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LITERATURE, LINGUISTICS & CRITICISM | CRITICAL ESSAY

A repressed desire named revolution: Social anomalies and anxieties in Coetzee's *Waiting for The Barbarians*

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Abstract: The present paper attempts to investigate J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) in terms of Fredric Jameson's concept of the political unconscious. Jameson's intellectual hermeneutics lies in uncovering the way in which the contradictions, antinomies, sociopolitical and cultural anxieties are to be unfolded within his three semantic horizons of interpretation. This study argues that the narrative, through the political unconscious analysis, reveals the repressed desires encoded in the unconscious of the text. To unravel the underlying contradictions and antinomies beneath the surface of the text, the narrative demands interpretations in order to pierce into the latent meaning of the novel. Coetzee's novel depicts the cultural and sociopolitical anxieties by which the south Afrikaners' collective consciousness is determined and shaped. Furthermore, the notion of utopianism has stood in opposition to the dominant ideology so that it could depict antithetical forces. The unimaginable notion of utopia functions as a revolutionary energy to solve the sociopolitical contradictions and antinomies. The very notion of utopia also expresses its antisocial agency of the real world until it ultimately finds its expression in *the ideology of the form*.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

There have been enormous arguments about Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* regarding issues of narrative, barbarity and ethics, however, this paper attempts to investigate the unconscious of the novel. Coetzee's novel is treated as a patient for diagnosing the social and political anxieties. To unravel these anxieties, the novel undergoes the three semantic models of interpretation, namely, the political, the social, and the historical. In the unconscious of the novel, the repressed desires revolt against the present reality. Furthermore, the characters' utopian desire functions as a revolutionary energy against the dominant ideology.

Subjects: Literature; Interdisciplinary Literary Studies; Literary/Critical Theory

Keywords: Jameson; Coetzee; the political unconscious; Utopia; ideologeme(s); modes of production; history

1. Introduction

Excavating the scripts on the body of South African history which perspicaciously uncovers the suppressed days of 1970s, Coetzee seeks to reconsider the history of a country which undergoes a crucial revolution. Written during the turbulent years of South African apartheid, *Waiting for the Barbarians* challenges the relation between the individuals and the system. Coetzee's third novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians* with its titular allusion to the Cavafy's poem demonstrates how the "Empire" waits and fears the attack of the people they called "the barbarians". On the arrival of the Third Bureau led by Colonel Joll who has begun to imprison a group of nomadic people, the Magistrate attempts to return a tortured girl to her family. The Magistrate found himself developing an intimate relationship with the girl up to the point where he takes a crucial decision to return her to her people. The Magistrate is accused of being complicit with the Barbarians. Coetzee, in this novel, turns upon a variety of questions concerning colonialism, barbarity and civilization, ethics, and human ethos so as to be able to portray the real face of South Africa in the years of uprising.

Coetzee's aesthetics in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is to reveal cultural and sociopolitical anxieties. Therefore, this paper is devoted to the analysis of the novel in relation with the issues of contradictions and inconsistencies within the realm of cultural and sociopolitical anxieties, all this under the rubric of political unconscious. Jameson's dialectical aesthetics is aimed to reconstruct the unconsciousness of the text, the underlying forces and contradictions at work. He "historicizes" the Freudian theory and transcends from the "individual psyche" or "personal identity" to human's "collective thinking and experience" or from the repression of desire to the repression of History. The dialectic and totality of the social structure are what he endorsed by glimpsing at the separation on the levels of consciousness "as a symptom of estrangement from the life of the collectivity" (Dowling, 1984, p. 115).

Jameson aims at comprehending the repressed history through the theory of political unconscious, or in Marxian terms, the history of class struggle. To Jameson what is repressed is the aesthetic of revolution which finds its authentic impulse in the contradictions which are strongly intolerable to the human mind. The content of the "Political Unconscious" rests upon the underlying contradictions beneath the surface of the social relation, by the same token, Jameson starts his analysis of the dynamic underlying contradictions by the model of interpretation he proposed. The three concentric horizons of interpretation he uses to rewrite the mystery of the past "broaden the horizon of the textual engagement and transform the textual object itself such that in the end one has gone from dealing with a single work to dealing with the mode of production in its entirety" (Buchanan, 2006, pp. 66–67). Each of these horizons deals with a specific object of analysis, however, they are all simultaneously interrelated and must be rethought and rewritten.

The mysteries of the past are only grasped, for Jameson, by restructuring "the problematics of ideology, of the unconscious and of desire, of representation, of history, and of cultural production, around the all-informing process of narrative" (Jameson, 2013, p. xiii). Accordingly, the repressed History is not present as object in itself but it is accessible through "the process of narrative" and it represents itself through its effects, or as "an absent cause" as Jameson points out that: "history is *not a text*, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious" (Jameson, 2013, p. 20).

The present paper, thus, attempts to evaluate Jameson's models of interpretation through the three concentric horizons, namely, "the political", "the social" and "the historical". At "the political"

level, the novel offers a socially symbolic solution to the social anomalies. Within the broader sense of social, the contradictions are revealed at the level of the “social” and the third horizon underscores the category of History and the antagonistic modes of production with its close affinity with the *form*. Finally, Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* is also examined in terms of utopia and utopian desire in relation with Jameson’s dialectical aesthetics in *The Political Unconscious*.

2. Critical overview

Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* has been read and analyzed from different perspectives, varying from postcolonial theory to deconstructive and psychoanalytic readings; all in all, it provides a proper and fertile ground both thematically and technically to critics. Drawing on Judith Butler’s pivotal concept of “desubjectivation”, Liani Lochner (2016), in her recent essay, *Power and the Subject in J. M. Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians*, conceptually argues for the possibilities of individual’s agency and their responsibilities within the dominant discourse of the Empire. He then, goes through the relation between power and the subject, - the empire and the magistrate- which results in breaking the line between the administration of the law and his own individual societal responsibility. Liani Lochner holds the idea that Coetzee’s novel functions “as a literary model for resisting power’s normative horizons and inaugurating the ethical principles of a future democracy based on the recognition of a shared precariousness of life” (Lochner, 2016, p. 103).

In a similar vein, Emanuela Tegla (2010) alludes to the Magistrate’s moral journey which develops a critical awareness to the sociopolitical situation from a different perspective. To Tegla, the Magistrate “opts for moral responsibility, against duty” which makes him to be branded as one of the “enemy” (Tegla, 2010, p. 80). On the other hand, Patrick Lenta (2006) explores the act of torture and power in the context of post September 11 in his essay *Waiting for the Barbarians after September 11*. Lenta states that the act of torture is justified to the administration of the Empire and the novel “implies the moral necessity of denouncing the suspension of human rights and of protesting against acts of torture” (Lenta, 2006, p. 81). He contextualizes acts of torture embedded in policy meant to fight terrorism.

In his book *J. M. COETZEE*, Dominic Head (1997) explores the concepts of guilt, doubt, torture and self-discovery in the “man of conscience” (Head, 1997, p. 72). He asserts that *Waiting for the Barbarians* is an allegory of imperialism in that the Magistrate attempts to “disentangle himself from its ideology of power and justice.” (Head, 1997, p. 75). The Magistrate develops a sense of doubt in which self-confrontation is inevitable.

Jane Poynor (2009) in her book *J. M. Coetzee and the Paradox of PostColonial authorship* addresses *Waiting for the Barbarians* in terms of civilization and madness. Using Foucault’s concepts of civilization and madness, she has applied a theoretical framework to channel the civilization into madness. Jane Poynor observes how the state of madness created in the mind of the protagonist asks for a breakdown of the self. The self that acts as both the oppressor and oppressed is to be considered as a kind of “double consciousness that can only lead to madness” (p. 54).

Arguing for the representation of torture, allegory and materiality, Russell Samolsky (2011) in “The Body in Ruin: Torture, Allegory, and Materiality in J. M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians*”, continues to compare *Waiting for the Barbarians* with Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony” regarding the interrelationship “between Kafka’s and Coetzee’s treatment of time and narrative” (p. 129). He goes on to assert that the narrative in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is “divided between historical time and timeless present” (Samolsky, 2011, p. 131). He also argues that the novel is not only a historical allegory but a political allegory in that it alludes to the death and torture of Steve Biko and the Soweto riots in 1976–1977. Other critics, like David Attwell, Dominic Head and Jean-Philippe Wade, believe that the novel is a sort of representation of real life and a response to South African historical event in 1976–1977.

Similarly, in his essay “*The Allegorical Text and History*” Jean-Philippe Wade (1990) attempts to find a relationship between allegory and history. Wade goes beyond the Lukácsian Marxist notion of historical novel and points to the complexities and interrelatedness of the text’s mediation: “while the allegoric form acts as a critique of ‘classic realist’ writing, this does not signal the text’s refusal of ‘history’. Rather, it affirms its location as a signifying ‘interpretation’ of the real that recognizes its discursive specificity” (p. 275).

On the contrary, Paul Rich (1984) closely explores the theme of “white settler political ideology” (Rich, 1984, p. 365) as a dominant mode against the “barbarians” of the South Africa in his essay “Apartheid and the Decline of the Civilization Idea: An Essay on Nadine Gordimer’s *July’s People* and J. M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians*”. He attempts to analyze the notion of “civilization” in its western meaning and its decline in modern South Africa both politically and culturally. By quoting from the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Rich considers the Magistrate as the “old school” of imperial official as he digs for some sort of civilization “where civilization entailed the corruption of barbarian virtues and the creation of a dependent people, I decided, I was opposed to civilization; and upon this resolution I based the conduct of my administration” (p. 382). Gradually, the Magistrate loses his faith in the Empire and faces the fact that his notion of civilized Empire has already declined. Rich concludes that the two novels have encountered the theme of civilization and its decline in the contemporary world where the western civilization is tied to the idea of progress in the context of modern South Africa, ultimately, resulting in the failure of humanistic value and “moral dead end”.

As regards the narrative technique, Matt DelConte (2007) seeks to illuminate the narratological phenomenon of the present tense in his essay *A Further Study of Present Tense Narration: The Absentee Narratee and Four-Wall Present Tense in Coetzee’s “Waiting for the Barbarians” and “Disgrace”*. As he puts it, his goal is to “quickly clarify the differences among retrospective narration, historical present tense narration, and simultaneous present tense narration” (p. 427). He terms *absentee narratee*: “the illusion (maintained by both narrator and author) that someone within the story world is listening to the narrative even though the narrative structure does not accommodate that someone” (DelConte, 2007, p. 433).

After an overview of the critical approaches to *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the full thrust of this argument lies in the way in which contradictions and anomalies are to be conceived in three levels, namely, “the political”, “the social” and “the historical”. Furthermore, it attempts to channel the utopian longing to the theory of the political unconscious. It is worth noting that both Coetzee’s novel and Jameson’s overarching book have been written in the early 1980s.

3. Bearing political and cultural anxieties

The first semantic horizon of interpretation, in its narrow sense, is called the political or the textual that is a sort of history which is “reduced to a series of punctual events and crises in time, to the diachronic agitation of the year-to-year, the chroniclelike annals of the rise and fall of political regimes and social fashions, and the passionate immediacy of struggles between historical individuals” (Jameson, 2013, p. 62). Jameson argues that in the first horizon, the text is aware of the existing antimonies and contradictions encoded in the social reality. The text is the field where history and reality are embedded and it might seem to suggest that the text is not ignorant of the discrepancy within the social reality. Furthermore, the object of the study in the first horizon deals with the text as a “symbolic act” in which individuals resolve the real social and cultural anxieties symbolically. To put it differently, each member of the society seeks an imaginary solution to the real incongruities embedded in the social whole. More significantly, the formal analysis goes beyond the traditional *explication de texte* so as to treat the cultural artefact as a symbolic act.

What is the historical contradiction for which the Magistrate’s purpose, returning the girl to her people, is supposed to be the socially symbolic resolution? Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians*, in more than one sense, reveals the inconsistencies of the Empire and then posits a man of conscience,

the Magistrates, at the centre of the Empires' ideology. The Empire has once promised to protect the settlement on the frontier from the attack of the Barbarians and by the same token, it sends a group from the Third Bureau to investigate the potentiality of the threat. Colonel Joll visits the frontiers and then has to report back his observations to the Empire. During his first visit to the settlement, he commands his soldiers to imprison and interrogate the nomadic people so as to find out whether they are the Barbarians or not. In this scene, the Magistrate witnesses the real face of the Empire as torturer and interrogator. It is he who develops a self-critique when he thinks that "It would be best if this obscure chapter in the history of the world were terminated at once, if these ugly people were obliterated from the face of the earth and we swore to make a new start, to run an empire in which there would be no more injustice, no more pain" (Coetzee, 1982, p. 24). Once, the Magistrate considered himself as part of that Empire but now, he is racked with a painful ambivalent sense: as a magistrate, the one who makes a just judgement and as a representative of an Empire's ideology; an ideology which attempts to consume every part of that region. The magistrate thus far takes a crucial decision to return the girl to her people.

In this case, witnessing the real face of Empire's ideology, the Magistrate consistently ponders on the fact that the supposed collective unity has been broken with the arrival of the men from the Third Bureau and by what they have done to the nomad and fisherfolks. It is in this historical moment that the Magistrate has to endure the contradictions wrought by the Empire. Ultimately, he plans to set off an arduous journey:

Before I can leave there are two documents to compose. The first is addressed to the provincial governor. "To repair some of the damage wrought by the forays of the Third Bureau," I write, "and to restore some of the goodwill that previously existed, I am undertaking a brief visit to the barbarians." ... "I am taking you back to your people, or as near as I can, seeing that they are now dispersed." (Coetzee, 1982, p. 57)

The symbolic resolution that the text offers its reader is that the Magistrate must return the girl back to her people. By doing this, the Magistrate attempts to restore the previous established relations between the Empire and the indigenous people and to efface the barbarity not only from himself but also from the Empire's face. He has contended with the contempt imposed upon the barbarians all these years and has endeavoured to uproot it but, after twenty years of his administrating, he fails in doing so. Here, there develops an ambivalent process in the psyche of the Magistrate; therefore, he wishes that "these barbarians would rise up and teach us a lesson, so that we would learn to respect them. We think of the country here as ours, part of our Empire our outpost, ... but they still think of us as visitors, transients" (Coetzee, 1982, p. 51). The text thus manifests its socially symbolic act by revealing the contradictions and offers its resolution through the Magistrate's attempt to return the girl to her people as the Magistrate muses:

And here I am patching up relations between the men of the future and the men of the past, returning, with apologies, a body we have sucked dry a go-between, a jackal of Empire in sheep's clothing! (Coetzee, 1982, p. 72)

In addition, Jameson's argument, thus once more, comes back to the notion of *denial* of history on the ground that any literary text not only *projects* a subtext (antinomies and contradictions within the real life) but also *denies* and *negates* it. This is the aesthetical notion of Burke's "Symbolic Act", as Jameson applies it, which simultaneously has the power to impact on the Real and leaving it unexpressed or untouched. Similarly, the operation of the Empire is oriented towards the potentiality of the barbarians' uprising and resorts to expunge the traces of the barbarians' will, the Empire attempts to force them to enter into the course of the history. To put it in a different way, the ideological underpinning of the Empire is to spread its dominating ideological control and to imposes its hegemonic ideological dominancy over the barbarians. The Magistrate resists this status of social reality and denies the necessity of History. Much as the barbarians, he calls into question the hierarchical social formation. This is where he realizes the contradictions of his social reality, the reality which is manufactured by an overpowering Empire.

The Magistrate's persistent fascination towards the torture chamber is another account of his attempt to understand human's unconscious, a cache for repressed desire and secrets where "It is at once an investigation of the archetypal dark chamber, and a reimagining of state violence as a response to a specific political situation" (Head, 1997, p. 78) and in a similar vein, the Magistrate's preoccupation is to excavate the slips from underground and to figure out the scripts on the slips, an act which implies the "mystery of the cultural past". Hence, the Magistrate's fascination in reading and understanding the scripts is similar to a critic's penchant for attempting to go beyond the surface of the text so as to extract the implications that the text bears; that is why the Magistrate endeavours to decipher the marks on both the scripts and the girl's body from within which a "truth" is repressed.

The Magistrate's intimacy with the girl implies a process of self-understanding. Now, he sees his real existence in the girl's eyes. He has once forgotten the real confrontation with himself in that he was subservient to the Empire's imperialist ideology. Laura Wright is right in her observation that the Magistrate attempts to wash himself from the sense of complicity with Empire's machinations "through the intellectualization of his ambivalent position as a champion of an anachronistic imperialism" (Poynor, 2009, p. 61). Washing the girl's body becomes a part of a ritual for the Magistrate as an epitome of the collective unconscious. On the other hand, rituals imply human desire for collective consciousness. The Magistrate's anxiety to decipher the repressed desire can be inferred as the projection of South Afrikaners' collective consciousness: "Is it then the case that it is the whole woman I want, that my pleasure in her is spoiled until these marks on her are erased and she is restored to herself... Too much or too little: is it she I want or the traces of a history her body bears?" (Coetzee, 1982, p. 64) and the corollary is this repressed desire a dialectical sense of doubt developing in the Magistrate's mind.

The Magistrate is completely aware that "the workings of justice are often obscure" (Coetzee, 1982, p. 126). The societal anxieties are what the Magistrate finds himself standing in a contradictory relation with History. Jameson argues that the text is the battlefield where the social reality and history are embedded and the text is completely aware of the discrepancy of social structure (the Empire was supposed to protect people but it turned out that it acted against them within the social reality. It is he as the magistrate who have had to challenge vivid contradictions). The underlying antinomies of social structure all along the frontier that the text projects as a subtext, for the Magistrate, need to be analyzed. That's why he profoundly subtly urges himself to understand the aesthetic of contradictions which is imposed on Mandel by History. It is here that the Magistrate is calling into questions the act of History and its contradictions. Experiencing the impotent yearning in front of a new scene of tortures against a new group of prisoners by "a simple loop of wire runs through the flesh of each man's hands and through holes pierced in his cheeks" (Coetzee, 1982, p. 103), The Magistrate seems to feel guilty and responsible for his indecisiveness and alienation. The Magistrate, eventually, answers to this aporia, to be or not to be with the Empire, by patching up the broken relations between the posterity and the past.

Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* provides a fertile ground for the analysis of the social and political anxieties spreading all along the frontier and which are immensely embedded in the allegorized sociality of South Africa and that the text offers a figurative alternative- returning the girl to her people- as a socially symbolic resolution to the socio-political and cultural contradiction on the frontier. In doing so, the Magistrate maintains that his individual life is tied to the collective lives of the frontier and he is the one who is required to solve the antinomies and contradictions which are imposed on the lives of the people in an unnamed location and time. Accordingly, he takes a crucial decision to return the barbarian girl to her people so that, "humanity will be restored across the face of society" (Coetzee, 1986, p. 13). Hence, Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* is conceived of as a socially symbolic act within the first concentric horizon inasmuch as it reads the unresolvable cultural and political anxieties.

4. The multifarious “Ideologemes” of social strata

Theoretically speaking, where the text is conceived of as the socially symbolic act bearing a figurative resolution to the historical anxieties within the first horizon of the political unconscious, the text now gets a broader platform dealing with what Jameson argues as “the antagonistic collective discourses of the social class” (Jameson, 2013, p. 61). Jameson’s main exhibit is the category of subversion: the conflict between the voices is not supposed to be solved but, instead, it is meant to reveal the conflicts. The duality that Jameson emphasizes is irreconcilable, and now, it appears in the form of antagonistic classes perceived as ideologemes. An “ideologeme”, to Jameson, is “the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes” (Jameson, 2013, p. 61).

Practically, Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* must be treated and analyzed as dialectical clashes between the antagonistic ideologemes. For Jameson, the existing conflict between class attitudes is that of the controlling class and that of the suppressed or labouring class. Dealing with ‘the antagonistic collective discourses’ is the object of analysis in the second horizon of interpretation. *Waiting for the Barbarians* is replete with passages and citations which unravel the characters’ class perspective as:

No, you misunderstand me. I am speaking only of a special situation now, I am speaking of a situation in which I am probing for the truth, in which I have to exert pressure to find it. First I get lies, you see this is what happens first lies, then pressure, — — then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how you get the truth. (p. 5)

The foregoing passage tends to unravel the personality and characteristics of Colonel Joll who represents the Empire’s ideologeme. Similarly, there are other characters in the novel who embody the consciousness of a specific class. He is the spokesman of the Empire as a ruling class to extend its hegemonic imperialist ideology. He is considered to be the one voice that embodies the attitude of oppressive Empire by the virtue of the fact that the Empire’s operation towards the potentiality of the threat seems to be examined only through the notion of torture and oppression. The Empire as a ruling class requires that its servants comply with all the regulations and do their job: “The Empire does not require that its servants love each other, merely that they perform their duty” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 6) which means that the Empire’s function is to employ the torturers and interrogators to oppress and break down any possibility of threats right as the Magistrate bears away the corollary of the underpinning of Joll’s thinking that “pain is truth” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 5).

Alternatively, the Magistrate is the one who struggles against the colonial and imperialist underpinning of the Empire’s ideology. In this sense, Jameson argues that “now the individual text will be refocused as a *parole*, or individual utterance, of that vaster system, or *langue*, of class discourse” (Jameson, 2013, p. 70). Colonel Joll belongs to a larger system, the military caste whose operation is to expunge the presence of the barbarians.

Correspondingly, among the novel’s voices, the Magistrate is the most complicated one because he is the only mediator, representing the administrative caste, through whom we are able to identify both his own class view and other characters’ perspectives. He is in exact opposition to Colonel Joll and Mandel who represent the oppressive controlling class:

He looks at me oddly. For the first time this evening I feel a barrier descend, the barrier between the military and the civilian. ... I think I know what he sees before him: a minor civilian administrator sunk, after years in this backwater, in slothful native ways, outmoded in his thinking, ready to gamble the security of the Empire for a makeshift, insecure peace. (p. 50)

Before the arrival of Colonel Joll’s troops, the Magistrate was once the representative of the Empire but, due to the destabilizing social equilibrium, a sense of doubt developed within him which makes

him turn against the Empire and its representatives. His status of self-doubt pushes him towards the self-consciousness which is clearly underscored in the foregoing passage of how the young officer seems to him as “a minor civilian administrator sunk” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 50). The Magistrate’s intimacy with the barbarian girl and then returning her to her people causes him be branded as collaborator with the “enemy”. In this sense, he was no longer the representative of the Empire but the “enemy”, or the other. The novel tends to unravel the constitution of the dialectical gap among the voices and class fractions.

The Magistrate is the embodiment of a “collective character”, of collective consciousness who desires to recognize the truth in an undetermined terrain and he knows that “my alliance with the guardians of the Empire is over, I have set myself in opposition, the bond is broken, I am a free man” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 78) which makes him to be unchained and a “free man” from Empire’s ideology.

I find myself wondering too whether he has a private ritual of purification, carried out behind closed doors, to enable him to return and break bread with other men. Does he wash his hands very carefully, perhaps, or change all his clothes; or has the Bureau created new men who can pass without disquiet between the unclean and the clean? (Coetzee, 1982, p. 12)

The notion of “purification” is of much significance to the Magistrate in that Colonel Joll and the Empire have committed the filthy atrocities against the barbarians and he wonders whether they hold “a private ritual of purification, carried out behind closed doors” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 12) to efface the traces of contamination from their unclean hands. The Magistrate’s ritual of washing the girl’s body and oiling her deformed ankle is part of a ceremony for the purification of the plague wrought by the Empire. He also stands against the cruel act of torturing while “the Colonel steps forward. Stooping over each prisoner in turn he rubs a handful of dust into his naked back and writes a word with a stick of charcoal ... ENEMY ... ENEMY ... ENEMY ... ENEMY ... ” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 105). Metaphorically the Magistrate branded as an “enemy in his way of the State” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 108), must expunge the notion of “Enemy”, a word which implies as a signifier.

What concerns the Magistrate more or less fully is the question: how is he orienting himself within the complexities of the Empire? How is the Magistrate’s real condition of existence oriented towards the totality of human experience? While being incarcerated, he once had the opportunity to escape from prison but instead, he rather took a crucial decision to return back into prison so as to map and represent his position within the complexities of the Empire’s ideology which is aesthetically what Jameson calls “cognitive mapping”. Jameson argues that the project of cognitive mapping:

was in reality nothing but a code word for class consciousness – only it proposed the need for class consciousness of a new and hitherto undreamed of kind, while it also inflected the account in the direction of that new spatiality implicit in the postmodern. (Jameson, 1991, p. 418)

Theoretically, the recognition of one’s situation in the unimaginable networks of global capitalism is a pivotal strategy and a praxis for class consciousness in which the subject- here the Magistrate- has to do with the question of his representation. To Jameson, the totality which is unrepresentable is addressed by the subject who becomes aware of the existing “gap between individual positionality and the totality of class structures in which one is situated, between individual perception and a ‘reality that transcends all individual thinking or experience’” (Kellner & Homer, 2004, p. 96).

The Magistrate stresses his own praxis as a voice to resist the hegemonic underpinning of the Empire’s ideology. After returning the barbarian girl to her people, he is captured and put into prison because he collaborated with the “enemy”. Under this circumstance, the Magistrate is thinking about the cognitive map to represent his real existence within the unrepresentable totality. First, it was all “darkness”, then he becomes aware of the fact that “I was the lie that Empire tells itself when times are easy, he the truth that Empire tells when harsh winds blow. Two sides of imperial rule, no

more, no less” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 135). Then, he attempts to decipher “the archaic writing on the poplar slips” before the Colonel Joll:

Now let us see what the next one says. See, there is only a single character. It is the barbarian character war, but it has other senses too. It can stand for *vengeance*, and, if you turn it upside down like this, it can be made to read *justice*.... “They form an allegory. They can be read in many orders. Further, each single slip can be read in many ways. Together they can be read as a domestic journal, or they can be read as a plan of war, or they can be turned on their sides and read as a history of the last years of the Empire the old Empire, I mean. (Coetzee, 1982, p. 112).

The “allegorical interpretation” (Jameson, 1991, p.168) is the practical political activity by the Magistrate to represent his own position within the world system. While the poplar slips “can be read in many ways”, the totality is unrepresentable and it needs continuous interpretation. The Magistrate’s attempts are to interpret the slips one by one, first it means “war”, then it simultaneously signals “vengeance” and by turning it upside down, it suggests “justice”. Thus, the Magistrate is turning allegory into a device to construct the cognitive map to depict and represent the unimaginative world system of capitalism as a dominant mode of production. Troy Urquhart observes that the Magistrate’s cognitive map is speaking for the voice of the repressed: “certainly the wooden slips might have contained meaning in the language of their original writer, but all who spoke that language are dead, permanently silenced by Empire, just as those who have been most oppressed by the system of apartheid in South Africa have been permanently silenced” (Urquhart, 2006, p. 9).

The novel’s expression, in the sense of providing the symptoms of the repressed desire and voices, bespeaks how the political unconscious of the text operates and how the barbarian girl is also considered to be another repressed voice representing the barbarian culture and history still living on the edge of the river. To the Magistrate, the barbarians are nomad people, “pastoralist” and “tent-dwellers”, they often come to the settlement for trading. The barbarian girl is silent for most of the time and subservient par excellence. Coetzee was very successful in depicting the voice of the repressed through the barbarian girl for there is no centrality for the marginalized barbarian as evidently, they “make no reference in their legends to a permanent settlement near the lake” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 15). The barbarian girl is the embodiment of the repressed history and culture and our knowledge of her past is less. The marks on the girl’s body signal the symbol of the repressed revolution which the Empire fears to confront and the Magistrate’s sustained engagement in deciphering them is parallel with the scripts on the poplar slips.

The hegemonic ideology of ruling class is exercised through the Colonel Joll’s act of torture and violence ironically over the barbarians and then the Magistrate. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* perspicaciously portrays the rise of class consciousness as the Magistrate’s endeavour in self-understanding is gradually unraveled. Aesthetically, the novel represents the antagonistic class attitudes in the political unconscious of the text. The upsurge of tensions in class attitudes happens all under a general unity of the sociopolitical and civil right movements in 1970s in South Africa. The ideologies in the second horizon of interpretation tend to represent the antagonistic class perspectives in the form of civilized/ barbarian, or allegorically bourgeoisie/ proletarian.

5. The residual and the dominant modes of production and the ideology of the form

The key term for Jameson is “History”, it is History upon which human consciousness is grounded, regardless to its inexorability and its effects. History, in Spinoza’s idea, is “an absent cause”, invisible to the naked eyes but only visible through its effects. To Jameson, History is the Lacanian “Real” that “resists symbolization absolutely” (Jameson, 2013, p. 20). The Historical is the primary object of analysis of the third horizon of interpretation. The contradictions are to be manifested within the various modes of production. Theoretically, the novel’s aesthetics lies in unfolding the way in which the dominant mode of production struggles against the residual and the anticipatory modes of production, of which Jameson acknowledges that the total human history is apprehended as “the

coexistence of various modes of production becomes visibly antagonistic, their contradictions moving to the very centre of political, social, and historical life” (Jameson, 2013, p. 81). The emergence of the new mode of production, along with the vestige of the residual, gives way to the dominant one at the moment of “transition”, the moment that “the symbolic messages transmitted to us by the coexistence of various sign systems which are themselves traces or anticipations of modes of production” (Jameson, 2013, p. 62).

Jameson argues that the form of the literary text bears the ideological significance in which every genre is linked to a specific mode of production: “genre is essentially a socio-symbolic message, or in other terms. ... form is immanently and intrinsically an ideology in its own right” (Jameson, 2013, p. 127). To put it in a different way, at any historical moment, the dominant mode of production shapes its peculiar form which simultaneously jostles with other modes of productions. Therefore, under the hood of Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the tensions and contradictions of various modes of production are to be revealed in terms of the *ideology of the form*.

Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* tends to manifest the conflict and contradictions among the various modes of productions in a way that identifies the signs of each mode of production that signifies a special connotation. From the very first chapter, the narrator is describing an object he has never seen before in his entire life:

I have never seen anything like it: two little discs of glass suspended in front of his eyes in loops of wire. Is he blind? I could understand it if he wanted to hide blind eyes. But he is not blind. The discs are dark, they look opaque from the outside, but he can see through them. He tells me they are a new invention. “They protect one’s eyes against the glare of the sun,” he says. “You would find them useful out here in the desert. They save one from squinting all the time... “At home everyone wears them”. (Coetzee, 1982, p. 1)

The narrator, at first, is really haunted by an object of “two little discs of glass” which leads him to pose a question: “Is he blind?” Colonel Joll is wearing a pair of glass. Colonel Joll and his troops are sent to check and then report the extent of danger caused by the barbarian on the frontier village. What is implied from the above passage is that Colonel Joll’s centrality is extremely obvious and on the contrary, the magistrate who is administrating the law is not a key character to the Empire.

An object of glass is what “at home everyone wears”, which means that everyone at home is worshipping the fetish commodity and it has got its ascendancy in the capital city. Clearly, by the formal analysis, it has its inherent significance and the narrator’s perplexities has been underscored from the very beginning of the novel. The object of glass becomes now a master code for the people “at home” which is the symbol of the dominant mode of production, namely capitalism and it aims to demystify the boundaries of space and time. Colonel Joll and all other people “at home” are all consumed by the emergence of a new master code resulting from the dominant mode of production. Joll’s impotency of transcending the fetishism and its capitalist ideology encoded within the object of glass is what extremely concerns the Magistrate. It is paradoxically true about the people who watch the scene of torture and it seems that they are on Colonel Joll’s side: “all four of them cease their labour and come forward offering their canes to the spectators” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 106). They are simply fascinated by the fetish commodity of the sunglasses and consequently consumed by what they have done to the prisoners and consequently, they are asked to whip the assumed barbarians.

The ideological contradiction of the dominant mode of production is uncovered when the capitalism “at home” promises the inhabitants and a new better world. What is noticeable, on the one hand, is that the people are all interpolated by the hegemony of class which shapes the underpinning of their subjectivity and on the other hand, there creates a distance between Colonel Joll and the Magistrate to communicate throughout the novel, as the Magistrate claims: “I shiver from the cold, but also from the tension of suppressed anger. An urge runs through me to smash the glass, to

reach in and drag the man out through the jagged hole, to feel his flesh catch and tear on the edges, to hurl him to the ground and kick his body to pulp” (ibid, 146). Colonel Joll failed in an imposed war on the barbarians and the novel unconsciously involves critiquing the dominant mode of production in that an object like sunglasses is unable to provide the people with a better vision of the world. Correspondingly, Terry Eagleton contends:

It is true that capitalism works some of the time, in the sense that it has brought untold prosperity to some sectors of the world. But it has done so, as did Stalin and Mao, at a staggering human cost. This is not only a matter of genocide, famine, imperialism and the slave trade. The system has also proved incapable of breeding affluence without creating huge swathes of deprivation alongside it. It is true that this may not matter much in the long run, since the capitalist way of life is now threatening to destroy the planet altogether. (Eagleton, 2011, p. 15)

All the Magistrate’s concern is to prevent “the planet altogether” from the destruction wrought by capitalism through the Empire’s operations. There exists another mode of production, the residual struggling against the dominant, which has lost its ascendancy and dominance and now attempts to recapture the lost position. As an underlying dynamic force, the residual resides within “the silence” and the unconscious of the literary text, as Pierre Macherey (1978) puts it in his *A Theory of Literary Production*: “What is important in the work is what it does not say..., what the work cannot say is important, because there the elaboration of the utterance is acted out, in a sort of journey to silence” (p. 87).

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the residual mode of production ironically lies in what the novel does not say by virtue of the fact that it is a repressed voice. The barbarian girl’s subservient behaviour is the real manifestation of the repressed voice like Friday in *Foe* and Michael in *Life and Times of Michael K*. To the Magistrate, the barbarians are nomad people who often come to the settlement for trading. The novel suggests that the barbarians – “pastoralists” and “tent-dwellers”- are not yet consumed and interpolated by the dominant mode of production and they still live on like an Arcadian and pastoral community. On the contrary, Social equilibrium and the supposed peace of the idyllic pastoral life are demystified and alienated by capitalism. The developing tension between the dominant and the residual intensifies more obviously when the Magistrate as a revolutionary son rises up against his capitalist father figure and his main concern is to create and change the course of history:

It is the fault of Empire! Empire has created the time of history. Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe. Empire dooms itself to live in history and plot against history. ... he tracks the enemies of Empire through the boundless desert, sword unsheathed to cut down barbarian after barbarian until at last he finds and slays the one whose destiny it should be to climb the bronze gateway to the Summer Palace. (Coetzee, 1982, p. 133)

The Empire’s machination is seized by the ideological presence of capitalism. To permeate its life-long continuity, the Empire attempts “to create the time of history” and to subvert and plot against it once more. The underlying contradictions manifest themselves in *the ideologies of the form* which locate its existence in the unconscious of the novel. In this sense the dominant mode of production creates its own *ideology of the form*. The novel also uses the allegorical strategy in its narrative form which is different from its traditional approach. In the case of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Empire has left its traces and marks on the barbarian girl’s body where it resists against interpretation. The act of purification by the Magistrate can also be viewed as an attempt to reach a stable interpretation but he fails which is paralleled by his failed endeavour to understand the scripts of the poplar slips. In both cases, his failure is evident; however, the contradiction encoded in the dominant mode of production is unfolded when the Empire plots against itself.

The dominant mode of production, namely, capitalism, has created a sort of allegory unsusceptible to interpretation. The allegorical mode of literature creates its allegorical language in which the Magistrate has been left in an endless confusion and bewilderment, particularly since the time when Colonel Joll interrogated the barbarian prisoners in a dark chamber as long as they accepted the language of the pain and its consequent tone. The multifarious layer of tone is irreconcilable with the hegemonic underpinning of the Empire's ideology in which just the one accepted tone of pain is possible among so wide a circulation of signifiers and that is the tone of confessions and lies, not the truth. The allegorical mode signifies various meanings and interpretations as the Magistrate is forced to interpret the scripts on the poplar slips while being interrogated by Colonel Joll and Mandel: "Now let us see what the next one says. See, there is only a single character. It is the barbarian character war, but it has other senses too. It can stand for *vengeance*, and, if you turn it upside down like this, it can be made to read *justice*. There is no knowing which sense is intended" (Coetzee, 1982, p. 112). In this way, the novel unconsciously, through the Magistrate, utilizes the same tool that has been created by capitalism itself. Simply put, the novel's habitus is to reveal the contradictions within the capitalist mode of production. The novel also attempts to disrupt the ideological impact of capitalism and this would resolutely be done through a character like the Magistrate.

In this sense, its narrative strategy offers multiple interpretations as some critics like Teresa Dovey (1988) and Jean-Philippe Wade (1990) have pointed out to the function and thematic strategy of allegory in Coetzee's novel. Wade argues that the allegorical narrative acts as a critique to the "realist". She contends that "This reading assumes that there is a realist novel hidden away in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (realism plus the censor equals allegory), and that we must therefore look through the formal veil of the novel to liberate that repressed 'truth' narrative which cannot now speak in all its 'clarity'" (p. 278). If the novel speaks in its silences, there will be allegorical mode of literature which lies in the political unconscious of the text and as a vehicle unconsciously critiques the dominant mode of production aiming to undermine the existing modes of production.

What is significant for the Marxist hermeneutics is that the novel's underlying dynamic provides the means of transition, of what Jameson calls "cultural revolution" which brings together the possibility of clashing the antagonistic modes of production. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the moment of transition is feasible when the Magistrate, for the last time, confronts with Colonel Joll already coming back from the war with the Barbarians: "An urge runs through me to smash the glass, to reach in and drag the man out through the jagged hole, to feel his flesh catch and tear on the edges, to hurl him to the ground and kick his body to pulp" (p. 146). This is the crucial moment for the Empire to ask: "And now, what will become of us without barbarians?/those people were a kind of solution" (Cavafy, 1992, p. 19). On the other hand, the Magistrate has to go through the destruction and annihilation caused by the Empire and starts the ritual purification ceremony as a collective desire in the society's collective consciousness. In short, the tension between the antagonistic modes of productions are revealed within the third horizon of interpretation, and it is the Magistrate who regains his ascendancy over the decadent mode of production. It is also the dynamic of the utopianism that gives him the courage to resist against the process of alienation.

6. The dynamics of Utopian thinking

Drawing on Jameson's intellectual engagement with utopian studies, the utopian thinking takes a crucial position in itself inasmuch as it pertains to the human discourse. In a comment at the *Utopian Studies Conference* (2006), Jameson contends that "Utopias have something to do with failure and tell us more about our own limits and weaknesses than they do about perfect societies". Our inability to imagine the utopian society is underscored. However, utopia is not merely bounded to human failure in representing the perfect society, it also, as Jameson maintains, designates as a part of the present social reality in which utopian longing acts as revolutionary energy to regain and reconstruct a society as a collective unity or a whole. Utopian longing resists and negates the existing social organization and pushed human history outward to the possibility of different social organizations.

The motif of utopian longing is well-nigh expressed in *Waiting for the Barbarians* specifically as the analysis of present reality. The socio-political challenges make the Magistrate conscious of the limits of his thought within the Empire's system to imagine a perfect social whole despite his attempt to map the existing reality. By the same token, the Magistrate's realization of the anomalies within the oppressive ideological system pushes him outward to deny the reality of the present. The interrogation and analysis of the social reality become the primary concern for the Magistrate after the arrival of Colonel Joll and his troops. What he seeks in South African reality of the present is the loss of truth and justice as Troy Urquhart (2006) draws a comparison between the Magistrate and Colonel Joll: "Joll is the quintessential torturer, seeking truth for his own ends by violent means, while the Magistrate is well-intentioned and apparently nonviolent, seeking truth as a way to escape the injustice of the Empire and thereby to effect justice" (p. 6). The Magistrate suffers from the social injustice which is encoded in the social reality, he hopes to find a means to restore symbolically the damage wrought by the Empire's machination before he leaves to return the girl to her people, he urges himself to compose two documents: one of which is "to restore some of the goodwill that previously existed, I am undertaking a brief visit to the barbarians" and the other is that he does not yet know what it would be "a testament? A memoir? A confession? A history of thirty years on the frontier?" (Coetzee, 1982, p. 58).

The operation of the utopian thinking and that of cognitive mapping pertain to the category of "representation" in which the subject- the Magistrate- is required to represent his own condition of existence within the reality of the present to find a means to clear the space for the analysis of the social reality. Wegner opines that the project of cognitive mapping "provides the mediating link between the spaces of the individual and those of the larger social and historical realities she[he] inhabits" (Wegner, 2002, p. 15). Endeavouring to analyze reality, the Magistrate thus, seeks to map his condition of existence and then to direct his cognitive mapping against the Empire. That's why he attempts to compose a "record" of the settlement towards the end of novel:

It seems right that, as a gesture to the people who inhabited the ruins in the desert, we too ought to set down a record of settlement to be left for posterity buried under the walls of our town; and to write such a history no one would seem to be better fitted than our last magistrate. ... 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. (Coetzee, 1982, p. 154)

It can be argued that the impossibility to represent the utopian vision of the perfect social whole is obvious inasmuch as the village on the frontier was and is supposed to be "paradise on earth". The Magistrate now attempts to patch up the past with the present and connect it to the future so that he could build the totality and "time of history". Theoretically speaking, the subject and the object have been separated and the subject's entire attempt is to reunify the broken collectivity and integrity. For the Magistrate, the prehistorical "unity of collectivity" has been destroyed by the hegemonic ideology of the oppressive system from within which utopianism is developed and that sparks a tension with the very notion of ideology. It is that questionable desire for collective life that motivates the Magistrate to resist against the present reality.

Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* is not depicting the South Afrikaner's collectivity but rather it challenges the dystopian dimension of the socio-political milieu. Apparently the Magistrate is incapable of tracing the utopian dimension of his and South African collective life since he is preoccupied with the reality of the present as an iron cage limiting the boundaries of his thought. But rather, he resists against that dystopian dimension within the existing social reality when he dreams of a saviour:

And who am I to jeer at life-giving illusions? Is there any better way to pass these last days than in dreaming of a saviour with a sword who will scatter the enemy hosts and forgive us

the errors that have been committed by others in our name and grant us a second chance to build our earthly paradise? I lie on the bare mattress and concentrate on bringing into life the image of myself as a swimmer swimming with even, untiring strokes through the medium of time, a medium more inert than water, without ripples, pervasive, colourless, odourless, dry as paper. (p. 143)

An apocalypse? The Magistrate thought that the world has drawn in ruins where the course of history stopped upon the arrival of the Empire's troops. The Magistrate thinks of "a saviour with a sword" who will save the world from destruction and will erase the evil from the world and may "grant us a second chance to build our earthly paradise". What is naked to the eye is that the world witnesses the dystopian dimension of itself. The Magistrate fundamentally faces an excruciating dilemma on how to represent the self: as a man of the law? As a saviour who banishes the enemy? Or as an individual like Mandel or Colonel Joll who runs away?

In Jamesonian sense, the Magistrate acts as an analyst of the present reality who revolts against the reification disseminated all over South Africa and his socially symbolic act "involves a whole Utopian compensation for increasing dehumanization on the level of daily life" (Jameson, 2013, p. 27). It is this utopian longing that guides the Magistrate to stand against the Empire's machination of dehumanizing and to liberate the repressed desire. The Magistrate's utopian longing is the re-expression of a utopian collective community in an earthly paradise, of "a reconquest ... of some feeling for a salvational future" (Jameson, 2013, p. 91). To restore the lost ruined Eden, the Magistrate attempts to reestablish moral and humane codes upon which the collectivity of the world is founded.

Over the question of the Magistrate's agency, it must be noted that his project of cognitive mapping reveals the dynamics of agency at work within the Magistrate, as an expression of aversion to the Empire's machination. The Magistrate was once the representative of an overpowering and universal system of domination and exploitation within which human agency was doomed and helpless. Despite the authority and domination of Empire, there exists a yearning within the Magistrate for a utopian alternative of collectivity and uniformization. In a practical sense, the Magistrate's symbolic solution could be assumed as a desire to "wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity" (Jameson, 2013, p. 3).

The Magistrate stares at a plea he has written and he is thinking of what is happening afterwards. He now depicts the dystopian world dying of hunger and he thinks to confess the truth on the arrival of the barbarian, he thus ponders: "I wanted to live outside history. I wanted to live outside the history that Empire imposes on its subjects, even its lost subjects. I never wished it for the barbarians that they should have the history of Empire laid upon them. How can I believe that that is cause for shame?" (Coetzee, 1982, p. 154). The Magistrate's agency is utterly demonstrated through narrating the whole history of humanity and barbarity.

Consequently, the Magistrate seeks to go beyond the boundaries of reality of the present as far as the problem of "representation" is concerned. The Magistrate's yearning for collectivity and that of "prehistorical happiness" lies in finding "the solution to the problem of reality". Coetzee's novel is thus representing the dystopian dimension of the South Afrikaner's life much as its protagonist- the Magistrate does narrate the time and life of a history on the frontier from which a desire for an alternative utopian future might appear.

7. Conclusion

The present paper has attempted to demonstrate the political unconscious analysis of Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* in terms of Jameson's intellectual key codewords, namely, the three-concentric models of interpretation. Drawing upon Jameson's hermeneutic, Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* unlocks the contradictions and anomalies of the dominant mode of production. The Magistrate bears the socially symbolic solution to the social and political antinomies, he takes a

crucial decision to return the girl to her people which caused him to be branded as “collaborator” with the enemy. Class(es), ideologeme(s) and voice(s) are the objects of analysis within the second semantic horizon. The social formation of the supposed South Africa is conceived of as various ideologemes struggling antagonistically with each other. Colonel Joll is the representative of the Empire whereas the Magistrate profoundly understands the fact that he was once the representative of the Empire but now he becomes the repressed voice along with the barbarians. The eccentric scripts on the wooden slips bespeak the fact that they were oppressed and silenced metaphorically as the Magistrate attempts to understand the script. The barbarian girl is the best demonstration of the repressed voice, the one that the Empire has bodily marked.

Within the third horizon, the contradictions have been revealed at the level of the “historical”, of which various modes of production jostling together are to be manifested in the *ideology of the form*. The novel shares some features of capitalism as an overpowering system of exploitation that reaches the frontier village. The pair of glasses is the most obvious emblem of Capitalism since everyone “at home wears them”. The Empire’s machination is seized by the ideological presence of capitalism with its allegorical mode of production on which it creates and changes the time of history and simultaneously it plots against itself. The Magistrate, on the other hand, has to go through the destruction and annihilation wrought by Empire and starts the ritual purification ceremony as a collective desire in the society’s collective consciousness. The novel also offers that there is a “realist” genre which is hidden away in the unconscious of the novel speaking of the repressed truth. The Magistrate hence, depicts the dystopian dimension of a society much as he resists and negates the reality of the present.

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