



Magistrate's Search for Wholeness in the Waiting for Barbarians

Manore Swapnil B.,^{1,*} & Dr. Bobade Archana,²

¹Research Scholar, Sant Gadge Baba Amravati University, Amravati- 444602, Maharashtra, India. & Dept. of English, Shri Narendra Tidke College of Arts & Commerce College, Ramtek 441106.

²Dept. of English, Shri Shivaji Arts & Commerce College, Amravati 444602. Maharashtra, India.

*Corresponding Author: swapsphd@gmail.com

Abstract

Apartheid was a powerful tool and technique used by the British to dominate the nation's social and economic structure. The fundamental goal of apartheid was to uphold white dominance and racial segregation. J. M. Coetzee is a versatile author. He takes care to keep a respectful distance between himself and the political issues. J. M. Coetzee's novel, "Waiting for the Barbarians" published in 1980. The narrative grounds the possibility of justice on the subject vulnerable to pain, that is, on the real subject common to human being. The text emerges from and obviously applies to the realities of an apartheid state in South Africa, where citizenship was conferred on a small minority of white, originally settler, peoples. The novel is the narrative of the Magistrate, the unnamed subject whose very designation defines him as a function of the state and, as well, a state subject who is the agent of justice.

Keyword: Identity, Apartheid, Justice

Apartheid was a system of legal racial segregation enforced by the National Party government of South Africa between 1948 and 1993, under which the rights of the majority 'non-white' inhabitants of South Africa were curtailed and minority rule by white people was maintained. The government of South Africa also practiced the same discriminatory policies while occupying South West Africa, known after 1966 as Namibia. While liberal white South Africans, by and large, have expressed the guilt, fear, alienation, and general malaise of the white minority living under apartheid, black and black-identified South African writers have written of the deprivation, injustices, violence, and anger suffered by the black majority. Their narratives are often set in the cities and townships.

John Maxwell Coetzee born 9 February 1940) is an author and academic from South Africa. He is now an Australian citizen and lives in Adelaide, South Australia. A novelist and literary critic as well as a translator, Coetzee has won the Booker Prize twice and was awarded the 2003 Nobel Prize in Literature. J.M. Coetzee, a South African writer born under the apartheid government, explores fiction as a discourse of postcolonial oppression. The basic narrative of Coetzee's oeuvre is indeed that of colonialism and decolonization. It underlies the entire corpus, which can be described sequentially as beginning with an aggressive imperialist violence in *Dusklands* followed by settlement of uncertain standing and duration in *In the Heart of the Country*. A defensive phase of anticipated revolution is presented in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, and in *Life and Times of Michael K* there is a stage of open civil warfare.

The novel is the narrative of the Magistrate, the unnamed subject whose very designation defines him as a function of the state and, as well, a state subject who is the agent of justice. It is concerned with the political subject as such, with the quest for a political ethics, for a practice of justice based in the real subject valid in any political, that is to say, human community. Given the structure of a contemporary world order based on national states, on an exclusionary political body,. And given that national states are unequal in development and power, that nation state must be imagined as an empire, because it defines itself through its potential for power over non-citizens. Located at the boundary between Empire and what Empire calls the "barbarians", Coetzee's novel calls up boundaries dividing citizen and barbarian only to cross them.

Coetzee focuses on the concept of power. Resulting from colonialism and the oppressive laws of apartheid is a dynamic of power that divides a nation by those who take power and those who become powerless. In this novel, Coetzee presents the story of an oppressive relationship through the voice of the oppressor. The reader receives the story through one perspective which, in effect, silences the voice of the "Other." This limited point of view presents a psychological perspective of the oppressor. Similarities appear in Coetzee's portrayal of the psychology of power that exists in the oppressive relationship. Coetzee depicts what leads to oppression as his fictional characters lose power and seek to regain it through oppression. The oppressor violently takes power through forcing another into powerlessness. "Waiting" becomes the central plot of *WB* which speaks of the Empire's continuous anticipation of a barbarian attack, but it also refers to the life of the individual. The Magistrate states of his life, "All I want now is to live out my life in ease in a familiar world, to die in my own bed" (*WB* 75). The Magistrate does not seek adventure, change, or honour; instead what he has resigned to is a life of waiting. Coetzee presents the image of a man in search of an easy, quiet life to pass the time until death. This embodies the existential notion of the purposelessness of existence. The individual is born into a world of limits and

suffering, doomed to wait until his death. It is under this title and the attached notion of purposelessness that Coetzee presents his story of a man who becomes an oppressor. Paradoxically, as the story unfolds, the officers of the Empire become barbaric as they torture and kill other human beings. As the Empire waits for the barbarians to attack, the reader becomes aware of the fictitious accounts of barbarian aggression reported from the capital. The Magistrate reveals his doubt about the threat of the barbarians, "In private I observed that once in every generation, without fail, there is an episode of hysteria about the barbarians ... Show me a barbarian army and I will believe" (WB 8). This observation asserts the Magistrate's disbelief in the barbarians as a threat. Instead, this fear of the barbarians becomes a creation of the Empire as a means of controlling the citizens and creating a false sense of legitimacy. The Empire declares its importance through promising safety from the barbarians. In fact, the Empire seems to only exist in relation to the barbarians. In defining the barbarians as "other," the Empire gains power and authority. The title *Waiting for the Barbarians* speaks of the desire of the oppressor to name another individual as "other" in attempts to gain purpose and power. As Joll takes over power, the Magistrate is deprived of his job. Joll purposely chooses others instead of the Magistrate to assist him in his work. As the Magistrate loses his political and sexual power, he also loses his place in the world. The Magistrate's existence becomes purposeless. This emasculation of the Magistrate, suggests that he has been placed on equal footing with women, demonstrating his loss of status above women. In WB, at this point during the fall from power, before the Magistrate turns to oppression, the Magistrate serves as the voice of reason as he chastises Toll for torturing the barbarians. He voices judgments and feelings that the reader holds. In comparison to Joll, the Magistrate seems heroic as he argues for the release of the prisoners and demands that they are fed. The Magistrate makes an effort to distance himself from the harshness of the Empire and the actions of Joll. The reader connects with the Magistrate as he attempts to separate himself from the role of the oppressor. As the protagonist in WB falls from power, he becomes aware of his existential existence. His world become purposeless and his mortal fate tragic. It is in attempts to regain his position in the old social order where he had youth and purpose through positions of power, that the Magistrate turn to oppression. He started to regain his power, wants to become as he was before. Sexual objectification becomes the means through which the protagonists seek to regain purpose and vitality. He claims women's bodies in order to gain power over the "Other." The existential questioning that all individuals are confronted with does not result in oppression necessarily. However, it is the sense of chaos and lack of understanding of self that occurs in this crisis that causes some, namely the protagonists in WB to choose violence and oppression. In WB, sex, to the Magistrate, serves as a medium through which he asserts his masculine power. As he

falls from the social hierarchy, the Magistrate attempts to claim power over the women he sleeps with. He searches to objectify these women in order to claim superiority over them. After Joll enters the settlement, the Magistrate speaks of the countless sexual experiences he has with a prostitute named "The Star." His encounter with this woman seems to have increased with the presence of Joll, and therefore increases as the Magistrate loses power. This relationship serves as a medium through which the Magistrate is able to assert his masculine power. He treats this woman as an object through claiming her body. He defines sex with "The Star" as a power relationship where he enters her and she receives him. Describing himself as the only actor, she becomes the object. The Magistrate describes the sexual experience, "to desire her has meant to enfold her and enter her, to pierce her surface and stir the quiet of her interior into an ecstatic storm; then to retreat, to subside, to wait for desire to reconstitute itself (WB 43).

Sex is viewed as a military offensive as the Magistrate pierces her, as if with a sword; he violently forces entry into her body. Within her, he alters and spoils her insides, creating a storm. After he gains possession and ownership of the body, he "retreats," which speaks of sex as an act not of unification but one where the Magistrate remains distant from the woman as he claims power and leaves. He demands subjectivity, describing himself as the only actor. The woman becomes her body as she receives him. Sex, to the Magistrate, becomes a medium through which he gains power over the "Other." Sexual objectification also serves as a way for the Magistrate to regain his youthful vitality. The Magistrate notes of his desire, "So I thought: 'It is nothing but a matter of age, of cycles of desire and apathy in a body that is slowly cooling and dying. When I was young the mere smell of a woman would arouse me; now it is evidently only the sweetest, the youngest, and the newest that have that power. One of these days it will be a little boy" (46). Aware of his aging body and its progression toward death, the Magistrate turns to sex. Sex becomes an act capable of restoring youth, as if he absorbs the age of his partner. As he takes in the barbarian woman, her scars become a cryptic language as he seeks to interpret his connection to her destruction. He believes she holds the answer to the question of his purpose and identity. Coetzee speaks of the present situation in South Africa as a result of colonialism and the oppressive relationships it creates:

After years of oppressing the black majority, even after the end of apartheid, racism and oppression remain a part of the present as they are still embedded in the political and social structure of South Africa. Coetzee humanizes the oppressor through depicting the existential crisis as the root of oppression which demonstrates the complexity involved in the larger problem of creating a new South Africa free from oppression.

Conclusion:

The problem of founding a political ethics, of determining a basis for justice for the subject of political community that is not limited by the status of citizenship, is the concern of J. M. Coetzee's novel, "Waiting for the Barbarians". The narrative grounds the possibility of justice on the subject vulnerable to pain, that is, on the real subject common to human being. The text emerges from and obviously applies to the realities of an apartheid state in South Africa, where citizenship was conferred on a small minority of white, originally settler, peoples.

Bibliography

1. Coetzee J.M Waiting for Barbarians London: Secker & Warburg
2. Head Dominic J.M. Coetzee. New York Cambridge University Press,1998
3. Attwell, David J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the politics of Writing. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1993.