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Abstract

THE CIVILIZER'S ETHICS TOWARDS THE BARBARIC 'OTHER' IN J. M. COETZEE'S *WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS*

This paper is concerned with the issue of the civilizer's ethics towards the barbaric 'other' in a colonial context, by means of an in-depth analysis of J. M. Coetzee's novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*. After a brief history of the development of the concepts of "barbarity" and "civilization", it is concluded that they can no longer be clearly delineated, largely due to certain "barbaric" practices adopted by the so-called civilizers. Having established this as the starting point for the analysis of the novel, the paper focuses on the long process of Coetzee's protagonist's ethical maturing. At the novel's outset, the protagonist, a magistrate in charge of one of the furthest outposts of an unnamed Empire, lives in a polarized world, sharing the colonizer's typical prejudice against the barbaric 'others' as filthy, bestial and licentious. After they are brutally tortured by the Empire's officials, however, the magistrate begins to sympathize with the barbarians. His certainties are shattered – who is civilized and who barbaric? Through discourse analysis, the paper then tracks the first stirrings of the character's conscience, which make him distance himself from the Empire. He comes a long way, from the concealment and denial of the ill-treatment to the attempts to be the speaker for the barbarians. At this point, the paper sets out to prove that the magistrate himself, like the barbarian he defends, becomes the subaltern subject, drawing on Gayatri Spivak's contention that being *silenced* by the dominant class (here, the Empire) is a distinctive feature of subalternity (Spivak, 1988).

In its closing paragraphs, the paper explores the magistrate's morality in detail, paying special attention to the questions of its purity. It is concluded that the magistrate *is* a moral person, but that his morality is somehow tainted, since invariably linked to less commendable desires.

Key words: *barbarian, civilizer, the 'other', morality, the magistrate.*