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The Humanist Discourse in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*

Abstract. This article interrogates the humanist discourse in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), negotiating the intersections between the novel's narrator, the Magistrate, and Coetzee, the public intellectual. The ethical narrator, through the very act of witnessing and describing imperial violence, objects to the practices of torture perpetrated on captured prisoners yet feels guilty for his complicity with the torturers. The articulation of his difficult position as a humanist serving a declining Empire forms the essence of a humanist discourse that corresponds to the difficulties and ambivalences experienced by the postcolonial writer/intellectual. Using the work of Edward Said on the representations of the intellectual and Coetzee's views on ethical authorship and torture, the present article locates the humanist discourse articulated by the Magistrate in the center of Coetzee's conception of the public intellectual. While Coetzee undertakes the task of representing oppression without reinscribing it, his narrator struggles with distancing himself from the oppressors physically and psychologically, and thus achieving the relative autonomy Said called for. In the process, the Magistrate moves from a position of consent to one of dissent.

Keywords: J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, humanist discourse, ethics, public intellectualism, Edward Said.

Theoretical contexts: Coetzee and public intellectualism

J. M. Coetzee's novels have been problematically received by critics, especially in South Africa during the apartheid years, because, in the words of Benita Parry, they are "self-reflexive novels which stage the impossibility of representation, estrange the norms of reality, and work ... to 'demythologize history'" (1998: 149). Since the mode of his novels was not one of traditional social realism directly evoking historical realities, critics have expressed concerns that many of his works are "only indirectly 'about' the political and

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social struggles of South Africa" (Martin 1986: 4), dislocating, abstracting, and allegorizing political realities into another time and place. Other critics try to justify Coetzee's position and look for alternative sociopolitical relevance. The present article is a step in this direction, situating Coetzee's relevance within ethical and political debates about the function and status of the intellectual (i.e., the South African writer and critic). *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980; hereafter abbreviated as *WB*) engages the ethics and politics of intellectual practice and the role/function of the intellectual at the heart of many of Coetzee's works. According to Michel Foucault, the "author function" is ideologically important in our conception of literary works because it is "characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society" (1998: 211). South African literature written under apartheid has often been read in terms of a specific "author function", i.e., in light of its engagement with political realities within a specific historical context.

Broadly speaking, Coetzee's novels published before the 1990s have been seen as complex (yet often inadequate or problematic) engagements with history due to their allegorical nature or psychological and postmodern dimensions. Coetzee has been criticized in South Africa for avoiding full engagement with political history. Mainly using the work of Edward Said on the representations of intellectuals, his 1993 Reith Lectures in particular, the present article explores the problematic position of the South African writer (artist or intellectual) confronted with violence, oppression, and a history of injustice. Torn between ethical commitment and humanist values on the one hand and attempts to publicly render them on the other hand, Coetzee was conscious of his role as an intellectual figure as well as the dangers of exploiting the oppression he sought to criticize. *WB* dramatizes the ironies, contradictions, and struggles involved in the intellectual practice Coetzee has internalized in his lengthy professional career. When he was writing *WB*, Coetzee had already published two novels (*Dusklands* in 1976 and *In the Heart of the Country* in 1977) and numerous scholarly articles in reputable journals. He was gaining international fame as a South African writer and scholar with a solid background in language theories, literary theories, world literature, and Western philosophy. The Ph.D. in English he earned from the University of Texas at Austin in 1969 was only one asset to an accomplished academic. Articulated in the first-person by the unnamed Magistrate, the humanist discourse in *WB* manifests ethical resonances, as well as the ambivalence of resistance and complicity. Coetzee's ethical and political concerns are dramatized and complicated through the Magistrate, who enacts the ethical and humanist voice in the novel and disputably serves as Coetzee's own alter ego.

Antonio Gramsci's argument concerning the formation of intellectuals makes it clear that intellectuals have a social and/or political function and not only a traditional profession or academic career. This social function and/or political responsibility of organic intellectuals entails generating the ideas and hopes of their class. For Gramsci, organic

intellectuals adopt the ideology of a particular party or class, and hence the independent, autonomous intellectual is a myth: "Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields" (1971: 5). For Gramsci, all men are intellectuals, even though not all of them have a social function. In this expanded sense, Gramsci argues that the organic intellectual "participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought" (1971: 9). So, intellectuals exist in varying degrees of complicity and commitment. While some intellectuals side with and serve the dominant classes, others side with the less privileged and the disenfranchised. Following this logic, the Magistrate in *WB* questions his role as an imperial intellectual just as Coetzee interrogates the role and function of his standing as a South African intellectual.

Commenting on the politicization of knowledge and the political circumstances governing the ideological production of discourse, Edward Said asserts: "No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society" (1979: 10). Here, Said not only contradicts the liberal position of true knowledge being nonpolitical, i.e., objective, but also confirms the intellectual's relative involvement in the production of knowledge in the field of the humanities and social sciences, the knowledge that is political in varying degrees and rooted in one's ideological standpoint, class affiliation, and culture/society. In *The World, the Text, and the Critic,* Said expounds secular criticism and argues that texts cannot be extricated from events and circumstances, i.e., from history and "the existential actualities of human life, politics, societies, and events" (1983: 5). Said goes on to assert that texts are "worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and, of course, the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (1983: 4). Said advocates reading texts in terms of the realities of power and resistance that produce and disseminate them, in terms of affiliations belonging to "culture and society" (1983: 20). Hence, critics are never free from politics or political consciousness, whether related to their personal life and background or institutional politics and party life. It is in this study that Said presents the intellectual's situation as a worldly one, as texts take place in life and critics exist in sociopolitical contexts. Said uses the term "worldliness" to indicate "circumstantial reality" (1983: 34), a specific occasion or situation. Just as texts are worldly, so is criticism. And hence, the critic is a committed intellectual for Said, one concerned with alleviating different sorts

of oppression: "More explicitly, the critic is responsible to a degree for articulating those voices dominated, displaced, or silenced by the textuality of texts. Texts are a system of forces institutionalized by the reigning culture at some human cost to its various components" (1983: 53). Said's assertion of discursive, textual politics is an invitation for us to explore ethics and politics in literary and cultural texts, which is what the present article attempts in relation to Coetzee's novel *WB*. If we take for granted the politicization of discourse Said advocates, what remains is to look at Coetzee's take on the intellectual's relationship with power and authority.

In his 1993 Reith Lectures, later published as *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said suggests that the intellectual is not only an "outsider" or "amateur" but also a "disturber of the status quo" (1994: x), trying to speak "truth to power" (1994: xvi) on behalf of the unprivileged or the weak. Said politicizes both discourse and the discourse writer. Therefore, the intellectual has a vital public role and a necessary social mission to "break down the stereotypes and reductive categories that are so limiting to human thought and communication" (1994: xi). The intellectual has a role to universally uphold standards of truth concerning oppression, regardless of one's background, nationality, or political affiliation. This comment can be taken to mean that the intellectual should not inhabit an ivory tower—he is not a predictable or conformist figure. Rather, the intellectual is the involved figure of dissent and opposition to injustice, war, and destruction: "There is always the personal inflection and the private sensibility, and those give meaning to what is being said or written. Least of all should an intellectual be there to make his/her audience feel good: the whole point is to be embarrassing, contrary, even unpleasant" (1994: 12). Hence, Said contends that the apolitical intellectual is a myth, and adopting an apolitical stance is neither the intellectual's role nor function. Of course, this does not entail a deterioration into simple propaganda or clichéd language. Rather, we are entitled to look into the ways and means of achieving a political stance, which is what the present article seeks to accomplish in the case of Coetzee's *WB*.

Above all, for Said, the intellectual is a universal humanist with a political mission as "standards of truth about human misery and oppression were to be held to despite the individual intellectual's party affiliation, national background, and primeval loyalties" (1994*:* xii). In the words of Said, "Real intellectuals are never more themselves than when, moved by metaphysical passion and disinterested principles of justice and truth, they denounce corruption, defend the weak, defy imperfect or oppressive authority" (1994: 6). Thus, the intellectual should seek solutions or alternatives to dilemmas, unmask facts, and side with the marginalized or less fortunate who are not well represented by dominant power structures, juxtaposing experiences of oppression and projecting suffering regardless of its location: "For the intellectual the task … is explicitly to universalize the crisis [of his/her people], to give greater human scope to what a

particular race or nation suffered, to associate that experience with the suffering of others" (1994: 44). Accordingly, the intellectual is not objective but rather controversial and risky for mainstream politics and authorities. Intellectuals are secular figures, not allowing authority figures or patrons to direct them. Rather, their main task for Said is to "speak truth to power" (1994: 85), and thus they need to maintain relative independence from being co-opted by institutions or policy makers. To achieve this goal, amateur attitudes are better than professional ones. Freedom should be sought by intellectuals, and relative autonomy is a goal that intellectuals should seek so that they are not absorbed by institutions, governments or organizations against the principles of freedom, justice and truth. In this logic, the intellectual's attempted autonomy from institutional policies is itself a worthy political stance.

Within the South African apartheid context, we can talk about relatively similar historical and cultural concerns to those articulated by Said: injustice, dispossession, dislocation, discrimination, and violence. The ethical and political considerations of writing and intellectualism that Coetzee tackles are, in fact, related and can be better understood in the light of Said's political and cultural pronouncements. For example, Coetzee complains in "The Novel Today" that there is "a tendency, a powerful tendency, perhaps even dominant tendency, to subsume the novel under history" (1988: 2). In other words, the depiction of historical realities like apartheid and violence commonly become criteria for serious or good art. Coetzee, hence, tends to favor a novel that rivals history, even "demythologizing history" (1988: 3), by operating in terms of the novelistic discourse rather than the historical one. This does not mean that Coetzee advocates nonpolitical and unhistorical art; rather, he argues for a particular way of representing historical realities in literature to not reduce literary discourse to a historical one. By analogy, what Said tried to achieve as a cultural critic, Coetzee tried to achieve as a writer of fiction, but not without some complication and universalism. Both intellectuals were concerned with the politics of representation in reaction to socio-political and historical realities.

According to Jane Poyner, Coetzee engages "self-consciously with the ethics of writing in his critical essays and all his works of fiction, often through the portrayal of the conscience-stricken white writer" and thus enters "the long-running and expansive debate about the ethics of intellectualism and the authority of the writer" (2006: 2). Poyner contends that in his depiction of writer-protagonists in his novels, Coetzee dramatizes a paradox in postcolonial authorship: "whilst striving symbolically to bring the stories of the marginal and the oppressed to light, stories that heretofore have been suppressed or silenced by oppressive regimes, writers of conscience or conscience-stricken writers risk re-imposing the very authority they seek to challenge" (2009: 2). Hence, the postcolonial author and critic should be careful not to reproduce hegemonic systems of power they intend to challenge or reimpose dominant power structures. If

postcolonial authorship is ethico-political at heart, then it should not replicate oppressive structures. Accordingly, the present article explores the intersections between the position of the postcolonial cultural critic and that of the postcolonial writer, both being ideally humanist figures with ethical-political concerns. The conflation between the postcolonial intellectual and the writer is manifested in the figure of the Magistrate in Coetzee's *WB*, who becomes a mouthpiece for staging Coetzee's struggles with representing politics and ethics in fiction without descending into plain propaganda or reproducing oppression.

Gayatri Spivak once suggested that "the subaltern could not 'speak' because, in the absence of institutionally validated agency, there was no listening subject" (2002: 24). It is intellectuals and the academic world that can serve as one validating institution giving voice or lending attentive ears to the subaltern. While intellectuals and critics have a responsibility to know and reveal society's Other, they should be aware of contradictions and ambivalences in their position, i.e., what Spivak called "the possibility that the intellectual is complicit in the persistent constitution of Other as the Self's shadow" (1988: 75). Ambivalently, the critic/intellectual can be hegemonic and oppositional. The potential risks of having first-world intellectuals speak for the Other are serious since this Other is heterogeneous. In the words of Spivak, "The postcolonial intellectuals learn that their privilege is their loss. In this, they are a paradigm of the intellectuals" (1988: 82). Spivak concludes that in a colonial context, the subaltern does not have access to history and cannot speak, and that "the subaltern as female" is even more marginalized (1988: 82-83). Interestingly, Spivak makes it clear that the elite class of privileged intellectuals shapes the image of the subaltern: "Can the subaltern speak? What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? The question of 'woman' seems most problematic in this context. Clearly, if you are poor, black, and female, you get it in three ways" (1988: 90). The intellectuals as the elite class are, accordingly, complicit in the construction of the subaltern as Other. Accordingly, questions of representation become essential for the writer, whether representing the oppressed or the sympathetic liberal humanist as the intellectual.

In this light, Said's calls for the secular, worldly critic are better understood, and so is Coetzee's problematic position in the context of South African apartheid politics. In both cases, questions of political relevance and commitment are at risk. In post-colonial theory, the term "comprador" has been broadly used to include "the intelligentsia—academics, creative writers, and artists—whose independence may be compromised by a reliance on, and identification with, colonial power" (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 47). Said's call for the independence of the intellectual from mainstream politics finds an echo in Coetzee's caution to avoid the "comprador" position. For Said, as for Coetzee and Spivak, the intellectual encounters the problem of representation and the perils of complicity. In the words of Coetzee in "Into the Dark Chamber," *WB* is about "the impact of the torture

chamber on the life of a man of conscience" (1986: para.4). Coetzee grapples with a moral paradox: the question of how to represent torture in fiction without endorsing it or depriving the reader, how to depict history from the position of the oppressed without appropriating their voice, how not to transgress the limits of fiction into history or propaganda, how not to shy away from portraying violence, and above all how this "man of conscience" (a different label for the intellectual, author, or critic) stands in relation to power. Through the figure of the Magistrate, the novel dramatizes the intellectual's unavoidable relation to authority. In his Reith Lectures, Said poses a question that is crucial to our understanding of *WB*: "How does the intellectual address authority: as a professional supplicant or as its unrewarded, amateurish conscience?" (1994: 83). The Magistrate moves from timidity and indirect pleading for the prisoners to speaking his conscience and thus being the exiled figure of dissent, embodying the amateurish position Said favors. If there is a change in the Magistrate's attitude, it is from one of conformity, what Said calls "professional" intellectualism throughout his Reith Lectures, to dissent, what Said calls "amateurish" intellectualism.

The ethical intellectual and humanist discourse

For Coetzee, the torture room metaphorically stages the uneven power relations between the oppressor and the victim, and embodies the difficulties involved in the intellectual's position. Trapped between the dilemma of ignoring the atrocities of the state or reproducing them, the writer points to a real challenge: "how not to play the game by the rules of the state, how to establish one's own authority; how to imagine torture and death on one's own terms" (1986: para. 8). Playing the game by the rules of the state entails complicity, which is the fate the Magistrate in *WB* resists in imagining the torture that takes place in Joll's rooms, or in his dealings with the victims of state-sanctioned torture. Another pitfall can be a cliched depiction of the torturer as a demonic, evil figure or simply a tool manipulated by the state. Torture, to use the words of Kelly Adams, "creates a crisis not only of interpretation for the Magistrate and the reader" of the novel, but also one of "representation for Coetzee" (2015: 173). The novel's dramatization of the Magistrate's questioning of the relationship between truth and language (between telling and believing) and Joll's declaration that there is "a certain tone" to truth that the interrogator knows through training and practice (Coetzee 2000: 5)[2] all hint at the intellectual's predicament of representation that Coetzee the writer and critic grapples with. While Said questions the extent to which the intellectual involved in the public sphere should participate—"How far should an intellectual go in

2 All future references to Coetzee's novel will be to this particular edition. Page numbers are consistently given in the text.

getting involved?" (1994: 105)—the Magistrate, a possible mouthpiece for Coetzee, also questions the extent to which the interrogator can exercise pain in pursuit of truth (5). Importantly, the Magistrate questions the extent of his own involvement in imperial politics after his "easy years" of "hunting and hawking and placid concupiscence" (9). Initially, he turns a deaf ear to the cries of pain coming from the granary (9). However, he goes there and sees for himself the dead corpse of the tortured prisoner (10). He talks to the prisoner's nephew and signs the false death warrant deposited by Joll (6), which makes him more conscious of his complicity with the torturers. He has been tempted into the dark chamber against his conscious wish, and his questions to the guard enable him to realize the falsity of imperial claims (6). His questions to Joll suggest his own inner struggle with knowing and telling the truth. The basic question for the intellectual, Said contends, remains one about truth: "how does one speak the truth? What truth? For whom and where?" (1994: 88). From one perspective, *WB* stages the Magistrate's struggles with speaking this truth to the Empire he serves, as well as his gradual transformation from a figure of consent to a figure of dissent, both being intellectual positions Said negotiates in his lectures on the representation of the intellectual.

The pitfalls of amateur intellectualism

In his Reith Lectures, *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said defines intellectual amateurism in terms of "the desire to be moved not by profit or reward but by the love for and unquenchable interest in the larger picture, in making connections across lines and barriers, in refusing to be tied down to a specialty, in caring for ideas and values despite the restrictions of the profession" (1994: 76). Professional intellectuals lose the full picture and can get absorbed in technical, abstract language. If the professional intellectual seeks objectivity and thus detachment or rewards, Said contends, the amateur intellectual favors "passionate engagement, risk, exposure, commitment to principles, vulnerability in debating and being involved in worldly causes" (1994: 109). For example, literature specialists can lose interest in history or politics while conforming to employers' wishes and their political agendas. In brief, amateur intellectuals do not conform to social and academic norms. On the other hand, Said defines amateurism as "an activity that is fueled by care and affection rather than by profit and selfish, narrow specialization" (1994: 82). Apparently, amateur intellectuals are moved by universal values of justice and truth against the authority of power and institutional influences.

Coetzee's novel begins with the arrival of Colonel Joll from the Third Bureau of the Civil Guard at the frontier settlement where the Magistrate has peacefully lived for years. Claiming he has arrived under emergency powers, Joll begins his ruthless campaign in search of possible barbarian enemies. The Magistrate, it should be stated, is also a seeker of truth, albeit of a different kind. He is an intellectual of sorts and a

man of principles, which fits Said's conception of the amateur intellectual. He is an amateur writer with literary ambitions, a cartologist, a historian, a hunter, and an archeologist reading ruins and desert signs. His life in this frontier outpost—which has grown into an "agricultural settlement" in the desert (5)— away from the imperial capital has sharpened his senses. He reads the wind and the migrating birds as early signs of the arrival of spring (62). He collects and reads desert ruins in the form of wooden slips with enigmatic script (15) as an indication of an earlier settlement near the lake. His preoccupation with reading signs can be summarized in his exclamation: "How will I ever know?" (16). He reads the classics in his spare time and excavates desert ruins, trying to locate his service of the Empire in the jagged history of the rise and fall of civilizations. He is a reader of imperial history and a critic of imperial practices. In brief, the Magistrate conforms to Said's conception of the intellectual as an "amateur" figure and as an "outsider" (1994: x) to dominant ideologies of power and oppression. The Magistrate discovers that his previous life as a civil servant and "responsible official" (8) administering his duties in peace has changed once he confronts imperial power in the figure of his visitor, Colonel Joll.

For Said, intellectuals can be constrained by affiliations, parties, governments, financial considerations, and the pressures of professionalism. Such factors, Said maintains, can "compromise judgment and restrain the critical voice", especially when trying to please audiences or employers (1994: 68). Before he sends the barbarian girl to her people months after she was left behind and after Joll leaves on another border mission, the Magistrate decides to write two documents, one addressed to the provincial governor explaining and justifying his visit to the barbarians as an attempt to prove his goodwill. As for the second document, he is not sure what it should be: "A testament? A memoir? A confession? A history of thirty years on the frontier? All that day I sit in a trance at my desk staring at the empty white paper, waiting for words to come" (62). Such writing attempts can be seen as trying to break ties with imperial centers of power to gain the independent voice intellectuals aspire to. When words do not come, he gives up the project and leaves. His numerous talents and hobbies, however, remain in the amateurish sphere. In the words of Said, "insiders, experts, coteries, professionals" who mold public opinion make the intellectual a conformist figure serving "special interests" and "corporate thinking" (1994: xiii). So, the intellectual as an amateur figure of exile remains an outsider to rules and guidance. While professionals, Said holds, can act as consultants or experts trying "to provide authority with their labor while gaining great profit" (1994: xv), the amateur intellectual seeks independence from institutional or governmental pressures. Nevertheless, escaping the public sphere and avoiding politics in art are difficult to achieve. When he finds Warrant Officer Mandel in his office after the mission of sending the girl back to her people, the Magistrate ponders: "It should not be so easy to attain salvation. And is there any principle behind my opposition?" (85). He

takes his status as a figure of dissent to authority for granted, and he is ready to sacrifice his freedom for his principles, yet he ethically questions his motivations for dissent.

The Magistrate links his inability to write to his inability to deal with this foreign woman in his bed whom the Empire views as the "barbarian" girl, thus conjoining artistic and sexual impotence, which symbolically points to the pitfalls of public intellectualism and the oppressions exercised by authority. Trying to leave a written statement, a history of the settlement, about the last days of the frontier town for future generations, he also fails: "What I find myself beginning to write is not the annals of an Imperial outpost or an account of how the people of that outpost spent their last year composing their souls as they waited for the barbarians" (168). Instead, he writes an idyllic plea on life on the frontier before border troubles. His amateur intellectualism, the "locutions of a civil servant with literary ambitions" (169), are opposed to the harsh winter approaching and the truth of expected invasion. His memorial is abortive, just like his sexual life. While taking the girl back to her people, he thinks: "Too much or too little: is it she I want or the traces of a history her body bears?" (70). In his ethical crisis, he cannot tell whether his interest in her is a desire for her whole body, restored to health after the marks of torture are erased, or a preoccupation with the tortured body carrying the marks of imperial history. The difficulties the Magistrate encounters in his intellectual and literary pursuits can be better understood in light of the challenges encountered by the postcolonial writer/critic, i.e., the extent of involvement and the ability to speak "truth to power" (Said 1994, 85). His failures and hesitations are the intellectual's uneasy relationship with authority, trying to establish a distance from the oppressor: "I must assert my distance from Colonel Joll!" the Magistrate interjects, "I will not suffer for his crimes" (48).

The ethical humanist: complicity and resistance

The Magistrate's ethical dilemma begins early in this novel, once he has to mediate between the tortured prisoners and his guest arriving from the capital to investigate a possible uprising against the Empire. Years of service in a "lazy frontier" (8) during which the Magistrate asked for a "quiet life" (8) before retirement ended with border troubles and rumors about a possible war with the barbarians. Justifying the capture of a sick boy and his old uncle for assumed banditry, the Magistrate says: "'No one would have brought an old man and a sick boy along on a raiding party.' I grow conscious that I am pleading for them" (4). However, his pleas on the prisoners' behalf never prevent the questioning and torture that follow and which he tries to ignore. Upon their next meeting, the Magistrate raises an ethical question to Joll. He is concerned about prisoners being exposed to more pressure during interrogation but already telling the truth and having nothing more to offer, or simply being forced (through excessive pain) to lie to please their tormentors: "And what a responsibility for the interrogator! How do you

ever know when a man has told you the truth?" (5). While posing questions about the ethical duty of the interrogator not to inflict excessive or needless pain on the prisoner, the Magistrate is still aware of his difficult position of complicity with the oppressor, serving the same imperial center: "... who am I to assert my distance from him? I eat with him, I show him the sights, I afford him every assistance as his letter of commission requests, and more" (6). According to Ashcroft et al., the word "comprador" in post-colonial studies describes "a relatively privileged, wealthy and educated elite" who interact with and benefit from colonial practices and thus feel reluctant to "struggle for local cultural and political independence" (48). While the Magistrate is not a native agent collaborating and benefiting from imperial structures, he still occupies the privileged and dominant part in his relationship with the barbarian prisoners. If the "comprador" class is complicit with the colonizer, the Magistrate is but a colonizer/settler complicit with another colonizer (i.e., Colonel Joll). As the novel progresses, the Magistrate will intellectually reject this complicity with the oppressor.

Comforting the tortured boy after the death of his uncle, the Magistrate feels his complicity with the torturers: "It has not escaped me that an interrogator can wear two masks, speak with two voices, one harsh, one seductive" (8). He has mixed feelings of guilt and shame as he, like the torturer, tried to leave his marks on the Barbarian girl: "Whom will that other girl with the blind face remember: me with my silk robe and my dim lights and my perfumes and oils and my unhappy pleasures, or that other cold man with the mask over his eyes who gave the orders and pondered the sounds of her intimate pain?" (147-48). Hence, he views this complicity with Joll as "Two sides of Imperial rule, no more, no less" (148-49). His encounter with Joll makes the Magistrate ponder the very existence of the torturer, i.e. how one becomes a torturer, how torturers clean their hands afterward, and how they can break bread with others after such brutal acts: "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?" (13). The Magistrate's epistemological impasse about knowing if the prisoner is telling the truth (i.e., to decide when to stop torture) is augmented by another level of ontological and ethical questioning of the life and behavior of the torturer. The mentality of the torturer and the conditions that create this type of people puzzle the Magistrate. On the one hand, the Magistrate's ejaculations serve to heighten his humanist vision and code of ethics. On the other hand, the Magistrate's ethical vision approximates Coetzee's attempt to object to torture by pondering the torturer's lifestyle and mode of being. Said asserts that the intellectual belongs "on the same side with the weak and unrepresented" (1994: 22). The Magistrate finds it ethically difficult to side with Joll, and he questions his position of complicity. His questioning of Joll's violent practices aligns him with Said's conception of "amateur intellectuals" who refuse to be co-opted by hegemonic power.

As a humanist, the Magistrate believes in peace rather than war, "perhaps even peace at any price" (15). Hence, he objects to Joll sending fishing people as prisoners to be held until his return from the desert. To his mind, the Empire has no external "enemies". However, his complicit stance of identification with the imperialists is manifest in his litany of complaints about their habits: "For a few days the fisherfolk are a diversion, with their strange gabbling, their vast appetites, their animal shamelessness, their volatile tempers" (20). The prisoners are made the other, the "filthy" counterpart of the civilized Empire. When the interrogation process begins, the Magistrate strains his ears not to hear the cries of pain and sounds of violence coming from the barracks hall. It is only when interrogation ceases that he can sleep, "away from the empire of pain" (24). The Magistrate, the guardian of justice and civilized manners, is made to question his ethical values just as the liberal humanist critic/novelist has to reconsider his/her relationship to oppressive regimes and different forms of hegemonic power. Gradually, however, the Magistrate moves from a position of avoidance or denial to one of confrontation and dissent.

As the first-person narrator, the Magistrate assumes the humanist stance expected from "amateur" intellectuals, per Said's account. Contemplating the pain and dehumanization the torturers imposed on the girl's father before her eyes, the Magistrate says: "Thereafter she was no longer fully human, sister to all of us. Certain sympathies died; certain movements of the heart became no longer possible to her" (89). When the main force comes back with a file of twelve barbarian captives, he is shocked that a loop of wire runs through their hands and cheeks to keep them meek. He feels disgusted at the sight: "My heart grows sick. I know now that I should not have left my cell" (113). In fact, the use of the word "cell" is illuminating as it disguises the Magistrate's unconscious wish to remain in his own private state of mind rather than get involved with this public spectacle of torture. He is trapped in ambivalent feelings of not wanting to hate the victimizers and not wanting to witness the atrocity and thus hate himself. Both experiences are depraving to the soul, and he decides to return to his cell to save himself from the atrocity to come: "Let it at the very least be said, if it ever comes to be said, if there is ever anyone in some remote future interested to know the way we lived, that in this farthest outpost of the Empire of light there existed one man who in his heart was not a barbarian" (114). The Magistrate acts as the man of law and justice, the humanist who is sickened by the sight of children encouraged to flog the prisoners. He wants to pass in history as the ethical humanist who first denies being part of this depravity before he gains the courage to speak "truth to power" in Said's terms. As an instance of a benevolent colonizer who "refuses", to draw on the words of Albert Memmi, the Magistrate cannot mentally escape a difficult situation: "to refuse its ideology [i.e. that of colonization's concrete reality] while continuing to live with its actual relationships" (2003: 64). This refusing colonizer "lives his life under the sign of a contradiction which looms at every step, depriving him of all coherence and all tranquility" (Memmi 2003: 64). It is only with

departing that such contradictions can be resolved, a course of action the Magistrate does not pursue. A man of ethics and principles, the Magistrate says he felt pained to see the settlers deceive the nomads in barter (41). In the words of Memmi, the Magistrate becomes a colonizer who "refuses" on ethical terms: "Having discovered the economic, political and moral scandal of colonization, he can no longer agree to become what his fellow citizens have become; he decides to remain, vowing not to accept colonization" (2003: 63). Hence, the Magistrate's ethical dilemma persists, due to his concurrent realization of his complicity with the Empire and his awareness of the Empire's devious ways.

When the Magistrate returns to the imperial settlement and is questioned for "treasonously consorting" with the enemy, he responds to Warrant Office Mandel by denying imperial foundations of superiority and asserting an ethic of equality: "'We are at peace here,' I say, 'we have no enemies.' There is silence. 'Unless I make a mistake,' I say. 'Unless we are the enemy'" (85). For Said, one of the intellectual's main tasks is "to unearth the forgotten, to make connections that were denied, to cite alternative courses of action that could have avoided war and its attendant goal of human destruction" (1994: 22). Despite his belief in humanist values like peace, tolerance, and justice, the Magistrate embodies the intellectual's sense of bewilderment in the face of historical wrongs. His failure to capture the barbarian girl's story or adequately read her body stands for the intellectual's failure to represent oppression. Conceding that comprehending torture is ethically difficult, he also realizes that representing it is equally, if not more, difficult. And when he is arrested and about to be confined, he is happy that he is now a figure of dissent: "I am aware of the source of my elation: 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" (85). He is resisting to uphold what Said calls the "eternal standards of truth and justice" (1994: 5). When Joll wants to use a hammer to crush the feet of the prisoners in the square, the Magistrate objects, hearing the word "No!" (116) come from his throat and chest despite himself. He sustains injuries: a broken hand and nose and a wound on his face. However, he insists: "'Look!' I shout. 'We are the great miracle of creation!' But from some blows this miraculous body cannot repair itself! How--! Words fail me. 'Look at these men!' I recommence. '*Men*!'" (117; emphasis original). The Magistrate's humanism is founded on his opposition to torture, on pursuing the ideal of justice despite the harsh imperial stratagems.

To reiterate, the novel demonstrates a shift in the Magistrate's position from deliberate silence and avoidance in his encounter with torture early in the novel ("Of the screaming which people afterwards claim to have heard from the granary I hear nothing" 5) to dissent as the novel reaches its climax. What Said calls the intellectual's "trimming, careful silence" and "turning away" which distort the intellectual's public role (1994: xii, 100) change as the Magistrate turns into an exile speaking "the truth to power" and becoming "controversial" (1994: xvi, 100). As a marginal figure of exile, the

intellectual for Said stands "outside the comforts of privilege, power, being-at-homeness" (1994: 59). The Magistrate's problematic relationship with imperial power is manifested in his repeated objections "No! No! No!" (116) to depraving the prisoners, and his direct and public opposition to Joll can be understood in terms of the dissent he embodies as a public figure. Assuming that saying "yes" entails accommodation or co-option by power, then saying "no" signifies the refusal to conform that Said assigns to amateur intellectuals. Exploring problems of identity and personhood in *WB*, Adrian Grafe has presented the Magistrate as a "personalized" figure of "rebellion" whose guilty conscience is revealed in the aptly used first-person narrative; hence, for Grafe the novel dramatizes "the opposition between justice and law" (2018: 23). The Magistrate, Grafe maintains, is "distinctly conscious of his conscience, and his 'growing conscious' is part of the process of his becoming a person" (2018: 25). In other words, his dynamic identity formation is contingent on his ethical pleas on behalf of the prisoners, an act which alleviates his feelings of guilt and complicity. Instead of accepting imperial policies or seeking the approval of authority figures, the Magistrate confronts both his intellectual objections to torture as well as his fears of authority.

If words fail the Magistrate and he finds the body of the tortured girl enigmatic, it is because the novel "does not recover history as a fully narratable subject, but bears witness to it by refusing to translate the suffering produced by colonial oppression into historical discourse" (Craps 2007: 59). Hence, the Magistrate fails to read the girl's coded body just as he fails to articulate the pain of torture he is witnessing, and the Magistrate's hermeneutical crisis echoes the intellectual's task when confronting oppression that is not told and cannot be told. Such a spectacle of cruelty, the Magistrate objects, corrupts both sides and denies innocence to children. Joll, accordingly, mocks him for trying to be "the One Just Man, the man who is prepared to sacrifice his freedom to his principles" (124). Seeking exoneration before history, the Magistrate accuses Joll of being the real enemy who committed "filthy barbarities" against the barbarians against the principles of civilized nations (125). With his hands tied and his body hoisted on a tree, the Magistrate still thinks in humanist terms despite the pain, hoping that the children do not imitate the games of their elders, "or tomorrow there will be a plague of little bodies dangling from the trees" (133). His question to a torturer like Mandel reveals much philosophical depth about attempting to understand the zone in which the torturer lives and how he eats after committing the atrocities of torture:

> 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. (138)

Even when the Magistrate begins to care for the tortured girl left behind, he feels that the distance between himself and her torturers is negligible, and he shudders at this realization (29). His ethical commitment to her burdens him, although he does not know what exactly to do with her tortured body. It is his awareness of being complicit with the oppressors that urges him to establish a distance from imperial ways in favor of humanist values like toleration and acceptance: "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" (41). However, his attempts at an ethical distance from the Empire bring him back to doubt and skepticism associated with complicity. His conversation with a young officer joining the new conscripts in the settlement reveals his humanistic stance against constructed bias: "How do you eradicate contempt, especially when that contempt is founded on nothing more substantial than differences in table manners, variations in the structure of the eyelid?" (55). One vital task for intellectuals, Said contends, is an effort to "break down the stereotypes and reductive categories that are so limiting to human thought and communication" (1994: xi). Moreover, Said adds that intellectuals should question "patriotic nationalism, corporate thinking, and a sense of class, racial or gender privilege" (1994: xiii). However, the Magistrate's ambivalence is manifested when he questions his own ideals: "Do I really look forward to the triumph of the barbarian way: intellectual torpor, slovenliness, tolerance of disease and death?" (56). His humanistic discourse is never free from imperial prejudices and stereotypes as he has been a functionary in the process for too long. Such contradictions in the Magistrate's position capture the paradoxical position of the intellectual who is complicit with systems of oppression or simply assuming a position of privilege against the subaltern, thus running the risk of further silencing them. While for Said intellectuals are unpredictable, conforming to no rules or expectations, they remain secular figures worshipping no gods (1994: xiv). The spirit of opposition and dissent they hold is a "struggle on behalf of underrepresented and disadvantaged groups" (Said 1994, xvii). Due to opposing imperial authority on behalf of the captured prisoners, the Magistrate is imprisoned and tortured accordingly. Having struggled with overcoming a difficult position of complicity and avoidance, the Magistrate becomes what Said calls the "unafraid and compassionate intellectual" (1994: 101).

Conclusion

It should be noted that for some critics the Magistrate assumes a problematic position as the liberal humanist since he "tries to maintain a moral gap from foul acts of the group, yet he fails" (Waham & Othoman 2019: 183). However, we should not undermine his attempts at relating to the Other or his attempts at opposing the authority of the Empire. Coetzee, like Said in a sense, has pointed out the risks and pitfalls of the humanist as the

intellectual, critic, or writer. The Magistrate's failures to decode the barbarian girl's body, to construct a coherent story of her pain, or to write a history of the Empire's last years, all point to the failures of liberal humanist discourse in the face of historical injustice. On the other hand, we should recall that imperial agents start leaving the frontier settlement at the end of the novel, allowing the Magistrate to resume some of his duties, and the Empire seems to be losing against the elusive enemy it has constructed. This indicates the ultimate triumph of the ideals of humanism and justice that the Magistrate represents against the oppressive authority practiced by the Empire. However, the intellectual as a liberal humanist has a role to play regardless of the outcome, i.e., regardless of their ability to actually change the status quo or subvert power structures. For Said, we should remember, the whole point is being controversial and active to "advance human freedom and knowledge" (1994: 17). Hence, the intellectual's critical sense should be augmented at any price, a necessary value often diminished when the intellectual seeks consensus-building or society's approval. On different occasions, Said experienced his public intellectualism in terms of a personal crisis. The life of Coetzee's Magistrate embodies those private tensions experienced by the public intellectual as the humanist. In the figure of the Magistrate, Coetzee found a way to negotiate ethical dilemmas and challenges faced by public intellectuals, especially those trying to speak "truth to power."

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