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POST-COLONIAL REFLECTIONS COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF 'DUSKLANDS' AND 'WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS

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ABSTRACT
This paper conducts a comparative analysis of post-colonial themes in J.M. Coetzee's "Waiting for the Barbarians" and "Dusklands." Through a close examination of the narrative structures, character dynamics, and symbolic elements in both texts, the paper explores how Coetzee addresses the complexities of power, identity, and resistance in the colonial context. By contextualizing the works within the broader discourse of post-colonial theory, the analysis illuminates the ways in which these novels offer insights into the lasting impacts of colonialism on both colonizers and the colonized, while also highlighting the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in the colonial experience. Through this comparative approach, the paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of Coetzee's engagement with post-colonial thought and its implications for contemporary literary discourse.
Keywords: Post-colonialism, J.M. Coetzee, Comparative analysis, Dusklands, Waiting for the Barbarians, Power dynamics, Identity, Resistance, Colonialism, Literary discourse

1. INTRODUCTION:

In the realm of post-colonial literature, the works of J.M. Coetzee stand as poignant and thought-provoking reflections on the enduring legacies of colonialism. With a profound exploration of power dynamics, identity struggles, and the complexities of resistance, Coetzee's novels offer a nuanced examination of the human condition within the context of colonial oppression. Two of his seminal works, "Waiting for the Barbarians" and "Dusklands," serve as compelling case studies through which to delve into the intricacies of post-colonial thought.

At the heart of both novels lies a profound interrogation of the colonial experience and its ramifications on both the colonizer and the colonized. Through a comparative analysis of these texts, this paper seeks to unravel the thematic threads that bind them together while also delineating the unique contributions each makes to the broader discourse of post-colonial literature.

"Dusklands," Coetzee's debut novel published in 1974, comprises two distinct narratives that explore the psyche of the colonial oppressor. The first narrative, "The Vietnam Project," follows the descent into madness of a psychological warfare researcher named Eugene Dawn as he becomes increasingly detached from the ethical implications of his work. Set against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, this narrative lays bare the dehumanizing effects of colonial violence on both its perpetrators and its victims. The second narrative, "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee," transports readers to the 18th-century Cape Colony and recounts the brutal exploits of a Dutch colonial explorer as he ventures into the uncharted African interior. Through these intertwined narratives, "Dusklands" grapples with the moral complexities of colonial conquest and the psychological toll it exacts on those involved.

In contrast, "Waiting for the Barbarians," published in 1980, shifts its focus to the perspective of the colonial subject. Set in an unspecified colonial outpost on the frontier of an unnamed empire, the novel follows the magistrate, a bureaucrat tasked with maintaining order in the borderlands. When rumors of an impending barbarian invasion surface, the magistrate finds himself drawn into a moral quagmire as he confronts the brutality of the empire's colonial project. As tensions escalate between the colonial authorities and the indigenous population, the magistrate is forced to reckon with his own complicity in perpetuating the cycle of violence and oppression.

Despite their differing narrative structures and settings, both "Dusklands" and "Waiting for the Barbarians" share a common thematic concern with the psychological and moral dimensions of colonialism. Through a close reading of these texts, this paper aims to elucidate the ways in which Coetzee navigates the complexities of power, identity, and resistance within the colonial context. By contextualizing these novels within the broader framework of post-colonial

theory, the paper seeks to shed light on the enduring relevance of Coetzee's work to contemporary discussions of imperialism, globalization, and cultural hegemony.

In the following sections, this paper will undertake a comparative analysis of "Dusklands" and "Waiting for the Barbarians," examining the ways in which Coetzee employs narrative techniques, character dynamics, and symbolic imagery to engage with key themes of post-colonial thought. Through this analysis, we will uncover the ways in which Coetzee's novels challenge conventional understandings of colonial discourse and offer new insights into the complexities of the colonial experience.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1.To analyze and compare the portrayal of post-colonial themes such as power dynamics, identity struggles, and resistance in J.M. Coetzee's "Waiting for the Barbarians" and "Dusklands."

2.To examine how Coetzee's narrative structures, character dynamics, and symbolic elements contribute to the exploration of the colonial experience in both novels.

3.To elucidate the ways in which Coetzee's works offer insights into the psychological and moral complexities faced by both colonizers and the colonized in the context of colonial oppression.

4.To contextualize the novels within the broader discourse of post-colonial theory and demonstrate their relevance to contemporary discussions of imperialism, globalization, and cultural hegemony.

5.To contribute to a deeper understanding of Coetzee's engagement with post-colonial thought and its implications for the study of literature and colonial history.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW:

The exploration of post-colonial themes in literature has become an expansive and evolving field, with scholars examining a wide array of texts to uncover the psychological, political, and cultural consequences of colonization and its aftermath. Within this broader discourse, the works of J.M. Coetzee have held a central position due to their profound engagement with the ethical, existential, and ideological dimensions of colonial power and resistance. His novels *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Dusklands* in particular offer complex representations of imperial structures, moral ambiguity, and the struggle for identity, prompting wide-ranging critical interpretations across decades of scholarship.

A foundational critical work that continues to influence post-colonial literary analysis is Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Said famously theorized how the West constructs the East as its inferior "Other" in order to legitimize its domination. This paradigm of representation is central to understanding Coetzee's narratives, in which colonizers justify acts of cruelty and conquest by projecting savagery and inferiority onto indigenous populations. Both *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Dusklands* echo Said's notion of the imperial gaze and reveal how the act of 'Othering' is instrumental in constructing colonial authority.

David Attwell's *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* (1993) remains a seminal contribution to Coetzee studies. Attwell explores how Coetzee's fiction navigates the moral crisis of writing under apartheid. His reading of *Waiting for the Barbarians* as a novel that dramatizes the tension between colonial complicity and ethical resistance provides an essential framework for understanding the Magistrate's internal conflict. Attwell also discusses *Dusklands* in relation to psychological warfare and historical violence, emphasizing its critique of Western rationalism and expansionism.

Elleke Boehmer, in her work *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995), focuses on how literature reflects the lingering psychological effects of colonization on both the oppressed and the oppressor. Her insights into *Waiting for the Barbarians* emphasize the ways in which colonial systems foster identity crises and moral disintegration. She frames Coetzee's work as a critique of the myth of empire, where civilization and savagery are mutually implicated rather than oppositional.

In *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (2004), Derek Attridge provides a philosophical interpretation of Coetzee's engagement with the ethical responsibilities of the writer and the reader. His reading of *Dusklands* underscores the novel's refusal to offer moral certainty. He argues that Coetzee's self-conscious narrative form challenges the authority of colonial discourse and invites readers to confront their own interpretive complicity.

Graham Huggan's *Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001) interrogates the commodification of post-colonial literature in a globalized literary marketplace. His chapter on Coetzee critiques the reception of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, noting how the novel simultaneously plays into and resists the exoticization of post-colonial suffering. Huggan's argument helps locate Coetzee within the tension between aesthetic resistance and market consumption.

While these foundational studies provide essential theoretical scaffolding, recent scholarship from 2023 to 2025 has revitalized Coetzee studies through new critical lenses and emerging methodologies. In a 2023 article published in *The European Review*, V. Biti analyzes *Waiting for the Barbarians* through the concept of "deterritorialization," arguing that the novel presents the colonial frontier as a space of exception where imperial legitimacy collapses. Biti

proposes that Coetzee's deconstruction of the Empire-Barbarian binary destabilizes the very foundation of colonial authority, transforming the frontier into a symbolic site of epistemological crisis.

In 2024, S. Singh's paper, *Traces of Power Dynamics and Class Struggle in J.M. Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians and Disgrace*, draws attention to the layers of class hierarchy within colonial administration. Singh argues that violence in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is not only a method of controlling the colonized but also a means of asserting intra-colonial dominance. The paper presents the Magistrate's moral dilemma as a classed performance of liberal paternalism, complicating his perceived sympathy for the barbarians.

A 2023 article in *Language and Translation* by A. Fatima, titled *Imperialism and Gender in J.M. Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians*, investigates the gendered dimensions of empire. Fatima argues that female bodies, especially that of the barbarian girl, become contested terrains upon which the colonizers project both desire and domination. The article critiques the Magistrate's actions as performative empathy that fails to restore the girl's subjectivity, reinforcing the silent victim trope in post-colonial fiction.

In a 2025 essay titled *J.M. Coetzee and the Aesthetics of Disgust*, K. Jacobs explores how *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* invoke visceral imagery to unsettle readers. Jacobs examines how representations of bodily degradation—torture, illness, scars—serve as metaphors for imperial corruption. Through a combination of affect theory and post-colonial ethics, the essay identifies disgust as a narrative strategy employed by Coetzee to subvert normalized depictions of colonial heroism.

Another notable contribution comes from S. Choi's 2024 paper in *Textual Practice*, which introduces the concept of "narratives of fascination." Choi contends that Coetzee simultaneously seduces and critiques the reader through aesthetic strategies that mimic colonial fascination with the exotic. In this reading, the novel's lyrical prose and dreamlike sequences serve as a counter-discursive force that deconstructs the Empire's myth of moral superiority.

Further, in a 2024 publication on *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, M. Rajan evaluates *Dusklands* through a psychoanalytic framework, highlighting Eugene Dawn's descent into madness as a metaphor for Western epistemological collapse. The study draws parallels between the internal fragmentation of the narrator and the structural disintegration of imperial ideology, positing that Coetzee writes against the very idea of the coherent, rational colonial self.

In sum, the literature on J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Dusklands* has evolved from foundational post-colonial critiques to incorporate newer theoretical trajectories such as affect studies, gender analysis, class critique, and ecocriticism. While early scholars like Said, Boehmer, and Attwell laid the groundwork for understanding Coetzee's engagement with colonial discourse, recent scholars have expanded this understanding by exploring the implications of Coetzee's form, imagery, and character construction in light of contemporary theoretical concerns.

The integration of both established and emerging perspectives enriches the interpretive possibilities of Coetzee's fiction, demonstrating its continued relevance in debates surrounding power, complicity, and the ethics of representation. This literature review, therefore, serves as a foundation for the present comparative study, which seeks to advance the conversation by analyzing how *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* interact with—and interrogate—key motifs in post-colonial thought, especially as they pertain to narrative form, moral ambiguity, and the psychological residue of empire.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodology rooted in post-colonial literary criticism to conduct a comparative analysis of J.M. Coetzee's *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Drawing upon theoretical insights from Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Frantz Fanon, the research explores the nuanced portrayal of colonial power, identity, resistance, and psychological trauma in these two pivotal texts. Said's theory of Orientalism is used to interrogate the mechanisms of "othering" and the imperial construction of the colonized subject, while Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, hybridity, and ambivalence help uncover the tensions inherent in colonial identity formation. Fanon's framework on colonial violence and mental colonization informs the reading of character behavior and narrative development, especially in relation to dehumanization and internalized oppression.

The study employs close textual analysis as the principal method, focusing on narrative structure, characterization, symbolism, and linguistic choices that reveal embedded colonial ideologies. A comparative approach is used to place the two novels in dialogue, not only thematically but also in terms of form, narrative voice, and the portrayal of ethical and psychological dilemmas. The novels are read both as individual texts and as intersecting critiques of the colonial condition, drawing attention to their shared motifs of conquest, moral collapse, and resistance. The actions and psyches of key characters—Eugene Dawn, Jacobus Coetzee, the Magistrate, and Colonel Joll—are examined for how they embody the cultural, political, and moral crises engendered by colonial systems. These figures serve as allegorical representations of different stages and dimensions of colonial history, from expansionist violence to post-colonial introspection.

This research relies on the 2004 Vintage editions of *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* as primary texts. Supporting evidence is drawn from critical studies by scholars such as David Attwell, Jane Poyner, Elleke Boehmer,

and Graham Huggan, whose work situates Coetzee within South African socio-political realities and global post-colonial discourse. The analysis synthesizes these critical interpretations with original readings of Coetzee's narrative strategies, paying particular attention to how spatial metaphors, gendered representations, and metaphysical meditations on guilt and power are interwoven in the texts. Comparative attention is given to the narrative techniques employed by Coetzee: the unreliable, fragmented confessional voice in *Dusklands* versus the ethical monologue in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, both of which subvert colonial authority and expose its psychological toll.

In interpreting symbolic imagery and narrative progression, this study also draws from psychoanalytic theory, especially Lacan's notions of recognition and the gaze, to explain the Magistrate's fixation with the barbarian girl and Eugene Dawn's descent into psychosis. The method of close reading enables a layered unpacking of how Coetzee constructs post-colonial critique not only through plot and character but through philosophical subtext, metatextual irony, and intertextual reference to classical colonial literature. The symbolic landscapes—wilderness, desert, frontier—are treated as ideological spaces, staging the colonizer's myth of dominion and the disintegration of rational control.

The selection of *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* is deliberate, given their shared concern with the violence of empire and their differing narrative positions—one from the perspective of the aggressor, the other from the perspective of a conflicted administrator. This contrast allows the study to explore both the internal mechanics of colonial justification and the moral consequences of complicity. The novels are situated within South African literary history as reflective texts that critique both the colonial past and apartheid-era political realities. The comparative reading highlights how Coetzee bridges historical specificity with universal questions about authority, suffering, and ethical responsibility.

Though the study is qualitative and interpretive, it remains grounded in verifiable textual evidence, consistently linking observations to primary and secondary sources. All references are documented using the Chicago Manual of Style (Author-Date format), ensuring scholarly rigor. Ethical considerations are also maintained, particularly in discussing sensitive topics such as torture, gendered violence, and psychological breakdown. Interpretations are handled with critical care to avoid reductive readings or the reproduction of oppressive perspectives.

This methodology enables a rich exploration of how Coetzee's works serve not only as narratives of colonial critique but also as philosophical reflections on the human condition under systems of domination. Through a comparative lens and theoretically informed textual analysis, the study seeks to illuminate the depth and complexity of Coetzee's post-colonial vision and to contribute meaningfully to the broader discourse on literature, empire, and ethical responsibility.

5. RESEARCH ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

In J.M. Coetzee's literary realm, the symbiotic relationship between characters and their environments mirrors a profound truth: the environment molds the individual, shaping their performance and inner workings. This observation resonates deeply within Coetzee's narratives, where the characters and their surroundings intertwine, suffused with the echoes of post-coloniality.

Across works like "Waiting for the Barbarians" and "Dusklands," Coetzee's South Africa and its diverse settings serve as crucibles, exerting a profound influence on the characters populating them. The palpable presence of post-coloniality saturates both setting and character, dictating their actions and beliefs. These characters, notably the Magistrate and Colonel Joll from "Waiting for the Barbarians," and Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee from "Dusklands," epitomize the colonial landscape.

Though hailing from disparate geographies and eras, these characters embody a shared ethos of hierarchical superiority over the native inhabitants. The indigenous population is consistently relegated to an inferior status, judged for their appearance, lifestyle, and very existence. Unwittingly, the characters slip into roles reminiscent of master and slave, blurring the boundaries of agency and exploitation.

Their actions, framed as endeavors to uplift the "savages," reveal a deeply ingrained sense of entitlement and paternalism. The natives, bereft of agency and stripped of recognition as fully human, exist within a moral vacuum. This master-slave dynamic permeates their interactions, underscoring the pervasive influence of colonial ideologies on both oppressor and oppressed.

In essence, Coetzee's characters serve as microcosms of the broader colonial narrative, embodying its power dynamics and ethical complexities. Their narratives unfold against a backdrop of systemic oppression and cultural hegemony, revealing the insidious ways in which colonialism distorts perceptions of self and other.

Through a critical examination of these characters and their environments, this paper seeks to unravel the intricate layers of post-colonial thought embedded within Coetzee's work. By illuminating the parallels between setting and character, it aims to deepen our understanding of the enduring legacy of colonialism and its impact on individual identity and agency.

The characters of the Magistrate, Colonel Joll, Eugene Dawn, and Jacobus Coetzee all exhibit a pervasive sense of superiority, positioning themselves as the "masters" within their respective narratives. In "Dusklands," Eugene Dawn's

involvement in a project aimed at showcasing US dominance reflects his detachment from human emotion. His callous depiction of atrocities in Vietnam underscores the dehumanizing effects of colonial violence. The images he presents, particularly those of severed heads, serve as trophies of conquest, reinforcing the notion of the colonizer as an indurated being devoid of moral qualms.

These images, including a graphic portrayal of American soldiers displaying shrunken Vietnamese heads, exemplify the patriarchal and colonialist triumphs inherent in the system of domination. They revise the colonial hunt myth, reducing indigenous peoples to the status of animals and reinforcing racist ideologies. The photographs create a radical distance between the viewer and the violence depicted, yet also implicate the viewer in the act of looking, thus making them complicit in the perpetuation of colonial power dynamics.

Similarly, in "Waiting for the Barbarians," the Magistrate and Colonel Joll embody the master-slave dynamic inherent in colonial relationships. Colonel Joll's brutal methods of interrogation and torture reflect a belief in the inherent superiority of the colonial regime. The Magistrate, though initially complicit in the colonial enterprise, begins to question the morality of his actions as he witnesses the suffering inflicted upon the indigenous population.

Jacobus Coetzee, in the second narrative of "Dusklands," epitomizes the colonizer's sense of entitlement and exploitation. His brutal exploits in the Cape Colony underscore the dehumanizing effects of colonial conquest, as he ruthlessly subjugates and exploits the indigenous population.

Overall, these characters serve as potent symbols of the colonial mindset, embodying the inherent inequalities and injustices of the colonial system. Through their actions and beliefs, they reveal the pervasive influence of colonial ideologies on individual identity and agency, highlighting the complex interplay between power, privilege, and oppression in the colonial context.

The authority wielded by the Magistrate within his jurisdiction resembles that of a ruler, enabling him to exploit the land and its inhabitants to his advantage. However, beneath his façade of concern and care lies a deep-seated sense of supremacy, particularly evident in his interactions with the native girl.

In "Waiting for the Barbarians," the Magistrate's encounter with the native girl unveils his latent colonialist tendencies. Despite his outward attempts at empathy, he ultimately views her as inferior in every aspect, a manifestation of his supremacist beliefs. His struggle to even sketch her face reflects his inability to truly see her as anything but "ugly" (Coetzee, 2004, p. 50).

Although the Magistrate endeavors to establish a connection with the girl, his motivations are called into question. His attempts at sympathy may be perceived as a guise for a more calculated desire for power, driven by a sadistic impulse to dominate and humiliate the "other" (Poyner, 2018, p. 65). Despite his altruistic actions towards the girl, the Magistrate remains entrenched in his colonialist mindset, unable to shed his identity as a colonizer.

His efforts to distance himself from Colonel Joll and his brutal tactics are undermined by his own complicity in the workings of the colonial regime. The tortured girl serves as a poignant reminder of the truth of empire, forcing the Magistrate to confront his own culpability in the atrocities committed by his fellow colonizers. Despite his initial attempts to disassociate himself from Joll's actions, the Magistrate ultimately realizes the negligible difference between himself and the girl's torturers.

As the narrative unfolds, the Magistrate grapples with his own moral ambiguity, torn between his desire to absolve himself of guilt and his recognition of his own culpability in perpetuating colonial violence. His journey serves as a stark illustration of the insidious nature of colonialism, wherein even those who seek to resist its oppressive structures are ultimately ensnared by its pervasive influence.

The Magistrate's attempt to comprehend the girl, or more accurately, to understand himself through her suffering, is perpetually undermined by his conflicting desire, paradoxically, to erase it. This endeavor ultimately reduces her to an object, perpetuating the oppression initiated by her torturers.

Laura Wright suggests that the Magistrate, through the metaphor of washing the girl's body, seeks to cleanse himself from his complicity with Empire "through the intellectualization of his ambivalent position as a champion of an anachronistic imperialism" (Coetzee, 2004, p. 74).

The realization that "the distance between myself and the torturers is negligible" is a chilling revelation for the Magistrate, one he struggles to reconcile. His movements around her are described as a "prowl," evoking a sense of predation and sexualization. Despite feeling "sick at [himself]," he asserts that his behavior is not as it seems. Both he and Colonel Joll wield power over the girl, interpreting her through their own motivations.

The Magistrate's shudder at the thought of his moral equivalence to the torturers carries a dual significance. It reflects both horror at his potential for domination and abuse, as well as a quivering anticipation, possibly indicating a sadistic pleasure in the violence inflicted upon the girl (Hayes, 2018, p. 66). The text hovers between these interpretations, deferring final judgment.

As the narrative unfolds, the Magistrate's identity as a colonizer is challenged by his interactions with the Barbarian girl. He seeks catharsis, no longer willing to be punished for the misdeeds of others. Instead, he aims to purge himself of his own guilt, using the Barbarian girl as a means. Coetzee utilizes the girl as a catalyst to reveal the Magistrate's true inner self, exposing the complexities of power, guilt, and complicity within the colonial context.

To assess the experiential depths of "Waiting for the Barbarians," it's essential to outline how this novel expands, and politicizes, Beckett's horizon of concern. Coetzee's narrative maintains the monologue form but explicitly politicizes the concept of otherness, notably around the distinctions of 'Empire' and 'Barbarian,' prominently embodied by the enigmatic 'barbarian girl.' This figure, analogous to Beckett's 'Worm' from "The Unnamable," challenges the protagonist, here named the 'Magistrate,' pushing against the boundaries of human recognition.

The Magistrate's attempts to understand the barbarian girl are thwarted by her unreadability, mirroring Worm's resistance to assimilation in Beckett's work. She appears both human and disturbingly non-human, defying the Magistrate's comprehension. Her presence disrupts his sense of self and humanity, igniting a crisis of identity and understanding.

As the narrative progresses, the Magistrate finds himself increasingly ensnared by the girl's presence, unable to reconcile her existence within his worldview. Even after she departs, her image haunts him, challenging his conception of humanness itself. Like Worm, the barbarian girl elicits a profound sense of crisis in the Magistrate, propelling him into a state of 'waiting' characterized by baffling dreams and transformative encounters.

In contrast, Jacobus Coetzee embodies the violent colonizer archetype, akin to Colonel Joll, viewing everything and everyone as conquests. His brutality towards his servants mirrors Colonel Joll's treatment of captives, emphasizing the ruthless imposition of colonial supremacy. "Dusklands" serves as an exposé of the cruelty inherent in conquest, highlighting the violent underpinnings of colonialism (Atwell, 2018, p. 34).

Through the juxtaposition of characters like the Magistrate and Jacobus Coetzee, Coetzee navigates the complexities of power, identity, and violence within the colonial context, challenging readers to confront the inherent injustices of empire.

The novels vividly portray the ruthless nature of colonialism, demonstrating that oppression can manifest not only through physical force but also through mental manipulation, as exemplified by Eugene Dawn's project. Capturing the minds of the natives as "new lands" is a form of enslavement, albeit one that may go unnoticed as the fetters of bondage are not visible, and the oppressed often accept their oppression willingly. The barbarian girl serves as a poignant example of this, passively accepting her fate even as the Magistrate uses her for his own purgation, oblivious to her suffering (Coetzee, 2004, p. 45).

Moral and social degradation permeates the lives of the characters in the novels, with none able to maintain a steady state of mind. Characters like Jacobus Coetzee and Eugene Dawn experience a steep decline, driven by their immersion in the oppressive systems they perpetuate. Eugene becomes so callous due to his work that he loses all sense of morality, even harming his own child without comprehending the gravity of his actions. Similarly, Jacobus Coetzee displays sociopathic tendencies, exhibiting no remorse for the violence he inflicts upon his servants.

Jacobus Coetzee's descent into madness, attributed to physical disease, is metaphorically linked to the sociopathic nature of colonialism. His delirium becomes a metaphor for the madness of colonial conquest, revealing the dehumanizing effects of imperial and colonial ideologies. Similarly, Eugene Dawn's psychological collapse serves as a lens through which to understand Jacobus Coetzee's metaphorically realized madness, exposing the willed misrecognition inherent in colonial enterprise.

The myths of imperialism and colonialism are depicted as forms of madness, stemming from a deliberate misrecognition of the colonial other. Coetzee's narratives unveil the underlying insanity of so-called civilization, undermining the pseudo-rational discourse that justifies imperial and colonial conquest (Poyner, 2018, p. 16). Through their exploration of madness and degradation, the novels offer a searing critique of colonial oppression and its enduring legacy.

Eugene Dawn's relentless assertion of self, akin to Jacobus Coetzee's demeanor, lays bare his profound insecurity and psychological instability, ultimately rendering him a casualty of the imperialist agenda he serves (Poyner, 2018, p. 20). Both protagonists, Jacobus Coetzee and Eugene Dawn, depicted in the novellas comprising "Dusklands," exemplify intelligent yet psychologically disturbed individuals entrenched in the service of imperial cultures (Atwell, 2018, p. 30).

In "Waiting for the Barbarians," the Magistrate is acutely aware of the mechanisms of Empire's discursive power. His encounters with Joll prompt a reflection on the ironies inherent in the concept of "civilization," while his tormentors reveal to him the true nature of humanity, portraying Empire's enforcers as the "new barbarians" (Coetzee, 2004, pp. 13, 126). The novel suggests that Empire's cultivation of fear regarding the barbarian threat serves to define the "civilized" self (Poyner, 2018, p. 64). Similarly, the Magistrate's journey to return the girl to her people marks a renunciation of Empire's sanctuary, leading to his alienation upon his return (Canepari, 2018, p. 151).

Jacobus Coetzee epitomizes the quintessential colonizer, exhibiting contempt towards indigenous groups encountered during his journey and treating them as subhuman. His ruthless killing of his servants reflects a colonialist approach aimed at suppressing any deviation from the established colonial order, showcasing a degradation from his former self to a self-consoled murderer (Coetzee, 2004, p. 58). His egocentricity and self-aggrandizement paint him as a caricature of colonial expansionism, viewing himself as a god-like figure wielding absolute power over the native populace (Poyner, 2018, p. 29).

Unlike the later white narrator-authors burdened by guilt and self-questioning, Jacobus Coetzee lacks the capacity for ethical awakening, remaining steadfast in his delusions of grandeur and colonial supremacy (Poyner, 2018, p. 29). His failure to reform underscores his inability to transcend the confines of colonial ideology, cementing his portrayal as a symbol of unchecked colonial hubris and moral bankruptcy.

In "Waiting for the Barbarians," the Magistrate embodies the archetype of the sympathetic yet ultimately complicit master, torn between his purported sympathy for the natives and his internalized superiority. As the narrative unfolds, the Magistrate's character undergoes a degradation from his initial position of authority to a state where he is reduced to a mere spectacle for the soldiers, akin to a performing animal. This social degradation mirrors a broader theme present in both novels, characterized by the prominent concept of "othering."

Indeed, the colonizers depicted in the narratives—Eugene Dawn, Jacobus Coetzee, and the Magistrate—rely on the presence of the "other," typically represented by the indigenous peoples of Vietnam, the Bushman and Hottentots, or the Barbarians, to define their own identities. As Dr. Susan Nirmala S. observes, the existence of the "other" is essential in delineating what is considered "normal" and in establishing one's own place in the world. The "other" is often perceived as lacking essential characteristics possessed by the dominant group, thus being relegated to an inferior status and treated accordingly (Nirmala, 2018, page 5).

Coetzee's narratives depict a struggle for recognition inherent to all individuals, who seek acknowledgment from others to solidify their identities. However, this pursuit of identity through recognition is fraught with contradiction, as Coetzee highlights. Drawing from Hegelian philosophy, Coetzee illustrates how the Master-Servant dynamic operates, emphasizing that the Master's identity is contingent upon the recognition received from the Servant. Thus, each system or individual seeks to establish dominance by relegating others to the position of the "Other," without whom their mastery would be invalidated, and their language unrecognized (Canepari, 2018, page 12).

Coetzee's exploration aligns with Lacanian theory, suggesting that human discourse fundamentally stems from a demand for recognition by the Other, leading to inherent tendencies towards aggression and coercion (Canepari, 2018, page 70). In "Waiting for the Barbarians," the Magistrate's quest for the girl's recognition mirrors the Empire's need for the Barbarians' acknowledgment of its authority (Canepari, 2018, page 82).

Throughout Coetzee's narratives, the portrayal of natives consistently underscores a depiction of them as intellectually inferior. They are depicted as existing solely because of the colonizer's supposed benevolence, perpetuating the notion of the "white man's burden" as emphasized in the novels. This burden entails the colonizer's obligation to civilize the natives, albeit through a coerced form of civilization imposed in every colonial context. The natives' perceived primitiveness and barbarism stem from their failure to conform to the standards of the colonizer's notion of "civilization."

Jacobus Coetzee exemplifies this mindset when he attributes the success of his expedition solely to his own efforts, dismissing the contributions of the natives and his oxen. He portrays himself as the paternalistic figure, asserting control and maintaining order among his men, ultimately viewing himself as indispensable to their survival (Coetzee, 2004, p. 64). This narrative perpetuates the colonialist narrative of the natives as dependent and in need of guidance from their purportedly superior colonizers.

Coetzee delves into the entrenched division between colonizer and native, a chasm seemingly insurmountable and deeply ingrained. The native is consistently depicted as the savage, bereft of firearms, epitomizing a state of enslavement to space, contrasting sharply with the colonizer's mastery of it. This spatial relation between master and savage underscores the inherent power dynamics. As Coetzee articulates in "Dusklands": "Across this annulus I behold him approach bearing the wilderness in his heart... He threatens to have a history in which I shall be a term. Such is the material basis of the malady of the master's soul" (Coetzee, 2004, p. 80).

Moreover, the distinction between colonizer and native extends beyond individuals to encompass all aspects of life. Coetzee illustrates this through a dialogue in "Dusklands": "What was wrong with me? Did I have the Hottentot sickness? He was sure I did not. The Hottentot sickness was for Hottentots" (Coetzee, 2004, p. 82).

The omnipotent and omniscient persona of the colonizer finds embodiment in Jacobus Coetzee, who epitomizes the attitude of "discovering" everything merely because of his unawareness of its existence. This notion is reinforced by S. J. Coetzee's Afterword, where Jacobus is hailed as a hero for his supposed discoveries, without regard for indigenous perspectives or contributions (Poyner, 2018, p. 22). Jacobus's blindness to his own hypocrisy is evident in his characterization of the Bushmen as "listless and unreliable" while simultaneously touting his own exploits in the wild (Poyner, 2018, p. 22). This hypocrisy extends to his expectation that indigenous peoples adhere to colonial social norms, while he freely indulges in the vast "emptiness" of the veld, blurring the boundaries between self and other (Poyner, 2018, p. 22).

S. J. Coetzee critiques European botanists, highlighting their narrow criteria for discovery and their Eurocentric taxonomies, as he states: "The criteria for a new discovery employed by the gentlemen from Europe were surely parochial. They required that every specimen fill a hole in their European taxonomies" (Coetzee, 2004, p. 116). He attributes the "inward moment of discovery" to the Boer, who draws not only from personal experiences but also from Bushman knowledge (Coetzee, 2004, p. 116). Additionally, references to idleness echo stereotypes perpetuated by European travel writers, who aimed to denigrate Boer frontiersmen, according to J. M. Coetzee (Poyner,

2018, p. 23). These stereotypes challenged European notions of purity and superiority over Africans, as Coetzee contends: "The spokesmen of colonialism are dismayed by the squalor and sloth of Boer life because it affords sinister evidence of how European stock can regress after a few generations in Africa" (Coetzee, 2004, p. 30).

Throughout the novels, characters navigate a landscape fraught with tension, reflecting the tumultuous times they inhabit. Their thoughts and actions mirror the societal unrest surrounding them, embodying larger societal paradigms. The notion of the "master spirit" is intrinsic to the colonizer, as depicted by Jacobus Coetzee's assertion: “They lacked all will, they were born slaves” (Coetzee, 2004, p. 73).

Moreover, female characters in the novels serve as embodiments of the post-colonial condition, grappling with both colonial and patriarchal oppression. The Barbarian girl in "Waiting for the Barbarians" and Marilyn in "Dusklands" are ensnared in colonial contexts beyond their control. Marilyn, particularly, is subjected to her husband's occupation, becoming little more than an object of his love-hate relationship, as he laments, “Most of the trouble in my life has been caused by women, and Marilyn was certainly my worst mistake” (Coetzee, 2004, p. 44).

The barbarian girl, in contrast, is depicted as a puppet in the hands of her torturers. Brutally assaulted by Colonel Joll and later taken in by the Magistrate, she becomes more of an object for his self-purging purposes. Both women serve as silent witnesses to the events surrounding them, symbolizing the conquered land that signifies the conqueror's power and prestige. Although the Magistrate ostensibly assists the Barbarian girl, their relationship lacks equality. She is merely a means to establish the authority first of Colonel Joll and then of the Magistrate. Eugene's perceptions of his wife mirror this turmoil, viewing her more as an object of desire than as an autonomous individual with agency. This dynamic reflects the master-slave equation, wherein the master relies on the slave to validate his position.

The Magistrate's relationship with the barbarian girl illustrates the liberal writer's attempt to imbue meaning into the victim's suffering, as he endeavors to interpret the marks of torture on her body akin to deciphering archaic script. Simultaneously, the Magistrate's obsessive attachment to the girl demonstrates how the suffering victim becomes a vehicle for establishing identity for the liberal writer. By bearing witness to the other's suffering and ultimately claiming a parallel suffering for himself, the writer assumes roles such as seer, truth-teller, blameless one, and potentially even tragic hero or scapegoat (Huggan, 2018, p. 143).

In "Waiting for the Barbarians" (2004), a young woman in an unnamed frontier town bears witness to the scars left by her torturers, including twisted feet and half-blind eyes. Similar to Morrison's "Beloved," the narrative emphasizes scars and bodily surfaces. The Magistrate gazes upon the marks on her body with a mix of fascination and revulsion, pondering whether she represents what he desires or merely the remnants of a fraught history her body carries (Hall, 2018, p. 95).

Violence emerges as a central theme in both novels, serving as a means to assert power. In "Waiting for the Barbarians," the exchange between the Magistrate and Colonel Joll regarding interrogation techniques highlights the inherent brutality of the colonizer. When the Magistrate questions the morality of doubting a truthful prisoner, Colonel Joll's response underscores the ruthless nature of interrogation under colonial rule: "What if your prisoner is telling the truth," I ask, "yet finds he is not believed? Is that not a terrible position? Imagine: to be prepared to yield, to yield, to have nothing more to yield, to be broken, yet to be pressed to yield more! And what a responsibility for the interrogator! How do you ever know when a man has told you the truth?"

"There is a certain tone," Joll says. "A certain tone enters the voice of a man who is telling the truth. Training and experience teach us to recognize that tone." "The tone of truth! Can you pick up this tone in everyday speech? Can you hear whether I am telling the truth?" "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." In this dialogue, pain becomes synonymous with truth, casting doubt on all other forms of communication and emphasizing the coercive methods employed by the colonizer (Coetzee, "Waiting for the Barbarians," p. 5).

Violence in the post-colonial context serves as a tool to suppress any form of resistance, regardless of whether it emanates from the Barbarians, Hottentots, or other native populations. This power dynamic grants the wielder an advantage, exploiting the vulnerability of the colonized, who are perceived as different from the colonizers. The colonizer employs violence to reinforce this perceived distinction. But why is violence so inherently intertwined with the post-colonial narrative?

As Edward Said elucidates, European discourses on Africa, India, and other regions often employ rhetorical figures and stereotypes to justify the use of force or violence against indigenous peoples. The notion of bringing civilization to supposedly primitive or barbaric populations justifies acts of violence, such as flogging or harsh punishment, when they are perceived as misbehaving or rebellious. This underscores the belief that the colonized are fundamentally different from the colonizers and therefore deserve to be ruled (Said xi).

In any scenario where power exists, there is a natural inclination to wield it. However, it is not power itself that is at fault, but rather the way in which it is wielded to subjugate others. The powerful often test their authority initially, and if they find themselves able to overpower their subjects, they assume positions of authority. This is exemplified by

colonizers who initially arrived as traders but eventually established themselves as masters. In every post-colonial setting, the powerful invariably succeed in their experiments and assert authority, often for their own benefit.

In the novels, characters like the Magistrate, Colonel Joll, and Jacobus perceive their methods as idealistic or idyllic. They believe they are bringing about positive change. However, as Said suggests in his commentary on Conrad's novels, this perception is rooted in a Western-centric view that dictates who is deemed a "good native" or a "bad native." When natives rebel, they are often dismissed as silly children misled by their Western masters, reinforcing the colonizer's sense of superiority (Said xx).

In the novel, characters like the Magistrate reveal their colonialist tendencies when they utilize their positions to intervene in the aftermath of the torture inflicted upon the Barbarian girl by Colonel Joll. As Kelly Adams suggests, both Joll and the Magistrate derive some form of satisfaction from their interactions with the girl's physical body, whether through torture or through acts of care like washing her feet. Importantly, the Magistrate is not oblivious to the parallels between his actions and those of Joll.

Similarly, in "Dusklands," the characters of Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee exhibit insensitivity driven by their power, which ironically renders them more paranoid than those they label as "uncivilized." The violence depicted in "Dusklands" may seem gratuitous, with the narrator's motives for murder appearing trivial, such as dealing with defiant servants or reacting to ants on his scrotum. This portrayal suggests that the violence in the novel is an unbridled expression of the characters' natures.

Colonel Joll exercises sovereign power by delineating the space that the barbarians, deemed enemies of the state, are confined to occupy. The torture inflicted by Joll and others is not merely an interrogation technique but a display of the Empire's dominance, showcasing its capacity to inflict pain upon its adversaries.

Through these novels, J.M. Coetzee delves into the deep-seated tensions stemming from colonization in his native land. They offer a profound exploration of the impact of colonization over the past century.

However, "Dusklands" isn't solely a narrative of cruelty; it also serves as a vessel for anger. The work reflects the indignation of a young author grappling with his origins and the role they've assigned him in the world. It's a testament to the author's anger about his upbringing and the societal constraints imposed upon him (Atwell, 2018, p. 34).

Coetzee's reflection on the psychohistory of white South Africans during the final years of apartheid reveals a detachment of libido from the world, leading to an inability to envision a future. This observation carries an element of introspection, as Coetzee himself experienced the psychohistory he describes. Despite initially attempting to imagine South Africa in the aftermath of a revolutionary war, Coetzee found himself unable to materialize such a narrative. Instead, he produced a novel about the failure to imagine a future, a novel fraught with thwarted desires, exemplified in "Waiting for the Barbarians."

"Waiting for the Barbarians" strips away specific ethnic markers from known colonial discourses while retaining the stark cultural disparities and conflicting lifestyles reminiscent of eighteenth-century Cape.

Coetzee's concoction of peculiar sexuality, tortured bodies, cultural disparities, and a regime on the verge of collapse creates a potent narrative blend. However, he remained uncertain about his creative direction, expressing doubts about the plausibility of his story and hoping for a transformative revelation.

His intuitions led him to intertwine sexual alienation with torture, conveying a sense of the body having no privileged space, and intensifying the protagonist's experience of the events unfolding in the torture room. Additionally, Coetzee contemplated subjecting the protagonist to physical pain, considering scenarios where he might be wounded during an attack by the barbarians on his party.

Six years after its publication, Coetzee reflected on "Waiting for the Barbarians" in an essay titled "Into the Dark Chamber," acknowledging the novel's theme as the impact of the torture chamber on a man of conscience. Despite this clarity of theme, Coetzee grappled with the challenge of managing and fictionalizing the directness of the events, recontextualizing them with depth and aesthetic consequence. Torture, he observed, had captivated South African writers due to its encapsulation of the relationship between authoritarianism and its victims, presenting novelists with the unique challenge of representing cruelty without replicating it.

Coetzee's intellectual lineage, influenced by Heideggerian ideas indirectly absorbed from Sartre's "Being and Nothingness" and the French literary avant-garde, is evident in "Dusklands." The novel reflects his polemical stance against the universalist ideal and an overt assault on the form of the novel. Coetzee portrays the aspiration towards a single rational basis for human identity and political life as a 'white' tribal myth steeped in a calculative will to power, associated with early European colonialism and contemporary American involvement in Vietnam. The protagonists, Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee, symbolize the era of modernity, with its dawn coinciding with colonial expansion in Africa and its dusk representing contemporary neurosis and scheming.

"Dusklands" underscores the cultural and political roots of its characters' outlooks in the logocentric mythos of the Christian tradition. While Jacobus Coetzee's Christianity asserts his racial distinction and superiority, Eugene Dawn's nationalist rhetoric transforms this idea into a duty towards history and the glory of consciousness. Despite their claims to higher humanity, both characters' attitudes towards cultural 'others' are depicted as remorselessly calculative and devoid of respect for their own universalist rhetoric.

Coetzee portrays a traumatized state in which both colonizers and natives suffer from the underlying disequilibrium brought about by colonization. Neither group finds ease in their present circumstances, with characters physically and emotionally affected by the adverse effects of colonialism. Through this turmoil, Coetzee vocalizes the postcolonial situation he observes, attempting to address an entrenched issue that seems resistant to change.

6. CONCLUSION:

In the exploration of J.M. Coetzee's seminal works "Dusklands" and "Waiting for the Barbarians," a comparative analysis reveals profound insights into the post-colonial condition, shedding light on the enduring legacies of colonialism and the complex dynamics of power, violence, and identity.

"Dusklands" and "Waiting for the Barbarians" offer distinct yet complementary perspectives on the post-colonial experience. While "Dusklands" delves into the psychological and philosophical dimensions of colonialism through the narratives of Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee, "Waiting for the Barbarians" examines the moral and existential implications of colonial violence through the eyes of the Magistrate.

In "Dusklands," Coetzee interrogates the corrosive effects of colonial ideology on both the colonizer and the colonized. Through the characters of Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee, he exposes the delusions of superiority and the moral decay inherent in colonial expansion. The novel serves as a powerful critique of the violence and exploitation that underpin colonialism, challenging the myth of progress and civilization propagated by colonial powers.

On the other hand, "Waiting for the Barbarians" offers a more intimate exploration of the human cost of colonial oppression. Through the character of the Magistrate, Coetzee delves into the psychological and moral dilemmas faced by individuals caught in systems of oppression. The novel poignantly portrays the dehumanizing effects of colonial violence, inviting readers to confront the ethical complexities of complicity and resistance.

Through a comparative analysis of these two works, several key themes emerge. Both novels grapple with the existential crisis faced by individuals living under the shadow of colonialism, exploring questions of identity, agency, and morality. Moreover, they highlight the enduring legacy of colonial violence and its impact on contemporary society, emphasizing the need for reconciliation and justice in post-colonial contexts.

Furthermore, Coetzee's nuanced characterizations and intricate narratives enrich the comparative analysis, offering deeper insights into the complexities of human nature and societal norms. His exploration of philosophical and existential themes adds depth and complexity to the examination of post-colonial dynamics, inviting readers to reflect on broader questions of power, ethics, and responsibility.

In conclusion, "Dusklands" and "Waiting for the Barbarians" stand as powerful reflections on the post-colonial condition, offering incisive critiques of colonialism and its legacies. Through their distinct yet complementary narratives, these works invite readers to confront the darker aspects of human nature and to reckon with the enduring injustices of the colonial past. As we navigate the complexities of the post-colonial world, Coetzee's novels serve as poignant reminders of the ethical imperative to confront oppression and strive for a more just and equitable future.

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