FACULTY OF ARTS AND PHILOSOPHY

MY BODY, MY VOICE:

SUBALTERN SOUNDS OF POWER IN J.M. COETZEE'S *WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS*

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Abstract

This thesis examines the silence of the Barbarian girl in J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) as a form of resistance against oppression. Starting with Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?", it proposes a new question: Should the subaltern speak? The analysis argues that silence, much like speech, can be a powerful and effective tool of resistance. Furthermore, relying on several scholarly perspectives, the study explores silence as a form of communication, examining, by extension, its implications in colonial contexts. The analysis considers silence as a communication means that resists the Empire's conception of the truth. Moreover, the thesis discusses the representation of women of color in the text as well as outside of it. Specifically, it critiques the portrayal of the girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, arguing that she is constantly reduced to either a sexualized or injured body. This is further illustrated through an analysis of several covers of the novel in different languages, which portray the girl through this reductionist lens. In the final section, this investigation will explore the allegorical nature of the narrative and, building on all sections, relate the analysis to a broader colonial context. Ultimately, this thesis argues that silence can be a strategy of resistance, a choice, and an empowerment for subaltern women, challenging oppressive systems and advocating for more truthful, and more inclusive representations in-and-out of literature.

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Introduction

Africa, the continent, is often portrayed either as an exotic, alluring *terra paradisus* or as an oppressed, *terra devastata* ravaged by war, poverty and natural disasters. African women, akin the land, are always either depicted as sexualized or injured and silenced. This reductionist portrayal reflects a narrow, shortsighted worldview, where reality is viewed through binaries and dichotomies. Such a perspective overlooks the versatile nature of human existence and eclipses the diverse experiences of subaltern groups, namely subaltern women. Experiences are not uniform, and people are not monolithic. Women of color can be more than sexual objects or victims. Silence can signify more than a lack of responsiveness and communication.

J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) unfolds through the eyes of the protagonist, the Magistrate, who observes a frontier settlement of an Empire. The plot is shaped by his encounter with a Barbarian girl who has been tortured and left with broken feet and partial blindness by colonial forces. The magistrate takes the girl under his care, initiating a rather complex relationship that drives much of the narrative. The girl's speech is little to non-existent throughout their interactions, yet quite powerful in its impact. The Magistrate eventually takes the girl back to her people, facing upon his return torture and humiliation by the very Empire he spent a lifetime serving. The girl's silence leaves a mark on the Magistrate's mind, planting seeds of doubt about the Empire and his role within it. She ignites his transformative journey and process of questioning his colonial beliefs, ultimately starting a quest of decolonizing his mind.

This thesis focuses on the character of the Barbarian girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians* for several reasons. First, while she is not the protagonist and her speaking moments are quite scarce throughout the narrative, her silent presence is of paramount importance to the development of the events and the Magistrate's personal journey. Second, her position as a

marginalized figure within the colonial context of the novel provides a closer, perhaps more truthful (albeit not monolithic) lens through which to examine the experiences of the oppressed, namely how she grapples with notions like power, resistance, representation and agency. Lastly, amid all these notions, her silence is highly intriguing, as it raises several questions and offers room for literary analysis. Therefore, by placing the Barbarian girl in the center, this thesis aims to explore how her character challenges traditional notions of voice and resistance in postcolonial literature, all while offering a clear illustration of the essence of a personal journey.

Recent scholarship, such as David Attwell's "A New Footing': Re-reading the Barbarian Girl in Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians," suggests that previous interpretations of this character may be outdated or insufficient. Attwell's use of terms like "new footing" and "re-examination" indicates that the readings of her character have evolved with time. This calls for an examination that investigates the girl's character, how she handles her experience, her existence, agency, and resistance in ways that previous examinations may not have. Therefore, by focusing on the Barbarian girl, this thesis seeks to contribute to this evolving discourse. Her silence will be examined as a potential form of communication and resistance, offering a rounded understanding of the unique, personal, and context-bound subaltern experiences.

This research is particularly timely given the ongoing global debates about decolonization, representation, and conveying marginalized voices. By offering a detailed analysis of the Barbarian girl's character, this thesis aims to contribute to these broader discussions, demonstrating how literary analysis can inform and add to our understanding of societal issues.

This thesis argues that the silence of the Barbarian girl in J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* should not be interpreted as a sign of subaltern powerlessness but rather as a strategic form of resistance and agency. Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and several scholarly perspectives on silence and agency, it examines the multiple readings of silence, and touches upon its effects on a larger colonial scale. Moreover, the examination of the nature of silence intersects with representation and paratextual objectives, leading to a comprehensive reading of the composition of the Barbarian girl's character, reflecting on the dichotomous, reductionist representation of African women as either sexualized or injured through feminist framework. Finally, and drawing on the same aspect of representation, the allegorical readings of the Barbarian girl will be scrutinized as they risk reducing and misrepresenting her, given the interpretative nature of allegorical texts.

To achieve this, the thesis will begin by examining Spivak's conceptualization of the subaltern and her call to question the possibility of speech. Based on that, it will suggest an alternative question that sheds light on an aspect equally as important as the possibility of speech, which is the necessity of it. It will then focus on how silence can effectively resist dominant structures and serve as a tool to reclaim agency. Furthermore, it will delve into different scholarly insights to interpret the Barbarian girl's silence as a form of resistance and an alternative truth, opposed to the Empire's. Moreover, it will apply a feminist lens to analyze the representation of the Barbarian girl, criticizing the reductionist, dichotomous representations of African women, highlighting their diversity and the endless possibilities for who they are and who they can be. Finally, building on previous allegorical readings of the novel, the analysis will suggest moving beyond these readings, as they also risk reducing the diverse subaltern experience to a mere text to be read and interpreted, which by extension, risks misreading, thus misinterpreting, thus misrepresenting. To sum up, this thesis aims to

challenge conventional interpretations and offer an inclusive reading of the girl's character and representation in *Waiting for the Barbarians*.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1 Subaltern Studies

The term “subaltern” finds its rootedness in the writings of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, particularly his *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci used the term to describe groups in society that are marginalized, oppressed, and silenced by dominant power structures. His idea of the subaltern “refers to subordination in terms of class, caste, gender, race, language, and culture and was used to signify the centrality of dominant/ dominated relationships in history” (Prakash 1477). Gramsci's main point was that the “elite,” the ones in a power position, maintain this power by influencing and controlling societal beliefs into supporting their agenda. In this way, the subaltern is used to shape the socio-political scene and power dynamics through their inferior position and passivity.

In the same vein, Indian historian Ranajit Guha expanded on the term “subaltern” and applied it to colonialism. Guha's important work in Subaltern Studies, especially his “Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society,” laid the foundation for the field. Guha and his colleagues wanted to shift the focus in colonial history from the “elite” to the people on the margins, the subaltern. His objective was to "rectify the elitist bias characteristic of much research and academic work" (Guha 7). Indeed, Guha was concerned that traditional historical narratives often ignored and dismissed the agency and resistance of subaltern groups, portraying them as passive beings within a larger social order of colonial rule. Instead, he wanted to highlight the voices and experiences of the subaltern, showing their agency and efforts to speak their own histories and challenge colonial oppression. In her essay, “Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South

Asia," Rosalind O'Hanlon describes it as "the masses and the recovery of their own specific and distinctive histories (O'Hanlon 159). Therefore, these scholars' goal was, as Prakash notes:

> [T]o uncover the subaltern's myths, cults, ideologies, and revolts that colonial and nationalist elites sought to appropriate and that conventional historiography has laid waste by the deadly weapon of cause and effect. (Prakash 1479)

With these considerations, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" reflects on Gramsci's and Guha's ideas on subalternity with a critical stance. She builds on them with the goal of examining the possibility of subaltern speech, especially the female subaltern. In her essay, Spivak discusses the difficulty of effectively representing the "subaltern subject," especially in postcolonial studies. She questions whether the subaltern can truly speak for themselves and argues that their voices are often silenced or misrepresented. Indeed, she asks: "With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?" (Spivak 80). To elaborate, Spivak questions the possibility of speaking for the subaltern within the structures of communication and understanding of the colonizer/oppressor. This implies the risks that lie in adopting the voice of the dominant powers—whether it is possible to accurately convey the experiences of the oppressed, in the language, framework, mindset and the attitude of the oppressor. Furthermore, she criticizes the subaltern studies group for not taking into account the role of gender in their examination. Spivak argues that: "The woman is doubly in shadow" (Spivak 84). Indeed, women in oppressed groups experience marginalization on many levels. Not only are they subject to oppression because they belong to a subaltern group, but also because they're women. By saying "doubly" (84), Spivak is implying that these subaltern women's voices are dismissed socially and scholarly. Ultimately, she concludes her essay by noting that "the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read (104). According to Spivak, subaltern women are marginalized and silenced on many levels.

Colonial oppression as well as patriarchy within their own cultures, come together to silence these women. Therefore, subaltern women's voices are doubly dismissed and unrepresented—on a colonial scale, and on a societal scale; this points to a necessary intersection of the reflection on colonialism with that on feminism.

1.2 Feminist theory

Feminism is a movement that advocates for social, political, and economic equality of all genders. Throughout history, women have been marginalized and denied basic human rights. Consequently, feminist efforts arose alongside this oppression. Over time, the focus and methods of feminism have adapted to changing social contexts and adopted an inclusive, understanding position of women's diverse experiences across racial, class, and cultural dimensions. This continual evolution has manifested in several waves. To elaborate, Ania Malinowska notes in her "Waves of Feminism," "[a]s a Western movement, it [feminism] has ensued in four waves that encompass a number of satellite formations of a vicarious or complimentary nature" (Malinowska 1). Indeed, the first wave emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and "was most active in the United States and Western Europe" (2). Its main focus was on legal rights, specifically women's suffrage. To illustrate, Malinowska notes:

> The first wave relates to social campaigns that expressed dissatisfaction with women's limited rights for work, education, property, reproduction, marital status, and social agency. It is associated with women's suffrage—a movement advocating women's entitlement to vote, the flagship organization of which became the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (1904). (Malinowska 2)

This wave laid the groundwork for gender equality, albeit focused on white, middle-class women. It "represents the pioneering stage of feminist activism" (Malinowska 1). Following

the end of the first wave, the second wave of feminism spanned roughly from the 1960s to the 1980s. It broadened the scope of feminist concerns as it “asked questions about the constituents of gender roles and women’s sexuality” (Malinowska 3). This wave is more inclusive than its predecessor. To elucidate, “[w]hile the first wave was dominated by white middle-class women in the west, the second wave was affected by the Civil Right Movement and, thus, many non-white faces in the west as well as in developing countries were in the lead” (Alhumaid 33). On the same note, Rampton writes in her “Four Waves of Feminism” that:

> Whereas the first wave of feminism was generally propelled by middle class, Western, cisgender, white women, the second phase drew in women of color and developing nations, seeking sisterhood and solidarity, claiming "Women's struggle is class struggle” (Rampton 4)

This inclusivity was strengthened during the third wave of feminism, which appeared around the 1990s and “came to complement what first and second wavers started” (Alhumaid 34). Indeed, this wave was more inclusive of all women, which globalized the movement. It “emphasizes diversity and speaks for all women more blatantly than the first and second waves” (34). Third wave feminism is of particular importance in this analysis as it “was informed by post-colonial and post-modern thinking” (Rampton 4). Indeed,

> Its transversal politics means that differences such as those of ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, etc. are celebrated and recognized as dynamic, situational, and provisional…Third wave feminism breaks boundaries. (Rampton 5)

As feminism evidently became more inclusive and evolved through these waves, two important concepts emerged: Black feminism and intersectionality. These ideas had roots in

earlier feminist waves but were amplified during the second and third waves. They addressed the unique experiences of women facing oppression on several levels.

1.2.1 Black Feminism

While the early waves of feminism were "pioneering" in many respects, they still had limitations in their inclusivity. (Malinowska 1) As feminist theory developed, scholars addressed these limitations. In her *Feminist theory: From margin to center,* bell hooks notes:

> Frequently, white feminists act as if black women did not know sexist oppression existed until they voiced feminist sentiments. They believe they are providing black women with the analysis and the program for liberation they do not understand, cannot even imagine, that black women, as well as other groups of women who live daily in oppressive situations, often acquire an awareness of patriarchal politics from their lived experience just as they develop strategies of resistance (even though they may not resist on a sustained or organized basis). (hooks 11)

Black feminism was, therefore, born as a response to a non-inclusive feminist theory, what Adrienne Rich calls "white solipsism—to think, imagine, and speak as if whiteness described the world" (Rich 299). Black women needed a safer space in which they could feel fully accepted as well as represented. In this sense, Black women had to "shape feminist theory and practice to include issues unique to them" (Taylor 234). Ultimately, Black feminist theory came into existence. Indeed, Ula Taylor notes in her article "The historical evolution of Black feminist theory and praxis" how Patricia Hill Collins, in her *Black Feminist Thought*, identifies "four major themes in the construction of Black feminist thought, all of which are generated from a black woman's "standpoint"" (Collins 39; qtd. in Taylor 234). To illustrate, Taylor outlines the four major themes in her essay, she notes:

> First, Black women empower themselves by creating self-definitions and self- valuations that enable them to establish positive, multiple images and to repel negative, controlling representations of Black womanhood. Second, Black women confront and dismantle the "overarching" and "interlocking" structure of domination in terms of race, class, and gender oppression. Third, Black women intertwine intellectual thought and political activism. Finally, Black women recognize a distinct cultural heritage that gives them the energy and skills to resist and transform daily discrimination. Collins sums these four themes up by saying that Black feminism is "a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community." (Collins 39; qtd. in Taylor 234-235)

Thus, Black feminist theory emerged from the need to establish a safe space for Black women, where they could challenge systemic marginalization and be truly represented, and their unique experiences properly addressed.

1.2.2 Intersectionality

In speaking for women who are marginalized on bases more than just gender, intersectionality emerges as a central theoretical framework. The term "intersectionality" was introduced scholarly by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989 in her article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." Crenshaw suggests an analogy, through which she explains what she means by intersectionality. She notes:

> Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in One Direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black

> woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (Crenshaw 149)

In this sense, intersectionality refers to the double discrimination directed towards Black women on the basis of their race, as well as their sex. In "Talking about intersectionality. interview with kimberlé W. crenshaw" by Babara Giovanna Bello, and Letizia Mancini, Crenshaw talks about the role of intersectionality: "Intersectionality came about as a tool to unlock many of the misconceptions and erasures surrounding the social justice demands of Black women before the law" (Bello and Mancini 11). According to Crenshaw, intersectionality is the byproduct of an "institutional context" of "a sharply discordant. In the political and legal culture in the United States" (Bello and Mancini 12). Furthermore, Crenshaw elaborates on how Black women were discriminated against "within several discursive projects" i.e. "antiracism, feminism, and critical legal perspectives on law" (12). In this light, Black women are marginalized on many institutional levels, where all forms of discrimination intersect to map and restrain their bodies, lives, ontological experiences, and voices.

To conclude this section, subaltern studies, Black feminist theory, and intersectionality collectively offer a comprehensive theoretical framework and a solid academic foundation, on which this thesis will base its interpretations and perspectives. These frameworks are essential for understanding and conveying the experiences of the subaltern, Black, African, colonized, Barbarian girl in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*.

2. Should the Subaltern Speak

The question "Can the subaltern speak?" raises important points regarding the agency, representation, and voice of marginalized groups. Indeed, Gayatri Spivak's argument in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" brings to the fore the importance of considering the

colonial barriers that the subaltern faces in speaking their experiences within dominant discourses, born in a colonial landscape. One way to look at this, is that the subaltern's voice has been systematically muted throughout history, and therefore, they should be given the opportunity and platform to speak their ontological and personal experiences, and to challenge the dominant narratives that have oppressed them and denied their voices. This aligns with the rhetoric of decolonization and empowerment of the previously oppressed, by allowing the marginalized a chance to reclaim their agency and to assert their identities in their own words, by their own voices. Nevertheless, another way to look at this, is by questioning the notion of "speaking" in itself, within the restrictions of dominant discourses that have been shaped by colonial and oppressive power structures. The act of "speaking" within these frameworks may indirectly reinforce and legitimize the systems of knowledge production that have long oppressed the subaltern. From this perspective, the question becomes whether the subaltern should seek alternative modes of expression, representation, and resistance that exist outside of these dominant discourses.

The focus, in this light, shifts from "Can the subaltern speak?" to: "Should the subaltern speak?" This new inquiry pushes us to look deeper into the act of speaking within oppressive frameworks. Accordingly, we are urged to explore the effect and power in choosing not to participate in these discourses, and to consider alternative ways of resistance and self-representation that may exist outside the confines of colonial structures. This question grants us new perspectives for understanding subaltern agency and resistance and encourages us to adopt comprehensive mindsets while treating the topics of voice, representation, and resistance in postcolonial contexts.

2.1 The Barbarian Girl as Subaltern

This analysis focuses on the Barbarian girl in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* as a representation of subalternity. Subalternity, according to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's

definition in her “Scattered speculations on the subaltern and the popular,” is a state of being in which the individual’s mobility is denied. Indeed, she notes that:

> If the thinking of subalternity is taken in the general sense, its lack of access to mobility may be a version of singularity. Subalternity cannot be generalized according to hegemonic logic. That is what makes it subaltern. Yet it is a category and therefore repeatable. (475)

It is safe to infer, then, that in Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Barbarian girl is in a position of subalternity. To elaborate, Dutta explains how the girl falls into the category of the subaltern as her “social mobility is hindered due to two reasons” (Dutta 256). According to her, the restriction of the girl’s social mobility comes from “her physical deformity which is caused by her broken foot, as well as her partial blindness” as well as “her capture” which, by extension, further narrows down her mobility “giving her a choice between navigating within the colonial space either as a beggar woman kneeling “in the shade of the barracks…muffled in a coat too large for her” or as the “Magistrate’s slut” (Coetzee 25, 73; qtd. in Dutta 256). In this light, the Barbarian girl is rendered the subaltern by the Empire – and the Magistrate as an extension of the Empire.

However, the girl's persistent silence throughout much of the narrative displays a mode of subaltern expression. Her refusal to communicate in the colonizer's language can be seen as a form of resistance against colonial discourses. Therefore, the combination of the girl's immobility and her silence creates a powerful representation of subalternity. It evidences how colonial oppression affects both the body and voice of the subaltern. By focusing on this specific aspect of subalternity, we gain an insight into the multifaceted nature of agency and resistance within colonial settings. To elaborate, traditional readings of subaltern resistance often highlight the importance of speaking out or gaining a voice. The Barbarian girl's character suggests that resistance can be conveyed through silence and the refusal to make

oneself legible to colonial understanding. Her silence becomes a form of resistance that opposes colonial attempts at interpretation and categorization.

This brings us to the question: “Should the subaltern speak?” In the case of the Barbarian girl, a close look at her character highlights how subalternity is not limited to speech. It can be a position from which alternative forms of resistance and expression can appear. This analysis builds a solid foundation for considering whether the subaltern should speak within dominant discourses. It emphasizes the importance of seeing the full picture of subaltern silence, or any other alternative expression, before advocating for or against subaltern speech. This understanding is highly important to awaken our self-awareness in order to avoid unconsciously reinforcing the oppressive power structures we aim to critique. The focus on the Barbarian girl and her silence allows us to explore the true, multilayered essence of subaltern experience and communication.

In essence, the centrality of the Barbarian girl and her silent presence in the novel are the core of this analysis. Through this focus, we can better explore how marginalized voices are represented and heard in the context of colonialism. This approach paves the way for future research that approaches subalternity with understanding and empathy. The expression and actions of subaltern voices are not singular experiences that adhere to fixed expectations and guidelines. They are personal journeys that reflect each individual’s identity and own circumstances. And this is, after all, the essence of why, how, whether, and if the subaltern should speak.

2.2 My Body, My Voice: Reclaiming Agency Through Silence

In *Waiting for the Barbarians,* the Barbarian girl's strategic use of silence is employed as a form of resistance that grants her agency over her own body within the oppressive colonial context. To explain, the girl’s body is central to the narrative and to her resistance. Indeed,

Yuan Yuan describes notes in her article “The Subject of Reading and the Colonial Unconscious: Countertransference in J. M. Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians,” that: “[f]rom the very beginning, the barbarian girl’s body is configured as the site of meaning, as the center of discourse” (Yuan 80). In this sense, her body becomes a focal part of the narrative, which is the reason she has to protect it with her silence. Building on this, the woman's position is traditionally confined to being a passive listener in discourse. However, in the novel, the Barbarian girl strategically places herself in this seemingly passive role and uses it to resist these stereotypical restrictions and reclaim her agency over her body. In her *Women’s Silence as a Ritual of Truth*, Patricia Laurence elaborates on the notion of the passive listener:

> In discourse, the speaker, in the western tradition, has come to be viewed as the one who is in control; the listener on the other hand is viewed as passive and powerless—traditionally, the woman's position. (Laurence 159)

Through her silence, the Barbarian girl transforms what could be seen as a “passive and powerless” (159) stance into an impactful form of communication. In this sense, her silence evolves from just passive listening to communication, where she speaks herself without actually speaking a single word. As such, the link between the Barbarian girl’s body and her voice is established. Yuan refers to it as “the silent body” (80). Thus, this duo holds significant importance in the narrative, as they complement one another.

Throughout the novel, the Barbarian girl's silence proves effective in subverting the power dynamics between her and the Magistrate. I argue that her silence grants her a position of superiority, particularly evident during their intimate encounters. The girl's silence becomes a tool of reclaiming bodily agency by disrupting the Magistrate's expectations and desires. Indeed, to all his attempts at fazing the girl, he is met with “nothing but indifference” (Coetzee 60). On the same note, Yuan observes:

> [U]nable to decode the scars on her body or figure out her silence, the magistrate is obsessed with the story that he believes she did not tell. Her silence is read as a sign of hiding a secret narrative which becomes the magistrate's obsession. (Yuan 80)

His frustration and sense of helplessness as he cannot "decode…her body or…her silence" (80) are evident in moments in his internal monologue: "I am disquieted. What do I have to do to move you?... Does no one move you?"" (Coetzee 47). This inner turmoil exposes his inability to connect with her on his terms—to dominate her body—and highlights how she indeed claims full agency over her body. In this sense, the Barbarian girl's silence disrupts the expected power relations, where the colonizer typically exerts control over the colonized through language and physical dominance. Her refusal to speak deprives the Magistrate of the narrative he seeks to extract from her and construct about her. This deprivation denies him the emotional and psychological control he expects to have over her body. In her "'The twisted feet, the half-blind eyes, are easily forgotten': The Collision of Trauma and Counter-Trauma in JM Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians," Suchismita Dutta describes their sexual encounters as "semi-sexual engagements" that "lead to no emotional fulfilment" (Dutta 256). During these encounters, the girl's silence acts as a shield against his advances as she "seems impenetrable and offers no carnal gratification" (Dutta 256). Indeed, "her docility is construed as a defense to his exploration of her "interior." Even her silence is regarded as a strategy of resistance to his penetration" (Yuan 79). Her silence becomes her way of asserting her control over herself and her body, proving the Magistrate's attempts at physical and emotional dominance to be in vain.

In the same vein, the nightly oiling ritual between the Magistrate and the Barbarian girl provides another example to examine the power of silence in reclaiming her bodily agency. Dutta's analysis suggests that the Magistrate's actions are a "daily purgatorial venture" (Dutta 258) intended to cleanse himself of the Empire's sins. While Dutta argues that these actions

represent a different form of torture, as the girl's consent and satisfaction are disregarded (Dutta 258), I propose that these rituals hold a dual significance. They offer the girl a means to reclaim a semblance of agency and engage in a ritual that provides her with pleasure within her harsh circumstances, all through her silence. From the girl's perspective, her silence during the oiling ritual could be seen as a means of personal redemption. Her silence does not necessarily signify passive acceptance but could be her way of exerting control over the situation. By remaining silent, she creates a "purgatorial" (258) space where *she* is cleansed of the Empire's brutality. This ritual provides a chance to erase "the marks on [the] girl's body" (Coetzee 33) left by the Empire—whether through torture or sexual exploitation. The soothing nature of the oiling might offer her a form of redemption and healing, not only physically but also emotionally. The Magistrate notes:

> Her body yields when I nuzzle my face into her belly or clasp her feet between my thighs. She yields to everything. Sometimes she slips off into sleep before I am finished. She sleeps as intensely as a child. (Coetzee 32-33)

The girl's untroubled sleep implies a sense of safety or at least temporary peace. This could be seen as a form of healing from the trauma she has endured. This newly felt gentleness could provide her with a sense of care and recognition that makes up for the brutality her body has been subjected to. In this sense, the girl finds a form of enjoyment or relief in these moments that grant her a temporary escape from her trauma through the silence she maintains. Thus, the girl maintains her bodily agency, all while healing her trauma through her silence.

Moreover, the Barbarian girl's assertion of bodily agency is demonstrated through her silence and subtle physical responses. When the Magistrate attempts to define her body by comparing her to a wild animal, saying "[p]eople will say I keep two wild animals in my room, a fox and a girl" (Coetzee 37), she refuses and resists this labelling. Her reaction, although silent, clearly conveys her anger and disagreement: "[h]er lips close, her gaze settles rigidly on the

wall, I know she is doing her best to glare at me" (37). Through these silent cues, she rejects the Magistrate's attempt to categorize or define her body by comparing her to "a wild animal" (37). The girl's lack of verbal or emotional response challenges the Magistrate's authority over her body. His colonial mindset, where "[p]ain is truth; all else is subject to doubt" (Coetzee 5), expects visible, bodily signs of hurt. It's possible, therefore, that he made this "wild animal" (37) analogy to trigger a hurt reaction from her, which does not happen. As a matter of fact, her silence disrupts his expectations, leading him to immediately apologize: "I am sorry, I say, the words falling inertly from my mouth" (Coetzee 37). This interaction proves that she is the one in control. Ultimately, through her silent, unfazed reaction to her body being described as animalesque, the Barbarian girl asserts her autonomy. She proves that she alone has the authority to define and represent herself. She is the one with control over her body and her voice.

In conclusion, the Barbarian girl's use of silence as a form of resistance and agency challenges traditional understandings and expectations of subaltern expression. In this sense, the girl's character serves as a reminder that the question "Should the subaltern speak?" is about acknowledging the diverse, personal, and context-dependent nature of subaltern expression. In the end, the girl's silent resistance reveals that amid this diversity of expression, sometimes the most powerful declaration of "my body, my voice" is made without uttering a single word, silently.

3. Silence, Resistance, and Truth

In J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Barbarian girl's silence functions as deliberate resistance. The Empire, believing that "pain is truth; all else is subject to doubt" (Coetzee 5), employs torture to extract confessions. However, by remaining silent even under torture and sexual exploitation, the girl defies the Empire's efforts to impose its version of truth upon her. Her silence not only protects her own truth but also preserves her agency

despite the severe consequences. This section will explore how the Barbarian girl employs silence a as a form of resistance and a challenge to the Empire's brutal methods of truth extraction.

3.1 Silence as Communication and Resistance

Silence can be a powerful form of communication that conveys meaning and purpose. Indeed, Adam Jaworski observes in *Silence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, "silence is a communicative resource whose manifestations go well beyond mere absence of speech" (Jaworski 382). This perspective foregrounds silence as a meaningful "communication resource" (382) in its own right. To further solidify this claim, Jaworski sets some clear functions of silence. He notes:

> Some of these forms and functions have come to mind very easily, for example:
>
> -expression and/or display of various emotional and cognitive states such as love, hate, embarrassment, respect, joy, anger, indifference, or meditation;
>
> -signalling of transitional states and processes (rites of passage): ceremonial, celebratory, sacrificial silence;
>
> -building resistance, showing disrespect, defiance of power: for example, exercising the right to silence, refusal to testify in political trials, stylized sulking, self-censorship;
>
> -display of silent and still behaviour for aesthetic/artistic purposes (e.g. in the performance art of Abramovic/Ulay) (Jaworski 381)

Jaworski's description of silence as a means of "building resistance, showing disrespect, [and] defiance of power" (381) is highly important in the context of this analysis. Indeed, this grants a new perspective through which silence can be recognized as an effective way for the marginalized to assert their agency and resist dominant systems of control, besides spoken

resistance. Based on this recognition, people are allowed to express their dissent in their own personal ways of resistance, creating diverse spaces of refusal within oppressive systems. In this sense, instead of being limited to vocal forms of protest, which might not be an option available to everyone, silent resistance offers a beam of light and a new avenue for individuals who are already short on options to express their non-compliance in a subtle manner.

In the same vein, the Barbarian girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a clear manifestation of using silence as a "communicative resource" (382) and a means of "building resistance… [and] defiance of power" (381). Indeed, the girl adopts silence as her way of resistance against an Empire that imposes its authority through merciless interrogation and demands for information. To elucidate, Jaworski notes in *The Power of Silence: Social and Pragmatic Perspectives*, "silence...has certain advantages for communicators...in going beyond the limits of words to deal with the unspeakable in psychologically extreme states" (8). The Barbarian girl suffers the "unspeakable" (8) psychological—and physical—scars of colonial violence. In response, she adopts silence as her main means of communication and resistance that allows her to withhold her truth from her oppressors. Her refusal to speak in the face of torture and sexual exploitation becomes her power instead of her weakness. In this light, the girl's "advantages" (8) lie in maintaining a degree of her privacy and agency, in the face of an Empire that seeks to "burn or tear or hack [its] weight into the secret…of the other" (Coetzee 46).

3.2 Uncovering the Truth: Between Pain and Silence

The Barbarian girl's silent resistance protects her truth from the Empire, which seeks to painfully extract it in the way they imagine and desire. Indeed, the Empire uses pain as a tool to force confessions, linking physical suffering to the extraction of what they deem truth. Oppositely, the Barbarian girl's choice to remain silent challenges the idea that truth can be painfully extracted and vocalized, suggesting instead that truth might lie in what remains

unsaid. The narrative explores this relationship between imposed, verbal truth and protective silence. Simultaneously, this relationship reveals the varied nature of individual autonomy within colonial contexts.

3.2.1 Empire's Truth as Pain

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Empire's conception of truth is linked to pain. Via brutal methods, it verbally extracts painful confessions out of the "Barbarians." As such, the Barbarian girl is subject to this. This manifests itself in two ways throughout the novel, each revealing the Empire's distorted truth and its disregard for human dignity and right to privacy. The first and most evident manifestation of this philosophy is in Colonel Joll's interrogations. His torture chamber is the literal embodiment of the Empire's belief that truth can only be forcibly extracted through pain, with the goal of obtaining verbal confessions. Colonel Joll, as the Empire's representative, operates under the principle that "[p]ain is truth; all else is subject to doubt" (Coetzee 5). This statement encapsulates the Empire's logic, that only through suffering can they get the truth.

Joll's interrogations are brutal, inhumane and in service of forcing verbal admissions. The Barbarian girl is, like her fellow people, a victim of these brutal interrogations. She becomes a living example of the Empire's painful truth-seeking. In "Acts without Agents: The Language of Torture in J. M. Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians," Kelly Adams describes the girl as "one of Colonel Joll's victims, a girl who is part of a group of fisherfolk that Joll sends to the Magistrate's settlement in his first expedition to find more barbarians" (Adams 170). Indeed, the girl, after getting tortured by Joll is "blinded and crippled" (Adams 170). She is treated as nothing more than a ''barbarian'' and ''enemy'' (Craps 62) who carries hidden truths, which must be extracted through her own words, regardless of her "damaged eyes and broken ankles" (Craps 62). Therefore, the Empire, through Joll's actions, makes evident its willingness to inflict harm in its quest for verbal confessions it deems to be the truth.

These interrogations, more than just physical torture, represent a total violation of the girl's agency and her right to remain silent or withhold her truth. Indeed, when asked by the Magistrate "[h]ow do you even know when a man has told you the truth" (5), Joll explains his torturous method:

> 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. (Coetzee 5)

This statement echoes the lengths Colonel Joll, and the Empire, are willing to go to in order to get the truth they seek. Indeed, truth is something they "get," no matter what. It does not matter they "break" the Barbarians along the way (5). Moreover, his statement "first lies" (5) implies that the Barbarian confessions are pre-ruled as lies from the outset and the only acceptable truth is that of the Empire. So, torture must be inflicted. This ties in with Yuan Yuan's argument in her article "The Subject of Reading and the Colonial Unconscious: Countertransference in J. M. Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians", asserting that "[a]t the very beginning of his inquiry of truth, the native voice is construed as untruth. As such, Colonel Joll has to resort to torture" (Yuan 77). Subjecting the girl to such brutal treatment strips away her right to engage in or abstain from speech, her humanity, all in an attempt to force her to speak the desired truth of the Empire. Accordingly, "the native speech becomes the disfranchised voice through which only untruth—the alien tongue—speaks" (Yuan 77). The girl is, therefore, denied her humanity, tortured, and forced to speak a truth that is not hers. Her autonomy and own truth are completely disregarded in the process.

In the same context, the second, more subtle but equally intrusive manifestation of the Empire's truth-pain equation is seen in the Magistrate's persistent questioning about the girl's scars. These questions are akin to micro-interrogations and another form of painful truth extraction, albeit less physically harmful, but still damaging to the girl's psyche. In her

“Torture and the Novel: J. M. Coetzee's “Waiting for the Barbarians,” Susan Van Zanten Gallagher describes the Magistrate as “obsessed” (283) with uncovering the girl's truth. She notes:

> When he takes in the Barbarian woman after the security police have left, the Magistrate acts like an obsessed man. He continually asks her about her experience of being tortured, probing for every last detail. (Gallagher 283)

In this light, “Like her interrogators, the narrator engages in a quest for truth involving torture” (Craps 62). The Magistrate himself acknowledges this parallel, observing that “she is as much a prisoner now as ever before” and that “[t]he distance between myself and her torturers, I realize, is negligible” (Coetzee 29,60). Indeed, his repeated questions about her pain reveal his internalization of the Empire's definition of truth. He asks her, “Did they do this to you? ... what did they do?” (31), demands to “see... does it hurt?” (29-30), and repeatedly inquires, “What is this? ... does it hurt?” (33). This “obsess[ion]” (Gallagher 283) with accessing the story behind the marks on the girl’s body demonstrates his colonial belief that truth is tied to physical pain and admittance of suffering: “It has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her” (Coetzee 33). Yuan observes this as a way “to penetrate her psyche in order to obtain the secret narrative, and to uncover the primal scene of her violation” (Yuan 79). Much like the Empire he serves, the Magistrate believes he is entitled to access the girl's experiences and memories. These micro-interrogations deny the girl her agency, in that her experiences become something to be “deciphered and understood” (Coetzee 33), rather than personal memories that she has the right to process and share out of her own volition, on her own terms, if at all. Thus, the Magistrate's questions, like Joll's torture, impose the Empire's “truth” upon the girl's body and mind, disregarding her right to decide what to say, when to say it, and to whom.

Both these methods of verbal truth extraction – Joll's explicit torture and the Magistrate's implicit inquiries – illustrate the Empire's indifference to the "Barbarians'" autonomy and right to silence. In "J.M. Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians and the ethics of testimony," Stef Craps quotes Rosemary Jane Jolly's observation in her *Colonization, Violence, and Narration in White South African Writing: Andre´ Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, and J. M. Coetzee*, likening Joll and the Magistrate's approaches to truth and how they both harm the girl. She remarks:

> Both Joll and the magistrate . . . turn the 'girl' into a text from which they believe the truth will originate, Joll through implanting the marks of torture upon her and reading the result as proof of her guilt, and the magistrate by attempting to possess the truth behind torture by reading the 'script' that Joll has 'written' on her body'. (Qtd. in Craps 62)

Therefore, whether through physical torture or persistent questioning, the Empire imposes its truth upon the girl. In conclusion, the Empire's equation of truth with pain and forced verbal confessions is emblematic of an oppressive regime's understanding of truth and truth-seeking. This denial of agency, namely the right to refrain from engaging in speech, sets the stage for an exploration of how the girl resists this oppressive and pervasive colonial philosophy with her silence.

3.2.2 Resisting the Painful Truth

Indeed, faced with the Empire's violence, the Barbarian girl's employs silence as a form of resistance to its brutal methods of truth extraction. The girl's silent resistance strikes twofold against the dual oppression inflicted on her by both Joll (representing the Empire) and the Magistrate. The first strike of the girl's silent resistance is evident in her unwavering refusal to break her silence under Colonel Joll's interrogations. In spite of the severe torture she faces, which leaves her with "damaged eyes and broken ankles" (Craps 62), the girl refuses to

provide the verbal confessions Joll seeks. Indeed, the girl insists she "had nothing to tell. That was all" (Coetzee 44). Her silence in the face of the gradually elevating "pressure" meant to "break" (Coetzee 5) her, shows her resilience and challenges the Empire's interrogation philosophy. Indeed, "[w]hile Joll asserts that there is "[a] certain tone" to truth, the girl's silence "throughout the novel destabilize[s] the linguistic certainties that ground such a claim" (Coetzee 5 qtd. in Adams 172). His truth is spoken—painfully—and has a "tone" (Coetzee 5), but the girl has no voice to offer, and thus no "tone" to "decipher." (Coetzee 5,33). Therefore, the Barbarian girl's silence during the torturous interrogations becomes a powerful way of non-cooperation and exposes the fragility and shortcomings of a philosophy upon which an entire system is built.

In the same vein, the girl's resistance to speak shows her understanding of the shortsightedness of the Empire's truth. To elucidate, Yuan observes how Colonel Joll's interrogation methods distort the truth:

> [H]is inquiry of truth, the native voice is construed as untruth. As such, Colonel Joll has to resort to torture…Consequently, the native speech becomes the disfranchised voice through which only untruth—the alien tongue—speaks. (Yuan 77)

The truth Joll demands to hear is the truth he desires, not the actual truth. In this sense, the Barbarians' voice "is reduced to silence and their language forbidden as falsehood; only the colonial subject speaks through the subaltern bodies as the truth" (77). This raises a question about the futility of speaking in this case. If speaking means telling "the record of the state instead of the fact of the other—natives" (77), then what is the point of speaking at all? The Barbarian girl's insistence on remaining silent reveals a deep understanding of this. To engage verbally with the Empire means to distort her own truth in order to please them. Thus, the girl's refusal to speak renders the entire process futile. This is where the effect of her silent

resistance manifests itself. She silently exposes the defect in the Empire's truth and truth-seeking methods.

The second strike of the girl's resistance through silence appears in her interactions with the Magistrate. His truth quest does not come in physical torture, but it is still painful. The Barbarian girl is victim of relentless questions about her scars and experiences. As Gallagher notes: “He continually asks her about her experience of being tortured, probing for every last detail" (Gallagher 283). Notwithstanding, the girl resists these intrusive, painful questions with her silence. She refuses to discuss her feelings or provide detailed accounts of her experiences. To every question the Magistrate asks, she “meets it with silence” and “gives no sign that she has even heard [him]” (Coetzee 28,34). This unresponsiveness frustrates the Magistrate. He links truth to the verbalization of pain, so, her refusal to describe her suffering denies him access to what he believes to be her truth. This frustration is evident in his inner dilemma:

> What did they do to you? Why don't you want to tell me? She shakes her head... she gives me no sign that she has even heard me...'Tell me,' I want to say, 'don't make a mystery of it, pain is only pain'; but the words elude me... I struggle to speak. (Coetzee 34)

Furthermore, when the girl finally speaks, she still does not give the Magistrate the truth he wishes to hear. To explain, in her article "The Body, the Word, and the State: JM Coetzee's" Waiting for the Barbarians,” Barbara Eckstein notes, “at first she will say nothing, and then she can speak only of the weapons that inflicted blindness but not of the pain itself” (188). Indeed, the Barbarian girl acutely describes the weapons, but there is no mention of pain or struggle in her description:

> It was a fork, kind of fork with only two teeth. There were little knobs on the teeth to make them blunt. They put it in the coals till it was hot, then they touched you with it, to burn

> you. I saw the marks where they had burned people.'... I had nothing to tell. That was all. (Coetzee 44)

In this sense, the girl remains silent about the part of the experience the Magistrate so wants to hear: her pain. This is her resistance. In this way, she reclaims her agency to decide what is to be shared and what is to remain unsaid. The Magistrate's dissatisfaction with this response reveals the impact of her silent resistance. He complains: "Is this the question I asked? I want to protest" (Coetzee 44). For him, as for the Empire, pain is truth. The girl's reply lacks her personal experience and confessions of pain; thus, it fails to answer his inquiry. This unsatisfaction persists throughout their interactions:

> I am disquieted. 'What do I have to do to move you?': These are the words I hear in my head, the subterranean murmur that has begun to take the place of conversation. 'Does no one move you? (Coetzee 47)

The girl's silence about her pain, therefore, becomes her way of resistance, frustrating the Magistrate and allowing her to maintain control over her own experiences and feelings.

Ultimately, the Barbarian girl's consistent silence in both contexts—Joll's interrogations and the Magistrate's micro-interrogations—resists the Empire's attempts to colonize her voice. It becomes her way of reclaiming her agency in a colonial context where she has been otherwise stripped of this agency. In this light, the girl's silent resistance challenges the Empire's equation of truth with verbally extracted information. Her refusal to speak denies them the very exchange they seek, her voice. Her silence, therefore, becomes a form of truth in itself. It communicates her resistance, her refusal to be broken, and her attachment to maintaining her own agency even in the face of extreme physical and psychological "pressure" (Coetzee 5).

Thus, the Barbarian girl asserts that her pain, her truth, and her voice are hers alone through her silent resistance. To speak or not to speak is a decision only she gets to make. In a colonial context where speech is forced and manipulated, and where pain is inflicted to extract truth, the girl's silence becomes her strength and her resistance. It is a reclamation of her agency and a refusal to be defined by the Empire's words. The girl's resistance serves as a reminder that one's experiences, feelings, and truths are one's own, and the choice to share or withhold them belongs to them alone.

Moreover, the girl's silence can be understood as a resistance to the Empire's refusal to accept any truth that is not its own. In this oppressive landscape, speaking out becomes futile. Any words would likely be dismissed, disbelieved, or misunderstood. As such, the girl's silence also protects her from potential misrepresentation. In an intersection of oppressions, where the Empire controls the narrative, silence becomes a shield against being spoken for or about incorrectly.

Finally, the Barbarian girl illustrates that silent resistance can be as impactful as spoken resistance. Her resistance exposes the limitations of the Empire's methods and points to a bigger issue within marginalizing systems: the misrepresentation of the colonized and their experiences. This will be explored in more depth in the following section.

4. Misrepresentation of Subaltern Women and Silence as Resistance

In this section, as the title suggests, I intend to investigate the misrepresentation of subaltern women through the character of the Barbarian girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. In his article "Reading and writing: Narrative motifs of sexual and epistemic violence in Waiting for the Barbarians," Raed A. Qassas describes the girl as "only a body, a site of writing sex and reading violence" (Qassas 3). Correspondingly, this section explores how the Barbarian girl is reduced to her body, limited to being either an object of sexual desire and lust or a victim of

violence and torture. Ultimately, we examine how this misrepresentation sets the stage for understanding the girl's silence as a form of resistance against intersecting systems of oppression. In this investigation, the analysis will be taking into consideration both textual and visual representations, exemplifying from the novel and several book cover illustrations from different editions and languages.

It is of paramount importance to note that, while the origins of the cover images to be used in this examination—whether newly created or repurposed—can be noted, this distinction is not central to our analysis. Instead, the focus will be on how the selected images, regardless of their source, contribute to the paratextual framing of the Barbarian girl. The editorial and design choices in coupling these images with Coetzee's text represent an important meaning-making operation. In examining the various editions of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, we observe that the cover illustrations consistently reduce the Barbarian girl to either sexualized or injured. This visual representation in the paratext reinforces the problematic portrayal of subaltern women found within the text itself. An analysis of these cover choices allows us an exploration of how paratextual elements can either heighten or challenge the misrepresentation of marginalized female characters. This reflects bigger issues of representation in literature and publishing. The consistency of this reductive imagery across different editions suggests a persistent interpretative framework that editors and illustrators have applied to the girl's character, shaping readers' expectations and interpretations before they engage with the text itself.

4.1 Sexualized and Injured Body

4.1.1 Sexualized Body: Textual Evidence

It is detectable, throughout the narrative, that the Barbarian girl's portrayal limits her to a sexualized body. It is her crippled, exotic body that piques the Magistrate's interest and urges

him to take her in, in an attempt to decipher this body. The Magistrate notes that, "[I]t is a week since words have passed between us. I feed her, shelter her, *use her body*" (Coetzee 32, emphasis added). It only took a week for the Magistrate to invade her body, which he reduces to a mere sexual object to be "use[d]" (32). This reduction is evident as the Magistrate is incapable of thinking of her as a complete person—beyond her body. Although he spends his nights "caressing her…massaging her" (33), touching "her feet...her legs, her buttocks…her belly, breasts" (32), he admits that: "If I took a pencil to sketch out her face I would not know where to start…there is a space, there is a blankness" (50). He can engage in "certain intimacies" (32) with her, but "cannot even recall the other one's face. 'She is incomplete!'" (45). This reveals that his view of her body as a sex object overshadows her humanity. Furthermore, the Magistrate's sexual desire for the girl is empty from any real emotional connection or acknowledgement of her as a person. This is illustrated when "[l]ater when he realises that she has to be returned to her community he satisfies his sexual desire without any sense of moral violation or guilt" (Rani 22). The Magistrate justifies this dehumanizing act by saying, "it would not have been done if I were not in a few days to part from her" (Coetzee 70). This reveals how, despite his supposed moral remorse and developed sense of empathy towards the girl, the reality is that he views her as just "a site of joy" (48) and an object for his sexual pleasure.

Moreover, the Barbarian girl's sexual assault by the Empire's men solidifies her reduction to a sexual object within the colonial context. She, herself, admits to the Magistrate that "there were other men, I did not have a choice" (Coetzee 58). This helpless admission reveals how her body is not really hers. It is the Empire's object to use for the sexual pleasure of men in power. As a matter of fact, throughout the novel, the Barbarian girl's body becomes a site where colonial sexual exploitation manifests itself. Her body is questioned, desired, and used. Her humanness, however, is completely overlooked. Therefore, the reduction of the Barbarian

girl to her body, specifically to a sexual object, exposes the oppressive perception of women in colonial contexts.

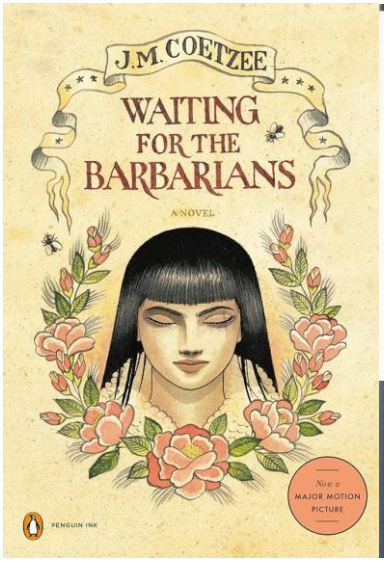
In the same vein, and despite his later repentance, the Magistrate is no less different than the Empire he serves. He views the girl's body as something foreign, new, and inviting. The girl's body is a *terra nullius* that calls for a discovery, the duty of a white man to take care of and mark it as his territory. He states that "until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her" (33). After all, the Magistrate rationalizes, "[t]his body in my bed, for which I am responsible…otherwise, why do I keep it?" (Coetzee 47). The urge to keep "it," this person that he reduces to a mere "it," finds its rootedness in his colonial belief that he must save and take care of this newly found body—land. Along the same lines, when he tries to describe what desiring a woman means to him, the Magistrate observes:

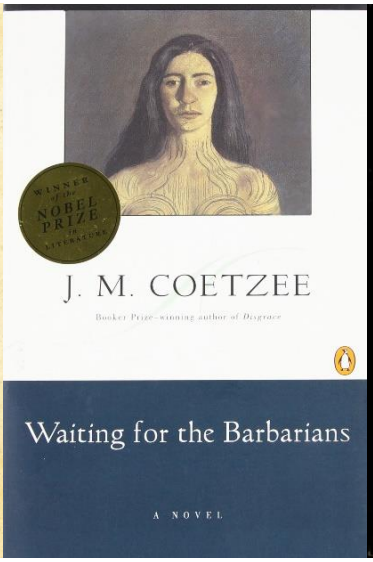
> [T]o desire her has meant to unfold her and enter her, to pierce her surface and stir the quiet of her interior into an ecstatic storm; then to retreat, to subside, to wait for desire to reconstitute itself. But with this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface across which I hunt back and forth seeking entry. (Coetzee 46)

The Magistrate's perception of the girl as having "no interior, only a surface" (Coetzee 46) reinforces the parallel between her and the *terra nullius*. Similar to how colonizers viewed lands as empty and prepared for conquest and willfully ignored existing cultures and histories, the Magistrate sees the girl as an object to be penetrated and possessed, disregarding her humanity and depth. Indeed, besides his individual misrepresentation, the Magistrate's failure to engage with her "interior" reflects a colonial mindset that reduces complex individuals and cultures to conquerable "surface[s]" (46). This is further confirmed when he admits that "only the sweetest, the youngest, the newest…have that power" to "arouse [him]" (Coetzee 49). The Barbarian girl's body is, therefore, akin to a new, virgin land, the new object of desire that strokes his colonial interest with its strangeness and novelty. (While I argue that this primarily

exposes the Magistrate's reductionist perspective, it could also point at a form of resistance from the girl—a theme to be explored in subsequent analysis). Thus, it is safe to infer that in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Barbarian girl is reduced to a sexual object for and by both; the Empire and its Magistrate.

4.1.2 Sexualized Body: Visual Evidence





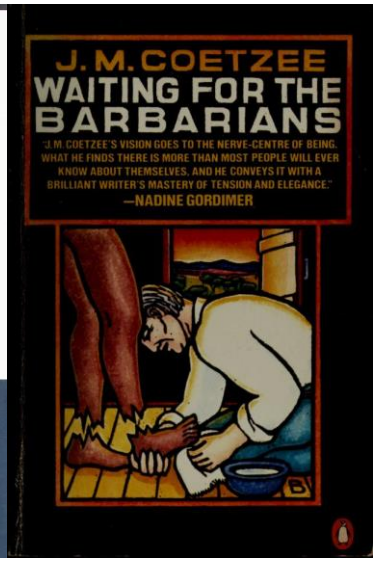


Fig. 1. White girl with long black hair and closed eyes, encircled by flowers.

Fig. 2. Nude white girl with long black hair, body marked with symbols.

Fig. 3. Lower half of a Black woman's legs, with a white man tending to one.

In his "Introduction to the Paratext," Gérard Genette introduces the term 'paratext' which is of paramount importance in this section. According to him, paratext refers to:

> [T]he reinforcement and accompaniment of a certain number of productions, themselves verbal or not, like an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations…in order to present [the text], in the usual sense of this verb, but also in its strongest meaning: to make it present, to assure its presence in the world, its "reception" and its consumption, in the form, nowadays at least, of a book. (Genette 261)

In the same vein, in her article “The twisted feet, the half-blind eyes, are easily forgotten”: The Collision of Trauma and Counter-Trauma in JM Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians,” Suchismita Dutta examines the paratexts, particularly the visual representation of the Barbarian girl on three Penguin Books editions of Coetzee's novel (Figs. 1-3). Dutta observes that “[A]ll the three images deal with the common theme of the effects of the Empire's dehumanizing regime on a female body” (Dutta 252). This observation serves as a strong basis for a more thorough investigation of the visual paratexts of *Waiting for the Barbarians* across various editions in many languages. I posit that the book covers of the novel offer visual introductions to the character of the Barbarian girl, particularly her portrayal as either sexualized or injured. Fig. 1 depicts a white girl with long black hair surrounded by flowers, painting her as the exotic Barbarian, in harmony with nature and in contrast to the civilized Empire. Her closed eyes could hint at her damaged sight as a result of the Empire's torture in the text. This sexualization is solidified in Fig. 2, which shows a nude white girl with marks all over her body. This image evokes the Magistrate's fixation on the girl's “marks” left by the Empire: “It has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her” (Coetzee 33). Fig. 3 then casts full focus on the girl's injured body, with dismembered legs emblematic of the injured body in its full symbolic power.

Building on this, a more detailed examination of several other book covers highlights the recurring pattern of sexualization and vulnerability (this will be examined in subsequent parts of this analysis) in the depiction of the Barbarian girl. Hence, this analysis aims to examine these visual paratexts, to acquire a full understanding of the Barbarian girl’s portrayal in and outside of the text.

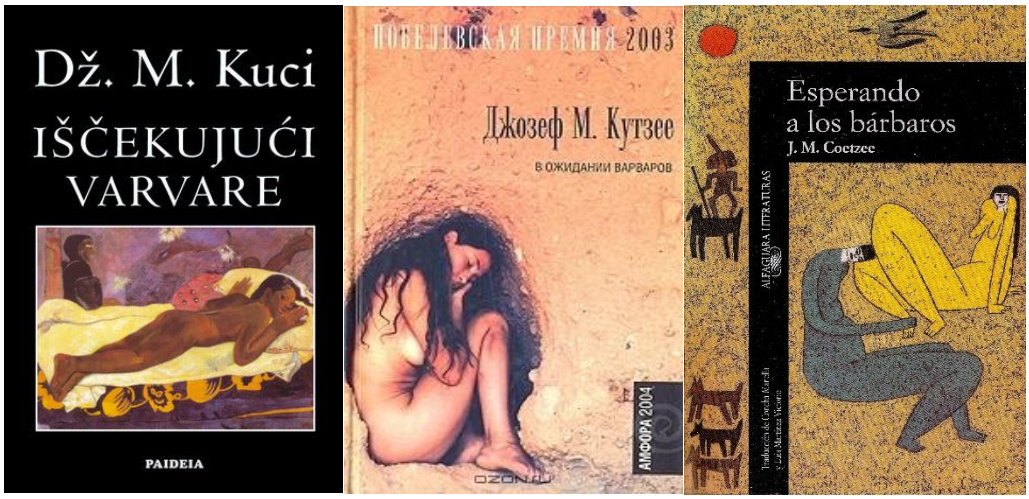


Fig. 4. Nude Black woman lying face down on a bed.

Fig. 5. Nude white woman with long black hair crouching against a wall.

Fig. 6. Comic-style illustration of a woman and a man.

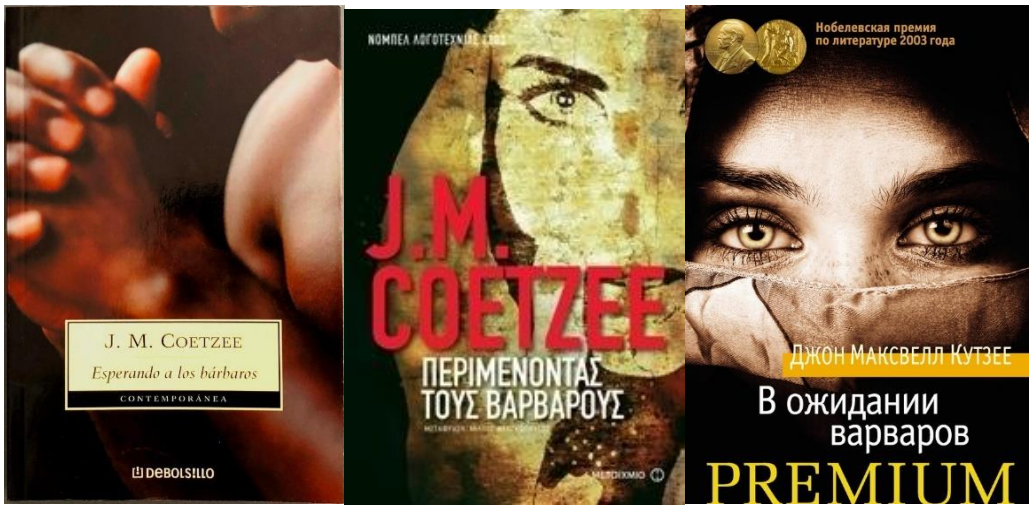


Fig. 7. Close-up of a nude Black woman in a gesture of supplication.

Fig. 8. Close-up of a woman with skin textured like a map.

Fig. 9. Close-up of a veiled white woman's eyes.

The visual representations of the Barbarian girl on various book covers showcase her reduction to a sexual object. This analysis examines six book covers (Figs. 4-9) that depict the girl in sexualized and objectified ways, extending the novel's reductionist portrayal outside of the

text. This sexualization manifests through full nudity, partial nudity, or a focus on a seductive gaze. Indeed, Fig. 4 shows the girl as fully naked, resting on her stomach, in a bed, with a sensual over-the-shoulder gaze. A seated figure is next to her, potentially representing the Magistrate or her father. This composition positions the girl's body on full display as an object of observation for the viewer. Fig. 5 similarly portrays the girl in a state of complete nudity, this time crouching and leaning against a wall. This image may allude to the Magistrate's first encounter with the girl, where he found her "kneel[ing] in the shade of the barracks wall" (Coetzee 27). However, the text describes her as "muffled in a coat too large for her, a fur cap open before her on the ground" (27), which contrasts with the cover's nude depiction. This contrast suggests a deliberate choice to sexualize the character, perhaps reflecting the Magistrate's perception or desire.

Furthermore, fig. 6 is a more ambiguous representation. The girl's body appears exposed, with particular emphasis on her breasts, yet the expressionist colors (white face, yellow body) create a sense of disconnect. This visual ambiguity could be interpreted as a representation of the Magistrate's conflicted perception of the girl—simultaneously accessible and inaccessible, penetrable yet impenetrable. Fig. 7 offers a close-up view of what appears to be a naked Barbarian girl, zooming on her shoulder and breast. The positioning of the hands suggests either prayer, supplication or asking for mercy, possibly symbolizing the girl's cultural otherness or her lower position within the colonial context.

Additionally, Figs. 8 and 9 both focus on the girl's gaze. Indeed, both figures portray her with seductive eyes. In fig. 8, the girl's skin looks map-like. This could be an interpretation of her body as a metaphor for colonized land—Africa as *terra paradisius*, an attractive territory enticing the colonizer, echoing the Magistrate's words "only the…newest…have that power" to "arouse me" (Coetzee 49). Fig. 9 presents a partially obscured face with a focus exclusively

on the eyes, ironically contradicting the textual description of the girl's impaired vision due to torture that burns her eyes.

Ultimately, this sexualization of the Barbarian girl in various book covers reveals that her reduction to a sexual object has become central to her characterization. In this sense, these visual paratextual portrayals extend and strengthen the reductionist descriptions present in the text itself.

4.1.3 Injured Body: Textual Evidence

In Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Barbarian girl's body is frequently reduced to an injured object. Indeed, the Magistrate's perception of the girl is shaped by her wounds. His descriptions of her scars and torture marks are very detailed, yet very detached. His focus is almost only on her physical injuries, without much regard to the suffering behind them. He traces all the injuries she carries like a map of pain, starting with her broken legs and "[h]er ankles [that] are large, puffy, shapeless, the skin scarred purple" (31), moving to her burned eyes where he finds in "the corner of one eye a greyish puckering as though a caterpillar lay there with its head under her eyelid, grazing... decapitated, at the pink inner rim of the eyelid" (Coetzee 33). This emotionless yet detailed description reveals a sadistic obsession with her injuries. He is intrigued with her scars and curious about her "marks" (Coetzee 70). In an inner monologue, he admits his own motivations of taking the girl in: "Is it the case… that it is the marks on her which drew me to her…is it she I want or the traces of the history her body bears" (70). This admission and moment of self-reflection exposes his colonial mindset, where the colonized body is reduced to a site on which "marks" and "traces" of torture are inscribed. (70) In his article "A Further Study of Present Tense Narration: The Absentee Narratee and Four-Wall Present Tense in Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians and Disgrace," Matt DelConte describes this behavior as an act of "humility" as, "[T]he magistrate…nurses the wounds she suffers from being tortured by Joll and his men, even washing her feet in

pseudo Christ-like humility" (DelConte 437). I posit a different reading. The Magistrate is no "Christ." He is a colonizer, the equal of "Joll and his men" (437), who shares the same reductionist view of the subaltern body: tortured and injured. To illustrate, the Magistrate's interactions with the girl's body reveal a disturbing mix of objectification and sadism that mirrors his colonialist outlook. In a passage where after washing the girl's feet, for a split moment, the Magistrate enjoys the idea of the girl suffering—even closes his eyes "to savour" the moment. (Coetzee 30) He notes:

> 'I will find clean bandages for your feet,' I say, 'but not now.' I push the basin aside and dry the foot. I'm aware of the girl struggling to stand up; But now, I think, she must take care of herself. My eyes close. It becomes an intense pleasure to keep them closed, to savour the blissful giddiness. (Coetzee 30)

This extract exposes the Magistrate's colonizer's sadism and his inclination to find "intense pleasure" (30) from the colonized's pain and struggle. His deliberate choice to stop helping her, and instead "savour the blissful giddiness" (30) of her difficulty standing up with her broken legs, reflects how he is just an extension of the Empire he serves. The Magistrate himself recognizes the fine line between his actions and those of her torturers: "The distance between myself and her torturers, I realize, is negligible" (29). There is a thin line between him and the torturers, both reduce the girl's body to a site of torture and an injured object.

In the same vein, across the text, the Magistrate excludes any information about the girl's personality, interests, cultural background, or emotions—beyond those related to her pain. This highlights how the Barbarian girl is completely dehumanized in his eyes and reduced to her injured body. Indeed, the Magistrate voices his narrow view of the girl quite a few times in the novel. He reflects how he "[has] not ceased to see her as a body maimed, scarred, harmed" (61). Even when he tries to imagine her, nothing comes to his mind but the deformities and injuries he remembers and associates her with. He observes:

> Is she truly so featureless? With an effort I concentrate my mind on her. I see a figure and a cap and heavy shapeless coat standing unsteadily, bent forward, straddle legged, supporting itself on sticks. How ugly I say to myself. (50)

These descriptions of the Barbarian girl, therefore, reveal his inability to see her beyond her injuries. Thus, the girl's body in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is confined to its scars, a site of torture and pain.

4.1.4 Injured Body: Visual Evidence

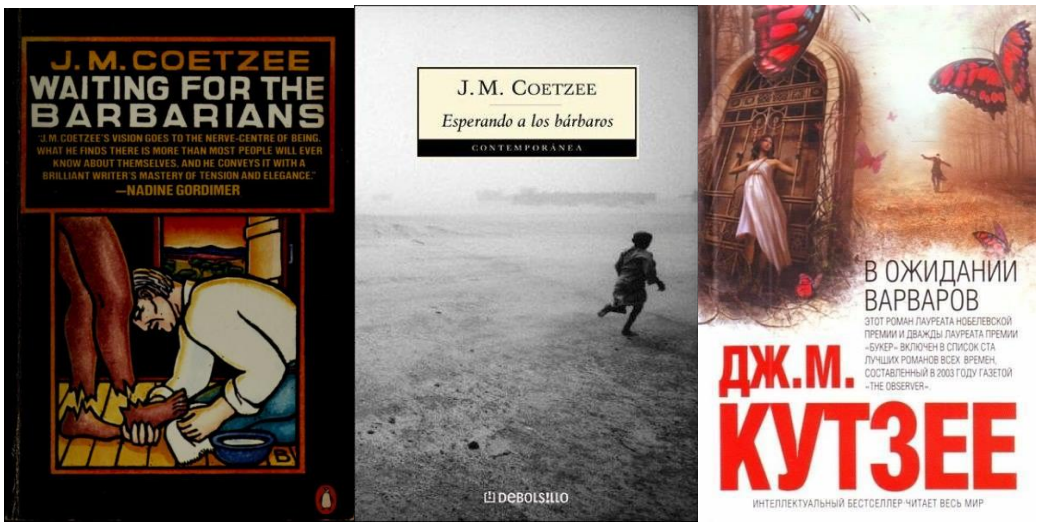


Fig. 3. Lower half of a Black woman's legs, with a white man tending to one.

Fig. 10. Rear view of a woman running.

Fig. 11. White woman in a white dress chained to a gate.

Fig. 12. Woman depicted as half-human, half-statue.

Fig. 13. Black girl holding a cane, with a pained expression.

Fig. 14. Close-up of a face with accentuated eyes expressing pain.

An examination of a number of books covers of *Waiting for the Barbarians* reveals a pattern of reducing the Barbarian girl to her injured body. The reductionist portrayal, in this sense, moves from the text, to the paratext. Accordingly, this analysis of seven book covers of the novel aims to highlight how the girl is also reduced to an injured body beyond the text. Indeed, fig. 3 depicts the Magistrate tending to the Barbarian girl's feet, which are literally severed from her body. This disturbing image can be interpreted as a literal manifestation of the Magistrate's description of "the twisted feet" (Coetzee 70). The girl's body is dehumanized. Her feet are portrayed as objects for the Magistrate to hold and polish, emphasizing her reduction to a deformed, injured body. Fig. 10 presents a back view of the Barbarian girl, seemingly in flight. This portrayal calls to mind the constant state of fear and flight experienced by the colonized in anticipation of captivation and torture. This representation is also, highly ironic: the girl flees on the very feet broken by imperial torture.

Fig. 11 portrays the Barbarian girl chained to a gate; her arms raised in a crucifixion-like position. In contrast, the background features a male figure, possibly the Magistrate, dancing joyfully through a field surrounded by butterflies. This juxtaposition could suggest an implicit meaning: the girl's suffering appears necessary for the Magistrate's joy. Similarly, the subjugation of her people is necessary for the Empire's contentment. It also echoes the instance where the Magistrate feels "blissful giddiness" (Coetzee 30) at the sight of her suffering. This cover, in particular, is quite significant considering Dominic Head's interpretation of violence in the novel in *The Cambridge Introduction to J.M. Coetzee* as "[t]he appropriation of Christian motifs or principles in the name of political ethics" (Head 20). Qassas elaborates on this in his article "Reading and writing: Narrative motifs of sexual and epistemic violence in Waiting for the Barbarians" explaining that "Head's reading of the religious implications of violence in the novel is based on Coetzee's reference to violence and Crucifixion in one of his interviews with David Attwell" (Qassas 2). Additionally, fig. 12 features the Barbarian girl as half- human, half-statue. She is chained to the ground; her lower body is statue-like while her upper body remains human. This illustration mirrors her sub-human status within the colonial landscape with her legs—the very parts broken by imperial torture—rendered non-human. Lastly, figs. 13 and 14 share a focus on the girl's gaze, portraying a suffering expression. In fig. 13, she holds a walking stick, mirroring her portrayal in the novel, where it aids her broken feet. Fig. 14 zooms in exclusively on her eyes, eliminating all other facial features. In both fig. 13 and 14, her gaze could be interpreted as a silent plea for help or pity from the book holder. In this context, the girl's gaze seems to pierce through the fourth wall, engaging the viewer directly, reinforcing her marginalized status where she is reduced to an object of pity both within the text and its paratextual elements. Thus, this closer examination of *Waiting for the Barbarians* book covers reflects the portrayal of the Barbarian girl as injured, dismembered,

or pitiful. This misrepresentation of women of color in prevalent in literature in and out of text.

4.2 Silent Resistance: An Intersectional Perspective

4.2.1 Intersectionality: The Body as a Site of Oppressions

The term "intersectionality," introduced scholarly by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 in her article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," refers to addressing the "double discrimination—the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex" (Crenshaw 149). In this sense, Black women are likely to be victims because of an overlap between systems of oppression, that collide based on their race and gender. Thus, in Crenshaw's own words, "if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination" (Crenshaw 149).

It is safe to infer then, that the Barbarian girl in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* stands at the heart of an intersection of oppressions. She is a "Barbarian" woman within a colonial Empire. This places her at the intersection of racial, gender, and colonial marginalization. This intersectional oppression is most evident in the portrayal of her body. As Raed A. Qassas observes in his article "Reading and writing: Narrative motifs of sexual and epistemic violence in Waiting for the Barbarians," the girl is "an alienated textual object…indecipherable to the Magistrate. What she represents for him is only a body, a site of writing sex and reading violence, whereas for Colonel Joll, the girl's body is a site of writing torture" (3). This supports the claim that the girl's body is, indeed, an intersection where several oppressions collide. The girl's racial difference and Barbarian identity make her "indecipherable," her gender turns her

into a target of sexual objectification, and her position as the colonized subjects her to torture. In the same vein, Qassas comments on:

> [T]he transposition of the native girl's body from the hands of Colonel Joll to the hands of the Magistrate. The body of the girl is the site of torture for the former and alternatively the site of sexual and textual penetration for the latter. (4)

Therefore, the girl's body is reduced to a mere object, transferred from one type of abuse to another, all coming down to one point of intersection, where her racial and gender identity meet.

Moreover, the Barbarian girl's portrayal aligns with what Devika Rani describes in her article "The Barbarian Women in White Fiction," as subaltern women are "neither protagonists nor significant characters who grow and evolve but projected through the binary, dehumanized, debased, negated and made invisible by the white consciousness" (18). This is evidence of the girl's intersecting oppressions as a colonial subject, a woman, a racially different other, both in real life and in literature. Therefore, the Barbarian girl's intersecting oppression moves beyond reality to land itself in fiction, making her doubly marginalized through reductionist representations. Notwithstanding, this problematic representation is not confined to the text alone but extends to the paratext. The cover art across various editions of the novel, as evidenced above, offers a clear example of how this marginalization is further commodified and solidified through visual representation.

4.2.2 Commodification and Objectification

Women of color are often represented as commodified objects textually and visually. This commodification is evident in the marketing and visual representations of the Barbarian girl in the book covers analyzed in previous sections. This aligns with the claim that women of color

are misrepresented in Western Media, argued by Nicole C. Schutte in her article "Misrepresentation of Women of Color in Western Media." Indeed, Schutte traces the rootedness of such misrepresentation to "Eurocentrism" which "relies on hierarchy and dichotomy" (Schutte 89). She evidences her argument quoting from Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought*, in which she also deduces that "[o]bjectification is central to this process of oppositional difference" (Collins 70 qtd in Schutte 89). Following this line of thought, it is safe to infer that "[a]dvertisements utilize binary thinking by attempting to project an image that is *so* different from the consumer" (Schutte 89, italics in original). The misrepresentation of women of color is, therefore, a marketing strategy based on the opposites attract belief. The Barbarian girl is presented in the covers as totally opposed to Western norms, reinforcing harmful dichotomies. To illustrate, examining figs. 4 and 8, we deducted how the Barbarian girl is consistently depicted as a sexual object, either fully nude or giving a seductive gaze. Additionally, in figs. 3 and 12, the dehumanization of the girl in the book covers, is quite evident, as she is dismembered in fig. 3 and only half-human in fig. 12, further supporting the idea of her otherness and vulnerability. These images feed into what Schutte calls "false stereotypes of women of color," that promote them as having "an uncontrollable sexual appetite, are primitive in nature, and possess less societal value in comparison to white women" (91). In this sense, the girl's intersecting oppressions lead to her suffering and marginalization, which are ultimately used "to project an image that is *so* different from the consumer" (Schutte 89). This approach aligns with bell hooks' concept of the "commodification of Otherness," where racial difference is presented as "a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling" (hooks 21, qtd in Schutte 92). Therefore, the Barbarian girl's marginalization is used as a pure marketing strategy. She embodies an exotic and sensual allure that appeals to the consumer.

Moreover, some editions feature white models made to appear exotic—stripped naked, hair loose and sometimes missing a body part. As a matter of fact, most of the book covers feature the Barbarian girl as white. A glance at figs. 1,2,5,6,8,9,11, and 12, shows a white girl either nude or chained (tortured). In her article, Schutte talks about an advertisement that not only fetishizes, but also whitewashes "Native American women" (91). She notes that:

> [T]he "Native American" woman in the advertisement is actually a white woman with an altered appearance to play the part. White people control how Native American culture is projected and internalized. (91)

I will draw an analogy between the misrepresentation of these "Native American" women to the Barbarian girl's portrayal in these covers. Akin to these women, the Barbarian girl is, too, presented as an "altered" white woman (91). She is stripped of her clothes, her body parts—dismembered legs—and by extension, her identity. This is a form of cultural appropriation that Schutte, drawing on Peter Kulchyski, describes as dominant groups deploying cultural elements of dominated groups for their own interests, often reversing or distorting their original meanings (Kulchyski 3, qtd in Schutte 91). Having a white girl "play the part" (Schutte 91) of the Barbarian girl not only denies her culture, but her whole identity altogether. In this light, this is emblematic of intersectional "violence" exercised on women of color, that "diminish one's cultural values as well as their own ethnic identity" (91). The desire for otherness presented in these images is an "alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other" (hooks 23, qtd in Schutte 94-95). Thus, the Barbarian girl's image becomes a way to legitimize existing power systems of oppression. The paratext elements, i.e. the book covers of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, mirror issues that go beyond the portrayal of women of color in Western media. They highlight how commodification, dehumanization, and cultural appropriation falsely shape public perceptions and feed marginalizing systems.

4.2.3 Silence as Resistance

One common denominator that systems of oppression—racism, colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism—share, is that they all collide and assert control over subaltern women's bodies. This control can be exercised in many ways, as previously discussed. Their objectives are one and the same: the exploitation and harm of women's bodies for the benefit of these systems, thereby stripping them of their agency.

Indeed, in Coetzee's novel, these oppressive systems intersect and leave the Barbarian girl with no agency, a fact she painfully expresses when she says, "I didn't have a choice" (Coetzee 58). This lack of choice extends to almost every aspect of her life. Her mobility, her bodily agency, and her future are all determined by powers beyond her control. However, in the midst of this marginalization, one choice emerges: whether to speak or remain silent. This calls for the previously evoked critical question by Gayatri Spivak "Can the subaltern speak?" I propose to rethink and expand this question to address what I believe is a more pressing inquiry: *Should* the subaltern speak? This new question acknowledges that the ability to speak exists (the Barbarian girl *could* speak if she wanted), but questions whether it's always in the best interest of the marginalized individual to do so, for even if she speaks, she would still be subject to torture and exploitation and, as Spivak points out, it would still be a speech with the words (and the truths) of the colonizers. Besides being a capability, speech is also a choice—perhaps the only choice available to those at the intersection of several oppressions. In this light, the possibility that this question opens up for marginalized women like the Barbarian girl grants them a moment of agency, albeit brief. To have a choice is to have control over at least one aspect of their lives.

The Barbarian girl's choice of silence becomes her means of resistance against the systems intersection oppressing her. The impact of this silent resistance is evident in the way it provokes and frustrates the Magistrate as well as Colonel Joll and his men. Her silence makes her

impenetrable and undecipherable to them. Joll's men fail to extract information from her through torture and sexual exploitation. So, when all their efforts prove futile, they let her go. Similarly, the Magistrate's attempts to connect with her are continuously blocked by her silence, until he eventually takes her back to her people. He tries to provoke her sexually, but he gets no reactions from what he describes as "her obstinate, phlegmatic body" which drives him to "stirrings of outrage" (Coetzee 45). The Magistrate also abandons her sexually by visiting "the girl whose nickname at the inn is The Star" (49), however, "she adapts without complaint to the new pattern…nothing but indifference" (60). None of these strategies work, so, he attempts to trigger her pain by inquiring about her feelings towards her torturers. Yet, all these efforts fail to obtain a response. The Magistrate's frustration is best shown when he helplessly asks himself, "[w]hat do I have to do to move you? ... Does no one move you?" (47). This frustration is ultimately followed by a realization that crowns her silent resistance victorious. The Magistrate understands that the girl defeats him and her torturers, as her silence collectively denies them "entry" (46). He observes:

> [W]ith this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface across which I hunt back and forth seeking entry. Is this how her tortures felt hunting their secret, whatever they thought it was? For the first time I feel a dry pity for them: how natural a mistake to believe that you can burn or tear or hack your weight into the secret body of the other! (Coetzee 46)

The girl's unwavering commitment to silence, in the face of every attempt of theirs, makes her untouchable—even if metaphorically—ironically contrasting her overly touched body during these many failed attempts. This aligns with Jane L. Parpart and Swati Parashar's challenge to the assumption that silence always signifies disempowerment (2). Indeed, in "Introduction: Rethinking the power of silence in insecure and gendered sites," they explore how silence can

have several functions. They argue that silence "can be a coping mechanism, a choice, an action that can help deal with toxic and often dangerous situations" (5). This perspective also resonates with Cheryl Glenn's observation in her *Unspoken: A rhetoric of silence*. Glenn explains that:

> The question is not whether speech or silence is better, more effective, more appropriate. Instead, the question is whether our use of silence is our choice (whether conscious or unconscious) or that of someone else. (Glenn 13)

Furthermore, Patricia Hill Collins suggests that silence can be used "to cope with, and in most cases, transcend, the confines of race, class and gender oppression" (Collins 92 qtd in Prapart and Swati 6). Indeed, by choosing silence, the Barbarian girl influences her circumstances. Her silent resistance eventually grants her literal freedom and emancipation from the Empire when it leads to her reunion with her own people. The Magistrate, unable to decipher her, finally decides to take her back to her people. Until the very end, the girl gives him no desired answer to anything. It is at the final moment that the girl finally voices her desires. Triumphant, at the borders of the Empire's territory and back with her people, she at last breaks her silence. When the Magistrate tells her, "I wish to ask you very clearly to return to the town with me. Of your own choice… do you understand me? That is what I want" (77), the power dynamic has shifted. Now that she has the upper hand and is surrounded by her people, she makes "her own choice" (77) and says what *she* wants: "No. I do not want to go back to that place" (78). This final statement marks the zenith of her resistance, giving voice to her long-held desire for freedom. Therefore, the girl's silence slowly but steadily turns into a major form of resistance and an effective tool of escaping oppression.

Thus, the Barbarian girl's choice to stay silent benefits her on many levels. It effectively resists reductionist misrepresentations. It acts as a protective shield against the Empire's attempts to “burn or tear or hack” her body (Coetzee 46) and frustrates the efforts “to [sexually] move” her body (47). Most importantly, it becomes her tool of resistance which ultimately allows her escape from this intersection of oppressions. The Barbarian girl becomes, therefore, the embodiment of Glenn’s statement that: “When silence is our choice, we can use it purposefully and effectively” (Glenn 13).

5. Beyond Allegory: Who Speaks for Whom

In the previous section, the analysis dealt with how the text and paratext of *Waiting for the Barbarians* misrepresent the Barbarian girl. This misrepresentation extends beyond the novel and its illustrations, to the act of allegorical writing and interpretation. Consequently, it sparks a debate about representation, voice, and agency. Given the representative nature of allegorical writing and its demand for interpretation, we must ask: Who speaks for whom?

Correspondingly, this section examines the triad of allegory, representation, and interpretation to highlight the harm inflicted when these processes result in misrepresentation and misinterpretation. In this context, the girl's silence emerges as a powerful form of resistance, as it makes her unrepresentable and thus uninterpretable.

5.1 Allegorical Readings and Beyond

J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* has been interpreted in multiple allegorical readings. Indeed, Lois Parkinson Zamora, in her “Allegories of power in the fiction of J.M. Coetzee,” describes it as “Coetzee's most allegorical work” (Zamora 5). Zamora's analysis is particularly noteworthy as it paves the way for moving beyond traditional allegorical readings — an idea that this examination plans to explore in the following parts. Indeed, while she does read the novel as an allegory, her interpretation is intriguing. She posits that “within this

allegory of Empire narrated by the magistrate is another allegory which he tells us that he wishes to write" (Zamora 7). Thus, Zamora moves beyond the first layer of allegory, arguing that "*Waiting for the Barbarians* repeatedly rejects the closed circle of traditional allegorical signification" (Zamora 7). This examination is intriguing because it is an allegorical reading that puts into question the essence of allegorical texts which lies in the act of interpretation. She suggests that interpretations of allegorical texts should not be limited to one fixed meaning. Instead, Zamora argues that an allegorical text is more complex than it appears on the surface, and that readers can observe multiple layers of meanings—as she does when she unravels an allegory within an allegory. However, Zamora doesn't entirely abandon the idea of allegory as an "expression of fragmentation and injustice" (Zamora 13). In the same vein, Jennifer Wenzel's "After Allegory" offers a further perspective. Building on Derek Attridge's "Against Allegory," Wenzel observes that "the Magistrate is himself a compulsive interpreter and frustrated allegorist" (Wenzel 92). This description of the Magistrate reflects the interpretative tendencies that come with allegorical readings. Particularly, it highlights the negative effects of allegory. In this context, Attridge, in Wenzel's words, suggests:

> To 'do justice' to this text, in Attridge's sense, requires confronting the diegetic failures of allegory and the Magistrate's reluctance to allow things to be themselves. To do justice to Waiting for the Barbarians…would be to allow it to be itself rather than 'stand[ing] for other things' (Attridge 35 qtd in Wenzel 92)

This opens up a paradox in the readings of allegory in the context of the novel. On one hand, allegory serves as an "expression of injustice" (Zamora 13), revealing the oppression within the narrative. On the other hand, the act of allegorical interpretation might be considered unjust to the text itself and, in order to "do justice" to the novel, we must resist the urge to make it "stand for other things" and instead "allow it to be itself" (Attridge 35, qtd in Wenzel 92). This paradox raises an important question about how we ought to read the novel,

especially the character of the Barbarian girl. Are we doing justice to her by reading her allegorically, or does this further marginalize her?

5.2 The Triad of Allegory, Representation, Interpretation

The relationship between allegory, representation, and interpretation forms a triad of paramount importance to our understanding of the portrayal of the Barbarian girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, and it is crucial to start by establishing the link between this triad before delving into the analysis. In her "Allegories of power in the fiction of J.M. Coetzee," Lois Parkinson Zamora states that

> The purpose of allegory in Coetzee's fiction is no longer to suggest the means to mend a fractured world, but rather to draw attention to the fractures, a purpose which current events in South Africa are also tragically serving. (Zamora 3)

In this sense, "to draw attention to" (3) refers to the representational nature of Coetzee's allegorical writing. On this matter, Morton W. Bloomfield, in his "Allegory as Interpretation" makes the connection between allegory and representation when he cites Paul de Man:

> [T]he allegorical power of the language undermines and obscures the specific literal meaning of a representation open to understanding. But allegorical poetry must contain a representational element that invites and allows for understanding, only to discover that the understanding it reaches is necessarily in error. (Qtd. in Bloomfield 302)

Hence, he deduces that "the poetics of representational and allegorical literature are close to each other" (Bloomfield 302). In this light, it is safe to infer that allegory, at its core, is a form of representation. In this context, Spivak's description of "representation as 'speaking for', as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation', as in art or philosophy" (Spivak 70) is of high relevance. To explain, the Barbarian girl, as an allegorical figure, is at the same time politically "spok[en] for", and also literarily "re-presented" (70). She is portrayed as to

represent what a “Barbarian” woman should be and look like. Zamora labels her as “representative of her class - she is a barbarian” (Zamora 6). This is what Bhagwat Hemangi and Madhavi Arekar describe in their “On the Margins: Theorising Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” as “speak[ing] on the behalf of the subalterns rather than allowing them to speak for themselves” (Bhagwat and Madhavi 43). Thus, within an allegorical narrative, the girl is left out of the process of shaping her very existence. She is but a bystander, watching as external figures speak for her and represent her on her behalf.

This relationship between allegory and representation is decked at the end by interpretation, which grants it its reason to be. Indeed, an allegorical text demands interpretation, as, in Bloomfield’s words:

> The only stable element in a literary work is its words, which, if we know the language in which it is written, have a meaning. The significance of that meaning is what may be called allegory. The problem of interpretation is the problem of allegory. (Bloomfield 301)

In this sense, an allegory is, by definition, linked to interpretation. An allegorical text is one that offers room for readings. This is further strengthened with Bloomfield’s statement that “allegory is that which is established by interpretation, or the interpretative process itself” (301). Thus, the link between the components of this triad—allegory, representation, interpretation—is evidently strong, as one paves the way for the other.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, this triad of allegorical representation and interpretation is present within the text (through characters like Colonel Joll, the Magistrate, and Joll's men) and beyond it (external readings). The result is a double misrepresentation. In the following section, a closer examination will reveal how the Barbarian girl is limited to a code to be deciphered by all, but herself.

5.3 The Mis-Allegory: A Triad of Displaced Meanings

The triad of allegory, representation, and interpretation contributes to the Barbarian girl's misrepresentation and reduction in many ways. Indeed, this process pushes for a double reduction of the Barbarian girl. Besides being reduced to a sexualized and injured body within the narrative, she is also "reduced to a sign, a symbol" (Rani 22). In "The Barbarian Women in White Fiction," Devika Rani comments on this reductionist characterization:

> The blacks in the predominant white narratives, Heart of Darkness and Waiting for the Barbarians do not exhibit themselves as thinking and civilized human beings. Besides these blacks are neither protagonists nor significant characters who grow and evolve but projected through the binary, dehumanised, debased, negated and made invisible by the white consciousness. (Rani 18)

This ties in with Stef Craps's argument in his article "J. M. Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians and the Ethics of Testimony" that this reduction to a "symbol" (Rani 22) and dehumanization is the byproduct of colonial 'othering'. To illustrate, Craps notes how "the Empire affirms and rationalizes its existence through a process of 'othering' the 'barbarians'" (Craps 62). Therefore, the Barbarian girl, as a symbol (Rani 22), becomes the 'other' who must be written and portrayed in the Empire's terms, because her existence justifies the Empire's own existence. This denies the girl any form of identity and agency over who she really is. She cannot identify herself, at least not beyond what the Empire sees befitting.

Moreover, The Magistrate's fixation on deciphering the girl's scars could be seen a form of violence. In her "After Allegory," Jennifer Wenzel elaborating on Derek Attridge's "Against Allegory" writes that "the Magistrate is himself a compulsive interpreter and frustrated allegorist" (Wenzel 92). This is evident in the Magistrate's statement that: "It has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and

understood I cannot let go of her" (Coetzee 33). The Magistrate is bordering on obsession in his penchant for reading, understanding, and overall reducing the girl to her marks. Regarding this issue, Attridge, paraphrased in Wenzel's words, suggests:

> To 'do justice' to this text, in Attridge's sense, requires confronting the diegetic failures of allegory and the Magistrate's reluctance to allow things to be themselves. To do justice to Waiting for the Barbarians…would be to allow it to be itself rather than 'stand[ing] for other things.' (Attridge 35, qtd in Wenzel 92)

In this sense, I would like to build on this idea of "doing justice" (35) to the novel by suggesting an examination of allegory as a form of violence. In her article "Colonization, Violence, and Narration in White South African Writing: André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, and JM Coetzee," Rosemary Jane Jolly expresses how this process of writing the Barbarian girl (allegorical representation) and reading her (interpretation) acts as a form of violence against her. She notes how the Empire (Joll and the Magistrate):

> [T]urn the 'girl' into a text from which they believe the truth will originate, Joll through implanting the marks of torture upon her and reading the result as proof of her guilt, and the magistrate by attempting to possess the truth behind torture by reading the 'script' that Joll has 'written' on her body. (Jolly 127-128)

Thus, this tripartite process inflicts violence on the girl in the way it reduces her to a blank page on which the Empire gets to "writ[e] on her body" and ultimately, "read" (127-128) what they have written. Similarly, drawing on the notion of "hermeneutics of inquisition," by Lucia Folena, Raed A. Qassas in his article "Reading and writing: Narrative motifs of sexual and epistemic violence in Waiting for the Barbarians" argues that this reductionist process transforms the girl into "an object of the violence of interpretation, a mere text to be read" (Folena 228, qtd in Qassas 2). Therefore, the act of speaking for the Barbarian girl, whether

through allegorical representation or interpretation, can be understood as an act of "epistemic violence." This concept, introduced by Gayatri Spivak in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" refers to the process of othering colonized people through reductionist lenses of colonization. She states that: "[t]he clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other" (Spivak 76). On the same note, Qassas observes that in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, this "epistemic violence" is performed through the processes of reading and writing. He notes:

> Reading and writing, therefore, become central motifs in the novel conveying the colonial exercise of power in the form of "epistemic violence," along with sexual violence, which is best defined by Gayatri Spivak as that violence whose main function is "to constitute the colonial subject as Other." (Qtd in. Qassas 1-2)

Furthermore, Qassas examines how the Magistrate's attempt to "read" the Barbarian girl's body exemplifies this "epistemic violence." His behaviour, as Maria Boletsi notes, "is incurably marked by the logic of understanding as penetrating and deciphering, so typical of the colonial attitude toward the colonized" (Boletsi 79, qtd in Qassas 3). In this light, this reading of the girl's body as a text to be interpreted means that the act of interpretation, whether inside or outside of the text, is harmful for the girl.

In conclusion, the triad of allegory, representation, and interpretation in the novel creates a conundrum where everyone speaks for the Barbarian girl except herself. This "speaking-for" (Spivak 70) constitutes a form of "epistemic violence" (76) that reduces the girl to a "symbol" (Rani 22) and fortifies her marginalization within the colonial context. The allegorical readings of the girl are reductionist and misrepresenting as they fail to access her true self.

5.4 Silent: Unreadable, Uninterpretable, Unrepresentable

The Barbarian girl's silence is a form of resistance against misrepresentation and misinterpretation. Indeed, her silence is a refusal to be read, interpreted, and ultimately misrepresented. Despite the attempts to speak for, represent, and interpret the Barbarian girl, her true self remains ever inaccessible. This inaccessibility is even articulated by Coetzee himself: "Perhaps whatever can be articulated is falsely put...Or perhaps it is the case that only that which has not been articulated has to be lived through" (Coetzee 73). This quote sums up the shortcomings of external representations and interpretations in fully capturing the true essence of the other's identity. This resistance aligns with what Derek Attridge describes as "the resistance to the discourses of the ruling culture" (Attridge 13, qtd in Qassas 4). Therefore, facing all this, the Barbarian girl's silence acts as "a form of resistance on the epistemic level" (Qassas 4). This suggests that there is power in the unsaid, unwritten, and uninterpreted.

Central to my analysis is an equation that facilitates the understanding of the mechanisms of interpretation and representation. The equation is, as follows: you can't interpret what you can't read, but you can very much interpret what you wrote. This principle operates within the text and outside of it. In this light, this reflects exactly how the Barbarian girl is represented and interpreted, or rather, misrepresented and misinterpreted. All external figures are left to "inscribe" their own "conventional truths" (Moses 121) in the absence of hers, due to her silence. However, these inscriptions are, at the end of the day, their truths, not *the* truth. They are external, imposed interpretations.

Building on the idea of imposed interpretations, by consistently refusing to yield her voice, the Barbarian girl denies access to her true self, making all readings of her mere assumptions. Indeed, the Magistrate voices this when he observes that "[w]ith this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface across which I hunt back and forth seeking entry" (Coetzee 46). As

such, the girl denies the external world the ability to read her and, consequently, to interpret and represent her. The impact of this silent resistance is quite detectable: the girl's silence forces those around her, including the readers, to create their own scenarios about who she is and what she represents. We might ask: is she sexual, pitiful, a "wild animal" (34), "indifferen[t]" (60)? And this is exactly where the impact of her silent resistance manifests. None of these interpretations can be confirmed. They are pure assumptions that exist only as projections of what the external world thinks it knows about her.

This situation is highly reminiscent of C.P. Cavafy's poem "Waiting for the Barbarians," from which the novel's title is inspired. Indeed, "[a]s in the poem by Cavafy from which Coetzee's novel takes its title, the Empire affirms and rationalizes its existence through a process of ''othering'' the ''barbarians'' (Craps 62). Just like the empire in the poem requires the existence of the Barbarians to justify its own existence, so too do the Empire within the novel, along with the readers, need to create their own version of the girl for their interpretations to exist. After all, without these made-up versions, we know nothing more about the girl than what she chooses to reveal. This is her power, her resistance. Through her silence, she remains unreadable, and thus uninterpretable and unrepresentable. It is she alone who knows her truth, she who can represent herself best. This silent resistance brings to the fore the implicit condition for her speech. Indeed, until she is given the chance and the space to speak and be truly heard, beyond the limiting and reductionist perspectives of oppressive systems, she refuses to be read, interpreted, and represented.

This conditional silence is best illustrated in a key scene where the Magistrate asks the girl how she feels about the men who tortured her, to which "[s]he lies thinking a long time. Then she says, 'I am tired of talking'" (Coetzee 44). This response is loaded with meanings. The girl thinks, for "a long time" too (44), indicating she has something to say - probably a lot. Yet she is tired of talking, both literally and metaphorically. The implication of this answer is that

she has spoken before but was never truly heard. It is logical therefore to ask: until she can be truly heard, is it not futile that the girl speaks? Hence, in a full circle, we are back to the question asked at the very beginning of this thesis: should the subaltern speak?

Indeed, the Barbarian girl's silence provides an answer to the question “Should the subaltern speak?” throughout the novel. To put it clearly: “No,” she says (Coetzee 70). Until the subaltern can speak for themselves and by themselves, perhaps they should not speak at all. The girl's silence reflects the counterproductive nature of speaking only to be dismissed, misinterpreted, or misrepresented. Her resistance through silence implies that until the dominant groups learn to accept truths that differ from their desired truth, until they can truly hear and understand the voice of the subaltern, the “Barbarian,” there is no point in speaking.

This perspective gives the novel's title an ironic meaning. While the Empire is “Waiting for the Barbarians” to exist in the way they imagine, there are “Waiting...Barbarians,” subaltern voices waiting to exist on their own terms, to be heard, to be understood. However, this choice of silence as resistance, powerful as it is, should not overshadow the need to think about a pressing inquiry: if speaking does not achieve much, and silence also does not stop misrepresentation, until when will the Barbarians keep waiting? Ultimately, we need to think about the long-term effects of this resistance and the responsibility to create spaces where true dialogue and effective exchanges can take place.

Overall, the Barbarian girl's silence serves as form of resistance against misrepresentation, exposing external projections on her. Simultaneously, it urges us, as readers and interpreters, to question our assumptions and how we represent and interpret the other, and to reconsider the notions of voice and representation in literature and beyond.

Conclusion

With a focus on the character of the Barbarian girl, this thesis examines the themes of silence, representation, and resistance in J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians.* Our analysis proposes to reframe Gayatri Spivak's central question: "Can the subaltern speak?" to: "Should the subaltern speak?" This reframing aims to highlight the diversity and complexity of subaltern experiences and resistance methods. It emphasizes that subalternity is not limited to the ability or inability to speak. It is personal, context-based, and embraces several forms of expression and resistance.

Indeed, in a colonial context where speech is forced and manipulated, silence can become a powerful tool of resistance and a means of reclaiming agency for the oppressed. The Barbarian girl's refusal to speak about her experiences distorts the principle by which the Empire operates: that truth can only be extracted through torture and forced, verbalized confessions. Moreover, silence protects her own truth from being distorted into a replica of the Empire's narrative. By refusing to speak the colonizer's truth, the marginalized subaltern chooses not to be spoken for or misrepresented. In this way, silence serves as a method of preserving one's privacy and agency over personal experiences, and a form of protection against misrepresentation in the face of systemic oppression.

In the context of misrepresentation, this thesis touches upon the novel's text and paratext. Correspondingly, the analysis extends to the novel's paratextual elements, specifically its book covers across different editions. These visual representations have a recurrent pattern of reducing the Barbarian girl to a sexualized or injured body. This reductionist portrayal reflects an underlying issue of misrepresentation of women of color in Western media. This also points to the intersectionality of the girl's oppression as a woman, a Barbarian, and a colonized subject. The commodification and objectification of the Barbarian girl's otherness

or pain in visual representations reinforces harmful stereotypes and concretizes these existing, intersecting systems of oppression.

Moreover, our study explores how allegory, representation, and interpretation can further marginalize and misrepresent the subaltern. The girl's silence resists allegorical interpretation, making her unrepresentable and uninterpretable. She consistently refuses to speak, which denies the Empire and the readers the ability to read, interpret, and represent her. This silent resistance forces those who try to understand her to confront their own assumptions. Ultimately, this exposes the limitations of their made-up narratives. The girl's silence, therefore, implies that until she can be truly heard and understood beyond the reductionist perspectives of intersecting oppressive systems, she refuses to be read, interpreted, and represented.

To sum up, this thesis has explored the silence of the Barbarian girl in J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* as her means of resistance against the marginalization of subaltern women within colonial contexts. The analysis has revealed how the girl's silence rejects reductionist portrayals and resists her double marginalization through misrepresentation in-and-out of text. These findings shed light on the issue of agency and representation of women of color in literature and media. Notwithstanding, four key insights emerge from our analysis that need to be addressed: the paradox of interpretation, the role of silence as resistance, the ethics of examining oppression, and the complexities of character transformation in colonial contexts.

In postcolonial studies, we often encounter a paradox. While we critique allegorical readings that impose predetermined meanings on the subaltern, we must acknowledge that our own analysis inevitably involves interpretation. This is highly evident in my thesis, particularly in the sections on moving beyond allegory and silence as resistance. After arguing against interpreting the Barbarian girl's character, I found myself interpreting her silence. This realization highlights the complexity of dealing with the topic of interpretation. My analysis

of the girl's silence as a form of resistance, though intended to challenge simplistic readings, still involves an interpretive act. I found this particularly evident in Lois Parkinson Zamora's article "Allegories of power in the fiction of J.M. Coetzee," in which she talks about "interpretive determinacy" (7). She notes that Coetzee:

> [U]ses the forms of allegory to undo the traditional referentiality of allegory, undermining and ultimately dismissing interpretive determinacy within his own allegorical fable. Waiting for the Barbarians repeatedly rejects the closed circle of traditional allegorical signification. (Zamora 8)

Reflecting on this quote, I recognize the difficulty of completely avoiding interpretation in literary analysis. The goal is, perhaps, not to eliminate interpretation entirely. The goal is to manage it with awareness of its complexity, to reject fixed meanings and to always question. This experience has taught me the importance of constantly questioning one's analytical frameworks and being transparent about one's own positionality as a researcher. In the context of Coetzee's work, this means recognizing that while one interprets the Barbarian girl's silence, one must remain aware of the limitations and potential assumptions in their interpretation.

Moreover, my analysis of the Barbarian girl has revealed silence as a powerful form of resistance, particularly in shielding her and rejecting the imposed misrepresentations and marginalization she undergoes within a colonial landscape. However, no matter how effective this silence proves to be, its long-term viability as a resistance strategy remains questionable. Indeed, while silence can be an impactful way of resistance, especially since it leaves the oppressor to grapple with their own ways of connecting with the other, it also risks making the subaltern further marginalized.

This raises a critical question: if speaking does not achieve much and silence also does not stop misrepresentation, how long can the marginalized afford to wait? This dilemma became particularly evident in exploring Lois Parkinson Zamora's examination of the novel's allegoricality, especially when she refers to "the reality of a system based on willful blindness" (Zamora 8). Indeed, silence might have worked on the Magistrate, yet Colonel Joll seems unfazed. In fact, the silence of his prisoners triggers more harm from him, not the other way around. It is important to keep in mind that in this world, not everyone is the Magistrate. There are many like Colonel Joll, who are deep in a "willful blindness" (8) and it is futile to try to nudge them through silence. These observations spark questions that continue to challenge postcolonial scholars: what forms of resistance are most likely to ignite change in colonial and post-colonial contexts? How do we balance the power of silence with the need for voice and representation? And, echoing Spivak's question, how long will subaltern women continue to wonder if they 'can speak'?

Moreover, while this thesis has argued against reducing the Barbarian girl to a sexualized, injured body, it is very important to clarify that this position does not negate the historical reality of subaltern women's experiences under colonial regimes. It is an undeniable fact that subaltern women were subjected to torture and sexual exploitation within oppressive colonial systems. The aim of this analysis is not to silence or deny these harsh realities, but rather to advocate for a more wholesome portrayal of subaltern characters. The critique presented in this thesis focuses on the reduction of subaltern women solely to their traumatic experiences, not against discussing these experiences altogether. While it is true that this reduction is historically accurate in part, I believe it still fails to reflect the full image of subaltern women's lives. What I advocate for in my analysis is, therefore, a holistic representation that acknowledges the trauma inflicted by colonial systems and portrays other facets of subaltern women's experiences.

In the context of Coetzee's novel, a more holistic characterization of the Barbarian girl might have included her emotions beyond pain and fear, her relationships outside of the colonial power dynamic, or her life experiences unrelated to her oppression. Such a portrayal could have included her hopes, her anger, her friendships, her cultural practices, or her personal aspirations – all aspects that are precluded by Coetzee's choice to represent the girl only through the Magistrate's perspective (and focalization). By presenting a more rounded character, the novel could have challenged the tendency in some postcolonial literature to define subaltern characters exclusively through their oppression. This aligns with critiques of the tendency to speak for the subaltern rather than creating spaces for subaltern voices to be heard in their full complexity. It suggests that truthful representation in postcolonial literature requires actively working to portray subaltern characters in all their human complexity. To sum up, while it remains important to acknowledge and depict the historical traumas inflicted on subaltern women, it is equally crucial to represent them as full human beings with diverse experiences, emotions, and agency. This approach would provide a more accurate and respectful portrayal of subaltern experiences.

Coming to my last point: the Magistrate's journey in the novel reveals a tough moral dilemma, specifically in his relationship with the Barbarian girl, which could be assessed in a more understanding way. Indeed, as discussed, there are several reasons why his actions towards her can be perceived as problematic. However, it's important to keep in mind the internal struggle he faces. The Magistrate deals with a radical shift in his worldview. He is questioning a belief system that has constituted his knowledge for the entirety of his life. This transformation is far from easy, and it manifests most in his interactions with the Barbarian girl. His fixation on "decipher[ing]" (Coetzee 33) the girl's scars could be perceived as harmful and reductionist to her as a person; nevertheless, it can be seen as coming from a genuine, albeit misguided, attempt to understand and connect with the colonized. As Zamora

notes, “we may sympathize with the magistrate's frustrated attempts to decipher a system which is not of his making” (8). This reflects the Magistrate's struggle with his growing awareness of the injustices of the Empire he spent a lifetime serving. In this light, the Magistrate's relationship with the girl becomes evidence of his internal conflict; his efforts to care for her represent his attempt to break free from the colonial mindset.

Notwithstanding, the Magistrate’s attempts are hindered by ingrained patterns of thought and behavior of the colonizer. In “Waiting for the Barbarians: The Magistrate’s Identity in a Colonial Context,” Abdullah F. Al-Badarneh observes that “the terminology [the Magistrate] uses to describe the natives becomes a built-in mindset or something automatic that he never questions” (124). Even when he tries to connect with the girl, he still struggles to escape the colonial framework that has long shaped his understanding of her and her people. This internal dilemma is described by W.E.B. Du Bois as “double consciousness,” which he introduces in his *The Souls of Black Folk* to refer to African Americans’ inner partition and struggle to fully identify with whichever side. It is worth noting that while Du Bois originally applies the concept to African Americans' experiences, here it is repurposed to describe the colonizer's internal conflict. This adaptation, though provocative, shifts the concept from its original context of racial oppression to the perspective of the oppressor. Al-Badarneh elaborates on this notion as he draws a connection to the Magistrate. Indeed, according to him “Dubois uses a metaphor to describe this idea of double consciousness as he calls it “the veil” behind which the soul is imprisoned” (Du Bois 124, qtd in Al-Badarneh 122). Accordingly, “the Magistrate's double awareness of fragmented positionality adds more to the conflict of his identity. He lives in a real conflict” (122). This conflict is at the center of his interactions with the Barbarian girl, as he oscillates between genuine care and inflicting harm.

While the Magistrate's behavior towards the girl can be criticized, it's important to recognize that it reflects an inner struggle and an attempt to change. Thus, by examining the Magistrate's relationship with the Barbarian girl, we gain an important lesson: that the decolonization of the mind might, sometimes, be harder than that of land. His journey reminds us that change does not happen in a linear way, and that perhaps, with understanding of the other's spoken words, but especially their inner, unspoken thoughts, this journey becomes more bearable.

These four ideas—the paradox of interpretation, silence as resistance, balancing representation, and reassessing character transformation—are all linked in the way they deal with voice, agency, and representation in postcolonial contexts. The paradox of interpretation, as seen in our analysis of the Barbarian girl's silence, shows that it is no light task to portray subaltern experiences without imposing our own interpretations. This paradox directly ties in with the idea of silence as resistance, where the Barbarian girl's refusal to speak becomes her shield against misrepresentation, yet also risks further marginalization. If the already silenced adopts silence for too long, they risk being forgotten in the pages of history.

Speaking of history, the question of balancing historical accuracy with holistic representation is an important aspect of the novel. It prompts us to acknowledge the harm inflicted by colonialism while avoiding the reduction of subaltern characters exclusively to their oppression. Ultimately, our reassessment of the Magistrate's journey adds a hint of empathy and understanding to the tough process of decolonizing one’s mind, which in itself gives us an insight into the bigger picture and shows how colonization is hurtful for the colonizer as well as the colonized. Together, these points call into question power, representation, and resistance in colonial and postcolonial contexts while creating a solid, all-rounded basis for decolonizing both literature and mindsets. Coetzee, in the end, reminds us of the need for empathetic, understanding, and self-reflective attitudes to representation, particularly when dealing with marginalized voices and experiences.

All in all, this thesis adds to our understanding of postcolonial literature by showing how layered silence can be. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, it is evident that the Barbarian girl's silence is a powerful way to resist being misrepresented. But at the same time, it is of importance to keep in mind that this silence, on the long term, might make it harder for her voice to be heard at all. This analysis foregrounds the way we show and understand the experiences of people who have been colonized. It argues that it is not enough to just show their suffering or paint them as victims, and advocates for the crucial importance of showing their full experience, including their hopes, relationships, and cultural practices, while acknowledging the real historical pain they went through.

Finally, readers learn from the Magistrate's journey. His story shows how hard it is for someone to change their whole way of thinking, especially when they've been part of a colonial system for a lifetime. The Magistrate tries to help the Barbarian girl, but he often falls back into old ways of thinking. This reminds us that decolonizing one’s mind is no easy or quick process. By looking at how both the Barbarian girl and the Magistrate struggle, it becomes clear how colonialism is harmful (although to different extents) to all, colonizer and colonized alike. In the end, there is no easy way to write about them or understand them. Our job as readers and scholars is to keep questioning what we read and how we think about it, always trying to see the full picture of people's lives and experiences.

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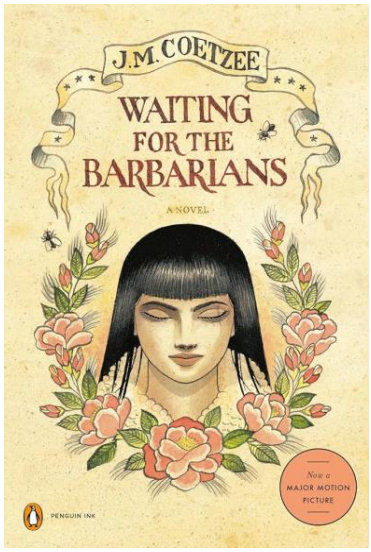

Fig. 1: White girl with long black hair and closed eyes, encircled by flowers. Cover image from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee, Penguin, 2010. Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/7948352-waiting-for-the-barbarians. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024. .....Page 31

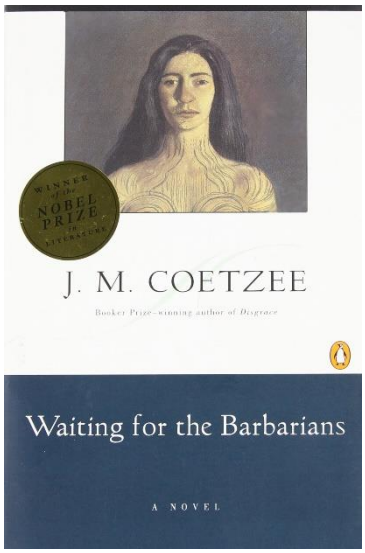

Fig. 2: Nude white girl with long black hair, body marked with symbols. Cover image from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee, Penguin, 1982. Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/12594534-waiting-for-the-barbarians. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024. .....Page 31

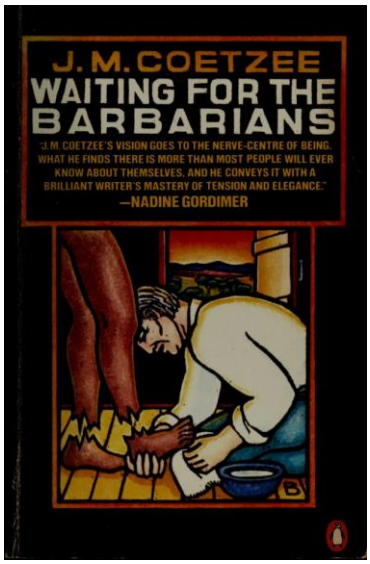

Fig. 3: Lower half of a Black woman's legs, with a white man tending to one. Cover image from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee, Penguin, 1982. Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/838250.Waiting_for_the_Barbarians. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024. .....Pages 31, 37

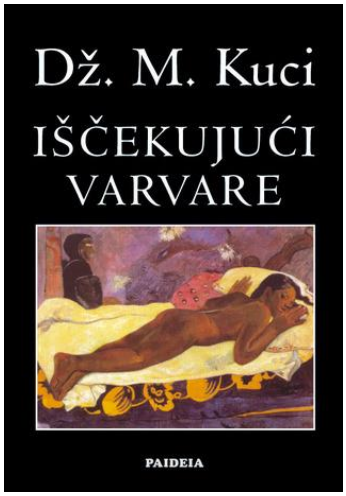

Fig. 4: Nude Black woman lying face down on a bed. Cover image from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee, Paideia, 2004. Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/15718269-i-ekuju-i-varvare. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024. .....Page 33

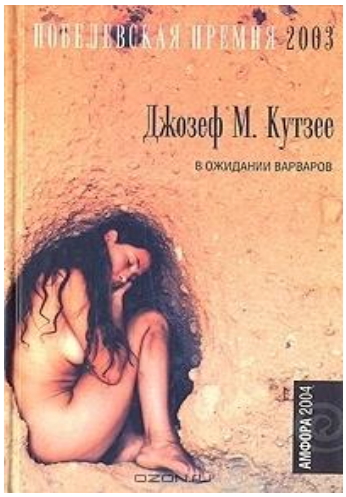

Fig. 5: Nude white woman with long black hair crouching against a wall. Cover image from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee, Амфора, 2004. Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/17225412. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024.
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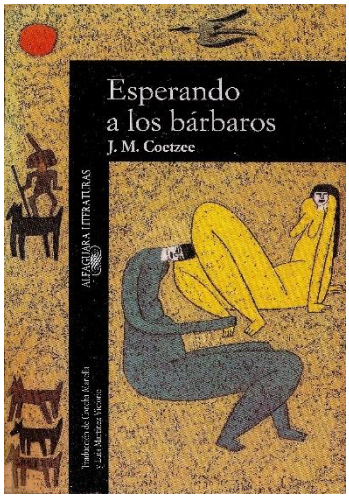

Fig. 6: Comic-style illustration of a woman and a man. Cover image from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee, Alfaguara, 1989. Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/38228143-esperando-a-los-b-rbaros. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024.
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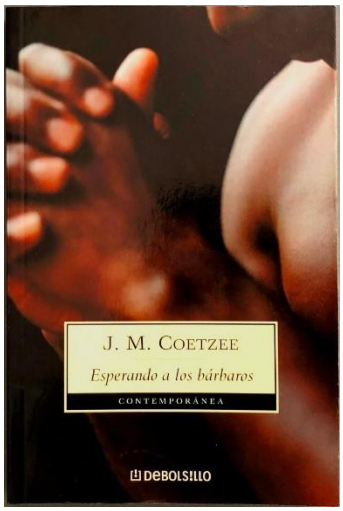

Fig. 7: Close-up of a nude Black woman in a gesture of supplication. Cover image from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee, DeBolsillo, 2003. Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/178795704-esperando-a-los-b-rbaros. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024.
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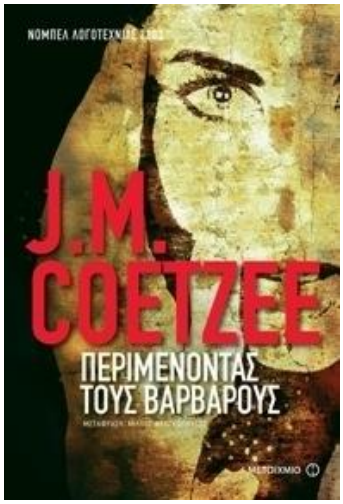

Fig. 8: Close-up of a woman with skin textured like a map. Cover image from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee, Μεταίχμιο, 2013. Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/18194406. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024.
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Fig. 9: Close-up of a veiled white woman's eyes. Cover image from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee, Азбука Premium, 2015. Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/32068310. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024.

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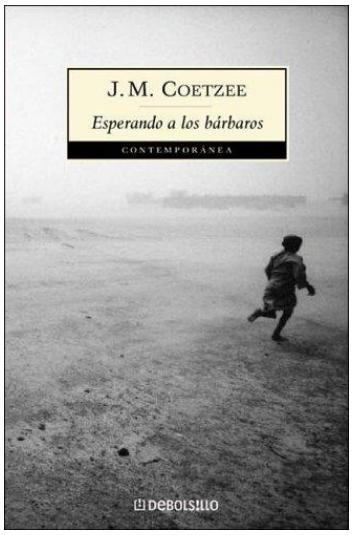

Fig. 10: Rear view of a woman running. Cover image from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee, Debolsillo, 2013. Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/16054085-esperando-a-los-b-rbaros. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024.

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Fig. 11: White woman in a white dress chained to a gate. Cover image from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee, Эксмо, 2009. Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/28510213. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024.
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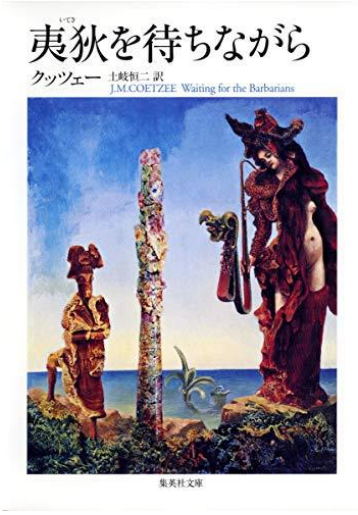

Fig. 12: Woman depicted as half-human, half-statue. Cover image from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee, Shueisha, 2003. Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/100781119-waiting-for-barbarians-shueisha-bunko-2003-isbn. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024. .....Page 38

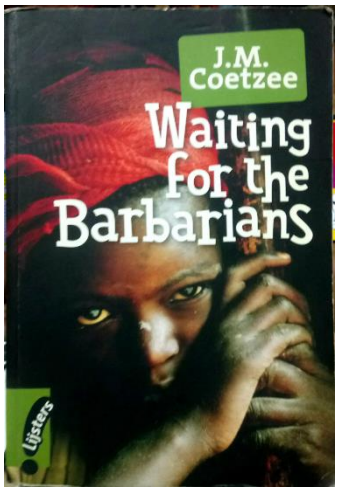

Fig. 13: Black girl holding a cane, with a pained expression. Cover image from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee, Wolters-Noordhoff, 2007. Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/29786942-waiting-for-the-barbarians. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024.
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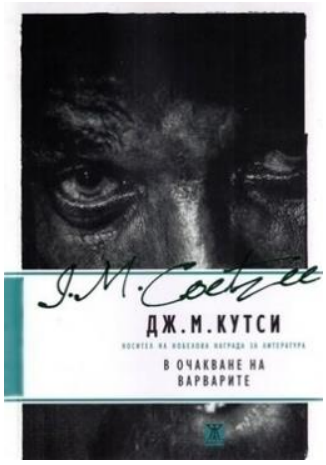

Fig. 14: Close-up of a face with accentuated eyes expressing pain. Cover image from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee, Жанет, 2012. Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8162126. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024.
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