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The Transformative Potential of Trauma in *Waiting for the Barbarians* by J.M. Coetzee

Abstract

This article analyses the novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) by the South African author J.M. Coetzee from the perspective of the transformative potential of trauma. *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a novel centred around the conflict between the Empire and the Barbarians, which prompts the active participation of the individual. The trauma in the protagonist's life becomes the motivator of the dramatic change in his humanist mindset. In my paper, I discuss the manifestations of indirect and direct trauma experience of the protagonist, which transform his attitude towards his personal situation, as well as the situation of "the other." The resulting perspective is compared to the concepts of posthumanist philosophy outlined by Rosi Braidotti. The article expands the viewpoint on the possibility of reading Coetzee's novels in the light of posthumanism. Through the analysis of the text, the article creates the interpretative framework linking the author with the fields of trauma theory and posthumanism.

Keywords: *Waiting for the Barbarians*, posthumanism, trauma, John Maxwell Coetzee

Introduction

In its announcement of the 2003 Nobel Prize in Literature, the Swedish Academy described John Maxwell Coetzee as a writer "who in innumerable guises portrays the surprising involvement of the outsider" ("The Nobel Prize"). His novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) tells the allegorical story of the Empire overtaking the territory of indigenous Barbarians. The political conflict, although set in an unidentified place and moment in time, can be viewed as a commentary on postcolonialism and apartheid, and as a simultaneous exploration of a seemingly incomprehensible rebellion of an individual against the system prompted by the unjust suffering of others. In *Waiting for the Barbarians,* it is indeed the involvement of the outsider – the Magistrate – with the natives that changes not only the status quo of the colonial regime, but also initiates a profound transformation of the protagonist.

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The aim of this paper is to present the analysis of this transformation from a posthumanist perspective. I will focus on the representation of direct and indirect trauma experience as a catalyst for the Magistrate's posthumanist turn. Initially, the vision of the world propagated by humanism can be seen in Coetzee's protagonist, who, through his gender, race, and attitude, becomes a representative of the humanist ideal, which in turn accentuates his later transformation. As the novel progresses, the Magistrate changes his perception of the world, assuming the lowest position, that of a prisoner and a victim, which enables his unconscious growth as a human being.

Trauma Theory and Posthumanism

As claimed by the Swedish Academy "Extensive reading reveals a recurring pattern, the downward spiralling journey he [Coetzee] considers necessary for the salvation of his characters," this very journey in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is laid open by the secondary trauma and follows the protagonist from the humanist position on top of the society downwards into posthumanist stance of embracing otherness ("The Nobel Prize"). The theoretical background of the article connects Freudian influences on trauma theory with Rosi Braidotti's take on posthumanist philosophy.

Sigmund Freud coined the term "traumatic neurosis," which entered his oeuvre as a consequence of his hysteria studies. E. Ann Kaplan further notes that in his study with Breuer, Freud relates "the symptoms of hysteria" to "the result of trauma" (26). Freud comes to claim that

> The symptomatic picture presented by traumatic neurosis approaches that of hysteria in the wealth of its similar motor symptoms, but surpasses it as a rule in its strongly marked signs of subjective ailment (in which it resembles hypochondria or melancholia) as well as in the evidence it gives of a far more comprehensive general enfeeblement and disturbance of the mental capacities. (12)

The aforementioned "disturbance" is caused by the external trauma experience "powerful enough to break through the protective shield" (Freud 29), which leaves a lasting mark on its victim, for whom recovery becomes a time-consuming process. Another key factor increasing the impact of trauma is unexpectedness, resulting in the victim's impossibility to activate the "protective shield": "[w]e either do not have time to prepare for it, or whatever receptive capacities (and defenses) are in place prove inadequate" (Hartman 257). The third crucial characteristic of trauma pointed out by Freud is latency. Sometimes referred to as belatedness, latency denotes the process of repressing the traumatic event in order to create a defense mechanism. In such a case the trauma is wiped from memory to protect the victim from the unbearably negative impact of the traumatic event. However, the memory of the event may return, triggered by external stimuli. As Michael Richardson notes, "this latency makes the traumatic event precisely that which resists representation: Its very status as trauma is defined by its refusal to be known" (321). A similar point is made by Beata Piątek, who pays attention to the "haunting" aspect of trauma, which is impossible to be represented on a one-to-one basis, and therefore instead of being processed and worked through, it might take the form of constantly recurring flashbacks.

Traumatized characters in Coetzee's novel face the difficulty of articulating the traumatic event, an inability that is another characteristic acknowledged by trauma studies. Geoffrey H. Hartman recognizes in this act of repression the ultimate need of the expressiveness: "As a specifically literary endeavour trauma study explores the relation of words and wounds. Its main focus is on words that wound, and presumably can be healed, if at all, by further words" (259). Hartman considers "expressiveness" to be the key factor in the process of healing and working through trauma; he believes that "Literary verbalization, however, still remains a basis for making the wound perceivable and the silence audible" (259). Marinella Rodi-Risberg

acknowledges the fact that "art can offer sensitive readers a unique view of other people's suffering" (115) despite the sheer impossibility of fully understanding the trauma unless the reader has had a similar personal experience. Contrary to that view, Dominick LaCapra remarks on the possible dangers of overidentification with the victim, resulting in vicarious victimhood: "But a difficulty arises when the virtual experience involved in empathy gives way to vicarious victimhood, and empathy with the victim seems to become an identity" (47).

In Coetzee's novel the protagonist experiences two types of trauma, which are here referred to as direct and indirect depending on whether the traumatizing events affect the life of the protagonist through his personal suffering or the suffering of others. I will argue that these two sources of pain result in the development of two types of traumatic disorders in the protagonist – PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and STSD (secondary traumatic stress disorder). The use of doubled traumatic disorder in the novel strengthens its impact on the protagonist and becomes the situation which transforms the humanist mindset of the character into the posthumanist one.

Developed in the late 20th century, posthumanism opposes what it deems a pernicious manifestation of anthropocentrism perpetuated by humanist positioning of the white male (in the form of the Vitruvian Man) at the center of attention. Rosi Braidotti discusses the critical approach of anti-humanists towards the humanist idea of anthropocentrism, claiming that "[t]his flattering self-image of 'Man' is as problematic as it is partial in that it promotes a self-centred attitude. This paradigmatic self-representation, moreover, is deeply male-centred and Eurocentric" (*Posthuman Humanities* 2). Braidotti draws attention to the prejudice introduced by the humanist thought, as its two important markers illustrate explicit preference over gender and race. Such beliefs have resulted in humanism becoming exclusive, applicable only to white, male individuals. Humanism does not allow "otherness" into its realm:

> In so far as difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as "others". These are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies. (Braidotti, *Posthuman Humanities* 15)

In response to such limitations of humanism, posthumanism is inclusionary and open to everyone, including not only humans, but also non-humans in its scope.

Being in many ways opposed to humanism, posthumanism moves away into the anti-anthropocentric vision of the world no longer focused on a white, male figure. Posthumanism disproves humanism's claim of being a "universal" philosophy. One of the primary features of posthumanism is the critique of the "human-centred (anthropocentric) ways of understanding life and reality" (Roden 10). Posthumanism moves human beings away from the centre of attention, and yet, simultaneously it underlines the prominence of our actions and impact they have on the state of future life and the environmental situation in the world. Braidotti importantly remarks that "the posthuman condition urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming" (*The Posthuman* 12). Therefore, the changes happening in the world should have a positive impact on humanity. They should encourage individuals to assess their human condition and strive towards self-improvement. Braidotti draws the attention to the importance of the human species in the world. According to her, "posthuman theory is a generative tool to help us re-think the basic unit of reference for the human in the bio-genetic age known as 'anthropocene,'" which she defines as "the historical moment when the Human has become a geological force capable of affecting all life on this planet" (*The Posthuman* 5).

This article addresses the influence of the trauma of "the other" on the life of the humanist individual, as posthumanism undermines the view that the world should be seen through the lens

of gender and racial segregation. The posthuman aspect here is limited to the discussion of human trauma – that of the barbarian girl, which in turn leads the protagonist into the direct trauma experience. The synthesis of trauma psychoanalysis inspired by Freudian theory and Braidotti's posthumanist philosophy will guide the analysis of the novel**.** To lead our understanding of these processes, I will start by analyzing the relationship of the Magistrate with the barbarian girl and explore how the posthumanist transformation of the Magistrate is visible throughout their affair and afterwards. My goal is to trace his journey of "becoming a person" (Grafe 25), which is prompted by his conscience awoken by the indirect and direct trauma experience.

The Trauma of the Barbarian Girl: Indirect Trauma Experience

Before he met the barbarian girl the Magistrate used to repress the inevitable presence of death and suffering of others from his life. However, the development of personal relationship with the girl, who can be seen as a representative of "the other," can be considered his first step in acknowledging the presence of trauma imposed by the Empire on the Barbarians. Thus, he rejected what Braidotti suggests is the very basis of ethical approach to life. She argues:

> This proximity to death is a close and intimate friendship that calls for endurance, in the double sense of temporal duration or continuity and spatial suffering or sustainability. Making friends with the impersonal necessity of death is an ethical way of installing oneself in life as a transient, slightly wounded visitor. (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 132)

The meeting with the barbarian girl and their relationship which follows afterwards makes the Magistrate see the repressed and allows him to experience the vulnerability of life in the way described by Braidotti. Subsequently, he is finally able to explore the sensitive side of himself, and thus, as I argue, become more humane. This relationship ignites his interest in the signification of visible scars covering the body of the girl as the indicators of the suffering she has undergone. The Magistrate offers her work and shelter, as she cannot be permitted to beg on the street. The readers are introduced to the girl's trauma through the effects of torture on her body and physical appearance, manifested in her partial visual disorder and broken limbs, which force her to use sticks while walking.

The lack of similar traumatic experiences in his past prompts the feeling of alienation in the Magistrate because he realizes he will never be able to identify with her pain. His rituals of washing her body manifest his urge to understand the girl's trauma through the scars. The protagonist becomes so engaged in the physical evidence of torture that he begins to treat the girl merely as an object of trauma, viewing her as "incomplete" (45). Małgorzata Hołda notices the potential of working through the trauma via providing the comfort to the body instead of focusing solely on the mind:

> In the trauma caused by either mental or physical affliction, the human body is the site both of feeling pain and of the possibility of its release – the body remembers the wound and is the potential ground for the healing process. The healing practice recognizes the interrelationship between the verbal and the physical aspects of trauma and the positivity of healing through the body, specifically in situations in which working through trauma via the narrative delivered by the wounded person does not suffice. (285)

The Magistrate's rituals of washing of the girl's body, something towards which he is instinctively (unconsciously) driven, can be viewed therefore, as the "release" for her trauma. However, his consciousness is too fixated on the unspoken trauma of the mind to notice the bodily comfort he provided for the girl can be just enough for her to heal. The Magistrate wishes to establish the

connection between the body and the mind, when it comes to detecting trauma, yet ultimately fails to notice this very connection, and the importance of the body in the healing process. He still operates under the humanist assumption that the body and the mind are separate entities that he needs to unite, whereas from the posthuman perspective they are a single continuum to begin with. His obsessive interrogation of the girl in order to extract the oral recollection of the traumatic event proves futile. As a result, he realizes his affinity with Joll, the torturer: "[t]he distance between myself and her torturers, I realize, is negligible; I shudder" (29). The Magistrate does not initially realize that his investigation would inflict additional distress and trauma on the girl, resulting in her deflection of his questions. Also, the girl opposes the idea of being defined by her torture, which the Magistrate fails to understand, being too self-absorbed with his fetishization of her wounds and scars. He believes in the Caruthian "story of a wound that cries out" (4), which suggests the traditional belief that trauma strives to be relieved. What the Magistrate wishes the girl to do is to "act out" on her trauma, to express it, but she withdraws, as she resents the idea of discussing the event. The Magistrate is ignorant of the fact that the girl's trauma is inaccessible to him. Only after his own experience as a victim is he able to realize this. When the barbarian girl declines to describe her trauma, it leads the Magistrate to the obsessive desire to "work through" her experience. The concept of "working through" is taken from Freud, and LaCapra explains the process as an attempt to "gain critical distance on a problem and to distinguish between the past, present and future" (143). Yet the girl's reluctance to discuss the experience may lead the readers to believe that she has already accomplished the process of "working through" her trauma. What the Magistrate fails to understand is that "certain wounds, both personal and historical, cannot simply heal without leaving scars or residues in the present; there may even be a sense in which they have to remain as open wounds" (LaCapra 144). It seems unacceptable for him to grasp the inevitable manifestation of the past trauma in the form of scars and wounds of the body and psyche. Such an attitude causes the Magistrate to impose imperatively the role of the victim on the girl.

When the Magistrate realizes the similarity between his treatment of the girl and Joll's tyranny, he is petrified: "I must assert my distance from Colonel Joll! I will not suffer for his crimes!" (48). Aware of his political involvement[1], the Magistrate develops the sense of guilt for the crimes of Joll and the Empire. Becoming like Joll is his greatest fear and, therefore, pursuing the opposite position, he chooses to become a martyr. In his view, any possibility of resemblance to the Colonel would confirm his complicity with the tyranny of the Empire. Therefore, the Magistrate represses the idea that he and Joll might have something in common: "extreme binarization is actually a way of concealing anxiety and the ways in which the seemingly pure opposites also mark each other and may share certain things" (LaCapra 149). However, the Magistrate's peculiar behaviour towards the barbarian girl still illustrates his affinity with Joll. The girl's unwillingness to share the trauma with the Magistrate results in his withdrawal from the relationship and his escape into sexual encounters with prostitutes. This brings him temporary alleviation of his guilt. Then, the protagonist decides to take the girl back to her tribe without asking her first. His decision arises from his failure to "cure" the girl, and from the fact that her presence reminds him constantly of his guilt. Despite his final resolution to part company with her, the relationship between the characters changes the Magistrate's life in a substantial way.

The trauma of the barbarian girl ignites the protagonist's interest in the ill-treatment of prisoners and becomes the moment of his awakening. It triggers his desire to understand the

[1] For the reader, the protagonist is defined by the function he performs for the machinery of the state, as in the novel his real name is never mentioned.

victimhood, to change his own role in the system and to find a purpose in life. Only later, when he himself becomes a martyr, is he able to partly understand the girl's behaviour and her actions. She frequently reappears during his time in prison in the form of dreams, flashbacks, and visions. Although she is physically no longer present in his life, his own victimhood makes him closer to her. In the next section I explore the direct trauma of the Magistrate, which stems from his relationship with the barbarian girl.

Direct Trauma Experience

Living in a borderland town, the Magistrate is directly traumatised when he becomes a prisoner of the Empire and suffers from the brutality of physical torture and public humiliation. The protagonist's imprisonment is a consequence of his involvement with the barbarian girl and the journey he organises to return her to her tribe. When arrested by Colonel Joll, the Magistrate is declared the enemy of the Empire.

Because of his position of the principal administrative officer, he is merely subjected to inconveniences and brutality of life as a prisoner during his first arrest. The Magistrate is acutely aware of the fact that he receives preferential treatment when compared to the imprisoned Barbarians. The novel illustrates the protagonist's evolving craving for discomfort, or even pain. Such a peculiar urge is driven by his wish to comprehend the significance of pain by himself, and not by means of the impersonal experience of others. Through his relationship with the barbarian girl, first unconsciously and then more consciously, the Magistrate develops a will to take part in the experience of collective trauma. He seeks suffering as a way of proving to himself that he has changed from a passive outsider to an actively involved individual:

> I take my fingers from my eyes and a grey world re-emerges swimming in tears. I am so profoundly grateful that I cease to feel pain. As I am hustled, a man at each elbow, back through the murmuring crowd to my cell, I even find myself smiling. (118)

The Magistrate's desire to feel pain is driven by his conviction that through martyrdom, he would be able to redeem himself for his passivity and alleviate his sense of guilt. Yet despite his wishes of becoming "the righteous one," he remains the creation of the despised Empire: "the Magistrate, against his innermost desires, represents Empire of evil while the girl stands for the victimized other" (Kowalczyk-Twarowski 71).

The Magistrate manages to escape from prison, yet when he sees the public shaming of the Barbarians, he cannot remain indifferent upon seeing a hammer – the threat of upcoming torture: "[n]ot with that! . . . You would not use a hammer on a beast, not on a beast!" (117). For his outburst the Magistrate is arrested again and only then is he subjected to various forms of physical torture, intended to show him "the meaning of humanity" (126), as the torturers claim that being a human is manifested through corporeality, and this, in turn, is to be experienced through pain. His subsequent imprisonment gives him ample experience of torments and humiliation. As a result, his desires become limited to the alleviation of bodily pain and suffering.

The narrative is preoccupied with the bodily experiences of pain and desire. The physical aspect of torture proves to be the key to confessing the truth; by wounding the body torturers aspire to break human spirit. In his speech in front of a crowd, protesting against the torture of the Barbarians, the Magistrate says: "'[w]e are the great miracle of creation! But from some blows this miraculous body cannot repair itself! . . . 'Look at these men!' I recommence. 'Men!'" (117). The protagonist brings the readers' attention to the image of the body, invoking its fragility. This judgement is driven by his relationship with the barbarian girl, who has scars on her body – the

signifiers of pain and torture. Sam Durrant refers to the scenes of washing the girl's body by the protagonist, claiming that they indicate the Magistrate's "inability to work through his failure to put her body back together, an inability to absolve himself of having allowed the torture to take place in the first place" (44). This leads the protagonist to the obsession with the body and its relevance.

The aftermath of the traumatic events evokes in the protagonist a form of mutism, identified as one of the trauma characteristics. To his own surprise, the Magistrate finds himself unable to talk about the experience. His cries have worn him out; afterwards there is no more he can say. During the period of imprisonment, he wants to prove to himself and others that he truly feels the pain:

> "Let everything be said!" I told myself when I first faced up to my tormentors. "Why clamp your lips stupidly together? You have no secrets. Let them know they are working on flesh and blood! Declare your terror, scream when the pain comes! They thrive on stubborn silence: it confirms to them that every soul is a lock they must patiently pick. Bare yourself! Open your heart!" So I shouted and screamed and said whatever came into my head. (141)

He believes his behaviour is different to that of the barbarian girl, yet in the aftermath of torture, he becomes just like her, unable to speak about his shame and suffering. The language does not seem to be a medium capable of transferring the pain and making it accessible for outsiders. The pain finds its way of expression only through the screams, which are inarticulate. The Magistrate's cry is reminiscent of the previously heard cries of the tortured Barbarians at the beginning of the novel. This illustrates the inhuman nature of the torture, which cannot be articulated through language, and can only be conveyed through unintelligible scream. However, Coetzee signals to the reader that the key for deciphering and understanding trauma lays in honest and empathetic interaction with the other.

The Posthuman Turn

These transformations happening in the Magistrate's attitude towards the Barbarians may be attributed to traumatic experiences, as described throughout this article. The intensity of his trauma gradually impels the Magistrate to endorse a different social, metaphysical and ontological paradigm in which the polarization between "us" and "them" is blurred. The elitist perspective is transformed into an egalitarian one, and the Magistrate himself realises that in terms of suffering there is no disparity between him and the Barbarians; the pain proves them equal.

At the beginning of the novel, the Magistrate is presented as an elderly man whose uppermost wish is to retire peacefully, which results from his self-centred attitude directed at the fulfilment of his own needs. His high office of the country magistrate gives him a sense of power and makes him respected among the society. The Magistrate accepts the division between his community, belonging to the Empire, and the Barbarians, which is based on the notions of the colonizer and the colonized. His attitude towards the Barbarians makes it apparent that he is the product of the Empire. Initially it is blatant for the reader that the protagonist is far from becoming engaged in a political conflict between the two parties. Although he does not necessarily consider Barbarians the threat to the Empire, unlike Joll, his opinion shows that he views them only as primitive nomads, which is a marker of his feeling of white superiority, characteristic of the anthropocentric vision proposed by humanism.

The division between the Empire and the Barbarians is an example of segregation characterized by the racism against the natives. Even the way they refer to them as the "Barbarians" is marked by prejudice and a sense of superiority of Empire. At this point in the novel, the Magistrate exemplifies a humanist model of indifference towards others, focusing primarily on his own comfort

and serene lifestyle. Until Joll's arrival, the Magistrate's life could be considered rather calm and uneventful. However, the visit from Colonel Joll from the Third Bureau changes everything. The regime dictated by the state apparatus of the Empire results in the creation of culture in which torture has become a regular tool used against the Barbarians. Despite the fact that the Magistrate finds Joll's interrogation measures disquieting and uncomfortable, he is forced to endure them and chooses to do nothing about the matter.

The violent treatment of the victims by the Colonel and his men leaves the Magistrate feeling ashamed of himself. His conscience is unable to accept the fact that he remains the part of the system which introduces such a regime. After Joll leaves, the Magistrate's first action is to take care of the imprisoned people; he orders the soldiers to "restore the prisoners to their former lives as soon as possible, as far as possible" (26). Another thing he demands his soldiers to do is the cleaning of the barracks: "I want everything cleaned up! Soap and water! I want everything as it was before!" (26). The crimes of the Empire trigger in the Magistrate the desire to purify himself from the shame he feels because of his passiveness. His obsession with the ritualistic purification continues later, during his relationship with the girl, which prompts the connection with Lady Macbeth: "[l]ike Lady Macbeth, he is unable to wash away the marks of his complicity" (Durrant 44). This complicity is distinctly visible in the scene in which the Magistrate desperately tries to ignore the cries of the tortured prisoners:

> I would like to be able to stop my ears to the noises coming from the yard below, which has now, it appears, become permanently a prison yard. I feel old and tired, I want to sleep. I sleep whenever I can nowadays and, when I wake up, wake reluctantly. (22)

The event makes him realize that by his passiveness, he becomes responsible for the torture as well. It marks the beginning of the process of awakening conscience: "His attempt to deny having heard the cries produces a crisis" (Durrant 43). Adrian Grafe observes in this moment the conflict between the wish to instinctively repress the feelings of guilt and simultaneous moralizing and critical sense:

> At the same time, the Magistrate tries to turn a deaf ear to his own moral deafness. It is an attempt to stifle his conscience, but that attempt is useless – he pleads his own cause because he knows he has behaved unethically by letting the Colonel take the prisoners away for questioning so easily. This weighs on his conscience. It is as though his personhood, dependent on his conscience, were at once affirmed and denied. (Grafe 25)

It becomes the first step taken by the Magistrate against the regime of the Empire. The audible and visible suffering of the Barbarians accounts for the protagonist's secondary stress disorder leading to his questioning of his role in society and becomes one of the factors determining his actions and new attitude to oppose the system. He wants to alleviate his sense of guilt for the mistreatment of barbarian prisoners by providing shelter for the barbarian girl.

However, the atonement that the Magistrate seeks by taking care of the barbarian girl is interfered by the sight of her "deficient" body. These wounds lead the Magistrate to an unconscious breakdown. He represses the idea of responsibility for the crime of the Empire, as well as the trauma itself, so deeply that it finds its representation in haunting dreams with the girl as their continuous protagonist. The trauma is experienced indirectly and because of the Magistrate's participation in trauma it is hidden by his own unconscious. The latency of the Magistrate's engagement in the conflict can be explained by the fact that the idea of complicity in the brutal reign of the Empire and the amount of wrongdoing is too overwhelming for the mind to be realised and accepted. Cathy Caruth notices that at times trauma is unavailable to the individual because of its unexpectedness

and consequently can find its way through "the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (4). Therefore, it comes back and haunts the victim later repetitively, as it was unable to be known at that time. The same is noted by LaCapra, who claims that: "Traumatic *Dasein* haunts or possesses the self, is acted out or compulsively repeated" (90). It is crucial that trauma may be "relieved" with or without the intention of the victim: "It may not be subject to controlled, conscious recall" (LaCapra 89). In the novel, the Magistrate experiences recurring dreams, which can be seen as a continuation of one narrative, which varies slightly each time. These nightmares "haunt" the Magistrate, oftentimes causing him to scream during his sleep, and become the signifier of the repressed. The Magistrate knows unconsciously that as a part of the system he is responsible for the torture imposed on the Barbarians, but he does not want to admit this to himself, which activates his morality through dreams.

As Kai Wiegandt points out, the Magistrate's mind produces visions in which the barbarian girl is disguised as a snowman – inanimate object, or hooded child, whose face is "featureless" and simultaneously can be viewed as a human face or a face of an animal. She sees this "dehumanization" as "an attempt of the magistrate's conscience to disown responsibility for the girl" (83). Not only do the dreams raise his awareness in terms of his complicity in the torture culture, but they also introduce the posthuman realm through the transcendence between human and non-human. The experienced trauma, which becomes a basis for the Magistrate's view of the girl as "incomplete," allows her to be transformed in his visions into an object or an animal or neither, because torture deprived her of humanity and gave her "less than human" status. Such a fluid representation of the barbarian girl shows that she moves freely between those categories and, thus, she can be viewed as a signifier of non-anthropocentrism and stand for widely understood category of "the other." This is an important point as it highlights the fact that the aforementioned classification proves irrelevant. In a sense, the girl deprived of humanity through torture makes humanist ideal and non-human others equal:

> Violence done to animals cannot be considered torture in a culture accustomed to exploiting non-human creatures. However, the magistrate begins to doubt the culture of the Empire. It becomes uncertain to him whether animals can be tortured, but things certainly cannot. (Wiegandt 83)

Dreams become the symbolical moment in which the Magistrate unconsciously crosses the line between humanism and posthumanism for the first time. The juxtaposition of two events – when he ignores the cries at the beginning, disregards his conscience, and when he stands in the defence of the Barbarians in public, following his conscience – is an illustration of the change that has taken place in the protagonist. The Magistrate goes from repression and indifference towards activism. He develops the qualities of the posthumanist subject: compassion, empathy, and the feeling of responsibility for the wrongdoing. He refrains from his man-centred vision of the world. His conscience leads him to forgetting about his own comfort and safety and challenges him into the victimhood and sacrifice for the sake of others.

This shows that he has disregarded the feeling of superiority, which was a part of his privileged position in society, but also his postcolonial legacy of imperialism. He withdraws from thinking about the Barbarians as inferior. Another change in his attitude towards the Barbarians is visible in the way he "translates" the language of the Barbarians. At the beginning, he considers them primitive shepherds, but with the change of his mindset he becomes open and sees his previous prejudice and racism. He proposes that the Barbarian language "can be read in many orders" (122), which exemplifies the shift in his outlook on the world. Braidotti points to decentralizing of the Euro-centric, universalist construction of humanity as a crucial project of the posthuman turn. She goes on to argue that:

> The process of becoming-minoritarian or becoming-nomad of Europe involves the rejection of the self-appointed missionary role of Europe as the alleged centre of the world. If it is the case that a socio-cultural mutation is taking place in the direction of a multi-ethnic, multi-media society, then the transformation cannot affect only the pole of "the others". It must equally dislocate the position and the prerogative of "the same", the former centre. The project of developing a new kind of post-nationalist nomadic European identity is certainly challenging in that it requires disidentification from established, nation-bound identities. This project is political at heart, but it has a strong affective core made of convictions, vision and active desire for change. We can collectively empower these alternative becomings. (*The Posthuman* 53–54)

In the novel, the Magistrate realizes Braidotti's vision of a post-national selfhood. The protagonist undergoes a fundamental change due to the crisis of his conscience: from the dutiful country magistrate submissive to the Empire towards the posthumanist version of the man. He withdraws from his sense of superiority and prejudice, becoming mindful and taking responsibility for the evil he has contributed to.

Conclusions

Grafe argues that the Magistrate develops into "a man of conscience", which is ultimately "what truly makes him a person" (30). Indeed, the traumatic experiences provoke a disturbance in his existence, a turmoil which becomes an irresistible force shattering his former way of life. The new posttraumatic reality cannot be understood or dealt with by means of the humanist model. The suffering of the individual evoked by trauma through its humiliating and degrading nature, which strips the victim of "grace," introduces the idea of shame. In this very moment we observe the symbolical "fall" of the false ideal of the Vitruvian Man represented by the protagonist. *Waiting for the Barbarians* underlines the metaphorical decline of the character when the Magistrate himself comes to the bitter conclusion, claiming that "[w]e are fallen creatures" (152). Throughout the course of the novel the main character does not only lose his position in the hierarchy of the system, but also becomes increasingly more aware of his own feebleness.

The Magistrate recognizes that his previous actions were driven by his sense of white supremacy towards the people of colour. Even though women are not the central protagonists of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the traumatic experience of the barbarian girl proves no less important to the Magistrate than his own suffering. Indirect trauma in the novel becomes a powerful incentive in the life of the protagonist, because it proves that when it comes to pain everyone is equal. No gender, race or species is immune to suffering. As the trauma is not only restricted to one's individual experience, but above all influences the Magistrate's life indirectly, it simultaneously makes him aware of the other. This, in turn, changes the focus from the main character of the novel to the narrative of the others. In this way, Coetzee illustrates that the central position of male characters only seemingly is his focus. The course of events shifts the male-driven perspective towards the broader vision, where the suffering of the other becomes acknowledged. The traumatic experience creates a fracture in a well-organised humanist vision of the characters. Subsequently, this fracture allows them a glimpse into a different mode of being – the posthuman. The loss of supremacy of the Vitruvian Man generates in the protagonists the ability to notice and embrace otherness.

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