



The Subversion of Enlightenment Rationality: On Two Vision-Blocking Metaphors in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*

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Abstract

The present paper bases its arguments around two vision-blocking metaphors in Coetzee's novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Revelations of the rich metaphorical meanings of the sunglasses and the blind eyes of the barbarian girl through close readings serve to demonstrate Coetzee's reflections on and criticism of Enlightenment rationality. As a superb narrator well-versed in the antipathy of modern Western culture, Coetzee arranges in dichotomy the two metaphors similar in form but opposing in essence, so as to propel with their tension the narration forward and highlight the gist of the novel. With the operations of various irrational elements in the text, such as the purification rituals, the dreams, and allusions to myth, he manages to subvert Enlightenment rationality for the sake of getting control of the order of nature.

Key words: Sunglasses; Blind eyes; Empire; Barbarians; Enlightenment rationality; Dream; Ritual

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INTRODUCTION

J. M. Coetzee's 1980 novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* won him international critical acclaim.(2014, pp.326-374) Ever after its publication, it has been thrown under critical

inspections from a wide range of perspectives. These critical reactions can be roughly put into two categories. In the first one, the criticism is based around colonial and postcolonial discourses, which comes natural to the study of Coetzee's works because Coetzee's life and career are inseparably intertwined with the colonial and postcolonial legacies of South Africa. His *Dusklands* juxtaposes 17th century colonial experience and postcolonial practice in the 1960's to illustrate the haunting ghost of Eurocentrism. *In the Heart of the Country* delineates the schizophrenia of the colonial psyche. *Foe* is a writing-back text and subversion of the canonical colonial narration *Robinson Crusoe*. *Age of Iron*, though pretty much Coetzeeian in its constant self-reflections, is his most explicit anti-apartheid text. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the opposition of Empire and Barbarians, as well as their ironical mutual transition, highlights the vintage critical tradition in the examination of the colonial experience, with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as its precursor. Critics represented by Bill Ashcroft (Ashcroft, 1998, pp.100-116) and Teresa Dovey (Dovey, 1996, pp138-151) take this story as an allegory of the apartheid South Africa. Susan Gallagher (Gallagher, 19688, pp.277-285) and Michael Valdez Moses(Moses, 1993, pp.115-127) approach it from the angle of torture and its traumatic effects. Dominic Head(Head, 2009,) views this book as an illustration of the old magistrate's moral awakening in the context of the Empire and the other.

The second category is characterized by the application of a wide range of other contemporary critical discourses, such as postmodernism, post-structuralism, body theories, trauma theories, narrative theories, and etc. These discourses, though some of them are more or less intertwined, respectively claim their distinctive critical rationale and methods, which together broadens the critical space of Coetzeeian studies and engenders more philosophical and cultural relevance and significance for Coetzee's works. Coetzee has been nurtured by the literary

modernism and postmodernism, well-versed in various philosophical and cultural movements in the second half of the last century, which, together with his profound understanding of European and American cultures, results in his insights into the essential problematics of the Western colonial institutions. What he really focuses on is the underlying stratum of the colonial discourse, the inveteracy of Euro-centrism. His probe into the nature of history and the deconstruction of it, as well as his linkage to the modernist literary tradition are reflected in his Kafkaian novel *Life and Time of Michael K.*; his illustration of the contemporary moral predicaments in *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*, in the disguise of meta-fictional poststructuralist construct, is indeed infused with moral force typical of the modernist heritage. Even in *Disgrace*, his most successful novel on the postcolonial conditions in South Africa, his criticism extends far beyond to instrument reason and the contemporary fate of the romantic tradition. His two collections of literary essays, *Strangers Shore* and *Inner Workings*, discuss leading modernist and postmodernist authors for the sake of piecing together a picture of the serious culture issues in the past century. In this sense, his oeuvre sets out to reveal the complicated philosophical, aesthetic, cultural, political antinomy deeply embedded in the Western Enlightenment and modernity, creating for his critics a vast space of critical possibilities.

As is mentioned above, the critical study on Coetzeeian works has a strong connection to post-colonialism and its related critical discourses. These critical perspectives, though varied in methods, generally share the common cause of revealing and criticizing the ideological, political, economical, cultural aspects of colonial practice, and scrutinizing various problems in the post-colonial era. Post-colonial theorists Said, Bhabha, Spivak, and the like explored the workings of colonialism and post-colonialism and established their respective theories; post-colonial writers Achebe, Coetzee, Naipaul, Rushdie and their peers write from their specific cultural background and individual understanding of the colonial and post-colonial conditions, providing the theoretical studies with down-to-earth raw material. In this sense, when studying a specific literary work, one shall, besides turning to the established theories and terminologies for critical insights and power, start from the very texture of the work being studied, trying to unearth the specificities of a specific writer for the modification and development of the understandings of the post-colonial discourse. This is especially true for the academic research on Coetzee's works, for he, with his mathematical, linguistic, literary, philosophical trainings, tends to weave his texts in highly intricate ways, creating complicated layers of meanings and delicate structures, rich metaphors and extensive inter-textual references, which altogether renders a texture abundant with implicit mechanisms with profound insights and sharp criticism.

Owing to this, a study on a Coetzeeian work shall be conducted with a thorough combing of the text itself, in order to expose its inner structuring logic and in turn the particular production of criticism, providing the ever developing post-colonial discourse with new weapons.

This paper is intended to reveal an aspect of the function of metaphors in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*. As for the metaphorical constructions in this novel there have been various studies; Gao Wenhui, for instance, said: "*In Coetzee's works, the writer exerts to construct another kind of narrative which exposes the violence in the reality through the use of metaphors*" (Gao, 2003, p.25). Then she proceeds with a discussion of the metaphorical use of Empire and Barbarian to refer to the colonizer and colonized. It is a shame that she does not go further to dig out more implicit metaphors to unveil the inner narrative force of the text. The present paper tries to highlight the narrative and critical power of two vision-blocking metaphors, especially the ways they are embedded in the critical points in the narration, how they are used to propel the narration towards successive critical points, how they are connected with the double layer of narration constructed in the text, and how they and their related textual and semantic creations work together to achieve a profound criticism on Enlightenment rationality, including instrumental reason. By vision-blocking metaphors, the author refers to the two metaphors, namely the sunglasses of Colonel Joll and the near-blind eyes of the barbarian girl, which blocks normal visual communications.

1. SUNGLASSES: THE METAPHOR OF THE INNER CONTRADICTIONS OF THE EMPIRE

The opening of this novel, "*I have never seen anything like it: two discs of glass suspended in front of his eyes in loops of wire. Is he blind? I could understand it if he wanted to hide his unseeing eyes. However, he is not blind. The discs are dark, they look opaque from the outside, but he can see through them. He tells me they are a new invention*" (Coetzee, 2004, p.1), presents some central critical elements. The magistrate's seems ignorance of the existence of sunglasses should not be understood temporarily but morally. This disguised highlighting of temporality is spatial in nature, distancing unconsciously the magistrate from the darkness and manipulateness of the Empire's mechanism. The darkness of the sunglasses points directly at the violent nature of the Empire's ruling practices. As is pointed out by Kannemeyer, "... *the ominous dark glasses concealing (Joll's) eyes and making his evil nature*" (Kannemeyer, 2014, p.336). The one-wayness of the sunglasses embodies a severance of equal communication, with the inequality based around

the basic dichotomy of the imperial logic: civilization vs. barbarianism.

The psychological advantage gained by wearing the sunglasses ironically reveals the insecurity felt by the wearer, Colonel Joll, the representative of Empire. The darkness, which allegedly is intended to protect one's eyes and skin from the fierce sunlight on the frontier, is actually not protective but aggressive in nature. The darkness itself, an example of Coetzee's ability to turn an image against its denotation, implies other kinds of darkness, not only the darkness evoked by the inter-textual reference to Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, but also the blindness to the very existence and right of the Other. In this sense, the magistrate's reflection "*Is he blind? I could understand it if he wanted to hide his blind eyes. But he is not blind*" (Coetzee, 2004, p.1) becomes a glaring irony, showing Coetzee's literary strategies of paradox.

Furthermore, the ironical nature of the sunglasses is enriched by a criticism on instrumental reason. The magistrate observes, "*The discs are dark, they look opaque from the outside, but he can see through them. He tells me they are a new invention*" (Coetzee, 2004, p.1). The invention of sunglasses in the 13th century in China was prompted by the needs of legal officials to hide their facial expressions in court from the suspects. It is instrumental in the sense that it enables an one-way observation and denies mutual communication. The wearer, with this instrument, gains psychological superiority and self-contentment, occupying a higher and dominating position in interpersonal communication. This instrument per se denotes inequality. Meanwhile, the insecurity and weakness of the wearer are adequately concealed. From the perspective of the magistrate who sees this object for the first time, besides curiosity and puzzlement, what emerges in his mind is probably a sense of fear and insecurity. He is forced into the position of an object being observed without any countermeasure. The objectification of the magistrate not only triggers his identity crisis, but also puts him at the other pole of the Empire-Barbarian dichotomy, together with the enemy of Empire. Joll says: "*At home, everyone wears them*" (Coetzee, 2004, p.1). This pair of sunglasses defines the identity of the subject of Empire. The magistrate is therefore categorized out of "home." His belonging to the imperial family is forfeited by this instrument. In this sense, this pair of sunglasses is the symbol of civilization, of refined life, of enlightenment, of modernity. On the wrong side of the darkness, the magistrate is distanced and marginalized, even if he used to be at the center of the frontier of Empire, a loyal servant.

Ever since Kant calls for the enlightenment of the human mind from its self-imposed state of ignorance and befuddlement, Enlightenment rationality became the core value of the modern Western culture. Human is given the status of god after God was relativized. Human, especially the White, became the dominant

force on this planet. God was just an invention of the Jews to regulate human relations. The fate of Human is in the hands of himself. Human is the master solely for his ability to cognize and control the world. All the things beyond the human subject can be reasonably and rationally exploited as instruments for the human purpose. The connotation is that the dominant ideology, race or class is justified to instrumentalize all the other existences, other humans included, especially uncivilized and pre-enlightened barbarians, a word in ancient Greece originally meaning the other without any derogatory sense attached to it. Besides this instrumentalization, the ideologization of racial differences and the explanation of language and customs differences as moral differences also contribute to the building-up of inequality which gives exploitation and violence a good reason to proceed. "*[Yet] the Empire's insistence on being the sole bearer of truth creates a Manichean dialectic, which invariably precludes and subjugates the other*" (Nashef, 2009, p.11). Based on this logic and hierarchy, the exploitation of Nature and the violence on the other become common practices. The name "*Waiting for the Barbarians*" itself is a sarcasm, for the barbarians would not exist if there was no Empire, as is suggested by Cavafy's cognominal poem. In other words, the very existence and legality of Empire are preconditioned by the presence of the barbarian, as Cavafy wrote: "*And now, what will become of us without barbarians/Those people were some sort of solution*" (Cavafy, 2007, p.17). Without the latter, the tension of the dichotomy would break and Empire would be annihilated. This dichotomy is built on the opposition of the two poles, not on the mutual understanding and communication of the involved two parties. The instrumental rationality has this dichotomy and the notion of subjectivity as its core, but in the ethics of postmodernism, "*'subjectivity' is a metaphysical fiction and a construction of a certain social order; therefore it is not real. As a result, the humanities which engenders this subjectivity is not real either*" (Gao, 2008, p.89).

The instrumentalization of Nature is vividly reflected in Joll's narration of his hunting spree. "*He tells me about the last great drive he rode in, when thousands of deer, pigs, bears were slain, so many that a mountain of carcasses had to be left to rot. ('Which was a pity.')*" (Coetzee, 2004, p.2). Joll and his like are blind (going back to the "sunglasses" metaphor) to the lives of the wild animal and deem them just as meat which, if not be able to be consumed, would be left rotting. The overkill of Nature suggests insouciance to the equal value of life. Paul Williams observes: "*[Similarly], both the protagonist and the antagonist of Waiting for the Barbarians are hunters of both human and nonhuman animals....The outpost which the Magistrate administers is a hunting culture, and this practice is taken for granted*" (Williams, 2013, p.18). What he failed to noticed is that Coetzee provides another approach to animals and

hunting through the mouth of the magistrate: "I tell him about the great flocks of geese and ducks that descend on the lake every year in their migrations and about native ways of trapping them. ... the fishermen carry flaming torches and beat drums over the water to drive the fish towards the nets they have laid" (Coetzee, 2004, p.2). This hunting practice poses as the other pole of utilizing Nature. Empire's attitude towards animals is characterized by its arrogance and superiority, endowing itself the right to kill at will. On the contrary, the local native's hunting is for subsistence, as is proved by a scene in Chapter 3: "By mid-morning they are back with huge catches: birds with their necks twisted, slung from poles row upon row by their feet, or crammed alive into wooded cages, screaming with outrage, trampling each other, with sometimes a great silent whooper swan crouched in their midst. Nature's cornucopia: for the next three weeks everyone will eat well" (Coetzee, 2004, 62). It has to be admitted that in this scenario there is indeed violence imposed upon the lives of animals, but there is an implicit expression of moral dilemma: whether killing animals for survival is allowed or not. Clearly, Coetzee makes a moral judgment against the merciless and excessive destructiveness of instrumental rationality. As for the subsistent killing, he has not aired definite opinion, for it is at the root of the existential dilemma of Nature. His concerns about the rights of animals are further embodied in Elizabeth Costello's lecture on *The Life of Animals*, where he expresses through the mouth of the fictive Australian novelist Costello his indignation and helplessness of the industrialized holocaust of animals. He, in his most fierce animal rights manifesto, does not touch the legitimacy of animal hunting for subsistence.

Coetzee's exploitation of this pair of sunglasses does not stop at that. As Joll said toward the end of the first paragraph, "They protect one's eyes against the glare of the sun" and "You would find them useful out here in the desert. They save one from squinting all the time. One has fewer headaches. Look." "He touches the corners of his eyes lightly. 'No wrinkles.' He replaces the glasses. It is true. He has the skin of a younger man" (Coetzee, 2004, p.1). Behind his seemingly irreproachable elaboration of the function of that pair of sunglasses, a sense of arrogant artificiality creeps into the text. With the darkness of the glasses and other unmentioned protections, he appears unnaturally younger and un-weathered. This artificiality assumes immediately a metaphorical meaning. Opposite to Nature, here the sun and the desert, this very synthetic creation of a younger face and no wrinkles signify the fear of nature as well as fakeness. The dark mask is a manipulation of truth, a message which Coetzee presumably intends to convey. Joll wanted to protect himself from the harshness of Nature, but this effort ironically ends him up an enemy of Nature and the naturalness of humanity. He also said, "At home everyone

wears them" (Coetzee, 2004, p.1). "Home" refers not only to the capital of Empire but also to the central mentality of the imperial institution. The frontier town is certainly not "home" in the eyes of Joll, which implicitly excludes and marginalizes the magistrate as well as the local people. In this way, the instrumentality of the sunglasses and the latent violence of the language manage to achieve the purpose of segregation; in other words, the polarity of empire and the other is forged at the very beginning of this novel.

The adherence to the darkness and blocking function of the sunglasses renders Joll himself no better than an instrument of the Empire. He is nothing more than a cog in the gigantic imperial machine operated by the logic of instrumentality and the mentality of fear. Ever since his baptism in the new religion called Enlightenment rationality, he went astray into a road which promised a prospect of the conquest of Nature and the other to be the master of the world. Along this road, he fused into a newly wrought barbarism in the disguise of rationality and righteousness. The sunglasses as the epitome of the dark nature of Empire therefore become his identity-defining token which is inseparable. This inextricability is reflected in the text, as "he picks his way uncertainly among the strange furniture but does not remove the dark glasses" (Coetzee, p.1). Thus, the pair of sunglasses turns into the logo of Empire, signifying its self-endowed authority and power, the severance of equal communication, and the subject anxiety and self-negation of Empire as a fabricated mega-narration.

The darkness epitomized by the sunglasses expands itself into a general metaphor hovering over the whole narration. It emerges in scenes such as the darkness in the torture chamber where the grandfather and the grandson were subjected to the barbarism in the seemingly logical and rational formula of getting the "truth": "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, 2004, p.5); the darkness between the room of the magistrate and the granary used as the torture chamber which "miraculously" blocked the painful screaming of the tortured from reaching the ears of the magistrate. As a key word in this context, "truth" as such is relativized into a discourse which is the embodiment of the logic of Empire. The "truth" as the real happening on the one hand and the intended "truth" on the other form the central tension of the narration, as it is not only in the acts of Empire of forging a truth for its justification, but also in the acts of the magistrate in searching for the truth embedded in the marred body of the barbarian girl.

That very pair of sunglasses eventually left the face of Joll in Chapter 6. At that point, the imperial army sent to the frontier town was already fleeing at

the rumored attack of the mighty barbarians, and the magistrate was released and resumed his responsibility for the town. Yet after the barbarian girl episode and the torture and humiliation experienced in the prison, he lost his former sense of superiority as the administrator of the city. Joll was back from his glorious expedition into the barbarian land, with only a few men left. This expedition proved to be a wild goose chase where no barbarians were encountered and fought. The implied truth is that there was no alleged barbarian threat at all; the whole farce was based around the lie fabricated by Empire itself to solidify the legality of its existence. This imperial strategy is used over and over again, as stated in the text that every several decades there would be words in the air that the barbarians are to attack with “concrete” and irrefutable evidences, to save the myth of Empire from being revealed as nothing but a political construction, an entity of power operation serving the interests of the ruling minority. Joll’s unreasoning attachment to the belief in the threat of the barbarians and his implementation of the imperial logic convincingly reveals the barbarian ironical nature of the empire. At his defeat, as well as the failure of the imperial myth, Joll self-consciously evaded the questioning and curious eyes of the magistrate. “*I stare through the window at the faint blur against the blackness that is Colonel Joll. ... As though touched by this murderous current he reluctantly turns his face towards me. His face is naked, washed clean, perhaps by the blue moonlight, perhaps by physical exhaustion. ...He looks out at me, his eyes searching my face. The dark lenses are a party*” (Coetzee, 2004, p.160). The pair of dark glasses was removed from the face, revealing “...his pale high temples.” “*Memories of his mother’s soft breast, of the tug in his hand for the first kite he ever flew, as well as of those intimate cruelties for which I abhor him, shelter in that beehive*” (Coetzee, 2004, p.160). Here, the intentional parallel placements of humanity as represented by the mother’s soft breast plus the kite and the intrinsic inhumane cruelty lead to a revelation of the destructiveness of the imperial ideology on the human nature. The mind of Joll is a beehive, a mayhem pointing to mental disorders. The question raised by Coetzee at this point is why a young boy cared by maternal love and close to the pure pleasure of nature and play, a man with finer taste of going to the opera shall end up a monster full of the urge to torture. A similar question came up by George Steiner in his famous book *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman*. He points out that “*the ultimate of political barbarism grew from the core of Europe. Two centuries after Voltaire had proclaimed its end, torture again became a habitual process of political action. Not only did the general dissemination of literary,*

cultural values proves no barrier to totalitarianism; but in notable instances the high places of humanistic learning and art actually welcomed and aided the new terror. Barbarism prevailed on the very ground of Christian humanism, of Renaissance culture and classic rationalism. We know that some of the men who devised and administered Auschwitz had been taught to read Shakespeare or Goethe, and continued to do so.” “*Assumptions regarding the value of literate culture to the moral perception of the individual and society were self-evident to Johnson, Coleridge, and Arnold. They are currently in doubt*” (Steiner, 1967, pp.4-5). Steiner, after ruminating the aftermath of the atrocious inhumanities in the first half of the 20th century, casts doubts on the European belief that a humanity education shall raise man above barbarization, which in essence questions the Enlightenment rationality characterized by anti-barbarianism, human autonomy, and the supremacy of human reason. The sunglasses and their wearer’s fine skin and fine taste of being unconsciously corresponding to the “darkness” and “Christian humanism, of Renaissance culture and classic rationalism” stressed by Steiner. Coetzee also shares his use of “torture” with Steiner in questioning the source of evil puzzling the rational mind of Voltaire.

The magistrate stands on the border between Empire and the barbarians. On the one hand, he belongs to the Empire as a cog in a huge machine, at least partially convinced by and embodying (though maybe unconsciously) its ideology; on the other hand, after a long life implied in the text spent in that frontier town and constant contacts with the local, the fisher people and the so-called barbarians, his imperial and colonial ideology had undergone subtle changes. He automatically assumed an opposite stand when Joll carried out his inspection and torture, implying his ideological transformation by the everyday truth of the frontier life. His only hobby, the digging of an archaeological site, tells nothing but his interest in the historical truth of the frontier. This seemingly unconscious obsession with the truth not only indicates his departure from the dominating ideology of Empire characterized by the imposition of its truth on the other, but also enables his self-inspection and self-doubt which ensures his self-awakening and self-salvation. These cannot be fulfilled merely by confronting the ideology of Joll; another polarity shall appear to drag him completely away from the imperial camp. This polarity is represented by the blind barbarian girl as well as by his dreams.

2. THE BLINDNESS OF THE BARBARIAN GIRL AND THE TRIUMPH OF IRRATIONALITY

As is pointed out by Dominic Head, “*the idea of personal awakening...now becomes a decisive structural principle*”

in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (Head, 2009, p.48). The true spirit of this very awakening is a questioning of and defiance against the value system of Empire, which implicitly challenges the ideology of Enlightenment rationality, with instrumental reason as one of its core components. This awakening is constructed on two levels of narration. The first is the elusive level of sub-consciousness of the magistrate realized by his series of highly suggestive dreams. As dreams are generally considered as the opposite of reason, the strategy of embedding dreams in the narration from time to time functions as a sabotage of the rationality of the seemingly traditional narration. *"To enter the disordered region of mind, in dreams, faints and frenzies, is often seen as revealing unconscious truths"* (Newman, p.129). The second level is mainly composed of the interactions between the magistrate and the barbarian girl, and the ensuing results. Several elements within the narration are subversive against the dominant ideology of Empire.

The first dream (Coetzee, 2004, p.9) takes place quickly after the narrator starts the whole narration. In the dream, the whole world is covered with snow with the sun, a symbol of rationality, dissolving into mist. The dreamer leaves the town and all defining landmarks disappear, giving way to "the world". The dreamer glides across the square, like a phantom, only to find children building up a castle. "Children" is highly suggestive in that they are destructive and constructive at the same time, and their language is so new that the magistrate cannot understand. The dreamer becomes self-conscious confronting such fresh and creative energy as he feels his own bulkiness and shadowiness. "Shadowiness" is related to darkness, a metaphor of his own complicity with the dark forces of Empire. His presence undoubtedly dispels the children, but one, not even a child, persists. It is a girl, deeply engrossed in her work of building the snow castle, the symbol of the fairy world. He tries to imagine the face of the girl whose back is facing him, a desire of cognition typical of the enlightened rational mind, but in vain. This girl apparently is a signifier of the real barbarian girl who enters the story later, and they share the same mysteriousness as the latter remains in the town without a given reason after all her tribesmen left, indicating that she is more textual than real, a mysterious force destined to enable the awakening of the magistrate, an existence designed to overthrow the dominance of the rationalistic ideology. This dream reappears with some differences after the magistrate's encounter with the barbarian girl. This time the child who remains is hooded. *"...I ...peer under the hood. The face I see is blank, featureless; it is the face of an embryo or a tiny whale; it is not a face at all but another part of the human body that bulges under the skin; it is white; it is the snow itself. Between numb fingers I hold out a coin"* (Coetzee, 2004, pp. 39-40). The magistrate expected to see a definite face, but is faced

with amorphism, animality, and prenatality, all signifying the primal force of life and its mysteries. Confronted with this pristine force, the magistrate, a man without any offspring as implied by the text, which indirectly suggests his sterility, holds out a coin. This act would be confusing if understood as one of charity; instead, this is an act of surrendering the power of the Empire embossed on both sides of the coin of Nature and its ways. In this sense, the dream is both the impetus and reflection of his interactions with the barbarian girl in the fictional reality.

In between these two related dreams there is another one, a *"...dream of a body lying spread on its back, a wealth of pubic hair glistening liquid black and gold across the belly, up the loins, and down like an arrow into the furrow of legs. When I stretch out a hand to brush the hair it begins to writhe. It is not hair but bees clustered densely atop one another: honey-drenched, sticky, they crawl out of the furrow and fan their wings"* (Coetzee, 2004, p.14). This dream enters the text before the magistrate's encounter with the barbarian girl when his disgust of what Joll is doing is building up. It is highly Freudian at first sight, but when one realizes that the magistrate does have access to sex with women around him, the sexual elements in this dream context take on political connotation. The lush pubic hair emitting sexuality is not an object of desire any more when it writhes at the touch of the magistrate, a symbol of the intrusiveness and violence of the imperial ideology. The hair ceases to be inanimate; the resulting honey bees crawling out of the furrow, a metonymy of earth, fanning their wings, strongly suggest the liquid process of birth. There is no blood present but honey, implying nurture opposite to blood shedding. This picture is subversive in that it presents the vitality and productivity of Nature against the thanatos of the imperial ideology.

All these dreams in another way suggest the inward awakening desire of the magistrate. This desire could be attributed to his innate conscience, but is more a result of his year-long marginal position which enables him to understand, though unconsciously, the importance of tolerance when living among the other. His imperial ideology of confrontation between the Empire and the other has been relativized and the demarcation line is blurred. The inspection of Colonel Joll serves as the first trigger of his doubting the value system of Empire. The appearance of the barbarian girl becomes the decisive force touching off his inquest into himself as an instrument of the empire and the invincible mysteriousness of Nature. The dubious origin of the girl, her inexplicable sojourn in the town, the quasi-religious night rituals all are related to dreams for their in definitiveness. During the whole episode of their interactions the blind barbarian girl remains a riddle not able to be cracked by the magistrate. She is to great extent the embodiment in reality of the girl in his dreams. In other words, the encounter with the

girl is just a dream unfolding in reality. In this sense, the concreteness of the reality is superseded and made inroads into by the “unreal” which ironically is true to the truth. The boundary between the rational and the irrational is neutralized by the latter’s conquering of the former. The permeation of the dream elements into the rational realm declares the bankruptcy of the ideology of enlightenment rationality. Coetzee does not deny the importance of rationality; he just intends to stress the order of Nature by using the story as a mega-metaphor showing that, as the girl in the dream predates the one in the reality, irrationality shall be positioned before rationality in the ontogenic order of things. This endows irrationality with a supremacy over rationality. The girl in the dream foresees that the salvation of the magistrate shall be achieved through the opposite sex, whose productivity points directly to the abstruse inner workings of Nature.

As is shown above, the series of dreams in the novel provides an underlying structure motivating and molding the narration. In the last scenario where children are building a snowman, the dreams eventually are materialized (Coetzee, 2004, p.170), which signifies the triumph of the irrational, or the reestablishment of the natural order.

On the level of the fictional reality where the real and the dream intermingle, the most striking metaphor is the near-blind eyes of the barbarian girl. When confronted with this pair of damaged eyes, the magistrate is again rejected by visual barriers. What is special of this pair of eyes is that they are not totally blind. The central parts are damaged by being exposed closely to fire, a torture invented by Colonel Joll and his men to prevent the girl from witnessing the truth of violence. Fire, the source of light and therefore a metaphor of civilization, is ironically becoming an instrument to sever communication and suffocate the pursuit of truth, the ultimate aim of Enlightenment. The margins of the eyes are miraculously kept intact, signifying the power of the marginal position, as represented by the frontier town, the marginalized magistrate, the buried city, the barbarians, and the desert stretching to the horizon outside the town. The blindness of the barbarian girl and the blindness suggested by the sunglasses, when posed side by side, form a striking contrast. The former is productive in that it evokes the uncontrollable interest of finding the truth in the magistrate, while the latter promises nothing but horror, unjustified sense of superiority, and finally barbarianism in its true sense.

The injured eyes as well as the broken ankles witnessed the dark and psychopathic mentality of Empire. The visual damage left the girl looking askance at people when trying to see, an implicit suggestion as to where to look if one wants to communicate with a traumatized subject. If the magistrate looks directly into the damaged eyes, his inquiry would turn out to be futile, as his practice

proved to be of confining the girl in his room and trying to crack the riddle of her through physical intimacy. The damage inflicted upon the body of the girl, the brand of the “rational” dichotomy of the Empire and the other, blocks the channel of direct and equal communication. But as is pointed above, the channel is not totally sealed, for the girl still possesses a lateral sight. This suggests that effective visual as well as spiritual communication can only take place when the source of trauma embodied in the frontal eye damage is circumvented. In order to effect real communication, it is implied that one must abandon the imperial discrimination and superiority involved, sometimes unconsciously, in the interaction between Empire and the other.

The magistrate took the barbarian girl on the verge of his awakening. He plans to dig out what happened in the torture chamber to the girl and her father. His method of investigation is a mixture of imperial rationality and irrationality. The former is reflected in his imposition of his logic and will of the barbarian girl. He ordered her to be taken to his room without asking for her consent, even though he deemed it as an arrangement for her own interest. The washing of the broken ankles and the subsequent anointment of her body is seemingly religious and therefore irrational, but they are in essence conducted in the vein of imperial rationality because no mutual communication whatever took place between the subject and its object. According to the Bakhtinian dialogue theory, “*To be means to communicate biologically. When dialogue ends, everything ends. Thus dialogue, by its very essence, cannot and must not come to an end. All else are means; dialogue is the end. A lone voice ends nothing and resolves nothing. Two voices are the minimum for life, the minimum for existence*” (Bahktin, 1984, p. 252). The one-wayness of the imperial rationality denies the “the minimum for life” when only one voice is here. The absence of the voice of the other negates the happening of communication, the ignorance of which contributes to the magistrate’s confusions and ensuing self-questioning.

On the other hand, those frustrating and abstruse religion-like nocturnal rituals keep infusing elements of enlightenment in its true sense. Enlightenment is intended to establish the independence of man in front of God. This does not mean that man shall be independent of and opposing to Nature or any other mysterious forces in the universe. Man is the child of Nature and is far from understanding the inner workings of the cosmos. Man shall show his humbleness not only to Nature but also to all other elements in the world; both of these are violated by Empire represented by Colonel Joll and his men. In the process of pursuing the truth which the magistrate feels with an instinct that there is behind the blind eyes as well as her physical presence, he inevitably automatically directed his inquiring efforts into the imperial national channel. It is clear that his interest was not in sex; his

sexual needs were satisfied physically whenever he wanted, but without any genuine intimacy engendered: the women he slept with left his bed without his knowledge and moved onto the floor for no given reason. This act is metaphorical in that his social status secured his sex supply, not his person. He became a symbol of the imposing and self-centered imperial force, which rendered him a husk without any seeds, the proof of which was in his sterility. The lack of sexual or reproductive element in their encounters not only indicates the germinating awakening of the magistrate, but also points to the futility of a relationship which had the physical and ideological imperial confines as its setting. In his exploration of the myth of the girl, there are two equally strong impetuses: the first one is the frustration and hurt feelings of being rejected by the other, as his imperial subjectivity has till then not been by any alien forces; the second one is the unconscious or sub-conscious craving for the truth, the mysterious and indefinable thing that he feels would promise the freedom from the historic discourse of Empire which he thinks is problematic.

His gradual turn towards sensing the power of irrationality, or the mysteriousness central to the quintessence of Nature begins with his washing ceremony in the dimly-lit, cave-like lodging resembling pristine tribal rituals. These highly irrational and esoteric ceremonies taking place in the heart of the frontier imperial power center is symbolic in that it implies the dismantling of Empire from within. "..., in physical rituals, venturing into uncharted areas beyond the confines of society may convey power and status on the return of initiation" (Newman, 1998, p.129). The magistrate, in the washing and anointment rituals, underwent a certain transformation which spurred him to introspect, to doubt, to demystify the core value of Empire, and finally to make the decisive decision to breach the ideological confines, braving into a pilgrimage to the wilderness. At this point, the ideology of the Empire built around the opposition and confrontation between the so-called rationality and irrationality is being abandoned by a force from within for the more inclusive system called Nature. The implicit suggestion is that Enlightenment rationality shall not be considered as a finished, perfect, and universally applicable ideology; constant revision and recognition of its complexity are indispensable. Meanwhile, the European Enlightenment shall not be the sole basis for modern social and cultural practices, for every culture shall be respected for its singularity and equal rights.

The expedition into the desert to escort the barbarian girl back to her people began despite oppositions from others in the severity that winter. Though they underwent the hostilities of the nature, the direction was towards spring, a symbol of life and resurrection. The previous soporificity represented by the archaeological exploration, the possession in the nightly rituals, and the indecisiveness

in the face of imperial violence were replaced by the resolute of entering the heartland of Nature. The previous impotence of the magistrate was miraculously cured, not only because of the fertility of the nature, but also because now the magistrate is no longer an imperial force which penetrates without the consent of the other, an act loathed by him which leads to his impotence in those nocturnal rituals. He and the girl were equal now. Only on this platform of communication is the sexual intercourse finally fulfilled. The girl went back to her kinsmen without looking back at the magistrate, which made him feel very lost. What he did not realize and what Coetzee implies is that the mystery of the girl is now fully revealed: she is nothing but the oracle of Nature for him, secretly showing him the way of emancipation. Upon returning to her people, the mission was accomplished and there was no love lost in between. This is the very reason of her tranquility at the departure, for she is not a real person but the herald of the real Enlightenment. The successful copulation between the two is the metaphor of the rejuvenization and reestablishment of the conscience within the imperial ideology. The successful sex on mutual consent eventually renders a new man with a steady belief in the vileness of imperial ideology and the right stand he shall by all means hold.

Coetzee's story line follows the cycling of seasons, an undoubted defiance against the concept of linear progress of history at the center of continental philosophy ever after Enlightenment. The magistrate met the girl in winter, escorted her back to her tribe through winter and into spring, suffered from the imperial violence in summer and fall, and finally entered a snowy world as a free man again. This near-perfect temporal circle promises stability and predictability in the overall temporal frame of reference; the intrinsic rhythm of nature prevails over all human ado, and the essential historical view and predictions of Empire went bankrupt. Towards the end of the book, the magistrates reflected upon the human impulse of writing history. "*But when I sit down at my writing table, wrapped against the cold in my great old bearskin, ..., what I find myself beginning to write is not the annals of an Imperial outpost or an account of how the people of that outpost spent their last year composing their souls as they waited for the barbarians. 'No one who paid a visit to this oasis,' I write, 'failed to be struck by the charm of life here. We lived in the time of the seasons, of the harvests, of the migrations of the waterbirds. We lived with nothing between us and the stars. We would have made any concessions, had we only known what, to go on living here. This was paradise on earth'*" (Coetzee, 2004, p. 169). Even if he deemed this idyllic pastoral as devious, equivocal, and reprehensible, it is clear that that is the life he is craving for, for he followed with: "*I wanted to live outside history. I wanted to live outside the history that Empire imposes on its subjects,*

even its lost subjects. I never wished for the barbarians that they should have the history of Empire laid upon them” (Coetzee, 2004, p.169). History in the Coetzeeian sense means the dominant discourse of the ruler, so the magistrate’s longing for a life outside history is a wish to establish a rivaling discourse against history. The pastoral above is a world where the impulse of nature rules. This escapement from the linear time line into total timeless freedom has also been described by some other authors, such as Marilynne Robinson, who in her famous novel *Housekeeping* depicts the life of the Foster women after the tragic and symbolic death of the paterfamilias in an railway accident where the train he was on board back from a business trip derailed and plunged off a bridge into a lake. “The years between her husband’s death and her eldest daughter’s leaving home were, in fact, years of almost perfect serenity.... **With him gone they were cut free from the troublesome possibility of success, recognition, advancement. They had no reason to look forward, nothing to regret. Their lives spun off the tilting world like thread off a spindle, breakfast time, supertime, lilac time, apple time. If heaven was to be this world purged of disaster and nuisance, if immortality was to be this life held in poise and arrest, and if this world purged and this life unconsuming could be thought of as world and life restored to their proper natures, it is no wonder that five serene, event less years lulled my grandmother into forgetting what she should never have forgotten**” (Robinson, 1980, p.10). The bold parts in this quotation unarguably show the reestablishment of the order of nature in the absence of the previous dominant masculine purpose of history.

As is illustrated in this section, the second vision blocking metaphor, the near-blind eyes of the tortured barbarian girl, serves ironically as a window through which the magistrates dimly sees his complicity with the Empire, which in turn prompted him onto the road of atonement and freedom. From the atrocity of the sunglasses to the enlightenment of the blind eyes, this adroit mechanism of metaphor use enables Coetzee to highlight the inner paradox of the imperial ideology. The transposition between these two vision-blocking metaphors concerning the real meaning of Enlightenment is masterfully schemed, succeeding in subverting the rational discourse of Euro-centrism.

CONCLUSION

The awakening of the magistrate was not fully achieved by the barbarian girl’s return. Real adversities have an essential role in the final fulfillment. Therefore, Coetzee arranges him to be thrown into prison charged with high treason. He was subjected to numerous atrocities, including a mock execution and a public humiliation of being forced into a woman’s garment. He was molded into public enemy, which illustrated the vicious propaganda

and manipulation of the mind of the people. Only through these hardships did his belief in the downfall of the unnatural imperial ideology become unshakable. The last sentence of the novel, “*Like much else nowadays I leave it feeling stupid, like a man lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere*” (Coetzee, 2004, p.170), is not as pessimistic as it sounds. Head observes, “*The dream sequence amounts to an accurate narrative of sublimation and human advancement which belies the negativity of the final ‘nowhere’ of the novel, and which is validated by an appeal to a mimetic moment in which the lessons drawn from the dream-visions can be ‘actualized’ for the character: the magistrate awakes into a new present in which the traces of Empire are eradicated from his identity*” (Head, 1997, p.92). In the final snowy scene, the only humans are the magistrate and the playing children actualized from his dream without any trace the girl. He felt stupid and often so nowadays because his stupid superiority and sense of security engendered by a blind reliance on the imperial rationality have gone. He does not quite understand now. In the final scene, dreams and reality unify, and the rigidity of history is neutralized by the non-purpose of the road. The magistrate is not lost at all; he just follows the road of Nature whose destination is kept a secret to the human, and maybe there is not any destination at all.

With focuses on two implicit but central metaphors of blocked vision, this study strives to reveal the inners narrative impetus so generated toward the subversion of the dominant imperial ideology characterized by the dichotomy of Empire and the other, the conception of linear timeline, and the instrumentalism. The opposition and transposition in connotations of the two metaphors manage to structure the central conflict and push the narration toward final enlightenment and freedom.

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