Staging the Ethical in the State of Emergency in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*

Stevan Bradić

Faculty of Philosophy, Department of Comparative literature, Dr Zorana Đinđića 2, 21000 Novi Sad, Serbia
stevan.bradic@ff.uns.ac.rs

In this article I analyze the novel by J. M. Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians *(1980), in an attempt to show how it stages an insufficiency of the ethical reaction, by positioning it upon a social stage which determines its reach and effects. I proceed by reading this stage in the categories of Giorgio Agamben's concept of the state of emergency, which spans throughout all of the novel"s events, and defines the relations between its main characters, the Magistrate (novel's narrator and protagonist), the "barbarian girl," and Colonel Joll. My main focus rests on two episodes: firstly, I present how the Magistrates supposed humane treatment of the "barbarian girl" is in fact only a humanization of the imperial domination, and secondly I analyze the scene of mass torture of the "barbarians," led by Colonel Joll, in which the Magistrate's reaction is shown to be misplaced and insufficient. Finally, by reverting to Badiou's understanding of ethics, I show that both the Magistrate and Colonel Joll function within the boundaries of the imperial logic, and how the Magistrate's ethical reactions remain ineffective precisely because they do not question the very foundations, the supposed universal law, from which they stem, and therefore never manage to reach the objective level of action. In this sense Coetzee's novel, on the level of form, fulfills that which is presented as lacking on the level of its content – by making its readers find a position outside of the logic of its characters, it presents them with the insufficiency of ethics devoid of any relation to politics.*

Keywords: literature and ethics / South African literature / Coetzee, J. M.: *Waiting for the Barbarians* / Agamben, Giorgio: *Homo Sacer*

Upon its publication the novel of the famous contemporary South African writer J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) was welcomed as a masterpiece of the so-called *late-modernist* literature, which resonated significantly in the emerging field of postcolonial studies. Its complex story raised numerous questions about race, imperialism, the "dangerous" other, the use of torture, responsibility, desire,

and the relation of power and truth that unfortunately seem to be as relevant today as they were when the work was first published. My primary focus in this essay will be the perspective internal to the narrative itself – I will analyze the staging of the ethical response of its main protagonist to the imperial acts of violence, in order to show its dependency upon the situation in which it is taking place. For this purpose I will focus on two episodes from the novel, the first one being the often commented upon (Attwell, Attridge, Hayes) encounter between the Magistrate and the "barbarian girl," and the second one the mass beating of the "barbarians" in the central square of the town, in which most of the novel takes place. In both of these episodes the character of the Magistrate seems willing to act ethically, but in both cases his actions seem to be insufficient, either when he functions as the representative of the sovereign power or when he acts against it.

For this analysis, instead of Greek understanding of ethics as the "good way of being," a more appropriate approach seems to be the one outlined by the Stoics and in the modern sense Kant. As Alain Badiou notices, for the Stoics the "wise man is he who, able to distinguish those things which are his responsibility from those which are not, restricts his will to the former while impassively enduring the latter" (Badiou 1). This is how we find the character of the Magistrate in the beginning of the novel – an elderly man attending to his duties as the head of the imperial outpost, awaiting for his retirement. But after the events of the novel start to unravel, he reluctantly accepts to fulfill the duty of the subject bound by a universal law, in the Kantian sense. This is immensely important particularly because the regular rule of law is allready suspended at this point,[1] and I intend to show how the apparent insufficiency of his response does not originate in some kind of flaw in his character or inconsistency of his actions but precisely in the logic of the general law he aims to enact.

I will therefore start from what I understand to be the "stage" of the events in this novel. By this I do not mean the spatial location of the plot, which is undeniably important, but from the juridical circumstances under which the plot takes place.[2] In the very beginning of the novel we are informed of the arrival of Colonel Joll of the Third Bureau, a representative of the emergency powers, as the Magistrate notes: "We do not discuss the reason for his being here.

[1] In this sense his ethical response is based on the Kantian "principle that judges the practice of a Subject" (Badiou 2).

[2] These two are indeed related, since both deal with the question of the border, the inner and the outer, the inclusion and the exclusion.

He is here under the emergency powers, that is enough" (Coetzee 4). The said "stage" is therefore explicitly defined in the terms of the *state of emergency*.[3] In his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben offers a complex explanation for these circumstances and their implications. Summed up, they can be described as the state of suspension of juridical order, based on the decision of the sovereign, which as an effect reduces his subjects to *bare life*. The sovereign is the one "to whom the juridical order grants the power of proclaiming a state of exception and, therefore, of suspending the orders own validity" (Agamben 17). Because of this he "stands outside the juridical order and, nevertheless, belongs to it" (Schmitt, qtd. in Agamben 17). The situation created by the emergency "has the peculiar characteristic that it cannot be defined either as a situation of fact or as a situation of right, but instead institutes a paradoxical threshold of indistinction between the two" (Agamben 18). In addition to this, the life "caught in the sovereign ban […] is originarily sacred" (53), and by definition *may be killed and yet not sacrificed* (12), becoming in a sense totally exposed to the violence of the sovereign power.

This setting of the "stage" therefore implies that the power is redistributed from the very start of the narrative – the Magistrate still functions in his official role, but the real power now resides with the representatives of the state of emergency (i.e. Colonel Joll). Nevertheless, the novel, does not start from the potential "chaos" of indistinction, it rather proceeds gradually, through localized events of violence that, from the juridical point of view, do not demand a response from the Magistrate. In this manner his reactions are delegated to the sphere of ethics, that is, to the sphere of his private decisions. At the same time, with each act of torture committed by Joll, the Magistrate becomes more and more involved with his prisoners. Through this we are witnessing the split in the very structure of the imperial power: the Magistrate, who is officially no longer in charge, sees it as his moral duty to intervene in the actions of the new imperial official, in order to enact the values he believes to be fundamental for the Empire, values which have been suspended

[3] Once put in the historical context the novel seems to, paradoxically, predict the state of emergency that was instituted in South Africa from "the mid to late 1980s" (Engle 123), with the emergency mirroring the fictional text by consisting "of a confrontation between a white state power which claimed to be European in its core beliefs and an oppressed non-white majority which had encountered European traditions in the form of colonialism, racist capitalism, and white owned technologies of oppressive power" (123).

precisely to be "protected" and "preserved". Accordingly he claims the following: "I struggle on with the old story, hoping that before it is finished it will reveal to me why it was that I thought it worth the trouble" (Coetzee 34–35). It can therefore be said how the Magistrate stands in for the imperial ethics and politics during the regular rule of law (which is supposedly based on them), and his interventions serve to protect the Empire from itself, to protect its "better nature", compromised by this state of emergency, which is supposedly motivated by the "barbarian" threat. [4] But this is only an internal perspective on the situation, a perspective of an imperial subject and an administrator, and its limitations become apparent through his relation to the "barbarian girl".

The character of the "barbarian girl" appears in the narrative only after she was partially blinded, crippled and effectively reduced to a beggar by Colonel Joll's torture (Coetzee 37). After the Magistrate notices her, he leads her to his quarters, where the following scene takes place:

> The fire is lit. I draw the curtains, light the lamp. She refuses the stool, but yields up her sticks and kneels in the centre of the carpet.
>
> "This is not what you think it is," I say. The words come reluctantly. Can I really be about to excuse myself? Her lips are clenched shut, her ears too no doubt, she wants nothing of old men and their bleating consciences. I prowl around her, talking about our vagrancy ordinances, sick at myself. Her skin begins to glow in the warmth of the closed room. She tugs at her coat, opens her throat to the fire. The distance between myself and her torturers, I realize, is negligible; I shudder. (Coetzee 39)

After this the Magistrate proceeds to bathe her body, and then falls asleep – this scenario repeats regularly while she remains at the outpost (40, 42, 43, etc.). Her relation to the Magistrate can be, and often was read allegorically, where she supposedly stands in for the colonized as such, while Colonel Joll and the Magistrate represent different faces of the Empire.[5] In addition to this I propose to read their relation in the

[4] Similarly, in his analysis of the novel Thomas P. Crocker describes how the state of emergency shows that "constitutional commitments are not absolute, and under conditions of necessity, can be abandoned in order to protect the physical survival of the state. Constitutional commitments, on this view, depend on perceived necessities" (309). Therefore, ordinary law, "which includes prohibitions against the use of torture" (308), is seen as something that "should not stand in the way of official necessity" (308).

[5] At this point the "national allegor[y]" (Jameson 69) in which the "psychology and […] libidinal investment is to be read primarily in political and social terms"

terms of sovereign and bare life. Form this standpoint, even before they meet, the power that Magistrate potentially has over her, as a citizen and an official of the Empire, is total, and what he does with her completely depends on his personal decisions .[6] Here the indicated ethical dimension of their interaction becomes crucial: once the ordinary rule of law is suspended the actions of the individual are no longer limited by an external force, and will instead depend upon his/her personal relation to the supposed universal law. The described relation forms one of the decisive splits within the novel – even though the Magistrate is in the position of the sovereign he does not use his power in its full extent, like Joll does, because he presumes the existence of some kind of boundary even though no such boundary is legally in effect.

In his book *J. M. Coetzee and the Novel* (2010) Patrick Hayes proposes two readings of the interaction between the Magistrate and the "barbarian girl": on the one hand, "the Magistrate shudders because he is horrified at the thought that what he is doing has a kind of moral equivalence with what Colonel Joll and the torturers did: that he might be dominating and abusing the girl in the very impulse of his charitableness" (67); on the other he proposes the possibility that the shudder "reveals the Magistrate's sadism" (67), and after a similar assessment of the Magistrate's constant sleepiness after bathing her, he concludes that "[t]he text oscillates between these alternatives, keeping them in play" (70).

What I propose instead is the parallel existence of both of these motivations, one being foundational for the other, in a structure deliberately constructed in such a way as to offer distinct and alternative sources of satisfaction to the Magistrate. He is absolved from the guilt of the committed violence by the "Christlike charitableness" (65), and allowed still to enact the hierarchical relation to the "barbarian girl." His constant bathing of her body is directed at wiping out the text of the colonization in an obvious attempt "to wash himself clean

(72), seems to be an unavoidable frame of reading. It should, of course, be approached carefully, and with an awareness that it does not exhaust all of the possibilities. As a "metonymy" of the colony, the body of the "barbarian girl" becomes a text of the colonization, and the Magistrate is "metonymic of the settler culture itself, ambivalent, 'schizophrenic', both colonized and colonizing" (Ashcroft 154).

[6] As Patrick Hayes notes: "[The Magistrate] and Colonel Joll have the girl entirely in their power: she is quite literally powerless to resist, and both are (albeit with ostensibly different motivations) trying to interpret her" (67). This power is based upon the state of emergency through which all of the "barbarians" are reduced to bare life, and simultaneously, at this point in the novel, all of the imperial citizens function as the representatives of sovereign power in relation to the "barbarians."

from his sense of complicity with Empire" (Poyner 61), especially in its new form, introduced by the state of emergency. But the result of this practice is only the reemergence of blankness, incompleteness of the "barbarian girl"[7] – there can be no absolution while reproduction of the relations of subordination is taking place. One can therefore claim that the supposed ethical reaction perpetuates the colonial domination.

In the final move of their relationship, the Magistrate returns the "barbarian girl" to the population he sees as "her people," revealing the implied ideology of the "stage" from which he acts: "Only, now that I have brought you back, as far as I can, I wish to ask you very clearly to return to the town with me. Of your own choice" (Coetzee 97). She has to be made into a free subject so she could *freely choose him*[8] as her ruler/lover: in order to fulfill the fantasies framed by the logic of (his) universal law, he has to be freely chosen and thus absolved of any guilt, and one can see that the absence of such choice was the obstacle in his previous advances. This is how his ethical response is dependent upon his imperial desire. On the other hand his recognition of the need for a free choice is an implicit recognition of the failure of the "pure" ethical relation, devoid of political context, and a signifier of the inadequacy of the supposed law itself, which requires individuals to be inscribed in it as imperial subjects in order to be fully recognized.

In other words, the Magistrate wants her to become an imperial subject of her own free will and thus retroactively accept the violence she has been subjected to, and also, paradoxically, he wants her before this violence took place. Following the allegorical reading instead of the

[7] The Magistrate notes: "'She is incomplete!' I say to myself. Though the thought begins to float away at once, I cling to it. I have a vision of her closed eyes and closed face filming over with skin. Blank, like a fist beneath a black wig, the face grows out of the throat and out of the blank body beneath it, without aperture, without entry" (Coetzee 58).

[8] By providing her with a choice, it can be said how the Magistrate is staging a sort of a *social contract*, in an attempt to justify the Empire in its ideal form. But even in this form the Empire does not get chosen: "It is only outside the limits of the Empire that he can present her [barbarian girl] with a free choice, but she knows that this freedom would be undermined the minute she accepts" (Attwell 81). In addition to the need to be desired it is precisely his implied knowledge that he will never be desired that blocks his attempts at constructing her. That is why he is not merely a *sadist*, hiding behind altruism, or an altruist that even at his best remains a torturer. One can rather claim that his dominating and objectifying desire is formed by such a discourse that it needs to be willed in order to be justified. In other words – at this point in the novel, he is, paradoxically, both, a sadist and an altruist, his objectification and domination being based on his altruism.

"literal one" (Attridge), it can be said that the colonizer who is always already in a situation after the violent colonization took place wants from the colonized to desire this colonization, and therefore projects himself as the object of desire in the past, before any of it took place. The Magistrate wants her to be willingly included in the Empire before her actual inclusion.

From Badiou's perspective, one could say how he does not want her to be just any possible *other*, but the *good* other,[9] whose differences one could respect: "The problem is that the 'respect for differences' and the ethics of human rights do seem to define an *identity!* And […] as a result, the respect for differences applies only to those differences that are reasonably consistent with this identity" (Badiou 24).[10] And the "barbarian girl" once faced with a choice refuses this imperial game, and remains in its eyes the inassimilable other, or rather the other which is included only through its exclusion, as the starting point of the imperial juridical order, its identity and ideology.

Similar logic, taken to its extreme, can be seen in the second episode I intend to analyze. It takes place after the Magistrate returns from the "barbarian lands," and is incarcerated because he has supposedly "treasonously consort[ed] with the enemy" (Coetzee 105). At this point the "barbarians" are fully recognized as the "enemy" by the representatives of the Third Bureau, but the inhabitants of the outpost, the citizens of the Empire, have known them mainly through the exchange of goods. In this sense the violence that takes place in the town square can be understood as organized mainly for their "benefit." It starts with Colonel Joll's return from his military raid, with a group of prisoners. At first, the crowd gathers to meet their supposed victorious defender. Through this process the people of the whole town are transformed into a singular "subject," and their relation to the law is suspended through the presence of the representative of the state of emergency.

In contrast to this, the Magistrate, who has escaped his confinement, joins the crowd, but refuses to accept its logic: "For me, at this moment, striding away from the crowd, what has become important above all is that I should neither be contaminated by the atrocity that is about to be committed nor poison myself with impotent hatred of its perpetrators" (140). His refusal of the crowd logic is also a refusal to

[9] Badiou points out: "As a matter of fact, this celebrated 'other' is acceptable only if he is a good other – which is to say what, exactly, if not the same as us?" (Badiou 24)

[10] Attridge similarly notices how the imagined other of the Empire in this novel is "*its* other" which is "still […] part of its system" (Attridge 30).

identify Joll as the embodiment of the law. At this point the "barbarians" make their appearance: "[A]t the end of the rope, tied neck to neck, comes a file of men, barbarians, stark naked […]. A simple loop of wire runs through the flesh of each man's hands and through holes pierced in his cheeks. 'It makes them meek as lambs'" (138–139). After this introduction a peculiar and violent scene takes place – Colonel Joll inscribes onto the prisoners bodies the word "ENEMY," and the people start beating them until this words is "washed clean" by the blood from their wounds (141). It can be said how the purpose of this spectacle is the *creation* of the enemy out of bodies that are being beaten. This is why the word "enemy" must be "washed clean" from their backs – their bodies must be transformed into the word itself. As Patrick Lenta claims: "The guards inscribe the tortured bodies in a way that produces the victim's status as enemy" (76), but it is the crowd of spectators that puts this word into circulation. The enemy is therefore "arbitrary" and "consensual," and the spectacle can be seen as a social contract of sorts, between Joll and the townspeople. Through this process the outer is incorporated in the inner, and the "barbarians" are *assigned* with a body.

Only after all of this has taken place does the Magistrate decide to intervene, and his attack is directed not at the people but at the leader of the spectacle: "When I turn to Colonel Joll he is standing not five paces from me, his arms folded. I point a finger at him. 'You!' I shout. Let it all be said. Let him be the one on whom the anger breaks. 'You are depraving these people!'" (Coetzee 144) He then addresses the crowd in the following words: "'Look!' I shout. 'We are the great miracle of creation. But from some blows this miraculous body cannot repair itself!' […] 'Look at these men!' I recommence. 'Men!'" (144). Because of this *ethical* intervention the Magistrate is than severely beaten on the spot by the officers of the Third Bureau, in a similar manner to the prisoners, him being the first imperial citizen in front of whom the law has withdrawn itself (now reducing him to bare life, a category which will be expanded in great measure further in the novel).

Described violence can be interpreted from the standpoint of Badiou's understanding of contemporary dominant ethics which he designates as *nihilism* (Badiou 30). Namely, "ethics is conceived here both as an a priori ability to discern Evil (for according to the modem usage of ethics, Evil – or the negative – is primary: we presume a consensus regarding what is barbarian), and as the ultimate principle of judgment, in particular political judgment: good is what intervenes visibly against an Evil that is identifiable a priori" (Badiou 8). In the

described scene we are precisely faced with this a priori inscription onto the blank bodies of the prisoners – Colonel Joll designates the "enemy" and the "barbaraian," and in turn he and the power he represents are elevated to the status of the good. In such situations Badiou claims how the politics is ultimately "subordinated to ethics, to the single perspective that really matters in this conception of things: the sympathetic and indignant judgment of the spectator of the circumstances" (9). The described scene in the novel offers something more – not only judgment but also punishment, which is possible and acceptable precisely because of this mechanism. In this sense we, as readers, are faced with the *final* consequences of such ethics, and at the same time, with its *starting* point in the reaction of the Magistrate. It is one and the same movement.

This is why the mass beating of the prisoners can be described as the *simulacrum of truth*: "When a radical break in a situation, under names borrowed from real truth-processes, convokes not the void but the 'full' particularity or presumed substance of that situation, we are dealing with a *simulacrum of truth*" (73). An emancipatory action indeed is a brake in the situation, an exception to the rule, but this exception is proclaimed from the position of the supplement of the situation, not from its very center. Sovereign power of the Empire here proclaims the state of exception and this is one of the main reasons why such an event is only a simulacrum. What is at stake, what this ethics legitimates, is in fact the "conservation by the so-called 'West' of what it possesses. It is squarely astride these possessions (material possessions, but also possession of its own being) that ethics determines Evil to be, in a certain sense, simply that which it does not own and enjoy" (14). Hence fidelity to such "simulacrum (and it demands of the 'few' belonging to the […] [collective] substance prolonged sacrifices and commitments, since it really does have the form of a fidelity) has as its content war and massacre. These are not here means to an end: they make up the very real [*tout le reel*] of such a fidelity" (74). In other words, the creation of the enemy, the violence (torture or collective beating), and following conflict are not coincidental, but at the very heart of the ethics of the Empire. The simulacrum of this event can best be uncovered in a simple fact that it is not *universally addressed*,[11] but rather based on the

[11] As Badiou claims: "What allows a genuine event to be at the origin of a truth – which is the only thing that can be for all, and can be eternally – is precisely the fact that it relates to the particularity of a situation only from the bias of its void. The void, the multiple-of-nothing, neither excludes nor constrains anyone. It is the absolute neutrality of being – such that the fidelity that originates in an event, altho-

substantiality of the imperial subjects, their identity, community etc. being an event of exclusive inclusion, through which the Empire is to reassert itself.

The Magistrate is, in this situation, a naive, ridiculous figure, which cannot make this connection, and continues to enact the starting point of the suspended law, by appealing to the humanity of the victims. Simultaneously, just as with the "barbarian girl" he does not intervene before the beating starts but only after it passes a point of no return – which can be read either as his reluctance to expose himself, or as an acceptance of certain amount of violence, necessary against the "barbarians" that "threaten" the Empire. His reaction, because it takes place upon the stage of the imperial logic, is consistent with its nihilist ethics – it reduces the prisoners to the "status of victim, of suffering beast, of emaciated, dying body," to their "animal substructure […] to the level of a living organism pure and simple (life being, as Bichat says, nothing other than 'the set of functions that resist death')" (11). By invoking their status of "men" the Magistrate designates them as *bare life*, which inhabits all of the bodies of citizens present at the square, in their relation to the representative of the sovereign power. But at this point this is still not clear, and only when the military campaign starts to descend into chaos will the imperial citizens experience this identification. He never invites townspeople to collectively resist the imperatives of imperial power, through which a space of immanent exception form its logic could be created.

The conflict of the two representatives of the Empire, and therefore of two extremes of singular ethics, at least on the level of the story itself, has no clear resolution. In this sense the Magistrate's humanness was made impotent precisely because of his reliance on the "universal" law which was proven not to be universal because it did not take into account the particular and the objective. The question the novel poses can, therefore, be read as a question on how to ground an ethical response in a space that is groundless, in a state of exception, which does not exclude the worst kinds of violence. For a possible answer we could look in the direction of what is absent from the novel, namely, the emancipatory collective action. Throughout the story the Magistrate's responses were always delegated to his private sphere, and have never transgressed onto the level of the community. In this sense, subjective was always presented as determined by the objective, ethics by politics.

---

ugh it is an immanent break within a singular situation, is none the less universally addressed" (73).

This novel can thus be understood as an intervention in the fabric of the common, because it does not offer any certain point for readers to identify with in the world it creates, but rather invites them to create such a point for themselves. It provokes a political response by presenting us with inadequacy of the purely ethical one. It could be said how it shows that no act of resistance to power can be accomplished in solitude, while at the same time questioning the basis of what is common.

WORKS CITED

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998.

Ashcroft, Bill. "Irony, Allegory and Empire: J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *In the heart of the country*." Bill Ashcroft. *On Post-Colonial Futures: Transformations of Colonial Culture*. London: Continuum International Publishing, 2001. 140–159.

Attridge, Derek. *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Attwell, David. *South Africa and the Politics of Writing*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993.

Badiou, Alain. *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. London & New York: Verso, 2001.

Coetzee, J. M. *Waiting for the Barbarians*. New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1999.

Crocker, Thomas P. "Still Waiting for the Barbarians: What Is New about Post-September 11 Exceptionalism?" *Law and Literature* 19.2 (Summer 2007): 303–326.

Engle, Lars. "Western Classics in the South African State of Emergency." *Thresholds of western culture: identity, postcoloniality, transnationalism*. Eds. John Burt Foster, Jr. and Wayne Jeffrey Froman. New York: Continuum, 2002. 114–133.

Hayes, Patrick. *J. M. Coetzee and the Novel*. New York: Oxford UP, 2010.

Jameson, Fredric. "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text*, No. 15. (Autumn, 1986): 65–88.

Lenta, Patrick. "'Legal Illegality': *Waiting for the Barbarians* after September 11." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing,* 42.1 (May 2006): 71–83.

Poyner, Jane. "Madness and Civilization in *Waiting for the Barbarians*." Jane Poyner. *J. M. Coetzee and the Paradox of Postcolonial Authorship*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009. 53–69.

Uprizarjanje etike v izrednem stanju: *V pričakovanju barbarov* J. M. Coetzeeja

Ključne besede: literatura in etika / južnoafriška književnost / Coetzee, J. M.: *V pričakovanju barbarov* / Agamben, Giorgio: *Homo Sacer*

V članku analiziram roman *V pričakovanju barbarov* (1980) J. M. Coetzeeja in pri tem poskušam prikazati, kako avtor uprizarja nezadostnost etičnega odziva tako, da ga umesti na družbeni oder, ki določa njegov domet in učinek. V nadaljevanju ta oder razlagam s kategorijami koncepta izrednega stanja, kakor ga je razvil Giorgio Agamben, ki zaobjema vse dogodke v romanu in opredeljuje razmerja med glavnimi liki, torej med Uradnikom (pripovedovalec in protagonist), »barbarskim dekletom« in polkovnikom Jollom. Posebno pozornost posvečam epizodama: najprej predstavim, kako je Uradnikovo domnevno humano obravnavanje »barbarske deklice« dejansko le humanizacija imperialne dominacije, nato pa analiziram prizor množičnega mučenja »barbarov«, ki ga vodi polkovnik Joll, v katerem je Uradnikov odziv prikazan kot neumesten in nezadosten. V sklepnem delu se vrnem k Badioujevemu razumevanju etike in prikažem, da tako Uradnik kot tudi polkovnik Joll delujeta znotraj meja imperialne logike. Uradnikovi etični odzivi ostajajo neučinkoviti, ker ne postavljajo pod vprašaj temeljev, torej domnevnega univerzalnega zakona, iz katerega izhajajo, in zato nikoli ne dosežejo objektivne ravni dejanj. V tem smislu Coetzeejev roman kot forma izpolnjuje, kar je v njem na ravni vsebine prikazano kot manjkajoče – nas bralce prisili, da najdemo stališče zunaj logike literarnih likov, sooča nas z nezadostnostjo etike, ki se ne povezuje s politiko.

1.01 Izvirni znanstveni članek / Original scientific article
UDK 821.111(680).09Coetzee J. M.:17