

Torture in waiting for the barbarian

[Literature](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Waiting for the Barbarian is a small book with only a hundred and sixty pages, but it contains a wealth of information: The Imperial War, colonialism, clashes of civilizations... It is a story about an uncertain time, place and character. It is based on fictional empire and history, but this allegorically complex work inevitably leads to many real scenes. From racial discrimination in South Africa in the past to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and even the recent Hong Kong Protest.

Torture is an efficient way to spread fear and build prestige, it is easy to control a big Empire if your civilians are afraid of you, so that is the main reason why the Empire forces resort to torture. The pain caused by imprisonment is not only physical but more importantly, spiritual loneliness and fear for the unknown future. The purpose of the torture is not only destroying someone's body but more importantly, destroy that person's core of internal resistance. Because once the body is humiliated, the mind cannot be restored easily. This novel satirizes how the country uses the topics of law, justice, history, etc. to create the imaginary enemy of barbarians through the violence against state power, thereby legalizing its own violent rule.

In some way, torture is a form of communication. It is a way to use the weakness of humans by abusing a person's physical or mental to force them to tell the truth or the truth that the abuser wants to hear. The relationship between torturers and victims is naturally unequal. In the cell, unrestricted violence is imposed on the individual's body, but these terrible acts were considered legal under the Empire's law. And by that mean, under the request of the empire and their superiors, prison cells become a place where

a human can exert his evil on another human's body as he pleases. " They were interested only in demonstrating to me what it meant to live in a body, as a body, a body which can entertain notions of justice only as long as it is whole and well, which very soon forgets them when its head is gripped and a pipe is pushed down its gullet and pints of salt water are poured into it till it coughs and retches and flails and voids itself."(pg. 154)The enormous pain was produced during torture, and that pain caused people unable to identify their true inner thoughts. Because the fear of physical pain has taken all the space of their brain.

There are many different ways torture was shown in this novel, the first scene of torture to the barbarian boy and his grandpa was presented through the imagination and question closely of between Magistrate and Colonel Joll.

" When I see Colonel Joll again, when he has the leisure, I bring the conversation around to torture. " What if your prisoner is telling the truth,' I ask, ' yet finds he is not believed? Is that not a terrible position? Imagine: to be prepared to yield, to yield, to have nothing more to yield, to be broken, yet to be pressed to yield more! And what a responsibility for the interrogator! How do you ever know when a man has told you the truth?"

' There is a certain tone,' Joll says. ' A certain tone enters the voice of a man who is telling the truth. Training and experience teach us to recognize that tone.'

' The tone of truth! Can you pick up this tone in everyday speech? Can you hear whether I am telling the truth?'

This is the most intimate moment we have yet had, which he brushes off with a little wave of the hand. ‘ No, you misunderstand me. I am speaking only of a special situation now, I am speaking of a situation in which I am probing for the truth, in which I have to exert pressure to find it. First I get lies, you see this is what happens first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how you get the truth.’(pg9. 10)As we can see here, Colonel Joll cannot believe anything a prisoner says unless they go through terrible torture.

For me, the most recognized and expressive scene is when the Magistrate was talking to one of the soldiers and asked him how the boy has been tortured. “ The boy lies on his back, naked, asleep, breathing fast and shallow. His skin glistens with sweat. For the first time the bandage is off his arm and I see the angry open sore it hid. I bring the lantern closer. His belly and both groins are pocked with little scabs and bruises and cuts, some marked by trickles of blood. “ What did they do to him?” I whisper to the guard, the same young man as last night. “ A knife,” he whisper back. “ Just a little knife, like this.” He spreads thumb and forefinger. Gripping his little knife of air he makes a curt thrust into the sleeping boy’s body and turns the knife delicately, like a key, first left, then right. Then he withdraws it, his hand returns to his side, he stands waiting. (pg. 16)

J. M. Coetzee is beyond all doubt a very genius writer, he patiently and meticulously described the process of torture, and the scene of violence appeared many times, not only for the barbarians, for the Magistrate, and even unfold in imaginations. Unlike other writers, J. M Coetzee described <https://assignbuster.com/torture-in-waiting-for-the-barbarian/>

these tortures in the first-person perspective, a different angle that brought us closer to the tortures, which is the main reason why they are so real. Readers become a part of the story, suffer the pain, smell the stench and see the blood dripping in front of them together with the barbarians.

“ First they came for the Communists

And I did not speak out

Because I was not a Communist

Then they came for the Socialists

And I did not speak out

Because I was not a Socialist

Then they came for the trade unionists

And I did not speak out

Because I was not a trade unionist

Then they came for the Jews

And I did not speak out

Because I was not a Jew

Then they came for me

And there was no one left to speak out for me” (Martin Niemöller)

We the readers are just like Magistrate and these uneducated people in the Empire, in some way we are complicit because we witnessed all the torture, but we are still unmoved until these cruel abuses come to us. As we fail to stop those acts in time and let it become worse and worse.

Colonel Joll's inhumane tortures outside the law brought scars that could never be bridged to the barbarians. These pain also hurt the sensitive humane nerves of Magistrate and awakened the conscience of him, transformed him from an onlooker or even an accomplice to a true justice warrior. In the last part of the novel, he even became the only man that has the gut to shout " No" to the inhumane abuse to barbarians.

" No! I hear the first word from my throat, rusty, not loud enough. Then again: " No!" This time the word rings like a bell from my chest. The soldier who blocks m way stumbles aside. I am in the arena holding up my hands to still the crowd: " No! No! No!" 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 tom the anger breaks. " You are depriving these people!" (pg. 143) This transformation did not happen overnight, in order to adhere to the humanitarian principles, he lost his freedom and fell into a state of torture and struggled between spirit and flesh after experiencing difficult suffering both mentally and physically.