

Otherness in Coetzee's "Waiting for the Barbarians"

الغيرية في رواية "في انتظار البرابرة" لكوتزي

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Abstract:

The present work investigates the representation of Otherness in the South African writer J.M. Coetzee's novel. The chosen literary work being under study is the novel "Waiting for the Barbarians" (1980). The aim of the present research is exploring the trilateral relationship between literature, philosophy and psychology. The investigation first outlines the psychological theory of Otherness. Then, it tackles the philosophical theory of Hegel based on the dialectic of the Master and the slave. The next step would be the discussion of the potential relation existing between Hegel's dialectic and the Other/Self relation representing Otherness. The novel "Waiting for the Barbarians" published in 1980 represents the mirror reflecting the trilateral relation through Coetzee's vision of the opposition established in South Africa on the political, social and cultural level. He represents both theories in his novel through the characters of his story who confirm the presence of Master Self/ Other Slave relationship living in a colonial era retelling the horror and the hardships of the South African history.

Keywords: Coetzee, Master, Other, slave, self.

ملخص:

تروم هذه الورقة البحثية إلى محاولة دراسة تمظهر الغيرية في أدب الروائي الجنوب افريقي ج.م. كوتزي. وقد وقع الاختيار على روايته "في انتظار البرابرة" (1980). كما يتمثل الهدف الرئيس للدراسة الحالية في حوض غمار العلاقة الثلاثية القائمة بين الأدب والفلسفة وعلم النفس. تتطرق الدراسة - في مرحلة أولى - إلى عرض النظرية النفسية للغيرية، ثم تحاول - في مرحلة ثانية - سبر أغوار النظرية الفلسفية لهيغل القائمة على جدلية السيد والعبد. ثم تحاول دراسة العلاقة المفترضة بين جدلية هيغل وثنائية الأنا والآخر التي تعبر عن الغيرية. تمثل رواية "في انتظار البرابرة" (1980) مرآة تعكس العلاقة الثلاثية من خلال نظرة كوتزي للمعارضة التي ظهرت في جنوب افريقيا على المستوى السياسي، الاجتماعي والثقافي. إذ أنه يعبر عن النظريتين من خلال شخصيات القصة التي تؤكد فرضية وجود السيد الأنا والآخر العبد الذان يعيشان في فترة الاستعمار مخلداً بذلك الرعب والمرارة اللذين عرفهما تاريخ جنوب افريقيا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كوتزي، السيد، الآخر، العبد، الأنا.

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1. Introduction:

Since ages, Linguists and psychologists and philosophers mastered the study of their various and different thoughts. Each one in his field worked on enriching the mind of their readers. Within time, the connection between domains starts to take place resulting in a more fruitful exchange. The different thoughts related to psychology and philosophy began to be applied and used in the field of the literary art. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the psychologist; presented his essays related to literature which stand on exploring the psyche of both: the writer and the characters of a literary work. His core aim is to provide psychoanalysis of the main elements of literature. A mutual relationship exists between the field of literature and philosophy. Both of them try to get enriched by the other. Philosophical theories are applied by authors in their narration while philosophers choose to treat some of the concepts created in literature.

The present paper aims at exploring the trilateral relationship between literature, philosophy and psychology. For that, the representation of the psychological theory of Otherness will be investigated in relation to the philosophical theory of Hegel (1770-1831), the one of the Master/Slave dialectic. Then, the representation of the two will be explored in the chosen literary work of the South African writer John Maxwell Coetzee (1940-). The novel entitled "*Waiting for the Barbarians*" (1980) is the selected literary work for conducting this research.

The quo research seeks the confirmation of the following assumed hypothesis. Both concepts of Otherness and dialectic theory of Hegel are treated in Coetzee's selected literary work "*Waiting for the Barbarians*". Therefore, a trilateral relationship is present.

The reason behind conducting this research is showing the strong bond formed between the different areas of study, being in this case: literature, philosophy and psychology. So, it will open the door for the possibility of treating distinct theories from various angles and domains in a sole literary work. Thus, the mastery of the writer will be credited at the end.

2. Otherness

From the first glance, the term "Otherness" speaks of itself. When altering it, we directly derive the radical "Other". In fact, Otherness has been the central study of different scholars and psychologists along time particularly in the Western world. In order to figure out its meaning, it is essential to know the main parts forming this term. As previously noticed, the Other is the main radical. However, to know more about it, its antithesis is required. It is simply "the Self".

Two main things participate in clarifying the meaning of otherness. They are knowledge and comparison (Dogan, 2000, p16). We have to know more about the self in order to come up with the significance of the Other. Extracting the difference that exists between them through the use of comparison will help in the making of a reliable, clear judgment and understanding as a final step.

It is the difference that makes the identification of the Other and the self. However, it can be positive or negative. Identifying the self through the difference based on the comparison of this latter with the Other is the positive side of this process. Yet, it is the othering of the other side of the relationship what makes it negative since it generates hostility towards the Other (Hall, 1997, p238 in Dogan, 2000, p17).

The whole process stands on dividing and opposing. Both Girard (1997) and Aho (1994) agree on the idea stating that comparison is the core element in the oneself identification. In Other words, the presence of the antithesis and the alterego is required. In this case, it is the Other who plays this role.

Several definitions surrounding the term otherness limit its meaning in the variant opposed relations that can be constructed. The self and the Other can be "Us" and "Them" or

“in-group” and “out-group” as given in the international encyclopedia of human geography (2009), or the “outsider” and the “insider”, the “deviant” and the “normal”, the “unacceptable” and the “acceptable”, the “pathological” and the “normal”, “what belongs” and what does not” for Dogan (2000), or the “colonizing Other” (capitalized) and the “colonized other” (not capitalized) for Spivak (1985). So far, it is agreed on that identity cannot be signaled without the presence of the “Other” and the “self”. The latter can only be identified if the former one exists. Hence, the Other is constructed by the self (Harle, 2000).

Otherness or the Other’s construction can be based on cultural, social, linguistic and political perspectives. In most of the cases previously mentioned, the Other is nothing but an outsider who represents the unique in every individual (Harle, 2000). As a consequence, the relation between the self and the other will be a non-violent one and this latter’s elimination is not required. Nevertheless, there are cases where the Other is considered as an enemy.

The other, considered as an enemy; is a special case mirroring the evil Other (Harle, 2000). Since it is associated with a negative image, for no doubt its elimination is required (Zur, 1991). Unlike the friend Other who does not represent a threat to the self, instead it simply delivers the difference that makes the identity of the self. Generally, the Other enemy is a source of disarrangement, chaos, unfairness, sins and wrong deeds and death whose total elimination becomes a must.

Exceptionally, Zur (1991) recorded types of Other enemy where the elimination process is necessarily demanded. He mentioned seven kinds of enemy. The types that fall under the obligation of exclusion and eradication are: the evil enemy, the enemy of God, offensive enemy, the oppressive, betraying enemy. Whereas, the worthy enemy and the symbolic one are considered as an ally who does not represent any menace. In between the layers of the whole process, Schmitt (1976) puts the possibility of changing status in front of us. He states that in the enemy/friend relationship, the friend can turn to be an enemy. Consequently, the Other can become a friend as well.

In addition to the fact that identity is relational, this latter is social, political and psychological too. Socially speaking, individuals can be classified on the ground of different criteria. The same for politics, the relation between the enemy and the friend helps in identifying the strongest from the weakest. Thus, the power that defines the social identity is constructed.

3. Hegel's Dialectic of the Master/Slave

George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) is the pioneer of the German philosophy. His thoughts and theories have been widely studied by scholars such as “Alexander Kojève”. Among his much known books, the phenomenology of spirit published in 1807 represents the core of his philosophy. It discusses the idea of dialectic through various concepts related to society, history and politics. The Master/Slave dialectic is part of the dialectic relations dealt with in Hegel’s philosophy of phenomenology. In an attempt to reveal the truth, Hegel uses his dialectic to show the reality of the paradoxes existing between the Master and the Slave.

Alexander Kojève is the best presenter of Hegel’s phenomenology of spirit. He provided the world with lectures that explain Hegel’s thoughts. So, Kojève tackled the dialectic relationship of Master/slave by referring it to the dialectic relation of life/death. In the precedent mentioned relation, the master is represented by the victor while the vanquished is the slave. For Hegel, the existence of the defeated is necessary since his enslavement is crucial to overcome him dialectically. The dialectic is created. It is the one related to the psyche enlisting two types of consciousness: the independent consciousness and the dependent one. Since the slave is dependent to the master or as put by Kojève (1969) he is a given being for another entity, his consciousness will be a dependent one as well unlike the master’s. The main concern of the master is to be recognized as the master while the slave’s is to be preserved. That is why; this latter accepts to remain under the power and the mercy of

the master who does not even consider him a human being. Instead, he is dealt with as a thing or an animal; in contrast to the master who deals with things as an object to satisfy the one's self.

The slave's recognition of the mastery of the victor is considered as the medium by which the master's human reality, certainty and liberty are guaranteed. However, his self-satisfaction is not. As a matter of fact, to reach a full acknowledgement of mastery; the master should be identified as such by a mutual equally recognized human being which is not the case here. As described by Hegel (1977, p116), the quo recognition is a one sided and unequal one. On that account, the master goes into the status of existential impasse (Kojève, 1969, p19).

4.Coetzee's Literature

In an attempt to define literature, critics differ in their way of dealing with this field. Each one of them focuses on a specific criterion such as form and content, greatness, subjectivity, imagination and creativity. One of the definitions I find attractive and catching is Rainsford's (2014,p7) stating that "[literature] is writing that that you want to read even though you have read it before; in fact, it is writing that you want to read all the more, because you have read it before".

When we look back over time, we notice that literature in itself has its own history. Artists developed their literary skills over time leading to the appearance of multiple, continuative literary periods and movements. South Africa is one among the places where literature prospered. Julien (1995, p308) claims that the "South African literature is one of the richest and most complex on the continent".

John Maxwell Coetzee (1940-) happens to be one the major figures representing the South African literature. Through his fiction, he participates in the growth and the development of the fiction of the twentieth century. He is widely known for the various critical subjects he treats, particularly contemporary issues such as: the relation between postmodernism and post-colonialism, the reflection of history and politics in fiction with an omnipresent sense of flash back to the era of colonialism.

Third in the row, the novel "Waiting for the Barbarians" was published in 1980 discussing the devastating political imperial regime of the Apartheid applied in South Africa. From a white South African's perspective, who opposes the regime, Coetzee uses his novel as "allegory" of imperialism (Head, 1997, p72). He sets his novel in an unknown setting on an outpost frontier where the story is told by a first person narrator who happens to be the protagonist: the magistrate. He is a part of the colonial staff of an undetermined Empire settled on the frontier.

On a random day, a state of emergency was announced by the third bureau of the empire. There was an unexpected attack on behalf of the so-called barbarians who in reality are the indigenous people of that colonized area. So, Colonel Joll (member in the third bureau) organized an expedition along with his soldiers where its start point was from the magistrate's outpost.

Victoriously seen, the Colonel came back with a group of barbarians. In the magistrate's settlement, he launched his investigation process using all the possible cruel and savage ways which sometimes lead to death trying to make them reveal the truth he wants to hear. By time, he returns back to his bureau to prepare for a larger campaign against the savages indigenous. Meanwhile, the magistrate plays the role of an observer who doubts the legitimacy of the so-called Empire he belongs to.

One of the oppressed and brutally tortured prisoners is a young barbarian girl who caught the interest of the magistrate or as put by Head (1997, p74) "she became the catalyst for [the magistrate's] journey of self-discovery". After nursing her and using her as a mistress to fill his intimate desires, he decides to return her back to her home land. Without any prior

notification, the magistrate, accompanied by two of his men; traveled and returned the girl back despite the difficulties they encountered during their journey. On his return, he was directly accused of treason and collaboration with the barbarian enemy. He was imprisoned, punished and tortured and dealt with in the same way as the rest of the prisoners; forgetting that one day he was a person of a high position.

As usual, Colonel Joll decides to go back into his expedition journeys hoping to catch more barbarians, which was the case every time. In the meantime, the magistrate escaped the jail but remained in the settlement since he had no place to go to. After a while, the new barbarian prisoners were brought to the yard of the settlement and tortured by Colonel Joll and his men who sense their victory in the humiliation and the oppression of the captives. Refusing such deeds, the magistrate interfered expressing his total denial of such brutal acts. However, his stands against the colonel cost him to go through the same experience he refused others to be put into. The magistrate was released later on by the soldiers who made fun of his new status letting him roam around freely in the settlement. He did not represent a menace for the Empire.

The story ends by the defeat of Colonel Joll and his men. The barbarians were victorious in fleeing their enemy from their land despite the absence of any kind of armed confrontation. So, they returned vanquished in a pitiful way leading Joll to abandon the settlement. Whereas, the magistrate gain back his position and his peaceful life while getting in touch with the real image of his Empire.

5.Relation between Otherness and Hegel’s dialectic

The different and thoughtful readings about both otherness (the psychological theory) and Hegel’s dialectic (philosophical theory) show the relationship that relates both theories. The Other/Self relation has numerous similarities if not identical with the Master/Slave dialectic. Both theories stand on the principal idea of difference. It is this latter which builds the identity of the strongest side in the relation being: the Self and the Master. Both of them use their antithesis to guarantee their recognition. The Other is dependent in comparison to the Self, the same for the slave who has a dependent consciousness.

The way the Self and the Master perceive the Other and the Slave is similar. Both latter are dealt with as inferior and object that should be othered, because they represent a kind of threat according to the context they exist in of course. Both theories are applied in political, social and cultural contexts which reflect the extent to which the Self Master relies on the Other Slave to prove its presence and power particularly.

The binary opposition is mainly what characterizes both relations. Both sides are opposed to each other and can represent any kind of opposed relationships. The exquisite thing about the opposed relations is the fact that it can be reversed anytime especially when the weaker entity decides to revolt against its master.

6.Master Self/Other Slave in Coetzee’s Novel

In “*Waiting for the Barbarians*” (1980), several opposed relationships exist between the characters of the novel. They are those of the protagonist magistrate, Colonel Joll and the barbarian girl. In general, the story is narrated in a colonial context where the opposition is omnipresent. Indeed, the Master Self represents the colonial power. Precisely in this novel, the magistrate and Colonel Joll represent the Master Self who is in a higher position enslaving and othering the so-called barbarian girl.

During his expedition, Colonel Joll led a mission to capture the barbarians who seem to be the enemies of the Empire he works under. Successfully for him, he brings a group of barbarians to the setting of the fort. He tortures them to death trying to know the truth about the rumors entailing an unexpected barbarian attack. Since Joll is an advocate of pain, “Pain is the truth” (WFB, p10); he uses all the unimaginable ways of cruelty to get the truth. Unfortunately, the barbarian girl and her father are among the captives. They took part in Joll’s painful investigation of the truth. According to this event, Joll is classified as the Self

Master exerting his mastery and power against the barbarian girl who is the Other Slave being under the mercy of her master. Moreover, the torture left scars on the girl's body are considered as the proof of her otherness along with the depiction linked to her in the novel (WFB, p36) saying that she was a dark skinned girl with a straight black eyed brows and a black hair.

Colonel Joll's quest for truth after his first expedition went in vain. He returned back to the third bureau and the barbarian prisoners were released, the same for the barbarian girl. In this event, another Master Self/ Other Slave relation appears on the surface. It is the magistrate/Barbarian girl relation. In an attempt of help, the magistrate decides to take the girl to his shelter and nurse her till she heals. However, while doing so; he uses her young body to fulfill his intimate old desires and regain his lost power during Joll's presence showed in the novel when he says "I curse Colonel Joll for all the trouble he brought me and for the shame too" (WFB, p29). So, the barbarian girl in this case represents the Other Slave used to confirm the Master Self being the magistrate's identity. He wants to win back his authority and superiority.

The hostility of the magistrate towards Colonel Joll's deeds shows another opposed relationship where the former is the representative of goodness while the latter is the indicator of evilness; stating "there is nothing to link me with torturers, people sit waiting like beetles in dark cellars...I must assert my distance from Colonel Joll!!" (WFB, p61). Hence, he takes the decision of returning the barbarian girl to her home to confirm his goodness to her, since she was exploited to satisfy his desire. In reality, he does not differ from Colonel Joll. It is just that their desires were different but the object used to satisfy themselves was similar, it was the barbarian girl.

The magistrate's decision flipped the relation between him, the empire and its members. After his return, he was accused of "treasonously consorting with the enemy" (WFB, p105). So, he was imprisoned by Colonel Joll who became his Master while he Othered him. The magistrate was treated as any other prisoner. He was tortured and humiliated.

At the end and during Joll's final expedition, he loses his position. He was defeated by the barbarians who in this event are considered as the powerful Self Master who managed to kick out the other Slave being Joll and his men from their land. As a result, he returns back vanquished and leaves the fort. Thus, the magistrate regains his position back and becomes the Master Self in comparison to Joll.

7. Conclusion

The findings reported here show that the Other/Self relation and the Master/Slave dialectic are represented in Coetzee's novel through his main three characters being the magistrate, Colonel Joll and the barbarian girl. They do confirm the representation of the psychological concept of Otherness and Hegel's philosophical dialectic in the literary work selected. Therefore, the hypothesis has been confirmed. There exists a trilateral relation between the three fields being: psychology, philosophy and literature. In accordance with present results, previous studies have demonstrated the presence of the Other in Coetzee's literature; particularly in "Waiting for the Barbarians" but none of them have investigated the possible presence of a trilateral relation. Henceforth, the novel "Waiting for the Barbarians" reflects that latter by showing that Otherness stands on the same opposed relation that Hegel represents in his dialectic and the same one that Coetzee uses to record the history of colonialism in his story. The Other is the Slave and the Self is the Master. They are opposed to each other through a binary opposition that indicates the difference between the two entities and that confirms the identity of one of the sides, the one of the powerful whether in a political, social and even cultural context.

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