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DISCURSIVE ANARCHISM IN J. M. COETZEE'S *WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS*[1]

Morakot Pan-Iam

Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University, Thailand

ABSTRACT

Drawing on Walter Benjamin's concept of allegory, and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theoretical framework of anarchism, this paper explores J. M. Coetzee's discursive practices in *Waiting for the Barbarians* with particular attention to the textual perception and employment of allegory as language and language as allegory. My argument is formed by the analyses offered by Derek Attridge in *J. M. Coetzee & The Ethics of Reading* (2004), and Jan Wilm in *The Slow Philosophy of J. M. Coetzee* (2016). I shall argue that Coetzee's practice of language and representation envisions an aesthetic articulation of discursive anarchism, a term which is taken to describe a kind of wild dispersing or disordering of order/language. A close examination of the novel's pointed employment of the term "allegory" including its textual representation both in form and concept will be presented in the first section to highlight allegory as an art of fragmentation. The discussion in the following sections will revolve around the analyses of dream sequences, which shall expand Coetzee's spatial and political discursivity. The exploration of language and discursive anarchism will also be discussed to reinforce the claim that Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a novel of discursive fragmentation and anarchism.

Corresponding author:
Morakot Pan-Iam
morakot.pai@mahidol.ac.th

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1. INTRODUCTION

To write in the language of apartheid, which in this case can be taken to mean writing under the historical/political preconditions set up by the state, a writer allows himself, Coetzee (1992) states in an essay entitled "Into the Dark Chamber," "to be impaled on the dilemma proposed by the state, namely, either to ignore its obscenities or else to produce representations of them" (p. 364). Rather than *following* the state, Coetzee (1992) remarks that "The true challenge is: how not to play the game by the rules of the state, how to establish one's own authority, how to imagine torture and death on one's own terms" (p. 364). If we consider Coetzee's discursivity in the context of South African geopolitics as well as in relation to the writerly dilemmas listed in

[1] This paper is part of the thesis entitled "Geography of Loneliness: The Politics of Deterritorialisation in the Apartheid Writings of Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee," School of English, University of Nottingham, 2021.

"Into the Dark Chamber," it is possible to argue that the need for such a concentrated degree of discursive techniques is related to Coetzee's idea that language, especially one that is constructed and fabricated under the regime of apartheid, is territorial and limiting.[2] In the same manner that history is viewed by Coetzee (1988) as "claim[ing] primacy" over literature as "a master-form of discourse," the language of apartheid expresses a claim, a colonial, territorial claim of representation, exploitation, and hierarchisation, and can therefore be understood as language of reductive truth and history (p. 2).

Understanding Coetzee's discursivity in line with the problem of territorial language, I examine the condition of language and discursivity in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. The novel follows the life of an aged Magistrate in a walled town of a lost empire. His life is entangled with a barbarian girl whom he eventually returns to her people, and the empire's officials who later punish him for helping the barbarian girl. However, this paper does not aim to read *Waiting for the Barbarians* allegorically in a way that links "Empire" in the novel to the apartheid regime.[3] As Derek Attridge (2004a) puts it, "But we are dealing here with novels which, to a greater degree than most, concern themselves with the acts of writing and reading, including allegorical writing and reading […] how allegory is thematised in the fiction […]," (pp. 33-34). While he does not completely ignore the significance of allegorical interpretation, Attridge (2004a) draws attentions to Coetzee's writing to foreground "its own linguistic, figurative, and generic operations" (p. 4).[4] Expanding on Attridge's claim, which presents Coetzee's writing as reworking allegory through his critical attention on what the work does, rather than what it means, this paper presents an analysis of language and allegorical discursivity in order to understand the elements of the political distance and engagement, respectively set up and performed by Coetzee in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. My argumentative focus here is that Coetzee's practice of language and representation is represented as a counter language to the language of apartheid-induced discourse of racial segregation. This presented form of discourse and representation, I argue, envisions an aesthetic articulation of discursive anarchism, a term which is taken to describe a kind of wild dispersing or disordering of order/language, or a discursive practice of disruption and insurgency – the very opposite of apartheid's *orderly* construction and representation of racialised geopolitics. From this critical position of discursive anarchism, Coetzee's political consciousness viewed from *Waiting for the Barbarians* depends so much upon the idea of distant and implicit engagement that overtly demands a political interaction based on a renewal of discursive practice in the question of political responsibility.

2. LANGUAGE AS ALLEGORY, ALLEGORY AS LANGUAGE

Reading *Waiting for the Barbarians* (Coetzee, 1982) as an exemplary work which explores Coetzee's discursivity, it is probably helpful to begin with one of the most often quoted passages of the novel, in which the idea of allegory is articulated and contested. The following passage is taken from a scene in chapter four, in which Colonel Joll demands that the poplar slips he finds in the Magistrate's apartment should be translated. The quotation below offers a reading of the said poplar slips:

> *"They form an allegory. They can be read in many ways. Together they can be read as a domestic journal, or they can be read as a plan of war, or they can be turned on their sides and read as a history of the last years of the Empire – the old Empire, I mean. There is no agreement among scholars about how to interpret these relics of the ancient barbarians […] I found [this set of wooden slips] not three miles from here in the ruins of a public building. Graveyards are another good place to look in, though it is not always easy to tell where barbarian burial sites lie. It is recommended that you simply dig at random: perhaps at the very spot where you stand you will come upon scraps, shards, reminders of the dead."*
> (Coetzee, 1982: 112)

Often taken to be indicating how the novel as a whole should be read, the passage outlines the appropriated form of allegory rendered in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Critics like Attridge (2004a) view an allegorical reading of Coetzee as having the effect of diminishing the "event" of reading the text, in the way that it universalises the text and disregards the reader's immediate response to the text each time the text is read (p. xii). In response

[2] See Ronald Bogue's (2003) reading of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the territory, the territorial.
[3] Critics and scholars of Coetzee have long debated the question of reading *Waiting for the Barbarians* allegorically. Notable examples include David Attwell (1993). Studying the historical and political responsibility of Coetzee, Attwell draws a deep and sustained discussion of *Waiting for the Barbarians* in its direct reference to contemporary South Africa during and after the Soweto Uprising, entitling his chapter on the text as "Reading the Signs of History." Rebecca Saunders (2001) reads the novel in light of the literary concept of the foreign, arguing that *Waiting for the Barbarians* is "an allegorical text that is […] both thematically and structurally about foreignness and, hence, an exploration into the relationships between 'literal' and literary foreignness" (p. 223). Shadi Neimneh (2014) offers a postmodern re-reading of the novel, claiming that Coetzee's writing is a visceral allegory "intertwined with allegorical viscerality" in the way that "the materiality of the suffering body becomes a new order for the allegorical" (p. 694).
[4] See also Susan VanZanten Gallagher's assessment of the novel (1991).

to Attridge's claim, Jan Wilm (2016) argues that Coetzee's works present "a complex balance" between the literal and the allegorical modes of reading, stating that "it is more productive, more ethically responsive to the text, to see allegorical as first […] a first and heuristically valid reaction" (p. 130). While both claims present valid points of argumentation, my reading will attest that *Waiting for the Barbarians* does court but resolutely resists allegorical reading. In other words, *Waiting for the Barbarians* offers a deterritorialised perception of allegory in its complete rejection of literal and reductive modes of reading and understanding.[5] Accordingly, I read the above passage's reference to allegory as a form of language and a mode of reading does not "[deal] with the already known" (Attridge, 2004a: 64). Specifically, allegory as outlined by the Magistrate deals with that which is impossible to be definitely known. It does not, one could say, have a single, determinate, universalised reading to be underpinned and understood. To the Magistrate, an *allegory* offers indefinite reading and is, therefore, subject to interpretation.

With the inclusion of the term "allegory" in a passage spoken by the Magistrate to Colonel Joll, *Waiting for the Barbarians* draws the reader's attention to one particular form of language: the language of singularity. The language of singularity (or allegory as the Magistrate calls it) performs similarly to what Attridge (2004b), in his observation of a literary work, understands to be the subversive quality of literature in the "testing and unsettling of deeply held assumptions of transparency, instrumentality, and direct referentiality" (p. 30). In broadest terms, the language of singularity identifies the special nature of literary language in its resistance to critical appropriation. This kind of language is the exact opposite to the kind of language that inevitably forces a reading of a certain text into an allegorical reading of a referential kind. *Waiting for the Barbarians* appears to be engaging in this specific employment of language and what that literary language entails, to disrupt and disperse the question of political responsibility that demands an immediate and urgent consciousness of commitment.

Over the course of the novel, the reader sees different aspects of language portrayed and interrogated in different layers of the narrative. Looking at the scene concerning the wooden slips as a whole, the language of the white poplar slips is represented first and foremost as "an unfamiliar script" (Coetzee, 1982: 110). The term "unfamiliar script" has different connotations. It could refer a kind of foreign language whose literal meaning is well beyond the linguistic knowledge of the speaker (who in this scene is Colonel Joll). Or, it could refer to the quality of literary foreignness whose literal meaning is well concealed in the decorated language of literariness. As the scene of the wooden slips unfolds, it is evident that the first meaning of the script is emphasised both by Colonel Joll and the Magistrate: "I [The Magistrate] do not know whether to read from right to left or from left to right. In the long evenings I spent poring over my collection I isolated over four hundred and fifty. I have no idea what they stand for," (Coetzee, 1982: 110). From this literal or linguistic foreignness, the novel progresses to another realm of discursive incomprehensibility which is vocalised in the aforementioned, long block quotation. In that passage, *Waiting for the Barbarians* shifts its critical focus to the literary or allegorical quality of language whose meaning is disrupted and fragmented by the very nature of language itself.

One question remains: if the singularity of literary language emphasises the elusiveness of meaning, is a political reading of a text actually possible? To put this into perspective, does not a reading of *Waiting for the Barbarians* in the political context of apartheid's discursive practice of reductive truth and history disregard the novel's supposedly prepositioned singularity? To answer this question, I examine the language of allegorical singularity evident in the character of the Magistrate and the novel's overall language of literariness. As the discussion that follows will attest, the mediation of discursive singularity in *Waiting for the Barbarians* depicts an artistic articulation of a hesitant/distant consciousness of spatial/political involvement, unique to Coetzee's writing. The hesitant/distant consciousness of spatial/political involvement is characterised by the novel's hesitant/distant identification of and interaction with a historical interpretation, whereby the idea of discursive anarchism becomes a reinvention of the language of reductive truth/history.

To reinvent language, Coetzee juxtaposes the representation of Colonel Joll with that of the Magistrate. In contrast to Joll whose mission is always to seek *the* totalised and reductive truth and who is often seen as being blind to the singularity and complexity of reality/history, the Magistrate speaks in figurative language, the language of allegorisation. To illustrate this, I look at various scenes in which the Magistrate employs a literary language in ways that depict, to a certain degree, a belief in the plurality/fluidity of reality/truth. For instance, in one of his recollections after he meets the barbarian girl, the Magistrate describes the girl as "an urn or a ball, something which is all surface" (Coetzee, 1982: 49). Or, in another instance, in which the Magistrate learns that the barracks will be expanded and "proper cells" will be built, he sarcastically recalls himself speaking symbolically, "time for the black flower of civilisation to bloom" (Coetzee, 1982: 79). In other

[5] The term "deterritorialised" or "deterritorialisation" is taken from Deleuze and Guattari's work, *A Thousand Plateau* (2016). In this paper, the term connotes the process of discursive renegotiation and respatialisation of an established geopolitical code of power. For more information on the term, see Bonta and Protevi (2006); Tomlinson (1999); and Scholte (2005).

words, the Magistrate's language of literary singularity emphasises the degree of discursive ambiguity and doubleness, in ways that suggest the variability of meaning and a complete rejection of Colonel Joll's belief in the totality and reduction of knowledge. Recalling the passage about the wooden slips in which the Magistrate emphasises the many, contradictory ways in which each slip should be read whether when placed together or read separately, I contend that through this depiction of language called allegory, *Waiting for the Barbarians* capitalises on the ideas of openness, ambiguity, and plurality, ideas that are often policed and prevented in Coetzee's contemporary South Africa.

3. ALLEGORY AS AN ART OF FRAGMENTATION

In a more extended discussion of the Magistrate's discursive practice, it is best to look at how the character understands and employs the term "allegory," a term which in the context of *Waiting for the Barbarians* becomes unsettled and destabilised. Broadly speaking, allegory is "to say one thing and mean another" (Machosky, 2010: 7). It is often a mode of writing and reading which demands that we think otherwise. However, *Waiting for the Barbarians* problematises that understanding of allegory (the interpretative and writing acts). Some critics have noted Coetzee's intervention on this matter. Shadi Neimneh (2014), for instance, argues that Coetzee's revision of the received notions of allegory is significantly grounded in his strongly pronounced emphasis on the surface and material condition of the novel, rather than its abstract meanings (p. 693). While I agree with Neimneh's claim, I contend that Coetzee's revision of allegory is equally grounded in its material representations as well as its particular investment on how language itself functions to produce and fragment meaning. That is, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, allegory leaves its traditional understanding and practice, and is understood through the context of the novel at a highly conceptual level of language. When the Magistrate says that the wooden slips "form an allegory," the novel itself does not merely invite the reader to understand the text as a whole as a work of allegory, which in turn requires an interpretative mode of allegorical reading. Instead, it alerts the readers to consider the wooden slips, which are regarded in the novel as forming an unfamiliar script, as a kind of language which is understood by the Magistrate as "allegory." The Magistrate's understanding of the wooden slips as forming "an allegory" demonstrates his attempt to subvert Colonel Joll's blind insistence and desire to reach a definite reading/truth concerning the slips. If we follow the Magistrate's wording when he points out the myriad possibilities of reading that the wooden slips may contain, it is evident that the idea behind his usage of the term "allegory" has nothing to do with the traditional practice of allegory and allegorisation as a mode of writing and reading. In fact, it reinforces the conceptual understanding of language which is interpretative and irreducibly arbitrary. The term "allegory" is therefore employed to underline such a nature of language which always rhetorically speaks and invites reading/meaning of more than one kind.

Looking more closely at the allegory passage, I see specific evidence of how language about allegorical perception performs. The Magistrate says, if all the slips are read together, "they can be read as a domestic journal, or they can be read as a plan of war […]." However, if they are read separately, each slip can be translated as "a barbarian character war, but it has other senses too. It can stand for vengeance, and, if you turn it upside down like this, it can be made to read justice. There is no knowing which sense is intended […]," (Coetzee, 1982: 112). Here, the Magistrate highlights the diverse and seemingly contradictory readings of wooden slips in ways that a single wooden slip can be read as "war," "vengeance," or "justice." Now while listing all the translations he may have made on reading the wooden slips, the Magistrate may be ridiculing Colonel Joll by emphasising all the translations he may or may not have accurately acquired through his reading of the wooden slips. Yet, as he speaks of those interpretative possibilities, it is evident that the idea that the Magistrate is trying to impart to Colonel Joll is the impossibility of knowing the definite meaning. This case of impossibility of knowing the definite translation may be twofold as it could possibly refer to the Magistrate's own limited understanding of the wooden slips or to Colonel Joll's inability of getting a clear and simple answer, simply because the wooden slips do not contain a single, coherent message.

Allegory as proposed in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is not merely a form of reading or writing which does not build up a single meaning since it will not offer a whole, coherent reading. Instead, allegory, seen by the Magistrate through his reading of the set of the white poplar wood, fragments and ruins meaning, and thus presents a case of breakdown in meaning. Noting the inadequacy that an allegorical reading of Coetzee's novel would present, Attridge (2004a) draws attention to the elusiveness and subversiveness of the text. To expand on Attridge's idea of elusiveness and open-endedness, I turn to Walter Benjamin and his acclaimed theory of allegory in the modern age. Particularly, Benjamin understands allegory as a form of art which deals with the perception of death and a world in ruins, which results in his claim that allegory destabilises what is established and whole. Discussing allegory in his critique of the Romantic valuation and vision of nature, Benjamin (1977) states that "death digs most deeply the jagged line of demarcation between physical nature and significance.

But if nature has always been subject to the power of death, it is also true that it has always been allegorical" (p. 166). As Benjamin rejects the organic power of nature, he relates the idea of death to allegory. This leads him to propose the idea that "the false appearance of totality is extinguished" (Benjamin, 1977: 176). Taken from George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the term "totality" implies the notion of knowledge as a whole. However, what Benjamin discusses here is the disappearance of that totality in allegory.[6] According to the critic, allegory as a form of art refuses to see meaning or knowledge as a whole or as a single, coherent entity. The *death* or the disappearance of "totality" or body of knowledge thus suggests that allegory both derives from and produces fragments or ruins of meaning. Commenting on this train of thought, Howard Caygill (2011) states that "The first movement of the allegorical is that of fragmentation – the destruction and ruination of contexts of meaning – with the ruin as an emblem of the destructive character of allegory" (p. 248).

The Magistrate's reading of the wooden slips illustrates a particular form of language called allegory similar to how Benjamin understands it. The textual representation of wooden slips is one which is grounded in the image of death and ruins: "[The Magistrate] found this one not three miles from here in the ruins of a public building. Graveyards are another good place to look in, though it is not always easy to tell where barbarian burial sites lie […]" (Coetzee, 1982: 112). In a similar way that the white poplar woods correspond to the perception and invocation of a world in ruins in its formation of an allegory, *Waiting for the Barbarians* could be understood as a narrative representation of, and, a meditation on, language which presupposes the impossibility and *death* of meaning/knowledge in its narrative premise dated back to an unknown period of a lost Empire. From that perception of death and ruins related to the wooden slips, the novel resolutely directs our attention to how many individual slips there are to be read. Judging from the Magistrate's attempt to ridicule Colonel Joll's reductive vision of truth, it is best illustrated in the speech that each individual slip invites a particular understanding of language, that each slip stands for fragments of history. Regardless of how one should read them separately, together, or in what order, they come to underline truth/history in its fragmented/broken forms.

Represented as fragments, the wooden slips and, by extension, the overall language of the novel, do not in any way lack in meaning. The problem that Benjamin (1977) implies to be at issue in the case of breakdown in meaning is, in fact, the problem of transmitting any valuable, coherent reading. Hence, the wooden slips do have *meaning*: they do have *meaning*, but they are in a fragmentary state and situated in the discursive realm where their immediate meaning is not readily available to both the Magistrate or Colonel Joll. Looking at this very same motif, Carrol Clarkson (2013) notes that "throughout Coetzee's writing […] there is an appreciation of language as material substance – an appreciation that it is something that is seen and heard, as much as it is understood" (p. 67). Later on, Clarkson (2013) asserts that this "something" can be "recognised *as signifying, as wanting-to-say* […] even in the absence of the reader's or the listener's comprehending it" (p. 67). In a similar vein to Clarkson's assessment of language in general, and of the wooden slips in particular, language as exemplified in the novel's representation of the wooden slips can be seen as "signifying" and "wanting-to-say." Yet, the very message or meaning is broken down by the nature of its form. The possibility of knowing the precise translation is thus made irrelevant. From the passage on the wooden slips, the reader is introduced to a kind of language which is incoherent, fragmented, indeterminate, and impossible to be completely understood.

4. DREAM SEQUENCES AND ALLEGORICAL AMBIGUITY

Intended to destabilise Colonel Joll's belief in the literal, definitive, and reductive production of knowledge, this kind of language is intricately linked to the novel's portrayals of the Magistrate and the barbarian girl. The tensions which unfold between the two characters as well as those raised in dream sequences highlight the textual ambiguity, and, above all, substantiate and deepen the reader's understanding of language as it is broken down into pieces and segments. How *Waiting for the Barbarians* as a mediation of language destabilises the totality and reduction of meanings, and with what effects, will further be shown through close readings of the textual construction and reproduction of allegorical ambiguity. The quality of language called allegory is manifest in different narrative levels. First, I will look in more details at the Magistrate's language of allegory and the representations of the barbarian girl. The following paragraphs will show a reading of the Magistrate's dreamscape pertaining to the subject of allegory as language and what it entails. The passage below gives a description of the Magistrate's first narrated dream:

> *"As I glide across the square, dark figures separate out from the whiteness, children at play building a snowcastle on top of which they have planted a little flag […] I am aware of my bulk, my shadowiness, therefore I am not surprised that the*

[6] Bainard Cowan (1981) writes: "Allegory could not exist if truth were accessible: as a mode of expression it arises in perpetual response to the human condition of being exiled from the truth that it would embrace" (p. 114).

children melt away on either side as I approach. All but one. Older than the others, perhaps not even a child, she sits in the snow with her hooded back to me working at the door of the castle, her legs splayed, burrowing, patting, moulding. I stand behind her and watch. She does not turn. I try to imagine the face between the petals of her peaked hood but cannot."
(Coetzee, 1982: 9-10)

There are five dream sequences in the novel. All of the Magistrate's dreams centre on the figure of a hooded girl at play in a snowy town. The above passage describes the Magistrate's first encounter with the hooded figure. The Magistrate's perception of the girl is not clear: "Older than the others, perhaps not even a child, she sits in the snow […]." The girl appears to be "hooded," concealed under a "peaked hood." In this dream as well as other dreams, the Magistrate is seen trying to "peer under the hood" to see what is beneath it (Coetzee, 1982: 37). At the advent of the first dream, the figure of the hooded girl immediately becomes a narrative mystery.

Although the link between the hooded figure and the barbarian girl is not immediate to the reader, the novel nonetheless presents both figures in such a similar way that seems to reinforce or, at least, court a reading above or beyond literal understanding. Rita Barnard (2007), among other critics, connect Coetzee's representation of the hooded girl with the image of the barbarian girl, commenting how the Magistrate "in a dream urges the barbarian girl to put people in the empty city she builds out of snow" (p. 33). Rather than seeing the hooded girl as a recreation of the barbarian girl in a dream, I see both narrative figures as emphasising the subversive quality of language in which the idea of totality and finality is dismantled. That is to say, while the figure of the hooded girl may symbolise a secret significance, in that it may lead the reader to probe for another meaning, the representation of it purposely obstructs the possibility of transmitting meaning by creating a significant split between surface meaning and what is underneath it. Here the connection between the surface meaning and what it represents is drastically increased since the analogy itself is wrested out of the Magistrate's consciousness and buried into his unconscious. Narrative attention is then drawn to the split, rather than the connection, between what or who the hooded girl is and what she represents. The hooded girl may be the barbarian girl as imagined and dreamed by the Magistrate, but it is not certain for the context in which the analogy appears is twice removed from waking reality and, thus, is too open-ended for definition.

These two separate depictions of the barbarian girl in waking reality and the hooded figure in dream sequences, at once, add layers of textual and allegorical ambiguity to the novel as a whole. To elaborate, *Waiting for the Barbarians* first invokes the image of a hooded girl at play in the Magistrate's dream. Later, the novel introduces another figure of the barbarian girl whose undecipherable nature has captivated the narrator in waking reality. Seemingly speaking, these representations suggest that the barbarian girl, and, by extension, the hooded figure in the Magistrate's dreams, could then be read allegorically as a textual personification of language. However, the textual ambiguity in these two invocations relies not only on the actual representations of these two figures themselves, but also on the narrative shift between waking reality and dreams. The shift between dream and waking reality produces, on the one hand, a textual movement which transforms the unconscious perception of language into a person. On the other hand, despite his attempt to *decipher* her allegorically, the Magistrate's encounter with the barbarian girl in his waking hours insists that the barbarian should be taken literally, first and foremost, as a person or agency. In addition, his subsequent, dream episodes, which offer another allegorical reading of language in another form of the hooded girl, confuses the issue of language as real, as being personified. The confusion is partly due to both the shift from the barbarian girl in waking reality to the hooded girl in dream sequences and the fact that in the Magistrate's dream, language is reimagined as a person, but the personified presence only resides in a moment of the unconscious.

The representations of the two figures, therefore, show the inconsistence and arbitrariness of linguistic representation which relies upon the correlation between the signified and the signifier, the literal and the literary, which is, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, represented through the projections of two different girls who reside in two separate realms. As language as an abstract quality is invoked in the form of the poplar slips; its meaning is well beyond the linguistic knowledge of Colonel Joll as well as the Magistrate. Yet, when the novel itself presents language in the figures of a barbarian girl and the hooded figure in the Magistrate's dreams, not only do their undecipherable figures remain unclear and closed, the personification of language arbitrarily slips in and out of consciousness and refuses to be underpinned as a person, making it a crucial way to see language as an active system which escapes definition and totalisation.

As discussed in the paragraphs concerning the wooden slips, this term "allegory" connotes a kind of language which is incoherent, fragmented, and impossible to be completely understood. This appropriated concept of allegory produces fragments of meaning, with no assumption can be made of an underlying coherent meaning. This form of language is proposed to be a complete opposite to the language of metaphor according to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, the two philosophers (1986) argue against the language of metaphor: "Metaphors are one of the things that make me despair of literature" (p. 22). They claim that in a language of metaphor knowledge is finalised, totalised, and homogenised. In order for a language to be truly deterritorialised, language must be able to perform the opposite of what metaphor

generally does. That is to say, language must be heterogenous and transgressive in ways that will not bring things back to a familiar ideological perspective, to what is already known. This is precisely what language as allegory does in *Waiting for the Barbarians*.

Besides showing the shift in consciousness and textual movement which fluctuates between waking reality and dream, the novel delves deeper into the realm of language in order to produce a language of allegory whose meaning is confused by means of transformative and transgressive capability or which Deleuze and Guattari (1986) call the process of "metamorphosis." This process is reinforced in the Magistrate's dreams in which the figure of the hooded girl persists, or, rather, transforms throughout the extended series of the novel's dreamscape. For example, in the Magistrate's second dream sequence, he manages to see the face under the hood. However, what appears to be under the hood is a blank and featureless face. The Magistrate himself notes that "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" (Coetzee, 1982: 37). In this very dream sequence, the face of the hooded girl transforms or metamorphoses into many different forms. The careful choice of the word "embryo" itself connotes that this vision of the hooded girl or her very face is subject to transformation, changes, and growth. Looking specifically at these transfigurations from "an embryo or a tiny whale" into "another part of the human body that bulges under the skin," and into "the snow itself," I see *Waiting for the Barbarians* as introducing a form of allegorical language which makes the text vibrate with a new intensity, in ways that it does not homogenise things/representations, or finalise meaning/truth. In this regard, the textual representations of the Magistrate's dreams with pointed emphasis on various images of the hooded girl throughout its extended series of dreams underline a Deleuzoguattarian concept of discursive *metamorphosis*, an idea which puts an emphasis on the deterritorialised transformation and fluidity of language.

The dream sequences, including its accompanying presence and transfiguration of the hooded girl, depict the novel's deliberate unsettling of reductive truth/history exemplified in the representation of Colonel Joll. The language of allegory, which fluctuates between dream and reality, and consistently rolls in and out of the Magistrate's attempt to read and personify it, is a language of literary singularity. First, language manifests itself in the personified form of the hooded girl, concealing parts of her face and figure in the snow. Later, the figure transfigures beyond recognition before it lastly evaporates into the air. The last two episodes of the Magistrate's dreams underline a refusal to underpin the image of the hooded girl into what is already shown in the previous sequences. Instead of showing a "blank, featureless" face or "an embryo or a tiny whale," the third encounter depicts the girl as "herself, herself […] a smiling child" before that vision is cancelled in the final dream by having the Magistrate and the hooded girl collide with one another (Coetzee, 1982: 53). Before the Magistrate could have a last glimpse of the girl, "all is lost from sight in the whiteness of the snow" (Coetzee, 1982: 136).

In addition to the idea of literary singularity, the allegorical ambiguity of referentiality evident in the metamorphosis of the hooded figure can also be discerned as being characteristic of what Wilm (2016) understands to be Coetzee's "slow philosophy." In his examination of Coetzee's aesthetics, Wilm (2016) states that "When reading Coetzee's works the reader is continually asked to weigh conflicting ideas, to qualify, to backtrack, and to reconsider formed opinions […], since for each thought and each opinion there seems to be a counter-thought […] a different way of seeing a phenomenon" (p. 14). This slow philosophy is meant to, according to Wilm (2016), "obstruct a quick or superficial reading that ends in an unequivocal interpretation" (p. 14). To build on Wilm's critical perspective, I contend that as the novel slows down its pace in its textual ambiguity of allegorical referentiality, it raises a question of the relations between meanings of the allegorical figures in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. That is, the allegorical ambiguity allows us to slowly see the discrepancy of, and the distance between, textual representations and its formerly established meanings. While allegory is often a narrative mode of "speaking other" – saying that A means B, and that the connection between A and B is rigidly coded through various applications of literary language, Coetzee's re-appropriation of allegory slackens, if not breaks, such rigidly coded connection.

Putting the re-appropriated language of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, whose connection between and meaning of A and B are problematised, into Coetzee's discussion of writing proposed primarily in "A Note on Writing," I understand *Waiting for the Barbarians* with its pointed investment in allegorical ambiguity, suspension, and fragmentation of meaning/relation as a text that emblematises Coetzee's middle-voice utterance (1992).[7] In the most popularised understanding of the term, Coetzee's "middle voice" shows the author's fascination with the determinism of linguistic structure, which, according to the essay, is limited to the

[7] See also Coetzee (1992), Coetzee's essay collection, *Doubling the Point* (1992). Two essays in the collection (The Rhetoric of the Passive in English and The Agentless Sentence as Rhetorical Device) discuss the rhetorical absence and interplay between agency and structure in writing. Particularly, the latter two pieces outline the linguistic construction of agentless sentences, which can broadly be understood as a means of linguistic evasion and ironic inversion.

active-passive opposition. Then, Coetzee (1992) goes on to address "the possibility of threefold opposition active-middle-passive," p. 94) This has been taken by scholars as Coetzee's projected attempt to escape such determinism of linguistic structure (of agency and structure), which is translated into his fiction in the form of insufficient claims to and representations of any direct historical and political event.[8] In line with such a reading of Coetzee's middle voice, I see the absence of direct interplay between meaning and representation, between historical agency and textual (allegorical) evidence. That connection is disrupted if not completely deterritorialised. The constant transformations of the hooded figure in the dream sequences is the prime example of such a state of disruption, dissolution and breakdown of meaning. As the figure of the hooded girl transforms and, eventually, disappears over the course of the novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians* develops and defends a particular understanding and representation of language which is insufficiently *transitive*. That is, the need for transitive correlation between A and B, or what the text says and what it means is entirely irrelevant. On a different note, a fully mapped-out allegory in which the correlation between A and B is distinct and finite is nothing less than the kind of reductive language Colonel Joll employs, in that it reduces the possibility and variability of meaning into a definitive, determinate, and finalised understanding.[9]

5. ALLEGORY AS DISCURSIVE ANARCHISM

Through Coetzee's introduction of a rather vaguely and transgressively coded language, in which A may or may not mean B, the textual space of allegorical ambiguity in *Waiting of the Barbarians* reaches its highest level. Appropriated use of allegory in the novel then becomes a textual embodiment of discursive anarchism, which distinctly manifests itself towards the end of the novel in which an episode of actual anarchism takes place. The event of anarchism, which is to be studied from the perspective of Coetzee's discursivity, is not however a reference to a political resistance of leaders/hierarchies, but a reference to the more popular conception of anarchy as social/political breakdown and disorder. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.), the term anarchy highlights the state of lawlessness "due to the absence or inefficiency of the supreme power: a political disorder." It also implies in the last entry as the state of "unsettledness or conflict of opinion." This sums up the state of anarchism that is dramatised at the end of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, at which point the narrator arrives at a scene and time of social and political breakdown, bringing the unsettledness of history and truth into the actual *disordering* of the outpost town.

The following passage is taken from the beginning of chapter five. It gives a specific outline of an outpost town on the verge of collapsing:

> *"The barbarians come out at night. Before darkness fall the last goat must be brought in, the gates barred, a watch set in every lookout to call the hours. All night, it is said, the barbarians prowl about bent on murder and rapine [...] The barbarians have dug a tunnel under the walls, people say; they come and go as they please, take what they like; no one is safe any longer [...] the barbarians are only waiting for the crops to be established, they say, before they flood the fields again."*
> (Coetzee, 1982: 122)

Descriptively speaking, the entire chapter describes the rapid decline and social and political breakdown of the Magistrate's town, characterised primarily by mass migration, anxiety, murder, rapine, desolation, and military withdrawal from the walled town. The whole town, as the Magistrate himself sees it, is overtaken by panic, hysteria and fear of the barbarian invasion. Looking at the passage quoted above, I see anarchism displayed in two different but interconnected levels. Firstly, anarchism is subtly projected here as resulting from "anxious rumours" of the barbarians' imminent attack (Coetzee, 1982: 123). As seen in the above quotation, Coetzee uses phrases such as "it is said," "people say," "they say," or, elsewhere in the chapter, "Others say" and "Some say" to deliberately suggest that the present state of disruption and disordering in the town is most likely grounded in "anxious rumours" rather than the actual invasion of the barbarians. Those phrases, which are placed in between clauses, at the start of sentences, or in the middle of sentences, constantly negate the public's assumption concerning the barbarians, which would otherwise be realised as actual and definite. With this careful placement of those phrases, Coetzee reinforces the notion that discourses are the true regulatory mechanism through which anarchism as a material condition can come to be.

[8] For more information, see Brian Macaskill (1994).

[9] The tension that may be inevitable here in my reading of Coetzee's deterritorialised language of allegory is one between an essentially allegorical mode of interpretation and the idea of unsettling the simple idea of allegory, and its colonial connotations. Attridge (2004b) solves the problem through his idea of "responsible instrumentality," highlighting "a preparedness to be challenged by the work, an alertness to its singular otherness, an attentiveness to the way it operates through mobile and meaningful forms as well as by thematic representation and conceptual argument" (p. 130).

Secondly, anarchism is imagined in the above quoted scene not merely as an actual, material condition. Rather, anarchism depicted here is an imaginary of wild dispersing and disordering of language, through which a space of disruptive and deterritorialised politics is reconstructed. Studying the works of Deleuze, Nathan J. Jun (2007) claims that Deleuzean philosophy, akin to Deconstructive philosophy, "seeks to avoid closure, entrapment, and structure; it seeks to opens up rather than foreclose possibilities, to liberate rather than interrupt the flows and movements which produce life" (p. 132).[10] Hence, anarchism here is a philosophical stance that acknowledges that power emerges from multiple sources, rejecting in that regard the ideas of normativity, totality, and finality. This leads us to a more complex understanding of anarchism. When referring to anarchism as a state of lawlessness or political breakdown, one often assumes that it means without a government or a state. In fact, Deleuzoguattarian anarchism principally means the state of no *coercive authority*, implying the lack of closed and normative power and domination (Jun, 2012: 115). Following this notion of anarchism, what the previous quotation implies is not merely the state of chaos and rulelessness. Rather, it depicts, in its very form of discursive deterritorialisation, the disappearance of the authoritative truth and the knowability of meaning/reality. As *Waiting for the Barbarians* inhabits that shifting and arbitrary space between what it says and what it means, the tension between these two realms of meaning reaches its height in this scene in which the notion of knowledge or, as the Magistrate has it, "tranquil certainties" is constantly disrupted by destabilising language of "they say," "people say" and "it is said" (Coetzee, 1982: 143). These phrases, so to speak, interrupt and break the general public's perception of the barbarians by putting the reductive and normalised truth or knowledge in those sentences in flux. This leads to a textual and discursive breakdown in knowledge and authority, in which the destabilising elements of Coetzee's language discursively undermines the *orderly*, established construction of the Empire's history and discourse. Therefore, what the passage discursively draws above is not merely an actual condition of an outpost town on the verge of collapse as a result of their own discourse of fear and anxiety, but also a textual portrayal of discursive anarchism, in which the language of allegory, of destabilising and deterritorialising effects, disperses and fragments the ordering and establishment of the master discourse of truth and history.

6. CONCLUSION

Coetzee's articulation of discursive anarchism enables us to see language (called allegory) as an essentially heterogenous system. In contrast to the language of Colonel Joll which is marked by a single and reductive meaning and simple communication, the allegorical language of *Waiting for the Barbarians* is reinforced through the representations of and the tensions between the Magistrate and the barbarian girl, in ways that it communicates not the homogeneous, but the dispersing and the heterogeneous.

Through the last scene of the novel, the novel presents a culminated imaginary of a discursive system which deals specifically with the notion of heterogeneity. This system, which is represented here through the actualised image of the snowman, is "made of assemblages of heterogeneous orders of signs that cannot be reduced to a binary structure" of truth and lies (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: xi). However, the novel does not directly invite any reading of any kind in the way that all the Magistrate's dream sequences do. Instead, the passage presents an allegorical figure of the snowman which is constructed from heterogeneity or "assemblages" of "*things*" (Coetzee, 1982: 155-156). Each *thing* serves for each part of the snowman whether it be "the great round body," "the mouth and nose and eyes" or "the head and arms". Among other items are a cap and pebbles, not the mention of the snow itself, a natural element which can dissolve, or can be shifted into forms. Hence, the snowman is a construction which takes the form of a human figure but is not a human figure itself. The snowman appears to be that final transfiguration of *Waiting for the Barbarians*' central allegorical figure which is not either a definite personification of language, or language completely reproduced in its abstract quality. It is, in fact, a combination of both abstract and concrete perception of language, a linguistic space that is radically heterogenous and arbitrary, completely deterritorialised in ways that it represents a meeting of signs, things, and fragments, contesting the established, dominant discourse of the Empire. This final moment of textual and representational cancelation and dissolution insists that we see the novel as the whole as a text which will not and cannot amount to anything conclusive and coherent, to anything more than fragments of meaning.

Affected by a high coefficient of deterritorialisation, this vision of language is pushed through allegorical distancing, reversals, and dispersing fragmentation. This is a vision of language called allegory which destablises and deterritorialises the whole symbolic and linguistic structure of the Empire's totality of history/truth. It is also a language which is constructed within and in juxtaposition with the dominant language of overcoding and normalisation. It marks the impasse of reading and transmitting meaning, which resolutely

[10] For more detailed discussion on the anarchist tradition in Deleuze and Guattari's works, see Van Heerden and Eloff (2019), particularly chapters 3 and 5.

"turns language into something impossible" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: xi). Through his vaguely, intransitively, and, rather, heterogeneously coded vision of allegory, Coetzee expresses his unique understanding of political responsibility. Whereas his literary writing as seen in the discussion of *Waiting for the Barbarians* does not appear to acknowledge and respond to the historical situatedness of apartheid, its very appropriation of allegory, including its criticism of definitive truth, transcends the distance, whether it be political or historical, that a text such a one as *Waiting for the Barbarians* produces. The figurative distancing and linguistic disruption of political involvement deliver, in this sense, the very essence of political involvement by not producing a linear and clear correlation between the representation and what it represents. The effort is to achieve a kind of language that is drastically the opposite of the apartheid language of truth and the geopolitics of segregation. The novel underscores such a spatial and discursive consciousness that emphasises distant interaction but does not, resolutely, limit its narrative realm to the condition of referential/historical/political finality and totality. The language of apartheid phenomena of totalisation and finalisation is here called into question, and broken down in the allegorical language of *Waiting for the Barbarians*. By introducing elements of destabilising effects, *Waiting for the Barbarians* displays a deterritorialised imaginary which is indeterminate, contingent and heterogenous. In contrast to the spatial/political production of apartheid which is rigidly constructed on the basis of the spurious categorisation and segregation of racial groups, *Waiting for the Barbarians* returns us through a process of discursive disruption to a space of singularity and anarchism, a deterritorialised space whose contours are undecidable and contestable, making it a crucial way of contesting and fragmenting the apartheid government's established discourse of racialised segregation, and, in doing so, turning and reducing the master-discourse of truth and history into "nothing but a certain kind of story" (Coetzee, 1988: 2).

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