

Baring Witness, Bearing Witness: Paradoxes of Testimony in J.M. Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians

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Abstract : This paper contends with the intersection between the act of witnessing and the act of reading in order to consider the relevance of literary testimony and fiction as tools for postcolonial readings of history. J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* elucidates what Primo Levi deems the 'paradoxical' task of testimony: that suffering can only be fully narrated by the sufferer themselves, whose voice and narrative capacity is often foreclosed by the very extent of their trauma. By examining the fictional Magistrate's position as both a reader and translator of history, this paper posits *Waiting for the Barbarians* as an ethical command against the appropriation of trauma.

Keywords : ethical criticism, limit-experience, postcolonialism, psychic trauma in literature, testimony

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