

## Waiting For the Barbarians: Chapter 4

*“My alliance with the guardians of the Empire is over. I have set myself in opposition.”*

This chapter is devoted to the imprisonment and torture of the magistrate after he comes back from his trip to the mountains. Based on false evidence given by the soldiers who accompanied him on this trip, he is accused of conspiring with the barbarians and betraying the Empire. While imprisoned alone, he analyzes the events of the last few weeks. He considers his feelings for the nomad girl, questioning his pity for her, and thinking that she became less and less human because of her torture; in the end she became only a creature who believed in nothing.

Meanwhile the Third Bureau continue their campaign against the barbarians. More prison blocks are built to house prisoners, and a fire is set to destroy trees along the dry river bed that could be used to cover an attack. An empire regiment returns from the desert with more prisoners, who have been wired up ready for torture. They are beaten with canes and made to kneel in the sand while the wires are tightened.

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### Knowledge Check

*Try to answer these questions from memory:*

**1. What is the magistrate initially imprisoned for?**

- (a) Siding with the enemy
- (b) Deserting his post
- (c) Returning the barbarian girl to her home
- (d) Stealing

**2. What colour are the tunics worn by officers of the Third Bureau?**

- (a) Lilac blue
- (b) Purple lavender
- (c) Blood red
- (d) Olive green

**3. What other charges are going to be brought against the magistrate?**

- (a) Land misallocation
- (b) Food shortages
- (c) Account mismanagement
- (d) Horse theft

**4. What repetitive food is the Magistrate provided in jail?**

- (a) Soup, porridge, and tea
- (b) Bread and butter
- (c) Waffles with jam
- (d) Pizza, salad, and Sprite

**5. Who does the Magistrate dream about while he's in his cell?**

- (a) Colonel Joll
- (b) Mandel
- (c) The indigenous girl
- (d) Nobody

**7. How does the magistrate escape from his prison cell?**

- (a) By tricking a guard
- (b) Through an open window
- (c) By using a stolen key
- (d) He dug a tunnel to the outside

**7. Which word does Colonel Joll write on the prisoners' backs?**

- (a) Slave
- (b) Barbarian
- (c) Late
- (d) Enemy

**8. What does the magistrate demand as his right?**

- (a) A phone call
- (b) A public apology
- (c) A legal tribunal
- (d) To be released

**9. What name does Joll mockingly call the Magistrate?**

- (a) Teller of Truths
- (b) One Just Man
- (c) The Last Loyalist
- (d) Last Honourable Citizen

**10. What is the Magistrate made to wear during his final torture and public humiliation?**

- (a) A woman's smock
- (b) A torn shirt
- (c) He is made to go naked
- (d) Beggar's rags

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## Understanding and Interpretation

1. How does the opening of chapter 4 confirm the Magistrate's 'transformation' in the desert during the previous chapter?
2. What important role do the excavated slabs inscribed with ancient symbols play in this chapter?
3. Describe the progress of degradation in this chapter. What does this chapter reveal about the use of torture and the limits of the human ability to withstand suffering?
4. How are Joll and the other soldiers depicted in this chapter? Throughout the novel, what is Coetzee revealing about the appearance and nature of 'evil' in the world?
5. What shift have you noticed in this chapter when it comes to ideas of 'civilisation and savagery' and, in particular, the use of the word 'barbarian'?

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## Important Theme: *dehumanisation*

*"Thereafter she was no longer fully human..."*

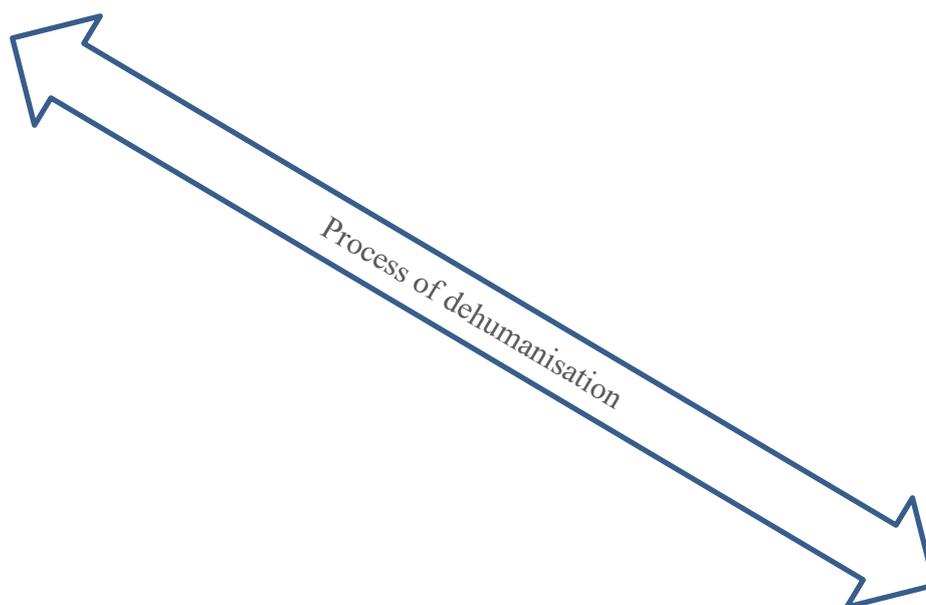
Torture, and the effects of torture on individuals, is one of the major themes of the novel. Colonel Joll is the main proponent of torture as a method of gathering information, and he stops at nothing to achieve his aim. Joll's willingness, and even sadistic pleasure, when inflicting torture represents the inhumanity and savagery lurking at the heart of the supposedly 'civilized' empire and highlights the hypocrisy of the empire's claims of an advanced culture in comparison with the barbarians. Coetzee's novel repeatedly highlights this hypocrisy, and the writer seems determined to reveal that behind the clean surfaces of civilized society lurks (to borrow Conrad's famous title) a 'heart of darkness' that revels in violence and obscene practices.

Coetzee also focuses considerable attention on the victims of torture. Joll tries to bring his victims to breaking point, a moment when he believes they will always reveal the truth. His methods are inhuman and treat the victims as simply a means to an end. No amount of pain or indignity is too immoral to inflict on people when they are not really seen as people in the eyes of others. Instead, Joll sees the barbarians as **subhuman**, and his acts of **dehumanization** further erase any human identity in the prisoners. The magistrate comes to experience the effects of inhuman treatment for himself. On page 93, the magistrate realizes, *'I daily become more like a beast or a simple machine, a child's spinning toy.'* On the same page he concludes, *'I am now no more than a pile of blood, bone and meat.'*

### Activity

Skim and scan chapter 4. Follow the pattern of dehumanization that the author describes in this chapter. Annotate this diagram with quotations:

**Human**



**Subhuman / animal**

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## Quotation Bank

*If you only remember three lines, remember these...*

<p><i>I daily become more like a beast or a simple machine, like a child's spinning toy. (p93)</i></p>	<p>This quotation reveals the dehumanising effect of torture on Joll's victims. The magistrate imagines himself transforming into a 'beast', something less than human, and also a 'machine', something incapable of feeling human emotion. In both cases, his words reflect the way Joll sees people as objects to be damaged and discarded at his whims. The magistrate's choice of <b>simile</b>, a 'spinning toy,' also suggests how this treatment goes around and around without getting anywhere. Indeed, Joll never discovers the truth of what passed between the magistrate and the barbarians in the desert.</p>
<p><i>A scapegoat is named, a festival is declared, the laws are suspended. (p131)</i></p>	<p>The magistrate uses a <b>tricolon</b> to express the processes of torture and dehumanisation. A 'scapegoat' is somebody who can be conveniently blamed for the empire's failures or vulnerability. The ease with which laws and rights can be ignored is suggested by the <b>pattern of three</b>, that moves quickly from one action to another. Even while he is a victim of the process he can recognise the steps of his own dehumanisation.</p>
<p><i>My alliance with the guardians of the empire is over... Have I been provoked into a reaction by the sight of one of the new barbarians sitting at my desk? (p85)</i></p>	
<p><i>Based on your own reading of Chapter 4 and / or your classroom discussion, add one more memorable line to this table, and provide an analysis comment:</i></p>	