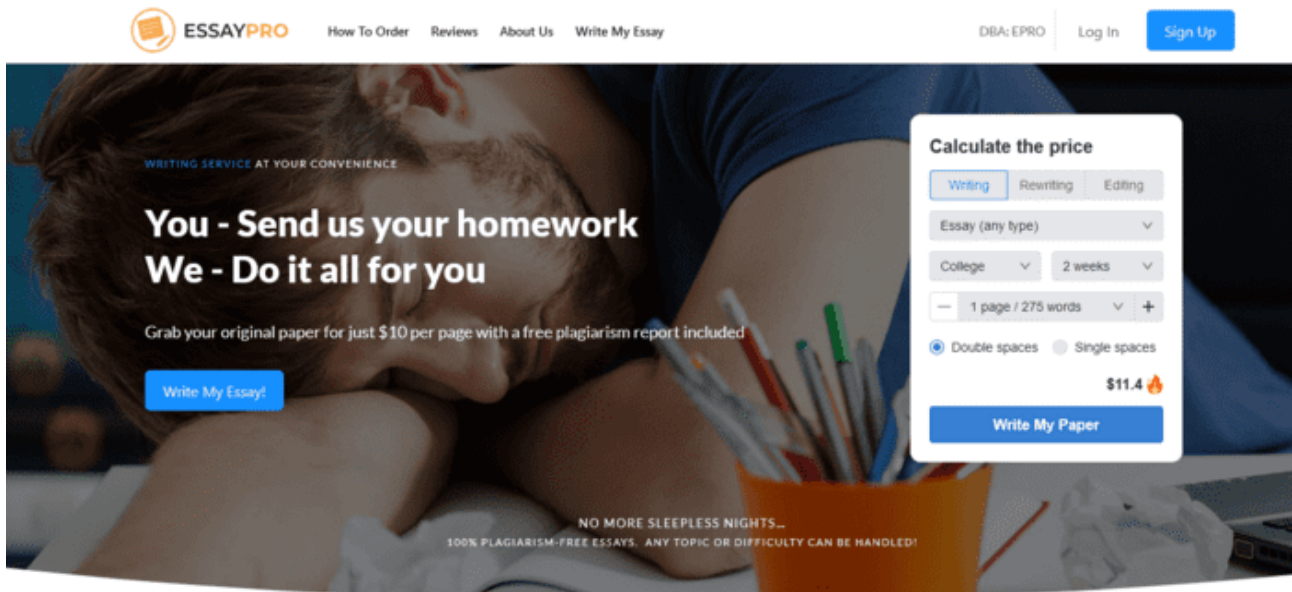


# Waiting for the Barbarians, by J. M. Coetzee



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One may begin the novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* wondering where and in what time period this story is set in and why so much attention is given to the weather. Many different places across the globe could suffice as the setting for the novel, and although vague, this setting still exhibits the same natural characteristics of the changes in seasons as any real place exhibits over the course of time. Coetzee uses a setting in *Waiting for the Barbarians* that is both ambiguous and specific in order to create a universal message that [imperialism](#) brings out the evil of the human heart while still conveying a sense of realism in his work.

As the novel begins, one is not given any specific setting - place, time, or historical event - in which to ground the plot. Although Coetzee is an African American writer and the horrific scenes of torture and imprisonment can easily be seen as the colonization of African, the setting is not given in order to allow the lesson of imperialism to be applied to a multitude of places. LaSalle finds the novel to be "haunted by Conrad" as it pertains to the portrayal of the darkness seen by individuals throughout history, however, I believe that Coetzee takes the message to a new level by introducing a more ambiguous plot that allows for universalism of the message (LaSalle). The scenes of torture in which the soldiers hold sticks "raised for the next blow" to violently harm their "prisoners" could very well be the

ill treatment of persons in Africa but also the horrid Holocaust or the Native American sufferings in America (Coetzee 123). By allowing a broad interpretation the negative aspects of imperialism, trying to forcefully civilize those who seem to be the uncivilized throu...

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...c changing of the seasons. (LaSalle) As well as it may seem that Coetzee is speaking to the same issue as Conrad, as Franklin argues, contrarily I believe that through such a setting with no clear background, Coetzee brings a new versatility to the message. (Franklin) Using both specific and ambiguous details, one receives sufficient information without unnecessary detail in order to relate to the allegory of imperialism on a universal level.

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