Fall: Essay Assignment 1  
Literary Analysis of *Waiting for the Barbarians*

**Introduction**

A *literary analysis* is a *close reading* of a text’s rhetorical elements to support a specific interpretation. Rhetorical elements may include figurative language (e.g., metaphor, allusion, or hyperbole); structural features (e.g., meter, stage directions, or narrative framing); or allusions to historical, cultural, or philosophical context. Because literary works may contain multiple meanings—found in keywords and their relation to one another—the literary critic selects passages of a text to show how the words in the passage signify.

For this essay, you will focus on the way a complex metaphor from Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* illuminates our course theme. Metaphor appears repeatedly and variously in Coetzee’s novel. You will find one example in the book’s first line, where the reader and the narrator are introduced to the “two little discs of glass suspended in front of [Colonel Joll’s] eyes in loops of wire” (2). This may not seem like a metaphor. In fact, it is one of the most literal descriptions of glasses we are likely to encounter. But, as the passage continues, we see the image echoed in references to *blindness*, *opacity*, *darkness*, *glare*, and *squinting*. We also observe repeated references to *youth*, *newness*, and *wrinkles*. How do those references relate? How do they shape your reading and interpretation of Coetzee’s text? As you read, the allusions increase, and the metaphorical significance intensifies. “Glasses” may refer to *blindness*, *vision*, *mediation*, *objectivity* and *objectification*, *encounters with others*, *containment*, *political right*, *etc*. Analyzing the meaning and associations of this metaphor helps build your interpretation.

**Assignment**

Select a passage from *Waiting for the Barbarians* that contains an extended, complex metaphor. Then argue how the metaphor helps characterize one aspect of empire represented in Coetzee’s novel.

Your paper must be between 4-6 pages in length (no more than 6) and will be worth 30% of your writing grade.
Additional Resources

Writing Process and Goals
Academic Essay Rubric (pdf)