

# J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*: Revision of 'imperial/ colonial dominance'

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## **Abstract:**

This paper examines J. M. Coetzee's novel *Foe* (1986) as a typical revisionary text written back to Daniel Defoe's eighteenth-century classic *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). It applies a theoretical approach to get into the technicalities and strategies of 'Revisionary writing', an emerging sub-genre, and shows Coetzee's success in writing the classic of its own. How Coetzee breaks Defoe's textual/literary discourse while entering into a thorough critical dialogue and shapes a 'canonical counter-discourse', is the central thesis of this study. An attempt is made to expatiate how Coetzee uses 'intertextuality' as a tool to destabilize Defoe's master-narrative and expose it as a colonial/imperial text constructing the myth of the 'orient'. Coetzee's artistic dexterity in foregrounding marginalized voice/s is focused and analysed at length.

**Keywords:** Revision, Counter-discourse, Intertextuality, Marginalization, Perspectives

## **INTRODUCTION**

'Revisionary writing' has emerged as a highly engaging sub-genre in the twentieth century literary studies. It is replete with critical insights and involves a range of technical ideas in its terminology. To comprehend the nuances of the term 'revisionary writing' and to enter into any discussion over it, below given five key points need to be analysed:

- Meaning, origin and appropriation.
- What is re-visioned?
- 'Revisionary writing': Terminological Flexibility.
- Strategy of 're-vision': Use of Intertextuality.
- Contrapuntal Reading

All these vital points will be brought into proceeding discussion after a brief overview of J. M. Coetzee and *Foe*, pertinent to be given here:

## **J. M. Coetzee**

The 2003 Nobel laureate, John Maxwell Coetzee is a prominent South African postcolonial novelist. He is a Cape Town born of 1940, lived his academic life exhaustively in South Africa till 2002, then immigrated and got Australian citizenship in 2006. He holds an honorary position at the University of Adelaide, South Australia. Coetzee has written some of the commendable postcolonial novels like *Dusklands* (1974), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *Foe* (1986) and a brilliant work on post-Apartheid South Africa titled *Disgrace* (1999). Besides, he has also written some essay collections. His literary corpus revolves round the postcolonial themes. He exposes the ugliness of colonial occupation by universalizing the problems generated in colonial paradigm. Coetzee highlights the colonial injustices and captures the trauma of the colonial subject. He gives voice to the oppressed and raises questions of race and identity in his fictional oeuvre. Coetzee is one among a generation of writers who firmly believe on the pivotal role of art in mirroring the troubles of life. He fervently submits this view in an interview with Richard Begam, "Yes, art is born out of burning issues, issues felt deeply, whether these issues are specific (political issues, for instance) or general (questions of life and birth, for instance) ..." (Begam and Coetzee 431). While seeing through the lens of postcolonialism Coetzee's literary oeuvre substantiates to be replete with the exposé of 'colonial discourse'. His fiction develops a sense of how colonial discourse constructs the colonizer/colonized binary and the myth of racial 'other'. He blatantly questions this dichotomous structure as, "Who are these blacks and whites? Surely it is colonial discourse... that creates blacks and whites... the blacks are blacks as long as the white constructs himself as white." (Begam and Coetzee 425)

In his works, Coetzee not only exposes the myth of the “other”, but unmarks the ulterior motives therein the construction of such myth.

### *Foe* (1986)

Coetzee’s fifth novel *Foe* is a revisionary text written back as a prequel to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). It is structured in four parts. The first two can be summed-up as a kind of Susan’s memoir. It begins with the narrator Susan Barton who is washed up on the shore of a small island. Interestingly, a negro named Friday, a vivid element derived from Defoe’s text, discovers and brings her to his so called “master” Cruso, a weather-beaten white man with a peaked straw hat. Cruso is another character sourced from Defoe. What is remarkable at the outset is that Friday’s tongue is mysteriously sliced. Furthermore, the master/slave relationship and the racial dichotomy surfaces early in the novel. After meeting Cruso Susan now reveals her own misery, her birth from an English mother and a French father and the abduction of her daughter by an Englishman. Susan herself had followed her to Bahia in Brazil where she stays for two years before sailing to Lisbon, Portugal. The reader gets to know by her narration that she had developed relationship with the captain yet Cruso remains unaware of this. The sailors having mutinied, killed the captain and set Susan adrift in a small boat with the corpse of her lover. This is how she landed on the Island which is under Cruso’s control. However, Cruso’s character has been altered by Coetzee to a great extent. From the strong and mighty in Defoe’s text, he is reduced to an irresponsible, haggard and indolent man. He lacks the managerial and organizing traits unlike Defoe’s Crusoe. He even does not have the idea how long he has been on the island because he has kept no records and thus, has lost track of everything. His unmanageability appals Susan who is much confused by Cruso’s fragmented narrative of events. Cruso reveals however that Friday does not speak because he has no tongue as he gets Friday to open his mouth and show Susan. His tongue has been sliced either by slavers whom Cruso blames or by Cruso himself. Susan is clueless how to proceed with Friday’s case after learning about his strife. She feels his misery and anxiously wants to give him voice. Susan spends a year on the island with Cruso and Friday. She gets intimate with Cruso also. Cruso falls into bouts of fever. He spends his days levelling useless terraces all over the island. There is nothing to

plant on the terraces and they have no purpose, but he labours over them as though they are the greatest necessity. The winds having gotten terrible raise a tempest and submerge the Island. An English ship comes in rescue and saves them all. Cruso’s health has deteriorated much and against his will he is carried on board. The company now travels to England but due to his severe illness Cruso enroute England dies and Friday becomes a complete charge of Susan Barton. Friday in England is wholly dependent on Susan who continues to be concerned about his strife. One more striking aesthetic sense which Coetzee bestows on the structure of this novel is that he frames its second part in an epistolary mode featuring a series of letters in which Susan writes to Foe about her stay in the island controlled by Cruso. Susan had grown desperate to give Friday voice. She attempts to seek out the famous writer Foe to persuade him to write a book on her stay on Cruso’s dominated Island wherein Friday’s traumatic condition has to be a seminal part. She reaches England with Friday to meet Foe to discuss the story to be published. In their first arrival at Foe’s home Susan and Friday do not find Foe as to avoid his creditors he had abandoned his house and gone into hiding. In foe’s absence they engage in Foe’s articles. Friday finds Foe’s robes and dances in them. He twirls endlessly, with nothing on underneath the robes. Significantly, one day while dancing the robes spin open and a awful revelation strikes – Friday is not only sliced by his tongue but is castrated also. This makes Susan grow more curious about Friday. She speaks to him, confesses things and shares her thoughts on him and delineates on language. However, she regrets bringing him to England and decides to send him back to Africa. They are penniless, thus, walk all the way from London to Bristol. They sleep in barns and under hedges, get chased down by drunken soldiers and are even branded as gypsies. Exhausted, turned shabby with filth and mud they reach the ports in Bristol and Susan attempts to put Friday on a ship bound for Africa but realizes that the hopeless situation. She fears of him to get sold back into slavery he is sent alone on ship. Thus, the only choice left is to go back to London and meet Foe.

In the third part, Susan takes up her narrative and the plot reaches to a significant point when they finally meet Foe at his residence. Thus, unlike their first arrival they now succeed in meeting Foe who has been too busy in writing her book. Much to the chagrin of Susan Foe does not show any interest to feature

Friday in the story rather he wants to restrict the book on Susan's time in Bahia. Their island existence seems quite irrelevant to him and against his own manoeuvres. Thus, the novel progresses to Susan's struggle to exert control over her story. Meanwhile, a short relationship between her and Foe develops. Coetzee bestows Susan a wilful adurance to counter the master narrative of Defoe and his parodic representative Foe, the character. Her firm assertion is that the story has to do with her life on the Island and with Friday and with his mysterious silencing. The story that Friday is not able to tell himself is the story they must tell in the book they plan. She leaves no stone unturned to raise the issue of Friday's misery – his mutation and castration. Finally, they try to involve Friday, discuss about his capability and try to make him able to write. Foe provides him a slate and surprisingly Friday draws *O's* all over it. Another significant progression in the plot is when the night approaches. Friday sleeps in the alcove of Foe's room and Susan gets in Foe's bed and sleeps with Foe. A symbolic act is framed by Coetzee in the form of Susan getting on top of Foe, frightening him at first. Then, she tells him to think of her as his Muse. This inverse move in intimacy from Susan signifies the counteractive measure against the male dominance.

In the fourth part, the novel involves a separate omniscient narrator who visits Foe's home. He sees Foe and Susan lying in bed together. Moreover, the narrator finds Friday stretched full length on his back. The narrator scrutinizes Friday and observes his battered body with scars on his neck and his whole condition seems quite miserable. He smells dust of the island which takes a reader back to the history of wrongs Friday had been subjected to. Finally, a dreamlike sequence ensues in which the narrator goes under water and finds a wreck of a ship. He finds Friday in chains and sinking into the sand. He also sees Susan and her ex-partner, the dead captain, but both are silent. Coetzee, creates a domain wherein words do not have value, but the long silence of Friday is brought under focus. Susan's attempts to persuade Foe to give Friday a space in his narrative and to make Friday speak or write, fail considerably. Thus, Coetzee wants to bring into attention the fact that Friday's body itself becomes a story. The novel ends with Friday releasing a slow stream of air "without breath" which reaches to far ends of the earth signifying his own manner of narrating his traumatic and heart-wrenching tales to the world.

### • Revisionary Writing: Meaning, Origin and Appropriation

The meaning of the term is aptly given by Peter Widdowson in his essay "Writing back': contemporary re-visionary fiction" (2006) peeks into the thin line between the verbs 'revise' and 'revision' and foregrounds the specificity and relevance of 'revision'. He explains the,

tactical slippage between the verb to revise (from the Latin 'revisere': 'to look at again') – 'to examine and correct; to make a new, improved version of; to study anew'; and the verb to re-vision – to see in another light; to re-envision or perceive differently; and thus potentially to recast and re-evaluate ('the original'). (Widdowson 496)

The origin of 'Revisionary Writing' is more technical as it substantially differs from the later usage of the term. The credit to coin this term in literary studies goes to the American poet, feminist and lesbian critic Adriene Rich who in her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision" (1971) gives very effective idea of revision of the literary 'canon' as follows:

Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves ... A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine our-selves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative... We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us. (Rich 18)

Rich gives an open call for her co-gender to break the age-old shackles in which they have been caught. The

bleak projection of women in literary discourse is under her scrutiny. Her radical voice against this misrepresentation is much vivid which had far-reaching consequences. A huge amount of literary corpus emerged against the erstwhile canonical texts which have been re-visioned and cast in a different light. The established codes in those 'old texts' have been dismantled for feministic purposes. Jane Smiley's re-vision of Shakespearean *King Lear* (1606) in *A Thousand Acres* (1991) is an exquisite example. The way in which Lear's two elder daughters, Goneril and Regan are presented is very bleak version of women given by Shakespeare. They are depicted like witches plotting against their father and leading him to madness. How can be a female so evil like these two sisters? Jane Smiley attempts to unfold the mystery behind this evil nature of the two sisters in *A Thousand Acres*. Thus, deflating the notion of being wholly canonic which Shakespearean drama is known for. Smiley, writing from a feminist position, blatantly views a failure in Shakespearean text in terms of its 'image' of women. In her interview she radically exposes the nuances of one-way correspondence in a patriarchal literary discourse:

I'd always felt the way *Lear* was presented to me was wrong. Without being able to articulate why, I thought Goneril and Regan got the short end of the stick. There had to be some reason his daughters were so angry. Shakespeare would attribute their anger to their evil natures, but I don't think people in the 20th century think evil exists without a cause. I knew where that anger came from..." (qtd. in Lombardic 2).

Smiley's text foregrounds the worst kind of treatment Lear's two daughters receive from their father. They become the poor victims of the 'paternal malfeasance'. Lear's earlier vicious sexual attacks on his daughters is a phenomenal reason unfolded by Smiles for all the treachery they incur back upon their predatory father. It is, "by centering upon incest as the dramatic and literal trauma, Smiley confronts the secret that was not obviously spoken in *King Lear*". (Lombardic 5) Marina Leslie differentiates incest and love saying that incest is, "but as a brute exercise of power and control" (qtd. in Lombardic 5). Smiley brings a new set of characters against the Shakespearean old one. She incorporates Larry Cook for Lear, Ginny for Goneril,

Rose for Regan and Caroline for Cordelia etc. Unlike the kingdom and wealth as fortunes to be shared among the three daughters in *King Lear*, Smiley frames Larry Cook as an owner of a thousand-acre farm to be shared and jointly owned by the daughters. Smiley in other words advocates the cause of the daughters against their patriarchal father. She argues:

I proposed a different narrative of their motives and actions that cast doubts on the case Mr. Shakespeare was making for his client, King Lear. I made Goneril my star witness, and she told her story with care. I made sure that, insofar as I was able to swing it, she was an appealing witness as well- cautious, judicious, ambivalent, straightforward. (qtd. in Lombardic 30).

There are lot more examples of this type of revisionary writing wherein the feminist novelists write back to the canon and foreground the impulses in which women have become the subject of male dominance.

Apart from feministic streaks Revisionary Writing is way forward a sub-genre in contemporary literatures to produce much in the literary world. In its more acclaimed sense it is largely recognized as a subgenre of postcolonial literatures. This shift occurs when the term gets appropriated and used to counter the colonial hegemony in European literatures. Peter Widdowson does a fine job to bestow flexibility on the term 're-vision' in the study, "Writing back': contemporary re-visionary fiction". He avers:

For Rich in 1971, such a re-visioning was principally a literary-critical strategy for feminists, but 'the act of ... seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction' in order to 'know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it', could also be achieved by the creative act of 're-writing' past fictional texts in order to defamiliarize them and the ways in which they have been conventionally read within the cultural structures of patriarchal and imperial/colonial dominance. (Widdowson 497)

Widdowson enriches the scope of 'revisionary writing' by extending its borders from feministic

perspective to postcolonialism. Thus, feminism and postcolonialism become two 'radical' counterforces for which the whole project of textual de-canonization in 'revisionary writing' stands. Nevertheless, postcolonialism itself, as aims, "to stimulate our students, and ourselves to see a fresh, and comparatively, across worlds. In this, a literary turn may achieve an ethical dimension" (Chapman 18)

Postcolonial literature commonly refers to a range of literatures written by the writers belonging to the erstwhile European colonies. Again, complexity in terminology comes to the fore. 'Postcolonial' is a loaded term which encompasses lots of anti-colonial literary voices written even before formal political independence of these colonies. Some critics are of the opinion that postcolonial without hyphen (-) means writings emerging from the colonized zones before independence and those emerging after independence constitute post-colonial with hyphen (-). However, one can say that given such literature getting inaugurated at the onset of colonialism rather at the end of it, there is no decisive temporal mark. Thus, the term refers more to a methodology and approach rather than a time frame. For its astounding nature in terminology Robert Young attempts give an alternative term 'tricontinentalism' to suggest the commonality between Asia, Africa and South America, arguing that 'colonialism' has not fully disappeared and therefore, 'postcolonialism' does not make much sense. (qtd. in Nayar 21) According to Bill Ashcroft et al the term 'post-colonial' is used:

to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. We also suggest that it is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted. (Ashcroft et al, *The Empire 2*)

Postcolonial literatures are highly responsive to engage with a history of colonialism with all its racist policies, oppressive machinations and myriad injustices. There is an inherent mechanism of 'resistance', 'protest', 'angst' in postcolonial

literatures. Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) remarks, "[the postcolonial theorists] formulated their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the "rationalizations" of modernity". (171). On the other hand, Leela Gandhi in *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (1998), "Postcolonialism can be seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia (oblivion) of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering, and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past" (4). These critical observations highlight the latent strategy of postcolonialism against the literary and cultural dominance of Europe.

#### • What is re-visioned?

Colonial enterprise has always been embedded in diverse machinations and apparatuses to ensure an all-inclusive occupation of the subject. To justify his arrival on the foreign lands the colonizer needed a peg to hang on his colonial motivation. The soft skill he could manipulate with was to construct the image of the 'native' as lesser child of God, a primitive savage unexposed to culture and civilization. In Frantz Fanon's view, "The colonist is not content with physically limiting the space of the colonized...the colonist turns the colonized into a kind of quintessence of evil. Colonized society is not merely portrayed as a society without values...The "native" is declared impervious to ethics." (6) The construction of the colonized as "other" is at the centre of the colonial process. What significantly surfaces is the Eurocentric/colonial/orientalist discourse based on definition of the 'orient' therein. Thus, the orient becomes a victim of this colonial discourse, which:

can be taken to refer to that collection of symbolic practices, including textual codes and conventions and implied meanings, which Europe deployed in the process of its colonial expansion and, in particular, in understanding the bizarre and apparently untranslatable strangeness with which it came into contact. Its interpretations were an expansion of its mastery... (Boehmer 48)

In his inaugural postcolonial critical treatise *Orientalism* (1978) Edward Said exposes this obnoxious orientalist discourse. He proposes the notion how orientalism works insidiously to construct the image of an orient. Said pierces the manner of Eurocentrism in generating a binary structure which features the bleak image of the orient. Said argues that the entire scheme of orientalism is:

a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western Experience... the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience... Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social, descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on... the phenomenon of Orientalism as, I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient (the East as career) despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a "real" Orient. (Said, *Orientalism* 2-5)

One of the most significant tools in this western discourse has been the literary text, especially the nineteenth century Victorian novel. Such texts can be safely termed as 'colonial/imperial' texts. In this view, "the novel [is] an aesthetic object whose connection to the expanding societies of Britain and France is particularly interesting to study." (Said, *Culture* xii) Gauri Vishwanathan in "The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India" (1987) is much bold in her perspective about such type of literature:

The strategy of locating authority in these texts all but effaced the sordid history of colonialist expropriation, material exploitation, and class and race oppression behind European world dominance...the English literary text

functioned as a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state. (Vishwanathan 436-37)

Notwithstanding, the above discussed discourse is exposed in Revisionary writing and all such European codes are dismantled. Revisionary Writing unvaryingly 'writes back' to English literary canon or those elite classics which have attained a decent space in the literary minds across cultures. Such writings entail a two-way correspondence between the source text and the revisionary text and exposes the obnoxious and nefarious colonial design. This counter strategy, thus deflates the hegemony of the colonial literary text which was a one-way transmission of the ideologically motivated content to which a reader was a passive recipient.

#### • **Revisionary Writing: Terminological Flexibility**

In the subversion of racist Eurocentric discourse Revisionary writing works as a potent 'counter-discourse', another technical term which can be contextualized as synonymous to 'revisionary writing'. This term was coined by Richard Terdiman in *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth Century France* (1985) to outline the theory and practice of resistance against the construction of the colonial subject in the French literature. While analyzing nineteenth century French writing, he identifies the 'confrontation between constituted reality and its subversion' as the fountainhead of cultural and historical change. Seen from this perspective, postcolonial counter-discourse has earned its theoretical framework because of the challenges that it poses to particular canonical texts and to the dominant imperial ideology inculcated and maintained through these texts. Ashcroft et al essentially define the term 'Counter-discourse' as:

The concept of counter-discourse within post-colonialism...raises the issue of the subversion of canonical texts and their inevitable re-inscription in this process of subversion... Thus, such challenges are not simply mounted against the texts as

such but address the whole of that discursive colonialist field within which imperial texts – whether anthropological, historical, literary or legal – function in colonized contexts. (*Key Concepts* 50)

Another remarkable term interchangeably used with ‘revisionary writing’ is “Canonical Counter-discourse” proposed by Helen Tiffin in her seminal essay as:

But the particular counter-discursive post-colonial field with which I want to engage here is what I’ll call canonical counter-discourse. This strategy is perhaps most familiar through texts like Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and it is one in which a post-colonial writer takes up a character or characters, or the basic assumptions of a British canonical text, and unveils those assumptions, subverting the text for post-colonial purposes. (97)

The approach of Revisionary Writing to challenge the tropes which have structured the binaries of colonizer/colonized and lured the reader to endorse the European hegemony as valuable and justifiable. Therefore, the authority of the colonial text is subdued to wrest space for the marginalized ‘other’ to voice his/her concern.

### • Contrapuntal Reading

The concept of Contrapuntal reading given by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) is quite in sync with revisionary writing. Said brings attention towards the discursive role of a European text which often remains closed to a polyphonous analysis. He suggests, any cultural text is to be looked at “not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts.” (Said, *Culture* 59) He disregards the one-sided viewpoint in a text as lapsed and denounces the author’s prerogative to put in shackles the recipient of such ideas. Contrarily, a reader has to observe keenly the politics of a text. Contrapuntal reading develops a counterpoint against the manipulation of the author. It espouses the idea that, “in reading a text, one must

open it out both to what went into it and what its author excluded. Each cultural work is a vision of a moment, and we must juxtapose that vision with the various revisions it later provoked.” (Said, *Culture* 79) Thus, what Said emphasizes with a theoretical paradigm, ‘revisionary writing’ is manifestation of the same. It resulted out of the contrapuntal readings of their authors whose critical sense was ‘provoked’ by the implicit textual hegemonies.

### ***Foe* (1986) and *Robinson Crusoe* (1719): RE-VISION FOR ‘POSTCOLONIAL PURPOSES’**

J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* (1986) is a representational revisionary text written within the perspective of postcolonialism against Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). It is a typical Canonical Counter-discourse. Coetzee’s novel presents us with a sort of investigation of a possibly silenced origin of Defoe’s text. With *Foe* Coetzee, “made canonic intertextuality a fundamental principle” (Atridge 69). Intertextuality is the basic tool used in Revisionary writing. Generally speaking, it is a technique which “includes literary echoes and allusions as one of the many ways in which any text is interwoven with other texts”. (Abrams 12). Julia Kristeva takes the credit to popularize it as a literary interchange between texts. She views a text, “as a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts intersect and neutralize one another” (Kristeva 36). However, Kristeva’s formulation, is in general parlance – to consider a text as an ‘intertext’ of numerous texts each lacking existence in isolation. This connotes a deep aesthetic bond between different texts. But, with respect to ‘revisionary writing’, intertextuality is a method to enter an old text, extract characters or excerpts which have been manipulated as colonial apparatuses, and use them to expose colonial intrigues. Through the same principle, Coetzee succeeds in breaking the master narrative of Daniel Defoe. *Foe* is a typical exposé of the colonial textual discourse. He creates a fictional surrogate of the so-called canonical writer and narrates the hegemonic bent of mind. What is authorship in a colonial context is at the core of *Foe*. In “Speaking in Tongues” (2006) Coetzee has summed up *Foe* in terms of authority:

My novel *Foe*, if it is about any single subject, is about authorship: about what it means to be an author not only in the professional sense (the profession of author was just beginning to mean something in Daniel Defoe's day) but also in a sense that verges, if not on the divine, then at least on the demiurgic: sole author, sole creator. (Coetzee, *Speaking* 26)

Thus, writing against the insidious tactics of the colonial text is what lies at the core of *Foe*. It alters Defoe's story not simply as an artistic move, but as a programmatic revisionary attempt to probe into the colonial text and destabilize it by building up a counter-narrative.

### Titular Significance of *Foe* (1986) in view of its Re-vision

The title of this novel is an exquisite artistic attempt to revision an old text. Coetzee shows his mastery in technique by setting apparently a small three lettered word 'foe', but in its essence, this term connotes highly rich and multiple ideas. Coetzee has wittingly played with the term. This term independently suggests abundant meaning, but is vividly linked to Daniel Defoe's second name. Primarily Coetzee omits the prefix from 'Defoe' to challenge the elite aristocratic sense of the term. Coetzee deauthorizes the master-narrative and different assumption therein. Forsaking the elite sense is tantamount to undermine the supreme authority of the colonial writer. The title is important due the character Foe which in the plot emerges as a parodic representation of Defoe. Instead of Daniel 'Defoe', Coetzee restricts on Daniel 'Foe', which is thoroughly shortened in its use in the novel as 'Foe', with quite a few occasions where the whole name features. The eighteenth century prominent English writer, Defoe having constructed a lapsed, distorted and bleak image of Friday in his text *Robinson Crusoe*, undoubtedly, acts as a colonial agency. His central principle is misrepresentation of the colonial victim. What Coetzee does to expose this textual discourse is that he creates the character Foe, an author himself to manipulate the narrative about Friday and deny him a point of view or a part in his story. Thus, Foe is a parody of Defoe, both as writers situate their art fracture their subject matter and give a distorted version. Besides, the term Foe is also replete

with the negative sense in its meaning. It means 'enemy' which fits well for the duo of Foe and Friday – Foe displaying his insidious animosity towards Friday. Denying him space is akin to plotting a scheme the way an enemy does.

Coetzee avoids to delve in Defoe's life, but he does take few biographical details. He selectively frames those facets which help him to deflate the authoritative and hegemonic attitude of the English writer. Coetzee does not show those facets of Defoe's life, like his career of entrepreneurship, politics, family life, and much of his illustrious writing career, but the bleak circumstances of his death, "away from his home, hiding from a creditor who had the power to seize all his goods and throw him into prison for debt". (Novak 6)

### Lacking the bliss of Children

Coetzee furthers Foe's deplorable situation, for though Defoe had a wife and eight children, the Foe we see is alone, and he emits solitude beyond any temporary absence on the part of his family. In the setting of his home and workplace there is no evidence that he might have been a family man. Coetzee draws attention to this lack of privilege, "What has happened to your sons and daughters?" asks Susan Barton in a parenthetical midway through the novel. "Could they not be trusted to shelter you from the law?" (Coetzee 95)

### Articles at Foe's Home

At Foe's home, Susan finds papers that include:

a census of the beggars of London, bills of mortality from the time of the great plague, accounts of travels in the border country, ... also books of voyages to the New World, memoirs of captivity among the Moors, chronicles of the wars in the Low Countries, confessions of notorious lawbreakers, and a multitude of castaway narratives, most of them, I would guess, riddled with lies" (Coetzee 50).

These papers are extraordinarily the manuscripts of Daniel Defoe's famous literary works. Texts which



have become the building blocks of Defoe's oeuvre, fiction and non-fiction like, *Moll Flanders* (1722), *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), and *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-27), as well as some pamphlets, essays and poems for which he became famous/infamous during his lifetime. Remarkably, *Foe*, after all, does not present itself as a biographical document or reflection of Defoe's actual career, but, a modified version to support the postcolonial reading of this the characters across the two interrelated texts. If on the one hand Cruso in *Foe* is shown as an epitome of colonial attitude paralleling Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, on the other hand, Foe becomes an apt parody of the colonial voice, Daniel Defoe.

Towards the end of the novel in the fourth part the narrator enters Foe's house and sees, "at one corner of the house, above head-height, a plaque is bolted to the wall. Daniel Defoe, Author, are the words white on blue, and then more writing too small to read". (Coetzee 155) Coetzee's minute approach to enter Defoe's textual world manifests further in a revelatory fashion. Coetzee seems to make more vivid connections between Defoe and Foe. The plaque featuring Defoe's name signifies how Foe eulogizes the so-called classical hero of whom he serves as a parody. Both the fictional and the real authors are hand in glove with each other to corrupt the history of colonial obnoxiousities. Coetzee exposes both real and textual discourses nurturing such nefarious policies.

### Treatment of Friday's Character

In *Robinson Crusoe* Friday is a negro depicted by Defoe as a savage subject of the so called "Whiteman's burden" on which the imperialist Crusoe plays his manipulative card by imposing his cultural, linguistic and religious codes. However, Coetzee though alters Friday's nativity from Caribbean to African but retains the racial identity of him being the "black marginalized other". Coetzee depicts him as silent by both being the subject of colonial manipulation of imposing the foreign language thus linking it with the same idea of Defoe's text and the subject of the physical violence – mutilation of tongue and castration. Coetzee's revisionary stance gives Friday space in order to counter his erstwhile silence in Defoe's novel and writes back to the canonical

misrepresentation of him by foregrounding his marginalization. Remarkably he depicts Friday by extending his subjugation from being the subject of colonial hegemony in Defoe's text to the physical violence. What is significant in Coetzee treatment of Friday is that in his character he employs the juxtaposition of repression and resistance. Although Friday is muted, but he has his own secret codes to narrate his story. In *Foe*, Coetzee exposes this construction of binaries under colonialism. Primarily, he shows how Friday is constructed as a racial "other" and misrepresented in the so-called canonical text by Defoe.

### Friday and Manipulation of Cruso/e

In Coetzee's revisionary novel or canonical-counter discourse Friday is 'taken up' from Defoe's early eighteenth-century classic, wherein he had been under Crusoe's colonial dominance, and used for postcolonial purposes. Thus, he works as one of the most important intertextual elements connecting Coetzee's narrative with Defoe's. Susan Barton, a castaway, and the main narrator of the novel meets Cruso and Friday, promptly pierces the wall of pretence aligned with Friday and grasps Friday's adverse situation. Cruso, on the other hand, is seen in the possession of island living there as the master of Friday:

"Then at last I could row no further. My hands were raw, my back was burned, my body ached. With a sigh, making barely a splash, I slipped overboard and began to swim towards your island. The waves took me and bore me on to the beach. The rest you know."

'With these words I presented myself to Robinson Crusoe, in the days when he still ruled over his island, and became his second subject, the first being his manservant Friday.' (Coetzee 11)

To give a larger picture of colonial enterprise fictionalized in the story of Crusoe and Friday, Coetzee depicts an extended misery of Friday. From a physically strong, worthy and capable 'racially marginalized slave' of Crusoe, He is presented as a subject of brutal physical violence, tortured, maimed

and rendered a dumb witness of such perpetration. However, Susan promptly, delves into the mystery and enigma of Friday's mutilation and his whole story. Who has been his tormentor? Which are the possible agencies dragging him into this abyss? These are the questions to be answered. This is the mystery which needs to be unravelled. The relationship between the two texts is a key to understand this complexity. Coetzee's *Cruso* denies his role, and plays a blame-game. But, how can he evade in this manner, when in the sequel to Coetzee's text, he dominated this beleaguered child of conflict in a systemic way. One can safely assume that Friday might be the victim of his colonial master:

'I stared in amazement. "Who cut out his tongue?"

"The slavers."

"The slavers cut out his tongue and sold him into slavery? The slave-hunters of Africa? But surely he was a mere child when they took him. Why would they cut out a child's tongue?"

'Cruso gazed steadily back at me. Though I cannot now swear to it, I believe he was smiling. "Perhaps the slavers, who are Moors, hold the tongue to be a delicacy," he said. "Or perhaps they grew weary of listening to Friday's wails of grief, that went on day and night.

Perhaps they wanted to prevent him from ever telling his story: who he was, where his home lay, how it came about that he was taken. Perhaps they cut out the tongue of every cannibal they took, as a punishment. How will we ever know the truth?" (Coetzee 23)

The above account manifests Friday existence under the threat of colonial hegemony which has already prefigured in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. So, his suffering and its ramifications were already known halfway. However, the issue remains inscrutable in Coetzee's narrative. Coetzee's stance is to pierce this mystery in-line with Cruso's attitude. In *Foe*, the master-servant relationship between Cruso and Friday is to be observed meticulously. There seems a contradiction between what appears and what lies hidden. Cruso's attitude is ambivalent. He is not a tyrant but, non-violent oppressor. Despite he lives with Friday, but is depicted as an unconcerned master

towards his misery. His responses for Friday's mysterious mutilation are casual and indifferent. To the most he replies with a statement which is laden with the silliness of word "perhaps". By making such a choice of words Cruso undermines Friday's existence. His identity as individual with unique traits remains unacknowledged and pushed into the margin. Coetzee enters Defoe's early eighteenth century classic and revisions Friday who had been muzzled by his voice and deprived by any perspective. Defoe's *Crusoe* is far-more stronger and manipulative to work on Friday as a colonial subject than Coetzee's *Cruso*. After going through numerous adventures, Defoe's *Crusoe* finally arrives on Friday's Island. Friday, is already under the threat of cannibals, *Crusoe* avails the opportunity and rescues him and gives him the name 'Friday', based on the day of his arrival. *Crusoe* finds both Friday and his native island as soft targets to take under his control. In the otherwise remote island *Crusoe* instead of missing his family and longing for home, he never attempts to escape, but is more concerned for making the island his "kingdom", where he could maintain his authority. This comes to fore when *Crusoe* orders Friday to call him "Master", cultivates the native land to meet his own ends. He keeps different domestic animals, develops skills like weaving, working with clay to make pottery. He also constructs canoes for transportation. Thus, in a systematic manner he settles on the native island of Friday as a foreigner. This well-organized approach culminates in his maintenance of a proper record of affairs therein. Besides, *Crusoe* works out his plan of imposing his own culture and values on the island and its dweller, Friday. To begin with, he leaves no stone unturned to teach Friday Christian values and impose his own language on Friday. Friday signifies an image of a colonized 'other' and the trusted identity on him is established by his European master when *Crusoe* declares now Friday is a "good Christian." However, *Crusoe* adopts a selective approach in terms of teaching English to Friday. He gives him quite a few words like "yes", "no" etc., to further ensure the master-slave relation. Calling *Crusoe* his "Master", Friday consciously or unconsciously succumbs to the pressures of colonial occupation. Like mentioned above, it is Cruso who gives Friday, this name, who most likely might have already his own indigenous name. Calling him by an English name is a covert act of stripping Friday his name and identity. Therefore, "Defoe has Friday offer lifelong subjugation or so at least *Crusoe* imagines in his confident interpretation of

the semiotics of Carib gesture” (Hulme 116). Crusoe as a typical colonizer acts out his well-structured plan to settle in the island and subjugate his subject. In this sense, he does not delve into fantasy, but he is a self-conscious man, more calculative and rational towards his goal. *Robinson Crusoe* is a project that reflects largely on Eurocentric discourse. Defoe depicts the mechanism with which the British Empire has established itself on the planet. In Crusoe Defoe has projected, “the archetypal English imperialist, an exemplary planter-setter, explorer, valiant defender of his domain and benign master of an ever-increasing number of subjects on behalf of his king and country.” (Alam 28)

### Friday as a Victim of Foe’s Authorial Dominance

Coetzee does not rest only on Defoe’s set of characters to narrate the Friday’s trauma, but dramatizes the idea of his misery by creating a fictionalized version of Defoe in the form of Foe. The affairs of Friday are manipulated by Foe in the same manner Defoe does in his text. His identity denigrated by Foe under his monopolized authorship in which his role is not only to create but to control Friday’s affairs. He ignores Friday and deprives him of his point of view within the story he is supposed to write. Susan rises to defend Friday by supporting his unarticulated version of the story. She strives hard against Foe’s manoeuvres. She is, “a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire.” (Coetzee 131) Susan wants to make Friday visible from the margins and reassert his fractured identity. In her letters addressed to Mr. Foe, Susan drives attention towards Friday’s silence as, “I told you of my conviction that, if the story seems stupid, that is only because it so doggedly holds its silence. The shadow whose lack you feel is there: It is the loss of Friday’s tongue... The true story will not be heard till by art we have found a means of giving voice to Friday.” (Coetzee 117-18) In the general schemata of things, Friday’s lost tongue symbolizes all the colonially muzzled voices of the world. Friday’s tongue is lost and this loss suggests the loss of identity. It is interesting to note that the image of Friday complicates the issue of identity in the novel. His otherness remains intact throughout the novel as all attempts made to interpret Friday’s roots, behaviour and actions fail to reach any plausible end. Coetzee frames his narrative by creating a mystery

about his silenced tongue which the main narrator Susan wants to unravel. Against Foe’s outright denial of giving Friday a space in the story and focus on Susan’s own affairs before her shipwreck. She insists on choosing, “rather to tell of the island, of, myself and Cruso and Friday and what we three did there.” (Coetzee 131) Thus, Friday existence is deeply linked with Susan Barton’s approach. She is hellbent to lead the story towards a plausible conclusion by including Friday. But, her concern has to face a web of complexities. Friday’s physical condition makes him inaccessible to any approach towards his welfare. Derek Attridge in *J. M. Coetzee and The Ethics of Reading* (2004) rightly remarks:

Friday is a being wholly unfamiliar to her, in terms of race, class, gender, culture. He may be a cannibal. But Friday’s story will never be known, he has had his tongue cut out and cannot even tell the story of mutilation. His silence, his absolute otherness to her and to her words is at the heart of Barton’s story. (81)

Having developed a cordial relationship with Susan, let alone his machinations against Friday, Foe wittingly puts forward a proposal before Susan that they, “must make Friday’s silence speak, as well as the silence surrounding Friday”. (Coetzee 142) Thus, Susan makes sincere but unsuccessful attempts to teach Friday how to write. She draws several sketches in lieu with Friday’s experiences and history. These sketches may stimulate Friday to reveal the history behind Friday’s loss of tongue. She begins with a sketch of Cruso with a knife along with Friday, then enquires from Friday if Cruso cut his tongue:

‘So this morning I made two sketches. One showed the figure of a man clad in jerkin and drawers and a conical hat, with whiskers standing out in all directions and great cat-eyes. Kneeling before him was the figure of a black man, naked save for drawers, holding his hands behind his back (the hands were tied, but that could not be seen). In his left hand the whiskered figure gripped the living tongue of the other; in his right hand he held up a knife.

Of the second sketch I will tell you in a moment. ‘I took my sketches down to

Friday in the garden. "Consider these pictures, Friday," I said, "then tell me: which is the truth?" I held up the first. "Master Cruso," I said, pointing to the whiskered figure. "Friday," I said, pointing to the kneeling figure. "Knife," I said, pointing to the knife. "Cruso cut out Friday's tongue," I said; and I stuck out my own tongue and made motions of cutting it. "Is that the truth, Friday?" I pressed him, looking deep into his eyes: "Master Cruso cut out your tongue?" (Coetzee 67-68)

This experiment proves to be futile, as this does not impact Friday. He doesn't even give a clue about his perpetrators. Then Susan attempts once more to unravel the mystery:

'I brought out my second sketch. Again there was depicted little Friday, his arms stretched behind him, his mouth wide open; but now the man with the knife was a slave-trader, a tall black man clad in a burnous (a thick hooded cloak), and the knife was sickle-shaped. Behind this Moor waved the palm trees of Africa. "Slave-trader," I said, pointing to the man. "Man who catches boys and sells them as slaves. Did a slave-trader cut out your tongue, Friday? Was it a slave-trader or Master Cruso?" 'But Friday's gaze remained vacant, and I began to grow disheartened. (Coetzee 69)

Another sketch drawn by Susan features little Friday with his mouth wide open and a man with a knife, who is of course a slave-trader with a sickle-shaped knife. Susan again asks Friday if a slave trader cut out his tongue. But this experiment also leads to confusion. Friday does not try to respond. His gaze remains vacant. Susan feels that she had been wasting her time on him as she fails to reveal Friday's mysterious identity. She concludes, "the unnatural years Friday had spent with Cruso had deadened his heart, making him cold, incurious like an animal wrapt entirely in itself". (Coetzee 70) Her vivid comment on Friday's life under Cruso reflects on the terrible, devastating, debilitating and destructive nature of colonialism on the native.

### Susan Barton and Foe: Contrary Perspectives

Against this fractured narrative of Defoe about Friday, Coetzee creates a counter-narrative. Susan works as an alter-ego of Coetzee to give Friday a perspective. Via Susan Coetzee raises substantial questions related to Friday's varied misery. Her attitude is that of a gregarious observant trying to engage both Cruso and Foe and unveil their colonial dominance. Cruso is taken to the task by her. She unfolds Cruso's implicit violence against Friday replete with the lack of communication in the so-called master-slave relationship. Susan focuses on the fact that Friday's identity is denigrated and he is deprived of his self-expression. Coetzee extends this dilemma by depicting him as mutilated which symbolically furthers his lack of perspective. His lack of command over words which hinders any possibility to know how he has been wronged. Susan stands tall to help Friday to regain his identity. She fights for a representation of Friday because she thinks that a true version of life on the island is not possible without giving voice to Friday. J. M. Coetzee uses Susan Barton as a counterforce to unravel the mysteries of Friday's mutilation vis-à-vis marginalization. On the other hand, besides foregrounding the colonial nature of the master-slave relationship of Robinson Crusoe and Friday, he brings forth the character of Foe as a dominating force itself whose attitude towards Friday is that of a colonial agent bent to negate the existence of the colonial subject like Friday. His name itself is derived from the so-called canonical writer Daniel Defoe whose misrepresentation of Friday in his own text *Robinson Crusoe* is quite a provocative venture. The character of Foe parallels the canonical figure of Daniel Defoe. In view of this analogy Foe plays the role of an 'enemy' against the battered, beleaguered and bruised Friday. He is intent to deny Friday space in Susan's story, instead tries to restrict the subject matter on Susan's life before she came to the Island. He is more curious to write her story while showing deaf ear to Friday's predicament on the island. He even drafts a plot for Susan's story which contains five parts:

We therefore have five parts in all: the Loss of the daughter; the quest for the daughter in Brazil; abandonment of the quest, and the adventure of the island; assumption of the quest by the daughter; and reunion of the daughter with her

mother. It is thus that we make up a book.  
(Coetzee 117)

Foe exercises his authorial power to shape the story according to his own whims and renders Friday's affairs insignificant to be centred for the book. He suggests that Friday's account can be brought to life only by setting it within a larger story:

'The island is not a story in itself.' Said Foe gently, laying a hand on my knee. 'We can bring it to life only by setting it within larger story. By itself it is no better than a waterlogged boat drifting day after day in an empty ocean till one day, humbly and without commotion (tumult/uproar), it sinks. The island lacks light and shade. (Coetzee 117)

Foe enjoying a status as a supremacist Whiteman tries to control the identity of island and Friday in London. He has his own preferences for inclusion and exclusion which Susan may not approve of. Commenting on the story of the island further, he states, "It is like a loaf of bread. It will keep us alive certainly, if we are starved of reading, but who will prefer it when there are tastier confections and pastries to be had". (Coetzee 117) Susan protests for she chooses to narrate the affairs to him covering the island – herself, Cruso, Friday and whatever is experienced there.

Friday's inaccessibility and elusiveness become the cause of uncertainty for Susan and this becomes the 'hole' in Susan's narrative. Though, Foe wittingly attempts to make Friday speak with the possibility to include him in the larger narrative of his work, but, he turns inside out when he shows his gratitude towards the previous white masters who seemed to be responsible for muting Friday. He reveals his mindset by saying, "we deplore the barbarism of whoever maimed him, yet have we, his later masters, not reason to be secretly grateful? For as long as he is dumb we can tell ourselves his desires are dark to us, and continue to use him as we wish." (Coetzee 148) Friday's absolute silence empowers Foe's manipulation of the subject matter for his book. He justifies Friday's loss of tongue and wants to cash the lack of self-expression on the part of Friday as option for himself, because he can manipulate, modify or distort Friday's identity according to his own desire.

Coetzee presents Foe as a dark spider who watches Susan throughout in the manner of spider, we find a dual image of an artist and foe. In one of the letters addressed to Foe, Susan's writes, "what art is there to hearing confession? – the spider has as much art, that watches and waits". (Coetzee 48) Foe, like a spider has the art of spinning the web. This web is for him the creation of stories and it also serves as a means to entrap both Susan and Friday. The spider has the power to expand or contract the web as it desires in the same manner Foe's spider like power enables him to make Susan and Friday his prey:

He is like the patient spider who sits at the heart of his web waiting for his prey to come to him and when we struggle in his grasps, and he opens his jaws to devour us, and with our last breath, we cry out, he smiles a thin smile and says: "I did not ask you to come visiting, you came of your own will. (Coetzee 120)

Susan differs from Foe in her attitude towards Friday. She has a deep concern for Friday and leaves no stone unturned to retain his identity. She firmly believes that the story has no meaning if it excludes Friday. She tells Foe that Friday's desires are not dark to her. Friday has been a slave all his life and she thinks that attempts should be made so that Friday may recover his freedom, she avers, "as to Friday, how can Friday know what freedom means when he barely knows his name". (Coetzee 148)

### Friday's Resistance

In a postcolonial counter-narrative or in, whatever its sub-genres, a juxtaposition of two opposite forces is at work. If on the one hand different nuances of 'discourse' are exposed, on the other hand, to strike it back, a 'counter-discourse' mechanism is built. The dichotomies like subversion and subjugation, domination and defiance, and repression and resistance are framed in tandem. This phenomenon is manifest in *Foe*. Friday is shown as a marginalized 'other', thanks to the machinations of both Cruso and Foe, who not only drag him to the fringes, but subdue any possibility of his representation. Equally potent force created by Coetzee is Susan Barton, who is hell-bent to daringly make Friday's trauma and misery known. However, Coetzee uses the duo of Susan and

Friday as instrumental to expose the horrendous colonial policies. But, what is strikingly noticeable is Friday's own unique manner of defiance. Coetzee's approach is, "to represent the unrepresented as unrepresented to show precisely the necessity of enabling them to represent them." (Begam, *Silence* 125)

There is no denying that Friday is mutilated which impedes his resistance, nonetheless, Coetzee frames him with certain substantial codes which help him to resist in a typical manner. Whether it is the casting of petals, humming tones, dancing etc., all such moves are different forms through which he vents out his feelings and frustrations. Susan writes about Friday's unique gestures to Foe:

Dear Mr Foe,

'Some days ago Friday discovered your robes (the robes in the wardrobe, that is) and your wigs. Are they the robes of a guild-master? I did not know there was a guild of authors. The robes have set him dancing, which I had never seen him do before. In the mornings he dances in the kitchen, where the windows face east. If the sun is shining he does his dance in a patch of sunlight, holding out his arms and spinning in a circle, his eyes shut, hour after hour, never growing fatigued or dizzy. In the afternoon he removes himself to the drawing room, where the window faces west, and does his dancing there.

'In the grip of the dancing he is not himself. He is beyond human reach. I call his name and am ignored, I put out a hand and am brushed aside. All the while he dances, he makes a humming noise in his throat, deeper than his usual voice; sometimes he seems to be singing. 'For myself I do not care how much he sings and dances so long as he carries out his few duties. For I will not delve while he spins. Last night I decided I would take the robe away from him, to bring him to his senses. However, when I stole into his room he was awake, his hands already gripping the robe, which was spread over the bed, as though he read my thoughts. So I retreated. (Coetzee 92)

At Foe's behest, Susan attempts to teach Friday the English language. She gives Friday a slate. Instead of writing the English letters, Friday makes his own marks on the slate. He draws, "eyes, open eyes, each set upon a human foot: row upon row of eyes upon feet: walking eyes." (Coetzee 147) To draw the human foot is Friday's sense of presenting the suppressive measures of a colonizer like Cruso and an agent of colonizer like Foe. Friday indicates that he has been witnessing silently the whole of his maiming and afflictions he has been made a subject of. This drawing is one of his acts of defiance.

### Friday Occupying Foe's Seat

Friday occupies Foe's seat near the writing desk. He situates himself as an author as noticed by Susan:

I turned back to Friday, still busy at his writing. The paper before him was heavily smudged, as by a child unused to the pen, but there was writing on it, writing of a kind, rows and rows of the letter *o* tightly packed together. A second page lay at his elbow, fully written over, and it was the same. 'Is Friday learning to write?' asked Foe. 'He is writing, after a fashion,' I said. 'He is writing the letter *o*.' 'It is a beginning,' said Foe. 'Tomorrow you must teach him *a*...' (Coetzee 152)

Friday writes rows and rows of letter 'O' tightly packed together. Friday fills the second page in the same manner. Foe tells Susan that it is the first day of learning for Friday and tells Susan to teach Friday how to write the letter 'A', but surprisingly, Friday writes 'O', which stands for *Omega*, the last letter of every Greek alphabet, signifying the end to complacency and beginning of the challenge which henceforth, would be his forte either. The drawing of 'O' also suggests an impenetrable circle, corner less and bordered against the assaults of the dominator, Cruso's imperial power and Foe's authorial power. This is Friday's attempt to defy authority and retain his otherness outside the power of master discourse of Foe. The story of island is Friday's possession in spite of not having the power of speech or self-expression. Coetzee uses Friday as a symbol to counter the dominance and to voice on behalf of the

colonially oppressed people of the world, thus, universalizes the themes of post-colonialism in this monumental work.

### Friday's Secret Codes

It is interesting to note that Friday has his own secret codes through which he communicates. Coetzee makes references to those codes a number of times in the novel. These codes are embedded in Friday's culture. Below given is a sound instance:

'Curious to find what he had been casting on the waves, I waited that evening till he had gone to fill the water-bowls. Then I searched under his mat and discovered a little bag with a drawstring, and turning it out found some few white petals and buds from the brambles (any thorny shrub) that were at the time flowering on parts of the island. So I concluded he had been making an offering to the god of the waves to cause the fish to run plentifully, or performing some other such superstitious observance. (Coetzee 31)

The mysterious marks on the slate, throwing petals in the sea, humming the tune of a song, playing the flute, dancing in Foe's scarlet robe, are means of expression to evade the colonizer/colonized binary. One of these codes is thus dancing the purpose of which Susan herself reveals, i.e., to show her body further mutilated. He is also castrated besides being sliced by his tongue. This has doubled his silence. Though Friday's silence is much focussed in this context, but, by bestowing upon him such secret codes of Friday, J. M. Coetzee does not disqualify him for having a history. Notwithstanding, if Foe denies, Susan strives to retrieve it for Friday.

### Friday's Silence as a tool to Defy

Friday's silence is not so ordinary, but it functions as a weapon of protest to foil Foe's attempt of setting the narrative according to his own desire. His silence turns out to be a symbolically potent force against all his dominating agencies. His silence is one of the different tropes which he uses to defy. Coetzee does not frame

his silence in abstract terms, but unfolds as a concrete force of protest. The effects of this vengeful silence are revealed to Foe by Susan:

When I lived in your house I would sometimes live awake upstairs listening to the pulse of blood in my ears and to the silence from Friday below, a silence that rose up to the stairway like smoke, like a welling of black smoke. Before long I could not breathe, I would feel I was stifling in my bed. My lungs, my heart, my head were full of black smoke. (Coetzee 118)

Coetzee compares Friday's silence with smoke. This simile enhances the aesthetic impact of the idea of silence. Friday is rendered as dark as smoke, but his presence and vibrancy equally permeate. Smoke also generates an amount of mystery; thus, the vivid presence of the dark mysterious smoke symbolizes the Friday's concrete silence which has been haunting his caretaker, Susan. She is unable to represent Friday's narrative by herself. She needs Friday's own discourse for which Friday must acquire his speech. Since, all attempts to make Friday speak have failed, so how does he wrest a perspective? To bring this entire fiasco to the fore, itself is tantamount to how Friday's concern is voiced. He is borrowed from Defoe's text, foregrounded from margins and set as an exemplary colonized 'other' perpetrated in the colonial textual discourse.

### Ending and Friday's Defiance

The fourth and the last section of the novel which does not exceed some five pages, can wholly be taken as the ending of this novel. In this part, a third person omniscient narrator figures whose addressee is unspecified, but one can safely assume that it may be the reader. This narrator visits Foe's house twice. In the first visit, he passes by a little girl, wrapped by her face in a grey woollen scarf, on the landing. He finds Foe and Susan lying in bed together. Moreover, the narrator finds Friday stretched full length on his back:

I find the man Friday stretched at full length on his back. I touch his feet, which are hard as wood, then feel my way up the soft, heavy stuff in which his body is

wrapped, to his face. Though his skin is warm, I must search here and there before I find the pulse in his throat. It is faint, as if his heart beat in a far-off place. I tug lightly at his hair. It is indeed like lambswool. His teeth are clenched. I press a fingernail between the upper and lower rows, trying to part them. Face down I lie on the floor beside him, the smell of old dust in my nostrils. After a long while, so long I might even have been asleep, he stirs and sighs and turns on to his side. The sound his body makes is faint and dry, like leaves falling over leaves. (Coetzee 154)

Friday's wretched condition and sufferings reach to the pinnacle in their implicit expression in the above excerpt. Coetzee lays more emphasis on his body and the bruises thereon. This account generates a lot of pathos about Friday. His situation is haunting and nightmarish. The whole of his body clearly appears to be battered. His feet have stiffened as wood. The narrator becomes more curious towards this 'child of conflict', lies on the floor beside Friday who smells the old dust in his nostrils. The mention of 'old dust' calls for more keen attention. It takes reader back to the Island governed by Cruso and clues at the marred and fragmented self of Friday under him. Friday's sighing makes things more disturbing. What he could not express through words, something else has to work for him to share his trauma. So, it is his varied gesturing which makes million-dollar words to be heard and comprehended. His bodily condition thus, begins to act to make its condition more visible and known to the world. His body further unveils its pains as:

I raise a hand to his face. His teeth part. I press closer, and with an ear to his mouth lie waiting. At first there is nothing. Then, if I can ignore the beating of my own heart, I begin to hear the faintest faraway roar...From his mouth, without a breath, issue the sounds of the island. (Coetzee 154)

What is more noticeable in Friday's body is his mouth and its functioning. The narrator's curiosity for Friday keeps on increasing. He gets himself closer with an ear to Friday's mouth and waits. He hears "the faintest faraway roar", like the roar of waves in a seashell. Then he witnesses the fiercest outcome

from Friday. It comes from his mouth, unwittingly and unusually, in the form of the sounds of Island recalling the history of wrongs incurred upon him. Therefore, the history that Susan is not able to tell or narrate is in Friday's tongueless mouth. Foe, the supposed mediator of Friday's story revealed his true colours and figured himself as an agent of the 'colonial metropolitan centre' by not giving Friday a perspective in his story. But, nevertheless, Friday carries the story of the island with him in his body. Even though he is mutilated to voice out his misery, but his body itself becomes a force to narrate his trauma under colonial occupation and marginalization, thus he is the sole possessor of the story of the island. He breathes the island and the narrator smells, listens and feels it within Friday.

Furthermore, Friday in his alcove is more keenly observed by the narrator who finds, "about his neck — is a scar like a necklace, left by a rope or chain." (Coetzee 155) Thus, Friday's body again becomes a vivid and overt narrative itself. The scar on his neck is the terrible mark of oppression and inhuman treatment shown towards the colonized subject or the marginalized other. The scar on the neck reveals the story written on his body parts narrating his atrophy and trauma – his pains and suffering. Though Friday cannot speak with his tongue or through his spoken word, it is the body that is set as an alternative to language in order to expose the enervating nature of colonial policy.

### **Dreamlike Manner**

The extreme end of the novel takes a dreamlike mode. The unnamed narrator descends into a ship wreck where he comes across the bodies of Foe, Susan, and Friday. The narrator is, "gripped by the current" and then "the boat bobs away" and sees "on the waters are the petals cast by Friday." (Coetzee 155) The ending is replete with the presence of Friday. When the narrator proceeds and ducks his head under water, he finds the dark mass of the wreck. He finds Susan, and her dead captain. Finally, the narrator finds Friday whom he asks, "what is this ship?" But this is not a place of words. Each syllable as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday". (Coetzee 157) The novel approaches to a tangible conclusion whereby Coetzee heightens the



impact of Friday's body which had been afflicted and tortured under occupation. But, his body at the end turns out to be a potent force to reckon. It is a story. Coetzee takes the plot to some surreal realms and wants to clarify Friday's affair in his own domain. It's Friday's world, wordless, but "where bodies are their own signs". Bodies narrate their stories. Friday's maimed, tortured, battered and bruised body has a 'say'. It will affect all the narratives constructed about Friday.

The narrator, henceforth, moves to witness a strange scene. He himself cannot 'speak' clearly underwater, so each interrogatory word is filled with water and diffused. In this domain, none can speak, but Friday, who strikes sensationally through his unique codes:

His mouth opens. From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through his body and out upon me; it lasses through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face. (Coetzee 157)

This scene is highly symbolic. While Friday remains mute throughout the novel, it is only now that he opens his mouth and the others keep silent. The narrator does find Susan and her dead Captain, but, neither he nor this duo will be able to speak. All else has failed even, "Susan's narrative and all that develops from it lie buried here: the story of Susan, Cruso and Friday has never been written". (Attwell 116) The only story which emerges is through Friday's beleaguered body. His reasserting and reaffirming body is further depicted in action as under:

His mouth opens. From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It Rows up through his body and out upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face. (Coetzee 157)

The wordless, continuous stream coming out of Friday's mouth probably indicates a repressed history that, though unrepresented, is the fit subject matter. Because Friday has a history, but it is what colonial tropes cannot do justice with, neither Defoe nor Foe, but Coetzee through Friday's strange sense of reassertion? This slow, but strange voice from Friday's mouth reaching to extreme ends of the earth, also suggests the power and impact of his voice. Coetzee succeeds in bestowing Friday a perspective which was denied by Defoe in his own text. It expresses the cry for freedom of a silent observer enslaved under colonial machinery to reach the ears of the people throughout the world.

Therefore, the impossible task of making Friday's silent voice heard is replaced by an attempt to make it solidly visible. Coetzee makes the reader experience a silent voice which was absent in the earlier master narratives. For Susan, Friday is a gap in which the possibility of telling the truth breaks down due to lack of evidence. For Foe, Friday's absolute passivity and apparent lack of desire and motivation make him impossible to characterize as anything other than an inert object. The ending, thus, provides a solution. The plot enters a symbolic domain and the bruises on Friday's body become words for him and his fractured self a story. Thus, though a silent and marginalized "other" Friday makes this typical way of narration work for him.

### **Cruso/e's Diminishing Stature**

Coetzee in depiction of Cruso weaves two realms. He is a typical colonial master, governs Friday's native island and oppresses him with varied forms of violence. However, equally important is the recreation of Cruso as an ageing and in-active haggard with an absolute lack of sense of maintenance. This weakening state is a deliberate act of defiance projected by Coetzee. Unlike Crusoe's highly adventurous stature in Defoe's text, Coetzee drags him into the depths of indolence and inaction, both mental and physical. His image is that of a culprit who is taken to the task for his transgressions. Coetzee, besides exposing his colonial attitude deflates his stature and renders him at the shorter end of the stick. He is projected as a zestless, un-heroic, short-sighted, lacking interest and curiosity about things. Thus, what appears is that

Coetzee's Cruso is out-and-out opposite of the mighty Crusoe of Defoe's text. According to Susan, when she tells him her story he simply watches in silence, showing no further curiosity and asking nothing. He does not want to leave the Island which has, nonetheless narrowed his outlook towards the world. He is shown unexposed to the vast world outside:

'So, I early began to see it was a waste of breath to urge Cruso to save himself. Growing old on his island kingdom with no one to say him nay had so narrowed his horizon- when the horizon all around us was so vast and so majestic! – that he had come to be persuaded he knew all there was to know about the world. (Coetzee 13)

Coetzee, further debunks Cruso's state by presenting him as dirty, untidy haggard, with the ugly habit of snoring and grinding teeth during his sleep:

'Sometimes Cruso kept me awake with the sounds he made in his sleep chiefly the grinding of his teeth. For so far had his teeth decayed that it had grown a habit with him to grind them together constantly, those that were left, to still the ache. Indeed, it was no pretty sight to see him take his food in his unwashed hands and gnaw (trouble/bother) at it on the left side, where it hurt him less. But Bahia, and the life I had lived there, had taught me not to be dainty. (Coetzee 19)

Cruso in *Foe* is dull and boring with no stories to share, nor is he interested in others' lives:

Cruso had no stories to tell of the life he had lived as a trader and planter before the shipwreck. He did not care how I came to be in Bahia or what I did there. When I spoke of England and of all the things I intended to see and do when I was rescued, he seemed not to hear me. (Coetzee 34)

Thus, unlike Defoe's Crusoe who is a passionate adventurer-cum-explorer, full of the colonist's spirit, Coetzee's Cruso is equally reverse. Coetzee creates Cruso in the postcolonial world which destabilizes the colonial dominant narrative. If Defoe's Crusoe

suggests 'power and dominance', Coetzee's Cruso represents the diminishing power of the colonist.

### Significance of Footprints

Susan's resistance is most clearly expressed in a direct refutation of the seminal image of Defoe's work: the footprint discovered by Robinson Crusoe in the sand. Just before the encounter with Friday Crusoe, "was exceedingly surpriz'd with the Print of a Man's naked Foot on the shore...I slept non that Night; ... but I so was embarrass'd with my own frightful Ideas of the Thing, that I form'd nothing but dismal Imaginations to myself." (Defoe 153-54) Crusoe is shocked to discover a man's footprint in an otherwise seemingly uninhabited island. His initial assumption is that this may be devil's footmark, then supposes that cannibals may be living in this region. This new development frightens Crusoe and cautions him to arm himself and be watchful against the cannibals. In *Foe*, Coetzee repudiates the entire idea of the footprint and the concoction of the cannibal story thereafter. This happens when Susan blatantly denies any presence of the footprint, "I saw no cannibals, and if they came after nightfall and fled before the dawn, they left no footprint behind." (Coetzee 54) By this contradiction, Coetzee seems to debunk the notion of the Cannibals' presence which a postcolonial critic can assume an excuse for Crusoe to dwell in this island and rescue the natives. In this manner Coetzee too, as a postcolonial revisionary writer dilutes the sense of authority of Defoe's narrative.

### The Problem of Language

The issue of language taught to Friday too works as an intertextual element linking the two texts. In *Robinson Crusoe* Defoe raises the issue of communication between the colonizer and the colonized, primarily the gap which gets bridged by virtue of Cruso teaching English to Friday. Soon after saving this victim from the cannibals Crusoe names him "Friday" who most likely already had a name. Then he introduces English language as the medium of teaching and learning on the island. Language contains force and power more than that of arms. It is an important trope which colonizers use both in building up a discourse to

manipulate the affairs of their colonial subject and also a cultural construct which they intrude with and try to impose it on the natives. After rescuing Crusoe orders Friday to call him “master” henceforth, and starts to teach him some English words for “yes”, “no”, so that he can convert him to a civil Christian “slave”. He teaches him only those words which are useful for the master-slave relation and helpful for dependence nit for Friday’s protest. The same inclusive-exclusive dichotomy is manoeuvred by Crusoe is framed in *Foe*. Coetzee shows Crusoe still governing the island as Susan narrates, saying, “with these words I presented myself to Robinson Crusoe, in the days when he still ruled over his island...”

In *Foe*, Coetzee retains the language issue though moulds it to fit his own manner. Cruso in *Foe* as well, is not inclined to teach Friday at length, but works out his selective approach. He teaches him only those words which satisfy his own needs:

One evening, as I was preparing our supper, my hands being full, I turned to Friday and said, “Bring more wood, Friday.” Friday heard me, I could have sworn, but he did not stir. So I said the word “Wood” again, indicating the fire; upon which he stood up, but did no more. Then Cruso spoke. “Firewood, Friday,” he said; and Friday went off and fetched wood from the woodpile. ‘My first thought was that Friday was like a dog that heeds but one master; yet it was not so. “Firewood is the word I have taught him,” said Cruso. “Wood he does not know.” I found it strange that Friday should not understand that firewood was a kind of wood, as pinewood is a kind of wood, or poplar wood; but I let it pass. Not till after we had eaten, when we were sitting watching the stars, as had grown to be our habit, did I speak again. “How many words of English does Friday know?” I asked. “As many as he needs,” replied Cruso. “This is not England, we have no need of a great stock of words.” (Coetzee 21)

In this exclusive approach, Cruso believes that Friday has no need of words, whatever he needs is to maintain for Cruso, a fruitful correspondence.

## The Issue of Journal

The issue of keeping and maintaining journal/letters also is an intertextual element linking the two texts *Robinson Crusoe* and *Foe*. Coetzee has adopted an epistolary mode in *Foe*. The letters bear the resemblance of journal entries maintained in Defoe’s novel in order to put into records the daily events on the Island he occupies. Thus, like the maintenance of journals Susan in her letters does the same to record the life lived on the island with Cruso and Friday. Hence, the adoption of the epistolary mode is to match Crusoe’s maintenance of journal in *Robinson Crusoe*. Moreover, Coetzee in his twentieth century novel writes back to the eighteenth century classic in the same trope of epistolary mode of writing fiction. This mode otherwise was championed in the eighteenth century by writers like Samuel Richardson whose most prominent epistolary novel is *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), but Coetzee makes a handy use of it and responds via the same apparatus to challenge the dominant narrative. Therefore, epistolary mode being instrumental to maintain records features as another intertextual element between the two texts to serve the purpose of revision.

## CONCLUSION

The current paper primarily found that ‘Revisionary writing’ as a sub-genre has attained a vital space in the contemporary World Literatures by developing an inter-textual dialogue to unfold the nuances latent in the ‘old texts’. Moreover, it is safe to argue that J. M. Coetzee in *Foe* has succeeded in building up a critical dialogue between the spatially and temporally distinctive texts to destabilize the biased Eurocentric discourse lying implicit in Defoe’s colonial/imperial text. Coetzee frames a nexus between two novels’ plot consequential to foreground the marginalized subject and his suffering under colonial dominance. In this view, he revisits Friday, muzzled by his point-of-view in Defoe’s textual world, and centres him in his text to reflect on his misery and show the colonial machinations insidiously at work in the ‘colonial discourse’ of the pre-text. Equally, apposite is the treatment given to Cruso/e whose hegemony is triumphantly challenged by Susan Barton’s stern narrative. Furthermore, this paper critically argued to

show how Coetzee revisits the so-called canon of Defoe with a 'contrapuntal' reader's approach to 'open it out both to what went into it and what its author excluded'. Therefore, *Foe* comprises the essentials of being a monumental text in the sphere of 'revisionary writing' or 'Canonical counter-discourse'.

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