RECYCLING THE REMNANTS OF THE 'MASTER NARRATIVE': DYNAMICS OF (RE)MAKING THE SELF AND THE OTHER IN J.M. COETZEE'S "FOE"

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Abstract: This paper examines marginality as a kernel of resistance to hegemonic representation as well as a site of self-fashioning in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986/1987). Conceived as a counter-narrative to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719/2007), Coetzee's novel (re)narrativises or, in a sense, recycles the contingently scattered fragments of alterity, (under)represented as rudimentary and insignificant remnants of the original (hi)story in Defoe's text. Coetzee's text, alternately, opens up a dynamic space of renegotiation that shifts from monologue to dialogue; from narrow ethnocentric and androcentric mindsets that exclude the Other to an awareness of the Self of its own limitations and lack of autonomy to articulate its sameness without harbouring a productive and humanising relationship with difference. Such an ethical and existential necessity for intersubjectivity urges the Self to accommodate alterity as a central and significant agent in the construction of its own subjectivity. While Susan Barton attempts to write (about) the silenced and oppressed Friday, namely, by unfolding or deciphering his 'true' story, she ironically ends up rewriting herself and concurrently empowering her once repressed and spurned narrative by converting it into a site of resistance to and subversion of the dominant discourse of the Centre.

Keywords: centre, margin, remnants, (post)colonial discourse, resistance, rewriting

1. INTRODUCTION

J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986/1987) has been regarded, at least within the critical spectrum of Western literature, as a twentieth-century

narrative that attempts to write back to the eighteenth-century literary canon, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719/2007). Defoe's novel is not just a text that marks the debut of the English novel, but it is more importantly a 'master'[1] text that reverberates logocentric and Eurocentric discourses of early European colonial military and political-economic extension beyond the old continent's geographical limits. In this context, most of the postcolonial critics have highlighted the colonial and imperial bearings and implications of Defoe's text, readdressed in Coetzee's *Foe*. To mention but a few, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak stresses the undermining effect of Coetzee's novel as it exposes the slippages and egocentric excesses of the white colonial demeanour in *Robinson Crusoe* as a text representing or speaking for the Western Centre. For her, "*Foe* is more about spacing and displacement […]. This is perhaps the result of the colonial white's look at the metropolitan classic" (Spivak 1990, 7). Ayo Kehinde, respectively, has also placed Defoe's text within colonial economics by contending that, "It is an early eighteenth-century testament to the superiority of rational civilisation over nature and savagery, a text that foregrounds the developing British Empire's self-representation through encounters with its colonial Others" (Kehinde 2006, 98). Last but not least, in his reading of *Foe*, David Attwell maintains that, "[b]ased on a revision of *Robinson Crusoe*, the novel [Coetzee's *Foe*] develops a characterology of the relations of power between the metropolitan centre and the settler-colonial and native sectors of colonial society" (1993, 103-104). The intersections between these critical positions revolve around the centre/margin dichotomy characterising the encounters between Self and Other in colonial contexts.

As an attempt to revisit the critical hub concerning the dialectic between centre and margin, this paper claims that the margin, with all its different connotations, could be read as an enabling space of mobility through which Coetzee, so to argue, manages to recycle the remnants of Defoe's narrative by giving them a subversive dimension that (dis)locates all what is distanced, misrepresented, underrepresented, and silenced at the centre of his novel, *Foe*. In this

vein, this paper examines, at a first step, Coetzee's rewriting of Crusoe, the central protagonist-narrator and enunciator of discourse in Defoe's novel, as 'Cruso,' a third-person character whose early death by the end of the first chapter displaces him on the fringe of the narrative. Then, the discussion orients towards the introduction of Susan Barton not only as a 'female' protagonist-narrator, raising by that gender empowerment or disempowerment issues, especially, in her triadic power relation with Cruso on the island then with Mr Foe in England, but above all, as the central consciousness of the narrative whose encounter with Friday has instigated an ethical transformation of her subjectivity. The inclusion of the figure of alterity in the story turns Susan Barton's narrative into a permeable thread pervaded with silences and apertures from which the Other peeps out or "irrupts", using Derek Attridge's term[2]. This falls within the scope of what Jacques Derrida designates as the unexpected presence of the 'arrivant', whose sudden 'visitation' (over)takes the Self into an act of awaiting without being waiting for[3]. The last articulation in this paper explores the way Coetzee puts at play the different extents and twists of Friday's character by presenting his alterity as a form of un-identity, an incommensurable conundrum that not solely interrupts Susan's adamant endeavour to bring her narrative to a teleological significant conclusion, but it equally disrupts the liberal humanist and logocentric conceptualization of the other as an intelligible and containable entity, bound to the power systems of representation and hierarchization.

2. *FOE*'S CRUSO: THE LEGACY

In Coetzee's *Foe*, the poetic and narrative complexities of Crusoe as the eponymous protagonist and narrator in Defoe's novel are conspicuously peeled away. The omission of the 'e' in the spelling of his first name, coupled with referring to him in the third person, which indicates his loss of the subject-position in the enunciation of

discourse, make out of Coetzee's Cruso an artful reduction to rudimentary and archetypal traits of Defoe's Crusoe. Such a minimisation is not so much an act of curtailment or limitation of Crusoe's character and characterisation as it is a process of revisioning through which Coetzee reconstructs a radically different character with a different agenda, more than just being a mere doppelganger. By being attributed an allegorical dimension[4] more than a realistic one, Cruso is staged in Coetzee's text as a dislocated, decontextualized and probably dehistoricized version of the original Crusoe in Defoe's novel. This is reflected in the dramatic change in the plot, the course of events, and the symbolic and discursive construction of the character itself in the text.

While Crusoe is offered the chance to be rescued and transferred back to England, which probably opens the door for further colonial explorations and adventures, the Cruso of *Foe* is not. Commenting on Cruso's early exit from the narrative, Jane Poyner contends that "whilst Cruso, the essential colonizer in *Robinson Crusoe*, is relegated to the margins of Coetzee's story: not only is he supplanted by Barton as narrator and author of the adventure, he also dies in the early stages of the narrative, not making the ideologically all-important journey home" (Poyner 2009, 92). Cruso's teleological journey towards achieving the colonial project, as emphasised in Defoe's novel, is cut short in Coetzee's narrative. In *Foe*, Cruso could not survive the act of leaving the island, his dominion, where he is the absolute and incontestable "Master" (22) and "the true king of his island" (*Foe* 1987, 17). Except in the first chapter of the novel, his existence in the rest of the narrative takes the form of a mere matrimonial honorific that provides Susan Barton with a social cover or umbrella to survive the detriments of misjudgement as a single and helpless woman in a male-dominated sphere. On the board of the ship taking her back home, Susan Barton is advised by the captain to "call Cruso [her] husband and declare [they] had been shipwrecked together, to make [her] path easier on board" (42), that is, to avoid or at least to put a curb on the high risk of being sexually assaulted or abused by the crew.

Shortly after reaching her homeland, England, homeless and penniless, Susan finds herself compelled to live in a clandestine way in "lodgings in Clock Lane" where she has to "go by the name of *Mrs Cruso*" (47, emphasis added). Apart from the first chapter, Cruso's presence in the narrative is reversed into an absence, where he is dwindled to a lingering memory of a shadowy spectre that would haunt Susan Barton's story.

Unlike Crusoe, who is presented as an enthusiastic adventurer, an explorer, and an emblem of European expansionist spirit, entrusted with the mission of civilizing and dominating his surroundings[5], Cruso is depicted in Coetzee's narrative as an atrophic and callous figure whose only interest or passion, little if any he has, is cantered upon building terraces as means to impose territorial control over the island through colonial modes of mapping and dissection of colonized space. From the very beginning of the narrative, the staggering presence of the colonial apparatus is indicated by the process of compartmentalising space on the island. The power acquisition of space is metaphorically galvanised in the Cruso's building of terraces and fences on the island. In the first chapter of the novel, all the events and actions take place in an uncharted and unknown territory, designated by Susan Barton as 'Cruso's Island'. The only physical markings that Susan pays attention to are Cruso's cottage, built over a hill and surrounded by terraces. When inquisitively asked by Susan about his reticence to make use of other possible tools and resources in the wreckage for other activities like farming and carpentry instead of limiting his quotidian labour to building terraces only, he sternly responds: "The planting is reserved for those who come after us and have the foresight to bring seed. I only clear the ground for them" (33). Cruso seems to act as a founding father of the early European colonies, where he installs boundaries and erects barriers separating civilisation from savagery and open wilderness, especially the threat of possible attacks by "apes" as well as "cannibals" (14). "Clearing ground and piling stones" (33), as he explains to Susan, becomes his ultimate reason for being, the supreme work and achievement of his

existence. Shortly after having been rescued by a ship, he does not survive. Without his territorial markings on the island, he dramatically succumbs to his illness and dies.

Cruso is depicted as a white man of European descent who settles on the island. As a coloniser, he spreads his power not only through the domination of space but through the control of colonial subjects. His ideology of 'the white man's burden' is realised through his control over Friday, the second inhabitant of the island. Cruso is presented as an enigma in the story; there is no account of his earlier life or inner feelings. Although he is not muted like Friday, they both share the same trait of having a recondite mode of existence. Accordingly, there is no real communication between Friday and Cruso. Silence, isolation, loneliness, and a lack of linguistic exchange characterise the relationship between the two characters. While the 'tongueless' Friday is robbed of his voice, Cruso seems to be reticent to keep a record of his (hi)story. Reflecting on Cruso's unwillingness to keep a diary, Susan realises that "Cruso kept no journal […] because he lacked the inclination to keep one" (16). She seems to settle with the idea that "Cruso on his island is a better thing than the true Cruso, tight-lipped and sullen in an alien England" (35). Commenting on Susan Barton's frustration at Cruso's abstruse and lethargic posture, David Attwell argues, "Coetzee's Cruso is unmoved by Susan's desire for authorisation. In fact, in his taciturn resistance and self-absorption, his refusal to keep a journal, his reluctance to do anything to save himself, he is quite unlike his model (being closer, if anything, to *Defoe's* model)" (Attwell 1993, 107). Probably, Coetzee's deviation from the original model is not so much a recreation of a new model, but it would be rather a distillation process that brings to the front the representational and discursive aspects underpinning Defoe's Crusoe. This can be detected in the master-slave relation between Cruso and Friday in *Foe*. The former is presented as the archetype of the white male coloniser in the text. Besides giving strict commands and orders to Friday, Cruso forces the latter to do hard labour by assigning him the task of carrying stones to build terraces

around the cottage. When Susan Barton asks Cruso about the reason why Friday does not know many English words, he informs her that there is "no need of a great stock of words" (21). Cruso refuses the idea of educating Friday; he indirectly gets rid of English as a language that could connect Friday with Western culture as a set of ideas, values, attitudes, and social mores. For him, the basic needs and pragmatic knowledge, rather than the sophisticated manners, would be enough to teach Friday practical commands.

While striving to teach Friday language to break his silence, a task ironically inherited from Cruso, Susan Barton fails short of surmounting the limits of the Eurocentric self-representation of the white man as being the centre of civilisation, ordained with a mission to enlighten other people(s). In her letter to Mr Foe, the novelist in the story, she confesses: "I tell myself I talk to Friday to educate him out of darkness and silence. But is that the truth? There are times when benevolence deserts me, and I use words only as the shortest way to subject him to my will. At such times, I understand why Cruso preferred not to disturb his muteness" (60). Feeling ruffled by Friday's irrevocable silence, Susan Barton understands that her humane sympathy for him is not enough to establish an interactive pattern of communication. She seems to retrograde in her stance on the Other, though with an undertone of shame, by conforming to Cruso's colonial utilisation of education as an instrument of power—camouflaged as a white man's responsibility to educate and civilise colonial subjects—that serves as its ultimate goal to modulate and eventually subjugate the colonised.

3. Susan Barton: The Ethical Burden

Besides Cruso and Friday, the two male characters on the island, Susan Barton is introduced as the only female inhabitant, "my name is Susan Barton, and I am a woman alone" (10). Although she stands out as the main voice of the text, Susan Barton is represented as a denigrated and historically silenced figure striving to claim an

authorial voice in an androcentric space. At the opening scene, Susan Barton is first depicted as a powerless and vulnerable person, her "hands blistered", her "back burned", her "body ached". She was nearly half-naked in her "petticoat" (1), struggling to reach the island. Being a white European lady does hardly spare Susan the fate of being treated as the third subject on the island because she is merely a 'woman.' She is subjugated both as a castaway and a different gender. During her stay, her movement around the island is harnessed by Cruso as she is not allowed to go beyond the terraces. Regardless of sharing the same ethnic and cultural background, the relationship between Susan and Cruso is by no means intimate and mutual. Cruso does not show any interest in knowing about her story before reaching the island. He sees her only as an unwanted burden on 'his' island. He is the king of the island, his "castle" (9), where everybody should comply with his rules.

Notwithstanding her efforts at surmounting the barriers elevated around Cruso's subjectivity, Barton fails to establish a reciprocal and equivalent relationship with him. In her pursuit of self-positioning, she uses her charms as a female to attract Cruso. Her body becomes the only space to confront men in her life since her voice is suppressed. She is sexually abused and humiliated by the mutinous crew before reaching the island. On the island, she gives herself to Cruso in the hope of experiencing a romantic adventure—the utopian pattern of Adam and Eve in paradise. But her venture comes to no avail as she regretfully admits, "Cruso did not use me again. On the contrary, he held himself as distant as if nothing had passed between us" (35). Cruso shuns her overture as he barely regards her as a commensurate match or partner in any love relationship. Acknowledging her failure to communicate with him, Susan comes to the conclusion that, "After years of unquestioned and solitary mastery, he sees his realm invaded and has tasks set upon him by a woman" (25). Bearing such a deeply ingrained misogynistic mindset, Cruso views Susan Barton solely as a female castaway who has to be subjected to his will. However, Cruso's illness and death on the ship while leaving the island hardly put

Susan on the track of liberation from subalternation and dependency; rather, it takes her into another path of struggle for her autonomy and agency as a storyteller.

Shortly after settling in England, Susan Barton embarks on an epistolary journey with Mr Foe, the novelist who is supposed to write her story on the island. At first, she bears high expectations that the latter would treat her respectfully as an intellectual equivalent, away from the bigoted stereotypical representation of women as marginalized weak creatures. Nevertheless, to her misfortune, Mr Foe turns out not to be so much different from Cruso in terms of their outlook on women. During the face-to-face encounter between Susan Barton and Mr Foe, the acts of subjugation are carried on, but this time they are overtly mixed with some insinuations of a possible sexual exploitation. In the scene in which Susan Barton meets Mr Foe in his house, he offers her accommodation in his private "lodging house" (130) with a "soft bed" (137). After making love, Susan realises that despite the social and spatiotemporal distances separating the two men (Mr Foe and Cruso), they are not too much different in inscribing their phallocentric statements of power on her female body. While in bed with Mr Foe, Susan Barton confesses, "I might have thought myself in Cruso's arms again; for they were men of the same time of life, and heavy in the lower body, though neither was stout; and their way with a woman too was much the same" (139). After two failed attempts at establishing a reciprocal pattern of interaction with the two white males in the story, Susan Barton realises that she is framed within a representational power grid that promotes the deprecating assumptions and clichés about women as supine, inferior, and thus othered figures of society. In an act of revulsion and resistance to processes of containment, Susan reclaims her independent agency in the face of censorship imposed by Mr Foe. Addressing him, she exasperatedly declares: "I am a substantial being with a substantial history in the world. I choose rather to tell of the island, of myself and Cruso and Friday and what we three did there: for I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to

her own desire" (131). Susan Barton recognises that she is doubly subalternized, not so much for being a homeless and social castaway as it is for being a woman in a world dominated by men. After meeting Mr Foe in person, it is her voice as a storyteller which becomes the target of processes of modulation and restriction exerted by patriarchy. In order to escape such unbalanced relationships with Cruso and Mr Foe, where she occupies the position of the oppressed, Susan resorts to Friday, the historically oppressed Other, to forge out a dynamic and liberating form of subjecthood operating in a more enabling space of intersubjectivity, away from the rigid and monolithic structures of her cultural identity.

Susan Barton's encounter with Friday correlates with an ethical awakening that empowers her to challenge the binary or either-or logic encapsulated in the dominant Eurocentric and androcentric discourses present in the novel, where Friday is (mis)represented as a 'negro' and, respectively, Susan is (under)represented as a 'female.' While the two white male characters, Cruso and Mr Foe, fail to accommodate an intersubjective relationship with the ethnically (Friday) and sexually (Susan) different Other(s) as they maintain their monadic and narcissistic posture throughout the narrative, it is Susan Barton who is endowed with the propensity to embrace a fluid and post-binary form of subjectivity that entitles her to take an ethical action towards the tortured and silenced Other.

Unlike Defoe's novel, where the encounter with Friday is a minor and inconsequential event within Crusoe's solipsistic and self-centred narrative, Susan Barton's stumbling upon Friday at the opening scene of Coetzee's novel has a pivotal effect on the subsequent events in the story as it exposes the stereotypes and clichés upon which the representation of alterity is predicated. At the first sight of Friday, Susan describes him as follows: "A dark shadow fell upon me, not of a cloud but of a man with a dazzling halo about him […]. He was black: a Negro with a head of fuzzy wool, naked save for a pair of rough drawers. I lifted myself and studied the flat face, the small dull eyes, the broad nose, the thick

lips, the skin not black but a dark grey, dry as if coated with dust" (6). The physical portrait of Friday in *Foe* is not just a recycling of the remnants of Defoe's Friday; it is rather a thorough rewriting or recreation of the character, more probably for a different finality. Friday in *Robinson Crusoe* is depicted as young, vivid, with a close *European* physical allure rather than that pertaining to a *negro*: "he had all the Sweetness and Softness of an *European* […]. His Hair was long and black, not curled like Wool; his Forehead very high, and large, and a great Vivacity and sparkling Sharpness in his Eyes […] His Face was round and plump; his Nose small, not flat like the Negroes" (Defoe 1716/2007, 173). If we juxtapose the two texts, all the physical traits of the eighteenth century's Friday are entirely reversed in the twentieth century's one. Coetzee disentangles Defoe's Friday from the colonial/imperialist representation which gives him an air of 'European-ness,' by reappropriating him his African-ness or 'negroness,' as referred to by Susan Barton in *Foe*. By doing so, Coetzee manages to reposition Friday a priori to or beyond the grasp of the colonial discursive mechanisms of othering by presenting his otherness as a disjunction in the text, defying acts of containment and normalisation.

In colonial discourse, the process of othering produces and maintains an image of the Other as an appendix to the Self, where the former is only an alienated and deformed construct. In "Three Women's Texts and Critique of Imperialism", Spivak maintains that the image of the Other is an inevitable corollary of imperialism. She holds that "the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self" (1985, 253). The colonial process of othering, therefore, tends to produce a distorted image of the Other, whether it be positive or negative, authentic or imaginary, that serves an ultimate end: defining the Self. Nevertheless, Coetzee's reference to Friday as a "dark shadow", as mentioned earlier, seems to go beyond the idea that the Other is so much an oblique construction, an object of desire or fear that re-echoes and in a way reverberates the Self. Rather, the Other's

spectral and obscure presence, especially in a number of Coetzee's texts, not only bears witness to the colonial history of violent silencing and eclipsing of alterity, but it more importantly prompts an ethical process of transformation that some Coetzeean characters experience[6]. Mike Marais contends that some Coetzeean novels suggest that "the self's encounter with the ungraspability of the other" (Marais 2001, 118) reflects Coetzee's ethical concern with alterity as "he refuses to attempt to represent the Other in his fiction" (Marais 2000, 161). The enigmatic and shadowy air shrouding the Barbarian girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and Vercueil in *Age of Iron*, for instance, has placed the Magistrate and Mrs Curren respectively into a moral quandary as they both end up questioning their own sense of belonging to the colonising group[7].

In *Foe*, despite the ostensible racial and cultural chasm separating the two characters at the beginning of the narrative, the first contact between them on the beach is described in physical terms, emphasising the corporeal proximity as a substitute platform of human mutuality rather than the ideology-laden discursive structures of representation embedded in language. At her first sight of Friday, Susan has recourse to the mainstream stereotypical representation of blacks as uncivilised and savage people when she thinks that he is one of the cannibals. Nonetheless, after giving her water and then offering his back to carry her, all her fears dissipate after such an act of hospitality translated into body intimacy. The corporeal reciprocity between Susan Barton and Friday, which starts on the beach and continues throughout the story till the last scene at the bottom of the sea, symbolically invokes a process of liquefaction between the two characters. This fluid and intersubjective relation between Self and Other in *Foe* is discussed within a Levinasian conceptualisation of physical proximity. Emmanuel Levinas suggests that such a non-mediated and embodied relation between subjectivities is a space of "pure communication" (Levinas 1998, 134) that is capable of substituting the hegemony of representation. The significance of proximity with the Other, Levinas puts forward, lies in the condition of being "the-

one-for-the-other, exposedness of self to another, it is immediacy in caresses and in the contact of saying. It is the immediacy of a skin and a face" (84-85). The sense of responsibility triggered by the Other's corporal contiguity exceeds any struggle by the Self to assimilate the Other or recognise its alterity because it is in this recognition that the Self tends to transform the Other from incommensurability to intelligibility. Following this logic of self-substitution for the Other, the Self jeopardises its sameness by undergoing a process of erasure that ends up with the loss of the unitary and autochthonous sense of identity the moment it comes face to face with otherness. The corporeal presence of the Other, as an irreducible and thus unintelligible entity, disrupts the frontiers between identities and subverts presumptions of homogeneity and originality.

Within this framework, the body contiguity between Susan Barton and Friday could be read as an ethical turn that opens up a space of non-verbal interaction and reciprocity between Self and Other in the text. While describing this first physical contact with Friday, Susan discloses, "I hesitated to accept, for he was a slight fellow, shorter than I. But there was no help for it. So part-way skipping on one leg, part-way riding on his back, with my petticoat gathered up and my chin brushing his springy hair" (6). Her vulnerability as a washed away woman with sore hands is met with Friday's saviour-like allure with a "dazzling halo" around him. Instantly and without any hesitation, he offers her a "backwards embrace" (6) as a gesture of hospitability and tenderness despite the ontological abyss between them.

4. Mutilated & Muted Friday: The Embodied Otherness

Friday's presence in the story as a speechless black slave from an African origin is in itself a memento of the Western colonial legacy, especially what has become termed the slave triangular or transatlantic trade. After learning about the mutilation incident,

Susan keeps wondering about his muteness. Being tongueless, Friday is unrepresented and disempowered and therefore his identity remains a riddle and a blank space for Susan to ponder on. However, undeterred by the deeply-seated racial and cultural boundaries separating them, Susan works hard to break the silence around him, to reach out for his true story. Throughout almost the entire story, Susan keeps questioning him about the identity of his mutilators and the reason why they cut his tongue, a labyrinth of speculations and queries without the slightest clues to know anything about his past. In an eventual attempt to make Friday reveal the truth about his identity, she tries to communicate with him via music. Thinking that music as a universal non-verbal language can actually be an effective and probably a reliable vehicle of interaction, she confides: "As long as I have music in common with Friday, perhaps he and I will need no language" (97).

At first, Susan tries to learn to play the flute as she manages to get some responses from Friday. However, after many tries, she comes to the realisation that Friday remains closed upon himself, unwilling to reciprocate with her. She bitterly admits, "all the elation of my discovery that through the medium of music I might at last converse with Friday was dashed, and bitterly I began to recognize that it might not be mere dullness that kept him shut up in himself" (98). In a final bid to unfold the mystery surrounding Friday's story, Susan Barton provides him with "a slate" to enact the mutilation through drawing. Against her expectations, Friday draws a picture of "walking eyes" (147), but he hides his drawings from her. He avoids any occasion to respond to Susan's obsessive desire to know him. Friday seems to withstand the panoptic power of surveillance exerted by Susan's both authorial and sometimes authoritative and inquisitive acts of probing, which would consequently reduce him into an object of study. Susan's recourse to the sensory and auditory means of communication falls short of creating an immediate and straightforward pattern of exchange capable of breaking the wall of silence insulating the Other in the narrative. The absence of Friday's (his)story makes Susan's narrative devoid of any interest or any

centre. Friday remains a sort of conundrum, a cryptic text challenging her authorial attempts to write him as a commensurable character in her story. Eventually, Friday's adamant rejection to respond to her multiple but fruitless communicative overtures pushes Susan Barton to desperately admit that all her endeavour is "a time being wasted by time" (70).

The role of language as an effective platform of interaction that can permeate the rigid structures of representation is undermined in the final scene of the novel: "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" (157). Friday's mutilated and dismembered body stands as an aporia in the face of Susan's varied methods of communication, which often turn into acts of coercion to make Friday respond to her attempts. Susan's assumptions that through language it could be possible to reach a certain level of unity, wholeness, and significance seem to lose ground when it comes to representing or narrating alterity. In colonial discourse, otherness is negated, obliterated or, if not, subjugated and contained within closed conceptual and linguistic systems of representation. Therefore, the other is ripped off of his/her difference and is shrunk to a linguistic and discursive construct, an alienated and distorted stereotypical image of all that the self *is* or is *not*.

In his article, "Postcolonial Temporality of J. M. Coetzee's Foe (1986)", Benjamin Goh emphasises the disruptive potency of silence in resisting processes of assimilation and normalisation. Describing Friday as "the guardian of the margin", he maintains that "it is Friday rather than Susan who is the unemphatic agent of withholding in the text […], there is a space of withholding, marked by a secret that cannot be unlocked. "The native", whatever that might mean, is not only a victim, he or she is also an agent". (Goh 2023, 114). This reading of the Other's silence as an intentional and active agency in the narrative seats Friday's tonguelessness as a somatic and unintelligible text that seeks to dilute colonial authorship through postulating corporeality as a counter-narrative

to representation. In this vein, by operating beyond the linguistic signification, Friday's mutilated body imparts a different story of what is negated, denied or forgotten in colonial history, narrativised this time by its own painful silence. Interviewed by David Atwell about the silence of Friday, Coetzee interestingly states:

> Friday is mute, but Friday does not disappear, because Friday is body. If I look back over my own fiction, I see a simple (simple-minded?) standard erected. That standard is the body. Whatever else, the body is not 'that which is not,' and the proof that it *is* is the pain it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt. (Attwell 1992, 248)

Coetzee posits the body as a counterargument to the uncertainty of language. For him, the body as a non-linguistic signifier has a sort of access to meaning and truth that language cannot attain. The sense of undeniable truth that Friday's suffering body imparts in the final chapter of the novel reverses the authority of language cherished by the three other characters, Susan Barton, Mr Foe, and Cruso. In the last scene, the picture of Friday enchained reveals all the atrocities of slavery and exploitation of black people in South Africa or probably the whole continent: "In the last corner, under the transforms, half buried in sand, his knees drawn up, his hands between his thighs […] the chain about his throat" (157). Although Friday is speechless, his silence marks his presence as a testimony of pain and suffering. The intense and heavy presence of the Other's violated body offers the possibility of an ethical transformation in the text. Before the last chapter of the novel, Susan believed that through her authorial voice as a storyteller, it would be possible for her to decipher and unfold Friday's true story, but all her endeavours to interpret his enigmatic silence, to unveil the history of violence and oppression related to his cut tongue, end in vain.

At the end of the story, Susan's narrative voice unexpectedly disappears when it is mysteriously replaced by an anonymous narrative voice. In the fourth chapter, Susan is referred to in the third person: "On the landing I stumble over the body, light as straw, of a woman" (155). Susan Barton, as a narrator and an

enunciator of discourse, makes her exit. She concedes her voice, her subject position, and reaches out for Friday in his silence at the bottom of the sea. Throughout the narrative, Susan has held the belief that appropriating her agency through storytelling is sufficient to claim and maintain her independence and autonomy. But after coming face to face with the ugly and inhuman truth about the tortured and silenced Other, Susan's concern about reclaiming her voice as a woman transforms into an ethical quest for self-realisation achieved through human reciprocity and interrelatedness with Friday. Emphasising the centrality of the Other in the moral development of the Self, Derek Attridge argues that "without responsibility for the other […] there would be no other; with no other, repeatedly appearing, always different, there would be no same, no self, no society, no morality" (Attridge 2004, 127).

Earlier in the narrative, Susan experienced a sense of loss and confusion when confronted with the unexpected and disruptive presence of alterity in her subjecthood. She eloquently describes the Other's presence in intimate terms, "We yield to a stranger's embrace or give ourselves to the waves; for the blink of an eyelid our vigilance relaxes […]. What are these blinks of an eyelid, against which the only defence is an eternal and inhuman wakefulness? Might they not be the cracks and chinks through which another voice, other voices, speak in our lives?" (30). The only way for Susan Barton to cope with the serendipitous encounter with the Other is to accommodate alterity into her subjecthood, not by speaking for the Other this time but ironically by abnegating her authorial voice, loaded with ideological assumptions and prejudice about otherness, and join Friday in his silence through body intimacy and communion.

The body itself, to extend the metaphor in the text, turns into a permeable parchment full of 'cracks' and 'chinks' through which the other could possibly articulate his/her voice away from 'wakeful' 'vigilance' of the Self–evoking by that to the ocular power of surveillance and control inherent in dominating systems. At the last scene, she is described stretching in bed with Friday: "The couple in

the bed lie face to face, her head in the crook of his arm" (155). This is not so much an act of self-erasure as it is an act of self-merging, a process of liquefaction that is capable of offering a space of communication and intersubjectivity with the Other. It is only now that Friday, the silenced Other in the story, has the power or the will to open his mouth and let a "slow stream" flow across his body and then 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" (157). In this final scene, the once disparaged 'slave' and 'negro' becomes able to occupy a central position in the narrative, gaining by that an authority and probably authorship, not in words but through his body, to finalise the story in Coetzee's novel. Probably, the only aperture offered to Susan to access Friday, to overcome the cultural and racial hurdles between them, is to share the corporeal space with the Other in a final gratifying 'embrace.

5. Conclusion

This paper has hitherto argued that Coetzee's *Foe* is a rewriting of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe,* where he manages to recentralize the marginalised leftovers of Defoe's narrative by allotting them a subversive scope in his novel. Starting with Coetzee's Cruso, on the face value of reading, it sounds like a reproduction of Defoe's Crusoe, and therefore it stands as a crossroad intertextual character linking the two texts. However, with a scrutiny of the text, it is an entire reinterpretation of the character that makes it much closer to Coetzee's earlier characters such as Dawn, Jacobus, Colonel Joll, and Mandel, who embody the dominating imperialist and androcentric ideologies in his fiction. Immersed within his monadic and solipsistic mode of existence, Cruso ultimately fails to assume a fluid subjectivity that would allow him to perceive of the sexually and ethnically different Other(s) as equal human counterparts.

It is rather through the introduction of the character of Susan Barton as a female protagonist-narrator that Coetzee succeeds in

bringing in the ethical issues concerning the white male ontological view of the world implanted in the original plot of the Western canonical text. Susan's encounter with Friday, the mut(ilat)ed Other, triggers a process of moral awakening and liquefaction that eventually leads her to relinquish her authorial agency. Unlike the two other male characters, who are presented as morally blind, Susan Barton is invested with the ethical capacity of departing from preconceived, panoptic, and limiting frames of identity and venturing into a fortuitous but productive space of change and becoming.

As importantly, through the reconstruction of Friday as an incommensurable silent figure of alterity, whose *tongelessness* has been at the centre of Susan's interests and preoccupations throughout the whole story, Coetzee puts into question the ability of some idiomatic systems of representation inherent in Western logocentrism to access or retrieve any true and significant meaning when it comes to understanding alterity. Nevertheless, even supposing that Friday's unique act of articulating his voice by the end of the narrative is a worthwhile attempt at recuperating agency that would lead to new pathways of resistance, it is the corporeal proximity between subjectivities that gains more significance in the text as it potentially opens up a fluid and extensive space that is capable of engulfing the Self and the Other into an intersubjective continuum.

ENDNOTES

1. While Jean-François Lyotard coined "metanarrative" as a totalizing legitimation story (*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* 1979, xxiii–xxiv), Fredric Jameson reinterpreted it, arguing late capitalism persists as a new master narrative (*Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 1991, 17–18).
2. Attridge 2004, 138.
3. This is a reformulation of Derrida's definition of unconditional hospitality according to which the other's 'visitation' turns up "unexpectedly,

inevitably, defying any horizon of expectation and any possible anticipation" (Derrida 2000, 83).

4, Among the critics who tackled the issue of allegory in Coetzee's early fiction is Stephen Slemon, who relates Coetzee's subversive use of allegory in his early fiction to the "revisioning and reappropriation of allegory" ("Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History" 1988, 162). For Slemon, the traditional structures of allegory, in a way, concur with the colonial hierarchical system of representation that tends to privilege the Self and inferiorize the Other in order to legitimise and maintain the status quo of colonisation.

5. This is used in the context of what Edward Said terms as "mission civilisatrice" in relation to the Western colonial enterprise during the 18th and 19th centuries (*Orientalism* 1978, xv).

6. In 'Yes, I am giving him up': Sacrificial responsibility and likeness with dogs in JM Coetzee's recent fiction", Lucy Graham emphasizes the moral implication of the Self/Other intersubjectivity in Coetzee's fiction from a Levinasian perspective, "For Levinas, the "face" is the embodiment of the other's demand which orders and enables the subjectivity of the self" (2002, 6).

7. It is worth noting that the feelings of guilt and shared responsibility between the perpetrator of torture and his/her compatriots are a recurrent motif in Coetzee's early fiction. Rafe McGregor (2017) sheds light on the dubious but reciprocal relation between the person of the torturer and some Coetzeean protagonists. In *Waiting for the* Barbarians, he argues, Coetzee emphasises the idea of shared guilt "by blurring the distinction between the torturer and the man of conscience, thereby asserting that all citizens of the empire share moral responsibility for the torturer's atrocities" ("The person of the Torturer" 49).

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