

A Feminist Critique of “Voice” and the “Other” in J.M. Coetzee’s Post-colonial Novel “Foe”

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to analyze the techniques and effects of voice and silence in the life of a female character in J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe*. The analysis shows how the character of Susan Barton in *Foe* gives readers a feminine perspective on the famous tale of *Robinson Crusoe*. The method of investigation is a critical examination of the characterization of the female character; the research analyzes the events, actions and the interactions of Susan Barton, with a sight to identify how the character of Susan is portrayed in the novel. The analysis shows that while Susan is able to find a “voice” in some parts of this post-colonial text, her constant submission to strong male characters in the novel ends up showing a picture of a frail woman who defines her existence and individuality relative to men in her life. It strengthens the fact that women were still struggling to free themselves from the patriarchal domination of the post-colonial era.

Key words: Voice, Silence, Sex, Expression, Identity, Other

INTRODUCTION

“In *Foe* the struggles between Susan and Crusoe, and Susan and *Foe*, at bottom have to do with who gets to establish and maintain the narrative framework and with who is going to seduce (and/or compel) whom into living inside his or her story world.” (MacLeod, 2006:3)

J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* is a post-colonial re-written text having a strong female character, Susan Barton, as the narrator of the story. Coetzee changes the whole notion of adventure stories by having a female adventurer, Susan Barton, narrating her experiences instead of a male character as shown in Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. Coetzee, despite being a male author, tries to give a female character a chance to tell her story in the context of the hugely popular story of *Robinson Crusoe* that was previously told by Daniel Defoe. While the thought of this famous adventure story being told from a female perspective would have been impossible before, post-colonial literature is not limited by any such boundaries. Coetzee tries to use the character of Susan to represent the newly empowered feminist of the era, giving readers a close look at the struggles, conflicts, powers and freedom of a woman in post-colonial society.

In J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe*, Coetzee creates a character, Susan Barton, who is determined to bring across her story to the reader and for that reason she realizes that she has to seek the help of an experienced author, namely *Foe*, as she knows that in the field of being a story-teller she is less experienced and knowledgeable. However, one could see the drive and ambition in her to be read by the readers. As Derek Attridge stated:

Every writer who desires to be read...has to seek admittance to the canon- or precisely, a canon, since any group approval of a text is an instance of canonization.... canons are not monolithic entities but complex, interrelated, and constantly changing systems....Awareness of this necessity, conscious or not, governs the act of writing quite as much as the need for self-expression or the wish to communicate....unless we are read, we are nothing. (Attridge, 2004:75)

But as Susan Barton continues to depend on another individual to find the right expression to tell her story, she starts getting detached from her own sense of self and identity as the whole process of writing her own story became a bone of doubt on her existence and individuality:

She has an obscure sense that her experience will remain lacking in reality until it is told as publicly validated narrative....but the longer she waits, the more conscious she becomes that to depend for her identity on a process of writing is to cast doubt on that identity. (Attridge, 2004:77)

The purpose of this study is to illustrate that even though Coetzee attempted to make a female character the protagonist of the novel, the character of Susan is unable to find her sense of individuality or expression and is reliant on her male counterpart throughout the journey. Coetzee’s initial intention might have been to tell the story of how a woman can have powerful stories and be an influential storyteller however, he bases Susan’s story completely on her interactions with three men who have a major influence on her sense of identity

Research Structure and Hypothesis

This paper will analyze how the three male characters in the novel influenced Susan's sense of identity and freedom of voice in *Foe*. Firstly, the paper will focus on Susan's encounter with a character named Friday and its impact on Susan's voice. Additionally, it will highlight Susan's relationship with Friday's master in which her submissiveness to Crusoe comes to light. It will further focus on Susan's interactions with Foe and how overpowering statements and authorship forces Susan to resort to silence as she loses her sense of individuality.

J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (Coetzee, 1988) is a re-writing of Daniel Defoe's influential acclaimed work *Robinson Crusoe* where Coetzee sets sail on a new challenge by replacing the legendary character of Crusoe as a narrator with the female voice of Susan Barton, providing a completely different dimension to the storytelling. In *Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe's narrative was mostly concentrated on his adventurous journey, focusing on his shifts from a desire for personal comfort to a lust for new challenges, while in Coetzee's *Foe*, Susan Barton's main focus of interest is for her story of being stuck in the island with Crusoe to be published. While societal norms might have restricted Defoe from using a female character as the main focus and narrator for a tale of adventure, the rise of feminism in the post-colonial times allows Coetzee to provide a unique, female perspective of the famous tale.

Methods and Methodology

This paper performs a feminist textual analysis of the post-colonial text, J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*. The focus of the paper will be an examination of the portrayal of the character Susan Barton and how the three male characters in the novel influence Susan's sense of identity and freedom of voice. In being concerned mainly with the text itself in its analysis of the above-mentioned characterization, the paper's approach leans towards formalist criticism in its approach. Moreover, the methodology also features elements of gender and a sociological critique due to the nature of the novel and the focus on gender and its performance and portrayal.

This paper will be examining the struggle of the female character in *Foe*, Susan Barton as she decides to depend on Foe for telling her story and it results in conflicts of power, as Foe is not interested in telling the "other" feminine side of the story while that is Susan's purpose. The analysis will focus on the theory of feminism-post colonialism and claim that the *feminist outlook* of the character is influenced by the approval and acknowledgement of male characters in the novel.

The rationale for choosing J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* is primarily because the female character Susan Barton conveys the well-known adventure story of Crusoe from the "other" perspective. As *Foe* is a re-writing of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, it is interesting to see a woman trying to explore Crusoe's island and being the author of her story, Susan's voice sometimes contains what she actually feels and sometimes it embodies what she is expected to say as a woman in a society.

ANALYSIS

The Ventriloquist

The analysis of gaps and silence of the protagonist in *Foe* will focus on Susan's communication and interaction with her male counterparts in the novel. It can be seen from the beginning of the novel that Susan keeps searching for her identity and sense of individuality and all the characters that she interacts with have an effect on the way she perceives herself as a woman and an individual in the society. Throughout the novel, the character of Susan Barton has difficulty in finding her "voice" and she resorts to a variety of techniques through voice and silence to overcome the confusion she has regarding her "identity."

Susan's troubles with voice are first seen in the novel when she meets Friday. Friday is a character who never talks and Susan seems to be deeply affected by his lack of voice. Susan feels an irresistible urge to give Friday a voice; to give his silence some meaning as she describes his tongue as a "buttonhole, carefully cross-stitched around, but empty, waiting for the button. (Coetzee, 1988: 121) The button is Susan's act of interpretation regarding Friday. She does not seem to be concerned about Friday losing his individuality by her interpreting his silent ways in her own style, since she is most interested in his voice being heard rather than it being unique. Susan seems to have "no problem with subjecting people to narrative manipulation; she just wants to be the one doing the manipulating. (MacLeod, 2006:5). This drives Susan to try to explain Friday using her own voice and is a constant feature throughout the novel.

Susan's description of Friday reveals not only about Friday, but also about the voice and character of Susan herself. Susan's description of her and Friday's rescue from the island, for example, reveals the way that her imperialist ideology causes her to misread Friday's character and relate his lack of voice to his lack of knowledge:

'There is another person on the island,' I told the ship's master. 'He is a Negro slave, his name is Friday....Nothing you can say will persuade him to yield himself up, for he has no understanding of words or power of speech....Friday is a slave and a child, it is our duty to care for him in all the things, and not abandon him to solitude worse than death.' (Coetzee, 1988: 39)

Susan's analysis of Friday as having no understanding of "words of speech" seems unlikely to be true, as he certainly listens and understands the language of both Crusoe and Susan. This attempt by Susan to explain the lack of voice of a person using mere technicalities reflects her own troubles with the lack of a strong voice and her instinctual reaction to try to make sense of them in her head using technicalities.

This confusion seems to be a constant for Susan as she struggles with helping Friday find his voice. In the beginning of the novel, Susan realizes that as long as Friday can express himself through other forms, they don't need any language between themselves - "if there was any language accessible to Friday, it would be the language of music." (Coetzee, 1988: 96) At that time Susan stressed on how music could work as a medium of communication between the two:

When Friday fell silent awhile, I came downstairs to the kitchen. 'So, Friday,' I said and smiled- 'we are musicians together.' And I raised my flute and blew his tune again, till a kind of contentment came over me. I thought: It is true, I am not conversing with Friday, but this is not as good? Is conversation not simply a species of music in which first the one takes up the refrain and then the other...As long as I have music in common with Friday, perhaps he and I will need no language.(Coetzee, 1988: 96)

However, Susan's thoughts about music seem to change later as she starts to believe that speech is an essential component of communication and music can't take its place. When after repeated attempts by both Foe and her, she fails to give Friday his voice, frustration takes over and the very notion of music working as a form of communication becomes inferior to her –

All my efforts to bring Friday to speech, or to bring speech to Friday, have failed.' She continues, 'He utters himself only in music and dancing, which are to speech as cries and shouts are to words. There are times when I ask myself whether in his earlier life he had the slightest mastery of language, whether he knows what kind of thing language is. (Coetzee, 1988: 142)

Eventually, the use of speech to express oneself seems to become Susan's main concern. She starts to fear that the lack of speech for so many years might affect Friday to the extent of him forgetting the very idea of speech - "What I fear most is that after years of speechlessness the very notion of speech maybe lost him." (Coetzee, 1988:57) Susan's fears for Friday also seem like a cover for her fears for herself and her own voice - "As to Friday, how can Friday know what freedom means when he barely knows his name?" (Coetzee, 1988:149) By attempting to give Friday his voice, Susan overlooks the fact that it is also an attempt to look into her inner self, trying to find her voice, her identity. She falls into the usual misconception of a society in which,

Silence is generally deplored, because it is taken to be a result and a symbol of passivity and powerlessness: Those who are denied speech cannot make their experience known and thus cannot influence the course of their lives or of history. (Gal, 1994: 407)

However, it is Susan who is in confusion about her identity, and not Friday. Her power of speech does not seem to be of as much help for Friday. Susan's fascinations relating to speech when it comes to Friday having a voice and expressing it reveal the significance of the power of voice to Susan.

The presence of Friday in Susan's story is completely dependent on Susan and her struggles with trying to understand his silence. Through Friday's presence as a silence in the text, and Susan and Foe's attempts to impose meaning on that silence, *Coetzee develops the theme of appropriation through language.* (Kossew, 1996:162) She acts as a ventriloquist and although it results in Friday losing his individuality, it is the main force behind us getting to know and understand the character of Friday. On the other hand, as Susan continues to become Friday's voice in front of the reader she starts losing her grip on her own individuality as she gets more and more confused in understanding her own self and own potential.

Submissiveness

While, Susan acts as the dominating figure in her relationship with Friday, her relationship with his master, Cruso, is a completely different story. The character of Cruso is central to Susan Barton's story. From the start, Susan assumes the submissive role, seeing Cruso as the dominant leader of the island as she watches him "on the Bluff, with the sun behind him all red and purple, staring out to see...I thought: He is a truly kingly figure; he is the true king of the island" (Coetzee, 1988:37). Susan's instinctive submission to a dominant man is proof of the fact that she wants to see herself as "a free woman" but in her heart she cannot get herself out of the tendency to bow down to a strong, masculine figure. It can be argued that bowing down to the opposite gender who is physically stronger is what Susan acquires from the society as she thinks that this is what she is supposed to do, be a submissive women in front of a man.

Susan's submissiveness to Cruso comes forward more clearly when it seems as if she wants to tell Cruso's story to Foe and not that of her own as she says to him, "Do you think of me, Mr. Foe, as Mrs. Crusoe or as a bold adventurer? Think what you may, it was I who shared Crusoe's bed, closed Crusoe's eyes" (Coetzee, 1988:45). There seems to be an innate sense of pride in Susan's words for having been a part of Crusoe's story. Her individuality and voice seems to drown in insignificance when it came to Crusoe. She herself admits to being Crusoe's subject saying, "I presented myself to Cruso, in the days when he still ruled over the island, and became his second subject, the first being his manservant Friday." (Coetzee, 1988:11)

Cruso has the kind of power over Susan that makes her want to please him no matter what, even giving her sexuality away to him just because it will please him. One night, as she was sleeping, Cruso's sexuality takes over. Susan describes the event saying, "I pushed his hand away and made to rise, but he held me. No doubt I might have freed myself, for I was stronger than he." (Coetzee, 1988:30) Even though she can free herself, Susan chooses to submit to Cruso's will, without uttering a single word. Her voice is lost in her admiration for the male figure she sees as the king of the island, her king. Not only does she let Cruso have his way with her, she even proceeds to make excuses for Cruso by saying, "he has not known a woman for fifteen years, why should he not have his desires?" (Coetzee, 1988: 30) Again, Susan comes across as someone who, in her mind, wants to be a feminist, wants to be independent, wants to be recognized as a unique individual with a unique story but the deep-rooted tendencies to submit to male domination drilled into her by society all her life always seem to take over as she inevitably ends up willingly losing her voice in the face of a dominant male character.

Susan's sexual submission to Cruso continues as he lay on his deathbed. Susan spends nights with him, trying to use her sexuality to connect with him, to keep him alive. She describes the nights saying, "I lie against Cruso; with the tip of my tongue I follow the hairy whorl of his ear. I rub my cheeks against his harsh whiskers, I spread myself over him, I stroke his body with my thighs. 'I am swimming in you, my

Cruso." (Coetzee, 1988: 44) Susan's use of sexuality to gain the acceptance of men and to feel significant is clearly reflective of the fact that she is somehow subservient to the male species. She is willing to give up her sexuality, to give up anything, to feel connected to a man; even though nowhere in the novel does she reveal any sexual attraction towards Cruso. Crusoe seems to have had a long-term effect on Susan just by being a dominating male species to whom she can submit. Even when she is with Foe, she ends up comparing it with her sexual relation with Cruso saying,

Then he was upon me, and I might have thought myself in Crusoe'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. I closed my eyes, trying to find my way back to the island, to the wind, and wave-roar, but no, the island was lost, cut off from me by a thousand leagues of watery waste. (Coetzee, 1988:139)

Even though she has no voice in her relationship with Cruso, in her mind, she fondly remembers and tries to get back to her life with Foe, completely accepting her lack of voice and power in the relationship.

Through her interactions with Cruso, both at the start, and the end of the novel, we see Susan as a woman who submits to the desires of men; by obeying to Cruso's orders and surrendering herself to him physically. Her voice becomes mute and insignificant, as if doing that somehow makes her feel like she is connecting with a dominant male character. She comes across as a person whose identity is defined by her interactions with men much more than from a strong sense of self.

Individuality

This sense of individual identity falls into further question when we analyze Susan's interactions with Foe. Susan's fascination with Foe is revealed in the beginning of the novel, when she is seen expressing her views to Foe in the form of letters in which her highly held opinion of Foe come to light - "I think of you as a steersman steering the great hulk of the house through the nights and days, peering ahead for signs of storm." (Coetzee, 1988:50) The use of the word "steersman" is related to ship which gives an indication that even though Susan left Cruso's island, she is still connected with it and the effect of Cruso is still there on her mind. This initial description of Foe shows a strong sense of admiration and respect. Susan seems to think of Foe as the leader of a patriarchal family who is looking out for signs of trouble, leading and protecting his loved ones. This description probably comes from deep-rooted gender assumptions on Susan's part and her admiration for Foe continues to be a constant source of confusion throughout the novel as she struggles to assert her authority and use her voice against the man who seems to have a lot of power over her.

Initially, Susan seems to try too hard to seem confident in front of Foe and let him know that she has power over her story and that her voice cannot be controlled or manipulated by any man. She tells Foe -

I am not a story, Mr. Foe. I may impress you as a story because I began my account of myself without preamble,

slipping overboard into the water and striking out for the shore. But my life did not begin in the waves. There was a life before the water which stretched back to my desolate searchings in Brazil, thence to the years when my daughter was still with me, and so on back to the day I was born. All of which makes up a story I do not choose to tell. I choose not to tell it because to no one, not even to you, do I owe proof that 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. (Coetzee, 1988:131)

This inaugural speech to Foe by Susan reflects a deep need to be recognized as a unique individual. Stemming from a sense of fear of losing her individual voice in her own story, Susan aggressively points out the fact that she does not need to explain herself to anyone as she is "a free woman". Susan does not describe herself just as a "free person", but as "a free woman". It is representative of Susan's need to rise above the power men held over women, especially when it came to narrative during that period. Susan seems to be persistent on proving that just because she is a woman, Foe has no power over the telling of her story. But it also exposes the fact that she defines her voice relative to that of a male (Foe), and the purpose of her story appears to be at least as much about the power struggle with a man for her own voice, as the narration of the story itself. Thus, Susan's idea of the power of voice seems confusing from the start as she tries so hard to express her freedom from male domination that she ends up defining her freedom only in relation to the interactions with the opposites in her life. The desire to see herself as a substantial being in the novel looks to be the root of her power struggle with Foe. She feels that as long as she has narrative freedom she is free of oppression, an individual with substance:

The nature of the conflict between Susan and Foe is not primarily ethical or political so much as it is narratological, and, by extension, ontological, in so far as the ability to narrate the world determines a character's presence as a 'substantial being... in the world. (MacLeod, 2006: 5)

This conflict of interest is further confused by Susan's inferiority complex. Even though she believes in the feminine voice and wants to tell her story with her voice and not be influenced by anyone else's, she puts her individuality at risk by reaching out to a male writer, Foe, to help her with the writing since she seem to think of him as superior. This action completely contradicts her speeches about individuality and the independence of feminine voice as she says:

When I reflect on my story I seem to exist only as the one who came, the one who witnessed, the one who longed to be gone: a being without substance, a ghost beside the true body of Cruso. Is that the fate of all storytellers? Yet I was much a body as Cruso. I ate and drank, I woke and slept, I longed. The island was Cruso's (yet by what right? By the law of islands? Is there such a law?) but I lived there too. I was no bird of passage, no gannet or albatross, to circle the island once and dip a wing and then fly on over the boundless ocean. Return to me the substance I have lost, Mr. Foe: that is my entreaty. For though my story gives the truth, it does not give the substance

of the truth. To tell the truth in all its substance you must have a quiet, and a comfortable chair away from all distraction, and a window to stare through; and then the knack of seeing waves when there are fields before your eyes, and of feeling the tropic sun when it is cold; and at your fingertips the words with which to capture the vision before it fades. I have none of these, while you have it all. (Coetzee, 1988:52)

Susan bestows praise after praise on Foe and his writing prowess to convince him to write for her. Even though she initially said that she would not let her story be controlled or manipulated by anyone, especially not a man, Susan still ends up feeling like she does not have the necessary skills to capture the story in a satisfying way and decides to rely on the talents of a male writer to find her identity, her lost substance. Susan comes across as more of a victim here as the overpowering nature of Foe confuses Susan's whole outlook and beliefs and she seems to have no other choice but to rely on Foe's words. Her experiences on the island seem to have a negative effect because of which she believes that her substance is lost and now her story will lack the truth. She realizes that she lacks a lot of qualities that are inherent in Foe and she cannot move ahead single-handedly to write her story. Susan's intentions and actions paint a confusing picture and reflect her conflicts with figuring out the definition of voice and finding her own. While it looks like she wants to believe in the power and independence of the feminine voice, her constant reliance on the male characters in her life seems to reflect a lack of confidence in the powers of feminine expression. Even though the story is being told from the perspective of a female, she chooses the skills of a male writer to capture its substance in its fullest and truest form.

Throughout the novel, Susan Barton is seen struggling to find the voice inside her that will help her story be written with the proper direction and technique. Since she struggles so much with her own voice and has little faith in her own talents, she is seen assuming roles or identities that are imposed on her by other characters. She becomes Foe's muse, Friday's translator, Cruso's partner and all these characters are imposed on her by men and one can argue that the roles Susan plays is more often than not imposed on her rather than by her own choice.

And these men don't seem to be too helpful when it comes to Susan finding her identity and expressing herself with her voice. Foe attempts to dissuade Susan in her attempts to inquire about language and from understanding and experiencing freedom as Susan remarks - "There is no need for us to know what freedom means, Susan. Freedom is a word like any word. It is but the name we give to the desire you speak of, the desire to be free. What concerns us is the desire, not the name." (Coetzee, 1988:149)

By confusing Susan's definitions of desire with actual freedom, Foe comes across as a typically manipulative man in a male dominated society. To further confuse Susan and stop her from accomplishing her goals, Foe brings forth another obstacle that fills Susan's mind with doubts about her identity. He brings a girl named Susan Barton as the lost daughter of Susan. This event summarizes Susan's confusions with her feminine voice and identity quite well. While this ploy seems to work at first, as it seems to have a negative

effect on Susan's confidence as an individual with substance, it fails to work completely as Susan rejects the dictation of her identity by a woman. Meeting a woman with the same name certainly has a lot of effect in the individuality and essence of Susan as a unique human being in society and bringing forth a person of the same name as that of Susan's is a direct attack on Susan's identity as Susan starts to question her own existence:

But now all my life grows to be story and there is nothing of my own left to me. I thought I was myself and this girl is a creature from another order speaking words you made up for her. But now I am full of doubt. Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom too? To what order do I belong? And you: who are you?" (Coetzee, 1988:133)

Susan's sense of identity seems to be shaken by this event but it eventually fails to completely derail her as her confusing views on feminine voice take over. The fact that a girl is imposing the new identity of a mother seemed to not have nearly the effect that Friday or Foe has on her. Susan rejects this new identity outright calling her supposed daughter mad - "My name is Susan Barton," she whispered; by which I knew I was conversing with a madwoman." (Coetzee, 1988:73) Susan continues the rejection of a coherent-self by claiming to Foe that the child hasn't the same characteristics - "She is unlike me in every way." (Coetzee, 1988:132) A girl dictating her identity as a person seems to have absolutely no effect on Susan whereas she adapts herself to all the men in the novel quite easily. Coetzee's views on male hegemony are exposed here. The fact that Susan readily accepts identities whose substance and meaning depend on three men, but completely rejects just one identity that is imposed on her by a girl, reveals that she still is trapped in the thought processes of most women who were born and grew up in patriarchal societies. No matter how hard these women try to find their own voice, no matter how assertive they are about their views, deep down they are used to following a man's leadership and accepting their views rather than that of a woman's.

Foe's overpowering statements confuse Susan to such an extent that eventually, silence becomes a regular form of communication. Failing to understand Foe's theories of speech and language, Susan thinks of resorting to silence to keep her confusing emotions in check. Susan is unaware that the person she relies on to bring her lost voice back to her, to give her substance as a woman and as a human being, to tell her story, will end up being the one doing everything in his power to confuse her, to take her identity away and manipulate her into giving him power over her story. As Foe's plans start to work and Susan becomes more and more confused with the whole notion of language and speech she silences herself to avoid confrontation in the fear that her story might never be told otherwise. She feels that the expression of her voice is completely dependent on Foe's writing and silence is the best way to deal with this helpless state. This silence is not a choice as she is compromising her voice and letting Foe's version dominate just so she can have her story told, even if it is not the version she would write herself.

However, this is a compromise that completely goes against her original intentions. Here again we see a contra-

diction between Susan's intentions and her actions as she had said, "In every story there is a silence, some sight concealed, some word unspoken, I believe. Till we have spoken the unspoken we have not come to the heart of the story." (Coetzee, 1988: 141) Susan seems to truly believe that she must speak the unspoken; she must tell the untold story. Her intentions are to give voice to the feminist cause. However, she chooses to be quiet instead of telling the unspoken story. She ends up telling Crusoe's story instead of her own. She appears to again accept compromise over conflict. She seems to again be overpowered by Foe and fails to assert her freedom when it comes to her story. Her actions again completely go against her belief that she was "a free woman" (Coetzee, 1988:131)

Silence is another source of frustration for Susan. Not only is Friday's continued silence worrying her but also the way Foe did not understand silence, neither Friday's nor Susan's, is frustrating her to no end. She tells Foe:

You err most tellingly in failing to distinguish between my silences and the silences of being such as Friday. Friday has no command of words and therefore no defense against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others. I say he is a cannibal and he becomes a cannibal; I say he is a laundryman and he becomes a laundryman. What is the truth of Friday? You will respond: he is neither cannibal nor laundryman, these are mere names, they do not touch his essence, he is a substantial body, he is himself, Friday is Friday. But that is not so. No matter what he is to himself (is he anything to himself? – how can he tell us?), what he is to the world is what I make of him. Therefore the silence of Friday is a helpless silence. He is the child of his silence, a child unborn; a child waiting to be born that cannot be born. Whereas the silence I kept regarding Bahia and other matters is chosen and purposeful: it is my own silence. (Coetzee, 1988:121)

Even though this attempt by Susan might seem to be her expressing her voice to Foe, it does seem to stem from her frustration with Foe's constant lack of concern or understanding for what was a way of life for Friday as Friday doesn't even have a name that he can say is his own and a definition of identity for Susan. It seems like she is pleading to Foe to understand the silence that they suffered from. She appears to still be looking for his approval, or at the least, his understanding of the roots of this silence. It also reveals the fact that she thinks of silence as a form of identity as she thinks it is an unavoidably negative condition for Friday while it is a proof of feminine independence for herself. Susan and Friday both uses silence but Susan sees Friday's silence as helpless. Susan feels that Friday has no words, no way to defend himself and no choice but to be silent. She thinks that it takes away from his identity. However, she sees her own silence as purposeful. She sees her silence as a choice that represents her independence as a person to reveal what she wants to and to keep secret what she doesn't want to share.

However, eventually, the authorship of Foe became so prominent and overpowering that Susan loses her sense of speech and independence. Susan started off by wanting to tell her side of the story, the feminine side, but it became clear later that she never believed that she could be the moth-

er of her story, as she was not born a storyteller. Thus she asked Foe to be the father to her story. Susan compares the authority of an author to that of a father, clearly accepting male hegemony, positioning herself as the victim, the "other" of the father and thus giving up authorship rights to the men. (Price, 2008:13) The initial aim of wanting to express her independence through words was completely shattered when she ended up doing the contrary by becoming overpowered and trapped under Foe's intimidating ways. She lost her voice completely to Foe's manipulation. "She wants to narrate the world and ends up as somebody else's [Foe's] character." (MacLeod, 2006: 5)

Susan ends up submitting sexually to Foe as well, falling for his manipulations, and trying her best to gain his attention and acceptance. Even though she is so in need of Foe's acceptance that she cannot refuse him, Susan tries to make herself believe that she still has some control. She says:

I calmed Foe. 'Permit me.' I whispered – 'there is a privilege that comes with the first night that I claim as mine.' So I coaxed him till he lay beneath me. Then I drew off my shift and straddled him (Which he did not seem easy with, in a woman). 'This is the manner of the Muse when she visits her poets,' I whispered, and felt some of the listlessness go out of my limbs. (Coetzee, 1988:139)

According to Susan it seems like she believes that there is a certain manner in which a muse should address her poet and in this instance the muse is herself and the poet is Foe. She readily accepts her role as muse and Foe's sexual advances but tries to justify the compromise by telling herself that somehow she is on top, that she too has a voice, when that clearly is not the case.

By the end of the novel, all Susan wants is to be free. She states:

There is an urging that we feel, all of us, in our hearts, to be free, yet which of us can say what freedom truly is? When I am rid of Friday, will I then know freedom? Was Crusoe free, that was despot of an island all his own? If so, it brought no joy to him that I could discover. (Coetzee, 1988:149)

Not only do Susan's initial intentions change after meeting Foe, but her ideas about being "a free woman" also change. Foe has such an overwhelming effect on her that she no longer believes that she is free and doubts if she ever can be. Susan's voice is no longer a worthy enough opponent for Foe.

Susan's Barton's story ends at the hands of an unknown narrator, who describes the experience of finding her dead in the ship with the narrator saying:

I enter. Though it is a bright autumn day, light does not penetrate these walls. On the landing I stumble over the body, light as straw, of a woman or a girl. The room is darker than before; but groping along the mantel, I find the stub of a candle and light it. It burns with a dull blue flame. The couple in the bed lie face to face, her head in the crook of his arm. (Coetzee, 1988:155)

Susan Barton and her dead captain (Crusoe), fat as pigs in their white nightclothes, their limbs extending stiffly from their trunks, their hands, puckered from long immersion, held out in blessing, float like stars against the low roof. I crawl beneath them. (Coetzee, 1988:157)

CONCLUSION

By taking away narrative power in the end, Coetzee drives home the point clearly visible from the beginning – Susan Barton never has power. She spent her life succumbing to the wishes of men, to gain acceptance, to avoid confrontation, to feel significant, and in her death she reunites with Crusoe, her “king”. Death did not silence Susan’s voice for it has been silent from the beginning even though Susan tries constantly to tell herself that she has power.

On the surface, it may look like Coetzee wants the readers to see Susan Barton as a strong and independent woman, who survives the odds and is determined for her story to come in the eyes of the reader, a closer look into the storytelling reveals that Susan’s desire to be a liberated woman is not strong enough in the face of male domination. While the idea of feminism seems attractive to Susan, her heart is still stuck in the colonial world of male domination and female subservience.

While Susan does symbolize the post-colonial mentality of women to be free, her tendency to compromise and desire to please overshadow her struggle for liberation. In Coetzee’s *Foe*, Susan’s voice is not only silenced by her male oppressors, she willingly chooses to silence herself giving readers the impression that she prefers being unheard.

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