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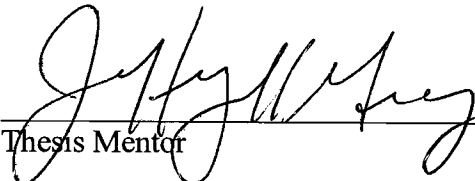
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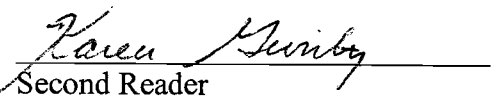
Coetzee's *Foe*: Susan Barton's (Un)Reliable Narration and her Revelation through Misreading

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Most critics of J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* approach the novel from a single theoretical perspective, like from a feminist standpoint for example, and in doing so they often dismiss other important approaches. In light of these deficiencies, this article argues that Coetzee's novel marries his critique of colonialism and patriarchy by using both postcolonial and feminist discourse and tropes. This article analyzes the narration of Susan Barton, the novel's narrator, and suggests that her narration is not an allegory of feminist discourse as Teresa Dovey argues, but that it is informed by feminist and postcolonial discourse.

This article also contends that *Foe* is a response to novels that also critique Euro-American hegemony or patriarchy. Consequently, this article engages Coetzee's novel *Foe* in a discussion with Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*. This article argues that *Pym* is a critique of imperialism and that *Villette* is a critique of patriarchy, and that the two largely fail to consider the position of the other. In *Foe*, Coetzee engages tropes from both of these novels to critique both colonialism and patriarchy.

Reading Barton's narration in terms of both Pym's and Lucy Snowe's narration, this article argues that Barton, like Snowe, has a revelation towards the novel's end. For Barton, this revelation is about the violence of language and about the way that human beings project meaning onto signs. This article concludes that *Foe* can be read as both Susan's misreading, in the style of *Pym*, and, as a result of her revelation, as Susan's deliberate withholding of information from the reader in the style of *Villette*. Analyzing the coda, this article suggests that its utopian vision is informed by *Villette* and feminist discourse. Finally, the article suggests that Coetzee critiques the canon and art in the coda for their oppressive and seemingly immortal nature.

Coetzee's *Foe*: Susan Barton's (Un)Reliable Narration and her Revelation through Misreading

“There is not 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, *Foe* 149).

“The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible crossing-over ...And this critique ... will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do or think...[I]t is seeking to give new impetus...to the undefined work of *freedom*” (Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” 315-316, emphasis added).

Critics have focused their analyses of J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* on the novel's postcolonial or feminist message, its postmodernism, and its critique of the canon. These focused critiques often neglect or seem to dismiss other equally important approaches. In his analysis of *Foe* in “The Silence of the Canon”, Derek Attridge remarks:

Since my particular interest here is in Coetzee as a South African novelist, I am focusing on the question of race rather than the question of gender, but I am conscious that this is to do less than justice to the novel's richness and importance. A longer discussion would consider the differences between the treatments in *Foe*, as well as the connections that link them. (Attridge 85, footnote 21)

Theoretically exclusionary approaches to *Foe* are often problematic, as is Lewis MacLeod's postmodern approach in “‘Do We of Necessity Become Puppets in a story?’ Or Narrating the World: On Speech, Silence, and Discourse in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*” (2006) which suggests, “[j]ust as the specificity of the conflicts between Susan and Cruso, and Susan and Foe get lost in the grand narrative of feminist discourse, Friday's position in the novel has been habitually overwhelmed by the demands of the larger (and less-nuanced) narrative of a postcolonial discourse” (6). While MacLeod's point about the way in which some critics have misread certain

elements of the novel (especially Friday's tongue) in imposing a theoretical agenda is quite accurate, to dismiss postcolonial and feminist approaches in favor of a reading of *Foe* within the "idiosyncratic terms" that MacLeod describes is also an errant approach. Linda Hutcheon's commentary, on the other hand, suggests that feminism and postcolonialism are not necessarily distinct from postmodernism:

It is true that, as Susan Suleiman acutely noted, literary discussions of postmodernism often appear to exclude the work of women (and, one might add, often of blacks as well), even though female (and black) explorations of narrative and linguistic form have been among the most contesting and radical. Certainly women and Afro-American artists' use of parody to challenge the male white tradition from within, to use irony to implicate and yet to critique, is distinctly paradoxical and postmodernist. (17)

As approaches like Attridge's and MacLeod's inevitably perform the same exclusionary practices as the canon (although Attridge does acknowledge this deficiency), the present essay will therefore explore the way in which Coetzee successfully marries his critique of patriarchy with his critique of colonialism. Teresa Dovey has previously considered "The Intersection of Postmodern, Postcolonial and Feminist Discourse in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*" (1989) in her essay of that title, in which she reads the novel as an allegory wherein each character represents one of these discourses (she suggests Cruso is an allegory of postcolonial discourse, for example); the present essay will explore similar intersections, arguing however that Barton's narration is informed by *both* postcolonial and feminist discourses and tropes. As Coetzee's protagonist, Susan Barton, directs the narrative in *Foe*, my purpose is to illuminate her un/reliable narration and the underpinnings of Coetzee's critique in the context of narratives that similarly critique Euro-American hegemony or patriarchy, specifically Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur*

*Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838) and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) respectively. Coetzee's engagement with feminist and postcolonial discourse enables *Foe*'s postmodern move of de-centering the common foe of these discourses – the white European male author, the canon, the academy – through Susan Barton's discovery that language is the leveller of ostensible hierarchies.

### **Barton's Unreliable Narration: The Influence of Pym and Snowe**

Susan's unreliable narration, in my opinion, can be read as being influenced by both postcolonial and feminist narratives. It is my contention that Poe's *Pym* is a critique of colonialism, that Brontë's *Villette* is a critique of patriarchy, and that each fails to consider the position of the other.<sup>1</sup> That is, Brontë's novel largely neglects the position of the colonized and Poe's novel fails to represent or consider a woman's perspective, although both have the same foe: white male European authority. Coetzee's *Foe* can be read, therefore, not only as an obvious response to Defoe, but also implicitly as a response to other novels that treat one of these subjects exclusively.<sup>2</sup>

Coetzee's analysis of Defoe's story in "Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*," in which he cites Poe's critique of *Robinson Crusoe*, is particularly revealing in terms of Coetzee's purpose in *Foe*:

'Not one person in ten,' wrote Edgar Allan Poe, 'nay, not one person in five hundred, has, during the perusal of 'Robinson Crusoe,' the most remote conception that any particle of genius, or even of common talent, has been employed in its creation! *Men* do not look upon it in the light of a literary performance. Defoe has none of their thoughts – Robinson all.' It is a tribute to an

author, one supposes, though of a rather backhanded kind, that he should be eclipsed by one of his creations. (Coetzee, *Stranger Shores* 18, emphasis added)

Obviously, both Coetzee and Poe recognize the fallacies of Defoe's book judging by their responses to it in their respective novels; however Poe's critique includes, as Coetzee points out, praise for Defoe's creation of the character Crusoe. Although Poe and Coetzee agree somewhat in their assessment of *Robinson Crusoe*, I've italicized "Men" in Poe's critique to emphasize the general practice of the canon during this period of excluding women from representation, from constructs of readership, and as a result, from authorship. Trinh T. Minh-ha's analysis of women's distanced position from authorship in *Woman, Native, Other* positions Poe as continuing in the legacy of patriarchal authors: "...she [the woman writer] often finds herself at odds with language, which partakes in the white-male-is-norm ideology and is used predominantly as a vehicle to circulate established power relations" (6). Consequently in *Foe*, Coetzee's response to *Robinson Crusoe* continues in the tradition of Poe's critique of imperialism in *Pym* but also responds to the patriarchal norms represented in Poe's novel.<sup>3</sup>

Tracing a few differences in the literary techniques, specifically the representation of the narrator, of Defoe's and Poe's works makes more lucid both the object of Coetzee's critique and the methods he uses to accomplish it. Clearly the difference in the style of the titles from Defoe's and Poe's tales indicates a shift in technique and meaning. Poe's "Narrative" as opposed to Defoe's "Life and... Adventures" suggests a difference in focus, namely, that Poe's novel ponders the writing process and is self-conscious of itself as fictional writing. Indeed, in his chapter on Defoe, Coetzee remarks, "The kind of 'novel' he [Defoe] is writing (he did not of course use the term) is a more or less literal imitation of the kind of recital his hero or heroine would have given had he or she really existed" (19).



To critique imperialism, Poe depicts the narrator and colonist Pym as consistently misreading the native Tsalalians' behavior, a degree of unreliability present in Barton's narration as well. Poe's narrator is deliberately unreliable as revealed in the "Note" that follows Pym's narrative: "The gentleman whose name is mentioned in the preface [Poe], and who, from the statement there made, might be supposed able to fill the vacuum, has declined the task – this for satisfactory reasons connected with the general inaccuracy of the details afforded him, and his disbelief in the entire truth of the latter portions of the narration" (Poe 153). Since the preface reveals that the "latter portions" of the narrative, wherein Pym and his fellow adventurers encounter the Tsalalians for the first time, have been written by Pym, there is clearly a distancing between author and narrator. Poe's refusal to "fill the vacuum" also indicates Poe's refusal to write a master narrative, a technique that Coetzee also adopts in the coda to *Foe*: "[t]his home of Friday, which is not a place of words, signals the impossibility of ever attaching a final authoritative meaning to Friday" (Probyn 36). Thus the way Pym interprets events reveals Poe's critique, rather than advocacy, of imperialism.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, in his article "Poe, *Pym*, Postmodernism," Ronald Foust contends that "the point of *Pym*, however, is not that nothing is what it seems to be, that in life reality is masked. Instead, the text's truly postmodern insight is simply that the 'surfaces' of experience are *all* that experience is. Pym is constantly guessing at the meanings of things, and Pym is constantly wrong" (17). Pym's misreading occurs in the scene where he first encounters the native characters, the Tsalalians:

It was quite evident that they had never before seen any of the white race—from whose complexion, indeed, they appeared to recoil. They believed the Jane to be a

living creature, and seemed to be afraid of hurting it with the points of their spears, carefully turning them up. (114)

Clearly, Pym's reasoning in this scene is suspect as he assumes and assigns a meaning to the natives' behavior, and as he later assesses their behavior as "ignorance," (114) it is clear that Pym is acting like Said's Orientalist, namely, that he is distorting the significance of the natives' behavior in order to confirm his intellectual superiority. The natives' reaction a few pages after Pym's description of previous colonial voyages in the South Seas reveals that Pym's assessment of their reaction is incorrect, and that the natives have interacted with the white man before. Therefore, their fear is warranted as the natives were most likely exploited by previous colonists.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Poe's narrator's misreadings of native behavior constitute Poe's critique of racist ideology and his attempt to undermine imperialist ventures.

Turning from the perpetual misreader Pym to the character Lucy Snowe in *Villette* allows us to see another dimension of Barton's narration in *Foe*. Joseph Litvak reveals that Brontë's narrator has particular relevance for any novel that attempts to critique patriarchy: "Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest...that, in Brontë's novels, 'escape becomes increasingly difficult as women internalize the destructive strictures of patriarchy'" (476); however, as with Poe, Brontë's writing only addresses the resistance to European male hegemony in terms of one Other. In essence, Brontë's novel, in its tour de force of portraying strategies to resist patriarchy, fails to consider the plight of the native or non-European, and in its complicity with European norms, *Villette* collaborates in the oppression of non-Europeans. Throughout the novel, characters offer derogatory comments about foreigners, reflecting their milieu, and largely neglect the non-European viewpoint. For example, after receiving an insult from Lucy, Ginevra replies: "Nobody in this world was ever such a Turk to me as you are!" (Brontë 342). The

editor, Helen M. Cooper, reveals the implications of M. Paul's business venture in an endnote, noting "Guadeloupe was still a slave colony at the time when the book is set. Hence the estates that M. Paul is going to manage would be slave plantations. This is nowhere referred to in the text" (Cooper 597-598). This lack of commentary on imperialist practices indicates Brontë's own Eurocentric views, which Coetzee dispels in *Foe* by combining her narrative technique with Poe's.

As discussed earlier, the central ideologies that Poe challenges in his novel are racism and imperialism, as evidenced by the many instances which Pym, the novel's unreliable narrator, mistakenly interprets "native" behavior and language. Brontë's novel, on the other hand, challenges patriarchy through the narrator's refusal to accept male-defined binaries and her resistance to categorization. Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, responding to other critics, offers a persuasive description of Brontë's narrative style:

What does Lucy do that leads Robert Martin to call her unreliable and Gilbert and Gubar to call her a voyeur? She is not an obviously unreliable narrator, like that of *Notes from the Underground* or Jason in *The Sound and the Fury*, where the reader must distance her/himself from the narrator's judgments. In general, Lucy's character judgments are very good...But on one or two occasions, Lucy Snowe actually withholds information with the intention of misleading us, for instance, as to when she recognizes Bretton. ( 245) <sup>6</sup>

Coetzee's *Foe*, successfully blends these two narrative techniques (that of the misreader and the deceiver) to focus its critique on the white-male European hegemony that has largely dominated the fields of literature and scholarship. His critique manifests itself through Susan Barton's misreadings of male, female, and "native" behavior and language. In addition, *Foe* reveals a

method for subverting the authority of European patriarchy by withholding information, in the style of Charlotte Brontë's protagonist. While Snowe's subversive measures in *Villette* are focused on patriarchy and a specific group of individuals, Barton's attempts to usurp power center on her exploration of language.

In Coetzee's *Foe*, Susan Barton is portrayed as an unreliable narrator; however, her misreading of events or signs represents Coetzee's critique of both patriarchy and colonialism. Consequently, Susan's unreliability differs from Pym's in the respect that she not only imposes imperialist ideology when reading "native" behavior, but also reads females (herself included) and males in terms of patriarchy, thus revealing the way in which she is at once both victim and aggressor. 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:

‘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 things, and not abandon him to a solitude worse than death’ (*Foe* 39).

Susan's analysis of Friday as having no understanding of "words or speech" seems unlikely as he has certainly listened to the language of both Crusoe and Susan. Lacan's notion of the unconscious structured like a language also suggests that Friday understands language: "Since the paternal metaphor is also grounded in primal repression, that is, in the advent of the unconscious, it follows that the unconscious, as such, is likewise subject to the signifying order" (Dor 127). As Dor indicates, although Friday does not speak in the novel, he may be able to, and he certainly may understand language as Lacan's idea suggests that the way we think is

necessarily structured by sign systems. Also, Susan's assumption that Friday's solitude on the island would be worse than death is unfounded as he would be free to do as he pleased and be the master of his own island. Susan's discussion of death in the passage above also foreshadows her later realization about the relationship between identity, language, and death towards the novel's end. In addition, Susan's sense of "duty" in this scene is a result of her belief in "Providence" (*Foe* 23) as she discusses earlier with Crusoe, indicating Coetzee's critique of the belief in god.

While the scene in which Susan and Friday are "rescued" focuses on *Foe's* critique of colonialism, the scene where Susan contemplates Friday's castration reveals the confluence of postcolonial and feminist discourse in the novel. Barton reveals her opinion about Friday's ostensible mutilation: "the lost tongue might stand not only for itself but for a more atrocious mutilation; whether by a dumb slave I was to understand a slave unmanned" (*Foe* 119). Like Lewis MacLeod's argument that the novel lacks "proof that Friday has no tongue" (7), Susan's description of Friday's apparent castration is vague and unclear: "What had been hidden from me was revealed. I saw; or, I should say, my eyes were open to what was present to them" (*Foe* 119). Thus, like the perceived mutilation of Friday's tongue, Susan's fascination with the idea of Friday's possible castration reflects her acceptance of patriarchy, considering Freud's description of the differences between the behaviors of children of different genders: "the little girl discovers her own deficiency from seeing a male genital... (Freud, *SE*, 19: 252; 21: 233)" (Heath 212). In essence, her inquiry into the "facts" of his genitals and his tongue suggests that she is making a correlation between the two: from her patriarchal view, a person's genitalia inform the authority of a speaker or non-speaker. Susan's ostensible classification of Friday as being non-male is her attempt to explain why the male character Friday does not tell his story or possess greater

narrative power than she. In this scene, Susan, in her reading of Friday seems to move from imperialistic views to patriarchal views, complicating the distinction between the two.

Trinh's analysis of the native woman's status sheds light on this apparent duality: "[t]he idea of two illusory separated identities, one ethnic, the other woman (or more precisely female), again, partakes in the Euro-American system of dualistic reasoning and its age-old divide-and-conquer tactics (Trinh 104). Extending Trinh's analysis of the native woman to Susan's character suggests that Susan's imperialist ideology is inseparable from her patriarchal ideology, as, at least in terms of discursive power and canonical authority, the progenitor of both is European males. Coetzee's commentary in this regard seems to emphasize that the two groups, females and natives (or non-Europeans), are both Others, at least from the view of white male Europeans that Susan adopts, and Susan will remain oppressed unless she refutes both the construct of patriarchy and that of European hegemony. In essence, *Foe* indicates the way in which patriarchy and imperialism are inextricably bound, and therefore Susan's misreadings suggest her inability to understand their connection.

As posited earlier, Barton's narration can be thought of as complementary: both as a misreading of the initial experience and as purposely elusive in its hindsight (post-revelation) nature. Thus, the aforementioned scene wherein she ambiguously describes Friday's genitals – "my eyes were open to what was present to them" – can also be read as her deliberate withholding of information from the text. In this sense of her narration, which I suggest is a feminist technique like that seen in *Villette*, Barton's revelation about the nature of language towards the novel's close seems to inform her mode of writing. In other words, by refusing to reveal the nature of Friday's body (the existence of both his tongue and his genitals or lack

thereof), she is also refusing to write a master narrative of his body. Mia Zamora's discussion of the violence resultant from assigning bodies a single meaning is insightful here:

...they ["live bodies"] are multidimensional spaces in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. Yet the idea of the human body as 'open' text yielding a multiplicity of readings is at once at odds with the predominant impulse to authorize bodies, to limit and furnish their meaning with a final signification...It is in this interminable process of lending bodies metaphorical and figural meaning that literal bodies have often been violated" (8).

In this sense, Susan's refusal to inform the reader about Friday's body suggests an evasive measure aimed at preventing further violence to his body. Clearly, this refusal is influenced by Susan's revelation about semiotics that occurs later in the novel, and also perhaps by Friday's refusal to speak (if it is a refusal).

Throughout the novel, Susan Barton often assumes roles or identities imposed on her by other characters; however, in the one instance wherein a member of her own sex, her "daughter," attempts to impose an identity on Susan, this other woman fails, an instance that reveals Coetzee's critique of male hegemony. Dana Dragunoiu discusses the relationship between Susan's identities and her discourse with males, after a discussion of Cruso's ambiguous identity:

In retrospect, Barton sees this vagueness of identity extending to herself.

Recalling her sexual encounter with Cruso, she asks herself: 'Would it have been better had we continued to live as brother and sister, or host and guest, or master and servant, or whatever it was we had been?' (30). By contrast, immediately after abandoning the island, she becomes aware of a socially imposed identity: 'what kind of woman was I, in truth?' (42), she asks herself after the ship's

captain advises her to go by Mrs. Cruso in order to avoid scandal. In England her roles multiply: she thinks of herself as Friday's mistress, Foe's housekeeper and muse, and after the journey to Bristol, even as a gypsy and stroller (108).

(Dragunoiu 319)

Aside from Cruso and Friday, who both seem to have a "deep-seated distrust of language as an effective medium for knowledge and communication" (Dragunoiu 317), the other male characters in *Foe* impose these identities on Susan Barton. Dragunoiu's quotations and analysis reveal the way in which *Foe* points to the inability of language to express human experience, a theme key to Coetzee's critique of the totalizing structures of patriarchy. Susan's acceptance of these male-imposed identities reveals her acceptance of the male claim to authority and also mirrors the way that male authors have written women throughout history.

Like her narration of Friday's ostensible castration, Susan's narration of the identities that males impose on her can be read as both an acceptance of Eurocentric patriarchy (as discussed above) and a subversion of it. Rabinowitz's discussion of *Villette* in which she analyzes Snowe's acceptance of identities from other characters is insightful here: "Allowing individuals to make of her what they will (Chapter XXVI), she retains her sense of superiority ('I smiled at them all'); allowing them to think little of her, she retains her privacy in a novel where there is much isolation but little of that valuable commodity" (Rabinowitz 249). Similarly, (and because her unreliable narration is retrospective), Susan's acceptance of these identities can be read as both an uninformed acceptance of male hegemony at the time the identities were imposed (Susan attempts to form her identity throughout most of the novel), and as her subversion of male authority in her hindsightful narration as she positions herself as a masked Other, trying on identities to withhold her private "self". While both *Foe* and *Villette* emphasize resistance to



binary oppositions, these readings of Susan's acceptance of male-imposed identities, which would otherwise seem contradictory, coalesce as a result of her (un)reliability as a narrator.

Susan's attempts to form her identity begin with her exploration of the identities that others offer her and eventually lead to her desire to learn about language. Noëlle Bissret Moreau's contention that "[t]he dominated's search for a unified ego gives rise to a passionate interest in the facts of language" (60) accurately describes Susan's motivation for the rest of the novel, following her initial difficulties with writing. In the beginning of her exploration of language Susan reads males as her linguistic superiors, as evidenced in the scene where she insists that she will yet "be father to my [her] story" (*Foe* 123). By comparing the nature of an author to that of a father, Susan's language not only reveals her acceptance of male hegemony, but also positions her as victim as she is the Other of the father, and therefore she concedes that authorship is beyond the realm of women and mothers. Susan's exploration of language enables the novel's critique of multiple hierarchies, rather than limiting itself to a single discourse.

### **The Response to Dodd, and the Feminist Ethos**

*Foe* has received a great deal of discussion from feminist critics due to the novel's ambiguous representation of Susan Barton. Josephine Dodd argues that, in *Foe*, Coetzee "vampirise[s]" women's stories, such as Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and Adrienne Rich's poem "Diving into the Wreck" (Dodd 121). On the other hand, in his chapter entitled "The Silence of the Canon," Derek Attridge points out the many allusions and references to other works, besides those Dodd mentions, in Coetzee's novel: "it was in *Foe* that Coetzee made canonic intertextuality a fundamental principle" (69). Attridge points out that Coetzee's style and word choice is allusive to a number of "canonical" writers including Shakespeare, Defoe (obviously), Wordsworth, and Beckett.<sup>7</sup> While his aim may be more to critique than complement

some of these authors, Coetzee nonetheless credits their value as artists, and does so for the female authors as well.

While many critics have disagreed with Dodd's critique, her sense of unease with *Foe* is certainly warranted, given the long history of men speaking for women in literature. Nonetheless, Trinh's apt quotation of Rich in *Native, Woman, Other* also confutes Dodd's perception of Coetzee as a vampire preying on women writers. Trinh quotes Rich's analysis of the woman author:

We seem to be special women here, we have liked to think of ourselves as special, and we have known that men would tolerate, even romanticize us as special, as long as our words and actions didn't threaten their privilege of tolerating or rejecting us and our work according to *their* ideas of what a special woman ought to be (87).

As Coetzee's novel is highly self-conscious of the exclusionary practices of the canon, as Attridge suggests, Coetzee cannot be considered one of the type of men that Rich mentions above. Indeed, Fiona Probyn argues that Coetzee recognizes the value of theory and literature written by women for usurping power, and makes use of it for his own distanced position from the canon. Spivak's discussion of Deleuze's ideas about representation and theory is also suggestive in response to Dodd's critique:

Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as 'speaking for,' as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation,' as in art or philosophy. Since theory is also only 'action,' the theoretician does not represent (speak for) the oppressed group. Indeed, the subject is not seen as a representative consciousness (one re-presenting reality adequately). (Spivak 256-257)

In this light, Coetzee's representation of the aspiring woman author embodied by Susan Barton is certainly not a "speaking for"; rather, Coetzee's representation is theoretical in nature as he makes use of the unreliable Barton to respond to numerous political issues. Thus, *Foe* does not speak for women, or natives for that matter. Dominic Head argues that the "aporia" that Spivak points to is the "locale in the maze of doubting... the position of Coetzee refusing to write for Friday" (Head 128). Barton's exploration of language, rather than of a specific hegemonic order, therefore enables *Foe*'s critique of both colonialism and patriarchy.

Laura Wright also takes up this debate with Dodd in her chapter "Displacing the Voice: Coetzee's Female Narrators" as she reveals, "[j]ust as Coetzee has been accused of avoiding 'the apartheid question,' it is equally easy to read his writing as antithetical to a true feminine thrust, evasive as it is of 'the woman question'" (56). Wright's comments convey the seemingly ambiguous nature of Coetzee's novel, but at the same time she provides persuasive arguments to oppose Dodd's assertion that Coetzee is a vampire: "if part of Coetzee's point is to illustrate that no one owns the story, then the question of direct or indirect reference becomes utterly meaningless" (64). This response to Dodd is especially convincing given the novel's deconstructive focus on the difficulty of using words to recreate the past, and the postmodern idea that there exist multiple truths or texts rather than an authoritative Truth or Text.

Quoting Pamela Ryan, Wright also points out the philosophical premises where some feminisms and postmodernism are at odds, namely postmodernism's rejection of the existence of the self. Supporting Regina Jane's argument that Coetzee is "'the first deliberately female-identified writer our tradition has produced,'" Wright suggests that Coetzee "has found at least one productive way to deal with this dilemma: writing women under the auspice of fiction, Coetzee exposes the fallacious reasoning that there can be any consistent notion of the 'real'"

(57). Jana Sawicki's commentary on the differences between Butler's feminist theories and Foucault's theories highlights the ways in which postmodernism is problematic for some feminist approaches:

...Butler has argued for feminist politics without a feminist subject. What is problematic about identity-based politics is their tendency to appeal to a prediscursive "I," to a stable identity, as their ground and reference point. They assume as Butler puts it: 'that an identity must first be in place in order for political interests to be elaborated and, subsequently, political action to be take' (*GT*, 142). Such a politics 'presumes, fixes and constrains the very 'subjects' that it hopes to represent and liberate.' (Sawicki 390)

Obviously, Coetzee's representation of identity in *Foe*, specifically in the coda, suggests that a coherent self doesn't exist. Kathrin M. Wagner and several other critics have suggested that the coda seems to call for the Buddhist state of the realization of both the I and non-I simultaneously. Again, Moreau's work is insightful here:

Each class speaks for itself, in other words, takes on and shapes its historical identity *according to the same hidden referent*. This social referent is the dominant group, whose identity is based on what it possesses (including knowledge and norms of language practice). It is the group which legitimizes its material power by defining itself as a collection of individuals incarnating the perfection of 'humanity,' a collection of 'subjects,' of 'I's.' (Moreau 59-60)

The postmodern idea of the I and non-I coexisting in this sense offers an alternative representation of reality to that of the dominant group -- in the case of *Foe*, European patriarchy and the canon. By challenging the patriarchal construct of the self and offering an alternative

narrative of “reality,” Coetzee, through the use of this postmodern and Buddhist idea, is able to usurp some power from the Eurocentric patriarchal structure.

The scene that takes place in Foe’s abandoned house, in which Susan and Friday take up residence, and a young girl who identifies herself as Susan Barton attempts to impose the identity of mother on the elder Susan offers another place to discuss how unreliable narration coalesces with a feminist withholding narrative style, and possibly indicates Susan’s rejection of the idea of a coherent self. The circumstances surrounding this scene are questionable as Susan asserts that the child hasn’t the same characteristics of her child; however, the importance of this scene is not whether or not the child is actually Susan’s daughter, but that Susan refuses to accept the identity because a member of her own sex attempts to implement it. In other words, this scene can be read as Susan’s rejecting the claims of the child merely because she is a woman, considering that Susan has accepted several male-imposed identities up to this point. In addition to this reading of Susan’s projecting the patriarchal structure onto her reading of the female child, Teresa Dovey provides an analysis of feminist resistance in this scene: “This girl and the maid, Amy, are characters from Defoe’s novel, *Roxana*. Rejecting this girl, Susan Barton rejects the script that has been produced for women by men writers” (127). Again, these readings which seem to be in opposition fail to be contradictory considering that Susan’s narrative is a re-writing. As she learns about the violence of language (and perhaps to reject the notion of a coherent self) in the writing lesson scene, which seems to echo Derrida’s essay, her writing of this narrative after such a realization necessarily includes both her initial struggles with the power dynamics of language and the influence of her “new” knowledge in her attempts to reproduce them. The way in which her tales throughout the novel are imbued with a knowledge of semiotics, as in her foreshadowing for example, suggests that her attempts at rewriting the

experiences prior to this revelation have been greatly influenced by it in her attempts to reproduce her story. In addition, the elder Susan's refusal to accept the role that the girl imposes on her, and Susan's description of the other female as a "madwoman" (*Foe* 77) resonates with the feminist theories of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

Talking about literature written by "women writers in England and America, throughout the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth," Gilbert and Gubar argue that "even when they do not overtly criticize patriarchal institutions or conventions...these writers almost obsessively create characters who enact their own, covert authorial anger" (1536). Certainly, this younger Susan Barton figure is a double for the unreliable narrator, and their interaction, namely, Susan's denial of the younger Susan's claim, mirrors Susan's own frustrations with asserting her authority as an author. Ultimately, this scene indicates that Susan's difficulty with writing results from the patriarchal exclusion of women from authorship of literature or any forms of knowledge. Again, this critique of patriarchy has postcolonial implications, considering the ways in which Western thought, as Said has argued, has considered male-Europeans more apt authorities on women than women themselves, as well as on "natives" than "native" peoples themselves.

Gilbert and Gubar also make the point that "the madwoman in literature by women is not merely, as she might be in male literature, an antagonist or foil to the heroine" (1536). They suggest "[r]ather, she is usually in some sense the *author's* double, an image of her own anxiety and rage" (1536). Coetzee's use of the trope of the madwoman in this sense suggests his own anxieties as a writer, and also substantiates Fiona Probyn's argument in her persuasive essay "J.M. Coetzee: Writing with/out Authority." Probyn suggests that "Coetzee's adoption of the feminine narrative voice constitutes *both* a strategic evasion of a lack of an adequate vantage

point from which to speak *and* a strategic encoding of that lack of authority in the figure of the white woman” (3). She remarks further, “Coetzee represents his marginality, his ‘writing without authority,’ in the characters of his white women narrators who construct ‘their’ texts (or ‘story’ in the case of Susan Barton...) from a position of marginality in relation to the canon, its recognized literary forms, and its masculinist dominance” (7). Attridge’s comments about the nature of the canon and its silences also suggests the impetus for Coetzee’s claiming a middle ground with Susan Barton as narrator: “All canons rest on exclusion; the voice they give to some can be heard only by virtue of the silence they impose on others. But it is not just a silencing by exclusion, it is a silencing by *inclusion* as well: any voice we can hear is by that very fact purged of its uniqueness and alterity” (Attridge 82). In this sense, Coetzee’s ability to write from a middle position, one both within and outside of authority, as Probyn suggests, enables his critique to be heard without being wholly subsumed by canonical norms. Through this literary technique that Coetzee adopts from women writers, he, like Poe, writes himself into his novel, albeit much less overtly, and in this way perhaps more like Brontë, to call attention to the idea that the narrator’s difficulty with writing mirrors the author’s own difficulties.

The trope of the madwoman in the attic is prevalent throughout the novel, and in addition to confirming Probyn’s reading, the scene in which Susan describes her, Foe’s, and Friday’s position in their houses indicates another instance of Susan’s perception of patriarchy. In the beginning of the second chapter of *Foe*, Susan’s description indicates each character’s distance (or ostensible distance) from the literary canon dominated by European males: “I have a room on the second floor. Friday has a bed in the cellar” (*Foe* 47). Susan continues a few pages later to describe Foe’s quarters: “[t]he room is barely furnished. The truth is, it is not a room but a part of the attic to which you remove yourself for the sake of silence” (*Foe* 49). The manner in which

Susan positions each character in the house suggests that the house might stand as a metaphor for the canon. Again, the “second floor” that Susan inhabits substantiates Probyn’s argument for Coetzee using the white woman narrator to claim a middle ground. Also, Susan’s description of her attempt to join Foe in the attic indicates the exclusion of women from the canon and the patriarchal custom of reserving women to domestic space and a position of subservience: “I climb the staircase...and tap at the door... [and Foe is] waiting for me to set down the tray [of food that she has prepared] and withdraw” (*Foe* 49). Coetzee’s description here calls attention to the glass ceiling that patriarchy has established on women in terms of authorship and also resonates with the one-dimensional representation of women in most patriarchal novels like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Pym*. In this scene Coetzee dramatizes the plight of the woman writer as Susan cannot even gain access to the attic, the metaphorical realm of authorship and is instead consigned to a position of exteriority on the second floor.

### **The Extended Influence of Brontë: Feminist Tropes and Utopia in *Foe***

In addition to Dodd’s and Attridge’s lists of allusions, in *Foe*, that novel shares characteristics with Charlotte Brontë’s novel *Villette*, besides the narrative style previously discussed. Obviously, the “madwoman in the attic” that shows up in *Foe* is a well-known trope from *Jane Eyre*, but Lucy Snowe, *Villette*’s protagonist, also finds herself in the attic, and sometimes in the company of what appears to be a ghost. Probyn’s aforementioned analysis of Coetzee as attempting to claim a middle ground with a white woman narrator might be the most obvious similarity to *Villette*. Indeed Patricia E. Johnson points out that throughout the narrative, Lucy attempts to be “the author of herself” and prevent herself from being forced into any binary categories, like “private sphere/public life; love/work,” for “patriarchal ends” (617, 620-21).



Clearly, Barton's search for her identity throughout most of *Foe* mirrors Snowe's motivation, as she similarly attempts to resist the influence of patriarchy.

The tropes that Brontë uses to undermine patriarchy in *Villette* illuminate the techniques that Coetzee employs to critique both patriarchy and imperialism. Rabinowitz's discussion of Lucy Snowe's narration is particularly telling for readers of *Villette*, but also for readers of *Foe*: "When games are played with what is told us...we are much more conscious of the medium of the tale, and consequently of the authority of the teller. Brontë can underline the assertion of that power by having her narrator deceive us and then undeceive us" (Rabinowitz 248). Thus, many of the aforementioned scenes of Susan's misreading, like her ambiguous description of Friday's ostensible castration, can also be deemed as her simultaneous attempts to deceive readers. Coetzee's blending of these narrative techniques mirrors *Foe*'s theoretical resistance to patriarchy and Eurocentrism, as the novel posits a non-binary approach as key to resisting both power structures.

Throughout Brontë's novel, the protagonist checks her actions and behavior to resist exposing herself to patriarchal characterization and influence, a practice that Susan Barton also adopts. For example, in the scene where Lucy is questioned by M. Paul's fellow professors as a test of her knowledge and credibility, she reveals: "Though answers to the questions surged up fast, my mind filling like a rising well, ideas were there, but not words. I either *could* not, or *would* not speak – I am not sure which: partly, I think my nerves had got wrong, and partly my humour was crossed" (Brontë 443). This scene of resistance by withholding speech clearly mirrors the aforementioned scenes where Susan refuses to inform the reader about Friday's body and the scene in which she refuses to respond to Foe: "Finding it thankless to argue with Foe as it had been with Cruso, I held my tongue, and soon he fell asleep" (*Foe* 144). In continuing with

*Foe*'s questioning of linguistics as key to freedom, Coetzee alludes to Susan's newfound understanding of the power of silence after her discussion with Foe about the semiotics of writing. The manner in which Susan's silence disarms Foe and places him in the vulnerable position of sleep, also reveals Susan's first attempt to exercise silence as a means of subverting patriarchy and empowering herself.

In addition to adopting Brontë's modes of resistance, *Foe*'s most striking similarity with *Villette* is the protagonist's experiencing a revelation after acknowledging that she has misread a sign. Brontë's representation of the unreliability of human experience and language enables Lucy to subvert authority from the group comprised of Père Silas, Madame Walravens and Madame Beck, which wields power over M. Paul and his money through religious manipulation. The scene wherein Madame Beck's pleas have little effect on either M. Paul or Lucy, and Lucy's revelation after breaking the rules of the *Rue Fossette* a few chapters earlier that "her [Beck's] habitual disguise, her mask and her domino, were to me a network reticulated with holes," (494) confirm Lucy's freeing herself from the oppressive regime that Beck heads. The language that Lucy uses is suggestive of deconstruction's emphasis on freeing oneself from oppressive structures. In combination with this description, Lucy's acknowledgment of her misreading is ultimately what empowers her: "The revelation was indeed come...it was I who had for a moment miscalculated" (Brontë 515). This scene mirrors Lucy's later revelation about her misreading of the nun figure in the attic as a ghost, and her claim a few paragraphs after her first revelation indicates her empowerment: "...and here I stand – free" (Brontë 516). In his portrayal of Barton's attempt to write a narrative, Coetzee employs this same concept of learning how to be free through an acknowledgement of misreading, although with a greater consciousness of its sociolinguistic relevance.

Comparing the aforementioned scene in which Susan describes the house, representative of an ostensible linguistic hierarchy informed by European male hegemony, with a scene that occurs later in the novel wherein Susan apprehends that she has misread a sign, again suggests how feminism and postcolonialism intersect. Certainly the metaphor of the house resonates with *Villette* as Rabinowitz relates Lucy's self-description: "Significantly, she [Lucy] imagines herself an 'honest man,' who can thus be (mistaken for) a housebreaker – criminal, daring, breaking the bounds of the house" (Rabinowitz 247). The description of Lucy imagining herself as a man also mirrors Susan's attempt to be the "father" of her story. Returning to *Foe*, Susan reveals her initial misreading of the person writing at the table: "But the man seated at the table was not Foe. It was Friday, with Foe's robes on his back" (*Foe* 151). In contrast to the earlier hierarchy portrayed by the metaphor of the house, this scene suggests that language's inability to accurately represent human experience is the cause for Susan's difficulty with writing. Ultimately, through an acknowledgement of her misreading, she sees that Friday has the same narrative dis/abilities as Foe, and thus Coetzee posits language as the great leveller of ostensible hierarchies. Friday's writing is similar to Foe's, and Susan's for that matter, as it is repetitive and stunted. Susan's contemplations prior to this revelation indicate a similar position on the leveling power of language: "And might not Foe be a kind of captive too? I had thought him dilatory. But might the truth not be instead...that the pages I saw issuing from his pen were not idle tales of courtesans and grenadiers, as I supposed, but the same story over and over...as lifeless from his hand as from mine?" (151) Thus, Friday's writing scene indicates his having the same skill with language that both Susan and Foe possess. The signs that Friday makes shortly after Susan's revelation also seem to echo the "indentures" in *Pym*, about which the unnamed editors of the "Note" that follows the text reveal that "the facts in question [about the indentures] have, beyond

doubt, escaped the attention of Mr. Poe” (Poe 154). Lewis MacLeod offers a warning to critics on these marks of Friday: “It is unwise, I think, to suppose too much about the nature of the pages with ‘rows of the letter *o* tightly packed together’ (Coetzee, *Foe* 152)” (MacLeod 13).<sup>8</sup> In both novels, this trope of signifiers with no corresponding signifieds reveals the critique of both representation and Orientalism.

Susan’s narrative foreshadows her realization, in the style of Lucy Snowe, as she reveals earlier: “‘Ah, Friday!’ I said. ‘Shipwreck is a great leveller, and so is destitution, but we are not level enough yet’” (*Foe* 70). Certainly, Susan’s difficulty with writing her narrative throughout most of the novel stems from her acceptance of the patriarchal norms of excluding women from authorship; however, in this scene she realizes that the story of white-male hegemony over authorship is a fiction to which she has acquiesced fact. It is through the acknowledgment that human beings impose structures onto their readings of signs that Susan is able to recognize and understand that she has been largely influenced by patriarchal structuring.

Susan’s last interrogation of the “facts” of language prior to her revelation reveals Foe’s attempt at dissuading her inquiry and his attempt to prevent her from finding freedom. After Susan asks about Friday’s ability to understand freedom, Foe replies: “‘There is not 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’” (149). Clearly, Foe is attempting to suppress resistance to patriarchal norms in this scene, which resonates with Susan’s earlier description of Foe “as a steersman steering the great hulk of the house [metaphorically, the canon and the patriarchal structure] through the nights and days, peering ahead for signs of the storm” (*Foe* 50).<sup>9</sup> Foucault’s appeal for a new critical approach, (quoted in the epigraph), reveals how Foe’s diversion is an attempt to subdue Susan’s attack of

patriarchy. Foucault's discussion of the nature of freedom clearly positions Foe as attempting to subdue Susan's challenges to male authority, as her questioning of what freedom means resonates with the "undefined freedom" that Foucault speaks of. In essence, Susan's questioning of the way that language works and its political implications indicates an inquiry into the "contingency that has made us what we are" (Foucault): the condition of being subjects in language. Therefore, Foe's attempt to divert Susan from inquiring into the nature of language and his suggestion that rather she focus on the desire for freedom is an attempt to reinscribe Susan's line of thinking within Lacanian terms: "that of *being the phallus* and that of *having the phallus*" (Dor 90). In other words, Foe tries to redirect Susan's exploration of semiotics and attempts to position her as subject to patriarchal hierarchy.

Coetzee's similarities with Brontë in narrative technique also extend to the coda in *Foe* as the ending in *Villette* mirrors Coetzee's conclusion. At *Villette*'s end, Lucy's revelation enables her to free herself from Madame Beck's influence, and M. Paul's disappearance (the certainty of his death is ambiguous) frees her financially as he has provided Lucy with her own school, which Brontë portrays as a utopian classroom free from patriarchal influence.<sup>10</sup> Coetzee adopts this technique, specifically of ostensibly killing off the oppressors at his novel's end, to similarly show how Barton has learned to free herself, in this case, from the oppression of language. Ultimately, Coetzee's coda suggests a utopian escape from the violence that Derrida calls attention to:

If it is true, as I in fact believe, that writing cannot be thought of outside of the horizon of intersubjective violence, is there anything, even science, that radically escapes it? Is there a knowledge, and, above all, a language, scientific or not, that one can call alien at once to writing and violence? (Derrida 126)

Coetzee's coda again differs from Brontë's critique as his coda posits a utopia free not only from patriarchy but also from the more universal oppressor: language. By focusing his novel on this Derridean concept of language, rather than on a single, socially specific form of oppression, Coetzee is able to successfully critique both colonialism and patriarchy.

Sarah Webster Goodwin's "Feminism and Utopian Discourse in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Villette*, and 'Babette's Feast'" explores the implications of the utopian in feminist discourse: "...because any definition of feminism must include an impulse to improve the human community, feminism seems to have at least an inherent utopian inclination...In turn, fictions may be the indispensable arena for a utopian sensibility, a field of play for the enactment of imagined realities" (Goodwin 1). *Foe's* coda's dream-like exploration certainly seems to be one of these imagined realities. Teresa Dovey reads the coda as being utopian: "[m]etaphor and imagery invoke Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck", and the article "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision" (1972), in which she speaks of a whole new psychic geography to be explored by women writers...The face to face positions of the bodies [in *Foe's* coda] suggests that each sex confronts and so displaces the other from a position of mastery. This is a utopian vision of sexuality..." (Dovey 129). As Dovey points out, the invoking of Rich's feminist texts supports a reading of *Foe's* utopia as feminist, but the postmodern, and perhaps the postcolonial (considering Poe's refusal to write a master narrative), also inform this scene if one considers the "displacement" to refer to the author and reader relationship as well, indicating Coetzee's refusal to be an authority on his own novels.<sup>11</sup>

Susan's discussions of dreams earlier in the novel also suggest that the coda is a utopia informed by feminist discourse. She reveals: "...we are asleep; and when we awake, we have lost the direction of our lives. 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? By what right do we close our ears to them?"

(30). This language which occurs much earlier in the text is also allusive to Rich's essay that Dovey mentions, and the "other voices" seem to again hint at the Buddhist notion of the simultaneous presence of both the I and the non-I. In addition, Goodwin's quotation of Ernst Bloch's *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* reveals the connection between Susan's analysis of dreams and the coda: "The point of contact between dreams and life, without which dreams are only abstract utopia and life yields only triviality, is given in the practical utopian capacity which is bound to the possibly real" (Goodwin 4). This utopian thrust also relates to Foucault's aforementioned call for a new critique, and in *Foe*, a novel highly conscious of the violence of language, the utopian ending is one that is devoid of language as indicated by the lack of quotations that several critics point out. Thus, if "the utopian may be present as a metonymic drive through a narrative toward something better than what the text sets up as a reality in the present" (Goodwin 5), the coda posits a place where strategies of power and resistance are no longer necessary to freedom.

The "reality" that *Foe* "sets up" prior to the utopia in the coda is one in which language causes violence to the characters in the novel. Thus, the unreliable narration is key to exposing this violence as Barton's descriptions indicate that language enables Eurocentrism and patriarchy as she both projects these structures onto signs, and, after learning about language, she withholds information with silence as a strategy to usurp some power from these hierarchies. By portraying Barton's narration in this manner, Coetzee's novel enables an outlook with possibilities for freedom and change rather than the more cynical approach of depicting the narrator as a perpetual misreader to merely expose the problems with imperialism, as in Poe's novel. *Foe*'s blending of these narrative styles also enables its critique of the assertion of "fact" by Crusoe and

Pym in their prefaces to their tales as Barton's representation of her "adventures" is influenced by her revelation and consequently *Foe's* critique of transparency suggests that only the traces of "fact" are available to readers through the text of her narration.

The description of the coda as "not a place of words" indicates the freedom from language in this utopia and consequently the freedom from oppressive structures and institutions founded on the violence of language: the canon, Orientalism, and patriarchy. Kathrin M. Wagner suggests that in the coda "Coetzee takes us to the only place which exists *beyond* language...the realm of Death itself" (11). Following this assessment of the final scene, Wagner adds, "[i]t is finally only Art (as constituted here in language) which can transcend that Void... Only over the vast mystery of death, over silence itself, does the artist-poet fail to have authority" (11). Wagner's commentary is insightful here, although she fails to fully explain the significance of the quote she provides from Coetzee a page earlier: "'That art is radical'... 'which, facing the abyss between language and the world, turns towards silence and the end of art'" (10). *Foe* can certainly be considered this type of art which prefers silence as the coda indicates Coetzee's refusal to write a master narrative and therefore a refusal to take part in the tradition of the canonical violence of representing Truth or the Real.

In a similar manner to the way that *Foe* makes "fundamental" use of intertextuality, as Attridge suggests, his novel also incorporates numerous theoretical concepts in its representation of Barton's narrative, as Gayatri Spivak discusses towards the end of her analysis. Thus, the coda can be seen as Coetzee's return to the original argument against art posited by Plato in "Book X," of *The Republic*, specifically against the inadequacy of representation in art. "[T]he encapsulation of the novel's beginnings in its end" (Wagner 11), then, mirrors the manner in



which Coetzee explores theoretical movements throughout the novel, only to return to the beginning of Western literary criticism.<sup>12</sup>

In essence, Coetzee's coda calls for the "end of art" because of the recognition that art allows ideologies, through language, to transcend the corporeal, and continue to live on to influence the lives of future generations beyond those who once inhabited the bodies with "skin, dry as paper...stretched tight over their bones" (*Foe* 153). In other words, the coda seems to fulfill Coetzee's foreshadowing earlier in the novel when Foe reveals that "[t]here are more ways than one of living eternally," (*Foe* 125) and, in other words, the idea that Walt Whitman expresses in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking;" namely, that art allows the artist to transcend her/his mortality to reach audiences not yet born.<sup>13</sup> Extending this critique of art to a more widely disseminated artwork, the Bible, makes Coetzee's critique of art clear as Foe wonders, "May it not be that God continually writes the world" (*Foe* 143). The implications of calling for the end of art, like the Bible, is especially relevant in terms of colonialism considering Chinua Achebe's commentary about the Bible in *Things Fall Apart*, which Spivak recently referenced, in the form of a common African saying: "Before the white man came, we had the land and they had the Bible. Now we have the Bible and they have the land."<sup>14</sup> This saying clearly suggests the connection between books and disenfranchisement that Coetzee takes up in the coda.

Ultimately, although *Foe* isn't a master narrative, Coetzee recognizes the powerful, didactic nature of art, like his own, and how it can impose ideologies on readers through structuring, causing prolonged misreading of "reality" for future generations. In the coda, Coetzee's critique of the canon suggests that an establishment and tradition which has ultimately excluded and distorted so many people based on its own constructs of gender and race, and for

the purpose of maintaining its own hegemonic legacy, is a structure that in the end causes more pain and oppression than enlightenment. The “reality” present throughout most of *Foe* that the coda challenges is an exploration into these canonical norms, and consequently Barton’s attempts at freedom necessitate her narrative embodying both feminist and postcolonial discourses and tropes. Her initial contention that writing her narrative will free her is altered after she comes to understand the violent nature of language, and her new approach of holding her silence, in line with postcolonial and feminist discourse, is an alternative response to canonical discursive power. Thus, in *Foe* Coetzee commits a strikingly provocative act of strategic essentialism by writing a novel essentially, to critique the writing of novels.

## Notes

1. For a discussion of the debates about Poe's position on slavery (including the "Paulding-Drayton Review"), see Terence Whalen's "Average Racism: Poe, Slavery, and the Wages of Literary Nationalism." Whalen discusses Poe's attempts to write apolitical literature, especially on the issue of slavery as a means to appeal to a larger audience and as a result of other financial concerns: "Poe's political agenda was conspicuously confined to problems of production, ranging from the poverty of authors to the corruption of publishers to the emergence of a vaguely ominous mass audience" (3-4). As a result, Whalen contends that the "average racism" present in Poe's works is an attempt to appease his audience and therefore not necessarily his own opinion, as his essays are largely evasive on political issues. Thus, the critique of imperialism that I argue is in *Pym* is certainly a "complicit critique" (a phrase that Hutcheon uses to describe postmodernism in general), but a critique nonetheless.

2. Coetzee's response to *Pym* is also obviously an aesthetic one. One example of Coetzee's critique is the way in which *Foe*'s ending differs from Poe's style of ending with a "Note." Coetzee reveals his distaste for such endings in an interview: "Dostoevsky, in *Notes from Underground*, faces a comparable question and produces a rather uninspired solution: an 'editorial' postscript saying that the text we have is incomplete. Endings of this kind, endings that inform you that the text should be understood as going on endlessly, I find aesthetically inept" (*Doubling* 248).

3. Coetzee also refers to Poe's *Pym* in his novel about a renowned woman author, *Elizabeth Costello* in a paragraph that seems to highlight the violence of language: "The Southern Ocean. Poe never laid eyes on it, Edgar Allan, but criss-crossed it in his mind... Teeth are for tearing, the tongue is for churning the swill around: that is the truth of the oral... Only by an ingenious economy, an accident of evolution, does the organ of ingestion sometimes get to be used for song" (Coetzee 54).

4. The strong similarities (the preface, an author helping to rewrite the adventurer's tales, etc.) between *Pym* and *Robinson Crusoe* suggest that Poe's main concern was with the production and dissemination of his novel (which Whalen argues), as he mimics the style of Defoe's popular story. Thus, his critique of imperialism is again complicit, limited, and subtle, manifesting itself mostly in the note that follows the text.

5. A large section of the above paragraph appears in Price's "Poe's *Pym*: A Response to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Nineteenth Century Perceptions of Race," forthcoming in *College English Notes*.

6. As the present essay argues later, Snowe's narration is unreliable at times in terms of her misreading a few signs in the novel. However, as Rabinowitz suggests, her judgments are mostly "good." Thus, the argument for Coetzee's blending of Snowe's style of narration with *Pym*'s is warranted given the more pervasive misreading that I argue occurs in *Foe* – again, a simultaneous deceiving is present in these scenes of misreading.

7. For an extended discussion on the nature of the canon, its silences, and Coetzee's treatment of it, see Attridge's chapter, "The Silence of the Canon."

8. Gayatri Spivak offers a similar caution: "Are those walking eyes rebuses, hieroglyphs, ideograms, or is their secret that they hold no secret at all? Each scrupulous effort at decoding or deciphering will bring its own rewards; but there is a structural possibility that they are nothing" (Spivak 190). This warning is certainly true for the "indentures" of Poe's tale as well, as the

editors make various guesses and Poe again offers no comment, distancing himself from the novel's misreaders.

9. Coetzee's foreshadowing here also resonates with Brontë's portrayal of Snowe's hindsighted narrative, in which she slyly includes observations about her behavior, which allude to her revelation later in the novel.

10. Rabinowitz's commentary about *Villette's* ending relates to Trinh's aforementioned quotation of Rich and indicates another instance of Brontë's strategy of withholding information to resist patriarchy: "We know that the current ending of the novel was in some sense dictated by Brontë's father; he wanted the novel to end with hero and heroine living happily ever after. The plot of the father, with its ideology of women's sexuality contained in marriage, is undercut, however, by its representation here. Instead of giving us one certain reading, Lucy gives us two ambiguous ones: Paul's drowning is never described...And the ending is meant to throw doubt on even that clarity" (Rabinowitz 252).

11. The description of the speaker's exploration of Friday's mouth in the coda invokes Whitman's "Song of Myself": "Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat, / Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even the best, / Only the lull I like, the hum of your valvèd voice" (Sec. 5) Coetzee's response to Whitman's poem is that Friday imparts the observer with a "slow stream," reflexive of the fluid utopia in the coda, whereas the Other (the soul) in Whitman's poem discloses "knowledge". Trinh's commentary illuminates this distinction: "The other is never to be known unless one arrives at a *suspension* of language, where the reign of codes yields to a state of constant non-knowledge" (76).

12. Also, *Foe* is a critique of Plato's patriarchal views and the belief in god expressed in *Book X*, as suggested throughout this essay.

13. Coetzee also may be positioning Rich's postmodern "Diving into the Wreck" against Whitman's poem as the narrator of Whitman's poem reveals "Wheretofore answering, the sea, / [...] Whisper'd me through the night [...] / Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death" (184). Thus, the contrast between the poems is that Rich's poem posits the sea as a realm beyond knowledge as it is without language whereas Whitman, the realist, suggests that the sea speaks.

14. Spivak referred to this saying at the Cosmopolitanism and Globalization conference 2007, at Stony Brook University.

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