“Whose Truth?” - A Postmodern Postcoloniality
A Textual Analysis of Foe by J. M. Coetzee

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Abstract
This article aims to provide a textual analysis of J. M. Coetzee’s novel Foe. The study will mainly focus on the theme of truth by distilling information and significance from the text, and highlighting the way the aforementioned theme can be linked and intertwined with postcolonialism and postmodernism as an altering notion. Through the characters provided by Coetzee and direct scrutiny of the text, I will deconstruct and talk through the notions of nationality, empire, freedom, and happiness, along with their impact on the protagonist, Susan, and her small entourage that consists of Friday and Foe. Consequently, this paper attests to the crucial influence of truth on the characters, how it changes representations and realities, and how it allows the readers to manufacture their own interpretations as the novel unfolds, for meaning is proven to be fragmented and fluid.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, postcolonial literature, postmodernism, truth.
0. Introduction

*Foe* by J. M. Coetzee is a postmodern narrative and a postcolonial text written in response to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. It is the story of Susan who washes up on the shore of an island while looking for her estranged daughter. She soon finds out that the island is inhabited by the white Crusoe and the black Friday. She quickly understands, then, that relations of subjugation and dominion are already established from the former on the latter. It also appears to her that time on the island seems to be an unknown notion, for none of her companions know how long they have been stranded on that remote place. They spend two years after Susan’s arrival during which Crusoe passes because of a strong fever. Finally, a ship comes and rescues the two remaining survivors and takes them back to England where Friday keeps on being dependent on the other white master; Susan. This latter, once settled, is desperate to have her story written by the famous writer Daniel Foe; however, he seems to have no regard for the actual events that happened on that island. After persistent attempts from the part of Susan to get the story of tongueless castrated Friday told in a way to give his voice back to him, she gives up. The narrative ends in a hazy dream-like sequence where Susan dreams of swimming to the shore of the island.

Since the start of the novel, the reader is made to question the objectivity or subjectivity of truth and how the meaning of that concept alters on an individual level. The fact that the first sentence is put in quotations immediately alludes to the readers that the story they are being told is a personal one. Coetzee projects the passing of time and pressures of life as a reason why the characters might move away from reality as it is and create a reality where they would rather belong. Throughout *Foe*, Coetzee says one thing but means another, and in a postmodern fashion, he does not offer any resolutions to his novel. By minimizing the plot and focusing on Susan’s internal voice, he satirizes the English mentality who is forever trying to play the hero and save the savage from his innate barbaric ways. In other words, and from a postcolonial perspective, *Foe* represents a clear response to the nineteenth-century novels surrounding the empire where binaries of master/slave and oppressor/oppressed are prevalent, and where discourses were altered in a way to benefit a certain ascendancy.
Thus, this article is an attempt to shed light on the notion of truth in the postcolonial theory as well as the postmodern one so as to set a foundation for an in-depth textual analysis concerning the truth from the perspectives of Susan, Friday, and Foe. This will help understand the factors that contribute to an individual’s understanding of reality, how one individual can create a reality for others in order to push forth a certain agenda, and the nature of truth for these characters.

1. Postcolonialism, Postmodernism, and the Paradigm of Truth

1.1. Truth in Postcolonialism

“We must question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognized from the outset; we must oust those forms and obscure forces by which we usually link the discourse of one man with that of another; they must be driven out from the darkness in which they reign […] We must also question those divisions or groupings with which we have become so familiar.”

- Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Language*

Postcolonialism or the postcolonial theory engulfs a vast array of ideas and interdisciplinary discourses. Its writing effect and vast vocabulary have made postcolonial scholars differ over the scope of its discursive implications, emphasizing the heterogeneity of Postcolonialism. Robert Young, in his book *Postcolonialism – An Historical Introduction*, more radically defines Postcolonialism as follows:

[It] names a theoretical and political position, which embodies an active concept of intervention within such oppressive circumstances. It combines the epistemological cultural innovations of the postcolonial moment with a political critique of the conditions of postcoloniality. […] Postcolonialism is both contestatory and committed towards political ideals of a transnational social justice. It attacks the status quo of hegemonic economic imperialism. (Young, 2001, pp. 57-58)

This proves that Young suggests that Postcolonialism is a theory that is against a status quo pre-established by a certain ascendant group so as to safeguard their personal interests at the expense of a subjugated category. Postcolonialism pries open the dichotomies “self-other” and
questions the situation of a reality based on the colonizer’s viewpoint, meaning that everyone’s center and periphery are different depending on a certain representation and worldview. Frantz Fanon makes it clear in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* that we have learned to perceive ourselves from a western perspective allowing them to shape our identities:

The underlying structures of oppression and injustice remain the same. Empire shaped the current national identity of Britain, France, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands. And Empire continues to play a key role in the psychological makeup, political and cultural outlook of Africa and Asia. The old European empires have been replaced by a new Empire, a hyper power that wants to rule and mould the world in its own image. (Fanon, 1967, pp. xviii-xix)

The quote above means that there is an obvious construction of the other, and there is an act of persuading this other to accept the constructed reality as common sense and an ultimate truth. The colonizer constructs an identity for the colonized and this latter is made to embrace it, define themselves by it, and even depend on it. This is what Fanon refers to as “The So-Called Dependency Complex of the Colonized People” in the book mentioned before, *Black Skin, White Masks*. In the Translation Note of the same book, Homi K. Bhabha writes:

The demand of identification—that is, to be for an “Other”—entails the representation of the subject in the differentiating order of Otherness. Identification, […] is always the return of an image of identity, which bears the mark of splitting in that “Other” place from which it comes. For Fanon, like Lacan, the primary moments of such a repetition of the self lies in the desire of the look and the limits of language. The “atmosphere of certain uncertainty” that surrounds the body certifies its existence and threatens its dismemberment. (Fanon, 1967, p. xxix)

On another note, postcolonialism and the notion of empire are interrelated. They have ventured into creating a Eurocentric westernized truth for the colonized people whilst disregarding their
cultural differences and rendering them obsolete. In this regard, Edward Said argues that even if the colonizer left the land, the imperial project is still undergoing, and to overcome the empire, the “other” should deconstruct the truth and decolonize the mind so as to provide alternatives for developing and shaping authentic identities. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said uses the concept of Contrapuntal Reading to contextualize the novel in relation to the empire. This means dealing with texts and novels with an awareness that they are culturally loaded entities with an imperialist ideology in what he designates as putting the work among other ones and exploring them in a larger contrapuntal discourse in order to achieve a more practical and socio-historical interpretation. By looking at a novel contrapuntally, we take into account intertwined histories and perspectives. He writes:

> Works of literature, particularly those whose manifest subject is empire, have an inherently untidy, even unwieldy aspect in so fraught, so densely charged a political setting. Yet despite their formidable complexity, literary works [...] are distillations, or simplifications, or a set of choices made by an author that are far less messy and mixed up than the reality. (Said, 1994, p. 287)

A contrapuntal reading is a postcolonial one. Its task is to both identify and resurrect what is invisible and excluded, to unveil the hidden meanings between the lines and question the pre-established truths. This reading is done by situating a text in its political and social context to interrogate it and historicize it whilst providing a contextualization and various understandings of a literary text and its nuances of truth following a varying of antagonistic perspectives and contrasting representations.

Thus, the European cultural imaginary and representation have a crucial role in defining white supremacy, and its justification of colonialism and imperialism through the concept of the “White Man’s Burden” that claims of bringing light, civilization, and knowledge to “the other” who is mostly considered as savage and backward. Therefore, this particular kind of awareness and attention to the fact that there is no ultimate truth, allows the readers to interpret canonical 19th and 20th century works with a newly engaged interest enabling them to read between the lines and against the grain of what was intentionally omitted and distilled by the authors mostly for political reasons. This unveils a simplistic
deceiving reality and an unstable truth, that rarely takes into account the position and actual representations of the colonized people and subjugated categories.

All the theorists mentioned and quoted above stress the fact that in postcolonialism, truth should be interrogated. The idea of a globalized and homogeneous history is rejected, and without empire, there will be no European novel. In later sections, this article will focus on the notion of empire and truth in Coetzee’s *Foe*, and how British nationalism manifests itself through one of the characters, and how it affects another.

1.2. Truth in Postmodernism

“One last precaution must be taken to disconnect the unquestioned continuities by which we organize, in advance, the discourse that we are to analyse: we must renounce two linked, but opposite themes. The first involves a wish that it should never be possible to assign, in the order of discourse, the irruption of a real event; that beyond any apparent beginning, there is always a secret origin - so secret and so fundamental that it can never be quite grasped in itself”

- Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Language*

As mentioned in the section above, postcolonialism questions the binaries and represents texts of resistance. The following section will argue the causes why it is interlinked and connected with postmodernism. This latter, as defined by Homi K. Bhabha, in his book *The Location of Culture*, is “limited to a celebration of the fragmentation of the 'grand narratives' of post enlightenment rationalism then, for all its intellectual excitement, it remains a profoundly parochial enterprise.” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4) This means that there is ideology involved in literature and that smaller narratives allow our knowledge to be situated. In the book, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard writes: “Mini-narratives do not contain any universal truths but together they form a body of knowledge more adept at describing the contemporary condition than the generalizing ideologies of grand narratives” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 65). This quote shows that the postmodern mind is that of small narratives that do not pretend to speak for all humankind but that speak from within a specific location situating its knowledge.
Thus, to work with a contingent methodology is to avoid the impact of “Grand Theory”. This term is well known in postmodernism, and it refers to the master narratives developed in the 19th century; such as Marxism, Freudianism, and Nihilism, that theorized about the social and the historical world in a universal way speaking for all humanity from an exclusively western Eurocentric perspective.

Stephen Hicks wrote a book entitled *Explaining Postmodernism – Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault* where he designates postmodernism as follows:

> Postmodern literary criticism rejects the notion that literary texts have objective meanings and true interpretations. All such claims of objectivity and truth can be deconstructed [...] Literary criticism becomes a form of subjective play in which the reader pours subjective affiliations into the text. (Hicks, 2004, p. 16)

The quote above is proof that, in postmodernism, the notion of truth is questioned, scrutinized, interrogated and, pried open. Moreover, James Clifford wrote an essay entitled “Partial Truths” in his book *Writing Culture* where he mentions that:

> In the 19th century, literature has emerged as a bourgeois institution closely allied with “culture” and “art”. Raymond Williams shows how this special refined sensibility functioned as a kind of courts of appeals in response to the perceived dislocations and vulgarity of industrial, class society. Literature and art were, in effect, circumscribed zones in which non-utilitarian, “higher” values were maintained. At the same time they were domains for the playing out of experimental, avant-garde transgressions. Seen in this light, the ideological formations of art and culture have no essential or eternal status. They are changing and contestable, like the special rhetoric of literature. (Clifford, 1986, p. 472)

This highlights the fact that literature is used as a means to construct a certain reality, maintain an ideology, present an ultimate truth, and force it on the subaltern as common sense and an accepted certainty. Clifford’s book resumes itself in the fact that truth cannot be interpreted from one perspective, that there is no complete knowledge, only partial
truth, and that claiming this partiality is becoming realistic. The postmodern theory certainly follows this flow of thoughts and perceives a text as a system of powerful meaning full of binary oppositions. Texts are constructed in a way to make readers adopt a certain attitude and disregard their latitude to think for themselves. However, in postmodernism, the reader is no longer passive and their schemata is activated, meaning that authority is challenged and the discourse of ultimate truth is subverted through dismantling pre-established realities.

It is a known fact that no text can be read independently from other texts and that a text is already written since it represents chunks of language already existing in history, that need to be individually constructed leading to the construction of individual identities. This is what Harold Bloom refers to in his book *The Anxiety of Influence* where he explains that what comes from one author emerges from different horizons that are invested in making a text, which represents a textual subconscious of literary history. Aspects such as upbringing, social status, and culture have a hand in creating literary fiction. This is what postmodernists term “intertextuality”, and what Julia Kristeva calls; text mosaic, meaning that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Prud’homme & Légaré, 2006). Moreover, intertextuality is related to Bakhtine’s “Dialogism”, and Barthes’ “Death of the Author” in which they questioned the traditional assumption that a text is directly and solely traceable to a single author for meaning and production, in short, for authority. Thus, the reader becomes an author constructing the text as well.

Another important aspect of the narratological techniques in postmodernism that punctures the truth of a text and interrogates the credibility of the author is “metafiction”, a term coined by William H. Gass. It is defined, in the book *A Postmodern Reader* written by Joseph P. Natolli and Linda Hutcheon, as “literature [...] which self-consciously renounces any pretensions to mimesis and projects itself as a purely verbal fabrication, [...] generally used to denote any systematically self-reflexive work of fiction, that is to say, fiction which investigates and exposes the processes of its own construction and, by implication, the codes and shifting parameters of "literature."” (Natolli & Hutcheon, 1993, p. 525) The quote shows that in postmodernism, the
reader does not rely on the author for interpretation and that the truth is never terminated or defined even after analysis and investigation.

Both intertextuality and metafiction are important elements in Coetzee’s *Foe*, which will be discussed in later sections.

2. A Postcolonial/Postmodern Textual Analysis of *Foe* within the Paradigm of Truth

2.1. *Foe* and *Defoe*

As a postmodern dichotomy, Coetzee’s *Foe* is a clear response and an obvious reaction to the colonial text. It questions the binary oppositions master/slave and oppressor/oppressed and carries an element of resistance pushing the readers to revise and question the structures and truth within a text. The origin of *Foe* lies in the 19th-century novel *Robinson Crusoe* written by the English writer Daniel Defoe - whose real name is Daniel Foe -. This latter is a tale of an entertaining adventure of a European man, Crusoe, who was shipwrecked on his way to discover the world. He found himself on an African Island devoid of any signs of civilization. This British protagonist survived by setting up a British empire and carried out the mission of civilizing the people following his British norms. It is a novel full of violence, pirates, cannibals, and it ends up with Crusoe’s eventual escape. The reader approaches Coetzee’s *Foe* with prior knowledge of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, which allows a comparative approach to the representation of the colonies between a colonial and postcolonial/postmodern novel.

Therefore, *Foe* is an adaptive piece based on *Robinson Crusoe* that plays on the various aspects of the original novel but transforms them and gives them a new meaning through the perspective of a female character, Susan Barton. In an essay entitled “Defoe and Foe” Brown Fuller refers to various noted scholars who have drawn important comparisons and contrasts between the two works and their interrelated significance and effect on each other. She writes:

Do we of Necessity Become Puppets of the Story or Narrating the World: On Speech, Silence and Discourse in J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* by Lewis MacLeod. This article argues that Coetzee has written the opposite of a novel, in a sense that *Foe* leads us further and further from the truth, and that this functions to investigate and
criticize the process of narrative in the novel. Another is entitled “Lost in a Maze of Doubting: J. M. Coetzee’s Foe and the Politics of (un)likeness” written by Chris Bongie. He argues here that a subject who reads Foe can sufficiently know, about the novel, about themselves, about their past, is that they know nothing. He also argues that Foe reflects unknowing back at the “seminal novel discourse of Defoe” and critiques, disapproves and disavows it. (Fuller, 2012)

The above quote is clear proof of the intertextuality and metafictionality of Foe, and how as a postmodernist, Coetzee uses a style of writing that works against the expectations and prospects of the reader so as to talk about social and political issues without explicitly saying so. This metaphorical writing allowed him to satirize the English idealism about colonization. Foe has been characterized as a postmodern novel, for it moves away from traditional narrative and representation. In addition, and written as a satirical reinvention and a revival of Robinson Crusoe, Foe uses a minimalistic plot in order to bound the reader’s view and sharpen the psychology of the characters. Using these latter as a metaphor, Coetzee sheds light and unveils the realities and truths of colonialism that were hidden behind the British Grand Narrative.

It is known that in postmodernism, the play on words is important. Therefore; Foe could be the name of the author within the story, an illusion to the writer Defoe, or even seen from its literary etymological meaning as enemy and nemesis. In a shifting style of storytelling; from partly writing a story, to writing it through letters, to finally telling the story directly, the truth is being filtered and distilled through the narrator. The reader in this case is not told an objective narrative from the gaze of an omnipresent perception, but rather from the view of a person who is often trying to persuade the former of the said words. The “I” shifts from one person to the other making perspectives and viewpoints alter as well. In Foe, the narration style further emphasizes this sense, and it engages extensively with the idea of whose reality, focusing on the notion of truth and the ways in which people can create and manufacture reality for others. The novel also adopts a first-person narration from the perspective of Susan Barton, for her own, and her reader’s speculations as will be discussed in the next section.
2.2. Susan Barton’s Truth

“Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? To what order do I belong?” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 133) This is one of the most significant lines of conversation between Susan Barton and Foe whilst discussing the reality of the existence of the characters involved in the novel. As mentioned before, Foe is a postmodern dichotomy that satirically sheds light on the British colonial project and Grand Narrative. The narrator of the novel is Susan Barton, a woman who, after venturing to look for her lost daughter in Brazil, is kicked off the ship by mutineers along with the captain’s corpse. Susan battles and finds her way to an island where she meets Friday and Crusoe and remains there for two years before being rescued.

On another note, the four main characters in this story are separate individuals with contrasting visions over reality, while only Susan gets to tell her story, the contrasting perspectives of Friday, Foe, and Crusoe are shown into action when held in comparison with the protagonist. Many instances occur in the novel to consolidate this point such as; Susan and Crusoe not agreeing on the importance of documenting their stay on the island, Susan and Friday not having the same understanding of the concept of happiness, or Susan and Foe not being on the same page regarding the notion of truth. Susan, along with her contradictions with the other characters, is clear proof of the existence of various factors that contribute to the understanding, the shaping, and the fashioning of one’s reality. Through her character, Coetzee uses Susan as a narrative device so as to criticize the elevated sense of British nationalism, the existence of ultimate truth, and the questioning of the actual sense of the notion of freedom.

While the narrative of Susan unfolds, she makes it hard for the reader not to question her credibility and authenticity as a narrator, for she, herself, does not have a firm grasp over reality. She uses her narration as a means to make herself believe that what happened is indeed true, and makes more effort to persuade herself than to persuade the reader. Many instances in her life were make-believe which proves her version of the truth to be unstable and untrustworthy. One of the many examples is her being told by the captain of the ship that came to their rescue to pretend that Crusoe was indeed her husband because her original story
of Bahia and the mutineers was vague. To this, Susan laughed and thought, “What kind of woman was I, in truth?” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 42)

Gender is a clear difference between Susan and the other characters. It is an aspect that affects her life the most, and disturbs her ability to self-publish, for she lacks the words and the patience. Her gender difference is also highlighted in the way she and Crusoe deal with and perceive the landscape surrounding them on the island. Crusoe feels the need to master it, fashion it according to his own preferences, and tame it in a laborious work with Friday, while she thinks that their efforts were unnecessary, tiring, and with no purpose, as shown in the following quote “A mighty labor, I remarked. But privately I thought: Is bare earth, baked by the sun and walled about, to be preferred to pebbles and bushes and swarm of birds?” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 33) Another thing worth noting in Susan’s character through her interactions with Crusoe is her attempt to hide her personal opinions and disagreements in order to safeguard his feelings of dominance and masculinity. Her passiveness is apparent when they have intercourse for the first time; she did not want to but thought of his well-being before hers. She also does the same later on in the novel with Foe.

Susan is portrayed in a way that shows that she approaches life from a fundamentally colonial attitude. She thinks that nature is better when tamed and controlled by the human hand when she states, “Here in England […] it is our custom to grow hedges to mark the limits of our property. Doubtless that would not be possible in the forests of Africa. But here we grow hedges, and then cut them straight, so that our gardens shall be neatly marked out” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 60) A clear argument on nature vs. nurture, and the fact that the natural primordial attitude may prevail in the absence of the improvement of one’s intellectual level and the enrichment of well-built perspectives over different aspects in life. Moreover, the way a person should deal with human existence and human interaction is defined by the level of one’s culture and literacy. This is why Susan’s interactions with Friday are obviously shaped by an elevated sense of nationalism and belonging to a higher civilized race, and the fact that she fears him reverting to his cannibalistic tendencies if he does not get civilized immediately highlights her sense of supremacy and domination over subjugated races.
Unconsciously and without planning on it, Susan imposes western and Eurocentric notions of happiness and freedom on Friday, not understanding that his dancing sprees and his repetitive tune on his flute could designate his own sense of joy. Susan also always compares Crusoe’s island with Britain as seen in “They say Britain is an island too, a great island. But that is a mere geographer's notion. The earth under our feet is firm in Britain, as it never was on Crusoe's island” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 26) what explains the fact that past experiences and involvements are a clear determinant and factor of how one will react to similar situations and occurrences in the future. This is further implied in the different responses that Susan and Friday have to being rescued. Susan is at peace with the sailors knowing they will take her back somewhere familiar, while Friday runs away when he sees the ship and those in it since they awaken fear inside him and render him restless, for they represent the unknown. Thus, lack of personal experience can manifest itself in differing perceptions of the world.

“Who but Crusoe, who is no more, could truly tell you Crusoe’s story?” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 51) Here Susan urges the reader to question her own authenticity and legitimacy as a narrator, as mentioned before. Moreover, she frequently mentions what little proof she has on the island’s existence when saying, “I brought back not a feather, not a thimbleful of sand, from Crusoe's island. All I have is my sandals. 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” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 51) This shows that at several instances, the reader is made to interrogate Susan’s account on the island because her story of how she came to it is not that convincing and holds notable gaps.

Furthermore, her interactions and exchanges with the girl who has claimed to be her daughter, present the possibility and introduce the prospect that Susan is completely detached from reality and that she may perhaps be living in a world of her own making, which only makes her truthfulness dubious and debatable. Both stories presented by both Susans are different and contradictory, so one of them must be incorrect, if not both. In addition, the fact that the alleged daughter holds the exact same name as Susan is suspicious. Susan hints to this aspect when stating “For though my story gives the truth, it does not give the substance of the truth (I see that clearly, we need not pretend it is
Coetzee, through Susan, plays on the idea that truth is subjective and could be in the eye of the beholder.

2.3. Friday’s Truth

Many aspects of Friday’s truth have already been mentioned and discussed through Susan’s truth in the previous section, for both characters go hand in hand and cannot be separated from each other because Friday’s account will only be revealed through Susan’s perspective. Friday is an interesting literary device used by Coetzee to pass the criticism and the satire on colonialism and British grand narrative in a subtle implicit way throughout the novel. However, even if Friday’s truth is only portrayed from Susan’s perspective, this latter makes the reader aware that Friday’s version of the same truth indeed differs in a signified/signifier kind of fashion. This is obvious in the following quote when Susan was trying to uncover the truth behind the person who cut Friday’s tongue using drawings, “And even if it was a Moor who cut out his tongue, his Moor was likely an inch taller than mine, or an inch shorter; wore black or blue, not white; was bearded, not clean-shaven; had a straight knife, not a curved one; and so forth.” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 70) This shows that ultimately, nobody will be able to tell Friday’s truth except himself, since Susan considers that even if she was right and a black slave trader cut out his tongue, the nature of that person is different to each of them.

On another note, Susan is given great power over Friday’s truth, which allows this latter notion to stretch and alter considerably. Even the account of Crusoe on Friday must be questioned since there is no way to verify its validity and truthfulness. In this regard, Susan states, “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?” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 121) Meaning that Friday’s truth could be molded and sculpted following the narrator’s desires and interests. Hence, if the truth is subjective in these ways, the reader is led into thinking about the novel’s representations of a person’s capacity to exist in a false reality. This validates Coetzee’s use of metafiction and the conflicted representation Susan faces psychologically, in order to expose the dichotomy master/slave of his era. Friday is under Susan’s mercy in her quest to civilize him and make him happy, which demonstrates the true British mentality on colonialism and its ideas on civility, as seen in the ways
she tries to teach him how to talk in a gullible failing attempt that sheds lights on the common idea of white race’s capability of civilizing the savage.

Many have had speculations over the meaning and the true significance of Friday’s silence. The fact that he is only accustomed to words that tell him how to serve is an obvious rhetoric for silencing the colonized. However, there is a talking back within the colonial discourse in what Bakhtine designates in his dialogism and polyphony where there are seeds of resistance within the colonial discursive practices. Although Friday’s truth can never be fully told because of muteness, he is in fact present. He forms visibility that threatens the colonizer. His way of resistance is not speaking the language which is a language in itself.

2.4. Foe’s Truth

Foe is the writer who was going to supposedly tell the story of Crusoe, Susan, and Friday on the island. He is first introduced in the narrative as the receiver of Susan’s letters. Susan considers him as the only person capable of bringing the story of Crusoe’s island to life, for she admires his writing style and way of composition. However, they disagree over the notion of truth, since Susan wants her story to be told as it is, while Foe wishes to add more entertainment and an adventure-feel to it. They fail to reach an understanding concerning the nature of the truth of storytelling. Susan addresses Foe and says “What can I do but protest it is not true? I am as familiar as you with the many, many ways in which we can deceive ourselves. But how can we live if we do not believe we know who we are, and who we have been?” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 130) This demonstrates that Foe does not only portray how people are able to fool themselves into accepting a false reality, but how one individual is capable of creating said reality for others. Within the novel, there is a changing relationship between Susan and Foe since they hold different perspectives on the importance of truth in bringing Susan’s tale to light. Eventually, Susan comes to appreciate that Foe’s task is “not only to tell the truth but please its readers too” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 63), and as the captain of the ship that rescued Crusoe stated, “their trade is in books, not in truth” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 40).

In Foe, Susan’s original story of the island fails to appeal to the English taste “Yet […] if we were nearer the heavens there, why was it that so
little of the island could be called extraordinary? Why were there no strange fruits, no serpents, no lions? Why did the cannibals never come? What will we tell folk in England when they ask us to divert them?” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 43) Her story lacks a grandiose sense of adventure and conquest. Therefore, Foe doubts Susan’s story and believes that it will not appeal to most Englishmen and will not make a successful book.

3. Conclusion

_Foe_ is a novel that cannot be thoroughly discussed in one study or one article, for it holds various nuances and aspects that require deep analysis and a complete understanding of the postmodern and postcolonial way of writing. This article has tried to focus mainly on the notion of truth and how it manifests itself through the characters, mainly through the perspective of the narrator Susan Barton, and how this latter notion affects the concepts of nationality, empire, freedom, and happiness. Friday’s truth was intricately interrelated to Susan’s viewpoint, and Foe’s truth did not match Susan’s opinions which leaves the readers able to construct their own vision and understanding of subjective truth in a true postcolonial and postmodern fashion where authority is undermined and scrutinized. The novel offers no last resolutions and is a definite response to nineteenth-century canonical literature. Coetzee’s use of Foe implies his adoption of intertextuality as well as metafictionality within his writing. It is, in a way, an invitation from his part for the reader to construct their own subjective understanding and to establish a personal meaning endowed with multiplicity, fluidity, and fragmentation.

“So in the end I did not know what was truth, what was lies, and what was mere rambling” (Coetzee, 1986, p. 12)

References


