

Woman and Narrative Power: An Analysis of J.M Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country* and *Foe*

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Certificate

This is to certify that the Minor Research Project titled *Woman and Narrative Power: An Analysis of J.M Coetzee's In the Heart of the Country and Foe* (MRP (H)-0602/12 - 13/KLMG031/UGC SWRO dated 27 march 2014) is a bonafide work done by Dr. Jyothimol.P, Associate Professor, Postgraduate Department of English and Centre for Research, Baselius College, Kottayam and that the project has been completed duly adhering to the rules and regulations laid down by the University Grants Commission.

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Declaration

I, Dr. Jyothimol.P hereby declare that the dissertation titled *Woman and Narrative Power: An Analysis of J.M Coetzee's In the Heart of the Country and Foe* has been prepared by me and also declare that this is a bonafide record of research work done by me during the course of Minor Research Project allotted to me by the University Grants Commission, New Delhi and no part of this study has been submitted earlier or elsewhere for any similar purpose.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The project titled “Woman and Narrative Power: An Analysis of J.M Coetzee’s *In the Heart of the Country* and *Foe*” is aimed at unravelling the space of the woman narrator in the textual world of the South African writer J.M Coetzee. This enquiry is done in four chapters. The first is an introduction through which the purpose and the impact of Coetzeean women narrators are analysed in general. The second chapter titled “Displacing Defoe/ Crusoe: Susan’s Story in *Foe*” is an exclusive explication of J. M Coetzee’s much acclaimed work *Foe*, the apprehension of Susan Barton as a powerful narrator and the multiple roles served by her in the trajectory of the story. The third chapter is “Magda as Narrator: Counter/Demythologization in *In the Heart of the Country*” which deals with Magda’s role as the narrator in the median serving a demythologizing purpose shaking the foundations of patriarchy, colonialism and even unnerving the postcolonial premises. The fourth chapter is a conclusion that sums up the arguments.

J.M Coetzee is regularly and rigorously engaged in exploring the ontological and epistemological issues crucial to the fictional discourse. The negotiation of his authorial position and situating his location in post Apartheid South Africa are primarily through the textual positions he seeks to endorse. Coetzee seems to endorse the view that self reflexive writing is the only mode through which he can transcend the concerns of reality and history. Even when Coetzee’s fiction has followed different narrative styles or patterns there are certain basic issues that run through them. Writing, authorship, language, domination, marginalization, the problem of authority, reflexive self- consciousness, the problems of narration and the intense and interconnected

deployment of these concerns make his texts the essence of theoretical and ideological inscriptions. These are the threads which connect his writing and texts and emphasize the web of textual relations. As Radical metafiction is a valid way of recording one's experience since it does away with the tyranny of realism Coetzee has resorted to it in an effective way in the complex expanse of his textual world. The truth in Coetzee's work lies in its ambiguity. These ambivalences are central to Coetzee as person and to his writing as he is situated within a problematic post colonialism caught between the white colonizer and the native African cultural dichotomy. He addresses the postmodern concerns of the problematic of writing, of self reflexivity and open ended texts and dubious narrators. His essays of writing and textual practices have been unquestionably motivated by his ideological preferences and situations and his narrators have been consciously located in a dichotomous realm between the centre and the periphery.

The novels of Coetzee occupy a special place in South African literature. The analysis of the colonizing psyche, the emphasis on textual structures, the challenge to novelistic conventions, the self critique and the position of holding the middle voice are certain characteristics of Coetzeean narratives. Coetzee is engaged primarily in exploring the potentialities and possibilities of fictional discourse. He very strategically locates himself in the "complex historical past and in the fractured social present of post- Apartheid South Africa" (Baral 12). Coetzee's writing style and his themes exemplify the very art of writing which he tries to put forth through his fictional world. His informed understanding of the craft of writing and the self reflexivity of Defoe and Lawrence Sterne, the art of writing of Kafka and other celebrated modernists along with vast exposure to the postmodern and poststructural scenario of Lacan, Derrida, Foucault and the negotiated location in South Africa where the postcolonial voices are primarily valid make him an able and effective wielder of strategic tools of writing.

Though Coetzee's novels may have followed different narrative styles, they all have some common themes and elements that run through them. Issues of authorship, language, the art and craft of writing, domination, marginalization, the multiplicity of voices and infinity of perceptions are some of the key aspects that dominate his fictional oeuvre. Coetzee's self as a writer is an intertextual space where he takes recourse to a number of philosophers and thinkers. The problem of silence or voice in the representation of the Other is a major concern in his novels. Coetzee's position in South Africa is in a complex relationship with the culture he partakes of. As a white South African writer Coetzee inhabits a very particular margin partly distanced from both African and English affiliations. This middle course- noman's land- is where Coetzee is situated in a dubious position of non affiliation and non belonging. This complex issue of identity is highly essential in locating Coetzee as a postcolonial writer. Attwell uses the term "colonial postcolonialism" (Attwell 112) for the middle -the median- position that Coetzee occupies in his response to the South African situation.

J.M Coetzee has effectively problematized the issue of the liminal voices in his various writings and has significantly made use of women narrators in his novels to embody the powerlessness of power and non-belongingness of affiliation. The true postcolonial and discursive dilemmas have been communicated through his narrators held between the margins, occupying the doubleness of perceptions and dubious dispositions, often inhabiting the inhibited location of the sensitive white postcolonial writer. The texts chosen for the study are selected for they conspicuously render the voice of the median through their very self conscious women narrators. Coetzee manages certain functions through his women narrators where his male voices sometimes fail and falter.

Coetzee has been much acclaimed for his elaborate and significant use of women narrators in his novelistic universe. He has strategically and conspicuously positioned white women narrators in the fictional realm. White women narrators do take the narrative effectively ahead and forward in at least three of his texts like *In the Heart of the Country* (1979), *Foe* (1986) and *Age of Iron* (1990). Coetzee's strategic employment of women in the narrators' role serves a number of objectives. His women serve the purpose of both feminine and feminist roles and needs in Coetzee's fictional world. Coetzee's perspectives on feminism and the conspicuous and strategic employment of women narrators have been subjected to effective critique with regard to his take on contemporary South Africa and its politics. Critics like Dunbar and Rody share the view that Coetzee is a feminist while Macaskill and Colleran are of the opinion that Coetzee is undermining the arguments of western feminism by opening it up for critique as inadequate to meet the challenges of marginalized sector. In the textual world of Coetzee, the women narrators are the boards on which the discourse of complicit marginalization is placed. The positioning of Susan Barton in *Foe* serves this purpose. There is another inherent objective for using the white woman narrator. Coetzee makes use of the woman narrators to raise a pertinent point of problematizing the narrative and discourse. Different voices within feminism have its resonance in the strategic use of the woman narrator in Coetzeean oeuvre. Fiona Probyn Rapsey opines, "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" (Rapsey 248). The figures of the white women narrators invest Coetzee with a power to criticize the dominant ideology without being overtly interrogative. They provide a space for being dialectical without being antagonistic. The white women narrators' inability to carry the discourse to where they would want it, their

inability to authorize, their incapacity to liberate and their inadequacy for toppling the narrative make them essentially significant in the Coetzeean scheme of narrative. They remain “as vehicles patrolling the boundaries of the subject’s breakdown” (246).

Many leading critics like Du Plessis, Spivak, Attwell and Dovey argue that the white woman’s presence and voice are used by Coetzee as appropriate vehicles for interrogating structures of power from within. Along with the overt feminist challenge, the woman narrator serves the aspect of femininity as well. If the feminist challenge is an open one with a view to topple the dominant discourse and to displace the centre, the aspect of the feminine aims to disrupt the narrative in an oblique way and maintain an ambivalent stand while doing it. This ambivalence places them between discourses, in a strategically significant operational ground beyond certainties of any kind where they remain without allying either with the hegemonic centrist systems that colonize or the colonized genuine Other.

The woman narrator in Coetzee functions as the author as well. Magda’s diary gets unravelled in *In the Heart of the Country*, while *Foe* develops through the progresses of Susan’s journal and letters. *Age of Iron* deals with Elizabeth Curren’s letter to her daughter living in exile in America. There is an element of uncertainty and self doubt regarding the act of writing in the mind of the woman author and she self-consciously scrutinizes her authoring, making the process of writing as self reflexive and dubious as possible. Susan is dubious about her prowess in the art and craft of writing and the way the writing happens easily surprises her as if she did not expect it to happen. She says, “Some people are born storytellers: I, it would seem am not” (*Foe* 81). Magda is also unsure about the authenticity and certainty of her writings when she says about “these words passing through my head on their route from nowhere to nowhere” (*In the Heart of the Country* 56).

The ambivalent positioning of the woman narrator seems to symbolize the equivocal and ambiguous position of Coetzee regarding the political scenario of South Africa. As a white South African he exudes power, but his disengagement with the politics of dominant discourse brings him to a position of disempowerment. Writing from this “medium, the median” (133) self realizing of powerful powerlessness Coetzee adopts the strategy of writing in the “middle voice” (Macaskill 67) which is “a complex amalgam of both power and powerlessness” (Rapsey 248). Fiona Rapsey is of the opinion that Coetzee’s women narrators fulfill the function of playing the medium, of questioning the dominant ideology without appearing to do so. Susan, Magda, Elizabeth Curren are all aware of their limited access to narrative power and their limitations regarding that which means they occupy a dubious stand with reference to power and its expressions. Coetzee embodies his powerful powerlessness, his marginality, his “writing without authority” (Coetzee, *Doubling* 392) in the character of his woman narrator.

J. M Coetzee’s *Foe* and *In the Heart of the Country* are answers to the enquiries that have characterized the recent theoretical concerns regarding the space and voice of the marginalized beings in literature. Feminism in its struggle to let the woman be heard and listened to have been actively engaged in setting right the erasures and submergences of female voices and selves. Claiming back the female self is claiming the female voice and presence. *Foe* and *In the Heart of the Country* address these issues and problematize the question of female narrative control vis a vis voice and space in a colonialist discourse. Presence is what determines power. Visibility, voice and their spatial positioning determine who controls the narratives. From time immemorial women have been the absence, the ones without voice and located in the margins. They have been the objects of the dominant discourse of patriarchy, their voices submerged within the claims of authority of patriarchal culture. *Foe* poses challenges to the double colonization, those

of patriarchy and of colonialism. It questions and disrupts the notions of 'woman' of the discourses of patriarchy and emphatically addresses the issue of women's claims for voice and space in narrative design.

Coetzee addresses the feminist issue in *Foe* through the character of Susan Barton, who gets to narrate the story of Crusoe and his island episode. Susan Barton in Coetzee's *Foe* challenges the erasure and absence of women from the discourse of patriarchy. She is a symbolic representative of the feminist challenge and serves as a site for addressing other ideological issues connected with woman's discourse and Coetzee's location in it. Susan is a counter-discursive figure in questioning the canonical text and the discursive universe associated with it. She serves as a space for the inculcation and stabilization of imperial ideologies by keeping a relationship of complicity with the dominant ideologies. Susan Barton also serves the role of the liberal feminist in her efforts to civilize Friday. She is also used as the vehicle for addressing the ambivalent position of Coetzee in South Africa. Susan Barton problematizes the question of authority and control in the narrative. Susan is the site of *Foe*'s intersection with *Roxana*.

In the Heart of the Country dramatizes the location of Magda in a no man's land between the woes of settler colonialism and the anguish of the black natives. She is represented as trying to authenticate her existence through the undated journal that she writes without preambles or epilogues. The text is an intriguing one as Magda as a narrator is a beguiling one with several versions of the same event coexisting simultaneously in the space of the narrative. There are various levels in which Magda serves as a signifier for the narrative power of women. She is the subtle, yet powerful voice of the colonialist negotiating her in betweenness effectively and powerfully. She is a conspicuous symbol for the compromising, blunt locale of the settler woman representing a discourse lost and written off. Magda has murdered her father repeatedly in

several ways and patricide is a symbolic destruction of patriarchy and this gesture makes her the unequivocal feminist. The lyrical ending of Magda's narrative in a mood and tone of tranquility in a contented harmony with her father upholds the female awakening in a lost saga of patriarchal colonialism and interrogating feminism. This multiple signifier of woman's power is Coetzee's voice from the median too where the interrogation of authority takes place without apparent authorial or authoritative garb, yet effective.

Chapter 2

Displacing Defoe/ Crusoe: Susan's Story in *Foe*

J. M Coetzee's *Foe* is considered as the intertext of *Robinson Crusoe*, the eighteenth century classic text by the master craftsman Daniel Defoe. In *Foe* the Crusoe story is just an episode in the narrative of Susan Barton, a woman castaway who shares the island experience along with Cruso and his man servant Friday. *Foe* raises the question of identity and subjectivity in a postcolonial entity. *Foe* exemplifies all the narrative and stylistic features of Coetzean creativity. From his eponymous status in the patriarchal narrative, Cruso just gets reduced into a character in a section of Susan's story. *Foe* challenges the institution of patriarchy and colonialism from the text's overtly postcolonial and feminist positions and also offers a textual revision of the entire ideological world of Defoean fictional realm.

Foe as an intertext of *Robinson Crusoe* problematizes the issue of women in all its diverse forms. But the finale of the novel suggests a "maze of doubting" (*Foe* 135) where the world of the feminine and the feminist conflate with the world of the postcolonial whose voices have been appropriated and manipulated by the same power structures albeit various ways. The contention here is that *Foe* celebrates the Other, the half colonized Other and the genuine Other and when their submerged voices emerge from the wreck or the abyss where the two discourses conflate in a rare but pertinent manner, it is the colonialist or the patriarch who takes a back stage, losing their dominant discourses among the uncertain infinity of 'O'mega. If Friday is the figure of postcolonial resistance, Susan Barton undoubtedly offers the feminist saga of the text. Her mode of resistance is more conspicuous than that of her postcolonial counterpart. The subtle resistance and the challenge of Friday sometimes submerge the violent upheaval of Susan's

discourse. Feminist concern is underplayed and sometimes used in complicity with the colonial design to thwart the cause of postcolonial silence in *Foe*. The problematization of the postcolonial is shouldered by the feminist and the feminist discourse loses its cutting edge on the way.

Patriarchy receives a jolt with the incursion of Barton into the life of Cruso and the author Foe. By invading Foe's premises and appropriating it for herself, Barton offers a proclamation of the woman toppling the patriarchal premises. In turn it becomes a tug of war for the appropriation of the narrative. As Foe is Defoe deconstructed, the great English writer of the celebrated tale of colonialism, invasion of his creative arena is a resistance to the theories of colonial and patriarchal ideological structure which 'writes and reads' woman as it pleases. The woman not only claims to rewrite the canon but also wants to be the author of the story. The author's position is one of authority. Susan wants to be "shaping and reshaping" (131) destinies just like man, God, authors and imperialists do. She wants to be the wielder of words controlling the discourse. As the pen is power she wants to be the one to manipulate destinies rather than be manipulated.

Right from the beginning it is a woman's intertextual answer to the patriarchal saga. The novel opens with the words of Susan as the narrator of the story, "At last I could row no further" (1). The narrator's emergence takes us by surprise as she is juxtaposed along with Friday who is already positioned in *Robinson Crusoe*. Being written is being assigned locations. Susan Barton escapes such an assignment as her existence is as a resistance figure, not part of an 'always, already written' discourse. Just as Friday had been made Cruso's first subject by being saved by him, Susan becomes his "second subject" (11) telling him her story. If Friday's subjugation is enforced, Susan's is caused by her misfortune. She tells him, "I am on your island, Mr. Cruso,

not by choice but by ill luck ...I am a castaway, not a prisoner” (20). Susan recognizes the great ‘resale’ value of her castaway story and wants to let the world know about it. As creating a story is an authoritative and manipulative gesture she hopes to manipulate Crusoe’s story as much as anyone. Though situations have forced her to be the subject of Crusoe, she is singularly conscious of her location and its significance. Susan has invaded into what is entirely a man’s playground/territory. She is proud of her unique position and is interested in capitalizing it to the maximum. “There has, never before to my knowledge, been a female castaway of our nation” (40). But as the economies of fiction are generally controlled by men and Crusoe does not want the story to be told, she has to wait till Crusoe’s death to narrate the story and Crusoe story in turn becomes the narrative of Susan. Hence Crusoe story begins from the time of Susan reaching the island as a castaway. Susan is an alternate Crusoe figure, a female adventuress. But unlike Crusoe her expedition is not motivated by economic reasons or the desire for founding empires and plantations. Her voyage is a quest for her lost daughter. It is this adventurous quest, undertaken for reasons other than domination which argues for the feminist rewriting in *Foe*.

Susan is not mute like Friday. She shows tremendous mettle in questioning the royal stance of Crusoe and she is not the representative of silent womanhood but symbolizes feminist challenges. Once on the island, she undermines patriarchal designs, its inclinations and inhibitions. She refuses to be abated by the stony stance of Crusoe with his intimidating stature and thwarts his silences with her prompt interrogation and shows tremendous capacity for practical applications, searching methods for deliverance from the island. Susan is not a figure of silence. Instead she is voluble and openly questioning. Her interrogations often put Crusoe ill at ease. She vehemently suggests to Crusoe to put his story in writing so that it will serve posterity, “Is it not possible to manufacture paper and ink and set down what traces remain of these

memories, so that they will outlive you?" (17). It is Susan who expresses the notion of the particularity of experience instead of the archetypal generalities of the great Romantic tales of adventures prevalent during the 17th century. Here she functions as a spokesperson for the ideology of Realism with its thrust on the particular and specific:

But seen from too remote a vantage, life begins to lose its particularity. All shipwrecks become the same shipwreck; all castaways become the same castaway, sunburnt, lonely, clad in the skins of the beasts that he has slain. The truth that makes your story yours alone..., resides in a thousand touches which today may seem of no importance...(18).

Right from the moment of Susan's incursion into the kingdom of Cruso it becomes the location for the questioning of patriarchal premises. She refuses to accept Cruso's perspectives/perceptions regarding life. She subjects him to severe interrogation and critique. She questions him about the "terraces, and the boat he would not build, and the journal he would not keep, and the tools he would not save from the wreck, and Friday's tongue" (34).

The fact that Susan Barton is given the role of the narrator indicates the thwarting of Crusoe story of Defoe. Crusoe of Defoe has been manipulated to be the Cruso of Barton's story. Unlike Crusoe in *Robinson Crusoe* who is supposed to have kept journals that elaborately deal with his island adventures, Cruso in *Foe is* presented as a dull old man engaged in futile labour. It is Susan Barton who equals colonial Crusoe by being innovative and maintaining a journal. Cruso just remains at the periphery of Susan's discourse. She proves herself to be spirited and practical with suggestions regarding ways to get out of the island. She defies the ideological

expectation of patriarchy and is a representation of an enlightened woman. She does what men generally do, and what a woman is not expected to do. She questions Foe:

Do you think of me, Mr. Foe, as Mrs. Cruso or as a bold adventuress?

Think what you may, It was I who shared Cruso's bed and closed

Cruso's eyes as it is I who have disposal of all that Cruso leaves

behind, which is the story of his island (45).

His story of the island at her disposal becomes her story, with all power invested in Susan to make any changes that she would like therein. The representation of Susan Barton is an affirmation of the woman's self, a regenerated soul, daring to challenge the patriarch and steering the course of the story, devising and designing the escape from the island.

Susan becomes the female Cruso, the female castaway. With the weakening of Cruso's discourse, Susan gains control. She says of the gradual decline of Cruso's power, "With every passing day he was conveyed farther from the kingdom he pined for, to which he would never find his way again. He was a prisoner and I despite myself his gaoler" (43). Story telling is a process of power and authority. This politics of narration is what Susan aspires for. After Cruso's death, she is bent on making her island experience into a narrative that people will pay attention to. It shows her aspiration to be part of the world that shapes discourses, the ideologies that construct and perpetrate subjectivities, and not be its empty objects, its mutilated selves. She wants to be the subject of the discourse and not its powerless Other. The death of the patriarchal figure Cruso is the symbolic death of the dominant, ideological structure. As Susan wants to make her mark in the universe, to let the posterity know of her existence not just in the suburbs of discourse, but close to the centre of the dominant ideological structures, she proposes

to use the same strategies of patriarchy "...for the world expects stories from its adventurers, better stories than tallies of how many stones they moved in fifteen years..." (34). Susan keeps a journal till the very end of the story which survives the patriarchal stone structures, but her narrative gets washed away by the uninterrupted stream of Friday's postcolonial discourse.

Susan's presence and the evolution of her character account for a female bildungsroman in which she emerges from her stance of being the lonely female castaway on Crusoe's island to interrogate the discursive systems that 'create' woman as the 'Other'. The first two parts of the novel is essentially concerned with Susan's narrative. The first part is her reflections on being shipwrecked on the island and her conquest of the Crusoe story. It also deals with her custody of all that Crusoe leaves behind on his death. With Crusoe's death the postcolonial figure of resistance, Friday becomes the liability of Susan as he had been to the colonial Crusoe earlier. Part two is in epistolary mode full of the letters that Susan writes to the author Foe "the letters [you] he never read" (117). The mantle of authorship has passed from Crusoe to Susan. Part I and II together celebrate the feminist rewriting of the Defoean narrative of Crusoe. Part II locates Susan not only in relation with the colonial/patriarchal figure Crusoe but also in an interface with Foe, symbolizing the woman's entry into the world of discourse and the signifying systems that shape the discourse. In spite of the claim about not being well versed in the "art of writing" (52) that brings "life to [your] thieves and courtesans and grenadiers" (52) as Foe is, she manifests a mature sense of perception and tremendous sense of responsibility in her letter and journal. In the absence of the author figure, Susan begins to exert narrative control, not only with regard to the woman's story but also with Friday's supposed story as well. She wants the authorship of her story, to be the possessor and narrator of realistic details wishing for substantiality and not just "a

ghost beside the true body of Cruso” (51). Susan does not want to play the second fiddle to the island experience. Susan says:

Yet I was as much a body as Cruso. I ate and drank, I woke and slept,
I longed. The island was Cruso’s. Yet by what right? by the law of
the islands? Is there such a law? but I lived there too, I was no bird of
passage...to circle the island once and dip a wing and then fly on
over the boundless ocean. Return to me the substance I have lost(51).

With part II Susan feels more or less in control of the narrative, raising questions of what constitutes textuality and substantiality. She is even pushed into taking up the responsibility of setting her story right by filling the gaps and voicing the silences, supplying whatever the narrative seems to have missed. “Alas, my stories seem always to have more application than I intend, so that I must go back and laboriously extract the right application and apologize for the wrong ones and efface them” (81).

As the novel progresses, Susan becomes the site for articulating the strategies of fictionality and becomes conscious of the ingredients that would truly make a story interesting and intriguing and tries to master the art of self reflexivity. On first coming to Foe with the island tale, Susan is very adamant about preserving the ‘truth’ of her story. She says, “I would rather be the author of my own story than have lies told about me” (40). She derides and denies the subtle touches of artistry that the author suggests as modifications to her story to make it more interesting and does not want her story to be manipulated with the art and craft of writing. Her interrogation and critique of the institution of patriarchy and its symbol are intertwined with the central issue of the metafictional aspects of textuality. Susan proclaims her unwillingness to be

the writing or the text and wishes to be the author. Her critique of Foe's textual practices does not just address the issue of textuality; it is an affirmation of the woman's challenge against the hegemonic centrist systems that keep her in subjugation. It also subjects the canonical writer Defoe to scrutiny by commenting about the characters in Defoean masterpieces and the way they are formed by artifice that resembles art

. In Susan's desire to be the author there is the gynocritic proclamation of the woman's voice, her self, her assumption of the responsibility and realization of her niche and space. Towards the end of part two she almost speaks the language of Foe, the author, when she plans to manipulate her story with the right mixture of fact and fancy so that the island experience becomes more appealing. In a letter to Foe she muses, "I am growing to understand why you wanted Crusoe to have a musket and be besieged by cannibals. I thought it was a sign you had no regard for truth ... It is all a matter of words and the number of words, is it not?"(94). The growth she mentions is one of power and its consciousness creating corresponding change in the subjectivities. Susan assumes the role of the centre denying the margins and assigning the location in the margins to Friday. Susan's desire to be the father of her story is indicative of her wish to topple the patriarchal, authorial sway and possession of the subjectivity of women reducing them to the peripheries of existence. Susan is not just satisfied with being the begetter of the story; she wants to go beyond the authorial intention of making her just an episode in a great island story.

As the /disruption of the notions of masculinity through disfigurement of the patriarchal hero is an essential strategy in the feminist rewriting, the faded representation of Defoe's Crusoe in *Foe* establishes the emphatic message of the woman's discourse. Susan becomes in charge of the narrative with the weakening of the institution of Crusoe. The Crusoe of *Foe* is a faded shadow

of the Crusoe of *Robinson Crusoe*. With Cruso's death she comes to be perceived as Mrs. Cruso, the true inheritor of the kingdom of Cruso along with the direction and the version of the story. The story of his island becomes 'the story of his island' as she perceives it. This is the narrative twist that takes place in the retelling of the Cruso story by Susan Barton.

The second part of the novel, which is in a mixed journal and epistolary form sees the emergence of Susan as a symbol of feminist ideology, taking control of the narrative, freeing it from the hold of the dominant ideology of patriarchy. She masters the art of storytelling and gives voice to the issue of textuality and of fiction writing like any major practitioner of canonicity. With the process of writing Susan subtly moves from the assigned locations in the margins to one of assigning locations. She writes and refuses to be written.

In Part Three Susan has assumed the position of an author; she speaks the language of authority and acts in control. The narrative of Cruso with Foe in charge of casting it the right way shifts hands and comes to the possession of Susan. Her reflections on the art of storytelling are authorial and political. She is open to those elements which will make her island experience a worthy, readable narrative. There are unanswered questions in the narrative and like any good craftsman of fiction she wants to address those mysteries. "I ask these questions because these are the questions any reader of our story will ask" (86). Susan proves adept at manipulating words symbolizing narrative power. She declares:

...but there is never a lack of things to write of. It is as though
animalcules of words lie dissolved in your ink-well, ready to be
dipped up and flow from the pen and take form on the paper. From
downstairs to upstairs, from house to island, from the girl to Friday: it

seems necessary only to establish the poles, the here and the there the now and the then-after that the words themselves do the journeying. I had not guessed it was so easy to be an author (93).

Susan unequivocally makes it clear to Foe that she is not going to be written out of the island story and that she will not permit any attempt of Foe to reduce her adventurous and eventful life into an episode in the story of a mother in search of a daughter. She vehemently makes it clear to Foe:

The story I desire to be known by is the story of the island. You call it an episode, but I call it a story in its own right. It commences with my being cast away there and concludes with the death of Cruso and the return of Friday and myself to England, full of new hope. Within this larger story are inset the stories of how I came to be marooned... (121).

Susan resists the attempt on the part of Foe to write her. She declares quite convincingly to Foe that “I am not a story, Mr. Foe” (131).

Susan as a woman who offers challenge to patriarchy and its signifying systems affirms that her substantiality resides in her self realization and it does not have to be in agreement with the dreams and desires of patriarchy. “... I do not choose to tell. I choose not to tell it because to no one, not even to you, do I owe proof that I am a substantial being with a substantial history in the world” (131). A woman is not just a creation of the male fancy. She has an identity and substantiality beyond the limits of the patriarchal margins. The history of culture is not just the history of man alone. A woman is entitled to her space in the scheme of things just like man. It is

this assertion of and for the space of woman in history that makes *Foe* a significant feminist intertext. Susan's declaration of freedom from the manacles of hegemonic systems that submerge her voice and deny her space and the bondages of culture that relegate her to a position of subordination in the margins, emphatically celebrates the woman's discourse. As Susan points out, "...for I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire" (131). Susan's theories on textuality and what constitutes 'truth' in a narrative conspicuously challenge the textual practices of Defoe, who peopled his literary oeuvre with the adventurous and magnificent tales of heroes and heroines in their "whimsical adventures" (135). That's how this novel becomes an intertextual critique of Defoe and his great masterpiece about patriarchy and colonialism.

As a figure of complicity, she is also open to the interrogation and critique of the postcolonial Friday. Just as the feminist challenge by Susan disrupts the patriarchal story of Crusoe and interrupts and interrogates the patriarchal narrative of the Crusoe story by Foe, Susan's effort to be in control is subjected to severe critique not by any figure of dominant ideological system, but by the mute marginalized Friday who keeps himself beyond the inscription of canonicity. In part three Susan's entry into the world of discursive power is suggested and it is the site of placing her in complicity with the hegemonic centrist systems, as manifested through her allegiance with the canonical figure, the author Foe and her efforts to make sense of the silence of Friday. "It is for us to open Friday's mouth and hear what it holds: silence, perhaps, or a roar, like the roar of a sea shell held to the ear" (142). With the incursion into the world of discourse and power, Susan's perception of Friday undergoes a subtle change as she begins to look at their relationship not as the pact of two marginalized beings trying to resist being written, but as a hegemonic one in which Susan is the mistress and Friday, her possession. "Thus it has

become, in a manner of speaking, between Friday and myself. I do not love him, but he is mine” (111). Her struggles to educate Friday in the strategies of ‘reading and writing’ prove futile as he refuses to be taken by the colonialist tools of subjugation. “All my efforts to bring Friday to speech, or speech to Friday, have failed” (142). His silence baffles her and when Susan tries to bring him language, it is met with impenetrable muteness and resistance.

Every arrival is a departure and hence the arrival of Susan in the island story is the point of departure for Crusoe and the ideology he represents. The question of truth in *Foe* is focused not on the character of Crusoe or on Foe, but on the marginalized figures Susan Barton and Friday. Susan’s mastery of the pen or the quill of Foe, the master craftsman, is her point of rewriting and writing back to *Robinson Crusoe*. Though Susan claims that she is not a good narrator, she exhibits tremendous mastery in her account of the life on the island in company of Crusoe and Friday. Susan’s portrayal of the author Foe is also an interesting one. She is also alert and conscious of the way the author tries to keep away from her.

Part IV of the novel is found to be one of subtle displacement for the feminist discourse of Susan Barton as Friday manages to take the narrative to the native spirit of the island to the “home of Friday” (157). Friday sidelines and topples the feminist claim for reclaimed voice and silently but forcefully communicates and conveys the postcolonial spirit.

Susan Barton is often spoken of as a representative of the white South African liberal, a liberal feminist, to be precise. The liberal feminists are concerned about facilitating freedom from oppressive systems and thrive on the stance of the less privileged. Viewed from that point Susan may be considered as occupying liberal feminist principles like the respect of law and awareness of one’s social, legal and political rights, sense of equality between the sexes,

consciousness of freedom, emancipation through the benefits of language and education, disregard for the basic structures of oppression like class and race and a subtle allegiance to the dominant ideologies etc. Her comments on the island life also indicate an allegiance to liberal feminist principles. Susan says:

It seemed to me that all things were possible on the island, all tyrannies and cruelties, though in small; and if, in despite of what was possible, we lived at peace with one another, surely this was proof that certain laws unknown to us held sway, or else that we had been following the promptings of our heart all this time, and our hearts had not betrayed us (37).

Susan's perspective, about the recording of truth in writing and material comforts which facilitate it, shows forth her liberalist stand:

To tell the truth in all its substance you must have a quiet, and a comfortable chair away from all distraction, and a window to stare through; and then the knack of seeing waves when there are fields before your eyes, and of feeling the tropic sun when it is cold; and at your finger tips the words with which to capture the vision before it fades (52).

Another occasion in which she exhibits the liberal feminist approach is when Susan decides to free Friday. "I have written a deed granting Friday his freedom and signed it in Cruso's name... If Friday is not mine to set free, whose is he?" (99). Kirsten Holst Petersen speaks about how Susan fulfills "an allegorical role representing the white South African liberal"

(Petersen 250). Susan expresses the most pertinent liberal propagandist stance through her desire to record Friday's story by giving him the gift of language and assist in his emancipation from the hold of dominant ideology.

Though there are two marginalized characters Susan and Friday, Susan "comes to occupy a different margin from that of Friday, the position of the half colonized Other" (Head 120). Her colonization is not as complete as that of Friday, whose repressive failure makes him a total symbol of racial oppression and subjugation. The reaction of the half-colonized Other to the genuine Other is one of repulsive revulsion. "But now I began to look on him - I could not help myself - with the horror we reserve for the mutilated" (24). Her reactions to him are generally marked by expressions like "I shuddered" (24), "I caught myself flinching" (24) and so on. Susan's perspectives on Friday and the resultant responses are conditioned by the preconceived notions of the Other as harboured by the dominant ideology. "I told myself I did him wrong to think of him as a cannibal or worse, a devourer of the dead. But Crusoe had planted the seed in my mind..." (106). The mutilation and consequent silence representing colonial repression of Friday and the responses on the part of Susan allegorically represent the white liberal attitude to the black community and the feeling of superiority of the half colonized Other over the genuine Other. If Friday performs the "consciously new approach of writing the Other" (Head 122), the usual method of writing back to the literary canon and its figures through open challenge is performed by Susan Barton. She is the agent of revisionary reaction to the patriarchal centrist systems.

In the last section of the novel an omniscient narrator emerges who occupies "the privileged position of the ultimate focalizer of the previous three levels" (Grabe 150). It is this introduction of the omniscient narrator that is sometimes considered as the displacement of the

feminist claim. The narrator seems to take the control of the direction of the story and steers it to the native sounds emanating from Friday. But to reach Friday's sounds he has to "stumble over the body, light as a straw, of a woman or a girl" (*Foe* 155) and he sees Susan's journal with "yellowed" (155) pages from which he slips into the water with "the petals cast by Friday" (155) around him. This is symbolic of the dismantling of the feminist narrative. If Susan's story is the basis of the story of Crusoe, *Robinson Crusoe* "represents a repression of female experience which is rechannelled according to the desires of the patriarchal author" (Head 115). The introduction of the higher level narrator has given rise to the argument that Coetzee himself is the "foe to those of us who search for the place and role of a female view of literature and history" (Petersen 251). The introduction of the omniscient narrator is a metafictional gesture where the narrator attempts to read the island experiences. He falls overboard into Barton's text and is able to find only the island voices emanating through the mouth of Friday. It allows the play of the deconstructive strategy of letting various versions reign and Friday's discourse gains visibility and voice by toppling the version of the colonialist Crusoe, the author figure Foe and also by sidelining the feminist figure of resistance, Susan Barton. Petersen argues that this presence of an omniscient narrator indicates the negation and deconstruction of the woman's point of view.

As the intertext of *Robinson Crusoe*, Susan's story is woven into an already existing plot. She is juxtaposed with Crusoe and his man servant Friday in a narrative with a view to offer an alternate version of the Crusoe story. Her position is not one of submissive acquiescence in the patriarchal ways. But she disrupts the flow of the pre-existent scheme of things by turning the narrative to address the issues connected with textuality. The plot floats along with Susan's entry and the challenging questions she poses. Once the patriarchal author of the canonical ideology evades the scene, the characters Susan and Friday are freed from the margins and begin to play

and begin to record their narratives, claiming space hitherto occupied by the author, letting their voice be heard.

Susan Barton is not symbolic of the questioning spirit of the feministic ideology alone. As a figure addressing the gender question she represents the creative spirit of woman as well. She is the female muse, “a goddess who visits poets in the night and begets stories upon them. In the accounts they give afterwards, the poets say that she comes in an hour of their deepest despair and touches them with sacred fire, after which their pens, that have been dry, flow” (126). She positions herself as a force and source of inspiration for the male author from whose pen countless narratives are to follow. The episode, in which “the muse pays her visits...to father her offspring” (140), establishes Susan as the “begetter” (126) of her story. “I was not intended to be the mother of my story, but to beget it” (126). This scene is marked as a symbolic gesture highlighting the fear of the male author of the female muse as an agent of “attack upon masculine control and dominance” (Lane 24).

Susan Barton is not just a symbol of the woman’s need for voice and space in the larger discursive realms of life. The initial effort of Susan to be given a part in Crusoe’s narrative where Susan’s adventure is also embedded shifts to an engulfing desire for manipulating stories and a yearning for the narrative control. In this strategic realm of story making she seems to resemble Foe. This is the point of the beginning of postcolonial critique as Susan is ‘Foe’ to Friday. Since Susan has inherited the Crusoe story, she exhibits a possession for the same and tries to get hold of other stories which will serve her yearning for mastery and control. It is noted that since her inheritance of the Crusoe story there is frequent repetition of the word ‘desire’ in her parlance. About Crusoe and Friday she says, “There was too little desire in Crusoe and Friday: too little desire to escape, too little desire for a new life. Without desire how is it possible to make a

story?" (Foe 88). Later she tells Foe, "The story I desire to be known by is the story of the island" (121). About Friday she says, "If he was not a slave, was he nevertheless not the helpless captive of my desire to have our story told?" (130). Desire is a word which gets reflected in the conversation of Foe as well. 'Desire' is associated with narrative control and the *Cruso* tale becomes a site for competition between Susan and Foe for control as the narrative is supposed to hold good only if it is embellished.

Coetzee's problematization of gender is not very open. It is subtly woven into a story which is primarily "the home of Friday" (157). The story at the beginning is Susan's. "Like a flower of the sea" (5) she swims to the island. But these flower images bring to context the much repeated gesture of Friday, of casting petals into the sea. The petals that are taken from the flower of Susan's story are cast into the water in the rightful abode of Friday. Susan Barton is no ordinary woman. She chooses to undertake things rarely thought by women of the time. A symbolic independence from the patriarchal influences is seen in her change of surname. She is not the Berton she was born. Instead she has become Barton "a name corrupted in the mouth of strangers" (10) as part of her adventures.

Foe is the tale of a woman's regeneration, her battle, quest and its culmination. This woman is capable of rewriting the entire history and the story of patriarchy, of kingship and the power of *Robinson Crusoe*. Susan is as much dominating as Cruso. Her sense of superiority to Friday and Cruso are commendable. The question remains: Is the Cruso in *Foe* the same as Cruso in *Robinson Crusoe*? If *Robinson Crusoe* is the story of man's pride and survival *Foe* offers us the courageous tale of a woman who questioned the world and the supremacy of Cruso and the textual throne that Defoe has been keeping for himself long. Susan's entry into Cruso's

world threatens his sense of power. Susan muses, “After years of unquestioned and solitary mastery, he sees his realm invaded and has tasks set upon him by a woman” (25).

The Defoe connection is made more complex by the figure of Susan Barton who is a version of the eponymous heroine of *Roxana*, another famous fictional work by Daniel Defoe. Susan is the first name of Roxana. *Roxana* may be considered as a rechannelization of the repressed female experience which fails to be recorded in *Robinson Crusoe*. Roxana is presented as an amoral and licentious character moving up in the social circles. This narrative puts a woman in visibility so conspicuously for the first time. The interrelationship with *Roxana* is hinted in *Foe* through the daughter episode which has a similar scene in *Roxana*. Roxana is doggedly followed by one of her abandoned children and it is suggested at the end of the novel that her faithful servant Amy kills this trouble giving daughter which puts Roxana into misery.

In *Foe* Susan’s feminist claim to the island story begins as a quest for an abducted daughter. This very quest itself becomes a challenging and disrupting gesture as the motif of quest is associated with the male world of exploration and adventure as the seventeenth century literary scenario would manifest. Susan believes that the appearance of the daughter depends on the invention and the artifice of *Foe*. When Susan is visited by the young girl who claims that she is Susan Barton, the lost daughter of Susan, she is confused. “‘Do you not know,’ said she, in a voice so low I could barely hear. ‘Do you not know whose child I am?’ ‘I have never set eyes on you in my life’” (73). She questions and blames *Foe* for trying to interrupt her sway of the island story by placing her into the customary roles expected of women. “Who is she and why do you send her to me...? She is more your daughter than she ever was mine” (75). *Foe* presents the emancipated Susan of *Roxana* who has moved out of the narrative limitations imposed upon her as a woman character in an eighteenth century novel to inhabit a text of colonialist adventure

whose protagonist evokes only a faint allusion to the hero of the tale of masculine adventure, Crusoe. Susan also rebels against and in a way settles the score with the canonical author Defoe by slipping out of the narrative planned for her and getting recast in a twentieth century novel and holding discussions of textuality, authorship and narrative strategies (topics generally associated with the discursive realms of the authors of dominant ideology) with the same author figure on an equal footing and competing with him for narrative control and autonomy.

As a woman's narrative, *Foe* celebrates Susan's freedom from a Defoean text and her extension into another text that spans continents. From the domestic world of sexual freedom and mothering children to which female autonomy was limited in *Roxana* where Susan was prefigured, her swimming to the island of Cruso has afforded her tremendous possibilities. Primarily she has been freed from the gender roles assigned to her by the canonical author Defoe. From the circumference of London she has expanded to explore the New World and has come back safe not with a horde of imaginary stories with which Foe's cupboard is full, but with a singular and substantial narrative to whose verisimilitude she can vouch for. Instead of the issues of mothering, which limit woman to the gendered roles expected of her, she intends to "be father to my story" (123). This is a demand for gender equality through which she intends to disillusion the power of the concept of fathering, and free the women's psyche from the gendered roles. That's why *Foe* is considered as a feminist intertext of both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana*.

The emergence and statement of the postcolonial point of view at the end of the novel could be considered as facilitated by the mediation of the challenge of feminism. The diving of the omniscient narrator at the end of the fourth part from the text of Barton into the fluid world of Friday is also symbolic of the answer to the challenge of feminism which is expressed by Susan Barton's suggestion and confused query as to who will "make Friday's silence speak"

(142) "...but who will dive into the wreck? On the island I told Crusoe it should be Friday, with a rope about his middle for safety" (142). The initiative to save history by giving voice to Friday's silence has come from Susan and that query is reflected in the answering dive in part four.

If the cruelty of sexism is questioned by means of feminist writing, Coetzee's metaphors of femininity can effectively interrogate the cruelty of racism as is depicted in *Foe* through the medium of Susan Barton. Susan is in a position to question and hold dialogues with structures of power and authority as she is conscious of the racial marginalization of Friday and can speak for him without overtly becoming oppositional. She tells Foe:

Friday's desires are not dark to me. He desires to be liberated, as I do too. Our desires are plain, his and mine. But how is Friday to recover his freedom, who has been a slave all his life? That is the true question. Should I liberate him into a world of wolves and expect to be commended for it? ...When I am rid of Friday, will I then know freedom? (*Foe* 148-9).

Women narrators like Susan are symbolic of the typical Coetzee brand of postcolonialism. Susan embodies "a position of weakness" (Morphett 456) from which to question power and hence paradoxically this location of weakness is an empowered one. Her 'weakness' as a woman makes her outside the realm and sway of the dominant discourses; at the same time her cultural and racial similarity puts her in a diagonal or an indirect intercourse with the hegemonic systems which is one of non/participation and complicity. Coetzee identifies his non / position with that of Susan Barton as she is the "unsuccessful author" (Morphett 456). As

Fiona Rapsey opines, “Coetzee is greatly reliant on the feminine for its promise of a position outside of his rivalry with the state, with truth and with realism. Clearly, Coetzee utilizes the feminine as a textual strategy to avoid certain rhetorical strategies and to inhabit others” (256). So the strategic disrupting and undoing of power have to be through powerlessness provided by the person and location of the woman narrator.

Another way in which the woman’s discourse may become valid in the total theoretical position of Coetzee in which “Susan’s womanhood suggests the relative cultural power of the province as opposed to the metropolis and of unauthorized as opposed to authorized speech; gender therefore serves as the sign of semi marginality” (Attwell 112) representing what Attwell terms as “colonial postcolonialism” (112) which Coetzee seems to inhabit. Susan in *Foe* occupies this critical position in which her gendered marginality is compensated and complicated by her cultural inclusion and participation in the workings of the dominant ideology.

Critics like Pamela Dunbar, Attwell and Catherine Dovey argue that Coetzee’s writing is essentially feminist and with regard to *Foe* the figure of Susan Barton essentially fulfills that role. But Coetzee has stated to Morphett while referring to *Foe* that “I would hate to say... that there is a feminist point” (Morphett 460). Dunbar says that Susan moves from “a position of subjugation to the white patriarchal male (Cruso at first, Foe later on) to that of feminist domination and literary autonomy. She achieves this transition through her symbolic usurpation of the male instrument of domination and of communication” (107). The feminist perspective has not been a limiting influence on Coetzee. Instead Coetzee has been “enabled by it. It constitutes the textual body on which he has (de)constructed not only his own op/positionality, but also his challenge to textuality” (Rapsey 265). In *Foe* it is Susan, the woman narrator who negotiates between various levels of discourse, “between what is representable and what is

unrepresentable” (266). The discourse of Friday is out in the open with the mediation of Susan. The unnamed narrator’s interference in her writing process underlines her as a failed narrator.

In spite of the discourse that is lost Susan is a bearer of various theoretical assumptions and fulfills a lot of discursive functions which includes questions of textuality, truth, the non/representational presences and voices. Above all she is a strong symbol of feminism and femininity in all its contextual and intertextual aspects. This use of femininity serves various purposes for Coetzee as a writer. He has made elaborate use of women narrators on whose shoulders and narrative capability the structure and the strength of discourse rest in spite of their dubious claim to the art and craft of writing.

Susan’s position is one of occupying the middle, as she finds herself outside the discourse of patriarchy as her story is conspicuously absent from the pre supposed text of *Foe* i.e. *Robinson Crusoe*. She is also outside the scheme of the island tale as suggested by Crusoe. Susan’s letter to Foe discusses how she could have been out of the scheme of male discourse:

I write my letters, I seal them; I drop them in the box. One day when we are departed you will tip them out and glance through them.

‘Better had there been only Crusoe and Friday’, you will murmur to yourself: ‘Better without the woman’ (72).

Crusoe tells Susan, “I do not wish to hear of your desire. It concerns other things; it does not concern the island” (36). These instances show how the representatives of patriarchy decided to keep women out of their discourse and it is in the backdrop of such manipulated schemes of hegemonic discourses that the woman’s challenge of these systems and assertion of woman’s self and voice become pertinent.

The dominant feminist effect is conveyed through an abundance of images of fluidity, reference to silence, the issues of mothering and metaphors of weaving. These images suggest an overtone of the *écriture féminine*. Instead of the hard, logical, precise, formal world of the male discourse, the world of *Foe* is steeped in fluid and infinite signification. Water dominates the discourse. It begins with the ocean and ends in ocean where “the water is still and dead, the same water as yesterday, as last year, as three hundred years ago” (*Foe* 157). It is through fluidity that Susan is conveyed to the island, “The waves took me and bore me on to the beach” (11). Of her life and relationship with Cruso on the island she says, “We yield to a stranger’s embrace or give ourselves to the waves” (30). Just as images of water are sprinkled along the text, images of silence are also conspicuously evoked. All these are directly associated with the feminist discourse suggesting a space beyond the limitations of phallo/ logocentrism. In her description about the life of silence that Friday leads, metaphors of silence get fused with those of weaving. “...to live in silence is to live like the whales , great castles of flesh floating leagues apart from one another, or like the spiders, sitting each alone at the heart of his web, which to him is the entire world” (59). Metaphors of water and silence appear when Susan says about Friday, “...the time before he lost his tongue, when he immersed in the prattle of words as unthinking as fish in water” (60).

A conspicuous signifier often noted in the feminist discourse is the concept of submergence which is given full play in the final section of *Foe*. The end alludes to Adrienne Rich’s Poem “Diving into the Wreck” , which symbolizes the feminist quest for identity, trying to reclaim the woman’s space in the history, discourse and language and the assumption that woman’s language exists in a fluid realm beyond the order of patriarchy. Though the allusion to Rich’s poem may bring in the feminist overtones, here the diver is not Susan Barton, the feminist

figure of challenge, but the unnamed narrator who supersedes her. But it may be inferred that the dive to reclaim the lost voices could have been the answer to Susan's question as to who will dive to cause the emergence of the lost voices from the wreck.

Coetzee's use of feminism represented through the persona of Susan Barton expresses multiple concepts. Here the diffused uncertain indefinite self of woman serves as a body for the writing of the postmodern dilemma of the fragmented selves of human beings "...it is possible that some of us are not written, but merely are" (143). Susan muses in uncertainty, "But now I am full of doubt. Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I phantom too?" (133).

The last section may represent the reference to difference feminism where feminism is not concerned with opposing canonical texts, logocentrism and patriarchy from a position of ineffective rivalry; instead it is concerned with expressing self positioning of finding one's own home and element like Friday, where unfathomable words issue unencumbered and undiluted by any dominant discourse. The discourse of difference feminism represented in *Foe* emerges when the woman is able to identify herself without offering any overt challenge to the hegemonic systems where she problematizes her limited access to the tools of representation. "Difference feminism does not try to make 'feminine' speak in opposition to phallogentrism, but rather it looks to the feminine as a model of marginality that necessarily disrupts phallogentric attempts to frame and signify it, much like Friday's body being its own sign"(Rapsey 269).

Barton carries on her shoulder several discourses, which Coetzee wishes to express through this character primarily considered as carrying the feminist aspects of the tale. This saga of Susan Barton becomes a site for the deployment of the strategy of postmodernism as there is a

deliberate attempt on the part of Barton to cross the margin and merge the boundaries. Barton is the symbol of feminist challenge toppling the scheme of the patriarchal authority by displacing and invading the hegemonic realm of Crusoe first and then of Foe. She also offers the celebration of the aspects of femininity which is the vantage point from which to attack and question power relations without overtly exposing the location, but at the same time getting the desired effect. On another level the woman narrator's position problematizes the cause of the Anglo American liberal feminism, while expressing and critiquing its limitations as well. It shows liberal feminism's liaison with the postcolonial subject where the racial subjugation is paired along with the question of gender. The female narrator also serves as the site for the writing of postmodern dilemma of the human self. The distracted, dissipated, broken self of the modern man is allegorized by the woman narrator, in her diffused, incoherent self.

Chapter Three

Magda as Narrator: Counter/Demythologization in *In the Heart of the Country*

“I make it up in order that it shall make me up” (*In the Heart of the Country* 73)

In the Heart of the Country is a complicated novel by J.M. Coetzee written in the year 1977. This has been often spoken as an allegory of decolonization, of the pastoral myth and of the woman's question. The novel is in the form of an interior monologue by “a poetess of inferiority” (*In the Heart of the Country* 43) as the narrator herself claims. It represents the self-cancelling dubious internal consciousness of Magda, the colonialist daughter caught in the throes of negation/ isolation occupying the liminal space of not being part of certitudes. The text is like an undated journal, a kind of diary entry running into several paragraphs, representing Magda's life in the veld surrounded by the colonialist Afrikaner and the native black interface. There are two hundred and sixty six numbered sections and the notable aspect of the narration is that it is often contradictory and paradoxical.

The bare story would reveal a barren spinster whose age is a clever surmise as she is an eternal daughter capable of belonging to any age. The story spans around 70 years from the late 19th century to the second half of the 20th century, caught between the transitional gap between the pastoral utopia and a deadening contemporary dystopia.

The fragmented monologue begins at a point when Magda's father brings home a new bride the narration of which gets displaced at a later entry with the details getting deranged. The entire story becomes a search of Magda for the “vision of a second existence passionate enough to carry [her] from the mundane of being into the doubleness of signification” (6). In the course of this journey through the heart of the country with a passion that lacks the will to carry it

through the narrative as he herself claims, she is represented as one struggling to rewrite the myth of the patriarchal hero, but one who is convinced of her inability to do so for the words that will translate her “into the land of myth and hero “(5) eludes her in her “ dowdy self in a dull summer heat that will not transcend itself “ (5)

The role of Magda as a woman narrator performs many functions for Coetzee the male white South African writer. Posited between the Afrikaner and the native Black, Magda inhabits the middle voice, the space in the median which is a happening interim space for Coetzee the writer. She is an embodiment of his colonial post colonialism” (Attwell112) voicing his liminality and double sidedness. She communicates a counter mythical stance serving as a fused signifier for the African pastoral mythology on the one side and the dominant myth of colonialism. She is as much part of the dominant Afrikaner, settler society as much as the native Blacks whose rhythms she yearns for in an attempt to manage a language that would transcend the divide. She is also the voice of the woman well past its feminine, feminist limitations asserting the fluid female stance in a true development of the self.

Magda as a narrator is both dubious and complicit. The first person monologue unravels the material and psychological identity of the speaker, who is an allegorical daughter of colonialism, a kind of Miranda like figure. The “stony monologue” (*In the Heart of the Country* 114) of Magda’s life is beyond the question of veracity and she proves to be a narrator beyond the claims of truth. Her accounts go on erasing themselves, giving into new versions of the old stories, still leaving greater scope for rewriting.

Magda is not only the narrator, but is the author of her story. *In the Heart of the Country* is the story of Magda’s rage and its sequel and she claims the authorship of the story vehemently

“even if it is a dull black stupid miserable story, ignorant of its meaning and of all its many possible untapped happy variants” (5). But as an author/narrator she lacks authenticity. Magda is an unreliable narrator as the events narrated in her journal gets cancelled at a later occasion rendering it as misplaced monologue, probably taking place in the various realms of her mental geography. The unreliability can be seen with regard to her description about her father’s wedding and also about Hendrik and Klein-Anna. She seems to grope for details and it is as if she is living in a “myth of expulsion” (8) incapable of explaining her aches to herself.

Authorship /authority is achieved only with the death of the father imaginary or otherwise. The quest for authority is carried or along with the desire for perfecting her language, a language that can sustain “a lost world of men, of cold nights, wood fire, gleaning eyes, and a long tale of dead heroes in a language I have not unlearned”(8). The entire narrative is a self-conscious one aiming to achieve a level of self-realization but lacking it reaches in “discourse of failure” (Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* 62).

Magda as a colonialist representative serves the function of executing without the authority, existing on the fringes of patriarchal/ colonial domination, without its poisonous sting. The double sidedness of Magda enables her to function both as a victim and an agent of colonialism. She is the impact and the effect of colonialist dominance in stunting, destabilizing notions of subject hood. She signifies non-authoritative authority and powerless power in a single signifier.

Magda as a middle space is a study in isolation. She seems to signify a world where her boundless compassion has been rendered insignificant and the colonialist epistemologies have given rise to a self in which “with no one to need her she is baffled and bewildered” (*In the*

Heart of the Country 6). Magda occupies a realm of alienation, not inhabiting the conventional space of the mother-martyr” (Baral 30). The Woman narrator is an agent of colonialist project, a symbol of the sensitive Afrikaner consciousness, caught in the dividedness of neither here nor there. Her interim position “of neither alone nor in the society” (*In the Heart of the Country* 9) is the way she has been strategically located betwixt the native Black community and the colonial authority. The dominant colonialist is dormant in her waking self with her inability to engender a discourse of equal and reciprocal relationship between the races. “I ,who living among the downcast have never beheld myself in the equal regard of another’s eye, have never held another in the equal regard of mine” (9). She is a stunted colonialist symbolizing the decolonization at hand, who lacks the authority and power that her father symbolized. She also partakers of a discourse of affiliation with the natives, sensitive to the love of the flora, fauna and people as much as he love of the land.

Inspite of Magda’s complicity with the dominant discourses, her location in the median does not allow her to proceed on the colonial way without self critique. Her rumination on the school house and what it did to the late generation are replete with doubts, inconsistencies of education and ceaseless confusions and endless flow of questions.

How many generations can have intervened between those children chanting the six times table and my dubious self? Could my father have been one of them? ... If so where has all the humane learning gone? What did he learn from Hansel and Gretel about fathers who lead their daughters into dark forests? ... And even if it was not he but my grandfather who sat on these benches and sang out his tables, why did he pass on no humanity to my father but leave him a barbarian and me

too after him? ... My learning has the reek of print, not the resonance of the full human voice telling its stories” (58)

The lack of humanity and the humaneness communicated through the colonialist school house is envisaged as inadequate to communicate the wisdom of the past ages. The demythification of colonialism is intricately connected with the nostalgia for the human wisdom communicated through the stories of the past.

Magda’s effort to record her monologue is an effort to write her self and she remains the lone signifier for the inscription of the self. This signifying process of the self is communicated by Magda when she says that “I am spoken to not in words, which come to me quaint and veiled, but in signs, in conformation of face and hands, in postures of shoulders and feet, in nuances of tune and tone, in gaps and absences whose grammar has never been recorded” (9). Her inability to communicate to the native Blacks renders her in a no man’s lands where “reading the brown folk, I grope as they grope reading me” (9) and Magda occupies the realm of a “displaced subject” (Kharshiing 29) attempting to construct her life and fashion a narrative, trying to resist the fate meted out to her by her character though she claims that character is fate. It is a web of relationships where all affiliations lack its authenticity and reciprocity. Trying to problematize her self through writing, using words “such as men use to men,” she remains the lone, barren figure, “the mad hag (she) is destined to be” (*In the Heart of the Country* 9). It is part of the writing self that keeps her in her internal monologue, the spinster with the uneasy consciousness resisting the destiny to be “one of the forgotten ones of history” (11).

In Magda, one perceives a narration self conscious and reflexive enough to offer “explanation for her predicaments” (Roberts 21), sometimes even undoing the critic’s role. In

this aspect, she occupies the postmodern pedestal of critiquing from within. The inconsistencies and the apparent flaws and revisions in her text necessitate explications from the narrator level, and the narrator is conscious about the power conferred by the colonizer's language and its right use. The Schizophrenic narrator is a true symbol of a land of mis/non- communication, of a community divided through racial animosity leaving unbridgeable chasm between discourses that can never be made right. It is this lack of belonging that renders her as an unreliable, frenetic narrator, with a castrated self- consciousness and fractured identity.

Magda also embodies the interrogative and transgressive aspect of the postcolonial political. All her fantastic interior monologues emphasize challenge of power, dominance and authority. Through the fragmented, fractured and hybridized post colonial self, she is constantly trying to decode and rewrite the existing patterns of racial domination and subordination. This process of demythification is achieved through constant patricide, more at a spiritual level than at a material level. She kills and goes on to bury her father, more as part of a neurotic fantasy revealing a desire to dominate and claims authority of her story. The double patricide, the frantic revisions of the story, the significance rendered to Hendrik and Klein Anna episode once the father figure is killed and buried and the ever vigilant presence of Jacob and Anna render the text as a challenge and resistance to colonial and patriarchal notion of ideology. Another conspicuous thwarting of the colonial legitimacy has been rendered through the occupation of the school house by black servants. The school house has been synonymous with dominant discourses and its methods of shaping obedient citizens with school mistresses modelled on colonial ideology imparting instruction of topics like the "rotation of the earth, Napoleon, Pompeii, the reindeer herds of the frozen wastes, the anomalous expansion of water, the seven days of creation, the immortal comedies of Shakespeare, geometric and arithmetic progressions,

the major and minor modes, the boy with the finger in the dyke, Rumpelstiltskin, the miracle of the loaves and the fishes, the laws of perspective and much much more” (*In the Heart of the Country* 57). The school house notably imparted instruction related to themes on a par with colonial impulses like expansion, conquest and hegemony. The occupation of the school by Jacob and Anna, the black natives is indicative of the degeneration of the old Afrikaner system giving into the discourse of decolonization.

Gallagher comments that “the meditations of Magda with their contradictions, fluid quality, feminine imagery- embody a counter myth” (Gallagher 84) to Afrikaner Nationalism. Magda as a demythifying agent becomes significant in dual perspectives. She is neither the guardian of racial purity nor the eternal mother as symbolized in South African farm novels. Primarily, she becomes the counter discursive figure to the maternal as the fountain and source of life, purity, sacrifice and humanity embedded in the African culture. Magda as an agent/signifier of demythification happens at this level of non- conformity to the expected roles in a traditional African society. She is a passive subject of colonialism, the antithesis of the natural, the obedient ways, partaking of coloniality and its outdated ideologies of domination in all its dried up, inhuman aspect. As a counter native African cultural force she symbolizes the barrenness of colonization. But Magda is a dichotomous, complex figure. She is a symbol of the counter myth of colonialist revival also. With her being positioned delicately and subtly in antithetical discourses, she undermines the cause of the colonial and the postcolonial leaving her a futile, fruitless spinster amidst the waking voice of emergent discourses.

Magda’s role as an agent of demythification is a complex process. The constantly revised narrative and the negation of earlier accounts, suggesting multiple versions and the reiterating admission of fallibility and incompleteness of the narrator make the account an implausible one.

Hence ascribing agent status to Magda becomes an act of utmost uncertainty. She negates the myths on two levels; from the perspective of the native other, she is a subversion of the mother myth, the foundation and the fountainhead of the race, the mama on whose able shoulders the community rests. Mother in a true African household is not just a tool as Magda claims. “ All my life I have been left lying about, forgotten, dusty, like an old shoe, or when I have been used, used as a tool, to bring the house to order, to regiment the servant”(*In the Heart of the Country* 5), ... a hole trying to be whole” (50). She is a murderer, a sinner who has committed double patricide in the dark recesses of her mind. She harbours shady, gruesome thoughts and abhorrent violent emotions and hence undoes the maternal celebrated in native African farm novels. Denial of responsibility and the peripheral status in the life of the community renders her as a deconstructive symbol of African pastoral utopia. Sans claiming agency and subject hood, Magda goes on to inhabit the realm of the interim, embodying counter myths on her ugly, frail shoulders.

As a counter myth to colonialism, Magda is more of reliable significance as the text abounds in references to the lost era of humanity and humaneness, of a love borne, not only for the land and the profits which it would invariably bring, but also for the love of its people, its flora and fauna. In this level Magda yearns for that pastoral Utopia undoing all the violent dystopic eruptions. Magda mourns for the loss of the traditional in her story and her dry tale as she puts it, “what was once pastoral has become one of those stifling stories in which brother and sister, wife and daughter and concubine prowl and snarl around the bedside listening for the death rattle or stalk each other through the dim passages of the ancestral home”(7)

In an extensive allegorical status, critics have also spoken of Magda as an allegory of the situation in South Africa, her “spinster fate” referring to the isolated position of contemporary South Africa due to its policy of the subtleties of Apartheid and its exclusionist racist attitude.

Magda occupies a pivotal position as the sole narrator of a saga, not only of the interim position of the sensitive white colonial wanting to thwart the colonialist designs, but one can also perceive her as a victim of the Elektra complex as well. Yearning to be like the father figure, desiring the unquestioned authority that her father enjoys over the native blacks, vying for his attention, simultaneously envying his amours and affairs with other women, hating him and his concubines, weaving disturbing mental pictures of his sexual relationships, fantasizing constantly about the authoritative figure of the master of the household- her father – torn between shifting and stifling emotions of love/hate, anger/ jealousy, obedience and resistance , she remains inconsistent and baffled between her Elektra like stance and Miranda like purity.

It was my childhood duty to light the fire an hour before sunset so that the hot water could be poured into the enamelled hipbath the moment he stamped through the front door. Tiptoeing out of the bath room, I would hear the wash, of his entry, the sucking of the water under his armpits and between his buttocks an Inhale that sweet damp heavy miasma of soap and sweet. Later this duty ceased, but when I think of male flesh, white heavy dumb, whose flesh can it be but his?
(10).

Magda unravels a heart, clamouring for her space with the colonial, Afrikaner father subtly suggesting that her “patient, bloodless, apologetic” (2) existence is due to her father for whom she has been “an absence” (2) all her life.

The narrative has a strange stoniness about it where the narrator with tremendous self control and painstaking artifice tries to perfect the art of writing, chasing all elements of weakening subjectivity away from the scope of the narrative. There is a deliberate attempt to be clinically objective with authorial assumptions, hoping that the authority gained through the use of the exact words as “men use to men” would liberate her from the destiny caused by her character, gender and racial divide but who at each reflective attempts is open to the awareness that “there is no act I know of that will liberate me into the world” (1)

It reveals a psyche, dormant and dominant at the same time trying to erase the subjectivities of the female psyche, attempting to undo the fluid lyricism of the female, hoping for the liberation that the hard, rock like words would toss in her way. “Resolutely I beat down the blind, the subjective time of the heart, with its sprouts of excitement and drags of tedium” (3)

Her stony monologue often becomes a requiem for the women in colonialism, silenced, thwarted, subjected, forced to forget their fluidity and compelled into complicity. “I am the one who stays in “her room, reading or writing or fighting a migraine” the colonies are full of girls like that, but none, I think, so extreme as I” (1). The loneliness and the marginal location the colonial women inhabits is constantly reiterated in spite of the otherwise unreliability of the incomplete, incoherent monologue.

The land is full of melancholy spinsters like me, lost to history, blue as roaches in our ancestral homes keeping a high shine on the copper ware and laying in Jam. Wooed when we were little by our masterful fathers, we are bitter vestals, spoiled for life. The childhood rape, someone should study the kernel of truth in these families (4)

Magda's narrative exposes the barrenness of the colonial myth and its perpetration. She reveals her position to be one of degenerated compromise between the so called wisdom of the masters, schemingly wooing the female for complicity in the policies of domination which ultimately benefits neither the colonial women, nor the postcolonial.

Magda comes across as a confident narrator at the outset fully well knowing her ability to use the language and words to her advantage occasionally lapsing into self doubt, but soon reclaiming her grip on the narrative. She fully well knows that the makers of the world /word would constantly elude her and negate her into "mundane glow with an aura of self transcendence" (17). But she is capable of reclaiming her narrative and her story as "I am equal to anything" (19). She has recreated a web of signification where she is the master of her own words where she can "creak into rhythms that are (her) own" (19). Even when certain words of the male/colonial world become stumbling blocks for her, she is able to overcome the obstacle creating herself "in the words that create me" (9). She brags of her control of herself as a woman who has never lost her self possession.

Magda's narration abounds in metaphors of usurpation underlying the dominant theme of colonialism and conquest. The usurpation of another's land is as bitter as the invasion of the body by another. The equation of the usurpation and conquest of the land to sexual usurpation is also conspicuously problematized.

How can I say that the law does not stand full grown inside my shell, its feet in my feet, its hands in my hands, its sex drooping through my hole or that when I have had my chance to make their utterance, the lips and teeth of the law will not

begin to grow their way out of this shell... while I lie sloughed, crumpled,
abandoned on the floor (84).

The metaphors of usurpation implicate Magda in a site of complicity from both sides, inhabiting a law which she does not design, but is a mere victim of.

The gendered usurpation received at the hand of the male colonialist is perpetrated with Magda's fantasy of inhabiting the body of Klein-Anna by climbing" down her throat while she sleeps and "spread myself gently inside her, my hands in her hands, my feet in her feet" ((108) ... "the holes of my body sliding into place over the holes of hers" (108-9) indicating the perpetration of colonialist assumptions and usurpation onto the discourse of the genuine other. It is here that Magda continues to exist both as a metaphor for colonality and its postcolonial aftermath.

Magda, the woman narrator also indicates the site of the impact of emerging black consciousness, with an overt disregard for white assistance in anti-Apartheid struggles. She is the butt of ridicule, of torture and molestation at the hands of Hendrik in a brutal rape and the usurpation of the latter parts of the narrative space by Hendrik and Kelvin Anna, toppling the earlier colonialist figures also signifies the atmosphere of resistance in an Africa, emerging into the throes of post colonization. The Soweto Riots had proved to be the ultimate point of the resistance by the genuine other. The backdrop of the text and problematic disposition of Magda rightfully theorize the moments of transition in all its varied tensions. Magda is an accomplice in the motif of invasion, usurpation and possession. Magda's skepticism of Klein Anna and her thoughts, betrays the colonial ignorance of the Other.

Magda as a narrator is the master of uncertainty with regard to the treatments of events and time. She goes on erasing her writing, evading all claims of truth, tossed and turned in the realms between fantasy and reality, never giving a chance to bind her to her predicament. The only unchanging aspect of her narration is the underlying alienation making her the mistress of nothingness leading a hollow existence amidst barren lands, destroyed kingdoms and invaded selves.

This novel is a saga of interiority revealing hidden depths, torn souls and fractured identities. The construction of identity by Magda the narrator /author is as labored as it is artificial, leaving one to distrust the entire narrative.

Magda as a counter mythical figure of colonialist disruption of the pristine beauty of an innocent pastoral world is mainly communicated through the last section of the text. The entries ranging from two sixty three are generally about recapturing the pastoral utopia away from the concerns, chaos and confusion of a contemporary dystopic realism which tells the dry, macabre tales of deceit and treachery.

Magda inscribes the invalid father at the centre of this testimony as a fitting symbol of the colonialist assumptions that has gone degenerate over the years, which is about to breathe its last and in which the half- colonial Magda can manage and negotiate the future utopia from her self-conscious points of view. She chooses to disregard the sky vices berating colonialism and in a serene, mode opts to be satisfied with the stories and the accounts that she has written without mourning for lost voices and misplaced choices. In spite of being corrupted and tainted in the clutches of patriarchal dominations and its subsequent affiliations Magda in the final sections of the text is trying to mitigate for the “failure of love” of the South African Afrikaner forefathers.

It is reclamation of community, a reaffirmation of love for the people that she tries to uphold. It is here that the demythologization of canonic colonialism takes place. One can detect a note of contentment in her decision to spin her “answer out of her own bowels” (172)

The text that is situated between postcolonial and feminist discourses has upheld its space for the strong presence of Magda the woman who is proud to write her story, fully conscious of her ability to carry the discourse home and she does not deny her complicity in the dominant narrative that has destroyed the lives of the “brown skins”(172). She also envisages a future utopic realm answering her umpteen questions through an effusion of literature. “Some where there is a whole literature waiting to answer them for me” (172)

At the closure, Magda emerges as fully conscious not only of herself, of the writing prowess, but also of opting to leave out certain poems for the future to be singing in nostalgia. But her identity has been shaped and reshaped and has shirked the claims of all discourses to be staying as a lone signifier for the voice of emergence of all discourses, yet to be written.

I have never felt myself to be another man’s creature... I have uttered my life in my own voice throughout... I have chosen at every moment of my own destiny which is to die here in the petrified garden, behind locked gates, near my father’s bones in a space echoing with hymns I could have written, but did not because I thought it was too easy (172).

It is the closure of the saga of a soul which has run its race through isolation, self and inflicted torment, hatred, love, animosity, absence, incompleteness and interiority; but has claimed her presence irrevocably and recorded her voice legitimately. It is ironic and paradoxical that the colonial father for whom Magda was an absence throughout his life gets his presence

back through her narrative and the resurrection of this symbol of colonialist and patriarchal presence has been solely due to the narratorial venture of the powerful woman narrator.

Magda is a scheming narrator who has also cleverly tried to evade the interrogative stance of critical enquiries as she leaves her narrative in a fluid finale where the divergent conclusions drawn through the various strategies are rendered impotent. She goes on negating the assumptions of various discursive points and forever remains outside the absences and the presences of inscriptions.

Magda in the course of the tale achieves a kind of completion. There is a sense of fulfillment of the narrative pattern and scheme not only in the way she ends up as a female, proclaiming her womanhood, neither in agreement nor in denial of her discursive complicity. One can perceive it as a movement from the feminist stance of revolt and interrogation through the feminine emotional space of dependence and need for male reassurance and affection to one of self-realizing tranquility and assertion of the female self. This trajectory of transition is ably carried forward by the tone and tune of her narrative, its self-cancelling fragmentation giving place to stability and assurance proclaiming self-assertion and expression. It is a female space, negotiating its credibility, fluidness and contentment in the “beauty of the forsaken world” (172). At the moment of adding up one’s reckoning and typing up the loose ends she hopes to “drift into a sleep in which there are finally no voices teasing or berating me” (172).

There is a strange self-awareness, dominating the narrative through various psychological phases of the narrator which symbolically denotes the phase of decolonization as well. She speaks of her father and herself as “the castaways of God and the castaways of history” (172)

possibly hinting towards a historical decline/ and degeneration of colonialist way, its certitudes and assumptions.

Coetzee's use of Women narrators problematizes the issue of "appropriation and colonialization" (Kossew 170). The male author's elaborate use of the woman narrators render the location of the author as well as the narrations in a highly compromised position of ambivalent complicity from which both of them are not exempted. Robin Visel uses the term "half colonization" (Visel 39) for the predicament the white woman narrator and she argues that the white settler women narrators are as colonized and marginalized as their native sisters without the settler sisters ever being aware of it. "[The woman colonizer] too is oppressed by white men and patriarchal structures; she shares in the power and guilt of the colonists" (39). That is why Visel describes the position of the white woman narrator as half colonized rather than double colonized like their native counterparts.

Magda's narration is probably her attempt to overcome the colonial barriers and to reach out to the native people through the language of the heart. But all these efforts get nullified as seen from the reactions of Jacob and Anna and also from the hatred and torture she suffered at the hands of Hendrik and Klein Anna. This could also theorize the failure of the love of the colonial thesis and its project which could bounce back to the colonizer in a harsher way resulting in their discourse of hate, far beyond redemption, away from all options of compromise.

Magda's sterility /barrenness is also problematic in the sense that her constant self mythologization hints at her own choice of spinsterhood as common to colonial daughters, "wooded by fathers" (*In the Heart of the Country* 9). It is apprehended as a common malady

inhabiting the race as a whole. But the male authorial complicity in rendering the woman-narrator sterile can also not be overlooked. Words are the blocks which prevent her from finding a communion with the brown folk. As words fail to communicate and her father tongue retains its hold on her psyche in spite of her constant continuous efforts to divest herself of its authority, she reverts to the intimate signifiers of the body and indigenous idioms to communicate with the brown folk. She claims to find meaning in the shaking of the head, in the twitch of the lips and the shifting of the eyes as much as the animal world does. Her effort to sexually tempt Hendrik and the subtle homosexual interest in Klein Anna expose this latent need to communicate intimately through gestures, through the realm of the emotions and feelings rather than through the hard words communicating bitter facts.

Magda as a narrator does not impose any restrictions on the text. The text goes on beckoning the reader to see through the authorial intention the narratorial ploy into unravelling the 'gruesome' representations that lie hidden in the dark caverns of desire, domination, hate and revenge forming own interpretation against which Magda remains her invincible self, highly visible both to the sky gods speaking Spanish and to the brown folks speaking incoherent language of which she is a master of. The fluid closures of Coetzee's narratives with women narrators have often been critiqued as "elaborate dead end" (Petersen 251) for they fail to drive home their significations; rather they end up in stunted narratives unable to reach certitudes. But Coetzee's objective in using them could be for this purpose as well so that they question authority yet remain outside its implicating connotations. There is a double bind in this speaking position which is very much Coetzee's own predicament and location.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

“ Our ears today are finely attuned to modes of silence....Our craft is all in reading the Other; gaps, inverses, undersides, the veiled , the dark, the buried, the feminine alterities....It is a mode of reading which subverting the dominant, is in peril, like all triumphant subversion, of becoming the dominant in turn”(Coetzee, *White Writing* 81).

This sums up Coetzee's purpose and objective with regard to the deployment of women narrators in his textual space. Coetzee's ambivalent stance in South Africa and its problematic politics have facilitated the effective narratorial presence of women narrators in his novels where he has a definite purpose of interrogation of the canons and challenge of authority. Though Coetzee has used women narrators in other novels, the project chose to look at the way the women have been hijacking the narratives in *Foe* and *In the Heart of the Country*. As asserted above, in these texts he was trying to employ a kind of triumphant subversion in order to question centres of power from the vantage point of a non-position and the effective roles of women as narrators suited his plans very well. The project looked in to the diverse impact of women narrators in the textual space of the selected texts and came to certain conclusions regarding the use of women narrators and the conspicuous function which they serve in them.

Foe by Coetzee is an intertext of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the great colonialist tale. As seen in chapter two, *Foe* dismantles the challenging position of Crusoe as the prototype of the colonial male by introducing Susan Barton and her appropriation of the island tale. Crusoe is just an invalid old man who is only capable of building empty terraces besides the vibrant, schemer Barton. Susan as a narrator challenges not only Crusoe but Defoe as well. Defoean theories of textuality and fictionality are challenged by her and she even aspires to the authorial

stance from where Defoe is toppled. She is the liberated feminist trying to unearth the submerged narrative of women and to reclaim the space of women in a male discourse. This white woman narrator partakes of the space of half colonization in a sense that she is able to interrogate colonialism from a non authoritative stance and achieve the decentering of authority. Susan's journal establishes her identity and subjectivity not only as a narrator but as an author too. Susan Barton also exemplifies the plight of feminism in its affiliation with post colonialism and it suggests that the feminist discourse may sometimes get submerged in its liaison with such movements. She represents the practice of liberal feminism which champions the cause of the emancipation of the privileged white women who hold themselves responsible for civilizing the native. The significance of *Foe* as a woman's text celebrating the narrative power of women is multiple and probably the emergent discourse of Friday in a fluid zone is indicative of an argument favouring the woman's discourse as it is intertextually linked to "Diving into the Wreck" by Adrienne Rich. It is to be noted that the world of *Foe* is suffused in symbols of fluidity which is associated with the women's discourse.

In the Heart of the Country is the story of Magda, the insane yet powerful narrator of the text. She begins to narrate her tale peripherally located in a text of male centrality. The daughter has taken significant hold of the father's tale and lets it to rot. In the course of the narration which is unravelled through Magda's journal the entire political situation in South Africa and the location of the White woman is delineated. Magda as the author/ narrator seems to hold a powerful discourse and proves it to an extent by the way she kills her father in a process of psychological patricide. This act cancels itself at the end of the text as the representation of a future utopia is achieved very much in the presence of her father figure. But it is to be noted that the patriarchal has lost all signs of power and authority and relies very much on the daughter for

his survival. The role of Magda as a woman narrator fulfills several functions in the Coetzeean textual world. She embodies “the colonial postcolonialism” (Attwell 112) that Coetzee inhabits with regard to the South African problematic politics where his location as a White male critiquing Apartheid is dubiously seen. Partaking the colonial ancestry but wanting to put an end to it Magda is forever caught between double discourses like Coetzee. This woman as a narrator in a dubious locale is Coetzee’s effective tool in interrogating power and its structures from a powerless stance. She is as sinned against as her native counterpart. But in Magda’s case it is more tragic as she does not seem to be aware of it. Native black predicament is obvious while Magda’s marginality is more subtle. She is tortured both by the centre and by the margins. Still she manages to topple discourses and raise questions which are not easily answered. There is an element of counter myth in her stance as she interrogates the Afrikaner myth of dominance and the African myth of the plentiful mother. She is both a settler colonialist and a native in her predicament. She is also the voice of the woman well past its feminine, feminist limitations asserting the fluid female stance in a true development of the self making this text in a true sense a woman’s text, a female bildungsroman.

On selecting these texts for analysis with regard to the position of the woman narrator in the texts, the objective was to explore the possibilities vested on the women narrators in J.M.Coetzee’s selected texts and also to analyze the way in which they serve different purposes for Coetzee. Woman occupies a central role in these texts as author/narrator and he uses the figure of woman “to address the folly of perceived wisdom and the rivalry that demarcates it” (Rapsey 270). His women narrators occupy a privileged position of power undermining the same constantly and become spokespersons for his interrogations of the systems of authority in diverse ways. They reiterate and uphold the political legitimacy of women’s discourses as a

challenge to the dominant power structures offering critiques from positions of semi marginality.

In a changing world these interrogations denote new equations and locations power in addition to the increasing validity of women's discourses.

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