Can the "Mutelated" Subaltern be Free? Reading Friday's Subversion in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*

Hemangi Bhagwat
University of Mumbai
India

Tanya D'souza
University of Mumbai
India

Abstract

J. M. Coetzee's 1986 novel *Foe* tells the story of Susan Barton, who has boarded a ship bound for Lisbon in her search for her kidnapped daughter. After a mutiny on the ship she is set adrift, washing ashore on the island inhabited by "Cruso" and Friday and intruding into their ongoing adventure. Her account is then inserted into the original *Robinson Crusoe* story line, which is redrawn following Susan Barton's perspective. The original text's recontextualization illustrates the effort by Coetzee to render the story in categories that are relevant to a contemporary cultural context. Like *Robinson Crusoe*, it is a frame story, developed while Barton is in England attempting to convince writer Daniel Foe to help transform her tale into popular fiction. Friday is a character whose marginality – as it first appears in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* – is carried forward in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, as this new version of Friday is that of a more disempowered and dysfunctional subject, one doubly mutilated – orally and sexually. This paper aims to study Friday's subversive subalternity in Coetzee's work by using postcolonial methodology with a view to uncover his unique, rebellious behaviour and his capacity to define his own modes of freedom.

Keywords: freedom, imperial, master-slave dialectic, mutilation, subaltern, subjectivity

In Coetzee's Foe, Friday is doubly mutilated – both orally and sexually. Instead of taking responsibility, Friday's imperial masters – Cruso, Susan Barton and Foe – mock, victimize, judge and essentialize him. Susan and Foe go a few steps further and attempt to interpret his actions, map his story of mutilation, represent and educate him. Yet, despite being corporeally maimed and physically subjected to his masters, Friday defies being psychologically subjected to essentialism and an imperial education. He practises modes of freedom–music, dance, disguise, writing and drawing–that subvert imperial codes and transport him away from England and victimhood.

Additionally, his silence may be seen as a site of resistance to imperial logocentrism and read as a mode of performing defiance and freedom. The critic Kyoung-sook (2009) interprets Friday's silence as "a form of articulation" (p. 113). He argues that although Friday's "tongue is mutilated" and he is muted or "mutelated" [emphasis added] against his will, "[his] silence should not be read as his inability to communicate but as his unique way of communication or his voluntary rejection of it" (2009, p. 113). In this reworking of "the Robinsonnade" (Maher, 1991, p. 34), Coetzee introduces Susan Barton as a new character and a female subaltern who is subjected to both Cruso and Foe. However, Friday occupies a fourth tier in the ladder of authority, as he is subjected to Susan as well as to Cruso and Foe. This paper analyses the subversive subalternity of Friday in an attempt to hear and understand his silences and his non-verbal modes of performing freedom.

The paper begins by providing a theoretical background of the key concepts used, including imperialism, the master-slave dialectic, subjectivity, subalternity and essentialism. A detailed thematic analysis follows. It comprises five sub-sections: cannibalism; freedom and responsibility; music, dance and disguise; writing and drawing; and silence and Coetzee's unknown narrator. The first sub-section sheds light on how Friday has been bestialised and described as a cannibal, attempting to understand the biased practice of "labelling" by questioning who the real cannibals are. The second sub-section questions the possibilities of physical and psychological freedom available to Friday. It indicates the futile ways in which Susan interprets Friday's desires and attempts to offer him freedom. It also inquires who embodies the role of master and slave in the dialectic Susan and Friday share. The latter three sub-sections highlight the manner in which Friday practises freedom despite being subjected to imperial masters – initially Cruso, later Susan and finally Foe. It delineates the different modes in which Friday subverts imperial codes and performs his freedom through his music, dance, disguise, writing, drawing and silence.

Theoretical Background

Theoretical concepts like imperial, master, slave, subject, subaltern and essentialism have been used repetitively in this paper.

Imperialism

In *Beginning Postcolonialism*, John McLeod (2012) discusses the conceptual difference between colonialism and imperialism. He explains that "imperialism is an ideological project which upholds the legitimacy of the economic and military control of one nation by another… colonialism [however] is [just] one historically specific experience of how imperialism can work through the act of settlement" (pp. 7–8). Broadly, Cruso, Susan and Foe function as imperial masters to the African slave Friday. Specifically, however, Cruso's enterprise on the

island can be defined as colonization, while Susan and Foe's mindset and ways of essentializing Friday can be seen as belonging to the broader rubric of imperialism.

The Master-Slave Dialectic

Hegel envisions the master-slave dialectic not only as an "intersubjective process, motivated by a desire for recognition by the other, but also an essentially conflictual one… each consciousness strives to assert its self-certainty through the exclusion and elimination of all that is other" (Teixeira, 2018, p. 108). In *Foe*, Susan continually longs to communicate with Friday and understand his predicament. At the same time, she expects him to recognize her as master and adhere to her expectations: she wants to give him a British imperial education to make him not just a corporeal but also a psychological subject. However, Friday's indifference to and defiance of such an education frustrate her. She experiences "a Hegelian reversal of power" (Marais, 1998, p. 55). Here, it is important to note that within the Hegelian dialectic, the slave "has power over the master by refusing him autonomy and forcing him into psychological dependence. Paradoxically, then, the slave has a greater awareness of freedom, whereas the master is only conscious of his need for control and mastery" (Smith, 2004, p. 216). Hence, Friday's indifference disputes the legitimacy of Susan's imperial domination and makes her feel subjected and subservient to him.

Subjectivity

In their book *Post-Colonial Studies:The Key Concepts*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2007) indicate how the concept of subjectivity is linked to postcolonialism, identity-formation and resistance. They state that "[t]he question of the subject and subjectivity directly affects colonized peoples' perceptions of their identities and their capacities to resist the conditions of their domination, their 'subjection'" (pp. 201–202). In Enlightenment philosophy, Descartes' dictum "I think, therefore I am" (as cited in Ashcroft, et al., 2007, p. 202) strengthened the belief that the human individual was autonomous and human consciousness was the source of action and meaning rather than their product. Thus, the Cartesian notion of autonomous subjectivity disregarded the role of social relations or language in the formation of subjectivity. This Enlightenment notion changed with the arguments put forth by the twentieth-century thinkers Marx and Freud. Their arguments paved the way for the notion that the human subject is not an autonomous entity but constructed through ideology, discourse or language.

Subalternity and Essentialism

"Subaltern, meaning 'of inferior rank', is a term adopted by [the Marxist critic] Antonio Gramsci to refer to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes… [like] peasants, workers and other groups" (Ashcroft, et al., 2007, p. 215). Subsequently, the Subaltern Studies group of historians–formed by Ranajit Guha–adapted this term to Postcolonial Studies. They "aimed to promote a systematic discussion of subaltern themes in South Asian Studies" (Ashcroft, et al., 2007, p. 216) and went on to define subaltern groups as opposed to elite groups. In her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak (1988/2013) criticizes the Subaltern Studies group of historians' uncritical, essentialist definition of subaltern identity. She argued that by doing so these scholars were returning to the unproblematic, Cartesian notion of autonomous subjectivity.

Essentialism is "the view… that there is an essential human nature, or set of defining human features, which are innate, universal, and independent of historical and cultural differences"

(Abrams, 2009, pp. 130-131). Poststructuralists and anti-humanists assert that humanist norms and values are based on the fallacy of essentialism. Spivak criticized the Subaltern Studies group because she believed that they were falling prey to essentialism in their Marxist attempt "to define who or what may constitute the subaltern group" (Louai, 2012, p. 7). She asserted that the "task of an intellectual is" not to define, but "to pave the way for the subaltern groups and let them freely speak for themselves" (Louai, 2012, p. 7).

Thematic Analysis

Cannibalism

In Coetzee's *Foe*, Friday is a character whose presence echoes throughout the narrative. He is the subaltern whose narrative punctures a hole in Susan's story and whose portrayal resonates within the readers long after turning the last page of the novel. In the beginning itself, Coetzee portrays Friday as a kind of hero. When Susan landed on Cruso's island "[a] dark shadow fell upon [her]... of a man with a dazzling halo about him" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 5). This man was Friday and his presence serves to overshadow and subvert Susan's narrative throughout. On the other hand, Susan attempts to perpetually essentialize Friday. Her imperial and racist Western mindset condenses Friday's character down to his race and slave subjectivity. She considers him a cannibal and dog long before Cruso discusses his cannibalism or mutilation. Right from the first glance she perceives his African features and the spear at his side, and her subconscious–"over which [she] had no mastery"–suspects Friday for a cannibal" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 106). The Western imperial education she received triggers this stereotypical response.

Likewise, Cruso declares Friday to be a cannibal during bouts of fever. Foe, unlike them, *consciously* insists on Friday's cannibalism. This is expected of him as he is the curator of the Western imperial fiction that has eroticised the orient. Thus, the question arises: was Friday a cannibal? If he was one, wouldn't he kill Susan and devour her flesh at the beginning, instead of carrying and leading her to Cruso to quench her thirst for water? Wouldn't he attempt to kill Susan, Cruso or Foe whenever he got the opportunity? Friday does not do any of this. Instead, he is the only character who was mutilated and maimed. So, who are the real cannibals? Coetzee's narrative subverts the assumptions of Friday's cannibalism by throwing light on the cannibalism demonstrated by his imperial masters.

When Cruso narrates Friday's mutilation, he consciously justifies the act and revels in the idea. He enjoys morbid pleasure in imagining the act and its cause, almost as though he had done it himself. Cruso "brought [Friday's] face close to [Susan's]" by violently "[g]ripping Friday by the hair" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 22) so she could see his mutilated tongue. He blames this cruel act on the slaveholders of Africa and smiles while narrating that they could have done it for four reasons: (1) they held "the tongue to be a delicacy"; (2) "they grew weary of listening to Friday's wails of grief"; (3) "they wanted to prevent him from ever telling his story"; or perhaps because (4) "they cut out the tongue of every cannibal they took, as a punishment" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 23).

An analysis of these theories raises several questions. First, how could Cruso conceive of so many reasons if he hadn't done the mutilation himself? Secondly, if the mutilator ate Friday's tongue as a delicacy, wasn't *he* the cannibal? If one accepts Cruso's tale as the truth, then the African slaveholders were cannibals. If not, then it is more likely that Cruso himself was a cannibal and he performed the mutilation for all the above reasons. He wanted to devour

Friday's tongue to enjoy it as a delicacy and save himself from any further consequences of having performed this cannibalistic act – physically impairing Friday so that he could not grieve, he could not tell his story of violence and had to bear the punishment of his master's crime. In this context, Friday's alleged cannibalism comes across as a means to conceal Western imperialism's cultural and economic cannibalism, practised on the social body of the colonised masses. But Susan and Foe can also be understood as cannibals of a different kind. They prey on each other's narratives as well as Friday's. They essentialize Friday, attempt to represent him and argue about who holds the better claim. It is crucial to analyse Susan and Foe's interpretations of Friday to learn how Coetzee and Friday subvert them.

Freedom and Responsibility

Unlike Cruso, Susan always wanted to understand the thought processes behind Friday's actions. She assumes that she knows what Friday desires. She claims that he "desires to be liberated" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 148). But does he really want freedom? While living with Susan in Foe's house, there are times when Friday begins moping. "[H]e mopes about the passageways or stands at the door, longing to escape, afraid to venture out" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 78). He mopes on Cruso's island as well. He longs to escape but fears it at the same time. Hence, he was never physically successful in escaping. The fear of unforeseen situations fixed him within the master-slave dialectic where either Cruso, Susan or Foe take on the role of the master and he is left with the only option of slavehood. Nevertheless, was it possible for a mutilated African slave to escape servitude on his own?

The reason Susan offers for Friday's inability to achieve freedom is his incapacity to define or understand the meaning of it. She believed that to him freedom was "less than a word" and just a "noise" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 100). She even contemplates why Friday submitted to Cruso and she blamed it on "the condition of slavehood that invades the heart and makes a slave a slave for life" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 85). Susan's explanation, here, is similar to Mannoni's argument about the "dependency complex" (Fanon, 1952/2008, p. 73) from which he believed the colonized suffered. Fanon (1952/2008) criticises Mannoni's explanation as a means of shirking responsibility "for colonial racism" by blaming the victims instead of acknowledging the coercion of the colonizers (p. 66). In this context, Susan's tendency to blame Friday for his slavehood because he possessed a so-called "dependency complex" is nothing but a means of denying responsibility and disregarding the violence and racism inherent in imperialism.

O' Connell states that "Susan is bound to Friday by her compassion, and her feeling of responsibility" (1989, p. 50). While she might have felt sympathy for Friday at times, it never translated into taking genuine responsibility for him. In England, Susan claims that she could not find a job for him. But, if she knew that Friday desired his freedom, was it entirely impossible for her to find a way of freeing him? When she tries to send him to Africa, she suspects the captain's intentions. What she fails to suspect and question, however, are her own intentions. There were jobs where she could send Friday. Foe suggests that she could send him to stay with the "Negroes in London" and he could "play for pennies in a street band" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 128).

However, Susan could not live without Friday. He was a "shadow" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 115) she could not let go of. She was accustomed to his presence, while he could have managed alone on the island or anywhere. Instead of freeing Friday, Susan grows dependent on him and the need to essentialize him. In contrast, while Friday could not physically escape from Susan's side, he is certainly able to escape and defy her attempts to essentialize him.

Music, Dance and Disguise

Despite being subjected to the other characters' imperialistic gaze, Friday comes to live a self-absorbed, independent life on the island. Susan claims that Friday "is the child of his silence". She assumes that Friday "is to the world what [she makes] of him" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 122). Yet there are moments when Friday is heard, to Susan's dismay. When Cruso falls ill, Friday shuns the hut and takes up the flute. Did he do so to soothe Cruso? That hardly seems likely because the monotonous tune gives even Susan a headache. Instead, his insistence on playing the flute was like a musical announcement that his freedom is imminent. He had never considered murdering or maiming his masters, but the thought of living an independent life after Cruso died may have certainly flitted through his mind.

That thought may be the reason why he was able to play the flute and sleep soundly during the stormy night when Cruso was experiencing fever bouts. To him, the storm represented the end of Cruso's reign and if not the beginning of his reign, at least the onset of his days of freedom. No wonder, he is crestfallen when he is nearly "harm[ed]" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 38) and escorted away from the island. To him, the island was the space closest to his sense of home. Hence, he continues to recount memories of the island in England by transporting himself through music and dance.

In Foe's house, Susan hears Friday playing music simultaneously on his old flute and on Foe's newly retrieved soprano record player. He played the same six notes he had played on the island. He had also disguised himself by wearing Foe's guild-master robes and wig while he played the music. In addition, he danced by spinning around. In these moments, he never heeded Susan. She found him "spinning slowly around with the flute to his lips and his eyes shut; he paid no heed to [her]" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 95). Frustrated, Susan feels the need to label Friday's music and dance negatively. She analyses his tune in consonance with the imperial discourses she had internalized, reducing it to a savage practise by exclaiming, "How like a savage to master a strange instrument–to the extent that he is able without a tongue–and then be content forever to play one tune upon it! It is a form of incuriosity… a form of sloth" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 95). Susan feels the need to mark Friday's musical creation as inefficient. But why does she feel so? Perhaps his creative abilities frustrate her and remind her of her own inability to produce a successful narrative about her island experience. Somehow, his ability to quickly master a new musical instrument in Foe's house despite his mutilation aggravates her.

To be more specific, Friday's ability to perform creatively and freely within the authorial space of an imperial master–Foe–and in the physical presence of Susan–another female imperialist–threatens their legitimacy of power and mastery over him. Friday's dance unsettles Susan and makes her "shiver" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 94). Hence, she feels the need to label his music as savage and fears the recurrence of his cannibalism. "It is in desperation that she substitutes words for" Friday's non-verbal communication in order to label his modes of practising freedom derogatively (Foxcroft, 2015, p. 16). She felt that his success at playing music and dancing was a symbolic manifestation of his previously free selfhood—which, for her, meant his cannibalistic selfhood that existed before he had been enslaved. Her British imperialistic mindset could only imagine Friday living a cannibalistic life in Africa before slavery "cured" him of it. When Friday had played the flute on the island, Susan felt so upset that she snatched his instrument away. While this act of authority and anger perplexed Friday, it never threatened him. He continued to play the flute on the island and later in Foe's house. Frustrated by his

careless disregard for her, Susan attempts to play the tune herself as a means of communicating with him. However, Friday defies Susan's efforts.

Moreover, "Susan experiences difficulty in harmonising with Friday" (Foxcroft, 2015, p. 18). "The music [they] made was not pleasing: there was a subtle discord all the time, though [they] seemed to be playing the same notes" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 96). One reason for this was Friday's indifference towards her. Another reason was Susan's insistence on playing a variation of tone which he did not intend to replicate. She initially perceives the music and dance of the "[t]ongueless, mute Friday" to be "tuneless flute songs and monotonous, repetitive dances" (Maher, 1991, p. 38). Later, however, she learns–to an extent–the meaning of this performance. She realizes that he performed dance and music to transport himself "or his spirit, [away] from… England, from [her]" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 104). Nevertheless, Foxcroft (2015) argues that Susan is "[u]nequipped to relate the wider, colonial context" (p. 15) of Friday. "[T]he key to decoding [Friday's] identity is hidden in the very gestures and movements which depict the story of his suffering" (Foxcroft, 2015, p. 16). The "continuous cadences and supersonic gyrations" which "shamanically" transport him to "another world" are "reminiscent of Brazilian dances rooted in African slavery… they provide a means of reclaiming identity through cultural and historical heritage, enabling Friday to be fully at ease with himself" (Foxcroft, 2015, p. 17).

Friday's dance also startles Susan for another reason. It reveals his second mutilation (of his phallus) to her. As Friday danced spinning around himself, the disguised robes fly and whirl around his shoulders to reveal this second, "more hideous" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 119) phallic mutilation. In this way, Friday "facilitates his spiritual self-transcendence" by "[r]esorting to elements of male sexual exhibitionism" through his dance. It allows him "a cathartic escape from his repressed existence" (Foxcroft, 2015, p. 18). Susan, however, could not even describe what she saw to Foe without the aid of figurative, "sexualised" (Foxcroft, 2015, p. 18) and racist language. She did not know "how these matters [could] be written of in a book unless they [were] covered up again in figures" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 120). She only states that the mutilation was "atrocious" and it "unmanned" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 119) Friday. Thus, since Susan was a subject of imperial discourses herself, she was unable to plainly articulate the heinous consequences of imperialism and racism.

Instead of acknowledging the role of imperialism in maiming Friday, Susan makes every effort to define Friday based on her imperialist mindset. However, "Friday's detachment causes the hole in Susan's narrative and is the primary cause of [her] uncertain narrative voice" (Kehinde, 2006, p. 112). She longs to communicate with Friday, but his indifference frustrates her. Friday's silence, which she compares to "black smoke", chokes and stifles her (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 118). "Friday destabilizes the dominion of language… by revealing his truth via the various media of writing, music and dance" (Foxcroft, 2015, p. 19). But Susan fails to realise that because she uses imperial codes to comprehend him, she will never be able to understand him. She uses language "to control [Friday] by gaining access to him through communication on her terms" (Jolly, 1996, p. 11). She reads British narratives to him and assumes it will educate him somehow. She wanted to imprint a British imperial consciousness within him. Friday's defiance of this is seen through his subversive form of writing.

Writing and Drawing

After Susan, it is Foe's turn to civilise and educate Friday. He does so by putting an emphasis on teaching Friday to write. Like Cruso, he prioritises the need to teach Friday only the relevant

words. Despite his focused vision, Foe is unable to teach Friday the alphabet. All he writes is–what Susan and Foe comprehend as–a series of the letter "o" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 152). While Foe assumes this is the beginning of Friday's imperial education, his writing comes across as a negation of imperial authorship. By installing himself at Foe's desk and wearing his robes, Friday assumes empowerment and "the position of authorship" (Kehinde, 2006, p. 113). Spivak suggests that the "o" Friday writes "could conceivably be omega, the end" since the narrative ends at this point "with the promise of a continued writing lesson that never happens" (1990, p. 15). However, the "o" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 152) could also be misconstrued by Susan and Foe for the numeral 0 (zero). In this context, Friday's writing was an effort at nullifying–or what Kehinde describes as "cancel[ling]" (2006, p. 112)–their imperial discourse so as to allow room for inclusivity and multiculturalism.

A more significant defiance is seen when Friday begins to draw several feet and eyes on his slate while Susan and Foe were distracted and talking to each other. He "filled his slate with open eyes, each set upon a human foot: row upon row of eyes: walking eyes" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 147). Susan commanded him to "[g]ive [her] the slate" but "instead of obeying [her]" he "rubbed the slate clean" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 147). Susan was upset with what he had drawn and wanted to complain and show it to Foe. But Friday notices her anger and erases the sketch before she could show it. His sketch is a kind of articulation of his subalternity and slavehood and demonstrates his acknowledgement of his subjectivity. By erasing the sketch, he displays a sense of ownership to his subalternity.

When Friday withholds the slate from Susan, Spivak interprets his act as that of one guarding the marginal space against Western imperialists. She argues that Friday "is not only a victim… [but] also an agent… the curious guardian at the margin" (1990, p. 16). His defiance against showing the sketch to Foe is the disavowal and subversion of any interpretation or judgement that would follow. He never wanted Susan or Foe to reprimand him or disapprove of the sketch. He felt they did not have the right to essentialize his art or punish him for his interpretation of his own subjecthood. It could also mean that he did not want to be enslaved by Susan or Foe as he had been enslaved to Cruso. Foxcroft interprets Friday's drawing to be his version of a "coloniser" (Foxcroft, 2015, p. 16). Perhaps, that is why Susan gets upset and Friday "intentionally evades [her] censorship" (Foxcroft, 2015, p. 16). In fact, Susan gets so upset when he withholds the slate that she feels she has been enslaved by Friday. Thus, his act of withholding mocks her and reverses the master-slave dialectic.

Silence and Coetzee's Unknown Narrator

Instead of regretting his "mutelated" (Kyoung-sook, 2009, p. 113) subalternity, Friday uses his silence to perform his freedom. Marais interprets Friday's silence as "neither a sign of submission nor merely a strategy of passive resistance, but a counter-strategy through which… [he] preserves, even asserts, [his] alterior status and in doing so interrogates the fixity of dominant power structures and positions" (1996, pp. 74-75). Friday rejects learning the imperial script and disregards every effort made by Susan and Foe to communicate with him. In this way, he bars them from psychologically subjecting him to imperialism. Susan realized that what kept Friday averse to communicating with her was not his dullness or mutilation, but "a disdain for intercourse with [her]" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 98). Hence, she remains "oblivious to the reality of his silence", which he appropriates as an "acquired mother tongue" (Foxcroft, 2015, p. 15). Coetzee assists him in performing his silence by introducing the perspective of an unbiased, unknown narrator in the final segments of the novel.

"The last scene of the novel in which the unnamed narrator enters Friday through his mouth in order to listen for his story instead of remaining outside and speaking for him suggests a possibility to listen for the subaltern [without] penetrating or interrupting their space" (Kyoung-sook, 2009, p. 113). Hence, the unnamed narrator performs what Spivak (1988/2013) describes as the task of a postcolonial intellectual in allowing the subaltern's (Friday's) voice to be heard. When the unknown narrator opens Friday's mouth, a stream issues from it. This is a form of a "baptismal wave" (Maher, 1991, p. 40) which flows across the narrator's eyelids and facial skin. The specific mention of "eyelids" and "skin of [his/her] face" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 157) hints at the symbolic inference that the stream or narrative issuing from the subaltern's (Friday's) mouth is meant to cleanse the imperial perception and racial stereotypes of the narrator who presumably represents the Western subject. In other words, it hints at the need for the Western imperial subject to cleanse his/her mind to allow room for inclusivity and equality.

Friday's "soundless stream" of "powerful silence" (Attridge, 2004, p. 67) is "truly intense, ubiquitous, and relentless…" (Foxcroft, 2015, p. 19). It is also a material representation of the long-suppressed voices of the subaltern which are unleashed and communicated with full force. According to Kehinde (2006), "[t]he concluding image… is Coetzee's articulation of a strong desire for reciprocal speech from the victims of colonization—a cross-cultural dialogue" (p. 115) and Friday symbolizes "the black world… as the site of a shimmering, indeterminate potency that has the power to engulf and cancel Susan's narrative" (p. 112).

Conclusion

As Susan tries to narrate and narrow down Friday's story based on her understanding, she acts like the archetypal Western intellectual who attempts to represent the subaltern biasedly. Yet, in spite of her multiple attempts to understand him and varied claims of having understood him, Susan is unable to comprehend, represent or essentialize him. The "stairway" to comprehend Friday turns to "smoke" (Coetzee, 1986/2010, p. 118) with her every attempt. There is always a jarring tune, an obstacle, an incomprehensible silence that blurs the route to navigate Friday. Coetzee continually punctures her navigation and Friday offers her his unapologetic indifference; these serve to finally frustrate her. Friday's body, attitude, habits, behaviour and physical reactions speak for themselves, subverting, in sundry ways, the harm to which his Western master(s) subjected him by mutilating him. Friday is physically silenced by his master(s). However, he does not fill these gaps of silence with nonverbal cues of communication and cooperation. Instead, he uses "the dynamically liberating influence of music-making and dance" (Foxcroft, 2015, p. 16) as modes of practising freedom and "self-transcendence" (Foxcroft, 2015, p. 18). Friday's music, dance, disguise, writing, drawing and silence subvert imperial codes and transport him to a space of self-absorption and freedom that his imperial masters cannot access. Thus, he demonstrates indifference and defies communication which serves to empower him and puncture the imperial masters' attempts to interpret and represent him. In addition, Coetzee disallows any misrepresentation by inserting an unknown, unbiased narrator in the final sections of his novel to subvert all imperial representations of Friday. This narrator shows how Friday's body and corporeal presence speak for him, instead of anyone else.

References

Abrams, M. H., & Harpham, G. G. (2009). *A handbook of literary terms*. Cengage Learning.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (Eds.). (2007). *Post-Colonial studies: The key concepts* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Attridge, D. (2004). *J. M. Coetzee and the ethics of reading: Literature in the event*. Chicago University Press.

Coetzee, J. M. (2010). *Foe*. Penguin. (Original work published 1986).

Fanon, F. (2008). *Black skin, white masks*. (C. L. Markmann, Trans.). Pluto Press. (Original work published 1952).

Foxcroft, N. (2015). The spiritual liberation of music, dance, and ritual: Verbal-Versus non-verbal communication in J. M. Coetzee's Foe. Commonwealth Essays and Studies, *38*(1), 11–20. https://doi.org/10.4000/ces.4943

Jolly, R. J. (1996). *Colonization, violence, and narration in white South African writing: André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, and J. M. Coetzee*. Ohio University Press.

Kehinde, A. (2006). Post-Colonial African literature as counter-discourse: J. M. Coetzee's Foe and the reworking of the cannon. *Ufahamu*, *32*(3), 96–115. https://doi.org/10.5070/F7323016508

Kyoung-sook, K. (2009). Listening for the subaltern's mutilated voice/ silence: J. M. Coetzee's Foe. *The Journal of Modern British & American Language & Literature, 27*(1), 113–131. https://www.kci.go.kr/kciportal/ci/sereArticleSearch/ciSereArtiView.kci?sereArticleSearchBean.artiId=ART001319477

Louai, El Habib. (2012). Retracing the concept of the subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak: Historical developments and new applications. *African Journal of History and Culture, 4*(1), 4–8. https://doi.org/10.5897/AJHC11.020

Maher, S. N. (1991). Confronting authority: J. M. Coetzee's Foe and the remaking of Robinson Crusoe. *The International Fiction Review, 18*(1), 34-40.

Marais, M. (1996). The hermeneutics of Empire: Coetzee's Post-colonial metafiction. *Critical Perspectives on J. M. Coetzee*. Macmillan, 66–81. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-24311-2_4

Marais, M. (1998). Writing with eyes shut: Ethics, politics, and the problem of the other in the fiction of J. M. Coetzee. *English in Africa, 25*(1), 43–60. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40238856

McLeod, J. (2012). *Beginning postcolonialism*. Viva Books.

O'Connell, L. (1989). J. M. Coetzee's life and times of Michael K and Foe as postmodernist allegories. *Literator, 10*(1), 39–51. https://doi.org/10.4102/lit.v10i1.821

Smith, A. L. (2004). 'This thing of darkness': Racial discourse in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. *Gothic Studies, 6*(2), 208-222. https://doi.org/10.7227/GS.6.2.4

Spivak, G. C. (1990). *Theory in the margin: Coetzee's Foe reading Defoe's Crusoe/Roxana. English in Africa, 17*(2), Rhodes University, 1–23. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40238659

Spivak, G. C. (2013). Can the subaltern speak? Williams, P., & Chrisman L. (Eds.). *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory: A Reader*. New York: Routledge, 66-111. Retrieved from https://z-lib.org. (Original work published 1988).

Teixeira, M. (2018). Master-slave dialectics (in the colonies). Krisis: Marx from the margins: A collective project, from A to Z, (2), 108-112. https://krisis.eu/master-slave-dialectics-of-the-colonies

Corresponding author: Tanya D'souza
Email: tanilicious1993@gmail.com