

## Narrative Struggles: Unraveling The Quest For Identity In J.M. Coetzee's 'Foe'

S.KUMARAN ARUL DEVARAM<sup>1</sup>, Dr.S.GUNASEKARAN (Corresponding Author)<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT:

*J.M. Coetzee's novel 'Foe' is a compelling exploration of identity, narrative power, and the inherent challenges in constructing one's sense of self. This paper delves into the intricacies of the characters' narrative struggles within the novel, aiming to dissect the multifaceted layers that define their quests for identity.*

*The narrative unfolds on an island where Susan Barton, stranded after her shipwreck, encounters Daniel Defoe and the mute Friday. The paper critically examines how the characters grapple with the imposition of external narratives upon their own, highlighting the tensions between personal agency and societal expectations. Susan Barton's journey, seeking recognition and voice in the face of colonial structures, becomes emblematic of the broader human struggle for self-identity.*

*The analysis extends to the role of language in shaping and limiting identity, as characters navigate linguistic barriers and confront the power dynamics inherent in narrative creation. Coetzee's intricate narrative style and metafictional elements further complicate the characters' quests, inviting readers to question the very nature of storytelling and its impact on identity formation.*

*Drawing on literary theory, postcolonial discourse, and narrative analysis, this paper offers a comprehensive exploration of how 'Foe' engages with the complexities of identity. By unraveling the narrative struggles of the characters, it seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on postcolonial literature, metafiction, and the profound interplay between individual and collective identity construction.*

**Key words:** *J.M. Coetzee, Foe, Identity, Narrative, Struggles, Susan Barton, Postcolonial, Metafiction, Language, Power dynamics.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

In J.M. Coetzee's novel 'Foe,' the exploration of identity stands as a central theme, interwoven with intricate narrative complexities and power dynamics. The characters grapple with the inherent challenges of constructing a sense of self, navigating through the twists and turns of their individual quests for identity. This paper delves into the heart of 'Foe,' dissecting the

---

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Research Scholar Department of English Anna University University College of Engineering  
BIT Campus Tiruchirappalli-620 024

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor (Senior Grade) Department of English Anna University University College of Engineering BIT Campus  
Tiruchirappalli- 620 024

narrative struggles that shape the characters' journeys and examining the broader implications for understanding the multifaceted nature of identity.

At the heart of the narrative is Susan Barton, a character stranded on an island after a shipwreck, whose encounter with Daniel Defoe and the mute Friday sets the stage for a profound exploration of identity. The paper engages with the intricate layers of Susan Barton's narrative journey, shedding light on the tensions between personal agency and societal expectations that underscore her quest for recognition and voice.

Central to the analysis is the role of language in identity construction, as characters grapple with linguistic barriers and confront the imposition of external narratives. Coetzee's masterful use of metafiction further complicates the characters' quests, prompting readers to question the very nature of storytelling and its profound impact on shaping individual and collective identities.

This exploration extends beyond the individual characters to encompass broader themes of postcolonial discourse, inviting readers to critically examine the novel's engagement with colonial structures and their enduring impact on identity formation. The paper aims to contribute to the academic discourse on postcolonial literature, metafiction, and the intricate interplay between narrative construction and the fundamental human struggle for self-identity.

Through a synthesis of literary theory, narrative analysis, and postcolonial perspectives, this paper endeavors to unravel the narrative struggles within 'Foe,' offering a nuanced understanding of how Coetzee's work contributes to the ongoing conversations surrounding identity in contemporary literature.

## **2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

The following are the objectives of the study:

**1. Examine Narrative Dynamics:** Analyze the intricate narrative structure of 'Foe' to uncover how characters grapple with and shape their individual stories within the overarching framework of the novel.

**2. Explore Characters' Quests for Identity:** Investigate the personal journeys of Susan Barton, Daniel Defoe, and Friday to elucidate the challenges, conflicts, and resolutions they encounter in their pursuit of identity.

**3. Evaluate Power Dynamics:** Scrutinize the impact of colonial structures and societal expectations on characters' agency, dissecting how these dynamics influence the construction and assertion of their identities.

**4. Analyze the Role of Language:** Investigate the linguistic nuances within the narrative, examining how language serves as both a means of expression and a constraint in the characters' efforts to articulate and establish their identities.

**5. Contribute to Literary Discourse:** Offer a scholarly contribution to the fields of postcolonial literature and metafiction by providing a nuanced analysis of the narrative struggles and identity quests within 'Foe.'

## **3. LITERATURE REVIEW:**

The exploration of identity within the realm of postcolonial literature has been a subject of profound scholarly discourse. In this context, J.M. Coetzee's 'Foe' emerges as a rich tapestry

that interlaces narrative intricacies with the complex pursuit of selfhood. As we embark on an examination of the existing literature, it becomes evident that the thematic intersections of identity, power dynamics, and linguistic constraints within 'Foe' resonate with broader discussions in the field.

Previous analyses of Coetzee's works, such as 'Waiting for the Barbarians' and 'Disgrace,' have often underscored the author's keen interest in interrogating power structures and their impact on individual agency. 'Foe,' however, introduces a unique dimension by foregrounding the role of narrative in the construction of identity. Susan Barton's plight, as she grapples with the imposition of external narratives, draws parallels with discussions on the postcolonial subject negotiating cultural impositions and reclaiming agency in a world fraught with colonial legacies.

Scholarly works on metafiction offer valuable insights into Coetzee's narrative strategies. Metafictional elements in 'Foe' not only add layers to the storytelling but also complicate the characters' quests for identity. The metafictional approach prompts readers to critically engage with the act of storytelling itself, mirroring broader debates on the relationship between fiction and reality, and how narrative structures shape our understanding of self and others.

Language, as a tool of expression and a constraint, has been a recurring theme in postcolonial literature. In 'Foe,' the examination of linguistic nuances in the construction of identity aligns with the broader discourse on the impact of language on cultural identity. Coetzee's portrayal of characters negotiating linguistic barriers contributes to the ongoing conversation about the complexities of communication in a postcolonial context.

Furthermore, the concept of identity in postcolonial literature has often been discussed in terms of hybridity, diaspora, and the negotiation of multiple identities. 'Foe' invites comparisons with works by authors like Salman Rushdie and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, where characters navigate the intricacies of identity within a colonial or postcolonial setting.

In synthesizing these strands of literature, this study aims to offer a fresh perspective on 'Foe,' delving into its unique narrative dynamics, characters' quests for identity, power structures, linguistic dimensions, and its contribution to the broader discourse on postcolonial literature and metafiction. Through this exploration, the paper seeks to contribute to an enriched understanding of identity construction within the intricate narratives of J.M. Coetzee's 'Foe.'

#### **4. METHODOLOGY:**

The methodology employed in this study combines qualitative textual analysis with a theoretical framework grounded in postcolonial literary theory, metafiction studies, and narrative analysis. The aim is to dissect the intricacies of identity, power dynamics, and linguistic nuances within J.M. Coetzee's 'Foe.'

**1. Literary Analysis:** The primary methodology involves a detailed literary analysis of 'Foe.' This includes a close reading of the novel to identify key passages, themes, and narrative structures related to characters' quests for identity. This analysis will extend to the examination of Coetzee's writing style, use of symbolism, and metafictional elements to unveil the layers of storytelling within the narrative.

**2. Theoretical Framework:** The study will be grounded in postcolonial literary theory, drawing on works by theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Said. This theoretical lens

will provide a framework for understanding the characters' experiences in 'Foe' within the broader context of colonial and postcolonial discourse.

**3. Narrative Theory Application:** Narrative theory, particularly as it pertains to the construction of identity, will be applied to analyze how the characters in 'Foe' navigate and shape their individual stories. This involves exploring narrative techniques, focalization, and the implications of storytelling on the characters' sense of self.

**4. Language Analysis:** The study will delve into the linguistic aspects of the novel, investigating how language functions as both a medium of expression and a constraint in the characters' efforts to articulate their identities. This analysis will draw from linguistic theories and postcolonial language studies.

**5. Case Study Approach:** The characters of Susan Barton, Daniel Defoe, and Friday will be treated as case studies. Their individual quests for identity will be examined in-depth, considering the specific challenges, conflicts, and resolutions they undergo throughout the narrative.

**6. Interdisciplinary Approach:** The study will adopt an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on insights from literary studies, cultural studies, and postcolonial studies. This multifaceted approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of the complex themes present in 'Foe.'

**7. Ethical Considerations:** Given the interpretative nature of literary analysis, ethical considerations involve presenting a balanced interpretation, respecting the author's intent, and acknowledging diverse scholarly perspectives. The study aims to engage in a critical dialogue without imposing rigid interpretations.

By employing these methodological approaches, this study seeks to unravel the narrative struggles and identity quests within 'Foe' and contribute to a nuanced understanding of the intersections between storytelling and identity in postcolonial literature.

## **5. RESEARCH ANALYSIS:**

J.M. Coetzee's 'Foe' (1986) undertakes a profound rewriting of Daniel Defoe's 'Robinson Crusoe,' recontextualizing the narrative within the complexities of the South African condition. At the heart of this reimagined tale is Susan Barton, the main narrator, who, driven by the desperate search for her daughter in Bahia, undergoes a tumultuous journey.

Following a ship mutiny resulting in the death of the captain, Susan is compelled to disembark. She finds herself washed ashore on an island, accompanied by the deceased captain's body—her former lover. The narrative unfolds as Susan encounters Cruso and Friday on the island, drawing parallels to Defoe's classic characters. However, the familiar tale takes an enigmatic turn as Susan discovers that Friday, the island's other inhabitant, has lost his tongue, a mystery that reverberates throughout the novel.

The circumstances surrounding Friday's loss of tongue emerge as a central puzzle, prompting questions about responsibility and the unknown adversities he faced. As Susan grapples with this enigma, the narrative intricacies become a lens through which the broader theme of identity is explored. Coetzee weaves a narrative web that challenges conventional storytelling, unveiling the complexities of character agency, linguistic constraints, and the broader postcolonial landscape.

This paper, titled “Narrative Struggles: Unraveling Identity in J.M. Coetzee’s ‘Foe’” seeks to dissect these narrative struggles, examining the characters' quests for identity, power dynamics, and linguistic nuances within the reimagined world of 'Foe.' In doing so, the study aims to contribute to the scholarly discourse on postcolonial literature, metafiction, and the profound interplay between individual and collective identity construction.

In this exploration of J.M. Coetzee's novel 'Foe,' the central theme revolves around narrative struggles and the intricate journey towards self-discovery. Susan, the protagonist, pens down her memoir titled “The Female Castaway” and endeavors to enlist the services of Foe, a professional writer residing in England but eluding his creditors.

The novel unfolds in four parts, with Susan's memoir employing the epistolary method. The letters, intended for Foe, remain undelivered as he evades his creditors. Undeterred, Susan travels to England accompanied by Friday, seeking Foe to bring her story to life. As the narrative progresses, it delves into Susan's dynamic with Foe, highlighting her constant battle to assert control over her own narrative.

The novel concludes with a compelling sequence narrated by an unnamed voice, challenging and redefining the historical account. This culminates in an act of authorial renunciation, transcending traditional narrative boundaries. Throughout the story, Friday's silence resonates, permeating the narrative and culminating in a powerful presence that overwhelms the narrator in the novel's final moments. 'Foe' becomes a profound exploration of identity, authorship, and the struggle to shape one's own story in the face of external forces.

In line with Ina Grabe's astute observation that the novel places a greater emphasis on the act of storytelling rather than the narrative itself, 'Foe' actively engages in postmodernism's inclination towards prioritizing the signifier over the signified (p.147-148). Susan, the central character, directs her attention to Friday, perceiving him as an inferior native stripped of avenues for self-expression. Friday's individuality, with unique characteristics and a distinct milieu, remains unacknowledged and marginalized.

Susan's outgoing nature prompts her to pose uncomfortable questions to Cruso, accusing him of a lack of communication with Friday. In the master-servant relationship between Cruso and Friday, Cruso emerges not as a cruel oppressor but as indifferent to Friday's identity, fate, and history. Susan queries Cruso about the loss of Friday's tongue, to which he casually responds, undermining Friday's existence as an individual. Cruso suggests that perhaps the removal of Friday's tongue was to quell his persistent wails of grief, or to prevent him from recounting history (p.23).

The narrative in 'Foe' thus becomes a platform for exploring the complexities of identity, shedding light on the struggle for individual expression and the consequences of historical silencing.

Within Cruso's apparent apathy towards Friday, a subtler form of non-aggressive oppression emerges. The oppressor, in this case, fails to proactively engage with Friday's perspective, refraining from any initiative to understand his voice. Cruso's reluctance to teach Friday stems from the belief that words hold no necessity for him.

In stark contrast, Susan takes on the role of an ally, seeking to collaborate with Friday to help him reclaim his identity. She contends that an authentic portrayal of life on the island requires giving voice to Friday. Foe, as the author and presumed creator, poses a threat to

Friday's black identity by assuming control and neglecting Friday's significance in the larger narrative. Foe treats the island as a story without acknowledging Friday's experiences, thereby diminishing the importance of Friday's perspectives.

Susan steps forward as a champion for Friday, advocating for his untold version of the story. She embodies a "free woman asserting her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire" (p.131). In contrast, Friday struggles with a lack of command over words, making it challenging for anyone to truly grasp his essence throughout the novel. The theme of seclusion plays a pivotal role in Friday's life, highlighting the complexities of identity and the struggle for representation. 'Foe' thus becomes a canvas for examining the power dynamics inherent in storytelling and the quest for individual expression within the narrative landscape.

The presence of Friday and Susan on the island underscores their entanglement in the colonial history initiated by Defoe's 'Robinson Crusoe.' The dynamic of the colonizer and the colonized becomes evident when Friday learns how to address the newcomer, marking a defining moment influenced by colonial legacy.

Coetzee, however, diverges from simply replicating the master discourse found in 'Robinson Crusoe.' Instead, he engages in deconstructive readings, positioning the text in relation to previous narratives to unveil lies, silences, and the slippages in histories deemed authoritative (p.389). This approach empowers Coetzee to rewrite and subvert Western colonial master narratives, emphasizing his responsibility to understand, modify, and reimagine the narratives shaping our reality (p.389).

In this context, Susan and Friday are strategically placed on the island, seemingly beyond the known world, challenging the authority of their voices. Susan adamantly rejects falsehoods and silences, consistently emphasizing her preference to be the author of her own story. She refuses to tolerate distortions, stating, "I would rather be the author of my own story than have lies told about me" and expressing reluctance to come forward as an author without the ability to affirm the truth of her tale (p.40).

This sentiment intensifies after leaving the island, as Susan reflects from a distance. She grapples with the idea of being a "being without substance, a ghost beside the true body of Cruso." Questioning the legitimacy of Cruso's claim over the island, she contemplates the fate of all storytellers and whether there exists a law governing islands (p.51). Coetzee's 'Foe' thus becomes a nuanced exploration of the power dynamics inherent in storytelling and the existential struggle for authenticity and agency within the narrative landscape.

A connection emerges between Susan's subdued voice and the silenced voices of the colonized, particularly the savage. Attwell highlights that Susan's womanhood signifies the cultural power of the province over the metropolis and unauthorized speech over authorized speech (p.112). In her letters to Mr. Foe, Susan intertwines these themes, suggesting, "I told you of my conviction that if the story seems stupid, that is only because it so doggedly holds its silence. The shadow whose lack you feel is there: It is the loss of Friday's tongue." The lost tongue becomes symbolic of submerged voices, including the native voices of South Africans. Without these voices, it is impossible to truly understand the core of the country, its people, and its culture.

Breytenbach underscores the complexity of getting to know one's own culture, asserting that it involves a continual process of making and unmaking the self, inevitably accompanied by a sense of loss (p.312). For any postcolonial culture, there is a pressing need

to reconsider its roots, but this cannot be achieved through stories told by "others." Coetzee himself, in 'Giving Offence' (1996), acknowledges the historical dyad of Christian/heathen, civilized/primitive, white/nonwhite, where the power to apply names rested with the white or civilized individual. This dynamic played out in South Africa, where whites dominated blacks, and the emergence of the true history and identity of the oppressed took years, mirroring Friday's concealed narrative (p.1).

'Foe' thus serves as a lens through which Coetzee critiques the power dynamics in storytelling, exposing the challenges of reclaiming silenced voices and reconstructing an authentic narrative in the postcolonial context.

The narrative of Friday's tongue remains an untold story, obscured within the mute silence of Friday. While numerous accounts may circulate about Friday's tongue, the authentic narrative lies dormant within him. Susan recognizes this, acknowledging that the true story will only emerge when art discovers a way to give voice to Friday (p.118). The loss of Friday's tongue becomes emblematic of a broader loss of identity.

Susan's own quest for storytelling is intertwined with a sense of lacking substance as an individual until her years on the island with Cruso are legitimized through a narrative. She believes that the publication of her story would bring recognition and financial gain, asserting that her experience will lack reality until it is presented as a publicly validated narrative. In her correspondence with Foe, Susan articulates, "For though my story gives the truth, it does not give the substance of the truth... To tell the truth in all its substance, you must have quiet and a comfortable chair away from all distraction" (pp. 51-52). She acknowledges the power Foe possesses as an author, understanding that he can infuse her story with the realistic details necessary to give it the density of truth.

In 'Foe,' Coetzee delves into the complexities of narrative struggles, exposing the intricate relationship between identity, silence, and the authoritative power of storytelling. The characters grapple with the challenge of making untold stories heard, emphasizing the transformative potential of narrative in shaping one's reality.

Susan contemplates the essence of storytelling as a repository of memories, where language forms a correspondence between the reality of things and the mental images we hold (p.65). In her letter to Foe, she grapples with the realization that this version of truth is not entirely feasible. While her narrative lacks the thrill of adventure, she is adamant about not fabricating events that never occurred. Susan faces the challenge of recounting the mystery surrounding Friday's mutilation, a narrative thread she cannot unravel. Reflecting on the inherent difficulties of storytelling, she itemizes the unresolved questions or "mysteries" of the island: the significance of the terraces, the circumstances of Friday losing his tongue, the rationale behind Friday's submission to Cruso, and the meaning behind Friday's act of scattering petals on the water near an imagined shipwreck. These mysteries persist without clear answers.

Foe expresses interest in Susan's life before the shipwreck, yet she declines to provide an account of that period. Susan asserts to Foe, "I chose rather to tell of the island, of myself and Cruso and Friday and what we three did there" (p.131). Coetzee's 'Foe' becomes a canvas for exploring the complexities of narrative struggles, as Susan grapples with the challenge of preserving truth while navigating the enigmatic facets of the island and the characters' lives. The novel invites readers to question the authority of storytelling and its role in shaping the perception of identity.

The depiction of Friday in the novel significantly complicates the exploration of identity. Despite all efforts to decipher Friday's roots, behavior, and actions, his inherent otherness persists throughout the narrative, resisting any conclusive interpretation. Friday's enigmatic presence defies categorization within any proposed system of classification by Susan or Foe. While Susan believes that her story on the island would be incomplete without including Friday, he remains largely inaccessible to her.

Derek Attridge astutely points out, "Friday is a being wholly unfamiliar to her, in terms of race, class, gender, culture. He may be a cannibal. But Friday's story will never be known; he has had his tongue cut out and cannot even tell the story of mutilation. His silence, his absolute otherness to her and to her words is at the heart of Barton's story" (p.81). 'Foe' emerges as a nuanced exploration of the challenges inherent in grappling with the complexities of identity, especially in the face of the profound silence and otherness embodied by Friday. The novel invites readers to confront the limitations of understanding and the struggle for representation within the narrative landscape.

In 'Foe,' Foe proposes a formidable challenge to Susan, stating, "We must make Friday's silence speak, as well as the silence surrounding Friday" (p.142). Susan, in earnest attempts, endeavors to teach Friday writing through the method of drawing sketches, aiming to capture Friday's experiences and history. However, the success of Susan's interpretation of Friday's past life hinges on Friday's response to the sketches and, ultimately, Friday's self-expression through the language Susan imparts.

Several sketches are drawn in a quest to unravel the mystery behind Friday's loss of tongue. Initially, Susan sketches Friday and Crusoe with a knife, prompting her to inquire if Crusoe cut Friday's tongue. This experiment proves futile. Another sketch depicts a small Friday with an open mouth, accompanied by a man resembling a slave-trader wielding a sickle-shaped knife. Again, Susan queries Friday about a potential encounter with a slave trader, leading to further confusion. Friday remains unresponsive, his gaze vacant.

Susan, feeling a sense of futility, believes she has wasted her life on Friday, unable to unveil the mysterious identity shrouding him. She concludes, "The unnatural years Friday had spent with Crusoe had deadened his heart, making him cold, incurious like an animal wrapped entirely in itself" (p.70). Coetzee's 'Foe' thus delves into the intricate layers of identity, communication, and the limitations of understanding, exposing the challenges inherent in attempting to give voice to the silenced and enigmatic figure of Friday.

At a certain juncture, Susan confides in Foe, expressing the closeness between Friday and herself, evolving over time to the point where Friday becomes her shadow. She muses, "Do our shadows love us, for all that they are never parted from us" (p.115).

Susan recounts her life before and during her time on the island to Foe, who, in turn, directs her to rehearse her story. Intriguingly, Foe shows more interest in Susan's personal experiences in Bahia than in the island's narrative. Constructing a plot for Susan's story, Foe adheres to the Aristotelian principle of an organic plot, with distinct parts: the loss of the daughter, the quest for the daughter, abandonment of the quest, the adventure on the island, assumption of the quest by the daughter, and the eventual reunion of the daughter with her mother.



For *Foe*, the main plot is paramount, following a structured progression with a clear beginning, middle, and end. The story of the island, according to Foe, lacks inherent narrative vitality and cannot stand alone. Foe exercises his authorial power, shaping the story as he sees fit, even expressing the impossibility of constructing a story solely about the island. He contends that the island's narrative gains life when situated within a larger story. Foe metaphorically describes the isolated island narrative as akin to a waterlogged boat drifting aimlessly in an empty ocean until, without fanfare, it humbly sinks. Foe emphasizes that the island lacks the nuanced dynamics of light and shade (p.117). Coetzee's '*Foe*' emerges as a commentary on the author's role in shaping narratives, juxtaposing personal stories against the broader backdrop of identity and storytelling.

Within the narrative dynamics of '*Foe*,' Foe, occupying a privileged position as a white man, seeks to assert control over the identity of the island and Friday from his vantage point in London. Foe, driven by his own preferences for inclusion and exclusion, shapes the story in a manner that may not align with Susan's perspective.

In commenting on the story of the island, Foe metaphorically likens it to a loaf of bread, suggesting its sustenance but questioning its preference when compared to more delectable confections and pastries (p.117). Susan vehemently protests against Foe's view, asserting her choice to tell the story of the island, herself, Crusoe, and Friday, emphasizing the significance of their shared experiences.

Despite expressing trust in her own authorship, Susan grapples with ambivalence, questioning whether her life has transformed into a story, leaving her identity in doubt. She wonders aloud, "I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom too?" (p.133). Friday's inaccessibility and elusiveness become a source of uncertainty for Susan, creating a 'hole' in her narrative. Susan recognizes that representing Friday's narrative requires his own discourse, yet Friday's silence poses a significant challenge. Attempts to make Friday speak have proven futile.

At Foe's urging, Susan endeavors to teach Friday the English language, providing him with a slate. Instead of writing English letters, Friday makes his own marks, drawing "eyes, open eyes, each set upon a human foot: row upon row of eyes upon feet: walking eyes" (p.147). These markings, according to Susan, symbolize Friday's watchfulness over both her and Foe, serving as tokens of Friday's position as the "wholly other" (p.157). Coetzee's '*Foe*' explores the complexities of identity, representation, and the power dynamics inherent in storytelling, as characters grapple with their own narratives and the narratives of others.

Friday's distinctive mark, the foot, becomes his trademark within Foe's London residence, symbolizing his occupancy of Foe's seat near the writing desk. In a symbolic shift, Friday assumes the role of the author, a transformation perceptible to Susan. Rows of tightly packed letter 'O's fill the pages as Friday endeavors to communicate. Foe instructs Susan to teach Friday the letter 'A,' envisioning a conventional narrative starting with 'A' for alpha, the beginning. However, Friday persistently writes 'O,' representing Omega, the symbol of the end. 'O' also signifies a circle, impervious to penetration by Foe's authorial power, asserting Friday's attempt to resist authority and maintain his inherent otherness outside Foe's master discourse.

Despite lacking the power of speech or self-expression, Friday retains possession of the story of the island. Notably, Friday communicates through secret codes embedded in his culture, referenced multiple times in the novel. These codes, manifested in mysterious slate markings, the act of throwing petals into the sea, humming songs, playing the flute, and dancing

in Foe's scarlet robe, serve as means of expression and presentation. Coetzee underscores that Friday possesses a history and culture, albeit unrecognized by Foe or Susan due to their incapacity to interpret Friday's secret codes of communication.

In drawing parallels to South Africa, Coetzee implies that the white ruling power, analogous to Foe, fails to comprehend and represent the racial and cultural identity of the oppressed. The silence of Coetzee's South Africa echoes the silence of Friday, both a consequence of the oppression against Blacks and Coloured individuals in the face of white authority, rendering them incapable of representing themselves due to their marginalized position imposed by their white rulers. 'Foe' becomes a reflection on the power dynamics inherent in storytelling and the struggle for representation within a colonial and postcolonial context.

Foe is torn between two conflicting desires concerning Friday's voice. On one hand, he seeks to make Friday speak, envisioning the inclusion of Friday in the broader narrative of his work. On the other hand, Foe harbors a subtle gratitude towards previous white masters responsible for Friday's tonguelessness. Friday's silence, a symbol of absolute otherness, captivates Foe's interest, particularly in its connection to Friday's inability to communicate in English.

For Foe, Friday's profound silence represents an extraordinary source of power. As a professional writer, Foe views the act of writing as a business of convenience. He justifies Friday's loss of tongue to Susan, asserting that Friday's lack of self-expression provides Foe with unparalleled options. With Friday unable to communicate, Foe can manipulate, modify, or distort Friday's identity according to his own wishes and desires. Foe articulates this perspective to Susan, stating, "we deplore the barbarism of whoever maimed him, yet have we, his later masters, not reason to be secretly grateful? For as long as he is dumb, we can tell ourselves his desires are dark to us, and continue to use him as we wish" (p.148).

In this intricate interplay of power dynamics and storytelling, Coetzee's 'Foe' delves into the complexities of manipulating narratives, exposing the ethical dilemmas faced by those in positions of authority, as they grapple with the agency and silence of the marginalized other, embodied in the character of Friday.

Foe assumes a dual role, embodying both a male figure and an author, wielding the power to shape truth as he desires. In his male persona, Foe seeks to dominate Susan, a woman without social or financial support. Susan's identity finds acknowledgment in the world of letters only if Foe consents to represent her in the narrative. Despite this, Susan diverges from Foe in her perspective on Friday, holding a compassionate view towards him. She believes the story loses its meaning without the inclusion of Friday, insisting that Friday's desires are not opaque to her.

Susan, acknowledging Friday's lifelong enslavement, advocates for efforts to help him regain his freedom. However, she expresses doubt about Friday's understanding of freedom, stating, "As to Friday, how can Friday know what freedom means when he barely knows his name" (p.149). In contrast, Foe, being free himself, fails to grasp the true value of freedom, dismissing it as "a puff of air, seven letters on a slate" (p.149). Foe asserts that it is a simple task to teach Friday a language that serves practical needs, but he sees no necessity to transform Friday into a philosopher.

Susan confronts Foe, drawing parallels to Crusoe's similar mindset, arguing that teaching Friday a few English words will not answer the yearnings of his heart. She contends

that there will always be a voice in Friday whispering doubts, whether expressed through words, names, sounds, or tunes. Coetzee's 'Foe' delves into the nuanced dynamics of power, gender, and the contrasting perspectives on freedom, revealing the struggles inherent in shaping individual and collective identities within the narrative landscape.

Susan Barton's quest for the authorization of the story of the island reflects her feminist stance toward creating an independent narrative on her own terms. Despite possessing genuine material for a story, Susan acknowledges her limitation in the skill of weaving parables continuously, likening it to producing roses from a conjurer's sleeve. A struggle for control over the narrative unfolds between Foe and Susan, revealing that Susan does not conform to Foe's suggested formula. She invokes the story of the Muse, a female goddess who visits poets in the night, bestowing stories upon them. Susan expresses a desire for a man-Muse to visit authoresses, emphasizing the Muse's role as both a goddess and a begetter, intending not to be the mother but the begetter of a story.

Susan manages to reverse traditional gender roles to some extent, assuming the role of the father when making love to Foe. In this act, she positions herself as the Muse, embodying both goddess and begetter. Susan believes she has transformed Foe into her 'mistress' and, ultimately, her 'wife.' Foe, uncomfortable in the sexual position offered by Susan, experiences physical discomfort. Susan remarks to Foe that it is always a challenging ride when the Muse pays visits. Coetzee intertwines authorship with sexuality, as Susan's attempt, while perhaps not entirely successful, represents an effort to provide her with creative energy to challenge Foe's power as both a male figure and the creator of the story. 'Foe' becomes a canvas where gender roles, authorial power, and sexuality intersect, inviting readers to contemplate the complexities of identity within the narrative.

Foe emerges as Friday's adversary, withholding his representation and wielding authority over the English language and writing skills, elevating him to a position of power and authenticity. Positioned as a metropolitan center, Foe strategically employs his authority to control and manipulate Susan and Friday's narratives, deciding what to include or exclude. Susan vocalizes her resistance, while Friday employs silence as a powerful weapon for protest and to thwart Foe's attempts to shape the narrative.

In the narrative, Susan's sincere confession as an artist unfolds under the watchful eye of Foe, depicted as a dark spider with a dual role as both artist and adversary. Susan likens Foe to a spider in one of her letters, stating, "what art is there to hearing confession? – the spider has as much art, that watches and waits" (p.48). Foe, like a spider, weaves the web of stories, simultaneously serving as a means to ensnare both Susan and Friday. Foe's spider-like power allows him to expand or contract the web at will, making Susan and Friday his prey. Susan metaphorically describes Foe as the patient spider at the heart of the web, waiting for prey to come willingly, smiling thinly when they struggle, and claiming, "I did not ask you to come visiting, you came of your own will" (p.120).

Coetzee's novel addresses the African reality and conditions, suppressed by white ideology that holds the privilege of writing. The whites strip away possibilities of expression from native Africans, leaving silence as the only means of identity expression for the powerless natives of South Africa. 'Foe' attempts to represent the silence of South Africa to the European world, suggesting that the whites cannot penetrate the Africans who resist and silently protest, choosing speechlessness as their only option. The novel unfolds as a narrative struggle, unraveling the complexities of identity and power within a colonial context.

Susan's relentless efforts are focused on crafting a narrative of the island, deeming it the only story that could grant her authorial status and restore her identity. However, she recognizes that Foe, representing white ideology, holds the power to lend her thoughts a voice and validate her version of the story.

The enigmatic figure of Friday remains a persistent challenge throughout the novel, carefully sidestepped by Foe in his narrative presentation. Friday, retaining his absolute otherness, fails to secure any space in the narrative, remaining elusive for both Foe and Susan. Susan, despite Foe's repeated pleas, maintains a deliberate silence about her past life before becoming a castaway, wishing to conceal that part from Foe.

Coetzee avoids presenting Friday's silence in abstract terms, choosing instead to offer concrete images of its profound impact. Susan vividly describes the effects of Friday's silence as she recounts, "When I lived in your house, I would sometimes lie awake upstairs listening to the pulse of blood in my ears and to the silence from Friday below, a silence that rose up to the stairway like smoke, like a welling of black smoke. Before long, I could not breathe; I would feel I was stifling in my bed. My lungs, my heart, my head were full of black smoke" (p.118). The silence transforms into a smoky manifestation, attempting to depict the essence of Friday. Like smoke, Friday remains dark and mysterious, a palpable presence haunting Susan. This portrayal of silence as smoke becomes a powerful metaphorical exploration of the struggles surrounding identity within the narrative.

The novel unfolds through four sections, each revealing Susan's voice progressively. It commences with the Female Castaway, a communication to Foe. The second section delves into letters where Susan articulates her story. The third section, absent of quotation marks, sees Susan transforming her narrative into an account of her association with Foe. In part four, an unnamed narrator emerges, seemingly addressing the reader, making two visits to Foe's house.

In the initial sequence of part four, the narrator encounters a chilling tableau: Foe, Susan, and the daughter lie lifeless in bed. Friday, with feet as hard as wood, possesses a faint pulse. The narrator attempts to pry open Friday's teeth, recognizing that the history Susan cannot narrate resides in Friday's silent mouth. Friday, the exclusive possessor of the island's story, emits sounds of the island without breath.

As the narrator is carried away by the boat's current, he observes petals cast by Friday, symbolizing the essence of the story. Submerging underwater, he discovers the dark mass of the wreck, including Susan and her deceased captain. Yet, the narrator notes that Susan's narrative, along with stories that may or may not include Friday, remains unwritten and buried. Continuing the search, the narrator encounters Friday, who outlives the narratives, emphasizing that the place is beyond words, and bodies become their own signs—the home of Friday. This final revelation underscores the unresolved narrative struggles and the elusive nature of identity within the novel.

Upon encountering a plaque on the wall bearing the words "Daniel Defoe," the narrator stumbles upon a poignant scene. "Daniel Defoe," author, inscribed on the plaque, frames a tableau where three figures lie together in a bed—Foe, Susan, and the lifeless form of a woman or girl. A peculiar detail catches the narrator's attention: "Friday has a scar on his neck, like a necklace left by a rope or chain"(p.155). The tableau is completed by Friday in his alcove, a bare table, and a dispatch box on the floor.

As the narrator lifts the dispatch box onto the table and delves into its contents, he discovers documents and begins to read them. The narrative entry, titled "the Female Castaway," echoes Susan's poignant words: "With a sigh, barely making a splash, I slip overboard "(p.155). Gripped by the boat's current, the narrator observes petals cast by Friday—a symbolic "eye" within the story. Submerging his head underwater, he discerns the dark mass of the wreck, revealing Susan and her deceased captain.

Scholar Attwell contends that Susan's narrative, along with its subsequent developments, remains submerged in this underwater realm. Despite Susan's efforts, "the story of Susan, Cruso, and Friday has never been written"(p.116). The narrator persists in the search, ultimately finding Friday, who outlives narratives that may or may not include him. Inquiring about the ship, Friday's response defies words. "This is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it emerges, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday"(p.116). The aquatic lens thus unveils the submerged complexities and unspoken truths within the narrative of 'Foe.'

In the submerged depths of the narrative, the narrator encounters the challenging task of articulating words underwater. Each word in his question becomes filled with water, losing clarity as it diffuses into the aquatic environment.

Friday, in response, communicates with a "slow stream, without breath, without interruption"—empty bubbles reminiscent of the "O's that he learns to write when he is in London in Foe's house" (p.157). This underwater exchange underscores Friday's distinctive mode of expression.

Despite the narrator's dive into the wreck, the truth of Friday's experience remains elusive, resisting resuscitation through conventional language. As elegantly articulated by Attwell, "Friday's home is his body: his existence is a facticity that simply asserts its own priorities. The trials of marginal authorship are irrelevant to Friday" (p.116). Within the depths of the narrative tangle, Friday's body emerges as his true sanctuary, where the challenges of marginalized authorship take a backseat to the assertiveness of his lived experience.

Coetzee's narrative explores the intricacies of the body, portraying it as both a terrain that defies traditional representation and a steadfast entity that insists on asserting its presence despite the limitations of portrayal. In this exploration, Friday's body emerges as a self-contained sign, carrying its own narrative weight.

The novel's concluding paragraph reverberates with the cacophony of prison, the cries for freedom, and the echoes of hope that emanate from those who were once silent and enslaved. The formidable challenge of making Friday's voice audible transforms into an endeavor to render it visible. A stream emerges from Friday's body, offering a poignant image of speech or a voice that remains unheard. Coetzee invites the reader to engage with the experience of a silent voice, present within Cruso's, Susan's, and Foe's discourses, characterized by its conspicuous absence.

"His mouth opens. From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through the body and upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliff and shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the end of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face" (p.157). In the face of Friday's unheard voice, Coetzee skillfully presents a

powerful depiction of embodied silence, where the body becomes a vessel for resistance and an enigmatic force that challenges conventional modes of representation.

Richard Begam asserts that, "In *Foe*, Coetzee seeks to represent the unrepresented as unrepresented to show precisely the necessity of enabling them to represent themselves" (p.111). The challenge of speaking on behalf of those incapable of representing themselves, whose desires and self-perceptions remain elusive, is pivotal in a postmodern conception of history. The novel delves into the political intricacies inherent in representing other cultures, individuals, and historical periods.

Friday emerges as a figure that disrupts the narrative of the novel, rendering reconciliation between Susan Barton's history and *Foe's* fiction an impossibility. To Susan, Friday represents an absence, a void where the potential for truth-telling collapses due to a lack of evidence. For *Foe*, Friday's absolute passivity and apparent absence of desire and motivation reduce him to an inert object, challenging any characterization beyond that. Consequently, the quest for identity and the representation of that identity persist as unresolved mysteries.

## **6. CONCLUSION:**

In J.M. Coetzee's novel "*Foe*," the narrative struggles vividly unfold as characters grapple with the complexities of identity and representation. The central focus revolves around the character of Friday, whose enigmatic presence becomes a locus of tension between Susan Barton's historical account and *Foe's* fictional narrative. The intricate web of storytelling, power dynamics, and the clash between individual perspectives shapes the narrative struggles in the quest for identity.

The novel explores the challenges inherent in representing the unrepresented and the necessity of enabling marginalized voices to speak for themselves. Friday, rendered silent by the mutilation of his tongue, becomes a symbol of the unvoiced, disrupting conventional narrative structures and challenging characters to confront the limitations of their own perspectives. Susan Barton's struggle to reveal the mysteries of the island and Friday's past encounters insurmountable barriers, highlighting the difficulty of representing the unknown.

*Foe*, embodying authorial power and residing within the metropolitan center, attempts to control and manipulate the narrative, revealing the struggles over inclusion and exclusion. His authority, influenced by societal norms and personal biases, perpetuates a struggle for control over the representation of identity and history. The tension between Susan's genuine desire to tell the story of the island and *Foe's* attempts to integrate it into a larger, more conventional plot further complicates the narrative landscape.

The climax of the novel brings a revelation, not in spoken words but through the submerged narrative of Friday's silent body. The final discovery underwater, with Friday's body as a sign, captures the essence of the narrative struggles. The attempt to make Friday's silent voice visible, represented by a stream without breath or interruption, resonates with the broader theme of enabling the unrepresented to assert their own priorities and self-representation.

In conclusion, "*Narrative Struggles: Unraveling the Quest for Identity in J.M. Coetzee's 'Foe'*" delves into the intricate layers of the novel, examining the challenges characters face in representing the unrepresented and the power dynamics at play in shaping narratives. Friday's silent yet powerful presence becomes a metaphor for the marginalized, emphasizing the necessity of allowing them to represent themselves. The quest for identity unfolds as a complex and unresolved mystery, urging readers to contemplate the broader implications of storytelling, power, and representation in a postmodern world.

**REFERENCES:**

1. Attridge, Derek. J.M. Coetzee and The Ethics of Reading. The University of Chicago Press. 2020.
2. Attwell, David. J.M. Coetzee South Africa and politics of writing. University of California Press 2020.
3. Attwell, David. J.M. Coetzee. South Africa and the Politics of Writing. University of California Press 2020.
4. Begam, Richard. "Silence and Mut(e)iliation: White Writing in J.M. Coetzee's Foe. South Atlantic Quarterly 93, 1(1994)
5. Chapman, Michael. South African Literature. London- New York: Longman 2018.
6. Coetzee J.M. 2015 Giving Offense: Essays on censorship Chicago- London: The University of Chicago.
7. Coetzee J.M. Foe (Penguin) 2020.
8. Coetzee J.M. 2002 Stranger Shores. Essays 1986-1999 London: Vintage. 2020.
9. Grabe, Ina "Postmodern Narrative Strategies in Foe" Journal of Literary Studies 5.2 (June 1989): P.147-148.
10. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty " Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's Foe Reading Defoe's Crusoe/ Roxana". English in Africa 17.2 (October 1990): Rept. Consequences of Theory: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1987-1988. Ed. Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1990. P. 157

**ETHICS DECLARATIONS:**

**Competing interests:**

The authors declare no competing interests.

**Ethical approval:**

This research did not require any ethical approval.

**Informed consent:**

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.