

Susan Barton's Voice and Friday's Silence from the Perspective of Post-Colonialism in *Foe*

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Abstract

John Maxwell Coetzee was an excellent writer, his first novel *Foe*, which is the rewriting of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, earns a lot of acclaim from home and abroad. Coetzee gives the marginal female the role of main character, who tells the whole story. However, Susan still exists as the colonizer to Friday and the relationship between Susan and Friday is self and "the other". With the help of the post-colonialism theory, through the analysis of Barton's ambivalent attitude towards Friday, this thesis manages to explore the Susan's voices and Friday's silence in *Foe*.

Keywords

Foe, Post-Colonialism, The Other, Coetzee

1. Introduction

John Maxwell Coetzee was an excellent writer, critic, translator, and professor in South Africa, who won the Booker Prize twice and was awarded the Nobel Laureate. He emerged as a prominent figure in analyzing the intricate social issues of South Africa. His novel "Foe", published in 1986, is a post-colonial rewriting of Daniel Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe", and its influence extends deeply into South African literature and the realm of post-colonialism. It stands as a landmark literary work, profoundly delving into postcolonialism, the power of discourse, and linguistic rights. The complex interactions and profound themes among the characters have left a lasting impact on subsequent works. This novel not only offers a novel perspective on the interpretation of colonial history but also sparks in-depth discussions on power relations, identity, and the expression of voice. As such, "Foe" has become a significant literary legacy, exploring post-colonial heritage and power dynamics in the context of globalization.

This study identifies a research gap in the analysis of Susan's discourse over Friday. While substantial research has been conducted on various aspects of "Foe", there remains a relatively underexplored area in the examination of the specific power dynamics between Susan and Friday from a post-colonial perspective. This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a more in-depth examination of their relationship within the context of post-colonialism. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the broader understanding of how post-colonial literature operates, how it challenges established power structures, and how it amplifies the voices of the marginalized. Through the analysis of Barton's ambivalent attitude towards Friday, this thesis aims to explore Susan's expressions and Friday's silence from the perspective of post-colonialism in *Foe*.

Following the introduction, this paper will be divided into four parts. The first part is the literature review, summarizing relevant research on "Foe" both domestically and internationally. After reviewing existing research, the identified research gap will be presented. The second part outlines the theoretical framework for this thesis, explaining the concept of post-colonialism and establishing the link between this theory and the original text. The third and fourth parts constitute the main body of the paper, which examines the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized through the lenses of Barton's expressions and Friday's silence. The former section focuses on how Barton, as the colonizer, displays hypocrisy and inequality, while the latter section delves into Friday's helplessness and being overlooked as the colonized.

In conclusion, this thesis contends that the lost words and historical truths of the colonized cannot be fully restored, yet remaining silent is not always the sole recourse for the "voiceless" other.

2. Literature Review

Foe earns international acclaim for John Maxwell Coetzee and attracts great attention home and abroad. The researchers' having conducted studies on *Foe* shows the characteristics of diversification. Their studies include feminism, narrative voice, deconstructionism and post-colonialism. This paper concentrates mainly on the current researches on the theme of post-colonialism.

2.1. Current Researches on *Foe* Abroad

There have been abundant studies on *Foe*. Many researchers have shown an increased interest in the coexistence of postcolonialism and feminism in *Foe*. Most researchers study the novel based on the theory of post-colonialism because of the white and the non-white's relations. Dibavar, Abbasi, & Pirnajmuddin (2021) give her opinion on "The Study of the Representation of Women and Subordinates in Coetzee's *Fu*: Western Feminism under Examination in a Post-colonial Context" that Coetzee exudes a critical reflection on patriarchy, colonial discourse and Western feminism under which system through the themes of power and representation.

Likewise, Coetzee (2010) believes that the postcolonial literature in the novel breaks the fixed mode centered on Western literature, reproduces the distorted narratives, sounds, stories, and images of Western-centric white male colonizers from the single perspective, and releases the narrative power of marginal literature. Peter argues in his paper that Coetzee strives to seek discourse for the marginalized and disadvantaged group (Bishop, 1990). Julian holds that by applying postmodern writing techniques and female narrative, Coetzee unfolds the way how women gradually realize the importance of narrative power and how their rights are exploited, and interrogates Defoe's authority. Although studies above have their own different interpretation on *Foe's* post-colonialism, one thing they both agree is that Coetzee's *Foe* pioneered postcolonial rewriting.

2.2. Current Researches on *Foe* at Home

Before Coetzee won the Nobel Prize, little attention was paid to him at home. Some researchers focus primarily on the content of the novel itself. Zhang (2010) emphasizes that in the novel, the women character Susan's abandonment of the desire to explore Friday is an important rewrite of Coetzee's story to Defoe. In addition, Coetzee attempts to solve Friday's mystery by introducing a mysterious narrator "I" at the end of the novel. These metafiction-style additions and changes allow Coetzee's novel to deeply explore narrative and desire in colonial power structures, and also provide a reference for studying the relationship between desire and power in narrative in a broad sense. Coetzee exposed the resistance and growth of the colonized through the changes in the identity and status of the characters in his works, and revealed the idea of colonized writing.

Jiang makes a description of *Foe's* implied discursive power used by western intelligentsia when speaking for others. In the paper, Friday's silence is emphasized, while Barton's voice is omitted (Jiang, 2016). Likewise, Zhang analyses in his paper that *Foe* reflects postcolonial feminism both in form and content, through the study of the change of the identity of Barton, Coetzee discloses the resistance and growth of the colonize people and express his support in decolonization writing (Zhang, 2010). As can be seen from the above studies, despite some slight differences, most of the scholars believe that Coetzee's postcolonial rewriting reflects and critiques issues of race, class, gender and power, expressing sympathy for vulnerable groups.

2.3. Research Gap

From the above overview, the author discovers the postcolonialism in *Foe* is immensely remarkable. However, the studies that using the postcolonialism to analyze the relationship between Barton's voices and Friday's silence are few. In short, few scholars seek to conduct an In-depth analysis and demonstration through the relevant theory of postcolonialism and make a systemic study on the Barton's discourse over Friday. Therefore, this paper tries to make a supplement study of *Foe* in postcolonialism, so as to excavate the deeper connotation of his

works and help to fully understand the significance of it.

3. Postcolonial Theory

In the realm of postcolonial literature, the term “post-colonialism” itself requires a clear and precise definition. Post-colonialism emerged as a response to the legacy of colonial rule, encompassing the analysis of the cultural, political, and social repercussions of colonization. It explores how former colonies engage with their histories, identities, and the power dynamics that persist even after political independence. Furthermore, “discourse power” refers to the ability of certain groups to control and influence the narrative surrounding specific topics. In the context of “Foe” it signifies how Susan, as a colonizer, holds the power to shape and control the story of the deserted island and the characters involved. These definitions lay the groundwork for a comprehensive analysis of the novel’s themes.

This paper employs western ethnocentrism, the colonized’s “mimicry” in post-colonialism theory to interpret Susan Barton’s voice and Friday’s silence in their interaction with each other. Post-colonialism originated from anti-colonial discourse in the mid-twentieth century. Said (1985) points out in his *Orientalism* that “the East” is the imagination in the eyes of the Western countries. It is the Western discourse associated with colonialism and imperialism. Homi K. Bhabha borrowed the concept of “Mimicry” when studying the relationship between the colonizers and colonized.

Western ethnocentrism is the Western scholarly discipline of the 18th and 19th centuries that encompassed the study of the languages, literatures, religions, philosophies, histories, art, and laws of Asian societies, especially ancient ones. Western-centric theory is the psychology of superiority gradually formed by the West after colonizing the world with the backwardness of Chinese civilization in modern times, which is a misunderstanding of civilization culture and history, and is an unconscious premise of Western culture (Li, 2016). Western ethnocentrism believes that Western culture is superior to non-Western culture and thinks that human history revolves around Western culture. It is a belief that Western cultural characteristics, values, or ideals have a certain universality that represents the future direction of non-Western development, all of which have Western-centric overtones.

Mimicry the theory proposed by Homi K. Bhabha. According to Homi K. Bhabha, mimicry is the act of imitating and adopting a new culture of colonized by colonizers after colonization. It is not the harmonious coexistence of two cultures in a certain cultural background, but the factor of disharmony in the original cultural background. Homi Baba once said that although the imitated culture seems harmonious, in fact, the hidden dangers are huge. Imitation is a sign of bicultural bonding and evidence of a better interpretation of otherness.

Post-colonialism is the aftermath of the western colonialism. It has been concerned with investigating the various trajectories of modernity as understood

and experienced from a range of psychological, philosophical, cultural, and historical perspectives. Barton influences Friday most in the psychological way.

4. Barton's Voices as a Colonizer

Post-colonialism is the aftermath of the western colonialism. In the novel, Susan and Friday's identities are uncertain between "the self" and "the other". Barton, as a colonizer, makes Friday affiliated to her. Therefore, in this part, the paper mainly discusses Susan's inequality and hypocrisy as the "Western gazer" through her ambivalent attitudes towards Friday.

4.1. Inequality in Race

As the protagonist of the novel, Susan has always longed to reveal the truth of the deserted island from a new perspective, and expressed her own emotions. Friday, in the eyes of Susan, is completed with the construction of "the other" through various imaginations and interpretations. In Susan's subconsciousness, she thinks there are some essential differences between herself and Friday. Susan shows her superior to Friday, as she is the master while he is the servant. She thinks it is normal for a master to feel at ease when facing with a servant. Susan naturally puts herself in the state of "the self" while Friday as "the other".

Although Friday is skillful under the master's tutelage, his desires do not belong to him. In this sense, Friday as a microphone is insignificant. In contrast, Friday in *Foe*, despite losing his tongue, has haunted Susan because of him and his mysterious life, so that even if his story cannot be told, he is presented as an independent being because of Susan's confusion and desires that are unknown but really belong to him. In Susan's story, Friday is an incomprehensible individual who at first seems to be a cannibal and then tamed by Crusoe, but who is never able to communicate with people. And the most symbolic thing is that Friday's tongue is cut off, which is a metaphor for being narrated and colonized, whose tongue is cut off by the white narrator. As a thoughtful person with his own mind, the paintings he paints, his dances and his flutes are the window into his world of mind, but the narrator Susan cannot enter and thus cannot tell us. When Susan tried to teach him English and communicate with him, he turns down the opportunity to speak out with silence and non-cooperation. Therefore, Susan explains, "He (Friday) doesn't understand that I'm leading him to freedom, he doesn't know what freedom is, freedom is a word..." At this point, Susan asked Friday to talk about herself in English, giving him the English word of "freedom", effectively depriving him of his freedom forever. This is to impose the white man's language, the culture, to colonize his culture.

In the eyes of Susan, who is the "Western gazer", her point of view about people and the world is superior to Friday's. She believes that European civilization is the most progressive and typical civilization in the world (Li, 2018). Friday's living condition is outside of Europe, therefore, Friday is barbaric and can only learn from Susan and develop himself following Susan's guidance. As a

colonizer, Susan uses these ways to subjugate Friday. It reflects that the relation between Susan and Friday is actually the relation of power, governing and the ever-changing hegemony and in the relationship between Susan and Friday, parity is omitted.

4.2. Hypocrisy on the Colonized

Susan demands Friday to meet her needs while at the same time is attracted by him. Susan shows her ambivalent attitudes towards Friday and influences him most in the psychological way. Susan, with her occidental thoughts, brings Friday, whom she makes as her servant, to England and finds *Foe* to help her to write down the story on the deserted island. The place where Susan herself lives is well-developed, rational and autonomous, while the place where Friday come from is backward, irrational, and lacks bad-governed.

Susan passionately expresses her desire to uncover the island's reality from a fresh perspective: "I shall set down what I know, what I have seen with my own eyes, so that it becomes a part of the record" (Coetzee, 2010). This quotation directly captures Susan's determination to reveal the truth as she experiences it. Additionally, Susan's emotional depth is demonstrated when she reflects on her feelings of isolation and her need for connection: "I am starved for the presence of my kind. Alone on this island, with no one to talk to, I have become like a desert animal that talks to itself" (Coetzee, 2010). Such instances from the novel effectively support the claim that Susan yearns to reshape the narrative and convey her emotions.

As a woman, Susan shares some similarities of Friday, that is, they are both "the other" in the eyes of white men. As a consequence, the two have the same fate to some extent. However, Susan shows her ambivalent attitude towards Friday. On the one hand, she is attracted by Friday for he has the talent of dancing, and she is eager to seek for his story, while on the other hand, she feels sad and disappointed by Friday's poor understanding, shortage in western culture and "the colonized" identity.

She demands Friday to learn drawing and playing music with him. All she wants is to fill the gap in the deserted island story. Through her interaction with Friday, she constructs herself as the "self" and Friday as "the other". Susan spares no effort to show her superiority, flaunted her power over Friday, and then used her power to rationalize it. Susan demands that everything should be centered on her authority and the "white", with knowledge produced at a specific time and place as the standard, and maintain her hegemony by suppressing Friday. It is the western ethnocentrism.

5. Friday's Silence as the Colonized

The silence of Friday plays a significant role in the novel, carrying profound implications and aiding in guiding our exploration of the core issues that follow. Friday's silence is more than just a passive acceptance of conquest; it is a form of

resistance. He chooses to remain silent, refusing to employ the language and frameworks of the colonizers to express himself, thus preserving his identity and agency. This silence reflects the power imbalance experienced by the colonized under colonial rule and how they maintain their dignity and independence when excluded from power structures. Friday's silence represents not only an individual's choice but also symbolizes the collective resistance of oppressed groups in resisting external pressures and influences. Therefore, delving into the silence of Friday is crucial for understanding the power dynamics, identity, and voice expression within the novel.

5.1. Helpless and Unlooked

Nature and freedom, the pursuit of individual liberation, and the maintenance of individual independence are the value of Western civilization. However, the identity of the Friday in *Foe* is ambiguous and lacks independent personality and nature (Ou & Li, 2022).

Unlike Susan's struggle for the right to speak, Coetzee's special feature of helping Friday "speak out" is that he allows Friday to speak out through "silence." Friday's silence is no longer an acceptance and identification with colonial culture, nor is Coetzee deliberately excluding him from the battle for discourse. Friday's silence is one of the features in Coetzee's writing. A unique vocalization strategy that quietly calls the reader's attention to the marginal other. Silent Friday shows the mutilation of the colonizer's body on the colonized, and the loss of the tongue is an irreparable physical loss. At the same time, this silence seems silent, but it actually contains huge resistance energy, which is invisibly resolved. The misrepresentation of the marginalized people in colonial discourse.

Transforming Friday's Caribbean national identity into black identity shows more bluntly the racial contradictions between the characters in the novel. The ideal slave Friday image is also completely reversed, and Coetzee's Friday has the most powerful way to resist all cultural invasions and speech (Li, 2018). The image of Black Friday represents the voiceless black nation on the African continent under colonial oppression, showing Coetzee's sympathy for the marginal and weak, and elevating blacks from the silence of inferiority to the silence of resistance, the silence of free expression, forming a silent magnetic field, and fighting for the freedom of expression of speech for marginalized racial others.

5.2. Absence and Pursuing

In order to record the colonial history, Susan "imposed on Friday the white's language and the white's thinking pattern, while Friday keeps his resistance in silence." However, his resistance is not expressed through words, but is shown in his silence, in his "silence sound" and dance. Through this, Friday maintains his nature and is not assimilated.

Friday exists as a heterogeneous and alien individual in the face of existing

Western order and rules, and he must make impossible decisions to conform, change, or transcend the existing order (Ou & Li, 2022). Friday's identity has its natural legitimacy, but it has been forced to lose impartiality. The conflict of individual decisions can create uncertainty about identity, which in turn is an extremely important condition for achieving fairness and transcending the existing order. Uncertainty arises from injustice, and it leads to the realization of fairness. In other words, it is precisely with uncertainty that fairness and justice are possible. In the work, Susan has always hoped to change the habit of Friday silence and let him learn Western culture and English; And find out how he became a colonized man and why he was willing to be a slave. But contrary to expectations, in the end, Friday's silence was not broken, and the uncertainty of identity remained. In short, in the process of describing the uncertainty of the identities of the two, the work not only reveals the fundamental opposition between the self and the other, but also confirms the importance of the existence of the other to obtain the subjectivity of the self.

Friday is demanded by Susan to narrate the story in English, which is the language of white people. Susan imposes white culture and thoughts to Friday, forming the mode of white colonization. While Friday refuses to be told and explained in the way of white people, thus rejects oppression and assimilation.

6. Conclusion

Based on the western centrism and mimicry theory, this paper aims to uncover the post-colonialism in the Coetzee's *Foe*. The white superiority and hegemony and the oppressed's helplessness are imposed. Through the rewriting and retelling of Robinson's story, Coetzee subverts the traditional Crusoe image by highlighting the differences, cracks, gaps and contradictions of experience to expression, memory to autobiography, and history to truth. In this way, he reveals the expressive dilemma faced by postcolonial literature: there is always a complex relationship between postcolonial writers and pre-imperial writers, that is, hostile, cooperative and complicit. The gaps and cracks between the signifier and the signified, the narrator and the expressed, and the sound and the silence are always presented. The lost words and historical truths cannot be restored, but keeping silent is not always the way for the "voiceless" other. Postcolonial writers constantly scratch, smear, rewrite or restate on parchment full of handwriting, which is both a helpless choice and a breakthrough out of this dilemma.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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