Chapter 4

The Woman and the Web

*Wide Sargasso Sea and Foe as Feminist Intertexts*

Feminism, as a movement for rewriting the way in which discourses are formed, aims at achieving the same through rereading of the narratives of life and its processes. This has been made necessary from the fact that since the dawn of civilization man has been the norm and woman, as Simone De Beauvoir puts in her masterly study *The Second Sex* is the Other. As Beauvoir says, “Woman is defined exclusively in her relation to man…Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth” (174-5). Feminism as a movement with its focus on women and the way they are re/presented in reality and literature has to overstep boundaries, to defy limits and to interrogate signification systems which contain woman and her voice within the walls of patriarchy.

The feminist theories concentrate on the “sexual politics” (Kate Millet) of the world outside the text and its signification within the realm of the text by trying to bring to light and express the gender based oppression and suppression at the hand of patriarchy and the repressive marginalization that the word woman entails. Feminists try to read and reread the male dominated existing systems and its representations to analyse the way the woman’s self is conceived during which they look for the gaps
and fissures in representations and offer subversive and alternate reading of the canonical texts. The alternate theories of reading and signification which apprehend reality differently have been much made use of by feminists as it would enable them to interrogate and deconstruct the hegemonic systems leading onto restructuring and reconstructing texts exposing the unseen and unheard discourse of the marginalized, occupying the periphery.

Alternate texts sharing deep intertextual relationships with canonical and classical texts have been the tool of the feminist literary critics to question the dominant and the powerful. These intertexts critiqued the gaps, fissures, silences and absences in the ideological expressions of patriarchy by voicing the silences, filling the gaps and making the invisible, visible. Intertexts interrogate and challenge the marginalizations of both gender and race through alternate readings and the reclaimed presence and voice of those at the periphery of dominant discourse.

The ‘mis’representation of women in literature is the means by which women’s subordination has been justified and perpetuated. “He projects upon her what he desires and what he fears, what he loves and what he hates” (de Beauvoir 229). Hence the canonical texts of the past celebrating patriarchy and its conventions have to be reread and consequently rewritten to alter this misrepresentation. Feminist intertexts, therefore, combine challenge with revision. They not only question the canon, but respond to them by writing texts that offer different perceptions, depicting subjective selves of women who have been displaced out of the male dominated texts. The word ‘feminist’ has overtones of politics and subjectivity, of vision and revision, of action
and reaction of woman whereas the word ‘intertext’ denotes a web of textual relationships and alternate discourses. The Other side of a text is what an intertext offers. A feminist intertext is a revisionary rewriting of a hegemonic text celebrating the self of woman trying to reclaim her voice, unearthing the submerged discourse lost in the clamour of patriarchy. It is not only the male authored texts that represent women in a devious manner. The eighteenth and nineteenth century women writers, engaged in the writing process during the heyday of patriarchy found themselves internalizing masculine values, apprehending reality the male way and creating women characters who apparently conformed to the masculine norms in their works. The feminist literary movement scanned male authored texts as well as texts by conforming women writers for the omissions and gaps in them and reworked strategies to break through the power structures and step out of their confines through texts that render the powerful discourse of woman. Both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* are intertexts that deconstruct the theoretical concerns of the hegemonic discourses and offer the emergent voice of women’s emancipation.

Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* and J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* celebrate the reclamation of the marginalized voices both of gender and race. They challenge the dominant power structures and bring out the alternate voices of the gendered Other and the colonial Other who inhabit the mute margins of negation and exclusion. Both these texts share an intense intertextuality with their prequels by bringing out the concealed and hidden story of women who occupy either the attics or the cellars of the edifices of patriarchy. *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys is an attempt to validate the existence and discourse of Antoinette Cosway, who was relegated to being Bertha
Mason in the dark and mysterious attic of Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*. J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* interrogates the whole narrative realm of the master craftsman of novel writing, Daniel Defoe and also offers a feminist critique on his *Robinson Crusoe*. *Foe* narrates the tale of the female castaway Susan Barton and her efforts at making her story heard. Defoe’s *Roxana* is also evoked in an intertextual relationship with *Foe*. In this chapter *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* are discussed as feminist intertexts by which the spectrum of woman’s discourse inherent in these two texts and their positioning as rereadings of phallogocentric texts are analysed. Both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* represent the struggle of women “to come into being and the thwarting of that process” (Fayad 438) and their stubborn insistence on self expression no matter what the cost may be. The texts also deliberate on the basic problems of the self-representation of a female in a patriarchal society.

4.1 *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a Feminist Intertext

Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is a reworking on Charlotte Bronte’s celebrated novel *Jane Eyre*. This text bestows the intertextual hold on Bronte’s text by bringing to light and sound the marginalized world and the voice of Bertha Mason of *Jane Eyre* whose identity is reclaimed and given a voice as Antoinette Cosway. Antoinette Cosway is not just a gendered Other; she is a colonial other as well. Hence *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the celebration of a fusion of voices waiting to be heard- the woman silenced within the four walls of patriarchy demanding expression and the voice of the postcolonial liberation subjugated under the colonial masters’ thumb rule-demanding emancipation from patriarchy and colonialism. The realistic
masterpiece of Charlotte Bronte undergoes an intense reversion and revision in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Rhys’ novel offers a strong literary resistance to the work of Bronte by exposing the phallo/logocentric world and its dictates. *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a feminist text is important as the revision of *Jane Eyre* because Bronte’s text was considered sufficiently feminist when it was published and hence those aspects of the woman’s discourse left untouched by Bronte gets highlighted in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It challenges and threatens to overpower and destroy the edifices of patriarchy and its conventions by choosing the silenced of the previous text as the primary narrator of the novel. Rochester, the patriarchal hero, is given a chapter to present his story. But Rochester’s cult status as the paragon of Victorian gentlemen undergoes intense revision with his transformation from Bronte’s hero to Rhys’ villain. But the final gesture of defiance is that of Antoinette Cosway defying the nomenclature and habitation provided to her by the rules of the male world. Along with Antoinette, Christophine, the maid of Antoinette serves as a point of resistance against patriarchy and colonialism.

Almost all Rhysian protagonists are alienated beings, unconnected and displaced. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the story revolves around the life of the first Mrs. Rochester, Bertha Mason, née Antoinette Cosway. Her Creole and catholic background, her childhood in the West Indies, courtship and marriage to Rochester, Rochester’s suspicions of the supposed madness which runs in the family, Antoinette’s confinement as a lunatic in the attic of Thornfield hall and her revenge-
through destruction- of the repressive systems that engulf her, form the plot of the novel.

The story of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is told in three parts. Antoinette Cosway is the narrator of the first part and it deals with her childhood as well as the inner dynamics of the relationship between the newly emancipated slaves and the Creoles and the white Europeans. An unnamed Rochester figure, the husband of Antoinette who comes to the unfamiliar land with its intense, extreme climatic natural characteristics, narrates the second part of the novel. It introduces the theme of the quest for love and shows forth the tragically unsurpassable gulf and dichotomy between the perspectives of man and woman. The third part is once again narrated by Antoinette now branded mad; but much has changed now, she is not any more in the familiar land of her dreams and wild fancies, but occupies the dark cold attic of the English structure of Thornfield Hall. Part three is the fluid self appraisal of Antoinette, refusing to conform to her status as Bertha Mason. The first part of the novel highlights the negations on the gendered subject. The coercive power and the self proclaimed legitimacy of the patriarchal system get themselves inscribed not only on the physical property but on the psychological realm as well. In her own words, Rhys says:

> When I read *Jane Eyre* as a child, I thought why she (Bronte) should think Creole women are lunatics and all that. What a shame to make Rochester’s first wife Bertha, the awful mad woman, and I immediately thought I would write the story as it might really have been. She seemed
such a poor ghost. I thought I’d try to write her a life

(Letters 156).

Bertha Mason never gets to give her point of view in *Jane Eyre*. She is viewed from all angles except the direct one. She was considered as “the wild beast or the fiend in yonder side den…” (*Jane Eyre* 243). Rochester describes Bertha, “I found her nature wholly alien to mine; her tastes obnoxious to me; her cast of mind common, low, narrow… (347). Stifled by the discourse of patriarchy and a world that moves by the yardsticks of patriarchy Bertha Mason is cast into the bestial mould till redeemed by Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. “The total effacement of Bertha Mason as a woman and as a person prompted Rhys to give a ‘voice’ to her unsaid part, suppressed under her savage, snarling sounds and fearful shrieks in *Jane Eyre*” (Walia 43).

This short novel published in 1966 is the last novel of Rhys and it offered a strong resistance to the dictates of canon by questioning the patriarchal masterpiece and by altering the way in which female selves were apprehended and analysed. The fact that it was published during the sixties added vigour to its revisionary aspect as the 1960s witnessed theoretical upheavals on a lot of levels aimed at reading, rereading, challenging existing texts, looking for the gaps, silences and fissures in canonical texts, thwarting the conventions of dominant discourses and exposing the inherent politics of logocentric systems.

Jean Rhys’ novel writes back to the canonical conforming protagonist Jane by going beyond the location assigned to Bertha Mason, by liberating her from the attic of Thornfield Hall and by deconstructing not only the literary structure but also the
structures of patriarchy which have imprisoned her. James Winson comments that “Jean Rhys not only chronicles the exploitation of women, but seems conscious of them as a group in society, of their economic position and of the roles imposed on them by a male society” (1018). John J. Su notes that “the novel’s intertextuality succeeds in breaking the master narrative of Jane Eyre specifically and the British imperial project generally by giving the suppressed Bertha Mason a voice, giving her a different name (Antoinette), relocating the action to the west Indies and changing the frame of reference” (158-9).

Wide Sargasso Sea shares an ethical bond with Jane Eyre. It tries to answer the questions left unanswered in Jane Eyre and writes back to the signifying systems of the earlier text, interrogating the dialectical claims of the male centred world of patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism and even realism. The signifier may be the same. But the signifieds have changed. Bertha Mason, the unseen lunatic in the attic of Thornfield Hall, is not the Antoinette of Wide Sargasso Sea. Antoinette Cosway is strong in the recognition that it is her story that is being told. She is placed in her own land in her story and it is the Rochester figure who serves as a link between the pre-determinant text and the one which follows it.

Antoinette Cosway’s alienation is unequivocally established at the beginning of the novel. Her diffuseness, dislocation from the parent and patriarchal culture is set. She is the “white cockroach” (Wide Sargasso Sea 23) like all Creole people caught between two worlds, of the European parent culture, who disowns them as coloured and the native blacks deriding them as the victimizers. Caught in this noman’s land the
white cockroaches remain in a limbo belonging to nobody. Patriarchy and colonialism fuse into a monstrous structure of tyranny and oppression symbolized by Thornfield Hall and its master, Rochester. The story is set in the West Indies which becomes a most powerful locale, exerting a vivid and resonant presence.

The tale of Antoinette is a feminist saga of resistance which traces her negated and neglected presence at the beginning of the text to one of self discovery and powerful presence at the end of the text. It also retraces her history, deviously rendered in the earlier text. Antoinette/Bertha has been occupying only a subhuman level of existence in the patriarchal narrative. Her identity was reduced to being “a monster” (Jane Eyre 351) and her feelings were “the antipodes of the Creole” (353). Bertha’s miserable reactions have been considered as dangerously mysterious. “What crime was this, that lived incarnate in this sequestered mansion, and could neither be expelled nor subdued by the owner?” (243). Bertha’s reappearance as Antoinette puts her in visibility amidst familiar locale, among familiar people inspite of her alienation as a Creole in Dominica.

Wide Sargasso Sea is a feminist text because of the way it changes the subjectivity of Antoinette. It is an intertext because it presents the point of view of “a previously peripheral” (Kubitschek 24) character who had been denied a voice in the earlier narrative. Antoinette is shaped and structured in a series of negations framing her as a symbol of “absolute negativity” (Zizek 108). This impression is created right at the beginning of the novel by marking her off as an alien. The sense of alienation, the brooding element of trouble and the consequent lack of identity of the
person account for the negations. “They say when the trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks” (Wide Sargasso Sea 2). The brooding sense of impending disaster is enhanced by the disapproval of the community. Antoinette and her mother find themselves ‘outside’ the discourse of the white masters, nor within the community of the blacks. They become the subject of exclusion both from the whites and the blacks, inhabiting a noman’s land, of not belonging anywhere. This negativity foreshadows her later subjugation by Rochester. “In her relationship with Rochester, Antoinette unlike Jane Eyre can make sense of her experience only through a ceaseless chain of negations. Before she can assert herself she must engage in a long and losing battle to make Rochester unlearn what he already knows about her” (Romita Choudhary 322).

By juxtaposing Bertha/Antoinette’s insanity against the so called sanity of the norm and the cardboard world of Thornfield Hall, Rhys has done an excellent implicit feminist critique of the values by which it is governed. “Jean Rhys faithfully highlights the social politics that insidiously operate inside the plot of Jane Eyre, which can uphold a Jane while humiliating a Bertha” (Shastri 71). Rhys relies on the suggestive power of images, incidents and dreams to prefigure Bertha’s tragic end in the leaping flames of Thornfield Hall, as worked out in Jane Eyre. In other words, Wide Sargasso Sea is a revision of the implications of female identity as suggested in Jane Eyre.

Wide Sargasso Sea provides an opportunity for Antoinette to validate her existence and to trace the trajectory of Antoinette-Rochester story from her
perspective. It shows that there may be other truths as well. It may not be what Jane perceives or what Rochester claims. “…that woman, who has so abused your long suffering -so sullied your name; so outraged your honour, so blighted your youth- is not your wife ;nor are you her husband.” (Jane Eyre 350). The judgement of the hegemonic world puts her in manacles both of the body and the mind. But she wonders, “… why I have been brought here. For what reason? There must be a reason” (Wide Sargasso Sea 234). All reasons that Antoinette see around her for her confinement are conditioned by the dictates of patriarchy. The discourse of gendered power play is reflected and critiqued in this rewriting of Jane Eyre which apparently celebrated the male approved concepts of intelligent femininity.

From a childhood spent among unnatural surroundings Antoinette proceeds to a marriage of convenience with the handsome representative of patriarchy and colonialism, Edward Fairfax Rochester. Antoinette- Rochester relationship provides an understanding of the gulf that separates the male and the female and of the cultural divide that exists between the warm and sensuous Caribbean of Rhys’ childhood and the cold rational world of patriarchal England. Antoinette-Rochester conflict shows the unbridgeable and impenetrable division and gap of the politics of the sexes.

Wide Sargasso Sea is a feminist deconstruction on patriarchy mainly because of the jolt it gives the elements of power structures. Rochester is a powerful icon of patriarchy, combining the power of wealth and masculinity. To this powerful figure of authority is addressed the subtle but destructive resistance of Antoinette. She overthrows the hegemonic chains on her by letting her story be told in the subtler and
stronger revisionary text. The masculine world fails to comprehend the sensitive being in thrall. The failure on the part of the male world to comprehend Antoinette segregates her as abnormal. Rochester, the strong powerful representative of patriarchy had his story effectively told by the realist master narrative. A counter-discourse to the coherent, organized narrative can only be in the form of a disjointed, symbolic, fluid feminist narrative as in the case of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The strings of patriarchy had been manipulating the story of the counter-conforming woman to land her imprisoned in the airless cold attic of Thornfield Hall. “In this room I wake early and lie shivering for it is very cold” (233). To the attentive world in *Jane Eyre*, Rochester is the victim of the faceless, screaming raving woman imprisoned in the attic. The marriage of Antoinette to Rochester is a manipulative gesture as testified in the letter of Rochester to his father. “The thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me without question or condition. No provision made for her (that must be seen to) …” (88) bringing out the economic motive of a liaison between the husband from the continent and the Creole bride. It is in this marriage that the feminist and the postcolonial element fuse in a rare way to render the question of challenge powerful and electrifying. The marriage makes the man the owner of everything she possesses; her body, her spirit, her lands, property, house, her smiles, tears, her thoughts and emotions. “She’s mad but *mine, mine*. What will I care for gods or devils or for fate itself. If she smiles or weeps or both. *For me*” (219).

The Antoinette-Rochester relationship becomes a touchstone through which the problematics of man-woman dichotomy is expressed in the context of the imperialist inability and unwillingness to comprehend and to build a bridge to the
heart of the white West Indian native. According Elaine Showalter “Bertha comes to represent the native, the heart of darkness, the other” (*A Literature of Their Own* 24). The Otherness of Antoinette is her female self, a self incomprehensible to the masculine discourse. “She represents the wholly otherness” (Spivak, “Theory” 4) to Rochester in being a white West Indian native and also being a woman. Her marriage with Rochester becomes a site and context for her transformation as Rochester’s subject. She has a pleading expression which makes him angry. She becomes his property like all the estates that was bequeathed to him to effect the marriage. Even the moments of intense passion are indicative of possession, authority and his total denial of her self as a woman. Rochester callously says, “When I was exhausted I turned away from her and slept, still without a word or a caress” (*Wide Sargasso Sea* 120).

The narrative strategy and the persona exhibit the relative powerlessness and the feeling of power of both Antoinette and Rochester. Antoinette narrates her impressions haltingly, in seemingly diffused and dissipated manner as an object of scorn and derision, as an isolated being divorced from the community of indigenous culture. There is a failure of a composite identity in Antoinette’s being. She sometimes undergoes an uncanny shifting of identities between herself and Tia. The narrative of Rochester is carried out powerfully and with a certainty in spite of his ambivalence regarding the unfamiliar terrain and the intense people. He is full of apprehension on coming to this land of strange people. The ‘uncivilized’, fierce and savage people with their extremist attitude and the intensity of colours he sees around him take him to an extent of paranoia. “…the mountains and the blue –green sea….but
I understood why the porter had called it a wild place. Not only wild but menacing” (87). In part three the narrative is shared between the reflections of Grace Poole, the nurse who looks after Bertha Mason and Antoinette. But Antoinette has changed much. She is no more Antoinette Cosway, the confused daughter of Annette Cosway, “an infamous daughter of an infamous mother” (243), but Bertha Mason, the lunatic wife of Rochester now imprisoned in the attic of Thornfield Hall with only her deranged thoughts to keep her company.

Rochester identifies her with the wild natural surroundings of the West Indian landscape as opposed to the outwardly ordered, urban, civilized surroundings of Britain. His comprehension and identification of Antoinette as the Other is expressed along with her search for self definition as a Creole and as a woman. Antoinette is part of the wild and natural and represents reality in its primal aspect. But Rochester is the essence of the city, of society and civilization. According to Mona Fayad, “Rochester recognizes in Antoinette’s island a matriarchal tendency… suddenly removed from a totally male centred society into one in which women play a dominant role, his whole identity comes into question” (450).

The island with its fluid atmosphere, intense landscape and vibrant colours represent primitive nature. The primitive nature represents the feminine value of sensibility, sensuality and love. The diffuseness, the multiplicity of emotions, thoughts and feelings, the uncertainty and the sense of the infinite and the indefinite make Antoinette a valid representative of the woman consciousness in search of her identity. The masculine world with its reason, logic, certitudes of power and knowledge is the
world of Rochester. Even during the fleeting moments of their shared happiness Antoinette remains as the Other both as a Creole and as a woman. “I did not love her. I was thirsty for her but that is not love. I felt very little tenderness for her, she was… a stranger who did not think or feel as I did” (*Wide Sargasso Sea* 78). The coherent tenets and the authoritarian principles of the logocentric or phallogocentric universe are opposed to the magical surreal world of Antoinette’s existence. Antoinette and Rochester move away in conflicting direction, Rochester turning away from Antoinette in revulsion and Antoinette moving into the incoherence of insanity which provides her with a magical world of self and subjectivity away from the conforming limitations as the object of the male world. She passes various assigned parts and roles of the masculine world in this drift towards insanity from being a dependent, confused girl looking for love, security and companionship in marriage, to one of tainted woman-hood and demonic propensities inhabiting the abnormal existence of a whore and a sorceress. Her stance as the hysteric monster woman and zombie confirms her locality as occupying the peripheral existence at the fringes and attics of the patriarchal world but ensures her resistance to the hegemonic systems by being non-conformist.

Patriarchy has always been wary of the expression of female sexuality. It has always baffled the male fantasy urging them to depict it the way man would have it. To man it is something mysterious and hence to be feared. Luce Irigaray states that “Female sexuality has always been theorized within masculine parameters” (99). The woman’s status of being the Other has always filled the male psyche with conflicting ideas about the female self and sexuality. Enticing and frightening at the same time
she symbolizes the fusion of male desires, fears and fancies. Early canonical texts of
patriarchy have expressed this fear of the ‘feminine’ and the mystery that surrounds
her by representing female sexuality as vixenish or aberrant. Normal women are not
supposed to express their sexuality either physically or vocally. If expressed they
violate the norm and become classified with the non-human beings of the mysterious
and magical world invested with the power to seduce and lead men astray like Eve
in Paradise Lost, Keats’ “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” or figure of a ‘Shoorpanakha’
in The Ramayana or a ‘Puthana’ in The Mahabharata. The entire world of the witches
and of the demons in which sexual excess and seductiveness conflate with mystery has
been the brain child of the male fear of female desires.

Patriarchy views female sexuality as threatening as it is supposed to
disempower men through their desire and hence it has to be vigilantly controlled.
Conforming women are considered as neither seductive nor desirable. Hence they do
not become the site for female excess. They live within the parameters set by the male
world, obeying its rules consciously and internalizing it subconsciously to check any
unconscious excesses on their part. They remain as angels in the house conforming to
the textual and contextual fringes assigned to them by logocentrism, never
questioning, never challenging the roles cast upon them. Here Antoinette gets burned
at the stake of hegemonic centrist systems exclusively because she deviates from the
norms of conformity. Rochester comments on Antoinette’s sexual desire, “Only the
sun was there to keep us company. We shut him out. And why not? Very soon she
was as eager for what’s called loving as I was, more lost and drowned afterwards”
(Wide Sargasso Sea 119). The sexual desire hinted here in the ardent response to the
love making of Rochester confirms her non-conformity and exposes her as a site for the female excess and predetermines her position within the confining enclosures of patriarchy.

The dialectical discourses of Antoinette and Rochester pave way for the gulf and the gap between the genders. They are separated by a whole lot of cultural divide as both are conditioned by dichotomous systems of signification. The world of Antoinette and Rochester are poles apart. The cultural conditioning and the internalization of the values of the logocentric universe find its most valid representation in the person of Rochester. His studied, artificial, callous, cold and logical response to her exuberant, spontaneous and natural self is indicative of the unbridgeable gap between the genders.

Patriarchal elements in complicity with one another bring out the doom of Antoinette. She does not possess anything. On taking her away from the land of her dreams, Rochester maliciously says, “She said she loved this place. This is the last she will see of it” (210). The system which smothers the spirit of the woman is censured and challenged in this text. The logocentric world identifies the woman as a commodity to be bargained and bartered, to be exchanged for better business purposes. Her dreams, illusions, disillusionments and desires are no more hers. She is just an object of sexual gratification for the cavaliers of patriarchy. She is the Other on whose screams and grunts the edifices of patriarchal discourse can be constructed.

Rochester robes Antoinette of her maiden name. She is no more Antoinette but Bertha a name which she hates. She tells Christophine, her maid, “When he passes my
door he says, ‘Good night, Bertha’. He never calls me Antoinette now’ (147). Later Antoinette protests on being called so as she knows that she lives a life of sham and hypocrisy with Rochester. She says, “Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else calling me by another name” (193). The name Antoinette is associated with her innocence, primitive beauty and spontaneity. Bertha, a proper English name, makes her the property of the English man, who is “stiff. Hard as a board and stupid as a foot, in my opinion, except where his own interests are concerned” (149). In this context, the comment made by Spivak is pertinent that “In the figure of Antoinette whom in Wide Sargasso Sea, Rochester violently renames Bertha, Rhys suggests that so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism” (“Three Women’s Texts” 250). Renaming Antoinette as Bertha is a patriarchal ploy to change the person into the patterns prescribed by patriarchy against which she rebels in the last part of the text.

The end of part two is poignant enough with Rochester taking Antoinette away from her intense coloured locality to cold unfriendly England. By that time “she was silence itself” (Wide Sargasso Sea 222). Along with physical silence, the agents of patriarchy succeed in quenching the spirit of a natural being in rendering “Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty cloths and her looking- glass” (235). This displaced being has lost the power to live. Her wings are clipped. Like the burning parrot, the fire of hatred and conflict has rendered her powerless. “He made an effort to fly down but his clipped wings failed him and he fell screeching” (51). But she does not remain silent. Her shrieks shake the foundation of the patriarchal and colonial mansion and its oppressive machinery and its echoes and reechoes are
reverberated through centuries in women’s frantic screams to be heard and listened to. The final realization comes with the strength of a resolution, the result of an epiphany opening her inner eyes to the duplicity in which she was held so long. Justice will thrive only if the patriarchal and colonial edifices housing conflicting elements within its structure and nourishing dominant figures and discourses are destroyed in an all consuming fire, too powerful to be quenched easily for it is fanned by the wind of oppression and hatred. “Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do” (249).

The final section of the novel where its plot converges with that of *Jane Eyre* is “a sustained feat of illusionism” (Sage 52), with Bronte’s setting hollowed out into a place of unreality, the solid mansion going up in Dominica coloured flames. The ending is triumphantly vengeful instead of being depressive and wretched. It is this final setting fire to the edifice of patriarchy with all that it signifies that makes this work so truly feministic with its devastating vigour and power. The marginal character left unattended in the attic of a nineteenth century gothic mansion with its enclosures comes back to claim the narrative for her own in this revisionary rereading of *Jane Eyre*. It is feminist not just in this annihilation of a symbolic power structure rendering the authoritative figure invalid. It is a representation of the awakening of the female spirit whose intense self representation has for once become powerful.

Antoinette is a character who has tried to narrate her story haltingly whose self representation has always been an ambivalent one. At the beginning of the novel she can’t write herself except in relation to her mother. There is a moment of total and
final identification with the mother rendering the thread of madness that runs through the family reaching up to her when Daniel Mason’s letter predisposes her to insanity in the mind of Rochester.

With her marriage her efforts to represent self is taken over by Rochester as he tries to write her self as he pleases, renaming her as Bertha and trying to anglicize and remove her from the familiar surroundings of her dream and reality. Patriarchy’s incursion into Antoinette’s world is synchronous with her reshaping her values according to the demands of patriarchy. Her attitude to Christophine and Tia undergoes subtle changes. Tia was once her reflexive mirror on whom is mirrored her own marginal self, gendered or cultural. “My dress was even dirtier than usual. ‘It’s Tia’s Dress’ ‘But why are you wearing Tia’s dress’?” (Wide Sargasso Sea 27). But slowly the influence of Rochester and his world view deviate her from her normal spontaneous responses to aspects of dominance and subservience with regard to the people around her. In the final moment of her answer to patriarchy she imagines Tia to be there with her. “Tia was there. She beckoned to me when I hesitated, she laughed” (248). But at this moment of emphatic realization in a dream more real to her than real life, Antoinette envisages herself one with Tia beyond the nomenclature of patriarchy and she knew what she must do to patriarchy, “And I heard the man’s voice, Bertha! Bertha! All this I saw and heard in a fraction of a second. And the sky so red. Someone screamed and I thought, why did I scream? I called ‘Tia’ and jumped and woke” (249).
The end of the text celebrates Antoinette’s realization, her empowerment and enlightenment rendering the feminist message emphatically. In the last part of the text, before she sets fire to the patriarchal mansion she muses in a moment of realization, “There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage” (249). The dark passage of patriarchal hegemony was illuminated by her awareness of the female self with its potentiality for subjecting patriarchy to critique. Antoinette Cosway stands for all those women who have dared to shout and rise in protest against the powerful, political and societal structures and cause them to crumble down and turn to ashes by the fury and fire of their hatred. It is the (in)security of the four walls which Antoinette has shunned preferring death to the spiritless life.

“Wide Sargasso Sea demonstrates that giving voice to the oppressed people is more complicated than merely conferring narrative authority upon speakers” (Winterhalter 12). Jean Rhys’ revision of the Bertha story is the site of intersection of various discourses. It utilizes the deployment of the feminist discourse answering the screams and grunts of the vague beastly figure roaming the periphery of the realist master narrative of Jane Eyre by letting her perspectives remain, where the gendered marginal offers her view of the world and her voice and presence strongly counter the silence and absence of the previous narrative. “The novel deconstructs the opposition between silence and voice and in so doing questions the western assumptions that the speaker is always the one in power” (Mardorossian 1082).
The intertextual relationship with *Jane Eyre* is carried through the portrayal and reflections of mainly three characters from part two onwards. The Rochester figure, Grace Poole, Bertha Mason and the reference to Richard Mason are the textual junctions in the intertext shifted from the earlier text to be reread and rewritten. The intertext here is juxtaposition in subversion as the value systems of the canonical text are subverted and put to critique here. From a muted existence in the corner of the colonialist attic Antoinette moves into the wide expanse of the Dominican countryside. It is entirely Antoinette’s story. Even when Rochester speaks in the second part, Antoinette’s story intrudes into it, stealing away his discourse. Grace Poole and Bertha share the narrative space of part three and Grace Poole comments on the fighting spirit of Bertha Antoinette imprisoned within the thick walls of Thornfield Hall. “But above all the thick walls, keeping away all the things that you have fought till you can fight no more…I’ll say one thing for her, she hasn’t lost her spirit” (*Wide Sargasso Sea* 233). Bertha Mason speaks only to react against the systems that “can be a black and cruel world to a woman” (233). Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have pointed out that “many 19th century writers constructed the emblematic figure of an enraged but tormented mad woman in order simultaneously to represent and express their feelings of anger” (77). In this context the effort of Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is to move the story of Antoinette from the liminal zone of third stor(e)y in which the 19th century artists had sequestered her to the first stor(e)y in which her own discourse could become central.

Jane herself was different from the angelic heroines who had peopled the world of canonical literature as she was an orphan without the advantages of wealth,
beauty and other attributes which patriarchy prefers. As her location places her in the patriarchal Victorian times she could not challenge its norms and dictates. Her commonsense and normalcy prevented her from enquiring into the ‘truth’ of Bertha. That challenge had to be undertaken by the abnormal and insane Antoinette as she is not restricted by being normal and proper. It is precisely her insanity and ‘impropriety’ which enable her to carry out the effective response to her confinement in the master narrative. “Bertha of Bronte’s nineteenth century *Jane Eyre* represents the devil in the flesh, which must be sexuality. Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* written in the twentieth century context, makes Bertha/Antoinette as a protagonist and gives voice to her suppressed story” (Walia 62).

The feminist revision of a text is conveyed not only through the assertion of female self. It is achieved through the rewriting of the notions of masculinity and the disempowerment of the male characters as well. The gaps and omissions of Bronte’s text get filled, by subjecting to revision not only the character of Bertha but of Rochester as well. It is to be noted that Rochester does not even possess a name in this intertext which is primarily Antoinette’s story. He is identified as a Rochester figure by means of the text’s intertextual relationship with *Jane Eyre*. The feminist revision begins right here. Rochester is shown here as a villain, callous and calculative and whose regard for the woman in his life is entirely related to the financial stability that she will provide him. The web of disfigurement of Rochester begins from part two where the young and fresh bridegroom appears bewildered in the strange country. But with the progress of the narrative, colours begin to fade from his halo and along with Antoinette the readers also begin to witness the seamy side of Rochester. His distrust
of the native blacks, the inconsiderate treatment of them, the growing intolerance and contempt of his wife, the non-involvement with the values of Antoinette’s world, the vehement censure of the world around him, the infidelity as a husband and his attempts for the forceful destruction of Antoinette’s self and identity are all revealed in the course of part two which subtly but conspicuously transform Rochester into a consummate villain. Whatever that made \textit{Jane Eyre}, was transformed to render \textit{Wide Sargasso Sea} a text that speaks of the woman’s discourse.

The strategic use of the black maid Christophine serves the feminist content of \textit{Wide Sargasso Sea} by the conspicuous location allotted to her as a source of strength and power to Antoinette in her journey towards the reclamation of her voice and the deathly blow to the patriarchal premises. Christophine does not need the strength of men in her life. Her denial of the masculine world is to be inferred from her criticism of the representatives of the power structures like Rochester and the Masons. She tells Antoinette:

\begin{quote}
All women, all colours, nothing but fools. Three children I have. One living in this world, each one a different father, but no husband, I thank my God. I keep my money. I don’t give it to no[sic] worthless man…A man don’t treat you good, pick up your skirt and walk out. Do it and he come after you (143).
\end{quote}

Her sentiments express the feminist content as strongly as Antoinette’s final fire of revenge.
Christophine is not afraid to speak out against Rochester and his devious ways. She remains a mother figure, a constant source of strength to Antoinette and it is Antoinette’s identification with Christophine and Tia in her dream that instills in her the urge to react and censure the dictates of patriarchy and gives Antoinette the courage to break free from the chains imposed on her by the system. Christophine represents uncurtailed and unrestricted freedom of woman and supplements the belief that the feeling and the reality of emancipation does not constitute in being a privileged white woman and that ‘a so called underprivileged’ woman can be as free in her spirit as she likes, if she remains undaunted by the systems that oppress her. Antoinette and Christophine represent the emancipated and empowered womanhood and establish the women’s discourse inherent in the text Wide Sargasso Sea in a conclusive way.

Thus Jean Rhys writes back to the patriarchal narrative by revising the plot, character and structure, giving a past and location to Bertha Mason, bringing her to human levels as Antoinette Cosway and giving her a Dominican setting. It is a work of uncanny insight and intensity in its depiction of pain and the feeling of the unwanted and the marginalized. This work is a phenomenal success as a feminist expression of woman’s self and the challenge to patriarchy. The woman’s discourse and the celebration of the spirit of woman make Wide Sargasso Sea a notable feminist text. Antoinette is the site of patriarchal inscription as well as the challenge to the male dominated discourse. She deviates from the expectations of conformity and destroys and deconstructs the world of Jane Eyre. It is a feminist text that reveals the gaps and fissures in the feminist movement as Antoinette’s racial Otherness accounts for the
denial of her voice in *Jane Eyre*. It shows that feminism as a movement may sometimes submerge the discourse of the racially marginalized as it may champion the cause of the white privileged woman over the black or the Creole. The text voices the alienation and the subordination of women in a male dominated society. Antoinette and her saga reveal the woman’s plight in a patriarchal community. By the strategic interrogation of patriarchy at the hands of Christophine, whose indomitable will places her beyond the hold of male domination, the text also theorizes on the diversity inherent in the feminist movement and its challenges of the power structures. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a feminist text as it debates over the issues of marginalization of the gender and the spirit of emancipation. Antoinette and Christophine are powerful signifiers for the empowerment of women, by which they are liberated from the limiting closures of patriarchy and thwart the designs of patriarchal inscriptions.

### 4.2 *Foe* as a Feminist Intertext

J. M Coetzee’s *Foe* is an answer to many of the enquiries that have characterized the recent theoretical concerns regarding the space and voice of the marginalized beings in literature. Rereading and consequent rewritings have flooded the literary and theoretical realm in the form of sequels to canonical texts, which celebrate the high sounding voices of the dominant discourses. Feminism in its struggle to let the woman be heard and listened to have been actively engaged in setting aright the erasures and submergences of female voices and selves. Claiming back the female self is claiming the female voice. *Foe* addresses these issues and problematizes the question of female narrative control vis a vis voice and space in this
intertextual rendering of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. Presence is what
determines power. Visibility, voice and their spatial positioning determine who
controls the narratives. From time immemorial women have been the absence, the
ones without voice and located in the margins. They have been the objects of the
dominant discourse of patriarchy, their voices submerged within the claims of
authority of patriarchal culture. *Foe* poses challenges to the double colonization, those
of patriarchy and of colonialism. It questions and disrupts the notions of ‘woman’ of
the discourses of patriarchy and emphatically addresses the issue of women’s claims
for voice and space in narrative design.

Coetzee addresses the feminist issue in *Foe* through the character of Susan
Barton, who gets to narrate the story of Cruso and his island episode. Susan Barton in
Coetzee’s *Foe* challenges the erasure and absence of women from the discourse of
patriarchy. She is a symbolic representative of the feminist challenge and serves as a
site for addressing other ideological issues connected with woman’s discourse and
Coetzee’s location in it. Susan is a counter-discursive figure in questioning the
canonical text and the discursive universe associated with it. She serves as a space for
the inculcation and stabilization of imperial ideologies by keeping a relationship of
complicity with the dominant ideologies. Susan Barton also serves the role of the
liberal feminist in her efforts to civilize Friday. She is also used as the vehicle for
addressing the ambivalent position of Coetzee in South Africa. Susan Barton
problematizes the question of authority and control in the narrative. Susan is the site of
*Foe*’s intersection with *Roxana*. 
Patriarchy receives a jolt with the incursion of Barton into the life of Cruso and the author Foe. By invading Foe’s premises and appropriating it for self, Barton offers a proclamation of the woman toppling the patriarchal premises. In turn it becomes a tug of war for dominance in narrative. As Foe is the deconstructed Defoe of the colonial England, invasion of his creative arena is a resistance to the theories of colonial and patriarchal ideological structure which ‘writes and reads’ woman as it pleases. The woman not only claims to rewrite the canon but also wants to be the author of the story. The author’s position is one of authority. Susan wants to be “shaping and reshaping” (Foe 131) destinies just like man, God, authors and imperialists do. She wants to be the wielder of words which control discourse. As the pen is power she wants to be the one to manipulate rather than be manipulated.

Right from the beginning it is a woman’s intertext to the patriarchal saga. The novel opens with the words of Susan as the narrator of the story, “At last I could row no further” (1). The narrator’s emergence shocks us as she is juxtaposed along with Friday who is already positioned in Robinson Crusoe. Being written is being assigned locations. Susan Barton escapes such an assignment as her existence is as a resistance figure, not part of an ‘always, already written’ discourse. Just as Friday had been made his first subject by being saved by Cruso, Susan becomes his “second subject” (11) telling him her story. If Friday’s subjugation is enforced, Susan’s is caused by her misfortune. She says, “I am on your island, Mr. Cruso, not by choice but by ill luck ...I am a castaway, not a prisoner” (20). Susan recognizes the great ‘resale’ value of her castaway story and wants to let the world know about it. Creating a story is an authoritative and manipulative gesture and she can manipulate Cruso’s story as much
as anyone. She is not an idiotic woman who knows not her worth. Though situations have forced her to be the subject of Cruso, she is singularly conscious of her location and its significance. Susan has invaded into what is entirely a man’s playground. She is proud of her unique position and is interested in capitalizing it to the maximum.

“There has, never before to my knowledge, been a female castaway of our nation” (40). But as the economies of fiction are generally controlled by men and Cruso does not want the story to be told, she has to wait till Cruso’s death to narrate the story and the story of Cruso in turn becomes the narrative of Susan. Hence Cruso story begins from the time of Susan reaching the island as a castaway. Susan is an alternate Cruso figure, a female adventuress. But unlike Cruso her expedition is not motivated by economic reasons or the desire for founding empires and plantations. Her voyage is a quest, a quest for her lost daughter. It is this adventurous quest, undertaken for reasons other than domination which argues for the feminist rewriting in *Foe*.

Susan is not a mute character like Friday. She shows tremendous mettle in questioning the kingly stance of Cruso and she is not the representative of silent womanhood but symbolizes feminist challenges. On the island, she undermines patriarchal designs, its inclinations and inhibitions. She refuses to be abated by the stony distant stance of Cruso and thwarts his silences with her prompt interrogation and shows tremendous capacity for practical applications, searching methods for deliverance from the island. Being a castaway on an island peopled by a patriarchal figure Cruso is symbolic of the motif of patriarchy and addresses the sense of women’s displacement in society. Susan is not a figure of silence. Instead she is voluble and openly questioning. Her interrogations often put Cruso ill at ease. She
vehemently suggests to Cruso to put his story in writing so that it will serve posterity, “Is it not possible to manufacture paper and ink and set down what traces remain of these memories, so that they will outlive you?” (17). It is Susan who speaks for the particularity of experience instead of the archetypal generalities of the great Romantic tales of adventures prevalent during the 17th century. Here she serves the purpose of being a spokesperson for the ideology of Realism with its thrust on the particular and specific:

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

Susan finds Cruso engaged in “stupid labour” (35) of building terraces to used as plantations by future generations of castaways who will bring sack of corn” (34).

Right from the moment of Susan’s incursion into the kingdom of Cruso it becomes a ground for the questioning of patriarchal premises. She refuses to accept Cruso’s perspectives regarding life. She subjects him to severe interrogation and critique. She questions him about the “terraces, and the boat he would not build, and the journal he would not keep, and the tools he would not save from the wreck, and Friday’s tongue” (34). The fact that Susan Barton is given the role of the narrator
indicates the thwarting of Crusoe story of Defoe. Crusoe of Defoe has been manipulated to be the Cruso of Barton’s story. Though Crusoe in Robinson Crusoe is supposed to have kept journals that elaborately deal with his island adventures, Cruso in Foe is presented as a dull old man engaged in fruitless labour. It is Susan Barton who equals Crusoe by being innovative and maintaining a journal. Cruso is located by his relationship to Susan and Friday.

Cruso just remains at the periphery of Susan’s discourse. She proves herself to be spirited and practical. Many of the suggestions for getting out of the island are her contribution. Susan refuses to limit herself into the patriarchal roles expected of her. She defies the ideological expectation of patriarchy and is a representation of an enlightened woman. She does what men generally do, and what a woman is not expected to do. She questions Foe:

Do you think of me, Mr. Foe, as Mrs. Cruso or as a bold adventuress? Think what you may, It was I who shared Cruso’s bed and closed Cruso’s eyes as it is I who have disposal of all that Cruso leaves behind, which is the story of his island (45).

His story of the island at her disposal becomes her story, with all power invested in Susan to make any amends that she would like therein.

Story telling invests the teller with power and authority. This politics of narration is what Susan aspires for. She wants to be the subject of the discourse and not its Other. After Cruso’s death, she is bent on making her island experience into a
narrative that people will pay attention to. It shows her aspiration to be part of the world that forms discourses, the ideologies that create and perpetrate subjectivities, and not be its objects, its mutilated selves. The death of the patriarchal figure Cruso is the symbolic death of the dominant, ideological structure. Once freed from its direct hold Susan emerges as a mark of authority with the postcolonial Friday. She would like to capitalize her unique location in history as the first female castaway. She is sure that “it will cause a great stir” (40). As Susan wants to make her mark in the universe, to let the posterity know of her existence not just in the suburbs of discourse, but close to the centre of the dominant ideological structures, she proposes to use the same strategies of patriarchy “…for the world expects stories from its adventurers, better stories than tallies of how many stones they moved in fifteen years…” (34). Susan keeps a journal till the very end of the story which survives the patriarchal stone structures, but her narrative gets washed away by the uninterrupted stream of Friday’s postcolonial discourse.

Susan’s presence and the evolution of her character account for a female bildungsroman in which she emerges from her stance of being the lonely female castaway on Cruso’s island to interrogate the discursive systems that ‘create’ woman as the ‘Other’. She rises to a position of significance as a wielder of power with regard to Friday’s destiny. The representation of Susan Barton is an affirmation of the woman’s self, a regenerated soul, daring to challenge the patriarch and steering the course of the story, planning and designing the escape from the island. Cruso is freed from his loneliness on the island due to Susan’s meaningful dialectical presence. Susan becomes the female Cruso, the female castaway. With the weakening of
Cruso’s discourse, Susan gains control. She says of the gradual decline of Cruso’s power, “With every passing day he was conveyed farther from the kingdom he pined for, to which he would never find his way again. He was a prisoner and I despite myself his gaoler” (43).

The first two parts of the novel is essentially concerned with Susan’s narrative. The first part is her reflections on being shipwrecked on the island and her conquest of the Cruso story. It also deals with her custody of all that Cruso leaves behind on his death. With Cruso’s death the postcolonial figure of resistance, Friday becomes the liability of Susan as he had been to the colonial Cruso earlier. Part two is in epistolary mode full of the letters that Susan writes to the author Foe “the letters [you] he never read” (117). The mantle has passed from Cruso to Susan. Part I and II together celebrate the feminist rewriting of the Defoean narrative of Crusoe. Part II locates Susan not only in relation with the colonial/patriarchal figure Cruso but also in an interface with Foe, symbolizing the woman’s entry into the world of discourse and the signifying systems that shape the discourse. In spite of the claim about not being well versed in the “art of writing” (52) that brings “life to [your] thieves and courtesans and grenadiers” (52) as Foe is, she manifests a mature sense of perception and tremendous sense of responsibility in her letter and journal. In the absence of the author figure, Susan begins to exert narrative control, not only with regard to the woman’s story but also with Friday’s supposed story as well. She wants the authorship of her story, to be the possessor and narrator of realistic details wishing for substantiability and not just “a ghost beside the true body of Cruso” (51). Susan does not want to play the second fiddle to the island experience.
Susan says:

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

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

All the stories are woven through the web of art. It is the art of storytelling which constructs structures and manipulates discourses. Susan Barton claims her ignorance of the art of storytelling. Each story assigns location to selves by placing subjectivities and objectifying the Other. As the novel progresses, Susan dwells on the particularities and specific touches which will make her story interesting. Susan becomes the site for articulating the strategies of fictionality and the characteristics of
fiction. She becomes conscious of the ingredients that would truly make a story interesting and intriguing. On first coming to Foe with the island tale, Susan is very adamant about preserving the ‘truth’ of her story. She says, “I would rather be the author of my own story than have lies told about me” (40). She derides and denies the subtle touches of artistry that the author suggests as modifications to her story to make it more interesting. Foe had suggested about bringing in musketeers and cannibals to the dull castaway adventures and Susan opposes this suggestion as she does not want her story to be manipulated with the art and craft of writing.

But in the absence of the author figure and in the presence of the mutilated self of Friday, Susan assumes the role of the centre denying the margins and assigning the location in the margins to Friday. Towards the end of part two she almost speaks the language of Foe, the author, when she plans to manipulate her story with the right mixture of fact and fancy so that the island experience becomes more appealing. In a letter to Foe she muses, “I am growing to understand why you wanted Cruso to have a musket and be besieged by cannibals. I thought it was a sign you had no regard for truth … It is all a matter of words and the number of words, is it not?” (94). The growth she mentions is one of power and its consciousness creating corresponding change in the subjectivities.

Each ideological construct is an accumulation of lies, of truth perceived from a variety of angles as one’s truth is another’s untruth. In Susan’s desire to be the author there is the gynocritic proclamation of the woman’s voice, her self, her assumption of the responsibility and realization of her niche and space. She decides,
“Or else I must assume the burden of our story” (81). Her interrogation and critique of the institution of patriarchy and its symbol are intertwined with the central issue of the metafictional aspects of textuality. Susan proclaims her unwillingness to be the writing or the text and wishes to be the author. Her critique of Foe’s textual practices does not just address the issue of textuality; it is an affirmation of the woman’s challenge against the hegemonic centrist systems that keep her in subjugation. It also subjects the canonical writer Defoe to scrutiny by commenting about the characters in Defoean masterpieces and the way they are formed by artifice that resembles art. She protests vehemently:

I am not, do you see, one of those thieves or highwaymen of yours who gabble a confession and are then whipped off to Tyburn and eternal silence leaving you to make of their stories whatever you fancy. It is still in my power to guide and amend. Above all, to withhold. By such means do I still endeavour to be father to my story (123).

Susan’s desire to be the father of her story is indicative of her wish to topple the patriarchal, authorial sway and possession of the subjectivity of women reducing them to the peripheries of existence. Susan is not just satisfied with being the begetter of the story; she wants to go beyond the authorial intention of making her just an episode in a great island story.

As the disfiguring of the notions of masculinity is an essential strategy in the feminist rewriting, the faded representation of Defoe’s Crusoe in *Foe* establishes the
emphatic message of the woman’s discourse. Susan becomes in charge of the narrative with the weakening of the institution of Cruso. The Cruso of *Foe* is a faded shadow of the Crusoe of *Robinson Crusoe*. This discolouring and displacement take place in the presence and with the agency of a woman who apprehends the reality as well and as much as the author does. With Cruso’s death she comes to be perceived as Mrs.Cruso, the true inheritor of the kingdom of Cruso along with the direction and the version of the story. The story of his island becomes ‘the story of his island’ as she perceives it. This is the narrative twist that takes place in the retelling of the Cruso story by Susan Barton. The intrusion of Susan is a deliberate deviation in the discourse of Cruso and is a direct challenge to the patriarchal premise.

The second part of the novel is in a mixed journal and epistolary form. The double gesture that Coetzee performs in this novel begins here of combining the woman’s story with the story of the native- Susan and Friday- addressing the feminist and postcolonial issues respectively. Part II sees the emergence of Susan as a symbol of feminist ideology, taking control of the narrative, freeing it from the hold of the dominant ideology of patriarchy. She masters the art of storytelling and gives voice to the issue of textuality and of fiction writing like any major practitioner of canonicity. Writing the island experience from Susan’s point of view constitutes the feminist aspect of this intertextual work engaging her on the path of challenge and critique of patriarchy. But ‘writing’ is not an empty process. It invests the writer with a certain power and narrative control. With the process of writing Susan subtly moves from the assigned locations in the margins to one of assigning locations. She writes and refuses to be written.
In Part Three Susan has assumed the position of an author; she speaks the language of authority and acts in control. The narrative of Cruso with Foe in charge of casting it the right way shifts hands and comes to the possession of Susan. Her reflections on the art of storytelling are authorial and political. She is open to those elements which will make her island experience a worthy, readable narrative. There are unanswered questions in the narrative and like any good craftsman of fiction she wants to address those mysteries. “I ask these questions because these are the questions any reader of our story will ask” (86).

Words are always in the possession of the powerful and the one in control of the discourse and Susan proves adept at manipulating words symbolizing narrative power. She declares:

...but there is never a lack of things to write of. It is as though animalcules of words lie dissolved in your ink-well, ready to be dipped up and flow from the pen and take form on the paper. From downstairs to upstairs, from house to island, from the girl to Friday: it seems necessary only to establish the poles, the here and the there the now and the then-after that the words themselves do the journeying. I had not guessed it was so easy to be an author (93).

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

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

Susan resists the attempt on the part of Foe to write her. She declares quite convincingly to Foe that “I am not a story, Mr. Foe” (131). Susan as a woman who offers challenge to patriarchy and its signifying systems affirms that her substantiality resides in her self realization and it does not have to be in agreement with the dreams and desires of patriarchy. “... I do not choose to tell. I choose not to tell it because to no one, not even to you, do I owe proof that I am a substantial being with a substantial history in the world” (131). A woman is not just a creation of the male fancy. She has an identity and substantiality beyond the limits of the patriarchal margins. The history of culture is not just the history of man alone. A woman is entitled to her space in the scheme of things just like man. It is this assertion of and for the space of woman in history that makes Foe a significant feminist intertext. Susan’s declaration of freedom from the manacles of hegemonic systems that submerge her voice and deny her space and the bondages of culture that relegate her to a position of subordination in the
margins, emphatically celebrates the woman’s discourse. As Susan points out, “…for I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire” (131). Susan’s theories on textuality and what constitutes ‘truth’ in a narrative conspicuously challenge the textual practices of Defoe, who peopled his literary oeuvre with the adventurous and magnificent tales of heroes and heroines in their “whimsical adventures” (135). That’s how this novel becomes an intertextual critique of Defoe and his great masterpiece about patriarchy and colonialism.

In part three Susan’s entry into the world of discursive power is suggested and it is the site of placing her in complicity with the hegemonic centrist systems, as manifested through her allegiance with the canonical figure, the author Foe and her efforts to make sense of the silence of Friday. “It is for us to open Friday’s mouth and hear what it holds: silence, perhaps, or a roar, like the roar of a sea shell held to the ear” (142). With the incursion into the world of discourse and power, Susan’s perception of Friday undergoes a subtle change as she begins to look at their relationship not as the pact of two marginalized beings trying to resist being written, but as a hegemonic one in which Susan is the mistress and Friday, her possession. “Thus it has become, in a manner of speaking, between Friday and myself. I do not love him, but he is mine” (111). She declares her independent self and refuses to be a puppet in the story of Foe. But like any representative of hegemonic ideology believes that granting freedom to Friday is her privilege and responsibility. As a figure of complicity, she is also open to the interrogation and critique of the postcolonial Friday. Just as the feminist challenge by Susan disrupts the patriarchal story of Cruso and interrupts and interrogates the patriarchal narrative of the Cruso story by Foe, Susan’s
effort to be in control is subjected to severe critique not by any figure of dominant ideological system, but by the mute marginalized Friday who keeps himself beyond the inscription of canonicity.

Susan’s effort to control and shape Friday according to her ideology is shown in her attempts to teach Friday. But her struggles to educate Friday in the strategies of ‘reading and writing’ prove futile as he refuses to be taken by the colonialist tools of subjugation. “All my efforts to bring Friday to speech, or speech to Friday, have failed” (142). His silence baffles her and when Susan tries to bring him language, it is met with impenetrable muteness and resistance. Friday’s tryst with the intricacies of writing and speech, which is the offer of the civilizing mission by Susan and Foe, makes Friday’s communication as mysterious as his silence is.

The question of truth in *Foe* is focused not on the character of Cruso or on Foe, but on the marginalized figures Susan Barton and Friday. Every arrival is a departure and hence the arrival of Susan in the island story is the point of departure for Cruso and the ideology he represents. Susan’s mastery of the pen or the quill of Foe, the master craftsman, is her point of rewriting and writing back to *Robinson Crusoe*. Right from the beginning the woman narrator Susan Barton dismantles any romantic exaggeration about patriarchy which was generally used by great colonial traders and travellers. The narrator has managed to swim across the sea, has reached an island, not a fantastic or a picturesque one but an arid dry land. Since landing on the island, this female castaway challenges the existing practices, trying to alter the way things are done and thought in Cruso’s land. Susan wants the story of Cruso to be set in a diary
which can serve posterity. She recognizes the potential of her stories, wants her story to be a memorial, a supplement to human memory. But Cruso is the authority and claims that “nothing I have forgotten is worth the remembering” (17). She wants the preservation of every day minute realities which makes any story one’s own. Susan’s journal is imitative of Crusoe’s journal and she seeks the help of Foe to set right her “sorry, limping affair” (47). Though Susan claims that she is not a good narrator, she exhibits tremendous mastery in her account of the life on the island in company of Cruso and Friday. Susan’s portrayal of the author Foe is also an interesting one. She is also alert and conscious of the way the author tries to keep away from her. There is a collection of narratives, ‘always already written’ and fictionalized in advance, kept ready by Foe. Susan feels that “without the supplementary embellishment by the novel writer” (Lane 23) her own existence becomes ghost like and insubstantial as it is not polished by authorial inventions. Her “insubstantiality is not just caused by Coetzee’s narrative strategies and literary devices but also due to her intertextual relationship with Robinson Crusoe” (23). She feels like “a ghost behind the true today of Cruso” (Foe 51) and Crusoe.

Part IV of the novel is found to be one of subtle displacement for the feminist discourse of Susan Barton as Friday manages to take the narrative to the native spirit of the island to the “home of Friday” (157). Friday sidelines and topples the feminist claim for reclaimed voice and silently but forcefully communicates and conveys the postcolonial spirit.
Foe, as the master storyteller, is interested in and invested with the power of creating stories, shaping the characters through channels desired and designed by himself while fathering the story. But at some point of time Susan Barton takes away the narrative control from Foe and expresses her disinclination to be manipulated. She resists his artifice and art. But once in charge of Friday, her control of Friday story does resemble Foe’s mastery of managing Susan’s story. It is this tussle for the control of the island story which dismantles the apparent and emerging feminist challenge to the author figure. Perceived from another angle, this act could speak for the feminist element that looks for representational and narrative control wrenching it from the male hegemonic centrist systems. The postcolonial countertextual aspect of the novel brings about the complicity between the male author and the female resistant figure united culturally while treating the postcolonial as the Other. The cultural unification is caused by the racial similarity of both the author Foe and Susan Barton as white Europeans who share a similar sense of domination and control.

Susan Barton is often spoken of as a representative of the white South African liberal, a liberal feminist, to be precise. Kirsten Holst Petersen speaks about how Susan fulfills “an allegorical role representing the white South African liberal” (Petersen 250). Susan expresses the most pertinent liberal propagandist stance through her desire to record Friday’s story by giving him the gift of language and assist in his emancipation from the hold of dominant ideology. The liberal feminists are concerned about facilitating freedom from oppressive systems and thrive on the stance of the less privileged. Viewed from that point Susan may be considered as occupying liberal feminist principles like the respect of law and awareness of one’s social, legal and
political rights, sense of equality between the sexes, consciousness of freedom, 
emancipation through the benefits of language and education, disregard for the basic 
structures of oppression like class and race and a subtle allegiance to the dominant 
ideologies etc. “Rather I wish to point to how unnatural a lot it is for a dog or any 
other creature to be kept from its kind; also to how the impulse of love, which urges us 
towards our own kind, perishes during confinement, or loses its way” (Foe 81). Her 
comments on the island life also indicate an allegiance to liberal feminist principles. 
Susan says:

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

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

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

Another occasion in which she exhibits the liberal feminist approach is when Susan decides to free Friday. “I have written a deed granting Friday his freedom and signed it in Cruso’s name… If Friday is not mine to set free, whose is he?” (99). The benevolence of Susan towards Friday is political as it is conditioned by undertones of power possessed through intimacy and complicity with dominant discourses.

Though there are two marginalized characters Susan and Friday, Susan “comes to occupy a different margin from that of Friday, the position of the half colonized Other” (Head 120). Her colonization is not as complete as that of Friday, whose repressive failure makes him a total symbol of racial oppression and subjugation. The major turning points in this text, which makes it a major inter/counter canonical text is the presence of these marginalized figures, Susan Barton and Friday. In spite of their marginalized states, the diverse cultural realms they inhabit make their discourses different. As Susan comments, “The music we made was not pleasing: there was a subtle discourse all the time, though we seemed to be playing the same notes” (Foe 96). The reaction of the half-colonized Other to the genuine Other is one of repulsive revulsion. “But now I began to look on him - I could not help myself - with the horror we reserve for the mutilated” (24). Her reactions to him are generally marked by expressions like “I shuddered” (24), “I caught myself flinching” (24) and so on. Susan’s perspectives on Friday and the resultant responses are conditioned by the preconceived notions of the Other as harboured by the dominant ideology. “I told
myself I did him wrong to think of him as a cannibal or worse, a devourer of the dead. But Cruso had planted the seed in my mind…” (106). The mutilation and consequent silence representing colonial repression of Friday and the responses on the part of Susan allegorically represent the white liberal attitude to the black community and the feeling of superiority of the half colonized Other over the genuine Other. If Friday performs the “consciously new approach of writing the Other” (Head 122), the usual method of writing back to the literary canon and its figures through open challenge is performed by Susan Barton. She is the agent of revisionary reaction to the patriarchal centrist systems.

In the last section of the novel an omniscient narrator emerges who occupies “the privileged position of the ultimate focalizer of the previous three levels” (Grabe 150). It is this introduction of the omniscient narrator that is sometimes considered as the displacement of the feminist claim. The narrator seems to take the control of the direction of the story and steers it to the native sounds emanating from Friday. But to reach Friday’s sounds he has to “stumble over the body, light as a straw, of a woman or a girl” (Foe 155) and he sees Susan’s journal with “yellowed” (155) pages from which he slips into the water with “the petals cast by Friday” (155) around him. This is symbolic of the dismantling of the feminist narrative. If Susan’s story is the basis of the story of Crusoe, Robinson Crusoe “represents a repression of female experience which is rechannelled according to the desires of the patriarchal author” (Head 115). The introduction of the higher level narrator has given rise to the argument that Coetzee himself is the “foe to those of us who search for the place and role of a female view of literature and history” (Petersen 251). The introduction of the
omniscient narrator is a metafictional gesture where the narrator attempts to read the island experiences. He falls overboard into Barton’s text and is able to find only the island voices emanating through the mouth of Friday. It allows the play of the deconstructive strategy of letting various versions reign and Friday’s discourse gains visibility and voice by toppling the version of the colonialist Cruso, the author figure Foe and also by sidelining the feminist figure of resistance, Susan Barton. Petersen argues that this presence of an omniscient narrator indicates the negation and deconstruction of the woman’s point of view.

If the omniscient voice is acknowledged to be that Coetzee, then the claim of Susan Barton to father the story and to twist the narrative and the effort of Foe to use the artifice of narrative strategies to do and undo texts and contexts for credibility and mastery are questioned. Having more claimants for authority offers the possibility for multiple versions and undermines the patriarchal claim to the authorship of the story. Susan expresses her disillusionment regarding her expectations from the author figure, “…that the pages I saw issuing from his pen were not idle tales of courtesans and grenadiers, as I supposed, but the same story over and over, in version after version, stillborn every time: the story of the island, as lifeless from his hand as from mine?” (151). The inadequacy of Susan and Foe with regard to relating the island experience is touched upon here supplying versions of the same story. But in spite of the slip in the last section Susan Barton has managed to get hold of the narrative in writing back to Robinson Crusoe, where a woman’s voice was never heard or a woman was never allotted any space.
As the intertext of *Robinson Crusoe*, Susan’s story is woven into an already existing plot. She is juxtaposed with Cruso/e and his man servant Friday in a narrative with a view to offer an alternate version of the Crusoe story. Her position is not one of submissive acquiescence in the patriarchal ways. But she disrupts the flow of the preexistent scheme of things by turning the narrative to address the issues connected with textuality. The plot floats along with Susan’s entry and the challenging questions she poses. Once the patriarchal author of the canonical ideology evades the scene, the characters Susan and Friday are freed from the margins and begin to play and begin to record their narratives, claiming space hitherto occupied by the author, letting their voice be heard.

Susan Barton is not symbolic of the questioning spirit of the feministic ideology alone. As a figure addressing the gender question she represents the creative spirit of woman as well. She is the female muse, “a goddess who visits poets in the night and begets stories upon them. In the accounts they give afterwards, the poets say that she comes in an hour of their deepest despair and touches them with sacred fire, after which their pens, that have been dry, flow” (126). She positions herself as a force and source of inspiration for the male author from whose pen countless narratives are to follow. The episode, in which “the muse pays her visits…to father her offspring” (140), establishes Susan as the “begetter” (126) of her story. “I was not intended to be the mother of my story, but to beget it” (126). This scene is marked as a symbolic gesture highlighting the fear of the male author of the female muse as an agent of “attack upon masculine control and dominance” (Lane 24).
Susan realizes that the events in her life are not enough to make a story. “To tell my story and be silent on Friday’s tongue is no better than offering a book for sale with pages in it quietly left empty” (Foe 67). The weight of the untold story of Friday that can never be told becomes a burden for Susan at it will leave “a hole in the narrative” (121). Susan’s efforts to wean the story out of Friday’s mouth ends in disillusionment and despair for Susan and confusion for Friday. They serve as the context for discussing theoretical questionings regarding multiplicity and singularity and versions of truth and reality. She becomes an agent of authority for characters associated with her. If her incursion into Cruso’s island is accountable for the emergence of an alternate discourse and story, her interface with Foe takes the narrative still further. Susan Barton is not just a symbol of the woman’s need for voice and space in the larger discursive realms of life. The initial effort of Susan to be given a part in Cruso’s narrative where Susan’s adventure is also embedded shifts to an engulfing desire for manipulating stories and a yearning for the narrative control. In this strategic realm of story making she seems to resemble Foe. This is the point of the beginning of postcolonial critique as Susan is ‘Foe’ to Friday. Since Susan has inherited the Cruso story, she exhibits a possession for the same and tries to get hold of other stories which will serve her yearning for mastery and control. It is noted that since her inheritance of the Cruso story there is frequent repetition of the word ‘desire’ in her parlance. About Crusoe and Friday she says, “There was too little desire in Crusoe and Friday: too little desire to escape, too little desire for a new life. Without desire how is it possible to make a story?” (88). Later she tells Foe, “The story I desire to be known by is the story of the island” (121). About Friday she says, “If he was not
a slave, was he nevertheless not the helpless captive of my desire to have our story
told?” (130). Desire is a word which gets reflected in the conversation of Foe as well.
‘Desire’ is associated with narrative control and the Cruso tale becomes a site for
competition between Susan and Foe for control as the narrative is supposed to hold
good only if it is embellished. Susan is afraid that as Cruso had kept no journal, the
particularity and minuteness of details which make a story one’s own will be lost and
instead universality of narrative will hold sway. Foe is also preoccupied with the
Cruso story wishing to impose a formulistic narrative principle on it.

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

*Foe* is the tale of a woman’s regeneration, her battle, quest and its culmination.
This woman is capable of rewriting the entire history and the story of patriarchy, of
kingship and the power of *Robinson Crusoe*. Susan is as much dominating as Cruso.
Her sense of superiority to Friday and Cruso are commendable.
The question remains: Is the Cruso in *Foe* the same as Crusoe in *Robinson Crusoe*? If *Robinson Crusoe* is the story of man’s pride and survival *Foe* offers us the courageous tale of a woman who questioned the world and the supremacy of Crusoe and the textual throne that Defoe has been keeping for himself long. Susan’s entry into Cruso’s world threatens his sense of power. Susan muses, “After years of unquestioned and solitary mastery, he sees his realm invaded and has tasks set upon him by a woman” (25). Narrating the world is theorized here as a powerful thing to do. What matters is the inextricable link between who gets to tell the story and who ends up listening to it. Foe speaks the language of patriarchy when he tells Susan that “there comes a time when we must give reckoning of ourselves to the world and then forever be content to hold our peace” (124), by which he seems to imply that she as a woman should be satisfied to have been given a chance to relate the story.

The Defoe connection is made more complex by the figure of Susan Barton who is a version of the eponymous heroine of *Roxana*, another famous fictional work by Daniel Defoe. Susan is the first name of Roxana. *Roxana* may be considered as a rechannelization of the repressed female experience which fails to be recorded in *Robinson Crusoe*. Roxana is presented as an amoral and licentious character moving up in the social circles. This narrative puts a woman in visibility so conspicuously for the first time. The interrelationship with *Roxana* is hinted in *Foe* through the daughter episode which has a similar scene in *Roxana*. Roxana is doggedly followed by one of her abandoned children and it is suggested at the end of the novel that her faithful servant Amy kills this trouble giving daughter which puts Roxana into misery.
In *Foe* Susan’s feminist claim to the island story begins as a quest for an abducted daughter. This very quest itself becomes a challenging and disrupting gesture as the motif of quest is associated with the male world of exploration and adventure as the seventeenth century literary scenario would manifest. Susan believes that the appearance of the daughter depends on the invention and the artifice of Foe. When Susan is visited by the young girl who claims that she is Susan Barton, the lost daughter of Susan, she is confused. “‘Do you not know,’ said she, in a voice so low I could barely hear. ‘Do you not know whose child I am?’ ‘I have never set eyes on you in my life’” (73). She questions and blames Foe for trying to interrupt her sway of the island story by placing her into the customary roles expected of women. “Who is she and why do you send her to me…? She is more your daughter than she ever was mine” (75).

The intertextual relation to *Roxana* becomes all the more pronounced with the reference to “Amy or Emmy” (76) who claims to be Susan Barton’s maidservant as she was of Roxana. The psychological coherence of Susan gets a jolt when confronted by her alleged daughter and the maid servant Amy. In this moment of the denial of the daughter figure, Susan becomes conflated with Roxana. Susan says to the young girl, “The world is full of stories of mothers searching for sons and daughters they gave away once, long ago. But there are no stories of daughters searching for mothers. There are no stories of such quests because they do not occur. They are not part of life” (78). It is not just a denial of the role of the mother, but a criticism of the fictional world of Defoe as well. Susan is perturbed like Roxana in her confrontation with the daughter and feels that the substantiality that she intends to gain through her
authorship of the island narrative will be lost in the daughter-mother digression as the daughter is “a ghost, a substantial ghost” (132) far away from the aspect of verisimilitude. This is a moment of ontological uncertainty for Susan as she wonders, “But if these women are creatures of yours, visiting me at your instruction, speaking words you prepared for them then who am I and who indeed are you?” (133). At this point of Susan’s doubt Friday gets hold of the narrative as he refuses to be represented by the ordinary and common paradigms of re/presentation. The island experience is removed from Susan’s self in her moment of uncertainty, “I closed my eyes, trying to find my way back to the island, to the wind and wave roar; but no, the island was lost, cut off from me by a thousand leagues of watery waste” (139).

*Foe* presents the emancipated Susan of *Roxana* who has moved out of the narrative limitations imposed upon her as a woman character in an eighteenth century novel to inhabit a text of colonialist adventure whose protagonist evokes only a faint allusion to the hero of the tale of masculine adventure, Crusoe. Susan also rebels against and in a way settles the score with the canonical author Defoe by slipping out of the narrative planned for her and getting recast in a twentieth century novel and holding discussions of textuality, authorship and narrative strategies (topics generally associated with the discursive realms of the authors of dominant ideology) with the same author figure on an equal footing and competing with him for narrative control and autonomy.

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

Though *Foe* is an intertext of the Defoean narrative world, it operates in multiple levels of challenge. If Susan Barton writes back through her voice, Friday challenges through powerful silence. The emergence and statement of the postcolonial point of view at the end of the novel could be considered as facilitated by the mediation of the challenge of feminism. The diving of the omniscient narrator at the end of the fourth part from the text of Barton into the fluid world of Friday is also symbolic of the answer to the challenge of feminism which is expressed by Susan Barton’s suggestion and confused query as to who will “make Friday’s silence speak” (142). “…but who will dive into the wreck? On the island I told Cruso it should be Friday, with a rope about his middle for safety” (142). The initiative to save history by
giving voice to Friday’s silence has come from Susan and that query is reflected in the answering dive in part four.

Coetzee has been much acclaimed for his elaborate and significant use of women in his novelistic universe. The positioning of white women narrators have been conspicuously done in the fictional realm of Coetzee. White women narrators do take the narrative ahead and forward in at least three of his novels like *In the Heart of the Country* (1979), *Foe* (1986) and *Age of Iron* (1990). Coetzee’s strategic employment of women in the narrators’ role aims at a number of objectives. His women serve the purpose of both feminine and feminist needs in Coetzee’s fictional world. Coetzee’s perspectives on feminism and the conspicuous and strategic employment of women have been much commented upon. Critics like Dunbar and Rody argue that Coetzee is a feminist while Macaskill and Colleran hold the view that Coetzee is undermining the arguments of western feminism by opening it up for critique as inadequate to meet the challenges of marginalized sector.

In the textual world of Coetzee, the women narrators are the boards on which the discourse of complicit marginalization is placed. The positioning of Susan Barton serves this purpose in *Foe*. The white woman narrator serves another purpose too. Coetzee makes use of the woman narrators to raise a pertinent point of problematizing the narrative and discourse. Different voices within feminism have its resonance in the strategic use of the woman narrator. Fiona Probyn Rapsey opines, “Coetzee’s adoption of the feminine narrative voice constitutes both a strategic evasion of a lack of an adequate vantage point from which to speak and a strategic encoding of that lack of
authority in the figure of the white woman” (248). The figures of the white women narrators invest Coetzee with a power to criticize the dominant ideology without being overtly oppositional. They provide a space for being dialectical without being antagonistic. The white women narrators’ inability to carry the discourse to where they would want it, their inability to authorize, their incapacity to liberate and their inadequacy for toppling the narrative make them essentially valuable in the Coetzean scheme of narrative. They remain “as vehicles patrolling the boundaries of the subject’s breakdown” (Rapsey 246).

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

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

The ambivalent positioning of the woman narrator seems to symbolize the equivocal and ambiguous position of Coetzee regarding the political scenario of South Africa. As a white South African he exudes power, but his disengagement with the politics of dominant discourse brings him to a position of disempowerment. Writing from this “medium, the median” (In the Heart of the Country 133) of powerful powerlessness Coetzee adopts the strategy of writing in the “middle voice” (Macaskill 67) which is “a complex amalgam of both power and powerlessness” (Rapsey 248). Fiona Rapsey is of the opinion that Coetzee’s women narrators fulfill the function of playing the medium, of questioning the dominant ideology without appearing to do so. Susan, Magda, Elizabeth Curren are all aware of their limited access to narrative power and their limitations regarding that which means they occupy a dubious stand with reference to power and its expressions. Coetzee embodies his powerful powerlessness, his marginality, his “writing without authority” (Doubling 392) in the character of his woman narrator.
If the cruelty of sexism is questioned by means of feminist writing, Coetzee’s metaphors of femininity can effectively interrogate the cruelty of racism as is depicted in *Foe* through the medium of Susan Barton. Susan is in a position to question and hold dialogues with structures of power and authority as she is conscious of the racial marginalization of Friday and can speak for him without overtly becoming oppositional. She tells Foe:

Friday’s desires are not dark to me. He desires to be
liberated, as I do too. Our desires are plain, his and mine.

But how is Friday to recover his freedom, who has been a
slave all his life? That is the true question. Should I
liberate him into a world of wolves and expect to be
commended for it? ...When I am rid of Friday, will I then

Susan embodies “a position of weakness” (Morphett 456) from which to question power and hence paradoxically this location of weakness is an empowered one. Her ‘weakness’ as a woman makes her outside the realm and sway of the dominant discourses; at the same time her cultural and racial similarity puts her in a diagonal or an indirect intercourse with the hegemonic systems which is one of non/participation and complicity. Coetzee identifies his non / position with that of Susan Barton as she is the “unsuccessful author” (Morphett 456). As Fiona Rapsey opines, “Coetzee is greatly reliant on the feminine for its promise of a position outside of his rivalry with the state, with truth and with realism. Clearly, Coetzee utilizes the
feminine as a textual strategy to avoid certain rhetorical strategies and to inhabit others” (256). So the strategic disrupting and undoing of power have to be through powerlessness provided by the person and location of the woman narrator.

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

Critics like Pamela Dunbar, Attwell and Catherine Dovey argue that Coetzee’s writing is essentially feminist and with regard to *Foe* the figure of Susan Barton essentially fulfills that role. But Coetzee has stated to Morphett while referring to *Foe* that “I would hate to say… that there is a feminist point” (Morphett 460). Dunbar says that Susan moves from “a position of subjugation to the white patriarchal male (Cruso at first, Foe later on) to that of feminist domination and literary autonomy. She achieves this transition through her symbolic usurpation of the male instrument of domination and of communication” (107). The feminist perspective has not been a limiting influence on Coetzee. Instead Coetzee has been “enabled by it. It constitutes the textual body on which he has (de)constructed not only his own op/positionality,
but also his challenge to textuality” (Fiona 265). In *Foe* it is Susan, the woman narrator who negotiates between various levels of discourse, “between what is representable and what is unrepresentable” (266). The discourse of Friday is out in the open with the mediation of Susan. Friday begins to be a question to be reckoned with the continual reference by the interception with Susan whose shouldering of the racial Other submerges her discourse. The unnamed narrator’s interference in her writing process underlines her as a failed narrator.

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

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

A conspicuous signifier often noted in the feminist discourse is the concept of submergence which is given full play in the final section of *Foe*. The end alludes to Adrienne Rich’s Poem “Diving into the Wreck”, which symbolizes the feminist quest for identity, trying to reclaim the woman’s space in the history, discourse and language and the assumption that woman’s language exists in a fluid realm beyond the order of patriarchy. Though the allusion to Rich’s poem may bring in the feminist overtones, here the diver is not Susan Barton, the feminist figure of challenge, but the unnamed narrator who supersedes her. But it may be inferred that the dive to reclaim the lost voices could have been the answer to Susan’s question as to who will dive to cause the emergence of the lost voices from the wreck.
Coetzee’s use of feminism represented through the persona of Susan Barton express multiple concepts. Here the diffused uncertain indefinite self of woman serves as a body for the writing of the postmodern dilemma of the fragmented selves of human beings “…it is possible that some of us are not written, but merely are” (143). Susan muses in uncertainty, “But now I am full of doubt. Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I phantom too?” (133).

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

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

I write my letters, I seal them; I drop them in the box. One
day when we are departed you will tip them out and glance
through them. ‘Better had there been only Cruso and
Friday’, you will murmur to yourself: ‘Better without the
woman’ (72).

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

_Foe_ as an intertext of _Robinson Crusoe_ problematizes the issue of women in all
its diverse forms. But the finale of the novel suggests a “maze of doubting” (135)
where the world of the feminine and the feminist conflate with the world of the
postcolonial whose voices have been appropriated and manipulated by the same
power structures albeit various ways. The contention here is that _Foe_ celebrates the
Other, the half colonized Other and the genuine Other and when their submerged
voices emerge from the wreck or the abyss where the two discourses conflate in a rare
but pertinent manner, it is the colonialist or the patriarch who takes a back stage,
losing their dominant discourses among the uncertain infinity of ‘O’mega. If Friday is
the figure of postcolonial resistance, Susan Barton undoubtedly offers the feminist
saga of the text. Her mode of resistance is more conspicuous than that of her postcolonial counterpart. The subtle resistance and the challenge of Friday sometimes submerge the violent upheaval of Susan’s discourse. Hence *Foe* is more a postcolonial countertext than a feminist one. Feminist concern is underplayed and sometimes used in complicity with the colonial design to thwart the cause of postcolonial silence in *Foe*. The problematization of the postcolonial is shouldered by the feminist and the feminist discourse loses its cutting edge on the way. Susan says of her constant companionship with Friday, the figure of postcolonial resistance, “I am the Sinbad of Persia and Friday is the tyrant riding on my shoulders. I walk with him, I eat with him, he watches me while I sleep. If I cannot be free of him, I will stifle” (148). Here the feminist discourse gets stifled when juxtaposed with the postcolonial problem.

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

Both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* are intertexts that address the woman’s discourse in its diversity. Primarily, they serve as feminist intertexts of the canonical narratives which they interrogate. The challenging voice of the feminist is brought out in rendering the point of view of the women narrators in both the texts. The women narrators occupy not only the feminist stand but other significant textual positions as well. Antoinette Cosway in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Susan Barton in *Foe* are figures of challenge and subversion. Antoinette Cosway serves as the site of inscription of patriarchy and colonialism and vocalizes the discourse of the gender and the race. She is the agent of critique of the same structures. She questions the dictates of patriarchy and achieves a destructive distortion of the edifices of the male dominated society that authorize the patriarchal world view. Christophine in *Wide Sargasso Sea* denies the paradigms of power of the hegemonic masculine discourses in her interrogation of Rochester, the icon of male dominated ideology. In *Foe* Susan symbolizes the feminist stand in her invasion of the island story and the displacement of Crusoan authority. Her quest for adventure and her desire for narrative control also make this text an unequivocal voice of the woman’s regeneration. Both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* represent the emancipated and empowered experience of womanhood and the feminist voice of self assertion through the chief women characters who signify the indomitable will to survive in a man’s world with their discourses intact.