Chapter 2

Implications and Explications

Wide Sargasso Sea and Foe as Texts

Intertextuality deals with the interdependence among texts by which independent texts are apprehended as intertexts. Along with their position and purpose as intertexts they are independent units of signification where each text functions as a signifier. Every text exists as a site of meaning, where it raises some pertinent questions even though the answers may be incomplete and indeterminate. Riffaterre suggests that the text is “always one of a kind, unique” (Text Production 2). He points out that the uniqueness of a text is an essential element of textuality. According to Barthes, a text is essentially concerned with its position within the work, “as a methodological field” (Barthes, “From Work to Text” 74) and it deals with the limits and demarcations of the discursive field. In spite of the divergent theoretical positions in which the text is held, its significance remains considerable as the text is the location for the play of multiple meanings of the elements that constitute textuality.

Jean Rhys’ Wide Sargasso Sea and J. M. Coetzee’s Foe are held in valid inter /countertextual relationship with canonical master narratives offering the view from ‘the othersides’. These texts are the location for the deployment of diverse elements of textuality as well which concentrate on aspects unique to the texts themselves as independent units of signification. This chapter tries to unravel the texts, Jean Rhys’ Wide Sargasso Sea and J.M Coetzee’s Foe and the various theoretical
concerns that run through the texts. They are apprehended here as texts and not just as counter/intertexts.

As the text is an encoded entity, it can be analysed from various levels. It is the literary text that comes first and foremost by which the generic features of the texts in question may be considered. Their interrelationship with the master narratives and the way various theoretical assumptions are deployed in the textual site becomes point of enquiry while dealing with the texts. On another level, the socio-cultural text that gets represented in the literary text is analysed. Along with the multiple levels in which the text operates, the texture of the works also comes into active play.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* are chosen as representing a twentieth century challenge to the conventions and the discursive systems of the previous era which retain a powerful hold on the psyche of the following generations as they represent the phallogocentric universe and its power structures. The authors of both texts have an ambivalent identity about them enabling them to question certainties without affiliations. As feminist intertexts *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* offer challenge to patriarchy and the texts which celebrate and glorify it. The interrogation does not end at this level. The texts also offer resistance to the imperialist colonial values inculcated through their prequels Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* and Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* respectively.

Both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* are intertexts in more ways than one. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* Jean Rhys’ mission is to validate the woman’s discourse and the West Indian postcolonial position while in *Foe* what Coetzee does is to make pertinent
the voice of woman and the discourse of the postcolonial South Africa. Both Rhys and Coetzee are noted for their interim position of non authority as their location in affiliation to white European culture and their moral and political preference for the local native ethos place them in a noman’s land. Both writers exist in supposed complicity with the dominant discourses while sharing the ideological location of the marginalized. Rhys writes back to the patriarchal and colonial hegemony through her rewriting of the unexplored story of Bertha Mason in Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte. As Jane Eyre is a realist master narrative, Wide Sargasso Sea also challenges certain inherent characteristics of realism by the agency of modernism. Jean Rhys’ achievement in the intertextual rendering of Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre consists in disrupting the authority of logo monocentric systems of the narrative of this realist text. Coetzee’s Foe performs assimilation enterprises by subjecting to interrogation the techniques of the pioneering force of Realism, Daniel Defoe. Here along with the author’s centrality Foe attempts to disrupt and subvert the conventions of canonicity and the dominant discourse of patriarchy and colonialism. Wide Sargasso Sea offers counter-discursive narrative in an informed celebration of voices that emerge from the native consciousness while Foe strategically establishes the self reflexivity of voices and narrative as exhibiting certain postmodern affiliations, not from the vantage point assigned from the location of hegemonic discourses, but from the open ended infinite stream of the postmodern.

2.1 The Textual Realm of Wide Sargasso Sea
Wide Sargasso Sea as a textual space is comprised of a number of theoretical assumptions and strategic manipulations. It is a feminist challenge to the ‘feminist’ assumptions of Jane Eyre. Along with being a challenge and critique, Wide Sargasso Sea is a commentary as well. The text makes strategic use of the methods of modernism to destructure the conventions of the realist methodology used to perfection in Jane Eyre. Wide Sargasso Sea writes back to the colonialist saga not only through its theme and characters, but also through the elaborate use of the gothic elements which allows the portrayal of the discourse of aberration. Rhys’ methods of characterization, plot pattern, the recurrent themes in her literary world and the strategic use of dreams and fantasies of the protagonist through which her agonies and ecstasies are portrayed also figure in the enquiry into its textual realm.

As Wide Sargasso Sea is an answer to many questions raised in Jane Eyre, reading the intricate web of Wide Sargasso Sea has to begin with a mention of Jane Eyre (1847) by Charlotte Bronte. As a nineteenth century Victorian novelist, Bronte succeeded in demolishing the commonplace image of a heroine by advocating a plain Jane as the protagonist of Jane Eyre as she is an unconventional heroine in the background of the Victorian social life which celebrated patriarchy along with capitalism. As Bonamy Dobree comments in the introduction to Jane Eyre, “And into the proud, a-moral, scornful, semi-aristocratic world…penetrates the insignificant seeming governess, Miss Eyre: she breaks up this world, it crumbles before her, she conquers it” (11). Jane has no pretensions to fine living and coy woman hood. She does not have any recommendations which will make her a darling of patriarchy. Jane flouts the conventions of Victorian prudery by being ordinary and expresses her
opinions fearlessly. But Bronte could never make her heroine powerful enough to
demolish the edifices of patriarchy and colonialism. The creation of the character of
Jane is a step towards affirming the woman’s self and an indirect challenge towards
patriarchy. Jane’s story portrays the trials and tribulations of a woman on life’s lonely
road, vying for survival in a predominantly man’s world. But the creation of a
character who embodies a direct challenge not only to patriarchy, but also to
colonialism could not be hoped for during the heyday of capitalism, patriarchy and
empire building. It was left to the bad girl of the story, Bertha Mason, the ghostlike
figure verging on the attic of the patriarchal mansion, to offer direct and vehement
destruction to the edifice. Bertha is denied a voice and persona in Jane Eyre as it is a
colonialist text and as its critique of patriarchy is subdued rather than vehement and
the racial issue is altogether ignored. She is relegated to the attic, to the upper storey
and equated to a beast, confined to non human levels of existence.

While analysing the creative processes of the women writers of the 19th
century, it can be seen that there is a lurking presence of an aberrant woman in many
of them in the form of mad, insane women caught precariously between sanity and
lunacy. Catherine in Wuthering Heights and Bertha in Jane Eyre are examples. These
presences can be explained as resulting from the need of these women writers to
express their dissent with the dominating systems without being conspicuous. Just as
the age is noted for the authoritative sway of patriarchy and colonialism, it is also an
age of awareness among women consequent to the multilevel development in society
in which they were a part. The fruits of education and literacy and the resultant sense
of empowerment and expression may account for the renewed awareness of their own
selves in women. But at the same time, it was a singularly debilitating experience to write like a woman as the literary scene was flooded with the misrepresentations of women infecting the female consciousness in the subtest way.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their critical work *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* speak about an inside story in the apparently conforming narratives of women writers. These texts present a woman’s story on close analysis but a very different one from what is apparently stated. They mention the presence, in nineteenth century women writers’ works, of an untold story containing “a secret message of literature by women” (Gilbert and Gubar 75). Writers like Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, the Bronte Sisters and George Eliot display a recurrent character pattern in their works where one could perceive vaguely developed, complex, subhuman women characters, powerful enough to destroy the conventional edifices and magnificent structures like Thornfield Hall in *Jane Eyre* and Mandalay in Daphne Du Maurier’s *Rebecca* and threaten the authoritative representations of male characters whom patriarchy has been relentlessly nourishing and cherishing. These extraordinary women characters with shady levels of existence are represented as mad women hovering on the attics of magnificent mansions far from the world of ordinary men and women beyond the rational realm of masculine logic.

Gilbert and Gubar states thus:

> As we explore nineteenth century literature, we will find that this mad woman emerges over and over again from the
mirrors women writers hold up to both their own natures and to their own visions of natures. Even the most apparently conservative and decorous women writers obsessively create independent characters who seek to destroy all patriarchal structures which both their authors and their authors’ submissive heroines seem to accept as inevitable (77-78).

The mad woman in *Jane Eyre*, the confined wife of Mr. Rochester, is the archetypal figure who stands simultaneously for confinement and revolt against repression in the literary works of nineteenth century women writers. Gilbert and Gubar argue that the recurrent images, themes and figures especially that of madness or psychical disturbance of Otherness prevail, articulating distinctly female experience and resisting dominant construction of patriarchy. “Of course, by projecting their rebellious impulses, not into their heroines but into mad and monstrous women (who are suitably punished in the course of the novel or poem) female authors dramatize their own self division, their desire both to accept the structures of patriarchal society and to reject them” (Gilbert and Gubar 77-78)..

Monika Kaup calls this “mad intertextuality” which gives “an open exchange between the domain of literature and a universe of intersecting scientific, cultural, ideological and literary discourse or voices…merging and overlay of those heterogeneous voices within what we usually regard as a single literary text” (12-13). Kaup also notices that a historically chronological approach will reveal how the
cultural construction of women and madness alter in each period. If, in the nineteenth
century, madness was considered as a psychological and biological disturbance in tune
with the patriarchal notion of man as rational and women irrational and therefore
insane, it undergoes a revolutionary rethinking in 20th century with madness being
thought as a construct which serves to marginalize and silence the characters in the
margins. Hence madness in Antoinette in Wide Sargasso Sea is her symbol of
resistance, while in Bertha in Jane Eyre it is of aberration.

The nineteenth century literary scene was also flooded with the
misrepresentation of women that women writers found it necessary to address this
issue through their works in which they tried to move away from the clichéd
representations of female characters and feminine emotions. Charlotte Bronte once
remarked:

If men could really see us as we really are, they would be a
little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often
under an illusion about women; they do not read them in a
true light; they misapprehend them, both for good and evil;
their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel;
their bad woman almost always a fiend (Shirley 10).

Charlotte Bronte herself was making a strong argument for women’s freedom
through the character of Jane who relentlessly rebelled against patriarchy in her
struggle for survival in an essentially man’s world. When Jane Eyre was published
amidst prudish Victorians, it created a startling effect in society. The figure of the
plain Jane born to middle class parents climbing ladders of success and respectability one after another was more than Victorians could ever tolerate as Jane lacked a lot of attributes preferred by patriarchy. There was some kind of surprise and wonder as the work was published with a male pseudonym like many female counterparts of Charlotte Bronte. *Jane Eyre* itself was a novel of female protest and Jane was sufficiently feministic enough to downplay male ideas of beauty and accomplishments, addressing issues of growing up in a patriarchal family structure. But Charlotte Bronte could not make her destructively feministic. When Bronte gives Bertha Mason the flaming candle to burn Thornfield Hall, Bronte was probably fulfilling her own desire and the need to rebel, which she could not achieve through the conforming protagonist of her text, *Jane Eyre*. On another level there is Bronte’s tacit complicity with the dominant ideology in the bestial representation of the Caribbean Creole which Jean Rhys felt the need to question and challenge. Sudha Shastri remarks, “Bertha is a white Creole and belongs to a non-privileged social class, which goes a long way towards divesting her of sympathy from her author and the readership the author is addressing” (95). Though Bronte interrogates a particular system of hegemony, she becomes the supporter and perpetrator of another kind of domination, making herself the target of attack from the Rhysian perspective.

The Thornfield section of Jane’s story and her love relationship with Rochester serve as the starting point for Rhys’ text. Rhys’ Antoinette Cosway is a development on Jane Eyre with reference to her position as an agent of the feminist and postcolonial disruption of the canonical narrative. The racial dimension of *Wide Sargasso Sea* adds the extra edge of vehement subversion to the subtle satire on patriarchy represented in
Jane Eyre. Though Jane’s character is a definite improvement on the traditional male ideas of beauty, character and conduct, it would take another century’s ride for her to catch up with Antoinette Cosway. In Jane Eyre, Jane’s achievement is at the cost of Bertha. Antoinette and Jane represent diverse feminisms as Jane’s colonizer status renders her more legitimate than the gendered postcolonial position of Bertha Antoinette. With Rhys’ revision Antoinette achieves what Jane could not. The questions raised in the nineteenth century with the publication of Jane Eyre were answered in the twentieth century with Wide Sargasso Sea. Rhys’ text takes Bertha’s ending written by Charlotte Bronte as ‘given’. The reader knows at the outset that Bertha Mason or Antoinette Cosway will set fire to the patriarchal mansion and will die leaping from the roof. The ending is inevitable. “But the telling of the story from Antoinette’s perspective demonstrates that her madness and death are not inevitable in other terms” (Ruth Robbins 44). In Jane Eyre, Bertha’s story becomes one of tainted heredity; she is “the true daughter of an infamous mother” (Jane Eyre 345). But Wide Sargasso Sea directs the trusting reader of the earlier narrative to question this point of view. In Antoinette’s words “There is always another side, always” (Wide Sargasso Sea 106).

Wide Sargasso Sea is the last but much celebrated novel of Jean Rhys, published in 1966. This text marks the re entry of Jean Rhys into the limelight of literary fame. For her it was an attempt at pitting “two cultures and two genders” (Letters 156) against one another. The title denotes the gap, the wide expanse of ideological conflict that separates the world of woman from that of man, the sea of convention that can’t be crossed easily. It also denotes the expanse of unresolved
conflict of the colonial and the postcolonial. Jean Rhys begins where Charlotte Bronte has left and she voices the discourse of Bertha Mason by giving her alter ego Antoinette Cosway, the control of the narrative, letting her tell the story from her point of view, both as a woman and as a colonized being, subjected to dual hegemony of patriarchy and colonialism. Rochester represents the colonial, patriarchal authority impervious to the discourse of the doubly marginal being, of the colonized and the gendered.

Jean Rhys had read *Jane Eyre* when she was a young girl. The picture of the unfortunate woman condemned to lunacy and isolation had moved her in to an awareness of her own precarious existence as a Creole woman that she wanted to write her a life. Rhys felt that literary texts with political motives are capable of depicting the native culture in a stereotypical manner. She writes, “Now I am almost as wary of books as I am of people. They are capable of pushing you into the limbo of the forgotten. They can tell lies –and vulgar, trivial lies- and when they are so many all saying the same thing they can shout you down, and make you doubt not only your memory, but your senses” (*Temps Perdi* 145). Rhys considers the work of Charlotte Bronte one such lie and she takes it upon her to revise and recreate. As Ellen Friedman says,“ Rhys enters and re-imagines Bronte’s text- glossing and subverting, reversing and transforming it- writing it to her own time and her own frame of reference” (117).

Jean Rhys, born in Dominica of the Caribbean islands, writes her own life in this saga of Antoinette. The motive for writing Antoinette’s story lies in the tragic
position of her insanity. The text is an enquiry into the causes of Antoinette’s lunacy
and the desire to bring her to the centre stage from the attic of the previous text.

Rhys puts her motive thus, “I have read and re-read Jane Eyre of course and I am sure
that the character must be built up” (Letters 156). Rhys subverts the premises of
Jane Eyre in her revision and sets right the misrepresentation of the racially and
gendered marginal in Wide Sargasso Sea. Rhys writes in her Letters:

....The Creole in Charlotte Bronte’s novel is a lay figure,
repulsive which does not matter, and not once alive which
does. ....She must be right on stage. She must be at least
plausible with a past, the reason why Mr. Rochester treats her so
abominably and feels justified, the reason he thinks she is mad
and why of course she goes mad, and even the reason why she
tries to set everything on fire, and eventually succeeds. Take a
look at Jane Eyre. That unfortunate death of a Creole. I’m
fighting mad to write her story (156).

Reading of a text is to be undertaken by analyzing the elements that constitute
textuality. The plot, characterization, the major themes, the locale and other devices
used in the work become the subject of enquiry in the analysis of textual structure.
Wide Sargasso Sea deals with the narrative of Antoinette Cosway, Bertha Mason of
Jane Eyre, the condemned first wife of Rochester, relegated to the attic of Thornfield
Hall in Jane Eyre. Jane wonders:
What Crime was this that lived incarnate in this sequestered mansion and could neither be expelled nor subdued by the owner? What mystery that broke out, now in fire and now in blood at the deadest hours of the night? What creature was it that matched in an ordinary woman’s face and shape, uttered the voice now of a mocking demon, and anon of a carrion seeking bird of prey? (*Jane Eyre* 243).

This is how Jane Eyre the much loved heroine of *Jane Eyre* perceives Bertha Mason, the Creole wife of Rochester in the attic of Thornfield Hall. The superficially feminist dynamics of *Jane Eyre*, which disregards the interaction between gender and race, stands to correction in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Antoinette Cosway’s Creole and catholic background, her childhood in the West Indies, courtship and marriage to Rochester, her early happiness with him, Rochester’s suspicions of the supposed madness that runs in the family and Antoinette’s final transport to England as Bertha and the sense of displacement she feels, her confinement as a lunatic in the attic of Thornfield Hall and the powerful expression of anger and revenge by setting fire to the mansion form the plot of the text. The story ends in her revenge and to which the end of *Jane Eyre* is like an epilogue.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea* the story unfolds in three parts. The first part is narrated by the protagonist Antoinette. It discusses her sense of alienation, the feeling of impending disaster and doom and the hatred of the native blacks against the half
colonized Creoles in the light of the Emancipation Act of 1833. Part two is narrated by the unnamed Rochester figure, apprehensive and anxious about the unfamiliar land with its intense characteristics and his beautiful but strange bride. In this section, Antoinette intrudes into part of his textual space establishing her control of the text over the patriarchal hero who had a whole text to record his point of view. Part three presents the text in its colonial background where the narration is carried out by Antoinette and Grace Pool, the nurse who looks after her in the mansion of Rochester. In part three Antoinette’s narration is not from the familiar location of Dominica but from the cold attic of English patriarchal home where she is perceived as “what it was, whether beast or human being one could not, at first sight tell: it grovelled, seemingly on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal; but it was covered with clothing and a quantity of dark grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its face” (*Jane Eyre* 321). Part three is a point of intersection with the parent text as the character of Jane is presented here through the vision of Bertha. It is an answer to the representation of Bertha through the eyes of Jane in the parent text. “It was then that I saw her- the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her” (*Wide Sargasso Sea* 247). All the three sections are intricately interconnected, though the narrative personae differ in each one. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a completion of the Antoinette story through the three parts. The revisionist strategy of Jean Rhys becomes more effective by making Bertha not only a victim of patriarchy, but also of colonialism. She is made to be the object of double colonization which will make the decolonization also doubly powerful. “As woman and colonial,
she challenges assumptions which commanded universal or natural status, examining these with the eye of the outcast, the object, the other” (Gregg 409).

The setting is typically West Indian. The West Indian locale is very consciously selected as it allows Rhys to explore her native place and engage with all the motifs of oppression that it evokes as a native and as a woman. The West Indian landscape and its intensely coloured nature is pitted against the cold, “card board world where everything is coloured brown or dark red or yellow that has no light in it” (*Wide Sargasso Sea* 236) which is England. It is a place where “gold is the idol they worship” (246). The cultural dichotomy accounts for the wide sea of difference and antipathy between the two continents. Bertha’s dislocation in England is complemented by Rochester’s alienation on the island. The native islands with its ‘Obeah’ and ‘Voodoo’ practices among whose rites and rituals Antoinette finds her peace, comfort and security is anathema to the white community as exemplified by the revulsion that Rochester exhibits towards them. He says about the behavior of Baptiste, the black servant, “He scowled at me then, I thought … However much I paid the Jamaican servants I would never buy discretion” (215).

There is an unbridgeable gap between the two cultures as suggested by the title, an ocean of undercurrents and violent tides that may topple the less empowered. Amidst this gap, caught between the two cultures that never meet, is placed the insecure self of Antoinette, insecure sans wealth, love and confidence. The feeling of being an outsider which Rhys underwent as a white Creole went into the making and placing of Antoinette in her likeness and identical ideological location. Antoinette
Cosway is given a story of her own which traces her background in Dominica in a Creole family looked down upon by the blacks and the whites alike. Living in insecurity and alienation, Antoinette has attachment only to the black servant Christophine while her mother Annette grows insane day by day as the harshness of the real world is unbearable to her and as she nostalgically lives in the ruins and ruminations of the colonial past unable to come to terms with the contemporary reality.

At the beginning itself the atmosphere, the background is set. The Creole descent puts Antoinette in a very unfavourable position. The theme of exile runs through the entire textual space. There is a sense of non-belonging that sets her apart from the life around her. “The girlish narrator lives in the interface between the privileged white colonists and the blacks” (Magill 434). She lives on the crumbling estate of her Creole mother, an “inbred, decadent and expatriate” (Wyndham, “Introduction” 10) existence suffering displacement and alienation. The girl grows up among the disapproval of their white neighbours and growing hostility of the blacks. Antoinette muses, “My father, visitors, horses, feeling safe in bed – all belonged to the past” (Wide Sargasso Sea 15). There is a dreamy otherworldliness which makes her the mistress of every ‘elsewhere’. She is steady in her unsteadiness, immobile in her mobility, unchanging in her flux, firm in her flexibility, as the other of Jane Eyre, the favourite heroine of the realist text.

Along with external reasons, the decay of the past glory and the growing insanity of her mother make the little girl’s existence a very precarious one. Attempts
of Antoinette for affiliation with her mother were responded with cold
disinterestedness as the mother herself was an alienated, displaced being who could
never offer safety and security to anyone, even to her daughter. Annette being such a
mother, the little girl looks for companionship elsewhere. In the unintelligible chanting
of the devoted black servant Christophine or in the cruel hatred and impersonal
distance in the eyes of Tia, her friend, she tries to locate and identify herself. The
destruction of the Coulibri estate, which is the fatal consequence of the antagonism of
the blacks results in the loss of a home for Annette and Antoinette. Marriage to the
young and handsome Rochester, the husband from the other side of the world who
marries for money and not for love seems to give her a false security for some time.
But the intense colours of Antoinette’s personality reciprocated with cold rationality
on the part of Rochester make them strangers to each other. She turns to take refuge in
the only haven offered to her through her mother’s example, the safe realm of insanity.
Being subjected by and subservient to the English temper was spiritual death for any
West Indian and Antoinette chooses to be mad, threatening patriarchy, colonialism and
conformity and sets fire to the mansion in a moment of visionary gleam.

Thus in Antoinette Rhys chooses a previously peripheral character to narrate
most of the story and shows forth patriarchy and colonialism as the Sargasso Sea of
conflict and oppression from the point of view of a woman and a marginalized Creole.
Because of their interim position in society the Creoles are not even positioned to
challenge the white oppressors. The Creole women live in complicity with the whites
because of their marital relationship with them. The Creole women pay for the
European or the whites’ cruelty by being the crux of the black hatred. Elizabeth Harrel
talks about the victim status of the Creole women in her essay “The Paradoxes of Belonging: The White West Indian in Fiction” thus:

In the English speaking Caribbean these women must bear the guilt of the horrors of slavery inflicted by their own white ancestors upon the people whose country they call their own ... England and Europe wishing to obliterate from their memories the part they played in the brutal history of the Caribbean have set them adrift with this guilt (281).

Here Antoinette is identified with the marginal and the marginalized people from the colonies while Rochester is the imperial England insensitive to the psychical machinations of the colonized milieu except as a source and basis of financial support and material comfort.

The strategic use of the West Indies as the locale renders it as a text letting various contexts prevail. It serves as the symbol of alienation that the protagonist suffers. The West Indian background also becomes a context for deliberating on the emotions of fear, hatred, oppression, love, revenge and displacement. It is an apt text of cultural antipathy and serves as a realm in which anger, hatred and distrust prevail in every relationship and the consequent insecurity that the marginal ones suffer.

The sense of doom and danger is aptly conveyed through characterization. The ‘misfit’ stature of Antoinette is set by means of parallelism and contrast. She runs a course parallel and similar to her mother in her flight to doom and destruction.
Antoinette’s “cockroach” (*Wide Sargasso Sea* 157) existence is paralleled by her mother’s destiny as both are victimized by the same forces of oppression. The character of Antoinette’s mother Annette serves as a precursor to Antoinette’s course of life. The mad, wretched state of victimization to which Annette is subjected and the insecurity through which she drags her life foreshadows the trajectory of Antoinette’s life. Her inheritance is not confined to the estates alone, it also includes a heritage of insanity and a family tradition of suffering, alienation and betrayal, hostility and consequent anguish and insecurity.

Another character who serves as a contrast to Antoinette is Christophine, the attendant maid of both Annette and Antoinette. Christophine is the personification of power though the realm she occupies is that of the marginalized native slave. She is rendered powerful because of her position of complete marginality in contrast to the semi marginality of Antoinette which in practice is worse than the peripheral existence of the natives. The natives are not expected to comply in total obedience with the wishes of the colonizers. They are free to retain their own position of open rivalry and conflict. They are active signs of protest and challenge of the dominant discourses. Antoinette achieves that stature of open revolt and freedom from complicity only after the course of her life is run a full term where her revolt can open only possibilities of death for her. Christophine is steeped in her native Martinique tradition and speaks a different language from that of the Creoles. As Antoinette says, “The girls from the bayside who sometimes helped with the washing and cleaning were terrified of her” (21). There is a transmission of power in the way the figure of Christophine is sketched. She sees through the darker side of Rochester’s character and it is to her that
Antoinette turns in times of trouble. “She smelled…so warm and comforting to me” (141). As a contrast to Antoinette, Christophine is a sure and conspicuous presence of revolt and interrogation and her ‘Otherness’ is one of power and strength. It is she who questions Rochester, the symbol of patriarchal and colonialist prowess in her virulent criticism of the way he treats Antoinette and the pretence involved in his marriage with Antoinette. “Everybody know[sic] that you marry her for money and you take it all…Oh. I see that the first time I look at you. You young but already you hard. You fool the girl” (201). Christophine carries in her the hatred and distrust of the people and terrain of England that does not change with the circumstances, while Antoinette’s position in the median makes her conjure pictures of beautiful England along with the fearful uncertainties of its people and land. Antoinette’s image of England is from the books, the ones which give factual information:

...England, rosy pink in the geography book map, but on the page opposite the words are closely crowded, heavy looking. Exports, coal, iron, wool. Then Imports and Character of Inhabitants. Names, Essex, Chelmsford on the Chelmer. The Yorkshire and Lincolnshire Wolds. Wolds?

Does that mean hills? How High?(144-5).

The picture of England is intertwined with feelings of non-belonging which she transports from her position in the attic of Jane Eyre. “For I know that house where I will be cold and not belonging, the bed I shall lie in has red curtains and I have slept there many times before, long ago. How long ago? In that bed I will dream the end of my
dream” (144-5). Her vision of life in England is associated with images that vanish. They all convey a transient sense of happiness, with the picture of the rose, the snow and the swans. “But my dream had nothing to do with England and I must not think like this, I must remember about chandeliers and dancing, about swans and roses and snow. And snow” (145).

If Christophine is a foil to the situation, character and persona of Antoinette, another character who is subjected to revision in this text is Rochester himself. He is presented as a nameless Rochester figure. But before Rochester can claim the story for himself, the narrative has been claimed by Antoinette. Rochester is the representation of the colonialist and patriarchal world, aspiring to material heights through property acquisition and the marriage with the marginal Creole is only a means to that end. The image of the aristocratic gentleman victimized by an insane Creole wife undergoes a sudden transformation to the suave villain who plots the downfall of his wife consciously. The transformation of Antoinette of Dominica to the Bertha of England achieves a paradigm shift in the case of Rochester too as his image from the hero crumbles to that of a mean villain. He literally becomes the master of ‘Thorn- field’, a field of obstacles and hardships for any gendered or racial Other. Tia, Baptiste and the other native black male and female characters who appear in the text represent the duality in the native attitude, of hatred and anger on the one side for the master class and on the other side a genuine concern for the Creoles caught off balance in the struggle for survival. Almost all the masculine characters are sketched as insensitive to the female world symbolizing the Otherness of women as an all pervasive phenomena prevalent in all walks of life.
The subversive revision achieved in Rhys’ text is corrective of the world of Bronte not only with reference to the ideological correction of the dual yardsticks used in the mis/representation of women - in what apparently is a feminist text- as seen from the simultaneous rendering of the figure of Jane as privileged over the shadowed figure of Bertha. Rhys’ text also attempts to correct the wrong and unconvincing portrayal of the character of Bertha. Rhys says in her letters, “I will struggle and make it as convincing as possible” (Letters 296).

Besides characterization and her use of the West Indies as a locale, Rhys’ powerful language and the distinctive way it is used also contribute to its effective inter/textuality. There is a harmonious combination of the poetic and the formal in her text. The language is easy and powerful. It changes with the mood of the characters and their identities get shaped by the way they talk. The beginning of Antoinette’s narration shows forth her loneliness and insecurity while the language and tone of Annette is one of frantic race through the intensity of momentary flashes of life, now sane, now insane. “‘Oh, let me alone’, she would say, ‘let me alone’ and after I knew that she talked aloud to herself I was little afraid of her” (Wide Sargasso Sea 19). The language and narrative style of Rochester begin on a note of uncertain and ambivalent sense of strangeness, confusing and exhilarating at the same time. The novelty and the feeling of innocent bewilderment soon give way to suspicion, plotting and a sense of power and mastery as the strategic change in the use of the tone and language would exemplify. The beginning of Rochester’s narration goes thus, “So it was all over, the advance and retreat, the doubts and hesitations. Everything finished, for better or for worse” (81). Later it changes to a monologue on hate:
I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain.
I hated the sunsets of whatever colour, I hated its beauty
and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its
indifference and the cruelty which was part of its
loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the
magic and the loveliness (227).

The language of Christophine thwarts all the conventions of the hegemonic
centrists systems as the tongue of every day commerce for her is the French dialect of
Patois deemed inferior by the white masters. She is truly a child of the native spirit as
her songs and slang is peculiar to her and her people. Christophine is a formidable
figure of the postcolonial spirit and inhabits a realm where the discourse of hegemony
cannot intimidate her. Her language and tone vary from a sincere concern and
affection with which she addresses Antoinette through indulgent censure with Annette
to cold and distant precision while challenging the Englishness of Rochester.

Rhys uses the devices of dream sequences to sketch the character of Antoinette
and her course of life caught between the realms of uncertain reality and the assured
solace of the world of dreams. The reality of the fire in Thornfield Hall in *Jane Eyre*
is the dream of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea.* “That was the third time I had my
dream, and it ended. I know now that the flight of steps leads to this room where I lie
watching the woman asleep with her head on her arms. In my dream I waited till she
began to snore…” (245). Antoinette lives more in her dreams than in actuality as the
reality is unbearable. Freud quotes Hildebrandt in his *The Interpretation of Dreams*
thus, “A dream is something completely severed from the reality experienced in the waking life, something ...separated from real life by an impassable gulf” (43). The dreams serve a concrete purpose of symbolizing various motives: in part one it is Antoinette’s alienation that is conveyed through the dream. In part two the dream sequence conveys her sense of doom presupposed in her marriage with Rochester while in part three the dream is the reality of the destruction of the patriarchal and colonial premises.

Rhys makes effective use of the symbols in rendering the text intelligible. The frangipani tree, the tree of life, the looking-glass, the picture of 'The Miller’s Daughter', the sea, the red dress and the pool are all powerful signifiers conveying the underlying theme and the course of destiny of the characters. There is fluidity in the way the themes are handled using the signs that convey more than words would ever do. The frangipani is associated with the images of Antoinette’s childhood and it also bears the first signs of her victim position. It is also associated in the consciousness of Rochester with the typical island smells. Antoinette in her primal beauty and innocence reminds him of the frangipani in full bloom. But it also serves as a site for addressing the blacks’ anger and hatred of the Creoles. It is under the frangipani tree that Annette’s horse lay dead. The strong scent of the flowers is indicative of the intense emotional conflicts that dominate the lives of the characters. The tree of life bears the image of the archetypal tree of life in the Garden of Eden bringing into context the sin and the resultant fall of Man. The tree of life for Antoinette is her sense of security and is powerfully associated with the uninterrupted life in Coulibri. It symbolizes a state of unsullied innocence in company with the
people who love her, who matter to her. The tree of life signifies a life before the advent of external forces- the whites in the form of Mr. Mason and the liberated blacks after the Emancipation Act- into their poor, insignificant life in communion with the wildness around them. “I am safe… There is the tree of life in the garden and the wall green with moss...I am safe from strangers” (Wide Sargasso Sea 29). The tree of life is associated with Antoinette’s moments of awareness and realization at the end of the text when she decides to do what she must do. Along with other intense images of her childhood like the figures of Tia and Christophine, she visualizes the tree of life in flames offering once again the security she had wished for all through her life, but which always eluded her.

Another symbol running throughout the text is the image of ‘the looking-glass’. It is associated with Antoinette’s sense of identity. The reflection in the glass goes on shaping her personality and the change in her persona occurs with the image in her reflection. The looking glass combines vision with revision and signifies the self image of Antoinette and the way she appears to others. It juxtaposes illumination, reflection and destruction in a lone signifier and is intensely and concretely associated with the nuances of Antoinette’s destiny and her psychological conflicts. Her identification with the situation and personality of Tia is conveyed through this image as “It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking- glass” (54). In the honeymoon cottage at Granbois the dominant furniture is a “large looking- glass” (92). This signifier is associated with all the stages of Antoinette’s life. The large looking- glass in her bedroom during the early stages of her life with Rochester is connotative of the feeling of happiness and (false) security that Antoinette feels with Rochester. It is the same
glass that reflects her change of moods and her slow and gradual progress to insanity. Towards the end of part two, as Rochester begins to exert his colonial ways of mastery, he revels in denying her the use of the looking-glass which suggests the denial of the assertion of her personality and recognition as a human being. He muses, “She will not laugh in the sun again. She will not dress up and smile at herself in that damnable looking-glass. So pleased, so satisfied” (218).

In part three as Bertha, she lives without the things that characterize her. The person and the personality of Antoinette sans her looking-glass have given way to Bertha. The absence of the looking-glass is the loss of a sense of the self. “… and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, pretty cloths and her looking-glass” (235). The looking-glass is essentially associated with self identity and in the patriarchal mansion where she is imprisoned amidst hegemonic, manipulative structures she is unable to retain her identity. “There is no looking-glass here and I don’t know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself….But the glass was between us - hard, cold and misted over with my breath” (236). Antoinette’s loneliness and displacement is also conveyed by the denial of the looking-glass.

The picture of ‘The Miller’s Daughter’ is a symbol of the dream to be one with the English culture, where the divide of the race will not thwart the Creole psyche. It is a prominent picture evoked every now and then in the frustrating moments of Antoinette’s life. Even when it signifies aspiration to the English culture, the picture
lays bare the wide Sargasso Sea between the cultures that can never be bridged. It is also associated with the sense of feeling safe at home as it was a very conspicuous thing associated with their family in its days of togetherness which showed forth the Englishness of Mr. Mason against the non-Englishness of Annette and Antoinette.

‘Red’ is a much repeated colour in the text. It is suggestive of the intense passion for life of the female protagonist and the violent rejection and upheavals in her life. The colour of the flowers of the tree of life is flaming ‘red’ in Antoinette’s home at Coulibri. The desires of Antoinette are associated with the colour ‘red’. In the convent while she cross stitches she intends to “write my name in fire red” (65). The land is steeped in the colour red and in the last section of the text Antoinette demands for her red dress. This red dress serves as a symbol of her identity and her passion for life. As Antoinette says, “the red dress is the colour of fire and of sunset. The colour of flamboyant flowers” (242). It is something that provides a kind of concrete reality to a person living in the abstraction of the expectation of others and dreams of self. She says, “But something you can touch and hold like my red dress, that has a meaning” (242). It is also associated with her unrealized first love for Sandi, her colourd cousin. The red dress for Antoinette is her identity and self while to Rochester it makes her “intemperate and unchaste” (243). Wearing the red dress becomes an act of standing up against the dictates of the male world to which female sexuality is aberrant and abominable. The entire final Antoinette section is steeped in red colour—Antoinette demanding her red dress, the colour of the blood of Richard Mason who is attacked by Antoinette, the redness of fire “reminding me of something I must do” (245), the large room with the red carpet and the curtains, the sky which turned red
and the red flames putting the colonial, patriarchal edifices into ashes and establishes that red is the colour of life and death.

The sun and the sea are also dominant symbols evoking multiple associations. They are effectively used throughout the text conveying the feeling of safety and succour for Antoinette while the loss of it is associated with her imprisonment and insecurity. She feels secure in the presence of the sea. She says “And the barrier of the sea. I am safe. I am safe from strangers” (29). In her cardboard house in England she hopes that the “sea would come in” (237) delivering her from the manacles of hate and domination. The sea is an agent of transformation in Antoinette’s life as she feels that “when I woke it was a different sea. Colder. It was that night, I think, that we changed course and lost our way to England” (237). The image of the sea dominates right from the title where it stands for the wide expanse of cultural and gender divide which may appear initially inviting, but may conceal currents of unforeseen magnitude. The sun stands for all that is good, bright and passionate in Antoinette’s life. There are occasions when Rochester cannot stand the heat of the sun while Antoinette revels in sunshine. Their passionate moments are indicated by the sun shining on the young couple. “Only the sun was there to keep us company” (118). The sunny West Indies is pitched against the cold England where sun never shone on the Other. Antoinette’s happiness is intensely associated with the shining sun as she imagines that the house gets haunted after sunset. It precludes what happens to Antoinette as Bertha in *Jane Eyre* as the ghost in the attic in Thornfield Hall. Christophine tells Rochester, “She is Creole girl, and she have [sic] the sun in her” (208). The dictates of the colonialist representative denies her the spiritual sources of her rejuvenation, by taking her away
from the sun and the sea of the West Indies. Rochester decides vehemently that “she
will not laugh in the sun again” (218). His decision to deny her the sun is a clear
spiritual death to her and culminates in her imprisonment in the dark attic of
Thornfield Hall. “No sun… No sun. The weather’s changed” (219). The weather that
changed with the absence of the sun is the destiny of Antoinette. The world of
imagery and symbols are effectively intertwined with the major themes of love and
hate, of alienation and attachment, of nature and people and of domination and revolt.
The symbols are the texts unravelling the hidden magic of Antoinette’s universe,
contributing structurally to the poetic fluidity of the text.

Counter-discursive writers do not just write through character and plot but via
genre as well. Jean Rhys makes elaborate use of the gothic to topple the sustained
realist narrative and to enable the questioning of the norm as a gothic novel celebrates
the deviant and the aberrant. “Moving from early eighteenth century stereotypes of the
heroine to twentieth century interrogation of domesticity and patriarchy the Gothic
has always enabled discussion and representation at various levels of female sexuality,
transgression and gender based boundary blurring” (Lane, “Performing Gender” 82).
Like acclaimed gothic novels, Wide Sargasso Sea evokes reference to landscape. The
locality and setting assume an anthropomorphic existence. The land is the subtext and
the background to which the protagonists feel drawn which is at once overpoweringly
beautiful and mysteriously menacing. In place of persons and characters that dominate
in a realist text, colours and smells predominate in a gothic narrative. This projective
method of landscape description sketching the location for the deployment of
character is a valuable tool among the gothic writers as seen in Wide Sargasso Sea.
The location conveys doom and danger as much as words. The Caribbean jungle provides a strikingly visual and textured terror and a convenient mirror in which to reflect the inner turmoil of the two main characters. The presence of ruins in *Wide Sargasso Sea* also affirms the gothic element.

Rhys’ use and control of the machinery of terror evoked through magic and superstition is remarkable in the rendering of the atmosphere of the gothic. The characterization also agrees to the general conventions of the gothic narrative. Though Rochester is presented as a hero, youthful and fresh but with an overdeveloped sense of money and fortune in the beginning, the series of shocks he receives in the superstitious and menacing land of intense colours transform him to a scheming villain who sells his soul for financial gains. In a similar vein, Antoinette is not a raging mad woman as Bertha but a “complex amalgam of two stock figures of the gothic…the persecuted woman and the femme fatale” (Luengo 233). Antoinette possesses almost all the characteristics of a young woman persecuted and alienated, fleeing from the situations that will colonize and imprison her and living like an exile in her own land. The persecution and the flight are as much internal as it is external. From Antoinette’s early status of innocent victim she moves unsteadily to one of dangerous womanhood where like her ancestors she must be watched as she combines in herself sexuality and madness. Woven through this structure, Jean Rhys creates around Antoinette and Rochester a sense of damnation that grows naturally out of the narrative action.

The counter-discursive text does not just look for alternates with regard to race and gender. In its course it critiques the realist notions of the narrative and structure
and the theories of fiction holding sway in the nineteenth century fictional realm. As the revision of a text which is an essential symbol of the movement of realism, *Wide Sargasso Sea* challenges it with the techniques of modernism. Rhys’ life in Paris and her close association with Ford Madox Ford seem to have initiated her into the modernist movement and her fiction reveals her effective use of the strategies of modernism. The elements of psychological realism and the use of the stream of consciousness method, the aberrant central character, the narrative pattern and the intense and integral use of the imagery together make this text a modernist one.

Aberration from normalcy is a prerequisite of modernism. The heroine Antoinette Cosway is an aberrant woman living in a blaze of unreality, enshrouded in mysteries and a dreamy otherness. Antoinette’s consciousness is revealed through the vague fancies, nameless agonies and faceless dreams which torment her. Her mind and heart are unfolded not in the steady first person narrative of realistic fiction where events follow one another in close, harmonious succession. The impressions on Antoinette’s mind are in a jumble and their heterogeneity sometimes negates one another in the struggle for dominance and leaves her blank in the end. The thought processes which form the mental pictures of intense colours are neither coherent nor united. They impinge on the subjective consciousness whenever they please. Like the ‘avant-garde’ creations the attempt here is to ‘make it new’. Antoinette is no more the prized possession of patriarchy. She does not fulfill any of the prerequisites of perfection or ideal virtue. Along with her character, Antoinette’s background too makes her aberrant. The wild, ‘uncivilized’ place with its intensity of “blue-green” (*Wide Sargasso Sea* 87) makes her a mistress of aberration and she becomes a blank
which the sequential impressions of a realist world can never fill up. It takes this modernist aberrant heroine to let loose the attack on the structural edifices of patriarchy.

In narrative techniques also, *Wide Sargasso Sea* closely follows modernist leanings. The narration is never coherent and organized. It follows different directions and touches upon many incidents, actual and imagined in a heterogeneous manner. All characters claim for themselves the unreality of a dreamy existence. The modernist method of presenting characters verging on the borders of sanity is seen here. Both the leading female figures, Antoinette and Annette are beings who have long ago sought escape in the safe confines of insanity. These two characters walk through the corridors of realistic, patriarchal and colonial edifices in an unpracticed way plotting insanely the destruction of these structures. The leading male figure is the young Rochester who himself is a paranoid. Far from being normal he moves through the conflicting, passionate West Indian wilds frightened of black witches and mad women alike. Another character is Christophine whose intense black complexion and the practice of black magic, possessed chants, dissipated laughter and disjointed songs add to the eerie unreal atmosphere.

The traces of literary impressionism, an important manifestation of modernism can also be traced in the texture of this work. As Magill points out:

> Impressionist fiction characteristically employs limited and unreliable narration, follows a flow of associated ideas leaping freely in time and space, aims to render the
impression of a scene vividly so as to make the reader see
it as if it were before his or her eyes, and artfully selects
and juxtaposes seemingly unrelated scenes and episodes so
that the reader must construct the connections and
relationships that make the story intelligible (434).

Rhys’ text exemplifies the strategies of impressionist fiction in which the
mainspring of the plot is some puzzling or shocking event that has already happened
when the story begins. The story proceeds in concentric circles closing on the crux or
the complication of the affair whose true significance becomes clear only later. In
Wide Sargasso Sea the main element of the plot is supplied by Jane Eyre in which the
insane Bertha sets fire to Thornfield Hall killing herself and blinding and burning
Rochester. This element which was oversimplified in the parent text as paving the way
for the lovers to unite is reworked into complications and the motives are sharply
analysed with the precision and clarity of a detective in Rhys’text. In this reworking of
a simple ‘affair’ into complication and to unknown realms of (un) realities
Wide Sargasso Sea can be called a modernist impressionist text.

Another important aspect of literary impressionism is the lively, constructive
activity that it demands of the reader. Limited narration, psychological time shifts and
juxtaposition of details are the verbal tricks effectively used for motivating the activity
in the readers. Within the texture of this text three parts are juxtaposed where the
narrative personae differ in each part possessing diverse identities and cultural climate.
Wide Sargasso Sea itself is juxtaposed with Jane Eyre. Different voices throw open
divergent consciousness which mean more together than alone. Thus in
*Wide Sargasso Sea* “Rhys was questioning conventions and values at both the level of
the subject matter- social and psychological commentary, criticism of life and society
and at the level of artistic formulation. The result is criticism of realism, conventional
subject matter and male themes and styles” (Wheeler 116).

Rhys utilizes her empowering heritage as successor to powerful women writers
like Charlotte Bronte to create her novel; at the same time rejects that part of Bronte
that supports mainstream fiction. Jean Rhys whom A.Alvarez called “one of the finest
British writers of this century” (79) very brilliantly came to limelight with the
publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966. Her works portray the loneliness of modern
life. Her writing style conveys the emotional desolation of the lives of her female
protagonists, who are in perennial but frustrated quest for identity through love. In
most of her novels the West Indies becomes a powerful locale. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*
the contrast between the lush green, intense landscape of the West Indies and the cold
hostility of English climate serve as a site and space of conflict addressing the issues
not only of the divide of colonial location but also of the divide of gender. The
themes of alienation, of exile, of dislocation from the parent culture coupled with
frustration leading on to insanity and the sense of being the Other find its way into the
Rhysian fictional world. As Mona Fayad comments, “*Wide Sargasso Sea* constitutes
as a novel, a means of fighting the silences that pervade woman’s history” (18). It
dramatizes the persistent struggle over meaning that characterizes the critical enquiries
of postcolonial and feminist awakening.
The textual realm of *Wide Sargasso Sea* seems to differ from the texture of *Foe* in several ways while sharing affinities with it in certain other levels. *Foe* writes back to the canonical narrative *Robinson Crusoe* in more ways than one. It is not just a counter-discursive narrative of postcolonial voices. It has a valid feminist content as well like *Wide Sargasso Sea*. But if *Wide Sargasso Sea* uses modernist strategies, *Foe* is a postmodernist evocation of the art of novel writing.

### 2.2 *Foe* as a Web of Textual Relations

J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* questions, challenges and writes back to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and holds significant interrelationship with *Roxana*.

*Robinson Crusoe* was published in 1719 during the time of the development of British colonialism and imperialism and is generally regarded “as the archetypal colonialist island tale” (Lane 20). The narrative of *Robinson Crusoe* revolves around the story of a shipwrecked traveller who turns to be an empire builder, earnestly establishing an organized society based on agriculture and plantations, never losing heart in the midst of isolation, helped solely by his ‘man Friday’. The society described in this text anticipates the capitalist economies that characterize the European colonialist practices. It also touches upon the institution of slavery that made empires happen. The story of *Robinson Crusoe* is thought to be realistic because of the way it is described and as the story seems to be based on a real life experience in the life of Alexander Selkirk. “Based on the life of Alexander Selkirk, it is fascinating in its descriptions of Crusoe’s ingenuity and inventiveness, his ability to make and use tools, his discovery of Man Friday and his treatment of him” (quoted from the back cover of *Robinson Crusoe*).
Robinson Crusoe is a key text associated with merchant capitalism in its colonialist interest and keenly participates in the rise of novels as a genre. Ian Watt argues that “Robinson Crusoe provides a unique demonstration of the connection between individualism in its many forms and the rise of the novel” (54). Crusoe is an empire builder and his world is representative of the mercantile and plantation economy and of the basic principles of colonialism as an aftermath of trade. Crusoe represents the European imperialist consciousness that turns the land, where they accidentally or consciously land in their adventures for money and material prosperity, to sites of inscription in their faith and politics. Crusoe is firmly located in the expansion drive of the western economic empires and mercantile capitalism. Daniel Defoe served not only his country, but the entire colonial enterprise by writing this colonialist tale and by making a single archetypal man the agent of building an empire “claimed for Christianity and England” (Said, Culture and Imperialism 83), Defoe was assisting the question of patriarchy as well. Hence the creative intertextual response to Robinson Crusoe undertaken by J.M. Coetzee becomes significant on a number of levels.

Coetzee’s Foe offers the rereading/rewriting of the colonialist principles from the postcolonial perspective and vehemently outlines a challenge and critique of patriarchal ideology. Foe conceals within it valid questions of textuality as it is a pointer towards the conditions of Defoe’s literary and political world. As Helen Tiffin comments:
Robinson Crusoe was part of the process of fixing relations between Europe and its ‘others’, of establishing patterns of reading alterity at the same time as it inscribed the ‘fixity’ of that ‘alterity’, ‘naturalizing’ difference within its own cognitive codes. But the function of such a canonical text at the colonial periphery also becomes an important part of material imperial practice, in that, through educational and critical institutions, it continually displays and repeats for the other, the original capture of his/her alterity and the processes of its annihilation, marginalization …

(“Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-discourse” 17).

Defoe is placed as a spokesperson for the ideology of imperialism and patriarchy which undergoes a severe censure in Foe along with the theories and practices in fiction writing prevalent during Defoe’s times. As Foe holds intertextual relationship with many works of Defoe, this text censures the entire creative practices and fictional realm of Defoe. More than any inter/countertextual adventure, it offers a self reflexive metafictional enquiry into the art of novel writing. The celebration of the Other, the multiple voices that dominate the context and the text in question, the spectrum of challenges it offers to the canonical picture of Crusoe and the deviation from the norm, the end of the text in infinity and indefiniteness without definite closures and the strategy of the erasures of history together make this text an enunciation of the postmodern reaction to the world of realism in Defoe. An analysis of Foe as a text will touch upon all these aspects that make up its textuality.
Coetzee’s self as a writer is an intertextual space where he takes recourse to a number of philosophers and thinkers. The problem of silence or voice in the representation of the Other is a major concern in his novel. *Foe* raises the question of identity and voice in a postcolonial entity. Coetzee’s position in South Africa is equivalent to the location of Jean Rhys in the West Indies in the sense that both of them are caught in a complex relationship with the culture they partake of. As a white South African writer Coetzee inhabits a very particular margin partly distanced from both African and English affiliations. This middle course- noman’s land- is where Jean Rhys also finds herself, between the English and the West Indian blacks. Both Coetzee and Jean Rhys are situated in a dubious position of non affiliation and non belonging. This complex issue of identity is highly essential in locating Coetzee as a postcolonial writer. Attwell uses the term “colonial postcolonialism” (112) for the middle -the median- position that Coetzee occupies in his response to the South African situation.

J.M Coetzee is regularly and rigorously engaged in exploring the ontological and other issues crucial to the fictional discourse. His engagement for making his authorial position and situating his location in post Apartheid South Africa are primarily through the textual positions he seeks to endorse. Coetzee considers that self reflexive writing is the only mode through which he can transcend the concerns of reality and history. Coetzee’s fiction might have followed different narrative styles or patterns but there are some basic issues that run through them. Writing, authorship, language, domination, marginalization, the problem of authority, reflexive self-consciousness and the intense and interconnected deployment of these concerns make his texts the essence of theoretical and ideological inscriptions. These are the threads
which connect his writing and texts. Radical metafiction is the only valid way of recording one’s experience as it does away with the tyranny of realism. The truth in Coetzee’s work lies in its ambiguity. These ambivalences are central to Coetzee as he is situated within a problematic postcolonialism caught between the white colonizer and the native African cultural dichotomy. He addresses the postmodern concerns of the problematic of writing, of self reflexivity and open ended texts. His essais of writing and textual practices have been unquestionably motivated by his ideological preferences and situations. And hence “Foe succeeds in writing back not just to an English canonical text, but to the whole of the discursive field within which such a text operated and continues to operate in postcolonial worlds” (Tiffin, “Post-colonial Literatures and Counter discourse” 20).

The novels of Coetzee occupy a special place in South African literature. The analysis of the colonizing psyche, the emphasis on textual structures, the challenge to novelistic conventions, the self critique and the position of holding the middle voice are certain characteristics of Coetzean narratives. Coetzee is engaged primarily in exploring the potentialities and possibilities of fictional discourse. He very strategically locates himself in the “complex historical past and in the fractured social present of post-Apartheid South Africa” (Baral 12). Coetzee’s writing style and his themes exemplify the very art of writing which he tries to put forth through his fictional world. His informed understanding of the craft of writing of Defoe and Lawrence Sterne, the art of writing of Kafka and other celebrated modernists along with vast exposure to the postmodern and poststructural scenario of Lacan, Derrida, Foucault and the location in South Africa where the postcolonial voices are primarily valid make him an able and effective wielder
of strategic tools of writing. Though Coetzee’s novels may have followed different narrative styles, they all have some common themes and elements that run through them. Issues of authorship, language, the art and craft of writing, domination, marginalization, the multiplicity of voices and infinity of perceptions are some of the key aspects that dominate his fictional oeuvre. *Foe* exemplifies all the narrative and stylistic features of Coetzeean creativity.

J.M Coetzee’s *Foe* is not only a postcolonial and feministic response to *Robinson Crusoe*. It writes back to the very structures of discourse that shaped such a work. As a critique of the fictional world of Daniel Defoe, it evokes the reference to *Roxana*, another work by Daniel Defoe published in 1724. The *Roxana* connection is made explicit by the presence of Susan Barton whose persona brings in allusions to the protagonist of *Roxana* whose first name is Susan. If the purpose of writing *Robinson Crusoe* is to reflect and to throw light on the maritime enterprises and the consequent colonialist and imperialist discourse, *Roxana* comes out from the intention of satirizing the Restoration (im) morality she at times embodies. As *Foe* alludes to both these texts, it is a combined and complex writing back to the Defoean strategy in which the woman character who is denied access and voice in the text that celebrates masculine spirit of enterprise, *Robinson Crusoe* is shifted to and placed in her own space of marital relationships in *Roxana*.

*Roxana* is a mirror of the age in which it is written, which presents the eponymous heroine’s change from a passive victim position to an active agent of evil tossing and turning in life’s changing ways possessing an imperious strength and self
reserve making her qualify as a female villain par excellence. There are occasions in which the woman narrator of *Foe* resembles Roxana. Susan Barton shares a lot of characteristics with the literary type exemplified by the likes of Roxana and reflects some attributes of the Defoean women characters like Moll in *Moll Flanders*, the assertive lower class woman belonging to the group of the picara, the woman rogue. So the shaping of Susan’s character as a transplantation of Roxana into *Foe* has the effect of shaking the foundations of the world of Defoe’s characters with the tool that Defoe provides. The relation with *Roxana* is overtly intertextual. Just as Roxana is confronted in her journey of life with a girl who intrudes and claims to be her daughter, Susan in *Foe* is surprised by the unwelcome entry of a daughter into her life. The reactions are also identical with both denying the charge. “Indeed, she now becomes conflated with the fictional model, behaving much as Roxana does when confronted, in public, with the daughter she is intent on denying: Roxana’s perturbation is seen in Susan Barton’s dizziness and breathlessness” (Head 116). But if in *Roxana* the daughter in search of a mother is part of the novelistic conventions of realism as a textual tool for bringing verisimilitude to the narrative, in *Foe* the daughter episode serves the function of addressing the issue of authorial intervention and invention in fiction writing. It supplies the element of unreality to the whole narrative, triggering questions that can’t be answered. The daughter is supposed to be an invention by the author ‘Foe’ for the purpose of displacing the woman narrator from the space of the travellogue to one where woman can be at home, their domestic sphere. Here the intertextual reference to *Roxana* is Coetzee’s way of criticizing Defoe’s politics and ideology which demarcated and
bound women characters in gender specific roles while addressing male pioneers with the spirit of imperialist adventures.

Susan Barton is not only the site of engagement with the feminist issue. The surreal world of *Foe* is unravelled through the agency of Susan Barton. In her narrative in part two, the text vacillates between reality and fantasy and a dreamlike quality hangs about the narrative. The story seems to concentrate on ‘real events’ those events that take place then and there juxtaposing them with fantastic reveries, the fusion of reality and fantasy bringing in an effect of surreality into play.

We trudge through the forest, the girl and I. It is autumn, we have taken the coach to Epping, now we are making our way to Cheshunt, though leaves lie so thick underfoot, gold and brown and red, that I cannot be sure we have not strayed from the path…What do I mean by it, father-born? I wake in the grey of a London dawn with the word still faintly in my ears. The street is empty, I observe from the window. Is the girl gone forever? (*Foe* 90-91).

Susan’s dreamy episode in Epping Forest with the girl who claims to be her daughter ends in her waking alone into the dull London morning. The entire episode is steeped in surreal effects and connects it directly and intertextually with the episodes in *Roxana*.

Another text that is intricately intertwined with *Foe* is a short story by Defoe written in 1706 titled “A True Revelation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal” whose
explicit echoes and overt references can be found in this text. It is a four sided account of
the visit of Mrs. Veal to her friend Mrs. Bargrave. Mrs. Veal is very anxious to rejuvenate
their friendship and goes to great pains for the same. She visits her friend and gives her
gifts of jewellery. She urges her friend to write to her brother about the gifts and renewed
friendship. Mrs. Bargrave later finds that Mrs. Veal had passed away before the visit and
it is the ghost who came visiting. Mrs. Bargrave is referred to as Mrs. Barfield in Foe.
This short story is used in Foe to deliberate on the issues of textuality. The first occasion
of reference to this story is in section two where Susan tries to sell ideas of literary fame
to Friday with the hope of unearthing his story. She promises him ‘eternal literary life’
with the example of this story read from Foe’s manuscript collection. Susan and Friday
are in Foe’s lodging and in the letter to Foe she writes:

    Having introduced you thus, I open your book and read from
    it to Friday. ‘This is the story of Mrs. Veal, another humble
    person whom Mr. Foe has made famous in the course of his
    writing’, I say. ‘Alas, we shall never meet Mrs. Veal, for she
    has passed away; and as to her friend Mrs. Barfield, she
    lives in Canterbury…(58-9).

    This allusion to the short story serves the purpose of the dominant ideology’s
intention to ‘coax the story’ out of the marginalized being by offering him “the use of
Defoe’s story as an enticement to fame” (Head 118). The deployment of the story is
intricately related to the major subtext of this text- strategy of fiction writing. The
second allusion to this story occurs at a time of argument between Susan and Foe
regarding questions of (in)substantiality in a fictional narrative. This occurs when the
girl who claims to be Susan’s daughter comes to visit her and Susan infers that “these
women are creatures of yours [Foe’s], visiting me at your [his] instruction” (Foe 133)
and hence are phantoms or insubstantial beings conjured up from afar. To substantiate
her points regarding the ‘truth’ of ghosts she alludes to the story written by De/ Foe.
Here also the reference evokes questions on textuality as it touches upon one of the
most important element of narrative strategy i.e. questions of in/substantiality. It is
the first work written by Defoe on insubstantial beings which ironically is alluded in
Foe to refer to “the maze of doubting” (135) regarding truth and substantiality.
Dominic Head writes, “The embedding of this self-cancelling text within this novel,
through a double allusion which progressively challenges the validity of its narrative
premise, is a complex intertextual gesture” (118).

The last part of Foe brings into mind the poem by Adrienne Rich,
intertextually bringing feminist concerns into play. The conclusion of Foe is
reminiscent of Rich’s poem “Diving into the Wreck”. But the same allusion seems to
suggest the retrieval of the postcolonial voices unlike the crux of Rich’s poem which
is essentially suggestive of the reclamation of the women’s discourses submerged
under the book of myths from which female names disappear. But the allusion stresses
the feminist content of the work in its celebration of fluidity, multiplicity and the
suggestion of non-phallic language as the site of signification.

Foe does not just offer the free play of intertextual references. It is a critique
of the art and artifice of shaping and making a story. Story as a manipulated discourse
and truth as relative is emphasized in this text. Hence along with a rereading of *Robinson Crusoe*, *Foe* deconstructs the writing strategies of a realist like Defoe. *Foe* rewrites *Robinson Crusoe* not only from the level of plot construction but from the authorial strategies of story making. *Foe* writes back to Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* not only as postcolonial counter-discursive text or as a feminist intertext, but it subverts the hegemonic assumptions of writing a novel. The art of novel writing is subjected to severe critique in this metafictional exercise which in turn interrogates Defoe as a novelist. “Within the bounds of his narrative Coetzee figurally locates sites of dominance and subjugation that pertain to issues of gender and race, but he also situates configurations of aesthetic and political representation…” (Macaskill and Colleran 437). The entire novel is suffused in allusions to the art of what makes a story and what constitutes the authority of an author figure. The conversation and communication between Foe, the author and Susan Barton, the author aspirant are riddled with references to the question of truth in writing and the dichotomy of fact and fiction in the art of novel. Susan says, “… but what little I know of book writing tells me its charm will quite vanish when it is set down badly in print. A liveliness is lost in the writing down which must be supplied by art, and I have no art” (*Foe* 40). Captain Smith to whom she tells of her story assures Susan that the colours her story lacks will be supplied by persons hired by the booksellers. It is a conscious commentary on the realist narrative strategy of depicting life in its semblance of truth. The truth of the realists is ‘what looks true and seems to be actual’ by putting in a “dash of colour too, here and there” (40). Susan argues that the truth of her story cannot be altered and that the author’s craft cannot be used in her story. “‘I will not
have any lies told ‘said I. The captain smiled. ‘There I cannot vouch for them,’ he said: ‘their trade is in books, not in truth’. ‘I would rather be the author of my own story than have lies told about me’” (40). The decision of Susan to set right her limping narrative brings her to Mr. Foe who lives among “a multitude of castaway narratives” (50). Susan wants Foe to create an interesting story by giving her account “the substance of truth” (51). Her demand for substantiality in the story is riddled with paradox and it is in a way writing back to the novelistic conventions of realism of which Defoe was an avid practitioner.

This metafictional narrative interrogates and puts to task the creative and manipulative strategies of fiction writing where the stance of a storyteller is that of a “ghost” (51) without any substantiality unless twisted and coloured by the craft of a master story maker. The art and artifice of writing juxtaposes the world of drab reality of the author’s daily life beside a vision of romantic landscapes and incidents holding promise of inspiration. In “Interpretative Authoritarianism: Reading / colonizing Coetzee’s Foe”, Michael Marais suggests that Friday’s drawing of “walking eyes” symbolizes “the graphic depiction of the metaphor of the reader as a traveler[sic]” (11) which is a ‘topos’ of the eighteenth century literature. There are elaborate discussions on what constitutes textuality and the question of authority in a text. The literary and authorial assumptions of Susan trigger deliberations on the question of ‘truth’ in writing. The second and third sections are steeped in such self reflexive metafictional nuances. As Denise Almeida Silva comments:
The metaphoric value of relationship between ‘I’ and ‘you’ is at the heart of *Foe*, which is largely an account of the relationship between the apprentice writer Susan Barton and Foe, the successful novelist whom she commissions to write her story...as she wishes it to be told. Coetzee’s interrogation of the nature and processes of fiction is...intimately linked to the interrogations of questions of power... (223).

The debates on narrative power and authority go on while the narrative undergoes a total transformation with Friday being an absence. It ends up on an informed recentering of the Other in which the entire question of authority and power gets wasted as Friday’s discourse proves to be beyond the grasp and understanding of the power structures that “cavil over words in a dispute” (*Foe* 150). Susan’s aspirations of ‘fathering’ her narrative the way she wants it and Foe’s inventions of extraneous episodes that would supply it with the semblance of truth occasion the inscription of Coetzee’s theories on the intimacy between power and authority in writing. Susan exhibits excellent technical knowhow with regard to the craft of the story. She says:

Taken in all, it is a narrative with a beginning and an end, and with pleasing digressions too, lacking only a substantial and varied middle, in the place where Cruso spent too much time tilling the terraces and I too much time...
tramping the shores. Once you proposed to supply a middle
by inventing cannibals and pirates. These I would not
accept because they were not the truth (121).

She assumes that the author /father figure is invested with the power to “guide
and amend. Above all, to withhold” (122).

But the elaborate questions of authorship and textuality end up in a space of
ontological uncertainty in which the intended writer wielding pen, the instrument of
power and the narrator cum author aspirant are caught in a moment of uncertainty
throwing the narrative into realms of doubt and denial. Susan asks, “Why do I speak,
to whom do I speak, when there is no need to speak?” (133). The uncertainty regarding
words generates elements of self doubt toppling her from the position of the surety of
fathering her story. Her self doubt is echoed by the author too. “I am doubt itself…
And you: Who are you?” (133). Foe’s answer to this question summarizes the entire
artifice of writing, writing as a mode of releasing the signifiers into the realm of free
play, leaving the author in doubt as to the intentions. Foe replies, “In a life of writing
books, I have often, believe me, been lost in the maze of doubting. The trick I have
learnt is to plant a sign or marker in the ground where I stand, so that in my future
wanderings I shall have something to return to, and not get worse lost than I am”
(136). The narrative of Crusoe is such a marker bringing back the authorial figure to
his own sites of inscription and authority to be interrogated.

*Foe* is remarkable as a challenge to the novelistic conventions of the eighteenth
century as it interrogates the fictional practices of Defoe who was a master practitioner
of the art and artifice of realism. True to the practice of the realist narrative, Defoe’s
Robinson Crusoe celebrates a unidirectional narrative concentrating on the single
point of view of the eponymous hero. Crusoe’s navigational enterprises, the various
journeys undertaken during his evil times, disagreement with the parents, his ship
wreck in an unknown island, Crusoe’s building of a settlement out of the meagre
available resources, his chance encounter with and subordination of the manservant
Friday, their slogging in his island, maintaining a steady journal as a record for
posterity, establishment of a settlement and final escape in a foreign ship, return to
the main land wealthy and successful and his revisit to the island to see it ever
thriving form the plot of the novel. Defoe’s protagonist is the representative of the
bourgeois individuals and their aggressive will to survive and to dominate and is
partly contained by the stereotypes of the traveller, merchant, thief, colonial
adventurer and pirate who were vastly visible in real life and journals of the times. It
is a first person narrative whose truth rests with the narrator and the figure of Crusoe
lends substantiality to the narrative. Defoe the artificer is so perfect a practitioner of
the art of realism that he consciously removes the author’s name from the title page
and introduces it as an autobiographical account of the travels, journeys and
adventures undertaken by Robinson Crusoe. There are thirty one chapters among
which twenty five commences with the ‘I’ factor. The narrator’s presence supplies the
narrative with a semblance of authenticity as the truth is thought to be vested with
him. Defoe’s art is in concealing the artifice under the guise of reality which is
exemplified in the narrative of Robinson Crusoe.
But all these conventions of the realistic strategy are toppled in *Foe* in the discussions on aspects of textuality carried on by Susan and *Foe*. The master manipulator admits that art lies in its artifice and that writing is a rambling occupation and that the position of the author is like a spider with his web, ready to pounce onto victims whose stories he weaves in a net work of textual space. Unearthing stories after stories is a conjurer’s trick and the author is just a conjurer often “lost in the maze of doubting” (136). All the assumptions about the primacy of the author and his authority are subjected to severe scrutiny in this self reflexive postmodernist text. Realist narratives thrive on the supreme position it bestows upon the figure of the author as in the case of *Robinson Crusoe* while *Foe* lets the narrative be submerged within the postmodern chaos where the strategy and artifice of the author fail to direct the narrative. By subjecting Defoean strategies to critique *Foe* aims at revising the techniques of the realist narrative. Hence *Foe* could be considered as Defoe deconstructed both as an author and as a text.

True to this idea of subjecting Defoe to censure, there is a world of difference between Defoe’s Crusoe and Coetzee’s Cruso. It is not just the divide of the centuries alone, but of the political, ideological and cultural dichotomy that is revealed in this alternate representation. The reversal and deviation of detail in Coetzee’s *Foe* is a conscious attempt to take Defoe to task. *Robinson Crusoe* is a true representative of the spirit of mercantile economy and the presence of man Friday and his initiation into faithful Christianity and obedient slavery accentuate the underlying colonial enterprise reflecting the true spirit of the age in which it is written. Coetzee’s Cruso is only a thin shadow of Defoe’s Crusoe figure. He is just interested in sterile work and does not
keep any records of his activity there as he is not engaged in any worthwhile task. Defoe’s Crusoe brings almost all tools from his ship which will support him in his settler and colonialist enterprise whereas Coetzee’s Cruso merely prepares barren terraces. He neither makes boats nor cultivates like his eighteenth century prefigure. The entire range of colonialist enterprises is derided in Coetzee’s representation of Cruso emphasizing the Coetzean middle voice emphatically. The tools and activities of colonization are denied to Cruso, the renowned representative of imperialism.

When Foe is presented as possessing the same tools the relation between authorship and imperialism as sites of dominance is emphasized. The altered Cruso figure is in keeping with the inherent ideological preoccupations which Coetzee would like to contest through his text.

*Foe* achieves not a mere rereading but a metafictional response to the world of Defoe and Crusoe. It tells the story from the point of view of Susan Barton, the female narrator of the story who was shipwrecked on Cruso’s island. Significantly Coetzee’s Cruso is spelt without an ‘e’. There are four sections in the text. The first section begins with Susan’s narrative where she swims to the island of Cruso after a shipwreck. He is steeped in preparing the land for cultivation and stays there in company of a mute black slave called Friday. With Susan’s initiative, they get saved by a passing ship but Cruso dies en route. Section two presents Susan’s arrival in England. She approaches the famous novel writer Foe who may stand for the eighteenth century novelist Defoe with the adventurous story of her ship wreck requesting him to put her narrative in shape. But Foe is not ready to do so as the woman’s narrative is not interesting and as it will not sell because he feels that the narrative lacks credibility. Foe, the author suggests
manipulation in the story but gets stalled in his writing job as he goes hiding avoiding his creditors and the hands of law. So Susan undertakes the task of arranging her story assuming the authority of authorship. At the same time she tries to free Friday but later on changes her plan. Susan and Friday manage to find Foe’s dwelling and stay along with him. In section three the two white people Foe and Susan undertake the task of teaching their language to Friday. But Friday manages a language of his own and fails to come to the expectations of Foe and Susan. In section four a newly cast narrator ascends to Foe’s room and finds a dead couple and the barely alive Friday in the alcove. The narrator listens to the sounds of the island emanating from Friday’s mouth. A second attempt is made by the narrator to reach Foe’s lodging and finds a board on the wall with the name of ‘Daniel Defoe’, ‘Author’ and notices on the neck of Friday “a scar like a necklace left by a rope or chain” (155). The narrator, in Foe’s chamber finds the manuscript of Susan’s account of her island experience. As he begins to read he slips overboard, into Barton’s text, into the water above the shipwreck, surrounded by the petals cast by Friday. In this wreck also, the only signs of life come from Friday but the narrator soon finds that it is not a place for words. “It is the home of Friday” (157). The narrator gets washed in the “slow stream” (157) that come from the mouth of Friday suggesting the emergence of the discourse of Friday.

The textual space of Foe is peopled with “a multitude of cast away narratives” (52) unlike the realist space glorifying the single point of view. Instead of celebrating monologic discourses of authority as the realists do, Foe deliberates on plurality as it is a postmodern creation. The fictional world presented in Foe parodies the novelistic conventions of realism in Foe’s attempt to supply the narrative of Susan.
with the prerequisites of readable narrative. The author aspirant Susan also expresses her desire to have a story that makes sense, one that possesses a beginning, middle and an end like all realist narratives. But the postmodern multiplicity of voices at the end of the text resists closure and leaves the story in a fluid, non phallic realm. The combined effort of Foe and Susan to produce a realist narrative that will be commercially viable is thwarted in the indefinite postmodern closure of Foe.

*Foe* is a postmodern text not just in the revision of the realist narrative, but in its possession of certain characteristics of postmodern fiction. The postmodern world presents the interweaving of many stories. There is a progression from singularity to the celebration of disruptive plurality. *Foe* is a web of multiple threads with Susan’s narrative intertwined with Cruso story which in turn gets manipulated by Foe’s artifice and the voiceless presence of Friday remaining a “hole in the narrative” (127). Stories are found to conceal within their structure innumerable untold stories as in the case of *Foe*. In its metafictional aspect also, *Foe* retains its postmodern affiliations. The metafictional exploration of the fictional status and nature by literary works is an essential element of postmodern poetics. *Foe* is a creditable exercise in metafiction which Dominic Head suggests as “Coetzee’s most obviously metafictional text” (112) with its enquiry and deliberations regarding the rambling occupation of fiction writing. *Foe* also interrogates aspects of textuality. The postcolonial and feminist aspects run parallel to the metafictional exercise of the art of fiction writing which is embedded in the matrix of the story. Susan represents any amateur attempt at fiction writing while Foe reflects the position of the professional novelist who has to sift and edit to render the story credible. The self conscious ontological uncertainty expressed and
experienced by the characters is a familiar postmodern dilemma as experienced by Susan and Foe while it is carried to its maximum in rendering Friday an essence of uncertainty. Susan asks, “Who am I and who indeed are you?” (Foe 133). The irony is that the character Susan interrogates the author Foe about her substantiality while she desires to father her narrative and at the same time “all my [her] life grows to be a story” (133).

There is a controversial merging of genres with a supposed end of no closures that leaves signifiers open in a vast space of free play. Foe establishes that there are only truths in the plural and that there are diverse genres evoked to render diverse narratives. The first person narrative of Susan is interspersed with the epistolary format in which she communicates with Foe. Section three is mainly in the form of dialogues between Foe and Susan while the fourth section in which an omniscient narrator is introduced is steeped in theoretical complexity. The ending in fluid uncertainty of the displacement of dominant discourses is a postmodern celebration of multiplicity of selves and plurality of voices. The same locale may be said to mirror the feminist assumptions in its allusion to Adrienne Rich’s poem while the open ended landing in the “home of Friday” (157) seems to mirror the postcolonial problematics. Friday is symbolic of the Coetzean preoccupations with textuality. As Friday fails to vouch for the various reasons of his silence and mutilation, the centre of certainties and absolute truths is decentred to give way to multiplicities, many sided truths and unauthorized versions of the same story. Thus his story becomes the versions of the same text, which is himself. This indefiniteness regarding Friday’s discourse constitutes the postmodern finale of the story.
The mixing of genres, the multiple narratives and narrative personae, the allusive, self-reflexive metafictional elements, the infinite closure, the embedded stories and the ontological uncertainties that characterize the characters and the textual realm establish *Foe* as an unparalleled exercise in postmodern poetics. Because of the themes of plurality and the multiple voices Coetzee tries to inscribe in his text, he is generally regarded as “South Africa’s most significant postmodernist writer” (Head 8). His responses to the issues of colonialism and his “option for a non-realistic, self referential fiction that constantly highlights its own unreliability” (9) are certain markers that set him apart as a postmodern.

*Foe* is not just a metafictional exercise in the theory of what constitutes fiction. This text can be read as an allegory of the practice of reading- Friday with his silence is the ‘text’ to be explored inviting the reader – Susan Barton – to make sense of his silence. Michael Marais opines that “Coetzee’s use of the conventions of the Richardsonian epistolary novel…place the reader as letter reader within the structure of the novel” (10). The metaphor of reading is carried further in the image of the “walking eyes” (*Foe* 147) which Friday draws as part of his learning enterprises. The combination of the eyes and the act of walking in a single signifier “is a graphic depiction of the metaphor of the reader as a traveler [sic]” (Marais 11). The process of reading is carried along the thematic length of the text. Throughout the novel Susan is trying to ‘read’ Friday, trying to make meaning out his silence, his sounds and his music. The position of ‘reader ’invests her with some semblance of power as the discourse of reading is juxtaposed with the discourse of domination. Friday’s silence makes her position powerful. “Friday has no command of words and, therefore no
defense against being reshaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others … No matter what he is to himself… What he is to the world is what I make of him ...” *(Foe* 121-2). It is not only Susan who tries to ‘read’ Friday. The author figure Foe also tries to ‘read’ Friday, trying to ‘make sense’ of him. In the course of the text the attempt to ‘read’ gets conflated with the attempt to inscribe and ‘write’ Friday, politicizing the art of reading to one of inscription as writing is a space of power and authority. But the indefinite end of the text would reveal that the author Foe fails to inscribe him and Friday like a postmodern text refuses to be read unidirectionally, offers multiplicity of significations and perceptions and mostly refuses to be inscribed. The position of the reader with reference to the novel is equated to the position of Barton and Foe in relation to Friday. “As reading is the process that forms the link between art and life, the novel by transforming the way in which the reader thinks and feels … politicizes the reading practice” (Marais 15). The act and art of reading is intimately involved with the politics of domination and the text becomes a context for the reader to comprehend the motives and movements of the text.

Another element problematized in *Foe* is the question of language. Language is an essential element of the postcolonial poetics. It is through language that the colonial ideology is inscribed and the question of language dominates the first part of the novel while the poststructuralist concern of the primacy of writing over speech is theorized in the other parts of the text. The argument of Susan in favour of keeping a journal and Cruso opposing it by mentioning stone structures as ensuring a place in posterity’s account are indicative of this primacy. The debate on language carried on with Cruso proves to be futile and his initiation of Friday into the language of the
colonizer is never intricate, but highly functional. Friday is allowed to master words only “as many as his needs” (Foe 21). This also points to a colonial practice of creating a few obedient sites of perpetration of colonial ideology. But the later sections in which the authors and other figures of authority try to initiate Friday into the intricacies of colonial speech practices are met with postcolonial rebuff where Friday uses the physical tools of language learning for creating a language system of his own, intelligible to self alone. His initiation into wielding the tool of authority—the pen—and writing results in his use of the pen to convey a spirit of the self which places him in a zone away from the influence and inscription of colonialism and imperialism.

The deliberations between Susan and Foe are steeped in allusions to the primacy of writing over speech and their inability to bring speech and writing to Friday the way they want it. Susan says, “All my efforts to bring Friday to speech, or to bring speech to Friday, have failed” (142). Foe asks her, “Have you shown him writing?” (142). She vehemently replies, “How can he write if he cannot speak? Letters are the mirror of words. Even when we seem to write in silence, our writing is manifest of a speech spoken within ourselves or to ourselves” (142). Foe’s enunciation is a eulogy and affirmation of the art of writing. As he says:

Writing is not doomed to be the shadow of speech. Be attentive to yourself as you write and you will mark there are times when the words form themselves on the paper…out of the deepest of inner silences. We are accustomed to believe that our world was created by God
speaking the Word; but I ask, may it not rather be that he wrote it, wrote a Word so long we have yet to come to the end of it? May it not be that God continually writes the world, the world and all that is in it? (143).

The irony is that the postmodern text that topples certainties alludes to the Word of God in its argument for the primacy of writing. “Nevertheless, God’s writing stands as an instance of writing without speech. Speech is but a means through which word may be uttered, it is not the word itself” (143).

*Foe* as a text opens up a multitude of enquiries and its textual space is a playground of the plurality of relations, ideological concerns and political devices. An analysis of its textuality has to make sense of the signifiers with their signified defying logic of canon, practice and authority of hegemonic systems. *Foe* achieves the writing back to *Robinson Crusoe* in more ways than one. Along with being a critique of Defoe’s texts, it raises issues of power and texuality. *Foe* also writes back to many of Defoe’s other works, like *Roxana* and “A True Revelation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal”. It writes back to the discourse of colonialism which shaped the Robinson Crusoes and Alexander Selkirks. *Foe* emphasizes the voice and silence of the other—of the genuine Other and of the half colonized Other. This text is a telling metafiction which dwells on the process and the act of writing and questions and challenges the authorial manipulation and artifice in the shaping of fictional material. The text is a postmodern celebration of the open ended narrative. *Foe* destabilizes the illusory
world of the realist narrative. In more ways than one, it is a celebrated intertext and counter text of *Robinson Crusoe*.

Both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* are examples of works that possess textual characteristics that ensure their permanence in the genre of the novel. Though both texts are united in the site of this study, their textual realms are vastly different. Hence their analysis is undertaken from distinct and diverse levels. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is intense and lyrical and hence the critical approach requires a consideration of the aesthetic levels it evokes in a reader. So analysis of characteristics that arouses this aesthetic response is a prerequisite in the textual study of this text. Instead *Foe* offers a web of textual relations that unquestionably raises challenges that evoke an intellectual appraisal of the aesthetic levels. *Foe* in its enunciation of the significant themes of textuality requires the reader to pay attention to all the intrinsic aspects of textual devices that make this text a paradigm of intellectual workmanship. So both texts have made use of their textual space in the discussion and debate over issues that have appealed to the senses of the aesthetic and intellectual selves, and issues of perennial interest in the human mind. Both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* are creative enterprises and they have opened up a world of textual possibilities. Both of them undertake to subvert the master narratives by exposing the inherent omissions in the canonical texts. Both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* are texts possessing unique characteristics that assure and ensure their theoretical relevance and practical influence in the literary world. These texts are inspired by the desire to transform the imperial codes of representation in the dominant discourses and achieve a devastating invasion and destruction of those codes. *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* succeed in the simultaneous
deployment of conflicting themes in the same textual realm by engaging the dominant with the subversive, the patriarchal with the feminist, the colonial with the postcolonial and celebrate a space for the confrontation of all forms of hegemony and its challenge.