CHAPTER-3

PROJECTION OF OPPRESSED SOULS
With the popularization of post-modernism and the heavy influence of post-structuralism, language has become a subject of continued and heated debate regarding the agency of words in defining and creating reality, identity and history. As language has undergone such critical attack, the truths upon which modern society is built have also been re-examined for voices lost or absent behind linguistic and rhetorical biases. As a means of recovering these voices, the historical media of patriarchal and imperialist hegemony must be dissected and interrogated in search not of what is present, but rather, as Foucault writes, to “expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body”. (Foucault, “What is an Author?” 356)

The Foucaultian approach to history then establishes the genealogy of an event or history and questions the way in which a person has been represented, or not represented, in accordance with social, political and economic influence. Czech poet Czselaw Milosz writes “to whom do we tell what happened on the earth, for whom do we place huge mirrors in the hopes that they filled up and will say so” (Milosz 414): his questioning of the “to whom” and “for whom” reflect the concern of contemporary novelists as they examine Ato Quayson’s question:” how is the narrative of the nation to be elaborated from the perspective of the ex-centric?” As the gaze of canonical authorship has been focused through a lens of imperial, patriarchal, Christianity, those who fall outside of this scope of “normalcy” have so been ignored in social, literary, political, economic and historical discourses. Coetzee has attempted to project this absent, silenced, marginalised persons in his novels.
In colonial and postcolonial discourse, silence has been read as a many- accented signifier of disempowerment and resistance, of the denial of a subject position and its appropriation. According to Banita Parry, the people who have power to name and depict other human beings dominates the ignorant and weaker human beings and silenced them the example of such silenced characters are to be found in many novels of Coetzee; Bushman and Hottentot in ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee’ (Dusklands), the Barbarians in Waiting for the Barbarians, the servants In the Heart of the Country, the gardener in Life and Times of Michael K., and the enslaved black Friday in Foe. They are subjected to acts of ventriloquizing, the dominated are situated as objects of representations and meditations which offer them no place from which to resist the modes that have constituted them as at the same time naked to the eye and occult. In ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee’ the process of muting is staged as an act of conquest. The conflicting enunciations in the making of a colonial discourse are ironically rehearsed. But what is there, in a narrative that dramatizes a metaphysics of conquest, to contradict Jacobus Coetzee’s doomed discovery that ‘in that true wilderness without polity... everything, I was to find, was possible’ (DL, 66), since the KhoiKhoin are relegated as being unable to impinge on and participate in annulling the discourse of mastery disclosed by an auto critique. The silence of these strange and defeated people is deployed in the text as the textual strategy which counters the colonizing impulse and impudence in stimulating another’s voice. Benita Perry considers that it can be constructed as a mute interrogation and disablement of discursive power. Attridge reads Coetzee’s fictions as a continued and strenuous effort in figuring alterity as a force out there disrupting European discourse, a force which is both resistant to the dominant culture and makes demands on it, not by initiating dialogue, but by interrupting or
disturbing the discursive patterns in which we are at home. On the other hand, this narrative muteness can be read as intimating a narrative disinclination to orchestrate a polyphonic score. And if so, then the consequence is that the silenced remain incommensurable, unknowable, and unable to make themselves heard in the sealed linguistic code exercised by the narrating self, and hence incapable of disturbing the dominant discourse.

Many postcolonial works, literary as well as theoretically, have had their focus on the subaltern speaking up: speaking up is presented as the way to gain control over one’s own life again and escape colonial oppression. The term subaltern is used by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to designate people without lines of social mobility (Spivak 28). In her article ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ she stresses the difficulty for the subaltern to speak up and gain a subject position, because of the impossibility to categorize the subaltern as one coherent group with a collective consciousness. According to Spivak, the subaltern’s heterogeneity prevents the construction of a unified effective voice, as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin point out in their introduction to The Post-Colonial Studies Reader (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 10). However, although Spivak’s article identifies the difficulties of speaking up, it underlines, at the same time, the relevance of speaking up, the importance that is attributed by postcolonial theorists to having a voice. Where gaining a voice is presented in postcolonial works as the way to gain control and escape oppression, silence, on the other hand, has been read, as Benita Parry points out in her article ‘Speech and Silence in J.M. Coetzee’, as a “signifier of disempowerment” and “of the denial of a subject position” (Parry 43). Many of Coetzee’s novels contain characters that have trouble speaking or do not speak at all, characters without a voice. Two examples of this kind of characters are Friday
(the completely silent character in *Foe*) and Michael K (a character that has trouble speaking, because of a hare lip and a mental condition that tends to be interpreted as a mental deficiency in *Life & Times of Michael K*). These characters are likely to be interpreted as being marginalized, for their lack of a voice and, consequently, a subject position. Apart from these two characters, there are other characters like the Barbarian girl who does not speak during the course of the action and are suppressed by the colonial power.

Coetzee’s (nearly) silent characters do not have a (strong) voice; it seems possible to attribute a certain positive value to their silence. Although they are supposed to be in a powerless position because of their voicelessness, they are not portrayed as such. Although the various figures of silence in Coetzee's fictions are the dominated and, hence, intimate disarticulation as an act of discursive power, they are not only 'victims' but also 'victors' accredited with extraordinary and transgressive psychic energies. As according to Robyn Fivush, voice and silence emerge from power and place. Voice and silence will emerge within individual as a function of their historical and cultural place and individual history of specific interactions with others. The way individual develop voice or silence will have important implications for the development of a story. Their silence seems to be important, rather than a problem. It is this importance of silence, within the novels *Foe* and *Life & Times of Michael K* by J.M. Coetzee, and the way in which this perspective on silence differs from the usual perspective within postcolonial thinking. Each of these characters has the desire to overcome societal customs and aspire to achieve greater heights and expectations. Their silence is their cry for freedom. In the end, Michael K. “slip his chain” and achieve freedom. Michael K escapes the camps—he leaves the control of the oppressor and attains freedom by returning
home. He refuses to play by the rules of the system, and constantly tries to find a niche on the margins of society in which he could simply live, without being continually imprisoned.

J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* (1986) in a very unique way, emphasizes both the racial and patriarchal power—the silencing of difference—exemplified in the telling of Crusoe’s story. Pantomime reverses the Friday–Crusoe dynamic by offering a contemporary relationship in which the black slave becomes the master. This can be seen to directly relate to the conceptualisation of post-space as a negotiation via the trauma of colonialism, rather than in spite of it: for Helen Gilbert, the play aims ‘to dismantle the binary oppositions on which imperialism depends’ (*Foe* 129) and reveals in Walcott’s work how ‘colonialism, despite—and even because of—its brutalities, thus becomes a kind of alchemy’ (*Foe* 128). Equally, *Foe* exposes, through a silenced Friday.

Refusing to write or speak their pain, instead representing it in symbol, they challenge the colonial privileging of the written word. This is a strategy equally prominent in Coetzee’s *Foe* in the replaying of the Crusoe narrative. Friday speaks, but not in the words of the colonial oppressor. Rather, denied speech by the removal of his tongue, he refuses language in favour of the acknowledgment that ‘there will always be a voice in him to whisper doubts, whether in words or nameless sounds or tunes or tones’ (*Foe* 149). Here, ‘bodies are their own signs’ (*Foe* 157). Such bodies are not metaphorical: their pain stands simply for itself, a refusal to ‘reify … as symbol’ (Boehmer 276) that means the importance of bodies, themselves, is seen in the postcolonial narrative. They may in themselves promote powerful change. Friday, for example, often is fore grounded as the voiceless and thus powerless
servant, oppressed by his speaking masters Cruso and Susan. Friday, whose
tongue has been injured in unknown circumstances, stubbornly refuses to describe
from his own point of view what has happened on the island. The mutilated Friday,
who cannot, (or will not) speak, grows to be the symbolic figure of colonial
oppression; his scars, the proofs of his physical suffering, speak instead of him just
as in the case of the girl in the novel Waiting for the Barbarians. ‘Can the subaltern
speak?’ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, representative researcher of postcolonial
literature asks and her answer is negative. The oppressed one is silent; s/he is
unable to tell his/her own story. While Barton’s story is told to the reader, Friday’s
story remains a void in the text. In his discussion with Barton, Foe says “in every
story there is a silence, some sight concealed, some word unspoken, I believe. Till
we have spoken the unspoken, we have not come to the heart of the story” (Foe
141). Coetzee positions Friday’s void or absence of voice as a focal point of Barton’s
narrative. The following dialogue between Barton and Foe, for example, indicates the
effect of Friday’s silence on Barton’s narrative:

Foe says, “We must make Friday’s silence speak, as well as the
silence surrounding Friday.”

“But who will do it?” I Barton asked. “It is easy enough to lie in
bed and say what must be done, but who will dive into the wreck? ...if
Friday cannot tell us what he sees, is Friday in my story any more than
a figuring (or prefiguring) of another diver?” (Foe 142).

Barton’s questions, especially as they are aimed at Foe, target the
assumptions Defoe makes in his text concerning the story of Friday, or the
colonized. The continuation the conversation between Barton and Foe further implicates the assumptions made by Defoe. Barton says:

All my efforts to bring Friday to speech, or to bring speech to Friday, have failed...he utters himself only in music and dancing, which are to speech as cries and shouts are to words. There are times when I ask myself whether in his earlier life he had the slightest mastery of language, whether he knows what kind of thing language is (Foe 142).

Barton, in this passage, uses the term ‘language’, yet predicates this word by saying that language cannot be music and dancing. Foe and Barton ignore Friday’s modes of expression in their own inability to comprehend language outside of a British framework. Ato Quayson writes of language and the colonized that

the human body has to undergo a form of violence and dismemberment for the body politic itself to come into being...the colonised’s quest for identity cannot be fully expressed without the dismantling of colonialism and since this dismantling, in this particular context, has to be achieved through so much bloodshed and violence, the quest for a language that seeks to shape reality is always undermined by the consciousness of the brutality and violence that attends the colonised’s body (201).

The non-communicative nature of Friday’s dances and speeches, then, are part of Quayson’s theory that “the colonised’s quest for identity cannot be fully expressed without the dismantling of colonialism.” Quayson explains that this expression of identity undermines “the consciousness of brutality and violence that attends the colonised’s body;” as in Robinson Crusoe. Crusoe shapes Friday’s
identity through a means of subjugation and violence in the sense that he took ownership of Friday's body, the re-structuring of Friday's body, and so his identity, according to Quayson must occur by re-constructing that reality of violence on the part of Crusoe. By denying Friday a tongue, Coetzee asks if the identity of the colonized is ever recoverable. Can Friday's story ever be fully expressed, or will the telling of Friday's story always be an enactment of violence, as the narrative of Friday's character revolves around brutality and destruction, so that re-creating his story will be a re-creation of such violence?

In the final scene of the novel the narrator is speaking instead of Friday, as if he was making a dream journey, dives into the sea and finds the wreck of a ship. This underwater dream world is the place where not the words, but the traces of suffering on the bodies are speaking (for example, the scar on Friday's neck left by a chain or rope): “This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday” (Foe 157). Robert Post asserts in his article “The Noise of Freedom”, by claiming that (…) Friday is denied one of the most powerful implements for securing and expressing freedom: speech. (…) He is further imprisoned by his inability to understand English, responding only to the few words Cruso taught him (Post 147). Post emphasizes the importance of speech to gain a subject position and he portrays Friday as a prisoner, because of his lack of speech and of understanding English. Attridge stresses the importance of Friday's otherness due to his silence (Attridge 179 – 184). Friday is “other”, because he is silent, whether his silence is inflicted on him or not is irrelevant for this statement. It is Friday's silence itself, which provides him with this otherness. Friday has no command of words and therefore no defense against being reshaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others. Susan Barton deliberately reveals her complicity in partial representation. She
admits that "in every story there is a silence, some sight concealed, some word unspoken" (*Foe* 141), and that to render a "composition more lively the painter (writer) is at liberty to bring into it what may not be there on the day he (she) paints (writes)" (*Coetzee* 1986: 88). Furthermore, we find implicit in her writing a subconscious doubting which materializes most ostensibly—in so far as something implicit can materialize ostensibly—in the employ of rhetorical questions. "What are these blinks of an eyelid, against which the only defense is an eternal and inhuman wakefulness? Might they not be the cracks and chinks through which another voice, other voices, speaks in our lives? By what right do we close our ears to them?" (*Coetzee*, 1986: 30). We are told that "from Friday's mouth, without a breath, issue the sound of the island" (*Coetzee* 1986: 154), and it is suggested, by way of this paradoxical and biologically impossible action, that silence may well constitute expression while expression, in turn, may produce silence. But while the "home of Friday" might be a "place where bodies are their own signs" (*Foe* 157), the narrative sphere of Foe functions within a mode of communication that is naturally exclusive and eternally selective.

The strong sense in Post-colonial literatures of the need to release a voice that is silenced by the colonial authority is complicated in white settler literature by the fact that the white writer is writing/speaking for the silenced voices and thus could be seen as merely imposing another kind of imperial authority upon them. Coetzee is aware of this double bind for the white writer in South Africa; *Life and Times of Michael K.* focuses on the question of narrative and authenticity, of freedom and dependence, and of the imposition of meaning by both liberal and antagonistic colonizers upon the colonized. Attridge writes:
The colonial writer does not have words of his own. Is it not possible that he projects his own condition of voicelessness into whatever he creates? That he articulated his own powerlessness, in the face of alien words, by seeking out fresh tales of victims...perhaps the colonial imagination is driven to recreate, again and again, the experience of writing in colonial space. (151)

Coetzee’s protagonist, Michael K. has a harelip. Words are not his medium, and find himself unable to tell the correct stories that people wish to hear: stories of victimization, or the humble words of the colonized demanded by the colonizers. It is only through the narration that Michael’s voice is released, in a metaphorical way, and that his silence is, tentatively, overcome. Throughout the novel, Michael often feels helpless because of his lack of communicative skills; he feels particularly bad about not even being able to reason with himself or telling his life story to himself.

“Always, when he tried to explain himself to himself, there remained a gap, a hole, a darkness before which his understanding baulked, into which it was useless to pour words. The words were eaten up, the gap remained. His was always a story with a hole in it: a wrong story, always wrong. Because of his mind that is ‘not quick’ (LTMK 4), Michael K lacks the ability to form his own story. Words are useless, for he fails to make the connection between them. His uneasiness with talking or expressing a chain of thought is expressed often throughout the novel, for example when “his heart was full” of gratefulness towards the stranger that has taken him home and fed him. Michael K. feels the need to thank him, but “the right words would not come” (Coetzee 1983: 48). However, at the very end of the novel, in a clear moment, K seems to accept his inability to communicate, seemingly questioning the use of storytelling:
I have become an object of charity, he thought. (...) They want me to open my heart and tell them the story of a life lived in cages. (...) And if I had learned storytelling at Huis Norenius instead of potato-peeling and sums, (...) I might have known how to please them. I would have told the story of a life passed in prisons where I stood day after day, year after year with my forehead pressed to the wire, gazing into the distance, dreaming of experiences I would never have, and where the guards called me names and kicked my backside and sent me off to scrub the floor. (...) Whereas the truth is that I have been a gardener, first for the Council, later for myself, and gardeners spend their time with their noses to the ground. (LTMK 181).

K has noticed how everyone (the medical officer in particular) has wanted him to tell his life story, but because he did not have the skills to do this, he did not give them what they wanted. However, he wonders about what would have happened if he would have learned storytelling in Huis Norenius where he grew up. Then he would have known how to “please” them; which implies he would not be telling his story for himself, but for the others only. He feels he would have been able to please them with a dramatic story of a life behind bars. Nevertheless, he himself realizes this would not be the truth. For him, the only truth, perhaps not a very interesting one but nevertheless the truth about him is that he has been a gardener. Telling the medical officer (and others that asked for it) his story to prevent being forgotten, is not important to K at all. To him, what is important is his own truth: being a gardener and spending his time with his nose to the ground, because that is what they do. That is what is substantial to him. Michael K is an existent outside language. By being silent, he is able to disengage himself from being registered in the linguistic
systems of meaning, hence evading the violence of the historical mode of representation. He deconstructs the verbal systems of meaning in his unrepresentable otherness.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Barbarian girl can speak, of course, but she remains largely silent in response to the magistrate’s questions, and even if she is willing to answer, as he says, “In the makeshift language we share there are no nuances” (*WFB* 40). She is unable to tell him what happened, but that telling will not necessarily give him the kind of knowledge he seeks. And so he is left with his attempts to read what he calls “the traces of a history her body bears” (*WFB* 64). The Magistrate is unable to communicate with a girl he is very much drawn to in a physical and emotional way, and instead communicates with tracing her body and physical touch. Parry describes this by saying that the Magistrate “cannot understand the gestures of the barbarian girl, and can communicate with her only in makeshift language without nuance, her body is a script to be decoded.” (Parry 156). Throughout the novel, the barbarian girl does not say a word, until the very end when she speaks with the people of her tribe. Parry has considered that speaking means spread or communicating lies as the prostitute opens herself, “How I missed you!” or “What a pleasure to be back!” but the barbarian girl does not even offer lies to the magistrate. Without voice, this recurrent figure of Coetzee’s is also unknowable, a cipher of indeterminate meaning and significance, except as it is indeterminate and lacking clear signification. Again, this is the unspeaking, inscrutable ‘other’. The girl is an enigmatic presence, then, thwarting the process of subject-constitution. She is also, however, more multivalent than the foregoing analysis might suggest. At the most obvious level, she represents a continuation of the longing for community that we have encountered before, in Magda in *In the Heart of the Country*. But whereas
in Magda's case female desire for belonging and association can be read as the
desire to escape from the loneliness that attends the colonizing history of the male
father, the Magistrate's desire in Barbarians brings in train all the dominating
implications of the colonial episteme. The desired colonized female is well known as
a troupe of colonial discourse, whether she represents the interior and its material
riches, the landscape, or the purely psychic abundance of the unknown. In
disallowing penetration, therefore, Coetzee both acknowledges and refuses to
perpetuate these generalized implications of dominance. There are other, more
specific implications. The girl's mystery is partly the result of torture.

Coetzee's figures of silence are not without a quotidian dimension, and an
inequality in social power is marked by the disparity between the obsessional will to
utterance in Coetzee's female and European narrators, who literally perform the
constitution of the subject in language and are authors of a discourse of the body,
and the inaudibility of those who are narrated: Michael K, who is cryptically identified
as coloured (96), is a unpropertied labourer; Friday is a black slave; and Vercueil is a
tramp of unspecified race. However this incipient critique of how deprivation inflicts
silence on those who are homeless in a hierarchical social world is deflected by the
ascription of value to the disarticulated body, since the reader is simultaneously
offered intimations of a non-linguistic intuitive consciousness, and is invited to
witness the fruits of speechlessness when there is a failure of the dialectic between
the 'Imaginary' and the 'Symbolic', or, in Kristeva's vocabulary, between the 'semiotic'
and the 'thetic'.

Both surmises can be referred to Michael K, who is written as a being without
an identity, outside the writ where the Law of the Father runs and as the exemplar of
a mind turned inward. Spoken for in the narrative—his representation depends on 'he thought', 'he found', 'he said'—Michael K is interpreted as being too busy with fantasy 'to listen to the wheels of history' (217); he is 'a soul blessedly untouched by doctrine, untouched by history' (207) who lives in 'a pocket outside time' (82), has access to a numinous condition when he 'emptied his mind, wanting nothing, looking forward to nothing' (74), and attains an ineffable state of bliss on eating a pumpkin he had reared in a parodic act of parental nurturing.

Although the narrative gloss has him likening himself, a gardener, to "a mole, also a gardener, that does not tell stories because it lives in silence" (248), Michael K is attributed with an ambition to interpret his own solitary, eidetic consciousness: 'Always when he tried to explain himself to himself, there remained a gap, a hole, a darkness before which his understanding baulked, into which it was useless to pour words. The words were eaten up, the gap remained. His was always a story with a hole in it' (150-151). Here failure to attain and articulate self-consciousness is not rendered as disappointment, since silence is privileged as enabling the euphoria of desire unmediated by words; and if Michael K is perceived as dramatizing the inability to achieve a voice in the 'Symbolic' order, then we can note that his 'loss of thetic function' is not represented as a lapse into psychosis but as a path to the visionary.

Because Friday's inner consciousness is not narrated, his silence is more secret, and less available to the attention of conjectural readings, a sign of which is that he is offered alternative futures by the fiction, one within and the other outside the formal structures of language. In her discussion with Foe on how to bring Friday into the realm of representation, Susan Barton protests at Foe's proposal that he be
shown writing, believing that since 'Letters are the mirror of words', Friday, who has no speech, can have no grasp of language. For Foe, on the other hand, writing is not a secondary representation of the spoken word but rather its prerequisite: "Writing is not doomed to be the shadow of speech... God's writing stands as an instance of a writing without speech" (Foe 142). It is Foe's view that would seem to prevail in the first narrative turn, where the prospect of Friday as a scribe is prefigured. Formerly, the pupil of an Adamic language taught by Cruso and a pictographic script offered by Barton, Friday, who had previously uttered himself only in the 'semiotic' modes of music and dance, now takes his seat at Foe's desk, and with Foe's quill, ink, and paper, and wearing Foe's wig, appropriates the authorial role.

His mouth likened by Barton to an empty buttonhole, Friday begins by forming Os, of which Coetzee has written: "The O, the circle, the hole are symbols of that which male authoritarian language cannot appropriate ' (Dovey 411). All the same it is intimated that Friday will go on to learn 'a', a portent of his acquiring linguistic competence. There is, however, yet another narrative turn, when the dream-like quest of a contemporary narrator for Friday's story takes him into the hold of a wrecked ship. This time, Friday does not cross the threshold into logical and referential discourse, remaining instead in that paradisiac condition where sign and object are unified, and where the body, spared the traumatic insertion into language, can give utterance to things lost or never yet heard, whose meanings, we are given to understand, will water the globe:

But this is not a place of words . . . This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday . . . His mouth opens. From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption . .
. it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and
shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the
earth. (*Foe* 157)

Benita Parry discusses Coetzee’s theme of silence as marked by social power
and ethnic heritage. She says, “the reader is simultaneously offered intimations of a
non-linguistic intuitive consciousness, and is invited to witness the fruits of
speechlessness when there is a failure of the dialectic between the ‘Imaginary’ and
the ‘Symbolic’” (Parry 154). Perry also states that as in Coetzee’s writing, silence
isn’t necessarily a bad thing. For instance, in Michael K his inability to articulate
leads to further insights into the visionary (*LTMK* 155). K is deprived of words from
birth. At Huis Norenius, they would put on music constantly, which would make K
‘restless’ (*J. M. Coetzee in Context and Theory* 142) and prevent him from forming
his ‘own thoughts’— “It was like oil over everything” (182). As an adult, articulation
remains beyond his means: “Always, when he tried to explain himself to himself,
there remained a gap, a hole, a darkness before which his understanding baulked,
into which it was useless to pour words. The words were eaten up, the gap
remained” (150–51). Ellmann compares K with Meursault from Camus’s *The
Outsider* (2000)—both men are antiheros in that they cannot explain themselves for
their peculiar acts against the social code; they are unable to articulate the
singularity of their motives (108).

Wright’s suggestion that language is “the medium of communication that
cannot be trusted as it problematizes access to the narrative of suffering whose text
is the body” (Writing 94). The medical officer warns Michael:
You are going to die, and your story is going to die too, forever and ever, unless you come to your senses and listen to me... We have all tumbled over the lip into the cauldron of history ... only you ... have managed to live in the old way, drifting through time ... no more trying to change the course of history than a grain of sand does... The truth is that you are going to perish in obscurity ... and no one is going to remember you but me, unless you yield and at last open your mouth. I appeal to you Michaels: yield! (LTMK 151–52)

This issue of exhaustion and silence characterizes a certain authority within the works of Coetzee’s fiction. The silence often denotes authority, especially in the case of the barbarian girl with the Magistrate. She has a certain hypnotic power over him, making him desire her more and more. In the case of Michael K, he has a certain authority over the refugee camp doctor. The doctor wants to help him, is obsessed with helping him, and is very much drawn to Michael. The two cases are similar as they both reflect the outcast having power over the person who is supposed to be in the authoritative position. This sense of being drawn to the silence leads to a certain longing for freedom. Each of these characters has the desire to overcome societal customs and aspire to achieve greater heights and expectations. Their silence is their cry for freedom. The idea of exhaustion or silence within postmodernism is also an important issue. A very prominent theme in postmodernist thinking, the works of art associated with this issue often have the main subject or character very quiet in their ways and actions. The character is usually seen as an observer, a thinker, and someone who would like to voice his or her thoughts, but does not. Another way of looking at exhaustion and silence is by observing personified objects that may have a very looming and muted effect. These silent
characters or objects are usually the ones who have the most to say. In their own way, they have the resounding voices in the novel. Thus, in a postcolonial situation, a way for the colonized to take back control over their world is to make their voice heard, where at first the voice of the colonizers was made heard loudest. As Benita Parry has noted, having a voice provides a subject position, while keeping silent entails disempowerment (Parry 1996: 43). Parry has been critical of Spivak on several points; both acknowledge the relevance of the issue of having a voice. The process of gaining a voice has often, like in Spivak’s article, been acknowledged as a highly complicated practice, but the importance of it nevertheless has been widely acclaimed. This emphasis on the importance of having a voice sheds an interesting light on the fictions of J.M. Coetzee.

**Ability in disability**

Coetzee places at the center of his narratives characters who often be ‘deformed’ either on a physical level (as in the case of the Barbarian girl, Michael, Friday and even to a certain extent Mrs. Curren, whose being is rendered less by terminal cancer), or psychologically (like Eugene, Jacobus and Magda). What is often found in postcolonial writings about disabled people is an uneasy relationship between the disabled and the able-bodied. Ato Quayson’s illuminative comments on the importance and status of disabled people in postcolonial literary works are worth quoting at details at this juncture:

The presence of disabled people in post-colonial writing marks more than just the recognition of their obvious presence in the real world of postcolonial existence and the fact that, in most cases, national economies woefully fail to take care of them. It means much more than
that. It also marks the sense of a major problematic, which is nothing less than the difficult encounter with history itself...What is important to note, however, is that the encounter with the disabled in postcolonial writing is as much a struggle to transcend the nightmare of history ("Looking Awry: Tropes of Disability in Post-colonial Writing", 65-66).

In postcolonial and postmodern texts, thematic foci have shifted from the centre to the hitherto marginalized plane of discourse (the margin)—the disabled, the poor, the disempowered, the third world, etc. Thus, disability is no longer conceived in postmodern/postcolonial texts as a marginal case. Coetzee’s heroes exhibit ability in disability. Like any other disable people, they refuse to become beggars instead they fight their battle unto the last. Michael K. refuses to join the bandwagon. Town had been flooded with people from the countryside looking for work of any kind. There was no work, no accommodation available. If they fell into that sea of hungry mouths, they would not survive. But Michael does not want to bow down. He constructs a hand-cart with which he hopes to take his mother to her dream place. His devotion and love for his mother is commendable. So despite his deformity, he is ready to fight against all the odds.

Michael K., the eponymous protagonist of the novel, is blemished from birth by a physical disfigurement, a hare-lip: “The lip curled like a snail’s foot, the left nostril gape” (3). This impacts greatly on his speech functioning. Not only is K vocally silent, but he is also in a state of physical and emotional exhaustion. His body is weak and because of that, he can barely function. The physical disfigurement makes the midwife obscure him for a moment from its mother. Nadine Gordimer (1998) succinctly describes Michael K’s disability in the following words:
He is marked out, from birth, by a harelip indelibly described as curled like a snail’s foot. His deformity distorts his speech and his actual and self-image shrinks from the difficulty of communication through words and the repugnance he sees holding him off in people’s eyes (140).

K’s problems are multi-dimensional and complex. He is handicapped; he belongs to the coloured race; he is fatherless, and he is from a very poor background. He is thus an object of manifold subjectivities. He is born into a world of oppression, deprivation, homelessness, chaos and raging unceasing wars. All these and many other painful backgrounds, including curfews and the debilitating health of his mother conspire to make life unbearable for K. To reveal the attitude of people towards the disabled in society, K’s mother, Anna K, “from the first, did not like the mouth that would not close and the living pink flesh it bared to her. She shivered to think of what had been growing in her all these months” (30). Even K’s peers do not see him as a worthy member of their age-group. They make jest of him, and “because their smiles and whispers hurt her, she kept it away from other children” (4). The disabled child is repulsive to his mother, and the midwife admonishes her: “You should be happy; they bring luck to the household” (3). There is therefore a contrast between K’s depiction as an ‘eyesore’, a child that should be concealed or thrown away, and a being that is a harbinger of good luck. This reveals Coetzee to be humanist. Per Wastberg of the Swedish Academy, in his citation during the presentation of 2003 Nobel Prize to Coetzee, confirms Coetzee to be a humanist.

Although he is disfigured, he is not retarded. His condition has been aptly described by the medical officer, ‘He is like a stone, a pebble that, having lain around quietly minding its own business since the dawn of time, is now suddenly picked up and tossed randomly from hand to hand.’ (LTMK 185) Despite apartheid’s heavy
blows on family relations, K.’s steady devotion and his instinctive love for his mother is commendable. His mother is said to be a domestic servant, polishing other people’s floors. She lives in a cramped room intended for air-conditioning equipment. The room is marked ‘DANGER’, ‘GEVAAR-INGOZI’ (6). It has no light, no ventilation, and the air is almost musty. She looks weary, disabled and is discarded and abandoned by her employers who cut her salary by a third as a result of her ill-health. She is hospitalized for severe dropsy, having been overused by the oppressor class. Her ailment is exacerbated by the ongoing civil war in the country. To aggravate her problem, she is ignored and neglected by the employers when she is hospitalized. But K is the only companion she has in her last days; K is to her rescue. He is also the last hope of her mother’s wish to achieve her yearning to return to the idyllic farm of her birth. ‘He supported his mother the fifty paces to the bus stop, carrying her handbag and shoes for her. When the bus came, there were no seats’ (6). He constructs a hand-cart with which he hopes to chauffeur his mother to her dream place: “now he returned to the project of using the wheels from his bicycle to make a cart in which to take his mother for walks” (21). He is able to withstand the onslaught of robbers, petty thieves, the army, the police and other problems emanating from the civil strife during his journey but he is unmoved by these odds and continues his journey. However, his mother falls ill and dies in the hospital. He buries his mother alone. He, instead of cancelling the journey, decides to continue the journey to bury his mother’s bones. He withstands a soldier who tries to brutalize him: “what do you think the war is for?” K said, “for taking other people’s money?” he is able to defy the curfew, and he negotiates his ways through police road blocks with ease: ‘to his left were houses, to his right a brickfield. The only way out was back. He pressed on’ (54). Despite his disability, he is still an adept hunter:
“In the fading light he was lucky enough to bring down a turtle-dove with a stone as it came to roost in a thorn tree” (63). He is also an award-winner, even where the able bodied fail. A farmer commends him, saying, “You have a feel for wire, he said. You should go into fencing. There will always be a need for good fencers in this country, no matter what” (130-131). He can cast surprises when least expected. Even when he is exempted from physical exercise for a minimum of seven days, he still performs well: “Yet when I emerged from the grandstand this morning the first thing I saw was Michaels slogging it out around the track with the rest of them” (77). K knows how to control his emotion. He is a pacifist who does not repay violence with violence. At times, he is subjected to ridicule and physical violence. For instance, coming back home on a night train, one day after the day’s job, he is beaten, robbed and left stunned—“he was hit with a terrible blow in the pit of the stomach and fainted” (122). Despite this apparent man’s inhumanity to man against K, he is not angry. He only quits the night job. He is able to excise himself from frustration, oppression, marginalization, which some people consistently try in vain to lodge in him. The more they strike at him, the more resurgent, dogged and re-creative he becomes. In fact, he seems to thrive in tense situations. When the going gets tough, the tough gets going. There is a didactic message in this K.’s unwritten principle. Through his exemplary doggedness, disabled people are encouraged to be hopeful in life and to serve as stars beaming hope to others who parade the city streets begging for alms. K is able to mediate his life through a place where there are instances of inability of the state to govern well, growing social and ethnic conflicts and unabated political and criminal violence. These are indices of deepening social inequity, weak state and lack of social integration. The racial glue in the society is unstuck, manifesting itself in gross levels of social and racial dissonance. Corroding
the society’s heart of darkness, as revealed in the text, are spiritual voids, mental stresses and excruciating pains. To live through the agony and anomy, one must be a unique, self-determined, spiritually empowered, courageous, bold and reticent being. Therefore, K simply withdraws from both the goals of the society and the means of attaining them. He can thus be called a rebel of a kind. With this strategy of living, K miraculously experiences the trauma of the society during the civil war without being overcome by it. The horrors of nightly curfews, restrictions of inter-district movements, forced labour, dubious resettlements, rehabilitation and internment camps, armed patrols, widespread lawlessness, looting by the poor, corruption on the part of the few, repression and deep economic crises do not move him or rifle his will. It is stated in the text that “sometimes on Saturdays he failed to hear the boom of the noon gun and went on working by himself all through the afternoon” (5).

In K’s exploits and struggles, various manifestations of centralizing and centralized authority are challenged. Julia Kristeva (1982:49) has once opined that the margin is the ultimate place of subversion and transgression. Another branch of French post-structuralism has shown that the margin is both created by and part of the centre, and that the ‘different’ can be made into the ‘other’ (Foucault, 1974: 21). However, postmodernism tends to combat this by asserting the plurality of the ‘different’ and rejecting the binary opposition of the ‘other’. K’s acts, actions and inactions contradict the ‘universal’ principle or construction of a public/private split which consigns the disabled to the ‘private’ realm of feeling, domesticity and the body, in order to clarify a ‘public’ realm of reason, as the able-bodied. As a clever being, K tends his crops by night and camouflages the growing vines with cut grass. This proves him to be a unique disabled character. In this sense, at least, the
discourse about literature and disability can be seen as an intrinsically ‘postmodern’ discourse.

The barbarian girl is one of Joll’s victims, a young woman who is left behind after the rest of her people leave. Her body bears the traces of the violence it endured: she is blinded and terribly crippled from having her feet smashed with a hammer and eyes scarred with a hot poker. She is the prisoner of colonel Joll but after their release she is left behind by her folk in the outpost, begging, semi-blind and disfigured from the torture. Even though, she is limited by body, she does not losses her hope. She lives in the streets of the frontier town and hopes to return to her own people. She endures all the pains inflicted on her silently and patiently and at last her patient was rewarded by the freedom from the frontier town to her own world.

Friday is tongue less. Friday’s tongue has been removed. No tongue means no words. Friday is dumb, yet wise. It symbolizes the cruel reality that the ruled people as a group are always oppressed and lose their discourse power. Their experiences cannot be restored; their benefits cannot be secured and their requests cannot be heard. They can only keep silent instead of resisting, and must use imagination instead of telling the truth. The mutilated body of Friday and the enslaved geographies of the colonial world are what resist aestheticization, and the fault is not Foe’s: “Might not Foe be a kind of captive too?” (Foe 151).

**Colonizers Who Refuse**

Coetzee’s major protagonists are colonizers who wish to elude at almost any cost their historical role as colonizers. Coetzee’s four novels are situated in colonial times and deal with one or other of the various aspects of colonialism. His characters like Eugene Dawn, Magda, the Magistrate, even the Medical Officer in *Life and
*Times of Michael K* are all of a piece in their single hunger. All of them (and this would include even Jacobus Coetzee) are wrought to a pitch of desperation in their efforts to escape the intolerable burdens of the master-slave relationship. If, indeed, there is a dominant moral impulse at work in Coetzee's novels, it is to be found in the insatiable hunger of all his protagonists for ways of escape from a role which condemns them as subjects to confront others as objects in interminable, murderous acts of self-division. Memmi writes:

> If every colonial immediately assumes the role of colonist, every colonizer does not necessarily become a colonist. However, the facts of colonial life are not simply ideas, but the general effect of actual conditions. To refuse means either withdrawing physically from those conditions or remaining to fight and change them. (Memmi 62)

He may openly protest, or sign a petition, or join a group which is not automatically hostile toward the colonized. This already suffices for him to recognize that he has simply changed difficulties and discomfort. Eugene protested against the established concept of American policies. Even though he is forced to change his report by his higher authority, he mentally fights against them. The magistrate helped the barbarian girl and indirectly joined the opposite group. He has to face all the difficulties and discomfort but he suffered them all and waited for the time to come and dreamt about the freedom.

It is not easy to escape mentally from a concrete situation, to refuse its ideology while continuing to live its actual relationships. From now on, he lives his life under the sign of a contradiction which looms at every step, depriving him of all coherence and all tranquility. If he persists, he will learn that he is launching into an undeclared conflict with his own people which will always remain alive, unless he returns to the
colonialist fold or is defeated. Eugene Dawn's narrative in *Dusklands* (1974) has as its backdrop the attempted American colonization of Vietnam; Jacobus Coetzee, in some respects a forerunner, is both a product of colonialism and, like Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, one of its most avid, twisted servants. *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) is a novel of an imaginary empire, of an imperialism which is merely an extension of colonialism. In this book, though, he more effectively shows the evils of colonialism by using the magistrate as narrator. Through the conflicting emotions and the change in values which the magistrate experiences because of the barbarian girl's presence, the reader is made more aware of the effect colonialism has on the oppressor and the oppressed. The magistrate sympathizes with the barbarian girl and begins to see how miserable her life has been, unlike Colonel Joll who represents the Empire in its most evil form. He attempts to right the wrongs which have been done to her by the empire, although he says, "The distance between myself and her torturers, I realize, is negligible" (*WFB*, 27). He later reverses this opinion by saying, "There is nothing to link me with torturers, people who sit waiting like beetles in dark cellars" (*WFB*, 44). But his attempt to make her life better is an utter failure because, as Coetzee says,

That is the imperial life. It's a life that has been based on conquest. It's just that the sharper edge of conquest isn't visible to him during his particular lifetime. And then he is brought up against the reality of what imperialism is and makes a choice in that situation but it's not a choice that is historically viable, that people can follow on a large scale as a way of life. (Kunapipi 6)

He becomes aware of the destructive nature of colonialism, something he had never really thought about. He says, "I did not mean to get embroiled in this. I am a
country magistrate, a responsible official in the service of the Empire, serving out my
days on this lazy frontier, waiting to retire” (WFB 8). He instead of continue to enjoy
the privileges, decides to listen to his heart and rises against the Empire. The
magistrate says,

I wanted to do what was right, I wanted to make reparation: I will not
deny this decent impulse, however mixed with more questionable
motives: there must always be a place for penance and reparation
(WFB 81).

As a part of his attempt to transcend the barriers between himself and the
barbarian girl, he makes a journey to return her to her people. By returning the girl he
hopes to be returning his life to order. Because of his humanity he then becomes a
victim of the Empire instead of the victimizer.

Even in Life and Times of Michael K. (1983), while it might appear to treat of
something rather different, has to do with colonialism. Its protagonist is a man intent
on eluding colonization whether it be the colonization of the body (through labor
camps) or the colonization of the mind (through charity). In fact, in all four novels
colonialism is treated from both an external and an internal point of view. The novels
not only allude to an actual historical reality, but they also give us, in fictional form,
the type of psyche, the psychology that this reality dictates. If colonialism, at its very
simplest, equals the conquest and subjugation of a territory by an alien people, then
the human relationship that is basic to it is likewise one of power and powerlessness:
the relationship between master and servant, overlord and slave. It is this aspect of
colonialism that receives the most extensive treatment in Coetzee’s fiction.

If there is also a pessimism in them, it is because the majority of these
characters (Michael K being the exception here) beat against the shackles of their
historical position in vain. For, of course, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that there have been and still are historical situations in which the dissenting colonizer, "the colonizer who refuses," to use Albert Memmi’s phrase, finds himself hamstrung, and worse. The portrait that Memmi provided of this type of colonizer in his *The Colonizer and the Colonized* is far from being obsolete today. But it is a gloomy one. This is basically because in the case of colonizers who do not (or perhaps cannot) return to their home country, and who nevertheless vow not to accept colonization, the specter of contradiction, of multiple contradictions, confronts them at every turn: He the colonizer who refuses may openly protest, or sign a petition, or join a group hostile toward the colonizers. This already suffices for him to recognize that he has simply changed difficulties and discomfort. It is not easy to escape mentally from a concrete situation, to refuse its ideology while continuing to live with its actual relationships. From now on, he lives his life under the sign of a contradiction which looms at every step, depriving him of all coherence and all tranquility. What is worse is that the passage from the refusal of the role of colonizer to that of accepting and being accepted by the colonized does not necessarily follow as a matter of course, however natural a progression this might appear to be. There is a further condition which confuses the refusal of this type of colonizer. As Memmi puts it, the leftist colonizer is part of the oppressing group and will be forced to share its destiny, as he shared its good fortune. If his own kind, the colonizers, should one day be chased out of the colony, the colonized would probably not make any exception for him. . . . Colonial relations do not stem from individual good will or actions; they exist before his arrival or birth, and whether he accepts or rejects them matters little. . . . No matter how he may reassure himself, "I have always been this way or that with the colonized," he suspects, even if he is in no way guilty as an individual, that he shares
a collective responsibility by the fact of membership in a national oppressor group. Memmi’s conclusion is somber. “There are, I believe, impossible historical situations and this is one of them”. (69) The leftist colonizer’s role cannot be sustained; it is unliveable. He cannot help suffering from guilt and anguish and also, eventually, bad faith. He is always on the fringe of temptation and shame, and is, in the final analysis, guilty.” Albert Memmi based these observations on his own experience in Tunisia three or four decades ago. In present-day South Africa the situation is somewhat different; the position of the colonizer who refuses is not necessarily intractable. Nevertheless, I wish to suggest along with Memmi that a fundamental and wide-ranging ambivalence is common to those who find themselves in the role of the dissenting colonizer, and that this ambivalence is only compounded in the case of a writer like Coetzee who also happens to be an intellectual of a quite particular sort.

**Awareness**

Coetzee’s characters have no real awareness of the evils being perpetrated around them until these evils catch up with them and involve them directly. The characters know of the wrongs at some level but choose to ignore them until the wrongs turn on them. The Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* has generally gone on a fishing trip whenever representatives of the government have come to his town to investigate the barbarians’ activity. At the start of this novel, he has for once decided, for no apparent reason, to stay. This decision puts him in a position, apparently for the first time, to see what goes on in these investigations. It puts him in direct contact with the instruments and dynamics of torture. He can never unknow them. Nor can he unknow his participation in the ruling order that allows for torture. While at the start of the novel he seems like a reasonable and decent person,
especially when he protests the torture, the novel reveals aspects of his past and his relations with women that give us pause. He has used his power to acquire women. He continues to do so, even when the official who supervises the torture, Colonel Joll, is in town. The magistrate differentiates himself from the extremes of the torturer, but, like the Master in *In the Heart of the Country*, the magistrate leaves the working women and the barbarian woman little choice when he chooses them to come to his bed.

Similarly, in *Disgrace*, David Lurie does not consciously understand the implications of his actions. He visits a prostitute every couple of weeks, a practice which he is satisfied has been his successful way of handling the demands of sex. When his prostitute disappears, he turns to a young female student and courts her. Soon, he has made love to her. Not long after that, she has him before the administration on charges of harassment, rape, and abuse. Lurie cannot understand her position because, after all, he loves her. He wonders how she can possibly interpret their lovemaking as an invasion, as inappropriate, as traumatic. He loves her. He discounts the reactions of others because his own feelings seem so very right to him.

Once Lurie loses his job, he visits his daughter on the isolated farm she has chosen to make her home. During this post-apartheid visit, several young black men lock Lurie in the bathroom and rape his daughter. Lurie tries to rescue his daughter by protesting, screaming, pounding on the door of the bathroom. The young men come in, pour lighter fluid on his head, and throw a match on him. He ends up alive but disfigured; his daughter survives the rape but becomes deeply depressed and soon finds she is pregnant. Again, the problems of black and white South Africa are linked
together through future generations as well as in the past. Lurie argues with his
daughter to take any number of actions to improve her situation.

Instead, she marries the black uncle of one of the men who raped her, so she
will be seeing her rapist in one way or another for the rest of her life. Lurie’s daughter
seems to accept it as penance for all the harm apartheid has done. Lurie himself,
meanwhile, continues to work on his opera about Byron’s true love, a woman who is
silent, mute, and an object for Byron’s own fantasies. Lurie comes into some halting
awareness, as does the magistrate. He never can see the harm he may have done
his student. He can, however, see the harm that has been done to his daughter. He
can see that a post-apartheid South Africa is violent, cruel, and unjust, too. Shifting
power does not necessarily solve anything. With the possible exception of Michael
K., each of Coetzee’s central characters has been complicit in the evils of his or her
society. Each has benefited from his or her position within the ruling class. Each,
even if disapproving or embarrassed by the actions of the government, has turned a
blind eye to the horrors of apartheid, of tyranny, of the torture chamber because
each, until the opening of the novel, has been allowed to live his or her own life
relatively undisturbed. But the life that character leads is a life of complicity, a life
tainted by a refusal to acknowledge participation in evil and a life tainted by the
character’s own silence.

Coetzee’s characters yearn for the freedom to be left alone, to live a simple
life in peace. Alienation, in this sense, is a positive thing. Freedom, in this sense, is
positive. If we can be left alone, we can be productive, we can be relatively kind, we
can be at peace. Michael K, in *The Life and Times of Michael K*, is born a victim and
continues to be a target throughout the novel. He is born with a hare lip and mild
retardation, and even his mother cannot find it in her heart to love him. When she
finds she is dying, she asks him to take her to her homeland, a farm somewhere inland. With no money and no food, he walks and finally, after she has died, carries her to this home. He understands at once what she loved about it. It is isolated; it is free. Times are hard; he has no money. He stays on the farm, acquires a handful of seeds, and grows squash, giving each plant a spoonful of water each day. The army finds him and accuses him of feeding the enemy. They destroy his garden and imprison him in a concentration camp. Despite he has to face an anarchic world of brutal roving armies. K prefers to work and be himself: “it was better in the mountains, K thought. It was better on the farm; it was better on the road. It was better in Cape Town” (105). He concludes that living in a camp is like going back to childhood. As a bold man, he encourages his compatriots: “if we are going to be in jail, let’s be in jail, let’s not pretend” (14). K does not want to be imprisoned; that is why he always escapes from confinement. It is apposite to quote the description of the South African camps offered by the Police Captain: “parasite was the word the police captain had used: the camp at Jakkalsdriff, a nest of parasites hanging from the nest sunlit town, eating its substance, giving no nourishment back” (106). Even his critics commend him for refusing to be caged. According to Sikorska, “Michael refuses to fit into prison life. His rejection of the institutionalized survival is the only action he ever undertakes. At the end of the novel, starved, sick, yet still planning to find a way back to the farm, Michael K. tells us:

He would clear the rubble from the mouth of the well shaft, he would bend the handle of the teaspoon in a loop and tie the string to it, he would lower it down the shaft deep into the earth, and when he brought it up there would be water in the bowl of the spoon; and in that way, he would say, one can live (LTMK 184).
If that is all Coetzee’s characters can expect, they will make it enough. Even a mere teaspoon of water is enough for life. Yet this desire for a life where one is left alone is a dream. Michael K imagines returning to the farm, imagines finding water, imagines being left alone. From what Coetzee has told us of his past experiences, it is doubtful that the dream and reality will ever align. All of Coetzee’s characters know at base that there is some decent way to live. Their problem—and ours—lies in determining what it is we can do that is decent. If loving another person is perceived by that person to be rape, what is it that we are able to get right? How do we live a moral life when all of our actions, negative and positive, are an imposition and burden on others? The outrage Coetzee inspires in us suggests that we know what is wrong. The problem lies in knowing what can be right that does not hurt others. The best option he leaves us is life itself. Life itself is the positive act, but that comes to us beyond our moral or physical control. Our outrage at the ill-treatment of others or ourselves leads us to make demands that our behavior be moral. All that we do within it, Coetzee suggests, whether we are driven by desire or structures of morality, whether we are driven by the will to do good or evil, produces suffering for ourselves or others.

**Realization through Pain**

With regards to J.M. Coetzee’s works, his characters attain—or, rather, come to an understanding of—their identity through their engagement with the violence of the text; however, not only do his characters liberate themselves from a state of innocence—assuming that innocence is a relative state of ignorance—to a knowledgeable state of their identity relative to their experience with violence, but,
the characters also discover the one unifying human quality that connects all of them together: subjection to physical pain.

Beginning with Coetzee’s first novel, *Dusklands*, J.M. Coetzee presents two different characters, each appearing to have nothing in common: they come from two different time periods, different locations and different circumstances. However, in both instances, each of the characters experience a common pathway towards achieving liberation, and through their experience discovers their own human reality.

The first character of *Dusklands* is Eugene Dawn, a disgruntled, misunderstood research analyst for the Vietnam Project. The opening sentence of the text, where the character states, ‘My name is Eugene Dawn. I cannot help that’ (*DL* 1), makes immediately clear his self-pity, an attitude which is confirmed by the description he gives of his job: ‘here I am under the thumb of a manager, a type before whom my first instinct is to crawl’ (*DL* 1); ‘my carrel in the library is gray book-rack and a little gray drawer… my officer is also gray. I grind my teeth and suffer’ (*DL* 7). Dawn views himself as “a thinker, a creative person, one not without value to the world” (*DL* 1). However, Dawn feels marginalized by his boss, ‘Coetzee,’ an authority figure whom Dawn views as a “failed creative person who lives vicariously off true creative people” (*DL* 1). He considers that ‘it is unpleasant to have your production rejected and it is double unpleasant if they are rejected by the one you admire, trebly unpleasant if you used to adulation’ (*DL* 5). These attitudes find correspondence also in his private life, as Eugene introduces his marriage as a ‘sad connection’ (*DL* 7). Even his sexual relationship with his wife Marylyn becomes for the protagonist a mere duty, which could bring him to ecstasy only if his wife were sound asleep. According to Canepari-Labib, Eugene clearly suggests the emptiness and the insignificance of his conjugal life (Canepari-Labib 164). However, his attempts to
obtain recognition from his manager and his wife fail. Eugene tries to achieve that recognition and a form of identity in different arenas, and in the attempt to find new ways to relate the reality he decides to relegate himself to the Loco Motel.

Right from the beginning, J.M. Coetzee has presented a character, Eugene Dawn, who is trying to self-identify against his authoritative figure by proclaiming a difference between himself and the fictional ‘Coetzee’ in terms of creative genius. As Trinh would argue:

Difference in such a context is that which undermines the very idea of identity, differing to infinity those layers of totality that form I...Many of us still hold on to the concept of difference not as a tool of creativity to question multiple forms of repression and dominance but as a tool of segregation used to exert power on the basis of racial and sexual essences. (416)

According to her argument, the exploration of difference, in terms of separation, to identify oneself, creates a sense of ‘otherness’, and by doing so, creates a sense of superiority over the other, thus resulting in domination and violence. No one in this novel has any sense of taking part in determining the course of history; no one is shown to believe he knows what that course should be. The sense is of the ultimate malaise: of destruction. Not even the oppressor really believes in what he is doing anymore, let alone the revolutionary.

This is a challengingly questionable position for a writer to take up in South Africa, make no mistake about it. The presentation of the truth and meaning of what white has done to black stands out on every page, celebrating its writer’s superb, unafraid creative energy as it does; yet it denies the energy of the will to resist evil. That this superb energy exists with indefatigable and undefeatable persistence
among the black people of South Africa—Michael K’s people—is made evident, yes, heroically, every grinding day. It is not present in the novel. (6) The reason Coetzee is telling such lies about black heroic identity is because of his own ‘stately fastidiousness’: the ‘revulsion against all political and revolutionary solutions’ that Life & Times expresses is emphatically Coetzee’s ‘own revulsion’ towards a revolutionary identity politics. His own definition of freedom, Gordimer claims, refuses any role for a properly political form of heroism rooted in ‘the energy of the will’, for Coetzeean freedom is merely ‘to be “out of all the camps at the same time”’. Unlike most novels, which merely ‘explore questions’, ‘this book,’ Gordimer believes, ‘is unusual in positing its answer’, and the ‘answer’ Coetzee gives is this: ”Beyond all creeds and moralities, this work of art asserts, there is only one: to keep the earth alive, and only one salvation, the survival that comes from her” (6). (Nadine Gordimer, ‘The Idea of Gardening’, New York Review of Books 1984)

However, J.M. Coetzee shows that through Eugene Dawn’s life experience, Dawn is not entirely responsible for his need to create dominance over ‘Coetzee.’ As Victor Brombert writes, “…in Dusklands, the psychological-warfare specialist who conceives the apologia for political assassinations and terror operations confesses to having been a pathologically bookish child. “I grew out of books” (D 30)”. Brombert here is indicating that Eugene Dawn is a partial—if not dominantly—result of the books he has read throughout the course of his life. And Peter Knox-Shaw concurs that “The hypothesis that the private life is inextricable from the public one is carried in ‘The Vietnam Project’ to the point of precise demonstration…and this would certainly appear to include a diagnostic link between the loss of affect Dawn displays in his personal relations and his work as a military propagandist.” (113). Even Eugene Dawn comments that “My human sympathies have been coarsened, she
thinks referring to the thoughts of Marilyn, his wife, and I have become addicted to violent and perverse fantasies” (9). Even though Dawn is expressing to the reader the thoughts of his wife, with J.M. Coetzee as the author, it is difficult to completely trust the narrator of his novels because it is always unclear if they are truly the thoughts of the character being represented, the narrator, or J.M. Coetzee himself. However, despite the uncertainty of who is making the claim within the story, I find Eugene Dawn’s personal reflections about his need for dominance over ‘Coetzee,’ and his wife Marilyn, and his son Martin, to be example enough that Eugene Dawn’s experiences are a direct mirror of the propaganda that he is analyzing for ‘The Vietnam Project’. Therefore, the sense of superiority over another is what propels Eugene Dawn forward into recognizing his own level of humanness as he proceeds through varying stages of violence—anger, aggression, and physical violence—to finally achieve liberation.

The magistrate of Waiting for the Barbarians remains deaf and blind to the injustices and horrors perpetrated by Joll until he witnesses the torture himself. From the beginning, the magistrate seems to hold a more and liberal and ethical view of history and colonization than the Empire he belongs to. He is not as morally blind as colonel Joll. He, even, feels guilty for the torture inflicted on the barbarian girl. The act of washing, feeding and keeping her in his bed, suggests his guilt consciousness. He undertakes the dangerous journey to leave the girl among her people. In fact, he has risked his life and freedom. But he is ready to take that risk. After his journey the magistrate is imprisoned and tortured. This torture induces him to realize his identity and he fights to get his identity back.

In Disgrace, David realizes when he witnesses his daughter’s rape by the three black men. Oppression is even worse, since Lucy refuses to talk to the police
and the rapist are still around. David feels oppressed by the latter ones and by his own daughter. Society does not take any attitude this time and what is private is kept private, not being exposed to the public eyes. David who was deaf and dumb to the situation of Melanie realizes the pain.

One might say that Coetzee’s characters do not much move from ignorance to attentiveness as through ignorance to attentiveness. While ignorance of those who lived alongside the concentration camps or enjoyed the privileges of apartheid clearly involved a willed denial of other people’s suffering and thus considered the inverse of attentiveness, a certain mode of unwilled ignorance, in which it is precisely the will that is given up, would seem to provide a passage toward attentiveness. If, as Foucault has exhaustively demonstrated, knowledge is inextricably linked to the will to power, then a certain state of ignorance would seem to constitute the ground for non-coercive relation to the other. While ignorance may simply indicate a profound indifference to other lives, it can also indicate the wisdom of ‘knowing not to know’, a state of humility or self-doubt that undoes the logic of self-certainty that founds the Cartesian tradition and underwrites the enterprise of colonialism. The magistrate ends waiting for the barbarians “feeling stupid, like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere” (156). David Lurie ends disgrace pursuing a vocation that he describes as “stupid, daft, wrongheaded” (146). His work with animals and their corpses seems to be both a way of “living out from day to day” (172) and an approximation of a state of grace. It becomes clear that stupidity, morally exemplified in the innocence of Michael K, “whose mind was not quick” (LTMK, 4), has always constituted the ethical destination, or anti- _telos_, of Coetzee’s fiction. For Coetzee’s world-weary, intellectual personae, the only way to achieve such a state is to engage in an anti-intellectual labor in which they are
literally, if only momentarily, able to lose their minds. Repeated physical contact with
the body of the other, with that which marks the limits of their own minds, would
seem to induce stupor, a suspension of will, and a mysterious but overpowering
tiredness, both Lurie and the Magistrate submit to bouts of unconsciousness
stretched out alongside the body of the other and then begin to sleepwalk through
their waking lives. The Magistrate “falls into oblivion…in the act of caressing” the
barbarian girl’s body (WFB 31). Unsure of his intentions, he “loses his way like a
storyteller losing the thread of his story” (45), dimly aware that “something is in the
course of happening to him” (43). Soon after sleeping alongside an old bitch called
Katie, Lurie “feels his interest in the world draining from him drop by drop” (D, 107),
aware only that “he does not understand what is happening to him”(143). Both find
themselves “bewildered” by a process that they do not understand and that does not
bring understanding.

**Oppressed/Other**

Coetzee constructs a Lyotardian differed between the privileged position of
the narrator and the oppressed position of an “other” whose story the narrator seeks
to narrate (Parry 40). To put it another way, characters such as Friday in Foe, 
Michael K in *Life and Times of Michael K*, and the barbarian girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians* remain radically incommensurable with the narratives in which they find
themselves; unhomely figures of and for alterity, they embody precisely that material
history of suffering that the narrative is unable to represent. Their bodily presence
indicates an unmournable, unverbalizable history, a material history that refuses to
be translated into words or conjured away by language. Coetzee strives symbolically
to bring the stories of the marginal and the oppressed to light, stories that heretofore
have been suppressed or silenced by oppressive regimes, writers of conscience or
conscience-stricken writers risk re-imposing the very authority they seek to challenge. The task of the postcolonial writer therefore is exacting. A number of Coetzee’s protagonists are only minimal, symbolic authors of their texts. For example, Eugene begins to write his text at the Loco Motel, and although it refers to the beginning of the novel it proceeds as the sort of dairy he writes while he is in the psychiatric hospital. Jacobus’ text correspondence to the narrative itself, the document which was written by the protagonist and to which other historical documents were later added. The alienated Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) resists writing as a means of outwitting the patriarchy and literary history that entrap her but finally succumbs because it is only through writing that she can re-enter society and break free from the fetters of her alienation. She writes messages with stones which can be read as texts. Michael K in *Life & Times* is author of his life because he bespeaks the familiar postcolonial tropes of writing the body and writing the land. *Life & Times* also embeds the ‘white writer’ in the sense that Coetzee would have it: “white writing is white only in so far as it is generated by the concerns of people no longer European, not yet African” (*WW* 11). The Medical Officer initially imperiously assumes the right to speak on the other’s behalf. The letters written by the medical officer can be treated as a text. Similarly, the story Susan Barton writes in epistolary form to Mr. Foe can be considered as a text. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the magistrate tries to write the history of the Empire outpost and the wooden slips he attempts to decipher can be identified as the texts on which the novel focuses. While in disgrace, Coetzee deals with characters oppressed by Colonial past. In South Africa, during the Apartheid, segregation was evident and black people were treated as a minority, whereas, in fact, they were the majority. In the post-Apartheid period, when they gained freedom, now white people are the real
minority and they are prone to same kind of injustice which the blacks have faced. In fact, they are the victims of prejudice of the colonial past. In the beginning of the novel, David manipulates Melanie. It can be linked to the apartheid: white people oppress the black ones. Besides, she is a woman and so other in the male dominant society. While the oppression of Lucy reflects the post-apartheid situation in which white people became less powerful or even powerless. The roles were exchanged. The whites are now other and are victims. Lucy suffers a shock by the hatred felt during her rape. On the other, David plays both roles: colonizer/ oppressor, and colonized/ oppressed person

Coetzee’s (‘white’) writers typically agonize over the ways in which the authority authorship engenders will always compromise their ethico-political conviction because authorship, for Coetzee, is always already imbued with power, mastery and colonization (Poyner 2). Eugene Klerk contends “that Coetzee’s depiction of desire in his novels is directly linked with his ethical preoccupations; that in much of his work desire is shown to be a subjective window onto inassimilable alterity, loss, weakness and repressed or suffering aspects of being” (Jane Poyner 10). The desire of what Klerk is focusing on, is Coetzee’s characters’ desires to discover what it means to be human in their respective state and/or states: white or black man, white or black woman, disabled person, etc.; in other words, Coetzee’s characters are in search of their human identity. As Trinh T. Minh-ha points out, in order to determine who or what they—the characters, the reader, the author—are, they must engage in a ‘search for an identity’ that “is, therefore, usually a search for that lost, pure, true, real, genuine, original, authentic self, often situated within a process of elimination of all that is considered other, superfluous, fake, corrupted, or Westernized” (415).
**Isolation**

Truly, man was not made to live alone! (*WFB* 80)

The novels of Coetzee invariably focus on extremely isolated, obsessive characters. Coetzee picks up the theme of alienation when he refers to Kafka’s influence on his writing in Doubling the Point: “alienation is … a strategy in the service of skepticism” (DP 203). However, his recoil from the idea that alienation is a “state, a state of being” and the idea that “art can become the alienated artist’s private means, his private vice even, for turning lack and woe into gain” in the same interview are palpable. For Coetzee, we might surmise, this attributes too much subversive energy to alienation. Rather, he concedes that alienation is not only a “position” but a “practice” (DP 203).

In *Dusklands*, the main protagonists in both the novellas are the isolated human beings. Eugene Dawn, for example, in the first novellas isolates himself completely during the compilation of his report on the Vietnamese conflict. However, his isolation does not simply coincides with his mental alienation, but also with the physical loneliness induced by his relegation to a Motel in the mountain first and later to a mental hospital, where he hopes he will find, in his childhood and in his job, an explanation for his current state and his attack on his son’s life.

Likewise, Jacobus, the protagonist of *Dusklands* second novella, is locked up in his world of selfishness and racism. The character’s mental alienation finds a correspondence in his physical isolation. He becomes increasingly fixated on his gun, the carbuncle which, during his feverish state, grows on his buttock, and his plan for revenge against the Hottentots who, in his distorted mind, have kept him imprisoned, depriving him of his dignity (*DL* 90), violating the privacy of his body and
making an attempt on his life. Once he recovered, Jacobus leaves the village, followed initially by his faithful servant Klawer. But soon this servant disappears and Jacobus continues his journey back to civilization on his own. As in the previous novellas, this combination leads to extreme consequences. After coming back to his own farm, Jacobus joins another expedition to the land of Great Namaqua, and when he reaches the place where he was allegedly kept prisoner, he condemns to death the four servants who had deserted him, and completely destroys the village.

The ambiguity which envelops the actual isolation of the setting depicted in Coetzee’s novels reaches its climax in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. The outpost where the magistrate lives— as well as everything that happens in the text— are in fact never defined either in time or in space. These characteristics of indeterminacy turn this novel— which focuses on the relationship between the emissaries of an elusive Empire and the barbarians who live in the desolate surroundings and who are to be preparing an attack against the frontier settlement— into an allegory which can be read in different ways. As no precise background is given in the novel, this allegorical dimension allows the author to allude not only to South Africa, but also to the Roman Empire, to the native Americans and to any situation in which an authoritarian state is implicated and in which we are confronted with the formation of an Empire that, like the one portrayed in the text, proclaims itself both invaders and colonizers, attacking and destroying those communities which have always lived on the land it now claims, thereby oppressing the colonized. The race of the characters is actually never specified and Coetzee himself states that they could well be Russians and Kirghiz, or Han and Mongol, or Turk and Arab, or Arab and Berber. It is precisely this adaptability of the novel to different situation that enables us to read in its
representations of this unnamed Empire, also depiction of the authoritarian and totalitarian regime of Italian fascism or Nazism.

Throughout the novel, the magistrate feels terribly isolated, both physically and mentally. Being himself suspected of scheming with the Barbarians against the Empire, the magistrate is first imprisoned and then tortured. It is during his imprisonment that he experiences solitude he has never known before, and which makes him realize that human beings are social animals, and that the lack of contact with other people could make him regress to a nearly beastly state (WFB, 80). The magistrate’s loneliness, however, is also and perhaps more fundamentally, psychological. Indeed, during the text he grows obsessed with a Barbarian girl who, having been tortured by the emissaries of the same Empire to which the magistrate himself belongs, is left behind, begging in the streets, blinded and crippled by the tortures inflicted upon her. In addition, he feels excluded not only by the society he has always lived in, but also by the barbarians society to which, despite the interest he takes in the girl and his family, he will never completely belong. As a matter of fact, although he comes closer to this society thanks to his relationship with the girl—a relationship more than once as problematic—he will never assume the position of a Barbarian subject.

Somewhat different is the situation of the protagonist of life and times of Michael K in fact, while in the previous novels the characters were obliged to endure their loneliness, in this novel the protagonist desperately tries to get away from other human beings, in order to live his simple, farmer life in complete solitude. Michael K is the epitome of alienation and cultivates his isolation as a means of resisting the tumult of the “now”, an imagined future South Africa in which the iron-hard rule of apartheid persists. Michael, a young black man disfigured by a harelip and deformed
nostrils, has been considered mentally slow since his childhood, and for this reason often marginalized. For a long time, the presence of his old and ill mother seems to prevent Michael from withdrawing completely into his world. When his mother dies, however, he isolates himself more than ever. He feels uneasy when doctors and nurses try to comfort him after the woman’s death (*LTMK* 31). When he goes back to the farm where his mother had presumably spent her childhood, to bury her ashes, he starts his life as a farmer in complete solitude, but when a nephew of the owners comes back to the farm he is obliged to abandon his cultivation. After this, Michael begins to live as a hermit in a cave, feeding on roots and insects and trying to avoid any contact with other people. Because of his ill health, though, he is forced to go to town, where the police find him sleeping in the streets and arrest him. He is then taken first to the hospital and then to a reinstatement camp, where he is given board and lodging and a modest wage for a little work. Michael feels wretched in staying in this camp not only because it reminds him of the institute where he spent his childhood, but also because here he is forced to have contact with other people. The protagonist thus affirms: “I needed more warming; I should have been told I was going to be sent back amongst people.” (*LTMK* 74), and finding this community life unbearable, he finally leaves the camp, returning to the farm. In order to attract as little attention as possible and avoid being found again, he decides to live in a sort of burrow, trying to keep his pumpkins safe from prying eyes.

After a while, the police find him again in a state of confusion and take him to a re-education camp, where a medical officer attends him. Once more, the proximity and the interest shown by the doctor make Michael withdraw into himself more and more, causing his umpteenth flight. In a certain way, then, Michael’s situation is more dramatic than Coetzee’s other characters’, as living in human society; Michael is
obliged to look for that peace and solitude the characters of the other novels seem to have in abundance. But unlike them, who lament their solitude, in life and times of Michael K Coetzee delineates an exceptional case, as no other character, apart from Cruso in *Foe*, has ever striven for complete physical isolation with so much determination as Michael.

*Foe* is the extreme example of isolated characters in all the novels of Coetzee. The novel is divided into two sections. In the first section, Susan Barton, the female narrator is saved from ship wrecked and has reached on the island where Cruso and his servant Friday were the only inhabitants. Cruso has been living in complete solitude since a very long time after he was castaway on this island. Though he has been castaway and is living in a small hut without any furniture, feeds himself with a monotonous diet, close to nature, with no comfort to speak of, he is happy. He has accepted his state very positively and has constructed his own kingdom on this island. In fact he has forgotten the time he spent in England. On the other hand the female counterpart, Susan considers the place as a place of punishment and longs to find her way back to her home. She has not accepted her solitude. When Cruso and the party is rescued Cruso dies during his journey back to England as his isolation from the civilized world and human beings like Michael becomes essential for him. Susan is scared of her solitude and cannot stand the silence that surrounds the island. She is exasperated by the wind which is blowing continuously. The smell of the skins used as clothes makes her sick. She has not forgotten the civilized world so considers everything in terms of its usefulness and feels disgusted when Cruso and Friday eats with their hands. Unlike Cruso she has not accepted the natural ways and the pleasure of solitude. After passing the uneasy time on the island, she is able to return to England. But once she reaches the civilization again, she feels
lonelier and more isolated from other human beings. She wishes to communicate the world through her story so requested Mr. Foe to write her story. She tries to speak to Friday, the native, who is isolated and marginalized because of the color of his skin and his stubborn silence. Friday like Michael does not allow anyone to enter their world.

**NAMELESS**

As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin explain in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (2008), language has the power to provide, because of its function of naming, a means for knowing the world that surrounds us (with, in a colonial situation, the surrounding world being a colonized place or people): “To name the world is to “understand” it, to know it and to have control over it… To name reality is therefore to exert power over it …” (Griffiths, Tiffin 261) The one that names is able to understand the world and control it; he or she is in a subject position. Thus, in a postcolonial situation, a way for the colonized to take back control over their world is to name it; to make their voice heard, where at first the voice of the colonizers was made heard loudest. Whereas language can be considered a way to categorize our surroundings as human beings, naming may be considered a way of categorizing other human beings; a way of fixing them, and therefore an act of power. As Kimberly W. Benston explains in his article “ I am What I Am: Naming and Unnaming in Afro-American Literature”, naming is (...) the means by which the mind takes possession of the named, at once fixing the named as irreversibly Other (...)” (Benston 1982: 3). He adds that namelessness can “invoke the power of the Sublime”. It invokes: (...) a transcendent impulse to undo all categories, all metonymies and reifications, and thrust the self beyond received patterns and relationships into a stance of unchallenged authority. (Benston 1982: 4)
Although in this quote Benston emphasizes the implications of the very act of unnaming on self (thus the active choice to free oneself from a name), however, it is namelessness itself that entails this Sublime quality. As Benston explains, the act of unnaming leads to the undoing of categories and patterns, with transcendence of all that is categorized and known and therefore authority over these categories as a consequence. Someone that refuses to be named, becomes “ungraspable”. The fact is that one without a name automatically escapes all category which makes him ungraspable an sich, leaving out of account how exactly this namelessness came into being.

Sigrid King pointed out that the practice of slave owners renaming slaves, forcing them to abandon their African identity, also enforces the idea of naming as an act of power (King 1990: 683). Unnaming, then, can be considered to be an act of taking back control; an act of defying this fixed otherness and escaping categorization (cf. the unnaming of Malcolm X). There is a strong parallel between namelessness and silence. Both are a form of withdrawal from articulation and both are a way of escaping categories and patterns, for silence is the escape from the referential quality of language that categorizes the world. Parry attributes qualities to silence that have affinity with Benston’s discussion of namelessness. In both cases, there is a surpassing of what can be known. Benston signifies this surpassing quality of namelessness as the positioning of the self “beyond received patterns and relationships”, while Parry describes this surpassing quality of silence, in relation to Friday, as the surpassing of meaning: (…) the outflow of sounds from the mouth of Friday gives tongue to meanings—or desires—which precede or surpass those which can be communicated and interpreted in formal language. (Parry 1996: 45)
The outflow of sounds Parry speaks of here, must consist of Friday’s flute music, for that is Friday’s only utterance of sound we encounter in the novel Foe. However, I feel the term “sounds” is not appropriate and that the way in which Friday gives tongue to meanings can be viewed much broader. There is, in fact, also his dancing and the stream that comes from his mouth in the last chapter.

Throughout the novel *Life and Times of Michael K.*, there are many examples available in which K. is turned into an object of oppression. Although his namelessness is not explicitly presented as being the cause for this oppression, his namelessness can be linked to his “being no one” for the law and the police. We come across this element of Michael K. “being no one” for the law and police several times in the novel, for instance when Michael attempts to take his mother to the country for the first time and they encounter a convoy of the army. One of the policemen tells them they have to stay at least fifty meters off the roadside, because: “Anything nearer, you can get shot, no warning, no questions asked.” (Coetzee 1982: 22). In this quote, we see how the police attributes this “being no one” to Michael K.’s existence: it does not matter what his story may be, where he comes from or what he is up to; when he approaches the roadside, he is nobody to the law and can get shot whenever the police feel like. This police statement, however, does not apply to Michael K. and his mother alone: it is applicable to every person that comes near the roadside. Michael K. is not the only one ‘being no one’; within the novel, there are many people that are portrayed as having no rights when encountering the police. Michael K.’s namelessness therefore can be viewed from several perspectives. First, interpreting the novel allegorically, his namelessness can be seen as signifying the lack of identity of people that live in a kind of world (a social context) as Coetzee describes in *Life & Times of Michael K*. It is this interpretation
that strongly invokes the association with Franz Kafka’s character Jozef K. in Der Prozess (1925), who succumbs as an individual to the overwhelming power of a system. It is this Kafkaesque idea (of the individual having no position of power within a system) that, in this allegorical interpretation, could be attributed to *Life & Times of Michael K* as well. Next to this, a connection between Kafka’s and Coetzee’s work could be made, considering that J.M. Coetzee has expressed his admiration for Franz Kafka at several times, as Patricia Merivale shows in her article “Audible Palimpsests: Coetzee’s Kafka” (Merivale 1996: 152). Also, Merivale points out that Heinrich von Kleist’s story “Michael Kohlhass”, an intertext for Kafka that has often been noted, can be seen as a “grandfather” intertext for Coetzee’s Michael K as well (Merivale 1996: 165). Michael K’s namelessness does not invoke a position of unchallenged authority for him on a practical level. However, he does withdraw from categorization, because of his namelessness and also his silence, which I will address later on in this chapter. K’s namelessness—he refers to himself as Michael, when asked what his name is (Coetzee 131)—signifies his ‘unknowability’: other people do not know who he is or where he comes from (endorsed by his silence). After having getting to know Michael a little, the medical officer attributes a certain miraculous quality to him and his unknown whereabouts: “No papers, no money; no family, no friends, no sense of who you are, the obscurest of the obscure, so obscure as to be a prodigy.” (Coetzee 142).

The obscurity of Michael K’s background (entailed by his namelessness), makes the medical officer think of him as a strange, but wonderful thing. Something that, because of his unknown background, escapes categorization. The medical officer himself, even ascribes a position of authority to Michael. While starting to wonder about the meaning of his own life, he ascribes a mysterious meaningfulness"
(Coetzee 1983: 165) to Michael’s and feels Michael could guide him towards this meaningfulness, which lies in a place that cannot be determined within the categorized boundaries we (normal human beings) are familiar with:

(…) I am convinced there are areas that lie between the camps and belong to no camp, not even to the catchment areas of the camps (…) I am looking for such a place in order to settle there (…). I am not so foolish, however, as to imagine that I can rely on maps and roads to guide me. Therefore I have chosen you to show me the way. (Coetzee 1983: 162-163).

This namelessness can be linked to the idea of being no one: Michael K is not treated as a full human being, which, as becomes clear in the novel, counts for many other people as well. In this way, his namelessness could be seen as allegorical: Michael K and his namelessness symbolize the way in which people that are caught up in an overwhelming power system, are viewed and treated. However, his namelessness also invokes the medical officer's inclination to ascribe peculiar qualities to K: the medical officer sees him as mysterious and an authority connected to another mode of existence. Still, we as readers encounter Michael K in a way that is less miraculous: because of Michael's frequent position of the focalizer throughout the novel, he is not transcendental to us, but accessible, in opposition to Friday, who is inaccessible to his surrounding characters as well as to the reader at all times. Next to this, the medical officer patronizes K a lot and it becomes clear that, on a practical level, K cannot be seen as an unchallenged authority because of his namelessness.

Another example of namelessness is to be found in Foe. Susan Barton has been washed ashore at an island where two man have been living: a white man
named Cruso and a black man named Friday. They take care of her and she lives with them for about a year. Cruso tells Susan that Friday has lost his tongue: slave traders have cut out his tongue. Friday communicates on a transcendental level and surpasses what is known to us. Friday gains unchallenged authority through his mode of communication that lies beyond known patterns. MacLeod has stated. Instead it is what I would like to call “trans-discursive”. Friday’s discourse does not challenge the discourse of language of the other characters: it transcends it. In this sense, Friday can be seen as being unchallenged and powerful. He does not ‘triumph’ against ‘insistent demands’ of the discourse surrounding him, as MacLeod states, because he simply does not join the struggle. One cannot win if one does not participate in the game. Friday’s discourse goes beyond the discourse of his other characters.

Cruso has found Friday on the island as he could not speak, he has named him Friday. The act of naming the unnamed clearly suggests the power game. In fact, Friday has been rendered as a slave by Cruso. Friday is ‘other’, because he is silent and nameless.

In Waiting for the Barbarians, Our narrator is a nameless Magistrate who governs a nameless settlement on the outer limits, the border, of a nameless Empire. We are given no recognizable sense of when or where the story takes place, no clear signs by which to locate the novel's events along the axes of time and space that form the grid of human history. The character of barbarian girl is also nameless. She is the victim of the tortures committed by colonel Joll and the representatives of empire. She, like Friday is the other or the slave who does not bear any identity.

**Female characters**

Coetzee represented a large variety of concepts with different characters and
events in his works; each novel is about some particular characters that are trapped in the complications of life from which there is no way escape. One of the important points is about the condition of women in the society; the female characters are not the same in all his novels. They can be black or white, married or unmarried, old or young, they may have different temperaments and very contradictory conditions of life, but all of them show a very important fact that is the marginalization of women and destruction of identity. In fact they introduce women as other that is different from man and should be subdued to him. It is the governing factor in their lives. Women find different conditions and experience various forms of limitations in Coetzee’s novels but the fact is that in all cases the real identity of women is ignored and they respond to the circumstances in their own way they see themselves. In South Africa, the prominence of political issues has limited the South African literature to racial and colonial problematic; a preoccupation with the politics of race has tended to deflect attention from the often more subtle issues of gender. However Coetzee has given much importance to this issue in his novels. He claims that his novels set out to “question power... from a position of weakness” (Coetzee, ‘The Almighty Pen’, 12). His female narrators write from marginal and disempowered positions in relation to oppressive masculine systems of power: Magda subverts her masterful father’s law; Susan Barton challenges Foe’s masculine authority; and Elizabeth Curren rejects various patriarchal discourses of nationalism. Not only does Coetzee utilize feminist discourse as a necessarily marginalized and complicit strategy, but he also adopts feminine symbols (fluidity, maternity, writing the body, silences, weaving metaphors), all of which are emphasized in the writings of difference feminists such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, in order to suggest a space beyond the limitations posed by logocentric thinking. Coetzee’s use of the
feminine must be read in terms of the broader impact of the feminine as a textual strategy in the elucidation of settler post-coloniality. Coetzee represents his marginality, his writing without authority, in the characters of his white women narrators who construct ‘their’ texts (or ‘story’ in the case of Susan Barton, ‘letter’ in the case of Elizabeth Curren, and ‘pastiche diary’ in the case of Magda) from a position of marginality in relation to the canon, its recognized literary forms, and its masculinist dominance. “I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire . . . the story I desire to be known by is the story of the island”. (*Foe* 131)

Coetzee’s narrative strategy is to avoid the mere replication of power by refusing to compete with it on its own terms. In his opposition to the State, in his opposition to ‘deformed and stunted’ apartheid literature, in his opposition to censorship and in his opposition to his own (constructed) position as a white South African man, Coetzee has chosen to render his own positionality and therefore his oppositionality, not as a ‘given’ but as an *object* of discourse. This objectification is achieved via feminization.

*Disgrace* follows a female specter—a symbolic recollection, a partial obscuration—as its primary memory muse. Not a romantic voice, but the troubling voices and haunting bodies of the oppressed are the central figures of the traumatic sublime. Coetzee portrays the post-apartheid situation in South Africa with its many political and social changes when the black people acquired their new found freedom and control. In spite of people’s expectation for a better life, the situation keeps getting worse not only for black women but also for the white women who were privileged during apartheid due to their skin colour. The female characters like Melanie, Lucy, Soroya, Petrus’ wife and Bev Shaw become victims of this situation
and undergo too much pain and difficulties. They are exposed to humiliation, rape and degradation. Women are often reduced to their physical functions. They are lovers and mothers, and their bodies serve to evoke David's body. Women are turned into commodities by male behavior. Furthermore, women are assigned a marginal role on the narrative level. Female characters do not gain a significant voice in the text, and no female point of view alternative to David's is offered. The novel focuses on David, and although it does not wholly explain him, the female characters remain even more inexplicable. But the example of Lucy serves to show that it is exactly the acceptance of this inexplicability which marks a non-appropriating attitude toward the female other.

Lucy has been cast in traditionally female roles by the narrative: as victim and as mother; she is integrated into a patriarchal system. Yet, she rejects these roles that have been inscribed upon her body or rather she rejects to play these roles as marginal parts. She employs her marked body for her own purposes and makes herself readable again, most of all to herself. She may be considered one of the strongest characters, since her power is provided by her indomitable and iron will. When Lucy and David are attacked on the farm by three black men, the attackers not only steal everything of value, shoot all the dogs and set David's head on fire, they also gang rape Lucy. After the rape, when Lucy is reduced to the role of a victim of history, she seems to have lost all her strength, all her interest in the things that used to make up her life. This extreme physical experience alters her own attitude to her body and the way in which her body is mediated in the text. It becomes an object of a crime and of medical observation (“... I have seen a doctor, I have had tests, I have done everything one can reasonably do ...” (125). During the phase in which Lucy feels alienated from her body, the reader likewise does not perceive of it
anymore as a signifier of solidity and security. It turns into a bearer of the mark of history. Her body becomes a material presence that is not under the control of its owner anymore; Lucy neglects herself. "Now that he is close to her, a faint smell of staleness, unwashedness, reaches him." (Disgrace, 125)

Despite her father’s pleadings and reproaches, Lucy refuses to report the rape to the police. He also suggests she should leave the place and make a new start somewhere else. But Lucy insists that she does not want to, indeed cannot live anywhere else. When she finds out that she is pregnant from the rape, she decides to have the baby, again against David’s advice and wishes—and to the bewilderment of many readers. The following events towards the end of the novel do not turn Lucy into a more comprehensible character: Lucy and David are invited to a party by her black neighbour and co-proprietor Petrus. At the gathering it turns out that one of the rapists is distantly related to Petrus and will henceforth stay with him. Although she is shaken, Lucy decides to stay on the farm. Petrus offers her a marriage-like arrangement, in which he gets her land in exchange for protection. Lucy accepts the deal. The novel ends with a tentative re-establishment of friendly terms between Lucy and her father. Lucy is an example of the text’s tendency to turn women into objects and commodities. From her function as a Mother Earth figure at the beginning she is at the end of the novel reduced to the value of her farm. She, who is intensely in love with the piece of land that she owns, is turned into an appendage to a business of land exchange. Before she becomes the victim of a rape, Lucy is an object of her father’s desire and a means for him to define himself. In the end she is again transformed into an abstract idea of femininity: the fertile woman, who gives birth to a child and makes the barren soil bear fruit.
Lucy is constructed in opposition to her father David. While David lives an urban, intellectual and markedly heterosexual life, Lucy is a lesbian, chooses a rural life and supports herself by the work of her hands. Lucy seeks to live in harmony with the people and nature surrounding her, while David sports the ideal of the Byronic hero and claims he does not need anyone. She represents the generation of young white South Africans who are more influenced by the historical change leading to the elections in 1994 than by the apartheid-regime. Lucy endeavours to overcome apartheid even to the extent of ignoring its long-term effects. She wants to tear down the colonial patterns of master and servant and seems to have established a little working model on her farm with Petrus. Her concern about historical repercussions even makes her refuse the term ‘farm’ for her smallholding, because it bears appropriating colonial connotations (200). She does not want to exert white authority over the country. Then history in the guise of the three rapists breaks into her life and literally inscribes upon her body that the past cannot be ignored or redeemed by an individual. However, the novel does not end with Lucy as a defeated, passive construct of history. It redefines her as a representative of the new South Africa, as a bearer of hope.

On the other hand Melanie is the cute, fashionable girl taking David’s Romantic poetry course, a drama student who spends her time out of the classes rehearsing for a comedy. She is the only major character in the novel whose motives are truly enigmatic, perhaps because Lurie, the narrator, is incapable of understanding her. David is instantly taken in by her. He has sex with her. However, she says she doesn’t want to, making us think that she is raped. But then later she shows up at his apartment unannounced, crying hysterically and asking if she can
stay with him. In fact, her relationship with David is complex. She files a complaint against David. According to Head, Melanie is the first character in the novel to display the feelings of the shame and personal disgrace, and it is also because of his desire for her that David himself becomes disgraced.

Melanie comes from a highly religious and disciplined family, Lurie learns, months after their affair (163-74), but at the university she has acquired a possessive boyfriend in black leather, who, to the extent of his abilities, follows her everywhere, to every rehearsal and performance (193). The boyfriend even follows Melanie to Lurie’s class after Melanie and Lurie’s third sexual encounter (31). The boyfriend is ‘protective’, although something of a pimp: he hovers in the audience while Melanie shares her beauty with the public on stage. Melanie’s affair with Lurie is perhaps either an attempt to escape her boyfriend, a probing of the limits of the relationship, or a fling made harmless by the strength of the relationship. The affair with Lurie may represent her own efforts to live within ‘Eros’ tamed. Perhaps it is the boyfriend who supplies the lyrical that Lurie mentions in describing his and Melanie’s affair to her parents (171). The lyric is one of violent jealousy, and given that Melanie has not succeeded in escaping the boyfriend's attraction by the end of the novel (193), one wonders whether her fate will be that of Desdemona. She, in the end, may be reconciled to that. Melanie’s affair with her professor threatens to destroy the life she has built for herself in Cape Town. She drops out of the university and the theater (36), yet it is hard to see how she is victimized so severely by Lurie as to make her dropping out a plausible response. Coetzee does not give us enough to understand her actions because we see her from Lurie’s perspective, a perspective too far removed, by age, race, and enculturation to make sense of her life. But she
recovers, finishes her studies, and continues on the stage. She is talented as an actress, ‘positively gifted’, Lurie now appraises her (191). Melanie’s talent shines forth precisely in a rather formulaic comedy set in a hairdressing salon in the now racially integrated Johannesburg neighborhood of Hillbrow (23). There is room for art, an art that shows our way of life to ourselves, even after the disgrace of the high culture that Lurie has failed to pass down. This is the hope that Melanie instantiates.

**Susan in *Foe***

Even more intricate to examine is the position within settler identities of the white or post-colonizing women who can be seen to have an in-between subjectivity, often caught between masculinist discourses of nationalism and a kind of maternal role involving compassion and reconciliation. At the same time, these women often share a history of violence with the indigenous colonized peoples, whether it be through exclusionary practices, through domestic violence, or through entrenched attitudes of discrimination. Susan in *Foe* is example of this kind of female character. She presents a struggle for self-autonomy and cultural recognition. Her story uncovers the unspoken biases and brings them out in the open. Written by a white male academic in the South Africa of the 1980s, *Foe* is a novel conspicuously conscious of its problematic relation to the discourses of both post-Colonialism and feminism. Gayatri C. Spivak has remarked, I think correctly, that, through the figure of Susan Barton, Coetzee ‘attempts to represent the bourgeois individualist woman in early capitalism as the agent of other—directed ethics rather than as a combatant in the preferential ethics of self-interest’ (Spivak 1999: 182). *Foe* is generally described by commentators as a rewriting of Daniel Defoe’s eighteenth century classic, *Robinson Crusoe*, told by a voice elided in the original story, that of a
woman. Although Robinson Crusoe had no place for women, *Foe* on the other hand centers on a woman character. Coetzee positions *Foe* in the discursive field of postcoloniality, but he does so in peculiarly South African terms. The novel develops a characterology of the relations of power between the metropolitan center and the settler-colonial and native sectors of colonial society. In *Foe* Coetzee most clearly shows the pervasive influence of colonialism. Susan, who at the beginning of the novel is portrayed as a rather independent woman, is, by the end of the novel, reduced to being enslaved by her mastery over Friday and enslaved by the greedy Foe. She is no longer Susan Barton, but rather Mrs. Cruso, bearing the colonial burden of Friday while also being used by Foe. Susan has become a part of a cycle from which she cannot escape. She finds that in the colonial system it is sometimes hard to tell who is the master and who is the slave.

Returning from Bahia, where she has been searching for a lost daughter, Susan Barton is put off the ship after a mutiny; she is accompanied only by the dead body of the captain, whose mistress she had been. She swims ashore and finds herself on the island with Cruso and Friday. The opening passage of the novel marks Susan’s birth in the novel. Susan slips overboard into the sea, her hair floating around her like a jellyfish—in an understated way the slimy, liquid imagery is suggestive of amniotic fluid. She is carried by the waves, and spewed forth onto the "hot sand" of the beach, naked save for her petticoat, which clings and dries on her body like some kind of afterbirth. Susan in fact protests later that the beginning of the novel is not her birth, that she had a life before her story begins:

> I am not a story, Mr Foe. I may impress you as a story because I began my account of myself without preamble, slipping into the water and
striking out for the shore. But my life did not begin in the waves. There was a life before the water ... and so on back to the day I was born.

(Foe, 131)

There is evidently tension set up between illusionism, inherent in Susan's 'realist' claim that she is a real woman with a real birth and life, and anti-illusionism, the opening paragraph suggesting Susan's birth as a character in a novel, and gesturing to a space outside of the novel in which Susan is born in the author/reader's mind. If it is not Susan as a character who is using anti-illusionistic ploys, then this suggests the presence of another 'I' who is feminine representative projection by Coetzee.

She finds herself one day on Cruso's island, where she is first greeted by Friday, Cruso's black, mute servant. Susan is fascinated by the enigmatic Friday, much as the magistrate is by the enigmatic barbarian girl. Susan looks up and sees a "dark shadow ... not of a cloud but of a man with a dazzling halo about him" (5). The first interaction between characters occurs between Susan and the black man, Friday. This initial encounter is a prefigurement of the strange and complex relation between these characters that follows in the novel. On the island, Susan meets Cruso, to whom she tells her story. She is searching for her lost daughter who has been abducted by an Englishman and "conveyed to the New World" (10). In response, Cruso has no story to tell for himself, but instead tells her, at various intervals, a set of stories "so various ... that ... he no longer knew what was truth and what was fancy" (12).
During her time on the island, Susan asks why Friday does not speak, or why Cruso does not teach him to speak. In response, Cruso opens Friday's mouth: "He has no tongue"; Cruso says, "they cut out his tongue" (23). Although Susan is told that the slavers cut out Friday's tongue, how Friday lost his tongue remains a mystery in the novel as Friday is the only one who can tell his story and he is mute. Although Susan comes to suspect Cruso of causing Friday's mute condition, he appears to be a benevolent master. Cruso says, "There is no call to punish Friday. Friday has lived with me for many years. He has known no other master. He follows me in all things" (37).

One of the reasons that Susan becomes the enigmatic Friday's master is that she realizes that Friday has never been without a master and she assumes he would be helpless on his own. Her initial curiosity and fascination, though, quickly wear off when she later becomes Friday's master and caretaker. She begins to feel the colonial burden which the master must carry as a part of subjugating another to servitude. One day, Susan sees Friday set himself afloat on a log of wood and scatter white flakes, which she later realizes are petals, on the surface of the ocean. Friday's purpose here is utterly cryptic, and yet the mysterious petals reappear in the dreamscape of section IV, floating around the unnamed narrator of this section "like a rain of snowflakes" (156). The significance of Friday's petals is that they remain indecipherable. Susan's hermeneutic enterprise fails to establish their meaning and like Friday's missing tongue, the mystery of Friday's casting of petals onto the ocean remains a mystery only he can answer. Friday's silence is a figure for his radical "otherness". Susan desires to escape from the island as she finds Cruso and Friday poor companions.
After she has been there a year, the three are rescued, but Cruso dies before they reach England, leaving Susan to care for Friday. Susan assumes the name Mrs. Cruso on the ship to protect herself and keeps the name after she returns to England. Susan wishes to write a story of her castaway so she consulted the famous author Foe. She wrote letters to him. Susan’s letters are often undated and are increasingly like ‘proper narrative’, signaling her progress as writer. Susan moves into Foe’s house, but Foe is missing, hiding from bailiffs. Susan waits for Foe to return as she is adamant that he should write her story for her. Her plea is that he should return to her the “substance” she has lost (51), that her life is ‘drearly suspended’ until Foe’s writing is done (63). In some ways her ‘lost substance’ reflects her ‘anxiety of authorship’, her lack of faith in herself as author of her own story. On another level, ‘substance’ becomes a metaphor for truth, for reality and even for literary realism which attempts to create substantial fictional worlds.

Gradually, Susan begins to write her own story, but this is only done through her appropriation of Foe’s pen: ‘Somehow’, she writes to Foe, “the pen becomes mine when I write with it” (66). Her assimilation of the pen as phallus marks the beginning of her struggle for literary power. Strangely enough it is precisely at this point that her role as mother returns to haunt her. Susan notices a strange girl outside the house. This girl claims to be Susan’s daughter and yet Susan rejects her as sent by ‘father-born’.

When Susan rejects this daughter as ‘father born’ she is in fact enacting a refusal of a particular patriarchal definition of herself. She rejects the script ‘written’ for her by a male author, which insinuates that women cannot be both mothers and ‘free agents’ in constructing their own lives. Susan scathingly questions Foe’s
knowledge of female experience: “Do you think women drop children and forget them as snakes lay eggs? Only a man could entertain such a fancy ... She is more your daughter than she ever was mine”. (75)

In England she has to take care of Friday, who would be completely helpless without her. After becoming exhausted trying to care for Friday ‘in all things’, she tries to send Friday back to Africa, but she can find no safe way to send him so she tries desperately to unlock the secrets in his mind. She says, "I tell myself I talk to Friday to educate him out of darkness and silence. But is that the truth? There are times when benevolence deserts me and I "use words only as the shortest way to subject him to my will" (60). She is enslaved by her mastery over Friday. In talking to Foe about Friday she says, "I must have my freedom! It is becoming more than I can bear! It is worse than the island! He is like the old man of the river!" (147) She explains, "There once was a fellow who took pity on an old man waiting at the riverside, and offered to carry him across. Having borne him safely through the flood, he knelt to set him down on the other side. But the old man would not leave his shoulders: no, he tightened his knees about his deliverer's neck and beat him on his flanks, to be short, turned him into a beast of burden" (148). At this point her life is no longer her own; she has become Mrs. Cruso in every sense, bearing the colonial burden of Friday which was once Cruso's. In an attempt to return Friday to Africa, and to free herself from him, Susan sets off. On the way to Bristol, she disguises herself as a man in order to hide her vulnerability as a single woman. While she and Friday are travelling they find an infant girl, "stillborn or perhaps stifled" (105). “Whose child is she?” Susan wonders. The dead child is an ‘uncanny’ presence, signaling a secret recognition. Susan secretly recognizes the child as herself: "Who
was the babe but I in another life?" (105). As with the earlier split in voice, in the
uncanny link between Susan and the dead child a covert childbirth metaphor
emerges. Stillborn is often a metaphorical way of describing a failed piece of writing. Perhaps the stifled infant points to the fact that Susan's story itself will be 'stifled' under the authorship of Foe/Defoe, as her part in the story of the island will be omitted in the final versions of Defoe's novels. When Susan gets to Bristol, she realizes the futility of her attempt to restore Friday to his native land, and that he has no defense against slave traders who will probably only sell him into slavery a second time. At the end of this section Susan resignedly adopts Friday as her child, seemingly as a replacement for the daughter she has lost.

Foe and Susan have sexual intercourse and she assumes the dominant position, asserting her status as author of her story. Susan then tries to teach Friday to write. On his slate, however Friday draws pictures of walking eyes. Susan demands that he give her the slate but he ignores her and wipes his slate clean. After a walk, Susan comes home to find Friday sitting at Foe's desk. Dressed in Foe's robes he holds in his hand a quill pen with a semen-like "drop of black ink glistening at its tip" (151). She first mistakes him for Foe, then realizes who he is and tries to snatch the pen away from him, a telling gesture. Although Susan challenges Foe's authority, she is outraged and threatened by Friday's usurpation of the literary father's authority. Friday is covering the page in rows and rows of circles. Susan and Foe interpret these as the letter "0". "It is a start", Foe says, "Tomorrow you must teach him 'a'. “ (152).

In the last section of Foe, an unidentified narrator, who possibly represents either Susan's unconscious self, enters the house where foe, Susan, the daughter
and Friday are lying covered in dust, decay and ‘a faint smell of lilac’ (153). Their bodies seem insubstantial, even paper-like: the woman/girl on the landing "weighs no more than straw" and the skin of Susan and Foe is ‘dry as paper’ (153) Friday seems to be the only one who is alive, ‘his skin is warm’ (154). The narrator tries to part his teeth and listen to what is emitted. From out of Friday's mouth 'issue the sounds of the island' (154). Following this strange vision is another, separated from the first typographically. In this second vision, an unidentified narrator enters Foe's (Defoe's?) house on ‘a bright autumn day’ and yet the room is ‘darker than before’ (155). The narrator sees the same woman/girl on the landing and Susan and Foe lying face to face. Around Friday's neck, the narrator observes, is "a scar like a necklace, left by a rope or a chain", ironically recalling the emancipatory notice Susan signs in Cruso's name and ties around Friday's neck, suggesting the futility of Susan's emancipatory gesture and her complicity in his oppression.

Coetzee's purpose in choosing a female persona involves a certain willful abdication of power and a challenging of authority. As the Morphet interview "The Almighty Pen" reveals, in Foe Coetzee aligns himself with Susan's position, that of the ‘unsuccessful authoress’. The feminism Susan represents is allegorized onto a postcolonial framework, rather than focused specifically on women’s relation to power. Coetzee's use of feminism begins from the assumption that white women's access to power is different from that of white men, that they are 'semi-marginal;' he takes a reading of gendered power relations and grafts it onto a postcolonial paradigm. Susan Barton's disabled authorial voice allows Coetzee to register, through her, a rejection of the colonialist, humanist discourse represented by Foe, and also a sense of complicity in it. Above all, Susan’s narrative is not about her but
is about something else expressed in the form of feminism's 'additional allegorical burdens'.

Through her appropriation of the efficacious pen, Susan seems to have achieved the authority and power of male authorship. She strives to invert the Western ideological model that viewed the women as inferior to men and restricts her social relevance. It is significant that she feels that her writing or language is inadequate for the job, and she must find a man to take what she tells about the island and turn it into a readable story. This characteristic of Susan's personality relates to the idea in feminist critical theory that women have no true language. What women are forced to communicate with is the language of a patriarchal society. The inadequacy that Susan feels in her language is parallel to Magda's feeling that the "father tongue" is not the language of her heart. Susan tells Mr. Foe that "it is I who have disposal of all that Cruso leaves behind, which is the story of his island" (45). She also tells Foe that she is "a ghost beside the true body of Cruso" (51). After Cruso's death, Susan has found a way to serve him as she wanted to on the island. Foe, then, is different from the other novels in that Susan takes upon herself the role of servant; she submits herself to subjugation and becomes a colonized woman, not at the will of Cruso, but by her own will. Susan, instead of speaking out against the dominating patriarchy as do Magda and the magistrate, actively participates in the colonial system because she seems to view this as the best way in which to try to change the aspects which she feels are wrong. For example, she takes care of Friday with the intention of freeing him and returning him to Africa. Her attempts, while noble, fail because she, like Magda and the magistrate, is only one person trying to change a pervasive colonial system. She, therefore, inadvertently becomes
a ‘pawn’ of the system just as she does to Foe. While Susan seeks Foe out and tells her story to him, her good intentions about telling the truth of her stay and Cruso's life on the island are turned on her; Foe becomes the one telling the story to Susan. In Susan's situation Coetzee offers a different expression of the female aesthetic. Susan tries to use the colonial system to work against itself, instead of directly speaking out against the system.

Susan is like Magda in that she plays a dual role as colonized and colonizer. Her colonial burden is greater than Magda's in some ways because she must not only provide for herself, but also for Friday. Not only is he a burden in a physical sense, but he is also a burden on her conscience and her peace of mind. By legally setting him free Susan hopes that her burden will be relieved somewhat, but she finds that this is not true. She feels an obligation as his caretaker such that she does not send him back to Africa when she realizes that the men on the ships would sell him back into slavery. She is fascinated with Friday to the point of obsession. She muses that the man who cut out Friday's tongue could, possibly be Cruso instead of slave-traders (as Cruso suggested), but she has no real evidence to prove this. She says in one of her letters to Foe, "I would give much to hear the truth of how he was captured by the slave traders and lost his tongue" (57). She has to discover Friday's story, because by finding out what happened to him perhaps she will find someone or something to blame for his condition and her troubles, just as Magda blames her father and the magistrate blames Colonel Joll.

She, like Magda and the magistrate, tries to transcend the barriers between the colonized and colonizer by freeing Friday and trying to send him back to Africa, where she assumes he was born. She considers this not only because she believes
that he would be happier among his own people and country, but also because she
does not want to deal with the burden of Friday or have him as a constant reminder
to her of Cruso and the enigmas that they both are. Critics of Foe have often fallen
into the trap of reading feminism according to this inflexible position, where the
feminist position is seen as "nothing but the operation of a woman who aspires to be
like a man" (Derrida, Spurs 64-65), and is primarily a phallic practice par excellence
(Derrida "Women in" 187-203). One example of this can be seen in Macaskill and
Colleran's collaborative work on Foe, with its suggestive title "Reading History,
Writing Heresy: The Resistance of Representation and the Representation of
Resistance in Coetzee's Foe." They suggest that Coetzee's strategy of
"undermining, while participating within, a feminist critique of patriarchal power
relations" entails that the authority of Foe and Susan is interchangeable (452). This
reading of Susan's position is deeply problematic given that Macaskill and Colleran
have suggested prior to this point that Susan is the feminist focus of the text. Another
example is Dunbar's reading, which owes much to Dovey's in that she argues that
Susan ends up colonizing the position of Friday through her assumption of
'masculinist attitudes'. Dunbar believes that this appropriation of a masculinist power
dynamic (the pen) allows Susan to move "from a position of subjugation to the white,
patriarchal male (Cruso at first, Foe later on) to that of feminist domination and
literary autonomy. She achieves this transition though her symbolic usurpation of the
male instrument of domination and of communication." (107) Similarly, Rosemary
Jolly points to "Susan Barton's replacement of Foe as Author-Narrator within the
novel" (Colonization 13). Such assertions of the literary equality or equivalence
between Susan and Foe are based on a fundamental misreading of the text,
whereby Susan's absence at the conclusion of Foe's writing is ignored. Furthermore,
such a reading overlooks Barton's equivocation over the Friday's silence. As Benita Parry has pointed out, "Barton articulates a reluctance to exert the narrative power which she holds over those who are muted, when she resists Foe's urgings to invent Friday's story" (50). Susan’s exclusion from the text of 'history' (prefigured as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*) and from the story that she seeks to tell (that of the island rather than of the search for the daughter) are vital to the depiction of writing in *Foe*, exclusions that Susan rightly predicts:

> Better had there been only Cruso and Friday," you will murmur to yourself: "Better without the woman." Yet where would you be without the woman? Would Cruso have come to you of his own accord? Could you have made up Cruso and Friday and the island with its fleas and apes and lizards? I think not. Many strengths you have, but invention is not one of them." (*Foe* 72)

Dovey's suggestion that Susan epitomises an Anglo-American feminist attempt to construct the racial other as a 'fetishistic shelter' has been extraordinarily successful in its influence on subsequent readings of *Foe*. Gayatri Spivak reads *Foe* as an illustration of the "wholly otherness of margins" ("Theory" 157) and points to a warning against feminist readings of the racial other that do not heed the "Eurocentric arrogance" inherent in any attempt to give voice to the margins. Spivak writes that "a concern with women, and men, who have not been written in the same cultural inscription, cannot be mobilized in the same way as the investigation of gendering in our own . . . attention to the wholly other must be constantly renewed" ("Theory" 159).
The Barbarian Girl in Waiting for the Barbarians

Dick Penner says

At the heart of Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a dialectic concerning the relationship between empire and colony, master and slave-rebel, man and woman, blindness and sight, law and barbarism, and expediency and ethics (35).

The Empire and the barbarian cultures are symbolically represented by the Magistrate and the barbarian girl. Their relationship, while corresponding in many ways to the relationship between the Empire and the Barbarians, is strikingly different because the magistrate sympathizes with the barbarian girl and begins to see how miserable her life has been, unlike Colonel Joll who represents the Empire in its most evil form. The girl was brought in with the other barbarians whom colonel Joll found on his campaign. The narrator finds the girl begging on the street and brings her into his apartment. He finds out that the girl's father is dead and that they tortured her in front of him. Her torturer brought a hot fork inches away from her eyes and made her look at it. It caused partial blindness. The barbarian girl stays with the narrator and works for him in his house. She sleeps in his bed but the narrator does not get to know her. However, she had not asked for his help and had never really seemed to want it. Since she was helpless the magistrate made the decision for her, forcing her into a way of life for which she had not asked. This parallels the Empire's forcing the barbarians to live a way of life which the Empire dictated, not the way they had lived before the Empire existed. Her distinguishing characteristics in the novel are her guardedness and her shyness. No matter how hard the narrator tries to have her tell him, ‘What did they do to you? … Why don't you want to tell me?’ (34).
She constantly refuses to answer. Her refusal is meaningful for the understanding of the kind of moral response the Magistrate is capable of at this stage. He seeks the marks on her body, but more from a self-centered reason—from his worrying concern that he is very much like the torturers, and from an obscure sense of guilt that he let all of those things happen—and less from her perspective, from the point of view of her sufferings. And his failure to confer on her an inner reality is indicated by the words he uses, in his confusion, when trying to convey a sense of his experience. He repeatedly refers to her (or her body) in terms of ‘surface’: ‘with this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface across which I hunt back and forth seeking entry’ (46); or ‘There is no answering life. It is like caressing an urn or a ball, something which is all surface.’ (52) Because of her guardedness the narrator never fully understands her and she does not accept him. The narrator ends up taking her back to the barbarian people because he feels that the best thing for her is to be with her people, those who understand her as he does not. He also feels that this is the only choice left to him if he wants to try to change things. He does not know what else to do with her, and he thinks that by taking her back to her people, he will be freeing her in a sense. At their parting, the narrator asks the girl to return to the town with him but she refuses and says ‘no. I do not want to go back to that place’. At the end of the novel, after his life has returned to normal, the magistrate learns from one of his lovers, Mai, that he made the barbarian girl very unhappy and that she would cry often. The magistrate says of Mai, "She is opening a door through which a wind of utter desolation blows on me" (WFB 152).

The barbarian girl’s lack of communication is more significant than her dialogue throughout the novel. She is quiet throughout most of the book, but when she does speak it is to state the obvious or to try to understand the situation. When
the magistrate decides to undertake the journey to take her to her people he is "surprised by her fluency, her quickness, her self-possession" (WFB 63). Outside the domain of the empire he sees her differently: "I even catch myself in a flush of pride: she is not just the old man's slut, she is a witty attractive young woman!" (WFB 63) He says, “She has a fondness for facts, I note, for pragmatic dicta, she dislikes fancy questions, speculations, we are an ill matched couple”. She is never able to tell him about the horrors of colonialism, but he eventually experiences these horrors when he is persecuted as a traitor because he returns her to her people and comes in contact with the barbarians. He then realizes:

It is the fault of the Empire! Empire has created the time of history.

Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe. Empire dooms itself to live in history and plot against history. (WFB 133)

Her lack of dialogue tells the reader that she does not accept the narrator. If she decided to talk with him and explain her torture she would be opening up to him and give him another power over her. Her silence is the one freedom neither the narrator nor her torturer can take from her and she is not willing to give it up easily. The girl's silence shows her strength and is her one form of resistance. The girl is an enigmatic presence, then, thwarting the process of subject-constitution. She is also, however, more multivalent than the foregoing analysis might suggest. At the most obvious level, she represents a continuation of the longing for community that we have encountered before, in Magda in In the Heart of the Country. But whereas in Magda's case female desire for belonging and association can be read as the desire to escape from the loneliness that attends the colonizing history of the male father,
the Magistrate’s desire in Barbarians brings in train all the dominating implications of
the colonial episteme. The desired, female colonized is well known as a troupe of
colonial discourse, whether she represents the interior and its material riches, the
landscape, or the purely psychic abundance of the unknown. In disallowing
penetration, therefore, Coetzee both acknowledges and refuses to perpetuate these
generalized implications of dominance. Even her presence forces the magistrate to
become aware of the destructive nature of colonialism, something he had never
really thought about. She is a catalyst for the change that takes place in the
Magistrate, she also fulfills the role as the colonized woman. The magistrate uses
her for his own needs, even though he thinks that he is helping her. It is obvious
when he says, "People will say I keep two wild animals in my rooms, a fox and a girl"
(WFB 34), that he does not value her as an individual. However, the longer the girl
stays with him the more he becomes obsessed with knowing everything about her
and her life and torture. He says, "It has been growing more and more clear to me
that until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go
of her" (WFB 31).

There are other, more specific implications. The girl's mystery is partly the
result of torture. Foucault argues in Discipline and Punish that the purpose of torture
is to get to the soul, the last vestige of selfhood in which resistance lies buried. As
such, torture is in fact a way of producing the soul, for it writes soul hood on the body
through pain (29). To put it another way, individuality is signified, constructed,
precisely in order that it may be destroyed; similarly, "pain is truth," says the
Magistrate in Barbarians, paraphrasing Joll (WFB 5). Later, after being tortured
himself, the Magistrate uses language similar to Foucault's: "He Mandel deals with
my soul: every day he folds the flesh aside and exposes my soul to the light" (WFB
At this early stage, then, the torture marks on the girl are signifiers pointing the Magistrate toward her individuality.

Tortured as she is the Magistrate's attentions, which involve washing her feet, take the basic form of atonement or expiation. This is a further significant implication, introducing the novel's parodic link with the moral framework of South African liberal humanism. The washing of feet invokes this context, placing the emphasis on liberalism's Christian component—a nuance that brings to mind, most obviously, the figure of Alan Paton. The liberal Christian path to social justice through forgiveness and reconciliation has as its literary correlative the religious tragedy of Cry, the Beloved Country. Coetzee's emphasis is to provide a gentle critique of this heritage, a critique that repoliticizes and eroticizes it, displaying liberalism's fetishization of victimhood and revealing it as a more humane but still essentially self-validating and dominating form of "soul-formation."10 Thus, looking at the image of himself in the partially blinded eyes of the girl, the Magistrate begins to see the image of Joll:

I am disquieted. "What do I have to do to move you?" ... "Does no one move you?"; and with a shift of horror I behold the answer that has been waiting all the time offer itself to me in the image of a face masked by two black glassy insect eyes from which there comes no reciprocal gaze but only my doubled image cast back at me.... No! No! No! ... There is nothing to link me with torturers. (44)

The realization of complicity proves to be intolerable for the Magistrate. He tries to forget the girl by paying more frequent visits to the bird-woman, but without effect. Gradually, the conviction grows that he should undertake a journey to the barbarians to restore the girl to her people.
Conclusion

Yet there are numerous problems associated with this ‘use’ of feminism, not the least being the idea that women’s (and Attwell does refer to white women when he writes ‘gender’) powerlessness is not significant in itself, but that it requires supplementation. In other words, feminist critical practice is most interesting as a discourse on power when it has little to do with women and more to do with the status of Coetzee’s own "self-positioning" as a male writer. Another significant problem is that Atwell's arguments about Coetzee’s "use of gender" repeat the dilemma located in a type of Anglo-American feminism which has appropriated race as an allegory of white women’s plight. While he agrees with Dovey and Spivak that *Foe* constitutes a warning for western feminism against easy affiliations between "woman" and the racial other, Attwell nevertheless subscribes to a view of "feminism" that sees it as a ‘convenient figure’ for issues broader than 'women's issues.' Attwell warns against the flexibility of the sign ‘woman’ in terms of Anglo-American feminism’s engagement with postcolonial issues, and yet his own eclectic view of post-Colonialism relies on the flexibility of woman as an allegory and as a discursive sign for other postcolonial positions.

The fact that Coetzee uses ‘feminism’ to dramatize his own self-positioning is not as unproblematic as Attwell suggests, and it is a strategy which brings us back to the poststructuralist and postcolonial use of the feminine as a figure of ‘crisis.’ It is in this area that a feminist reading may find ground on which to frame a critique of this particular correlation, for as Attwell’s interpretation shows, the feminine is here functioning as an expression of a postcolonial settler crisis. Indeed, Caroline Rody has argued that Magda’s ‘feminist voice’ has afforded Coetzee a masterly reading of
"the horror and absurdity of his own postcolonial condition" (179). Ian Glenn writes
that "Magda as writer mediates on the limitations of writing as a way of articulating a
poetics for Coetzee himself" (127). Sue Kossew claims that Coetzee’s portrayal of
women’s writing encompasses a self-referential or ironic twist that reflects back on
Coetzee himself; further, she points out that Coetzee "implicates his own authorial
performance as a potentially colonizing activity, thus highlighting the ambivalent
speaking position of any ‘liberal’ settler writer" ("Women’s Words" 169). While this is
true (Coetzee is implicated), it is unclear as to whether or not Coetzee’s
‘performance’ would be heralded as an achievement had the object of his ‘potentially
colonizing activity’ been other than the white woman. Moreover, does the fact that
Coetzee is ‘aware’ of the colonizing impulse behind writing also mean that he is
attentive to all the ways in which that impulse may manifest itself? Benita Parry has
noted that the attribution of this kind of self-reflexive textual sophistication has the
effect of disabling criticism: "it has been suggested that… Coetzee’s fiction registers
the author’s understanding of his own positional historicity", which according to
Parry, has the effect of "preempting any effort by critics to theorize the elisions and
ideological complicities inaugurated by the texts’ spoken and unspoken cultural
affiliations" (39). The question of the white woman narrators remains relatively
unexplored because it is often conflated with Coetzee’s own position, self-reflexively
secure in paradox. More often than not, the question of the white woman narrators
arises in relation to the way in which their position approximates position of the
‘subject’ in/of language.

Some critics, including Pamela Dunbar, David Attwell, Teresa Dovey and
Caroline Rody, have insisted that Coetzee’s writing is ‘feminist.’ Coetzee, however,
is reluctant to take on this description and has stated, in reference to *Foe*, that: "I would hate to say . . . that there is a feminist point" (Morphett 460). A ‘use’ of the feminine in his writing, and even a prolonged engagement with feminist writers, is not coterminous with a feminist interest in the position of women. As du Plessis maintains, rather than Coetzee writing a ‘feminist’ text, he is interested in the "textual enunciation of femininity" to "test the limits of meaning" (120). This use of the feminine is predicated on the idea that women’s access to representation, to writing, to literacy, and to power has been marginalized under patriarchy. The already written crisis of female subjectivity—her diffuseness, her multiple, contradictory and displaced subjectivity which embodies the historical situatedness of the postmodern subject—is the product of patriarchy. Consequently, the appearance of the feminine is not necessarily due to an interest in feminism; instead, the female subject can be seen as an appropriate model for the decentred, fragmented, postmodern subject. As Dodd argues: "Discursive sign she might be, but it’s a gender inflected discursive sign for sure" ("Textual" 162). Attwell’s refusal to see gender as anything other than a textual device for undermining narrative authority, then exposes the major difference between a feminist interest in such a project and a postmodern or postcolonial interest in such a project.

Not only do Colleran and Macaskill patiently describe what they see as Coetzee’s reading of feminism, but they also go on to prescribe, somewhat self-contradictorily, *against* reading Coetzee from a feminist perspective. They argue that Coetzee’s text should not be ‘swallowed up’ by feminism: "Coetzee’s text can ill afford to have itself swallowed up by deconstructionist, or feminist, or any other form of theorizing that might desire to expose every kind of secret other than those of its
own” (442). They quote Coetzee’s concern over a type of critical activity which “swallow(s) one kind of discourse into another kind of discourse . . . when one may not want that” (443). Far from being ‘swallowed up’ by feminism, however, Coetzee has been enabled by it. It constitutes the textual body on which he has (de)constructed not only his own op/positionality, but also his challenge to textuality. Furthermore, the problems of Anglo-American feminism and its tendencies towards essentialism and universalism (as seen in the criticisms of Gilbert and Gubar) constitute the ground on which Coetzee maps his rejection of liberal humanism -- albeit by utilising the tools of post-structuralism and difference feminism.

The continuum of Coetzee’s characterization seems just like drops of rain on the soil—only few can cherish one’s nose with the peerless smell. Of course, the variety is few but when united, they are substantial enough to represent the journey of pain through which human race has gone through and survived. All the characters represents various facets of human nature, developed and mutated through width and breadth of this world, through the history of Homo Sapience. They might be classified under various categories but Coetzee has endeavored to represent the voices of ‘human being’ only without any discrimination of colour or class.