

Ayo Kehinde: Post-Colonial Literatures as Counter-Discourse: J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* and the Reworking of the Canon

Africa in Western Canons

A CENTURY of European (British and French mainly, but also Portuguese, German, Italian and Spanish) colonization left behind an African continent dazed, bewildered and confused. This is why modern African writers see the need for and admit a commitment to the restoration of African values. In fact, the Western world equates knowledge, modernity, modernization, civilization, progress and development to itself, while it views the Third-World from the perspective of the antithesis of the positive qualities ascribed to itself.¹ Such negative stereotypes are perpetrated by a system of education, which encourages all the errors and falsehoods about Africa/Africans. Writing on the jaundiced portrayal of Africa/Africans in Western canonical works, Edward Wilmot Blyden asserted over a hundred years ago that:

All our traditions and experiences are connected with a foreign race –we have no poetry but that of our taskmasters. The songs which live in our ears and are often on our lips are the songs we heard sung by those who shouted while we groaned and lamented. They sang of their history, which was the history of our degradation. They recited their triumphs, which contained the records of our humiliation. To our great misfortune, we learned their prejudices and their passions, and thought we

had their aspirations and their power. (91)

Africa and Africans are given negative images in Western books of geography, travels, novels, history and in Hollywood films about the continent. In these texts and records, Africans are misrepresented; they are portrayed as caricatures. Unfortunately, Africans themselves are obliged to study such pernicious teachings. Reacting to this mistake, Chinua Achebe declares that if he were God, he would “regard as the very worst our acceptance, for whatever reason, of racial inferiority” (32). He further comments that his role as a writer is that of an educator who seeks to help his society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of vilification and self-denigration.

Homi Bhabha also declares that Western newspapers and quasi-scientific works are replete with a wide range of stereotypes (17). In similar fashion, Andrew Milner and Jeff Browitt dwell on the inscriptions of stereotypes of Africa/Africans in Western religious canonical texts (the Bible in particular). To them, canonical texts are:

those Christian religious texts considered divinely inspired by the Church. In secular aesthetics, literary and other texts accorded a privileged status, within some version or another of a 'great tradition', as embodying the core values of a culture. (225)

Thus, in expansion of Milner and Browitt, Dennis Walder asserts that the Western-associated canons of texts are dotted with a whole complex of conservative, authoritarian attitudes, which supposedly buttress the liberal-democratic (bourgeois)

states of Europe and North Africa (74).

Actually, the colonization of Africa is explicit in the physical domination and control of its vast geographical territory by the colonial world and its cronies. However, this physical presence, domination and control of Africa by the colonizer is sustained by a series or range of concepts implicitly constructed in the minds of the colonized. Therefore, more than the power of the cannon, it is canonical knowledge that establishes the power of the colonizer “I” over the colonized “Other” (Foucault 174). It should also be stressed that the available records of Africa's history handed down by the Europeans, far from being a disinterested account of Africa, are interested constructs of European representational narratives. This view is supported by Ania Loomba : “the vast new world (Africa inclusive) encountered by European travelers were interpreted by them through ideological filters, or ways of seeing, provided by their own culture” (71).

The English novel is the “terra firma” where the self-consolidating project of the West is launched, and *Robinson Crusoe* is an inaugural text in the English novel tradition. It is also an early eighteenth-century testament to the superiority of rational civilization over nature and savagery, a text that foregrounds the developing British Empire's self-representation through encounters with its colonial Others. Crusoe, the eponymous hero of the novel, anticipates the Hegelian Master. A postcolonial reading of the novel, however, reveals that Defoe discloses –however unwittingly– some deeper ideological operations: Western colonialism is not content with pillaging human and material resources to sustain and consolidate its power over its colonies; it has to

destroy the indigenous cultures and values (religion, language, dressing codes, etc) and supplant them with distorted and totally ambivalent versions. As Frantz Fanon asserts:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today. (168)

By distorting the history and culture of Africa, the colonizer has created a new set of values for the African. Consequently, just the subject fashioned by Orientalism, the African has equally become a creation by the West.

On his 'island', Crusoe attempts to subjugate all of nature, including Friday, his manservant. The founding principle of subjugation is force, as he uses his gun to save Friday from his captors (and to silently threaten Friday into obedience). He then begins a programme of imposing cultural imperialism. The first method in this programme is a linguistic one. Crusoe gives Friday his new name without bothering to enquire about his real name. He instructs Friday to call him "Master." He thus initiates Friday into the rites of English with a view to making him just an incipient bilingual subject. He teaches him just the aspects of the English language needed for the master-servant relationship –to make Friday useful, handy and dependent. The master-servant orders suggest how Africans and other 'natives' have been tabulated and classified by the West throughout colonial (and

neocolonial) history. The second method is theological.' Crusoe's attitude to Friday's religion is akin to the later imperialist missionaries' attitude to the indigenous religions they encountered on African soil. Crusoe sees African traditional religion as blindly ignorant pagan creed. He believes that his own (Western) God is the true God, and that he is doing Friday an invaluable service by converting him. As constructed moral and cultural inferiors, then, indigenous people are 'naturally' suited to work for Westerners; when Crusoe wants to build a boat, for instance, he assigns Friday and his father the dirty and difficult tasks, while the Spaniard is merely to supervise. Perhaps to justify such incipient tyranny, Crusoe sees all natives as savages (marked most of all by their cannibalism) and constantly refers to them as such:

All my apprehensions were buried in the thoughts of such a pitch of inhuman, hellish brutality, and the horror of the degeneracy of human nature, which though I had heard of often, yet I never had so near a view of before; in short, I turned away my face from the horrid spectacle. (163)

With tongue, pen, gun and Bible, Crusoe is able to prove and assert his superiority and assume a new mantle of power. He is a 'Master' who controls and thus can exploit his environment, a budding imperialist conveniently furnished with an inferior Other to reflect, even constitute, the superior Self. James Joyce also identifies some prototypes of colonial experience in *Robinson Crusoe* in forms of colonization, subjugation, exploitation and Christianization of the colonized:

The true symbol of the British conquest is Robinson Crusoe, who cast away on a desert island, in his pocket a knife and a pipe, becomes an architect, a carpenter, a knife grinder, an astronomer, a baker, a shipwright, a potter, a saddler, a farmer, a tailor, an umbrella maker and a clergyman. He is the true prototype of the British colonist, as Friday (the trusty savage who arrives on an unlucky day) is the symbol of the subject races. (qtd. in Susan Gallagher 170)

Throughout *Robinson Crusoe*, the protagonist embodies Western mercantile capitalism, grounded in a colonial economy, through his money-making schemes (engaging in the slave trade, investing profits, hoarding gold on the island) and his moral lapses (most notably, selling the Moorish boy with whom he escaped from the Turkish pirates for sixty pieces of silver). On the other hand, the natives, represented by Friday, are depicted as careless self-indulgent individuals who lack forethought or reflections. This is why the white man who has a life of reason, introspection and faith, intervenes, like the Almighty God, to civilize the savage Other.

Although Friday is described specifically as not black, and as possessing non-Negroid features, he represents the Black Africans in *Robinson Crusoe* even more than he represents Amerindians (which he presumably is). The novel is set on a New World island; British colonialism at that time was centered in the Caribbean and its slave-based plantation economy. As most native Caribs, Arawaks and Tainos had been annihilated through war and disease, slaves were

supplied from Africa. The triangular trade itself blurred spatial boundaries and, by importing a new 'native Other' to replace the old 'native Other,' blurred ethnic distinctions as well. Every one who is not white becomes 'black.' It is precisely this developing Manichean dichotomy, a direct consequence of the myth of civilization based on repression, that Robinson Crusoe records.

In Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe the Western European self is equated with futurity, vision, civilization, rationality, language and light. Conversely, the depiction of the non-European (the Amerindians, the African) in the text is an absolute negation of the Other. The black is associated with pre-history, savagery, cannibalism, unconsciousness, silence and darkness. Crusoe, the archetypal Western man, assumes the posture of a king, a prince, a governor, a general, and a field marshal. He is worried by the sense of his self-assumed greatness. He suffers the pang of delusions of grandeur, seeing himself as some kind of God. This temper is reflected in his unconscious (his dreams) most especially, in which he rescues a savage from his enemies. The so-called savage kneels down to Crusoe as a sign of reverence, praying him for assistance.

To a great extent, Crusoe has the passion of racial consciousness. In fact, he is "an unlikable man for [a] hero" (Palmer 10), an egoist who has little interest in anyone but himself. In his portrayal of Africa/Africans/Amerindians, Defoe was expressing an opinion common to his contemporaries. *Robinson Crusoe* articulates the European attitude about the peoples of Africa and America that structured an expanding imperialist venture. Once considered a model for alternative Rousseauian concepts of education

and growing up, the 'Robinsonade' and its protagonist (Crusoe) have had to face harsh criticism. In fact, Crusoe, his kith and kin, and Defoe, the author, are guilty of ethnocentrism, logocentrism, proto-imperialism, and even megalomania. Crusoe is not a role model in this multicultural, pluralistic world of ours. Instead, he plays a role that begs to be rewritten –thus the existence of alternative versions of the Robinson myth in post-colonial fiction, including Coetzee's *Foe*.

Countering Misrepresentation: Post-Colonial Literature in Dialogue with Western Canonical Works

What is today known as colonial discourse, post-colonial theory or postcolonialism is an offshoot of the anti-colonial activism and writings of such nationalists as Leopold Sedar Senghor, Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral (Bill, et al 63; Schipper 82; Zukogi 17). The early writings of the nationalists set the tone, pace and character of the debate in the field today. The publication of four key texts whose views many Africans largely share also energized the tempo of counter-discourse in Africa. These texts are Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (originally published posthumously in 1961); Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972); Said's *Orientalism* (originally published in 1978); and Chinweizu, et al's *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (1980). These counter-hegemonic texts decentered, even undermined the intellectual heritage of the Western Academy while questioning the foundational assumptions behind the Western colonial/imperial/neocolonial project.

Similarly, African writers (for example, Achebe, Ngugi, Salih, Armah, Kane) critique European imperialism. The fact

that a significant portion of contemporary African literature is preoccupied with reworking Western canonical works is a logical and natural –rather than a misplaced and belated–response. This is because Africa's contact with Europe has impacted greatly on its socio-cultural, political, economic and psychological well-being. The 'dislocation', psychic and physical debilitation that this contact has created, is so enormous that it rarely escapes the critical attention of African writers, and more recently, of the post-colonial discourse analyst. As Ime Ikiddeh claims in his Foreword to Ngugi's *Homecoming*:

There can be no end to the discussion of African encounter with Europe because the wounds inflicted touched the very springs of life and have remained unhealed because they are constantly being gashed open again with more subtle, more lethal weapon. (xii)

African literature's fundamental engagement is with the colonial presence in Africa, dismantling its dehumanizing assumptions and resisting its pernicious consequences. The African novel, in particular, reflects an evolving consciousness at once historical, cultural, and political. It strives to counter the negative picture of Africa and Africans promulgated by some European writers, including Joyce Cary, Graham Greene, Joseph Conrad, Ryder Haggard, Daniel Defoe, William Shakespeare and the like. Even as African novelists seek to interrogate and modify European racism and exploitation² in literature as well as in practice, they use their writings to 'bridge' the cultural gap between 'Blacks' and 'Whites.' Their reactions to precursor colonial canonical

works emphasize their own difference and unique qualities. They claim their own culture, aesthetics, history and essence. This nationalist temper is also reflected in many movements (like PanAfricanism, the Black Renaissance, Negritude, Black Consciousness) that search for African roots and black traditions. In Schipper 's words:

The medium of the novel proved very suitable to the needs of African writers who wanted to address colonial reality as they have experienced it. In their work, the novelists uprooted the myth that riches and power make the white man superior (37-38).

African writers see the need to tell their people's and continent's stories themselves. According to Ernest Emenyonu, any attempt to relinquish this God-given right would “allow foolish foresters stray in and mistake the middle of a mighty African baobab for an African tree trunk”(4). The idea that only one group of privileged people (in this case, Europeans) is qualified to interpret the world should be interrogated. For instance, Achebe, in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and his other polemical writings, claims that the missionaries and explorers have lied about Africa. He argues that the depictions of the human and political landscapes of Africa enshrined in Western canonical works are biased and ignorant. Achebe thereby assumes the task of retelling the African *stories* and asserting the primacy of African culture. To Achebe, the ultimate service of African writers to their people is to make African society regain belief in itself and put away the complexities of years of denigration and self-abasement (165).

Inheriting Achebe's legacy, contemporary African critics and writers are required to act with integrity and dedication. This is because the colonial discourses about Africa/Africans need to be subjected to further reworking with a view to correcting erroneous notions about Africa and her peoples. In the words of Walder (4), “these works require a new sense of their place in the changing world of today, if they are to retain their freshness and relevance” (4). Whether these reworkings take the form of 'national allegories', as Fredric Jameson (85) suggests, or appear as inversions of black/white or center/periphery binaries or question binary structures of thought themselves³ they must keep responding not only to the burdens of the past but also to the exigencies of the present and the challenges of the future.

Salman Rushdie, in his much quoted statement “The Empire writes back with a vengeance” to the imperial “centre”, admits that postcolonial writing is imbued with nationalist assertion which involves the “Other” claiming itself as central and self-determining, by questioning the basis of European and British metaphysics (336). The postcolonial writers therefore challenge the world-view that can polarize centre and periphery in the first place. On his part, Fanon sees the dichotomy (colonizer/colonized) as a product of a 'manichaeism delirium', the result of which condition is a radical division into paired oppositions such as good-evil, true-false, and white-black (81). This dichotomy is absolutely privileged in the discourse of the colonial relationship. Thus, the colonial discourse needs new liberating narratives to free the colonized from this disabling position. Therefore, the central 'postcolonialist' argument is that “postcolonial culture

has entailed a revolt of the margin against the metropolis, the periphery against the centre, in which experience has become 'uncentred', pluralistic and nefarious" (Ashcroft, et al 12).

In his "Representing the Colonized", Said prioritizes narratives which take the Third-World seriously by placing what it has to say on equal terms with its own explanations ("Representing the Colonized" 206). Also, Gayatri Spivak is highly critical of the current intellectual enterprise of constituting the colonial subject as Other in her "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (68). No place is created for the subaltern (raced) to speak, as colonialism's narrativization of African culture effaces all traces of black's voice. She believes that postcolonial critics should concentrate on articulating the margins and gaining control of the way in which the marginalized are represented; the postcolonial intellectual should also break with the paradigms of representation that promote antagonism between the First and Third Worlds.

J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* and the Debunking of Racial and Patriarchal Egoism in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*

Chinua Achebe, J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, George Lamming, Patrick White, Margaret Atwood, Jean Rhys and other postcolonial writers have rewritten particular works from the English canon "with a view to restructuring European 'realities' in postcolonial terms, not simply by reversing the hierarchical order, but by interrogating the philosophical assumptions on which that order was based" (Ashcroft 33). The African story continues to be (re)told by postcolonial writers. When Coetzee's *Foe* was published in 1986, it added to the growing corpus of counter-discursive writings in postcolonial literature. Although Coetzee is among

the most critically revered of world writers, he is also one of the most misunderstood and misrepresented African writers. At least, this is the opinion of critics like Kwaku Korang and Andre Viola, who observe that a problem in Coetzee's fiction is the difficulty of reconciling a liberal humanist approach with the reality of the oppressive power hegemonies in South Africa, which negate such a vision. However, a careful consideration of the various systems of oppression with which Coetzee's novels contend provides a powerful antidote to viewing him as an 'apolitical' relativist. The critic of Coetzee's fiction should be less concerned with the fiction's absolute or historical truth than with its fictional truth as embodied in the narrative. His works engage with a vast literary heritage and question authority is invested in literary discourse, as well as investigate power dynamics and political oppression and ethical responsibility.

Foe takes up some central postcolonial issues, which include the following: who will write? (that is, who takes up the position of power, pen, in hand?); who will remain silent? (the issues of silencing and speech); how do colonial regimes distribute and exercise power? (and, in consequence, create zones of powerlessness). Attempting to demythologize a dominant knowledge about empire, *Foe* is imbued with a 'fresh' paradigm; its textual universe is tailored towards not only revisiting but also retracting the long line of epistemic violence foisted on the psyche and intellect of the Other. The text seeks to uncover the silence and oppression at the heart of Defoe's classic novel to suggest the power of anti-colonial as well as colonial discourse.

Coetzee slips through the operations of various critical unfoldings of the Defoe's canonical text and sets up another

text as a relatively autonomous but supplementary interlocutor, which seems to add to and substitute the original at the same time. According to David Attwell, “although it is true that his novels are nourished by their relationship with canonical Western literature, it is equally true that through his complicated postcoloniality he brings that situation to light and finds fictional forms wherein it can be objectified, named and questioned”(4-5). His works engage with a vast literary heritage and question the authority invested in precursor discourse, as well as investigate power dynamics, political oppression and ethical responsibility.

Coetzee does this by recasting both Defoe (the author) and his protagonist (Crusoe) as minor characters within a woman-centred narrative, thereby distorting and twisting the 'truths' that the reader assumes from Defoe's original. A character omitted from and silenced by Defoe's account (the female) is foregrounded in Coetzee's version through the narrator Susan, an English woman marooned for a year on the island with Cruso and Friday. The optimistic Robinson Crusoe, in *Foe*, becomes Cruso, a weak-minded mountain of insecurity who, unlike the original protagonist, lives sullenly on a desolate island with only a few tools, no gun, no Bible, no writing utensils, and no records. He labors every day to construct gigantic terraces, walled by stone, which stand empty and barren, for he has nothing to plant. In Cruso's island (as opposed to Crusoe's island), there are no providential seeds, spiritual or and natural. Such meaningless construction also symbolizes the hollowness at the core of Empire-building. Cruso as colonist manqué is not only impotent but also ludicrous.

Perhaps most significantly, Friday becomes an eccentric

mute with whom the real secrets of the story exist. Further, Coetzee demystifies the racial slippage surrounding Friday. Coetzee has stated that in *Robinson Crusoe*, “Friday is a handsome Carib youth with near European features. In *Foe*, he is an African” (463). By transforming the light-skinned, delicately-featured Amerindian into a woolly-haired, thick-lipped, dark complexioned Negro, Coetzee makes visible the racist subtext that drives Defoe's novel, colonialism in the Caribbean, and imperialism in Africa. Reading *Foe* allegorically, then, suggests a reaction against imperialism and white supremacy. As Derek Attridge maintains, *Foe* represents

a mode of fiction that explores the ideological basis of canonization, that draws attention to the existing canon, that thematizes the role of race, class, and gender in the process of cultural acceptance and exclusion, and that, while speaking from a marginal location, addresses the question of marginality such a mode of fiction would have to be seen as engaged in an attempt to break the silence in which so many are caught, even if it does so by literary means that have traditionally been celebrated as characterizing canonic art. (217)

While *Foe* re-writes a canonical text from marginal perspectives, it still demonstrates the power of the original to command the desire for imitation; it also exposes the silences and contradictions of the precursor text. *Foe* privileges the intersection or partial overlap between the postmodern and the postcolonial in contemporary cultures, with reference to

its resistance to the monologic meta-narratives of modernism and realism (in arts), to Orientalism (in cultural anthropology), to colonialism and racism (in geopolitical history, fundamentalism and nativism) and to patriarchy (in gender relations). The novel's stylistic and ideological strategies challenge established ways of writing about race. For instance, the resolution of the plot action is an ideologically sensitive site for this challenge. It contradicts the typical ending of the colonial texts, which asserts that choice is over and that the growth of character or the capacity for defining action has ceased.

The core of Coetzee's *Foe* lies in the deconstruction of established literary styles and conventional roles assigned to blacks and women –beginning, as Silvia Nagy-Zekmi has explained in reference to feminist and postcolonial theory, “by simply subverting images of existing hierarchies (gender/class/culture/race) in a patriarchal or colonial setting”(1). *Foe* reworks *Robinson Crusoe*'s representation of black identity in general and female identity in particular, of the values of the colonizer and those of the colonized, and of the forces of patriarchy against those who try to free themselves from it. Friday (the archetypal black man, the oppressed race) and Susan (the womenfolk) in *Foe* transgress social taboos, as part of Coetzee's depiction of colonized/female resistance to colonial/patriarchal power.

Although Friday seems to be an object of colonial knowledge due to his tonguelessness, he –like the black world– has his own story to tell, even if a monocultural, metropolitan discourse cannot hear it. He may seem to be an embodiment of the world of self-absorption, without self-consciousness, without the Cartesian split of self and other,

without a desire; yet his silence is not an ontological state but a social condition imposed upon him by those in power. He therefore represents all human beings who have been silenced because of their race, gender and class. The apparent inaccessibility of his world to the Europeans in the story is an artist's devastating judgement of the crippling anti-humanist consequences of colonialism and racism on the self-confident white world. To Dick Penner, "Friday's muteness can be read as a symbol of the inexpressible psychic damage absorbed by blacks under racist conditions" (124). Yet his speechlessness, through negative inversion, becomes a symbol of a pre-capitalist Africa where history was transmitted and lived with full articulation, authenticity, and authority.

Further, Friday's muteness marks Coetzee's rejection of the canon, that is, its limited authority; this rejection takes partial shape in formal innovations and subversions of generic expectations. Throughout the novel, Friday's silence and enigmatic presence gain in power until they overwhelm the narrator at the end. Friday's detachment causes the hole in Susan's narrative, and this is the primary cause of Susan's uncertain narrative voice. In the third and final sections of the novel, Friday/the black world gains in stature as the site of a shimmering, indeterminate potency that has the power to engulf and cancel Susan's narrative and, ultimately, Coetzee's novel itself. This is an instance of the problem of closure. Friday, the radical black man, possesses the key to the ideological sensitive site of the narrative. He cannot give voice to this key, and no external discourse could adequately represent his knowledge. Coetzee does not allow Susan to assume the authority to construct the racial difference. Therefore, Susan's discourse as well as the novel's discourse,

cannot appropriate the image of Africa/Africans. In frustration, Susan comments, “I do not know how these matters can be written of in a book” (*Foe* 120). Precisely, in relationship to lack of speech (Friday) and collapses of narrative voice (Susan), it is writing –specifically, writing books that challenge the literary canon– that is at stake in *Foe*.

Friday's own writing, that is, his marks on the slate, shows him to be the “wholly Other” (Spivak, “Theory in the Margin” 20); his trademark is the foot (the recontextualized foot from *Robinson Crusoe* and every Robinsonade). Writing is a means for him to prove that he is a human being and not an ordinary thing. For instance, Friday once installs himself at Foe's desk, assuming the position of authorship with a quill pen in hand. The embarrassed Susan intervenes and tells Foe, “he will foul your papers” (151), but Foe replies, “my papers are fouled enough, he can make them no worse” (151). This interchange upsets expectations of mastery (the white man, the white literary canon), and it has been precipitated by Friday's silent, subversive assumption of 'Western' prerogatives.

Such subversive assumptions become points of 'education' for Susan, who now believes that all races are equal: “We are all alive, we are all substantial, we are all in the same world” (152). Thus, *Foe* like much post-colonial literature rests upon one ethico-discursive principle –the right of formerly un- or misrepresented human groups to speak for and represent themselves in domains defined, politically and intellectually, as normally excluding them, usurping their signifying and representing functions, and over-riding their historical reality. The mystery surrounding Friday's silence as well as the

silence surrounding Friday must be unravelled in order to allow Susan to see into the 'eyes' of the island. Friday has the ability to override both Susan's desire for authorization and Foe's ability to grant it. Friday possesses the history that Susan is unable to tell, and it will not be heard until there is a means of giving voice to Friday. This is to suggest that the world's harmony and true 'progress' will improve if there is mutual respect and cross-fertilization of ideas. Friday's voice, to wit, the black world's voice, will liberate not only himself/itself but also Susan (and, we assume, Foe the archetypal European, in other words the European world), for her story is dependent upon Friday's and the black world's meaning. Therefore, in *Foe*, the reader witnesses a gradual development towards and a concern for giving voice to the Other so long silenced in literary history. Consequently, the "subaltern has spoken, and his readings of the colonial text recover a native voice" (Spivak, "Theory" 110). In *Foe*, Coetzee uses a strategy of reading/writing that will "speak to", as distinct from "speaking for" the historically subaltern (wo)man. Although this involves an act of the imagination, it is a profoundly viable vision.

Coetzee has shifted the emphasis from the ostensibly unmediated narrative of *Robinson Crusoe* to the informing intelligence of multiple points of view. Foe wants to control the story of Susan and Friday; he is more interested in what will sell than the truth of the story. He finds the story lacking in exotic circumstances –for instance, a threat of cannibals landing on the island, as found in the original text. Susan, in her feminist temper, retorts: "What I saw, I wrote. I saw no cannibals; and if they came after nightfall and fled before the dawn, they left no footprint behind" (54). Foe, the fictional

meta-author, would have preferred a replication of the story as it occurs in Defoe's text. In addition, as a racist and a misogynist, Foe wants to write the significance and meaning of Friday's (black world's) life and determine Susan's story. This is to suggest that authorship and authority are equivalent. Throughout much of the novel, however, Susan resists Foe's authority and insists on telling her own story. If stories give people their identities, and people are written by others, Susan wonders, do people really exist for themselves?

The concluding image of the novel envisions a future when people exist as full individuals and when an equal exchange will be possible among races. Susan lies face-to-face with Friday underwater, and feels "a slow stream, without breath, without interruption" (157) coming from inside him and beating against her eyelids, against the skin of her face. This is Coetzee's articulation of a strong desire for reciprocal speech from the victims of colonization, a cross-cultural dialogue. This image positively reinforces the ironic thesis developed throughout *Foe*, that African history did not begin with the continent's contact and subsequent destruction by the European colonialists. Rather than being the beginning of African history, the colonial period signals the end of the beauty, communality and reciprocity characteristic of African culture. In the post-colonial era, it is the task of African literature to reclaim that which has been misappropriated and to reconstruct that which was been damaged, even destroyed. In fact, the tone and the narrative voice of the novel invest it with the authority to function as a counter-discourse.

Conclusion

Coetzee's *Foe* serves as a counter-text to the dominant

discourse of representation in general, and to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in particular. Such counter-discourse is quite justifiable because knowledge about the Other, whether seen as Oriental, as African, as Caribbean, or aboriginal, is neatly packaged and disseminated through the medium of Western literature and travelogue. Consequently, one strong reason for the emergence of postcolonial theory has been to re-think the European representations of non-Europeans and their cultures. To this end, what Coetzee –like other postcolonial African writers– has done in *Foe* is to undermine dominant notions of history by contradicting, challenging, or disrupting the prevailing discourse (Said xxiv). Yet beyond the foisted haze, the Africa that Coetzee depicts in the novel is whole, a community at peace with itself and whose pristine values are crystallized in the beauty of relationship, community and, above all, reciprocity.

Textuality should cease to be a 'battle ground' for orchestrating and illuminating the binary opposition between the colonizer and the colonized. Rather, canonical and non-canonical texts should be a means of promoting racial harmony, equality, and concord. This is in alliance with Bhabha's opinion that textuality should have more to offer in the way of hope for the oppressed. In his words:

Must we always polarize in order to polemicise?
 Are we trapped in a politics of struggle where the
 representation of social antagonisms and social
 contradictions can take no other form than a binary
 of theory versus politics? Can the aim of freedom
 or knowledge be the simple inversion of the
 relation of oppressor and oppressed, margin and
 periphery, negative image and positive image? (5)

What is needed in this millennium is the ability of disparate races and ethnic groups to come together to confront the challenges posed by globalization. Contemporary writers, scholars and critics need to articulate alternatives based on inclusivity and the full diversity of experiences. People of all ages, backgrounds and races would have a space to exercise their creativity, leadership acumen and imagination if there is an enduring racial harmony. In this way, we would be able to work collaboratively and strategically to create a world where many visions can co-exist.

NOTES

¹See: Ngugi, wa Thiong'o. "Europhonism, Universities and the Magic Fountain: The Future of African Literature and Scholarship." In *Research in African Literatures*. 31.1, (2000): 2

²Schipper, Minneke. *Imagining Insiders: Africa and the Question of Belonging*. (New York: Cassell, 1999): 34.

³See: Bill Ashcroft, et al, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*. (New York: Routledge, 1989): 63, and Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994): 31.

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