

Can The Subaltern Speak? Rebutting the Empire in Spivak's Fashion- A Postcolonial Reading of J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*

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Abstract

Postcolonial writers have penned many responses to colonial texts to apprise accurate details of their cultures and break the myths and stereotypes established by the British canonical literature. Initial postcolonial response texts were simple inversions of the colonial narratives- if the original text showed natives to have no culture, the response text portrayed native's diverse culture, as in *Things Fall Apart*. Gradually the responses became more creative and powerful. Assessing whether a response text's style, technique, and content are truly effective and distinctive requires careful research and analysis. This paper explores how J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, a response to Robinson Crusoe, challenges colonial myths about natives and brings marginalized voices to the forefront through his storytelling. The theoretical lens chosen to analyze the selected text is Gayatri Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Gayatri Spivak proposes an interesting way of fighting back the empire's concocted narrative and that is by silence. Her concept of silence proposes to take pride in marginal identity and to reject any effort to be recognized by the oppressors or to correct their misconceptions. J.M Coetzee's *Foe* has strong reflections of Spivak's idea of establishing identity and this reflection of Spivak's idea in *Foe* encourages this study. The study collects data through close reading and note-taking, which is then analyzed using content analysis, guided by Spivak's theoretical framework.

Keywords: Postcolonial Response Literature; Colonial Myths in literature; J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* Analysis; Qualitative Content Analysis; Gayatri Spivak *Can the Subaltern Speak?*

Introduction

For centuries, English literature has played a key role in supporting the colonial mission of civilizing colonized peoples, all under the banner of universality and humanism. In reality, British literature was one of the most effective tools for establishing and maintaining white dominance over the non-white world. Writers such as Milton, Spenser, Joseph Conrad, Daniel Defoe, Graham Greene, and Shakespeare reinforced the idea that Western culture and values were inherently superior (Carter, 2014). Kehinde (2007) points out that the novel, in particular, became a stronghold for advancing colonial ideals (p. 35).

Robinson Crusoe has been widely recognized as a vehicle for colonial ideology. It celebrates the British Empire through the character of Crusoe, a white man portrayed as the embodiment of civilization, knowledge, and moral authority. Crusoe not only dominates the natural environment of the island but also asserts control over Friday, the indigenous man he meets on the island. Kehinde highlights how Crusoe uses power, language, and religion as tools of subjugation, ensuring Friday's obedience through acts like threatening him with a gun (2007, pp. 36-37).

Colonialism wasn't just a fleeting historical phenomenon; it created deeply entrenched systems of inequality that persist to this day. Postcolonial theory and literature challenge this legacy by offering creative resistance to dominant Western narratives. Gilbert and Tompkins argue that postcolonialism is inherently political, aiming to break down the structures that enforce power imbalances rooted in binaries like "colonizer and colonized" or "us and them" (2002, p. 3).

In the early stages, postcolonial writers—many of whom had been educated under imperial systems—began by rewriting colonial texts to challenge their narratives. As Walcott explains, this was an attempt to reclaim and adapt these works, making them relevant to local cultures (1974, p. 4). Over time, however, postcolonial responses have grown more nuanced and creative. These new works not only critique colonial ideologies but also establish their own identities. Gilbert and Tompkins note that such texts expose the exploitative mechanisms of colonialism while carving out space for voices previously silenced (2002, p. 16). Today, postcolonial literature invites scholars to explore its impact, not just as a critique of colonialism but as a powerful force for reshaping global literary conversations.

Exploring the Importance of the Problem

Many canonical texts have been reimagined through postcolonial revisions that challenge their original assumptions and provide localized perspectives. For instance, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* critiques and expands upon Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, focusing on the silenced character of Antoinette/Bertha, a marginalized Caribbean woman. Rhys reframes Antoinette's

tragic narrative, transforming her fate from one of victimhood to an assertion of heroism. Through this, the novel demonstrates the reliance of the center (colonial narratives) on the margins for identity formation, even while seeking to exclude them. Additionally, *Wide Sargasso Sea* promotes cultural and racial pluralism, while shedding light on the suffering and struggles of the underrepresented, and critiques the British Empire's exploitation of local cultures.

Similarly, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* reinterprets Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Achebe challenges the colonial portrayal of Africa as the "dark continent" (Whittaker & Msiska, 2007, p. 17), presenting a more complex and humane perspective of African society and culture. This work holds significant value within African and postcolonial literature for its direct interrogation of colonial stereotypes and its reclamation of African identity.

Among the canonical colonial texts, *Robinson Crusoe* has been revised by several writers, most notably Derek Walcott and J.M. Coetzee. The novel's enduring influence and its embedded colonial ideologies have made it a prime target for critique. As John Moore notes, *Robinson Crusoe* was arguably the first English novel to achieve universal acclaim, second only to the Bible in readership across English society (as cited in Ford, 2000). The power dynamic between Crusoe and Friday has particularly drawn attention from these postcolonial authors, inspiring them to deconstruct the narrative.

Derek Walcott's *Pantomime* reimagines *Robinson Crusoe* through the medium of theater, where the roles of Crusoe and Friday are fluidly exchanged within a play. This reenactment subverts the static hierarchy of the original text. On the other hand, J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* retains the novel format but significantly reworks its elements from a postcolonial perspective. Coetzee introduces a female narrator, Susan Barton, as the central voice, while tackling Friday's silence in innovative ways. Unlike Walcott, Coetzee explores non-verbal modes of expression, such as dance and visual imagery, to give Friday a form of resistance without speech.

This research prioritizes *Foe* over other revisions of *Robinson Crusoe* due to its nuanced engagement with themes of silence and subjugation. Coetzee's approach aligns with Gayatri Spivak's concept of "silencing" as discussed in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* The analysis will focus on how silence, whether imposed or self-willed, becomes a tool of resistance and empowerment in *Foe*. Spivak's theoretical framework provides a compelling lens to examine the dynamics of voice, power, and marginalization within the text.

Research Methodology

The research methodology for this paper employs Postcolonial Theory, with a specific focus on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of silence proposed in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* to analyze the selected text. Postcolonial theory explores the power dynamics between colonizers

and the colonized, investigating how colonialism disrupts cultural identities, systems of knowledge, and subjectivity. This theory also addresses the ways in which the voices of marginalized groups—especially women and indigenous people—are either muted or misrepresented within dominant cultural discourses.

Spivak's essay challenges the assumption that the oppressed or subaltern can easily speak for themselves within these dominant structures. She argues that the subaltern, particularly women from colonized spaces, are systematically silenced by both colonial and patriarchal structures. In her view, silence is not merely the absence of speech but a tool of oppression that denies the subaltern subjectivity and agency. However, Spivak also suggests that this silence can be a combatant strategy, where the silenced subject resists colonial forces by refusing to conform to the terms of representation imposed by the oppressor.

By applying Spivak's theory, this study explores how silence in the J.M Coetzee's *Foe* functions as a form of resistance, where characters strategically withhold their voices or refuse to engage in the discourse constructed by the colonizers. Spivak's concept of the "untranslatable" silence offers insight into how marginalized characters like Friday, in the selected text, use silence to protect their identity and resist being co-opted by colonial narratives. Thus, the research will analyze the dual nature of silence—as both a tool of subjugation and a means of agency and self-preservation.

Importance of Selecting a Theory for Interpreting Text

Selecting a theory for interpreting a text is crucial for determining the lens through which themes, characters, and narratives are analyzed. In the case of postcolonial texts, Postcolonial Theory provides a framework for critically examining how colonial power structures affect identity, voice, and autonomy. According to Ashcroft et al. (2007) in *The Empire Writes Back*, postcolonial theory facilitates a deeper understanding of the ongoing impact of colonial histories on contemporary cultural narratives, especially regarding issues of race, power, and marginalization (p. 3). Theories like Spivak's also allow for more nuanced readings of silence, enabling researchers to examine how the absence of voice can signify both oppression and resistance.

Spivak's Concept of Silencing and Use of Silence as a Combatant Means

In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak critiques the dominant Western discourses that silence marginalized individuals and argues that the subaltern cannot speak within these structures because their words are always interpreted through the lens of the oppressor. Silence, for Spivak, is not simply a passive absence but a form of resistance, particularly when imposed upon marginalized

groups such as colonized women. These individuals often do not have the power to represent themselves in ways that are recognized by dominant cultural institutions.

Spivak argues that silence, when it is actively chosen, can subvert the power structures that seek to control discourse. In this sense, silence becomes a strategy of survival and resistance. For the colonized, silence can be a way to protect identity, resist misrepresentation, and avoid being subject to the reductive categories imposed by colonialism. Therefore, the silencing of the subaltern is both a form of oppression and a refusal to be co-opted by colonial narratives. Through this lens, silence is reimagined as a combatant force, challenging the systems of power that marginalize and dehumanize.

Research Method

This study uses Krippendorff's (2018) content analysis for analyzing the selected text through the lens of the chosen theoretical framework. Content analysis is a systematic method used to interpret textual data by identifying patterns, themes, and underlying meanings. It involves coding and categorizing textual elements to uncover ideological structures and cultural discourses. For novel analysis, this method includes close reading, note-taking, and thematic classification to examine character representations, narrative techniques, and power dynamics. By applying Krippendorff's approach, the study ensures a structured and replicable analysis, allowing for a deeper understanding of the text's embedded meanings and implications.

Analysis and Conclusion

Salman Rushdie, in his work *Shame*, suggests that silence is a language of loss and defeat (1984, p. 89). On the other hand, Dale McKinley views silence as an aiding tool of oppression (1998, p. 19). However, in Coetzee's *Foe*, silence is depicted as a powerful force, one that conveys the suffering of being muted and the distress of being denied a voice. The two central characters, Friday and Susan Barton, both experience silence, but in distinct forms: Friday's silence is complete, as he is nonverbal, while Susan's silence is the result of her limitations in verbal expression and the silencing of female agency. In addition to the characters' silence, the narrative itself contains an inherent silence that ridicules and criticizes various elements of the parent text. This silence questions the white man's self-proclaimed role of representing the other's identity in comparison to their own. *Foe* presents a silent, non-verbal but perceptible version of history from the other's point of view (Lin, 2000, p. 43).

The text, being narrated entirely by a female voice, challenges the notion that women lack

the power to tell stories or engage with adventures beyond domestic spheres. Susan Barton, through her control over the narrative of her own experiences as well as those of characters such as Crusoe and Friday, subtly yet confidently challenges the notion that women are unfit for the storytelling tradition. Throughout the text, Barton insists on adhering to the true facts of her experience. She rejects the idea of embellishing her tale, as she remarks that she will not leave the interpretation of her story up to others. She emphasizes her power to guide, amend, and withhold details, presenting herself as the ultimate authority over her narrative (Coetzee, 2010, p. 123). This stance implies that women are potentially more truthful in their storytelling, as they are not driven by the desire to increase the market value of their work by incorporating sensationalized, untrue elements. Women, being less involved in the capitalist pursuit of material gain, are portrayed as more focused on authenticity. For example, Barton rejects the inclusion of cannibals in her story because she did not encounter any on the island.

Despite pressure from *Foe* to include more dramatic elements to attract readers—such as the suggestion that the island’s lack of variety makes it too dull—Barton remains steadfast in her refusal to fabricate. She laments the tendency to add strange circumstances to stories and the difficulty of creating narratives without such embellishments (Coetzee, 2010, p. 67& p.117). Barton’s reflections on authorship reveal a critique of the deceptive practices involved in shaping stories and constructing identities, particularly within colonial narratives. She critiques the storytelling tradition that blends lies with facts. Barton considers castaway stories to be "riddled with lies" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 50), and compares the writer to a painter, emphasizing that a storyteller must discern the hidden meanings in historical events and carefully weave them together (Coetzee, 2010, pp. 88-89). This comparison subtly and silently reveals that adventurers, in their quest for recognition, embellish their accounts to make them appear more extraordinary. However, in doing so, they never present the lands they explore as superior to their own, the center of the empire. As Jeanne Colleran and Brian Macaskill note, Barton realizes that she can no longer ignore how representation shapes meaning, particularly in the context of colonialism and the perpetuation of stereotypes such as cannibalism (1992, p. 445). Martin Heidegger appreciates silence and asserts that being silent does not necessarily mean being dumb or senseless; authentic silence can only be achieved in an authentic discourse so there is silence in speech and speech in silence (1962, p.208). Merleau-Ponty goes further by saying “the absence of a sign can be a sign”, “true speech...is only silence” (1964, p.44).

Cannibals are introduced in *Robinson Crusoe* from the very beginning and maintain a consistent presence throughout the novel. The cannibal’s depiction projects a fear to the life and civilization on the island. Defoe depicts the New World as a place dominated by chaos, anarchy,



and savagery. This portrayal of the indigenous people as "savages" has been skillfully critiqued by Coetzee. In *Foe*, the fear of such "savages" is revealed as an illusion, rather than a reflection of reality. Although Crusoe, in *Foe*, never encounters any cannibals, he continuously warns Susan Barton about their potential arrival, even suggesting that he remained on the island longer than necessary to avoid being captured by them. His firm belief in the existence of cannibals, despite lacking evidence, highlights the stereotypical views he carries with him from his homeland. Barton, on the other hand, denies any evidence of their existence on the island and argues that she has never witnessed any cannibals. She argues if the cannibals come in the dark and leave before the dawn then they are not leaving any footprints for her to substantiate their existence (*Foe*, p. 54). It is in the silent message under her mockery of absence of cannibals that she debunks the colonial claim of savages' presence among the colonized.

The author, while appearing to challenge Crusoe's belief in cannibals, is actually critiquing the Western world's blind confidence in a completely made-up idea. This concept, shaped by their culture and intellectual traditions, is treated as fact despite having no basis in reality. She also pokes fun at how flimsy these beliefs are, pointing to Columbus introducing the term "cannibal" without any real evidence. With sharp sarcasm, she suggests that when they leave the island, people who come later might assume the structures they left behind were built by cannibals. She implied that people who would visit the island after them might describe the structures as remnants of a civilization associated with cannibals, emphasizing the ridiculousness of such baseless assumptions (p. 54-55). Pierre Macherey in *A Theory of Literary Production* (1978) discusses the meaningfulness of silence:

What is important in the work is what it does not say. This is not the same as the careless notation 'what it refuses to say', although that in itself would be interesting: a method might be built on it, with the task of measuring silences, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged. But rather than this, what the work cannot say is important, because there the elaboration of the utterance is carried out, in a sort of journey to silence. (In Lazenbatt 2000, p. 191)

Spivak appreciates Macherey's observation quite enthusiastically by arguing that though he writes about the literariness of European origin' literature still he has articulated a method which is applicable to any social text, and the method involved here is indeed a task of "measuring silences" (Spivak, 1992, p.81)

The discovery of a murdered baby wrapped in blood and discarded in a garbage bin in London serves as a harsh, silent critique of the Western world, revealing that the idea of "cannibals" is not limited to distant or foreign lands but exists within their own society. Later, her conversation with Foe about the creation of the concept of cannibals indirectly but powerfully highlights how Western writers have played a role in inventing and promoting such ideas for economic and social benefits. She remarks on the nature of her story, emphasizing that it might appear boring in terms of an interesting adventure or a travelogue but if it is considered a true account of her experiences, it is definitely interesting. She points out that this is likely why Foe encouraged her to include cannibals in her tale to impress readers of unusual happenings (p. 127). Susan Barton's persistence in urging Mr. Foe to write her story reflects the silent yet significant struggle of women, particularly female travel writers, to gain recognition in the male-dominated literary sphere. Barton pleads with Mr. Foe, asking him to restore the "substance" of her story that she feels is missing, despite its truth (p. 51).

As the rightful owner of her story, Barton repeatedly strives for control over the narrative, asserting herself against Foe's dominance in shaping the account. Her critique of the writing process from a patriarchal perspective act as a strong protest against male dominance in storytelling and literature as a whole. According to Coetzee, the conflict between Susan and Foe is less about ethics or politics and more about narrative authority. This authority is tied to one's very existence, as the ability to tell one's story is essential for being recognized as a "substantial being in the world" (as cited in Lewis Macleod, 2006, p. 5).

Susan Barton challenges Crusoe's image as a civilized and a refined man through her persistent belief and ongoing debates about his potential role in either the mutilation of Friday's tongue or his enforced silence. This accusation can also be seen as a metaphor for the way white colonizers, particularly in the Caribbean, destroyed African history and culture, severing people from their roots and leaving their heritage irretrievably lost.

The struggle for power is not limited to the interactions between Foe and Barton or Barton and Crusoe. Instead, Friday emerges as a key figure in this conflict. His approach to asserting power is entirely different from the others—he uses silence rather than words. Without pleading or explaining, Friday expresses his anguish over his lost rights and the destruction of his history and culture in a way that resists interpretation. By creating a barrier of silence, he prevents others from reaching him or understanding his inner self, making him the sole keeper of his thoughts and emotions. Susan Barton describes Friday's silence as being like "a buttonhole" which is cautiously stitched, symbolizing how his silence resists others' attempts to define or interpret him (p. 121).

Richard Godden and Mary McCay consider silence to be an act of “linguistic subversion” that helps the marginalized or repressed to maintain their own counter-reality against the established reality of dominant world (Lazenbatt2000, p.200).

It remains unclear until the end whether Friday’s tongue was physically cut off or if he has chosen to remain silent. When Crusoe instructs him to say "la la la," Friday responds with "ha ha ha," but his tongue does not appear to touch the roof of his mouth. Barton admits when Crusoe asked her to look at Friday’s tongue that it was too dark inside his mouth to actually see it (p. 85). It is also possible that Friday intentionally said "ha ha ha" to keep Barton from discovering whether his tongue was intact. Macleod (2006, p. 7) suggests that Friday may indeed have a tongue but chooses silence, possibly because he distrusts Crusoe, whom he sees as self-centered, arrogant, and opportunistic. If Friday’s silence is intentional, it reflects his remarkable self-mastery. By refusing to speak, he removes himself from the discourse, ensuring that he cannot be misrepresented. Rather than being untranslatable, Friday deliberately chooses to make himself untranslatable. Christopher Miller, while discussing the ambiguous nature of silence, is of the view that though it works as an oppressive tool yet different types of words can be heard in it and that operates as a resistant strategy (Parry, 1996, p.43).

Although Friday does not speak verbally, he communicates in his own ways—through repetitive, non-verbal acts. Susan Barton interprets Friday’s act of spreading white flakes on the water as his way of remembering those who are lost or left behind. He sings wordlessly, dances with his eyes closed, holding out his arms and spinning in circles (p. 92). He also draws leaves and eyes and plays flute, however, he never explains the meaning behind these actions. Barton reflects on the mystery of Friday’s silence, saying that it is impossible to tell the authentic story of Friday’s tongue, it can be interpreted in various ways “but the true story is buried within Friday, who is mute. The true story will not be heard till by art we have found a means of giving voice to Friday” (p. 118).

In England, Susan Barton attempts multiple times and in multiple ways to understand Friday’s silence and his inner identity by making efforts to understand his actions and by insisting him to express his past. She tries to develop his communication by instructing to watch and do as she tell him but Friday resolutely maintains silence (p.56) and never lets anyone succeed to give meaning to his being. He stubbornly remains un-adjusted to the environment and lifestyle of England. Susan Barton copies Friday’s dancing and plays the same tune as his to connect to him but eventually she realizes that Friday remains in a trance of his own, his soul resides in Africa rather than where he is physically present, Newington (p.98). Barton reflects on Friday’s silence by comparing his existence to that of a whale in an ocean or that of a spider in the center of his

web and just like spider's web is his entire world, Friday's silence and his un-understandable actions are as his biosphere (p.59). In their paper *Giving Voice to Friday: An Evaluation of Key Concerns in J.M. Coetzee's Foe: Writing, Reading, and Silence* (2008), Oosterhout and Van Andries argue that interpreting or assigning meaning to a victim's silence is, in itself, a form of violence. They suggest it's just as harmful as completely denying the victim the ability to express themselves, much like colonial writers did. Anne Carson (2008), in her essay *Variations on the Right to Remain Silent*, emphasizes that silence can be just as powerful as words. She explores the idea of metaphysical silence, where words become untranslatable or unclear, making their meaning impossible to grasp.

By the end of the story, Friday does attempt to write, but after much effort from Susan Barton, the only character he repeatedly writes is the letter "O," an empty, hollow symbol. This letter is witnessed in his flute notes and in his dancing movements. Friday's meaningless writing represents his entire possession of his self and his history. The language of the oppressed, imposed on him, can never fully express their experience; its words will always lead back to silence, unable to capture the full essence of his reality. His silence, once imposed, becomes a symbol of his marginalization. Barton argues that Friday's home is "not a place of words" (p. 157). Friday's empty speech becomes a means of resisting being interpreted by others, expressing his refusal to be controlled. Barton notes that it could be "silence, perhaps, or a roar, like the roar of a seashell held to the ear" (p. 142). Friday's use of his body as a form of speech in contrast to verbal language is appreciated by Elleke Boehmer who emphasizes that this process is not just about reclaiming one's voice, but also about self-expression, similar to how someone speaks out to heal from their condition (1993, p. 272).

Friday's silence remains consistent, indifferent, and unresponsive to everyone, even though he follows his master's orders without ever showing any sign of gratitude or affection in his actions. His silence toward Crusoe seems to represent his refusal to express the pain and anger he feels from being treated as a captive and a savage—physically, culturally, and historically mutilated. Crusoe's illness, in particular, appears to matter little to Friday. At one point, Friday plays the flute, which invites multiple interpretations. It could suggest that he finds some comfort in his master's suffering, or alternatively, it could indicate Friday's own sorrow over Crusoe's passing, as he never had the chance to avenge or seek retribution for the wrongs done to him.

Even at Crusoe's death, Friday's reaction is one of complete stillness, though his eyes "glinted in the candlelight" (p. 45), which could suggest a sense of joy at being freed. However, his silence also reveals the emptiness of freedom for him, as it no longer holds any meaning. He is isolated from his past, with no place or people to turn to. The grief he feels is so overwhelming

that words seem insufficient, especially when he knows they would be misinterpreted by others. Coetzee (as discussed by Tabas, 2001, p. 2) reflects that the mystery of Friday's silence will remain unresolved until it is answered by the speaking subject himself.

Susan Barton also experiences silence, but unlike Friday's self-acquired or defiant silence, hers is imposed and helpless. Her silence reflects the centuries-old suppression of women, symbolizing the loss of their voice, intellect, and ability to write. Crusoe's constant demands, such as forcing her to agree with his views on Friday's mutilated tongue, the existence of cannibals, and his building of purposeless walls, as well as his involvement in sexual intercourse without her consent, showcase the subjugation of women. However, her attempts to resist his orders and reject his opinions subtly represent women's efforts to break free from imposed silence and dominance. Barton's repeated pleas to Foe to write her story reflect the lack of authority women hold in literature, while men continue to benefit from their manipulation of the truth. Barton's silence is a representation of the complete deprivation of power, authority, and the freedom to speak and express oneself. In contrast, Friday's silence is more symbolic, carrying meaning without the need for verbal communication. His silence can be interpreted in different ways by various characters, depending on their interests. While Crusoe sees it as the result of the slave's fault, Foe attempts to capitalize on it by portraying him as a savage cannibal in his writings, and Susan, the victim of silence, interprets it logically based on available signs. Barton draws a distinct contrast between her silence and Friday's, stating that Friday "has no command of words and therefore no defense against being re-shaped" and explaining that if she calls him a cannibal, he becomes one, yet the truth of Friday is more complex. She acknowledges that labels such as "cannibal" or "laundryman" do not define his essence, for he is a "substantial body" and remains himself—Friday is simply Friday. Barton reflects that he is "the child of his silence" (pp. 121–122).

Silence can only be assertive and meaningful when it is chosen willingly, rather than being a forced imposition. Christopher Miller, while discussing the ambiguous nature of silence, is of the view that though it works as an oppressive tool yet different types of words can be heard in it and that operates as a resistant strategy (Parry, 1996, p.43). Friday communicates through his body, disarming himself of the deceptive power of language, which is often full of clichés, dual meanings, and stereotypes. He deliberately chooses to convey his story in a unique and unconventional way, creating a sense of thrill, emotion, and depth. This choice allows him to maintain authority over himself until the end, ensuring that no one can truly uncover his true self. Elleke Boehmer, in her praise of Coetzee's portrayal of Friday, explains that Friday, who lacks a tongue, symbolically represents the colonized struggle to make meaning. She notes that Friday expresses himself through circular dance, playing a single tune on the flute, and writing only one

character—"O"—which signifies the "empty set" or "empty mouth." By writing "O," Friday begins to communicate in his own distinct manner (Innes, 2007, p. 53).

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