

*In the Name of God*



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**M.A. Thesis**

**Rewriting the Canon: J.M.Coetzee's *Foe* as Postmodern**

**Historiography**

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کلیه حقوق مادی مترتب بر نتایج  
مطالعات، ابتکارات و نوآوری های  
ناشی از تحقیق موضوع این پایان  
نامه متعلق به دانشگاه اصفهان است.



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**بازنویسی متون مصوب: فرا داستان تاریخ نگارانه در رمان فو اثر ج.م. کوتزی**

در تاریخ ۹۰/۰۶/۲۸ توسط هیأت داوران زیر بررسی و با درجه ی عالی به تصویب نهایی رسید.

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## **Abstract**

As the canon is shaped by white male standards rewriting the canonical works of literature is one of the ways through which postcolonial writers subvert the authority of the masters. Writing in the language of the masters the colonized writers use the very suppressive tool in the hands of the masters i.e. their language to question the validity of their norms. Regarded by most critics to be the beginner of Realism *Robinson Crusoe* was accepted to the canon as a masterpiece. Although he is apparently trying to civilize Friday, Crusoe is actually a white master who makes Friday his slave by the strategy of naming and using the suppressing power of language. Coetzee's novel *Foe* on the other hand is the critique of Defoe's colonialism. As an African novelist writing in English he uses the language of the masters to subvert their discourse of power. *Foe* is an exemplary works of resistance in that not only is it a revision of a canonical work but also the characters in the novel are resistant to the masters. This study compares the postcolonial issues in these two novels especially as they are related to the notions of language, identity, master/slave dialectic and women, having in the background mostly those ideas of Edward Said, Franz Fanon, Homi K. Bhabha , Gayatri Spivak and Henry Louis Gates which are related to the notions of cultural suppression and resistance. Being a historiographic metafiction as Linda Hutcheon would call it. *Foe* will also be analyzed in terms of her ideas in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. Therefore, this thesis will compare *Robinson Crusoe* and *Foe* focusing on colonization and decolonization as their main themes and the way Coetzee manages to counteract

the discursive power of Defoe's. novel by applying postmodern techniques of writing

**Key words:** postcolonial, historiographic metafiction, suppression, resistance,  
*Foe, Robison Crusoe*

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter introduces the basic points of this project. First, it gives a general overview, in the form of the thesis outline of what is going to be included in each chapter of the work. This is followed by defining the key terms. Methodology addresses the theoretical background of the arguments by explaining the features of Colonial and Postcolonial literature and its relation to postmodern literature especially the genre of historiographic metafiction which is the focus of this study. This goal is achieved mostly through the study of the ideas of critics such as Homi K. Bhabha and Linda Hutcheon.

## 1.2 Thesis Outline

This project consists of four chapters and will study Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and J.M.Coetzee's *Foe*. Mainly, it tries to address those strategies used in *Robinson Crusoe* to legitimize and expand the colonizers' subjugation of the colonized and the methods deployed by J.M.Coetzee in rewriting Defoe's novel in order to subvert its claimed authority. The focus in this regard is on the issues of language and discourse in the construction of reality and identity, along with an eye on the position of women and formal features employed in the novels. The first chapter is allocated to the theories informing the study including postcolonial theories especially those regarding writing and rewriting and critics' ideas about the position of postcolonial writers and the possibility of resistance on their part. While historiographic metafiction, as it is called by Linda Hutcheon, is defined as a postmodern genre which rewrites the supposed facts in order to question the very notion of factuality, postcolonial writers try to rework the canonical works of literature in which they are depicted as Others to demystify the authority of the colonial Masters. As a result, this project which is the study of *Foe*, a historiographic metafiction having a Realistic colonial antecedent, will include the intersection of postcolonialism and postmodernism in the opening chapter.

The second chapter will examine *Robinson Crusoe*. Showing how Defoe represents Robinson Crusoe "rightfully" colonizing other lands and peoples, the

researcher tries to discuss the ways through which Defoe depicts non-European peoples as Others in a way that they are shown as cannibal savages who need to be educated and tamed by a British master, Crusoe. A direct consequence of such a study will be the analysis of the (mis)uses of literature, especially the form of novel, to impart and impose certain ideas onto the reader. Therefore this chapter will mainly be focused on the character of Robinson Crusoe which somehow reflects the author, Defoe, and the way he suppresses the Others in narrating his story. It will also shed light on the characterization of the Others especially that of Friday, Crusoe's slave.

The third chapter includes the study of *Foe*. Written by a white male South African writer, told by a female narrator and being a rewriting of a canonical work of literature which does not have a female character, the novel lends itself to many theoretical autopsies and their intersections among which the main ones are colonial and postcolonial studies, postmodern theories and female studies. While J.M.Coetzee is often criticized as being apolitical and indifferent to the condition of his countrymen and the notion of resistance, by studying the thematic and structural details of *Foe*, one can clearly see how Coetzee masterfully uses the tool of the master, language and its discursive power, in creating a novel which (re)claims the rights of the supposed Others and subverts the claims of its antecedent novel, hence resisting the authority exerted through it before by its colonial writer.

The last chapter is the conclusion which gives an analytical summary of what is discussed in the project and provides a survey of how Coetzee not only (re)gains his postcolonial voice as a South African writer, but also invests the silenced with voice to speak and a position to be heard from.

### 1.3 Definition of Key Terms

**Colonial literature:** "texts described as colonial or colonialist are taken to be those[...] which exhibit a tinge of local colonial color, or feature colonial motifs-for example, the quest beyond the frontier of civilization"(Boehmer, 1995, p.2). And it concerns "the superiority of European culture and the rightness of empire. Its distinctive stereotyped language was geared to mediating the white man's relationship with the colonized peoples"(Boehmer, 1995, p.3).

**Postcolonial criticism:** is a body of literary criticism that reacts to the discourse of colonization. Postcolonial criticism as Bhabha (1994) observed in *The Location of Culture*, "bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contests for political and social authority within the modern world order." Postcolonial critics "formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the 'rationalization' of modernity. [...]" The postcolonial perspective resists the attempt at holistic forms of social explanation. It forces recognition of the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp of the often opposed political spheres" (pp. 171-173).

**Post-colonial:** which is different from postcolonial in this text refers to the period of time when colonization is over, i.e. the time that a nation is no longer a colony of another and it is independent.

**Master/Slave Dialectic:** In Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic, "Man is never simply man. He is always, necessarily, and essentially, either Master or Slave. If the human reality can come into being only as a social reality, society is human-at least in its origins- on the basis of its implying an element of Mastery and an element of Slavery, of 'autonomous' existences and 'dependent' existences" (Bloom, 1969, p.8). According to Russon (2004), "Hegel sees the relation of master and slave as emerging out of a fight to the death of two individuals" (p.72) in that "the master-to-be can become master only through a recognition of the acquiescence of the slave"(Russon, 2004, p.74). The identities of the master and the slave are mutually dependent on each other. The slaves are defined as inferior to the masters. However, the master is also "defined by the slave as the one who constitutes the essence of the situation. The master's identity- The master identity as ruler—is reflected to the slave through everything that the slave encounters. Everything, in other words, is the master's own, and its disposition is the master's alone"(Russon, 2004, p.82)

**Postcolonial Discourse:** Edward Said's theorization of Orientalism as the discourse which constituted the Orient in the consciousness of the west offers an influential analysis of how the world was constructed in the European mind. "The Orient is not merely there", noted Said,

"Just as the Occident itself is not just there either. We must take seriously Vico's great observation that men *make* their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities – to say nothing of historical entities – such locales, regions, geographical sectors as 'Orient' and 'Occident' are man-made"(Said 1978, p.5)[emphasis mine].

Just as the Occident and the Orient, in Said's terms, "support and to an extent reflect each other", all postcolonial peoples realize their identity in difference rather than in being. They are constituted by their difference from the center and it is in this relationship that identity both as a separation from the centre and as a means of self-assertion comes into being.

To speak of a post-colonial discourse in Foucault's or Said's sense, then, is to invoke certain ways of thinking about language, about truth, about power, and about the interrelationships between all three. Truth is what we think of as true within the system of rules for a particular discourse; power is that which controls, determines, and verifies truth. Truth is never outside power, or deprived of power, the production of truth is a function of power and, as Foucault said, "we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (as cited in Markula and Pringle, 2006, P.54)

**Canon:** Abrams (1993) defined literary canon as "those authors who, by a cumulative consensus of critics, scholars, and teachers, have come to be widely recognized as 'major' and to have written works often hailed as literary *classics*. [...] Discussions of the process of canon formation, and opposition to established literary canons, have recently become a leading concern in critics in diverse viewpoints.[...] a widespread charge is that the standard canon of great books [...]has been formed in accordance with the ideology and political interests and values of an elite and privileged class that was white, male, and European, with the result that the canon consists mainly of works that manifest racism, *patriarchy*, and imperialism, and either marginalize or exclude the interests and accomplishments of Blacks, Hispanics, and other ethnic

minorities, of women, of the working class, of popular , of homosexuals, and of non-Europeans"( pp. 20-21).

**Historiographic metafiction:** is a term which was first used by William Gass but come to be known as coined by the postmodern theorist Linda Hutcheon. According to Hutcheon, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), works of historiographic metafiction are" those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (p.5).

Historiographic metafiction is a quintessentially postmodern art form, with reliance upon textual play, parody and historical re-conceptualization. Hutcheon(1988) added that in historiographic metafiction" its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs [...] [makes]the grounds for rethinking of and reworking of the forms and contents of the past"(p.5). "This kind of novel asks us to recall that history and fiction are themselves historical terms and that their definitions are themselves historical terms and that their definitions and interrelations are historically determined and vary with time" (Hutcheon , 1988, p.105) On the whole, it is, "a genre which foregrounds the narrative construction of history in direct opposition to those early-eighteenth-century fictions, such as *Robinson Crusoe* which claimed to be real histories, and were sometimes accepted as such."(Burgass, 2000, p.180)

## 1.4 Theoretical Background

The present project is a study of J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986). *Foe* re-tells Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* from a female point of view, a perspective entirely absent from the original text. *Robinson Crusoe* is "an early paradigmatic text of European colonial experience" (Beohmer, 1995, p.17) and *Foe* is a postmodern rewriting of it by a South African writer who now lives in Australia. These two books' origins the— first one is written by a master/colonizer in the time of colonial rule , and the latter a rewriting by a postcolonial writer, during the post-colonial era— call for certain postcolonial theoretical backgrounds to address, on the one hand, the ways Defoe represents imperialism as legitimate, and, on the other hand, Coetzee's approach in calling into question Defoe's claims in order to make salient the voice of the margins which is silenced and suppressed in Defoe's work. Beside being a rewriting of a canonical colonial work, *Foe* is specifically a postmodern rewriting told by a female narrator, hence considering postmodernist and feminist ideas in studying it is somehow necessary, if not mandatory. Therefore, you may come to know by now that in this novel we come across the intersection of postcolonial criticism with postmodern and feminist or post-feminist theories. Before moving on to the study of each novel in the second and third chapters, in this first chapter the writer goes over some relevant postcolonial ideas and explains how they intersect with postmodernism and feminism.

*Robinson Crusoe* is accepted to the canon as the pioneer of Realist novel. Regarding this fact and having in mind that such a canon is shaped by the colonial masters, we should be concerned with theories discussing colonial works and the ways they are shaped and approved by the masters as rightful texts. Postcolonial writers



have found that such canonical texts lend themselves well to their task of reinterpretation and as a consequence to resistance. But one would ask why Coetzee rewrites *Robinson Crusoe*? What is the significance of *this* novel that Coetzee chose to reinterpret? Which one does Coetzee try to condemn or subvert, the authority of Daniel Defoe or that of his text, or may be both? In order to answer these somehow broad questions, we should first turn to some basic concepts of postcolonial theory especially theories of Homi K. Bhabha and Linda Hutcheon.

### **1.4.1 language, identity, colonization**

Language is one of the most important issues in colonial and postcolonial approaches to literature and closely related to it is the Nietzschean concept of power in that. To use Hegelian terms, in Master/Slave relationship the language of the Master is a means to colonize the voice and identity of the Slave; the colonizer suppresses the voice of the colonized by making him/her speak the language of the master, and constructs the colonizer's identity as negatively shaped as Other in contrast to the master's Self. Identity is not some stable fact, but its meaning is unstable and constructed by language through discursive powers. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2004) also referred to "the interdependence of language and identity" stating that "you are the way you speak"(p.53). Regarding the fact that the identity of the colonized is shaped and defined in the masters' texts, one can say the colonized is that which is *written* by the colonizer.

In his article, "The Alchemy of English", Braj B. Kachru, (1995) observed, "The English language is a tool of power, domination and elitist identity, and of communication across continents"(p.291). Language is a fundamental site of struggle for post-colonial discourse because the colonial process itself begins in language. The colonizers usurp other lands and exert power over Other nations but "To assume control over a territory or a nation was not only to exert political or economic power; it was also to have imaginative command" (Boehmer, 1995, p.5).

By imaginative command one can refer to the large body of colonial writings in which the people whose lands are taken, are depicted and defined as Others, as subjects, as inferior savages. Coetzee (1986) stated that "the world expects stories of its adventurers" (p.8). But who is going to tell them, from whose point of view is the reader going to know about past events and adventures? "Present-day readers experience Empire textually, through the medium of nineteenth- and eighteenth-century novels and periodicals, travel writings, scrapes of doggerel. Yet, Empire was itself a textual exercise"(Boehmer, 1995, p.13). Therefore, as it is discussed that "The emphasis is on the importance of the written text as an instrument of control "(Ashcroft et al., 1995, p.9), inevitably the site of resistance should be the very same battle-ground that is language, hence a large body of the masters' texts' rewritings by the post-colonial writers. Regarding the fact that " what the native rewrites is not a copy of the colonialist original, but a qualitatively different thing-in-itself, where misreadings and incongruities expose the uncertainties and ambivalences of the colonialist text and deny it an authorizing presence "(Parry, 2004, p.42), through "

displacing those images of identity already held by the colonised society "(Ashcroft et al., 1995, p.9).

### **1.4.1.1 Stereotype**

This notion of the interrelatedness of language and identity and its relevance to the colonial and postcolonial studies, reminds one of Bhabha's notion of stereotype. Stereotypical characters are not limited to colonialist texts. They are the inevitable consequences of "Formulaic fictions [...] [that] construct ideologically powerful but intensely 'literary' worlds"(Waugh, 1984, p. 82). These formulaic fictions are the ones which are almost unanimously accepted as realistic fictions that claim to present reality. They are the written texts of the masters that include both the colonizer and the colonized in stereotypical forms. Central "to the practices of colonial governmentality" (McRobbie, 2005, p.108), they are used to legitimate the mastery of the colonizer over the colonized. The stereotype, as a linguistic construct, is itself a "critical instrument of government, it renders others knowable in such a way as to justify the superiority of the coloniser"(McRobbie, 2005, p.110).

The Others, in contrast to the masters as being Self, are not the same group of minorities and their presentation is not also the same in every text. According to the changes in the uses that the writing master senses, the definition and shape of the colonized would change, too. This fact is referred to as "Differential Racialization"(Tyson, 2006, p.375). Black non-American people, for instance, are at one point shown as "simple-minded, in need of white supervision lest they revert to

their 'heathen' ways, and as happy to serve white people, [...] [at another point they may be] threatening, prone to violence, and, often at the same time, lazy. (Tyson, 2006, p.375)

On the other hand, according to Mc Robbie(2005), Bhabha, in his essay "The Other Question", "argues that the stereotype is a form of knowledge about 'the other', but far from securing certainty it in fact betrays the instability and uncertainty of relations between the powerful coloniser and the powerless colonised" (p. 108). This happens when the post-colonial writer parodies these stereotypes. "When they are parodied, the release effect of such forms is to do with *disturbance* rather than *affirmation*"(Waugh, 1984, p.82). Waugh (1984) contended that this parodic representation of the stereotypes happens in postmodern fictions especially in metafictional novels (pp.82-83) as "a revisionist mission aimed at substituting reality for stereotype" (McDowell as cited in Tyson, 2006, P. 390). This reality is now from the viewpoint and in the words of the colonized. As Tyson(2006) admitted" that is, how 'one' story can become many different stories, depending on how, for what purpose, and from whose point of view it's told "(p. 446).

But race is not the only point of departure for the discussion of stereotypes. There is also the issue of gender leading to "patriarchal stereotypes of women"(Tyson, 2006, p.102). Tyson(2006), in his analysis of the presentation of female characters in some well-known fairy tales such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella* found two general categories of women as being either "good girl" or "bad girls". He later concludes that the just the good one at the end marries the hero of the story and lives happily ever after. In his view" These characterizations