

# Foe, coetzee

Literature



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English Literature (IC and Modern) Topic: Foe, Coetzee

### Introduction

The novel, “Foe” by J. M. Coetzee opens with a dramatic sequence. Susan Barton is a castaway on the island and she introduces herself to Crusoe, her rescuer, thus: “My name is Susan Barton...I was cast adrift by the crew of the ship yonder. They killed their master and did this to me.”(9) Crusoe takes her to his abode in the island and Susan meets Friday there. Crusoe and Friday are marooned on the island since long, later rescued and Crusoe dies on shipboard en-route to England. Susan is in the island for a little more than a year, being given protection by them. On reaching London, Susan feels that she owes a debt of gratitude to mute Friday and writes notes of her experiences on the island. To capture her feelings in a proper form and give it the authentic literary shape, Susan needs expertise which she finds in Foe, who exercises control and power over her identity, on being given charge of her emotional world and secular experiences in the island.

Foe has created two characters Crusoe, an English adventurer and Friday, an African slave, with purpose. On return to England Susan wishes to write a story narrating her sojourn in the island, and that is possible with the help of Friday, whose tongue is cut by the slavers. Through Friday Foe depicts the plight of the African slaves and attempts to give some background information about the history of postcolonial South Africa. Susan is the window through which Foe sees and shows us the happenings in that era. Susan is dependent on Foe, but Foe is not dependent on her.

Friday’s muteness indicates the suppressed African history and that is the problem with Foe and Susan in their efforts to get a clear picture about the sufferings of the blacks. Foe argues his points and the issues faced by Susan

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in providing an authentic story by informing the readers that the slavers cut off the tongue to " prevent him from ever telling his story: who he was, where his home lay, how it came about that he was taken" (23). This allegory indicates the process of obliteration of the black history.

The lost story of the blacks is indicated by the plight of Friday, though Susan is able to offer an account of her life experiences in the island under fortuitous circumstances. For more authenticity and to get a wider audience for her publication, and to put a stamp of literary authority, she entrusts her authorship to Foe, for furthering her cause and writing objectives. She is confident about the merits of her story, but not enough to make it marketable and acceptable to the general public. She tells Foe, "" You have not heard a story before like mine. I am new-returned from far-off parts. I have been a castaway on a desert island. And there I was the companion of a singular man" (48). So, the one plot is being handled by two hands and two minds, Foe and Susan. The weakness of the later to complete her project, is the strength of the former, as she is the object of Foe's writing and he can interpret the issues as he is more competent. He controls Susan's identity. Susan is aware of her shortcomings and she candidly admits that she lacks creativity and professional approach and though she has fertile ideas on the subject of her intended novel, she is unable to express them in proper terms of description. She tells Foe, " To tell the truth in all its substance you must have quiet, and a comfortable chair away from all distraction, and a window to stare through; and then the knack of seeing waves when there are fields before your eyes, and of feeling the tropic sun when it is cold; and at your fingertips the words with which to capture the vision before it fades. I have none of these, while you have all" (51 - 52). Susan is aware of the ability of <https://assignbuster.com/foe-coetzee/>

the competent writes to weave magic through words. To say it in the language of metaphor, Susan has different colors. But the literary artist Foe controls the strokes with his brush.

### Conclusion

The three important characters reveal three aspects of issues relating to blacks. Friday, knows and has undergone all types of suffering, but he is unable to express them as his tongue is slashed by the slavers. Susan has some experience about the agony of the blacks, but lacks ability to express them in proper language and provide authentic interpretation to her research on the subject through appropriate words. And Foe, the professional writer, who controls Susan's identity will pen her experiences as per his own perspectives.

### Works Cited

Coetzee, J. M. Foe. Penguin (Non-Classics), 1988; Print