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J. M. Coetzee and the Postcolonial Rhetoric of Simultaneity

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Having published nine novels and won such prestigious literary awards as the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize (1980), the Booker Prize (1983, 1999), and the Jerusalem Prize (1987), J. M. Coetzee has become one of the most important late twentieth-century authors to emerge from South Africa, and the reputation Coetzee enjoys is due, in part, to the international appeal of his novels. Since the publication of *Dusklands* (1974), Coetzee seems to favor what we may call a rhetoric of simultaneity, one that emphasizes the importance of considering South African colonial trauma not as an isolated and autonomous event, but as one that relates to, and must therefore be juxtaposed with, similar human conditions outside South Africa. This essay offers an analysis of Coetzee's rhetoric of simultaneity as exemplified in the novels *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *Foe* (1986), and *Age of Iron* (1990); it first explores how Coetzee negotiates the boundary-crossing between postcolonial writing and allegorical writing followed by an examination of how Coetzee brings the issue of writing to bear on the status of being.

Coetzee's inclination to demystify regional colonial suffering has empowered his novels to address dilemmas facing both South Africa and the larger international community. In an effort to translate his rhetoric of simultaneity into corresponding narrative forms, Coetzee has chosen to write not about the "provincial" but about the "universal" that, "purged of uniqueness and alterity," [1] can express "a spiritual and moral truth beyond politics or culturally determined structures of signification." [2] As Laura Di Michele notes, Coetzee's novels clearly "expose the difficulties in reconciling the idea of belonging to a nation, or 'imagined community,' with the wish to express singular cultural identities and differences." [3] For example, in *Dusklands*, Coetzee juxtaposes the twentieth-century American invasion of Vietnam and the eighteenth-century Dutch occupation of South Africa, a strategy he later uses to parallel colonialism, writing, and being in *Foe*. Similarly, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee defuses its local color by situating the novel in an elusive geographical context. All of these textual designs demonstrate Coetzee's consistent effort to free his novels from being ensnared by the cultural, ethnic, and ethical insularity implicitly embodied in the nativism, negative nationalism, and Euro-American multiculturalism that have informed postcolonial writing. [4] Accordingly, Coetzee's novels mark the emergence of a new mode of postcolonial writing characterized by postcolonial authors' willingness to de-essentialize the uniqueness of colonial oppression by bringing it to bear on similar human experiences outside the historical specificity of colonialism.

Coetzee's fifth novel, *Foe*, offers a typical example of this new mode of postcolonial writing. In the novel, Coetzee presents three highly fluid motifs - history, writing, and being - and emphasizes their simultaneous significations by showing that these motifs are transferable to and shareable by one another. By negotiating the transfer of meaning between Coetzee's notions of history,
writing, and being as expressed in *Foe*, Coetzee effectively dissolves the novel's linguistic and philosophical boundary between the historical and the allegorical, between writing and being, and between the self and the other. One result of this dissolution is that *Foe* poses resistance to conventional categorical criticism; for example, Coetzee's refusal to give prominence to the feminist issue has been (mis)understood as "trouble negotiating a gender position" and as "discomfort in imagining a woman." [5]

The narrator of *Foe* is Susan Barton, a female castaway who washes up on the island inhabited by Cruso, an English adventurer, and Friday, an African slave. After an uneventful stay on the island, the three of them are rescued by the crew of a Bristol-bound ship. Cruso dies on the return journey, and Susan and Friday are safely transported to England, where Susan seeks out the author, Mr. Daniel Foe, in the hope of having her story written. Yet, the reader soon learns that the only way Susan can reconstruct the story of her sojourn on the island is with the help of Friday whose tongue is cut out by the slavers. The rest of the novel recounts Susan's struggle to write her encounter with Friday.

Based on this plot summary, one is tempted to remark that *Foe* is about writing history in postcolonial South Africa. However, this reading is too narrow because, as Coetzee suggests, the thematic space occupied by postcolonial writing is made easily transferable to and sharable by allegorical writing. In one sense, Susan and Foe are confronted with the difficulty of dealing with Friday's muteness, which, in Derek Wright's terms, results from "a culturally enforced rather than a physical condition." [6] Yet in another sense this problem goes beyond Susan and Foe because it may befall any writer who is denied access to the past in creating a historical narrative. The inaccessibility of Friday's personal history thus embodies a much broader implication in that Coetzee turns postcolonial writing, the writing of a suppressed personal history, into a problem of allegorical writing, which is the writing of history in general.

For Coetzee, history in *Foe* takes on three levels of meaning. First, history exists as a subtext surrounding the enigma and elusiveness of Friday's past. Second, history exists as a displaced authority; although the slavers may have succeeded in erasing Friday's personal history and have made it impossible for Susan to write her complete story, Friday's past asserts its power by constantly setting limits on writing, and, as the novel's end suggests, by even engulfing writing completely. Third, history exists as a shared space of personal history and universal history. Using postcolonial writing as a model to address larger problems concerning writing, Coetzee creates Friday as a key narrative locus onto which Coetzee inscribes the three meanings of history. However, little is known about this central character except for his slave identity and speech deficiency. The reader is told that when Friday was a child, he was taken by the slavers, and that they cut off his 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). [21] Thus the mutilation of Friday's tongue ensures that his story remains buried within himself and inaccessible for textual representation. But as Susan's/Foe's aborted writing project suggests, the moment the slavers take Friday's tongue to erase his personal history is also the moment they simultaneously obliterate their own history.

That Friday's lost story impedes the flow of the narrative raises the following question: Under what conditions can writing take place? Common sense tells us that writing requires a subject, namely, the writer, and an object, the content. In Part I of the novel, Susan offers an account of her adventure story, and in constructing her autobiographical narrative, she becomes both the subject and the object of her own writing. Later, when Susan entrusts her authorship to Foe, a "reputed" (48) author she meets by chance in her Clock Lane hotel, their meeting seems to fulfill the conditions of writing. In every respect Susan has an extraordinary story to tell, as 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). In handing over her authorship, Susan also splits her unity as subject and object of her writing; she now becomes the object of Foe's writing. An extraordinary story like Susan's no doubt constitutes a proper object for Foe's writing, and a well-known author like Foe no doubt makes a competent writing subject. The reason that compels Susan to give up her authorship is her initially banal notion of writing as a professional and creative activity. Susan reckons that her lack of competence is due to her lack of creativity and professional status, both of
which Foe possesses: "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 [Foe] have all" (51 - 52). Susan's remarks clearly place emphasis on the writing subject, Foe, whom she admires and even idolizes for his ability to transform "fields" into "waves" and "cold[ness]" into "tropic sun" by means of willful imagination.

Yet Part III of the novel exposes the "impotency" and futility of Foe's entrusted authorship. After some difficult negotiations, Susan and Foe agree to situate her daughter-seeking fantasy within the larger island story, but they soon realize that the real obstacle to Foe's writing lies in Friday, to whom both have not paid due attention until then. Struck by the urgency of Friday's silence, Susan admits: "To tell my story and be silent on Friday's tongue is no better than offering a book for sale with pages in it quietly left empty" (67). The same sense of urgency prompts Susan to teach Friday first to speak and then to write, but eventually all her attempts fail; the only thing Friday learns to write is a circle, the meaning of which is as enigmatic as his buried past. This failure reduces the authority of the speaking subject to the object of writing, one that has been muted by the brutal act of tongue-cutting and thus reveals "the inadequacy of colonial words." [9] The final implication is that Susan's story may well "lose [its] voice" due to the absent history of the colonized.

In an interview with David Attwell, Coetzee explains why he insists on the suffering body as the legitimate object of writing in South Africa: "If I look back over my fiction, I see a simple (simple-minded?) standard erected. That standard is the body. Whatever else, the body is not 'that which is not,' and the power that it is is the pain it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trial of doubt." [11] This insistence is evident in the manner in which Coetzee structures Foe. First, unlike Coetzee's other novels, which invariably contain a single narrative, the novelistic space of Foe is occupied not only by a narrative (Parts I and II) but by a metanarrative (Part III) which serves as a commentary on the production of the former. Second, unlike Coetzee's other novels, which (at least to some extent) are capable of narrative progression and closure, Foe is virtually devoid of both: it simply renders an incomplete story. By problematizing Foe's narrative progression and closure, Coetzee addresses a fundamental question about writing: the dichotomy of history (object) and representation (subject). What informs this dichotomy is Coetzee's recognition that history "can be given a permanent shape only in words that in turn rely on history as the object of representation." [12] For Coetzee, this object, when circumvented within a postcolonial context, can only be the historical process of colonization and decolonization in South Africa. Writing about South Africa means writing about the process of colonization, the crux of which, to be sure, is the gradual constitution of the master/slave dialectic, one that exerts to squeeze the natives to the margins of humanity. To write about South Africa, then, is to reveal how such an active/passive dichotomy is constituted, consolidated, and sustained; it is, after all, to write a history of humiliation, dehumanization, and subjection. This means that the exclusion of either the colonizer or the colonized from this kind of writing will distort history. Here Coetzee's belief that writing about South Africa should be no different from writing the history of colonialism and its subsequent residues should not surprise us. Few would deny that, since the first European settlement in South Africa about three hundred years ago, colonialism has had a deep, wide-ranging, and enduring effect on its linguistic, cultural, psychological, and economic makeup.

Born in Cape Town in 1940 and educated in South Africa and the United States, Coetzee is sensitive to the colonial history of his native country. This sensitivity has led Coetzee to claim colonial suffering not only as the object of postcolonial writing, but as a proper dimension for truth. In his Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech, Coetzee evokes South Africa as a pivotal site for truth: "In South Africa there is too much truth for art to hold, truth by the bucketful, truth that overwhelms and swamps every act of the imagination." [13] What Coetzee means by truth is what he calls "the crudity of life in South Africa," the crudity manifested by "the naked force of its appeals, not only at the physical level but at the moral level, too, its callousness and brutalities, its hungers and its rages,
By affirming the object's status in postcolonial writing, Coetzee simultaneously affirms its status in writing history in general, and this thematic transfer from the local to the allegorical is strategically engineered by Coetzee's deliberate blurring of *Foe's* geographical location. Although Coetzee presents Friday as an African slave, he never tells the reader which part of Africa Friday is from. Even Susan does not know Friday's home, and when asked about her relationship with Friday, she replies that Friday "will take ship for Africa and his homeland" (107). One wonders why Coetzee refuses to give Friday's homeland a specific name on an occasion like this. One possible answer is that once a name is given to Friday's home country, Friday immediately takes on a specific national and cultural identity; in other words, Friday would become Friday of a certain place. The fact that the novel does have Africa as its only context leads us to assume that *Foe* is situated in a place larger than South Africa. Theodore F. Sheckels, Jr., makes a similar point, noting that *Foe* "is not just about South Africa. If one pays attention to the details in the novel and then tries to place it in time and space, one will have some difficulty. Some details suggest a location considered farther away from the tropics than South Africa is." [16] For Sheckels, Coetzee's "surreal creation" of "the landscape" is "designed to evoke many places simultaneously." [17]

Coetzee's use of elusive geography as a strategy to diffuse local color is also evident in his earlier novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*, throughout which Coetzee does not indicate where the central plot, the raids upon the barbarians, takes place. All the reader knows is that these violent campaigns are launched in a vague place called "the frontier" (2). [18] In accordance with the ambiguous context, Coetzee refers to the colonizing nation merely and elusively as "Empire" without specifying its national affiliation. Whereas in *Foe* one can at least locate the novel in Africa, *Waiting for the Barbarians* seems to discourage the reader from associating the novel with any real and tangible place. Thus, both in *Foe* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee's marginal use of local color, as Dominic Head notes, is "subversive," and it denotes Coetzee's endorsement of "ethical universalism." [19]

The fact that writing occupies a salient place in *Foe* has led critics to claim that *Foe* rehearses the poststructuralist concept of writing, a concept that privileges the signifier over the signified in the act of writing. [20] The critics who note the postmodern strategies in *Foe* neglect the fact that Coetzee's use of them does not confirm their usefulness to postcolonial writing; rather, his use of postmodern strategies reveals their limitations, which can be overcome by postcolonial writing. In short, the postmodern and the postcolonial do not readily go together in *Foe*, and their opposition can be seen clearly in Coetzee's reversal of history formerly marginalized by poststructuralists. In competing with text for what Althusser calls an "absent cause," Coetzee's history refuses to be effaced by the hermetic poetics of poststructuralists. This resistance inevitably constitutes a massive ideological offence against the bourgeois project of constructing subjectivity from Descartes through Hegel to Nietzsche. This notion of subjectivity is forcefully articulated by Derrida in his subjectivist account of writing in *Writing and Difference*, in which he claims that "writing is inaugural" [21] and not an expression of some pre-existing object. Here Derrida is obviously suggesting a lack of liaison between the signifier and the signified, and, having effaced presence as the object of writing, Derrida then designates absence or excess as the new object of writing: "This emptiness [absence of object] as the situation of literature must be acknowledged by the critic as that which constitutes the specificity of his object. Or rather, his proper Object - since nothing is not an object - is the way in which this nothing itself is determined by disappearing." [22] Seen in this light, Coetzee's reversal of history from absence to presence marks his departure from poststructuralists on the issues of history and writing.

While Coetzee unfolds the transfer of postcolonial writing to allegorical writing, he also dramatizes a related thematic transfer: the transfer of the linguistic act of writing to the philosophical inquiry of being. Using postcolonial writing as a starting point, Coetzee suggests that the problem of Susan's/Foe's writing is...
ultimately one of identity; what begins for them as writing an adventure story ends with larger implications not only for the formations of the writing subject and the object of writing, but also for the fundamental status of being. This thematic shift from writing to being is strategically accomplished by Susan's gradual changes, which result from her struggle to combat her preconceptions about history, writing, and being, and her struggle to help Foe overcome his preconceptions about these categories. And Coetzee stages Susan's double struggle precisely in the act of writing. Initially, Friday means little to Susan, who, as writing continues, gradually becomes aware that Friday's "uncomfortable presence" and the "absence" of his history threaten to erase her story. The implication is that Susan alone cannot be the object of her own writing; the object in this case becomes the interobject, and only the combination of Susan and Friday can constitute the proper object of white writing. The same holds true for Foe's status as the writing subject: if Susan alone cannot be the object of her writing, so too Foe alone cannot be the writing subject; his language alone cannot be the legitimate signifier, which has to be co-constituted by the language of both Foe and Friday. Displaced from Foe to the collaboration of Foe and Friday, Foe's authority is subversively challenged. As Susan discovers Foe's insufficiency as the writing subject and her own insufficiency as the object of writing, she realizes that Friday's silence not only thwarts Foe's writing but also threatens to impair the fullness of her own being, rendering it solitary and empty. Thus Susan finally perceives the link between the act of writing and the status of her being, and between the status of her being and the being of the other, namely, Friday. This is why she anxiously deplores that her life is "drearilly suspended till [Foe's] writing is done" (63).

Susan's awakening is illustrated by her attitude toward Friday, who initially remains an "other" having little in common with Susan as a white European woman. For Susan, Friday occupies a position outside her realm of self, and the images she initially forms of Friday evoke animality and barbarity. That a Negro "with a head of fuzzy wool" (5) is a "cannibal" (6) is a notion Susan quickly adopts upon meeting Friday; she subsequently aligns Friday with "a dog," a "dumb beast" (32), and "a frightened horse" (42). To Susan, Friday appears no more than a "shadowy creature" (24) who belongs to the category of inhumanity. Gradually, Susan's close interaction with Friday brings her to see the other side of him, the side reminiscent of human attributes and qualities, and her knowledge of them arouses her "compassion for him." Early in the island episode, Susan has glimpsed the "spirit or soul beneath that dull and unpleasing exterior" (32) through Friday's petal-casting drama on the river. Later, Friday's dancing in robes (92) and playing music (96) on the flute disclose to Susan the artistic, the sentimental, and even the romantic side of Friday.

Susan's transformation is climactically dramatized by two instances, the first of which is found in Part II in the scene where Susan is deeply frustrated by Friday's unresponsiveness. Since Susan finds Friday mute, she has tried to talk to him, hoping that one day Friday will converse with her in one way or another. Susan's craving for Friday's response reaches a point where it dawns upon her that her life will remain pale, meaningless, and incomplete if she is doomed to "speak into a void, day after day, without answer" (80). She feels that her desire for Friday's response is more than a desire for a linguistic response; it is the desire for the embrace by another human being. This is why, she reckons, people do not "kiss" and "sleep" with "statues," because the statues are cold, unresponsive, and "dead" (79). She further ponders the function of speech in relation to being and desire: "I say that the desire for answering speech is like the desire for the embrace of, the embrace by, another being" (80). What Susan discovers here is the crucial link between language, desire, and being, which, arguably, is a Lacanian concept, one that stresses the material basis of language and being, and the importance of the addressee's response. Dick Penner also notes Coetzee's endorsement of the Lacanian relationship of language and being in Foe: "His [Friday's] lack of language, his refusal to learn the language of Cruso, combined with his isolation, have left him in a perpetual state of the Lacanian Imaginary. Having no 'You' to be 'I' who responds to his address, he cannot learn to live in the Symbolic." By dramatizing Susan's awakening, Coetzee suggests that Friday's silence equally has left Susan in a perpetual state of the infantile Imaginary and has truncated the fullness or completeness of her being. [26]
The second instance is found in Part III when Susan and Friday encounter the abandoned corpse of a child on their way to Foe's dwelling. Taking pity on the dead child, Susan thinks of delivering it to local inhabitants, yet on second thought she decides not to, fearing she'll be suspected of child-abandonment. Later, Susan and Friday take lodging among a grove of trees, but she soon wakes up, realizing that she had better remove the corpse before crows and rats devour it. It is at this point that Susan's thoughts "ran to Friday" (106); she fears that hunger might incite Friday to eat the dead child. But Susan soon realizes the absurdity of her worry, as she puts it: "If Friday forswore human flesh during his fifteen years on the island why should I not believe he had forsworn it forever? And if in his heart of hearts he remained a cannibal, would a warm living woman not make a better meal than the cold stiff corpse of a child?" (106). Recognizing that it is Cruso who has "planted the seeds of madness in [her] mind" (106), Susan admits that she "did him [Friday] wrong to think of him as a cannibal or worse, a devourer of the dead" (106), her face soaked in tears of remorse.

As much as Susan changes her attitude toward Friday, she gains a new understanding of the meaning of writing. As we note, Susan's initial motive to publish her story is chiefly economic; she wants to become "famous throughout the land, and rich, too" (58), and she puts the commercial value of books to good use when she sells them in exchange for "shoes" (100) and "a guinea" (107) in times of need. But as her writing evolves, its commercial attributes gradually fade under the pressing weight of Friday's silence, and writing for her gradually takes on an ethical function. Having gone through toils and moils, Susan now has discarded "an idle ambition" to become "famous" (125) and regards comfortable material life as "abject" (126); all she wants is to have Foe tell her true story. Susan's changed attitude toward writing further leads to her changed outlook on her own selfhood, her own being. She finally perceives what Michele terms "the twofold temporality of [her] being [that is] at the same moment both outside and inside [her self]." [27] Susan's realization that Friday is not irrelevant to and outside her being and that Friday's silence casts profound implications on her identity is the final threshold Susan must cross to complete her transformation. In her efforts to have her story written, Susan finally concludes that Friday's silence means not only the absence of the writing subject and the object of writing, but the emptiness and futility of her own self, her own being. In the end, Susan helps Foe to become her sympathetic collaborator, who comes back and listens to her island story.

Coetzee's creation of fluid novelistic themes in Foe not only exemplifies his rhetoric of simultaneity, it also sheds light on his alleged escape from literary realism and, accordingly, his reticence on the economic and social reality in South Africa. Coetzee's South African critics often fault him for eliding the immediate economic and political problems in the wake of apartheid. Commenting on Coetzee's first three novels, Michael Vaughan observes that they lack a "real connection with forms of class struggle" and a "basis for a concern with objective social conflicts within industrial society." [28] Vaughan goes so far as to blame Coetzee for expressing "the predicament of a liberal petty bourgeois intelligentsia" and for being "a part of the system." [29] These criticisms make sense to the extent that Coetzee tends to frame nineteenth-century colonialism as an epistemological rather than an economic problem. While strenuously engaging issues of colonialism, power, and oppression, Coetzee's novels seldom probe the economic basis of colonialism, that is, the connection between modern capitalism and the emergence of colonialism. Coetzee's avoidance of economic issues may be partly explained by evoking the macro-historical milieu out of which his novels grew: it is likely that Coetzee wants to avoid taking issue with global capitalism. [30] However, Vaughan's criticism does not do justice to Coetzee's global awareness, for it fails to see that too much involvement with the local and the specific may risk haphazardly crossing between the local and the global. This suspicion is supported by Coetzee's own defense that a novel like Foe is "a retreat from the South African situation in a narrow sense and temporary perspective; it is not a retreat from the subject of colonialism or from questions of power." [31] In an interview with Stephen Watson, Coetzee explains why the idea of simultaneity becomes an important frame of reference for his novels: Coetzee sees "the South African situation as only one manifestation of a wider historical situation to do with colonialism, [and] late colonialism,
neo-colonialism." This is why Coetzee prefers to be labeled an international writer, and why on several occasions he has spoken of his uneasiness at being called a South African writer. Since Coetzee has chosen to write in English, with the result that many African readers do not have access to his novels, it is clear that he has targeted a wider international audience.

Coetzee's preoccupation with the rhetoric of simultaneity recurs in a later novel, *Age of Iron* (1990), in which Coetzee dramatizes Mrs. Curren's changes as she struggles to understand the function of the other, a "derelict" by the name of Mr. Vercueil, in relation to her own being. Having contracted cancer and knowing her time to be limited, Mrs. Curren records her last days in a letter to her daughter in America. The letter recounts Mrs. Curren's unexpected encounter with Mr. Vercueil in her back yard one day. Mr. Vercueil, with his "weathered skin" (13) and an "unsavory smell" (14), first strikes Mrs. Curren as a foul alcoholic for whom she can only feel revulsion and indifference. We soon learn, though, that in spite of Mrs. Curren's initial feelings, Mr. Vercueil becomes her helper, lover, and companion. As the novel closes, her initial distance and indifference disappear in the "mighty embrace" (198) in which Mr. Vercueil holds her cold and fragile body. It is indeed unusual that, as Derek Attridge notes, a randomly encountered homeless person who is "outside any of the normal codes that govern interpersonal relations" and who is "the least appropriate repository for anyone's trust" should "play a central role in Mrs. Curren's revision of her selfhood and her values". The dynamic that drives their relationship, however, is, as Attridge notes, "a fundamental ethical understanding," the willingness to open oneself to the other and to trust the other. Through their final union, Coetzee suggests that the other is indispensable in the constitution of the self. Writing about herself, Mrs. Curren is writing about her changing relationship with Mr. Vercueil because writing about the self is impossible without writing about the other. As Mrs. Curren puts it: "When I write about him I write about myself" (9).

Susan and Mrs. Curren are not the only white characters capable of compassion toward the colonized. The Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, for example, shows his interracial sympathy, evident in his "pleading" (5) for the old man and the boy who are brutally tortured by Colonel Joll and in his tender care for the blind barbarian girl. By dramatizing the Magistrate's compassion, Coetzee suggests that racial prejudice and hatred are not universal conditions and that they can be subverted by people of the privileged race. This subversion becomes more telling when Coetzee places his white characters in mutually fulfilling sexual relationships with the colonized, as such sexual encounters undermine the conventional concept of racial difference. Just as Susan can make love to Friday, so the Magistrate can make love to the barbarian girl.

In building a theoretical and ethical bridge between Susan and Friday, between Mrs. Curren and Mr. Vercueil, between the Magistrate and the barbarian girl, Coetzee links the categories of the self and the other in a broad sense. In Coetzee's novels, the other occupies a position inside the self and constitutes a part without which the self would remain incomplete. As such, the other becomes a cosignifier of the self. In light of this self-other dialectic, then, Friday's silence is not just his; it is also Susan's and Foe's whether they like it or not. Friday's wretchedness, savagery, horror, and bestiality are not just his; they are also Susan's and Foe's whether they like them or not. For Coetzee, the only possible relationship between the colonized and the colonizer, between the self and the other, is one of simultaneity, of presence, of participation, of communication, and of cosignification, in which the existence of one depends on that of the other. It is a relationship based on responsibility, trust, and ethical understanding; it is, as Susan puts it, similar to the relationship between the mother and the child: "A woman may bear a child she does not want, and rear it without loving it, yet be ready to defend it with her life" (111). Informed by the belief that it is ethically more sound to consider the South African experience in juxtaposition with other human experiences, Coetzee has arrived at this crucial self-other dialectic through the rhetoric of simultaneity. Coetzee's espousal of this rhetoric inevitably sets him apart from such first and second generations of African writers as Chinua Achebe and the early Wole Soyinka and, accordingly, points to the burgeoning of a new mode of postcolonial writing, one that promises a more sympathetic way of writing and of living in the new century that is unfolding.
Endnotes

Coetzee, Doubling the Point 99.  

Theodore Sheckels, Jr., The Lion on the Freeway: A Thematic Introduction to Contemporary South African Literature in English (New York: Peter Lang, 1996) 163—64.  

Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians (New York: Penguin, 1980). All subsequent references are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.  


Michele 164.  


For a recent critique of postcolonial authors' and critics' reluctance to probe


[33] For Coetzee's uneasiness, see Gitzen 3.

[34] Gallagher 49.


[37] Attridge 62.

[38] In locating the African postcolonial novel, Kwame A. Appiah makes a useful distinction between two generations of African postcolonial novels, citing Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as a typical first-generation postcolonial novel and Yambo Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence* as representative of the second generation postcolonial novel.