

The Spiritual Liberation of Music, Dance, and Ritual: Verbal- Versus Non-Verbal Communication in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*

Abstract

In exploring the power and diverse means of communication reflected in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), this article considers the nature, musicality, and limitations of language - both written and oral. It investigates the sway of non-verbal communication, reflected through the spiritually liberating forms of story-making, music, dance, and ritual. Dexterity in Afro-American dances (Capoeira, Candomblé, and Calypso) is contemplated with regard to *Foe*'s Bahian setting and Friday's performing abilities.

J. M. Coetzee's novel, *Foe* (1986) bears witness to the potency and limitations of language, as an expression of truth and as an antithesis of silence. The adroitness at storytelling of its heroine, Susan Barton is *not* without its shortcomings, for it exposes her inadequacy in relying purely on verbal communication as a means of expression. Indeed, it is Friday's non-verbal abilities which convey his truth through the exhilarating and spiritually dynamic liberation of the soul provided by music-making, dance, and ritual. In this respect, Attridge contends that "music succeeds in conveying its own inventiveness by engaging with and alluding to the system out of which it emerges and which it challenges" (Attridge, *Singularity* 48).

In her pursuit of a resolution to the riddles of the island, Susan is preoccupied with the relationship between fiction and real life. In her letters she asserts the importance of integrity by asking Daniel Foe, a profit-orientated professional writer: "If I cannot come forward, as author, and swear to the truth of my tale, what will be the worth of it?" (*Foe* 40) Accusing her

adversary of lying, she admonishes him by insisting upon veracity in verbal communication. She implores: “Return to me the substance I have lost, Mr. Foe: that is my entreaty. For though my story gives the truth, it does not give the substance of the truth” (51). Yet, in attempting to resist his influence, she visualises communication as a rhetorical struggle by proclaiming: “I thought [...] you had no regard for the truth. I forgot you are a writer [...] It is all a matter of words and the number of words, is it not?” (94)

Nevertheless, in order to be a successful author, Susan eventually comprehends the potential of story-making as a means of non-verbal communication. She reluctantly evokes the exotic paraphernalia of the eighteenth-century travel narrative, realising “that her story is determined not by herself but by the culture within which she seeks an identity” (Attridge, *Coetzee & Ethics* 79). Furthermore, she ultimately recognises that the writer must have a magician’s sleight-of-hand, for the creation of images is akin to sorcery. She admits: “Mr. Foe, I do not have the skill of bringing our parables one after another like roses from a conjurer’s sleeve” (*Foe* 125). Identifying the importance of divine inspiration, she conjectures that “we have all of us been called into the world from a different order [...] by a conjurer unknown to us [...] How rambling an occupation writing is; and conjuring is surely much the same” (135).

In this respect, it is through the musical potential of language that Coetzee weaves his magical, poetic web of sonic word-associations and alliterations, together with “rhythmic and syntactic repetitions” (Attridge, *Coetzee & Ethics* 66). In the very first line of *Foe*, the reader encounters the following sentence: “At last I could row no further” (5). The very ambiguity of the word “row” immediately raises the question as to whether we are being propelled by oars, or launched into a noisy dispute which we may wish to challenge. Alliteration - through repetition of the initial letters “b,” “f,” and “s” - is used to echo the recurring sounds of the paddles in motion. Maritime terminology - such as “splash,” “overboard,” “floating,”

“swimming,” and “current” (*ibid.*) - enables us to feel, hear, and see the attributes of the remote island approaching us, linking the collocations, “a flower of the sea” and “the strange island”:

‘My hands were blistered, my back was burned, my body ached. With a sigh, making barely a splash, I slipped overboard. With slow strokes, my long hair floating about me, like a flower of the sea, like an anemone, like a jellyfish of the kind you see in the waters of Brazil, I swam towards the strange island, for a while swimming as I had rowed against the current.’ (*ibid.*)

Upon arrival on the island, these aquatic sounds – such as the “splash... overboard,” the “slow strokes” of “swimming,” and rowing “against the current” - are intensified by “the drumming of rain on the roof” (14). This repetitive, overnight pounding conjures up the sounds of the drum-rhythm focal to the Bahian *samba de roda*, or “circle-dance,” which follows a Candomblé ceremony (Albuquerque 5). It also brings to mind the lingering musical performances and dance sequences of the Candomblé, a religion which spurns judgement and empowers destiny. It is also commensurate with Friday defining himself, as we shall see, through the ensuing rituals of his musical performances and dance sequences. Furthermore, the mention of “how free the ladies of Bahia were before their servants” (*Foe* 14) acts as a reminder of the former servitude of many Afro-Brazilians who were imported - during the slave trade - to Bahia (now Salvador in Brazil) from West Africa between 1781 and 1855.

However, in terms of communication, in what has been called Coetzee’s “representation *in writing of writing*” (Attridge, *Coetzee & Ethics* 73), it is language without speech – the written word - which is privileged by Foe himself:

‘Writing is not doomed to be the shadow of speech. [...] We are accustomed to believe that our world was created by God speaking the Word; but I ask, may it not rather be that he wrote it, wrote a Word so long we have yet to come to the end of it? May it not be that God continually writes the world, the world and all that is in it?’ (142-3)

These contentions emphasise that writing is not “a fallen manifestation of speech” (Marshall 71), but, indeed, precedes it, as conceptualised by Jacques Derrida (Rivkin and Ryan 300-31). Hence, in this challenge to the authority of the spoken word, logocentrism is favoured over phonocentrism. In this respect, Derrida declares: “We already have a foreboding that phonocentrism merges with the historical determination of the meaning of being in general *as presence* [...] Logocentrism would thus support the determination of the being of the entity as presence” (Derrida 82). In Coetzee’s work, as a wordsmith, Foe “reinforces the concepts of Author as God the Father, as full Presence, and thus as the purveyor of ultimate Truth, the Word, the Law” (Marshall 60). In so doing, he refers to Friday’s lack of speech by explaining that it is his non-verbal gestures of touch and sensation which reflect his communicative abilities: “God’s writing stands as an instance of a writing without speech. Speech is but a means through which the word may be uttered, it is not the word itself. Friday has no speech, but he has fingers” (Foe 143).

Reluctantly acting as a “spy” for Foe, the “very secret man, a clergyman of sorts” (Foe 120), Susan defines the narrator’s role as that of a keeper, or guardian of enigmas. She emphasises that a discerning storyteller “must divine which episodes of his history hold promise of fullness, and tease from them their hidden meanings” (88-9). It is these unfathomable signs, implicit both in Friday’s reluctance, or incapacity, to speak and in the riddles of the island, which have to be deciphered to provide “closure” (Marais, “A Child” 78)

in the search for “rational governance” (Hayes 120). Accordingly, Susan identifies five “touches of mystery” (Marais, “A Child” 79):

1. Cruso’s barren terraces.
2. The psychological trauma of Friday’s silent tonguelessness.
3. The puzzle shrouding his submission to slavery.
4. His lack of desire for Susan.
5. His ritualistic scattering of white petals. (83-7)

What is evident is that almost all of these riddles are associated with Friday, who reveals his spiritual dimensions *not* through verbal communication, but through enlightened Buddhist-like rituals. In actual fact, Coetzee’s predecessor, Daniel Defoe, was familiar with the publication *An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon* (1681) by Robert Knox (1641–1720), an English sea-captain in the service of the British East India Company (Chakravorty on Frank). As Boyle notes, Knox’s Sri Lankan legacy includes “the first occurrence in English literature of a word so hallowed by such a large percentage of the Island’s population” – that is, “Buddha” (quoted in Ondaatje). With regard to Coetzee’s postmodern and postcolonial retelling of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Friday is endowed with interiority, as acknowledged by Susan who witnesses his rituals. She assumes that, as a “superstitious observance,” they represent “an offering to the god of the wave” (*Foe* 31). In this respect, she infers: ““This casting of petals was the first sign I had that a spirit or soul – call it what you will - stirred beneath that dull and unpleasing exterior”” (32). Subsequently, the buds and petals cast by Friday float for a short while and “then sink to settle among the bones of the dead” (141).

In endeavouring to unlock the past, Susan reaches out to the seemingly tongueless Friday, who, Crusoe assumes, “has no tongue” (22) as it was “cut out” by “the slavers” (23), although Susan “looked, but saw nothing in the dark” (*ibid.*). As a result, Friday’s “power” is “largely that of silence” (Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* 247) – an expression of his lack of verbal communication. Susan aims “to build a bridge of words over which [...] he may cross to the time before Crusoe, the time before he lost his tongue” (*Foe* 60). By recognising “the secret meaning of the word story” as “a storing-place of memories” (59), she ingeniously uses pictograms in an attempt to interpret Friday, who is apparently intent on withstanding detection. Indeed, he is “the condition of possibility for the stories that Barton tries to tell” (Marshall 76). Unlike Crusoe, “who no longer has any use for narrative,” he “lives [...] through, narrative” (Attridge, *Coetzee & Ethics* 79). He must be made conversant with her at all costs, if only a mutually intelligible wavelength can be located.

However, in her unsuccessful attempts to unravel the truth behind Friday’s ostensible intransigence, Susan reveals more about her own scars and phantoms, her own narrow-minded, “pre-existing conceptual framework” (Marais, “A Child” 66). Yet, it is a configuration which necessitates not only “the act of breaking down the familiar,” but also “the act of welcoming the other” (Attridge, *Singularity* 26). In this respect, Susan - a spider entangled in Foe’s web - admits: “Sometimes I believe it is I who have become a slave” (*Foe* 87). Perpetually haunted by visions of the daughter whom she has lost in Bahia, Susan communicates with her apparition. However, it is a confession permeated with scepticism, for she declares:

‘But now all my life grows to be story and there is nothing of my own left to me. I thought I was myself and this girl a creature from another order speaking words you made up for her. But now I am full of doubt. Nothing is left to me but doubt. I

am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom too? To what order do I belong? And you: who are you?' (133)

Although her dialectic with Foe leads her to reject her *Roxanaesque* daughter-double as an imposter, her ventriloquism is *not* restricted to endless conversation with this fictitious fabrication, or figment of her imagination (Marais, "A Child" 79). Subjecting her "shadow," Friday, to her own volition, she assumes the role of coloniser (*Foe* 115). Using a mesh of language to ensnare her "slave," she proceeds "to control him by gaining access to him through communication on her terms" (Jolly 11).

In his 2003 Nobel lecture, "He and His Man", which refers to the hypotext *Robinson Crusoe*, Coetzee alludes to the dangers of having recourse to malicious gossip. Indeed, he condemns it as a reprehensible and untruthful mode of communication:

It seemed to him, coming from his island, where until Friday arrived he lived a silent life, that there was too much speech in the world. [...]

When the first bands of plagiarists and imitators descended upon his island history and foisted on the public their own feigned stories of the castaway life, they seemed to him no more or less than a horde of cannibals falling upon his own flesh, that is to say, his life; and he did not scruple to say so. [...] *These cannibals were but figures of a more devilish voracity, that would gnaw at the very substance of truth.*

(Coetzee, "He and His Man", n. p.)

Hence, it is ironic that, in disputing the belief that "the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power" (I Corinthians, 4.20), it is to the medium of speech that Susan resorts to exert

authority over her prey. Her justification for manipulatively using the spoken tongue as a weapon against Friday's taciturnity is that:

'Friday has no command of words and therefore no defence against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others. I say he is a cannibal and he becomes a cannibal [...] You will respond: he is neither cannibal nor laundryman, these are mere names, they do not touch his essence, he is a substantial body, he is himself, Friday is Friday. But that is not so. No matter what he is to himself (is he anything to himself? – how can he tell us?), what he is to the world is what I make of him. Therefore the silence of Friday is a helpless silence. He is the child of his silence, a child unborn, a child waiting to be born that cannot be born.' (*Foe* 121-2)

However, she does recognise the potentially deceptive nature of verbal communication in contrast to the sanctuary provided by Friday's recourse to music-making as a means of expression by asserting:

“The tongue belongs to the world of play, whereas the heart belongs to the world of earnest.

“Yet it is not the heart but the members of play that elevate us above the beasts: the fingers with which we touch the clavichord or the flute, the tongue with which we jest and lie and seduce.” (85)

Although Foe suggests that she make optimal use of her senses to ascertain Friday's true nature, Susan insists upon compelling her captive to define himself. Taking his mutilation

“to be a fact” (MacLeod 8), she is complicit in insisting that Friday’s speechlessness must be broken. He must utter the unspoken: the truth of his silence must be prized from him by coercion:

‘In every story there is a silence, some sight concealed, some word unspoken, I believe. Till we have spoken the unspoken we have not come to the heart of the story. [...] I said the heart of the story,’ resumed Foe, ‘but I should have said the eye, the eye of the story. [...]’ ‘Or like a mouth,’ said I, ‘[...] It is for us to descend into the mouth (since we speak in figures). It is for us to open Friday’s mouth and hear what it holds: silence, perhaps, or a roar, like the roar of a seashell held to the ear.’

‘That too,’ said Foe. ‘I intended something else, but that too. We must make Friday’s silence speak, as well as the silence surrounding Friday.’ (*Foe* 141-2)

Susan also strives to coerce Foe to reciprocate her approaches. Yet, it is not only words which bind her to him, for she also parleys with him through the ritual of lovemaking. Indeed, she assumes the function of procreator, aided and abetted by her male accomplice:

‘Do you know the story of the Muse, Mr. Foe? The Muse is a woman, a goddess, who visits poets in the night and begets stories upon them. [...] When I wrote my memoir of you [...] I wished that there were such a being as a man-Muse, a youthful god who visited authoresses in the night and made their pens flow. But now I know better. The Muse is both goddess and begetter. I was intended not to be the mother of my story, but to beget it. It is not I who am the intended, but you.’ (126)

Furthermore, it is Foe who replaces Crusoe as the subject of her advances, for she declares: ““The desire for answering speech is like the desire for the embrace of, the embrace by, another being”” (80). In turning to Foe for gratification of her desires in order to substitute love-making for creative inspiration, she reveals an unbridled determination to secure his favours by declaring: ““It is always a hard ride when the Muse pays her visits,’ [...] – ‘She must do whatever lies in her power to father her offspring”” (140).

However, in her literary liaisons with Foe, Susan does preserve a degree of self-determination, for she recognises the need to withstand his attempts to circumscribe her creative license in a work which “both resists *and* exacts interpretation” (Marais, “A Child” 86). Mirroring, even parodying, Friday, she defies Foe’s insistence on censoring her writing. Aiming for narrative jurisdiction over Chapter III, she ironically declares her independence - a liberty which she would have denied Friday - by proclaiming: ““I am not a story, Mr. Foe. [...] I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire”” (*Foe* 131). Moreover, she asserts authorial rights over her version of the truth by contending: ““The story I desire to be known by is the story of the island. You call it an episode, but I call it a story in its own right”” (121). Yet, her proficiencies in composition and in resolving the island’s mysteries only partially meet the criteria set by Susan Gallagher, who deems that “the value of a story [...] lies in its truth, its ability to record reality, but also its ability to reveal meaning” (175) .

Unequipped to relate the wider, colonial context of Friday’s puzzling life-history, Susan Barton is oblivious to the reality of his silence, his acquired mother tongue. Paradoxically, the “magic of words” (Foe 58) has led to a degree of failure in the spoken language in his case, though he can “hum in a low voice” (22) and “sometimes he seems to be singing” (92), as he spins and dances. Yet, in her written correspondence with Foe, Susan

reaches the conclusion: “He has lost his tongue, there is no language in which he can speak, not even his own” (108). Eventually, she realises that another means of representation must be sought to decipher Friday:

‘The story of Friday’s tongue is a story unable to be told, or unable to be told by me. That is to say, many stories can be told of Friday’s tongue, 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.’ (118)

Hence, the potency of Coetzee’s text lies in its questioning of “the ability of language to represent reality adequately” (Royle 1). In his muted defiance and untranslatability, Friday may be envisaged as being in a subaltern condition. Indeed, many critics interpret him as an *African Other*, performing “a voluntary act” (MacLeod 7) as a form of protest. Gallagher contends that “*Foe* speaks of conditions in South Africa” (Gallagher 192) and raises the issue of “how one can write for [...] the other”. Marshall refers to “the silencing of the black voice (the tongueless Friday) in Coetzee’s native South Africa” (Marshall 129), whereas Attwell argues that “Friday will always remain the silent, subverting Other” (Attwell 113). Similarly, Head describes “the novel as an allegory of modern South Africa” (Head 119), Friday being “the genuine Other of this text” (123) and “the colonial Other” (126). Morton too identifies Friday as “the figure of the colonised subject” (Morton 31). The moral issues linked to slavery are highlighted by Lane who disparages “modes of interpreting the Other” which seek to justify “the enslavement of entire peoples” (Lane 23). Marais interprets Friday’s stance as being truly assertive. Indeed, he goes as far as contending that the latter’s silence is “neither a sign of submission nor merely a strategy of passive resistance, but a counter-strategy through which the other preserves, even asserts, its alterior status and in so doing interrogates the fixity of

dominant power structures and positions” (Marais, “Hermeneutics” 74-5). It is indeed conceivable that Friday intentionally evades Susan’s censorship by drawing his coloniser as “row upon row of eyes upon feet: walking eyes” (*Foe* 147). By employing “this technique of internal mirroring” (Marais, “Hermeneutics” 72), he manages to assume authorship over *his* story. Observing that he has transformed himself into a scribe to mimic Foe, Susan declares, “the man seated at the table was not Foe. It was Friday, with Foe’s robes on his back and Foe’s wig” (151).

Certainly, there is much truth in the contention that Friday’s method of communication is expressed “in his own idiosyncratic terms” (MacLeod 12). Although, on Susan’s instigation, he becomes adept at copying, onto a slate, the words “hous” (for “house”), “ship,” “Africa,” and “mother” (*Foe* 146), towards the end of the novel, we glimpse him independently “writing the letter *o*” (mirroring the initial letter of the word “omega”) (152). It is accepted by Foe as a new “beginning,” if we “resist the urge for closure” (MacLeod 13). Indeed, it provides an alternative to the letter “*a*” (for the “alpha” which commences Coetzee’s work), which suggests that Friday does have a written means of communication to match Susan’s spoken one. It is in desperation that she substitutes words for the babble of his sounds by ascribing to them her own meaning: “He does not understand that I am leading him to freedom. He does not know what freedom is. Freedom is a word, less than a word, a noise, one of the multitude of noises I make when I open my mouth” (*Foe* 100-1).

However, unlike Susan, Friday is highly receptive to the dynamically liberating influence of music-making and dance. Witnessing the power of non-verbal communication, she discerns that “Friday did not understand the words. [...] Friday understood tones” (41). Hence, the key to decoding his identity is hidden in the very gestures and movements which depict the story of his suffering. Susan eventually realises that he is able to sense and improvise accordingly, though she still insists that he communicate in the mode of her desire: “He utters

himself only in music and dancing, which are to speech as cries and shouts are to words” (142). We visualise Friday spinning *not* a tale, but a jig.

In this respect, much of the action of *Foe* is related to Brazil and, indeed, to the former Portuguese colony of Bahia in particular. Numerous references are made to these locations and to their historical and cultural heritage. The novel commences with a setting “in the waters of Brazil” (5) and then focusses on Bahia where Susan reaches land in search of her daughter who was “abducted and conveyed to the New World by an Englishman, a factor and agent in the carrying trade” (10). It is portrayed as “an island in the ocean of the Brazilian forest” (51) - “a world in itself” (122), with its Negro women on the streets and its “processions of flagellants and whirling dancers” (*ibid.*). In this context, Friday is compared to a “house-slave in Brazil” (24), being “a former slave from the Americas, happily now free, who wished to make his way home to Africa” (109). In this respect, it is not surprising that the spectacle conjured up by Friday’s rhythmic movements unsettles Susan, who admits: “I shiver as I watch Friday dancing in the kitchen, with his robes whirling about him and the wig flapping on his head” (94). In actual fact, it is his continuous cadences and supersonic gyrations which enable him, shamanically, to travel to another world through “a kind of trance” (103). Hence, he defies Susan’s sway, as she realises when she remarks: “I understood why Friday had danced all day in your house: it was to remove himself, or his spirit, from Newington and England, from me too. [...] We dance and spin and transport ourselves” (104). Besides, she links his ritualistic movements with an indication of the existence of design, or divine purpose in life.

With regard to the characteristics of his cadences, they are actually reminiscent of Brazilian dances rooted in African slavery, for they provide a means of reclaiming identity through cultural and historical heritage, enabling Friday to be fully at ease with himself. In this respect, similarities to the Capoeira and the Candomblé immediately spring to mind. The Capoeira was developed in Brazil - mainly by the descendants of West African captives - from

the sixteenth-century onwards. Incorporating Brazilian influences, it comprises elements of music, dance, and acrobatics (with an emphasis on constant motion), which parallel Friday's kinetic abilities, as already described. Candomblé, as a "dance in honour of the gods" (Albuquerque 1), involves a trance-like, spiritual state (5), akin to the mesmerising allure of Friday, as depicted above. The music and rhythms of its sacred ceremonies reflect its heritage as a syncretic, polytheistic religion, practised in Bahia, where it originated at the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, as an oral tradition, its roots date back to the slave trade during which West Africans brought to Brazil their Muslim beliefs, Friday being a day of worship. Devoid of the duality of good versus evil, Candomblé requires its adherents to align with their soul to attain inner peace and so fulfil their individual destinies, which is just what the protagonist, Friday achieves in his ritualistic performances.

A major facet of his dancing comprises his apparent attempts to communicate something natural, though enigmatic. Bringing to our attention Friday's mastery of music and dance, Coetzee conjures up a "multiplicity of cross-cultural influences" (Cowley 232), which are also characteristic of the Calypso's coupling of West Indian songs to the Kaiso music of West African slave culture in the oral transmission of history, cultural heritage, and literature (Warner 3). With its patterns of drumming, singing, dancing, and chanting derived from its precursor, the Canboulay, the masquerade-festival of the Calypso gives its participants both "a voice and a platform" (Warner 87). It also provides an appropriate analogy for a vivid image of Friday - finding emancipation through multicultural means by parading like a Trinidadian Calypsonian!

Susan suspects that he has a cryptic secret linked to his spinning and humming, for, in her mind, his ritualistic actions unveil unbelievable scars by revealing the traumatic, "atrocious mutilation" of a "slave unmanned" (*Foe* 119). Hence, his dark, phallic mysticism is interpreted by her in a sexualised manner:

‘He would spend entire days spinning and dancing and singing, after his fashion. What I did not tell you was that for his dancing he would wear nothing but the robes and wig. [...] The purpose of his dancing was to show forth the nakedness underneath. [...] In the dance nothing was still and yet everything was still. The whirling robe was a scarlet bell settled upon Friday’s shoulders and enclosing him; Friday was the dark pillar at its centre. What had been hidden from me was revealed.’ (118-9)

Resorting to elements of male sexual exhibitionism - akin to those of the Calinda and to the rituals of magical possession characteristic of the *bel Air*, or the *bélé* - he makes a cathartic escape from his repressed existence. Such is a release which facilitates his spiritual self-transcendence, though, if triggered, it would have the potential to act as a conduit for the expression of socio-political criticism (Rohlehr 1-2; Warner 3, 59-61).

As we have seen, Friday’s “spinning in a circle” (*Foe* 92) “in a trance of possession” (98) “in the kitchen, where the windows face east” (92) - as if to Africa, or else to Mecca - appears to be something which he has learnt in Bahia. However, his elated, Brazilian rotations also bear some similarity to the ecstatic performances of a (North) African dervish, performing an act of Sufi Muslim whirling, in the venerating ritual of the Circumambulation.

What we do learn from Susan is that, Friday is capable not only of gyrating, but is also intent upon providing musical accompaniment to her by playing - on a reed flute and then on a soprano recorder - a “tune of six notes, always the same” (28). These are sounds which she “will forever associate with the island and Crusoe’s first sickness” (95). Performing alongside him, she claims that their instruments should accompany one another, assuming that “if there were any language accessible to Friday it would be the language of music” (96). On another

level, she compares their duet to spoken dialogue and love-making. Contending that they “make an irregular couple,” she conceives their connections as being truly complementary (107). However, somewhat disappointingly, “music proves to be a medium in which nothing approaching communication between the two can occur” (Attridge, *Coetzee & Ethics* 82), for Susan experiences difficulty in harmonising with Friday:

‘I found him spinning slowly around with the flute to his lips and his eyes shut; he paid no heed to me, perhaps not even hearing my words. [...] The music we made was not pleasing: there was a subtle discord all the time, though we seemed to be playing the same notes. Yet our instruments were made to play together, else why were they in the same case? [...] Is conversation not simply a species of music in which first the one takes up the refrain and then the other? [...] Are not both music and conversation like love?’ (*Foe* 95-7)

It should not be overlooked that certain strains in Friday’s hexatonic music are remarkably Chekhovian in their sense of foreboding. In Chapter IV of *Foe* the narrator is distraught: “I begin to hear the faintest faraway roar: as she said, the roar of waves in a seashell; and over that, as if once or twice a violin-string were touched, the whine of the wind and the cry of a bird” (154). With its analogy to Anton Chekhov’s highly reputed play, *The Cherry Orchard* (1903-04), in which “a distant sound is heard [...] of a breaking string” (Chekhov 294) and “silence follows, broken only by the thud of an axe,” allusion made to the plucking of “a violin-string” is somewhat ominous, as it may infer a past catastrophe, or else an impending period of revolutionary change, as it does in the Russian drama. It may be compared too with the pinnacle musical motifs of the “silly plink-plunk of the toy banjo” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 184), the *Byron in Italy* chamber opera, and the barking of dogs in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*

(1999), which represent “a range of non-verbal vociferation which occupies the silence that overtakes speech in the story” (Holland 403).

Yet, in *Foe*, we rely on Friday, as sole survivor, to unlock fully all the enigmas. In the final, cinematic, flash-back and flash-forward sequences, we move from Foe’s “house of sleepers, [...] a site of unconditional hospitality” (Marais, “A Child” 84) and “a timeless stasis” (Hayes 108) to glimpse the true, spiritual abode of Friday through the eyes of a new, but nameless narrator. Slipping overboard and then diving into the wreck, “descending into that eye” (*Foe* 141) to restart the narrative, our storyteller effectively turns a range of possible endings into alternative beginnings.

In conclusion, “impregnated with the novel’s otherness” (Marais, “A Child” 90), Coetzee’s *Foe* suggests the potency of the rites of non-verbal communication in a world “governed by other rules” (Gallagher 190). Friday destabilises the dominion of language - as an “expression of reason” and predominant “over other forms of consciousness” (Clarkson 37) – by revealing his truth via the various media of writing, music, and dance. In the coda of Chapter IV, we hear the eternal “sounds of the island” (*Foe* 154) and dive into the subconscious mind to confront “the otherness of the other” (Marais, “A Child” 84) in “the home of Friday” (*Foe* 157). The latter’s mysterious and divine wisdom is discernible when his mouth opens (firstly, by force, and then, in the story’s second version, of its own accord). Immersed beneath “the petals cast by Friday” (155) which may be seen “floating around [...] like a rain of snowflakes” (156) on the waters where the ship submerged, the reader is reminded (possibly in memory of the perished) that it is “not a place of words” (157). We are immediately confronted with magical, non-verbal symbols which solicit “a special type of perception that lies beyond this sphere” (Hayes 113), in a dominion where different procedures apply. Although it has been contended that Friday’s “silence is finally impenetrable” (MacLeod 6), Coetzee exposes the limits of language by empowering him to convey the surviving spirit of

his existence. This is achieved *not* through a cacophony of spoken words, but through his own means of communication, which have been described as a “soundless stream” of “powerful silence” (Attridge, *Coetzee & Ethics* 67). In response to syllables “filled with water and diffused,” “from inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through his body and out [...]; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; [...] it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth” (*Foe* 157). Friday’s muted “voice” is truly intense, ubiquitous, and relentless....

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