

COLONIZATION AND FEMINISM IN J. M. COETZEE'S
IN THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY,
WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS,
AND FOE

BY

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Introduction: Three Important Women in Coetzee's Work--Magda, the Barbarian Girl, and Susan Barton

John Maxwell Coetzee is a highly acclaimed South African writer whose five novels, Dusklands, In the Heart of the Country, Waiting for the Barbarians, Life and Times of Michael K, and Foe have won him South Africa's CNA Prize (1977), Britain's Booker-McConnell Prize (1983), and France's Prix Femina Etranger (1985). While his works comment on the politics, literature, culture, and society of South Africa, they also go beyond the context of South Africa to question the inhumanity of colonialism universally.

Each of his five novels takes place in colonial times and deals with some aspect of colonialism. In an essay on Coetzee's fiction Steven Watson says,

If colonialism, at its very simplest, equals the conquest and subjugation of a territory by an alien people, then the human relationship that is basic to it is likewise one of power and powerlessness: the relationship between master and servant, overlord and slave. It is this aspect of colonialism that receives the most extensive treatment in Coetzee's fiction.
(370)

The colonialism about which Coetzee writes is not only that of Jacobus Coetzee and the Hotentots in Dusklands, of the unnamed empire in Waiting for the Barbarians, of the farm complete with servants in In the Heart of the Country, or of the work camps into which Michael K is forced. It is also about the colonization of woman, which is the topic of this study. This study will also look at how Coetzee has used the "female aesthetic" in writing these three novels about female

protagonists rebelling against the dominant patriarchy.

Coetzee's most important portrayals of women are found in three novels: In the Heart of the Country, Waiting for the Barbarians, and Foe. In these works the women occupy diverse roles within a colonizing patriarchal society. Although this patriarchal society--particularly in In the Heart of the Country--defines the female as "a reserve of purity and silence in the materiality of its traffic with the world and its noisy discourse" (Jacobus 28), the women are all adversely affected because of the colonization they undergo.

Magda, In the Heart of the Country, is a lonely spinster who lives on a rural Afrikaner farm. She has contact with only a few people, her domineering father and the uncaring servants. She is ignored by her father and is eventually raped by Hendrik, one of the servants. She has many philosophical discussions with herself and questions her life and the uses of language. She is eventually driven completely insane--evidenced by her communicating with the sky gods and talking with her dead father--because of the loneliness, neglect, and abuse she suffers as a victim of this patriarchal society around the turn of the century.

Waiting for the Barbarians, set in an indeterminate place and time, is an allegory about the evils of colonialism. The main character is a magistrate of a small village on the outskirts of an unnamed empire. Most of his life has been spent in quiet servitude to the empire, but occupation of the village

by the empire, which tortures and imprisons the "barbarians," causes him to become more aware of the colonial situation. He takes in a tortured barbarian girl who has been blinded and crippled by the imperialists and left by her own people.

The barbarian girl causes the magistrate to have a much greater awareness of the nature of colonialism than he previously had. He tries to make her happy, but he also uses her to try to discover the nature of the master/slave relationship. She remains an enigma to him because they cannot communicate in any way. She is never able to tell him about the horrors of colonialism, but he eventually experiences these horrors when he is persecuted as a traitor because he returns her to her people and comes in contact with the barbarians.

After a period of persecution he returns to being the magistrate, and his life goes back to the way it was before he encountered the barbarian girl, except that he has a different perspective on colonialism and a greater understanding of the master/slave relationship, of which he has seen both sides. This greater understanding leads him to a sense of sadness and regret because he cannot make a change in the colonial system.

The final novel in which a woman is a major character is Coetzee's most recent, Foe. In this book he retells the Robinson Crusoe story, but this time a woman named Susan Barton is the narrator and the main character. Susan inadvertently runs into Cruso (as Coetzee spells it) on his island and becomes an important part of Cruso's story. Rather than Cruso being

interested in her, it is Susan who is fascinated by Cruso and his story, which she insists must be written. The two important themes running throughout Foe are the nature of narrative art and colonization as seen in the following master/slave relationships: Cruso/Friday, Susan/Friday, Cruso/Susan, and Foe/Susan.

Magda of In the Heart of the Country and Susan of Foe are both colonized and colonizers, while the barbarian girl acts only as the colonized. Magda is a victim of her father's wholly patriarchal, domineering personality and a victim of the society that has shaped her lonely life on the farm with him. But she plays a dual role in that she also rules over the servants. She may think herself low in the familial hierarchy but she knows her dominant place as colonizer in society.

The barbarian girl in Waiting for the Barbarians, unlike Magda, never plays the role of colonizer. Her people have been run off their land and tortured and killed while she has been subjected to personal physical and mental torture. She is not only colonized by the empire as a barbarian, but as a woman by the magistrate as well. He uses her body as an object and he uses her to try to assuage his conscience, to come to a higher awareness, a better understanding of the nature of the empire and what it really means to him.

Susan is more like Magda in that she also plays a dual role as colonizer and colonized. She inherits from Cruso mastery over Friday. But instead of fulfilling the roles of master and slave, she becomes a slave to the enigma which is Friday. She is also a

willing slave to Cruso's memory. She loses her identity as Susan Barton and assumes the identity of "Mrs. Cruso," although she does not marry Cruso. Her obsession with getting down Cruso's story takes over her life. Even though she and Cruso did not have a typical master/slave relationship, she is serving Cruso's needs and not her own by taking care of Friday and trying to tell Cruso's story. She is also used by Foe (Daniel DeFoe's birth name) because he wants to write her story. He uses her to promote the creative process when Susan acts as the Muse while they are having sex. Because of her desire to tell the tale of the island she becomes a pawn to Foe's literary ambitions. Of the three women Susan is the one whose life is most dominated by the patriarchy. She, rather than escaping the evils of colonialism, becomes more a part of the patriarchy than she was before she was stranded on the island. There are moments in which she realizes how she is being used and what kind of woman she is becoming, but she has become too deeply involved in the colonial system to have the chance to speak out against it.

Coetzee's approach in writing these novels is as significant as his message. Two of the novels, In the Heart of the Country and Foe, are written with a woman as the first person narrator. Waiting for the Barbarians, narrated by the magistrate, never gives the viewpoint of the barbarian girl, but the magistrate definitely attempts to understand the feminine viewpoint. He is even at one point dressed as a woman by his torturers who are servants of the Empire. Intentionally or not, Coetzee's writing

in these three novels has many of the qualities of the "female aesthetic." Rachel Blau DuPlessis says in her essay "For the Etruscans" that

the female aesthetic turns out to be a specialized name for those practices available to those groups-- nations, sexes, subcultures, races, emergent social practices(gays?)--which wish to criticize, to differentiate from, to overturn the dominant forms of knowing and understanding with which they are saturated. (149)

The "female aesthetic" is therefore not necessarily the position only of women but of anyone speaking out against the dominant patriarchal society. Coetzee is doing exactly this, writing in the "female aesthetic," in his novels criticizing colonialism, which can be the colonization of the barbarians, the blacks, and more specifically, women.

I. Magda: The Colonized and Colonizer in In the Heart of the Country

One aspect which ties the three women together is that they are the victims of the patriarchal societies in which they live. The larger colonial system subjugates them and dictates their roles in society, but it is the individuals such as Magda's father, the magistrate, Cruso, and Mr. Foe whose actions directly affect the women's lives. In the Heart of the Country is a novel in which, "At one level of interpretation, the reader might begin to see that stone farm at this point as South Africa itself, the father as the Afrikaner baas, and Magda as the ineffectual, dreaming liberal" (Roberts, 30).

Magda is not merely the victim of this society. She, like Susan, as we shall see, acts both as the colonized and as the colonizer. Magda as a woman is low in the hierarchy but she still has a place above that of the blacks who work for her father. Stephen Watson says that "The novel is surely constructed on the principle that it is through language itself, through those conventional representations which come to be accepted as either 'natural' or 'universal,' that we are colonized as much as by any overt act of physical conquest" (374). She orders the servants around and talks down to them. But she also makes an attempt, especially with the servant Klein-Anna, to try to eliminate the social differences between them. Sheila Roberts says that Magda

can never be at home in a world where there is an unbridgeable distance between herself and the other human beings peopling it. She can only continue, as she has done in her narration, to toy with ideas of living closely and sensually with the brown people, while in reality retaining her isolation. (28)

Magda's attempts at kindness and equality with the servants are similar to those which the magistrate makes toward the barbarian girl. Coetzee says in an interview about both Magda and the magistrate, "perhaps they are trapped in their situation but they don't resign themselves to being trapped in their situation. But whether they get out of it in their own lifetime, that is another question" (Kunapipi 8). When Magda struggles to achieve a position of equality, she fails, as Coetzee says, "because a mere effort of the will is not enough to overcome centuries of cultural and spiritual deformations" (Kunapipi 7).

She is unsuccessful in her attempts at kindness and equality, and this only serves to frustrate her and to turn her more into herself. Although her mental condition deteriorates rapidly, she is still aware that the basis of communications has been undermined in her isolated society. Magda says to herself,

I cannot carry on with these idiot dialogues. The language that should pass between myself and these people was subverted by my father and cannot be recovered. What passes between us now is a parody. I was born into a language of hierarchy, of distance and perspective. It was my father tongue. I do not say it is the language my heart wants to speak, I feel too much the pathos of its distances, but it is all we have. (97)

It is significant that Magda uses the words "father tongue" when talking about the language she uses. This emphasizes even more the pervading dominance which the patriarchy has in all aspects

of her life. Magda is voicing here what many feminist critics believe is one of the main problems for women or feminists writing in the dominant culture. There is no "women's language"; there is only the "father tongue," as Magda says, which is distant and not the language of her heart. This is when she discovers that the master suffers just as much as the slave and that the master is also a slave to the colonial system. As Joan Gillmer says, although Magda is "a reluctant inheritor of her progenitor's masterful language and speculative bias, she nevertheless has access to the world of emotional experience that the patriarchal intellect has despised and repressed" (112). Similarly, Josephine Dodd points out that, "Magda is the victim of double colonization. At the level of character, she is subjected to the patriarchal domination of her father and Hendrik and the cultural hegemony of the first world" (160). Magda is subjected to both sides of the colonial situation; she is a part of the patriarchy but she is also repressed by it.

According to Stephen Watson's simple definition of colonization, Magda is colonized by her father and by Hendrik, Klein-Anna's husband. Her father neglects her and treats her as if she were a servant rather than his daughter. She says that, "To my father I have been an absence all my life" (2). Magda is like a territory and her father the subjugator, although his subjugation of Magda is mainly mental rather than physical. "The land is full of melancholy spinsters like me," she says, "lost to history, blue as roaches in our ancestral homes, keeping a high

shine on the copperware and laying in jam. Wooed when we were little by our masterful fathers, we are bitter vestals, spoiled for life. The childhood rape" (3). There is only one time in the novel when it seems to become clear that Magda's father physically abuses her (in fact there is no evidence that anything in the novel ever happens), but his neglect, harsh words, and obvious lack of love are enough to make Magda feel completely isolated. Magda thinks to herself,

When was I last struck a blow? I cannot think when. Perhaps I have never been struck before, perhaps I have only been cherished, though that is difficult to believe, cherished and reproved and neglected. The blow does not hurt but it insults. I am insulted and outraged. A moment ago I was a virgin and now I am not, with respect to blows. (57)

In stark contrast to this behavior, the father speaks gently to her just before and after she shoots him. He says, "Come, sleep now, my child, it is getting late" (56) and Magda thinks, "His hand is on my forehead, the horny hand of a man who bends wire. How tender, how comforting!" (56) But her obsessive jealousy-- seen in her daydreams about her father, his new bride, and their murders--shows that she is very attached to her father. She still acts as a child begging for attention when she is around him. Magda blames all this on her father because he broke the "old code" when he took Klein-Anna for his lover, when she came to live in the big house as if she were one of them. Magda says,

I am a conserver rather than a destroyer, perhaps my rage at my father is simply rage at the violations of the old language, the correct language, that takes place when he exchanges kisses and the pronouns of

intimacy with a girl who yesterday scrubbed the floors and today ought to be cleaning the windows. (43)

Magda is inescapably caught in the colonial system. On the one hand, she wants equality with the servants, but on the other hand, she is outraged when Klein-Anna is treated as an equal.

After this incident nothing is the same for Magda, because she feels as though her father has destroyed, for good or bad, the only way of life she knows. Josephine Dodd suggests that, "Rather than interpret Magda's killing of her father as originating in her inability to take the place of Anna in her father's bed, I would suggest that Magda's actions can be read as an attempt to overthrow the rule of the patriarch" (159). This interpretation fits with the actions of Magda and her father after he has been shot. The father is now completely dependent on Magda; she is in the position of power and he in the position of powerlessness. In this act of shooting her father Magda is still thinking idealistically, as she was with the servants. She seems to think that making him helpless, under her control, and finally getting rid of him altogether, will solve her colonial problem.

Having been oppressed for his whole life, Hendrik seizes the chance--after the father's death--to be the master instead of the slave, and uses Magda to accomplish it. Hendrik, unlike the father, does physically abuse Magda by raping her. He subjugates her body, a territory, which causes her to become submissive. She says, "Am I doing it right, Hendrik?" (110) Even though Magda is theoretically the master and Hendrik the slave, the

roles have now been reversed. When she is trying to bury her father, Magda cannot get any response when she orders Hendrik to help her. She says, "Don't just stand there, help me! You damned hotnot[sic], it's all your fault, you and your whore!"

(91) Hendrik is unmoved by her tirade and "pays no heed" (91) to Magda's screams.

Being dominated by the only men she knows, her father and Hendrik, and being isolated from almost any human contact that is kind or civil or caring, causes Magda to become unhappy and mentally unstable. She cries, "I am a hole crying to be whole" (41). The domination and isolation are products of colonialism. In her isolation, Magda turns into herself as she says, "Deprived of human intercourse, I inevitably overvalue the imagination and expect it to make the mundane glow with an aura of self-transcendence" (14). When talking about herself, speaking to her reflection in a mirror, she says that she "will dwindle and expire here in the heart of the country unless she at least has a thin porridge of event to live on" (23). Coetzee uses Magda to show the terrible effects that colonialism has on human nature. He also shows how the master/slave relationship is one where both are the masters and both are the slaves. At the end of the novel when Magda is alone she hears voices saying,

It is the slave's consciousness that constitutes the master's certainty of his own truth. But the slave's consciousness is a dependent consciousness. So the master is not sure of the truth of his autonomy. His truth lies in an inessential consciousness and its inessential acts. (130)

The master relies on the slave to tell him that he is the boss,

but the master knows that the slave is only saying that to please the master. In the master/slave relationship the master is as dependent on the slave as the slave is dependent on the master. In In the Heart of the Country Coetzee is saying that there is a cycle involved in this type of relationship from which neither the master nor the slave can escape.

II. The Magistrate: "The Colonizer Who Refuses" in Waiting for the Barbarians

One of the main differences between Waiting for the Barbarians and In the Heart of the Country or Foe is that Coetzee uses a male instead of a female narrator. In this book, though, he more effectively shows the evils of colonialism by using the magistrate as narrator instead of the barbarian girl. Through the conflicting emotions and the change in values which the magistrate experiences because of the barbarian girl's presence, the reader is made more aware of the effect colonialism has on the oppressor and the oppressed. Dick Penner says "At the heart of Coetzee's allegory is a dialectic concerning the relationship between empire and colony, master and slave-rebel, man and woman, blindness and sight, law and barbarism, and expediency and ethics" (35).

The Empire and the barbarian cultures are symbolically represented by the Magistrate and the barbarian girl. Their relationship, while corresponding in many ways to the relationship between the Empire and the Barbarians, is strikingly different because the magistrate sympathizes with the barbarian girl and begins to see how miserable her life has been, unlike Colonel Joll who represents the Empire in its most evil form. He attempts to right the wrongs which have been done to her by the empire, although he says, "The distance between myself and her torturers, I realize, is negligible" (27). He later reverses

this opinion by saying, "There is nothing to link me with torturers, people who sit waiting like beetles in dark cellars" (44). But his attempt to make her life better is an utter failure because, as Coetzee says,

That is the imperial life. It's a life that has been based on conquest. It's just that the sharper edge of conquest isn't visible to him during his particular lifetime. And then he is brought up against the reality of what imperialism is and makes a choice in that situation but it's not a choice that is historically viable, that people can follow on a large scale as a way of life. (Interview, Kunapipi 6)

The presence of the barbarian girl forces the magistrate to become aware of the destructive nature of colonialism, something he had never really thought about. He says, "I did not mean to get embroiled in this. I am a country magistrate, a responsible official in the service of the Empire, serving out my days on this lazy frontier, waiting to retire" (8). Joan Gillmer says that the magistrate,

Through his involvement with her, is compelled to experience the involuntary power of emotions that have been consigned to oblivion, to become aware of unconscious guilt that motivates his obsessive concern with cleanliness and his compulsive rituals of purification, to examine the threadbare ideals of civilized conduct that sustained him before his authority was challenged, and eventually to recognize that a state of emergency really does exist, despite his longing to resume his tranquil life of cultivated pursuits and 'placid concupiscence.' (114)

The Empire has been a way of life for him, not to be questioned or disobeyed.

While the barbarian girl is a catalyst for the change that takes place in the magistrate, she also fulfills the role as the colonized woman. The magistrate uses her for his own needs, even

though he thinks that he is helping her. It is obvious when he says, "People will say I keep two wild animals in my rooms, a fox and a girl" (34), that he does not value her as an individual. However, the longer the girl stays with him the more he becomes obsessed with knowing everything about her and her life and torture. He says, "It has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her" (31). When he rubs oil into her feet or allows her to sleep in his bed, he is also assuaging his own conscience, doubts, and fears. He says, "I lose myself in the rhythm of what I am doing. I lose awareness of the girl herself. There is a space of time which is blank to me: perhaps I am not even present. When I come to, my fingers have slackened, the foot rests in the basin, my head droops" (28). The magistrate is not entirely sure whether or not his act of taking her in and caring for her is an act of subjugation, but it is. He says to himself, "I behave in some ways like a lover--I undress her, I bathe her, I stroke her, I sleep beside her--But I might equally well tie her to a chair and beat her, it would be no less intimate" (43). The barbarian girl had not asked for his help and had never really seemed to want it. Since she was helpless the magistrate made the decision for her, forcing her into a way of life for which she had not asked. This parallels the Empire's forcing the barbarians to live a way of life which the Empire dictated, not the way they had lived before the Empire existed.

At the end of the novel, after his life has returned to normal, the magistrate learns from one of his lovers, Mai, that he made the barbarian girl very unhappy and that she would cry often. The magistrate says of Mai, "She is opening a door through which a wind of utter desolation blows on me" (152). Jane Kramer says of the magistrate and the barbarian girl, "He does not have the simple power to restore her that a fire in the hearth does, or a warm bed, or a downy quilt around her shoulders. This is what drives him--like the torturer, like the Empire both of them represent--to such terrible failed intimacies" (12). The magistrate says, "I wanted to do what was right, I wanted to make reparation: I will not deny this decent impulse, however mixed with more questionable motives: there must always be a place for penance and reparation" (81). He realizes that all his efforts to make things right for her were futile, that in trying to make amends, he only contributed more to her sadness.

It is not the barbarian girl but Colonel Joll, the man from the capital of the Empire, who is the magistrate's main antagonist. This evil man "embodies the consciousness of master-empire" (Penner, 35). The novel opens with the first meeting between the magistrate and Colonel Joll wherein the magistrate is puzzled by the sunglasses the colonel is wearing. Thinking to himself, "I have never seen anything like it: two little discs of glass suspended in front of his eyes in loops of wire. Is he blind?" (1) Dick Penner says that "Joll is ethically blind, as

is the empire that he represents; in the capital, he tells the magistrate, everyone wears such glasses. The magistrate's dilemma is that in Joll's dark glasses, he can see a shadowy reflection of himself" (36). The advent of Colonel Joll triggers the changes that are to come in the magistrate's life. The magistrate says to himself, "I curse Colonel Joll for all the trouble he has brought me, and for the shame too" (20). The magistrate also realizes that he can no longer remain blind to what he sees. He says to himself, "I know somewhat too much; and from this knowledge, once one has been infected, there seems to be no recovering" (21). The magistrate instantly dislikes Colonel Joll and realizes that although they serve the same master-empire, they are distinctly different. The magistrate says, "He deals with my soul: every day he folds the flesh aside and exposes my soul to the light; he has probably seen many souls in the course of his working life; but the care of souls seems to have left no more mark on him than the care of hearts leaves on the surgeon" (118). Colonel Joll has no humane qualities as the magistrate does. In defending himself against the Colonel the magistrate, outraged, yells "You are the enemy, Colonel! You are the enemy, you have made the war, and you have given them all the martyrs they need--starting not now but a year ago when you committed your first filthy barbarities here! History will bear me out!" (114) Joll is cold-blooded, ruthless, and brutal. "I must assert my distance from Colonel Joll!" the magistrate says, "I will not suffer for his crimes!" (44) Debra Castillo says,

"The colonel, blinded, is the emblem of the estrangement of knowledge and law, of law and justice. The magistrate, whose eyes are open to the sun, espouses the humanistic values of knowledge and justice, but he no longer represents Law in the frontier town; he is powerless" (79).

The magistrate has several dreams in which he sees the barbarian girl playing in the snow; until the last dream, though, he is never able to see her face. He believes that this playing girl he sees is one who is happy and beautiful and has never been tortured or scarred. During his first dream he says, "she sits in the snow with her hooded back to me working at the door of her castle, her legs splayed, burrowing, patting, molding. I stand behind her and watch. She does not turn. I try to imagine the face between the petals of her peaked hood but cannot" (10). Another time he says, "In the night the dream comes back," but this time he says, "the face I see is blank, featureless" (37). After the dream in which he finally sees "herself as I have never seen her, a smiling child, the light sparkling on her teeth and glancing from her jet-black eyes" (53), the magistrate decides he must return her to her people. These dreams show the magistrate's growing sympathy and awareness of individuality. In the first dreams the magistrate is unable to see the girl's face because he is only concerned with her as a tortured object. When he looks at her he only sees her scars and deformities. He is, therefore, unable to picture her original face in his subconscious dreams. It is only after he has come to see her as

a real person, not just a tortured shell, that he is able to imagine her in his dreams as she really was before she was disfigured.

As a part of his attempt to transcend the barriers between himself and the barbarian girl, he makes a journey to return her to her people. Catherine Belsey says that

Among the commonest sources of disorder at the level of plot in classic realism are murder, war, a journey or love. But the story moves inevitably towards closure, which is also disclosure, the dissolution of enigma through the re-establishment of order, recognizable as a reinstatement or a development of the order which is understood to have preceded the events of the story itself. (53)

While Coetzee says that he is not writing in the tradition of classic realism, this idea can still be applied to the magistrate's journey. By returning the girl he hopes to be returning his life to order, but he will also be changed by Joll because of his experience with the barbarian girl. Returning the barbarian girl to her people is not the end of the story for the magistrate; therefore, the closure which Catherine Belsey talks about is ironic. The magistrate returns the girl to her people because he feels that the best thing for her is to be with her people, those who understand her as he does not. He also feels that this is the only choice left to him if he wants to try to change things. He does not know what else to do with her, and he thinks that by taking her back to her people, he will be freeing her in a sense. It also seems clear that he does this for his own benefit, but it is interesting that on this journey he is "surprised by her fluency, her quickness, her self-possession"

(63). Outside the domain of the empire he sees her differently: "I even catch myself in a flush of pride: she is not just the old man's slut, she is a witty attractive young woman!" (63) He thinks that after this journey he will be able to return to the village and go on with his life. This, as the reader knows, is not true because he is then branded as a traitor and subjected to the tortures of the Empire. He then realizes,

It is the fault of the Empire! Empire has created the time of history. Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe. Empire dooms itself to live in history and plot against history. (133)

The magistrate, according to Watson's definition, colonizes the barbarian girl, but he, unlike the Empire, tries to treat her with some sense of humanity. After he has been tortured and humiliated by Colonel Joll he says, "Let it at the very least be said, if it ever comes to be said, if there is ever anyone in some remote future interested to know the way we lived, that in this farthest outpost of the Empire of light there existed one man who in his heart was not a barbarian" (104). Because of his humanity he then becomes a victim of the Empire instead of the victimizer. Colonel Joll, to completely humiliate the magistrate, half hangs him and dresses him as a woman in front of the whole village. In this instance Coetzee shows that Colonel Joll views the magistrate as no better than a woman because he has spoken out against the Empire. The magistrate therefore fits with the DuPlessis definition of the female aesthetic as one who takes up the position opposite that of the patriarchy. This

position is only emphasized more through the magistrate being dressed by Colonel Joll as a woman.

Paul Rich says that

Instead, the magistrate--in his move toward rejection of empire--becomes an example of what Albert Memmi has termed 'the coloniser who refuses'. Insofar as he is still part of the imperial 'civilization', the magistrate merely cuts himself off from his fellow imperialists and comes to represent merely himself.
(384)

In a colonial situation he learns that there is no place for humane feelings or acts. This is why at the end of the novel his life returns to the way it was before the barbarian girl was a part of it. But even before the barbarian girl, he was a humane man. George Steiner describes him as "the archetypal representative of disenchanted decency, of worn-out humaneness" (102). He cared about the comfort of the prisoners and delighted in the children playing. He is a changed man because of his experience, but he is not able to make any of these changes in the colonial system of which he is a part. His humanity, which has always been present, is accompanied at the end of the novel by a greater awareness of the evils of the empire and a despairing sadness because of the knowledge he now possesses and his inability to change anything. At the end of the novel the magistrate says he feels "like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere" (156).

III. Susan Barton: Mrs. Cruso's Colonial Dilemma in Foe

In his fifth novel, Coetzee explores master/slave relations through a retelling of Robinson Crusoe. The narrator, Susan Barton, sets out on a ship from England to find her kidnapped daughter. On the way to Brazil the crew mutinies and she is left to drift in the ocean in a row boat. She finds herself one day on Cruso's island, where she is first greeted by Friday, Cruso's black, mute servant. Susan is fascinated by the enigmatic Friday, much as the magistrate is by the enigmatic barbarian girl. She wants to know how he became mute and how he understands Cruso. She asks, "How many words of English does Friday know?" Cruso replies, "As many as he needs. This is not England, we have no need of a great stock of words" (21). Master Cruso has only taught Friday words of command. Her curiosity is piqued by the master/slave relationship between Cruso and Friday. Although Susan comes to suspect Cruso of causing Friday's mute condition, he appears to be a benevolent master. Cruso says, "There is no call to punish Friday. Friday has lived with me for many years. He has known no other master. He follows me in all things" (37). One of the reasons that Susan becomes the enigmatic Friday's master is that she realizes that Friday has never been without a master and she assumes he would be helpless on his own. Her initial curiosity and fascination, though, quickly wear off when she later becomes Friday's master and

caretaker. She begins to feel the colonial burden which the master must carry as a part of subjugating another to servitude.

Susan herself is not subjugated by Cruso while he is alive, but after his death she becomes a slave to his memory. Telling Cruso's story is her only goal. Susan says, "If Cruso had a widow, I am she; if there are two widows, I am the first. What life do I live but that of Cruso's widow" (99). While they are on the island Cruso demands that Susan do a few certain tasks. In one of his rare outbursts, Cruso cries at Susan, "While you live under my roof you will do as I instruct!" (20) Otherwise, he basically ignores her and leaves her to do what she wants. Susan cannot understand Cruso's behavior. She is also puzzled as to why he will not keep a journal so that when he is rescued he will be able to relate his experiences. Cruso dismisses her by saying, "Nothing is forgotten. Nothing I have forgotten is worth the remembering" (17). She cannot understand why he does not try to sleep with her or force her to work more around the island. Cruso is as much an enigma to her as Friday is.

The relationship between Cruso and Susan has an interesting twist because she, rather than Cruso, initiates the master/slave relationship. When she first arrives on the island, Susan says, "I presented myself to Robinson Cruso, in the days when he still ruled over his island, and became his second subject, the first being his manservant, Friday" (11). Even though he tells her to just leave him when he has his attacks of fever, Susan feels an obligation to nurse him through the attacks. She also thinks

that she should be allowed to help out more on the island, but Cruso is very specific in saying that he does not want her in the way. Even after his death Susan is still intent on serving Cruso by telling his tale about his stay on the deserted island instead of her own tale. Cruso never seems interested in her as a servant to himself; rather, Susan is the one who views their relationship as that of master/servant. This suggests that, whether she realizes it or not, Susan has accepted the traditional male/female roles of dominance and submission, like that of the master/slave relationship.

After she has been there a year, the three are rescued, but Cruso dies before they reach England, leaving Susan to care for Friday. Susan assumes the name Mrs. Cruso on the ship to protect herself and keeps the name after she returns to England. She meets Mr. Foe briefly soon after she first arrives in England. She writes him almost daily, but quickly loses contact with him. After going to his house and discovering it empty, she decides that she and Friday will live there and be caretakers of the house. She continues to write to Foe, but receives no response.

In England she has to take care of Friday, who would be completely helpless without her. Earlier, she told the Captain of the rescuing ship, "Friday is a slave and child, it is our duty to care for him in all things" (39). After becoming exhausted trying to care for Friday "in all things," she tries to send Friday back to Africa, but she can find no safe way to send him so she tries desperately to unlock the secrets in his mind.

She says, "I tell myself I talk to Friday to educate him out of darkness and silence. But is that the truth? There are times when benevolence deserts me and I use words only as the shortest way to subject him to my will" (60). She is enslaved by her mastery over Friday. In talking to Foe about Friday she says, "I must have my freedom! It is becoming more than I can bear! It is worse than the island! He is like the old man of the river!" (147) She explains, "There once was a fellow who took pity on an old man waiting at the riverside, and offered to carry him across. Having borne him safely through the flood, he knelt to set him down on the other side. But the old man would not leave his shoulders: no, he tightened his knees about his deliverer's neck and beat him on his flanks, to be short, turned him into a beast of burden" (148). At this point her life is no longer her own; she has become Mrs. Cruso in every sense, bearing the colonial burden of Friday which was once Cruso's.

It is Susan who wishes to find some way to record what is happening on the island, but Cruso scoffs at her idea. The idea that there is a story to be told from Cruso's experiences on the island becomes extremely important to her while she is there. But after being rescued from the island she becomes obsessed. Her sole purpose in life is to find someone to write Cruso's story the way it should be written. It is significant that she feels that her writing or language is inadequate for the job, and she must find a man to take what she tells about the island and turn it into a readable story. This characteristic of Susan's

personality relates to the idea in feminist critical theory that women have no true language. What women are forced to communicate with is the language of a patriarchal society. The inadequacy that Susan feels in her language is parallel to Magda's feeling that the "father tongue" is not the language of her heart. Susan tells Mr. Foe that "it is I who have disposal of all that Cruso leaves behind, which is the story of his island" (45). She also tells Foe that she is "a ghost beside the true body of Cruso" (51). After Cruso's death, Susan has found a way to serve him as she wanted to on the island. Foe, then, is different from the other novels in that Susan takes upon herself the role of servant; she submits herself to subjugation and becomes a colonized woman, not at the will of Cruso, but by her own will. Susan, instead of speaking out against the dominating patriarchy as do Magda and the magistrate, actively participates in the colonial system because she seems to view this as the best way in which to try to change the aspects which she feels are wrong. For example, she takes care of Friday with the intention of freeing him and returning him to Africa. Her attempts, while noble, fail because she, like Magda and the magistrate, is only one person trying to change a pervasive colonial system. She, therefore, inadvertently becomes a "pawn" of the system just as she does to Foe. While Susan seeks Foe out and tells her story to him, her good intentions about telling the truth of her stay and Cruso's life on the island are turned on her; Foe becomes the one telling the story to Susan. In Susan's situation Coetzee

offers a different expression of the female aesthetic. Susan tries to use the colonial system to work against itself, instead of directly speaking out against the system.

The final master/slave relationship in the novel is that between Susan and Mr. Foe. Susan puts herself at the mercy of Foe because she so desperately wants to have the story of the deserted island written, and written the way that it really happened. Susan puts herself in a vulnerable position and Foe takes advantage of her and her knowledge. She thinks to herself, "Sometimes I believe it is I who have become the slave" (87). He uses her story as the starting point for one of his own. Just as she has lost her real identity as Susan Barton to become Mrs. Cruso, she also loses her own, true story to the imaginative Foe. She begs Foe to "bear it in mind, however, that my life is drearily suspended till your writing is done" (63). The story may be Susan's but it is Foe who is in a position of control and power as the "translator" of her story into the language of the patriarchy. He uses Susan as the Muse to help promote the creative process. Susan is colonized by Foe because he not only uses her sexually, but also keeps her at his mercy by writing her tale about the island.

The ending of the novel is, like *Friday*, difficult to decipher. This last scene supposedly takes place three hundred years later and under water. The narrator is no longer Susan but an outsider looking in and exploring the remains of a ship wreck. He says, "With a sigh, with barely a splash, I duck my head under

the water. . . The dark mass of the wreck is flecked here and there with white" (155-56). The narrator sees the bloated, floating bodies of Susan and her lover-captain and a partially buried Friday. The narrator asks Friday what kind of a place the ship is but realizes, "this is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday" (157). Dick Penner says that

In terms of both the narrative and colonial themes, it is significant that Friday is submerged, unresolved, and that of all the characters, he is the only one still apparently alive. The 'slow stream' emerging from Friday's mouth and running 'to the ends of the earth...dark and unending' may well foreshadow the impending outrage of all the silent ones waiting to break their bonds. (214)

Susan is like Magda in that she plays a dual role as colonized and colonizer. Her colonial burden is greater than Magda's in some ways because she must not only provide for herself, but also for Friday. Not only is he a burden in a physical sense, but he is also a burden on her conscience and her peace of mind. By legally setting him free Susan hopes that her burden will be relieved somewhat, but she finds that this is not true. She feels an obligation as his caretaker such that she does not send him back to Africa when she realizes that the men on the ships would sell him back into slavery. She is fascinated with Friday to the point of obsession. She muses that the man who cut out Friday's tongue could possibly be Cruso instead of slave-traders (as Cruso suggested), but she has no real evidence to prove this. She says in one of her letters to Foe, "I would

give much to hear the truth of how he was captured by the slave-traders and lost his tongue" (57). She has to discover Friday's story, because by finding out what happened to him perhaps she will find someone or something to blame for his condition and her troubles, just as Magda blames her father and the magistrate blames Colonel Joll.

She, like Magda and the magistrate, tries to transcend the barriers between the colonized and colonizer by freeing Friday and trying to send him back to Africa, where she assumes he was born. She considers this not only because she believes that he would be happier among his own people and country, but also because she does not want to deal with the burden of Friday or have him as a constant reminder to her of Crusoe and the enigmas that they both are.

She fails in her attempts to escape the roles imposed by colonialism, because she, like Magda and the magistrate, is only one person and not enough to make a difference in the staunch colonial system. Freeing Friday and sending him back to Africa she sees as the perfect way to make him happy, assuage her conscience, and to relieve herself of the burden he causes, much like the magistrate returning the girl to the barbarians. She has a good enough conscience, though, not to send him back into slavery which, she discovers, is what the men on the ship on which she has arranged passage for him are going to do. In trying to teach Friday to read and write, Susan realizes how distant she is from the real Friday. This realization plagues

her even more and she tries harder and harder to teach Friday how to read and write. She tells Foe that if Friday could read and write she could finally discover how his tongue was cut out, who did it, and where he comes from. But her attempt only frustrates her. Instead of trying to communicate with Friday by using his symbols, she dismisses them as unimportant and meaningless. She does not even try to discover the meaning behind Friday's pages of O's or his drawing of an eye inside a foot. Susan dismisses Friday's "language" in his drawings because she is dealing with Friday as if he is a part of a Western language. She has, therefore, inscribed him in a subordinate position in her society, just as she as a woman is inscribed in patriarchal discourse.

In Foe Coetzee most clearly shows the pervasive influence of colonialism. Susan, who at the beginning of the novel is portrayed as a rather independent woman, is, by the end of the novel, reduced to being enslaved by her mastery over Friday and enslaved by the greedy Foe. She is no longer Susan Barton, but rather Mrs. Cruso, bearing the colonial burden of Friday while also being used by Foe. Susan has become a part of a cycle from which she cannot escape. She finds that in the colonial system it is sometimes hard to tell who is the master and who is the slave.

Conclusion: Coetzee and the "Female Aesthetic"

The preceding discussion should make it clear that none of Coetzee's female characters is weak, one-dimensional, or static. Rather, they are atypical in terms of the passive female stereotype, but they are also not able to escape the presence of this stereotype. For instance, although Magda is often passive when she is around her father and Hendrik, this is only because she believes that this is the proper way to act to receive attention from them. Each of the women is a strong, sometimes stoic, character who is forced to deal directly with oppression and to survive.

Even though she eventually goes crazy, Magda is presented as an intelligent, thoughtful woman who desperately wants to be a part of humanity. On her lonely farm there is no chance for her to recognize her full potential as an intelligent and possibly caring human being. She tries to overcome the barriers between her and her father and the servants, but her effort, while sincere, is never enough. She does not fail because of any weakness in her character but because she is fighting a tradition which has existed for thousands of years, that of the master/slave relationship.

The magistrate, like Magda, makes an attempt at rectifying the damage that colonialism has done. He also fails because change does not happen instantly or quickly in a system like a static colonial one. Both Magda and the magistrate discover that

the efforts of one person are not enough to demolish the barriers between people formed by colonialism. Magda cannot deal with this realization and goes crazy, while the magistrate returns to his former colonial life conscious of its problems and limitations.

The barbarian girl stoically survives her torture and protects her "inner self. Even though the reader never sees her except through the eyes of the magistrate, she seems to have quietly accepted her fate. She survives the terrible torture inflicted on her by Colonel Joll's men and also sees her father tortured and killed, but instead of giving up and dying, she lives on the streets and earns money by prostituting herself. The magistrate is never able to understand her and never discovers what she thinks about herself. But he does discover, after he has returned her to her people, her humanity and dignity, and that she was unhappy with him, and yet never let him know.

Susan Barton, even more so than Magda and the barbarian girl, is a strong, atypical female character. She sets out on her own to find her daughter, survives a mutiny, is stranded on an island in the middle of the ocean, is rescued, and must support herself and a mute black servant. She relies completely on herself until the end of the novel when Mr. Foe takes her and Friday into his house. Even when she has a source of shelter and food because she is living with Mr. Foe, she must constantly defend herself from him, because he uses her for his own

purposes.

Coetzee's manner of portrayal shows sympathy for his female characters. None of his female characters is an evil or bad person, as Colonel Joll is, but rather each is portrayed as the victim of colonization. Their lives are ruled over, and ruined by, the dominant patriarchal society, which is a part of the colonial system. Coetzee's treatment of women is a significant part of his overall treatment of imperialism. It is significant that, except for the magistrate, the male characters in these three novels are not generally "good" people. They are portrayed much more as the victimizers. Even Hendrik, a slave, rapes Magda and manipulates her. Magda's father, even though he shows a moment of tenderness, is the archetype of the domineering, uncaring, and abusive patriarch. Colonel Joll, probably Coetzee's most evil character, is simply a personification of the Empire. All the destructive characteristics of the Empire are played out by his actions. Mary Jacobus says in Reading Woman that "femininity--heterogeneity, otherness--becomes the repressed term by which discourse is made possible" (29). Coetzee speaks through the femininity of Magda, the barbarian girl, and Susan to express his ideas about colonialism. These three female characters are repressed, their "otherness" emphasized in the novels.

Another way in which Coetzee shows sympathy for his female characters is by writing from the feminine point of view. In the Heart of the Country is narrated by Magda and Foe by Susan.

Coetzee uses a technique of sympathy-through-identification in these two novels. By writing from the feminine point of view, he stresses the destructive nature not only of colonialism, but also the destructive force which the dominant patriarchy imposes on women. The domination of women by this patriarchy corresponds to the domination of other races by the empire.

Judith Gardiner says that the "female author is engaged in a process of testing and defining various aspects of identity chosen from many imaginative possibilities" (187). Coetzee, while obviously not female, attempts to assume that role by using first-person female narrators. In this female persona role, as Gardiner says, he is given more freedom in choosing the character's identity, thereby giving him, as an author, a wider range of possibilities for his novels. Normally the identity for a male author already would be defined by the language of the patriarchy. However, because women are not a part of this language, the female author, and the male author using a female voice such as Coetzee does, must search for an identity which is not that defined by patriarchal discourse but by "imaginative possibilities." Perhaps it is easier for Coetzee, as a South African writer in the heart of apartheid, to identify with another oppressed group, women; thus he may have chosen female narrators for these two novels of oppressed people. Jacobus also says,

Difference is redefined, not as male versus female--not as biologically constituted--but as a multiplicity, ambiguity and heterogeneity which is that of textuality itself. Writing, the production of meaning, becomes

the site of both challenge and otherness; rather than (as in more traditional approaches) simply yielding the themes and representation of female oppression. (30)

Coetzee challenges the system of apartheid and the oppression of colonialism through revealing his female narrators as victims of male-centered discourses whose end is to reduce the world to an easily dominated system. Coetzee reveals also how both men and women are victimized by these attempts at "mastery."

As noted in the introduction, Coetzee's writing fits the definition of the "female aesthetic" formulated by Rachel DuPlessis. To paraphrase her definition, she says that the "female aesthetic" is a practice available to any individual or group, not necessarily female, who criticizes, differentiates from, and attempts to overturn the dominant culture.

Coetzee criticizes colonialism, in his novels, as a system which does not work, for either the colonized or the colonizer. By using women in the novels, In the Heart of the Country, Waiting for the Barbarians, and Foe he is able to criticize the subjugation of women in a patriarchal culture while showing the destructiveness of the larger issue of universal colonialism. The theme expressed as master and slave, dominance and submission, colonizer and colonized, is stressed more because he uses women, an already non-hegemonic group, as the main characters portraying this theme.

The preceding discussions point to the fact that Coetzee writes within the "female aesthetic," uses female narrators, and shows sympathy for the female characters in his novels.

The criticism on Coetzee has largely been concerned with his political themes, rather than with the characteristics of the female aesthetic and how it relates to his use of the female persona in his writing. Something is possibly obscuring this important aspect of his writing. Perhaps the patriarchal society represented in his books is the same that is reviewing his books. Many of the critical articles dealing with Coetzee's work are written by men and appear in South African journals. (A few women have written on him who could be considered feminist critics). But this study shows, in many significant ways, that Coetzee is writing in support of women using the idea of the "female aesthetic."

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