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(RE)WRITING (HI)STORIES

Coetzee's Foe VS Defoe's Robinson Crusoe

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I hereby declare that the substance of this dissertation is entirely the result of my investigation and that due reference or acknowledgement is made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers.

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¹ At the start, this research was entitled “Caliban Writes Back” and dealt with the comparative study of two South African writers: JM Coetzee and Lewis Nkosi. The subject has been narrowed because of the bibliographical constraint.

To all those who could not carry on...

To that one who helped me do it : Ms DERAMCHIA

*For your professional and human commitment , You have my
everlasting recognition.*

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is primarily concerned with a comparative study between two novelists writing in the same language but belonging to two different countries, and different periods of history. The first –the main focus of our study- is J.M. Coetzee a writer of the 20th century belonging to the South African context and the other is Daniel Defoe from 18th century Britain. The main scope of this study is concerned with the intertextuality involved in Coetzee’s novel *Foe* –through Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*- and the way it relates back to Coetzee’s South African historical context.

Our intention is to show the different strategies used in *Foe* that inscribe the book in the field of postcoloniality. As many critics have remarked, the novel “resists any clear interpretation”. Different layers of meanings co-exist in the novel and inform its complexity and its distancing from the South African context. The overlapping strategies present in the novel create a kind of maze that confuses the reader and blurs the critic on his way of interpretation.

Two main strategies of fiction writing are used in the construction of the novel and generate two overlapping layers of meaning in *Foe*. The first layer relates back to intertextuality with Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, at a first degree, and *Roxana* , at a second degree. The second layer is related to aspects of postmodernism. Both layers represent the key to reach the hidden meaning of the narrative which is directly linked to the problematic of the context of South Africa.

This dissertation purports to be an original contribution to the comparative studies on Coetzee’s work. The major aim of this study is to contribute in the open debate on Coetzee’s works by positioning itself within the critical literature linking

Coetzee's work to its historical context. It is to be inscribed in the ongoing reflections on literature and writing and their interrelations with History: How Truth is found in Fiction and conversely Fiction in Truth. As a first attempt to introduce this author in Magister research in the University of Algiers we hope to initiate the interest in this field for upcoming scholars in our University.

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INTRODUCTION

“Coetzee’s Fiction: a Maze over the Message”

“Why do people always expect authors to answer questions? I am an author because I want to ask questions. If I had answers, I'd be a politician”

Eugene Ionesco

The novels of J.M. Coetzee represent some of the most –if not **the** most- difficult works to access in South African Literature. The recognition they presently know, both in the South African and international literary scenes, has been very slow to come. The main reason was the lukewarm reception of his first works in South Africa because of their lack of evident relevance to the South African context.

The major challenge for any South African writer and particularly for “white” writers is the degree to which their works are overtly committed to the South African context. The particular historical and political context of South Africa imposed on writers a commitment that was –and still is- judged through their creative works. Writers are considered to hold a responsibility in the “*construction of a new, non racial, and democratic society ... what they should write about, how they should write and where they should direct their energies*”¹ are all decisive elements that influence and shape the critical reception of the South African writer’s works. Those are the kind of issues which created controversy regarding Coetzee’s work.

Coetzee’s novels were criticized from the beginning for their failure to express and represent the political and cultural dilemmas of the immediate South African context. The novels’ ambivalence and ambiguity lacked “*the essential gesture*”² of explicit commitment against the oppression of the Apartheid system. Coetzee himself makes a statement in *Doubling* that joins this idea on his novels being “*too indirect in their approach, too rarefied, to be considered a threat to the order.*”³

¹ Dennis Brutus, « *literature and Change in South Africa* » quoted in Sue Kossew, *Critical essays on J.M. Coetzee*, p.2.

² With reference to Nadine Gordimer’s *The Essential Gesture : Writing, Politics and places*.

³ JM Coetzee. *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, p298.

It is worth noting that any literary work that was considered “a threat to the order” was censored by “the order”. Many writers and political leaders were banned or exiled. Consequently, those who remained could not escape the responsibility to take a clear position concerning the Apartheid system. Writers, as Sue Kossew observes, had the duty to speak out and as a writer, one is either with or against the struggle. It is this kind of attitude which fostered the respect given to the social-realism characteristic of the major literary works in South Africa. The literary scene of South Africa received positively those works because they answered their expectations from writers to provide a representation of the socio-political struggle taking place in the country. André Brink and Nadine Gordimer are among the white writers who answer those expectations whereas Coetzee’s work resists this categorization.

In fact, Coetzee holds a frustrating attitude –for critics- that resists the attempts of being assimilated or his novels in any political discourse. He always evades comments on his own novels preferring to let them speak for themselves. This attitude can largely be explained by the fact that censorship in South Africa created an atmosphere of fear and anxiety that inhibited many writers to speak up! Coetzee’s collection of essays on censorship in *Giving Offense* (1996) attests to his concern about this issue.

Coetzee does not only distance himself from political grounds but also from his Afrikaans heritage. “No Afrikaner would consider me an Afrikaner...I am not embedded in the culture of the Afrikaner”¹ he affirms. One related issue to this distancing is his use of English as the linguistic medium for all his novels. One can even add to this ethnological, linguistic and political distancing a geographical one that

¹ J.M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point*, p341/42.

he experienced during his ten years (1962-1972) of absence from the country during which he continued his studies in the United Kingdom and the United States. If we take into consideration the biographical elements presented in *Boyhood* (1997), Coetzee's detachment of the former mentioned issues finds an echo in his own solitary detached character.

Coetzee's resistance to be assimilated by any of the prominent discourses in the South African scene can find its roots in his own sense of alienation that goes back to his early childhood. He hated the aggressiveness of his fellow Afrikaner boys and spent his time playing cricket trying to keep integrated. Coetzee's own knowledge of South Africa remains limited to Cape and the Karoo. This detachment is consequently reflected in his novels and his own attitude. However, it can not be the origin of the complex narratives that Coetzee provides through his novels. There is something else which lies behind Coetzee's seemingly detached narratives.

Before being a teacher of literature, Coetzee worked as a computer programmer holding an MA in mathematics. At first sight, one can wonder at the wide gap between the two fields which account for Coetzee's outstanding intellectual interests. Yet, Coetzee's interest in linguistics as the study of human language and its components finds its parallel in his interest in computer language and its workings. Thus, Coetzee's approach to language remains a pragmatic one. He is more interested in language itself as he admits being a linguist before being a writer. Saussure's dichotomy of signifier/signified -completed later by Barthe's theory of meaning/explanation- is probably the notion in linguistics which interests him most as his main target is that of making his narratives speak for themselves.

Self-reflexivity, deconstruction, “the death of the author”¹ are tendencies that are associated with Coetzee’s novels and that can simplify their apparent complexity. Actually, it is not before a full recognition of those notions in Coetzee’s work came that an understanding of its commitment to the South African context was established. Teresa Dovey’s *The Novels of J.M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories* was the first consistent critical work to defend Coetzee’s work by showing the different narrative strategies that account for the novels commitment to the South African context. As Teresa Dovey observed, the novels possessed a theoretical sophistication that disarmed the critics in advance.

Since the mid eighties, critics have been looking at Coetzee’s work from new perspectives. There have been four full-length critical works to date², two comparative studies³, and a number of collections of critical essays on Coetzee and his works⁴. Teresa Dovey’s study is the first full-length study on Coetzee’s work and remains a reference work for most critics. David Attwell’s *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* and Susan Gallagher’s *A Story of South Africa: J.M. Coetzee’s Fiction in Context* support Dovey’s position revealing the complex artistry and language concerns at stake in Coetzee’s novels that relate them to their historical contexts. Dick Penner’s *Countries of the Mind*, on the contrary, views Coetzee’s work

¹ With reference to Roland Barthe’s work.

² The first study to appear was Teresa Dovey’s *The Novels of JM Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories* (1988), Dick Penner’s *Countries of the Mind: The Fictions of J.M. Coetzee* (1989), Susan Gallagher’s *A Story of South Africa: J.M. Coetzee’s Fiction in Context* (1991) and David Attwell’s *J.M. Coetzee : South Africa and the Politics of Writing* (1993)

³ Rosemary Jolly, *Colonization, Violence, and Narration in White South African Writing: André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, and J.M. Coetzee* (1996) and Sue Kossew, *Pen and Power: A Postcolonial Reading of J.M. Coetzee and André Brink* (1996).

⁴ They include. Michael Valdez Moses ed, *The Writings of J.M. Coetzee*,(1994) , Huggan & Watson, *Critical perspectives on J.M. Coetzee*, (1996), and Sue Kossew, *critical Essays on J.M. Coetzee*, (1998).

from a more universal and detached position. If he relates his works to history then it is from a global perspective and not from the specific context of South Africa.

If the number of full-length studies is relatively poor it is balanced by the number of journal articles on the subject¹. Among those critical studies, some joined – and enlarged- the positive critical perspective fostered by Dovey and some carried on insisting that the novels lacked terribly a sense of commitment to the specific and urgent needs of the South African context. Up to now, the critical corpus² on Coetzee's work seems to account for that same ambivalence. One of his novels which continues to stand on the stage of critical debates and which still does not satisfy critics with obvious relations to the South African Context is *Foe* (1987). Being a retelling of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, it gives obvious connections with a remoter time and place of discourse that deceives the active literature of commitment.

Because of the problematic raised by Coetzee's work but also because of our personal interest in this particular novel, we try to answer in this present study the main question: "does *Foe* relate in any way to the South African Context?" The present research aims at showing that in spite of its apparent detachment from the South African context *Foe* is very closely related to it. What makes *Foe* a complex work is the presence of different layers of meaning. The more we read the novel the

¹ There is a considerable number of journal articles the most recurring in bibliographies are those appearing in *Commonwealth*, *Current Writing*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Dissertation Abstracts International*, *Critique* and many others.

² One thing should be underlined here which is that this literature review is based on the available bibliographies on the subject. Not being able to have access to full texts of most of those references, the content and themes exposed in this introduction are based first on the information collected from those references to which I could have access (mentioned in the bibliography) and second on the numerous informative literary reviews, journal detailed summaries of contents and articles (plus preface or introduction texts of major critical studies) that are available on the net.

more we sense different layers of meaning and to be able to approach the text without missing any layer one needs to refer to different theories of fiction.

The overlapping strategies present in the novel create a kind of maze that can confuse the reader and especially the critic on his way of interpretation. To be able to refer to the multiple meanings spread over the text of *Foe* and account for its polyphony, one approach imposed itself: Deconstruction. Here, the term is used in its general sense, that is unveiling or revealing the different parts that are connected and joined together to create, thus construct, a whole body.

The strategies of two main theories of fiction that are used in the construction of the narrative and that generate two overlapping layers of meaning in *Foe* are related to intertextuality and postmodernism. Their combination creates a third hidden layer of meaning which is not apparent at the surface of the narrative, a kind of layer *Mise En Abyme*¹. It is our main aim in this study to unveil this layer because it relates to South Africa. The first layer relates back to intertextuality with *Robinson Crusoe* -at a first degree- and *Roxanne* -at a second degree. The second layer is related to aspects of postmodernism. Both layers represent the key to reach a hidden meaning of the narrative, a sort of “unconscious” of the text, which is directly linked to the problematic of the context of South Africa.

Consequently, the present study is divided into three main parts. The first part introduces those specific aspects of Defoe’s works which are re-visited in *Foe*. It gives a brief study of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana* with a survey of the context of their production. Dealing with imperialistic texts, this part is entitled “Islands of Imperialism”. The second part explores the narrative strategies used in *Foe*, thus it is

¹ A notion introduced in postmodernism and which will be discussed within the present study.

divided into two main chapters that study the two main strategies of the book: intertextuality and postmodernism. Dealing with narrative strategies, this part is thus entitled “Islands of Narration”.

The third part of the present study takes up again the findings of the previous parts to introduce the novel’s connection with the South African context hence its title “Islands of Postcoloniality”. Inevitably then, this part contains historical facts with specific focus on those elements relevant to this study. The historical context has been left on purpose to the end of the study as we start from the critics’ objections that Coetzee’s work is detached from his historical context. Thus, starting from this assumption, we rely solely on the text and its pre-text to establish the link with the South African context. It is only when the link has been established that we allow ourselves to replace the work in its context.

The synthesis of the three parts is made in the conclusion which reassembles the findings of all previous parts, hence its title “Piecing the Jigsaw Together”. It develops on the implications of Coetzee’s narrative techniques as stemming from Coetzee’s view that narrative is itself a historical product. In terms of such a position, we discuss the extent to which, not only story telling is related to history, but also and especially determines history, hence the title of the present study: “Re/writing Hi/stories”.

Given that the debate concerning the ambiguity of *Foe* is still at issue and remains a pioneers’ field, we hope that the present study will be an interesting addition to the presently available literature on the subject. According to the available bibliography, it seems that there has not yet been a study focusing at the same time on

the intertextual and postmodern aspects of *Foe*. The majority of the available literature has a main focus on postcolonialism, postmodernism, and feminism, but studied separately in each of the available studies. In addition, it seems to us that the historical links established in Part Three of the present study have not been raised before. For this reason, this dissertation purports to be an original contribution to the critical debate on Coetzee's work.

PART ONE/

ISLANDS OF IMPERIALISM

*“Books are companions, teachers, magicians,
bankers of the treasures of the mind. Books are
humanity in print”*

Barbara W. Tuchman

CHAPTER ONE/ THE WORKS

*“All books are either dreams or swords, You can
cut, or you can drug, with words”*

Amy Lowell

1- ROBINSON CRUSOE

Robinson Crusoe is the acknowledged work in English literature that started the tradition of the novel. It is Defoe's most acclaimed work too for it contains the spirit of the time of discoveries and the expansion of the empire. It was considered later as one of the prominent works proclaiming the supremacy of the white over the other cultures.

Robinson Crusoe is probably known by everyone. But most probably too, most of those who recognize the name have never read the book. Indeed, *Robinson Crusoe* belongs to that tradition of those few stories as Don Quixote, Don Juan, Hamlet or Frankenstein that have rapidly exceeded the status of narratives to become concepts and even myths.

Robinson Crusoe was written more than twenty years before Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* initiated what Ian Watt calls a 'constant feature in the tradition of the novel'¹. There was no precedent in 1719 for prose fiction as a coherent moral or psychological whole. Rousseau considered the book as more than a contribution to the rapid expansion of children's literature, but as an essential reading for children's education. A huge number of children's tales emerged from the Robinson myth. Hundreds of island tales have been published through the centuries and reinforced the myth dimension of the book incessantly rewriting the island adventure. Through the

¹ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p.154. The exact point Watt was discussing before the quoted remark was *Pamela's* appeal to the wide audience of women. It goes without saying that the quotation as used in the present study describes the general features as pinpointed by Watt in his study (and comparison with *Robinson Crusoe*) that make of it the first prose fiction to have balanced 'several of the major problems which Defoe had left unsolved' (135).

centuries, the rewritings of the story have developed into more serious reflections on the book and its ideology, the case of J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* is one of the latest cases.

But what are the elements in this book that are so appealing that they account for its immortality?

One of the most probable answers to this question is the wonderful and wide range of ingredients offered through the story and which made it a children's story, a traveller's tale, a religious diary and a myth of modern individualism.

Defoe's Crusoe is a mixed form of narrative, in turn pseudo-autobiography, marvellous traveller's tale, religious Diary ... a collage of the various forms of textual discourse that the ageing Defoe had practiced during his crowded life as projector, journalist and Double agent¹

The mythic dimension of *Robinson Crusoe* most certainly comes from the fundamental theme of human existence explored through life on the island. No other theme in the book is more appealing than the meditation upon the existence of the self and its encounter with the "other".

As a matter of fact, an exuberant island, free and isolated, is the ideal place for man to see the capacities, limits and consequences of his physical and psychic energies. *Robinson Crusoe* explores the wonders of having a piece of paradise to dispose of: he is the King and the subject of his land. This is what makes Crusoe the exemplary model of modern individualism. However, Defoe's depiction of this trait betrays in many instances a will not only of individual independence but of dominion over others.

¹ E.D. Lieve Spaas & Brian Stimpson, *Robinson Crusoe: Myths and Metamorphoses*, p. 1.

Crusoe's pleasures on the island are those of ownership of the land and control over time through the mastery of crafting, fabricating and the like. By facing solitude on the desert island, Crusoe is also experiencing the many possibilities of appropriation and control. Though those traits are best expressed through the chapters of life on the island, those individualistic traits are present in the whole novel.

As the facets of extreme individualism in Defoe's narrative are addressed in Coetzee's *Foe*, in what follows we will focus on the elements of the novel where this tendency is best apparent. Those are: characterization and setting; the first allows us to see the ruling drive in Crusoe's –Defoe's– view of human relationships while the second shows how those same concepts are projected over the land and everything it contains.

A- HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN THE NOVEL

*“The primacy of individual economic advantage has tended to diminish the importance of personal as well as group relationships.”*¹ In *Robinson Crusoe*, one marked trait of Crusoe is his tendency to judge the people around him (whether close or not) not as human beings but as mere objects or elements he may use for his own personal benefit. There is a glaring lack of emotional expressions or shows of affection in the text. One memorable instance of this is the fact that in the entire narrative Crusoe cries only once. In a tale full of so many misfortunes, shipwrecks and tumultuous events Crusoe cries in one single

¹Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p.67.

The points presented in this part of the study are supported directly by Watt's study on those aspects of *Robinson Crusoe* as he devoted a whole chapter precisely on the theme of individualism in *Robinson Crusoe* with a discussion on its place and contribution in the development of the novel. The quoted sentences in what follows are from this chapter except when duly mentioned.

moment when his old friend, the captain of the ship informs him that he is not poor after all his absence on the island and tells him how he intends to give him money.

Ian Watt states that there is a clear “*devaluation of non economic factors*” in *Robinson Crusoe* which applies in Crusoe’s relationships. He states in a pertinent sentence: “*He treats them all in terms of their commodity values.*”¹ Bearing this sentence in mind, it is quite interesting to see how the attitudes of Crusoe are so much governed by this system of (d)evaluation.

a- Xury

One of the first good examples of this attitude is Crusoe’s relation with Xury, a person with whom he spent a good deal of time and to whom he owed much. The boy assisted him in his escape from slavery and showed perfect devotion to him. He even offered to sacrifice his own life for Crusoe. Consequently Crusoe resolves ‘*to love him ever after.*’² But what do sentiments have to do when put in the middle of a good economic bargain? Even if these are sentiments of gratitude and recognition for such a unique devotion as Xury’s, “a deal is a deal” and for Crusoe nothing on earth could ever weigh with it. When an opportunity presented itself to sell Xury into slavery he could not resist it. “*Remorse later supervenes but only when the tasks of his island life make manpower more valuable to him than money.*”³

¹ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p.69.

² Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p.69.

³ Idem.

b- Women

Few women appear in this man's tale. It would not be correct to say that they are inexistent but there is a complete absence of any prominent female figures in the novel. And those who are present are loosely represented, if we ever can speak of representation at all! We have clearly understood that emotional relationships have no place in this novel and this is best illustrated by Crusoe's relationship with women. Obeying the same economic functional value -mentioned above- the lucky women who are mentioned in the text are the ones who represent an interest, a potential to serve Crusoe. Actually, the exclusion of women from Crusoe's adventures is the direct result of this economic value given to things, that is, "Treating the persons according to their commodity value" so, women appear only when they have an economic role.

By no means are we allowed to see or guess the slightest slip of emotional expression towards any woman. Even those who are supposed to be the closest and most important to a man's heart receive the same treatment and are valued in exactly the same way. Crusoe's mother is mentioned just because she was able to be mediator between him and his father. The reader can not forget his wife because she is the character with the shortest life and appearance in the text. To be concise, her whole existence as wife is carried in one sentence: "*In the meantime, I in part settled myself here; for first of all I married, and that not either to my disadvantage or dissatisfaction.*"¹

This sentence is a memorable one because we really feel that Crusoe –and Defoe- opened a parenthesis and quickly wanted to close it. Crusoe's wife is like a sort

¹ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, p.297. All subsequent references will appear parenthetically in the text.

of digression. One can observe that she is mentioned only to justify his renewal with sea adventures. Who would dare come back again to sea after all he endured? Therefore, we have the honour to meet Mrs Crusoe only to know that she is the excuse for Crusoe's return to sea:

But my wife dying, and my nephew coming home with good success from a voyage to Spain, my inclination to go abroad and his importunity prevailed and engaged me to go in his ship... (p.297)

So is the case with Crusoe's mother whom he mentions only because he needed her intervention to convince his father to let him go to sea. Do we hear about her later in the text? Not a word until the end of the narrative and only to know among other details that she is dead. When we observe this, we are no more astonished that the other women in the family get less attention. In the opening pages of the narrative, Crusoe gives a brief sketch of his lineage and the family "Male" members. It is not before the very end of the narrative that we are brought to know that he had two sisters. "...my father was dead, and my mother and all the family extinct, except that I found two sisters..." (p.272) – who were completely omitted in the opening pages.

If the women of the family are not given much attention, the other women are not any luckier. Crusoe's attitude towards women is characterized by an extreme inhibition of natural human affection. What is worth pausing at too, is the total absence of any sexual/erotic drive towards women in the whole narrative. During his solitary stay on the island, not one second does Crusoe yearn for a woman's presence. Not one word in the text induces us to understand that he needed or ever wished to have a woman on his island. Quite odd indeed for this goes against human nature. In fact,

being brought up as a Dissenter, Defoe did not escape the inhibitive attitude towards sex as being one of the most -if not the most- dangerous irrational threats to the pursuit of rational self-interest. The life of Crusoe is completely de-sexualized to allow him to achieve success.

Consequently, the absence of women on the island is not a problem at all for Crusoe. On the contrary, it seems that their presence would have been a hindrance. For this incorrigible “homo economicus”, this solitary stay is an opportunity to live on his own and experience both husbandry and housewifery .Cooking, cleaning, hunting, making pots... he does it all and with great pleasure. He is an all in one man. By this, he depicts an image of an idealized and androgynous version of self-sufficiency transforming a story of disastrous shipwreck into a chronicle of individual success. Crusoe was too busy in this pursuit of self-interest and self-realization to bother about emotional ties that would be a constraint more than anything else. And when he achieves his goal of self-sufficiency, he notices lack of "society". However, he prays for the company of a male slave. That wish being fulfilled with Friday he overtly expresses his perfect happiness with him.

... and the conversation which employed the hours between Friday and I was such as made the three years which we lived there together perfectly and completely happy, if any such thing as complete happiness can be formed in a sublunary state(p.217)

The presence of a woman is not allowed to cloud Crusoe's perfect happiness.

In a book of 298 pages containing a lot of scrupulously detailed descriptions of Crusoe's adventures: two thirds of the book focus on the slightest details of everyday life on the island. One third (or maybe less) serves as opening and closing account of

the island life. And, actually, it is among this third that we find the concentration of women in the whole book. And all of the female characters -with no exception- are there to secure Crusoe's interests. Therefore, once they pass to answer Crusoe's need, we do not see them anymore. Curiously, those who appear in the opening pages have no chance to come back in the closing pages and vice versa. The only female character to appear in the beginning and in the end of the novel is the widow and that is because she protects Crusoe's most important, constant and reliable value: his money.

After Friday, a multitude of characters pour into the island; they are all males. It is only when Crusoe's "settlement into the world" is secured and only after his "successor the Spaniards" assure the intermediary of the individual labour on the land that a group, or shall we say a share, of twelve women are incorporated in the text and it is meant to secure the durability of Crusoe's enterprise and to allow the existence/ proliferation of the colony! It is no surprise that this is introduced on the last page of the novel. Five women are set on the island as a means of procreation, to populate the island: "*...and five women prisoners, **by which**, at my coming, I found about twenty young children on the island.*" (p.298) For the rest and last women introduced in the tale, Defoe takes no more "gloves" to hide his attitude towards women: "*...I sent a bark...with more people to the island; and in it, **besides other supplies**, I sent seven women, being such as I found proper for service, or for wives to such as would take them*"(p.298) It is interesting to note here the thin line separating a wife from a servant. What is more awkward is the overt innuendo that women are certainly not considered as human beings by Crusoe: when he says that he had sent people and with them, "among other supplies" women, it is as if he said I sent people

and women! Women are clearly viewed as objects –among other supplies. Crusoe's beloved companion on the island, is not treated in a different way, as we shall see in what follows.

c- Friday

Friday is certainly Crusoe's favourite encounter in the novel (not only on the island) as he is the character that spends the most time with Crusoe. From all the people whom Crusoe encountered in his travels, it is to Friday that his best compliments go. He is the only one who succeeded in making Crusoe speak about "perfect" situations and "perfect" persons. With the coming of Friday, Crusoe tastes true happiness in his life and he does not hide it:

This was the pleasantest year of all the life I led in this place...My life began to be so easy that I began to say to myself that...I cared not if I was never to remove from the place while I lived (pp.207-210)

To be content to a degree so as to renounce the company of the rest of the world is the clue that Crusoe was depicting an ideal situation for him.

Does that perfect situation of happiness exclude the Crusoe/Friday relationship from economic type of relations as the previous ones mentioned? Does it stir some emotions in him? Certainly not; on the contrary, Crusoe's individualistic egocentrism finds its best expression in this case. The ideal partner is Friday:

...never man had a more faithful, loving, sincere servant than Friday was to me, without passions, sullenness, or designs, perfectly obliged and engaged; his very affections were tied to me like those of a child to a father... (p.205)

What makes Friday so special and valuable in Crusoe's eyes is his complete and unquestioned devotion to him. If ever submission and servitude had a name then it was

Friday. He answers Crusoe's wishes even before they are uttered. He has the talent to "let him know he would serve[him] as long as he lived" without being asked to. He is even willing to work harder for [Crusoe] and even die for him, and this is because Friday does not forget his obligation to [Crusoe]. Indeed, Crusoe saved his life not only from the cannibals who brought him to devour him on the island but also from the savagery of his own existence.

I...was now to be made an instrument under Providence to save the life and, for aught I knew, the soul of a poor savage, and bring him to the true knowledge of religion,...instruction sufficiently served to the enlightening this savage creature... (pp.216-217)

It becomes clear that Friday is the dreamed partner to Crusoe. Actually, he really comes out directly from a dream. Before the coming of Friday, Crusoe dreams of his coming. When Crusoe begins to wish for a company, it is not for any kind of company. In his dream he sees a servant who kneels down to him who would also be his guide in the place to avoid being devoured by cannibals, the only threat on his island. Dreams are obviously widely acknowledged as the space where the most inner thoughts and desires are brought to the surface and find the means to come to life. Crusoe's ideal relationship and most cherished desire is to have a partner to serve him, so we are just right back to that functional relationship based on Crusoe's interest. Friday is the best because he serves him best.

The two excuses that Crusoe introduces to justify his disposal of Friday (saving his life and soul) are completely undermined by his spontaneous reflections here and there in the text. At no time did Crusoe plan to save Friday for the sake of saving a Man's life. By the time he is preparing his intervention, he has in front of him a man

trying to escape death and he says with great impunity: "*That man was my time to get me a servant*" first, "*and perhaps a companion or assistant*"... even better : "*a means to help me*"(p.199) He saves Friday "*to get a savage into [his] possession*". It is wonderful how the notion of saving is distorted here: he saves Friday to capture him in fact! Then, Crusoe carries the mission of enlightening this "poor savage".

I was greatly delighted with him, and made it my business to teach him everything that was proper to make him useful, handy and helpful; but especially to make him speak and understand me when I spoke (p.206)

So he made it his priority to teach him everything to... elevate his soul... in Crusoe's terms of elevation and value!

Friday's role is limited to this notion of being useful to Crusoe and being able to understand –and more importantly, execute - his orders. That is why Crusoe makes no effort to know about Friday. He shows no interest in his personal life and culture. The few discussions he had with him on his native land were again dictated by utilitarian reasons. He pointed to the areas which interested him to realize his escape. Another marked instance in the narrative that contradicts Crusoe's argument that he wanted to teach Friday was his complete indifference to do the like with Friday's tribe because they simply represent no interest to Crusoe. This way, Friday is a hollow Character, a puppet! Of all the characters in *Robinson Crusoe* he is the most de-humanized though the one who is given the most attention from Crusoe. Still, we made it clear that Crusoe's focused attention on Friday is only driven by the fact that Friday represents the most "helpful, useful" character that he appropriates.

B- THE ISLAND

a- Territories of Exploitation

Robinson Crusoe is first and foremost a book about appropriating the outside space, appropriating the Other. The island, just like Friday and the other characters of the novel, is a space on which Crusoe will throw his possessive drives. The tropical sun, the sea and the white sand of a secluded island are for a wide majority the ideal setting for a return in the arms of Mother Nature. Crusoe's view of the island is different. The extreme marked individuality of Crusoe could not find better land where to expand than an island. Crusoe's uncontrollable egocentricity leads him directly on that island because society hinders him from exerting and considering the extent of his power and authority. Consequently, all of Crusoe's individualistic drives, fantasies and actions are reflected in that material space of the island.

All the essence of Crusoe's relation between the self and the other, between Crusoe's "inner self and the outside world", is to be most clearly translated on the island. Every action of Crusoe on the island is dictated by his insatiable need to exploit and possess. Nature in the island is not approached in terms of communion or cohabitation by Crusoe but is viewed in terms of raw material to be exploited and refined to Crusoe's needs. Crusoe's life on the island is a perpetual labour of possession. There is a marked presence of the dichotomy of production/possession. If Adam's original sin was the apple, Crusoe's "original sin" is his unsettled urge to be productive. There is no wonder in this for, as we have seen earlier, in Crusoe's world, "utility" is the key word. Just as his relations with others are valued with their "commodity value" so is his relation with himself.

The island is the best setting to answer this need because it is a virgin land. Therefore, he has plenty of opportunities to prove his "commodity value", ie, exploitation. Besides, a virgin setting gives him the opportunity to make his imprints unforgettable, unquestioned, and not confused with other persons' contributions. That is what has prevented the introduction of other persons in his territory for a long time.

b- Animals

Nothing equalled Crusoe's obsessive work to enlarge his territory except maybe his fear of seeing his 'kingdom' invaded or intruded. Because Crusoe is an excessive individualist, he would not accept to share his enterprise on the island with anyone else. So, even when he laments on his solitude, the only "Others" to be allowed to enter his world are the animals. And his encounter with the parrot and the goat are expressive enough to betray his uttermost fear of discovering another person, some other image different from his own. It is funny enough how the animals succeed in appeasing Crusoe. Each time, we see him thunderstruck when thinking that he is about to discover the presence of a human being and each time we see his relief when the animal is revealed! It is worth observing too how, in a way, animals are related to himself.

The dogs which survive the shipwreck as himself, the goat which Crusoe would like to die like him and the Parrot in which nobody misses the voice of Crusoe's conscience have all something in common with Crusoe. However, it is worth noting that Crusoe tries many times to escape and go to meet others but each time he fails. One should see how in these instances he does not fear to meet the other because the

desire arises from his own will¹, but as soon as the situation slips from his control he is not only anxious but completely terrified.

A marked unsociability is a sign of a character with strong veins to control others. So, to sum up Crusoe wants the presence of the others only if he can have control over them and be able to neutralize the Other. Stated in this manner, an explanation forces itself upon our mind: Crusoe is so conscious of what his inner self desires and is capable of doing that he is terrified to find it in another person. This idea finds a sound explanation with Nietzsche who states that "*the desire to rule has often appeared to me a sign of inward weakness: they [those who want to rule] fear their own slave soul and shroud in a royal cloak*"² This sheds light on the progressive introduction of the other on his territory. Crusoe needed to introduce replicas of himself, but inferior and domesticated ones. One can easily observe how a parrot replicates his master's words faithfully and how a dog obeys his words faithfully...Friday?...He does both at the same, that is what makes him safe with Crusoe!

c- Human Flesh

Speaking about the fear of others leads me to foreground the recurrence of a strong image in *Robinson Crusoe*: men eating other men's flesh: Cannibalism. After Crusoe, the only men to come on the island from time to time are the "savages". Each time they step on the island it is to exhibit their triumph over their victims by eating them. Markman Ellis observes how the notion of cannibalism remains one of the

¹ This analysis of the animals presence in the novel relies on Le Goff's study of this point in (Le) Goff, Jean-Pasca. *Robinson Crusoe ou L'invention d'Autrui*. Paris : Klincksieck, 2003.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachlass, Fall 1880 6 [206]* ,quoted in Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/the_Will_to_power).

central disputes of the eighteenth-century discourse on savagery as it served the scheme of imperialism. He quotes William Arens¹ who argues that “*the description by one group of people of another people as cannibals is an ideological and rhetorical device to establish moral superiority over them.*”²

We would agree with this idea especially since the discourse on the savagery of other cultures provided a justification for the imperial enterprise. Applied to the case of Crusoe, Ellis observes how Crusoe “*dehumanises the cannibals*”³ through his picturing of their rituals and how this reinforces his melancholy on the island and provides him with a “legitimate” sense of revenge ‘*how I might destroy some of these monsters in their cruel bloody Entertainment, and if possible, save the Victim they should bring hither to destroy*’ (168). Furthermore, Ellis does not fail to underline that Crusoe’s construction of the cannibal is connected to his general anxieties about authority on the island (just like the construction of the relations studied in this part). Ellis summarizes Crusoe’s attitude by putting forth that “*Those who are called cannibals are those who refuse to submit to Crusoe’s authority.*”⁴ Actually, there is an interesting point in the construction of the narrative of Crusoe which makes Crusoe portend the death of others around him and ends in his unconscious “allegorical cannibalism”!

Following this idea, when we observe Crusoe's journey we can not miss his indifference towards human society. On or outside the island Crusoe eliminates others around him. It is precisely his untamed individualism which pushes him to go

¹ In his cross cultural study *Man-Eating* (1979)

² Markman Ellis, “*Crusoe, Cannibalism and Empire*”, p.46.

³ *Ibid*, p.47.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.49.

against his society's code and ignore the warnings of his father. Crusoe by his obstinate will to go his way despite all the warnings of people and nature (tempests) results in not only ignoring them but rebuking all possibility of communication with them. So, he imposes his judgement, his will upon others.

Another interesting point is that Crusoe portends death wherever he steps. First, the remark of the captain of the first ship who declares that the tempest they had was only due to his presence on the ship. Where all the other ship fellows are captured, he escapes. At last, where everybody dies he is alive on the island. Therefore, two notions are confronted: the death of others and his life. Associated to his deliberate refusal of the other and doubled with the recurrence of the cannibalistic images this culminates in a pertinent image: that of Crusoe allegorically killing the other because of his "original sin". This desire to kill is tamed through Crusoe's killing or domesticating of animals.

The image is but another translation of the strong individualistic drive pictured in the novel. As stated earlier, the unsociable trait of Crusoe betrays a strong need for control over others. In psychological terms¹, through domestication and killing of animals, Crusoe tries to get around an unconscious need of self-destruction. Control over others is explained as being a way of surviving the world around. Korang describes this situation as, *"the classic situation of Robinson Crusoe on his island as he repeatedly struggles to master the traumas and anxieties of self-division and to embody, in the fullness of time, the sovereign imperial self."*²

¹ Based on Freud's study of the ambivalent desire of life and death in human beings.

² Kwaku Larbi Korang, "An Allegory of Re-Reading: Post-colonialism, Resistance, and J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*", in Sue Kossew, *Critical Essays on J.M. Coetzee*, p. 187. Actually, Korang's idea expressed in this essay is taken from Hulme, Peter. *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean: 1492-1797*. London: Methuen. 1986.

The philosophical perception of Nietzsche reinforces this psychological description as Nietzsche's idea of aggression is equivalent to aggression towards oneself which is dictated by self-mastery. Nietzsche explains the desire to control as a driving force ruling and directing a man's existence: "*My idea is that every specific body strives to become master over all space and to extend its force (its will to power) and to thrust back all that resists its extension.*"¹

If this need has allegorical connotations of killing the other in *Robinson Crusoe*, it has a concrete outcome in *Roxana*. Though seemingly having a "passive" kind of individualistic drives –as we will underline in the next point dedicated to Defoe's *Roxana*- the heroine is finally not so different as she downright kills "the other" -her daughter Susan- to preserve her "self".

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, Trans. Walter Kaufmann, *The will to Power*, quoted in Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/the_Will_to_power).

2- ROXANA

All Defoe's heroes pursue money, which he characteristically called 'the general denominating article in the world'; and they pursue it very methodically according to the profit and loss book keeping which Max Weber considered to be the distinctive technical feature of modern capitalism¹

This description applies very well to Roxanne. We find the same interest and economic system of valuing people as that found in Robinson Crusoe. Even if Roxanne is different from Crusoe, as first being a woman, the individualistic traits are ever present in the novel.

Actually, Roxanne shares many traits with Crusoe. Even if she is much more sociable than him, still her search for society is in fact a lust for high rank advantageous positions. So it is just another way of asserting this value they give to money. Just as Crusoe, she is brilliant at keeping journals of her properties and so much meticulous about having receipts. *Roxana* contains even more details concerning keeping accounts, no wonder as among the various jobs Defoe had was accountancy. In fact, this is one of the central themes of the novel made present by Roxanne's obsessive fear of falling into poverty as happened when her first husband abandoned her. Therefore, many details are given on how she kept her accounts and how she was so much concerned about having receipts for anything she might hold or give.

One of the main features she shares with Crusoe is the presence of a redemption process offered repetitively in different stages but which is very quickly forgotten as the situation changes. A marked similarity is the feelings of remorse with bitter regrets

¹ Ian watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p.63.

on the decisions and/or actions Crusoe and Roxanne made in their lives when they met with outstanding tempests at sea. But the appeal of their egocentric natures is so strong that they quickly forget these moments of distress as soon as the weather is better. In this context, they both manage to end in very good situations despite the outstanding range of adventures and misfortunes they go through.

One still other marked similarity is that both Crusoe and Roxanne have the best servants that man could ever wish to have. Both Friday and Amy are the exemplary servants so much obeying and loving their masters that one would wonder about the kind of love they bear. Both are capable of killing themselves for the sake of the welfare of their masters. Amy was Roxana's best friend, confidant, assistant, accountant, in a word, she was her "*right hand*". As she says herself, she "*did all [her] Business; and without her, indeed, [she] knew not how to go away*"¹ We will not dwell too much on this point for the main traits that summarize Amy's relationship with Roxanne are already summarized in the relation of Crusoe and Friday.

A last point of similarity is the one already mentioned at the close of the last point on Crusoe. If Crusoe allegorically kills the presence of others, Roxanne does it concretely through the episode of her daughter's murder. Even if it is her servant Amy who does it for her, the outcome remains the same. It is presented in a way that makes it inevitable: either the daughter dies or Roxana loses her prestigious image and position. For the sake of her welfare, to maintain her living by being freed from the troublesome presence of children her "self" comes before anything else. It is quite interesting to note how this position is related to manhood:

¹Daniel, Defoe. *Roxana*. New York:Oxford University Press,1996, p.318.Further references will appear in the text parenthetically.

While a woman was single, she was a Masculine in her politick Capacity; that she had then the full command of what she had, and the full Direction of what she did; that she was a Man in her separated Capacity (p.148)

Indeed, Roxanne's power and wealth depends on men in her life. She does not labour hard herself to gain her wealth as Crusoe does.

Even if Roxanne shares the same individualistic drives as Crusoe, she is far from being the female version of Crusoe. The main reason is that there is a basic difference between Roxanne's individualism and Crusoe's. Crusoe is definitely the active type of person whereas Roxanne is the passive one. Everything that happens in her life, she does not create it or work for it; she merely receives and experiences what life brings her. One should notice that her change of situation is solely the result of the generous treatment of her lovers; therefore, her fortunes are attributed to men. She remains passive while her various lovers are shaping her existence through various ways. She is somewhat spectator of her own life and own story –a theme definitely addressed in *Foe*. It is obvious that this passivity portrayed is linked to the social context of production of *Roxana* where “*women functioned as the main consumers for the family in the eighteenth century...Thus, society came to believe that women were inherently materialistic.*”¹ Contrary to Crusoe, Roxanne feels strong when she has money² and helpless when she is broke.

What is of interest for us, for the sake of this study, is not so much to see the similarities between Crusoe and Roxanne as much as it is to flesh out the differences

¹ Catherine, Imperatore, “*Feminity, Materialism and Class in Eighteenth Century England*” (on the web)

² As the money she collects comes always from men then that strength is attributed to men solely. Of course, this is not the case for Crusoe who –being a man- when he is broke he finds and invents other ways to find control and thus power over the world he lives in.

in portrayal of those heroes as this can lead us to the reason of Coetzee's choice of Roxanne as narrator in *Foe* (and not Crusoe for instance). What can be of even greater help to clarify certain key concepts addressed in *Foe* is to ask the fundamental question of What does a male author of the 18th century have to gain from using a woman as narrator? The opposite situation is largely justified by the fact that a female author of the 18th Century takes the position of power whereas the contrary is hardly justifiable.

One answer to this question would be to gain more credibility for the narrative as Defoe was always so keen to validate the truth of his fictions. Narrating a story as Roxanne's would have less effect and credibility than when she tells it herself. Is it not exactly this point which is addressed in *Foe*? It is addressed from a different –not to say an opposite- perspective: Susan needs Foe to write her story because he is a well established writer but she does not want him to distort it and control it. She makes it clear throughout the novel that her main concern is to make Foe tell the story sticking to “her” version, the true version of the story.

Actually this brings us to the second answer to the question: What does a male author of the 18th century have to gain from using a woman as narrator? A male author of the time has certainly nothing to gain by positioning himself on the marginal side of society except to shape the discourse and identity of this marginalized self. There is a clear advantage to set control over a woman's story and its meaning. Defoe was not ignorant of the power of narratives to move and influence readers and readers' views through themes exposed in those narratives. He was fully conscious that “*the novel [was] a form which allowed its authors to exploit the instability of gender categories*

and which is thus inseparable from its own continual re-examination and redefinition of those categories.”¹ Gayatri Spivak observes how :

The female marginal is the exceptional entrepreneurial woman for whom the marriage contract is an inconvenience when the man is a fool...Defoe's heroine must be a rogue –a social marginal finally centralizing herself through marriage. In this enterprise she uses the money held by men as aristocrats, made by men as merchants...Defoe can not make his Roxana utter her passion for women's freedom except as a ruse for her real desire to own, control, and manage money...²

Though Defoe's Roxana is used in *Foe*, it is for other issues than the issues of money. As Gayatri states, Coetzee “*is involved in a historically implausible but politically provocative revision.*”³ She pinpoints that Coetzee draws attention to Susan's involvement in the construction of the marginal and her attempts to rescue “*mothering from the European patriarchal coding and the native from the colonial account.*”⁴

In the next point concluding this part we will set light on those biographical elements of Defoe's which show that his writings were not the fruits of innocent and neutral inspiration. The individualistic traits of his characters, their tumultuous lives and their obsession with money are mere artistic expressions of their author's views and ideologies.

¹ Madeleine, Kahn, *Narrative Transvestism: Rhetoric and Gender in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel*, p.6. In this interesting study of the struggle of gender voices in the arena of the novel, Madeleine Kahn devotes a complete chapter on the study of Defoe's appropriation of the female voice in his narratives. Though concise and interesting her arguments are not used for the present study for two main reasons. The first one is that gender study in Defoe and *Roxanne* are side issues in the present study which tries mainly to support principal issues of postcoloniality. The second one is related to the fact that Kahn is grounding her arguments on a psychoanalytical approach which –though very interesting- is not part of our approach in this study. For this, what we raise here is the main outcome of appropriating and shaping the marginalized voices.

² Gayatri, Spivak, *Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's Foe reading Defoe's Crusoe/Roxana*, In *Consequences of Theory : Selected Papers of the English Institute*, 1987-88, New Series, n°14, ed.Jonathan Arac & Johnson (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins U.P., 1991, pp 154-180).

³ Idem.

⁴ Idem.

3- DEFOE THE VISIONARY OF THE EMPIRE

What we have tried to do in this part is to foreground those aspects in Defoe's works which are addressed via different channels in *Foe*. Those are –to sum up- a basic tendency in Defoe's characters of individualistic drives expressed through a desire to exploit and control others. The narratives capture the essence of mercantile values and principles and they introduce money as '*the general denominating article in the world*'. In fact, they introduce matters of wide variety linked to the concepts and ideology of their historical context that largely shaped the thoughts and writings of their author. As a matter of fact, Defoe was deeply engaged with his age.

Defoe had a tumultuous life and was remarkable for finding a way out of his troubles just as the heroes of his narratives.

He lived what he referred to metaphorically in various autobiographical fragments as a life of shipwreck and recovery...Defoe took risk, suffered from them, and invariably bounced back for more. In sum, he was one of the most experienced, savvy, and innovative participants in eighteenth-century life, and, whether a merchant or writer, always in the business of selling himself. The Crusoe saga is not merely the tale of an island castaway but as commercial adventurer whose product, like Defoe's, is endurance¹

The novel *Robinson Crusoe* in this way is a mirror of contemporary issues and especially of Defoe's vision of the world.

More than one can think with a detached reading of his narratives, Defoe casts over his writings – namely *Robinson Crusoe* – his perception and expectations from England of the time. Those expectations translate his very engaged vision of the

¹ Micheal Seidel, *Robinson Crusoe : Island Myths and the Novel*, p.4/5.

British Empire. He was highly committed to the development of the empire and spared no effort to contribute to its welfare. He advised the government and even spied for its people. As a journalist and novelist, he promoted his ideas and brought them to life through his sharp essays and driving narratives where the economic welfare of the nation depended on its uncompromised individualistic labour. The need for expansion and the plan for appropriating other territories were among other details in his writings presented through the successful overseas plantations whose welfare depended on the slave trade. Those themes become the logical outcome and promotion for his life activities as he was involved in the African slave trade monopoly in 1695.

His first major prose work *An Essay Upon Projects* is a vision of reformations for England's life. The Orinoco River, the setting of *Robinson Crusoe*, represented at that time the setting of one of Defoe's most cherished dreams, that of colonization on the South American Coast. He started offering the proposal as from 1698 and carried on offering it over and over again in 1711 and 1719, the year of publication of *Robinson Crusoe*. Consequently, replacing the story into its historical and ideological context of creation clarifies and explains the extreme individualistic vein of the book.

As archetype of "the true born English Colonizer", Crusoe has to be driven only by that obsessive will to exploit whatever situation was present to him to take –and make- advantage of it. The survival of a shipwrecked on a desert island with all the details of everyday life on the island becomes clearly an overt appeal to the capacity of the English man through labour to push the frontiers of the English territory. He even

justifies this need with the urge to civilize “those savage cannibals” to bring them to the light of White Anglo Saxon Christian Culture “taking up the white man’s burden”¹.

Can we still think of *Robinson Crusoe* as a children’s adventure tale? Joyce’s description of the work is a full answer to this question:

*The story of the shipwrecked sailor who lived on the desert island reveals, as perhaps no other book throughout the long history of English literature does, the wary and heroic instinct of the rational animal and the prophecy of the empire...The true symbol of the British conquest is Robinson Crusoe...He is the true prototype of the British colonist, as Friday (the trusty savage who arrives on an unlucky day) is the symbol of the subject races...whoever rereads this simple, moving book in the light of the subsequent history can not help but fall under its prophetic spell.*²

Coetzee most apparently is far from being blind to those “prophetic aspects” of *Robinson Crusoe*. Korang makes a sharp statement on Coetzee’s work as being opposed to Defoe’s: “*If Robinson Crusoe is written out of the ambience of an emergent and triumphant Europe, Foe, as its concluding image of shipwreck shows, is more fruitfully read within a context of submergence*” pointing out to the problematic raised in *Foe* as displacing the white man’s burden into the white settler’s burden in South Africa.³

The following part of the present study is devoted to the study of the literary tools that Coetzee uses to flesh out those colonial voices in Defoe’s work that appealed –for

¹ With reference to Kipling’s opening line of his immortal poem, “*The White Man’s Burden*” (1899), and all the Eurocentric ideas that are widely recognized and associated with the mere reference to the title of this poem. In fact, Kipling’s title created a strong suggestive image that was and still is related to imperialistic projects that share the same basic Eurocentric view of the world in which white people bear the responsibility to educate the rest of the world which leads in all cases to rule over it. An interesting digression here would be to observe that in 2006, William Easterly –economist– published *The white Man’s Burden*, an analysis of “*Why the west’s efforts to aid the rest have done so much ill and so little good*”.

² From James Joyce’s conclusion of a lecture on Defoe quoted in Michael Seidel, *Robinson Crusoe : Island Myths and the novel*, p.11.

³ Korang, p.191.

Coetzee- to be put under scrutiny. His main focus seems to be those marginalized voices in Defoe's stories (Friday as the subject race and Susan the marginalized gender). Through intertextuality, Coetzee subverts and dialogises the hegemonic imperialistic discourse of Defoe. Coetzee enhances the effect by the use of postmodernist techniques to support the work of intertextuality in *Foe's* narrative. Thus, the following part is devoted to these two aspects –postmodernist techniques and intertextuality- studied each in a separate chapter.

PART TWO/

ISLANDS OF NARRATION

*“Like stones, words are laborious and unforgiving,
and the fitting of them together, like the fitting of
stones, demands great patience and strength of
purpose and particular skill”*

Edmund Morrison

CHAPTER ONE / INTERTEXTUALITY

*“The secret of good writing is to say an old thing in
a new way or to say a new thing in an old way”*

Richard Harding Davis

• DIALOGISM/ INTERTEXTUALITY

As our study is basically concerned with a work questioning the integrity of another one, Dialogics imposes itself as ‘a reading strategy’¹ for the very spirit of Dialogism is the presence of reciprocity and answerability simply : dialogue. Dialogism by definition is :

*A quality most fully developed in a particular literary form, novelistic discourse, which is equipped formally to relativise and dialogise monologic utterance and...offer a fuller and truer version of the way things are.*²

Bakhtin emphasises the presence of a dialogical dimension, that is a presence of a possible dialogue between two poles, in every discourse “*The dialogic orientation of discourse is a phenomenon that is, of course, a property of any discourse.*”³ Bakhtin recognises a potential inherent in each word –not only utterances or discourses- to reveal the dialogical principle:

*The word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way*⁴

As Todorov explains: “*There is no utterance without relation to other utterances...the term that he [Bakhtin] uses to designate the relation of every utterance to other utterances is dialogism.*”⁵

¹ Lynne, Pearce, *Reading Dialogics*, (London: Edward Arnold 1994), p.16.

² Idem.

³ Bakhtin M.M., *The Dialogic Imagination*, University of Texas Press, 1981, p.279

⁴ Idem

⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin : the Dialogical Principle*, p. 60.

Dialogism as opposed to monologism opens up a space for “*relations between all utterances within verbal communication.*” It is worth emphasising here that monologic utterances, according to Bakhtin, are not devoid of a dialogical capacity. Their opposition to dialogical utterances lies in the fact that they allow only an internal dialogue characterized by the fact that “*there is no second voice alongside that of the author; hence, no problem of the combining of voices*”¹. If we have to think of a literary term equivalent to Bakhtin’s technical terming of “monologic” discourse that would be “hegemonic” discourse.

As Tzvetan Todorov notes, the term Dialogism is so loaded with a variety of meanings that the term intertextuality² has been more widely used to refer to those voices present in a given work –thus text- coming from another work –or text-. Therefore, it is in this sense that the word intertextuality is used, for the study at stake. Dialogism will be left for the more specific instances of “these relations [between discourse of the other and the discourse of the I], the relations between the exchanges of a dialogue.”³

The definition of Bakhtin’s dialogism being set, we would like to pinpoint its use as a “reading strategy” in our work. Bakhtin’s dialogical principle –as explained above- can be exploited at any level of the discourse. Therefore, for the sake of our study, we will be using different “constituents” of the author’s discourse to show their “relation” to Defoe’s discourse.⁴ Pearce explains this trait in a dialogical reading:

¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin : the Dialogical Principle*, p.63.

² A term introduced by Julia Kristeva in her work

³ Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin : the Dialogical Principle*, p. 60.

⁴ Hence, our use of the title as a starting point of comparison in the discussion presented in this part.

*A dialogic approach is possible toward any signifying of an utterance, even toward an individual word, if that word is perceived not as the impersonal word of language but as a sign of someone else's semantic position, as the representative of another person's utterance; that is if we hear in it someone else's voice*¹

In this way, we will be trying to find the “textual voices” that refer us back to the pre-text and how they shape the creative process of re/presentation.

In this process, our concern of “reading” *Foe*'s discourse, we will be dealing mainly with the different ways of representation reshaping the previously created images in the pre-text. Brunel and Chevrel explain that « *L'image est, jusqu'à un certain point, langage (langage sur l'autre) ; à ce titre, elle renvoie évidemment à une réalité qu'elle désigne et qu'elle signifie.* »² It is precisely our target to decipher the meaning(s) that the image bears in the construction of the narrative. Brunel and Chevrel explain how it is the comparatist's task to :

*Dénombrer, démontrer et expliquer ces types de discours, montrer et démontrer comment l'image, prise globalement est un élément d'un langage symbolique, lequel est à étudier comme un système de sens*³

In this way, we will chart our way in this chapter following step by step the intertextual elements that shape and constitute re/presentations that reinforce the interaction of voices within the text. In this way, we will be able by the end of this chapter to make a statement on the type and role of the dialogism initiated by /in *Foe*.

¹ Lynne, Pearce, *Reading Dialogics*, (London: Edward Arnold 1994), p.50.

² Pierre Brunel, Yves Chevrel, *Précis de littérature comparée*, (Paris : PUF, 1989), p.136/7.

³ *Ibid.*, p.139.

1- A CASE OF OPEN POLEMICS

Before being able to study in depth the intertextual points in a piece of work, the comparatist needs first to establish the comparatist fact. This is done simply by underlining the elements in a text that refer to an existing pre-text. As the degree of presence of the pre-text can vary from one text to another, there are different cases of intertextuality. Therefore, the presence of a pre-text(s) can be overt or implied in a given literary work. So at one end, there is the case of open polemics (overt presence of the pre-text) and at the other end, there is the case of hidden polemics (implied).

Foe is an obvious case of open polemics for the elements of the pre-texts are overtly presented in the novel. The critic does not need to launch into complex and never-ending demonstrations about its existence. First, the last section of the novel contains the most explicit reference to the pre-text, the name of the author: Daniel Defoe. Then, in the novel many elements are drawn from the characters and plots of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* at a first level, and *Roxanne* at a secondary level. Main characters of these narratives are kept in the novel, namely Friday, Susan and Cruso as well as minor characters (such as Amy and Susan's daughter).

When reading *Foe*, a sense of familiarity with Defoe's characters is felt. Still the spirit of the book is completely different from Defoe's books. Besides, no book of Defoe's united characters of his different fictions. Coetzee meant *Foe* as a revision and a re-vision of Daniel Defoe's narratives and that is probably why he did not want to conceal this fact and made it a case of open polemics. In the following study of the intertextual elements in *Foe* we are grounding the discussion by setting *Robinson Crusoe* as the primary intertextual text on which the major comparative arguments are

made. *Roxana* represents the secondary source for the comparative arguments hereafter.

2- LITERARY DEVICES AT WORK

To think this project over and mediate the island tale, Coetzee reintroduces Miranda in the picture. The responsibility lies with Miranda for reviewing, rethinking and trying to rewrite this story. To reintroduce Miranda means to bring the balance the story lost with her absence. At least, this is what Coetzee seems to do. From the outset of *Foe*, Crusoe is playing the role of Prospero while Susan and Friday are the Miranda and Caliban ruled over by Crusoe. “*The island was Crusoe’s. Yet by what right? By the law of Islands?*”¹: It is precisely to make statements like this one that Susan is here. She is here to question the truth of Crusoe and his story. She will be the words unuttered in *Robinson Crusoe* and the voice unheard and unspoken of.

In fact, Susan is not Coetzee’s only means in revisiting the island story. He uses a certain number of literary devices which work together to serve a main purpose: finding and recovering the truth. These elements – that I am exploring in what follows – are: the title, characterization, point of view and the imagery. Each of these introduces a novelty which when juxtaposed with its homologues in the pre-text creates a mirror effect.

One should understand the mirror effect here as that which we can have in fairs: the “distorting mirror” shows a new aspect, a new shape of the person. The same

¹ J.M. Coetzee. *Foe*. London: Penguin Books 1988, p.51. Subsequent references will appear parenthetically in the text.

person can experience – discover – other new possible forms never thought of before. We will come back later to the effect of Coetzee’s new version of the tale. For the time being, I will look closer into the aspects mentioned above.

A- THE TITLE

Before even opening the book, Coetzee gives the reader hints of his work on the cover page of the novel through the title: *Foe*. The first words that could be associated are: enemy, antagonist and competitor. The reader expects, then the presence of tensions within the story or possible confrontations. The idea is set off by the fact that the word is used in its single form which suggests a sole and serious enemy. The single form can even bring about the idea of an old, familiar antagonist. This being said, when we become familiar with the content of the book we understand that this is not a word but a proper noun, the name of one of the characters.

Taking into consideration the background of the story and the intertextuality at stake, we obviously associate this fictitious author named Foe with that real one: Defoe. Therefore, regarding the project of the book, Coetzee wanted to put forward one of the main ideas at stake: Defoe is not to be dealt with in positive terms. Keeping in mind what the meaning of Foe suggests, there is the idea of not trusting him or not trusting his words, his writings. Furthermore, there is another “trick” or “clue” in this title. In fact, Foe is the original name of Defoe, a name that he wanted to erase and hide. He added “De” to make it look or sound more dignified, above the common way.

Gayatri Spivak explains that “*in restoring this proper name, Coetzee makes it a common name.*”¹ Korang agrees with this point as he states:

*Defoe’s original name is itself restored in another truncation as Foe. This scaling down is of ironic import in a novel that is itself a foreshortening of the self-aggrandizing narratives-like the “De” that Defoe affixes onto his name in order to invent a fancy pedigree for himself- that legitimate the imperial and colonial adventures.*²

So, Defoe suggesting a higher rank, Foe brings about inevitably connotations of a lower position for Daniel, at least, in the book. We understand the story to be engaged in providing material to bring forth a new aspect of Daniel Defoe, something new and which is expected to be rather negative. Simply, we have the impression that he is going to be unmasked and revealed to the public by his real face – name.

Actually, it seems that Defoe is not the only author whose name has been subverted in Coetzee’s novel. Susan discovers the initials “M.J.” which inevitably will make the reader think of Coetzee’s own initials. With regard to this point, Korang makes a very interesting remark as to the passage where the initials are mentioned:

*Who indeed is M.J.? In Coetzee’s eccentric text, it seems plausible to see M.J. as an inversion of Coetzee’s initials (J.M.)...Susan, donning the habiliments from M.J.’s trunk can be seen as J.M.’s alter ego, forced by circumstances to bastardize and devalue the house of the cultural icon Daniel Foe by selling its resources in “quarters where thieves sell, and to receive the prices thieves receive” (93) a reflexive account on the circumstances of the white writer and white writing under Apartheid? Plausible.*³

¹ Gayatri, Spivak, *Theory in the Margin: Coetzee’s Foe*, reading Defoe’s *Crusoe/Roxana*, In *Consequences of Theory : Selected Papers of the English Institute*, 1987-88, New Series, n°14, ed.Jonathan Arac & Johnson (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins U.P., 1991, pp 154-180).

² Korang, p.196.

³ Idem.

The emphasis on real names in the book will be confirmed by the use of the original names of the characters -as we shall see- which is, in fact, just a start in the process of recovering the truth about the story. The title, as a result, has to be considered as the first step (clue) in the quest for truth. The second step would be that narrator, Susan. In what follows, we will have a look at the way Coetzee presents the characters of the new island tale.

B- CHARACTERIZATION

As far as characterization is concerned, one remark is called for before another. Crusoe is no longer the hero of the story and in *Foe* one would hesitate before saying who the hero is. At any rate, we are quite sure that Crusoe is no longer the linchpin of the story. The focus is on Friday and Susan. Therefore, the reader's interest is aroused by two characters; one was only a companion of the hero, and the other was not at all part of the story. As a matter of fact, *Foe* introduces new faces on the stage, among which one is rather emblematic: Foe. What is more, we wonder how a book bears the name of that who is not the hero.

In fact, the broad outline of characterization in *Foe* can be summed up in two main aspects. The first one is that the story introduces new characters and the second being that it reshapes some existing characters in the pre-text. We will see that both aspects work together for the same purpose namely to reveal weaknesses in presentation (characterization) in the pre-text. The major reshaped characters from the pre-text are Crusoe and Friday. The major new characters introduced into the island story are Susan and Foe.

a- Friday

The very first character we meet in *Foe* is Friday. We meet him on the first page, the very first lines. Thus, we see him before Crusoe which is revealing of the fact that he has more importance in the story. At least, we give him more attention than we do Crusoe.

One would even notice that we almost give him all our attention and the reader's interest is mainly aroused by the story of Friday. The main reason for focusing on Friday is the fact that his tongue has been cut off. Consequently, all eyes are upon his aspect from the outset till the – so called – end of the story. The spotlight is on Friday's silence. What we keep in mind concerning Friday is mere silence and the many associations with the figure of a child. These references range from indirect slight references, made mainly at the beginning of the narrative, to clear statements on that like: "*Friday is a slave and a child, it is our duty to care for him, in all things, and not abandon him to a solitude worse than death*" (39). As a whole, we are left with the idea that Friday is a silent child.

Friday is the main focus of the story still, we do not know much about him. He is here, without really being here. He is a shadow in / of the story. In fact, he is the shadow of a former shadow: Friday of the original version in *Robinson Crusoe*. Thus, apparently, Coetzee wanted to foreground the way Friday had been presented in *Robinson Crusoe*: a character without real depth and contours. If Friday is a child in *Foe* it is because Defoe treated him as such. Indeed, when we look back into the character in *Robinson Crusoe*, we find a lovely companion brought only to cheer Robinson up in his solitude just as a child would bring joy in a home. This aspect is

even clearer with the role that Crusoe assigns himself as the educator of Friday. He initiates Friday to the rudiment of White Anglo Saxon Christian Civilization. We definitely associate his behaviour with Friday to that of a father with his child. So, he plays the role of the father figure in the story.

Coming back to *Foe*, we already said that Friday is associated with two main notions: silence and childhood. It is worth noting too that these two aspects are constantly confronted – in one way or another – to Crusoe. One of the indirect and subtle examples of stating Friday's child figure as against Crusoe's man's figure is their physical description. For Crusoe, we have the image of a man of about sixty, "heavily bearded" (8) with clothes and a knife on him. While with Friday, we have no clue about his age but we see him "naked save for a pair of rough drawers" (6) and no trace of beard.

The two descriptions when compared suggest that Friday is rather young which is not the case of Crusoe. Another way of implicating Crusoe in Friday's state is that each time Susan tries to explain Friday's silence, she comes back to Crusoe as the one that might be at the origin of his muteness. Friday's relationship with Crusoe in Defoe's narrative was already compared to that of a father to a child "*his very affections were tied to me, like those of a child to a father*"¹ However, Coetzee's depiction of this aspect of the relationship is far from bearing the same perspective as Defoe's.²

By pinpointing Crusoe's father figure, Coetzee represents that famous "white man's burden" but from a perspective different from that of a Eurocentric Defoe or

¹ Daniel, Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 205.

² That of submission and faithfulness as was foregrounded in the first part.

Kipling. As a father is responsible for the welfare of his children so is Cruso. Susan states this idea overtly : “*Friday is a slave and a child, it is our duty to care for him in all things, and not abandon him to a solitude worse than death*” (39). Friday is “*father-born*” (91). Cruso is held responsible for the state of Friday, or rather “declared” responsible for and may be even guilty of Friday’s muteness.

Korang describes Coetzee’s use of Friday as “*an inscription of the African otherness that functions in Coetzee’s novel as the representational fracture that estranges the discourse of a Eurocentric settler nationalism.*”¹ In fact, Korang builds upon Tiffin’s argument that Coetzee is continually rehearsing Friday’s silence because he means it to be “*the interpretative problem which fractures all the potential narratives Barton and Foe attempt to construct.*”² Derek Attridge sustains this view as he describes:

*In Foe, the tongueless Friday represents the unassimilable other whose silent presence overshadows the authority of the two author-figures, Susan Barton and Foe himself.*³

Furthermore, we would agree with Korang’s remark that the book leaves the critic with the burden of the black and we would add that this burden is inevitable in a novel like *Foe* as it aims precisely to show the outcome of a “burden of the white”, namely Defoe.

¹ Korang, p.187.

² Helen Tiffin, “Post-colonial literatures and Counter-discourse”, p30-31, quoted in Korang, p.184.

³ In Derek Attridge & Rosemary Jolly: *Writing South Africa. Literature, Apartheid and Democracy, 1970-1995* (Cambridge UP, 1998).

However, Korang positions himself against Coetzee's picturing of Friday which he finds "a spectacular disfigurement". Again, Attridge's description would sustain this point:

Although he is there to reveal the contingency and precariousness of the voices of those who can speak, Friday is not, indeed...an interlocutor, for while he produces meaning by other symbolic gestures (music, dance, the scattering of petals), he remains silent.¹

We can also find reinforcement of this argument with Fanon's analysis that speech represents existence for and recognition from the other. He affirms that "*il y a dans la possession du langage une extraordinaire puissance.*"² From this perspective, the critic of *Foe* can find arguments that involve a harm done to the character of Friday. However, we would sustain that the critic of *Foe* should first and foremost seek the intended use of Coetzee's representation.

The over-emphasized image of a silent and mutilated Friday functions as a denouncing image of Defoe's "mutilation" of the character of Friday in *Robinson Crusoe*. Besides, as Teresa Dovey underlines:

It is important to recognise that Friday's speechlessness does not mean that the colonised subject does not have a voice of his/her own. It suggests, rather, that the colonised subject has no discursive authority within the field of western discourses.³

Thus, Coetzee's representation of Friday here can be interpreted as a denunciation and foregrounding of a violence committed by Defoe which by extension hangs over the

¹ In Derek Attridge & Rosemary Jolly: *Writing South Africa. Literature, Apartheid and Democracy, 1970-1995* (Cambridge UP, 1998).

² Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire Masques Blancs*. Alger: éd. Enag, 1999, p.12.

³ Teresa Dovey, "J.M. Coetzee : Writing in the Middle Voice", p.26.

imperialistic, Eurocentric monological discourse. Besides, we can also find in Fanon's analysis other arguments to reinforce this side of interpretation. He explains how language is first and foremost a cultural act: "*Parler...c'est surtout assumer une culture, supporter le poids d'une civilisation.*"¹ He explains how every colonized person would situate herself in relation to the language of the colonizing nation:

*Le colonisé se sera d'autant plus échappé de sa brousse qu'il aura fait siennes les valeurs culturelles de la métropole. Il sera d'autant plus blanc qu'il aura rejeté sa noirceur, sa brousse.*²

From this perspective, Friday's representation becomes a sign of Friday's resistance to « colonization », a sign that he communicates with his own code of language not with the one of the colonizer.

Tiffin explains how Coetzee "*situates himself directly in relation to Friday and Friday's potential for speech*"³ allowing Friday's silence to speak metaphorically and "wordlessly."⁴ As Coetzee confirms in the last part of his novel, *Foe* is a place "*where bodies are their own signs*" (157). With reference to Nietzsche's description of the struggle of each body to master the space around, we could see in Coetzee's sentence here an indirect reference to Nietzsche's view, hence reinforcing Friday's representation as meant to empower him rather than reduce him.⁵

¹ Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire Masques Blancs*. Alger: éd.Enag,199,p.12.

² Idem.

³ Helen Tiffin, "Post-colonial literatures and Counter-discourse"

⁴ To take Kossew expression on this point.

⁵ *I have found strength where one does not look for it: in simple, mild and pleasant [people], without the least desire to rule...The powerful n[atures] dominate, it is a necessity, they need not lift one finger. Even if, during their lifetime, they bury themselves in a garden house!*⁵-Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachlass*, Fall 1880 6 [206]

The way Coetzee pictures Cruso tallies with this situation as he puts forth Crusoe's defects in the original *Robinson Crusoe* .

b- Cruso

The first detail that calls our attention about Cruso is his name. He is no more Crusoe but Cruso without the final "e". Another time, Coetzee shows his will to indicate the truth. Timothy Cruso was Defoe's mate in the Dissenting school, a name that apparently informed his choice of the name of his hero. The first time we meet Cruso, he is "*at the gate of the encampment*" (8) in the dark, "*heavily bearded*" (8) symbolically standing at the crossroads. The first contours of his character which are put forth are mainly his abusive authority and the impossibility to argue with him. As a matter of fact, the very first thing we grasp from Cruso is that "*he gestured to the negro*" (8) to bring the water. There is no need to search for more clues on his authoritarian temper for he soon states it by himself: "*While you live under my roof you will do as I instruct!*"(20).

He is narrow-minded and stubborn. He sticks to his habits and daily routine till his last breath. It is probably because of that that he did not cling to life as he left the island on the captain's boat. We are confronted with an embittered Cruso, enclosed on his island and in his ideas. He is even cold and indifferent to others, not willing to communicate. This is made perceptible from the first contact Susan had with Cruso:

I fell to crying. I sat on the bare earth... and sobbed like a child, while the stranger (who was of course the Cruso I told you of) gazed at me more as if I were a fish cast up by the waves than an unfortunate fellow-creature (09)

These aspects relate back to an image of a conservative person with whom regeneration and springtime are practically impossible. *“The simple truth was Crusoe would brook no change on his island”* (27). The escape from his hold is made possible only through his death. It is when the character dies that the passage to life – in England – takes place. Thus his fever and weakness announce “the decline of his reign”. Therefore, what Coetzee points to essentially is the fact that in *Robinson Crusoe*, Robinson was the ruler, nothing less: *“He is the true king of his island”* (37).

He indirectly denounces the fact that Crusoe possessed the means of power and used them to control the other inhabitants who became his subjects. The sequence of the sandals is a good illustration of this point: Susan had been without shoes since her arrival on the island and she had been ever since clinging to Crusoe’s promise that he would make her a pair. As he took time to give her shoes, she was unable to walk freely on the island – a fact that we understand pleased Crusoe then:

The next day after our conversation, when Crusoe returned from his terraces, I was walking about in sandals. But if I expected thanks for the labour I had saved him, I received none.” “A little patience and you would have had better shoes than that, he said. This was very true, for the sandals were clumsily made. Yet I could not let his words pass.” Patience has turned me into a prisoner (24/25)

The implications of such an episode obviously have clear connotations on the relation colonizer / colonized. The Crusoe that we see here is definitely a caricature of Prospero. He stands for the old, narrow-minded, conservative people living on their own islands, believing they are kings of the world whereas they ignore, or rather insist on ignoring the vast world around them.

c- Foe

Among the new figures introduced in Coetzee's novel is Foe. In fact, Cruso fades away only to be replaced by Foe. From the way Foe is presented we feel that he is an extension, a reminder - and remainder of Cruso. Just as with Cruso, it is hopeless to try to have a discussion with him: "*Finding it as thankless to argue with Foe as it had been with Cruso, I held my tongue, and soon he fell asleep*"(144). He has the same way of thinking: "*You speak as Cruso used to speak*"(149). Even in the most intimate moments, Susan can not help associating Foe with Cruso for they behaved the same way:

Then he was upon me, and I might have thought myself in Cruso's arms again; for they were men of the same time of life, and heavy in the lower body, though neither was stout; and their way with a woman too was much the same (139).

And as we feel him fainting by the end of the narrative, we remember Cruso's last moments on the island.

One specific aspect of Foe is that he is sought after for many reasons. In one way or another, he has to be answerable to other people. First, he has debts to pay – that is why he was hiding. Then, he has explanations (another form of debts) to give to Susan who entrusted him with the task of writing the island story. Susan, in fact, did that for she knew Foe was an established writer. In addition to what has been stated earlier on the link between the names of Foe and Defoe, we have in the narrative¹ a direct statement confirming that Foe is a fictitious character symbolizing Defoe. That is to say that if Coetzee made Foe indebted it is to foreground this aspect in Defoe.

¹ By the last section of the book, on page 155, we are brought to see Foe's house through a dream like scene in which we see the name of Daniel Defoe written on a plaque bolted on the wall.

Without dwelling on the details, from certain aspects in the narrative – we will come back to this later – we understand that Coetzee wanted to reveal Defoe’s debts towards his own narratives, towards his characters. Just like Foe, he has explanations to give them for having erased an aspect in them just to foreground and draw the attention on another. That is why, they expect him – Foe – to return to them the substance they have lost (51). As Simone Francescato observes, “*the character of Mr Foe is denied his role of ultimate author and is paired with would-be writer Susan Barton, who becomes his female alter (counter)-ego and the narrator of the story.*”¹ She further argues that the use of a female author allows a metaphorical use, that of making the female voice the “*locus for marking the sign of ambiguity and indecipherability of the unauthorized voices of history.*”

d- Susan

All these ideas, aspects, and every detail in *Foe* are realized through Susan’s speech. However, before discussing her role in the narrative, we will underline how she does not escape from Coetzee’s concern with names. Her character is presented from the beginning and throughout the novel as being Susan. But, through elements in the plot we associate her with Roxana. The most important element is the young lady looking for her mother -looking for her- and the association of the presence of Amy. In addition, her easy involvement into intimate moments with Cruso then with Foe is an allusion to Roxana’s shameful life. The final clue to her being the replica of Roxana is her name.

¹ Simone, Francescato, *Lost Voices of the Trans-Atlantic*. On the web.

In Defoe's *Roxana* the original name of the heroine is stated once between brackets and in the middle of such an important episode that the reader would barely notice it or remember it: "*Amy promis'd to return her Visit, and did so; and in a word, Amy and SUSAN, (for she was **my own name**) began an intimate Acquaintance together.*"¹ Thus, Susan and the other characters bear "*true names, ... veritable names*" (76).

In fact, Susan is Coetzee's key-tool to achieve many goals at the same time. Susan is both character and narrator in *Foe*. This allows an extremely sound implementation – at least, I consider it as such! - to use her role to reach all the important points that Coetzee wanted to unveil. By being a re-adapted character introduced into the narrative of another novel this allows permeability in voice and status, especially since she is the narrator in *Foe*.

On Susan's physical appearance, we know little. We have this short description at the opening paragraph of the story: "*My hands were blistered, my back was burned, my body acted my long hair floating about me, like a flower of the sea, like an anemone....*"(5). Then we know later that she is "a tall woman with black hair dark eyes(86). As for her temper, we get to deduce it through her speech. All along the story: she is the one narrating the facts. Leaning on her discourse, I came to notice that we distinguish different voices within her speech. She is before anything else Susan, the woman. She is also the oppressed. At last, she is speaking on behalf of the author Coetzee. Paradoxically, I even find (hear) sometimes the voice of the oppressor, the colonizer, to be more precise, it is rather the conscience of the oppressor.

¹ Daniel Defoe, *Roxana*, p.205.

- **Voice of the Woman**

Susan's first intention in writing the island story is to make of it the story of the female castaway (67). Her discourse is loaded with a feminist drive. As early as page fifteen, she does not miss the opportunity to raise the oddity of Cruso's remark and by such affirms her position as a liberalist:

Cruso warned me not to venture from his castle; for the apes, he said, would not be as wary of woman as they were, of him and Friday. I wondered at this: was a woman, to an ape, a different species from man? (15).

Through her role in the novel, she already embodies the active and enterprising woman. In the narrative, she holds the responsibility of telling the island story. She is a source of healing and relief (as with Cruso). She uses objectivity and common sense to find the truth about Friday. She is determined and courageous for all that she had lived and still does to achieve her goal. Her position of an established woman, she comes to term with it and does not hesitate to confront it to the conformist ideas of Foe and Cruso. She reproaches them their denigration of the role of the woman in their life: “*Better had there been only Cruso and Friday, you will murmur to yourself. ‘Better without the woman’*” (71/72).

As Susan is a pragmatic person, she will not stop at this blame, she will go further and try to explain the position of Foe and Cruso. This rejection of the woman is just a voicing of their deep fear of the woman and the impact that she could have on them. A fear which is nothing but the irrational apprehension and the refusal of being dominated by the woman, by the other: “*Did Cruso in his way and do you in your way believe I came to claim dominion over you, and is that why you were wary of me?*”

(86). A fear which proves to be so deep that it restrains a natural desire that ought to be felt:

Why did you not desire me.....surely desires kept banked for many years must have flamed up within you. Why did I not catch you stealing glances from behind a rock while I battled? Do tall women who rise up out of the sea dismay you? (86)

In fact, Susan is here to point to matters like this one. She seems to be “*the Exiled queen coming to reclaim the island man has stolen from her*” (86).

Sue Kossew takes up this idea and observes that :

Susan’s attempt to be both “goddess and begetter” (126), not just a Muse or Mother but also “father” to her story, extends to her eventual sexual encounter with Foe with Susan reversing the traditional position of subjection by “straddling the poet” to “beget” a story.¹

Still, Kossew does not fail to underline the fact that despite Susan’s efforts to subvert and undermine male authority, Foe “*retains his position as master*” which explains the position of marginality that confers to Susan’s discourse the “voice of the colonized” too. Kossew relates the notion of women’s subjection directly to patriarchal authority of male writers. Thus, she confirms the reason for “*Coetzee’s choosing to write back to Defoe [as] Defoe’s tendency to exploit women’s stories, reinforcing his reputation as father of the English realist novel.*”

- **Voice of the Colonized**

Coming back to the reproach Susan made on the denigration of the role of the woman, one should note that she did not address it to Friday. Rather, she makes the reproach for both Foe and Crusoe then she rapidly corrects herself to recall that Friday himself is living a situation similar to her own, if not worse. She does not fail to

¹ Sue Kossew, p.172. Subsequent quotes from Kossew’s essay on this page are taken from the same page (172).

underline the fact that even if Friday is afraid of her, it is not because she is a woman but because she is that Other imposing her presence and power over him (thus for her race): “*Perhaps I am unjust, perhaps that is a question for Crusoe alone for what have you ever stolen in your life, you who are yourself stolen?*” (86)

Hence, because there is a sort of kinship, many times we hear in Susan’s discourse a voice speaking for the oppressed in general and not especially for the woman. This voice manages to make itself heard basically when she questions the authority of Crusoe. “*The island was Crusoe’s yet by what right?*” (51). She continuously draws attention to her status of prisoner “*I am on your island, Mr Crusoe, not by choice but by ill luck.... I am a castaway, not a prisoner*” (20)

- **Voice of the Colonizer**

However, due to her identity, Susan belongs to the realm of the dominating race (associated with Crusoe). Then, we can sometimes distinguish in her discourse realizations, states of mind where she admits, regrets or explains the behaviour which became innate. Thus, we can hear statements that betray her position of a colonizer: “*I do not love him but he is mine*” (111). Kossew confirms this reading as she finds in this sentence an echo to Susan’s Miranda-like role which betrays her sense of ownership. Kossew sustains this argument by underlining Susan’s uncertainty about the means of making Friday recover his speech “*Who will do it? ... who will dive into the wreck?*” (142). It is worth observing that Friday is represented following her and not another character in the story. Her ambivalent position of a white trying to give the other his due position finds a clear expression and description in her following statement:

I tell myself to talk to Friday to educate him out of darkness and silence. But is that the truth? There are times when...I use words only as the shortest way to subject him to my will...I understand ... why a man will choose to be a slave owner. (60/1)

This ambivalence of a white speaking for the marginalized is certainly not to be under-evaluated as Coetzee himself is writing / speaking from the same position. Kossew would confirm our point as she states:

...it is easy to see why feminist readings have been unable to fully account for the ambivalence inscribed within the text in the form of Susan's narration, as she is caught between her colonised and colonising selves¹

- **Voice of Coetzee**

Beyond the voices speaking through Susan, there is that backstage voice which also uses Susan's lips as a way out. It is a voice which raises a certain number of issues each associated with the will to find the truth. The tone of this voice recalls that of "impassioned voice that in its concern for justice rips through the labyrinths of words and expresses its moral conviction."² Obviously, that is Coetzee's voice! In Korang's words:

Between the shade of Cruso and the shadowing of the tongue of Friday, the missing tongue that unrelentingly haunts and fractures Susan Barton's project to possess herself in a different if transcendent temporality, we could posit a Coetzee who is writing the contemporary moment of the settler nation from its margin"³

In that way, Coetzee uses the bends in the course of speech to point out to his views concerning themes like silence, truth and authorship. We would agree with David

¹ Kossew, p.174.

² Michael Chapman, *Southern African Literatures*, p.389.

³ Korang, p.188.

Attwell's observation that the female narrator "*serves to dramatise Coetzee's own self-positioning with respect to the versions of authority, both social and discursive, that compete around him.*"¹

This point brings us face to face with one of the basic features of intertextuality and the dialogical discourse which is heteroglossia:

*Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (whatever the forms of its incorporation)...serv[es] to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intentions of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such a discourse, there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions.*²

It is clear enough how Bakhtin's description finds its fullest application in the context of Coetzee's use of Susan as a voice mediator.

The words and sentences that he makes Susan say are to be related to different contexts to grasp their whole meaning. Teresa Dovey confirms the dialogism engaged in *Foe* :

*Despite the predominance of autodiegetic narrators, they are not monologic, but are dialogic in a profound sense, engaging in a discursive confrontation with the discourses they inhabit.*³

These contexts range from the immediate register of the story (that is, to be related to the events in *Foe*) to the pre-text and through the socio-political context of South Africa and the even broader context of Colonizer/Colonized. Thus it is by placing the

¹ From David Attwell's Afterword in Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson (E.D.), *Critical Perspectives on J.M. Coetzee*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996) p.215. quoted in Kossew, p.166.

² Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.324.

³ Dovey, p.27

novel in its historical and intertextual context that Susan's discourse takes on its full meaning- a point which we will develop in part three of this study.

C- IMAGERY

Coetzee seems to want to use all the elements that constitute the narrative to put forth his ideas. As we have seen, even the title is loaded with meaning, directing the reader towards the multifacets of the book. In addition to the previous elements visited, language and setting are combined together to bring forth another layer of reading and interpretation. As Francescato observes:

Coetzee also re-invents the setting of Defoe's novel by focusing mainly on Susan's and Friday's journey to England and their stay there. Their adventures become symmetrical to Crusoe's and Friday's on the island.¹

Again, through the working of a web of associations and suggestions certain images are set up in the mind of the reader in relation to the setting or to certain scenes of the story.

a- Captivity on the Island

The major image used by Coetzee in his depiction is that of prison and captivity. Almost all the elements of the story are loaded with meanings of captivity and suggest prison as an allegory of the story. The setting of the story is limited to two main places where events take place: the island and Foe's house. For both, we find many allusions that these are prisons.

¹ Simone, Francescato, *Lost Voices of the Trans-Atlantic*. On the web.

At the beginning, the characters Friday, Cruso and Susan were all captives, castaways of /on the island. But through the way Coetzee presents the events on the island we are encouraged to think that Susan and Friday are prisoners of Cruso rather than of the island. Was it not “Cruso’s Island?”. The very fact that Susan keeps questioning his authority over the island is a clue that it is more Cruso’s authority which is oppressive than their castaway situation. It is a fact that Susan complains more of Cruso’s abusive authority and repressive character than she does of her situation. The clue -again- is that they are free when they leave the island but also- and mainly- because Cruso dies.

However, the real captive of the island is neither Friday nor Susan, it is Cruso. That is why he can not live outside it. He is linked, tied to this island because he can exercise his authority as he wishes, he is master of the place. But in fact, because this island offers him what no other place can ever do, that is to say “*unquestioned authority*” (25), he finds himself dependent and slave of his own authority. A dependency and imprisonment of a special case for escape from it means death. This brings us back to Nietzsche’s conception of the need to rule over all space that ends in enslaving the person rather than making it master: “*in the end, they still become the slaves of their followers, their fame etc.*”¹ That might be the reason why his death does not create a big effect of surprise on the reader. We had already seen him getting weaker just with the presence of another person questioning his acts and casting doubt on his power.

We also understand that Cruso is imprisoned because he refused to communicate, to enter into dialogue with others: Friday and Susan. The latter seems

¹ Nietzsche, *Nachlass*, Fall 1880.

to be the mediator that came precisely to restore the natural order of things. There is a clue of this point that Coetzee chose to show by means of imaging. Each time Crusoe felt faint and got fever, it coincided with a tempest outside the house. The fury of nature is allegorical of the fury taking place inside him because of the realization of his isolation. Moreover, the tempest calms down as soon as Susan lies next to Crusoe and the fever, in the same way, diminishes. This is an image heavily loaded with the meaning that nature should follow its course to bring harmony and balance.

Coetzee uses other elements from nature as symbols relating to the dichotomy captivity /escape. The wind stands for change and rebirth, and another interesting image used by Coetzee is the rocking of the island as a sign of coming change as Susan “invaded” Crusoe’s territory to question his authority. Thus, just after the episode of the sandals¹, Susan describes how she feels “*the earth to sway beneath [her]*” (25) and how she takes this as a “sign”. For the reader there is another sign a few lines after this statement just after Susan’s discourse on the rocking of the island and its bearing of its freight to the future. She directly makes the analogy that Britain is an island! A further interesting remark is her statement: “*The earth under our feet is firm in Britain, as it never was on Crusoe’s island*” (26). What one can read from such a sequence is obviously an analogy to forecast on Britain.

A multitude of readings is possible in this context. I will make here one which seems to me very probable –especially in connection to the aim of the present study– with reference to Defoe. As stated earlier –in Chapter one – *Robinson Crusoe* was a

¹ Susan needed sandals to walk comfortably on the island and was waiting for Crusoe who had the means to do it. Still, as she states, “*patience has turned me into a prisoner*” (25). So, she makes sandals herself and faces Crusoe with that. Of course, this is welcomed by Crusoe’s bitter anger for as Susan says : “*After years of unquestioned and solitary mastery, he sees his realm invaded and has tasks set upon him by a woman*” (25).

great dream for Defoe that he could not realize during his life. The project of colonizing the Orinoco River was just like a sand castle that he precisely built on a sandy island whereas Britain's mighty place as an empire is as solid as its ground. However, this is only a digression which was the outcome of our discussion of the major theme of captivity in *Foe* to which we shall return.

b- Captivity Outside

Outside the island, as a logical outcome, the reader expects Friday and Susan to live free but this is the case neither for them nor for the other characters who are all entrapped in one way or another. Friday remains captive of his silence:

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 can not be born.(122).

Susan waits to be freed from the burden of the story and of Friday: "*Here I wait ...for the book to be written that will set me free of Crusoe and Friday*"(66). She is herself prisoner of her past. Leaving a child behind her, she can never know real rest. She leans a lot on Foe to write their story for her and, at least, to save her from this burden .Foe proves to be more captive than anyone else. He is indebted to bailiffs and to Susan. More significantly, he is indebted to his characters. He has the duty to release them and give them back "the substance they lack". Here comes Coetzee's masterful use of Foe's house as a gathering place or rather a prison for the characters. We are made to understand that the house is an allegory of Foe's – Defoe's- work where his characters endlessly wander with no rest.

c- The Castaways of the Past

When we hear about Foe (in part II) we are already informed that he is indebted and even chased by the bailiffs. We already associate Foe with Defoe for the

similarity of profession and characters. The simple fact that Susan expects him to write their story holds a symbolical meaning of what *Foe* is about. Is it not an attempt to rewrite the island story? Through many bends of speech, Coetzee conveys this idea, this image that these persons that we see living in Foe's house are nothing but the characters of his own previous stories.

First of all, we have the impression that Susan is familiar, close to Foe, without knowing him. An unknown person (for Foe) who expects an author to write her story would not behave as if he were obliged to do so, and even more, to take charge of her. From the way she speaks about that, it seems normal that Foe should take care of them (her and Friday) as if they were under his care. While Foe runs away from his house, Susan has no difficulty in finding her way to it and even to use a false identity, she even has less difficulty to stay there. Not only we do not feel her disoriented nor bothered by such a situation, but we watch her moving and walking in this house with ease as if she had always lived there:

I feel as we feel towards the house we were born in. All the nooks and crannies, all the old hidden corners of the garden, have an air of familiarity, as if in a forgotten childhood I here played games of hide and seek (66)

Apart from her and Friday, there is that young girl pretending to be her daughter – a nod to *Roxanne*- the boy and the woman, all looking for something to recover “their substance”. A revealing passage is:

I thought this was a lodging-house, but now I see it is a gathering-place for actors...and they will embark on stories of a past in which they will claim I was an actor too. (130)

As from the description of the place we understood that it is set in eternity¹ and that it takes time sometimes to understand that the person we have been “*conversing with is a ghost*” (134). Coetzee pushes back the limits of fiction to brush against those of reality when he makes the character realize that he is precisely character:

But if these women are creatures of yours, visiting me at your instruction, speaking words you have prepared for them, then who am I and who indeed are you? I presented myself to you in words I knew to be my own...I continued to trust my own authorship. (133).

This being said, even if Coetzee uses other characters to make the task of Foe difficult, he does not miss the opportunity to underline that Susan and Friday remain particular cases that need more attention and care:

He has turned his mind from us... as if we were two of his Grenadiers in Flanders, Forgetting that while his grenadiers fall into an enchanted sleep whenever he absents himself, Friday and I continue to eat and drink and fret. (66)

This suggests also that they are still alive for the impact of Defoe’s narrative remained, he “*planted the seed in a [whole generation’s] mind.*”

It would be of interest to note here Francescato’s argument that among the trapped characters in *Foe* Friday is “*depicted as capable of signifying outside the structures of language.*” For her, Susan is trapped within the struggle to conform to the authoritative mode of the male writer. Francescato underlines that it is her “*act of*

¹ Through her discourse, Susan gave clues on the artificial status of the story going on in *Foe*. One of those clues is her meditation on her life: “*life is never as we expect it to be...as for instance a bath-house on a hot afternoon, with spiders dozing in the corners; at the time it will seem like any Sunday in the country; later will it come home to us that we are in eternity*” (113/114).

rebellion” that keeps her suspended between two worlds “in a space that keeps her guessing.”¹

D- THE NARCISSUS MYTH

a- The Mirror

As a whole, Foe’s house is also a sort of isolated island lost in time, the inhabitants of which are prisoners of their past, their silence and of what they lost: their substance. Looking back at these elements, the setting, then, is just a tool to reveal the characters and make them face their own realities. In other words, the setting functions as a mirror. This recurrent imagery of characters entrapped/enclosed on their islands is itself symbolic of putting people in front of a mirror to face their real shapes(nature).

A mirror is an island and an island is a mirror. Both reveal the metaphysical loneliness of the self who is left alone and who is continually confronted with the reflection of his own picture.²

Therefore, the theme of captivity / entrapment draws the contours of a recurrent central image in the process of writing *Foe* : the mirror effect. This brings forth veins of Narcissism to the narrative.

According to the myth, the hero drowns into himself through self contemplation. He refuses communications and love, for the acceptance of full communication may lead to such sentiment. And while he assumes the shape of flower floating on dormant waters, the naiads are transformed into weeping willows, to express their infinite sorrow. Narcissus portends death to himself and to others.³

¹ Simone, Francescato, *Lost Voices of the Trans-Atlantic*. On the web.

²Jean Sévry,,*Variations on the Work of JM Coetzee*, “Commonwealth” Vol.9, N° 1 p.19.

³ Ibid, p.19

The mirror, in this sense, is heralding the end, the destruction. That is exactly what happened with Cruso. In his death, we have an illustration of the myth. Foe gave an even better and more overt expression of narcissistic discourse in the narrative with the scene of Friday on the surface of water. In that sequence, first described on page 31, we see Friday throwing white petals on the surface of water. This curious ceremony that Friday held regularly on the island, Susan will first relate to Friday's superstition. Then, she will soon understand from that event the human dimension of Friday that she did not recognize immediately.

Beyond that immediate effect there is the literary reference which leads us directly through the metaphor to the myth of Narcissus. Apparently, Coetzee wanted the reader to make the relation with it for he used exactly the same picture of the myth substituting only the descent to the water. The image announces in fact what will be the outcome of Friday: a man captive of his silence. But one thing to be noticed is that though Friday is on the edge of death, he is safe and sound. He does not collapse as Cruso, he is not as "*sadly enclosed*" (150) as Foe whom we associate with a ghost. As negative as the imprisonment of others could be, as dark as the atmosphere surrounding them could ever be, we are encouraged to see Friday's case with a positive eye. So, "*why was Friday drawn into such deadly peril?*"(141)

Maybe the answer is because Friday is a child; he has a life to live yet. He is not supposed to leave that early. This can find a symbolic expression in the white petals, symbol of purity, innocence and deep hope. The image is really overloaded with many possible interpretations, for as Susan says, in the depths of that water could lay his

fellow slaves. Therefore, the image will suggest that Friday is carrying out a regular ceremony honouring the dead. Then, it could also suggest that he manages to keep safe because he draws from that energy. It is because Coetzee brings forth many possible interpretations that he succeeds in making “*Friday’s silence speak*”(142)

b- The Mirror Stage

As Susan takes it, to make Friday recover his tongue is “our” duty. “*Friday has no commands of words and therefore no defence against being reshaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others*” (121). I think that this is the reason why Coetzee chose to associate Friday with the image of a child: he calls for care. But Coetzee seems to be a skilled person. With dexterity, Coetzee associates two images in the construction of the narrative: the Narcissus myth and the Mirror. These two elements involve a name, a doctrine: Lacan and the Mirror Stage. It is well established that Coetzee is a Lacanian-type analyst. With that, we can only confirm that the presence of this association is meant to convey a precise idea.

The Mirror Stage, as defined in Lacanian theory, is the stage: “*qui définit ainsi le trait unaire qui fonde la singularité du sujet ... il génère le narcissisme primaire.*”¹ He explains that as a newly born, the child has no conscience of being-existing. He sees his body as disconnected parts with no particular identity and to recognize the self. Still, a detail of uttermost importance in the good sequence of this phase is that the child is not able to recognize himself alone in front of a mirror. According to Lacan’s observation, it is the adult (most of the time, the mother) who will confirm and

¹ Chelebourg, *L’Imaginaire Littéraire : Des Archétypes à la Poétique du Sujet*, (Edition Nation : Paris 2000)p.101.

validate this recognition without which the child would not be able to go beyond this stage.

*voir son image dans le miroir permet au sujet de s'imaginer homme, mais pour qu'il puisse faire sienne cette image, l'intérioriser, il lui faut qu'elle s'intègre dans le regard de l'autre*¹

That is what Coetzee had in mind through the child image given to Friday. Another suggestive image confirming this point is the sequence when he was dancing in the robes of Foe (119).

In this scene, much of the mirror stage elements are metamorphosed. First, Friday is dancing in Foe's robes. The image is very close to the classical one of a child trying on the clothes of his parents (father or mother according to the sex of the child) to feel adult and grown up. Besides, there is this will, on the part of Friday, to be seen. Susan puts it forth, on the island they "*observed the decencies as far as[they] could, Friday not least of [them]*" (119) but here, he deliberately lets the robe reveal what had been hidden from her: "*my eyes were open to what was present to them*" (119). As the child seeking a sign of recognition from his mother so does Friday who was dressed in Foe's robe which, one can guess the suggestion, "*settled upon [his] shoulders and enclosing him, he was the dark pillar at its centre*" (119).

With reference to the use of Lacanian theory in the construction of a narrative, Teresa Dovey studied in depth the use of Lacanian theory in Coetzee's novels.² Whereas we have just referred to it in the construction of imagery in the text, her explanation on its use in the construction of the language would be interesting to mention at this point. Dovey explains how Coetzee's novels exploit the "*divided*

¹ Idem

² For full reference of her work, we refer the reader to pages 12-13 of the present study.

subject of Lacan” as the split between text and narration as a possible gate to escape the complicity with the dominant discourses. She furthers this explanation by underlining that

they also exploit the Lacanian definition of the function of language as being “not to inform but to evoke” with the subject seeking, via speech, “the response of the other” an “I” which requires the response of a “You” in order to achieve identity.¹

As Dovey states it, within discourse, one inevitably expresses the self via the Other hence, the word places itself as a third position between two other subjects. In this way, Coetzee’s novels locate themselves as specific modes of discourse attempting to communicate within a particular historical moment and trying to “evoke” a response from “*the victims of colonisation*”.

Therefore, Coetzee uses with great dexterity Lacanian imagery to serve the intertextual project of the work. He places the text in psycho-analytical relation to the pre-text “*so as to read into the lies, silences, and slippages of what has been repressed in histories [and stories] that are assumed to be authoritative.*”² As Susan states it:

In every story there is a silence, some sight concealed, some words unspoken, I believe. Till we have spoken the unspoken we have not come to the heart of the story (141)

Giving voice to the silences in the Other’s discourse is the main characteristic of the process of dialogizing the monological utterance. Wittenberg’s description of the voices interaction in *Foe* is worth quoting in this context:

¹ Dovey, p.19

² Michael Chapman, *Southern African Literatures*, p.389.

*Foe is thus, strongly imbricated in an intertextual framework in which narrative voices interact, but also fail to interact, conspire and jostle for dominance. Put differently, stories, or fragments of stories, have escaped from their temporal, textual fixity and have travelled into the textual space of Foe.*¹

No need to pinpoint again here the monological characteristic of Defoe's work as it stands for the hegemony of the empire. Through this dialogising of Defoe's discourse, Coetzee places himself in the line of writers for whom "*the prose writer, the object is a condensation of heterological voices among which his own voice must also resound.*"² In his breaking up of Defoe's work, bit by bit, he "*break[s] up the compactness and closure of the other's [Defoe's] discourse to absorb it, to erase its borders.*"³ Bakhtin calls this kind of dialogising of the other's discourse, *the pictural style*. Coetzee seems to have the will to use all literary means in an artistic (re)construction of the text that makes every word an intersection of multiple meanings and a way out to multiple voices. It is precisely this particularity that accounts for its *hybrid* construction, to use Bakhtin's terminology again.

This hybridism is even enhanced with Coetzee's play with postmodernist strategies in the construction of the narrative. Elements like the search for truth, the appropriation of power and the theme of entrapment are rehearsed through postmodernist techniques. In the next chapter, we will focus on the narrative construction of the novel where postmodernist strategies are entwined to work hand in hand with the dialogical dimension of the novel.

¹ Hermann Wittenberg, "*Spatial Systems in J.M. Coetzee's Foe*", in *Inter Action 3*. Proceedings of the Third Postgraduate Conference. Bellville: UWC Press. (On the web)

² Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The dialogical Principle*, p.72.

³ *Idem*, p.69.

CHAPTER TWO / POSTMODERNISM

“Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree”

Ezra Pound

• POSTMODERNISM

The complicated web of intertextuality at stake in *Foe* made the novel, at its first reception, seem to break totally from the South-African context and its problematic. The setting of the story being the desert island and England creates a geographical distance that alienated the book from the setting of South Africa. The intertextual project being set against Defoe, an author of the 18th century, even deepens the gap between *Foe* and the South African context by setting the story in a much remote time than the time of publication of the book 1987. The first reactions to the novel were that it was an “abandon” of the South African context and a sad escapism on the part of Coetzee -in front of the urgent problems of the country. It seems that Teresa Dovey’s book on Coetzee’s novels opened a new debate on the literary scene concerning *Foe*. She apparently pointed to the sophistication of Coetzee’s works that “disarmed critics in advance.”¹ She apparently underlined the need to pay attention to Lacanian, allegorical and deconstruction strategies present in Coetzee’s works in order to grasp the full extent of the meanings of his texts. Thus she launched indirectly the postmodernist criticism of his work.

As a matter of fact, the critic of *Foe* can not miss the postmodernism of the narrative. What -in my opinion- gives *Foe* its special taste is that the intertextuality at stake is foregrounded in postmodernist strategies which convey the special aesthetic of the book. At this level of my study, I will consider the most prominent postmodernist

¹ To take David Attwell’s words in : Attwell, David. *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.(electronic version –full text- on the net)

strategies used in the book to show how Coetzee's aesthetics of the book are not haphazardly used.

Just as Coetzee tries to use all the elements of literary devices to flesh out the intertextuality (as we saw in the previous part) so he tries to use all the theoretical tools of fiction that can serve his project. He spins a complex web which he puts at the service of postcoloniality.¹ Here, we will focus on three major postmodern elements: collage, play and metafiction. Let us dive again in the ocean of Coetzee's artful creation...

¹ What we will come to deal with in the last part of the present study.

1- THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

- COLLAGE

Postmodernism is a term applied to a wide-ranging set of developments in critical theory, philosophy, architecture, art, literature, and culture, which are generally characterized as either emerging from, in reaction to, or superseding, modernism. In architecture, art, music and literature, postmodernism is a name for many stylistic reactions to, and developments from, modernism. Postmodern style is often characterized by eclecticism, digression, collage, pastiche, and irony.¹

One of the first aspects of postmodernism to be presented in *Foe* is an implicit strategy of collage that Coetzee used in the construction of the narrative structure. The novel is composed of four parts which have different narrative modes. The first part is the story of the life on the island. It is a narrative told in the first person as it is Susan who tells it. In this part, we know how Susan came to the island after her unsuccessful search for her daughter in Brazil. She tells how she met and lived with Friday and Cruso on the island. The story is placed between inverted commas and is addressed to Foe. The style reminds us of the beginnings of the novel with confessions and stories of adventures collected by Defoe. This feature is shared with the second part of the book but the narrative mode is different.

Part two is a collection of letters written by Susan to Foe where some of his answers (letters) are mentioned. The main focus of the letters is to ask Foe to bring her story to the world -Foe being an author- she dreams of achieving success and good

¹ *Wikipedia Encyclopaedia.*

fortune by that. Being resourceless she settles in Foe's house who escaped bailiffs. This part of *Foe* has obvious links with the epistolary genre.¹

The inverted commas disappear in part three and four as Susan lives with Foe and so converses directly with him. Susan is still the narrator. The narrative of this part consists mainly of polemical discussions between Foe and Susan sometimes interrupted by commentaries and descriptions. Nothing really happens in this part except the sharp dialogues of Foe and Susan on the scope of writing. The writing style of the part approaches the writing of the 19th century.

The last part consists of five pages, it is a break from the rest of the book for it presents two enigmatic repetitive scenes where an unidentified author penetrates different places and discovers many bodies among which Friday's. He is alive and shows the ability to say something. Friday's unclear words end the novel. Contrasted to Friday's heavy muteness during the whole book, his words then in this part suggest an open end to the book. We can recognise the simple style of 20th century fiction. The narrator of this part is assimilated to Coetzee as Susan's body is present in the dreamlike sequence of this narrative and Daniel Defoe is cited. We feel that this part is presented as a hand over to the reader to take on the narrative and to decide about the extent of the substantiality and meaning of its characters. The blurring of time, space and person declares its metafictional discourse.²

¹ Francescato observes that "*mostly written in Epistolary form, Foe undoes the self-centered, monolithic writing which distinguished Defoe's text*". Francescato, "*lost voices of the Trans-Atlantic Journey*."

² For further discussion of metafictional discourse, we refer the reader to p.79 of the present study.

- **Definition of Collage:**

...an ironic brick-a-brack or collage approach to construction ...combines several traditional styles into one structure. As collage, meaning is found in combinations of already created patterns.

*Following this, the modern romantic image of the lone creative artist was abandoned for the playful technician...who could **retrieve** and **recombine** creations from the past--data alone becomes necessary. This synthetic approach has been taken up, in a politically radical way, by the visual, musical, and literary arts where collage is used to startle viewers into reflection upon the meaning of reproduction...¹*

This definition applies very well to the narrative structure of *Foe*.

At the structure level, Coetzee is providing a fan of narratives starting from the origins of the novel (part one) to the latest drives of postmodernism. Viewed from this side, Coetzee's choice of Defoe as the provider of the pre-text is probably not a coincidence as Defoe is considered to be the father of the novel and *Robinson Crusoe* being the acknowledged first novel in the history of English literature. His (re)construction of the novel structure as such is but a strategy among the other strategies he used to (un)veil his project of reconstructing the myth of Crusoe. Collage operated in the narrative structure gains its full meaning when combined to other elements of the book. This aspect of postmodernism must have seduced Coetzee. At all the levels of the narrative, the reader has to assemble first the elements of the story to find their Symbols(ism) then (re)assemble the codes/symbols to put them in front of the pre-text elements and thus find the ultimate meaning/message behind the book.² A

¹ Wikipedia Encyclopedia.

² No wonder that Coetzee's background in mathematics shaped his concern with this way of "encrypting" the language of his narrative.

very tricky and smart way to lead the reader through the labyrinths of meanings involved in a text. In the next point we look closer into this technique of writing.

2- THE NARRATIVE MODE

- **PLAY**

*An important concept in postmodernism's view of language is the idea of "play". In the context of postmodernism, play means changing the framework which connects ideas, and thus allows the troping, or **turning, of a metaphor or word from one context to another**, or from one frame of reference to another. Since, in postmodern thought, the "text" is a series of "markings" whose meaning is imputed by the reader, and not by the author, this play is the means by which the reader constructs or interprets the text, and the means by which the author gains a presence in the reader's mind. Play then involves invoking words in a manner which undermines their authority, by mocking their assumptions or style, or by layers of misdirection as to the intention of the author.¹*

A main aspect characterizing Coetzee's writings is that no direct moral is given, rather situations are set up to the reader to think about. In introducing conflicts, Coetzee does not seem to provide solutions. He only highlights the problem and lets the reader draw his own conclusions. Obviously he wants the reader to be involved in the process of reading.² Moreover he calls him out to do so. These are features definitely present in *Foe*.

What is interesting in *Foe* is that there are different layers of narration. There is, at first sight, the immediate context of the story. Then, one can not ignore the presence of a juxtaposition made with *Robinson Crusoe* which constitutes a leitmotiv to the

¹Wikipedia Encyclopaedia.

² This way of presenting the work relates to Reader-Response theory "which recognizes the reader as an active agent who imparts "real existence" to the work and completes its meaning through interpretation". For further information on the theory, we refer the reader to the informative article on Wikipedia from which the quote is taken.

story, a sort of central layer of narration. But then within this layer, there are other secondary layers of narration (cross-references) which relate to other works of Defoe's like *Roxanna*. These different layers meet and merge in putting forth dichotomies of relations and/or conflicts between dominated/dominating and colonizer/colonized. They generate the presence of a third layer of narration to be related first to The South African context and second, to the universal theme of the relation between Self and Other and its impact on the process of self-realization. These levels of narration are like the waves on a water surface. They begin at a starting point in the centre that generates other circles which broaden. The reader, to grasp the meaning of each layer and be able to move from one layer to another, should be informed of the different registers they relate to.

The presence of different levels of interpretation, then, is probably the origin of the ingenuous way of presenting facts and ideas in *Foe*. Rather than stating them in a direct way, Coetzee engages the reader in a process of suggestions that leads him to the idea he wanted to convey. He realises this by starting with small clues until arriving to clear statements. This movement agrees with the principle of waves on the water surface. In fact, to convey the ideas he proceeds as follows:

- First, he gives hints, clues which might be sometimes hardly perceptible at a first reading. eg: Friday as first seen (5) has no beard which is a sign that he is to be associated with the image of a child.
- Second, he weaves a web of associations and repetitions that confirm the first glimpse given of the idea with, this time, some clues or clarifications, on the relation between cause and effect.

- Then, he proceeds by bringing together all the items from the beginning through an overt statement of the idea. Eg: “Friday is a child” (39)
- Once the statement is uttered, he finally draws attention to its implications which have already been captured by the reader due to the way the idea is conveyed. In fact, at this stage, he only confirms what the reader had already kept in mind.

This is a way which adapts the different registers of narration and which allows Coetzee to smoothly play with words and shadows of meanings. In fact, when noticing this mode of narration I could not help making the parallel with one of the theories of Language acquisition. I allowed myself to cite it here because of Coetzee’s deep interest in linguistics. The theory I am referring to is the “Natural Method” (the new version of the Direct Method). According to tenants of the method, the most effective way of learning / teaching a language is to put the learner in the same situations as when he learned his mother tongue.

This implies that no direct instruction should be provided (imposed) to the learner. He should be exposed to the language and he alone naturally would come with the conclusions about the internal relations (grammar & syntax) of the language. The outcome of such a view is that any instruction should respect the following steps:

- First, put the learner in situations which will make him visualize the concept.
- Once the concept visualized and only when visualized, the instructor names it.

The method proved to be efficient because the learner is involved in the process of learning. He remembers the rules because he deduces them on his own.

It might seem inappropriate to introduce a linguistics point in a literary discussion but the fact is that Coetzee declared on many occasions his pronounced interest in linguistics and that he even was “*more interested in the linguistic than the literary side of [his] academic profession I think there is evidence of an interest in problems of language throughout [his] novels.*”¹ Besides, I was particularly aware that he is the kind of writer seeking new sources to re/shape the narrative structure. He described the writer’s task as that of “*adapting whatever models and theories lie to hand to make writing possible.*”² Consequently, I wonder whether Coetzee is not trying to give a new look and a fresh breath to the language of Fiction through the use of language acquisition theories. This aspect will be also related later –in the conclusion to this part- to what Linda Hutcheon associates with the narrative of the detective story where we find the same pattern of resolving the intrigue of the story through the interpretation of clues given throughout the text.³

¹ Jean Sévry, “An Interview with JM Coetzee”, in *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies* 9 (autumn 1986), p1

² JM Coetzee, *White Writing : On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*,p.162/ quoted in Sue Kossew, *Critical Essays on JM Coetzee*,p.19.

³ We refer the reader to pp.90-92 of the present study.

3- THE NARRATIVE LANGUAGE

- **METAFICTION**

Metafiction is, literally, fiction about fiction. It is generally used to indicate fiction including any self-referential element. Metafiction typically involves games in which levels of narrative reality (and the reader's perception of them) are confused...¹

It is also defined by Patricia Waugh as:

fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality". Metafictional works, she suggests, are those which "explore a theory of writing fiction through the practice of writing fiction."²

She identifies three types of metafiction. The first is that which deals with subversions of the role of the 'omniscient narrator'. Within the second type, she includes works that present a parody on a specific work or fictional mode. In the third type are works that attempt to create alternative linguistic structures or to merely imply old forms by encouraging the reader to draw on his or her knowledge of traditional literary conventions.

- **ITS CHARACTERISTICS**

Although characteristics of metafiction vary, a pattern of several common traits can be traced. These techniques often appear in combination, but also can appear singularly. Metafiction often employs intertextual references and allusions by:

¹ Wikipedia Encyclopaedia.

² Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction*, p.2.

examining fictional systems, incorporating aspects of both theory and criticism, creating biographies of imaginary writers and presenting and discussing fictional works of an imaginary character. Metafiction also uses unconventional and experimental techniques by rejecting conventional plot, refusing to attempt to become "real life" and subverting conventions to transform 'reality' into a highly suspect concept.

Authors of metafiction often violate narrative levels by **intruding to comment on writing**, involving his or herself with fictional characters, **directly addressing the reader** and finally **openly questioning how narrative assumptions and conventions transform and filter reality, trying to ultimately prove that no singular truths or meanings exist** .

For this study we will focus on the presence of the second set of characteristics (those in bold) in *Foe*. In what follows, we will concentrate on the metafictional language use in reflections on power, authority/ownership and writing. A close reading of *Foe* shows that the language is less concerned with the intertextual possibilities offered by reading the novel against *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxanne* than it is with the extensive use of metafictional discourse.

We have already underlined the fact that the novel does not follow the traditional linear sequence of events and time. Maybe the first narrative is the only exception. Apart from the island story, which in fact is the only part that can claim to be a Robinsonnade, the rest of the book is an account of how Susan tries to persuade Foe to write her story. In the event, the two thirds of the book are concerned with major themes of power, authority and ownership. All four parts of the book give developing commentary on the activity of writing as a whole.

One of the first recurring metafictional discourses confronts facts to fiction; consequently, truths to lies. The confrontation of these opposite notions works on the variety of levels, the first one given to the reader is the intertextual level. Very often, discourses on the need to check the validity of information in Defoe's work and throws a shadow of suspicion over the truth of his discourse. In other instances Susan's commentary on Fact versus Fiction takes on explicit metafictional traits when addressing the wider notion of fiction and truth sometimes amounting to moments of pure theoretizing.

Susan's discourse on the matter is almost always set to challenge male authority represented in the novel by Cruso and Foe. Her challenging of Cruso's ability to distinguish between reality and fiction and his refusal to write the island story are in fact challenges set against his world view (opinion). These points always culminate in the debate on who has the right to decide about the limits of ownership and the struggle to the limits of one's properties (in *Foe* the most important property being one's story that is the guarantee to have one's substantiality).

The structure of the book just enhances this point. The first section is a narrative, what we will call "the female castaway" narrative. The rest of the novel is an account of her struggle to get her story told. The difficulty in fact, as presented in the novel, is not to have it told but to keep it intact from the changes and distortions operated by Foe. There is a paradox emphasized here, that of Susan's need of the validation of Foe. Her utmost fear is to lose her substantiality.

Substantiality is threatened by the presence of the daughter, a nod to Defoe's *Roxanne*. The critic (reader) can understand the innuendo. Susan fears to lose her

substantiality : of her being and of her story. The substantiality is assured if it is not distorted by the “artifacts” of fiction of the author. Each time the girl comes, her fear grows again until it reaches the peak that we presented earlier, when she asks who she is, and who is speaking. Inevitably, we project the distortion of facts on Defoe for we know he is the author of *Roxanne* and so the creator of the daughter.

Francescato’s reading of Susan’s daughter furthers our own. For Francescato, Susan refuses to recognize her daughter simply because she “*refuses to accept a narrative which is not hers and finally rebels against the authoritative voice.*” Still, at the same time, she uses the symbolic means of her counterpart and “father” her story. Francescato sustains that Susan partly identifies with her daughter who succeeded in escaping the dominant discourse which is “*basically her only consolation in a world which seems to have lost its measure for truth and reality.*”¹

Through these moments, Susan makes continuing reflections on the process of story telling and who decides its boundaries and thus controls the narrative. Susan is constantly threatened by Foe's shaping of her story to his own design.

...I am a substantial being with a substantial history in the world. I choose rather to tell of the island, of myself and Crusoe and Friday and what we three did there: for I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire (131)

Recurrent reflections express the necessity to write one's story to be free. Susan’s dwelling on the struggle for the control of her own story is, it seems, Coetzee’s indirect way to address the necessity for the struggle for it seems Friday's story. Incessantly, Susan makes the connection with Friday. What is true of her situation is

¹ Francescato Simone, “*Lost Voices of the Trans-Atlantic Journey*”.

even truer for Friday. Friday has been deprived of his story by the loss of his tongue. The loss of control over his narrative exposes him to the mercy of anyone who chooses to invent a story on his behalf.

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... (121/22)

One spontaneous observation is that Coetzee made Friday so silent. Why did he not give him the means to struggle for his own story just as Susan does? I think that the first answer would be that Coetzee in this project foregrounded the "real" presentation that Defoe made of his characters. Then -and in my opinion it is the most probable reason- Coetzee's position as a white author writing in a post-colonial context gave him some barriers so as to take the risk to speak on behalf of the voice of the Oppressed (Black) belonging himself paradoxically to the realm of the Oppressor. To my sense, this would explain the fact that Coetzee introduced Susan as a mediator to bridge the gap between his voice and Friday's.

In *Foe*, Friday's loss of tongue is the obsession of the narrative. It is the central enigma of the narrative or if we may say epicentre of all the other levels of meaning (as we saw above). Maybe the only question that can almost parallel Friday's mutilation is Susan's daughter. The recurrent commentaries on that push us to observe something. In the book there are two problematic pairs: Crusoe and Friday/ Susan and daughter. Being informed of the intertextual references we can make a sequence of deductions. In the heart of the metafictional discourse when Susan is questioning her

substantiality we understand how the daughter is the source of threat because she throws the responsibility on her.

In this sense, we better understand why Susan is obsessed with the theme of story telling/writing and why the narrative of the novel is so much concerned with the metafictional discourse on the problem of story production. Let us recapitulate, to see things clearer: Only the first section is a narrative of Susan's experience on Crusoe's island, so the only part that can be considered a Robinsonnade. This narrative along with the letters of the second part, are sent by Susan to Foe. Her aim is to have her narrative written by him. The third section is entirely devoted to the problems of production to the original narrative. It is here that we find the essence of the metafictional discourse on the problems of writing generating the themes of ownership and control.

The fourth section takes place at another dimension -if we may say- in all aspects: time, space and narration are relevant of another realm of meaning. The dreamlike scenes of the section are additional allegories to the already mentioned ones. They symbolize the enterprise of the whole book. The section is a metaphor of Coetzee's tentative in the book to open up Friday's mouth that Defoe managed to close for so long. Here again -like in structure and narrative mode- we find this strategy of presenting developing levels of narration beginning from a simple island story to a metafictional discourse on Friday's voice. Travelling from one space of narration to another through the sections of the book, Coetzee ends the book by handing over the narrative to the reader to carry on. In the following point we put together the elements that govern the overlapping narratives of the book.

- **ISLANDS OF NARRATION VS ISLANDS OF SILENCE**

Certain points of similarities can be noticed in the sections of the book. First of all, each section introduces a new setting. The first part takes place on Crusoe's island, the second, in England, the third in Foe's house in Bristol and the fourth in a sort of transcendental enigmatic space. Then each part ends with a movement (travel) that precedes a shift in space but also in narration. As stated earlier, the passage from one section to another marks a passage from one level of narration to another. At an aesthetic level, the parts of the book operate a travel from the origins of the novel to the contemporary metafictional narrative.¹

Similarly, Susan's narration follows this rhythm. In her attempts to "bring her story to the world" she is confronted with obstacles which generate her shift from one level to another to make the story told. "*The world is full of islands*" (71) and so is the case in *Foe*. The book is full of islands of writing to be discovered. In what follows I will describe how Susan's narrative is also linked to the metaphor of the island.

At the centre of the book is the theme of entrapment. The stories of Cruso, Susan, and Friday present problems of coming into the world. This is so because each one is trapped within an island. As we saw earlier, the island concretely and allegorically is a space limited with contours and isolated from the rest of the world. This applies very much to the narratives in *Foe* that try to find their way to the world.

On Cruso's island the blocking of the communication is best presented. Cruso scarcely speaks or shows any desire to do so. He absolutely does not want to tell his story to Susan or any one else. He encloses himself and the island story within the

¹ As discussed earlier in "collage" on p.72.

boundaries of the island. Friday the only person able to fill in the hollows of the silence is hindered by the loss of his tongue. As the mutilation of his tongue is often attributed to Crusoe, so again he is the one who blocks the narrative.

Susan's wish to write her own story and the island story seems to be possible only outside the boundaries of Crusoe's island. Thus Susan moves to another place to tell her story. The narration on the island is marked by overwhelming silence caused by Cruso's unwillingness to narrate or let the others do so. Consequently, he is the controller of the means of communication. The fact that she sends the manuscript to an author (Foe) signals the start of another level of narration.

The second part takes place in England. Susan very soon remarks that England is an island (26). If on Cruso's island Friday and herself are captives of Cruso, in England it is not better. They are in the heart of the city but people do not notice them at all, as if they were "*ghosts.*"¹ Still, in this part, Susan can at least develop her narrative by starting her commentaries on story telling/writing. She is freer than on Crusoe's island but still less free than she should be. This part corresponds to the second island of narration. The blocking of the narrative on this island (part) is set against the traditions/demands of the metropolis that is why she needs Foe to validate it. Consequently, she moves to his house which marks the movement to another island of narration.

The entrapment of Susan's narrative in Foe's house is as we have seen due to Foe's resistance. The clash between writing the story to his own design and writing "her" story with "her" own words generates the third development in narration. This development is further stressed as both Friday and her, one after the other, sit at Foe's

¹ "*We Hear no word from you, and the townsfolk pay us no more heed than if we were ghosts*"(87).

desk and take his pen, the ultimate symbol of control of the narrative. Actually, this part closes with Friday sitting at the desk and starting to write.

Indeed, the main clue that narration on this island reaches another (higher) level is that Friday starts to communicate, in his own way but it is still the only part where he shows signs of willingness to do that. It is thus in this part that we see Friday dance and draw on the slate. Finally, we see him sit at Foe's place to "foul his papers" and so doing, his narrative.

Though at the end of part three, there is no clear travel from one place to another (as the previous parts) to announce the shift to another island of narration, there is still a movement of Susan. She goes out for a short walk, and when she comes back, Friday is at Foe's desk and a few lines later we are taken to the realm of narration of the final part of the book. I would hesitate to call this part an island of narration for its contours and details are blurred. I would rather situate it outside islands on a space of its own thriving to reach or generate a new island of narration that of the reader, thus to slip overboard the boundaries of the novel and row towards the island of the external world.

Wittenberg would agree with this reading of *Foe* as he argues that

Intratextually, Susan's story of the island never reaches her readers...Intertextually this story of the island "survives" as Robinson Crusoe. Coetzee's text thus invites us to examine the difference between these narratives. Foe, read as intertextual criticism of Robinson Crusoe, exposes the power structures which manipulate the narrative processes it exposes the system of power which authorises certain versions of stories while blocking, silencing others.¹

¹ Wittenberg, "Spatial Systems in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*".

Wittenberg observes that the difference between *Foe* and *Robinson Crusoe* shows a lack in the latter text that *Foe* refuses to fill in with another mis-representation. He explains how in *Foe* “*the colonial space and its marginalised subject are silent*” because the text wants “*to open up a conceptual space for a critique of the hegemonic master narratives in colonialism.*”¹

¹ Idem.

POSTMODERNISM AND INTERTEXTUALITY AT WORK

Set by the intertextuality in Foe and enhanced by the metafictional discourse in the text, meanings and levels of narration overlap and co-exist in a kind of unchained story. Just as characters are trapped so are their narratives. The progressive development of narration shows a movement towards a communication freed of the shackles of islands of silence like Crusoe's. Islands as Crusoe's retain the substance of people on them and refuse to value or consider any voices coming from outside the boundaries of these islands. They impose and accept only those narratives that are set by the Ruler of the island, like Crusoe.

Looking back at the postmodernist strategies studied in this chapter, a final statement can be made to reveal their function. The three strategies presented – collage, play and metafiction- account for the self-reflexivity of the text. The extensive metafictional discourse used in the novel with its emphasis on the conflicts generated by the story telling and story production and the recurrent meditations on the confrontations of the notions of truth and fiction as well as author and authority are all elements that construct what Linda Hutcheon calls the “*narcissitic narrative*”. She says that this type of fiction is “*in some dominant and constitutive way, self-referring or autorepresentational: it provides, within itself, a commentary on its own status as fiction and as language, and also on its own processes of production and reception.*”¹

Foe presents a case of what she calls “*a diegetic overt narcissistic narrative*” which overtly invites and incites the reader to reflect on the reading/writing process. In

¹ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: the Metafictional Paradox*, p.IIX.

this case of narratives, the reader is invited to the creation of worlds of meaning through the language of the novel to make sense of the experience of reading. The epistolary form opening the novel's structure is one way of addressing the reader within the structure of the novel, the metafictional discourse was another. Linda Hutcheon underlines the frequent presence of intertextuality in those narratives which is exactly the case of *Foe*.

Actually, the intertextuality in *Foe* is structured in many ways as the postmodern elements of the novel. In fact, they are interrelated and dependable on each other in the sense that all postmodern techniques function as enhancers and clarifiers of the intertextual meanings. There is in fact, a judicious artistic work on the narrative language and structure –through postmodernism- that Coetzee uses to dress the intertextuality in the book. What is interesting to note is how the postmodern strategies studied in this chapter take up again notions and images already drawn by the intertextual elements in *Foe*. As we saw, one major instance is the presence of the notion of captivity and quest for freedom.

Looking back at the stream of images, themes and techniques exposed in this part of the study there can be a further remark to be made. The blurring contours of the structure, plot and characters in *Foe* cast over the novel and the narrative a sort of aesthetic artistic maze. The themes approached through this part –captivity, Friday's silence...- just enhance the enigmatic specificity of the story and its discourse. The narrative meanings are presented through that pattern of finding clues progressively – as discussed earlier in this part- to guess and build upon others to find the final meaning(s). Linda Hutcheon in her presentation of the different types of narcissistic

narratives identifies that one where metafictional discourse is based on the general pattern of the puzzle or the enigma. Again, she underlines the fact that this device is used when there is a main focus on the necessity of the reader's interpretation. More than any other type of those narratives, "*the emphasis is upon bringing both this liberty and this **duty** to the reader's attention.*"¹

In those kinds of narcissistic narratives, she emphasises how necessary it is that the reader share the same historical, social and cultural background to be able to draw from those registers and relate them to the text's puzzle as they represent the missing – or shall we say the linking- piece. She states that it is the reader's triumph to interpret and find the clues of the puzzle just as in real life puzzle games. Until now, we have reconstituted the two thirds of the puzzle in the building blocks of the narrative. Through dialogism Coetzee subverts the original story of Crusoe the castaway and its imperialistic discourse.

Teresa Dovey describes Coetzee's "*recognizing that repetition is inevitable, he wittingly inhabits prior modes of discourse in order to deconstruct them from within.*"² Thus she calls this mode of writing the "*postmodern allegory*". Dovey's description of the term approaches very much Hutcheon's description of this present case where intertextuality and postmodernism interact:

*Postmodern intertextuality is a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context...It uses and abuses those intertextual echoes, inscribing their powerful allusions and then subverting that power.*³

¹ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative : the Metafictional Paradox*, p.30.

² Dovey,p.19.

³ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p.118.

Through postmodernism in *Foe*, Coetzee basically reinforces the dialogics at stake but broadens its scope to touch on the wider notions of control, entrapment, author/ity and how truth can be found in fiction and vice versa. In the following and last part of this study, we are unveiling those last “hidden clues” that lead us directly to Coetzee’s historical context and which represents the final part of the puzzle.

PART THREE/

ISLANDS OF POSTCOLONIALITY

*“What I like in a good author is not what he says,
but what he whispers”*

Logan Pearsall Smith

CHAPTER ONE/
FROM ROBIN ISLAND TO ROBBEN
ISLAND

“The words dripped on my consciousness, sank into my being, and carried me away to the magic long ago of once upon a time”

Peter Abrahams

1- ROBIN'S ISLAND, PRISON OF COMMUNICATION

For readers reared on traveller's tales, the words desert isle may conjure up a place of soft sands and sandy trees... (07)

But Crusoe's island is a different kind of place, not fit for adventures and marvellous tales. From the very first pages and among Susan's first remarks there is the description of the island:

But the island on which I was cast away was quite another place: a great rocky hill...with drab bushes that never flowered and never shed their leaves. (07)

Actually, in the whole first part which centres on life on the island, not one time do we meet one positive aspect related to the island. The geographical as well as the human (governed by Crusoe) elements on the island are combined to hang a shadow of oppressive silence that Susan relates to death. Susan's many descriptions and commentaries here and there in the section foreground the infertility of the island and of Crusoe's life there.

The recurrent characteristic given to everything on the island is that it is desolate, unfruitful, and an arid space. The untamed whistling wind incessantly blowing everyday enhances the emptiness of the place both geographically and allegorically for we will see that the aridity of the place refers to the harshness of another place. There is a predominance of rocks in the island. The soil is rocky, most of Crusoe's habitation is made of rocks, his utensils too. His daily routine consists of building terraces separated by walls made of rocks. The rock is an element too much present and described to be a mere random choice by Coetzee. The rock bears the

symbolism of coldness and hardness. It stands for the hard and long lasting labour of Cruso.

Though there is life on the island, liveliness is not present, though. An oppressive atmosphere hangs over the people living there. From the first description Susan makes of the island, there is a particular description that the reader can not miss. It concerns the description of one of the insects that she saw there: “...a tiny insect that hid between your toes and ate its way into your flesh.” (07). A curious way to describe the insect that attracts the attention to the particular “bloody” detail that thrusts a gloomy tone on the atmosphere of the island .

As explained earlier, on the island, everything seems to be the result and fault of Cruso’s egocentrism. Susan’s commentaries and descriptions of Cruso leave no doubt that he stands for the figure of the authoritarian governors. This trait plus his use of Friday as a slave and his point of view concerning slavery makes of him the perfect symbol of the colonizer. Cruso’s actions can be fairly enough recognised as traits of the colonizer. There is still one daily routine habit of Cruso that Susan finds enigmatic, his obsession about building terraces separated by walls of stones. This is an exhaustive, repetitive routine with no positive results taking all of Cruso’s time and energy.

This work is a big thing still, because it is the only thing for which Cruso gives much attention and importance. Susan underlines the fact that the terraces provided a subject that made Cruso speak of which betrays his great concern about this work as he never pays much attention to what Susan says in general. This work is also the only thing to which Cruso gives a future dimension: “*the planting is reserved for those who*

come after us and have the foresight to bring seed. I only clear the ground for them ”

(33). The way Cruso speaks of the terraces allows the reader to give it a positive connotation. However, Susan makes a comment which quickly moves away any positive point that could be given to this work as she associates it to a death enterprise:

I found it a foolish kind of agriculture .It seemed to me he might occupy his time as well in digging for gold, or digging graves first for himself and Friday and then if he wished for all the castaways of the future history of the island, and for me too. (34)

Cruso does not resist the desire to control the land. Even if he knows that this desire is unfruitful, he fancies that the future generations will get advantage of his enterprise. Such a plan is curious enough and can not have an explanation based on the grounds of the story: a castaway is more obsessed with finding the way to escape his solitude than concerned with getting settled and even preparing for the coming of others as a kind of descendents that would take on the enterprise. It is obvious that such a plan is more a plan of transforming the island into a colony owned and ruled by that first person who had the idea of appropriating the place.

In this light, Cruso's terraces recover their full significance especially when Friday is in the middle of the picture carrying the stones and doing all the hard chores. Controlling and dividing the land into separate parts all well encircled in thick walls of stones: the more we observe this image and we link it with all the metafictional discourse of the text, the more we can see the allegorical meaning of it.

When we slip overboard the walls of the terraces, we think that we escaped the oppressive silence of the island and that Cruso has no more authority but we are wrong...when we open our eyes we see that we are right in the middle of the terraces

of South Africa with walls even more oppressive than those of fiction: the walls of Apartheid!

2- ROB BEN ISLAND, PRISON OF HEROES

“The world is full of islands” (71)...Indeed, Crusoe’s island is not the only island on the Ocean! Crusoe’s island reminds me of another one on the Atlantic Ocean...as small and as secluded as his. Just as Crusoe’s it is a *“great rocky hill with a flat top”* (07) with a wonderful variety of birds and a rich fauna on the whole. The nerve teasing wind on Crusoe’s island is also present on that island and it has exactly the same weather conditions that inspired the name of the region, “Cape of Storms”. And on top of that, Crusoe’s terraces can be seen there but the walls are much higher ...maybe Crusoe’s dream was realised, maybe other castaways came in and took his project over and so knew how to develop it!

And just like Defoe’s story, stories about this island accompanied generations of small children...but, here lies the difference, unlike Defoe’s island, this one inspired no adventure tales to the children but rather it was a lighthouse of terror for them. If Robin’s island was synonymous of adventure, Robben island was synonymous of oppression! This is more likely Crusoe’s island!

No South African could ever miss the presence of Robben Island or ignore its mighty place in the history of South Africa:

Robben Island has a long history of being used as a place of punishment. In 1652 Jan van Riebeeck established the first permanent settlement by Europeans in South Africa in the area that today is the city of Cape Town. Van Riebeeck was

sent by the Dutch East India Company, a company based in the Netherlands which traded goods between the East and Europe. Five years later, in 1657, he decided to use the island as a place of banishment, sending exiles and slaves to dig out the white stone found there. From then on, the various governors of the Cape found the Island very useful for getting rid of people they didn't want around...In 1959 the island became a maximum security prison and between 1961 and 1991 over three thousand men were incarcerated here as political prisoners. The most famous of these was, of course, Nelson Mandela.¹

Robben island is a prominent and alive symbol of oppression and segregation in the history of South Africa, at a first degree, and the history of humanity, at a larger degree that Coetzee could certainly not ignore!

Robben island is the final hidden layer of meaning in *Foe* that is wrapped in all the layers of meanings that we observed in the previous parts of this study. First, Coetzee makes the theme of captivity on islands the core of all constructions in the narrative of the book. Then, he instils it with a particular concern with the deconstruction of imperialistic symbols through intertextuality. Then, he puts Crusoe's island at the heart of entrapment islands of the book. He leaves no room for coincidences in this work; even the names are given too much care to bear the right meaning that serves the project of this book. Consequently, it is no coincidence that Crusoe's original name in the pre-text is Robinson Crusoe who is also often called Robin. Thus to name the island Crusoe's or Robin's –which is close enough to the name of Robben- makes no difference at all.

Actually, the discovery of this direct link with the South African context found its way gradually. As stated earlier, the repeated associations of dialogics at stake with

¹ *New York Times*, About, Alistair Boddy-Evans "Islands of Infamy: Robben Island".

the metafictional discourse spread over the novel have clear applications on Coetzee's historical context of authoritarian apartheid repression of liberties. But -to be quite concise- I found my way to Robben Island through a small clue in the text. Coetzee cites an existing place in South Africa which is "North Bluff". This happens early in the novel, in an episode where Susan describes how Cruso hated the apes on the island and made it his priority to kill them. "*He had killed many, after which the remainder had retreated to the cliffs of what he called the North Bluff.*" (21)

With the description of how Cruso found them when he first came to the island roaming all over it and how he exterminated them, one can think of another suggestive image of the colonial enterprise in South Africa and how the first colonizers killed the original inhabitants who were viewed as primitive men –an image often related to apes. However, a question imposed itself: why from all the places in South Africa, Coetzee cites this one. Finally, I found out¹ that the newest lighthouse presently in service on South Africa's coastline is situated in North Sand Bluff.

Right around the South African coast, there is a close link between the location of lighthouses and wrecks of ships from the 15th century onwards. The Ivy beach near the lighthouse of North Bluff bears the name of the ship which wrecked on its coast. With this piece of information, the choice of North Bluff becomes less neutral. Putting the name of a real place which witnessed the shipwreck of a real English ship gives a clear indication on Coetzee's will to relate the story to real history. Further readings cleared the way for a further more significant historical link –that of Robben Island.

¹ After extensive research on the net. The reader can find further information on Wikipedia or on the official web pages of the lighthouses in South Africa.

Another question imposed itself: If North Bluff is the newest lighthouse then which one is the oldest? Which was the first one to be built on the African Coast? The Greenpoint light at Mouille Point was South Africa's first solidly built lighthouse, in 1920 but, not the very first to exist on the South African coast! The first lighthouse in South Africa was a beacon built by Jan Van Riebeeck's men in 1657...on Robben Island! Through the long but “witty” labyrinth that Coetzee built in his novel, the clues left here and there within bends of words build up corridors of meanings that finally lead to the core of the story.

Considering the presence of allegorical references to Robben island in *Foe* is like cementing all the different parts that co-work –if we may say- in the narrative and providing the final element to piece the jigsaw together. On the one hand, the theme of captivity recaptures its full sense and the deconstruction of colonial symbols of domination and oppression is sensed as a denunciation of the injustices committed on Robben island. As we have seen, captivity is present wherever Susan goes. The whole space of *Foe* is a space of entrapment, whether it be on the island, in England or in Foe’s house, Susan and Friday find themselves trapped. The same can be said of those who were imprisoned in Robben island. Life in prison was not worse than life in South Africa. For a Black South African, life was as restricted, controlled watched over as a prisoner’s on Robben, only the dimensions differed.

Life for a prisoner on Robben Island was not easy, but life in the old South Africa was not so pleasant either. People of colour were treated inhumanly, not permitted on the beaches, in pools, in movies or to practice their own traditions by order of law...¹

¹ *New York Times*, *About*, Alistair Boddy-Evans “*Islands of Infamy: Robben Island*”.

The idea of imprisonment hanging everywhere in *Foe* is thus an allegory of the entrapment in the South African problematic.

The same can be said on account of communication. Very little communication could be achieved between the outside world and those on the island. The point explored in islands of narration versus islands of silence summarized this attention given in *Foe* to entrapment of narratives that stem from the incapacity of communication to spread over because it is blocked by authoritarian figures that want to impose their own word over all the others. And just as the themes of the novel apply very well in the reality of Robben island so we understand that Coetzee wanted to throw the deconstructive discourse in the book over reality too.

Korang argues that there is “*an expressive relationship between text and context, the literary text Foe and the social text of Apartheid.*” He adds that Coetzee’s novel confronted to the post-colonial scene may be called “an allegory for the post-colonial project”. He underlines that he sees the allegorical mode of the novel because the presence of the “*South African social text is visible as a partial presence.*”¹ Furthermore, Korang sustains that “*Foe is poised to betray the forgettings and violent repressions that provide the narrative mechanisms -embedded in a seamless grid of Anglo-European interpretation.*”²

To put such a suggestive symbol as Robben Island in the middle of a work like *Foe* is simply putting Apartheid under the light of deconstructive criticism.

¹ Korang, p.186.

² Ibid, p.190.

Very few places in the world exemplify and symbolise the struggle for freedom against oppression of basic human rights, as Robben Island does. The power to eradicate apartheid was believed to have been strongly supported by the presence of this far away prison island where many of the leading members of South African political parties and ANC members were incarcerated.¹

The history of Robben Island is unavoidably linked to that of Apartheid and the breathtaking fight of Black South Africans against segregation rules that denied them the most basic forms of freedom such as the right to go wherever they wanted in their own land.

The island was **the** prison of Apartheid but it was also **the** necessary stop for every hero of South Africa:

A place where great men met, where survival of the African youth became a desperate motivation for the need to challenge the struggle for the freedom of rights, the right to vote, and the right to be socially and legally equitable.²

It is an island where heroes like Nelson Mandela strove to make their voices heard to be able to destroy the injustices of Apartheid... but “the world is full of islands” ... and there are islands like those in *Foe* where the hidden hand of the author strives to imagine other ways to support the struggle and make the voice of the unheard, of the mut(e)ilated “wash over the cliffs and shores of the island to run northward and southward to the ends of the earth” (157).

¹Official homepage of Robben island Museum, « *Island of Horror, Robben Island* ».

² Official homepage of Robben island Museum, « *Island of Horror, Robben Island* ».

3- APARTHEID

As the final meaning of the novel has been unveiled and the link with its historical context of production being made, we can pause here for a brief outline of the history of Apartheid. It imposes itself at this stage of the present study to put the previous account in its context and to foreground the elements which shaped Coetzee's daily life as any other South African.

A- HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Although Apartheid began in the twentieth century, South Africa's history of racial discrimination is as old as its colonial history. Its first colonists were the Dutch, who set up a supply station for their ships in 1652. The Dutch considered the Africans needed to be governed and guided. Probably as all the colonial enterprises, this attitude was encouraged by theological considerations. The Africans were used as slaves working on Dutch farms. In 1795, Britain seized the colony and began to impose its laws. Britain abolished slavery but kept the discriminating laws. The Dutch farmers wanted to preserve their culture and especially the advantage of using the Africans as slaves so they fled into the interior of South Africa, and this trip became known as the Great Trek (an episode in South African history to which we will come back below).

The Dutch believed that they deserved South Africa because of their hardships. Britain granted South Africa independence in 1910 but blacks were denied the right to vote and the Dutch Afrikaners took over. In 1948, the Afrikaner National party won the national election, and Apartheid became the official policy. The goal, said

Cornelius Mulder, a South African Minister of black affairs, is that eventually there will be no black South Africans.

The purpose of apartheid was separation of the races: not only of whites from nonwhites, but also of nonwhites from each other, and, among the Africans (called Bantu in South Africa), of one group from another. In addition to the Africans, who constitute about 75% of the total population, those regarded as non white include those people known in the country as Coloured (people of mixed black, Malayan, and white descent) and Asian (mainly of Indian ancestry) populations. Those populations were forced to relocate out of so-called white areas. African townships were demolished and their occupants removed to new townships well beyond city limits. Between the passage of the Group Areas Acts of 1950 and 1986, about 1.5 million Africans were forcibly removed from cities to rural reservations.

- **Separate Development Policy**

Under the prime ministership of Hendrik Verwoerd apartheid developed into a policy known as “separate development,” whereby each of the nine African (Bantu) groups was to become a nation with its own homeland, or Bantustan. An area totaling about 14% of the country's land was set aside for these homelands, the remainder, including the major mineral areas and the cities, being reserved for the whites. The basic objective of the separate development policy was to reduce rights and freedoms of Africans within the boundaries of their homeland, but that outside it blacks were to be treated as aliens.

Movement to and between other parts of the country was strictly regulated, the location of residence or employment (if permitted to work) was restricted, and blacks were not allowed to vote or own land. Only those holding the necessary labour permits, granted according to the labour market, were allowed to reside within urban areas. Such permits often did not include the wife or family of a permit holder, contributing to the break up of family life among many Africans.

Most African urban dwellers had to live in townships on a city's perimeter. All Africans living outside the Bantustans were subject to strict curfew regulations and passbook requirements, especially in the cities; if unable to produce these when asked to, they were subject to arrest. The police were granted powers of preventive detention in 1962, initially for 30 days, later for indefinite periods.

- **The Bantustans**

In 1962 the South African government established the first of the Bantustans, the Transkei, as the homeland of the Xhosa people, and granted it limited self-government in 1963, later becoming “independent.” Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, and Venda were also granted “independence,” but no nation other than South Africa recognized them. Lebowa, Kangwane, Gazankulu, Qwaqwa, KwaZulu, and KwaNdebele were declared “self-governing” in the 1970s.

None of the reserves were viable nations; they were made up of broken tracts of poor-quality land incapable of supporting their large populations. With no industry, opportunities for employment were few. Urban wage earners attempted to contribute to the support of their families in the reserves, but the level of black wages was so low

that this was barely feasible. In 1994 the Bantustans were abolished and the territories were reabsorbed into the nation of South Africa.

- **Opposition and Repeal**

Despite public demonstrations, United Nations resolutions, and opposition from international religious societies, apartheid was applied with increased rigour in the 1960s. In 1961 South Africa preferred to withdraw from the Commonwealth of Nations rather than abandon its racial policies. In the same year, the three South African denominations of the Dutch Reformed Church did the same, preferring to leave the World Council of Churches rather than abandon apartheid.

Probably the most important factors, both internal and external, that weakened the barriers of apartheid were economic. International sanctions severely affected the South African economy. In addition, the severe lack of skilled labour led to lifting limits on African wages, and granting Africans the right to strike and organize unions. Unions, churches, and students organized protests throughout the 1970s and 80s. Moreover, political, economic, and military pressures were exerted by the independent countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

As a result of these pressures, many lesser apartheid laws—such as those banning interracial marriage and segregating facilities—were repealed or fell into disuse by 1990. In 1991 President de Klerk obtained the repeal of the remaining apartheid laws and called for the drafting of a new constitution. In 1993 a multiracial,

multiparty transitional government was approved, and fully free elections were held in 1994, which gave majority representation to the African National Congress.

B- ISLAND OF OPPRESSION, PRISON OF JUSTICE

In such a chaotic context, it is no wonder that the first reception of *Foe* was so confused. Extreme situations call for extreme measures and as we have pointed out earlier, the critics were startled by the novel's seemingly breaking away from the South African problematic. The arguments claiming the absence of clear implications with the South African context are not totally wrong for no direct link is given to the reader. Still, reading the novel through postmodernism and intertextuality sheds light on the map of ideas that construct the text. Two exits are possible through the reading of this map. The first is to find inevitably the route of denunciation of imperial structures. The second is found when the reader puts all the elements of the jigsaw together with which he can find his way directly to South Africa. Ayo Kehinde confirms that "*from whichever perspective it is read, Coetzee's Foe is self-consciously written against the cultural stereotypes and representations commanding the field of postcolonial African literature.*"¹

The hidden meaning is left at the backstage of the narrative as a "mise en abyme". Linda Hutcheon explains² how this concept in fiction writing allows the writer to deal with narratives on three dimensions of narration. The first is the narrative's discourse with the pre-text (or the subject in general), the second is the narrative's discourse with

¹ Ayo Kehinde, "*Postcolonial African Literature and counter Discourse: J.M. Coetzee's Fiction and Reworking of Canonical Works*" (summary on the web)

² In Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p.48-53.

the reader and finally, the narrative's discourse on the socio-historical context. It is clearly apparent, in the study at stake, that each stage of this technique finds its equivalent in the construction of the narrative in *Foe*. Intertextuality develops the relation between the narrative and the pre-text. The metafictional discourse with all its self-reflexivity attracts the attention of the reader on the discourse taking place and appeals to his meditation on it. The allegory extended through the two levels of discourse -intertextuality and metafiction- deals with the socio-historical context. Consequently, as underlined before, every word bears its three dimensions of meanings.

Through this concept of "mise en abyme" of the historical meaning, every single point studied in the previous parts can be applied to Apartheid. Through its segregating rules, apartheid created a geographical gap between the populations by separating them on different territories. The many restrictions on inter-racial contacts resulted in an even wider gap prevailing on the social space. The combination of the two resulted in the development of different communities on different grounds having different (most of the time opposite) ideologies. And though living on the same soil, sometimes sharing the same space of life (as the workplace) no communication was possible, no contact was achieved.

People brushed past other people without touching, without even noticing the presence of others...as if they were ghosts! (a situation well described by Susan as stated earlier). People, whole populations lived one next to the other but as if they lived on their own. It is as if they shared the same space but lived each in a different dimension: on isolated islands. Any attempt at contact was sensed and lived as a

violation of frontiers, as a forbidden attempt to escape from one's territory, from one's prison. No need to emphasize again how much and how well these ideas construct the essence of *Foe*. Korang explains how "*the literary argument against the spectacular, the debased image, carries a specific political and pragmatic ethical charge in relations under Apartheid.*"¹ When putting the techniques used in the book in the light of the South African context then the veil slips down on dark spots of the book and innuendoes become direct statements with overt meanings. Susan's following words are a good example of this:

I understood why Friday had danced all day in your house: it was to remove himself, or his spirit, from Newington and England, and from me too. For was it to be wondered at that Friday found life with me as burdensome as I found life with him? As long as we two are cast in each other's company, I thought, perhaps it is best that we dance and spin and transport ourselves (103).

Korang affirms that Coetzee's textual and thematic displacements still return the reader to the South African, to Coetzee's settler's white patrimony on the one hand, and to the marginalized Africa on the other. In Korang's words, the white writer must find a way to negotiate opposed tides and to do so

*he is compelled to dive figuratively through the shipwreck of his history to reach Friday's home, imagining in the process an impossibly non-allegorical, non narrative, and non transcendent world where "bodies are their own signs."*²

Teresa Dovey confirms this idea by underlining the fact that the white writer's task in South Africa is not as simple as choosing to give voice to the oppressed or not for the ambiguity resides in the difficulty to question power from a position of power.

¹ Kwaku Larbi Korang, "An Allegory of Re-Reading: Post-colonialism, Resistance, and J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*", p.192.

² Korang, p.190.

CONCLUSION

“PIECING THE JIGSAW TOGETHER”

“Fiction reveals truths that reality obscures”

Jessamyn West

At this stage of the present study, we will first recapitulate to foreground the prominent findings of the three parts of this research which will lead to the main conclusion of the present research.

- **The Alliance Of Postmodernism And Intertextuality In *Foe***

We have seen in the first part, “islands of imperialism”, the main traits of Daniel Defoe, a writer whose fictions left an imprint on whole generations after him. We foregrounded those specific aspects of his life and his work marked by his personal commitment to the expansion of the British Empire. He not only actively participated in its expansion but tried to draw the lines, to set the rules and conditions for its expansion. The biographical elements exposed in this work show how much he was a visionary of the empire. We focused on two of his main novels, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana* for these are the main texts used in *Foe*.

We underlined the presence of extreme individualism in the construction of the heroes of both novels. We drew the similarities and differences of this characteristic between Robinson and Roxana. Those amount to a major similarity of individualism and the economic ruling drive. However, we also underlined the passive kind of individualism of Roxana caused by Defoe’s appropriation of a woman’s voice viewed as the voice of marginality at the time.

The extreme expression of individualism of *Robinson Crusoe* has always been a motto for the independent, successful modern individual. The intertextual project in *Foe* sheds light on the other side of those same specific aspects which made the success of Robinson. The study of intertextuality in the second part of this study

focused on those elements in *Foe* which re-present the characters of Defoe's works – namely *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana*. We showed how all the elements of the narrative, beginning from the title, work together to frame a malaise falling on Defoe's characters. The main outcome of intertextuality in *Foe* is the entrapment of characters. This entrapment is spread over all the levels of the narrative. The characters are shown captive of their past and of their silence and (De)Foe is shown to have a hold over them. We pinpointed how Friday holds the central place in this prison.

In the chapter on Postmodernism, we showed how the postmodernist strategies present in *Foe* enhance and enlarge the theme of entrapment in *Foe*. The entrapment proves to be -through the structure of the book- an entrapment of discourse and communication this time. The metafictional discourse prevalent in *Foe* introduces a questioning of the role of the author and writing and their respective power in determining, shaping and imposing stories. Related to the central theme of entrapment it establishes the relation between it -the theme of entrapment- and the role of the writer in shaping discourses. Consequently, the structure of the book, which corresponds to the characters' movement from one space of narration to another, allegorises the narrative's attempt to escape from one monological discourse to another towards a freer space of discourse.

Consequently, it becomes clear that although the novel is engaged in an intertextual project, intertextuality is not its main focus as much as the themes addressed through this intertextuality via the pre-texts. The dialogism engaged with the pre-text, namely *Robinson Crusoe*, addresses more widely the canonicity of its writer and the monological colonial discourse it left behind. The final section of the novel

finds then another dimension of meaning. It becomes the space of freezing of all canonical, colonial, monological discourses to privilege a freer speech of the marginalized. Only Friday is allowed to fill the silence of this space because it is the deconstructed space of the whole narrative where “*the bodies are their own signs*” (157).

The alternation of the previously mentioned strategies creates overlapping frames of meaning and interpretation co-existing in *Foe*. The combination of those overlapping frames of meaning allowed us to sense another possible frame of meaning which lead us directly to the South African Context. In part three of the present study we synthesised how the recurrence of strong elements of captivity, entrapment, and islands added to all the dialogical discourse of the novel and confirmed by a concrete clue from the text allowed us to make the connection with one of the strongest symbols in the history of the struggle in South Africa which is “Robben Island”. We underlined how such a strong symbol put in the middle of all the frames of narration in *Foe* could only emphasise the deconstructive discourse of the text; a deconstruction meant to dialogise and undermine the colonial imperialistic monological discourse and its tenants.

- **The Reader : the Intersection of Meanings**

Consequently, with all those overlapping layers of interpretation, an image, a setting, a character...a word in the text becomes an intersection of multiple possibilities of meanings. Each reader can add many possibilities through his own knowledge and thus add to the matrix of meanings hanging over the text. Each reader

will find himself called out to construct his own interpretation of the narrative. When he engages in the reading process, he will be himself trapped in the narrative until he finds his way out from its labyrinth. Susan's words seem to speak for themselves: "*Your search for a way out of the maze –if you are amazed or be-mazed- might start from that point and return to it as many times as are needed till you discover yourself to be saved*" (136). If the reader can not read the clues offered to him, if he has no background knowledge of the elements shaping the intertextuality within the narrative he will find no sense to the story, no plot...no way out from its labyrinth.

With a *narcissistic narrative* like *Foe*, the reader is really engaged in a personal commitment to fill in the gaps of the narrative through his own – and real- participation in the process of reading. The reading process with such a kind of narrative becomes very close to that of writing: there is a real personal commitment and effort to draw the contours of the story. Every element has to be continually reassessed and questioned to select its most valid meaning. As we saw earlier –in part two- meaning is approached bit by bit, the reader is engaged in a real process of piecing a jigsaw together. The reader becomes an active participant in this game of deciphering the narrative construction. Coetzee believes strongly in the mind challenging capacities of writing as for him, writing is but a linguistic game. The postmodern intertextuality as presented in *Foe* is certainly an attractive game of reading through the silences of the (hi)story.

Postmodernism and intertextuality allied bring forth a certain number of major characteristics in the novel. Through the maze set by metafiction and the blurring of setting and time through a cast of past actors of intertextuality, uncertainty is spread

over the narrative: on the reality and truth of the events it narrates, on its characters and their substantiality. The whole world of the narrative is questioned. Subjectivity of points of view, of events, of its narrators is put under scrutiny. The writer establishes then differentiates to disperse at last the narrative voices showing that there are always different facets for the same event. The spinning of questioning goes from one sphere of meaning to another until it broadens to reach a more general sphere outside the world of the novel: the world of the reader.

As a matter of fact, through the questionings over story telling and its recurrent problematic of finding the balance between truth of the story lived and that told or written, the reader is engaged in dialectics that make him transcend the boundaries of the text he has in front of him to ponder over the wider questions of the subjectivity of hi/story telling. As such, the postmodern intertextuality questions the subjectivity in our acquisition of knowledge, of history events, of all those facts that shape our perception of the world and determine our views on certain key positions. In the light of this discussion, it becomes clear that *Foe* reveals not only a subverting of Defoe's discourse but of all storytellers that can silence, exclude and absent past events in which case readers become conditioned to a subjective monological discourse. In this way, Coetzee does not only rewrite a story but also contributes in redefining –thus rewriting- a cultural history refusing a hegemony of a white, Western male world. .

The questioning spread over the narrative becomes a questioning of reference. In other words, one has to question the very references he uses for his acquisition of historical information as the referent is inscribed in the discourse of his culture and thus translated into texts. As we know the past –thus history- only through the

textualized forms then our knowledge is conditioned through the traces of those subjective referents. Here lies the necessity of keeping an alert critical mind to be able to make one's own reading of the discourses of history. Questioning every single fact that can be questioned is most certainly the nutshell enveloping all the core ideas of the narrative. In the same way, everything is questionable in *Foe*.

In *Foe*, the questioning started on Crusoe's island to question his authority, it quickly moved to question Foe's role in controlling Susan's story, it then moved to question Defoe's role in shaping stories and characters by silencing and distorting many facets in his narratives. When rewriting Defoe's narratives –with reference to *Roxanne* and *Robinson Crusoe*- Coetzee re-appropriates Defoe's discourse to dismantle it from within and foreground those missing facets ignored by him. By doing so, he sets the new rules on his island, he especially resets the places by decentring the first order and replacing the margins of the former discourse into the new centre –or shall we say into the centres of the narrative as the narrative of the postmodern intertextuality is first and foremost concerned with decentring narration.

- **Writing Stories, Rewriting Histories**

If Coetzee resisted the commentaries on his novels it was not because of his unwillingness to comment on them but because of his unwillingness to interfere with the discourses they generate. He spends enough time working and reworking his narratives that he encodes them with language structures that speak for themselves as any of his computer programs would do. The program runs automatically: once

programmed, the programmer has no need to interfere again. Once written, the narrative needs no comment; it generates comments on its own.

Coetzee's concern with the role and status of language as a powerful means of authority distances him from preoccupations of representation in realistic terms. However, it opens up new perspectives on the relation of the text as a means to rewrite discourses and thus to assimilate, reshape, redirect previous discourses. Those ones – discourses- when profoundly rooted in history or when closely related to important historical moments, this ability of rewriting the discourse turns out to be a means to affect and destabilize that particular place that the discourse held in history. From this perspective, writing and rewriting stories is a never-ending process of writing and rewriting discourses of hi/stories. This is the kind of big game which Coetzee's novels are about, which justifies his non interest in realistic representation.

Coetzee is certainly not part of the South African writers belonging to the literature of commitment as long as literary commitment is translated as realistic representation. However, as Coetzee underlines, aesthetics and revolutionary literature –or literature of commitment- are not incompatible and people who say they are incompatible are simply mistaken. Writing is first and foremost an arena for free expression, it emanates from the writer's being and this sends us back to the notion of referent and subjectivity. Feelings and perceptions can be the same but this does not exclude different expressions –hence the place for Art with its different facets. As we can not impose the supremacy of one art over another -say of painting over music- one can not judge a piece of writing according to fixed rules as we intrude the writer's world : his inner perception and inner reaction to a certain event. If we do so, then we

are most certainly falling into what we try to fight : monological discourses. What one expresses in shouts another expresses in silence...silence is not always synonymous of abnegation:

Letters are the mirror of words. Even when we seem to write in silence, our writing is the manifest of a speech spoken within ourselves...be attentive to yourself as you write and you will mark there are times when the words form themselves on the paper...out of the deepest of inner silence (142/3)

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