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Acts of Writing and Questions of Power: From Daniel Defoe to J.M. Coetzee

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Alla mia famiglia

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INTRODUCTION

Before becoming the famous Nobel laureate, winner of a number of awards among which the Booker-McConnell Prize and the Jerusalem Prize, J. M. Coetzee was first and foremost an academic who specialised in literature and mathematics, conflating the two subjects into linguistic studies, and who later turned again to literary studies and to writing. His interest in literary theory can be detected from the beginning of his career as a student, when it took the form of an early master's thesis on Ford Madox Ford and of a later doctoral dissertation on Samuel Beckett, whose influence persisted also in his strictly literary production.

An emigrant in his early twenties, Coetzee graduated in English and Mathematics at the Cape, and soon left South Africa to work as a computer programmer in England. After four years he went back to study literature at the University of Texas at Austin. In 1968 he moved to Buffalo, New York, where he was appointed a professor in African literature, and taught there until he was forced to return to South Africa after being embroiled in an anti-Vietnam war protest on campus. Almost ten years after his departure, with the first of his novels already half written, he returned to the Cape with a new consciousness: while he “had left South Africa to be part of a wider world,” he says in an interview with David Attwell, in the US “I discovered that my novelty value to the wider world, to the extent that I

had any novelty value, was that I came from Africa” (*DP*, 336).¹ His moving from the periphery to the centre of the Western metropolitan cultural environment must have at that time appeared vain if all his ambitions to be part of and contribute to the development of the wider world were reduced to his being merely considered a (South) African. To confirm such deluded desire to leave his provinciality behind his back, in the same interview he admits that “strictly construed, the terms of my visa were that I should depart the United States and use my American education for the betterment of my own country. But I had no desire to return to South Africa” (*DP*, 336). Today, half a century later, J. M. Coetzee is one of the most influential South African writers, whose literary and critical work attracts the attention of Western-oriented cultures, insofar as it represents for them a double source out of which they can enrich their tradition. Not only are his novels representative of the much troubled country he is from, thus answering the demands of Euro-American environments that he speak about Africa, but they also make continuing reference to that same European and American tradition which has had a strong influence on his upbringing and education.

The double presence of South African and Euro-American elements in Coetzee’s writing is consistent also with his personal situation, which we can define as highly ambiguous, but surely unavoidable: his mixed origins, his father being of Afrikaner and his mother of English descent, led him to identify with neither of these cultures within South Africa, and therefore to look outside the country in order to find a point of reference. “No Afrikaner would consider me an Afrikaner,” he admits to Attwell when talking about his identity;

¹ J.M. Coetzee, (1992) *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*. London: Harvard University Press, ed. David Attwell. Further quotations from this work will be referenced with the abbreviation *DP* followed by the page number.

Why not? In the first place, because English is my first language, and has been since childhood. An Afrikaner (primary and simplest definition) is a person whose first language is Afrikaans [...]. In the second place, because I am not embedded in the culture of the Afrikaner [...] and have been shaped by that culture only in a perverse way. What am I, then, in this ethnic-linguistic sense? I am one of many people in this country who have become detached from their ethnic roots [...] and have joined a pool of no recognizable *ethnos* whose language of exchange is English. (*DP*, 342)

Life in the interregnum, borrowing Gordimer's expression, lent to Coetzee's style and thematic concerns a characteristic mark; drawing on his complex personal background, it is almost natural that Coetzee, as a writer of fiction, would create novels whose characters live through a similar crisis of identity, and which belong to South Africa while at the same time detached from its immediate context and its cultural traditions. As Huggan and Watson also underline in their introduction to the collection of essays *Critical Perspectives on J. M. Coetzee*, "he is a first-world novelist writing out of a South African context" (1), and despite his voluntary exile he is also an intellectual feeling the burden of being complicit with that same white élite he claims not to be part of. Reflecting on the situation he found himself in around the late Sixties, he expresses a certain sense of inescapable complicity to Attwell:

The Americans I lived and worked among, fine people, generous, likeable, liberal in their values [...] were nevertheless as little able to halt the war machine as liberal whites at home were able to halt the forced removals. Whatever my private feelings, I was as complicit in the one case as in the other. (*DP*, 337)

If we look at his first six novels, published regularly between 1974 and 1990, the same inability to face and fight the bigger events, to take position either with or against the system is revealed in each of his characters, whom he depicts with a gradually developing interiority and psychology. It is possible indeed to trace in his

novels some recurring issues, as well as to detect a similar personality surfacing through the actions and thoughts of his characters; both elements create a thematic continuity and affinity among his early production.

That *Dusklands* (1974) was already underway when Coetzee left the United States appears clear from the first section, titled “The Vietnam Project” and narrated by Eugene Dawn, a mythographer writing an analysis and a project for the improvement of the psychological war in Vietnam. The images are strong; they draw on contemporary world issues and their unnecessary colonial violence which, at the end of the day, damages both the attacked and the invading population: Eugene Dawn, obsessed by some images of war brutality which he carries always with him, will eventually break down and enact that same ‘paternal’ violence on his little child. Running on the thread of colonial invasion and claims of power and control, and following Coetzee’s return to his homeland, section two goes back to the eighteenth century expeditions of the Dutch Jacobus Coetzee towards an inhospitable interior and its candidly guilty population of the Namaquas. A different epoch and different actors too, but the violence is the same: gratuitous cruelty bursts from the conqueror of Namaqua-land because he is unable to understand the different habits and traditions of a clearly different culture. Jacobus Coetzee, of whom our Coetzee claims to be translating the personal narrative as well as the official 1760 report, may symbolise all that the liberal writer refuses about his home country; nevertheless, even in the pitiless Jacobus at some points in the narrative the reader can detect a slight, cautiously expressed feeling of comradeship with and almost gratitude towards his one faithful old servant. This may serve as a hint for the direction toward which J. M. Coetzee’s introspection into his characters’ personality

will develop. Starting from his second novel, we will always read the narrations of white 'superior' individuals, with one single exception in *Michael K*, who show a complex and ambiguous relationship with black 'inferior' servants, and we will always perceive that such relationship is analysed and questioned in its principles not only by the writer but also by each of them. Magda, the protagonist of *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), is the first of such narrators, and Coetzee's choice of a woman is even more significant in his metaphorical depiction of the ambivalence of the white South African liberal. In an interview, Coetzee explained his awareness of the problems inherent in representing and criticising acts of power and authority by asking, "How can one question power ('success') from a position of power? One ought to question it from its antagonist position, namely the position of weakness" (Morphet, "Two Interviews", 462; reported in Macaskill and Colleran, 448, note 15). If in *Dusklands* the narrators are two strong colonial figures, who even though mentally unstable believe in what they do, the changes in the following works show an attempt to conform to the above conviction. Magda, Susan Barton and Elizabeth Curren are three white women who passively take part in the system, but because they are women they suffer the oppressive manners of the patriarchal authorities controlling them. On the other hand, the magistrate and the medical officer manage to threaten the power of Empire and of the state respectively, because they take the defence of and identify with the oppressed and, in the case of the magistrate, even suffer the same brutality.

Going back to *In the Heart of the Country*, Magda is a white girl living in the Karoo with her father, isolated from the rest of the world and stranded on a metaphorical island where dream and reality will merge to the point that the reader

is forced to be careful when reading her diary entries, doubting everything and believing everything at the same time. Magda is a child alone; she longs for some human, sympathetic attention from her father but gets none, because he directs all his affection first towards another bride and then towards the young black bride of his servant. Thus, her father disrupts the family balance enraging Magda until she fantasizes to murder him and his lover, until she finally shoots in the dark of his room while he is again spending the night with the servant Klein-Anna. Her father injured to death, the farm falls under Magda's unsteady control, and she attempts to establish the lost familial relationship, substituting her father with the old servant Hendrik. While on the one hand Magda tries to be a benevolent mistress, allowing the servants to sleep in the house and encouraging them to feel equal with her, on the other hand she at times detects their disrespect for her, a gleam of mockery in their complicit gaze. Their respective roles slowly reverse: two black servants have now reached a momentary power position and are allied against a young white woman forgotten by everyone out there in the middle of the country, in the middle of nowhere. Hendrik is now empowered with the same authority held until not long before by Magda's father; not only can he feel the master of the house and of Magda, but now he also has the chance to even the scores and take rightfully what Magda's father had taken unrightfully from him. Since Magda narrates the culminating event of her union with Hendrik three times each time differently, it is difficult to understand whether she has been raped or it was consensual intercourse; even more so because she hints at the possibility that that was what she wanted, an incestuous relationship with a paternal figure finally caring for her and entitling her with womanhood. In his second novel Coetzee develops his characters and draws a picture of continual reversing, with a white protagonist holding authority over the

black characters by virtue of her whiteness and with black characters taking revenge for the mistreatment they have suffered, slaves enslaving their mistress in their turn. But *In the Heart of the Country* also offers an insight into the troubled and contradictory relationship of a young woman with the authority of the father, a formula which will represent a background frame in the subsequent novel, where an individual faces a white authority determined to win its war against the unknown barbarian enemy.

Magda is, indeed, only the first of a number of characters so depicted by Coetzee: like her, the magistrate of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the medical officer taking care of Michael in *Life and Times of Michael K*, and the other two women Susan Barton and Elizabeth Curren, narrators and protagonists of *Foe* and *Age of Iron* respectively, will occupy an ambivalent position with respect to the ‘inferior’ colonial Other as well as to their own system; in this sense, they may be described as helpless pieces of a greater order they do not feel part of but nevertheless cannot escape from. The third novel of Coetzee’s early corpus, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), shifts the focus back on an unavoidable topic for a South African postcolonial writer: violence. The violence described by the magistrate is twofold: on the one side, it is the same colonial violence depicted in *Dusklands* and epitomized by the Voortrekker Jacobus Coetzee. The peaceful frontier outpost governed by the magistrate is rapidly transformed by Empire into a war post from which to attack the barbarians, who are believed to be roaming on the outside of the fort with the intention of intimidating, invading, and finally conquering the Empire. Therefore Empire needs to proceed with a preventive attack of the barbarians, giving reasons that appear only pretentious when seen through the eyes of the liberal

magistrate, who is driven by moral scruples in all his actions. On the other side, *Barbarians* deals extensively with the bodily violence of torture, introducing thus the issue of the disfigured body of the Other. In this case, it is the body of a young barbarian girl which has been transformed into a cluster of signs the magistrate is unable to decipher, in spite of all his attempts, just as he cannot interpret the barbarian scripts he digs out of an archaeological site. A normal man used to reading the world with his eyes but attempting to read it only through the touch of his fingers, the magistrate finds it impossible to look at the core of this girl with his eyes and attempts to reach her soul, her true self by establishing a connection other than literally visual. The attempt to retrieve the image of her before she was tortured proves ineffective, both when he recurs to the manipulation of the girl's body, inch by inch starting from her feet, and when he tries to see her face in his recurring dream. The Other is impenetrable for the colonist – be he torturer or saviour the distinction is not meaningful –, and it closes behind the hard shell of its body and its silence to prevent any further imposition by the colonizer. The magistrate of *Barbarians* is conscious of the necessity to read this girl, but also to let her go and avoid to transform himself into a torturer only kinder than Captain Joll; he has been partially blinded by Empire, but he attempts to escape its brutality and to find his 'humanism'/humanity back, siding with the barbarians and considering them human beings. The inversion of roles is complete when he is tortured in his turn, and understands who the real barbarians are.

While the barbarian girl still answered some of the magistrate's questions, somehow in an effort to help him get closer to understanding her, Michael K decides to be silent, even though his words would anyway come distorted out of his hare lip,

thus contributing to his characterisation as an imbecile. Focussing on Michael for two thirds of the narration, with *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) Coetzee shifted the perspective of his novel-writing for the first time on a non-white character, even though his non-whiteness is never clearly declared but rather only hinted at. This time the shades of a civil war remain on the background, only intermittently intruding into the protagonist's life and convicting him to a camp life he always manages to escape. A young man in his thirties, Michael has always lived alone; he is one of the forgotten children of his country together with Magda, but while she longed to be seen and acknowledged by the wide world he wants to be invisible, instead, to go through his life untouched by the civil war raging in the Cape and in the Karoo, ignored by everyone. His vocation is to be a gardener, and once he has found the farm where he believes his mother had lived as a child he buries her ashes and decides to live off the fruits this mother-earth will bear for him. Through his narration, we witness to the progressive transformation of Michael into an element of the earth, belonging to it like a mole that hides in his burrow during the day and lives at night, cultivating his pumpkins and melons and hiding them from human sight. No one will understand his reasons and his lifestyle, not the young deserter who comes hiding to the farm, not the troops of soldiers who believe him to be siding with the rebels, not even the medical officer from whose point of view we observe Michael's last internment into a camp, the recovery camp of Kenilworth where he is taken as a guerrilla dissident. In his desire not to be interpreted Michael K seems to prefigure Friday, and to place himself in an intermediate position between the silenced, uninterpretable body of the black castaway and the scarred but still recoverable body of the barbarian girl. Even though the medical officer will try many times to make Michael speak, tell his story and the reason why he has decided

to let himself starve to death, nothing will come out of his lips; Michael K will at last appear as a resistant figure, resisting impositions from outside and only wanting to live outside history, outside any form of society, above all outside the camps that so neatly provide a forced shelter for the rejected. Michael K willingly keeps that silence that, in *Foe*, Friday will be forced to live with by colonial-imperial, as well as textual-authorial, powers and to transform into a valuable form of protection against those same authorities.

The development of Coetzee's writing from the first novel to *Foe* is meaningful and allows to see some *traits d'union* that are almost summarized in this novel, even though "in each of the four novels after *Dusklands* there seems to be one feature of technique on which there is a heavy concentration. In *In the Heart* it was cutting, montage. In *Barbarians* it was milieu. In *Michael K* it was the pace of narration. In *Foe* it was voice" (DP, 142-143), as he himself admitted. The shift in Coetzee's fifth novel is, indeed, towards a more exasperated textuality, towards the question of silence and voice and who is finally allowed to speak. The narrator will be once again a woman, but all her attention will focus mainly on two elements: on the one side, she will try to make the oppressed and silenced slave Friday speak, while on the other side she will carry through a thorough analysis of the force-play involved in novel writing and on the right of an author to take possession of someone else's story and transform it into fiction. *Foe*, which is the subject matter of the following discussion, may be read as a sort of climax in which all the elements of the previous novels conflate to give birth to a complex text, whose themes not always emerge plainly but are rather indirectly hinted at through veiled allusions. As we shall see, *Foe* embraces issues as varied as: colonial violence, both as invading

force and as bodily torture, carried out by single-minded, Eurocentric imperial whites; the liberal moral values of a white woman narrator who perceives her complicity with the system but cannot avoid being part of it; and a particular attention to the resistance of the oppressed Other, and to his silence as a response to the attempts to discover his story. A prominent feature which is here accentuated is also intertextuality: the previous novels implied reference to a past literary tradition both South African and Euro-American through formal, stylistic or thematic traits, as for example the constant reference to the South African pastoral novel or to the travel narrative of the early settlers, or the Kafkian reminiscences of *Michael K*; alternatively, they took such tradition as a starting point, a basis for a further development like the case of Cavafy's poem from which the title and subject matter of *Waiting for the Barbarians* are taken. In the case of *Foe* both elements merge in a novel which is explicitly intertextual, with a storyline overtly following *Robinson Crusoe* and taking many elements from other novels by Daniel Defoe, in a reverent parody of them, and displaying different styles which mimic various eighteenth-century modes of narration.

Chapter 1. The hypertextuality of *Foe*

The fifth novel by J.M. Coetzee, *Foe*, presents itself as his “most obviously metafictional text” (Head, 112), which arises in a reader familiar with the European literary tradition at least the connection with the well-known eighteenth-century writer Daniel Defoe. In this novel, in fact, not only are his most famous fiction *Robinson Crusoe* and his own biography overtly recalled, but a specialist will not fail to identify also reference to other of his works, i.e. *Roxana*, to a minor degree *Moll Flanders*, and the early short story “A True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs. Veal”. Following Gerard Genette’s definition of hypertextuality as “any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary” (1997, 5), it soon becomes clear that *Foe* can be considered as the hypertext to a number of hypotexts. Its hypertextuality, however, is more complex than it would appear at a first glance, to the extent that it cannot be defined a mere re-writing of *Robinson Crusoe*, since the interconnections woven together by the author are multiple. Moreover, we should bear in mind that as a transposition *Foe* has attained the status of literary work, and thanks to its “aesthetic and/or ideological ambition” it has almost “obfuscate[d] [its] hypertextual character”

(Genette, 1997; 213), so that its analysis must at one point depart from Defoe's works. On a formal basis Coetzee's novel can thus be seen as a postmodern text playing with tradition, i.e. at the same time acknowledging it as a model to draw on and deconstructing it in an effort to unveil its flaws and to compete with it. Examined from this perspective, it may represent an interesting reading that sheds light on the process of writing and on the relationship of a literary work with tradition; on another level, however, this rewriting of the famous castaway story may also be considered as functional to a discussion on the South African situation of oppression and silencing (Head, 112). Coetzee, in *Foe*, has indeed created a hypertext that is rooted in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, but he then departed from it to provide its readers with a thorough, though veiled, reflection on more contemporary issues of political and social interest. Before moving to a more detailed discussion of the important thematic transformations that have been introduced by Coetzee and which have occurred during the whole process of rewriting, it may therefore be useful to look at the relationship that binds *Foe* with its main hypotext, i.e. to compare the two texts from a superficial point of view in order to identify the main differences and the shifts in the narrative focus.

1.1. One hypertext, more hypotexts

Two of its central characters, Cruso and Friday, are *Foe*'s main inheritance from Defoe's *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, even though the correspondence is closer to a faint resemblance than to a real identity. A change which inscribes from the beginning a difference, "although this is noticeable

only in the written form”, is the loss of the final –e in the protagonist’s name, as Kossew observes (1996, 163); leaving the formal, linguistic change aside, Robinson Crusoe has been transformed from the young and active adventurer he was into the old Mr Cruso, a man of “sixty years of age” (*F*, 8),¹ physically consumed by the time spent on the island and with no more demands from his life than daily survival. While on Defoe’s island the castaway meticulously organised his days so that he would not stand idle but always work to his own benefit, thus allowing the following generations to identify him as a symbol *ante litteram* of capitalism, on Coetzee’s island he works only a few hours a day without profit whatsoever and spends the rest of his time meditating and looking out to the ocean. So different is Cruso’s nature from Crusoe’s that he shows no need for the hundreds of tools his literary predecessor had rescued from the wreck or had created during his solitary life. Curiously enough, he does not even show the desire to either tell his story, to leave memory of himself, or to keep an account of the days and years he has spent on the island. The careful autobiographer of Defoe’s has died in Cruso to the point that he has become unreliable as to his life, seemingly unable to remember his past or to know “for sure what was truth, what fancy” (*F*, 12), as the narrator of *Foe* speculates. Eagerness to make new experiences does not seem to be part of his personality, as was the case with the young Crusoe, and though he continually looks out at sea it is not because he awaits rescue; the narrator speculates that “the desire to escape had dwindled within him. His heart was set on remaining to his dying day king of his tiny realm”, and what finally held him back from any attempt to escape was “indifference to salvation, and habit, and the stubbornness of old age” (*F*, 13-14). Kraft, talking about such meditations of Cruso, describes them as “spiritual

¹ For practical reasons, all direct quotations from *Foe* will be referenced using the abbreviation *F* followed by the relevant page number.

exercises” (47) and explains them as “moments of spiritual transcendence [which] are experienced [...] as solitary, bodiless, and enigmatic communions with an unnamed, unseen presence” (46). A further remarkable difference between the two Robinsons pertains their death: while Crusoe is rescued after twenty-eight years and goes on to live enough to write two more accounts, Cruso does not outlive his rescue. When a ship finally arrives on the island, Cruso is found ill with fever; in spite of his unconscious state, “when he was hoisted aboard the *Hobart*, and smelled the tar, and heard the creak of timbers, he came to himself and fought so hard to be free that it took strong men to master him and convey him below” (*F*, 39). Never returning to his wits again, he will die a few days later. From this introductory comparison, evidence is clear to the reader that what the narrator tells of this Cruso is quite the opposite of what we know of the Crusoe described by Defoe; the further one reads through the novel the more it becomes clear that Coetzee’s aim is to somehow lay bare Defoe’s literary artifice through a complete reversal of the story (Head, 114).

The first person the reader meets on the island is not Robinson, however. Through the eyes of a still unknown internal narrator we see “a Negro with a head of fuzzy wool, naked save for a pair of rough drawers” whose “flat face, the small dull eyes, the broad nose, the thick lips, the skin not black but a dark grey” (*F*, 5-6) call to mind a black African rather than a native South American, where the island is located. It is Friday, but in him nothing is left of the “Sweetness and Softness of an *European* in his Countenance” that Robinson Crusoe describes after observing his new manservant, noting also that

His Hair was long and black, not curl’d like Wool; his Forehead very high, and large, and a great Vivacity and sparkling Sharpness in his Eyes. The Colour of

his Skin was not quite black, but very tawny; [...] His Face was round, and plump; his Nose small, not flat like the Negroes, a very good Mouth, thin Lips [...] (RC, 148-149).²

Friday's transformation in *Foe* is in all respects similar to the one involving Crusoe, since not only his physical features but also his behaviour proves to be incongruous with Defoe's character, to which he nevertheless makes continuous reference. Information about the 'Negro slave' of *Foe* is all but definite and reliable, but we may in any case conclude that this Friday seems to have landed on the island together with Crusoe, when he was still a young boy but already in a subject position. He is unable to speak because, Crusoe says, his tongue has been cut out by the slavers, and the few English words he knows and understands are those essential to carry out his master's orders. Even this short introduction of him allows to affirm that the power of colonialism has been sharpened by Coetzee's re-characterisation of Friday; this time, however, this mute slave looks impenetrable to any type of cultural colonization while, on the other hand, his eighteenth-century counterpart was depicted as the 'noble savage' eager to yield to civilisation (Iannaccaro, 106). The power brought to the forefront in *Foe* is not merely the supremacy of a culture over another, but the more pervasive power of physical and mental violence.

Up to this point, it is clear that Coetzee has basically built his novel using Defoe's *Crusoe* as an important starting point; however diverse the two works may be, the affinity between the two stories can be detected mainly within Part I of this hypertext, where the above-mentioned characters are introduced and their lives on the island is described thoroughly. Nonetheless, the one striking difference the reader cannot fail to notice right after reading the first few pages of *Foe* is that this

² For practical reasons, all direct quotations from *Robinson Crusoe* will be referenced using the abbreviation RC followed by the relevant page number.

time the narrator is not Robinson, as in the (fictional) autobiography of Defoe. Plunging into the narrative *in medias res*, the reader encounters at first some difficulties as to understanding whose eyes and thoughts are guiding them first out of the ocean and then on to a hilltop towards the interior of the island. The detail of the petticoat suggests it is a woman, and this arises even more perplexities since in Defoe's narrative no women ever appear, and when they do they are only mentioned. Who is she, then, and where does she come from? We need to read on just a few pages to learn that her name is Susan Barton, and she has been marooned on Cruso's island by the mutineers of the ship she was sailing in to go back to England. Before being a castaway, she had lived in Brazil for two years where she had been searching for a lost daughter, without success (*F*, 10-11). She is the repository of Cruso's story and the only witness to the life of the island who can tell something about it. Indeed, following her desire to make her singular story known to the English public and thus restore herself to a better social condition, once in England she writes an account of it under the title "The Female Castaway. Being a True Account of a Year Spent on a Desert Island. With Many Strange Circumstances Never Hitherto Related" (*F*, 67) and sends it to a writer, the famous Daniel Foe who "will know how to set it right" (*F*, 47). While chasing Foe and putting pressure on him for the writing of her story, she is herself dogged by a girl who bears her own name and claims kinship. It is at this point, when the episode of the girl is introduced and we read all the details she provides about her lost mother, that we are able to uncover Susan's mysterious identity. Coetzee has taken her, the lost daughter and her maid Amy – who will appear only towards the end – from Defoe's novel *Roxana, or the fortunate mistress*, and the overlapping is most significant: first of all the protagonist's name is Susan in both novels; the would-be

daughter, too, is called Susan and finds no maternal recognition in the mother (*F*, 73). Other correspondences between these two works can be detected when Barton's would-be daughter "says her father was a brewer. That she was born in Deptford" (*F*, 75), and that her father enlisted "as a grenadier in the Low Countries" to escape creditors; so she was left with "a maidservant named Amy or Emmy" (*F*, 76), who, on the contrary, in *Roxana* is the faithful servant of the protagonist. In assuming this Susan to be the "intermediary of Crusoe's story" in *Foe*, Coetzee has ultimately established an "intertextual circularity" between the hypertext and its hypotexts (Head, 114-115).

This circularity can be thus explained: *Foe*, written in the twentieth century, is a novel that draws on both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana* for its characters and for part of the episodes it narrates; while it needs the existence of these works in order to exist in its turn, at the same time it purports to be the official version of events which have been manipulated by Defoe to be acceptable for the eighteenth-century public. It is thus that Susan's "experience is rechannelled according to the desires of the patriarchal author", Head maintains, and her dull story is re-shaped in order to conform to a more appropriate representation of both man and woman:

Crusoe remains a myth of the male pioneering spirit, while the challenge which Susan represents is reinscribed, in *Roxana*, as a challenge to codes of economic subjugation and sexual fidelity in marriage (a challenge ultimately condemned in that novel's moral scheme). (Head, 115)

The complex interconnections between Defoe's novels and *Foe* can therefore be read from the point of view of the writing of a story and all the implications that this means: who disposes over the facts and events and how? To what purpose and to what extent is the result realist and reliable? All these issues will be discussed in due

course, but first the comparative analysis of *Foe* and *Robinson Crusoe* brings our discussion to the changes in and/or addition of themes.

1.2. Thematic transformation

The overview of the main intertextual relationships existing between *Foe* and its hypotexts has given the opportunity to compare and contrast the sources with their re-writing, and moreover to mention, or at least hint at the main issues to which Coetzee has drawn attention. From the reading of any rewriting appears evident that “there is no such thing as an *innocent* transposition: i.e. one that does not in one way or another alter the meaning of its hypotext”, especially when the text is augmented or transfocalized (Genette, 1997; 294). In the process of rewriting *Robinson Crusoe*, Coetzee has operated what Genette defines a “*diegetic* transposition” (1997, 294), meaning with this expression all those changes in “the world wherein [the] story occurs” (1997, 295). Not only have Cruso and Friday undergone major modifications in their nature, but a new narrator, Susan Barton, and moreover the fictionalised figure of Foe have also been added to a story which is at the same time similar to and completely different from the original of Defoe. It is through these characters and their words or actions that Coetzee provides his reader with reflections on three main relevant themes which can all be grouped under “the question of *who writes?* Who takes up the position of power, pen in hand?”, as he himself acknowledged during an interview (as quoted in Gallagher, 169). Remarks about authorship and the activity of the writer are thus ever-present in *Foe* through

Susan's letters and then in her long conversation with Foe, but they are also the means through which the other two topics are discussed and foregrounded.

Even though Coetzee has been often criticised for not being directly engaged with the political struggle involving many South African writers (Huggan, 3), and he himself has more than once expressed his irritation with those who “automatically try to interpret my thinking in political terms” (Gallagher, 167), it is undeniable that his literary work deals primarily with the events afflicting his native country. *Foe*, in recovering the story of Robinson Crusoe and re-writing it, can indeed be seen as “a retreat from the South African situation, but only from that situation in a narrow temporal perspective”, Coetzee states. He further specifies that his novel does not retreat “from the subject of colonialism or from questions of power” (interview reported in Gallagher, 169), but rather delves into them by depicting the complex relationship between his characters, and by centring on and around the dumb slave Friday. The introduction of a female character is furthermore an occasion first to consider the role and position of women in eighteenth-century Western society, and second to express the ambiguities faced by the white South African intellectual, of whom Susan would represent an allegory.

1.2.1. Imperialism, colonialism and post-colonialism

Robinson Crusoe has in time established itself as “an embodiment of the great myth of Western imperialism, an enthusiastic narrative of the project of ‘civilizing’ virgin territories and indigenous peoples” (Head, 113), thus representing a sort of mirror image of the eighteenth century when the colonization of the Third World was at its dawn. His story is a collection of imperialist acts towards the other, be it a territory,

an animal or a human being. An adventurer at heart, Defoe's character leaves the security of his father's business to take sail, and after a number of vicissitudes he ends up establishing his own business as a planter in Brazil. Buying a piece of "Land that was Uncur'd" (*RC*, 27) and transforming it, with careful labour and a lot of patience, into a productive plantation is merely a prefiguring of his later colonization of the desert island. Once on the island, in fact, he proves to be a meticulous worker able to create a real kingdom from scratch, with two dwelling places, cultivated land, and a flock of tamed goats. When finally his personal creation seems complete he can define himself "Prince and Lord of the whole Island" (*RC*, 108), and when other Europeans land on it he even appoints himself Governor. Moving from the mother country England to new territories, the British colonizer hiding within Crusoe comes out plainly; it is however in his relationship with other people that his ethnocentric, imperialist mentality is most clearly revealed. His first encounter with the Other takes place before the shipwreck, when Crusoe escapes from his captivity by the Moors with the boy Xury, who becomes his first slave and whom Crusoe loves for being faithful and obliging to him. Even though upon their adventure of escaping from the Moors Crusoe promised "if you will be faithful to me I'll make you a great Man" (*RC*, 19), later a modest offer by the Portuguese captain who saves them is enough to arouse in him only a few scruples about selling "the poor Boy's Liberty" (*RC*, 26); his doubts can, in fact, be satisfied by the captain's promise "to set him free in ten Years, if he turn'd Christian" (*RC*, 26). The proof that, as Ian Watt suggests, Crusoe "treats his personal relationships in terms of their commodity value" (301) lies in his later regret for not having such a good servant as Xury at his disposal in the moment of need. The same attitude he will show towards Friday, the 'cannibal' he saves from certain death and who becomes his manservant and only

companion on the island. It has often been remarked that Crusoe's consideration of him is plainly Eurocentric, and his behaviour towards him is not dissimilar to his behaviour towards the much beloved parrot (Marshall, 914). Showing no interest in Friday's own name, his culture or language, he imposes a name, the English language and culture, and even a new religion on him, and thus creates a puppet enslaved but completely at ease with his condition; Friday is moulded into a perfect, subservient slave whose identity is ignored by his colonizing master, and also willingly effaced by himself.

This eighteenth-century imperialist mentality is retained by Coetzee, who however sharpens Crusoe's behaviour towards the other by making of him an authoritarian patriarch and an allegorical representative of the white male oppressor of South Africa. Consequently, Friday would stand for the black South African who has been silenced by the European power, obliged to obey and deprived of the means to rebel against domination. Coetzee's choice of *Robinson Crusoe* as his hypotext for *Foe* is therefore meaningful, since he is well aware that the history of South Africa is bound up with colonialism and with the presence of Europeans on its territory (Huggan, 13). The shadow of Defoe's novel in the background always reminds the reader of the past of conquest and subjection carried through by the Europeans and creates "a strong association" with the "early Dutch settlement in South Africa" through a temporal coincidence: *Crusoe* was published in 1719, short after the first great movements of the Dutch settlers from the Cape towards the interior (Head, 113). A second connection is even more incisive, since it takes the reader directly to consider the complex contemporary situation in South Africa. In the 1980s the country was still living a surge of rebellion, and the many

insurrections and riots were once again repressed through violence by the white minority government, which in 1986 – *Foe*'s publication year – proclaimed the National State of Emergency and safeguarded once again the regime of apartheid. The distortion and repression of the voice of the black was, and still is systematically carried out, as Gallagher points out (31). Not only in that historical moment was the black population kept away from any form of higher education, but also each time they attempted to make their voices heard through “nonviolent strikes, protests, and defiance campaigns” they were silenced by a growing policy of banning orders (Gallagher, 31). Many intellectuals, whose works were banned or heavily censored, Gallagher continues, were led either to interrupt their writing activity in order to take on the political struggle or to leave the country in voluntary exile. Given such situation in South Africa, it is plain enough that Friday's mutilation in *Foe* stands as an allegory of a whole population mutilated by the oppressor.

The presence of Susan Barton, then, further complicates the reference to colonial issues, since after Crusoe's death she is the only inheritor of his properties, i.e. the island, the slave Friday, and his story. Once back in England, she takes on her shoulders “the white man's burden” and decides to take care of Friday, observing that he is a helpless creature who at any time runs the risk of becoming a slave again. Her behaviour towards him is most of the times contradictory: to a patronizing maternal care she alternates an authoritarian tone, and she herself must admit that “there are times when benevolence deserts me and I use words only as the shortest way to subject him to my will” (*F*, 60). In recounting their everyday life, moreover, Susan cannot avoid representing herself as the mistress intent on writing

their story, while she depicts Friday as the servant who must “(carry) out his few duties” (*F*, 92). Despite these bare facts, she claims that Friday is “his own master” and she “no slave-owner” (*F*, 150), and proves it with “a deed granting Friday his freedom and signed (it) in Crusoe’s name” that she hangs around his neck (*F*, 99). This gesture, however liberating she may think it is, can be interpreted as enslaving rather than liberating Friday, and the scar around his neck will at the end of the novel stand as proof for it; Susan is therefore comparable and indeed compared to the slave-traders who oppressed and chained their victims (Marais, 1989; 13). Keeping in mind that *Foe* appears “as an allegory of modern South Africa” (Head, 119), the ambivalence of Susan’s behaviour could also be interpreted as the ambivalent position of the white South African liberals who cannot avoid the feeling of partaking to the *status quo* but at the same time distance themselves from it, characterising themselves as opponents of the system. Like many of Coetzee’s characters before her, Susan represents the “dissenting coloniser” who tries to escape “from a role which condemns [her] as subject(s) to confront others as objects in interminable, murderous acts of self-division”, as Watson clearly explains (23). This ambiguous positioning is further reinforced by her gender, which puts her in between the colonizing and the colonized (Kossew, 1998; 168): not only is she a white European who willy-nilly exerts power over the inferior black African, but she is also a woman subject to the same male authority that subjugates Friday, as proved by Crusoe’s and Foe’s behaviour towards her.

1.2.2. *The addition of a woman and the connection with feminism*

The fact that Coetzee has decided to re-write *Robinson Crusoe* from the perspective of a woman, Susan Barton, represents in itself a feminist challenge to this powerful

“myth of ascendancy” of Crusoe (Maher, 35), and a way to resist and subvert the “patriarchal master text” while at the same time revealing “correlations between the experiences of racial and sexual subjugation” (Macaskill and Colleran, 440). In a South Africa where apartheid and issues of race have been the most compelling political themes on which attention has been focused, it is not easy to foreground gender-related issues or to address them without touching on race. It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that in *Foe* the female narrator Susan Barton occupies a mediatory role in the colonial equation, i.e. she represents the half-colonized who at the same time shows “sympathy for the oppressed” and “entrapment within the oppressive group” (Driver as quoted in Kossew, 1998; 168). A position she shares with the author Coetzee and which has caused many critics to argue whether she can really be considered a “feminist heroine”, given that her treatment of the slave Friday little differs from the patriarchal treatment she experiences as Crusoe’s and Foe’s subject (Jolly, 140). This ambiguity notwithstanding, Coetzee’s primary aim in reinstating the woman to her original position as owner, creator and narrator of the castaway story is to point to the act of supremacy carried out by the eighteenth-century author Defoe, thus criticising “the male appropriation of women’s writing” (Wright, 2008; 21). Even though many feminist critics have argued that Coetzee’s “representation of women” would merely mirror that same “patriarchal, appropriative and repressive” power he is intent on uncovering (Kossew, 1998; 167), *Foe* can still be analysed as a novel presenting a feminist struggle for the authorial control over a story.

In the course of the narrative Susan develops self-confidence, and through her writing activity she becomes aware of her power to shape the story as she wants

it to be written, thus loosening the ties that bind her to Foe as an (in)substantial body that is “drearly suspended till your writing is done” (*F*, 63). While at the beginning she entreated Foe to “return to me the substance I have lost” (*F*, 51), by the time they meet in Part III she has become an independent author who has built her identity by authorising her narrative and who cannot and does not want to be a mother, both figuratively and concretely. Refusing the motherhood imposed on her by Foe, whom she accuses of having conjured up the false daughter with her maid, she resists “her positioning as gender object” (Macaskill and Colleran, 448) and manages to substitute the male author by first getting hold of his pen, and then by expressing her desire to be the father of her story. Like the Muse, “a goddess, who visits poets in the night” (*F*, 126), during her sexual intercourse with Foe she transforms her attempt to be the begetter of her story into a bold reversal of sexual stereotypes, thus turning Foe into the mother whose womb will bear the fruits of this encounter (Kossew, 172). What he generates, however, we know is a story that silences the woman, effacing her from the castaway narrative and re-directing her into a mother-daughter fiction. Even though she dares to compare him to her mistress or even her wife, Foe takes his authority back from Susan through a vampirising act (Wright, 2008; 22): while kissing her, he bites her lip and then “suck(s) the wound” (*F*, 139), re-establishing their roles as the male colonizer and the female subject. Even though she finally fails, Susan’s desire and attempt to tell the story of the island, and therefore her own story, can be interpreted as a daring step towards her affirmation as a woman, as a way of “writing [herself] into history” (Wright, 2008; 20) and thus resisting that patriarchal authority which tends to efface women from history as well as from fiction. The fictionalised writer Foe appears therefore as an enemy who, instead of helping her to emerge from darkness,

“essentially revises her character in order to assert patriarchal control over her story, experience and sexuality” (Wright, 2008; 20), and in order to finally re-channel it into another story. What Macaskill and Colleran define as the heretical account of Susan’s adventure (440), where she abandons the search of her daughter and becomes the mistress of a castaway, will eventually be re-inscribed by Foe into a “narrative that restores the child to the mother [and that] is less subversive than Susan’s indecent narrative”, as Laura Wright suggests in her study (20).

The parallel drawn here with Roxana and also with Moll Flanders, the protagonists of Defoe’s eponymous novels, is meaningful. Foe is in fact transforming Susan, her boldness and her attempt to assert herself as a free woman, into the only model of free women accepted in the eighteenth century. According to Spivak, Roxana, whose first name is of course Susan, would represent “the female marginal”, “the *exceptional* entrepreneurial woman for whom the marriage contract is an inconvenience when the man is a fool” (1990, 8). Both Roxana and Moll Flanders, in Defoe, are depicted as women who attempt the way of autonomy and independence and are therefore obliged to renounce respectability and turn into mistresses or thieves. The price for freedom is therefore the use of “sexuality as labour power”, but also the sacrifice of motherhood for a “destiny of female individualism” (Spivak, 1990; 9). Similarly, when Susan recounts her life in Bahia, she admits that because she moved freely within the city she “was thought a whore”, but then further specifies that “there are so many whores there, or, as I prefer to call them, free women, that I was not daunted” (*F*, 115). Like Defoe’s protagonists, Susan knows that her behaviour does not conform to the acceptable standards of the time; even though she does not seem ashamed of her conduct, still she complies with

the patriarchal suggestion of the captain of the *Hobart* to pass “as Mrs Cruso to all on board”, because “it would not easily be understood what kind of woman I was” (*F*, 42). Her ironic smile in response to this observation and her rhetorical question, some lines later: “Do you think of me, Mr Foe, as Mrs Cruso or as a bold adventuress?” (*F*, 45) prove that she knows the answer to her moral doubts. The fact that she passively accepts the captain’s advice, just as on the island she had excused Cruso’s abuse of herself with the words “he has not known a woman for fifteen years, why should he not have his desire?” (*F*, 30), and just as she will later give herself to Foe for the sake of her story, allows to group her together with all those white women who are, according to Laura Wright,

complicit victims of male domination and of violence that is enacted not only on their bodies, but also on the bodies of their black counterparts, on the bodies of animals, and on the land itself. By excusing such sexual violations, these narrators [i.e. Magda and Susan] maintain a complicity that enables their violators to perpetuate the more pervasive violence of colonization. (21)

Such complicity, and the ambiguity that derives from it, further reinforces Susan’s dilemma about authorship and about her right to interpret Friday’s silence and speak for him.

1.2.3. Postmodern influences

When dealing with its hypertextuality, one of the first remarks that could be made about *Foe* was that, drawing on already existing texts, it could be, and indeed has been considered a highly postmodern text. It is in fact well-known that one of the main concerns of postmodern literature is that of deconstructing the “master narrative of European culture” often through those same subversive strategies that characterise post-colonial writing, i.e. irony, parody, mimicry, and the focus on

language and on the role of writing in the construction of experience (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 117). Not surprisingly, therefore, has *Foe* been regarded as a novel dealing with both post-colonial and postmodern discourse, which are intertwined throughout the narrative but should however be dealt with separately, being the discussion about their relationship still open. Following Linda Hutcheon, who suggests that “‘postmodern’ could also be used [...] to describe art which is paradoxically both self-reflexive (about its technique and material) and yet grounded in historical and political actuality” (1989, 150), the current section will mainly concentrate on the postmodern character of *Foe*, shedding light first on its relationship with the past and second on one among the many meta-narrative acts it includes.

It has already been hinted at that, through its composite reference to Daniel Defoe’s work, *Foe* establishes a connection with the English literary tradition which proves at the same time respectful and critical. The rewriting has implied that Coetzee acknowledged the importance and influence of the eighteenth-century writer, who is to be considered at the same time an innovator for the artifice of presenting a fictional story as a historical autobiography and the father of the English novel. Coetzee in fact proves to be “sensitive to Defoe’s technical achievements and innovations” (Head, 113), exploiting in his narrative all the different modes of *Crusoe*, which are also typical eighteenth-century narrative forms and which range from the autobiographical account to the “epistolary narrative”, and to “a first-person narrative focalised through conventions of limited omniscience” (Macaskill and Colleran, 452). In his almost parodic imitation of Defoe, however, Coetzee aims also to unmask him as an author by claiming that the original story is

the one recounted in *Foe* and not the autobiography of Robinson Crusoe. (De)Foe becomes therefore not only a creator of fictional illusions, but also a manipulator of history.

The manipulation of the events is something much discussed in the text, and takes the form, in Part II, of the author-to-be Susan reflecting on the process of writing while she is intent on it, and in Part III of the exchange of opposing opinions about such an activity between the two authors Foe and Susan. It is therefore possible to read *Foe* as “an allegory of the creative process” (Splendore, 58) that sheds light on the problem of ‘who is speaking whom and how’. According to Susan, the writing of a story should in fact be as faithful as possible to the truth; hence her concern is always to avoid that any lies are told, even though the dullness of her island story may too easily drive her, too, “to invent new and stranger circumstances” to please the reader (*F*, 67). Foe, as an expert author, tries on the other hand to convince her that the story she wants to be told “is too much the same” (*F*, 127) and “will keep us alive, certainly, if we are starved of reading” but needs reshaping to become a narrative in itself with “beginning, then middle, then end” (*F*, 117). Susan’s doubts about her ‘(in)substantiality’, about her life that every day becomes more and more a story in the hands of Foe cannot be quietened, and she therefore leads Foe into a “philosophical speculation” taking Defoe’s short story ‘A True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs. Veal’ and the apparition of her purported daughter as a starting point (Head, 117). Susan has in fact become uncertain about her own reality, given that what she considered only a ghost conjured up by Foe has proven to be a substantial being, or at least a “substantial ghost, if such beings exist” (*F*, 132), as (De)Foe’s account would demonstrate. Foe’s

response is calm and draws on his literary activity as a writer. He describes it to her as a “maze of doubting” where he has learnt to “plant a sign or marker in the ground” (*F*, 135) to which he can go back to whenever he gets lost due to his imagining and creativity. As Head signals (118), the typical postmodern crisis of identity of the individual, represented here by Susan and her questions “Why do I speak, to whom do I speak [...]?” and also “Who is speaking me?” (*F*, 133), is mirrored by a crisis of the writer who, surrounded by uncertainty as to what he is writing about, is time and again questioning everything until he finds “a way out of the maze” (*F*, 136). To a similar conclusion had rather unconsciously come Susan when she realised that “it seems necessary only to establish the poles, the here and the there, the now and the then – after that the words of themselves do the journeying” (*F*, 93). It is in any case through Foe’s (and, by proxy, Coetzee’s) words that the self-reflexivity of *Foe* reaches its highest degree, thus reinforcing the postmodern characterisation of Coetzee’s text as “a book about writing a book” (Parry, 50) where the suspension of disbelief is deliberately interrupted and “the reader’s attention [is drawn] to the act of reading” (Marais, 1989; 10), shifting the focus from what the book is about to how it is written, from the content to the form, from the story itself to the telling of the story (Gräbe, discussed in Attwell, 1993; 104).

Besides this “representation in writing of writing” (Attridge, 172), *Foe* contains also a number of acts of writing, or attempts at interpreting, carried out by the various characters within the narrative. These will be discussed further and in more details in the following chapters, proving thus not only the post-modernity of Coetzee’s work but also its carrying a post-colonial meaning related to questions of

authority and of power. Before moving on, however, this brief examination of postmodern influences on *Foe* could be interestingly concluded by looking at one important metanarrative element which stresses how Coetzee himself has also played with and within his own text, i.e. the last section of the novel. Part IV represents, in effect, a sort of “supplemental coda” (Macaskill and Colleran, 453) that puzzles the reader for its ambiguity and for its style, which may recall the techniques used in the shooting of a movie scene. The first sentence of the section echoes the first sentence of Part III; while there we followed Susan’s steps, this time we are dealing with a first-person narrator who recounts his/her actions in the present tense and who enters Foe’s hiding place twice. The first time, s/he notices the dead bodies of three unnamed people, a girl and a couple whom the reader can identify as the purported daughter of Susan Barton, and Susan Barton with Foe respectively. Given that s/he sees a dead Susan, the nature of this narrator is to be considered uncertain: some critics arguably support it may still be Susan, as Post (discussed in Kossew, 1996; 172) or as Auerbach, who suggests that “Susan relinquishes her compulsion to narrate herself to Foe” only to go back to the island as the “source and solution of all human enigmas” (reported in Gallagher, 189). According to other critics such as Denis Donoghue or Jane Gardam (both cited in Kossew, 1996 ,172; and Gallagher, 189) this *I* cannot be Susan any more, but it rather appears to be the personification of an omniscient author/narrator who can even be identified with Coetzee himself. Even though his/her identity cannot be established, it is however sure that this narrator knows all about the island, and moreover knows all that has been said by the characters during their discussion, as the comment that the sound issuing from Friday’s voice is “*as she said*, the roar of waves in a seashell” (*F*, 154; emphasis added) shows. Upon entering the second

time, the same scene is presented with a particular attention to a number of new details, almost as if in a close up of the place: the plaque with Defoe's name – which suggests that the narrative has moved to present time London –, a scar on Friday's neck and the dispatch box containing Susan Barton's manuscript attract the narrator's and our attention. It is at this point that “the novel makes its boldest metafictional gesture”, as Head points out (125): the narrator not only reads the same words with which Coetzee's text begins, but literally slips overboard and enters the fictional narration of Susan only to find him/herself in the middle of the sea by Cruso's island (*F*, 155). Here s/he is able to carry out the task identified by Susan and Foe in the previous section, i.e. to “dive into the wreck” and “open Friday's mouth and hear what it holds” (*F*, 142), thus liberating his voice and letting his silence resonate “to the end of the earth” (*F*, 157).

1.3. Transfocalisation: from the margin to the centre

Coetzee, undertaking the rewriting of *Robinson Crusoe*, has also chosen to “modify the narrative ‘point of view’ or [...] the *focalization* of the narrative”, to say it with Genette, since “such transfocalization would inevitably entail profound alterations of the text and of the narrative information” (1997, 287) and thus allow him to pursue his goal of changing the thematic perspective from which the novel should be read. In both *Crusoe* and *Foe* the narrator is internal and his/her thoughts and personality are therefore never seen or commented upon by an external narrator. The reader learns to know the narrating character directly through his/her thoughts, and the surrounding diegetic world through the image presented by him/her. As Genette

points out for the case of *Crusoe*, the artifice of producing a fictitious autobiography creates an overlapping of narrator and author, so that the reader is presented with the story of a castaway told by himself (1986, 246). The same is true in *Foe*, too, but Coetzee's shifting the point of view from the man Robinson Crusoe to the woman Susan Barton is meaningful and relates to the above mentioned issues of the feminist as well as the post-colonial struggle, which in both cases attempts to "reinstatate the marginalised in the face of the dominant" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 249).

"The *marginal* [...] is the victims of the best-known history of centralization: the emergence of the straight white Christian man of property as the ethical universal", Spivak argues (1990, 5), and figuring as the victims of the white male's authority of Cruso and Foe Susan Barton and Friday seem to satisfy such description. Friday being mute, Susan is the main means through which Coetzee presents his challenge, i.e. that of re-establishing the other's centrality and therefore moving him/her from the margin back to the centre. Susan is in fact a woman, and as such she occupies a marginal position not only in society but also in the literary domain she has decided to become part of. For the male patriarchal society of the eighteenth century she represents the other, someone who must be kept in a subject position and whose attempt to liberate herself from its oppressive power and to assert herself as individual must be repressed. Her marginalisation is gender-related. Her depiction as a silenced writer who, however, manages to create and partially impose her manuscript on the recognised author Foe is also a clear hint at all those women writing in the same period as Defoe but whose work met little, if any, acknowledgement (Gallagher, 176). Most importantly, however, it is a way of constructing the marginal – "both Cruso ... and Friday, *and* herself as character – as

object of knowledge” (Spivak, 1990; 9). In trying to write herself out of the margin, she cannot therefore avoid thinking about Friday, the Negro slave whose story is worth telling but impossible to disclose, the colonized subject to whom she is coupled “as social pariah(s)” (Head, 120). Feelings of affinity with him drive Susan to search for ways to communicate with him, to establish a deeper relationship that may finally help her give him voice, but his silence proves impenetrable and “confirms [him] as the genuine Other” (Head, 120) who refuses to be further colonized. As Attridge also states, “Friday is a being wholly unfamiliar to her, in terms of race, class, gender, culture”, and because of his “absolute otherness” his puzzling silence will never be unravelled (179). Susan’s experience in the margin is, finally, a different experience from Friday’s, not only because he represents “the guardian of the margin” who cannot be taken back to the centre without sabotaging his guardianship (Spivak, 1990; 15, 5), but also because of her partial complicity with the oppressing power as a white English woman. “Her double project, that of her search and rescue operation with regard to Friday and of her writing her story to ‘save’ herself, are both threatened by the power of discourses she is incapable of controlling”, Jolly affirms (138), and as an obvious consequence the closely related attempt to move herself as well as Friday out of the margin is doomed to fail. “The Female Castaway” will not be written by Foe, and her story will be re-inscribed and she will be put back to place in the margin, both as a woman and as a writer. No matter how great her commitment to tell Friday’s story is, then, he is not willing to communicate with her and to let her know about his past, as the episode of his own writing on the slate proves. (Indeed, all through the narrative he provides reasons for such affirmation, as we shall see.) On the other hand, however, the marginality of the oppressed and silenced has been challenged by Coetzee, who manages to direct

attention both to the woman as other, by making Susan the real author of the island story, and to the colonized slave as the Other, by making Friday's silence audible and therefore heard. Through his "metaphor for the provisional postcolonial position", i.e. the maze of doubting which represents Foe's writing activity, Coetzee has managed to redeem the colonized other from the marginality where the colonizer has placed him or her, thus representing "a process of decentring succeeded by an informed [provisional] recentring" (Head, 128).

Chapter 2. Five authors writing their story

In the previous chapter, the analysis of *Foe* has been kept on general terms, highlighting that the characters created by Coetzee all serve the purpose of exploring “the relationship among postmodern, postcolonial, and feminist discourse”, as Dovey proposed in her study (reported in Jolly, 2). Following Dovey’s model, Foe would represent an anachronistic postmodern writer “closer to Coetzee than to Defoe” (Head, 127), and the author of a master narrative which has imposed its ideological and literary dominion over the literature of the following centuries; Crusoe and Friday would then stand for the postcolonial in the narrative, the former being a colonizer while the latter is the oppressed colonized; finally, the feminist discourse utters itself through Susan, even though she finally embraces all three discourses at one time, grouping them under the feminist struggle of a woman who challenges the male authority of Crusoe and of Foe through her attempt to authorize a narrative and be recognised as a novelist. The purpose of this second chapter is to present all the characters of the novel, with the addition of its author Coetzee, through a more detailed description which will enable us to determine how and to what extent each of them is an author, and moreover what they give birth to or refuse. “Since Coetzee’s allegory is calculated to draw attention to the fact that acts

of narration are always also, necessarily, acts of violation at the figurative level”, as Jolly maintains (2), a close look at each character involved in the development of the novel will also give us the opportunity to shed light on the power implicit in the authorial and interpretative acts to transform both the self and the other into either victim or perpetrator of colonial violence.

2.1. Who was Daniel Defoe?

The name of Daniel Defoe has been inexorably linked with his most famous novel, *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. It is not unusual, however, that people are acquainted with the work, its protagonist and his story, but cannot establish a connection with its author. Indeed, the artifice of presenting it as an account “written by himself”, as the title page reports (image, RC, 2), has been so effective that Robinson Crusoe often tends to be identified with a real rather than a fictional character, and his story to be read as a real rather than fictional autobiography. Coetzee himself, introducing his Nobel Lecture in 2003, pointed out the confusion he was thrown into as a child upon reading in a children’s encyclopaedia that “a man with a wig named Daniel Defoe” was also part of the story. What the child could not figure out was the contradiction of referring to Daniel Defoe as the author of the story, while “it said on the very first page of *Robinson Crusoe* that Robinson Crusoe told the story himself”.¹ In a fine postmodern Lecture, emblematically titled “He and His Man”, Coetzee then moves on to analyse the hypothetical relationship he imagines should exist between the

¹ These passages, which are not included in the published version of the lecture, are quoted directly from the video of Coetzee’s Nobel Lecture. (“Video Player”. Nobelprize.org. Accessed: 23 Jan 2013 <http://www.nobelprize.org/mediaplayer/index.php?id=555>)

figures involved in the narrative and, most of all, in the process that precedes it: the Robinson/Daniel authorial figure and his manservant Friday. The halo of uncertainty surrounding the authorial figure seems now to legitimate the questioning of both the identity and, above all, the methods of Daniel Defoe, inasmuch as he represented a true literary innovator who, probably, was able to identify with any of his characters to the extent that the boundaries between reality and fiction, between himself and his characters became blurred, accentuating even more the deriving confusion. James Sutherland also notices this when he explains that Defoe “had in abundant measure one of the most essential gifts of the novelist, the ability to put himself in someone else’s place, even to the extent of almost losing his own identity in that of a fictitious character” (346).

Historically, Daniel was born Foe in 1660 and added the gentrifying prefix De- to his name in 1695. Son of a hard-working tallow chandler, he was prepared by his father for a career as a minister but then decided to make his fortunes and misfortunes as a merchant, being thus able to travel in England and Europe and even become an economic theorist. Along with the trade, young Defoe was deeply engaged in political and religious matters and his pamphlets as a supporter of William III and as a Dissenter caused him to be regarded with increasing suspicion by the ruling class. His career as a merchant began to sink in the early 1690s, when he declared bankrupt and was imprisoned for debts, the first of many times thereafter. As a pamphleteer, on the other hand, he had considerable success with both the Tory and the Whig governments. When the latter finally took power, however, his success was sealed, and from the didactic work *The Family Instructor* (1715) onwards his new career as a writer started off. His first fictional work is

Robinson Crusoe, which appeared in 1719 and whose popularity and success with the public were so great that led him to write, within the next year, two sequel stories – *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* and *The Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. A prolific author up to his death in 1731, he wrote many other novels in which humble men and women confess their struggle against the difficulties of life in a plain and straightforward style. Defoe’s ability to cast a deep glance into human nature and to create situations with a high degree of verisimilitude has contributed to establish him as the “indisputable father of the English novel”, and moreover as the “patriarch of realism” (Maher, 35). A father and patriarch whose authority Coetzee has decided to investigate and question, Maher continues, in order to “lay(s) bare the illusion of art, the conventions that sustain it” and to thus unmask the literary artifice and the manipulations that enabled the author to achieve the effect of high verisimilitude and realism. So the title question of this section may be slightly modified to “Who is Mr. Foe?” in order to apply to *Foe*’s fictionalised character who, though Coetzee has drawn on the historical author to create him, has a personality of his own and shows it when confronted by another, emerging writer.²

2.1.1. *An enemy within*³

The emerging writer who confronts and challenges Foe is Susan Barton, the female castaway newly returned to England who has sought a male author to entrust him

² The main sources used to build this paragraph on Defoe’s life were the online article of the Encyclopaedia Britannica about Daniel Defoe and the chronology provided in the edition of *Robinson Crusoe* which has been used as primary text. (“Daniel Defoe”, Reginald P.C. Mutter. Britannica.com. Accessed: 14 Jan 2013. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/155842/Daniel-Defoe>.)

³ Accidentally, only at a later stage it was noticed that the title of this section corresponds to the title given by Kossew to the section about *Age of Iron* in her article “‘Women’s Words’: A Reading of J.M. Coetzee’s Women Narrators”. The content of the two passages being different, I did not deem it necessary to opt for another title.

with her singular account and who, after someone's suggestion, has come to "Mr. Foe the author who has heard many confessions and [is] reputed to be a very secret man" (*F*, 48). Their first meeting is described by Susan in her letter opening the second section of the novel, where we can see him from her perspective for the first time – and the last, too, for a while: to her eye Foe looks much more like "a lawyer or a man from the Exchange" (*F*, 49) than like a writer. During the rest of Part II, then, Foe will be no more than a presence dogging Susan, the ghost of a stereotypical eighteenth-century author asking for details which confirm he has and needs but a stereotypical image of a castaway to give birth to his narrative (Jolly, 6). Susan seems to be conscious of the risk she is running into by handing him over her account, a risk which concerns her desire to stick to the truth of her experience set against the fictionalised version he could produce; in her imagination, in fact, Foe's chest is full of papers among which there are "a multitude of castaway narratives, most of them, I would guess, riddled with lies" (*F*, 50). A first demonstration of Susan's probably unconscious suspicions is represented by the only letter of Foe we learn about through her reply. Therein he should have remarked that "it would have been better had Crusoe rescued not only musket and powder and ball, but a carpenter's chest as well, and built himself a boat" (*F*, 55), a preoccupation which normally becomes the castaway but which did not touch Crusoe at all. It is Foe, here, who as an imaginative writer feels the need to balance Crusoe's passiveness, and who "believes that Barton's history cannot become story without the addition of the exotic paraphernalia of the eighteenth-century travel narrative" (Jolly, 5-6); only thus can Susan's "sorry, limping affair" (*F*, 47) turn out to be a popular adventure tale commercially successful and recognised by the wide public (Jolly, 5; Mackaskill and Colleran, 440). Even though Susan will accept no falsifying change to her story,

and proves it by retorting with sensible arguments to Foe's initial requests, his words will later echo in her mind and come to make sense to her the more she becomes an author.

What Foe plans to do with Susan Barton's account appears already clear in Part II, even though he disappears soon after the first few letters Susan writes to him. Authorised by her to set down in good writing the story of herself, Cruso and Friday on the island, he will use "The Female Castaway" as well as Susan's life as raw material on and through which he will build his own masterpiece (Kossew, 1996; 163). When Susan tries to think Foe's thoughts, her guess that the story would have been better without the woman corresponds to truth, and if we compare her purportedly true account with the final version of Defoe this is only too clearly confirmed: the "author-as-enemy" has managed to take full control over the story, to manipulate it according to contemporary conventional representations of the castaway, historically represented by Alexander Selkirk, and to finally leave the woman out of the adventure narrative (Kossew, 1996; 168). Left out from one story, however, Susan is worth the telling of at least another story, on which Foe can focus his attention when he finally meets her in his lodgings. Asked by an impatient Susan how the island story progresses, his answer is a rather elusive "It is a slow story, a slow history" with which he can put Cruso's adventure aside just to inform her that "there is more I must know about Bahia" (*F*, 114), introducing thus the topic he is interested in the most. It is Foe's desire, in fact, to re-inscribe Susan into what, in the previous chapter and following some critics, was defined a less subversive and more conventional mother-daughter story; to achieve his objective he will need to become "one of those notorious libertines whom women arm themselves against, but against

whom they are at last powerless, his very notoriety being the seducer's shrewdest weapon" (*F*, 120).

The deriving confrontation of Foe and Susan as author and owner of the story respectively takes place in Part III. After Susan's protestation that "Bahia is not part of my story," because "Bahia is not the island. Bahia was but a stepping stone on my way" instead (*F*, 114; 116), Foe talks to her as a writer and author and gives an interesting lecture on story-making. With the purpose of convincing her about the feasibility of his project, he first rehearses for her the story of her own life, beginning in London with the abduction of the daughter and then following Susan during her vain quest in Brazil and her marooning on the journey back to England. This part we know corresponds to truth, Susan herself having narrated it in her account. But then Foe's imagination creeps into Susan's life right where she had interrupted her search, and transforms it into a narrative, his own narrative where Susan becomes but a character whose actions no longer depend on her will. He provides therefore a motherless daughter who, hunting her lost mother down, traces Susan's steps backwards: first Bahia, then Lisbon and finally England, where she hears of a woman who carries her own name and has been a castaway and now lives somewhere in London. "We therefore have five parts in all" (*F*, 117), he concludes summing up the main points that build *his* version of Susan's story:

It is thus that we make up a book: loss, then quest, then recovery; beginning, then middle, then end. As to the novelty, this is lent by the island episode – which is properly the second part of the middle – and by the reversal in which the daughter takes up the quest abandoned by her mother. (*F*, 117)

Foe's story is therefore provided with a 'happy ending' where the final reunion of the mother with the daughter can take place and the story can close with a circular

movement. To this reunion we have already witnessed in Part II, when Susan meets the young girl Susan Barton and becomes acquainted with her story, listening with terror to her claims of being the daughter she has long lost and looked for. On such occasion she rejected the girl as conjured up on purpose by Foe, her story being only another of Foe's inventions, and she quieted her perplexities by telling her she was father-born and could therefore have no mother. Similarly, now she must keep on resisting Foe's imposition of this story because it represents something she willingly decided to "leave unsaid", because "it is by choice that I say so little of it [Bahia]. The story I desire to be known by is the story of the island" (*F*, 120-121). As Jolly quite aptly observes, "the wording of her refusal highlights the conjunction of colonization and patriarchy in his conception of narrative" (139), since not only he tries to impose motherhood and the character of Roxana upon her, but also attempted to turn Crusoe's story into an adventure with "cannibals and pirates" (*F*, 121). Susan's rejection comes therefore to symbolise a form of "resistance to the violation that she perceives Foe to be imposing on her by demanding she recognize his creation, Susan Barton II, as hers", Jolly continues to argue; "this recognition would mask the fact that Foe would then be at liberty to 'colonize' Susan Barton, to appropriate her; he would be able to claim Susan Barton's story, even Susan Barton herself, as his own" (140).

Recalling her words in the first letter, she now plainly reveals to Foe how she had perceived and still perceives him to be:

When I first heard of you I was told you were a very secret man, a clergyman of sorts, who in the course of your work heard the darkest of confessions from the most desperate of penitents. [...] I told myself (have I not confessed this before?): He is like the patient spider who sits at the heart of his web waiting for his prey to come to him. (*F*, 120)

Both metaphorical descriptions seem to correspond to truth and to be apt figures to account for the power he has by now gained over Susan. As if to confirm her suspicions, Foe tells her the story of a woman who, before being executed, could not stop “confessing and throwing her confession in doubt” until the chaplain decided for her and put an end to her story, thus allowing Foe’s interpretation that “there comes a time when we must give reckoning of ourselves to the world, and then forever after be content to hold our peace” (*F*, 124). Gallagher suggests, in discussing this passage of Foe, that “if understanding ourselves within the context of a story is indeed a crucial part of our self-identity, those who dominate storytelling become capable of great oppression” and the different moral drawn by Foe and Susan testifies to it and presents clearly “the different viewpoint of the one who speaks and the one who is silenced” (179). After she has noticed that there may be some correspondence between the characters of this parable and the two of them, the insightful conclusion Susan draws is in fact that “he has the last word who disposes over the greatest force” (*F*, 124), thus implicitly acknowledging the close relationship between language and power. A power that Foe holds tight in his hands, no matter how hard Susan tries to be the father and begetter of her story; at last, in fact, he is “the one alone intended to tell my true story” (*F*, 126), he is the successful male author whose womb will deliver the ‘ultimate creature’ which will be “capable of producing the recognition, commercial and other, which Susan believes this enterprise will afford her” (Jolly, 5). The power he acquires over Susan is, therefore, first and foremost that of controlling her as a character through a kind of mental manipulation. Even though she has already firmly refused the mother-daughter narrative, in fact, at his lodgings Foe launches the last and crucial attack against her and brings in the young girl Susan and her maidservant Amy, causing Susan to feel

dizzy and confused. Having before considered this daughter to be but a ghost, an appearance no more substantial than she herself when on the island, upon this new apparition she starts casting doubts again on her newly acquired identity as confident author of herself. She recognises at last that “now all my life grows to be story and there is nothing of my own left to me” (*F*, 133). On the psychological level, Foe has managed to win his battle against Susan for the control of her story. The other, conclusive step to assert his full authority over her will be to seduce her and thus undermine her sexuality, since “the act of authorship is linked with sexuality”, Kossew notices (1996, 168), and power cannot be restricted to the mastery of words but in this case also extends to a physical colonization and subjection. The conflicting relationship between Foe and Susan unfolds also as a “continual reversing of sexual stereotypes” (Kossew, 1998; 172) on the part of Susan, who will nevertheless succumb in spite of her efforts. Somehow developing Susan’s earlier comparison with the spider, Foe at one point in fact turns into a vampire and first bites, then sucks Susan’s lip, symbolising the male patriarch “who devours the woman’s story, robbing her of her narrative voice” (Wright, 2008; 23). The seduction of Foe and the inversion of roles during the sexual encounter they have shortly afterwards are, then, only an apparent achievement for Susan; the privilege to straddle him and the attention he finally shows towards Friday’s story may in fact be regarded as a mere consolation prize to make up for Foe’s lying words: “I would not rob you of your tongue for anything” (*F*, 150), he answers when Susan accuses him of being no better than a slaver.

At this point, the title of Coetzee’s novel can be interpreted as a play on words, since it stands both for the author-to-be Foe, who will later change his name

for commercial and social reasons, and for the common noun *foe*, highlighting thus the presence of (at least) an enemy within the narrative. The main character who emblematically embodies this enemy is Foe, who is primarily Susan's enemy on the ground of literary production and story-making; and yet, after their sexual intercourse he averts his thoughts also to Friday and, following Susan's pressures, he starts sharing her reflections and desires about him. The couple hence sets up a short collaboration and join forces to unveil Friday's story past and present, thus becoming together his chief enemy (Macaskill and Colleran, 451-452). Foe begins to show the same curiosity as Susan, and they both come to agree that Friday's silence can be seen as a hole, a space that needs to be filled (Kossew, 1996; 162). "Till we have spoken the unspoken we have not come to the heart of the story" (*F*, 141), comments Foe, somehow echoing Susan's earlier words when she was trying to convince him of the key role covered by Friday's dumbness for the telling of the "true story [which] will not be heard till by art we have found a means of giving voice to Friday" (*F*, 118). They therefore agree on the two main points that the heart of the story lies down under the water of seaweed where Susan saw Friday scatter petals, and that in order to "make Friday's silence speak, as well as the silence surrounding Friday" someone must take up the task and "dive into the wreck" (*F*, 142). Nevertheless, they stand on opposite sides when it comes to the level of confidence in their manipulative and authoritative power to interpret such silence and give voice to the tongueless slave, and also to the honesty they attribute to such a task. On the one hand, Susan proves to be cautious and would not dare speak for him, hypothesising that "if Friday cannot tell us what he sees, is Friday in my story any more than a figuring (or prefiguring) of another diver?" (*F*, 142), and preferring to stick to her (failed) attempts to allow him to communicate on his own terms.

While Susan lacks confidence, “Foe’s model of authorship is one of power and authority (as was Defoe’s)”, Kossew observes (1996, 171), and his authorial confidence leads him to show less scruples and little respect for Friday, as he already did when confronting Susan. He will therefore not hesitate to speak for – instead of – Friday, were it too complicated to let him convey his own meanings. What Foe aims at is to help Friday disclose in some way or other his desires, from whence he could then build a good story; and because “it is no great task to teach Friday such language as will serve his needs” (*F*, 149) he presses on Susan with the teaching of any form of writing which will become such demand. But once again “Susan raises the question of Friday’s need to have access to more than just these practical concepts, linking Foe with Crusoe in his attitude to words”, i.e. when Crusoe deemed it of little importance to teach Friday more words than he needed to fulfil his duties (Kossew, 1996; 167).

Taking Foe’s behaviour towards Friday into consideration, too, it is possible that when he referred to his “manner of preying on the living” (*F*, 139) he was not simply explaining the biting of Susan’s lip, but he probably also metaphorically described how more generally he tended to handle the subjects of his narratives. It is indeed important to remember that (De)Foe used to write about “thieves or highwaymen”, mistresses or the like, i.e. people who “gabble a confession and are then whipped off to Tyburn and eternal silence, leaving you to make of their stories whatever you fancy” (*F*, 123), as Susan reminds him. He should be thought of as a sort of parasite who almost literally sucked people’s stories out of their bodies and took them into his own body to live for them and transform their lives as his imagination and creativity suggested. Such strategies of (De)Foe have been

unmasked in and through Coetzee's novel, revealing that he is at the same time "depicted as both a reader-surrogate and an author-surrogate" (Marais, 1989; 13). He is indeed the first addressee and main reader of Susan's account, but he is also the author of *Robinson Crusoe* as we know it, and of *Roxana* and *Moll Flanders*, too. The existence of the latter novels demonstrates, through the perspective of Coetzee's *Foe*, that (De)Foe imposed his personal reading on Susan's story and, considerably departing from it, he gave birth to some new 'creatures' which must be perceived both as an act of oppression and as interpretative authoritarianism (Marais, 1989; 13).

2.2. Susan: the birth of a writer

The feminist struggle represented by Susan Barton's storytelling project is an attempt to depict a woman as the agent holding control over her own life both in reality and in the realm of fictional writing. Throughout the novel the reader is confronted with a humble person trying to become a writer and thus discovering the power of authoriality and, by proxy, of authority. In *Foe*, Susan is the primary author whose activity comes to the foreground during the reading, taking on the form of oral performance, written manuscript and also of almost-academic debate with another author. The present section will concentrate on her attempt to write herself, Cruso and Friday into her story, and on her growth as a conscious and independent writer despite Foe's opposition.

2.2.1. *Telling a castaway story*

The autobiography of Susan Barton begins with inverted commas and a first-person narration that recounts her landing with great effort on an apparently uninhabited island. There, on the beach, she meets the Negro Friday who takes her to his master, Cruso, to whom she finally introduces herself thus also uncovering her identity to the reader. “Let me tell you my story”, are her first words, “for I am sure you are wondering who I am and how I come to be here. My name is Susan Barton, and I am a woman alone” (*F*, 10). Opening thus her account, Susan Barton provides us with “a tale within a tale” (Gallagher, 187) which consists in her first narration of her life story up to the point when her writing began and we met her rowing towards the island. In her analysis, Gallagher aptly observes that “perhaps one of the most notable things about Susan, in Coetzee’s account, is her interest in stories. Her narration of the novel is only one of a number of times that she acts as a storyteller” (173). Before becoming the written account in form of autobiography that we read as Part I of the novel, in effect, her story is first and foremost an oral performance she rehearses many times. From her early introductory narration to Cruso we discover that Susan has French origins and that her father’s name “became corrupted in the mouths of strangers” from Berton to Barton (*F*, 10). Interestingly, the first piece of information establishes a link between Coetzee’s protagonist and Defoe’s Roxana, herself an Englishwoman who was born in France, while the second further reinforces that with Robinson Crusoe, the famous castaway whose name, too, had been corrupted from Kreutznaer to Crusoe (*RC*, 4). The next thing we find out about Susan’s story is the existence of a daughter who was abducted from her and brought to Brazil and whom Susan has been searching for two years in Bahia, without

success. Abandoning the search, she embarked for England as the mistress of a ship's captain; when the sailors mutinied she suffered their mistreatment and, instead of being killed, she was cast away on a boat in the proximity of Cruso's island. Her first public during this monologue is represented only by her fellow castaway Cruso who, to her disappointment, from the very beginning proves almost insensible and indifferent to her presence on the island; this will cause her to be overcome by frustration each time she vainly tries to establish a connection with him, mostly because "he has no stories to tell of his life as a planter before the shipwreck, and he is not interested in Susan's stories about Bahia. He is equally uninterested in the future" (Gallagher, 173).

The second time Susan recounts her own story to someone within her own narrative she is with Captain Smith on the *Hobart*, the merchantman which rescued the castaways. We are not presented with this second performance, but since Susan informs her addressee that she "told him [the captain] my story, as I have told you" (*F*, 40), it is easy to imagine it includes also the account of her year on the island, of which the rescue voyage here represents for her a happy conclusion. Unlike with Cruso, this time she obtains a positive effect on her audience: so exciting and extraordinary her story is that the captain encourages her: "It is a story you should set down in writing and offer to the booksellers [...]. There has never before, to my knowledge, been a female castaway of our nation. It will cause a great stir" (*F*, 40). At this early stage, however, Susan is still unaware of her potential as a writer and she does not believe in her abilities to produce as lively and charming a story as the oral narration is, a detail noticed also by Gallagher (176), because such liveliness "must be supplied by art, and I have no art" (*F*, 40). At the same time, however, the

captain's suggestion that someone may be hired to manipulate her story and to "put in a dash of colour" (*F*, 40) awakens her aversion, thus marking the real moment when the seeds are sown for her transformation into a writer. For the first time, in fact, Susan expresses a certain literary awareness and formulates what could be called her poetics:

I would rather be the author of my own story than have lies told about me, [...] if I cannot come forward, as author, and swear to the truth of my tale, what will be the worth of it? I might as well have dreamed it in a snug bed in Chichester.
(*F*, 40)

To this intention she will try to be true all through the writing process, and she will also have to defend it when facing her competing author Foe. "Susan steadfastly demands her story to be true" punctually maintains Gallagher, and "her narrative demonstrates that she is well aware of the ways that people falsify stories" (175). An awareness of the demands and the difficulties of writing begins therefore to grow in her already during the journey back to England when, speaking to a dying Cruso, she remembers that their life together on the island had "so little [that] could be called extraordinary" (*F*, 43) and that she could usefully put together to build her narrative. In a last desperate attempt to retrieve some more information from Cruso, she then persists in asking him questions about his personal life; her questions, she knows, will never find an answer so that she is driven to emblematically ask "What will we tell folk in England when they ask us to divert them?" (*F*, 43)

The reflection on the truth and value of stories will serve as a guideline for Susan's writing in Part II, hence Jolly can affirm that "for at least the first half of the novel, the single justification of a narrative for Susan Barton is its ability to convey 'the truth'" (3). As the captain of the *Hobart* had suggested, when back in London

Susan looks for a male successful author who she believes will be able to create an acknowledged narrative out of her story; only in this way, in fact, she would succeed in bypassing the gender limits imposed on her by the eighteenth-century English society, and her voice could somehow be heard by the wide public. She begins thus to entertain a correspondence with a certain Mr. Foe, to whom she sends an almost day-to-day narration of her wanderings in and around London. Her letters can be considered a bridge between her life on the island and her new life in the metropolis, allowing her to provide as many details as she can to answer to the questions Foe apparently asks her and which we do not read. Moreover, they also serve as the means through which she can express her ideas about the art of writing and her doubts about her own work; they are a sort of literary exercise for the author-to-be Susan, as could be inferred from her remarks that “there is never a lack of things to write of. It is as though animalcules of words lie dissolved in your ink-well, ready to be dipped up and flow from the pen and take the form on the paper. [...] I had not guessed it was so easy to be an author” (*F*, 93). The more she in this way reflects on her new activity, however, the more she also grows aware that “the problems of writing history are not unlike those of writing fictions [...] that is, lies and fabrications” (Hutcheon, reported in Kossew, 1996; 164), so that any true story, any history, can be easily manipulated by any author into a fictional story that departs from reality. On progressing with the reading we, too, realise that

Susan Barton’s history is, finally, a history of her inability to tell the story she wants to tell; it is not at all the story she originally desires. From the beginning, Susan Barton as narrator seems to be aware of the threats to her control of the narrative (Jolly, 4)

which come first from Crusoe’s lack of interest and Friday’s dumbness, but then also from her alleged ally, Mr. Foe. What she plans to write, with the help of Foe, is in

fact an account “with all the particulars of you [Friday] and Mr. Cruso and of my year on the island and the years you and Mr. Cruso spent there alone, as far as I can supply them” (*F*, 58). In order to achieve this objective, however, she is forced to face the above-mentioned challenges, i.e. she must defend her truth against Foe’s desire to control it and, most importantly to start with, she must discover and disclose Cruso’s and Friday’s past stories.

Cruso, as we have said above, showed to be reluctant to speak about his past, and each time Susan started to inquire he would not answer or, even worse, “the stories he told me were so various, and so hard to reconcile one with another, that I was more and more driven to conclude age and isolation had taken their toll on his memory” (*F*, 11-12). When confronted with the task of writing she has decided to carry out, therefore, Susan cannot but acknowledge that “Who but Cruso, who is no more, could truly tell you Cruso’s story?” (*F*, 51), and thus limit her activity to a recording of what she experienced personally and heard from him, avoiding as much as possible to force one reading of his story over the others. For this reason, and to avoid any betrayal of her search for truth, when she cannot answer with certainty to Foe’s curious enquiring after Cruso she is merely obliged to speculate and offer some counter-questions that appeal to common sense rather than to the reality she could not gain access to.

You asked how it was that Cruso did not save a single musket from the wreck; why a man so fearful of cannibals should have neglected to arm himself. [...] Now I ask: Who can keep powder dry in the belly of a wave? Furthermore: Why should a man endeavour to save a musket when he barely hopes to save his own life? As for cannibals, I am not persuaded, despite Cruso’s fears, that there are cannibals in those oceans. (*F*, 54)

The only acceptable conclusion she can come to is that “What I saw, I wrote” (*F*, 54), therefore leaving Cruso’s story open, uncertain, unfinished. Jolly’s comment that “her first ‘failure’ to tell us her story comes when she is unable to account for, and therefore is unable to recount, Cruso’s history” (4) seems to the point, since there are too many things about Cruso that Susan cannot properly describe or explain: his past before the shipwreck, his passiveness during the past years on the island, the lack of desires. Everything she cannot explain she groups under the definition of ‘mysteries of the island’; however, it is easy to notice that it is around the slave Friday, rather than around Cruso, that the biggest uncertainties and silences ‘resound’ as a “puzzle, or hole in the narrative” (*F*, 121) that needs to be either solved or filled. The problem of Friday’s lost tongue is therefore foregrounded as soon as Susan is back in England and sets to writing, so that she will soon leave aside the unanswered and unanswerable questions about Cruso and concentrate on Friday.

The case of Friday is presented as much more complex than, or rather as very different from that of Cruso for the simple reason that the slave has no tongue and apparently cannot tell anything, be it reliable or not, about his own story. All that we know comes from Cruso’s confused and confusing words, but such information does not satisfy Susan’s need of accurate details; for the second time, she is forced to implicitly acknowledge another failure when she affirms that “the only tongue that can tell Friday’s secret is the tongue he has lost” (*F*, 67), establishing a parallel with her inability to tell Cruso’s story. Nevertheless, this time she does not give up so easily: while the information about Cruso is indeed irretrievable because he died, the secret of Friday can still be discovered, he being alive and capable of understanding

and of learning to communicate. For this reason, in the course of the events Susan will try many times to find functional means enabling her to interact with the dumb slave and give him voice in order to fill the gaps in her narrative. She thus “begins the long and difficult project of ‘restoring’ Friday”, as Jolly defines it (9). Her first attempt in this direction is through talking to him, and teaching him “the names of the various utensils he uses to fulfil the tasks she sets for him” (Jolly, 9) in the hope that “if I make the air around him thick with words, memories will be reborn in him which died under Cruso’s rule” (*F*, 59). She hopes to be able “to build a bridge of words” (*F*, 60) which may bring him back to his past life, before London, before Cruso and the island, and in this way she wishes he may recover the ability at least to communicate, if not to speak. This attempt proves to be a partial delusion, however, since she is obliged to recognise that her behaviour is very similar to that of the colonizer Cruso, but masked behind “a superficially well-intentioned liberalism that is, ultimately, insidious in terms of its ability to camouflage its own intent” (Jolly, 10). Most of the times, in effect, her command over language lends her power over Friday’s dumbness and, abandoning her objective “to educate him out of darkness and silence”, “benevolence deserts me and I use words only as the shortest way to subject him to my will” (*F*, 60). In this behaviour Susan appears to be “appropriately placed within an island narrative with Friday as Caliban”, Kossew observes (1996, 169), so that she can be seen to resemble another famous female castaway, Miranda daughter of Prospero who in *The Tempest* had taught the savage Caliban to speak English in an attempt “to transform ‘a thing most brutish’ into a man” (Gallagher, 180), but in effect ignoring his identity and reinforcing his enslavement through the commanding power of language. The ambivalence of Susan’s position comes therefore to the foreground, as pointed out in the previous

chapter: even though she occupies a marginal position together with Friday, she is nonetheless “shown to be prepared to exploit Friday’s story for her own purposes [...] and is thus as much a part of the patriarchal system as Foe” (Kossew, 1996; 170), becoming yet another representative of the colonial white European who, instead of letting the oppressed speak with his own voice, tries to speak for him.

Since Friday has apparently no tongue, Susan has therefore little hope that he will ever be able to speak. Nevertheless, Kossew maintains that “another important aspect of Susan’s need to fill Friday’s silence is the desire for a response, her need to have questions answered and mysteries solved” (1996, 166), a desire so strong that she is finally led to resort to what could look like a more direct path to truth than the mere conversing with him “as old women talk to cats, out of loneliness” (*F*, 77). She in fact decides to draw two sketches depicting the act of Friday’s mutilation as she imagines it could have taken place. In the first drawing – the version of events Susan would like to think true – the perpetrator, holding a knife in one hand and a tongue in the other, is in all similar to Crusoe; the second sketch depicts “a slave-trader, a tall black man clad in a burnous” instead (*F*, 69). In both pictures there is a black young man kneeling with his hands tied behind his back: he represents Friday in a clear act of submission. Susan is initially positive about this idea, because “Friday might not know the meaning of the word *truth*, I reasoned; nevertheless, if my picture stirred some recollection of the truth, surely a cloud would pass over his gaze” (*F*, 68). However, her enthusiasm soon fades away when she realises that her gesture of showing a picture and asking questions, or of putting out her tongue in an attempt to explain the meaning of her pictures, might be interpreted in various ways:

If Friday’s gaze indeed became troubled, might that not be because I came striding out of the house, demanding that he look at pictures, something I had

never done before? Might the picture itself not confuse him? [...] And how did he understand my gesture of putting out my tongue at him? (*F*, 68-69)

Such reflections quite surprisingly induce her to abandon her ethnocentric perspective in order to take into account Friday's own cultural background, thus highlighting her understanding that "what she sees as an act of extreme violation – the dismemberment or dysfunction of Friday's tongue – may not be a violation from another perspective, but rather a cultural norm" (Jolly, 10). Moreover, if anything at all stirs within Friday, causing any outer change in his countenance, there is again no way to know what it is about, i.e. to know his feelings and thoughts. Yet all her worries are almost futile, since she must at last acknowledge that "Friday's gaze remained vacant, and I began to grow disheartened" (*F*, 69). It appears clear that the more she looks for answers, the more she finds her head replete with questions and doubts and the bigger grows her craving to have them answered, even though she knows this will be hardly possible.

The next steps Susan takes in her attempt to establish a connection with Friday will prove even less successful and even more a delusion for her. Leaving the realm of words until her meeting with Foe, Susan tries to penetrate Friday's silence through his own means of communication, i.e. music and dancing. One day, upon finding "a case of recorders" in Foe's house, she

took out the smallest of these, the soprano, and set it aside where Friday would find it. The next morning I heard him toying with it; soon he had so far mastered it as to play the tune of six notes I would forever associate with the island and with Crusoe's first sickness. (*F*, 95)

At first annoyed by the sound repeated over and over always the same, and because in this way Friday isolates himself and does not pay any attention to her, Susan soon realises that "if there were any language accessible to Friday, it would be the

language of music” (*F*, 96). This sort of epiphany convinces her that she should practice the same tune on another flute, so that on the following morning she is ready to play it together with Friday, but in another room. For a brief moment, while they are thus playing ensemble, she senses they have at last managed to communicate, to converse even without the language of words. Thinking some kind of harmony has finally been established between them, she decides to vary the tune being “sure Friday would follow [her]. But no, Friday persisted in the old tune, and the two tunes played together formed no pleasing counterpoint” (*F*, 97), thus making her effort vain. For the first time at this point the consciousness raises in her that his silence may not be due to his dullness nor to his lost tongue, but rather to “a disdain for intercourse with me” (*F*, 98). On this occasion she has also the chance to remark that during his whirling Friday remains completely untouched by the events happening around him, being as it were “in a trance of possession, and his soul more in Africa than in Newington” (*F*, 98). Susan will indeed be able to confirm this observation by experiencing the whirling herself, in an attempt to imitate him. On a rainy night on their journey to Bristol, Susan starts spinning around like Friday in order to warm her body up and dry it from the rain, and

in that same instant I understood why Friday had danced all day in your house: it was to remove himself, or his spirit, from Newington and from 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? (*F*, 104)

Looking at these two epiphanies, when Susan almost truly identifies with Friday, it could be concluded that the more Susan abandons her civilised ways and manners and shifts towards Friday’s rituals, the better she can understand him and is able to see things from a different perspective. Even though she will never be on the same level as Friday in the colonial pyramid, thanks to music and dancing she

unconsciously draws nearer to her objective of getting to know him, and probably also his story, than when she takes up the above-mentioned Miranda-role and tries to teach him English, i.e. to grasp the meaning of words and then to write them correctly.

Despite this partial understanding of Friday's behaviour and the apparent connection she at last manages to create with him, Susan's longing to disclose Friday's secret and thus get to the heart of his (and her) story will prevail and spur her to make a last attempt: she will set to teaching him to write. In Part III Susan and Foe engage in a long debate during which Susan strives to convince him that "if the story seems stupid, that is only because it so doggedly holds its silence" (*F*, 117), and to defend her right to be silent on "a story I do not choose to tell", i.e. the story of Bahia, while "I choose rather to tell of the island, of myself and Cruso and Friday and what we three did there" (*F*, 131). Descending upon him like the Muse, Susan is finally able to "father her offspring" and to instil the interest for Friday's story in Foe, too. Now that his attention has shifted from the mother-daughter story he wants to impose on Susan to the silence of Friday, they can devise a method to overcome such obstacle and reach "the eye of the story" (*F*, 141), as Foe defines the central moment of Susan's account when Friday paddled into the seaweed to straw petals.

After Susan admits

all my efforts to bring Friday to speech, or to bring speech to Friday, have failed [...] He utters himself only in music and dancing, which are to speech as cries and shouts are to words. There are times when I ask myself whether in his earlier life he had the slightest mastery of language, whether he knows what kind of thing language is (*F*, 142),

Foe suggests a last path they could undertake before giving up. Even though she is convinced that without the mastery of spoken language one cannot master written

language, Foe encourages Susan to teach Friday to write. Gallagher, linking this idea with Derrida, affirms on this point that “writing, opening up endless displacements of meaning, paradoxically grants the oppressed – those without presence or authority – a voice” (185). However true this may be, from Susan’s point of view also this attempt is doomed to failure, because she keeps on approaching the matter from a European and ethnocentric perspective. Her mistake as a teacher lies not only in the expectation that Friday reproduce exclusively what she shows him on the slate, i.e. “culturally relative words such as *house*, *ship* and *Africa*” (Gallagher, 185) which most likely do not have any meaning for him, but also in her overreaction when he finally shows some independent creativity and writes in his own way. The writing he produces will therefore not be understood by Susan who, instead of ‘listening’ to what he has to ‘say’, reproaches to have wasted time on him – as Miranda did after Caliban’s rebellion.

2.2.2. *Becoming an author between substantial body and doubt*

During this analysis of *Foe* it has been pointed out more than once that Susan undergoes an important development which sees her growing from the status of a simple woman with a singular story to tell to the status of a writer, owner and creator of a narrative. Prompted by the captain of the Hobart, she decides that her experience on the island should become a publication so that memory of the deceased Crusoe and of his life as a castaway should not be lost. Feeling sceptical about her abilities to write her own experience into a novel, she decides to blot down a simple account that will serve as a blueprint for the notorious Foe, whom she has chosen as her ‘intended’. As Jolly notices, moreover,

Susan Barton's gender is important to the goal of her creative desire, which is to produce the first female narrative. Yet the novel potential that her gender holds for her creative future is overwritten by the predominantly male-determined attributes of her racial identity, namely her inheritance of and admiration for the masculine traditions of writing and colonization. (139)

The link she establishes with tradition is therefore important in her struggle against it, as Jolly continues to support, because the male authority represented by Foe attempts to colonize her story by modifying it (139). Susan did not envisage that events would take such course when she had sought the famous writer who, with his reworking of her account, could "make us famous throughout the land, and rich too", she tells Friday, so that "there will be no more need for you to live in a cellar" (*F*, 58). And, of course, there will be no more need for Susan to take care of Friday and to continue assuming the burden of Crusoe's slave. What moved her on the first place, explains Gallagher, was her

belief that she [was] unable to perceive the true story of her year on the island [which was] part of the lack of confidence which [as a consequence prompted] her to ask Foe to write her story. That she is a good storyteller we can attest from the evidence of the first chapter. (176)

Even though she proves to have art enough to write her story, there is another determining factor which has led her to bind herself to Foe and which is clearly related to the quest for truth she so meticulously carries on. As early as the second letter of her correspondence with Foe, where she provides the details he must have asked for in his letter to her, she explains her feelings and sensations: "When I reflect on my story I seem to exist only as the one who came, the one who witnessed, the one who longed to be gone: a being without substance, a ghost beside the true body of Crusoe"; she then asserts that the task of Foe is precisely to "return to me the substance I have lost [...]. For though my story gives the truth, it does not

give the substance of the truth” (*F*, 51). Until her story has been set down in good writing, presented to and accepted by the wide public, she is but an ‘insubstantial’ body; to say it more precisely with Gallagher, “she feels insubstantial, suspended, incomplete, trapped in a world of things and events without order or meaning” (175). Susan is a ‘someone’ who, it must be reckoned, is always rather absent and concentrated not on the present she is living but either on the past or on the future. As she herself admits, much of her life consists in waiting: “In Bahia I did little but wait, though what I was waiting for I sometimes did not know. On the island I waited all the time for rescue. Here I wait for you to appear, or for the book to be written that will set me free of Crusoe and Friday” (*F*, 66). Foe has been therefore assigned a somewhat complex task, i.e. to write a story which may allow him and the entire world to recognise her at one and the same time “not merely as a character, but as owner-author of the tale” (Jolly, 4).

Such plans cannot be fulfilled the way Susan decides, mainly because Foe soon disappears and obliges her to take over his place and try “to shoulder the ‘burden’ of the story herself”, Kossew explains (174). In her figure Coetzee conflates thus both the authoritarian patriarch and the male writer, since she starts working at Foe’s writing table adding word upon word on a piece of paper just like Crusoe worked on his terraces moving stone after stone on a piece of land. In this way, she finally comes to authorize her own narrative and entitle another project parallel but very different from the one carried out by Foe, i.e. “The Female Castaway”, the account we read as Part I of the novel (Macaskill and Colleran, 436). Of her account Susan has but little consideration, however, and twice she will accuse the poor conditions in which she was forced to write it, an element which

also Dodd underlines in her feminist study (330-331): “The memoir I wrote for you I wrote sitting on my bed with the paper on a tray on my knees” (*F*, 63), Susan observes in the letter dated May 8th in which she invites Foe to press on with his writing. Later, talking face to face with him, Susan will also be able to compare Foe’s new retreat with her previous abode, and she will plainly notice:

You have found yourself a fine retreat, [...] a true eagle’s-nest. I wrote my memoir by candlelight in a windowless room, with the paper on my knee. Is that the reason, do you think, why my story was so dull – that my vision was blocked, that I could not see? (*F*, 127)

Whether the time and place of her writing negatively influenced or not the result of her activity, we cannot avoid noticing what could be defined a literary creativity emerging from her second and third letters. Iannaccaro suggests that Susan’s prose is clear, highly evocative, and elegant (109): in these two letters she lets her imagination loose and sees in her mind Foe taking shape as a figure sitting at his desk intent on giving birth to her own and other stories. Her daydream becomes a written description of how Foe’s life as author should look like, everyday shutting himself up from society and from reality in order to find the necessary silence and peace in an attic where he, too, can fantasize and his mind can travel back to where he interrupted his writing on the previous day. As Iannaccaro pursues in her analysis, Susan writes Foe writing about her, a quite ironical act if we consider that she entrusted Foe with the writing of her story right because she did not feel worthy enough for such a task (110). Days pass, Foe’s silence is steady, yet Susan does not give up either the writing of and the reflections concerning her story; when she finally moves to Foe’s house in Newington, her life takes a turn. Taking hold of his study-room and power over his own tools, Susan literally substitutes Foe and allows her fantasies to become reality, so that she can at last inform him: “I have your table

to sit at, your window to gaze through. I write with your pen on your paper, and when the sheets are completed they go into your chest. So your life continues to be lived, though you are gone” (*F*, 65).

The identification with the writer Foe represents an important sign of Susan’s growth as an author who can claim to be Muse, father and begetter of her own story. Macaskill and Colleran affirm to this point that “in puzzling out her role as midwife to Foe’s story, to history, Susan moves from a position of sexual and hermeneutic dependence [...] to one of sexual and authorial independence” (440-441); such position will allow her to develop a consciousness as author, and to create her narrative and have full control and power over it. As a consequence, she not only physically substitutes Foe, but “her very desire to make [Friday] into a story parallels Foe’s turning her into a story” (Kossew, 1996; 170), so that she is driven to manipulate the events she has lived on the island in order to give birth to a proper narrative. While she had previously despised Foe’s requests about cannibals or about Crusoe’s activity on the island, she gradually recognises that her story is dreary and lacks the adventure that would catch any reader’s attention. After writing a short list of the strange circumstances she can think of, “dubiously I thought: are these enough strange circumstances to make a story of? How long before I am driven to invent new and stranger circumstances”, adding thereafter an imaginary inventory of what could make up for the lacks in Crusoe’s story and which, indeed, appears in Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, concluding with a sorrowful “will the day ever arrive when we can make a story without strange circumstances?” (*F*, 67). The activity of writing proves to change Susan’s way of thinking, since she becomes absorbed by the male system she is trying to break through and, at the same time, escape from. In a quite

meaningful passage, she imagines Foe's thoughts and observes "'Better had there been only Crusoe and Friday,' you will murmur to yourself: 'Better without the woman.' Yet where would you be without the woman? Would Crusoe have come to you of his own accord?" (*F*, 71-72), and in this she foreshadows the final revisited version into which (De)Foe will force her account, while at the same time she questions that same authorial power through which he will eventually efface her from his narrative. Nevertheless, the more Susan writes the more she understands his requests and reasons, until she must owe him:

Who would wish to read that there were once two dull fellows on a rock in the sea who filled their time by digging up stones? As for me and my yearnings for salvation, one is as soon sated with yearning as one is with sugar. We begin to understand why Mr. Foe pricked up his ears when he heard the word *Cannibal*, why he longed for Crusoe to have a musket and a carpenter's chest. (*F*, 82-83)

Acknowledging to Foe the right to ask for strange circumstances she then proceeds to discuss the "touches of mystery" (*F*, 83) which she would like to include in her story, were it possible for Friday to disclose and explain them. Except for the terrace building, these mysteries, whose meaning will remain dark, all concern and centre on the black slave: his lost tongue and dumbness; his unconditional submission to Crusoe; the lack of desire for Susan; and last, but not least, the paddling out to sea to scatter petals on the water. As Susan herself will later remark, "on the sorrows of Friday [...] a story entire of itself might be built; whereas from the indifference of Crusoe there is little to be squeezed" (*F*, 87). The difficulty of writing appears plainly in front of her eyes when she must confront the few facts she can write about, and she admits that out of sloth and out of a lack of desire it is impossible to make a story, unless in despair one begins "to make up lies", as Susan thinks "past historians of the castaway state have done" (*F*, 88). After some more reflections on

her and Foe's activity she will once again agree with Foe's desires to have exotic circumstances added to the story and will realise that his requests were probably an attempt to attract the reader's attention and not a complete disregard for truth, as she initially thought and as also Gallagher supports by affirming that "Foe is more interested in what will sell than in the truth of the story" (177). It must be remembered, however, that Susan too needs to take the public into consideration if she really wants to become rich and famous, so she is somehow forced to realise the importance of the words a writer chooses: "I forgot you are a writer who knows above all how many words can be sucked from a cannibal feast, how few from a woman cowering from the wind. It is all a matter of words and the number of words, is it not?" (*F*, 94). This remark makes us understand that Susan has finally become an author herself, a bold woman who knows how to write a story and who can look for success in the literary field and in society, having achieved full control over the story she wants to tell and over her own life. With such self-confidence she faces Foe in Part III, and to his unyielding questioning about Bahia she can answer that "to no one, not even to you, do I owe proof that I am a substantial being with a substantial history in the world [...]: for I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire" (*F*, 131). Macaskill and Colleran, in their study, attribute such freedom from patriarchal authority to her confession, but also remind us that it is only a partial achievement since "it is made principally of words and remains fundamentally symbolic" (445). It is for this reason that Susan is thrown back into uncertainty and "Beckettian doubt" when confronted with Foe's story of her, the mother-daughter narrative, and with the possibility that his version of her story may be as true as her own island-narrative (Macaskill and Colleran,

442). The passage in which Susan finally loses any hope to become a substantial body through Foe's work represents a sudden capitulation:

now all my life grows to be story and there is nothing of my own left to me. I thought I was myself and this girl a creature from another order speaking words you made up for her. But now I am full of doubt. Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom, too? To what order do I belong? And you: who are you? (*F*, 133)

This new consciousness goes back to the episode of the dead baby on the way to Bristol, when Susan identified with it giving reason to Attwell to suppose that it is "as if at the core of her desire for self-representation she senses a lack that will always leave her incomplete, inchoate" (1993, 111). What the reader is left to assume, by the end of the novel, is that Susan has finally succumbed and surrendered to Foe, only partially winning her fight against him for the control of her life and story. On the one hand, in fact, Foe manages to efface the woman from the castaway narrative and to make of her the controversial protagonist of *Roxana*, but on the other hand he indeed decides to pay attention to the true core of Susan's island story, i.e. Friday and his silence.

2.3. "There is a cannibal in Clock Lane"

The most ambiguous and most difficult character Coetzee has created for his *Foe* is probably Friday. Completely altered in comparison to the famous character in *Robinson Crusoe*, the black slave is here a dumb and passive creature at the mercy first of his master Cruso and then of his mistress Susan Barton, who together with Foe embody different types of the colonizing white. Friday represents therefore the focal figure who allows to identify colonial and post-colonial issues in *Foe*; under

this perspective he is also the centre around whom the attention of all the writers in and of the novel revolves, i.e. both the fictional Susan and Foe and the real-but-not-so-real Coetzee. The elements of attraction that make him stand out are primarily related to his imposed and apparently irreversible silence, and as a consequence they deal with his past story, which corresponds to a history of colonialism and oppression. The aim of the current section is first to look at how Friday is described and perceived by the other characters and how they relate to him. Then it will try to analyse his story from the information given and to figure out who he really is when the reader carefully reads between the lines and, uninfluenced by the many versions provided in the novel, tries to interpret the signs he is giving to reveal his true identity.

2.3.1. Being a slave for life

Friday, the literary savage tamed by Robinson Crusoe in Daniel Defoe's adventure novel, has been assumed as the symbol of the ideal submissive and obedient slave who can provide solace and company to the solitary master. Spivak argues he is

the prototype of the successful colonial subject. He learns his master's speech, does his master's work, happily swears loyalty, believes the culture of the master is better and kills his other self to enter the shady plains of northwestern Europe. (1990, 14)

Coetzee's Friday, on the other hand, has been moulded so to appear as the result of decades of colonial European power over the oppressed populations of Africa. Of him Laura Wright observes he "typifies the traumatized individual. He has no voice, no perspective that we can learn about, for he has no tongue" (47). Given Coetzee's South African provenance and the political and social situation of South Africa

while he wrote, it is easy to see in him the black native South African silenced and mutilated, “scarred by slavery, colonialism, apartheid, all manner of inhuman abuse which has indeed rendered it difficult to speak from the subject position, cut off from history and dislocated from home”, as Laura Wright continues (47). Looking at the two fictional slaves from a comparative perspective, their different positioning is moreover underlined through the different master-slave relationship which binds them with the white colonialist. While in *Robinson Crusoe* the dichotomy is established only between Robinson and Friday, giving thus birth to a complicit though socially unequal pair, within the narrative of *Foe* the black slave comes to be the anomalous subject of three different powers: Cruso’s patriarchal authority, Susan’s ambivalent behaviour, and Foe’s literary enslavement. Even though his behaviour does not undergo meaningful changes when he ‘interacts’ with each of these masters/mistresses, mainly because “he is a substantial body, he is himself, Friday is Friday” (*F*, 122), from their individual point of view he is seen and perceived in three clearly different though most of the times overlapping ways.

The solitary Cruso has shut himself away from any form of society and his behaviour towards Friday seems to be the most straightforward among that of the three colonizers: he is the master, Friday the subservient slave. When this relationship began is not clear, the information Cruso provides about Friday’s past is blurred and unsure; Friday may have been “a cannibal whom he had saved from being roasted and devoured by fellow-cannibals”, but it is not excluded that he may have come to the island on the same ship as Cruso, “none but they having been spared when their ship went down” (*F*, 12). What appears to be clear is that Cruso and Friday have been living some fifteen years together on the island, and for all

those years their respective roles have not been subverted. A major difference between Defoe's Crusoe and Coetzee's Cruso in the relationship with Friday is related to the use of language. Robinson Crusoe taught his slave the English language, and Friday would at last master it well enough to carry out even a theological debate with his master. It is nevertheless true that after many years, as could be and has indeed been noticed, he still speaks a pidgin English, somehow confirming Caliban's implicit reproach to Prospero, in the other great colonial text *The Tempest*, that "the 'gift' of speech is [...] circumscribed: 'You taught me language, and my profit on't is, I know how to curse'", so that "from a post-colonial view-point, the manipulative and partial nature of this 'gift' [is] obvious" (Kossew, 1996; 165). On the other hand, Cruso's approach is one that pursues a sort of 'economy of speech': teaching Friday no more words than those necessary to perpetuate the master-slave *status quo*, he limits himself to the use of commands such as *firewood*, or *fetch* and *dig* (*F*, 21; 149) and the like, so that he can oblige his master without making any mistake. Gallagher comments to this point that "Friday's duty to collect *firewood* is reminiscent of Caliban's assignment in *The Tempest*, and Cruso occasionally resembles Prospero in his evening reveries" (180) and, it could be added, in his authoritarian approach. Contrary to his eighteenth-century counterpart, this Friday was not made into a pleasant companion who could "have lightened [Foe's] solitude had [he] been master of English" and who could have given him "the pleasures of conversations" (*F*, 22), as Susan remarks before knowing that he cannot speak. When later, in one of her letters to Foe, she reflects on this past episode, however, she admits

Cruso would not teach him because, he said, Friday had no need of words. But Cruso erred. Life on the island, before my coming, would have been less

tedious had he taught Friday to understand his meanings, and devised ways by which Friday could express his own meanings. (*F*, 56)

The master Crusoe decided to relegate him further into silence and subjection, instead, giving reason to think that within the master-servant dichotomy words may be superfluous and, moreover, that the savage Friday may not deserve the gift of language, a reason which may have led unknown perpetrators to deprive him of his tongue.

About the ambivalent and ambiguous relationship between Friday and Susan something has already been suggested in the previous sections. The two are both subject to the male colonizing authority of Crusoe while on the island, and to the male authorial power of Foe when back in London, but still they are not equal. Susan is in fact a white and a European, and in her relationship with Friday she is as much part of the oppressive system as the two male figures that also control her. As Gallagher observes, “initially, she appears as a daughter of her time and class, unthinkingly repeating the prejudices of British society” (181), and a certain sense of superiority appears in her already when they are on the island. After spying on him and discovering his ceremony on the seaweed she observes:

Hitherto I had given to Friday’s life as little thought as I would have a dog’s or a dumb beast’s – less, indeed [...]. This casting of petals was the first sign I had that a spirit or soul – call it what you will – stirred beneath that dull and unpleasing exterior. (*F*, 32)

The comparison with a dog will return later on, in London, when she says of him that he “grows old before his time, like a dog locked up all its life” (*F*, 55), or when she comments on his future and sees it similar to that “of a watch-dog, raised with kindness but kept from birth behind a locked gate” until one day he manages to escape but is so frightened by the wide world that he becomes suspicious and

ferocious (*F*, 80). It may be interesting to notice that this specific metaphor within the animal kingdom brings Coetzee's Friday back to Defoe's Friday, though on different terms. Robinson Crusoe, indeed, educates the native savage so that he "provides him with a human companion, and is more useful to Crusoe than his now defunct dog was, [but still] he remains essentially a more versatile, articulate, and amusing dog", observes Sutherland (353). So while Crusoe's manservant proves to be a faithful and sociable companion, in *Foe* Friday is exactly the opposite, like the dog described by Susan: disoriented in open spaces and mistrustful of people, instead of providing companionship he needs someone, in this case Susan, to look after him. For this reason, "Friday is a version of the white, in this case, woman's, burden" (Jolly, 11) and causes Susan to feel, according to Kossew, "a mixture of revulsion and fascination" towards him (1996, 170) and to alternate pity on the helpless creature he is and impatience with the slave whom she denies to own. Her feelings are mirrored in her words, so that at one time "her Miranda-like role is echoed in her words about Friday/Caliban 'I do not love him, but he is mine' (111), which also inadvertently emphasize her sense of ownership", Kossew observes (1996, 170), while in an outburst with Foe she defines him a "tyrant riding on [her] shoulders" (*F*, 148) and enslaving her with his steady, stifling presence, thus at last also leaving her to still be the "subject to the actions of others" (Macaskill and Colleran, 449). Similarly to the Caliban who rebelled against his benevolent tutor and teacher Miranda, Friday also refuses the chains of slavery represented by language, and therefore he refuses to interact with or learn anything from Susan. He is a difficult pupil, indeed, and the lack of any reaction to her stimuli leads Susan to ask herself first if it was "possible for anyone, however benighted by a lifetime of dumb servitude, to be as stupid as Friday seemed?", but then also if it could be "that

somewhere within him he was laughing at my efforts to bring him nearer to a state of speech?" (*F*, 146). Susan is well aware of the fact that Friday is not as stupid as she thinks him to be, but exploits the wall of silence he has built to his advantage to avoid her, as happened when Foe hinted at the possibility to "make him a present of [his] flute" (*F*, 128). On that occasion, too, Friday seemed to mock her with his indifference, as her words give reason to think: "I glanced across at Friday. Did I mistake myself, or was there a gleam of understanding in his eye? 'Do you understand what Mr Foe says, Friday?' I called. He looked back at me dully" (*F*, 128).

The last master who manages to assert his power over Friday is the writer Foe. After a failed attempt to liberate Friday and send him back to Africa, Susan is finally able to find Foe, thus condemning both herself and Friday to succumb to his control. His attention is first attracted by Susan and by the story of her daughter, as the sections above already point out, and at last she yields to his persistence and by fathering her story she transforms him into "an old whore who should ply her trade only in the dark", as he defines himself, or rather into a mistress, even a wife, as Susan corrects him (*F*, 151). The decisive moment when Foe turns his attention to Friday is signalled by their sexual intercourse. Upon Susan's persevering suggestion that "the shadow whose lack you feel is there: the loss of Friday's tongue" (*F*, 117), Foe starts discussing the reasons that might have driven Friday to risk once again his life in order to scatter petals on the water, and the meaning of such a ceremony. He shares Susan's opinion that the silence surrounding Friday should be filled, no matter how much Friday will be able to reveal about himself; this attitude shows his confidence as a writer, but he also proves to be fully aware of "the possibility of the

sterility of language games” and that a superficial use of words, “a circular theorizing about discourse” risks to represent the threat of a new colonization (Head, 127).

But you must ask yourself, Susan: as it was a slaver’s stratagem to rob Friday of his tongue, may it not be a slaver’s stratagem to hold him in subjection while we cavil over words in a dispute we know to be endless? (*F*, 150),

Foe tells Susan to conclude their discussion concerning Friday’s desire. Foe’s position, from this dialogue, appears clear: while Susan is sure “Friday’s desires are not dark to me. He desires to be liberated, as I do too. Our desires are plain, his and mine” (*F*, 148), he knows that he can literally use Friday as an empty figure that can be moulded and modelled by him. Foe is indeed the artist who can

deplore the barbarism of whoever maimed him, yet have we [Foe and Susan], his later masters, not reason to be secretly grateful? For as long as he is dumb we can tell ourselves his desires are dark to us, and *continue to use him as we wish* (*F*, 148; emphasis added).

2.3.2. *The lost tongue*

Among the mysteries of the island enlisted by Susan the tongue Friday has lost, and for whose loss he cannot account, stands out as one of the most important elements for the development, disclosure and closure of her story. Attwell argues that “Friday’s contextualization [within a South African environment] is most clearly rendered [...] in his mutilation and lack of speech” (1993, 108), thus giving reason to interpret his status as both the symbolic and effective centre of Coetzee’s narrative. His dumbness represents rightfully a major concern for Susan, since it creates a hole in the narrative of the island which prevents her to write a full story able to counter Foe’s claims over her. “The problem”, explains Attwell “is that Friday cannot be

incorporated into this story: his mutilation, his ritual of scattering petals on the water at the site where Susan assumes he was shipwrecked, his subjectivity – all are simply inaccessible to Susan” (1993, 111); such inaccessibility, he continues, is one of the reasons causing Susan’s uncertainties and doubts, and maybe also one of the reasons, it could be argued, of Friday’s power (1993, 112). The need Susan feels to fill her narrative and provide it with a meaningful centre, however, probably initially blinds her to this power of Friday, and leads her to resort to any possible means of communication and interaction in order to disclose his secret, to unveil his past, and to explain his dumbness (see section 2.1.1).

As a basis from which to start her reconstruction of Friday’s past, Susan can rely on the unreliable versions Cruso told her. Provoked by her criticism for not having taught Friday to speak, Cruso commands Friday to “sing for Mistress Barton”, and the slave “obedient to his master, began to hum in a low voice. I listened, but could make out no tune. Cruso tapped on my knee. ‘The voice of man,’ he said”, remarks Susan in her account (*F*, 22). Upon discovering that Friday has no tongue, though unable to prove it with her own eyes because of the dark, Susan continues questioning Cruso about it and learns from him that the slavers did this to a young Friday. “Why would they cut out a child’s tongue?” she asks, amazed; to her question, Cruso seems to be able to provide only some guesses of his own:

Perhaps the slavers, who are Moors, hold the tongue to be a delicacy [...]. Or perhaps they grew weary of listening to Friday’s wails of grief [...]. Perhaps they wanted to prevent him from ever telling his story [...]. Perhaps they cut out the tongue of every cannibal they took, as a punishment. How will we ever know the truth? (*F*, 23)

Indeed, the truth will never be discovered, but some of Cruso’s suppositions will be coming back again during Susan’s account. Most interestingly, however, Susan

would rather believe the mutilation was carried out by Cruso and not by the slavers, as the episode of the drawings and her later comment “have I misjudged Cruso all this time: was it to punish him for his sins [i.e. eating human flesh] that he cut out Friday’s tongue?” (*F*, 95) may prove. Susan cannot be content with hypotheses, all the more so because to the ones instilled in her by Cruso she adds some of her own which are related to cultural practices she may not know, since “who, after all, was to say he did not lose his tongue at the age when boy-children among the Jews are cut [...]? Who was to say there do not exist entire tribes in Africa among whom the men are mute and speech is reserved to women?” (*F*, 69). From Susan’s speculations we are led to take Cruso’s words at face value, and assume that Friday is unable to speak because he has no tongue; a more careful reading of her words, however, proves that she too is an unreliable witness, not only because on that evening when Cruso showed her Friday’s open mouth it was too dark to see anything but “the glint of teeth white as ivory” (*F*, 22), but also because she willingly “averted [her] eyes from seeing” (*F*, 119). Susan is psychologically influenced by Cruso’s words to the point that from the moment of that discovery onwards she “began to look on [Friday] [...] with the horror we reserve for the mutilated. It was no comfort that this mutilation was secret, closed behind his lips (as *some other mutilations* are hidden by clothing)” (*F*, 24; emphasis added), thus also unconsciously linking the possession of a tongue and the mastery of speech to masculinity and sexual potency, and creating a “metaphoric connection of pen with penis” (Gallagher, 181). The above-hinted analogy with Caliban comes here back to mind, even though on quite different terms. In the case of the savage of *The Tempest*, an insufficient mastery of English matched with a distorted sexuality which led him to attempt to rape Miranda, Gallagher argues. On the other hand, in

the case of Friday Susan associates the loss of the tongue with castration, thus also allowing her to find an explanation for Friday's lack of desire towards her (Gallagher, 180-181). Such conviction, she reveals to Foe, developed in her when assisting for the first time to Friday's whirling, during which his nakedness was exposed to her and the sight could confirm her thoughts:

Now when Cruso told me that the slavers were in the habit of cutting out the tongues of their prisoners to make them more tractable, I confess I wondered whether he might not be employing a figure, for the sake of delicacy: whether the lost tongue might stand not only for itself but for a more atrocious mutilation; whether by a dumb slave I was to understand a slave unmanned. (*F*, 118-119)

The naked body of Friday is laid bare in front of her as a dark pillar spinning around, and though now Susan can state: "what had been hidden from me was revealed. I saw; or, I should say, my eyes were open to what was present to them" (*F*, 119), her description remains vague. The second mutilation, like the first, is only hinted at, never clearly revealed or proved by Susan, who by making "reference to doubting Thomas supplies a further obfuscation" and by talking about a wound "supports the sense of a mutilation" which would be the consequence of the many sufferings caused by colonization (Head, 121). Head suggests that this indeterminacy is mainly related to Susan's inability "to capture or describe the Other" and that "in a sense, Friday's possible double mutilation achieves a mythic status which cannot be adequately addressed in a discourse other than his own" (121).

Whether or not Friday has been deprived of both tongue and phallus, whether or not he is potent, "what is more important, Susan doesn't know" ("Two" 463). Friday may be more potent, more capable of speech, than Susan suspects" argues Gallagher, quoting also Coetzee (181). It is true that for Friday the loss of the tongue

means the impossibility to speak and tell his story, the inability to have full control over himself and to defend himself “against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others. –Susan remarks – I say he is a cannibal and he becomes a cannibal; I say he is a laundryman and he becomes a laundryman” (*F*, 121). Thus a process originates which precludes the possibility of ever coming to the essence of Friday, to his true self. “No matter what he is to himself (is he anything to himself? – how can he tell us?), what he is to the world is what I make of him” Susan continues, and finally characterizes his silence as a “helpless silence” (*F*, 122). While Susan, seeing the situation from a subject position, would want to avoid speaking for Friday and uttering words which do not belong to him, Foe speaks as a professional author and brings the debate with her one step further. He knows, in fact, that “in every story there is a silence, some sight concealed, some word unspoken” (*F*, 141) and he suggests that, where the subject does not provide any solution to the gaps in the story, the author must do it for him. Through this opinion of Foe, which clearly indicates his self-consciousness as occupying a power-position, Coetzee emphasises how “Friday’s silence [...] is not so much an ontological state as it is a social condition, imposed upon him by those in power. As a symbol of oppression Friday represents those who have been silenced because of race, gender, and class”, Gallagher aptly observes in her analysis of the character (181). Seen from another perspective, however, Friday is so depicted as to represent the “site of a shimmering, indeterminate potency” (Attwell, 1993; 112) that also utters itself through this apparently helpless silence. A parallel interpretation of his silence can indeed be related to Friday not-wanting-to speak and/or communicate with any of his interlocutors as a form of resistance against his subjection and colonization. His dumbness becomes therefore a symbol for his ‘power to withhold’

(Spivak, 1990; 16) and thus, unacknowledged by either Foe or Susan, a way to assert control over his life and story. According to Jolly, even though he is a prisoner of Susan's narrative desire, "Friday cannot speak. By virtue of this he is resistant to Susan Barton's colonizing narrative" and dooms to failure her projects to save him first from the island and then from his irretrievable silence (9). A first proof for this is one moment in the episode of their rescue from the island: Susan learns of the presence of someone when one day Friday "suddenly came scampering into the hut and snatched up his fishing-spears and dashed off towards the crags where the apes were" (*F*, 39). Her sudden enthusiasm at the prospect of being rescued clashes with Friday's fears, but thinking "it is our duty to care for him in all things, and not abandon him to a solitude worse than death" (*F*, 39) she prays the mariners to go and fetch him. Jolly further observes in her analysis that Friday's "demeanor is not that of the saved but of the enslaved" (9), condemned to a life he does not want to live, consigned to a new slavery in the great metropolis where mistrust will leave him no more. London confuses and frightens him; he is trapped in an environment he is not used to, and must adapt to new habits, all of which makes him fall into a state of laziness and apathy. Burdened by his presence in her life, Susan feels now compelled to help him retrieve his past and, with that, also his ability to speak or at least interact with other people. However, no matter how hard Susan tries to penetrate his silence and in this way let his story loose, all of her methods seem to falter and to reveal her true intentions: "as the history of Susan Barton's attempts to 'free' Friday unfolds, it becomes clear that Susan Barton is not trying to liberate Friday at all, but to control him by gaining access to him through communication on her own terms" (Jolly, 9). That she will finally be unable to control him is due to his counter-ability to shield himself from her attacks: his

silence, his isolation in the dancing and singing and flute-playing ‘ceremonies’ in Foe’s house, his mysterious writing are all a protection from Susan and her worldly intrusiveness.

2.3.3. *Unconventional forms of expression*

Even though Friday never responds to Susan’s stimuli in the way she expects him to do, his silence is also the place from whence he can actively produce some independent forms of expression. Macaskill and Colleran speak of “Friday’s art”, which Susan knows about and “no doubt values”; “more pertinently – they continue – she knows that to unlock Friday’s secret will take a key differently constructed from any she possesses” (447). The silenced slave who refuses colonization manages too to be an artist and author just like Foe and Susan; the only difference lays in his art being more obscure and harder to read, especially if the readership comes from a European background and cannot see things but from their own point of view, as the analysis of Susan’s struggle for production has pointed out (see 2.2.1). Kossew, too, explains that Friday “never does ‘speak’ in the text, except in non-verbal, possibly metaphorical, ways: his music, his singing [...], his dancing, his drawing, his ‘writing,’ and the release of his voice at the end” (1996, 162), providing us with an orderly list of Friday’s ‘artistic performances’ which shows a clear development towards the final moment of dis-closure. Before becoming acquainted with pen and paper, therefore, Friday begins to express himself by using music and body language, forms of communication which are more immediate though, for Susan, rather unconventional.

About Friday's dancing something has already been hinted at elsewhere in our discussion, but it is worth mentioning it again. Upon finding Foe's robes and wigs at his house, Friday takes possession of them and starts a kind of everyday ritual which Susan "had never seen him do before" (*F*, 92): moving from kitchen to drawing-room to follow the sun, Susan informs Mr. Foe how

he does his dance in a patch of sunlight, holding out his arms and spinning in a circle, his eyes shut, hour after hour, never growing fatigued or dizzy. [...] In the grip of the dancing he is not himself. He is beyond human reach. I call his name and I am ignored, I put out a hand and am brushed aside. All the while he dances he makes a humming noise in his throat [...]; sometimes he seems to be singing. (*F*, 92)

Unable to figure out the meaning of or to see the reasons for his daily exercise, she slowly grows wary of it and is therefore determined to bring him back to his senses taking the robes away from him. His equal in their misfortunes, on such occasion Susan clearly appears as both the mistress and enemy of Friday who wants to influence his everyday actions assuming the role of his tutor and protector. Friday's above-mentioned resistance to her is confirmed also on a concrete level, since Susan finds him "awake, his hands gripping the robe [...] as though he read my thoughts" (*F*, 92). By holding the robes Friday manages to keep hold on his life and individuality, also leaving Susan out of it both as a mistress and as an author. Susan is initially frustrated by his behaviour, but everything changes when she discovers the flutes and perceives music to be a potential language through which she could gain access to Friday. When he familiarises with the flute at Foe's it is not the first time that Friday uses an instrument: Susan recounts about Crusoe falling ill twice on the island, and upon both occasions his slave plays "on his little reed flute a tune of six notes, always the same" (*F*, 28). The link between Crusoe's fits of fever and Friday's tune seems almost natural, all the more so if we consider that during the

second fit Friday ceases to play as soon as Cruso calms down, so that it may be possible to speculate that in music Friday had found a form of real and deep connection with an unconscious Cruso. Whether or not our hypothesis is true, what appears clear from the text is that any possibility to establish a musical connection between Susan and Friday proves vain, both because Susan does not and cannot understand him and because he is not willing to create it. On the island, the first time Friday takes out his flute he goes on playing it for twelve days without interruption and the tune

grew so to annoy me [Susan] that one day I marched over and dashed the flute from his hands and would have scolded him too, whether or not he understood [...]. Friday sprang to his feet, his eyes wide with surprise, for I had never lost patience with him, or indeed paid him much heed. (*F*, 28)

While on that occasion the interaction was not even prompted due to Susan's lack of interest for Friday, at Foe's Susan indeed feels that an interaction has been established between them, but her feelings soon prove to be unilateral and illusory. The failure is once again ascribable to Susan who, finding the tune monotonous and annoying, cannot restrain herself from varying it: "Just as we cannot exchange forever the same utterances [...] and believe we are conversing, [...] so it is with music: we cannot forever play the same tune and be content" (*F*, 97), she concludes after having played in consort with Friday for almost an hour. As soon as she accordingly changes her tune, however, she realises that all the time Friday "had been insensible of me" (*F*, 98), and so her effort at flute-playing is no more than a mere delusion. Music and dancing represent for Friday a sort of temporary wall, a shield he uses to protect himself and which Susan tries ineffectively to penetrate using as weapons the same music and dancing of Friday, but mistaking the methods

and the timing – i.e. she varies the tune when she should not do it, and she starts whirling when Friday is no more responsive to her.

Music and dancing may be the truest means of communication used by Friday to express his identity, but they are not the only ones he uses. Like Susan, he too manages to gain access to a power position through the mastery of pen and ink and to literally substitute Foe: he “installs himself at Foe’s desk, assuming the position of authorship” (Attwell, 1993; 114) and causing Susan a fit of horror at the prospect that “he will foul [Foe’s] papers” (*F*, 151). At this point in the narration he has already reached the last stage of his learning, but the process has been slow and much to Susan’s disappointment. Friday’s first approach to writing takes place thanks to Foe: given that all of Susan’s attempts to bring him to speech have failed, there must be another way to allow him to convey his meanings, and Foe is sure this way is written language and the teacher cannot be but Susan. Despite her perplexities: “how can he write if he cannot speak? Letters are the mirror of words” (*F*, 142), she objects to Foe, she sets to teaching Friday with a simple and straightforward method:

On the slate I drew a house [...], and beneath it wrote the letters h-o-u-s. [...] I made the sounds of the word *house* one by one, pointing to the letters as I made them, and then took Friday’s finger and guided it over the letters as I spoke the word; and finally gave the pencil into his hand and guided him to write h-o-u-s beneath the h-o-u-s I had written. (*F*, 145)

She believes thus to be able to create in his mind the association between concept and word, signified and signifier, but when it is his turn to write down each word she teaches him the result is not promising: “h-s-h-s-h-s he wrote, on and on, or perhaps h-f; and would have filled the whole slate had I not removed the pencil from his hand” (*F*, 146). Spivak notices that “at this stage the only letter he seems to be able

to produce is *h*. *H* is a strange letter in this book – it is the letter of muteness itself” (1990, 14). Susan does not seem able to create such a connection; all she can do is to react to Friday’s inaccurate writing in a harsh way, lacking any sympathy for her pupil who will nevertheless have his second more profitable try at Foe’s lodgings, when he is left unattended and “discovers his own mark, his own written ‘language’” (Head, 122). A language which yet another time Susan will at first misread, thinking that Friday is filling the child’s slate with “a design of, as it seemed, leaves and flowers” while indeed “when I came closer I saw the leaves where eyes, open eyes, each set upon a human foot: row upon row of eyes upon feet: walking eyes” (*F*, 147). A powerful and most enigmatic image whose meaning is all but clear to Susan, to the reader, and to scholars alike, but whose interpretation may be understood to represent one of the keys to unlock Friday’s art, the one Susan does not possess “for it is Friday’s art, not hers” (Macaskill and Colleran, 447). Given that Friday reacts to Susan’s command “Give! Give me the slate, Friday!” by putting “three fingers into his mouth and wet them with spittle and rub (bed) the slate clean” (*F*, 147), we may first of all understand this episode as one further demonstration of resistance against being controlled or violated by others. Attwell interestingly acknowledges that “Friday’s writing inscribes his own watchfulness over Susan and Foe” and conjoins Friday’s body, epitomised by that foot which is his trademark in the tradition of Robinsonnades, with his silent gaze (1993, 114). Head reports a few interesting interpretations of Friday’s writing in his study (122): Gräbe perceives these eyes as referring to Friday’s and Susan’s roaming from London to Brighton and thus symbolising a particular focalisation of voyages undertaken in the perspective of reparation; according to Maes-Jelinek they could represent Friday’s accusatory stare as the victim of someone else’s subjection; Spivak, as also her study

suggests (1990, 15), puts the emphasis on the resistance of meaning and the effective impossibility of understanding this writing. A possible conclusion we may infer from such interpretations, also following Head's conclusion (123), is that the walking eyes are a metaphor for colonization conveying the sense of bearing witness to the history of violence, repression, and injustices that all black people have been living in the past centuries. Among the studies taken into consideration, only Marais offers a different reading of the walking eyes as "a graphic depiction of the metaphor of the reader as a traveller, a topos of eighteenth-century literature", thus contributing to accentuate the process of reading on which he focuses in his analysis of *Foe* (1989, 11). After having drawn the walking eyes, Friday attempts a third time to write, probably spurred by Foe who wants him to express in a totally autonomous way; this attempt consists of "rows upon rows of the letter *o* tightly packed together" (*F*, 152), which according to Foe represent "a beginning" that gives way to the next lesson when Susan "must teach him *a*" (*F*, 152). Like the eyes, these *os* have been interpreted in different ways, too: Spivak suggests that Foe may be wrong in failing to see that "the *o* could conceivably be *omega*, the end" (1990, 15) of any effort to disclose Friday's story and make his silence speak; similarly Attwell, who however underlines how Foe's exhortation to continue the lessons represents his desire "that [Friday] produces the assimilable story of himself, starting at the beginning with *a*, alpha" (1993, 114). Interesting is also Kossew's association of

these circular *o*'s and eyes (possibly narrative 'I's') [with] the 'hole' or gap in the story which is Friday's silence. It is possible to read these *o*'s – she continues – as signs of completion, as Friday's alter/native system of language which has its own referentiality, and which refuses to be colonized by other systems (1996, 162).

2.3.4. *The home of Friday*

Whether Friday's *os* really represent the omega, and thus the end of Susan's tutelage, or whether they stand for a new beginning is hard to establish. We can however agree with Macaskill and Colleran when they say that Foe's exhorting words "constitute an extraordinary ending; so fine in orchestration, so adept in execution, this act of closure seems to gratify all previous desires [...]. More significantly, Friday's future seems assured", since both Susan and Foe seem to be willing to "give him words" (450). The closing scene of Part III, however, is not the ending of the novel but the ending of Susan's own narrative, and a turning point towards a new brief section in and of the novel, i.e. Part IV. In this section we witness to the last and most powerful 'act of writing' carried through by the acting subject Friday. The chapter allows to be looked at as a last attempt to shed light on the figure of Friday, on his past and on his story, and to finally perform the task which none of the authors in the novel has been able to fulfil, even though we feel to concur with Kossue when she remarks that

the question remains whether Coetzee has offered 'a means of giving voice to Friday': ie, whether he has offered a model of authorship which frees itself from the colonizing author/ity represented in their different ways by Cruso, Susan and Foe. (1996, 172)

Part IV has been defined by Mackaskill and Colleran something of "a coda indifferently, mistakenly attached" (450), which shifts the point of view from Susan to a new narrating *I*, "an 'authorial' voice supplying an ultimate frame to this metafiction" (Head, 123). Stepping into the narrative, this 'persona' guides the reader first into Foe's lodgings and thereafter down under the water, to the wreck of a ship, thus carrying out the task which had been signalled by Foe and Susan: s/he

dives into the wreck and goes searching for Friday. What had been identified by Foe as a “dark pupil – or the dead socket – of an eye staring up”, and by Susan as rather “a great mouth, or beak” (*F*, 141), appears now to be a double attempt on the part of this new narrator to make Friday speak, to release his voice. Part IV can be read as a time travel of sorts, since the narrator stumbles over the dead bodies of *Foe*’s characters; to reference Head, “the novel ends by gesturing towards a post-colonial utopia” (126) where the complicit author attempts to undo the injustices of apartheid which have afflicted black slaves just like Friday.

In the last few pages of *Foe*, the reader follows a first-person, gender-neuter narrator different from Susan, and is presented with a scene metaphorically standing “for the post-colonial moment, with Friday outlasting the late-colonizers who have struggled unsuccessfully to release his voice”, as Head explains (124). Both times this visitor enters *Foe*’s dwelling place, where we had left *Foe*, Susan and Friday at the end of Part III, s/he finds the characters of *Foe* (including the young would-be daughter of Susan) all dead but Friday, towards whom his/her concentration is directed. Friday’s skin is, in fact, still warm; upon the first visit the narrator notices his “heart beat in a far-off place”; “his teeth are clenched” (*F*, 154), this *I* further notices, but after a little effort s/he at last manages to part them, so that s/he can lie waiting to listen what sound comes out of his mouth.

If I can ignore the beating of my own heart, I begin to hear the faintest faraway roar: as she said, the roar of waves in a seashell; and over that [...] the whine of the wind and the cry of a bird. Closer I press, listening for other sounds: the chirp of sparrows, the thud of a mattock, the call of a voice. From his mouth, without a breath, issue the sounds of the island. (*F*, 154)

A first result has thus been achieved, Friday’s silence has begun to be disclosed without any mediation, proving that “the history that Susan was unable to tell is

there; the story of the island is still Friday's possession" (Attwell, 1993; 115). The sounds of the island, however, do not represent the true heart of his story, and Head warns that such an association "can be seen as a continuing marginalization, a stereotypical identification of the 'native' with 'native culture'" (124). A second visit to the past must therefore be paid, Head continues to argue, thus implicitly acknowledging that the first was unsatisfactory and inadequate, while "the existence of two attempts itself implies the unsuitability [also] of this narrator to the task" (124).

The second rehearsal of the scene opens with a new detail, a plaque "bolted to the wall. *Daniel Defoe, Author*, are the words, white on blue, and then more writing too small to read" (*F*, 155), a sign that has been interpreted as a gap in time (Kossew, 1996), a leap in the "literary-historical present, from which the cultural project of the novel as a genre is being examined" (Head, 125). This time the narrator does not linger long at Foe's house, where another detail is noticed: around Friday's neck "the history of colonial slavery and subjugation" (Head, 125) is evoked by "a scar like a necklace, left by a rope or chain" (*F*, 155). No sooner has the narrator made this observation that s/he finds on the floor the dispatch box containing Susan's manuscript, now properly addressed to Foe and beginning "Dear Mr Foe, At last I could row no further" (*F*, 155); at these words, the narrator literally plunges into Susan's account and becomes the new protagonist of her story, marking thus the transition to an even more significant time and place. Surrounded by the white petals thrown by Friday, our narrator is now obliged by the current and, maybe, by the *kraken* mentioned earlier by Foe to dive to the wreck of a ship, which Head assumes conflates "three different ships: Crusoe's wreck [...]; the ship from

which Barton is originally set adrift [...]; and the vessel which rescues her” (125). Moving slowly towards the eye of the story, the narrator finds Defoe’s unfinished stories of grenadiers on his/her way, stories which “now lie dead” buried under “the same water as yesterday, as last year, as three hundred years ago” together with “Susan Barton and her dead captain” (*F*, 157), and her unwritten account, too. Knowing who to search for, the *I* finally comes to Friday, defined by Attwell as “the symptomatic presence of all colonial narratives, seemingly dead but in fact not dead, outliving the stories that might or might not include him” (1993, 116). Now, in the remote past when he was shipwrecked, instead of a scar he has a “chain about his throat” (*F*, 157) which clearly indicates his slavery and, probably, also refers to Susan’s bill of freedom. Fingering the chain, the narrator impatiently asks him “what is this ship?” (*F*, 157), emblematically looking for an explanation about the origin of the ship, where and why was it sailing and who were its passengers, “while also alerting attention to the strange nature of the vessel, and what it represents”, warns Head (126). But neither the question nor the answer can be heard, because “this is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday” (*F*, 157). Under the water, on a ship that could also have been full of slaves brought to America, not the words but the body bears the marks of suffering, like the chain which has left a scar around Friday’s neck or the wound of a mutilation. As Susan had earlier observed, Friday is first and foremost body and his silence is a powerful

slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through his body and out upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of

the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face. (*F*, 157)

Friday's voice has finally been released, and while earlier this resounding silence oppressed Susan, rising like dark smoke and filling the air and her lungs till she almost stifled, now it is "a scream of no-sound" (Macaskill and Colleran, 451) which overwhelms the narrator and leaves him/her no other choice than to be silent in his/her turn. This closing metaphor, as Kossew argues in the final passages of her discussion of *Foe*, "admits its vulnerability and inadequacy" but at the same time "it posits an alternative way of telling Friday's story, one that seeks to avoid the kind of betrayal of the subject epitomized by de-Foe, the foe-author, and by the collaboration in this colonizing discourse, however unwillingly, of Susan" (1996, 176).

2.4. Robinson Crusoe vs. Robinson Cruso

"Let it not by any means come to pass that Cruso is saved, I reflected to myself; [...] Cruso rescued will be a deep disappointment to the world" (*F*, 34). Susan's words echo in the reader's mind as a deep truth after she has yet again pointed out that the life on the island was all tediousness, and "Cruso's lack of interest in stories" (Gallagher, 173) was of no help in diverting them during their empty and everyday similar days. Some of the changes Robinson Crusoe has undergone to become Robinson Cruso have already been introduced in the first chapter through a brief comparison of the two characters, but it may be important to underline other traits of Defoe's Robinson in order to carry out a deeper and more fruitful analysis of Coetzee's Cruso. A closer look at this complex and almost unreadable new castaway

may subsequently help to become acquainted with Crusoe, to understand him and to contextualise his life-story within the framework of Susan's narrative.

The story of Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, cast away on a desert island for almost three decades, has long been accepted as a myth by Western society, Ian Watt explains, not because he is described as a hero but because his experience shows a strong link with "some of the enduring traits of our social and economic history" (289)⁴. The reading Watt makes of the novel is partly influenced by the modern capitalist ideologies as well as by Marxist reflections, and touches on three main areas that he himself labels as "Back to Nature", "The Dignity of Labor" and "Economic Man" (289). Under the first heading he identifies all those aspects related to the new life led by Crusoe on the island: far away from society and civilisation he is able nonetheless to survive, "to do without, to adapt to reduced circumstances and to cope successfully with startling change" (Kraft, 40). The initial surge of desperation for finding himself stranded alone on a desert and apparently inhospitable island is soon followed by the acceptance of and adaptation to his new condition. Much like his real model Alexander Selkirk, and in spite of what one would expect, solitude and isolation do not drive him to madness or reduce him "to the condition of an animal" (Novak, 316), as other castaway narratives testify; he does not lose the ability to speak nor his Western habits, and thanks to all the tools he can rescue from the wreck during many expeditions he does not succumb to a primitive life of barbarism but, at last, manages to exert full control over nature. Thanks to his industriousness, Robinson does not stand idle but will soon learn to do things he had never done before, like building table and chair or baking bread or till

⁴ The writing of the current paragraph has been primarily based on Ian Watt, "*Robinson Crusoe* as a Myth". Specific reference to page numbers will be made only in case of direct quotation.

the land. It is for this reason that he has become, in the course of time, “a symbol of self-sufficiency” for “our collective imaginations” (Kraft, 37). Isolation from society and remoteness from any form of civilisation do not represent an obstacle for his daily routine, which is as close as possible to the life he would lead in England and which is strictly organised and regulated in order to avoid any waste of time. Civilisation has thus moved from the mainland to what, with imperialist terminology, could be called a colony. It is through hard work that he manages to create his kingdom and thus become a capitalist *ante litteram* who understands the value of work as a means of production and accumulation of goods. Far from being the adventurer looking for “unearned increments from the work of others” he was before the shipwreck, on the island necessity has turned his preoccupations towards an “accurate planning and stocktaking” (Watt, 299) which will eventually allow him to survive almost thirty years. The late arrival of Friday on the island has two main consequences on his life. On the one hand, it confirms his now capitalistic character, and therefore, instead of seeing the chance to work less and use Friday as his slave, the two work together and contribute to improve the production of goods. On the other hand, however, it also partially reawakens his former Eurocentric, colonial-imperialistic attitude towards the Other, which further characterises him as a “*homo economicus*” who tends to love the Other only as long as they can be useful to his own personal objectives.

The turn given by Coetzee to his *Cruso*, if compared with *Robinson Crusoe*, is more than evident and moves from a total “systematic reversal” (Head, 114) of his lifestyle and character. On the one hand, Defoe created the perfect castaway who can successfully overcome any difficulties, the first being the idea that he is the only

survivor of a shipwreck doomed to live a life of solitude; on the other hand, Coetzee's *Cruso* claims to be proof of the high implausibility (Head, 114) of a man leading such a normal life for so many years and in a relatively unpleasant condition. Once he has accepted the events that have befallen him, Crusoe can in fact move on with his young life and reshape his habits according to his new situation, thus testing his abilities as a carpenter, a cook, a baker and a farmer, too, proving in the end to be an excellent example of "versatility and adaptability" (Richetti, 359). On the other side of the coin, Coetzee builds a purportedly original *Cruso* as a man worn out by "age and isolation" (*F*, 12), grown to be narrow-minded and lacking any type of desire. During their first conversation, in effect, Susan does not need long to understand that the first desire he has lost, if he ever had it at all, is to be saved and to return to civilised England; a lack that will all the time be balanced by the "desire to be saved which I call immoderate" felt by Susan (*F*, 36). *Cruso* represents the exact opposite of Susan – and, of course, of Crusoe – also on the level of narrative: while she is continually looking for stories, either to tell or to hear, he is rather a man of few words who has little to ask and almost nothing to tell. Soon after their meeting, "I would have told more about myself, too", she remarks with a touch of disappointment, "but he asked nothing, gazing out instead into the setting sun"; after an unsuccessful attempt to know more about him, she concludes

I early began to see it was a waste of breath to urge *Cruso* to save himself. Growing old on his island kingdom with no one to say him nay had so narrowed his horizon – when the horizon all around us was so vast and so majestic – that he had come to be persuaded he knew all there was to know about the world. (*F*, 13)

Later, lamenting that *Cruso* is of no company because he has no stories to tell about his past, she finally realises that he may be identifying his whole life with the island;

probably, she has met a man willingly without a past and without a future, who only lives the here and now and expects all the other inhabitants of his kingdom to do the same (Gallagher, 173-174).

His little interest in history and stories becomes even more evident when Susan discovers he has never written a journal, and has not even kept track of the days and years he has spent on the island. Susan's surprise is big, because she knows that "with every day that passes, our memories grow less certain" (*F*, 17) and a castaway like him should desire to preserve and leave memory of such a solitary and singular life. It is in fact the number of details, she maintains, together with the "thousand touches which today may seem of no importance" (*F*, 18) which testifies to the truth of his story and diversifies it from the other castaway stories which, in the end, all resemble one to the other. Susan's earnest and fervent speech about memory, however, falters in front of Cruso's countenance, which remains unchanged, and finds good counterpoint in his short but meaningful replies to her perplexities. He is in fact convinced that "nothing I have forgotten is worth the remembering" (*F*, 17), therefore there is no need to keep a journal; on the issue of leaving something behind to any potential visitor of the island, he moreover replies that his terraces "will be more than enough" (*F*, 18) as inheritance for those future generations of planters who will "have the foresight to bring seed" (*F*, 33). Susan, who is of course not used to a life of solitude as Cruso is, cannot fully appreciate his words and is convinced he may have spent his time better than building empty terraces and standing idle for hours, "losing himself in the contemplation of the wastes of water and sky" (*F*, 38). Even though it is true that his work is fruitless and may metaphorically also represent "the hollowness at the core of empire-building"

(Gallagher, 173); and although his self-imposed solitude can be of no example when attempting to mend a traumatic experience (Kraft, 47), Susan could learn something important from and about him, as Kraft explains. Just as his literary predecessor, during the years on the island Crusoe has learnt to “know(s) the value of work” as a way to avoid being swallowed up by the sloth and the desire of death which arise in a condition of isolation like his (Kraft, 48). His terraces, we may want to argue, also represent a bridge with “those who come after us”, a paradoxical connection he tries to establish with the world from his disadvantaged position of castaway who, however, may not necessarily be “a castaway at heart” (*F*, 33).

During her year on the island, Susan becomes more and more familiar with Crusoe’s uncommunicative disposition, which however does not stop her curiosity as to his life and habits, and as to the reasons why not only he did not have a diary, but in all the years spent on the island he also never felt the need to live somehow more comfortably. As Head notices, “where Defoe’s Crusoe is the archetypal imperialist, governed by economic self-aggrandisement, Coetzee’s Crusoe is concerned merely with subsistence and sterile work” (114). Susan covertly reproaches him for never having furnished his abode with proper furniture; we could add to this that he never set to create European-like clothing to wear, nor he showed to be any time disgusted with his monotonous diet of fish, birds’ eggs and lettuce. When one day she boldly suggests that they could dive to the wreck and save some tools to add to Crusoe’s only knife, his reply is more than eloquent:

The ship lies on the bed of the ocean, broken by the waves and covered in sand [...]. What has survived the salt and seaworm will not be worth the saving. We have a roof over our heads, made without saw or axe. We sleep, we eat, we live. We have no need of tools. (*F*, 32)

Cruso has as it were frozen his habits, and any change Susan would be glad to introduce on the island is seen as a waste of time and energy, and probably also as a way of usurping the male patriarchal power he holds over his kingdom and his two subjects. If we consider Susan from such perspective, i.e. as someone who “came to claim dominion” (*F*, 86), Cruso’s reaction when Susan, on the third day after her arrival, disobeyed his order not to leave home appears almost obvious: “While you live under my roof you will do as I instruct!” (*F*, 20), he bursts out angrily. Unable to restrain herself from being critical, Susan replies without fear that “I am on your island, Mr Cruso, not by choice but by ill luck [...]. I am a castaway, not a prisoner” (*F*, 20); soon, however, their living together will prove to her that he may have his reasons to be so surly. Indeed, “why should he not be?” she asks herself, “After years of unquestioned and solitary mastery, he sees his realm invaded and has tasks set upon him by a woman” (*F*, 25); Susan’s arrival and presence may be perceived by the old Cruso as an almost literal invasion by a woman-enemy, from whom he needs to safeguard his uncontested “autocratic rule” (Gallagher, 173), much resembling with his behaviour the first Afrikaners with their territorialism and their later expansionism in the territory of the Cape (Head, 119). Her decision following this understanding is therefore to control her words and reactions every time Cruso will grow impatient with her, thus acknowledging that among the inhabitants of the island there exists a hierarchical division which they must respect.

A hierarchy, in terms of power-relations, had long been established also between Cruso and Friday, but while in the case of Susan her submission could find a reason in her being the last who arrived and intruded into a long established balance, in the case of Friday his submission appears harder to figure out and to

explain. How did it come to be that the master-servant roles could be preserved so many years without Friday ever rebelling? “What had held Friday back all these years from beating in his master’s head with a stone while he slept, so bringing slavehood to an end and inaugurating a reign of idleness?” (*F*, 36-37) Susan asks herself one day during a reflection that shows much of her liberal thought (Head, 119). On the one hand, this is one of the unsolved mysteries of the story pointed out by Susan, and since no answer can be provided by the mute Friday we can do no more than merely record it using her own words:

And then there is the mystery of your submission. Why, during all those years alone with Crusoe, did you submit to his rule, when you might easily have slain him, or blinded him and made him into your slave in turn? Is there something in the condition of slavehood that invades the heart and makes a slave a slave for life [...]? (*F*, 85)

On the other hand, to the reader the way through which Crusoe has succeeded in holding power over the slave appears almost evident, i.e. he has a full control over language and, as a consequence, over the slave deprived of it. Thinking about Friday’s dumbness, Susan will later remark that indeed the loss of the tongue makes it impossible for him to speak, but it should not inevitably prevent him to understand, and moreover communicate his feelings, his thoughts, and his past “for example by gesturing with his hands or by setting out pebbles in shapes standing for words” (*F*, 56). Instead of becoming a teacher, however, Crusoe clearly prefers to be a commanding master like Crusoe and Prospero had been before him. The parallel that can be drawn here runs hence on a double track. Crusoe, disregarding the savage’s own background culture and language, taught him not only the English culture and language but also to be a subservient, obedient and faithful slave. Kossew reports the relevant sentences on this point from *Robinson Crusoe*, and

comments them: “the colonizer’s dehumanizing of the Other by naming him after a day of the week and his self-elevation by naming himself ‘Master’ illustrates well the manipulative use of language as power”, adding that the same applies in *Foe* (1996, 165-166). In her study, Kossew also draws on the parallel between Crusoe/Cruso and the main character of *The Tempest* which had been established by Mannoni in *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*; she mentions this “pioneering work” in the context of the colonizer’s use of language as the means through which “the paternalistic desire to dominate” is fulfilled (1996, 165). To the present argument, what interests us is Prospero’s decision of leaving Caliban’s tutelage in the English language to his daughter, in order then to be able to exploit the brute Caliban through the words he has been taught. What we would like to argue is that the above-mentioned characteristics of Crusoe’s and Prospero’s colonial figures somehow merge into Coetzee’s Cruso: he in fact treats Friday from an ethnocentric perspective, and teaches him to respond to a limited set of English words, so that he can become a “useful slave” (Kossew, 166); therefore his decision that Friday would only know “as many [words] as he needs”, because “this is not England, we have no need of a great stock of words” (*F*, 21). Summing up, Cruso on his island is the commanding master who “does not teach Friday to make of him a companion; he only wants a slave. [Moreover,] he rejects Susan’s overtures of friendship; he needs her only as an object of control” (Maher, 36).

2.5. The author in his political and literary context: J.M. Coetzee

The role of Coetzee as a South African writer has always been difficult to establish with certainty, since for many reasons he occupies a rather unstable position within

his society. A white South African with a famous but rather inconvenient surname, Coetzee's origins date back to the first Dutch settlers who arrived at the Cape and colonized South Africa; he grew up in the typical Afrikaner environment of the farm, speaking both Afrikaans and English, his mother being English. His education was mainly Western-oriented, influenced as it was by the European and the American academic world, and such influences can be clearly traced in his activity as a writer, since his novels are written in English and can be now recognised as being part of the corpus of the world literatures in English. Therefore, the European and American literary framework represents for Coetzee an important reference to which he looks from his marginality within the South African literary field: the tradition he has incorporated, he now addresses and tries to become part of is mainly Western. As Tiffin demonstrates in her study, through authors such as Coetzee the Empire keeps writing back to the centre, appropriating its forms and giving them back filtered through post-colonial themes. It is for this reason that Coetzee himself has always found it difficult to place himself and his own writing within a South African context: since his narratives are primarily European, and also his identity is partly European, how can he effectively not only represent his country, but also produce a narrative that "can speak to Africa and be spoken to by Africa?" (Coetzee, quoted in Parry, 38). The reverberation of the canonical literary tradition of Europe can be read in all of his novels, where intertextuality and steady reference to authors such as Kafka, Beckett, Nabokov, and Dostoevsky, and to the great works of imperialism by Shakespeare, Defoe, and Conrad have led Stephen Watson to comment that

there are occasions in his work when Coetzee puts one strangely in mind of something said by Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. Like Kurtz, one is tempted to

say, ‘all of Europe’ (and North America) has gone into the making of Coetzee – or at least into the making of his books. He has produced by far the most intellectual and indeed intellectualising fiction of any South African or African writer. (25)

Coetzee, as the following section about *Foe* will help to illustrate, not only seeks admittance to a certain European literary tradition, but he also aims at canonisation precisely through this tradition, weaving it into fine postmodern narratives.

Coetzee’s ambiguous relationship with Europe is not limited to the literary domain, however, but it extends also to a political level, given that the history of South Africa is bound up with colonialism and a South African context cannot for this reason be detached from a European context (Watson, 13). If we want to try and position him politically, Coetzee may be considered one of those English-speaking South Africans who distance themselves from the oppressing regime of apartheid instituted by the Afrikaners, but nevertheless share with them the social positioning of a “ruling class in an essentially colonial set of relationships where stratification took on a racial coloring” (Attwell, 1990; 607). Coetzee can thus be identified as “a member of the Western-oriented English intelligentsia in South Africa”, Watson observes (25), who in the past had an important role in preserving a South African liberal tradition but whose political relevance has in more recent years been reduced. As such, in his complex position of colonizer who is an intellectual (or vice versa) he has lost responsibility, Watson continues, but still feels the weight of that responsibility and lets the deriving ambiguity come to the fore in his novels. The main characters of his narratives tend, in fact, to embody the ‘coloniser who refuses’, i.e. they are all colonizers escaping “their historical role as colonisers” and “the intolerable burdens of the master-slave relationship” (Watson, 22). His work represents therefore a deep and insightful interrogation of white authority and of the

violence inherent in an oppressive society, even though it does not conform to “the received conventions” of political commitment required of a South African realist literature (Barnett, 290; Watson, 15).

Barnett explains that Coetzee’s novels can be read as allegories in which a double movement is performed: they are anchored in a familiar environment that can be identified as South African, but at the same time they move out of it and are set in an undetermined time and place so that they can be removed from a specific political and historical situation to address themes of higher universal value (293). Coetzee occupies therefore an ambivalent position as far as political issues are concerned, since in his writing he proves to have anti-apartheid sympathies but also avoids as much as possible “to provide authoritative interpretations” and political readings of his novels (Barnett, 297). This has caused a conflicting and controversial reception of Coetzee’s activity as a writer to emerge both internationally and within South Africa. International audiences and criticism have in fact imposed upon white South African writers what Barnett defines “a peculiar ‘burden of representation’” (294): in a country whose life is characterised by violence and oppression, a writer is expected to deal primarily with the life under apartheid, but at the same time their being placed “on the margins of Western literary canons” demands that they become also representatives of “universal values of justice and equality” (Barnett, 294). Coetzee seems to meet such international requirements. Within a national context, on the other hand, the role of the writer has long been established as interrelated with the South African political struggle, so that a politically elusive style such as Coetzee’s has often been strongly criticised. He has been charged with avoiding to deal with apartheid and to face the immediate political context in which he lives, in

order to merely pursue art for the sake of art and thus falling into an “aestheticism” which is to be “considered politically irresponsible, or simply irrelevant” (Huggan and Watson, Introduction, 3). Coetzee’s answer to such accusations shows awareness of his elusiveness but also reluctance to be in the limelight with critics always looking for his personal opinion on and interpreting of his own novels. As Gallagher points out referencing some interviews, he ultimately refuses to be categorized and assigned a predetermined role within society, even though he does not deny the writer a precise function (13).

2.5.1. *A challenge to the literary canon*

“Every writer who desires to be read [...] has to seek admittance to the canon”, affirms Attridge in his essay on “*Foe* and the Politics of Canonisation” before moving on to analyse the relationship each of *Foe*’s character has with the canon.⁵ The previous discussion has pointed out how Coetzee’s position with respect to a canonical literary tradition is still to be defined, and his writing may be considered part of that “white writing” which “is white only insofar as it is generated by the concerns of people no longer European, not yet African” (*White Writing*, quoted in Begam, 423). It is however true that Coetzee’s prose underwent a process of canonisation both in South Africa and in a Western-oriented context for reasons both intrinsic and external to the writing itself. The external factors are related to Coetzee and to the South African context: in spite of all the criticism, his work can be accepted as canonical because of its thematic focus on gender, race and class and their role within society, and because it addresses questions of marginality. As for

⁵ The discussion carried out in this section mainly draws on Attridge, Derek (1996) “Oppressive Silence: J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* and the Politics of Canonisation”; specific reference will be made only in case of direct quotation.

the factors inherent in the writing, Attridge signals three main characteristics which contribute to make a literary corpus part of the canon and which can all be detected in Coetzee's work. Allusiveness to a past, recognised tradition and intertextuality represent a first step towards inclusion in that same tradition, which in this way is revered rather than overtly challenged and subverted. The deliberate use of "a highly literary language" which can be savoured by the reader is also important, of which Coetzee's "chiselled prose" represents a fine example (Attridge, 169-170). A last discriminating factor concerns the content of the narrative and consists in dealing with well-known motives such as civilisation and humanity, or the master-servant dyad.

If we look at *Foe* bearing in mind Attridge's discussion, it is easy to identify all the above mentioned characteristics, from the intertextuality with the prototypical Western novel of Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, to the focus on universal themes such as the "survival of the individual, the fundamentals of civilised life, and the dialectic of master and servant" (Attridge, 170). Through *Foe*'s main characters, however, Coetzee has also carried out a dramatisation of "the procedures and problems of canonisation" (Attridge, 175), thus showing a complex relationship with the many facets of the canon. As we have seen in the course of this chapter, Cruso is the only one who has no interest in narrative and who has therefore lost any contact with the tradition that has preceded him. The differences with *Robinson Crusoe* testify to his being anyway related to the canonical image of the castaway, but as a parodic version of it, unable or unwilling as he is to become a true colonizer and to tame the inhospitable environment which surrounds him. The two authors in the novel are, on the other hand, almost obliged to face the question of canonisation. Susan has come

to the fore because of her impelling need to have her story told and thus to feel a substantial being once again. Sensing her incompetence in the field of narrative writing and her inadequacy as a writer because of gender and class reasons – she is a woman in poor economic conditions, obliged to be a maid to get a living –, she looks for public recognition through the mediation of a famous(-to-be) author. She therefore entrusts to one Mr. Foe not only her account but even her own now blurred identity, hoping that the story he sets to writing will help her to become a substantial human being once again and “will make us [Susan and Friday] famous throughout the land, and rich too” (*F*, 58). In turning to Foe she seeks to become part of a legitimated narrative and to be granted admittance to a canon of castaway tales, but what she will achieve is the opposite. Her attempt will be in fact torn apart by the man she initially considered her liberator and saviour. As a professional author, Foe is able to identify, classify and produce a narrative which conforms to canonical requirements, and he also knows how to please his audience. It will not take him much to explain, as we have seen, how a story must be written to be appropriate and linear, and Susan’s protestations will be of little value: her “Female Castaway” needs a great deal of re-writing to be “fit for the developing bourgeois canon of the early eighteenth century” (Attridge, 177). Suffice it to compare it with Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, where the woman has been left out because the taming of nature and the colonization of new territories were predominantly male enterprises. While the castaway adventure remains an exclusively male dominion, Susan as heroine fits a narrative like *Roxana* or like *Moll Flanders* better, where the woman asserts her freedom and challenges the conventions of marriage and economic dependency from man. As Attridge goes on to explain, however, “all canons rest on exclusion; the voice they give to some can be heard only by virtue of the silence they impose on

others” (181), and so Coetzee’s greatest challenge to the literary canon is not displayed through Foe and Susan and their pursuit of “culturally validated narrative forms” that can at the same time provide substance and represent a threat to human experience (178). The challenge is once again embodied by Friday and his silence. Within the colonial discourse Friday represents the fully Other “in terms of race, class, gender, culture” (Attridge, 179), and as a marginal figure who has been silenced in an act of oppression he cannot access the canon, but makes his absent presence stand out precisely through his tonguelessness. Canonisation and oppression can be seen as similar acts which involve a certain degree of silencing, and since both on a literary and on a political and cultural level it is impossible to define Friday on the basis of his uninterpretable acts – his various rituals and his writing –, the only way left is a definition by negation through his body.

Friday represents what cannot be either represented or spoken, and his silence streaming and screaming out of his mouth is Coetzee’s attempt to elevate him to canonical status trying to avoid imposing words or an interpretation upon him, as Susan and, above all, Foe do in the narrative. Therefore the importance of Part IV and of its narrator who restrains his/her actions to opening Friday’s mouth and hearing what it holds: Coetzee shows to be aware of the danger represented by language and of the power implicit in discourse, and instead of trying to interpret Friday’s story and to speak on his behalf, he lets the unending stream which is his utterance flow and beat against his body and resonate all over the earth. The oppressor, finding himself to be unwillingly part of the ruling class, tries his best to produce a discourse that could be felt as representative of South Africa and its oppressed majority. The contribution of Coetzee’s *Foe* lies therefore in its “refusal

to dictate to or speak for” the other (Macaskill and Colleran, 446) and in its shedding light on “the processes of authorship, empowerment, validation and silencing” instead (Attridge, 184). The task is not exclusively set on the perpetrators, however; also the oppressed must work towards the same direction, if they want to be seen and heard, and take on an active role and become what Spivak defined as the agent guarding the margin (1990, 16). In this sense, Friday and not Susan would represent the real “agent of withholding in the text” (Spivak, 1990; 16) who is able with his silence and his undecipherable graphics to subvert the master discourse (Attridge, 184). In giving visibility to Friday not specifically as a South African but more generally as a black slave oppressed and silenced by the white male European imperialist, Coetzee manages to fulfil one of the requirements demanded of canonical literature previously identified, i.e. that it aspires to be “repository of universal humanistic moral values” (Barnett, 290; also Attridge, 171). Through his novels, he therefore “came to hold a central place in defining an international canon of respectable, morally robust and liberal oppositional literature” together with the work of other white writers such as Brink or Gordimer (Barnett, 288).

Chapter 3. Colonization through textuality

The discussion carried out so far allows to confirm that *Foe*, as a South African novel closely linked to its cultural and social background even though set outside of it, deals primarily with colonial and postcolonial issues. The colonial force-play depicted reveals itself as multiple, operating as it does on different subjects: on the one hand, the slave Friday and the woman Susan are politically colonized for their race and gender respectively; on the other hand, also the texts produced within the narrative by Susan and historically by Daniel Defoe can be considered as subjected to a certain power, exerted by the white South African writer Coetzee. To understand how precisely this colonization is carried out, we must go back to Coetzee's statement that "What you call 'the nature and process of fiction' may also be called the question of *who writes?*" (reported in Gallagher, 169). Ultimately, "positing a moment before *Crusoe* is written" Coetzee wants to "speculate on the omissions, silences and pointed constructions involved at the notional moment of the 'fathering' of the novel as genre" (Head, 114). Having by now analysed first *Foe* in a more general sense, and then the specific role and position of its characters within the narrative, it is possible to provide evidence that each character holding a position of power within the colonial pyramid existing in the novel can strengthen such

power, and the deriving authority over the weaker characters, through their mastery of language and through their authorship of or authority over a narrative.

3.1. Authorship is authority

What Coetzee has tried to expose by writing *Foe* can be summed up as the “colonizing power of authorship” (Kossew, 1996; 161), an aim he pursues by establishing a connection between the post-colonial and the post-modern moments he depicts in the novel. The complex network of relationships he creates comprises the representation of “Cruso as master of Friday and Susan, Susan as sexual mistress of Cruso and Foe and social mistress of Friday, Foe as master of Susan and her tale”, as Maher effectively summarises (39). While Cruso is the representative of imperial-colonial authority, Foe represents the male writer who exerts his authority within a textual domain. Susan positions herself between these two poles, allowing Coetzee to carry out a “conflation of the acts of writing and imperialism” through a number of analogies identified by Marais (1996, 67-69). Within the text, comparing her writing activity with the terrace building of Cruso, Susan implicitly characterises her relationship as author with the text as a form of colonialism, and at the same time alludes to “imperialism as a form of metaphoric authorship” (Marais, 1996; 68). Besides being Friday’s master, Cruso is indeed also his author, the creator of a new Friday out of the “old Friday of the cannibal forests” (*F*, 95). “By conflating imperialism and authorship”, Marais continues, “Coetzee also demonstrates [...] that the imperialist gesture is, essentially, an *hermeneutic* act” which, in the case of Cruso, “is informed by the hermeneutic urge to domesticate Friday and the alien

landscape of the island by integrating both into a European system of recognition” (1996, 69).

A similar urge characterises also Susan, but her position being ambiguous as both colonizer and colonized, author and character, it needs to be discussed with closer attention. Laura Wright quite accurately informs us that at the core of *Foe* is “the woman’s desire to tell a story, in this case, the story Cruso does not care to record and that Friday cannot tell because his tongue has been cut out by slavers” (20). Despite her initial “lack of confidence which prompts her to ask Foe to write her story” (Gallagher, 176), when Foe fails to meet her expectations and disappears she undertakes the task herself and becomes a writer who “asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire” (*F*, 131). During the process of her birth as a writer, however, “she discovers the difficulty and the temptation of authority” (Gallagher, 183): her adventure story is dull and flat, so she is indeed tempted to make up new and stranger circumstances; her Cruso is passive and lacks any initiative, while “she desires and expects Cruso to be Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe” (Jolly, 5); and finally there is Friday’s silence, which puzzles her and at the same time “invests her interpretative stance with power” (Marais, 1989; 12). In order to produce her narrative she is obliged to establish a double connection (see 2.2.1), one with Cruso and the other with Friday, so that on the one hand she “remains bound to Cruso and his story” even though he dies on the way to England, while on the other hand “tongueless Friday remains bound to Susan and her narrative” (Macaskill and Colleran, 440).

Her authority therefore extends from the control over the island and over herself also to the command over her companions, whom she keeps imprisoned and

whose bodies “suggest that the translation of themselves into narrative is a violation” (Jolly, 8). Susan tries to save Crusoe and Friday both physically and metaphorically from the island, but “the rejection of salvation through narrative, signalled by the refusal or rejection of the figures of Friday and Crusoe to be translated into narrative, suggests a violation” she is imposing on them (Jolly, 8). Thanks to her growing consciousness of being an oppressed woman and writer, she will be able to recognise that for the two men to leave the island meant indeed death and decay rather than salvation. In the case of Crusoe, abduction from his island causes his physical death, since on the trip back to England his illness not only does not recede but is worsened by the woe of being everyday “conveyed farther from the kingdom he pined for” (*F*, 43). Observing his gradual decay, Susan comments with a self-accusing tone that “he was a prisoner, and I, despite myself, his gaoler” (*F*, 43). Even though he does not outlive the island, however, Susan “cannot shake his mastery of her” (Maher, 36) and his presence in her life will be constant as the ghost of a character about which she feels she must write; what she fails to do, however, is to recognise that the task of writing about Crusoe’s years as a castaway is self-imposed and has nothing to do with an inheritance she believes he has bequeathed her. Proof of this is given by Jolly, who suggests that Crusoe’s refusal to be taken away from the island is symptomatic of his refusal to be assigned a history and “to submit to Susan Barton’s colonization of him in writing and by writing” (9). In the case of Friday, on the other hand, death is represented rather as an inner loss of vitality and energy. Friday is Susan’s second prisoner, and his imprisonment begins when she obliges him to leave the island and carries him to London with her, where he lives in a cellar like a captive dog (see discussion in section 2.3.1). “It is a terrible fall, I know, from the freedom of the island” (*F*, 56), Susan comments after seeing

how he has changed for the worse after a few months in the metropolis. The reason which leads Susan to take care of Friday is nevertheless other than a mere humanitarian gesture towards a helpless dumb creature: having decided to write the story of the island, “to tell my story and be silent on Friday’s tongue is no better than offering a book for sale with pages in it quietly left empty” (*F*, 67). Her many attempts to discover the secret hidden behind his silence are proof enough that she is enslaving him both as a real person and as the fictional character of her story. Her failure in solving Friday’s riddle becomes however so frustrating that she cannot see herself as her oppressor straight away or without doubts, but leads her instead to accuse Friday of enslaving her by riding on her back “like the old man of the river” (*F*, 147), taking advantage of her pity. Her relationship with Foe will eventually awaken her to her real role with respect to Friday: “Though you say you are the ass and Friday the rider, you may be sure that if Friday had his tongue back he would claim the contrary”, he explains (*F*, 148). As Jolly points out, as narrator-characters Susan and Foe are the only cannibals of the story, and their “cannibalism is that which they inflict upon their subjects in the process of turning them into stories” (8). Susan’s desire to save Friday is so strong that it blinds her to the fact that his silence is but a way to resist to her “colonizing narrative” (Jolly, 9). Seeing herself gradually oppressed and enslaved into the role of Foe’s character, she comes to realise that as author she is becoming Friday’s ‘Foe’; doubts about her conduct arise in her only following her awareness that Foe is manipulating her into a story: in the end, she is driven to draw a parallel between his enslaving patriarchal authority and her own enslaving “desire for a response, her need to have questions answered and mysteries solved” (Kossew, 1996; 166). She will finally recognise that “I was wrong, I knew, to blame my state on Friday. If he was not a slave, was he nevertheless the helpless

captive of my desire to have our story told?” (*F*, 150). Ultimately, her attempt to “liberate Friday from her ‘authorial’ control actually imprisons him”, and the liberation bill she hangs around his neck stands as one among many actions proving it (Marais, 1989; 12).

Getting things finally into perspective, Susan recognises what has happened during her meeting with Foe in Part III: his ability as creator of stories has enabled him to become the puppet master who moves his puppets thanks to invisible strings. Susan is one and the first of these puppets, and although she had decided not to “kneel before him like one of his gallows-birds”, she has indeed voluntarily given her confession over to this secret man Foe, as she herself immediately recognises in affirming “yet here I am pouring out my darkest secrets to you!” (*F*, 120). As Gallagher points out, “condemned by her gender to silence, Susan must turn to the more adequately equipped male in order to see her story brought into the world” (177). Foe is empowered by his gender and can effectively be described as the patronising and patriarchal author who controls the woman within the narrative. A parallel can thus be drawn with Cruso and his authoritarian behaviour towards Susan; but it also extends to his attitude to words (Kosew, 1996; 167) and to the master-slave relationship with Friday. Friday represents, in fact, Foe’s second puppet whom he manipulates together with Susan. Macaskill and Colleran quite interestingly speak of Susan’s and Foe’s literary collaboration as dealing primarily with the “representation of race” and establishing a

collaboration within this text [which] gradually reveals itself as an insidious activity that extends beyond a competitive literary co-laboring to become a working on behalf of the enemy, a siding with the foe. Their collaborative effort finally sides with the hegemonics that suppress Friday; their contest for authority produces only a new foe for Friday. (452)

Susan and Foe represent therefore an enemy for both Crusoe and Friday: their attempt to transform them will be successful, even though the main agent who will re-write the story will be only Foe who, after managing to subjugate also Susan, will come to occupy the highest position in the pyramid of authors-in-the-text. The result of Foe's work on the island story, as we have already hinted at in the previous chapters, will be a total distortion of Susan's account and a "reification of the characters" she initially depicts, Marais suggests (1989, 13). Crusoe is thus transformed into the modern hero of *Robinson Crusoe*; Friday is made a native South American cannibal redeemed and converted to Christianity and to the European cultural values; and Susan is effaced from the adventure story only to contribute to the shaping of Roxana and Moll Flanders, the two subversive women of Defoe's eponymous novels.

Foe's activity, however, is not restricted to writing but extends to an attempt at literary criticism, which Head suggests may show a clear affinity between him and Coetzee (127). When Susan brings out doubts about her own identity she not only accuses Foe of shaping her as his character, but she also "draws the authorial figure, Foe, into this philosophical speculation on (in)substantiality, and he describes his own 'maze of doubting' (*F*, 135)" where everything is continually called into question, not only the activity of writing but life itself, and "representations of author and character are united at the same place of ontological uncertainty" (Head, 117-118). What Foe suggests is, in fact, that their existence as 'real' human beings may be in all similar to the existence of fictional characters in books and that, moreover, "we have all of us been called into the world from a different order [...] by a conjurer unknown to us, as you say I have conjured up your daughter and her

companion” (*F*, 135). The postmodern description of his literary activity that follows, and which we have already tackled in Chapter 1 (see 1.2.3), proves that “he shares Susan’s doubts about identity” (Head, 118). This long monologue of Foe also allows to be interpreted as linking “the idea of God with writing” and “the idea of writing with the creation of a subject” (Kossev, 1996; 164-165), so that it can be stated with certainty that the author holds full authority over his or her creations. Foe will then later further specify his conception of the author as a God-like figure when he talks Susan into teaching Friday how to write: “writing is not doomed to be the shadow of speech”, he tries to convince Susan against her claim that “letters are the mirror of words” (*F*, 142). Articulating what Head defines “a recognizably poststructuralist opinion concerning the primacy of writing” (127), Foe continues his argument with two interesting questions:

We are accustomed to believe that our world was created by God speaking the Word; but I ask, may it not rather be that he wrote it, wrote a Word so long we have yet to come to the end of it? May it not be that God continually writes the world, the world and all that is in it? (*F*, 143)

As characters, then, neither Susan nor Foe have the key to read this writing of God because “we are that which he writes” (*F*, 143) and therefore they, too, are helpless puppets obeying a higher force.

To meet with this higher force there is no need to go as high as God in the pyramid of authors involved in the writing of Susan’s tale; the God-like author is, in this case, J.M. Coetzee, who as the third important writer-in and writer-of the novel dominates over all of its characters. Here he can be considered from two different perspectives: on the one side, he is the real author of *Foe*, while on the other side he can be identified also with the omniscient narrator becoming fictional character in

Part IV, as some critics have argued (reported in Kossew, 1996, 172; and in Gallagher, 189). By entering his narrative and taking the form of the *I* who appears in the last part of the novel, Coetzee comes to challenge the other two authors and their attempt to obtain full control over the figure of Friday, finally rejecting their models of authorship to suggest a model “which seeks to avoid appropriation, absorption and betrayal of the subject by restructuring patriarchal language” (Kossew, 1996; 175). Susan and Foe, in Part III, have finally agreed on the need to let the dumb slave’s silence speak, or else fill it by exploiting their authorial power so that the story may be once and for all complete, and its mysteries solved, even though this would also mean to “impose words upon him, to colonize him via language, as Cruso/e has done on the island” (Kossew, 1996; 162). Conscious of this danger, Coetzee “seeks to escape [from filling Friday’s silence], refusing to further enslave Friday while still acknowledging the urgency of Friday’s presence”, continues Kossew. And so the only solution left to Coetzee-narrator seems to be that of setting the disclosure of Friday’s voice in a place where words are ineffective, i.e. under the water. From under the water, the differences in the mastery of language between the narrator and Friday are as it were evened out, and Friday can escape being once again written by words he does not own. Coetzee has here devised an artifice that allows him to criticise the mechanisms implied in colonial and post-colonial discourses without at the same time “offering alternative figures of the colonized” (Childs and Williams, 163): he lets loose Friday’s voice and breaks his silence; the importance and meaning of his gesture will be further discussed and examined in the following section. As external, real author, Coetzee’s position seems to be somewhat even more ambiguous. On the one hand, we have already seen that he gives voice and visibility to two marginal-ised figures, the slave Friday

and the woman Susan Barton; however, on the other hand he is the author who, at the end of the day, manipulates each character, so that Macaskill and Colleran can argue he is

one of the co-confessors who, together with Foe and with *Foe*, draws forth Susan's narrative, even while he 'confesses' himself by means of *Foe* to yet other and critical authorities, Coetzee controls the development of all these rituals within rituals and is of course responsible for the cadence through which his characters' collaborative attempt emerges. (152)

His position towards Susan and, more generally, towards women's writing seems in this case quite emblematic. By introducing Susan into the castaway narrative and pretending to restore her as the original repository of Crusoe's story, only at a later stage effaced by Defoe who may not have had access to it had it not been for her—"Where would you be without the woman?", rhetorically asks Susan (*F*, 72) —, Coetzee gives her also the "power to guide and amend" (*F*, 123), and to decide how the world should see her. She becomes the master of her own life and story, despite (De)Foe, representing thus the feminist struggle for recognition within a male, patriarchal and oppressing society. Following Gallagher,

Susan's story fills the silence of *Robinson Crusoe*, uncovers the hidden colonialism and oppression. However, her story also ironically speaks of the process of silencing. Silenced intertextually by Daniel Defoe and textually by Foe, Susan nonetheless speaks to us, for we read her story, *as she wrote it* (186, emphasis in the text).

There is, however, also a downside to add to this point. Only apparently can Susan be seen as the one who tells the whole story; the truth is that, no matter how free and invested with the power of narration she feels, indeed she is Coetzee's character and responds to his will and desires. While at the beginning we defined her as half-colonized if compared to Friday and with respect to her social status (see 1.2.2), on the other hand here we could speak of her subjection in terms of a 'double

colonization' carried through by the two male figures of Foe and Coetzee, and directed against both Susan-woman and Susan-author. If Susan Barton is, in the end, silenced as author and woman and, moreover, if she cannot penetrate Friday's silence, "it is finally not Susan's key that will unlock Friday's tongue, but Coetzee's" (Macaskill and Colleran, 449). Coming to such a conclusion, it may seem legitimate to ask, using Parry's words: "Is Coetzee's fiction free from the exercise of that discursive aggression it so ironically displays, since it repeatedly and in different registers feigns woman's writing?" (50) Going back to feminist issues, we cannot forget that Coetzee has often been also negatively criticised for his ambiguous relationship with women's writing. While *Foe* can indeed be read as "feminist revisionism, a critique of the male appropriation of women's writing", Laura Wright also warns that "such a reading is problematic [...] if we consider that Coetzee without attribution also borrows from Adrienne Rich's *Diving into the wreck* [...], he can be accused of enacting the very appropriation that his text critiques" (21-22). Of the same opinion is Josephine Dodd, who is even more critical and adds that "Coetzee has been happy to use Susan Barton's body (in the opening paragraphs) as his entry to his fiction, happy to make her the butt of Foe's mind-games and finally happy to kill her off in the name of his quest" (332). Whether or not Coetzee's position should be seen in a positive or negative light, it seems here important also to remember that Susan's final aim is not "to promote the claims of woman's writing, since Friday is the genuine Other of this text"; so the final section stands as a means to relinquish that same authority Coetzee has gained over Susan in the course of the narrative and to "offer a compromise rather than an authorial imposition" (Head, 123).

3.2. Language, silence and the creation of meaning

What kind of compromise Coetzee is offering becomes clear through the last section of the novel, where in a few pages all the attention is conveyed towards Friday and his mysterious silence. The valorisation of silence in *Foe* represents a sort of counter-tendency in post-colonial discourse, where it is rather the mastery of language that is considered of major importance. As During specifies, one of the main desires of post-colonial societies corresponds to the “desire for an identity”, which is both related to the birth of local nationalisms and to the question of language (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 125). The problem in post-colonial societies is that the colonial subjects have been in all shaped by the colonizers to the point that, as Homi Bhabha observes in his essay “Of Mimicry and Man”, they find themselves in an ambiguous position: on the one hand, they are considered as the other and kept at a distance because of their otherness, becoming thus the subjects of the colonizer’s authority; on the other hand, they are also the subjects of a civilising attempt on the part of that same authority, which tries to make of them an imperfect double of itself. The mimicry of Western habits resulting from this situation is reflected in the use of language, since most of the times the colonized is obliged to use the colonizer’s language in order to be heard. Something similar happens to Susan in *Foe*, who finds herself “caught in a double-bind” (Macaskill and Colleran, 447) since she, too, as a woman “is forced to speak in something like a foreign tongue, a language with which she may be uncomfortable” (Burke, quoted in Macaskill and Colleran, 447). According to post-colonial discourse, therefore, language plays a “crucial role [...] in impeding the ability of the other to express

self”, since it is clearly related to power and oppression; however, being the only means through which the repressed can hear themselves, language also has a “restorative and liberatory potential” that leads to use it as a “political weapon” and, consequently, to view silence with suspicion (Marais, 1996; 73). The situation of Coetzee’s Friday, seen from this point of view, appears therefore somehow controversial, since one would expect *Foe* to conform as a post-colonial novel to this general post-colonial conception of language, but meets a tongueless slave unable to let his voice be heard. Kossew quite legitimately claims, to this point, that “a crucial depiction in the novel of the problem of subjection and authority, both colonial and textual, is Friday’s silence” (1996, 165), since it gives Susan (but also Foe) the power and “capacity to control the representation of Friday” (Jolly, 141), as she herself acknowledges when she says that “he is to the world what I make of him” (*F*, 122). Friday’s silence seems therefore to be the product of colonial discourse, the result of a physical colonization which has rendered the slave powerless by cutting out his tongue and by thus putting him in the condition of being manipulated by the colonizer into whatever form they please. As Head points out, however, this silence is also a form of resistance to the colonizing power of words (121). Also Marais underlines how Coetzee’s representation of the other as a silent individual allows him to “invest(s) silence with power: silence is cast as the means by which the other preserves its anterior status against assimilation by the West” (1996, 75).

Given such premises, we are now in the condition to analyse better the symbolic value of Part IV. The decision of Coetzee to change narrator in the last section may be interpreted not as a way of usurping and annulling the value of

Susan's narrative, as some feminist critic has claimed¹, but as a last attempt "to interpret Friday's silence" as a means through which "instead of imposing an interpretation on and therefore resolving the problem of Friday's silence, the novel's ending perpetuates and endorses the enigma", Marais argues (1989, 14). Coetzee has indeed found a successful strategy to speak about the Other without speaking for him. The uninterrupted stream coming out from Friday's voice is described, in Head, as indicating "historical necessity", as a "silence with a moral compulsion" which challenges the narrator and obliges him to acknowledge the "unvoiced history" of the oppressed and to be silent and cease his narration (126). Like a "baptismal wave", as Maher defines it, this stream washes everything and invites the reader "to find the traces of other voices, and to question any attempt at authority" (40). It also invites them to look further and in other places for meaning, since words are finally proven as ineffective and unable to "penetrate the silence of the Other" and, moreover, "any mediation via language is a betrayal of the subject", as Kossew concludes after her own investigation of authority and authorship in *Foe* (1996, 176). The obvious place where meaning can be looked for and found is, finally, the body of Friday, the real sign of his existence and the only witness of and to his suffering. Down under the water Friday can 'live' untouched by any worldly discourse; he "remains instead in that paradisaical condition where sign and object are unified, and where the body, spared the traumatic insertion into language, can give utterance to things lost or never yet heard" (Parry, 47). The power of this closing last scene lies precisely in the depiction of the body "as encoding a protowriting", Parry suggests (48), making the use of words unessential and reinforcing thus the violation

¹ Kirsten Holst Petersen is one of them. In "An Elaborate Dead End" she positions Coetzee as the real *foe* of the title and accuses him of trying "to show that there is no special insight to be gained from a woman's point of view" (quote and argument based on Head, 123).

of the subject represented by the imposition of a narrative to an other whom, in the end, the author with his narrative must confront “as an other whose body it [the text] – as narrative – has always been unable to master completely” (Jolly, 145).

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