

**SINARA FOSS**

**COETZEE'S *FOE*: A READING ON HISTORY AND FICTION**

**PORTO ALEGRE**

**2008**

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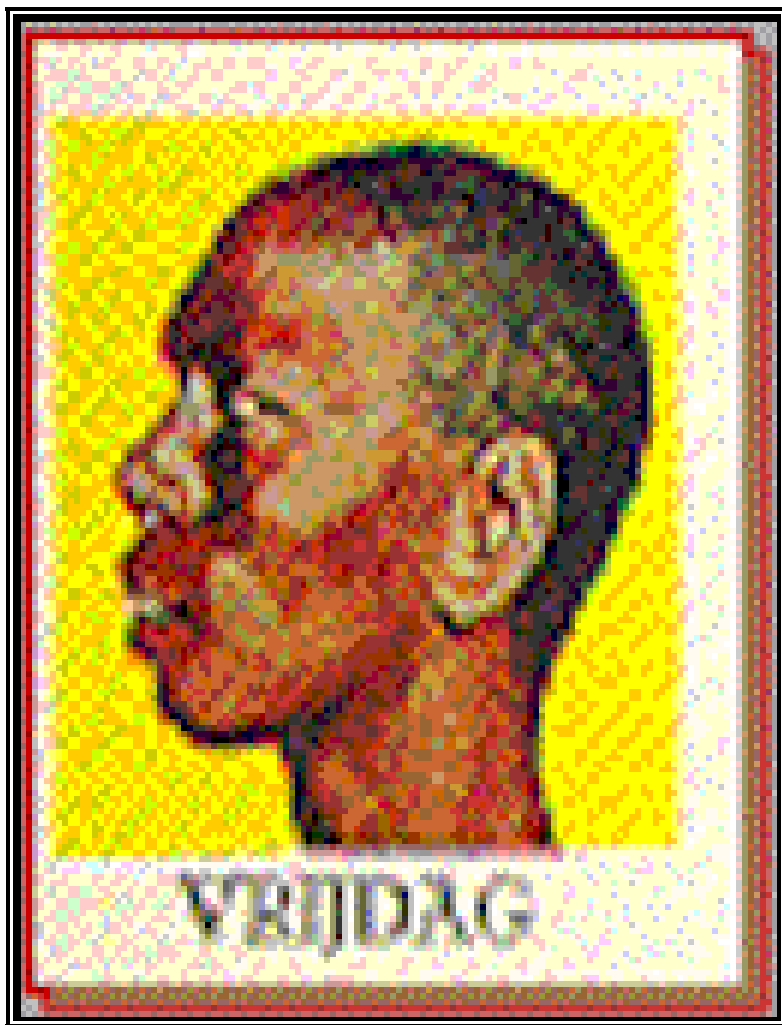
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**COETZEE'S *FOE*:  
A READING ON HISTORY AND FICTION**

Dissertação submetida à Universidade Federal do Rio Grande  
do Sul para obtenção do grau de Mestre em Letras  
na área de Estudos de Literatura: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa

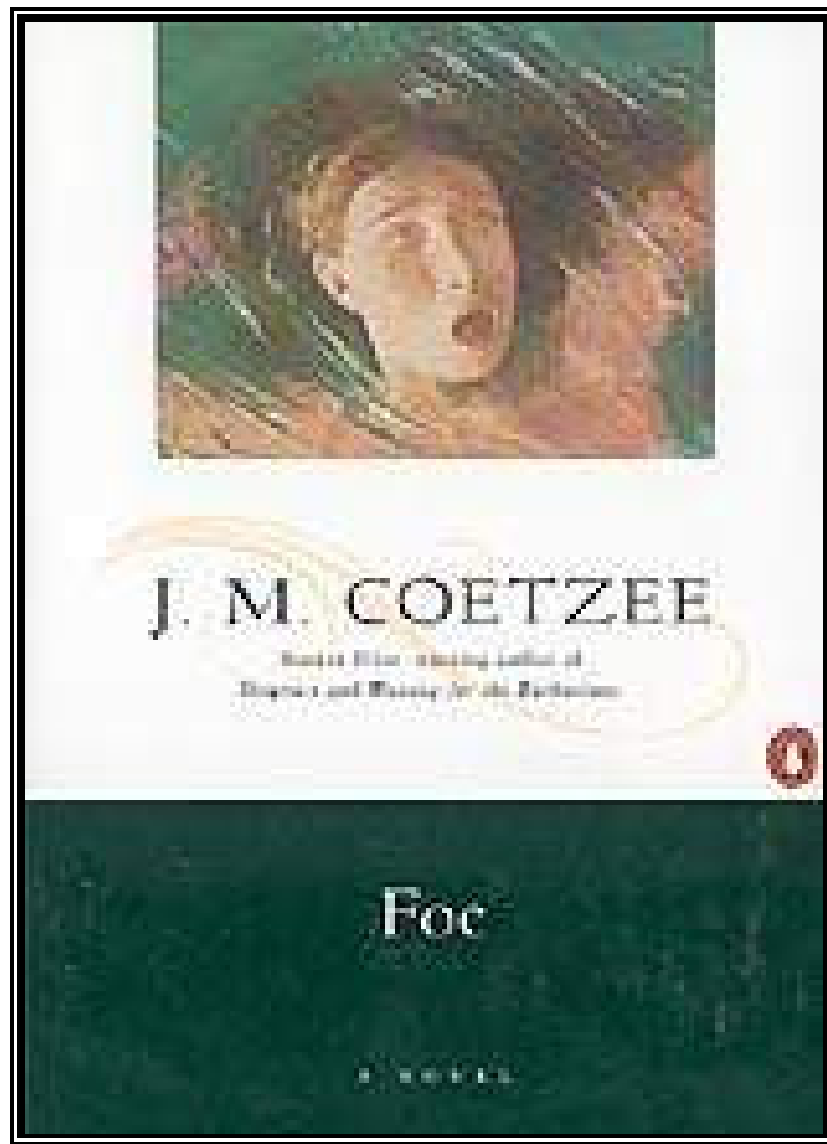
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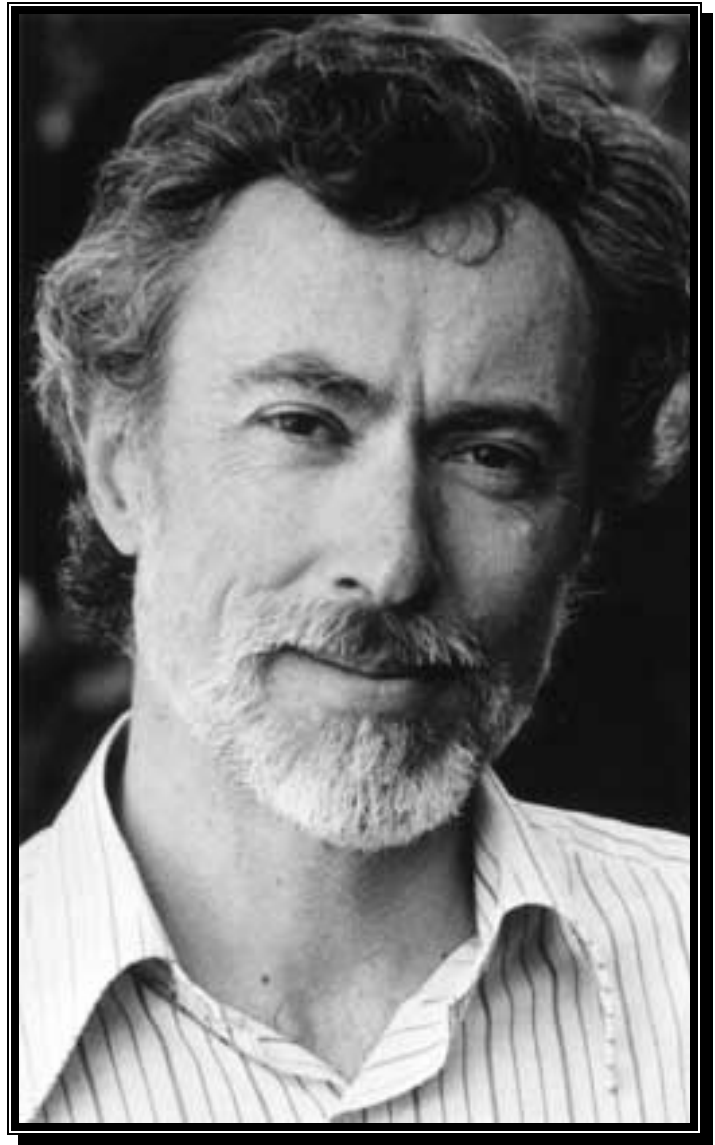
*“ I Have crossed an ocean  
I have lost my tongue  
From the root of the old  
One  
A new one has sprung.”*

**Grace Nichols, *Epilogue***



“\_I Have crossed an ocean  
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**Grace Nichols, Epilogue**



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## **Acknowledgments:**

I would like to acknowledge the help I have received from my mother Francelina and from my sister Istela during all these years. They were my only family for twenty-four years, until I got my first present, Isadora and, six years later, Teodora. These two little big gifts from God are the reason why I finished this work and the reason why I try to improve in all aspects of my life.

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## RESUMO

O escritor ganhador do Prêmio Nobel de Literatura John Maxwell Coetzee publicou *Foe* em 1987. Ao lermos esse romance, somos imediatamente levados à ilha de Robinson Crusoe - e, conseqüentemente, ao mundo ficcional de Daniel Defoe. O objetivo deste trabalho é tomar a leitura da obra *Foe*, de Coetzee, como um comentário sobre a estética de construção de um romance. Esta é uma dissertação argumentativa, dividida em três partes. O primeiro capítulo introduz o autor e contextualiza as discussões sobre a Escrita, a História e a Ficção. O segundo capítulo traz o suporte teórico, que consiste na apresentação das idéias de Linda Hutcheon sobre Historiografia e nas conceitualizações sobre Meta-ficção, de Patricia Waugh. Ambas conduzem à referência poética ao Anjo da História feita por Walter Benjamin. A terceira parte comenta o romance *Foe* e o insere no conjunto da obra de Coetzee, apontando elementos compartilhados com os outros romances do autor. Na conclusão, espero validar a tese proposta, de que *Foe* é realmente um romance auto-reflexivo que reflete as condições de produção de sua época.

Palavras Chave: J. M. Coetzee – *Foe* – Intertextualidade - Daniel Defoe - *Robinson Crusoe* – Meta-ficção.

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## ABSTRACT

Nobel prize winner John Maxwell Coetzee published *Foe* in 1987. When reading that novel, we are taken back to Robinson Crusoe's island – and, consequently, to the world of Daniel Defoe's fiction. The aim of this work is to undertake the reading of Coetzee's *Foe* as a study on the aesthetics of novel-making. This is an argumentative thesis, divided into three parts. Chapter one introduces the author and contextualizes the discussions on Writing, History and Fiction. Chapter two brings the theoretical background, that consists of the presentation of Linda Hutcheon's ideas about Historiography and Patricia Waugh's conceptualizations on Metafiction, both of them relating to Walter Benjamin's poetic reference to the Angel of History. The third part submits an analysis of *Foe*, and connects this novel with the other works written by Coetzee. In the conclusion, I hope to validate the thesis proposed, that *Foe* is, ultimately, a self-reflexive novel that reflects the aesthetics of novel making of its own time.

Key-words: J. M. Coetzee – *Foe* – Intertextuality - Daniel Defoe - *Robinson Crusoe* - Metafiction

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## INTRODUCTION

This work is meant as a comment on the beautiful dialogue held, in *Foe*, between two of my favorite authors, J. M. Coetzee and his predecessor in the art of fiction, Daniel Defoe. The implicit considerations about the craft of writing provoked in me this irresistible wish to start this thesis presenting the three different images that illustrate the same epigraph. The first shows Friday in *Robinson Crusoe*; the second, the cover of the novel *Foe*, introduces us to Susan Barton during the shipwreck. The third is a photograph of the author, J. M. Coetzee.

The text of the epigraph, the poem *Epilogue*, is taken from Grace Nichols' book *I is a Long Memored Woman*, written in 1983,

*I have crossed an ocean  
I have lost my tongue  
From the root of the old  
One  
A new one has sprung*

I chose this poem, and repeated it three times using three different pictures, because the repetition reminds me of the countless number of changes that took place in literary aesthetics between the centuries in which Defoe and Coetzee write their Robinsonades, as well as the different phases Literary Criticism has gone through in the last few centuries.

When the epigraph relates to Friday's picture, it leads us to questions concerning the treatment of that character in *Robinson Crusoe*. I do not mean only the treatment received by Friday on the part of Crusoe. I mean especially the

treatment of the character within the structure of the work – where he is, now and then, depicted almost as an animal. I mean that the space granted to a black slave in eighteenth-century fiction would be very poor in contrast with the space occupied by a white, English-speaking, middle-classed or genteel character. The protagonist must forcibly be a white male European in those times.

Transposed into the present, that issue could lead us into discussions involving relations of power, otherness and multi-culturalism or post-colonialism. When Coetzee writes his novel, however, Friday's circumstances are even worse: now he has had his tongue and his sexual organs cut out! In *Foe*, the treatment of Friday seems to have been interpreted in two opposite ways: some critics find marks of racial prejudice on the part of this white *Afrikaans* author; while other critics read the character as the bearer of a subtle, witty parody on this entire question.

The second picture, the one that shows a drowning woman, leads us to Susan Barton, the protagonist in *Foe*. We notice, then, that this character does not – could not? – exist in Defoe's narrative. There is no room for a Susan Barton in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and the reasons for this have been competently and thoroughly disclosed through the practices of Feminist Studies. If we made a point to be fair, however, we could also take Coetzee's Susan Barton as a homage paid by Coetzee to Defoe's many feminine protagonists, Moll Flanders or Roxanne being nice representatives of that group. To make things still more puzzling, we finish *Foe* with a series of doubts whether – even in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – our female protagonist created by a male author has accomplished thorough visibility or not.

The third picture presents J.M. Coetzee, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2003, a white, male, English-speaking *Afrikaans* – the very epitome of Identity! The academic question, after Coetzee won the prize, was: *Did he win it as a South African author or as an English writer?* Too white to be considered African, too African to be considered European. In a way a hybrid creature, Coetzee and his work embody all the issues involving multiculturalism. So, in a sense, he also fits the last sentence of the poem "Epilogue", by Grace Nichols. I very much like the fact that the title of this poem is "Epilogue", meaning "end", an ambiguous word, because the end

of something is always the beginning of something else. And “end” is also a synonym to “aim”, “goal”, “objective”. In hybrid, multicultural times, an epilogue may be the forecasting of a new beginning.

John Maxwell Coetzee is the author of *Foe*, a novel in which the main character is a socially invisible woman, who walks around through the novel, carrying Friday along with her as a shadow. Susan is the protagonist in this re-creation of *Robinson Crusoe* where “Cruso” himself plays but a minor role in the early chapters of the narrative.

Each of the three pictures, therefore, might open the way to specific critical lines of action. If I chose to work with the Post-colonial approach, I would be favoring the first picture. If I chose to work with Feminist Studies, I would plunge deeply into the second one. However, looking at Coetzee’s photograph, I realized I would rather move freely through different schools as much as the beautiful text of *Foe* demands. That is how I finally realized what I mean to propose: a reading about a writer who is talking to another writer. For I believe that, in many ways, *Foe* is indeed a conversation between J.M. Coetzee and Daniel Defoe about their craft, the art of writing.

There is a still another explanation I owe you, about the image of the balloons on page six. What does a balloon have to do with *Foe*? Would not a boat seem more appropriate in a story about a shipwreck on a desert island?

The metaphor of the balloon comes from Phileas Fogg, the protagonist of the novel *Around the World in Eighty Days*, by Jules Verne. Fogg makes a gamble, in a London club, betting that he would succeed in traveling around the world, ballooning, in eighty days. At the end of the story he is very frustrated because, instead of eighty, it took him eighty-one days to accomplish the task. It is only when everything seems lost that he realizes that, since he had traveled against the regular time fuses, his calendar was one day advanced in relation to the English time. In a sense, therefore, this means they figuratively traveled back in time, into the past.

This trope agrees with the metafictional movement we have in the final chapters of *Foe*, where actuality and fiction are somehow fused, and we find what, to my reading, is the 20<sup>th</sup> Century male writer J. M. Coetzee entering the house with the seal of the National Trust where the writer Daniel Defoe has once lived. This 20<sup>th</sup> Century writer, as if sliding through Friday's tongueless mouth, reaches the 18<sup>th</sup> Century fictional island and finds out what might have happened to Susan Barton in the shipwreck. Like Phileas Fogg, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century writer that we willingly identify with Coetzee finds a way of moving back into the past and exchanging ideas with the author of what Ian Watt acknowledges as the first novel ever written, *Robinson Crusoe*.<sup>1</sup>

After these preliminary pieces of information about epigraphs and balloons, I am now to proceed to the regular items due in an introduction so that the delimitations of the work may be established. The first time this novel came into my hands I was taking a course on Post Colonialism taught here, at UFRGS, by Professor Eloína Prati dos Santos, some years ago. When I started reading the book, I just could not put it down. From the first pages, I was immediately taken to Robinson Crusoe's island. More than the points in which the two narratives converge, what fascinated me in fact were the puzzling variations proposed in *Foe*. The protagonist and narrator, Susan Barton, does not exist in *Robinson Crusoe*. Her name, and many of her circumstances, evoke other works by Defoe, especially *Roxanne*, *Moll Flanders* and *True Ghost Stories*. Coetzee's "Cruso" lives less years on the island than Defoe's Crusoe; and, in *Foe*, the narrative concentrates on what happens *after* Susan and Friday leave the island and reach England. The game of presence and absence within the scope of these two novels is a very rich field to be explored, as it seems.

Among the many aspects that stand out as worth investigating in this path, the connections between History and Fiction seem to me very relevant, as well as the dialogue established, as Coetzee addresses Defoe through his statement of belief concerning what a novel is and what an author should do. This exchange is operated, within the fictional frame, through the letters exchanged and conversations held

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<sup>1</sup> WATT, I. *The Rise of the Novel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964.

between Susan Barton and Mr. Foe, the writer she appoints to write a book telling of her experience on the island. *Foe* stands, in this sense, as a representation of our fragmented, postmodern ways of telling a story, as much as *Robinson Crusoe* remains as a giant representing the 18<sup>th</sup> century sedimentation of the novel as a fictional genre.

Another peculiar likeness between these two works lies in the ease with which both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Foe* cross the boundaries between history and fiction. Coetzee borrows from Defoe as Defoe has borrowed from the narrative about Selkirk's shipwreck. As for us, we will move backward and forward in time, and cross the lines between fiction, history and criticism. We will fly from Defoe to *Foe*, have a glimpse at Walter Benjamin watching an Angel digging over the debris of History, visit Linda Hutcheon and listen to her speaking about History and Literature, and examine Patricia Waugh's propositions about the uses of Metafiction.

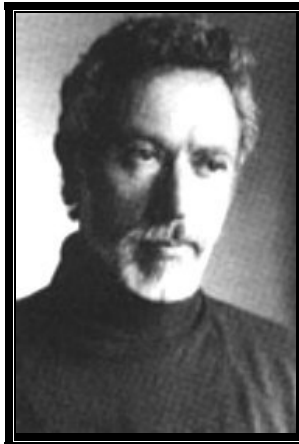
My thesis is structured in three chapters. In the first, I will briefly contextualize on Coetzee's life and career, consider the many references to Writing presented in *Foe* and establish connections between History and Fiction. Chapter Two introduces the theoretical background that will offer some critical support to my study of *Foe*, granted by Walter Benjamin, Linda Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh. Finally, in Chapter Three, I will present my reading of the novel, aiming at pinpointing some of Coetzee's choices and techniques, connecting this work with other novels written by him and offering some possibilities of interpretation to the stimulating challenges proposed by the narrative.

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## 1 CONTEXTUALIZATION

### 1.1 A Word about the Author



*He continues to teach because it provides him with a livelihood; also because it teaches him humility, brings it home to him who he is in the world. The irony does not escape him: that the one who comes to teach learns the keenest of lessons, while those who come to learn nothing.*

**J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace***

John Michael Coetzee was born in a small town 90 miles from Cape Town, South Africa, in February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1940. Later on he changed his middle name to Maxwell, so now he is known as John Maxwell Coetzee. He grew up in the deserts and semi-deserts known as the Karoo. A descendant from 17th-century Dutch settlers, Coetzee was born into the middle ranks of white privilege. His Afrikaner<sup>2</sup> parents “preferred to be English,” by virtue of education and aspiration. At home they would

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<sup>1</sup> Afrikaner – South African person whose first language is Afrikaans, especially a descendant of the Dutch settlers of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

speak only English, but with other relatives he grew used to speaking Afrikaans<sup>3</sup>. Coetzee's father was a lawyer, and his mother a schoolteacher. In his memoir, *Boyhood* (1997), Coetzee portrays himself as a sickly, bookish boy, who adores his freedom-loving mother, who wants to be free and not a prisoner in her house.

Coetzee studied English and Mathematics at Cape Town University, graduating in 1961. The following year he moved to England, working as an application programmer for two years, from 1962 to 1963. His evenings were spent in the British Museum reading Ford Madox Ford, and the rest of the time walking on the streets of London thinking about life and writing. Much about this time can be found as reflected in his novels *Youth* and *Boyhood*. During this period he wrote a thesis for an MA on Ford Madox Ford which was awarded a prize by the University of Cape Town in 1963. From London he moved to Bracknell, Berkshire, where he worked as a systems programmer for a computer company.

In 1965 Coetzee moved to the University of Texas in Austin to take his Doctorate on the style of Samuel Beckett's fiction. He accomplished it in 1969 and went to teach in the University of New York at Buffalo from 1968 to 1971. There, Coetzee started to write his first book, *Dusklands* (1974).

However, Coetzee was forced by circumstances to go back to South Africa because he was unable to get a green card to remain and work in the United States. Back in his country, in 1972 he became a lecturer at the University of Cape Town – at that time an institution for the White – and was later appointed professor of literature. Coetzee worked as a General Literature professor up to 2001, when he left the university and his country and emigrated to Australia. In an interview to Anne Susskind<sup>4</sup>, he said that “leaving a country is, in some respects, like the break-up of a marriage. It is an intimate matter.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Afrikaans – a language of South Africa, similar to Dutch.

<sup>4</sup> Anne Susskind is a literary critic, and a contributor to the Bulletin Newsletter. Available in the website <http://bulletin.ninemsn.com.au>. December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2005

<sup>5</sup> This quotation is also found in the website <http://bulletin.ninemsn.com.au/Bulletin/EdDesk.nsf/All/AC6DED0D346B9974CA256ABD00496548>. December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2005

One of the possible reasons why Coetzee went to live in the small city of Australia named Adelaide may be that, because he does not seem to feel comfortable with the notoriety that surrounds the literary world, it is easier to keep a calm life there. The author Rian Malan describes Coetzee as “a man of almost monkish self-discipline and dedication. He does not drink, smoke or eat meat. He cycles vast distances to keep fit and spends at least an hour at his writing-desk each morning, seven days a week. A colleague who has worked with him for more than a decade claims to have seen him laugh just once. An acquaintance has attended several dinner parties where Coetzee has uttered not a single word.” (Cowley, 1999 p. 1)

In 1963 Coetzee married Philippa Jubber (1939–1991). When she died, 28 years later, because of a cancer, they were already divorced. They divorced in 1980. Nowadays, Coetzee has another companion, Dorothy Driver who is a literary critic and South African literature professor as well.

From his first marriage with Philippa Jubber, Coetzee had two children, a boy Nicolas and a girl, Gisela born in 1968. Nicolas (1966-1989) died at the age of 23. Nobody knows exactly about the circumstances of his accident, nevertheless it is said that Nicolas fell mysteriously from a high balcony.

Although Coetzee prefers a discrete lifestyle, this is a difficult aim to be achieved by a man who was awarded the 2003 Literary Nobel Prize. Besides, he has been the only author in the world to win the Booker Prize twice.

In December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2003 when he received the Nobel Prize, Coetzee’s speech was very brief. He referred to the conversation he and his companion Dorothy had about the prize. Dorothy mentioned that his mother would have been very proud, if she were alive, to be able to say “my son, the Literary Nobel prize winner.” To this comment, Coetzee had asked Dorothy, “Even prouder than of my son the doctor? Even prouder than of my son the professor?” Dorothy answered, yes, even prouder. Without abandoning his inner irony, Coetzee remarked that if his mother were alive she would be ninety nine years old and a half, probably have senile dementia and fail

to have any idea of what was going on around her. Then, trying to come back to the point, but adding even more irony, he stated that, yes, his mother would be proud of him the way mothers use to be proud about their children. So, he fancied that the scene would go like,

“Mommy, mommy! I won a prize!”

“That’s wonderful, my dear. Now eat your carrots before they get cold.”

Coetzee finished his speech regretting the fact that parents grow old and die before their children win prizes to make up for all the troubles they have caused to them. Then he presented his special thanks to Alfred Nobel and “To my parents, how sorry I am that you cannot be here. Thank you.”

Coetzee is a professor, writer, critic and translator, who hardly ever attends the ceremonies to receive his literary awards. He may eventually escape from the media, but not his books, which are well known all over the world. He spends at least two hours in front of his computer every morning, so that every year Coetzee presents his readers with a novel, or a translation or a book of critical essays. A list of Coetzee’s complete works can be found in Annex I.

I think it would be useful for us to investigate a little about the circumstances of J. M. Coetzee’s homeland at the time he was born. Also due to the history and politics of his country, as well as the oppression lived by people in his continent, have provided Coetzee with much material for his novels and his characters. Coetzee's works cannot be classified as belonging to any specific postmodern intellectual current. His essays reveal interest in linguistics, generative grammar, stylistics, structuralism, semiotics, and deconstruction. The kind of reasoning developed in his years as computer programmer also plays a significant role in the shaping of his plots. Nevertheless, the dilemmas of his novels are rooted in South African reality, often presented in a timeless, metafictional form, and carrying a plurality of meanings.

In 1948, when Coetzee was eight years old, the Afrikaner National Party came to power in South Africa, and it imposed the Apartheid system. South Africa then,

became famous for the political and racial problems that followed, and that accompanied the life of J. M. Coetzee while he grew up and into his adult life. In *Youth*,

The whites of South Africa participated, in various degrees, actively or passively, in an audacious and well-planned crime against Africa. Afrikaners as a self defining group distinguished themselves in the commission of that crime. Thereby they lent their name to it. It will be a long time before they have the moral authority to withdraw that brand mark. . . . Is it in my power to withdraw from the gang? I think not. . . . More important, is it my heart's desire to be counted apart? Not really. Furthermore -- and this is an afterthought -- I would regard it as morally questionable to write something like the second part of *Dusklands* -- a *fiction*, note -- from a position that is not historically complicit. (Coetzee 1992 p. 342-343)

Reading his novels we realize that Coetzee criticizes and feels ashamed in relation to the way native people were treated in his country. In *Youth*, chapter 15, the character Richard Merrington asks John when he is planning to go back to South Africa. John answers that he never wants to go back, he wants to stay indefinitely in London. He has left South Africa for good. Richard then asks if the situation is so bad there, and John says it is. The man continues the dialogue asking, "Even for the whites" (Coetzee, 2003 p.138) with this question, John is silenced. He does not know how to answer this. He cannot answer this. He thinks that there is no way to answer this without being ashamed to death.

The problems, however, started way ahead, in the break of colonization, when the Dutch settlers arrived, in 1652, in an area adjacent to Cape of Good Hope. These settlers intermarried, later, with French protestant Huguenot refugees, creating the early Boer population. This Boer population opted to be called "Afrikaners," and aimed to develop and create their own language and culture. They soon started to practice hard exclusions on the native people, the Black Khoikhoi<sup>6</sup> and the Bantu<sup>7</sup> peoples.

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<sup>6</sup> The name Khoikhoi means 'men of men'. They spread out across Southern Africa, and migrated south 2,000 years ago, bringing animal herding to the Cape.

When slavery was abolished, in the early nineteenth century, and the British started to rule the Cape, English was established as the main language. The Afrikaners tried to preserve their independence and culture through the “Great Trek,” a kind of protest in which they wandered through the countryside, trying to escape the English influence. Then in 1948, through general elections, takes place the restoration of the Afrikaner power, with the victory of the National party, the era in which the segregation practices become official, known as the Apartheid<sup>8</sup>

Coetzee exposes the pressures and ambiguities he experienced for living in South Africa, in a place where “the crudity of life [...], the naked force of its appeals, not only at the physical level but at the moral level too, its callousness and its brutalities, its hungers and its rages, its greed and its lies, make it as irresistible as it is lovable”. (Coetzee 1992, p 99)

In *White Writing* (1988), where Coetzee writes several essays about South African history and culture, he introduces Jodocus Hondius<sup>9</sup>. Coetzee tells that in 1652, the year of the Dutch arrival to the Cape, Hondius was one of the early travelers who described the Hottentots<sup>10</sup>, calling attention to the differences between their habits and customs and those from West Europeans,

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<sup>7</sup> 'Bantu' is a generic name covering many black tribes. Bantu migration into South Africa began in the 3rd century AD, with the occupation of the fertile eastern and coastal stretches of the country, where they came into contact with the Khoikhoi.

<sup>8</sup> **Apartheid** (meaning *separateness* in Afrikaans, cognate to English *apart* and *-hood*) was a system of ethnic separation in South Africa from 1948, and was dismantled in a series of negotiations from 1990 to 1993, culminating in democratic elections in 1994. Available in : <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apartheid> September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> By the end of the 16th century, a number of Protestant Flemings escaped to the northern Netherlands to avoid persecution. They included the scientist, Petrus Plancius, & the cartographer Jodocus Hondius. (1563-1612) As a cartographer, Hondius accomplished several sea travels and in 1652, when the Dutch arrived to the Cape, Jodocus

<sup>10</sup> The Khoi, commonly known as Hottentots, belong to the same linguistic and racial group as the San. The San are the universally acknowledged first people of Southern Africa. Their hunter-gatherer society reaches back over 27,000 years, and their genetic origins to over one million years. It is believed the San represents the oldest genetic stock of contemporary humanity. The Hottentots are different from the San in the sense that they have a more settled lifestyle, they have a greater sense of ownership to cattle.

The local natives have everything in common with the dumb cattle, barring their human nature [...] They are handicapped in their speech, clucking like turkey-cocks [...] Their food consists of herbs, cattle, wild animals and fish. The animals are eaten together with their internal organs [...] raw, skin, and all[.] A number of them will sleep together in the veld, making no difference between men and women [...] They all smell fiercely [...] and give the appearance of never having washed. (Coetzee, 1988, p. 34.)

The repetition of some of these patterns in the reports of seamen, traders, doctors in relation to the local natives' language, social, and eating habits created a kind of a common discourse which Coetzee calls as Discourse of the Cape. And, as Coetzee observes (COETZEE, 1988 p 18), this discourse serves "both to define a Hottentot vice and to distance the writer from it." The sea men and other travelers make rude observations about the food the native people eat, their language, their hygiene, calling them lazy, indolent and idle. According to Coetzee, the discourse that places the people from the Cape as animals is called "Discourse of the Cape".

## **1.2 Writers on Writing**

### 1.2.1 Coetzee and Defoe

In his Nobel lecture, Coetzee chose to speak about Daniel Defoe and his character Robinson Crusoe. Its lecture consists of 8 pages entitled "He and His man" attached at the end of this paper. In the very first page we realize that "He" stands for Robinson Crusoe and "His man" stands for Defoe. Why did Coetzee choose to speak about Robinson Crusoe and Daniel Defoe? Why did he choose to rewrite this story inserting here another character and not another from the same time, Richardson's Pamela or Fielding's Tom Jones for instance? Or even another book from the same author?

This question may be answered by Coetzee himself. Even though, Coetzee does not consider *Robinson Crusoe* Defoe's best book, he thinks that the idea of a man alone on the island – Crusoe – “is Defoe at his best”. Maybe this is the reason why he wrote his own novel, *Foe*, as well as his Nobel Prize speech based on this character.

In “Stranger Shores”, Coetzee writes an essay about Defoe in which he says,

Defoe is in fact something simpler: an impersonator, a ventriloquist, even a forger.(...)The kind of 'novel' he is writing (he did not, of course, use the term) is a more or less literal imitation of the kind of recital his hero or heroine would have given had he or she really existed. It is fake autobiography heavily influenced by the genres of the deathbed confession and the spiritual autobiography. (Coetzee: 2002, p 18)

Defoe and Coetzee, although they have written about the same character, and the same core - a man lost on an island. They are completely different authors and see the act of writing from a complete different angle. For Defoe the act of writing is a way of living. Good writing in Defoe's time is poetry, drama and essays, the role of fiction is to entertain .For him this is the best way to make money taking into account he is always running, escaping from creditors. He had tried other occupations before; he had already been to prison. As they did not work out he then wrote just to make a living. He realized that writing was a good way to make a living then he started to write. It seems that being an author is just a way of living, an easy way of making money.

We have already seen at that time, fiction is not art but rather entertainment. Defoe's writing was to be sold. He sold political leaflets even though he did not agree with what he was writing. Although he was concerned about the world around him, his matters were with the money, not with the content. People used to pay him in exchange of his writing. People told him their stories, for one reason or other they could not do it by themselves. Maybe they could not write. Maybe they thought they did not have the skill for that. Like Susan, the character in the book. She does not have the skill for writing or at least she thinks she does not, so she looks for Foe.



For Coetzee, the act of writing is not the same as for Defoe. Coetzee is a professor at a University. He has another occupation from which to make a living. Of course he is well, very well paid for his books and for his prizes. However, he worries about what he writes, the content is relevant to him. He is that kind of author who would like to change the world in which he lives in for better through his writings. He is aware of the world which surrounds him, of the problems of his country, of the people, of the animals, of the minorities.

Writing fiction in prose in the beginning of XIX century was a kind of opening the path. The writers of that time were doing something new. In *Foe*, chapter 2 we have a metaphor of this, when Crusoe is preparing those terraces, - a technique used in agriculture to prepare the land for future crops. Nevertheless he does not have seeds and Susan does not understand and questions him about it. "We can understand that Defoe is\* symbolically preparing the land for the flourishing of the novel. According to Lemos, in her dissertation "allegorically speaking, *Robinson Crusoe* indeed has been offering the fertile soil for the cultivation of new ideas alongside almost three hundred centuries of readings." The harvest Defoe's work promised comprises the contributions of all critical evaluations." (Lemos 2006 p. 77)

When we speak about novel as a literary genre, the first name that comes to our mind is Daniel Defoe. The genre appears first in capitalist England in the beginning of XVIII century through the hands of Daniel Defoe. The notion of a subjective identity appears in this moment in literary history. On the other hand, Coetzee writes in late capitalism in a time when the notion of identity and subjectivity is broken. The modernists had brought the idea of subject fragmentation. With multiculturalism came the notion of pulverization of identity. The one confounded with the whole. The narratives then are not so clear, they are harder to decode and decipher, they are as *Foe* and "*He and his man*" the speech Coetzee did as a lecture to his Noble Prize. These look like puzzles, enigmas that need to be solved. And the key to decipher works like *Foe* is to create a dialogue between Defoe, there, in the very beginning, with Coetzee here in the end.

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### 1.2.2 Barton and Foe

In the novel *Foe* by J.M Coetzee when Barton and Foe are discussing about what to write, what story should be written down, Foe expresses the idea of writing a linear story, with a beginning, middle, and an end. The story Foe wants to write is a structuralist story he even gives Susan the recipe of a real book, as if he were the owner of the truth. The story he wants to write down begins in London where her daughter is kidnapped, for an unknown reason. Susan then sails to Bahia in her quest for Susan suspects that the girl is there. There she spends two long useless years. What she did or not, what food she ate, what clothes she wore, to whom she talked to, all these details which took place during these two years are stories the readers will enjoy to know, according to Foe. Susan abandons the quest for the daughter and leaves Bahia. At the same time Susan is looking for the girl, the girl is also looking for Susan. The girl has heard about a tall English woman in Bahia in quest of a lost daughter. Time goes by and the girl hears about a woman rescued from an island. Then she hears a rumor about the woman's name: Susan, the same name as hers. This would be Foe's story, a different story from hers

The story Susan wants to tell starts when she arrives in the island. She "*slips overboard*" for a long time until she arrives ashore at the beach unconscious due to the shipwreck she had gone through. She tries to communicate with Friday but he does not say a word and leads her to a man who is named Crusoe. There in the island there are not pirates, nor cannibals. She makes sex with Crusoe only once. Her story finishes when they are rescued.

Foe is very much like Defoe. He wants to entertain with his writing. For him the story of the island could be only one episode into many others. The purpose of his writing is to entertain. He says in relation to Susan's story the story of the island "lacks light and shade. It is too much the same throughout. It is like a loaf of bread. It will keep us alive, certainly, if we are starved of reading; but who will prefer it when there are tastier confections and pastries to be had" (117)

Foe considers that the story of the island is not worth a book, it is not more than a mere episode or a chapter. It must be fulfilled with interesting stories with cannibals, pirates, romance, in order to entertain the reader. "Once you proposed to supply middle by inventing cannibals and pirates. These I would not accept because they were not the truth."(121)

Susan in the other hand does not mind about entertainment. She minds about truth. She wants to tell the reader exactly what happened in the island. She wants to tell about the roar of the shelves, the wind, the silence...Susan is committed with the truth.

You err most tellingly in failing to distinguish between my silences and the silences of a being such as Friday. Friday has no command of words and therefore no defense against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desire of others. I say he is a cannibal and he becomes a cannibal; I say he is a laundryman and he becomes a laundryman. What is the truth of Friday? (121)

Susan means that she is the owner of her writing. Nobody can tell her what to say. She knows what to say, she has her own opinion and she does not want to change just because Foe, a man, demands it from her. She is not like Friday, who, Foe could put the words he wanted in his mouth and he would accept. Susan has her own will. She knows what she wants to say or not, and definitely she wants to tell the truth, the true story of the island.

It would be difficult to write about Susan and Foe separately for their opinions about writing come together in the novel. That is why their ideas come in contrast here.

"Once you proposed to supply middle by inventing cannibals and pirates. These I would not accept because they were not the truth. Now you propose to reduce the island to an episode in the history of a woman in search of a lost

daughter. This too I reject.” (Coetzee, 1987. p.121) Susan and Foe disagree on the idea of writing the story of the island. Foe, on the one hand, wants a structured story with five definite parts: the loss of the daughter; the quest for her in Brazil; the giving up of this quest and the adventure on the island; the girl would also look for the mother and then the reunion of mother and daughter. According to him this is what makes up a story, this is what makes up a book “*loss, then quest, then recovery, beginning, then middle, then end*” (COETZEE, 1987 p.117) this is what readers want to read, this is what readers expect from a book.

Foe wants to change Susan’s story, he wants to tell other facts he considers to be more relevant in a book, Foe is worried about the reception the book is going to have. He thinks about what the readers are going to think or not. In his opinion, no one, not any reader will seat for hours to read about an island, an island like hers, without any attraction. Susan in the other hand is the kind of author who is committed to the truth, she wants to tell what really happened at the island, and she does not want to invent any new facts. In her story she does not want to introduce pirates, cannibals or new adventures, romance between her and Cruso... She just wants to pass the real facts on the way they really happened.

When thinking about writing, Foe is interested in the commercial part, in selling the books. All he thinks about is making money from the books. Writing for Foe is a way to survive, to make money. Foe’s interest is in the response the book is going to have. Susan does not worry about it. She worries about taking control of her story and telling what really took place in the island. In one of several conversations Susan and Foe had about the story of the island, she makes it clear for him that her story would not be like the other ones he was used to, in which he wrote what he wanted. She was the father of her story.

“I am not, do you see, one of those thieves or highwaymen of yours who gabble a confession and are then whipped off to Tyburn and eternal silence, leaving you to make of their stories whatever you fancy. It is still in my power to guide and amend. Above all, to withhold. By such means do I still do I still endeavor to be father to my story” (Coetzee, 1987p.123)

Hence, there are two ways of understanding writing: The ways that Susan and Coetzee see it that is a commitment to the truth, to write a story the way it really happened and write a story aiming to make money, the way Foe and possibly Defoe saw it.

### 1.2.3 Other Voices in Coetzee's Writings

Taking into consideration that Coetzee's characters are so rich in terms of creativity and invention, I would like to dedicate a part of this chapter to the presentation of their ideas and considerations about the act of writing, because many of Coetzee's characters pose relevant considerations on writing. Let us start by Elizabeth Costello who is an author as well as a character. Elizabeth Costello is the character of a homonymous novel she is an aging Australian writer, although she is a poor public speaker. She is famous for a book she had written years ago and now she is traveling the world speaking about it. Through her speeches and interactions with her family especially her son and sister, *this novel* is more of a series of essays and articles contained within a fictional outline.

Elizabeth does not want to write like other writers do, she means to be different. She does not think her books are autobiographical, but agrees that an author recurs to his/her own life all the time, because his/her own life is the main source of experience and ideas and, in a certain sense, it is the only source. Michael K.<sup>11</sup> considers that a writer, an author must have the gift to tell a story to keep the listener's interest.

In relation to rewriting an existing novel, giving it a new sense, introducing or denying some characters' presence, Costello does not consider that an offence to the author of the first novel. She thinks that some novels are so prodigal of invention

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<sup>11</sup> Michael K is the main character of the novel *Life and Times of Michael K*. He is a young gardener who decides to take his mother away from the war, far from guns and battles, towards a new life. Nevertheless, war follows him. There is no where to go.

that they ask to be reused and rewritten, that they ask you to use their material and build a new thing of your own, giving it new glances, new episodes, and a new life.

Elizabeth Costello thinks that since she is going to die one day, at least her work will remain. Her name will be part of history. *In Life and Times of Michael K*, the second chapter deals with this subject when the narrator, who is also a character, wants Michael to tell his story so that he can become part of History. If Michael continues in silence, if he does not tell his story, he will not be substantial; he will be apart from history. On the other hand, Michael considers his life so uninteresting, so insignificant, that it is not worth being told, being passed on.

I believe that when an author writes, he/she uses the characters shoes. Besides that, the author is also able to enter the reader's mind and sow that terrain with his/her thoughts, as Cruso does with the soil of his island. The author has the power to lead his/her reader to other lives, to other existences. So a writer can live many lives and is able to do that to his readers as well.

Elizabeth Costello considers that being an author is similar to being a star. You are always exposed, you have no private life. She considers that once exposed in the sky, the stars have no other choice but being examined by telescopes. When asked about the future of the novel, she answers with another question. She asks what the future can be if not a set of hope and expectations. According to this character the Future lives in our minds, it has no reality. And if people say that Past is fiction as well, she would say that the Past contains something miraculous. That millions of individual fiction, which are created by God, in which the characters are the human beings, are so well sewed that it builds a tissue that we call Common Past, Collective History.

Elizabeth Costello also appears in the novel *Slow Man* (Coetzee, 2005) as an author. In this novel she arrives at Rayment's flat and informs him that she decided to make him a character in her novel. He had an accident and his leg was amputated. She tried to cheer him up to live an interesting life, and she even offers him a blind

woman, who can not see his missing leg, to be his lover. Rayment<sup>12</sup> resists her at every turn, but his underlying dilemma remains; how is he to fashion a life while he is still trying to find his place in the world?

David Lurie,<sup>1</sup> the protagonist of Coetzee's *Disgrace* is a professor of modern languages at Cape Town University College, and a specialist in Wordsworth and Byron. After he was fired Lurie is writing an opera about Byron and Teresa Guiccioli's life. At the beginning, this exercise in writing was just a hobby, "just something to dabble at" (COETZEE, 2005, p. 189) as he says to Rosalind, his ex wife. Nevertheless at the end of the novel, the way he sees the act of writing changed, it becomes his life. "It consumes him night and day" (idem, p. 214)

John, from *Youth*, is an intense reader who makes some relevant considerations on writing. He is a South African who believes that living in obscurity is part of becoming a famous poet or a writer. He asks himself what he must go through to write like the authors he admires so much such as Pope, Swift, James, Kafka, Blake, Pound, or Eliot. He considers that an author must go through suffering, madness, depression, loneliness, have sex, to be in love, in order to be able to call the sacred fire that makes a person write. He believes that women do not receive the visit of the sacred fire, but for certain exceptions, like Sapho, or Emily Brontë.

John considers that fictional characters in general are not created out of nothing, they are created from a person in flesh and blood, from experience lived by its "creator". There must have been a woman or many women whose attitudes and traits lead the author to create a character like her. He has these feelings and thoughts when he thinks of Emma Bovary. John goes on, saying that even if there is not a woman like her who had inspired the author, she, the character, must have affected some women to act and think like herself, creating then many versions of Emma in real life.

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Rayment is the *Slow Man* in J. M. Coetzee's novel. He's a 60-year old Australian man who is hit by a car while cycling and has a leg amputated. He retires to his Adelaide flat, depressed by his circumstance and the lack of substance to his life. He lusts for his Croatian caregiver, Marijana, and wants to be a surrogate father to her sons, even though she has a husband. He offers to pay for a private school for her oldest son, something her husband refuses Available in: [http://www.reviewsofbooks.com/slow\\_man/](http://www.reviewsofbooks.com/slow_man/)

John believes that, in fiction, things are rarely what they seem to be, that a book must have a true aura, otherwise it has no value. He points out that many people write, however just a few manage to be read and achieve a certain success. He quotes “Many are called but few are chosen.” (Coetzee, 2003, p. 72)

In *Doubling the Point*, published in 1992, a book where Coetzee is not a novelist but a critic, there is a part when David Attwell<sup>13</sup> questions him about the issue of autobiographical writing. Coetzee answers:

“Let me treat this as a question about telling the truth Rather than as a question as a question about autobiography: everything that you write, including criticism, writes you, as you write it” (*Doubling*, 17)

In this same book *Doubling the Point*, in the last interview, Coetzee tells a passage of his life from the years 1982-83. Nevertheless, what really calls attention in this passage is that Coetzee chooses to speak about himself as a boy, not as a man in the present tense using the third person. Part of a description of his early boyhood is here:

His years in rural Worcester (1948-51) as a child from an Afrikaans background attending English-medium classes, at a time of raging Afrikaner nationalism, a time when laws were being concocted to prevent people of Afrikaans descent from bringing up their children to speak English, provoke in him uneasy dreams of being hunted down and accused; by the age of twelve he has a well developed sense of social marginality”(393)

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<sup>13</sup> David Attwell studied at the Universities of Natal and Cape Town in South Africa before completing his doctorate at the University of Texas at Austin. He has taught at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town and at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg. In 2003 he was the Gerard Manley Hopkins Distinguished Professor in English at John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio. Before coming to York he was Chair of English at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. His main research interests are in postcolonial studies: postcolonial theory, critical formations in postcolonial countries, anglophone African writing, South African literature, and theories and practices of cultural translation In <http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/engl/staff/academic/attwell.htm> in September 12, 2007



This feeling of marginality goes on after his boyhood days into his adolescence,

His years in Worcester are followed by adolescence in Cape Town, as a protestant enrolled in a Catholic high school, with Jewish and Greek friends. For a variety of reasons he ceases visiting the family farm, the place on earth he has defined, imagined, constructed, as his place of origin. All of this confirms his (quite accurate sense) of being outside a culture that at this moment in history is confidently setting about enforcing itself as the core culture of the land (393-394)

Most of Coetzee's fiction is presented in first person narration – the narrators who use first person are Jacobus Coetzee, in *Dusklands*; Eugene Dawn, in *Dusklands*; Magda in *In the Heart of the Country*; The Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Susan Barton in the book *Foe*, Mrs Curren in *Age of Iron*, and Michael K. in *Life and times of Michael K.* In *The Master of Petersburg* he makes use of both the present simple and the third person, this novel is the one previous to *Boyhood* and *Elizabeth Costello*.

It is naïve to think that writing is a simple two stage process: first you decide what you want to say, then you say it. On the contrary, as all of us know, you write because you do not know what you want to say... Writing, then, involves interplay between the push into the future that takes you to the blank page in the first place, and a resistance. Part of that resistance is psychic, but part is also an automatism built into language: the tendency of words to call up other words, to fall into patterns that keep propagating themselves. Out of that interplay there emerges, if you are lucky what you recognize or hope to recognize as true. (Doubling 18)

In “Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky”, a text written by Coetzee in 82-83 and published first in 1985 and reprinted in *Doubling the Point* (251-93) Coetzee discusses these authors and shows the “ structural interminability of confession in a secular context”.(p. 142 *The Ethics of Reading*)

After reading *Boyhood* and also *Youth* you start thinking how can one confess anything using the distant third person singular and the present tense? We have always the idea that to confess, to talk about our past we must use first person and past simple. Besides, reading these two novels, we have the idea that this John, born in South Africa, who has grown up in Worcester, besides of all the distance with which J.M. Coetzee wants to hide him is , in fact, Coetzee himself. It is impossible to divorce John writing his dissertation on Ford Madox Ford from J M Coetzee writing his own. So why it is not a confession? Why it is not a biography? an autobiography?

What does the use of the third person mean? His choice of person dissociates the narrative voice from the narrated consciousness; it separates the narrator from the author. It is not the author who is thinking that; way it is the narrator itself. In *Boyhood* Coetzee makes “autobiography”, a term used by Coetzee himself, to refer to this novel that is an autobiography written in the third person. He is an OTHER for himself in the act of writing this novel. When he poses to write an autobiography he sees himself an OTHER. When he is twenty five, he is at the University of Texas as a graduate student, in 1965 Coetzee says “he now begins to feel closer to I: autobiography shades back into autobiography” (394 *Doubling*)

In this same book, the narrator, John, the other Coetzee, is ashamed of being from South Africa. When someone asks him where he is from he does not properly responds. He is ashamed of being from that land where so many horrors took place, from a place where he does not agree with the past and current rules. John and Ganapathy are the only foreigners in the group. Ganapathy wants to go to South Africa, he asks about his perspectives there, how life is like there. John , on the other hand, tries to dissuade him to go there, but does not tell him that foreigners are not welcomed unless they are white.

Also in *Youth*, Coetzee gives a hint of what writing is. In the novel the character John had to write from the perspective of 1820, Burchell's<sup>14</sup> time. John, the character says he wants to enter the environment of those years. He has to forget things, he will have to know less than he knows now, and he will have to forget things before he will be able to bring this writing outside. Nevertheless, before the author forgets he must know what to forget; He needs to convince as an author, to forget his current knowledge and write from inside the time he is writing about.

John, the character, also questions at the end of the novel *Youth* if art comes from depression, because he could only write if he got depressed. When he was having good moments he could not write. On the other hand when he was going through bad moments he could write poetry.

With a sentence from the novel *Elizabeth Costello*, taken from the speech "In the Lives of Animals" one can have a strong idea of the close relation Coetzee has with his characters. In Speech 1, Realism, Elizabeth Costello says the animals deserve privacy, like the writers do. Nevertheless, animals which are in a zoo are in exhibition like authors. They are like stars. No one needs to ask to look for them. They are in exposition. His characters are a part of him, his voice is in the voice of his characters. Coetzee is an author, is a real person. If we take Elizabeth, for instance, who is one of Coetzee's characters and who is also an author, we can see that Coetzee is speaking about her fictional characters, giving her opinion about life and death. But through her voice, through her speeches we can see what goes in Coetzee's mind in the act of writing. Through her voice he says "There is no limit to

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<sup>14</sup> **William John Burchell** was born on July 23 in 1781 in Fulham, London and died in 23 March 1863 Fulham. He was an English explorer, naturalist, traveler, artist and author. His father was Matthew Burchell a botanist and owner of Fulham Nursery. He served a botanical apprenticeship at Kew .In 1805 he went to St. Helena as schoolmaster and later as official botanist. He sailed to the Cape on the recommendation of Gen. J.W. Janssens to explore and to add to his botanical collection, in 1810. When he land at Table Bay in November 1810, he set a plan to an expedition into the interior of the land, leaving Cape Town in June 1811. Burchell traveled in South Africa between 1810 and 1815, collecting over 50,000 specimens, and covering over 7000 km, much over unexplored terrain. He described his journey in a two-volume work appearing in 1822 and 1824, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*.

the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another. There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination.” 91) Soon after that she continues saying that to write the novel “*The House on the Eccles Road* about Marion Bloom<sup>15</sup>, she had to enter Marion’s thoughts, she had to imagine how Marion would feel if she were in her shoes. This is what Coetzee does in every novel.

The subject into question in Elizabeth Costello was the holocaust. J.M Coetzee’s writing is a relation of identification with its own creations, we could say there is a relation of sympathetic identification in which Coetzee identifies with the matters , and problems which his characters go through. We could even go further and say that Coetzee suffers along with his characters.

In my opinion Coetzee is that kind of writer who is very much aware of his environment and everything that surrounds him. He is pretty much conscious of the political problems his country faced along the time and its consequences on its people. Even though Coetzee does not live in South Africa anymore, his home land haunts him like a ghost, like an evil spirit and he cannot get rid of it. He uses writing as an effort to escape from it; nevertheless he cannot forget the history of his own country.

In Elizabeth Costello’s novel, in the first speech, Elizabeth is in the cruise talking to a couple Steve and Shirley about her books. Then the subject changes to the sea. Steve seems to know everything about ocean and its tiny beings, even the ones which most people have never heard about. He knows about those beings that live eating and being eaten, multiplying and dying “ignored by history” (Coetzee 2004, 57) Here we see Benjamin in Elizabeth Costello.

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<sup>15</sup> There was a real Marion Bloom who was a nurse during World War One. Also she was H.L. Mencken’s lover for a great part of the early twentieth century. He was a journalist and writer of the early 20th century. Molly Bloom is a character from the novel *Ulysses*, by James Joyce. Molly is Leopold Bloom’s wife. She stands for Penelope in the *Odyssey*, and for Nora Barnacle, Joyce’s wife. If we were to find a difference between them both it would be that the first is faithful and the latter is not.

## 2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS

### 2.1 Walter Benjamin and the *Angelus Novus*



“My wing is ready for flight  
I would like to turn back  
If I stayed timeless time  
I would have little luck”

“Mein Flugel ist zum Schwung bereit  
ich kehrte gern zuruck.  
denn blieb ich auch lebendige Zeit  
ich hatte wenig Gluck.”

Gerhard Scholem, *Gruss vom Angelus*

A Klee <sup>16</sup> painting named *Angelus Novus* lies at the root of two works, the text *Thesis on the Philosophy of History*, by Walter Benjamin, and the above poem by Gerhard Scholem.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Paul Klee (1879-1940) a Swiss born painter. In 1921 Benjamin bought his painting *Angelus Novus* and he kept it as one of his most important possessions. Benjamin's identification with the image of this angel was deep In his text *Thesis on the Philosophy oh History*, Benjamin referred to this painting

<sup>17</sup> Gerhard Scholem (1897-1982), a Jewish historian and philosopher born in Germany who used to exchange letters with Walter Benjamin.

In Benjamin, it reads,

A Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm, is what we call progress. (Benjamin 2002 p. 364)

This paragraph introduces the Angel of History, who is looking straight ahead, although his face is turned behind. We see that the angel is in the present with the face turned to the past. Benjamin pictures this angel, who is in the present, looking back to the past. The angel perceives that events are taking place, events which cannot be changed. The consequences of these events, as well as the consequences of all other events that occurred in the past, come to the angel. Nevertheless, he is only watching: he will not change what has already happened, he will not awaken the dead, judge one's guilt, he will not interfere with what has been established as truth.

The text "Thesis on History" by Benjamin as well as Klee's painting "*Angelus Novus*" have an important role in the understanding of history and life itself: these two works registered to all those who read this text, and to all those who see this painting that behind the official History, behind the history that was sacramented there is the rubble. The rubble is always there; although it is omitted and ignored it influences everything that happens. After reading Benjamin's article and Klee's painting one must have in mind that both sides are always there. Both the winner and the loser are always there. Also, both the spoken and the omitted are in a relation of complementarity. The winner does not exist without the loser as well as the loser does not exist without the winner, they have these positions because of the other. He is the winner just because the loser exists and is in that position. Their histories are complementary. One complements the other.

The angel must heed towards the future, progress obliges him to,

The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. 'The truth will not run away from us': in the historical outlook of historicism these words of Gottfried Keller mark the exact point where historical materialism cuts through historicism. For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. (The good tidings which the historian of the past brings with throbbing heart may be lost in a void the very moment he opens his mouth.) (Benjamin, 2002 ,p 363 )

It is worth mentioning that this excerpt reminds us that what happened in the past is “never seen again”. We readers, from the present, get in touch with facts that come to us by historians. However, we can ask ourselves, “How do they determine precisely in what way such facts happened? How can they determine who are the real winners and who are the real losers? The historians fictionalize complex events and we are left with easy simple solutions. Most of the times, the ones who put History into words were not there, in the past, they did not see the debris, and ignore them. If only they could revisit the past like the angel – or like the narrator in *Foe* – they would gain the authority of the one who has been there, at the moment things were taking place.

What Benjamin states is that the past cannot be recognized. The past is like the act of taking a picture. If you photograph one scene from a birthday party, you cannot say that was the only scene in the party. Many other scenes took places that were not photographed. Some guests may have arrived later, or gone away before the picture was taken. The picture presents only an infinitesimal piece of the complex event taking place in the birthday party.

The most frequent instances in which History is represented involve a confrontation that end with one of the sides as the winner and the other as a loser.

The names of the winners and losers are 'photographed', as well as the facts and names (usually on the side of the winners) that triggered the official result. Let us take a simple soccer match as an example. Suppose we want to know who won a match we have missed. We ask someone, and through the answer we know the name of the team which got the best result, the name of the winner, and maybe who scored the goals. Nevertheless, we are not aware of the many facts involved, such as if the referee tried to harm one of the teams in benefit of the other, if one soccer player who was banished from the game really deserved to be sent off, if the team which won was actually the best one playing on the field, or if it was just chance and good luck that caused it to win the match. We will never know if the audience shouted, cheered, cried, cursed, because we were not there. And those who report the facts cannot tell us all the details involved, all the truth, because they are limited by their own focuses and circumstances.

When we see that a new building was built, we learn the name of the owner. However we do not know the names of the bricklayers, the engineers, the painters, the carpenters, or their lives, what happened to them while building, while working on that project. We do not know if some workers died while building the bridge we are now passing over, or about their lives and their feelings. These facts are forever lost. History is not fair in this sense. History omits vital details from the past, as well as it can invent new facts and make them seem true to the ones who will come after. I have the impression the narrator in the last chapter of *Foe*, like the Angel of History, would like to stay and awaken the dead. The narrator would like to awaken Friday in order to listen to his version of the story.

Also, in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin, calls attention to the fact that history empathizes with the victors, and that this empathy is a benefit only to them, so "empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers." (p. 363) In this sense we connect Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* with the victors, for he was a male, from Western Europe, who belonged to the middle class. Susan, a poor, illiterate woman, does not appear in Defoe's story.



“Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate...the spoils are carried along in the procession.” (p. 363) Susan Barton, the protagonist in Coetzee’s *Foe*, tells Friday, speaking rather to herself, something related to this: those terraces Friday helped Cruso to build were like tombs “those tombs the emperors of Egypt erected for themselves in the desert, in the building of which so many slaves lost their lives.”(*Foe*, p. 84)

They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another. A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain. (Benjamin, 2002, p. 363)

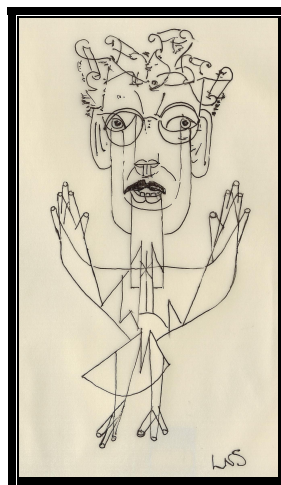
The narrative *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe can be seen as a document of barbarism in the sense that in the fiction of this time there is no room, or political will to read a book written by a woman. Even Mr Foe, three hundred years after considers to be better to tell her story in a picaresque novel, like Defoe did in *Moll Flanders*. Considering that *Robinson Crusoe* is a book about loneliness, it is a book in which a woman puts an end to the loneliness of a man lost in an island with a tongueless black man.

There is no room, in a construct like Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, to a character like Susan Barton. It is said that Defoe read about Alexander Selkirk’s story in a newspaper and then wrote the story. Nevertheless, Coetzee introduces a new dimension to the cannon book about the lonesome castaway, which happens to be also the first effort towards the release of a new literary genre, the novel. Coetzee, with his female narrator, inserts a companion to Friday, to engross the ranks of invisibility in the famous narrative: one is a wild native, a cannibal perhaps; the other is a woman, who should be home in England looking after her own affairs, but is not, she is here, meddling with the tale of loneliness of Mr. Cruso.

Coetzee, in his article in *The Marvels of Walter Benjamin*<sup>18</sup> says, “ his call (in the *Thesis*) for a history centered on the sufferings of the vanquished, rather than on the achievements of the victors, is prophetic of the way in which history-writing has begun to think of itself in our lifetime.” (p. 14)

He suggests the writer to focus the narrative from the point of view of the vanquished, from their sufferings, not only from the victors and their prizes. “For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. (The good tidings which the historian of the past brings with throbbing heart may be lost in a void the very moments he opens his mouth.) (Benjamin 2002 p. 362) Susan wants to pass the story of the island on, she does not want it to be lost. She considers that if she does not tell it the way it really happened, the details, everything will vanish when they die. Their story will die along with them.

According to Benjamin, if one wishes “to relieve an era” he should “blow out everything he knows about the later course of history.” (Benjamin 2002 p. 363) This is what Coetzee does in *Foe*. Coetzee re-shapes *Robison Crusoe’s* story, and “re-lives” its plot including Susan Barton’s presence – along with her wish to tell her own story, her view of the facts – to find out what difference this might make.




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<sup>18</sup> Coetzee’s article written in 2001 in which he tells the story of Benjamin fleeing from occupying France to neutral Spain. The police stops them. Their papers are not in order, desperate Benjamin takes an overdose of morphine and dies. Along with his belongings they do not find any signal of a manuscript

The *Thesis* is very relevant for the understanding of the novel *Foe* as well as for this paper for this article leaves us aware of the importance of both sides: the victorious and the defeated. Without the defeated we would not have the victorious and without the victorious we would not have the defeated. In History, in *Foe*, in this paper, in life itself we always have both sides to ponder. One does not exist without the other, in *Foe*, *Susan* does not exist without *Foe*, her version of the story would not exist without *Foe*'s. And *Foe*'s would not exist without *Robinson Crusoe*'s.

## 2.2 Linda Hutcheon on Historiography



***Historiographic metafiction represents not just a world of fiction, however self-consciously presented as a constructed one, but also a world of public experience.***

Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*

Linda Hutcheon, daughter of Italian immigrants born in Canada, graduated in Italian and English in 1969, held her M.A in Italian in 1971, and her Ph. D. in Comparative Literature in 1975. She is now Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto. Hutcheon's theoretical works include *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*; *The Politics of Postmodernism*;

*Narcissistic Narrative: the Metafictional Paradox; A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms; The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction; Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies*; and, most recently, *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death* with Michael Hutcheon.

In the nineteenth century Literature and History were seen as “*branches of the same tree of learning*” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 105). Afterwards there was a rupture which created two different subjects of study: the literary and the historical. This very separation has been challenged in postmodern art and theory, and the critics have been paying attention to their similarities rather than to their differences.

The similarities are that Literature and History seem to acquire their strength from verisimilitude rather than from any objective truth,

they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure and they appear to be equally intertextual deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality. (Hutcheon 1988, p. 105)

These characteristics are also shared by the ideas of Historiographic Metafiction. Novels which present such characteristics, as well as recent theories on history and fiction remind us that both history and fiction are historical terms and that their definitions and interrelations are historically determined and vary with time.

Postmodern theory and art have been paying attention to the separation of the literary and the historical. They have concentrated on the similarities rather than on the differences between them. The following features recur: their sources seem to come more from verisimilitude than from objective facts; they are both identified as linguistic constructs and they seem to be intertextual, developing the texts from the past with their own complex textuality. Nevertheless, these features are also implied in historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction, as well as the new theories about history and fiction, asks us to “recall that history and fiction are themselves

historical terms and that their definitions and interrelations are historically determined and vary with time.” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 105)

In the historical novel the protagonist should be a type, while in the historiographic metafiction the protagonists are anything but proper types. Historiographic metafiction both installs [inscribes] and then blurs the line between fiction and history. Lukács also adds some important considerations towards the subject, he considers that “the re-telling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality” (LUKACS, 1974, 42)

Nowadays, in both fictional and historical writing, the confidence in “empiricist and positivist epistemologies have been shaken- shaken but perhaps not yet destroyed” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.106) and this justifies the skepticism as well as the paradoxes of postmodern discourse. Linda Hutcheon says that “postmodernism is a contradictory cultural enterprise, one that is heavily implicated in that which it seeks to contest. It uses and abuses of the very structures and values it seeks to contest” (idem.)

In her book *Narcissistic Narrative*, Linda Hutcheon calls attention to the implications metafiction has on the theory of the novel. Reading and writing have always been an exercise of activity and creativity in novels that present traditional realism. The readers can identify with the characters, the actions, the settings, they are able to recognize the literary in their own reality. On the other hand, in this new form of metafictional novel, the reader cannot remain passive, he must be active, he cannot only read and find similarities with his real life. The reader now must decode, he is defied, his art of reading is challenged in order to understand what he is meeting. Now the novel demands that the reader must “be conscious of the work, the actual construction, that he too is undertaking, for it is the reader who, in Ingarden’s terms “concretizes” the work of art and gives it life.”( HUTCHEON 1984p. 39)

According to Hutcheon the new narcissistic fiction or metafiction allows or forces the novel of the past to be reevaluated, due to "its challenging of the inadequate, reified critical notion of realism based on narrow product mimesis alone" (HUTCHEON, 1984p. 39) The process of reading now becomes like the process of writing. It is no longer a passive process the way it used to be, it is active. It demands the reader to take control of the reading and make decisions to understand what he is reading.

Linda Hutcheon calls the modern metafiction a narcissistic narrative because it is the subject of its own "fiction making" (HUTCHEON, 1984 p. 39) The directions of literary history are changing and the literary critics are not the responsible for this. The texts themselves are altering the course of literary history.

Historiographic metafiction "is one kind of postmodern novel which rejects projecting present beliefs and standards onto the past and asserts the specificity and particularity of the individual past event. It also suggests a distinction between "events" and "facts" that is one shared by many historians. Since the documents become signs of events, which the historian transmutes into facts, as in historiographic metafiction, the lesson here is that the past once existed, but that our historical knowledge of it is semiotically transmitted. Finally, Historiographic metafiction often points to this fact by using the paratextual conventions of historiography to both inscribe and undermine the authority and objectivity of historical sources and explanations. "(HUTCHEON, 1988 pp. 122-123)

Historiographic metafiction challenges history and "plays upon the truth and lies of the historical record. Certain known historical details are deliberately falsified in order to foreground the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history and the constant potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error". It is here that post-modernism, metafiction, and post-colonialism can be said to meet as the work questions universal truths and histories by reflecting that narratives can be biased, and distort "truth". Linda Hutcheon writes, "[these] are novels that are intensely self-reflexive but that also both re-introduce historical context into metafiction and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge." Historiographic metafiction struggles with many of the issues post-colonialism attempts to grapple with, namely:

Identity and subjectivity, reference and representation, the intertextual nature of the past, ideology of the past, and the role of language.

According to Hutcheon, the new narcissistic fiction or metafiction allows or forces the novels of the past to be reevaluated, due to “its challenging of the inadequate, reified critical notion of realism based on narrow product mimesis alone” (HUTCHEON, 1984 p. 39) The discussion on the relation of art to historiography is not new. Aristotle contributed relevant considerations on the subject, saying that the historian could only speak about what had really happened, about the facts and events from the past; but the poet, on the other hand, could talk about what might happen and, doing so, he could deal with universal elements. The poet’s plot could present different units taking into consideration it was free from the historical writing. This does not mean to say that the characters and events from history could not appear on fiction and that some fictional events could not appear on history either.

When writing history, historians seem not to have any restraints of probability and possibility. However, they have been using the “techniques of fictional representation to create imaginative versions of their historical, real words.” (HUTCHEON, 1988 p. 106) we can see this on the postmodern novel as well as we can see the reverse. This confrontation is a feature of the postmodern novel in the sense that it does not restore or dissolve any part of the dichotomies such as past /present; real/imaginary; fictive/historical; general/particular, but rather wants to exploit them all.

History and fiction have always been considered as porous genres and there are many mutual influences between them. In the eighteenth century the concern was the relation of ethics to truth in narrative. As Josipovici says, in his book *The world and the book: a Study of Modern Fiction* (Josipovici, 1971, p.148) “From the start the writers of novels seemed determined to pretend that their work is not made, but it simply exists”. Defoe’s works made many people believe they were truth for presenting so many claims to veracity. Nowadays the contemporary readers of historiographic metafiction enjoy “this double awareness of both fictiveness and a basis in the real” (HUTCHEON, 1988 p.107)

The question of truth and reality has a long path. One can not assert that there is only one truth, but rather truths in the plural, for truths are relative to the “specificity of place and culture” (HUTCHEON, 1988 p.108) There is the suggestion that in the act of representing or rewriting the past, whether in fiction or history, we “open it up to the present to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological. (HUTCHEON, 1988 p. 110)

The problematizing of the nature of historical knowledge has been a relevant part of contemporary literary theory and philosophy of history. Paul Veyne, for instance, calls history “a true novel”. By saying this, he signals the conventions that these two genres have in common: “selection, organization, diegesis, anecdote, temporal pacing and emplotment.” We could say that, it does not mean that fiction and history are part of the same order of discourse. Although they are different they have some features in common such as the same social, cultural and ideological contexts and the same formal techniques.

The novels present social and political dimensions to some variable extent; on the other hand, historiography is structured teleological and coherent as a novel. Both novels and historiography can be betwixt and between. Hayden White {WHITE, 1987 p.44} argues that historians constitute their characters as possible objects of narrative representation, and Linda Hutcheon includes novelists in her book as well.

In Jacques Ehrmann’s point of view, “history and literature have no existence in and of themselves. It is we who constitute them as the object of our understanding.” (Ehrmann, 1971, p 36) According to Umberto Eco, there are three ways to narrate the past: the romance, the swashbuckling tale<sup>19</sup> and the historical novel. And Linda Hutcheon adds a fourth way of narrating the past: historiographic metafiction.

So, Hutcheon asks about the difference between historiographic metafiction and what one thinks of historical fiction from the nineteenth century, and states that

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<sup>19</sup> Swashbuckling Tale is a tale of adventure which blends fun and sadness.



the best answer is given by George Lukács, who points that the protagonist of the historical novel should be a type, a synthesis of the general and particular. On the other hand, the protagonist of historiographic metafiction is nothing but the proper types (. . .) the ex-centrics, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history.” (HUTCHEON, 1988 .p114)

Since Plato's and Aristotle's times, diegesis has been contrasted with mimesis the form that is *showing* rather than *telling* the thoughts or the inner processes of characters – through external action and acting. Diegesis is thought of as *telling*, the author narrating action indirectly and describing what is in the character's mind and emotions, while mimesis is seen in terms of *showing* what is going on in characters' inner thoughts and emotions through their external actions. Diegesis, however, is the main narrative in fiction and drama, the *telling* of the story by the author, in that he speaks to the reader or the audience directly. The author may speak through his characters or may be the invisible narrator or even the all-knowing narrator who speaks from above in the form of commenting on the action or the characters.

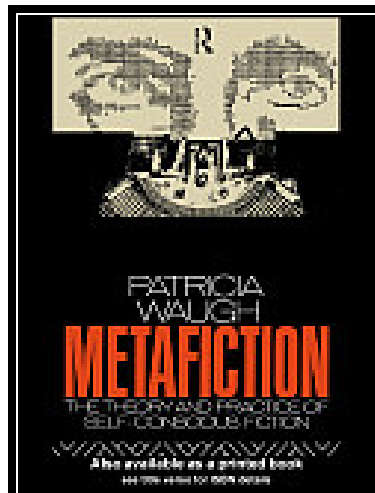
Diegesis may also concern elements, such as characters, events and things within the main or primary narrative. However, the author may include elements which are not intended for the primary narrative, such as stories within stories; characters and events that may be referred to elsewhere or in historical contexts and that are outside the main story and are thus presented in an extra-diegetic situation.

Diegesis, therefore, it is not the form in which a work of art represents reality, but that in which the author is the speaker who is describing events in the narrative he presents to the audience. It is in diegesis that the author addresses the audience or the readership directly to express his freely creative art of the imagination, of fantasies and dreams, in contrast to mimesis. In the arts, mimesis is considered to be re-presenting human emotions in new ways, and so re-presenting to the onlooker, listener or reader the inherent nature of the emotions and the psychological truth of the work of art. Mimesis is thus thought of as a means of perceiving the emotions of the characters on stage or in the book; or the truth of the figures as they appear in

sculpture or in painting; or the emotions as they are being configured in music, and being recognized by the onlooker as part of the human condition.

Historiographic metafiction is very relevant for this paper, for it explains the relationship between history and literature. In John Veyne's words History is a "true novel" (1971 p 10) Defoe wrote *Robinson Crusoe* due to Alexander Selkirk, a true story of a man on an island. Coetzee wrote *Foe* due to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*'s inventiveness and creativity. Also this book inspired Coetzee to write his Nobel lecture speech "*He and his man*".

### 2.3 Patricia Waugh on Metafiction



*Since I've started thinking about this story, I've gotten boils, piles, eyestrain, stomach spasms, anxiety attacks. Finally I am consumed by the thought that at a certain point we all become nothing more than dying animals.*

R.SUKENICK, *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories*.

Patricia Waugh's book *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self Conscious Fiction* opens with five quotations. I chose one of them to open up this part. All the quotations come from different times and they present some similarities such as self

consciousness about language, about the act of writing and literary form, a very simple, playful style of writing and a “celebration of the power of the creative imagination together with an uncertainty about the validity of its representation” (WAUGH, 1984, p.2) and also that they seem to “explore a theory of fiction through the practice of writing fiction” (idem). I chose Sukenicks’s for it summarizes it all.

Patricia Waugh is a general Professor on English Studies at the University of Durham, in the United Kingdom. She has published extensively in the field of modern fiction and criticism. Her research interests concentrate broadly in the area of literature and intellectual history in modern literature; aesthetics and literary theory; postmodernism; women's writing; literature and psychoanalysis; utopianism and dystopianism; the relations between science, politics and literature. Waugh’s name is very relevant in metafiction studies and she contributed to the development of the ideas proposed in my thesis.

The term metafiction, or metafictional practice, has been widely discussed in the last twenty years in reference to contemporary fiction. The authors are becoming interested in issues concerning writing fictions, and their books usually deal with self-reflexivity and with a formal uncertainty. This term has been widely discussed by literary critics in several ways. One of the most simplified definitions we find in the words of John Barth, who says that metafiction “is a novel that imitates a novel rather than the real world.” (Currie. 1995, p. 34) Patricia Waugh goes further stating that it is a “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to itself as an artifact to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality.” (WAUGH, 1984, p. 5); a plot which is non linear, it has no beginning, nor middle, nor end, it does not follow the realistic patterns; a novel that contains footnotes and continues the story while comments on itself, it is a story that prepares the reader for what comes at the end, that anticipates the reader’s reaction. Nevertheless, as Patricia Waugh states “although the term ‘metafiction’ might be new, the practice is as old (if not older) than the novel itself (WAUGH, 1984 p.5)

The term “metafiction”<sup>20</sup> seems to have first appeared in an essay written by the novelist and literary critic William H. Gass<sup>21</sup> in his nonfiction work *Fiction and the Figures of Life*, published in 1970. Nowadays, this term has been broadly used to describe works which show a character writing or reading a novel, or featuring the author as a character in the story; a novel that presents characters who are conscious that they are in a story, in a fictional work, characters that express awareness that they are in a work of fiction, acting according to the way they would expect personages to do.

Taking these considerations into account we come to the conclusion that metafiction does not concern the creation of a new novel or a new story, but rather the recreation and representation of something that previously already existed. Waugh even says that the major intention of metafiction is to “explore a theory of writing through the practice of writing.”(WAUGH, 1984, p. 2).

Accuracy, or even truth of detail is irrelevant in the historical novel to achieve historical faithfulness, and it usually assimilates the data to lend a feeling of verifiability. On the other hand, in historiographic metafiction there are two ways to contest this, the play upon the truth and lies of the historical data, and the uses of historical data, but rarely assimilating such data.

Historical characters play secondary roles in the historical novel as if to hide the joins between fiction and history in a formal and ontological sleight of a hand. In its turn, this ontological join is seen as a problem in metafictional self reflexive novels.

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<sup>20</sup> The prefix *meta* in Greek means “after”. The term metafiction has been vague since its appearance in 1970 in William H. Gass’s essay entitled “Philosophy and the Form of Fiction”. He used this term to refer to the new texts that were appearing in the 60’s in America, which break with the tradition that dominated the American literature so far. (<http://tunes.org/wiki/term.html>)

<sup>21</sup> William Howard Gass was born on July 30, 1924, in Fargo, North Dakota, US. He attended Wesleyan University, and got an AB in Philosophy from Kenyon College in 1947, and his PhD, on Philosophy from Cornell University in 1954. Gass has taught at the College of Wooster, Purdue University and at Washington University, where he retired in 1999. Gass is still an emeritus professor there. *Omensetter’s Luck* (1966), *In The Heart of the Heart of the Country* (1968), *Willie Master’s Lonesome Wife* (1968), *The First Winter of My Married Life* (1979), *Culp* (1986), *The Tunnel* (1995), and *Cartesian Sonata* (1998). Are among his fiction works.

They cannot see the way to know the past, they cannot see how we can know the past now.

Although metafiction is often a relevant part of postmodern works, we cannot classify it as if one could not exist without the other. Metafiction is one feature of postmodernism, we could say, but works which are postmodern are not always metafictional, neither works which are metafictional are always postmodern. *Hamlet*, for instance, is an early example of metafictional work, contrasting with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Metafiction can be found as far back as Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. It came to prominence in the early 60's through authors as John Barth, Robert Coover, and William H. Gass. The classic examples of the kind include Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*, Coover's *The Babysitter*, and *The Magic Poker*, and Gass' *Willie Master's Lonesome Wife*.

According to Noah Marshall-Rashid and Sarah Schnable in their article "Metafiction and JM Coetzee's *Foe*" written in 2001, metafiction is described "as self-conscious, narcissistic, introspective, introverted, and auto representational" and there are several features which allow the reader to identify a work as being metafictional or not.

The first feature quoted by Rashid and Schnable is that metafiction works and employs intertextual references and allusions by examining fictional systems, incorporating aspects of both theory and criticism. Also, when it creates biographies of imaginary writers, and when it presents and discusses fictional works of an imaginary character.

The author introduces himself into the narrative so that he is able to comment and get involved with the characters of the fiction. "Metafictional authors directly address the audience and question how narrative conventions can filter reality. Metafiction tends to flaunt itself as subverting reality and exaggerating instability." Thus the "novel must display reflexivity, or self-examination." (HUTCHEON, 1987,p. 122)

*Is writing not a fine thing, Friday?*

*Are you not filled with joy to know that you will live forever,  
after a manner?*

The question above is posed by Susan Barton, the fictional author of *Foe*, by J. M. Coetzee. This technique is referred to by Waugh, as she says that “metafictional texts explore the notion of alternative worlds by accepting and flaunting the creation/description paradox, and thus expose how the construction of contexts is also the construction of different universes of discourse.” (WAUGH 1984, 90)

Susan Barton is a good example which Waugh could have quoted in her book for she is a character with no substance. When the reader finishes reading the novel he may ask to himself, “Did Susan really exist?” “Was she ever really present in Cruso’s story?” “Throughout many metafictional novels, characters suddenly realize that they do not exist, cannot die, have never been born, cannot act” (WAUGH, 1984, p. 91) Does Susan really have a story of her own, does her story start when she is rescued by Friday at the shore of the island?

Waugh reminds us that, “although literary fiction is only a verbal reality, it constructs through language an imaginative world that has, within its own terms, full referential status as an alternative to the world in which we live. (WAUGH, p.100)

‘However, metafictional texts which introduce real people and events expose not only the illusion of verisimilar writing but that of historical writing itself. The people and events here may match those in the real world, but these people and events are always re-contextualized in the act of writing history. Their meanings and identities always change with the shift in context. So history, although ultimately a material reality (a presence) is shown to exist always within ‘textual’ boundaries. History, to this extent, is also fictional, also a set of alternative worlds.’”(Waugh, 1984, 9 106)

In Coetzee’s fiction, Susan looks for a writer (Foe) in order to make him tell their story, and thus preserve the memory of her experience on the island. Foe is introduced as “the author who had heard many confessions and was reputed a very secret man.” (*Foe*, p 48) In this sense, the character Foe borrows from Daniel Defoe,

living historical person who was not only a writer, but the writer who (according to Ian Watt) created this new literary genre, the novel! (WATT, 1994, p. 92) But not only Daniel Defoe is taken from History and put into this fiction. Crusoe, the castaway on the desert island takes us to Defoe's Crusoe, in *Robinson Crusoe*. Defoe's Crusoe, by the way, had also been "borrowed" from the real shipwreck involving Alexander Selkirk<sup>22</sup>, the man who had been a castaway on an island.

Patricia Waugh raises the question that telling stories is telling lies, and calls attention to the idea of truth and reality. Metafiction, in her words, "draws attention to the creation/description paradox which defines the status of all fiction" (WAUGH, 1984, p. 88)

Even among metafictional writers we can notice some differences in relation to the accurate connection of everyday world, real life to the world of fiction. Some writers such as Doctorov, Vladimir Nabokov, or Iris Murdock, suggest that "reality exists beyond text certainly but may only be reached through text" (WAUGH, p.89) Other writers like Donald Barthelme and Gilbert Sorrentino suggest that there is only one difference between fiction and reality or better that literary fictions are constructed entirely with language and this allows certain freedoms" (WAUGH, p. 89)

Taking this into account, there is no need for the implication that "telling stories is telling lies." According to Plato's concept of literature, the imaginative, creative, freedom is, and can be, justified. Therefore, it looks as if, so far, no one has yet established the real nature of 'truth'.

In order to better define this "ontological status of literary fiction" (WAUGH, 1984, p.90), philosophers have created two categories. The first one exposes the "falsity theorists" who believe that fictionists are liars: the second shows the "non referentiality theorists" whose argument is that it is not appropriate "to talk about the truth referring to the status of literary fiction" (WAUGH, 1984, p. 90)

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<sup>22</sup> The real castaway was born in 1676 and died in 13 December, 1721. Selkirk was a sailor who lived on the uninhabited Island of Juan Fernandez in the Chilean Sea far off in the Pacific Ocean for four years. He told his story to the Captain Woodes Roger, who published it. Nowadays the name of this island is Island of Robinson Crusoe, showing that, if history interferes with fiction, fiction always does interfere in history.

Many metafictional novelists adopt one of these two categories, however some of them created a third position that is followed by most metafictional writers nowadays. This third category was first suggested by John Fowles in his novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The reference to fiction suggested by Fowles is "as worlds as real as, but other than the world that is. Or was." (WAUGH, 1984, p.86) This category is referred to as 'alternative worlds'. "Metafictional texts explore the notion of 'alternative worlds', by accepting and flaunting the creation/description paradox, and thus expose how the construction of contexts is also the construction of different universes of discourse." (WAUGH, 1984, p. 90.)

Regardless of the philosophical point of view, the fact is all metafictional writers and aestheticians face two problems when trying to explore the relations between fiction and reality. The first problem is related to the paradox of character identity, and the second one is the question of referentiality, "the status of literary fictional discourse".

If we take the first problem into consideration we could think of Susan Barton as a character of fiction who "both exists and does not exist; he or she is a non entity who is a somebody" (WAUGH, 1984, p.91). Susan Barton is a non entity, she only exists if Foe keeps on writing. Not only Susan Barton, but Friday as well. In *Foe*, it reads "more is at stake in the history you write, I will admit, for it must not only tell the truth about us but please its readers too. Will you not bear in mind, however, that my life is drearily suspended till your writing is done." (*Foe*, p. 63)

Susan Barton is a fictional character created by Coetzee. As a character, within the fiction, she feels she will only become "real" if her experience is registered by the fictional author Foe in his fiction. Or rather, she will only feel "real" after she is turned into a character by an author. In this sense she is unreal. On the other hand, even though she is not a person, she still exists, she exists in her particular world.

Many characters in metafictional novels, suddenly realize that "they do not exist, cannot die, have never been born, cannot act. (WAUGH, 1984, p. 91) This



reminds us of Susan. She is a character who may never have been born, she is a non substantial character. She cannot write the story she wants, this act she cannot accomplish, still she tries,

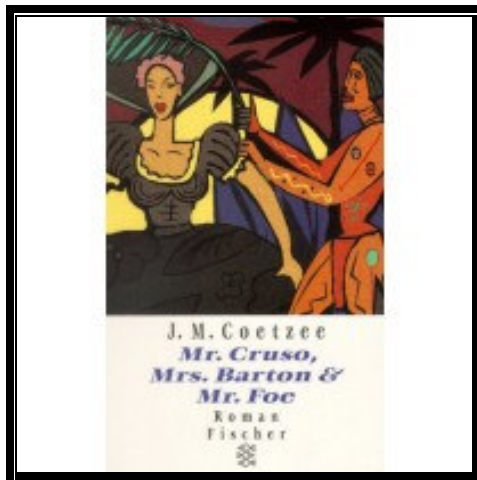
All of which makes up a story I do not choose to tell. I choose not to tell it because to no one, not even to you, do I owe proof that I am a substantial being with a substantial story in the world. I choose rather to tell of the island, of myself and Crusoe and Friday and what we three did there: for I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire. (*Foe*, p. 131)

Patricia Waugh states that the questions of the ontological status of fictional writers and the referentiality of fictional language cannot be separated. She says this in relation to the notion of naming. Nowadays readers refer to the characters of the novels they are reading as if to friends or relatives, exclusively by their names. In traditional fiction names are used as an attempt to cover the evidence that there is not any variance to differ the name from the thing named. Metafiction gives attention to this problem of reference.

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### 3 MY READINGS

#### 3.1 MY READING of COETZEE' NOVELS IN RELATION TO *FOE*



The first of Coetzee's novels I read was *Foe*. I felt so much in love by the novel and J M Coetzee that I read all his other novels. Hence, you can not avoid finding similarities or establishing connections among them .. I tried to read his whole work in order to understand *Foe* better. Also I think I understand a novel better after reading more works by the same author So far I have read all of his works published and I found out that all of them are interrelated. I will try to make some relations among them and more specifically with *Foe* that is the focus of this paper.

The second novel that came to my hands was *Life and Times of Michael K*. When reading this novel I was taken back to Kafka's *The Trial*. The atmosphere is depressing; there is no way to run. Remember that Kafka's main characters names were always one letter, mainly K. The main character Michael K is always like that sometimes you forget you are reading Coetzee and you have the impression you are

reading Kafka. Both protagonists, Kafka's Joseph K and Coetzee's Michael K share not only the name, but also a feeling of punishment for something they do not know. They both accept this punishment ignoring its reason. Both authors create the same environment atmosphere.

This novel is divided into three parts. The first part, is a third person narration and tells of Michael K, a hare-lipped non intelligent gardener, who tries to run away from the South African war during times of apartheid. (The character is like that hybrid animal mentioned by Kafka in his tale. "*A Crossbreed*") This novel is about the way he wanted to take his dying mother to the rural area called Prince Albert, where she had spent her girlhood days. His sick mother dies on the way and he finally reaches that place with her ashes. Nevertheless, there is not a small trace connecting what he sees with what his mother used to tell him, and the place that he faces now is an abandoned dirty site with some goats.

This journey Michael and his mother take is similar to the one Susan and Friday's in the streets of London before they reach Foe's house. The feelings they share are the same.

In order not to be captured Michael goes to the mountains and builds him a place to hide, a kind of hole on the earth. He gets weaker and weaker due to lack of good food, he only eats insects and some seeds. The best food he gets is the pumpkins he has planted. Besides he does not seem to need it the way other people do. He spends most of his time sleeping in this cave he digs to live. After some time, he is captured almost unconscious.

The second part of the novel is narrated in the first person, however, he is nameless. This narrator knows the past of the characters as well as their thoughts and feelings. He has some concerns towards Michael's story. He wants to know it. And it reminds me of Susan who wanted to know Friday's history. He even writes a letter to Michael explaining him why he should tell his story. Nevertheless this letter is never read. Michael never gets it. The letter is full of questions that are never answered.

Something else quoted in this letter that reminds me of Susan and Friday is the question of being substantial. In *Foe* it reads, in relation to this question of substantiality, when Foe and Susan are discussing about the girl who pretends to be Susan's daughter.

"No, she is substantial, as my daughter is substantial and I am substantial; and you too are substantial, no less and no more than any of us. We are all alive, we are all substantial, we are all in the same world." (*Foe* p152)

The narrator, in *Life & Times of Michael K* says in his letter to Michael that he is going to die, he is going to be more and more unsubstantial. That he is going to die and his history is going to die along with, it is going to disappear, as it had never existed, forever unless he listens to him and tells his story. He says that we all are inside history but Michael has run away from it when he escaped from the war, floating on time observing the seasons without interfering in the course of history, he does the same as a grain of sand would do. He finishes his letter saying that no one will ever remember Michael but himself because he does not want to tell his story. His story is going to finish with his life.

This is also Susan's worries. This is the reason why she wants to write the story of the island. She wants to pass the story on. She does not want those facts to die with her. This is another similarity between these two novels.

Michael runs away from this camp and the narrator, we realize afterwards, is the pharmacist. The pharmacist, whose name we do not know, pledges to Noel, the man who is in charge of the place, to forget Michael, not to denounce that he escaped in order not to be persecuted. He pledges Noel to put an end in Michael's story.

In *Foe*, Susan uses to speak about the island as if it were the world, or at least their world. Here, in this novel, the camp is their world. The third and last chapter is in third person narration. It tells about Michael in the city where the story began, Sea

Point. What is worth mentioning here is that Michael thinks his life is insignificant, it is not worth being passed on, and being told, or better he simply does not know how to tell a story, how to keep the interest. On the streets he finds some people like him. And they want K to tell them his story. Again he does not say a word. What can he say? Do they want him to open his heart and tell them a history of a life lived in a jail? People want to know about all jails he has lived in as if he were a rat or a bird or a monkey. If he had learnt to tell his history in the orphanage where he spent his childhood, he would tell them about his life on jails where everyday he used to look far, year after year, dreaming of facts and experiences he would never be able to live. When he finished telling his story people would shake their heads felling pity, or angry. But he is just someone who does not tell his story because he lives in silence. Michael has a meaning, the same as Friday's.

*Waiting for the Barbarians* is a novel divided into five chapters. When reading the novel I felt a strange kind of feeling, a kind of intractable taste in my mouth, a kind of fear and of course, it evoke us, the homonymous poem by Konstantinos Kavafis.<sup>23</sup> (1864-1933)

The novel is about a magistrate of a settlement frontier, we presume it is in South Africa. He witnesses Colonel Joll's cruelty towards people. Colonel Joll is a man who is in charge of finding enemies of the Empire in the desertic areas in their land. The magistrate sees the way Colonel Joll treats the prisoners and considers them acceptable and necessary for the security of the people. Nevertheless, cruelty has a limit for the magistrate and he tells Colonel Joll the way he truly feels towards the prisoners. This fact along with the magistrate relationship with a barbarian girl who is temporarily blind and cripple due to the tortures received, made him the new object of the Empire suspicion to Colonel Joll. Then the prisoners are released, and this girl is left on the streets begging. The magistrate invites her to sleep in his room however their relationship is not sexual but based on emotional needs. They both share a strange ritual where the magistrate washes the girl. She soon recovers her vision and she can walk a little better.

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<sup>23</sup> See the whole poem in the Coda to this work.

This journey takes several weeks and when he returns to the settlement Colonel Joll charges him with treason and sends him to prison. There he is tortured and humiliated in order to confess his treason, nevertheless he does not confess it and pledges for a trial in order to prove his innocence.

The Magistrate decides to return the girl to her people, and here I remembered Michael K's journey to take his mother back to her hometown and also Susan's try to send Friday back to his island.

Susan wanted to send Friday back to Africa, she was afraid that they could sell him as a slave instead of giving him freedom, though.

"Was I too suspicious? All I know is, I would not sleep easy tonight if Friday were on the high seas destined a second time, all unwittingly, for the plantations.. A woman may bear a child she does not want, and rear it without loving it, yet be ready to defend it with her life, Thus it has become, in a manner of speaking, between Friday and myself, I do not love him, but he is mine. That is why he remains in England. That is why he is here." (Foe p.111)

The magistrate of the novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* also reminds me in a sense of a character of Coetzee's *Disgrace* named David Lurie. Both David and the magistrate do not try to apologize for what they have done, or for what they have been. The magistrate denies having done something against the Empire as well as David refuses to apologize for having a sexual relationship with a student just because in their inner minds they have done nothing wrong. They both are strange characters for they value their own principles more than physical and emotional security and money.

If we are about to reach a kind of conclusion after reading this book, it would be that Human beings are their own enemies, the barbarians they wait for are nothing more than themselves and if they have to find convenient scapegoats to project their interior demons it falls to anyone who they can call "Other". If barbarians do not exist,

we have to invent them, we have to project them in others. Or, as Pogo said, "We have met the enemy, and he is us."

As we are talking about David, let us make some comments on *Disgrace*. This novel is divided into twenty four small chapters and it deals with the question of loss, exploitation and lack of hope. This character, David Lurie loses his job, his reputation, his dreams to reach a successful life. He is an English language teacher twice divorced who used to have a regular sexual relationship with a prostitute until the day when he sees her in a different environment walking down the streets with two kids. Afraid of being discovered by her husband now that a client has seen her on the streets, she gives up her life as a prostitute, David then finds out her telephone number and calls her, she denies the fact that she knows him.

As he does not have any interest in any other prostitute of that place he starts to court a student in his Literature class, Melaine Isaacs. They make love, she even sleeps in his house, she misses the mid term test and he gives her a grade seventy although she has not accomplished it. Melanie along with her ex boyfriend, or boyfriend, it is not clear in the novel, denounce the harassment. The authorities of the university want him to apologize, want him to say he is not going to repeat this, they want him to say that he regrets having an affair with the girl. But he does not regret it, it was a valuable relationship for him. He denies saying something he does not feel. He is kind of in love with her. For him, it was not only a sexual relationship. It seems that if he had regretted this fact he would not have lost his job. Everything they wanted was a regret.

So he is condemned, he loses his occupation due to sexual harassment and goes to his daughter's farm in the Eastern Cape. His daughter, Lucy, used to live there with a girl, but this girl has gone away, it is not quite clear but Lucy is a lesbian. There, David works in the farm, and also helps Bev, a kind of veterinarian who puts down the animals when they are not wanted anymore or very sick.

Because of the problems in the country, Eastern Cape becomes a place of rape, torture and robbery. Once three men appear at the farm and steal David's car, rape Lucy, and kill the dogs. David, on trying to defend his daughter is thrown on fire, he gets hurt. From this rape Lucy gets pregnant. David connects the three rapists with Petrus, a kind of employee of the farm. The youngest of the three is a relative of Petrus's. David tries to talk to Petrus, to solve the problems, to understand the facts, nevertheless, as Lucy says, they are in Africa. It seems that Petrus does not understand what he means, does not understand his language. This is a constant issue in the novel, everything about which David questions Lucy, she just answers: "...This is the country. This is Africa" (*Disgrace*, pg 124)

Several facts take place as David deals with the threat of more violence and crimes in the farm. David fears that they are coming back again. Petrus proposes a kind of "marriage" to Lucy so that she can be protected in this land. Petrus has already had two wives. In the meanwhile, David starts having an affair with Bev and goes to the city where Melaine's parents live and has dinner with her family. Her father tells him that he is not giving up the process because David deserves it, and he will receive what he deserves.

He tries to persuade Lucy to leave Eastern Cape, he is selling his apartment so that she can use the money to start her life in Ireland where her mother lives. However she does not accept any of his ideas and he does not have another alternative as to live there in Eastern Cape as well as to take care of her, even at a small distance. Unable to get along well with Lucy, David finds himself a place to live near the clinic building. He thinks about what it is like to be a grandfather. His end is hopeless and he ends up killing the dog that has become his friend, his only friend in that lost sad place.



Bev asks him when he takes the dog to the room where they kill the animals: “Are you giving him up “. And he answers...” yes I’m giving him up” ( *Disgrace* p .220) David has given up everything.

Chapter sixteen of *Disgrace* is a very relevant one because it reminds me of Elizabeth Costello, another main character in Coetzee’s work. In this chapter David Lurie thinks of dogs situation before they are put down. When he is driving the car taking the corpses of the dead dogs to be incinerated, he thinks the dogs know what will happen to them when they are going to the room where they will die and they accept it, they lick you showing forgiveness. Some of them can even sway their tails trusting that you know what is better for them. These thoughts could be the ones by Elizabeth Costello found in the novels *Elizabeth Costello* and *The Lives of Animals*.

Mrs Curren from the novel *Age of Iron* reminds me of Susan for she nurtures the alcohol addicted homeless Vercueil in the same way that Susan nurtures the black tongueless slave Friday. There will always be an aspect of a novel to remind you from another you have already read before. There are connections among them.

The novel *Age of Iron*, divided into 4 big chapters, deals more with apartheid than any others he has written, and not only about apartheid per se but also about the shame of living or having to live with it. The word shame repeats overtly in the text. “That price I used to think would have to be paid in shame: in a life of shame and a shameful death, un lamented in an obscure corner”( *Age of Iron* p. 164) I strove always for honor, for a private honor, using shame as my guide. ( *Age of Iron* p.165)

When thinking about her daughter living in the USA, she imagines people asking her about where she is from. She says her daughter will always answer with a half of a sentence. “I was born in Africa, in South Africa” ( *Age of Iron* p.75) and the second half never comes, it hangs in the air. The second half would be that one day

I will be back, or I intend never to come back. And she knows which is the second half her daughter would say, because of her shame of living in a country like that.

Mrs Curren is dying from a cancer and she believes she has this disease due to apartheid and the violence it brings. 'I have cancer from the accumulation of shame I have endured in my life,' she says. 'That is how cancer comes about: from self-loathing the body turns malignant and begins to eat away at itself.' ( *Age of Iron* p. 145)

Mrs Curren is a retired teacher at Cape Town University, she used to teach Classics. She lives alone since her divorce, but now her ex husband had already died .Also her daughter emigrated to the United States swearing never to come back again to that place where Apartheid was in power. Mrs. Curren misses her daughter and writes to her all the time; she wants this letter to be sent after her death. Everyday she writes to her daughter about her feelings, her shame, about the situation of the country.

The novel is Mrs. Curren's whole letter. She took three years to have this letter accomplished, from 1986 to 1989 and it is divided into four parts. This long letter does not have inverted commas like Susan's letter to Foe.

In *Youth*, we have John, who was born in South Africa and goes to London. He does not enjoy his life in South Africa, he dreams of leaving that country and never coming back. In London, he wants to become a writer. He reads many books and thinks of the authors and their lives, sometimes he compares them to his. He is very lonely, and he even thinks about the fact that he is so lonesome in a city where there are so many people. His thoughts and ideas are only divided into sex and the act of writing. Besides thinking so much about sex, John can be considered as a cold man. The women who passed through his bed are not important. He does not feel real lust for any woman. His acts are mechanical without passion as everything in his life.

Letters play an important role in Coetzee's work. *Age of Iron* is a letter, *In Life and Times of Michael K*, a letter is written telling about Michael's situation, In *Foe*,

Susan writes a letter to Foe, and the most interesting though is that these letters are never read. In *Disgrace*, David, besides living in the same house as his daughter, writes her a letter and she answers him with a letter too. It is easier to write what you think than speak directly to the person.

“Writing is not doomed to be the shadow of speech. Be attentive to yourself as you write and you will mark there are times when the words form themselves on the paper de novo, as the Romans used to say; out of the deepest of inner silences. 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?” (Foe p 143).

To be a teacher is common in Coetzee’s novels. Maybe because Coetzee himself is one. Most of Coetzee’s main characters are teachers. Mrs. Curren is a retired one, David Lurie, is a teacher.

In *Age of Iron* and *Foe*, Mrs Curren and Susan Barton instinctively nurture the oppressed, in the first case , a homeless alcohol addicted man and in the second, a tongueless black slave. Nevertheless they only have a vague idea of who such people might be internally, they have no idea towards the way they really feel. These two women do not consider their nurtured men’s own needs to be --gender, language and culture stand immutably out of question.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Life and Times of Michael K* and *The Master of Petersburg*, men reach out from guilt and the desire for connection but with even less success than the women.

The novel *The Master of Petersburg* also starts with a gloomy atmosphere for in the very first pages you learn that the main character of the story, Dostoevsky himself, is visiting Petersburg because his stepson, Pavel, has just died. Dostoevsky, in his late middle ages, prey to epilepsy, despite of the secret police and the creditors’ treat tries to find out if Pavel committed suicide or if he was killed. Another

question that is in his mind is whether the boy loved him or hated him during his short lifetime.

You feel terribly sad and sympathetic with the character's grief when he cries on the tomb of the boy and when he puts on his suit in order to try to feel his feelings. Another very deep part is when Dostoevsky cries on the boy's pillow trying to feel his smell and he thinks how long that beloved smell will remain. It seems that you are feeling that pain along with the character.

Coetzee chooses the words carefully and passes too much emotion through his sentences. Only the fact that Coetzee himself had lost a son could explain the truth carried on the words that are able to touch the reader so deeply.

Paul Rayment is the main character in J. M. Coetzee's *Slow Man*. He's an Australian 60-year old who was riding his bicycling when he was hit by a car. The result : he has a leg amputated. According to the circumstances he does not see any reasons to live anymore and retires to a flat he owns in Adelaide. He lusts for Marijana, the Croatian woman who takes care of him but she is married. He offers to pay school for her children what her husband refuses. Unexpectedly the novelist Elizabeth Costello arrives at Rayment's flat and tells him she wants him to be a character in her next book. She even offers him a blind woman to be his lover so that she can not see he does not have a leg. Rayment resists all of Elizabeth Costello's offers and he continues in his dilemmas;; how is he to fashion a life while he's still trying to find his place in the world? How can he have a life of success if he did not find his place in the world?

Susan also feels this feeling of displacement. She does not feel well anywhere, she does not feel home anywhere. In Chapter two, in her letters to Foe, June 1<sup>st</sup>, she confesses that her life in London is even worse than their life on the island.

"Have you taken residence in his attic, where you pass the time perusing through a spyglass the life we lead? If so, you will

believe me when I say the life we lead grows less and less distinct from the life we lead on Crusoe's island. Sometimes I wake up not knowing where I am." (Foe p.71)

## 3.2 PERSPECTIVES

### 3.2.1 Coetzee as the angel of History



A nameless painting shows Coetzee as an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, and his wings are spread. Coetzee is the angel of history, he is aware of the past as it really happened, he is able to move around in the past as well as in the present. Taking this into consideration we know how Coetzee is able to go to the past and see Defoe's story and come to the present and see Foe's.

The fourth chapter of the novel *Foe* is short, it has only 5 pages, however it is very elucidative. It is full of labyrinthic ideas and proposes a repetition of sentences which had already appeared before in the text.

I think it will be worth mentioning at this point that Coetzee himself as a Literature professor as well as a literary critic is aware of the many aspects which

enrich, embellish and give literary value to a text. Just to mention one of these aspects, Coetzee himself in one of his critic works called attention to the repetition of a sentence in a text, when mentioning “The Strike” by Yvonne Burgess. In a 1976 article named *The Composition of the Self in Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians* written by Debora A Castillo, she mentions the fact that Coetzee, calls attention to the first sentence of *The Strike* by Yvonne Burgess, pointing to the significance of the first sentence of a novel, to “its labyrinthine quality, to the daunting possibilities for analysis coded even in simple-sounding formulaic openings.”<sup>24</sup>

Taking into consideration Coetzee’s knowledge on literary criticism and literature in general, one must pay attention, when reading his novel, to the aspects which he focuses when he is a critic. So let us pay attention to the opening sentences of the chapters, and of the novel *Foe* itself. Coetzee has a reason why he opened the novel and the chapters with these words. What is the first sentence of the novel *Foe*? “At last I could row no further. My hands were blistered, my back was burned, my body ached. With a sigh, making barely a splash, I slipped overboard.” (*Foe* p. 5).

On page 11 these sentences come again, this is the moment when Susan is telling Cruso her story: “then at last I could row no further. My hands were raw, my back was burned, my body ached. With a sigh, making barely a splash, I slipped overboard and began to swim towards your island. The waves took me and bore me on to the beach. The rest you know” (*Foe* p.11)

Chapter 4 starts with the sentence “The staircase is dark and mean.” (*Foe* p.153) and if we go back to chapter 3 we can see that its opening sentence is “The staircase was dark and mean” (*Foe* p.113) The Third chapter is in the past tense, and the fourth chapter is in the present tense. The present chapter which is the fourth is narrated by Coetzee himself. It is he who enters the house and sees that now in the present “the staircase is dark and mean”.

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&se=gglsc&d=98942680>. The Composition of the Self in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Debora A Castillo

Not only the repetition of the sentences is important to Coetzee in order to produce a relevant literary effect, but also the repetition of ideas and scenes. Chapter four shows the narrator entering the house. And two pages on the narrator enters again, repeating the previous scene and then realizes some features he had not observed before giving them new hints. Lets us focus on these aspects now, on the labyrinth and spiral scenes that come and go, with different aspects and nuances at each time it is narrated.

Chapter four starts with the narrator, Coetzee himself, in my reading, entering the house "The staircase is dark and mean"(Foe p.153) ( the tense here is present) He sees a body on the landing, he lights a match and sees a female body which makes no sound or stirs. "She weighs no more than a sack of straw" We presume it is the girl who claimed to be Susan's daughter, although the narrator does not say anything about this. He continues his search in the house and the only sound he hears is from a rat or a mouse running across the floor. He sees a man and a woman. Again, the narrator does not mention names. Nevertheless I presume they are Susan and Foe. "They lie side by side in bed not touching" (Foe p.153) The narrator speaks as if we, the readers, knew whom he is talking about, that is why he does not mention names, but only the personal pronoun.

He lifts their covers and then holds his breath afraid to feel the bad smell that may come from their corpses, but what he feels is a good smell of lilac instead. He does not spend time with them. They are not the reason he is there. His search is for Friday, and his pursuit continues. Coetzee is afraid the air of the room can extinguish the light of his matches.

He kneels and gropes and then finds Friday stretched on the floor. Coetzee touches Friday's feet then his face. His skin is not cold though. The narrator finds a faint pulse in his throat "as if his heart beat in a far-off place". (Foe p.154) What place would it be? Would it be the island? Differently from Susan and Foe, whose lips had receded uncovering their teeth, Friday's teeth are clenched. Coetzee tries to part them pressing his fingernail between his rows. The smell here is of old dust. Tired, the narrator lies on the floor next to Friday with his face down.

Some time goes by, and Friday “stirs and sighs and turns on to his side. The sound his body makes is faint and dry, like leaves falling over leaves” (Foe p.154) Coetzee sees his teeth part and gets closer in order to hear any sound which can leave Friday’s mouth. He lies near him, his ear in Friday’s mouth, waiting. Waiting for a narration.

Repeating Genesis words “At first there was nothing” (note that this sentence is the past) Coetzee continues his narration, but again changes the verb tense. “At first there is nothing” (Foe p.154) (here we have the present of be) then he starts listening to the sounds of the island: “as **she** said”<sup>25</sup>. This She is very important, for he mentions the pronoun, not the name, as if he, the narrator had already spoken about her before. The narrator is aware about everything Susan said, Coetzee, the angel of history, knows about the island, about all the facts and scenes inherent to them. The closer he gets to Friday, the clearer he listens to the other sounds concerning the island. “From his mouth, without a breath, issue the sounds of the island.”

The page finishes with this sentence and two asterisks as if it were the ending of the novel. However, next page starts with a new beginning. The narrator enters the house again. From his narration we know that the room is darker than before although it is a bright autumn day. He repeats the same sentence “I stumble over the body” (155) here he uses the definite article, in the previous page he used the indefinite article. The use of “The” here, shows that he knew what body he was talking about.

Differently from the previous narration, now he lights a candle. Now, Coetzee does not use the subject pronoun “They” to refer to Susan and Foe, but the word couple. “The couple in the bed lie face to face, her head in the crook of his arm” (Foe p.155) Friday is in a different position “he has turned to the wall” (Foe, p.155)

The narrator wants to make it much more than clear, he wants to make it explicit in every sentence that he has been there before, through the careful choices

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<sup>25</sup> Bold mine



of words and even sentences. Here we can see Coetzee as the angel of history, the one who can go to the past and see things the way they really happened. Coetzee as the angel of history is able to go back and forth, in the present and in the past to understand things better. Here he wants to, see a scar in Friday's neck: A sign of slavery, in his neck left by a chain or a rope. Towards this, Coetzee says "I had not observed this before" (Foe p.155) This second time he sees a box on the floor, he opens it and with the help of the candle he reads " Dear Mr. Foe, at last I could row no further" (Foe p.155) which are the opening words of the novel.

Continuing, we read the words from the first chapter again "With a sigh, making barely a splash, I slip overboard" (Foe p.155) With these words the Coetzee, the narrator is immediately transported to the island ( again as the angel of history with the power to go to the past and see the facts the way they really happened) "Around me on the waters are the petals cast by Friday. (Foe p.155) the boat bobs away and he drowns feeling the petals cast by Friday caressing his legs and body. "I am in the great bed of seaweed: the fronds rise and fall with the swell."(Foe p.155) "With a sigh, with barely a splash" he repeats. "I duck my head under the water. Hauling myself hand over hand down the trunks, I descend, petals floating around me like a rain of snowflakes." (Foe ps.155-156)

It would be very relevant to quote at this point the fact that Susan in one of her letters to Foe, mentions that she saw Friday making a kind of offering in the sea which she does not understand at that time

" But Friday was not fishing. After paddling out some hundred yards from the shelf into the thickest of the seaweed, he reached into a bag that hung about his neck and brought out handfuls of white flakes which he began to scatter over the water. At first I thought this was bait to lure the fish to him; but no, when he had strewn all his flakes he turned his logboat about and steered it back to the ledge, where he landed it with great difficulty through the swell." ( Foe p.31)

What was Friday doing? Was he in a way throwing those petals of flowers in honor of the people who died on a shipwreck which took place at that place exactly?

This place here, mentioned by Susan is the same where the narrator enters in the last chapter.

Through a dark hole made of petals of flowers, cast by Friday, the narrator finds a ship wrecked in which he enters. He then reaches the deck of the ship.

“I am below the deck, the port side of the ship beneath my feet, feeling my way along beams and struts soggy to the touch. The stub of candle hangs on a string around my neck. I hold it up before me like a talisman, though it sheds no light.”(156)

He never realized the sea could be so dirty. He continues anyway and finds a stairway and walks it up. The narrator knows exactly where to go. He does not hesitate any minute. Then he finds a closed door which he pushes putting his shoulder and is able to enter. He finally reaches the cabin of the ship

In the black space of this cabin the water is still and dead, the same water as yesterday, as last year, as three hundred years ago. Susan Barton and her dead captain, fat as pigs in their nightclothes, their limbs extending stiffly from their trunks, their hands, puckered from long immersion, held out in blessing, float like stars against the low roof. I crawl beneath them. (*Foe*, p.156-157)

Going on, he sees Friday. “half buried in sand” denoting the passing of time. The tides of years moved sand to bury his body. This is a strong aspect chosen carefully by the author to show that he has been there for a long time. He finds Friday and asks him “What is this ship? What is the meaning of this ship?”(*Foe* p.157) When we ask someone we presume that we can be answered. If he asks something to Friday, it is because he thinks he has conditions to answer, it is because he realizes that Friday is alive, not dead, like the others.

Coetzee, the narrator, does not give us any certainty in relation to this ship. Is it the ship in which Susan, and Friday were going to England, in which they were going away from the island? Or is this the one in which Susan was coming from Brazil, and shipwrecked which lead her to the island and gave a beginning for the novel.

However, Friday does not answer, for that is not a place of words. "This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday." (*Foe* p.157). Nevertheless, Coetzee tries to open Friday's mouth in order to hear the answers. "His mouth opens. From inside him comes a 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." (*Foe*, p.157)

According to some critics and readings, Susan Barton is an illiterate woman so in their account, this may be the reason why she can not have written the novel. Nevertheless I do not share their ideas. While some may see the following passage as a sign of her illiteracy, I see it in an opposite way. I see in this passage a sign of her understanding of language teaching. On page 145 of the novel it reads:

"On the slate I drew a house with a door and windows and a chimney, and beneath it wrote the letters HOUS. "This is the picture", I said, pointing to the picture" and this the word" .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 HOUS I had written."(145)

But Susan is not illiterate. It is clear in the text; she does not say she writes correctly the word house, she explicitly says the "sounds" of the word. She is just trying to teach Friday, the way people nowadays communicate through computer language. It is easier for kids to learn the words the way they hear it, in a shorthand way, not the way they are correctly written. It is easier to write what they hear exactly.

<sup>26</sup>Even when it is Portuguese she is speaking, she continues using the same method. On page 8 when she asks Friday if he could speak English, she says “Fala inglez” instead of “fala inglês”, that would be the correct graphic spelling.

Susan is so much aware of this that she explains in the continuation,

and Friday wrote the four letters H-O-U-S, or four shapes passably like them: whether they were truly the four letters, and stood truly for the word **house** and the picture I had drawn, and the thing itself., only he knew. (146)

There are some other important passages in the text which corroborates my idea that Susan is not an illiterate. On page 58, Susan is talking to Friday, she is explaining to him that Mr. Foe will tell their story. She explains that she has told Foe their story “using words” and then he will be able to know the particulars of them at the island. She is explaining these things for Friday when she finds a book also written by Foe and shows Friday. She explains about the story of the book, she tells him about its characters. So, if she knows about the book it is because she has read it. A person who can read is not an illiterate person.

Susan writes letters to Foe. Chapter 2 is all composed by letters from Susan telling Foe about the facts which are happening to her and to Friday as well as her thoughts, fears and feelings. A person who writes letters has the potentiality to write a book as well.

Also, Susan is not an illiterate; we can go further and say: she has culture. At the beginning of chapter three, Susan has just met Foe face to face and then is observing the stuff in his room. She then talks about how things are different in real life from what we imagined. Exactly here she mentions she recalls an author” reflecting that after death we may find ourselves not among choirs of angels but in some quite ordinary place, as for instance a bath house on a hot afternoon, with spiders dozing in the corners; at the time it will seem like any Sunday in the country;

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<sup>26</sup> As common computer language shorthanded expressions we have, for instance: hunni = honey, plz = please, b= be, r = are, w8 = wait, l8 = late. Let us see some sentences using this kind of written manner: U R 2 good 2 B 4 GOT 10. Translating into correct English: You are too good to be forgotten.

only later will it come home to us that we are in eternity.” (Foe p.114) and then Foe says: “It s an author I have not read” (Foe, p.114)

A person who recalls authors in the moment of speech, a person who makes quotations, and explains about her feelings taking into account the ideas of an author is not illiterate. Susan is not only a literate woman and she has much culture. She has read many books, she knows about characters. Her discussions, her conversation with Foe denote those of a person who is cultivated. Illiteracy certainly was not the reason why she did not write the novel.

In order to cooperate with the idea that Susan is cultivated we can recall that part of the novel, in Chapter III when she and Foe are conversing about the act of writing and she mentions the Muse<sup>27</sup>

Do you know the story of the Muse, Mr Foe? The Muse is a woman, a goddess who visits poets in the night and begets stories upon them. In the accounts they give afterwards, the poets say that she comes in the hour of their deepest despair and touches them with sacred fire, after which their pens, that have been dry, flow. Foe p.126

Susan knew about Greek and Celtic mythology. She read about the subject. This story to what she is referring to comes from the Celts. They believed that Muses could come at night and inspire people who had never done it before, people who had never had inspiration before to sing beautiful ballads.

Now we have two more alternatives to find out why Susan could not have written the novel. Either Susan has never been born or she died in the shipwreck before reaching the island, before the beginning of the story. In Chapter three, which is composed by Susan’s letters to Foe, there are some useful comments in which Susan gives hints to prove that she has never been born. She is telling in the letter that she was walking outside Marlborough along with Friday when she noticed a

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<sup>27</sup> Muses are a channel of inspiration for a poet. Muses according to Greek mythology, were the nine daughters of the god Zeus and Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory. The Muses were believed to inspire not only poets to write, but all artists to make any kind of art..

small parcel wrapped on the floor. When she started to unwrap it, she realized there was blood on it. She realized it was a body “stillborn or perhaps stifled (*Foe p.105*).It was the body of a girl. She asks herself who the girl was, she was perfect, the place around was all empty with no sign of anyone. She wrapped the baby as fast as she could, afraid people nearby could think she was responsible for her and could hale her before the magistrates. She gets away but she can not stop thinking about the child:

I could not put from my thoughts the little sleeper who would never awake, the pinched eyes that would never see the sky, the curled fingers that would never open. Who was the child but I, in another life? (*Foe, p. 105*)

This new born dead baby girl can be a hint that Susan has never existed. Also this idea is reinforced in chapter three when Susan is talking to Foe about one of this books where a character, Mrs Barfield had spent a whole afternoon, with a friend although she was dead. She then questions him if in his opinion ghosts can talk, and touch people and look like a person who is alive. Taking this conversation into account Foe replies:

My sweet Susan as to who among us is a ghost and who not I have nothing to say: it is a question we can only stare at in silence, like a bird before a snake, hoping it will not swallow us. (134)

“To who among us is a ghost” Us here, are we- the readers. This sentence is strong for she denounces that Susan died in the shipwreck or maybe that she has never been born. Susan is a ghost. She is dead. To reinforce that Susan died at the shipwreck, (this, if she had been born) we have the last and fourth chapter when the narrator enters the ship through the hole of petals made by Friday and it reads “ the water is still and dead, the same water as yesterday, as last year, as three hundred years ago. Susan Barton and her dead captain, fat as pigs in their nightclothes, their limbs extending stiffly from their trunks, their hands, puckered from long immersion.” (*Foe p.157*) Susan is there, she has been dead for a long time beside her dead captain.

This captain is the one from the merchant ship who helped her to leave Brazil and embark to Lisbon. As she has told Cruso during the trip from Brazil to Lisbon, the crew mutinied and they killed the captain who pleaded for his life.

'I was cast adrift by the crew of the ship yonder. They killed their master and did this to me' All at once, though I had remained dry-eyed through all the insults done me on board ship and through the hours of despair when I was alone on the waves with the captain lying dead at my feet, a handspike jutting from his eye-socket... (*Foe*, page 9)

This is what she tells, nevertheless she is a ghost who was killed along with the captain and has not just realized that. She is a ghost, who is among the living people ignoring her real disincarnated situation.

In the novel, *Foe*, Coetzee searches for Friday and tries to awake him, giving him the opportunity to speak. Nevertheless, Friday is mutilated; he has no tongue, so he can not tell their story. Foe does not seem to have interest in Susan, for he knows that she can not tell the story.

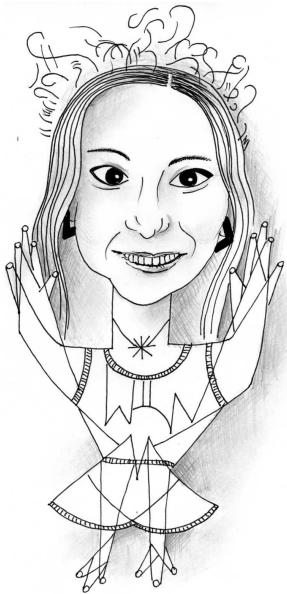
There is one single purpose why Coetzee enters the house and looks for Friday; there is one single purpose which leads this narrator to dive into the leaves: it is the narration itself. It is the narration whose narrator is Friday; he wants to listen to Friday's narration.

In the letter written on June first, in which she is confessing that she and Friday had a worse life in London than in the island., Susan creates a conversation with Foe in her mind in which she thinks of a possibility of having her existence ignored in the story. This is due to the fact that Robinson Crusoe, by Daniel Defoe is a solitary man, saved from the female presence. In her letter it reads:

Better had there been only Cruso and Friday,' you will murmur to yourself: "better without the woman" Yet where would you be without the woman? Would Cruso have come to you of his own accord? Could

you have made up Cruso and Friday and the island with its fleas and apes and lizards? I think not. Many strengths you have, but invention is not one of them. (*Foe*, p. 72)

### 3.2.2 I as the angel of History



A nameless painting shows me as an angel looking as though I am about to move away from something I am fixedly contemplating. My eyes are staring, my mouth is open, and my wings are spread. I am the angel of history, I am aware of the past as it really happened, I am able to move around in the past as well as in the present.

Taking Benjamin's ideas, now, I am supposed to look back and see the ruins of the past, of this story. I as the angel of History should read *Foe* again as if I have never read or heard about any other Crusos, Crusoes, or Fridays. I should erase Defoe's novel from my mind, and delete all the impressions I had towards these old characters presented to me in these previous books but I can not. I am not going to see the characters now for the first time, Friday and Cruso are old acquaintances of mine. Only Susan Barton is new, I have not heard of her before. I can not get to know them as if it were the first time.



Reading the novel we are taken back to what Patricia Waugh defines as metafiction as: " a tendency or function inherent in all novels." Though it is true that "the metafictional practice has become particularly prominent of the last twenty years (1960-80), . . . the term 'metafiction' might be new, the practice is as old (if not older) than novel itself" (5). To give a basic definition, metafiction is " [a] fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship about fiction and reality" (WAUGH, p. 2). These statements come to your mind for, something that calls your attention is that the novel itself is a fiction and reality. The names of the characters are sometimes real and sometimes fictional and, even those that are fictional, may allude to real names.

I researched about some names mentioned, and concluded that some names are characters from Defoe's novels, such as Dickory Cronke, Amy for instance and others are names of real English people who were Defoe's contemporaries, or at least, these names have some kind of connection with this author.

First of all, I researched the name Susan Barton. Does Barton have any relation to reality? I only found that Barton is a small town 163 miles far from London. Nevertheless, I saw that Daniel Defoe went there when he was alive and called it "a straggling, mean town noted for nothing but an ill-favored, dangerous ferry whilst the Hon" when he visited it.

Going back to the novel, Susan finds bills, reports, accounts, books of voyages, chronicles and also "a memorial of the life and opinions of Dickory Cronke, (who is he?)" among Foe's papers. (50 p.) I can answer Susan's question. Dickory Cronke is a character also created by Daniel Defoe. Dickory was born dumb in the County of Cornwall. He was a tinner's son. He had always been dumb until he is fifty eight years old, just some days before his death. The most interesting thing is that he then had the gift of speech, and he could not only speak about all his life memories but he could also speak about the way he would die.

In the novel *Foe*, Susan and Foe are talking about one of his characters, Mrs Barfield. She was the one who was already dead and had spent the whole afternoon with a friend conversing and embracing her without being aware of her condition. In fact, the name of this character, really written by Defoe in *A Relation of the Apparition of Mrs Veal*, published for the first time in 1705 is Mrs. Veal not Mrs. Barfield as they say in the novel. In fiction Mrs Veal is the name of the character who has appeared to her friend Mrs. Bargrave.

Wilkes, another name quoted in *Foe* also has a relation to Daniel Defoe and to Coetzee as well. James Wilkes is a writer who, as well as Coetzee, rewrote a work by Defoe *A Tour thro' the whole island of Great Britain*.<sup>28</sup> For rewriting Defoe's 13 letters, James Wilkes gives up 8 of them, using only 5. He uses each postcard in a different way; he takes small hints from Defoe's *Tour* and turns them into a contemporaneous style. *A DeTour*, by James Wilkes adds the De, Coetzee took off to write *Foe*.

In the novel *Foe*, the girl who claims to be Susan's daughter appears in Foe's house telling her story. She starts telling her story in order to persuade Susan to believe her. In the story Susan continues:

That she was born in Deptford in May 1702. That I am her mother. We sit in your drawing room and I explain to her that I have never lived in Deptford in my life, that I have never known a brewer, that I have a daughter, it is true, but my daughter is lost, she is not that daughter. Sweetly she shakes her head and begins a second time the story of the brewer George Lewes, my husband" [...] The brewer haunts gaming houses and loses his last penny. He borrows money and loses that too. To escape his

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<sup>28</sup> The name George Lewes borrows from the English writer, literary critic and philosopher who has been married to the author George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans). Lewes started Renscombe Press, his own editing house as a way of publishing his own work. He was born in April 18, 1817. Some of his works are: 1845–1846 *The Biographical History of Philosophy*, In 1847–1848 he wrote two works of fiction — *Ranthrope*, and *Rose Blanche and Violet; Robespierre* (1849).; *Life of Goethe* (1855), *Seaside Studies* (1858), *Physiology of Common Life* (1859), *Studies in Animal Life* (1862), and *Aristotle, a Chapter from the History of Science* (1864). Lewes died in November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1878. In: <http://www.enotes.com/salem-lit/genres/picaresque-fiction>.

creditors he flees England and enlists a rumored to perish. I am left destitute with a daughter to care for. I have a maidservant named Amy or Emmy. (Foe, pp. 75-6)

In this story told by the girl we have two interesting names. The brewer's name who is supposed to be Susan's Barton husband, and the father of this girl who is telling this story to Susan is named George Lewes. In reality, George Lewes,<sup>29</sup> is the name of an English Philosopher as well as a literary critic who lived with Mary Ann Evans, better known as George Eliot. They lived together in an extramarital relation from 1854 until his death in 1878.

The other interesting name quoted in this paragraph is Amy. Amy in *Foe* was, according to the girl's story, Susan Barton's maidservant who helped her to raise her daughter. Who is Amy in relation to Defoe? Is Amy the name of a character in one of Defoe's stories? Amy is a very important character in the novel *Roxana*. She is Roxana's loyal servant who does not abandon her even in the worst times of her life. She could be able to prostitute herself in order to give the money to Roxana if she asked. According to some critics there is a lesbian relation between them. Also, another interesting aspect concerning the occupation the brewer reminds us of Defoe. In the same novel *Roxana* the character with the same name was married very early in life, when she was 15 to a brewer's son.

In the novel *Foe*, Jack is the name of the boy who helps Foe to do the chores in his house. If we research the name Jack in Defoe's literature we can see that Jack is another character by Defoe from the book *Colonel Jack*<sup>30</sup> published for the first time in 1722.

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<sup>29</sup> His complete name was George Henry Lewes (April 18, 1817–November 28, 1878) was an English philosopher and literary critic. Some of his works include: 1845–1846 *The Biographical History of Philosophy*, In 1847–1848 he made two attempts in the field of fiction — *Ranthrope*, and *Rose Blanche and Violet; Robespierre* (1849). In 1853 he republished under the title of *Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences; Life of Goethe* (1855), *Seaside Studies* (1858), *Physiology of Common Life* (1859), *Studies in Animal Life* (1862), and *Aristotle, a Chapter from the History of Science* (1864).

<sup>30</sup> The History and Remarkable Life Of the truly Honorable Col. Jacque, also called Col. Jack, who was Born as a Gentleman , was a for many years Thief, and then he was Kidnapped to Virginia, after he Came back a merchant; he married five different Whores; went into Wars, behaved as a brave man. He was made Colonel of a Regiment, came over, and fled with the Chevalier. He dies as a General. In: [http://www.forbesbookclub.com/bookpage.asp?prod\\_cd=IPJOY](http://www.forbesbookclub.com/bookpage.asp?prod_cd=IPJOY)

Not only names of characters are mentioned in the text which shows a close relation to reality, but also names of places. I researched some of them

On page 92 in the letter addressed to Foe,

...what you know of your parentage comes to you in the form of stories, and stories have, but a single source" [ .. ] You are a father-born. You have no mother.. (*Foe*, p. 92)

What calls my attention at the beginning of this book is that idea of which characters can tell stories and which cannot. It is clear since the very beginning. Not only do the characters in the novel wonder about the concept of storytelling and truth, but Coetzee as the author seems to be defying or challenging the story told previously by Defoe. Friday is discarded since the very beginning, he can not speak, he has no tongue. Someone whom we do not know and will never be able to know has cut his tongue. He cannot tell what happened and at the same time, he can not write, he is an illiterate slave. Although Susan has tried (it was Foe's idea) to teach him several times how to communicate in order to know what has happened to his tongue. In her attempt to know the truth, she made some sketches in order to know the truth

" I took my sketches down to Friday in the garden. Consider these pictures, Friday, I said, Then tell me: Which is the truth? I held up the first. " Master Cruso," I said, pointing to the whiskered figure. "Friday," I said, pointing to the kneeling figure. "knife," I said, pointing to the knife." Cruso cut out Friday's tongue," I said; and I stuck out my own tongue and made motions of cutting it. "Is that the truth, Friday?" I pressed him, looking deep into his eyes: "Master Cruso cut out your tongue?" (*Foe* p.68)

In her attempt to teach Friday how to write, she gives him a child's slate along with a pen and tries to teach him some words which he can not recognize the

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symbols. The two ways you have to tell things are through writing and speaking. Since he cannot speak the only alternative to listen to his story is making him write.

There are some other ways of communicating, of telling how things happened though; drawing is an example. Like the paintings in the caves nowadays can tell us some facts about their past, Friday could draw in order to give us his story. Nevertheless, painting and drawing do not seem to interest him. And also, he does not seem to have any interest in telling his story, what happened to him, or the way his tongue was cut as well as his genitals.

Susan is so committed with the truth that she even tries to communicate with Friday through music. She has even tried a kind of communication through the language of music "...It occurred to me that if there were any language accessible to Friday, it would be the language of music. (*Foe*, p.96)

There may be many suggestions as to why Barton can't tell Robinson Crusoe's story. Throughout the first chapter (if we are to divide it into four chapters) of the book, Susan is very concerned about persons telling or writing down their life stories so that someone can learn about them in the future. This is important to her. This is exemplified by her saying the following to Crusoe:

"But seen from too remote a vantage, life begins to lose its particularity. All shipwrecks become the same shipwreck, all castaways the same castaway, sun burnt, lonely, clad in the skins of the beasts he has slain. (*Foe*, p18)"

Defoe's Crusoe used to keep a journal in order not to forget about the facts which happened to him during all those years he spent at the island alone and then with Friday. He used to count the years not to be lost in time wondering that some day he would come back to England. Coetzee's Cruso, on the other hand, did not. He did not keep a journal; he did not make any effort to leave the island. When Susan interrogated him about this he just replied smiling as if it were a nonsense question. "And where should I escape to? (*Foe*, p.13)

Susan gets to the conclusion that Cruso has no interest either in counting the years nor in leaving the island. As she says,

What I chiefly hoped to find was not there. Cruso kept no journal, perhaps because he lacked paper and ink, but more likely, I now believe, because he lacked the inclination to keep one, or, if he ever possessed the inclination, had lost it. I searched the poles that supported the roof, and the legs of the bed, but found no carvings, not even notches to indicate that he counted the years of his banishment or the cycles of the moon. (Foe, p. 16)

Susan is concerned with truth and reality. When the subject into question is storytelling, she worries about what really happened, she does not want to add new facts to embellish it, to make the story more attractive or interesting to the reader. For twice in the text we see male characters wanting her to change her mind about truth and storytelling. First, Captain Smith and Susan have a relevant conversation about it when he rescues them (She, Friday, and the moribund Cruso) from the island.

It is a story you should set down in writing and offer to the booksellers"- he urged- "There has never before, to my knowledge, been a female castaway of our nation. It will cause a great stir"" I shook my head sadly. "As I relate it to you, my story passes the time well enough," I replied; "but what little I know of book-writing tells me its charm will quite vanish when it is set down badly in print. A liveliness is lost in the writing down which must be supplied by art, and I have no art." "As to art I cannot pronounce, being only a sailor", said Captain Smith; " but you may depend on it, the booksellers will hire a man to set your story to rights, and put in a dash of color too, here and there." I will not have any lies told," said I. The captain smiled "There I cannot vouch for them," he said: "their trade is in books, not in truth." "I would rather be the author of my own story than have lies told about me," I persisted – "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. (Foe, p. 40)

Susan has her own opinions. In a letter to Foe, she says exactly what a storyteller should be like. She gives her recipe of a writer. "The storyteller (...) must divine which episodes of his history hold promise of fullness, and tease from them their hidden meanings, braiding these together as one braids a rope." (*Foe p.89*)

Afterwards in a conversation between Susan and Foe about the story of the island, we see that the story Foe wants to tell is different from the one Susan wants to. Susan is concerned with the truth. Foe in the other hand wants to tell a structuralist story, and he gives her the recipe on how to do a book, a structuralist one. The story he wants to tell is as follows:

We therefore have five parts in all: the loss of the daughter; the quest for the daughter in Brazil; abandonment of the quest, and the adventure of the island; assumption of the quest by the daughter; and reunion of the daughter with her mother. It is thus what we make up a book: loss, then quest, then recovery, beginning, then middle, then end. As to 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. (117)

Susan is so concerned about truth and reality that if she knew she would tell their story, she would have asked Crusoe more questions, more details, even though he did not seem to have many more to add. She says to Foe "Had I known, on the island, that it would one day fall to me to be our storyteller, I would have been more zealous to interrogate Crusoe" (*Foe, p .89*)

Crusoe's story is the following: He is a mariner who runs away to the sea at the age of 19. He goes through a number of misfortunes at the hands of pirates and the elements. Finally Crusoe is shipwrecked off South America. With material and supplies he can hardly take from the ship, including the Bible, he manages to survive in the island. He remains in the island 28 years, two months and nineteen days. After several lonely years, he realizes there are some strange footprints in the beach sand. A tribe of cannibals have arrived and are preparing a feast of prisoners, one of whom manages to escape. Crusoe meets this frightened native, whom he names "Friday"

and teaches him English. Some years later an English ship arrives in the island. Crusoe saves the captain and crew, rescuing them from the hands of mutineers and returns to England. Robinson marries and promises before the ending of the novel to describe his adventures in Africa and China.

On page 7, Susan the narrator, addresses the reader for the first time and then we realize she is narrating, she is dialoguing with the reader. She is expecting a reaction from the reader and even comments on it. She considers that by speaking of a “desert isle” the reader will have a wrong idea of what that island was like, based on previous readings, previous assumptions the reader may have had.

For readers reared on traveller’s tales, the words *desert isle* may conjure up a place of soft sands and shady trees where brooks run to quench the castaway’s thirst and ripe fruit falls into his hand, where no more is asked of him than to drowse the days away till a ship calls to fetch him home” (*Foe*, p. 7)

Also in pg 9, there is another aspect worth being mentioned. Susan is found ashore at the beach by a Negro - whose name we do not know. He does not say a word and leads her to a man whose name we also do not know. She goes to him and introduces herself, he is silent. She describes what she sees, his appearance

The stranger’s eyes were green, his hair burnt to a straw colour. I judged he was sixty years of age. He wore (let me give my description of him all together) a jerkin, and drawers to below his knees, such as we see waterman wear on the Thames, and a tall cap rising in a cone, all of these made pelts laced together , the fur outwards, and a stout pair of sandals. In his belt were a short stick and a knife. A mutineer, was my first thought: yet another mutineer, set ashore merciful captain, with one of the Negroes of the island, whom he has made his servant. (*Foe*, pp.8-9)

As I told you before, Cruso and Friday seemed to me as old acquaintances whom I met again after a long time without seeing. The same seems to have



happened to Susan. On page 9 she addresses the reader as if she already knew about Cruso:

I [...] sobbed like a child, while the stranger (who was of course the Cruso I told you of) gazed at me more as if I were a fish cast up by the waves than an unfortunate fellow creature. (*Foe*, p 9)

She addresses him as if we readers knew about him as well. In her mind she considers that we know him, and consequently we will understand what she is saying. Or better as if she herself had told us something about him before. Taking this into account When was it that Susan mentioned the name Cruso before? Was not it the first time she mentions his name in this story? Are not we still in pg 9? How come she knows his name is Cruso if he has not introduced himself yet and Friday who is the only person she has seen before this scene can not speak a single word? Here again Susan is expecting the reader to have read Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe.

Also in this part, there is a definite article **the** before Cruso. "the Cruso I told you of". We who have studied English grammar know that when we use the definite article we presume that the reader or listener knows the one you are referring to. And if we know the one that she is referring to, it is because there are more Crusoes, more Crusoes from other stories. She was telling here about one, this one, the one she told the reader of, so there are others.

On page 25, Susan is telling that for years Cruso's domination on the island had not been questioned. Friday the slave, who used to live with him there, had never put his will, his word into question.

After years of unquestioned and solitary mastery, he sees his realm invaded and has tasks set upon him by a woman. I made a vow to keep a tighter rein on my tongue. (*Foe*, p. 25)

We could also suggest the same in relation to Defoe's story. For many years, Robinson Crusoe's narration, his point of view had not been questioned. The story of the island, the man who lived for many years in an island only with a Negro

companion had only been told by his point of view. Then , in both aspects Susan came either in terms of the island or in terms of narration and offered us another reading, a story of the island from her point of view, from a female point of view.

J.M Coetzee creates a character, Susan Barton, a female narrator, who is the Other and dislocates the old narrator (Defoe's Crusoe), a western white male. Coetzee gives the voice to the periphery, a female narrator to speak with the voice of the center, the male. Coetzee makes a dialogue between them a possibility. And as in this paper is my reading, I converse with both narrators.

The island itself has a special meaning. What is an island? It is land surrounded by water. It gives us a geographical meaning of a center. There, in his island in the center, Crusoe, is free from the other.

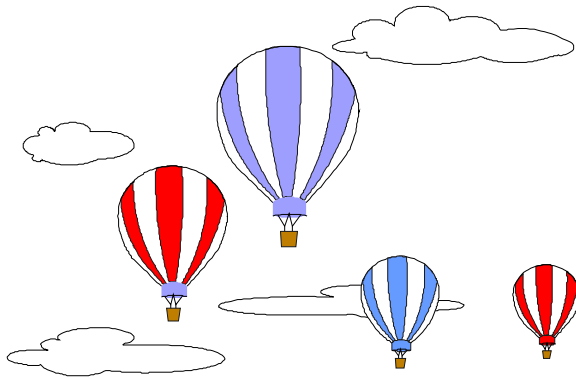
What is detachable in this novel for me is the problem of truth and storytelling. One question asked along the whole book is: Whose story is the right one Susan's, Foe's or even Crusoe's? Is there one right story? What happens to the untold stories, the ones which could not be told for several reasons? Where are they, these stories? Who is going to tell them? So we want to pay attention, throughout, to how characters are and aren't able to articulate their stories. Why can't Barton tell Crusoe's story? Why can't Friday tell his story? Why can't Susan just write her own book? Why does Foe want to join new facts to the true ones?

Some of these answers can not be answered here in this reading, the same way as many questions could not be answered in the novel as well. We could not know as we can not know now what happened to Friday's tongue, who was the responsible for its cutting off. We can not know why Crusoe did not count the years, why he did not have any interest to pass his story on. As we also do not know why Susan gave up telling her story due to the fact that she did not want to invent, to lie. She was not really an author, for an author adds events, tries to embellish his or her story. Susan on the other hand was only committed with the truth. She wanted to tell a true story which she considered being interesting. She did not want to create an interesting story. As she explained in one of her letters to Foe,

All I say is: What I saw, I wrote. I saw no cannibals; and if they came after nightfall and fled before the dawn, they left no footprint behind ( *Foe*, p.54.)

Her commitment was with truth. She wanted to tell the reality, the facts as they really were, the accurate happenings. Nothing invented. Nothing fictional in order to call more the attention of the reader. Nothing but the truth. And Susan considered so relevant to pass their true story on for she wanted to continue living with her story. She wanted Crusoe to continue living, as well as Friday. They would be alive while their histories would be told. That is why it is so important for Susan to tell her story the way it really happened.

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## CONCLUSION

This work was meant as a comment on the beautiful dialogue held, in *Foe*, between two of my favorite authors, J. M. Coetzee and his predecessor in the art of fiction, Daniel Defoe. The implicit considerations about the craft of writing provoked in me this irresistible wish to finish this thesis presenting the three different images that illustrate the Angel. First, the *Angelus Novus*, painted by Klee, then Coetzee as the Angel and then myself (the Reader) as the Angel.

Another peculiar likeness between *Foe* and *Robinson Crusoe* lies in the ease with which both works cross the boundaries between history and fiction. Coetzee borrowed from Defoe as Defoe has borrowed from the narrative about Selkirk's shipwreck. As for us, we were taken on a trip, moving backward and forward in time. We crossed the lines between fiction, history and criticism. We flew from Defoe to *Foe*, had a glimpse at Walter Benjamin watching an Angel digging over the ruins of history, visited Linda Hutcheon, listened to her speaking about history and literature, and examined Patricia Waugh's propositions about the uses of metafiction.

There was an explanation I gave you, about the balloons, on page six. What does a balloon have to do with *Foe*? Would not a boat seem a more appropriate simile in a story about a shipwreck on a desert island? Certainly, the balloon was very relevant for the accomplishment of this paper. Because of the balloon we can also

have a small further trip with Coetzee and Defoe together in “Appendice B” and listen to what they have to say about the act of writing, in my interpretation of what writing means to each one of them.

*Foe* rises as a rewriting of Daniel Defoe’s novel *Robinson Crusoe*, written through the point of view of Susan Barton, a woman whose daughter has been kidnapped. This daughter has never been found, though. Susan then looks for an author, Foe, to document the story of her shipwreck on a deserted island as well as her brief affair with the man she found there, a man she called Cruso. In her story she wanted to document also her rescue, as well as her pursue of an author. Nevertheless, she and the author she finds cannot agree on the story that is to be written down, the purpose of writing is very different to each of them. Foe’s purpose is one, hers is another: he wants to sell books; she wants to pass her story on.

My thesis was structured in three chapters, and dealt with subjects as Coetzee’s life and work, establishing connections between history and fiction; my reading of the novel *Foe*, aiming at pinpointing some of Coetzee’s choices and techniques, and offering some possibilities of interpretation to the stimulating challenges proposed by the narrative. Hutcheon’s, Waugh’s and Benjamin’s ideas were intrinsically mixed in this work and equally relevant to reach my aim. Benjamin’s Angel of History, looking melancholy back, destroys time, subverting a catastrophic moment in the hope of a future that is buried by the past, which may rise and be built within the present. This combination of past and present is called in German *Jetztzeit* - time now. In the novel *Foe*, Coetzee looks back and then reconstructs a new story giving voice to a woman unburied from the past, and he builds up a new present. Coetzee saves the woman from the ruins of history. Differently from Foe, he grants her the opportunity to speak, to be, and therefore he gives her a chance to the buried in a dignified way, representing so many nameless people buried in the debris of literary historiography.

Benjamin’s point of view is a pessimistic one, the only law or rule in history consisting of fighting and violence. Benjamin emphasizes that that history is written from the viewpoint of the winners; history is the written history of rulers. The Angelus

Novus is looking back into the ruins of history and sees people without a name in the ruins. In the Thesis, Benjamin states that the task of the historian is to save from the ruins of history the memory of the people without a name. (CZARNIAWSKA, 2002, p158.)

According to Hutcheon, one of the important names in this work, "Postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological." (HUTCHEON, 1988 p 109) She distinguishes the real and the imaginary texts, the historical and the fictional in such a way that the historical discourse does not offer explanation to the events of the past but rather possible interpretations. Following this way of thinking we see the concept of historiographic metafiction as post modern works which come from a historical fact to its fictionalization and re-interpretation. This sort of distotalization of history takes place through a review of the official version of history and then the presentation of other possibilities and other interpretations. Again, this is what we see in *Foe*. Coetzee does not explain the past or its events, he rather opens up a path for many possibilities.

I tug his wolly hair, finer the chain about his throat. 'Friday', I say, I try to say, kneeling over him, sinking hands and knees into the ooze, 'what is this ship'? But this is not a place of words. Each syllable, a sit comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own sign. It is the home of Friday. (*Foe*, p.157)

The last chapter of this novel can be seen through different perspectives; it can be given different interpretations. I gave mine in this thesis. You can have your own. Any different reader can have their different interpretations of the facts, of the signs.

Patricia Waugh complements these ideas of Benjamin and Hutcheon in the sense that *Foe* is an entirely metafictional work. According to her

ideas, metafictional novels are those which “explore a theory of writing fiction through the practice of writing fiction” (WAUGH, p.2), and we have seen along this work that Foe and Susan Barton talk about the act of writing. Susan says to Foe, when they are discussing about writing, that “Writing does not grow within us like a cabbage while our thoughts are elsewhere, (. . .) It is a craft won by long practice, as you should know.” (Foe, p.147) Waugh warns us that the narrator and the characters will call the reader’s attention, will participate in the process of writing, in the way Foe and Barton do. They participate; they talk about writing their story, they argue about what to write, and about what not to write.

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*What are we waiting for, assembled in the forum? The barbarians are due here today. Why isn't anything happening in the senate? Why do the senators sit there without legislating? Because the barbarians are coming today. What laws can the senators make now? Once the barbarians are here, they'll do the legislating. Why did our emperor get up so early, and why is he sitting at the city's main gate on his throne, in state, wearing the crown?*

*Because the barbarians are coming today and the emperor is waiting to receive their leader. He has even prepared a scroll to give him, replete with titles, with imposing names.*

*Why have our two consuls and praetors come out today wearing their embroidered, their scarlet togas?*

*Why have they put on bracelets with so many amethysts, and rings sparkling with magnificent emeralds? Why are they carrying elegant canes beautifully worked in silver and gold?*

*Because the barbarians are coming today and things like that dazzle the barbarians.*

*Why don't our distinguished orators come forward as usual to make their speeches, say what they have to say?*

*Because the barbarians are coming today and they're bored by rhetoric and public speaking.*

*Why this sudden restlessness, this confusion? (How serious people's faces have become.) Why are the streets and squares emptying so rapidly, everyone going home so lost in thought?*

*Because night has fallen and the barbarians have not come. And some who have just returned from the border say there are no barbarians any longer.*

*And now, what's going to happen to us without barbarians? They were, those people, a kind of solution.*

KONSTANTINOS KAVAFIS, *Waiting for the Barbarians*.

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## APPENDIX A

A list of J. M. Coetzee's books, reaching as far as 2005, includes:

**1974 – *Dusklands*** – Published in South Africa, it consists of two closely related novellas, one about America and Vietnam, the other, "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee," set in the 1760s. This second novel is relevant for the study of South African history.

**1977 – *In the Heart of the Country*** – (US title: *From the Heart of the Country*). Here the central character is the rebellious, sexually deprived daughter of a sheep farmer. Coetzee, in this novel, examines the conventions of the South African *plaasroman*, or farm novel. With this work he won South Africa's then principal literary award, the CNA Prize.

**1980 – *Waiting for the Barbarians*** – This novel questions the voyeuristic nature of fiction. The title of the novel refers to the lines of a poem by Constantin Cavafy: "and now, what will become of us without / barbarians? / These people were a kind of solution." Coetzee received international notice for this book.

**1983 – *Life and Times of Michael K.*** – Coetzee's reputation was confirmed by this novel, which won Britain's Booker award, though the author did not attend the ceremony. Following the trend of autobiographical references (Coetzee's second

name is Michael, remember!), the protagonist of the story – set in Cape Town and Karoo – is a descendant of Franz Kafka's characters, who never find out the meaning of their suffering. Like the victim of the execution machine in the short story "In der Strafkolonie" (1919), Michael K. eventually ends up in a concentration camp. Cynthia Ozick writes of this book, "Mr. Coetzee's subdued yet urgent lament is for the sadness of South Africa, that has made dependents and parasites and prisoners of its own children, black and white." (Ozick, 1991, pg 31)

**1986 – *Foe*** – Brings an interplay with Daniel Defoe's classic *Robinson Crusoe*. In the story, a woman, Susan Barton, shares the island with Robinson 'Cruso' and Friday. "I am cast away. I am all alone," she says without getting any sympathy from Cruso, the unapproachable tyrant in his small empire. After they are rescued, Susan meets Daniel Foe, a writer, and asks him to write her memories of their life on the island. But, troubled with his own problems, Foe forgets to write the book. Friday remains silent – his tongue cut – unable to tell his tale. This novel has been analyzed by many critics as an allegory, as parody, as metafiction, and also in terms of its silence and muteness as a representation of post-modern and post-colonial fiction. Susan Barton is the central character in the narrative, because she alone feels the urge of preserving the memory of their experience, and feels desperate as she acknowledges her incapability to accomplish the task. *Foe* offers the corpus for my study, in this thesis.



**1987 – *A Land Apart: A Contemporary South African Reader*** – (with André Brink).

This book has been written in Afrikaans and then translated into English by Coetzee himself.

**1988 – *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa***. – A compound of letters about South African literature and culture.

**1990 – *Age of Iron*** – The main character in this novel is Mrs. Curren, a retired Classics professor in Cape Town. The book is in the form of a long letter written to her daughter, who escaped from the Apartheid and now lives in the United States. Mrs. Curren's last days are spent in a horrible situation. Her housekeeper's son is involved in an uprising, so the two women try to look for him. Meanwhile, a homeless alcoholic man appears at her door and she gives him asylum. Having to face the "age of iron" imposed by her country's conditions, she has also to face her own problems, and this alcohol-addicted guy is the only one she has to trust her last will to. He is the person who will deliver her letter to her daughter. Nevertheless, she will never know if the task will be accomplishment; nor will the reader. Following the tradition of meta-fictional references, Coetzee wrote this novel while his ex-wife was dying of cancer.

**1992 – *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*** – Coetzee, as a literary critic, examines authors such as Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka, Robert Musil, D.H. Lawrence, as well as some South African writers as Athol Fugard, Breyten

Breytenbach, and Nadine Gordimer. The book also includes sections on poetics, popular culture, syntax, and censorship. Coetzee is interviewed at the beginning of each section, to complete a retrospective analysis of the essays.

**1994 – *The Master of Petersburg*** – Here the protagonist is the famous Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky, who tries to understand the death of his step-son, Pavel Alexandrovich Isaev. In his sorrow, he takes the place of Orpheus, “He thinks of Orpheus walking backwards step by step, whispering the dead woman's name, coaxing her out of the entrails of hell; of the wife in grave clothes with her blind, dead eyes following him, holding out limp hands before her like a sleepwalker. No flute, no lyre, just the word, the one word, over and over.” (COETZEE, 1994 pg.5 ) The novel echoes the fact that Coetzee had himself lost his son, Nicolas, who died in a mysterious fall from a high balcony.

**1996 – *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship*** – A book divided into twelve chapters. The first two chapters are about the psychological and moral effects of censorship, considering the damage it causes to writers. The other ten chapters deal specifically with writers who were once subjected to censorship and who wrote and theorized about the subject. Among them we have Catharine McKinnon’s, D.H Lawrence, Erasmus, André Brink, and Breyten Breytenbach.

**1997 – *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*** – This book is the first in Coetzee’s autobiographical series, written in the third person.

**1997 – *What is Realism?*** – Thirty two pages where J.M Coetzee and Bill Reichblum present their considerations on Realism, having South African literature as their main focus.

**1999 – *Disgrace*** – This is Coetzee's first book to deal explicitly with post-Apartheid South Africa. The picture it paints is a cheerless one that will comfort no one, regardless of race, nationality or viewpoint. After we read this novel we come to the conclusion that politics may change, but nothing can be done to diminish human suffering. This novel granted him the second Booker Prize.

**1999 – *The Lives of Animals*** – (with Amy Gutmann) When invited to talk in 1997/1998 at a traditional academic meeting in Princeton – the Tanner Lectures – Coetzee chose to speak in narrative form instead of delivering a philosophic essay about the relation between Animals and Humans. Here, in two lectures, he defends the animals, raising issues of abuses practiced against them.

**1986–1999, 2001 – *Stranger Shores: Literary Essays*** – The book contains several essays, and reviews some novels by Salman Rushdie, and A.S. Byatt. It has no index or foreword.

**2002 – *Youth: Scenes from Provincial Life II*** – This is the sequel of *Boyhood*, also written in the third person. It tells of John, a South African young man who goes to London and wants to become a writer. There is a vast quotation of well known authors such as Pope, Swift, Henry James, Kafka, Blake, Pound, Eliot, and many others, as well as views and impressions of the character about them.

**2003 – *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*** – Coetzee creates his female alter ego, a famous writer, who travels all over the world delivering speeches and academic lectures. In the United States, she discusses and analyzes Kafka's monkey story "A Report to the Academy" (lesson 1); in England, at the fictional Appleton College, she draws a parallel between gas chambers and the breeding of animals for slaughter (lesson 3); in Amsterdam, her subject is the issue of evil (lesson 6). As material, Coetzee uses his own academic lectures. But, at the same time, he strips bare Costello's intellectual lifestyle – although her arguments are always fresh and seductive, the result of all her theorizing is that she starts resembling more and more the copy of Kafka's primate, whose basic predilections and moral ideas are contrary to what Costello preaches in the real world.

**2004 – *Landscape with Rowers: Poetry from the Netherlands***. – Poems compiled and translated by Coetzee, in order to bring some Dutch poems to light. In *Youth*, Coetzee's main character, John, says that "of all nations the Dutch are the dullest, the most antipoetic." (Coetzee, 2003b, p 86) With these poem translations, the author/translator proves his protagonist is wrong.

**2005 – *Slow Man*** – The story of a man, Paul Rayment, in his middle ages, who lives a comfortable life until the day he has a cycling accident and has to amputate his leg. Elizabeth Costello also appears in this story as a character who enters his life.

## ANNEX I

J. M. Coetzee's Awards and Prizes, won until 2003:

1977 – Central News Agency (CNA) Literary Award (South Africa) *In the Heart of the Country*

1980 – Central News Agency (CNA) Literary Award (South Africa) *Waiting for the Barbarians*

1980 – James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for fiction) *Waiting for the Barbarians*

1981 – Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize for *Waiting for the Barbarians*

1984 – Central News Agency (CNA) Literary Award (South Africa) *Life & Times of Michael K*

1984 – Prix Fémina Etranger (France) *Life & Times of Michael K*

1987 – Jerusalem Prize *Foe*

1990 – Sunday Express Book of the Year *Age of Iron*

1995 – Irish Times International Fiction Prize *The Master of Petersburg*

1998 – Lannan Literary Award (Fiction)

1999 – Booker Prize for Fiction *Disgrace*

2000 – Commonwealth Writers Prize (Overall Winner, Best Book) *Disgrace*

1983 – Booker Prize for Fiction *Life & Times of Michael K* and *Disgrace*

2003 – Nobel Prize for Literature

(Source of information available on the Internet at:

<http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth108>. Date: Nov. 21<sup>st</sup>, 2005.)

## ANNEX II

J. M. Coetzee's Nobel Lecture:

### He and his man



But to return to my new companion. I was greatly delighted with him, and made it my business to teach him everything that was proper to make him useful, handy, and helpful; but especially to make him speak, and understand me when I spoke; and he was the aptest scholar there ever was.

**Daniel Defoe**, *Robinson Crusoe*

Boston, on the coast of Lincolnshire, is a handsome town, writes his man. The tallest church steeple in all of England is to be found there; sea-pilots use it to navigate by. Around Boston is fen country. Bitterns abound, ominous birds who give a heavy, groaning call loud enough to be heard two miles away, like the report of a gun.

The fens are home to many other kinds of birds too, writes his man, duck and mallard, teal and widgeon, to capture which the men of the fens, the fen-men, raise tame ducks, which they call decoy ducks or duckoys.



Fens are tracts of wetland. There are tracts of wetland all over Europe, all over the world, but they are not named fens, *fen* is an English word, it will not migrate.

These Lincolnshire duckoys, writes his man, are bred up in decoy ponds, and kept tame by being fed by hand. Then when the season comes they are sent abroad to Holland and Germany. In Holland and Germany they meet with others of their kind, and, seeing how miserably these Dutch and German ducks live, how their rivers freeze in winter and their lands are covered in snow, fail not to let them know, in a form of language which they make them understand, that in England from where they come the case is quite otherwise: English ducks have sea shores full of nourishing food, tides that flow freely up the creeks; they have lakes, springs, open ponds and sheltered ponds; also lands full of corn left behind by the gleaners; and no frost or snow, or very light.

By these representations, he writes, which are made all in duck language, they, the decoy ducks or duckoys, draw together vast numbers of fowl and, so to say, kidnap them. They guide them back across the seas from Holland and Germany and settle them down in their decoy ponds on the fens of Lincolnshire, chattering and gabbling to them all the time in their own language, telling them these are the ponds they told them of, where they shall live safely and securely.

And while they are so occupied the decoy-men, the masters of the decoy-ducks, creep into covers or coverts they have built of reeds upon the fens, and all unseen toss handfuls of corn upon the water; and the decoy ducks or duckoys follow them, bringing their foreign guests behind. And so over two or three days they lead their guests up narrower and narrower waterways, calling to them all the time to see how well we live in England, to a place where nets have been spanned.

Then the decoy-men send out their decoy dog, which has been perfectly trained to swim after fowl, barking as he swims. Being alarmed to the last degree by this terrible creature, the ducks take to the wing, but are forced down again into the water by the arched nets above, and so must swim or perish, under the net. But the net grows narrower and narrower, like a purse, and at the end stand the decoy men, who take their captives out one by one. The decoy ducks are stroked and made much of, but

as for their guests, these are clubbed on the spot and plucked and sold by the hundred and by the thousand.

All of this news of Lincolnshire his man writes in a neat, quick hand, with quills that he sharpens with his little pen-knife each day before a new bout with the page.

In Halifax, writes his man, there stood, until it was removed in the reign of King James the First, an engine of execution, which worked thus. The condemned man was laid with his head on the cross-base or cup of the scaffold; then the executioner knocked out a pin which held up the heavy blade. The blade descended down a frame as tall as a church door and beheaded the man as clean as a butcher's knife.

Custom had it in Halifax, though, that if between the knocking out of the pin and the descent of the blade the condemned man could leap to his feet, run down the hill, and swim across the river without being seized again by the executioner, he would be let free. But in all the years the engine stood in Halifax this never happened.

He (not his man now but he) sits in his room by the waterside in Bristol and reads this. He is getting on in years, almost it might be said he is an old man by now. The skin of his face, that had been almost blackened by the tropic sun before he made a parasol out of palm or palmetto leaves to shade himself, is paler now, but still leathery like parchment; on his nose is a sore from the sun that will not heal.

The parasol he has still with him in his room, standing in a corner, but the parrot that came back with him has passed away. *Poor Robin!* the parrot would squawk from its perch on his shoulder, *Poor Robin Crusoe! Who shall save poor Robin?* His wife could not abide the lamenting of the parrot, *Poor Robin* day in, day out. *I shall wring its neck,* said she, but she had not the courage to do so.

When he came back to England from his island with his parrot and his parasol and his chest full of treasure, he lived for a while tranquilly enough with his old wife on the estate he bought in Huntingdon, for he had become a wealthy man, and wealthier still after the printing of the book of his adventures. But the years in the island, and then the years traveling with his serving-man Friday (poor Friday, he laments to himself, squawk-squawk, for the parrot would never speak Friday's name, only his), had made the life of a landed gentleman dull for him. And, if the truth be told, married life

was a sore disappointment too. He found himself retreating more and more to the stables, to his horses, which blessedly did not chatter, but whinnied softly when he came, to show that they knew who he was, and then held their peace.

It seemed to him, coming from his island, where until Friday arrived he lived a silent life, that there was too much speech in the world. In bed beside his wife he felt as if a shower of pebbles were being poured upon his head, in an unending rustle and clatter, when all he desired was to sleep.

So when his old wife gave up the ghost he mourned but was not sorry. He buried her and after a decent while took this room in *The Jolly Tar* on the Bristol waterfront, leaving the direction of the estate in Huntingdon to his son, bringing with him only the parasol from the island that made him famous and the dead parrot fixed to its perch and a few necessaries, and has lived here alone ever since, strolling by day about the wharves and quays, staring out west over the sea, for his sight is still keen, smoking his pipes. As to his meals, he has these brought up to his room; for he finds no joy in society, having grown used to solitude on the island.

He does not read, he has lost the taste for it; but the writing of his adventures has put him in the habit of writing, it is a pleasant enough recreation. In the evening by candlelight he will take out his papers and sharpen his quills and write a page or two of his man, the man who sends report of the duckoys of Lincolnshire, and of the great engine of death in Halifax, that one can escape if before the awful blade can descend one can leap to one's feet and dash down the hill, and of numbers of other things. Every place he goes he sends report of, that is his first business, this busy man of his.

Strolling along the harbour wall, reflecting upon the engine from Halifax, he, Robin, whom the parrot used to call poor Robin, drops a pebble and listens. A second, less than a second, before it strikes the water. God's grace is swift, but might not the great blade of tempered steel, being heavier than a pebble and being greased with tallow, be swifter? How will we ever escape it? And what species of man can it be who will dash so busily hither and thither across the kingdom, from one spectacle of death to another (clubbings, beheadings), sending in report after report?

A man of business, he thinks to himself. Let him be a man of business, a grain merchant or a leather merchant, let us say; or a manufacturer and purveyor of roof tiles somewhere where clay is plentiful, Wapping let us say, who must travel much in the interest of his trade. Make him prosperous, give him a wife who loves him and does not chatter too much and bears him children, daughters mainly; give him a reasonable happiness; then bring his happiness suddenly to an end. The Thames rises one winter, the kilns in which the tiles are baked are washed away, or the grain stores, or the leather works; he is ruined, this man of his, debtors descend upon him like flies or like crows, he has to flee his home, his wife, his children, and seek hiding in the most wretched of quarters in Beggars Lane under a false name and in disguise. And all of this – the wave of water, the ruin, the flight, the pennilessness, the tatters, the solitude – let all of this be a figure of the shipwreck and the island where he, poor Robin, was secluded from the world for twenty-six years, till he almost went mad (and indeed, who is to say he did not, in some measure?).

Or else let the man be a saddler with a home and a shop and a warehouse in Whitechapel and a mole on his chin and a wife who loves him and does not chatter and bears him children, daughters mainly, and gives him much happiness, until the plague descends upon the city, it is the year 1665, the great fire of London has not yet come. The plague descends upon London: daily, parish by parish, the count of the dead mounts, rich and poor, for the plague makes no distinction among stations, all this saddler's worldly wealth will not save him. He sends his wife and daughters into the countryside and makes plans to flee himself, but then does not. *Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror at night, he reads, opening the Bible at hazard, not for the arrow that flieth by day; not for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee.*

Taking heart from this sign, a sign of safe passage, he remains in afflicted London and sets about writing reports. I came upon a crowd in the street, he writes, and a woman in their midst pointing to the heavens. *See, she cries, an angel in white brandishing a flaming sword!* And the crowd all nod among themselves, *Indeed it is so, they say: an angel with a sword!* But he, the saddler, can see no angel, no sword.

All he can see is a strange-shaped cloud brighter on the one side than the other, from the shining of the sun.

*It is an allegory!* cries the woman in the street; but he can see no allegory for the life of him. Thus in his report.

On another day, walking by the riverside in Wapping, his man that used to be a saddler but now has no occupation observes how a woman from the door of her house calls out to a man rowing in a dory: *Robert! Robert!* she calls; and how the man then rows ashore, and from the dory takes up a sack which he lays upon a stone by the riverside, and rows away again; and how the woman comes down to the riverside and picks up the sack and bears it home, very sorrowful-looking.

He accosts the man Robert and speaks to him. Robert informs him that the woman is his wife and the sack holds a week's supplies for her and their children, meat and meal and butter; but that he dare not approach nearer, for all of them, wife and children, have the plague upon them; and that it breaks his heart. And all of this – the man Robert and wife keeping communion through calls across the water, the sack left by the waterside – stands for itself certainly, but stands also as a figure of his, Robinson's, solitude on his island, where in his hour of darkest despair he called out across the waves to his loved ones in England to save him, and at other times swam out to the wreck in search of supplies.

Further report from that time of woe. Able no longer to bear the pain from the swellings in the groin and armpit that are the signs of the plague, a man runs out howling, stark naked, into the street, into Harrow Alley in Whitechapel, where his man the saddler witnesses him as he leaps and prances and makes a thousand strange gestures, his wife and children running after him crying out, calling to him to come back. And this leaping and prancing is allegoric of his own leaping and prancing when, after the calamity of the shipwreck and after he had scoured the strand for sign of his shipboard companions and found none, save a pair of shoes that were not mates, he had understood he was cast up all alone on a savage island, likely to perish and with no hope of salvation.

(But of what else does he secretly sing, he wonders to himself, this poor afflicted man of whom he reads, besides his desolation? What is he calling, across the waters and across the years, out of his private fire?)

A year ago he, Robinson, paid two guineas to a sailor for a parrot the sailor had brought back from, he said, Brazil – a bird not so magnificent as his own well-beloved creature but splendid nonetheless, with green feathers and a scarlet crest and a great talker too, if the sailor was to be believed. And indeed the bird would sit on its perch in his room in the inn, with a little chain on its leg in case it should try to fly away, and say the words *Poor Poll! Poor Poll!* over and over till he was forced to hood it; but could not be taught to say any other word, *Poor Robin!* for instance, being perhaps too old for that.

Poor Poll, gazing out through the narrow window over the mast-tops and, beyond the mast-tops, over the grey Atlantic swell: *What island is this, asks Poor Poll, that I am cast up on, so cold, so dreary? Where were you, my Saviour, in my hour of great need?*

A man, being drunk and it being late at night (another of his man's reports), falls asleep in a doorway in Cripplegate. The dead-cart comes on its way (we are still in the year of the plague), and the neighbours, thinking the man dead, place him on the dead-cart among the corpses. By and by the cart comes to the dead pit at Mountmill and the carter, his face all muffled against the effluvium, lays hold of him to throw him in; and he wakes up and struggles in his bewilderment. *Where am I?* he says. *You are about to be buried among the dead,* says the carter. *But am I dead then?* says the man. And this too is a figure of him on his island.

Some London-folk continue to go about their business, thinking they are healthy and will be passed over. But secretly they have the plague in their blood: when the infection reaches their heart they fall dead upon the spot, so reports his man, as if struck by lightning. And this is a figure for life itself, the whole of life. Due preparation. We should make due preparation for death, or else be struck down where we stand. As he, Robinson, was made to see when of a sudden, on his island, he came one day upon the footprint of a man in the sand. It was a print, and therefore a sign: of a foot, of a man. But it was a sign of much else too. *You are not alone,* said the sign;

and also, *No matter how far you sail, no matter where you hide, you will be searched out.*

In the year of the plague, writes his man, others, out of terror, abandoned all, their homes, their wives and children, and fled as far from London as they could. When the plague had passed, their flight was condemned as cowardice on all sides. But, writes his man, we forget what kind of courage was called on to confront the plague. It was not a mere soldier's courage, like gripping a weapon and charging the foe: it was like charging Death itself on his pale horse.

Even at his best, his island parrot, the better loved of the two, spoke no word he was not taught to speak by his master. How then has it come about that this man of his, who is a kind of parrot and not much loved, writes as well as or better than his master? For he wields an able pen, this man of his, no doubt of that. *Like charging Death himself on his pale horse.* His own skill, learned in the counting house, was in making tallies and accounts, not in turning phrases. *Death himself on his pale horse:* those are words he would not think of. Only when he yields himself up to this man of his do such words come.

And decoy ducks, or duckoys: What did he, Robinson, know of decoy ducks? Nothing at all, until this man of his began sending in reports.

The duckoys of the Lincolnshire fens, the great engine of execution in Halifax: reports from a great tour this man of his seems to be making of the island of Britain, which is a figure of the tour he made of his own island in the skiff he built, the tour that showed there was a farther side to the island, craggy and dark and inhospitable, which he ever afterwards avoided, though if in the future colonists shall arrive upon the island they will perhaps explore it and settle it; that too being a figure, of the dark side of the soul and the light.

When the first bands of plagiarists and imitators descended upon his island history and foisted on the public their own feigned stories of the castaway life, they seemed to him no more or less than a horde of cannibals falling upon his own flesh, that is to say, his life; and he did not scruple to say so. *When I defended myself against the cannibals, who sought to strike me down and roast me and devour me,* he wrote, *I*

*thought I defended myself against the thing itself. Little did I guess, he wrote, that these cannibals were but figures of a more devilish voracity, that would gnaw at the very substance of truth.*

But now, reflecting further, there begins to creep into his breast a touch of fellow-feeling for his imitators. For it seems to him now that there are but a handful of stories in the world; and if the young are to be forbidden to prey upon the old then they must sit for ever in silence.

Thus in the narrative of his island adventures he tells of how he awoke in terror one night convinced the devil lay upon him in his bed in the shape of a huge dog. So he leapt to his feet and grasped a cutlass and slashed left and right to defend himself while the poor parrot that slept by his bedside shrieked in alarm. Only many days later did he understand that neither dog nor devil had lain upon him, but rather that he had suffered a palsy of a passing kind, and being unable to move his leg had concluded there was some creature stretched out upon it. Of which event the lesson would seem to be that all afflictions, including the palsy, come from the devil and are the very devil; that a visitation by illness may be figured as a visitation by the devil, or by a dog figuring the devil, and vice versa, the visitation figured as an illness, as in the saddler's history of the plague; and therefore that no one who writes stories of either, the devil or the plague, should forthwith be dismissed as a forger or a thief.

When, years ago, he resolved to set down on paper the story of his island, he found that the words would not come, the pen would not flow, his very fingers were stiff and reluctant. But day by day, step by step, he mastered the writing business, until by the time of his adventures with Friday in the frozen north the pages were rolling off easily, even thoughtlessly.

That old ease of composition has, alas, deserted him. When he seats himself at the little writing-desk before the window looking over Bristol harbour, his hand feels as clumsy and the pen as foreign an instrument as ever before.

Does he, the other one, that man of his, find the writing business easier? The stories he writes of ducks and machines of death and London under the plague flow prettily



enough; but then so did his own stories once. Perhaps he misjudges him, that dapper little man with the quick step and the mole upon his chin. Perhaps at this very moment he sits alone in a hired room somewhere in this wide kingdom dipping the pen and dipping it again, full of doubts and hesitations and second thoughts.

How are they to be figured, this man and he? As master and slave? As brothers, twin brothers? As comrades in arms? Or as enemies, foes? What name shall he give this nameless fellow with whom he shares his evenings and sometimes his nights too, who is absent only in the daytime, when he, Robin, walks the quays inspecting the new arrivals and his man gallops about the kingdom making his inspections?

Will this man, in the course of his travels, ever come to Bristol? He yearns to meet the fellow in the flesh, shake his hand, take a stroll with him along the quayside and hearken as he tells of his visit to the dark north of the island, or of his adventures in the writing business. But he fears there will be no meeting, not in this life. If he must settle on a likeness for the pair of them, his man and he, he would write that they are like two ships sailing in contrary directions, one west, the other east. Or better, that they are deckhands toiling in the rigging, the one on a ship sailing west, the other on a ship sailing east. Their ships pass close, close enough to hail. But the seas are rough, the weather is stormy: their eyes lashed by the spray, their hands burned by the cordage, they pass each other by, too busy even to wave.

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Available at: [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/2003/coetzee-lecture-e.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2003/coetzee-lecture-e.html)  
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## APPENDIX B

### **A Post modern Dialogue:**

Defoe and Coetzee talk, their mild voices are easily heard. It is not the sound of the island that we hear. We hear the sound of the fire engine which makes the balloon move. Is this the balloon of time? Is this the balloon of history? Or is this just a fiction that I am inventing to accomplish one more part of this paper? The fact is that I see Defoe and Coetzee in the balloon talking. If I did not know them I would easily recognize them by their voices. Defoe's accent is easily recognizable, it is the same, the same as three hundred years ago. Coetzee, although he has traveled a lot and has been living in Adelaide for some time, still speaks like a South African man.

Both men are in the balloon, they do not look at each other for a while. They appreciate the beauty of the sky. The view presents them with gifts that only a balloon ride could offer, a slow sightseeing from the heights. They have no fear. There is no reason for that. The breeze draws some pictures in the clouds, and they, as ingenious-minded authors, have their thoughts running far away. This meeting between the two authors was something expected since *Foe* was written. Now they are reunited, and they keep silent? There are so many things to be said! The only sound we hear is not of the roar of the shelves but the sound of the wind, the flames of the balloon engine and Defoe's white scarf which is dancing.

As for me, as it is to be expected, I am invisible to them.

Defoe is the one to cut the silence. Addressing Coetzee he asks, "Why did you choose to write about my character, my story?"

Coetzee looks at Defoe with his enigmatic eyes and answers,

“I liked very much the idea of a man alone on an island, for me it was the best of all your ideas.”

Defoe had a glow of flattering passing over his mind. He felt, however, that the tone of the other’s voice was not a compliment. He then raised his right eyebrow and said,

“Let me ask you the one thing that I urge to ask about Sir, Why, Why did you introduce a woman in my story? A story that has been read and admired along the years as a tale about loneliness, without the intromission of any woman...”

“First of all...Mr. Defoe...- Coetzee looks at the blue sky, where there is a cloud with the shape of a dog, and sighs – I did not do anything different from what you did...in *Roxanna* or in *Moll Flanders*, I gave a woman the role of protagonist and narrator.”

“I know, I know...But this story was meant to be a man’s tale about...”

“Who says that? - Interrupts Coetzee - I am the author of this book now! This is another story, another point of view. The other one is yours! *I do not wish to hear of your desire. It concerns other things, it does not concern the island, and it is not a matter of the island* (Foe p.36)

“But it was I who started it all! You would not have written *Foe*, had I not written *Robinson Crusoe* before. And there is something else. Why cannot Friday speak....”

“Friday cannot speak ‘cause I wanna give voice to the Negro, and visibility to the Woman, of course...”

Defoe, gets in his nerves.

“How come, if you took *off* his voice! How can you give voice to the minorities if you take their voice from the book? And you are speaking about giving him voice!! I guess we do not speak the same language, Sir.

Defoe makes many gestures with his hands and his voice is altered. Coetzee on the other hand continues standoffish. The 18<sup>th</sup> century writer looks at the sky as if he were asking for help and says,

“Why? What is the reason, explain to me, if there is one, for things in your literature of the future seem not to have any... Why did you mutilate Friday, the Noble savage? What kind of entertainment do you think you are offering your readers with that?

Coetzee smiles with the corner of his mouth, as if mocking on Defoe and says,

“I do not aim at entertaining my readers, I do not write to entertain them. That is not the goal of my writing...”

“I am afraid I do not really understand your story, Sir. The tale has no proper end. The two last chapters start the same way, with only a difference of the tense. One is in the present and the other is in the past. I am lost as to that...”

“Maybe this is the reaction I want to cause on people...”

- Are you always so laconic, Mr. Coetzee?

“That is I want people to think. – And he raises his head to the sky. - Making people think is the purpose of my writing.”

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