The Intersection of Postmodern, Postcolonial and Feminist Discourse in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*

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Summary

This paper is a condensed version of the final chapter of *The Novels of J.M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories*. It was to have been presented at the seminar on *Foe* in March 1988, prior to the publication of the book in July 1988. It offers a reading of the novel, *Foe*, as allegory, with the figure of Susan Barton representing certain positions in feminist discourse, Cruso representing postcolonial discourse from the position of the colonizer, and Friday's muteness representing the impossibility of a pure, original discourse on the part of the colonized. Feminist, postcolonial and postmodern discourses have in common the problem of speaking *as* Other, of representing the self as Other to various dominant discourses. In *Foe* Coetzee would appear to borrow strategies for figuring radical Otherness from both feminist and postcolonial discourse, while exploring the contradictions inherent in these strategies. Postmodernism offers strategies of intervention and evasion necessary to white South African writers, and at the same time is able to offer a critique of the claims to authority and self-representation made by a certain postcolonial and feminist discourse.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel is 'n gekondenseerde weergawe van die finale hoofstuk van *The Novels of J.M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories*. Dit sou gelewer word tydens 'n seminaar oor *Foe* in Maart 1988, voor die publikasie van die boek in Julie 1988. Dit bied 'n lesing van die roman *Foe* as allegorie, waarin Susan Barton sekere posisies in feministiese diskoers verteenwoordig, Cruso postkoloniale diskoers vanuit die posisie van die kolonialiseerder, en Friday se stomheid die onmoontlikheid van 'n suiwer, oorspronklike diskoers vanuit die kant van die gekolonialiseerde voorstel. Feministiese, postkoloniale en postmoderne diskoerse het die gemeenskaplike probleem van "praat *as* Ander", van die self voor te stel as "Ander" aan verskeie dominante diskoerse. In *Foe* lyk dit asof Coetzee strategieë ter figurering van radikale Andersheid van beide feministiese en postkoloniale diskoers leen, terwyl die inherente teenstrydighede in hierdie strategieë terselfdertyd verken word. Postmodernisme verskaf strategieë van tussentrede en ontwyking wat noodsaaklik is vir wit Suid-Afrikaanse skrywers, en is terselfdertyd in staat om kritiek te uiter teen die aanspraak op outoriteit en self-representasie wat gemaak word deur 'n sekere postkoloniale en feministiese diskoers.

Shortly after the publication of *Foe* in 1986, a review appeared under the heading: "Postmodern Games While Soweto Burns". This title carries the implication that postmodernism is *not* an appropriate literary mode in a situation such as South Africa, and, by extension, the implication that certain modes of writing *are* appropriate to a greater or lesser degree in the context of such blatant and legalised oppression. Coetzee's postmodernism is evident, at the level of style or form, in the self-reflexive, allegorical and palimpsestic nature of his writing. While *Foe* announces its palimpsestic status in very explicit terms, it can be argued that the previous novels function in a similar manner, inhabiting prior modes of discourse and deconstructing them from within.[1] By means of this strategy, the novels announce their own inevitable

imbrication in these existing modes of discourse and their history, while seeking to evade the ideological assumptions and power relations in which they are inscribed. Producing what might be called discourse theory in the form of novelistic discourse, Coetzee's writing attempts to figure its own desire and to avoid constructing an alternative power base. In a recent interview he asks how one can question power from a position of power, and suggests that one ought to question it from its antagonist position, namely, the position of weakness. He resists being installed in a position of power even in relation to his own text, insisting that by accepting or rejecting the interviewer's implications concerning *Foe* he would be producing a master narrative for a set of texts that claim to deny all master narratives (Morphet, 1987: 2).[2]

In this sense, then, his postmodernism is not a "game", but a strategy of intervention and evasion, which would seem to me to be an entirely appropriate response to the dilemma of being a white South African writer. I wish to focus upon a particular aspect of this dilemma, by way of leading into the issue of how it is useful, or even possible, to posit the intersection of postmodern, feminist and postcolonial discourse in Coetzee's novel. In this novel, Susan Barton is shown arriving at a point at which she expostulates: "To tell my story and be silent on Friday's tongue is no better than offering a book for sale with pages in it quietly left empty. Yet the only tongue that can tell Friday's secret is the tongue he has lost!" (Coetzee, 1986: 67). This is a dilemma faced not only by white South African writers, but by any writer who, in a postcolonial context, historically occupies the position of colonizer in relation to the colonized people, that is to say the indigenous population. If it is recognised as important not to repress or deny the presence of the colonized subject, then the problem that arises is that of invoking this presence without speaking *for* the Other, or without turning the Other into the Same.

An analysis of the way in which *Foe* addresses this problem, and the related problem of speaking *as* Other, leads us beyond issues of form to a consideration of postmodernism as an expression of resistance to the conditions of postmodernity. According to Simon During,

> We can, rather brutally, characterize postmodern thought ... as that thought which refuses to turn the Other into the Same. Thus it provides a theoretical space for what postmodernity denies: otherness. Postmodern thought also recognizes, however, that the Other can never speak for itself *as* the Other. One should hesitate to call a discourse which revolves around these positions either for or against postmodernity, but it is certainly not simply consonant with it. (1987: 33)[3]

The Other is turned into the Same in the process whereby a group or an individual erects an identity for itself, excluding that which produces the necessary limits for this identity. An hierarchical structure is established, with the self at the centre and as the source of a valorised positive term, which is set against a subordinate and excluded term, for example male/female, black/white, presence/absence, truth/error. Real difference, or radical Otherness, is thus reduced to an opposite term, the same inverted or

reversed, as occurs with a mirror image, so that this Otherness can be incorporated dialectically into that which is known (see Mohanty, 1983 and Lang, 1983). One of the responses of those who have been subjected to this process has been to insist upon their radical Otherness, and upon the possibility of speaking as Other. It is at this point, the problem of speaking as Other, that I see the intersection of postmodern, feminist and postcolonial discourse taking place. I realise that in positing such an intersection I run the risk of implying that each of these areas of discourse is homogeneous or unproblematic, and that there exists a universally acceptable way of characterising them. I should point out that Coetzee's novel does not produce this effect: the allegorical reading which I am going to offer reduces the contradictions, stabilises the shifting positions and smooths over the sense of the heterogeneous which the novelistic discourse is able to produce. My argument is that feminist and postcolonial discourse seem to offer certain strategies for figuring radical Otherness which Coetzee's novel borrows while exploring their contradictions.

The problem for oppositional discourses, then, is one of representation, of finding a place from which to speak, and of resisting containment by the dominant discourses. If we accept Fredric Jameson's definition of postmodernity as a condition which is inextricably linked to multinational capitalism, a system so totalising that it makes the achievement of critical distance impossible, then it seems that the centre has spread outwards to absorb the margins, effacing the opposition centrality/marginality and allowing no foothold for opposition itself. According to Jameson:

> not only punctual and local countercultural forms of cultural resistance and guerilla warfare, but also even overtly political interventions . . . are all somehow secretly disarmed and reabsorbed by a system of which they themselves might well be considered a part, since they can achieve no distance from it. (1984: 87)

Lyotard, who approaches the phenomenon from a different angle, and has been accused of denying postmodernism its historical specificity, nevertheless articulates a similar problematic when he says:

> The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself . . . that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. (1984: 81)

Craig Owens makes the connection between postmodernism and feminist discourse in terms of a critique of representation:

> It is precisely at the legislative frontier between what can be represented and what cannot that the postmodernist operation is being staged – not in order to transcend representation, but in order to expose that system of power that authorizes certain representations while blocking, prohibiting or invalidating others. Among those prohibited from Western representation, whose representations are denied all legitimacy, are women. Excluded from representation by its very structure, they return within it as a figure for – a representation of – the unrepresentable (Nature, Truth, the Sublime, etc.) . . . Montrelay, in fact,

> identifies women as the "ruin of representation"; not only have they nothing to lose; their exteriority to Western representation exposes its limits.
>
> Here, we arrive at an apparent crossing of the feminist critique of patriarchy and the postmodernist critique of representation ... (1983: 59)

The phrase on which I want to focus for the moment is the one that refers to "that system of power that authorizes certain representations while blocking, prohibiting or invalidating others". Susan Barton's story is the story of a woman seeking to authorise her own representation: she challenges the authority of existing representations, and wishes to be recognised as the author of her own speech, which is why the first three sections of the novel take the form of letters addressed to Mr Foe, and why the novel is a palimpsest of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. The choice of Defoe as the archetypal author is perhaps best explained by means of reference to Foucault's much cited paper "What is an Author?" According to Foucault, the author's name serves to characterise a certain mode of being of discourse, distinguishing it from everyday speech and from texts such as private letters or anonymous posters, which have writers but not authors. The author function, he claims, describes the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society, in that authorship denotes a form of ownership, and that texts only began to have authors to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive. Thus, Foucault claims, "since the eighteenth century, the author has played the role of the regulator of the fictive, a role quite characteristic of our era of industrial and bourgeois society, of individualism and private property" (1984a: 108 and 119). Defoe is widely regarded as the "father" of the English novel and, while his role as originator may be disputed, his particular status as writer in the first half of the eighteenth century, and the fact that he was arrested on several occasions for his political writings, do allow him to figure effectively as one of the early representatives of the Author function.

The most significant displacement which takes place between Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Coetzee's *Foe* is, of course, the use of a woman narrator, who tells Cruso's story in place of Crusoe himself. This is not, however, the sole feature on which I base my claim that Susan Barton's speech is representative of certain positions in feminist discourse. The novel also contains scattered allusions to certain seminal feminist texts, the most obvious of these being *The Madwoman in the Attic*, with Susan Barton's repeated references to the attic as writing space, and with her name suggesting a contraction of the names of the two authors, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. More important is the way in which *Foe* takes up the strategy of the palimpsest, which Gilbert and Gubar valorise, in order to deconstruct their claim that writers such as Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson "managed the difficult task of achieving *true female literary authority* by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards" (1979: 73, my emphasis). Tracing the series of alliances which Susan Barton establishes with the men she encounters, one is able to trace the

strategies successively projected and abandoned by women's writing on its way to the proclamation of authority. And simultaneously one can trace the development of Coetzee's novel *beyond* the insistence upon authority over its own meaning, so that if the enemy for Susan Barton is the *male* author, the enemy for Coetzee is the assumption of authority *per se*.

Narrating her story to Mr Foe, Susan Barton tells how her journey away from the centre was motivated by her desire to find her daughter, who "was abducted and conveyed to the New World by an Englishman, a factor and agent in the carrying trade" (Coetzee, 1986: 10). The daughter has, literally, been sold down the river, and the mother's desire to save her may be read as women's desire to retrieve the self from its representation as an item of exchange in men's speech: a necessary project, if one recalls the closing section of *Robinson Crusoe*, in which Crusoe recounts how, along with *other* supplies, he sent seven women for the men remaining on his island. Failing to find her daughter, Susan Barton embarks for Lisbon, but is cast away with the murdered ship's captain. One may read this scene of mutiny and murder as representing the bourgeois political revolutions which undermined precapitalistic, preindustrial patriarchal relations between rulers and subjects. Ship's master, or patriarchal figure of authority, and women are cast away at the same historical moment, suggesting perhaps that feminist discourse emerged subsequently as a by-product of bourgeois individualism.[4]

Susan Barton is cast up on Cruso's island. This supremely separate sphere has, predictably, been read by reviewers as representing the South African situation, and while Cruso's kingdom may in some senses function as a metaphor of Afrikaner Nationalism, it would seem that here, as in his previous novels, Coetzee is concerned to place the South African situation within the context of certain dominant Western ideologies, seeing it, in his words, "as only one manifestation of a wider historical situation to do with colonialism, late colonialism, neo-colonialism" (Watson, 1978: 23). As sole survivors of a wrecked slave ship, both Cruso and Friday are presented as victims of the colonizing enterprise. Cruso's rule over his island kingdom seems to represent a form of postcolonial nationalism, as he asserts his independence from the mother country, while repeating the modes of oppression of the original colonizers. Friday's tongue has been cut out, and Cruso does not attempt to communicate in alternative ways, preferring not to disturb Friday's muteness, and using words as the shortest way to subject Friday to his will.

While Owens points to the connection between postmodernism and feminist discursive strategies, During posits an affiliation between postmodern thought and postcolonialism. He says:

> For me, perhaps eccentrically, post-colonialism is regarded as the need, in nations or groups which have been victims of imperialism, to achieve an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images. Here the argument becomes complex, since, clearly, for postmodernity (thought of as a cultural dominant), post-colonialism constitutes one of those Others which might derive hope and legitimation from the first aspect of postmodern thought, its refusal to turn the Other into the Same. As such it is threatened by the second

> moment in postmodern thought [its recognition that the Other can never speak for itself *as* the Other]. (1987: 33)

What is sought in both feminist and postcolonial discourse is a position from which to represent the self as Other to patriarchal or Western modes of representation, while postmodernism introduces the recognition that the context of postmodernity denies a space for Otherness. The desire to speak as Other has been figured as a form of auto-erotism by feminists such as Luce Irigaray (1977), and During has, likewise, constructed postcolonialism in terms of auto-affective speech:[5]

> The subject hears him/herself speak using signs that are universal. They belong to a language uttered not only by the self but by others. Yet the signifiers are uttered as "his own". To apply the argument in our context: the postcolonial self knows itself in universal terms, that is, in terms of the international centres, of a colonial past. Yet the images and texts it produces as "its own" can affect it as if they have passed through no "external detour", no world which is not their own. (1985: 369)

It is significant in this respect that Coetzee's Cruso is a taciturn figure who, rather than engage in conversation with Susan Barton, prefers "gazing out . . . into the setting sun, nodding to himself as though a voice spoke privately inside him that he was listening to" (Coetzee, 1986: 13). It is also significant that he cannot survive the journey back to England, back to the centre: he refuses translation into a universal context, or universal language, and represents an extreme and impossible insistence upon an autonomous identity.

Susan Barton, on the other hand, describes herself as pre-occupied with two things during her stay on the island, that is, with what she refers to as her immoderate desire to be saved, and with Cruso's failure to set down a record of his island sojourn. These two things are related, for the desire to save oneself or another functions as a metaphor of the desire to translate the self or the other into writing. On her return to London, her nostalgia for Cruso's island would seem to represent the feminist desire for a form of self-present speech which is possible only from the position of island isolation. While Cruso dies, Susan Barton has to find ways of surviving in the metropolis. She becomes Cruso's heir, inheriting Friday from Cruso just as Cruso had inherited him from the original traders in human life, and it is possible to say that Friday survives the journey from periphery to centre by virtue of his speechless condition, and his consequent dependence upon her speech. Her nostalgia for island life is supplanted by an increasing pre-occupation with Friday, as the concern with Cruso's story is replaced, first, by the concern for truthful representation of her own story, and then by the desire to fathom Friday's story.

There is no space here to trace the steps in the dialogue between Susan Barton and Mr Foe, steps which represent various positions occupied by feminist discourse (see Dovey, 1988). I will instead focus upon the contradictions I see represented in Susan Barton's attitude toward Friday, contradictions which have the potential to undermine the project of any opposi-

tional group attempting to posit an autonomous identity in writing, or attempting to speak as Other. Firstly, such a project involves setting up relations of power which, to return to Owens's words, inevitably authorise certain representations, while blocking, prohibiting or invalidating others. This is what occurs in the hierarchical relationship between Cruso and Friday, in which Friday is maintained in a condition of silence. Secondly, there is a danger that a subordinate figure may be appropriated as a means of *representing* radical Otherness, that is to say, as a means of signalling an essential identity beyond speech. It should be noted that these dangers have been identified by, amongst others, Toril Moi (1985) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1986), who offer a critique (from within) of certain positions in feminist discourse.

It can be argued that Susan Barton's preoccupation with Friday's lost tongue is an allegory of the way in which the colonized subject has been appropriated by feminist discourse. One of the forms this appropriation has taken is the metaphorical alignment of women and colonized subjects as victims of patriarchal oppression which, it is claimed, has deprived both groups of their natural language.[6] This alignment has led to the equation of an authentic women's language with the possession of a mother tongue. Thus, for example, we find a collection of essays in feminist psychoanalytic interpretation titled *The (M)other Tongue* (Garner, Kahane and Sprengnether, 1985), and Gilbert and Gubar talk about

> a dialectic of the sexes that centered on the crucial issue of woman's command of language as against language's command of woman, a dialectic that now directs our attention to women's historic efforts to come to terms with the urgent need for female literary authority through fantasies about the possession of a mother tongue. (1985: 527)

Elaine Showalter is, however, alert to the problems of positing a women's language in the form of a mother tongue, for although she makes the point that "From a political perspective, there are interesting parallels between the feminist problem of a women's language and the recurring 'language issue' in the general history of decolonization", she goes on to say that

> despite its unifying appeal, the concept of a women's language is riddled with difficulties. Unlike Welsh, Breton, Swahili, or Amharic, that is, languages of minority or colonized groups, there is no mother tongue, no genderlect spoken by the female population in a society, which differs significantly from the dominant language. (1981: 192)

The colonial subject becomes the means of figuring a position outside patriarchal language not only in theoretical discourse, but also in feminist dramatic and fictional discourse. Thus, for example, in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*, British imperialism in Africa and the black man are used to construct a somewhat facile approximation of women's oppression.[7] And in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972), the indigenous inhabitants of an island in the Canadian wilderness, and the figure of the unborn child, provide the narrator with the means of representing her pre-linguistic identity.

For a certain feminist discourse, then, racial or linguistic difference, and the possession of a mother tongue from which the colonized subject has been alienated by the colonizer's language, become symbols of undifferentiated presence. The quest for a primordial identity is described in Lacanian terms by Jacqueline Rose, who draws attention to the way in which this quest assigns femininity "to a point of origin prior to the mark of symbolic difference and the law". This point of origin is "the maternal body, an undifferentiated space, and yet one in which the girl child recognises herself ... fully *knows* herself in the mother" (1982: 54). Now in Coetzee's novel Susan Barton finds a dead girl child, a newborn baby who has been abandoned in a ditch. Returning the body to the ditch, she asks: "Who was the child, but I, in another life?" (Coetzee, 1986: 105). The dead child is the woman in another life because she stands for this point of origin "prior to the mark of symbolic difference and the law", prior to her entry into the life granted by language. This incident occurs while Susan Barton and Friday are on their way to Bristol, where she hopes to place him on a ship bound for *his* place of origin in Africa, and the dead baby girl may be described as the correlative of the unsullied self to which she would have Friday return. That this is so is evident when at a later stage she is made to recognise the way in which Friday's silence has served her. She says to Mr Foe:

> 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 defence against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others ... No matter what he is to himself (is he anything to himself? – how can he tell us?), what he is to the world is what I make of him. Therefore the silence of Friday is a helpless silence. He is the child of his silence, a child unborn, a child waiting to be born that cannot be born. Whereas the silence I keep regarding Bahia and other matters is chosen and purposeful: it is my own silence. (Coetzee, 1986: 121–22)[8]

Susan Barton's assumption that it is *possible* to return Friday to his origins by simply placing him on a boat bound for Africa represents the denial of the colonized subject's geographic, historical and linguistic specificity. The *difference* of the colonized subject is reduced to sameness, as this difference is posited with reference to white Western women. Using the "speechless" condition of the colonized subject as the means of representing that which is outside language, women's discourse reproduces patriarchal structures in which, as Owens points out, *women* return as a figure for the unrepresentable. Just as woman has been fetishised in men's language, so the colonized subject becomes fetishised in a certain feminist discourse. Each becomes the means of simultaneously recognising and disavowing symbolic castration: that is to say, of recognising and disavowing the irrevocable loss of self-presence, of wholeness, that occurs upon entry into language. Larysa Mykata makes the point that what the male looks for in the woman is not the phallus, but its absence. She says:

> Instead of having a penis and being a subject, for man, woman as the object of desire, woman as a whole, as a veiled hole, becomes the phallus. And it is by

> seeing the woman as an object that does not speak or look that the man can believe he is approaching her when what he approaches is only the cause of his desire (for her). (1983: 54)

For Susan Barton, the loss of the tongue becomes the equivalent of the absence of the penis. Having averted her eyes from the sight of the stub at the back of Friday's mouth, she fears that "evidence of a yet more hideous mutilation might be thrust upon [her] sight" (Coetzee, 1986: 119). She describes a scene of unveiling, in which her gaze is directed at Friday's genitals, as she looks for his absent penis. She finds its present absence, or its absent presence: her failure to say whether the penis is present or absent maintains the equivocal status of the phallus:

> In the dance nothing was still and yet everything was still. The whirling robe was a scarlet bell settled upon Friday's shoulders and enclosing him; Friday was the dark pillar at its centre. What had been hidden from me was revealed. I saw; or, I should say, my eyes were open to what was present to them.
> I saw and believed I had seen, though afterwards I remembered Thomas, who also saw, but could not be brought to believe till he had put his hand in the wound. (Coetzee, 1986: 119–20)

Friday is the "dark pillar" at the centre of the "scarlet bell": his absent penis/tongue allows him to figure as the phallus for Susan Barton as woman writer; he becomes a fetishised phallus which allows her to elude the fact of her own symbolic castration in language.

Engrossed in this fetishistic attachment to Friday, Susan Barton is shown simultaneously in the process of rejecting a girl who claims to be her daughter, and whom Susan believes has been sent to her by Mr Foe. This girl, and the maid, Amy, are characters from Defoe's novel, *Roxana*. Rejecting the girl, Susan Barton rejects the script that has been produced for women by men writers, a particularly negative script in this case, for Roxana exemplifies the worst aspects of capitalistic enterprise: she turns her body into an item of exchange, and makes her fortune out of duplicitous relationships with men, having abandoned her children on the doorstep of an unwitting sister-in-law. Roxana seeks out her daughter later in life, but when this child attempts to expose the secret of the mother's identity, she is conveniently done away with by the faithful maid, Amy, whom Roxana then rejects. It is a script of a woman's treachery and betrayal of her own kind, and Susan Barton's disavowal must be read as a positive strategy on the part of women writers. However, rejecting this negative script, Susan Barton has to recognise that the daughter and maid, *as* representations, have an equivalent status to her own representation of herself in language. She has to recognise that once women enter the realm of writing, claims for authentic and immediate presentation of the self and for authorial control are not valid. Thus when Mr Foe introduces the daughter and the maid from Roxana into the room in which he and Susan Barton are talking, Susan asks:

> But if these women are creatures of yours, visiting me at your instruction, speaking words you have prepared for them, then who am I and who indeed are

> you? ... I thought I was myself and this girl a creature from another order speaking words you made up for her. But now I am full of doubt. Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself. (Coetzee, 1986: 133)

Foe's response is to kiss Susan, who then asks: "Was this his reply – that he and I were man and woman, that man and woman are beyond words?" However, she goes on to say: "If so it was a paltry reply, demonstration more than reply, one that would satisfy no philosopher" (Coetzee, 1986: 134), thus rejecting the essentialist definition of sexual difference, refusing Foe's insistence upon natural, physiological difference as *the* mark of difference between men and women. This is not to argue that anatomical difference does not exist, but that a gendered identity is produced, not beyond words, but in words. As Rose has pointed out, if anatomical difference comes to figure sexual difference, it becomes the sole representative of what that difference is allowed to be (1982: 48).

Although I have offered a negative critique of the way in which Friday's muteness is made to figure a strategic silence on the part of Susan Barton, which in turn points to the way in which the figure of racial and/or linguistic Otherness is fetishised in a certain feminist discourse, I would not in this way exclude the possibility of comparing the processes of racial and sexual differentiation (the problem as I have articulated it is that of the discursive exploitation of one group by another, which can occur despite the best of intentions). Homi Bhabha recognises the danger of conflating "unproblematically, two forms of the marking – and splitting – of the subject", but suggests that there is a theoretical and a political space for the articulation of forms of racial and sexual difference. He says:

> in the sense in which that word [articulation] itself denies an "original" identity or a "singularity" to objects of difference, sexual or racial ... it follows that the epithets racial or sexual come to be seen as modes of differentiation, realised as multiple, cross-cutting determinations, polymorphous and perverse, always demanding a specific and strategic calculation of their effects. (1983: 194)

Within the phallic definition of sexuality, the woman is constituted as the "not-all", while within the chromatic definition of racial identity the colonized subject is constituted as "not-white", or non-white. In both cases, then, the identity of man/woman or colonizer/colonized (black/white) is posited in terms of a fixed and polarised difference, which denies the vicissitudes inherent in the process of subject formation.

To critique this position is not, in turn, to deny the existence of difference, but to offer in its place a process of mutual differentiation, a process based on reciprocity, in which one recognises one's own Otherness to oneself, and grants to the other group or individual its radical Otherness, accepting rather than denying or recuperating alterity. It is this that Susan Barton is presented as being unable to achieve. Straddling Foe in a sexual encounter which symbolises her assumption of authority, she claims to be the muse who begets her story on Foe, repeating the way in which men have engendered their stories on the figure of woman. This is a simple reversal of positions, a supplanting of men's authority by women's literary authority, which in no way

disturbs the notions of ownership or mastery which women have criticised so strongly. And Susan Barton cannot tolerate the undermining of her newly assumed authority by Friday, whose gaze returns to confront her from the position of the Other, in the same way that the gaze and words of women have returned to confront men and displace them from their position of authority. When Friday produces a design of row upon row of eyes upon human feet, she demands that he give her the slate. She would efface his gaze, refuse the look he turns upon her, decentering her and undermining her self-presence. She says to Mr Foe: "I am Sinbad of Persia and Friday is the tyrant riding on my shoulders. I walk with him, I eat with him, he watches me while I sleep. If I cannot be free of him I will stifle!" (Coetzee, 1986: 148)

Coetzee's novel, on the other hand, anticipates and invokes its own displacement from the position of provisional authority. Functioning as a palimpsest of Defoe's novel, it nevertheless implies an awareness that in turn it too will be re-inscribed as it submits to the inevitable process of supplementarity. *Foe* has two endings, the first of which both refuses nostalgia and undermines the utopian quality of the second ending. At the conclusion of Section Three, Foe and Susan Barton are teaching Friday to write. We see him being inducted into the system of Western discourse in which, we assume, he will have to fight for a position of "authority" as Susan Barton has done. In the final section of the novel we are provided with a figure of supplementarity as the un-named, un-sexed narrator describes a descent into the wreck of the slave ship: a movement into the future projected by means of a descent into the past. Metaphor and imagery invoke Adrienne Rich's exploratory feminist writing, particularly the poem, "Diving into the Wreck", and the article "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision" (1972), in which she speaks of a whole new psychic geography to be explored by women writers. If the descent into the wreck is a metaphor of the descent into the underwater world of the unconscious, what we find there is not, as Rich's poem suggests, an androgynous being, not some area outside signification, but a place where bodies are, precisely, their own *signs* (Coetzee, 1986: 157). The three successive scenes of discovery, which suggest repeated attempts to penetrate to yet deeper levels of the unconscious, reveal the same signs, the bodies of the girl, of Friday, of Foe and of Susan Barton: what is discovered each time is the same old situation, the family constellation of father, mother, child. The face to face position of the bodies of Foe and Susan Barton suggests that each sex confronts and so displaces the other from a position of mastery. This is a utopian vision of sexuality, reminiscent of that described by Derrida in the interview with Christie McDonald. Asking "What if we were to approach . . . the area of relationship to the other where the code of sexual marks would no longer be discriminating?" Derrida says:

> The relationship would not be a-sexual, far from it, but would be sexual otherwise: beyond the binary difference that governs the decorum of all codes, beyond the opposition feminine/masculine, beyond homosexuality and heterosexuality which come to the same thing. (1982: 76)

The final scene of Coetzee's novel takes us beyond the dream of a "multi-

plicity of sexually marked voices" (Derrida, 1982: 76), toward an area of relationship with the other where the code of *racial* marks would no longer be discriminating. Rose has argued that women are excluded, not *from* the nature of language, but *by* the nature of language (1982: 49), and it is possible to make the same claim in relation to the colonized subject. It is possible to anticipate a change in these areas of relationship precisely because identity and difference are articulated in language. As Homi Bhabha points out, if the process of racial and sexual subject formation,

> inscribes a normative, normalizing place for the subject ... that metaphoric access to identity is exactly the place of prohibition and repression, precisely a *conflict* of authority. (1986: xix; my emphasis)

At a late stage in their dialogue Foe says to Susan Barton:

> Let us confront our worst fear, which is that we have all of us been called into the world from a different order (which we have now forgotten) by a conjurer unknown to us ... Then I ask nevertheless: Have we thereby lost our freedom? Are you, for one, any less mistress of your life? Do we of necessity become puppets in a story whose end is invisible to us, and towards which we are marched like condemned felons? You and I know, in our different ways, how rambling an occupation writing is; and conjuring is surely much the same ... Have we cause to believe that the lives it is given us to live proceed with any more design than these whimsical adventures? (Coetzee, 1986: 135)

If we are inevitably Other to ourselves, located in a system which allows for no *radical* Otherness, there is at least the consolation that this system is not purposeful or planned, is not a monolithic centre of identity and truth. It is thus susceptible to transgression, is indeed constituted by these transgressions: in Bhabha's words, the metaphoric access to identity is a conflict of authority. In this closing scene, then, the narrator lies face to face with Friday, replicating the face to face position of Susan Barton and Foe:

> 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. (Coetzee, 1986: 157)

This soft stream beating against the skin of the narrator's face points us forward to a time when it might be possible to perceive the self through the gaze, or the speech, of the Other, recognising the self to be simply an Other among Others. It points us forward to a time when the claim to authority might no longer be a politically necessary strategy, and when it might be possible to ask, as Foucault does at the conclusion of "What is an Author?": "What difference does it make who is speaking?"

Notes

1. See Dovey, 1988: in the book I develop detailed readings of each of the novels, establishing their relationship to these prior modes of discourse which they inhabit and deconstruct.

2. The problem is, of course, that even in the claim that his texts *deny* all master narratives, Coetzee is producing a master narrative of sorts.
3. During argues that: "it is just as rewarding to construe literary postmodernism as an enemy of postmodernity as to consider it as its expression and helpmeet. Thus in ethicopolitical terms postmodernist texts do not differ from modernist texts which are simultaneously enemies of, and moments in, modernity" (1987: 32).
4. Thus Toril Moi points out that:

   > Feminists must be able to account for the paradoxically productive aspects of patriarchal ideology (the moments in which the ideology backfires on itself, as it were) as well as for its obvious oppressive implications if they are to answer the tricky question of how it is that some women manage to counter patriarchal strategies despite the odds stacked against them. In the nineteenth century, for instance, it would seem true to say that bourgeois patriarchy's predilection for liberal humanism as a "legitimizing ideology" lent ammunition and arguments to the growing bourgeois feminist movement. If one held that the rights of the individual were sacred, it became increasingly difficult to argue that women's rights somehow were not. (1985: 64)

5. During develops this argument out of a passage from Derrida:

   > Postcolonialism then is the name for products of the ex-colonies' need for an identity granted not in terms of the colonial power, but in terms of themselves. It operates in modes similar to what Derrida in his early work on Husserl called "pure auto-affection": "the operation of hearing oneself speak". Indeed, though difficult and belonging to another realm of discourse altogether, Derrida's remarks on hearing oneself speak are very pertinent here.
   >
   > On the one hand, it (hearing oneself speak) operates within the medium of universality; what appears as signified therein must be idealities that are *idealiter* indefinitely repeatable or transmissible as the same. On the other hand, the subject can hear or speak to himself and be affected by the signifier he produces, without passing through an external detour, the world, the sphere of what is not "his own". (During, 1985: 369, cit. Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison: Evanston, 1973, p. 78).

6. Another form taken by this appropriative activity is described by Spivak as "an information retrieval approach" to "Third world" subjects. She says:

   > To consider the Third World as distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact literary heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted, and curricularized in English translation fosters the emergence of "the Third World" as a signifier that allows us to forget that "worlding", even as it expands the empire of the literary discipline. (1985: 243)

   See Dovey, 1988, for a reading of the way in which *Foe* constructs a critique of this aspect of feminist discourse.
7. In her introduction to *Cloud Nine* Caryl Churchill says:

   > When I came to write the play, I returned to an idea that had been touched on briefly in the workshop – the parallel between colonial and sexual oppression, which Genet calls "the colonial or feminine mentality of interiorised repression". So the first act of *Cloud Nine* takes place in Victorian Africa, where Clive, the white man, imposes his ideals on his family and the natives. (1985: 245)

   Having served Churchill's purpose in Act One, Joshua, the black man, is effectively marginalised, for he does not appear again in the play – the play ends in London in 1979, "in the changing sexuality of our own time" (Churchill, 1985: 246).

8. This is reminiscent of Foucault's argument in "The Repressive Hypothesis" that: Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name; the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses. (1978: 309–10)

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