

Postmodernist Narrative Strategies in *Foe*

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Summary

It is argued in this paper that Coetzee's notion of narrativity necessitates an analysis of the interarticulation between contemporary theoretical discourses and narrative practice. Since calculated construction seems to inform his re-writing and re-contextualization of romantic tales of adventure, Genette's structuralist model is used as a framework for tracing Coetzee's unique exploitation of postmodernist narrative strategies via the segmentation of his text into four different parts.

Opsomming

Daar word in hierdie referaat uitgegaan van die veronderstelling dat Coetzee se opvatting van narratiwiteit 'n analise van die interartikulasie van kontemporêre teoretiese diskoerse en narratiewe praktyk noodsaak. Aangesien berekende konstruksie blykbaar sy her-skrif en her-kontekstualisering van romantiese avontuurverhale onderlê, word Genette se strukturalistiese model as raamwerk gebruik vir 'n analise van Coetzee se unieke eksploitasie van postmodernistiese narratiewe strategieë via die segmentering van sy teks in vier verskillende dele.

1 Introduction

Postmodernist or metafictional texts are usually distinguished by their self-conscious reflections on the art of story-telling or the artifice of writing.¹ In this regard, J.M. Coetzee's latest novel *Foe* constitutes no exception within the ever-growing corpus of so-called postmodernist fiction. Indeed, the explicit reflections on the possible stories of Cruso(e),² Susan Barton or Friday, the worlds in which their narratives are supposed to have taken place or in which they are being re-enacted and the constant fluctuation between fiction and reality are emphasised to such an extent as to appear almost obsessional at times. In order to achieve this explicit focus on the art of story-telling rather than on the story itself, Coetzee resorts to a unique exploitation of narrative strategies which results in a constant metacommentary on more conventional views regarding the limits of fictional texts or the nature of narrativity.

These strategies presuppose a particular competence regarding the reading of Coetzee's text in that they require an awareness of the complexity and apparent elusiveness of the narrative signifier itself. It is, however, an awareness that simultaneously demands that the reader becomes involved in the process of writing. This type of active reader participation is particularly required in metafictional texts, where continuous deliberations on the artifice of writing seem to frustrate or abort attempts at pinpointing the so-called meaning or relevance of the textual signifier; instead, the reader seems to be coerced into self-conscious reflection on those problematics of writing with which the author of a postmodernist text is invariably confronted. Hutcheon (1980: 138-139) observes that in self-conscious fiction the reader's role is a

two-pronged one: as a narratee the reader is actually inscribed and addressed in the text; at the same time, s/he is also drawn into the process of writing, in that the modern novelist seems to offer his reader:

... a relationship based on a mirroring of the actual process in which he is engaged at that moment as he puts pen to paper – the process of bringing to life the fictive worlds of his imagination in and through language. The reader ... is engaged in an analogous creation but in the opposite order, from those same words to the worlds of *his* imagination.

Seeing that *Foe* is presented as a layered text in which the attempted retelling of a number of related stories is scrutinized, active reader involvement in an analysis of the nature and production of stories seems warranted. In this regard, Genette's (1980) structuralist model in which the interdependence of story, text and the act of narration is outlined, suggests itself as both an appropriate point of departure for a reading of Coetzee's text and a convenient yardstick by which to distinguish any transgression of conventional techniques brought about by the author's unique exploitation of narrative strategies.³ As will be argued in the ensuing analysis, Coetzee's self-conscious telescoping of the artifice of story-telling and the relativity of the writing act presents itself as both an extension and a subversion of familiar narrative techniques employed by authors in the utilization of such well-known aspects of narrative structuring as the ordering of events, the depiction of character, the focalization of the fictional world or the narration of the text itself. This remarkable scrutiny of the writing act, provided the reader is prepared to engage in an active interaction with the text, eventually discloses a unique vision of the relevance of stories for our experience of reality. Without unnecessarily pre-empting the ensuing analysis of Coetzee's notion of narrativity, one may concur with Waugh (1984: 7) in pointing to a provisional assessment of the significance of a postmodernist text like *Foe* for a particular reality or historical context:

Contemporary metafictional writing is both a response and a contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that reality or history are provisional: no longer a world of eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures.

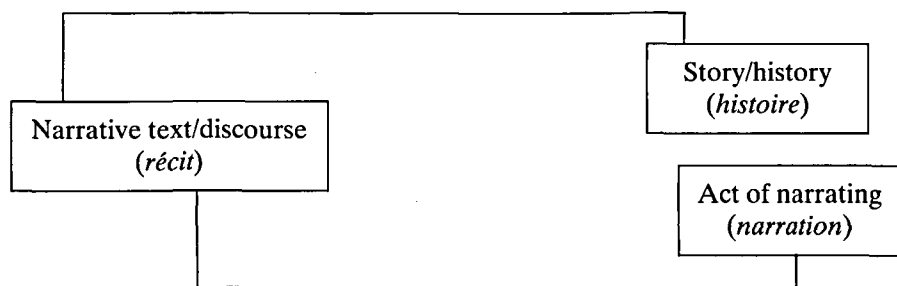
The provisionality of reality and history is, of course, one of the issues favoured in poststructuralist thought, so that it is not surprising that literary theorists often resort to, for instance, deconstructive reading strategies or psychoanalytic paradigms in an attempt to account for the apparent defiance of the notion of readily accessible meaning in postmodernist literature. It would appear that this so-called undecidability, prevalent in a self-conscious awareness of the artifice of writing and a seemingly infinite play of meanings, seems to require a relativizing poststructuralist explanatory framework. In a text like Coetzee's *Foe* a reader familiar with poststructuralist thought may even get the impression that the author uses fiction as a vehicle, or perhaps a pretext, to indulge in a deliberate flaunting of contemporary theoretical discourses.⁴ However, in my opinion, Coetzee's "narrativization" of theoret-

ical discourses necessitates an awareness of the interaction between fiction and theory. I should like to argue, then, that as far as a postmodernist text like *Foe* is concerned, one seems to be confronted with an impasse – on the one hand, Derridean deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis may very well inform a literary text and hence are essential to an understanding of its meaning; on the other hand, the text invariably places a particular construction on whatever framework it apparently relies on. It is this construction that I wish to address in this paper. Since the nature of stories and their telling, re-telling, writing up and eventual distribution by means of publication, essentially inform Coetzee's text, a model in which the relation of the narrative text to both its underlying content and the means of its production is addressed, appears to be a suitable point of departure for engaging with the intricate narrative strategies employed by the author in *Foe*.

2 Story, text and narration

Genette (1980) distinguishes three meanings of the term "narrative": the concrete narrative text, the abstract content of such texts and the method of their production. These terminological distinctions point to interdependent levels in Genette's model, which may be represented as follows in the diagram below:

(1)

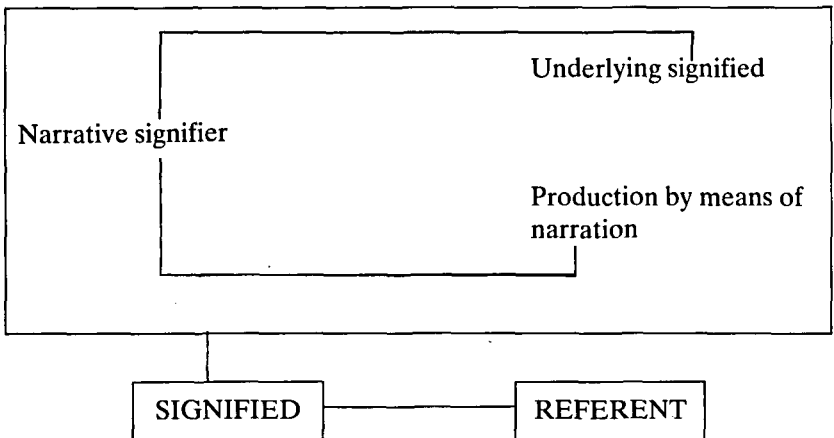


For Genette (1980: 29) there can be no question of narrativity unless a story is told: "As narrative it lives by its relationship to the story that it recounts; as discourse, it lives by its relationship to the narrating that utters it". In these terms Coetzee's text *Foe* as we perceive it in its printed form as a book would be the concrete narrative text; Defoe's works, notably *Robinson Crusoe*, would form the substance of the text's content discernible as its underlying story or history; finally, the method of the text's production would closely be determined by the utilization of postmodernist narrative strategies resulting in the self-conscious preoccupation with the telling of the story of a metafictional text. It is clear that in Genettian terms the production of the text would take precedence over the content of the text in postmodernist fiction – that is to say, reflection on the structuring of the text would be much more important than its underlying content. To put it another way: reflection on the writing

act in postmodernist fiction seems to favour the signifier (i.e. the way in which the story is being produced) over the signified (i.e. the substance of the story).

Genette's (1980) distinction of different meanings of the term "narrative" is indeed also characterized in terms of the relationship that a narrative signifier upholds with both its underlying content or signified and the means of its production. The "matching" of such a complex narrative signifier to a possible signified and its eventual relation to a referent in reality may in turn be indicated as follows:

(2)



As I understand Genette, he wishes to elucidate the complex nature of the narrative signifier, in that it may only be understood in terms of its interdependence with both the underlying content or signified and the means of its production. This of course entails that a reader of a (postmodernist) narrative text could only arrive at a possible signified after having studied the relations of narrative levels as distinguished in Genette's notion of the narrative signifier. And only after such extensive investigation of the complexities of the narrative signifier and its possible "matching" to a signified has been carried out, could a possible referent to reality be considered. It should be clear from these remarks that postmodernist fiction, because it self-consciously emphasizes the *artificiality* of the production of the narrative text, further problematizes the text's ultimate relation to a referent in reality.

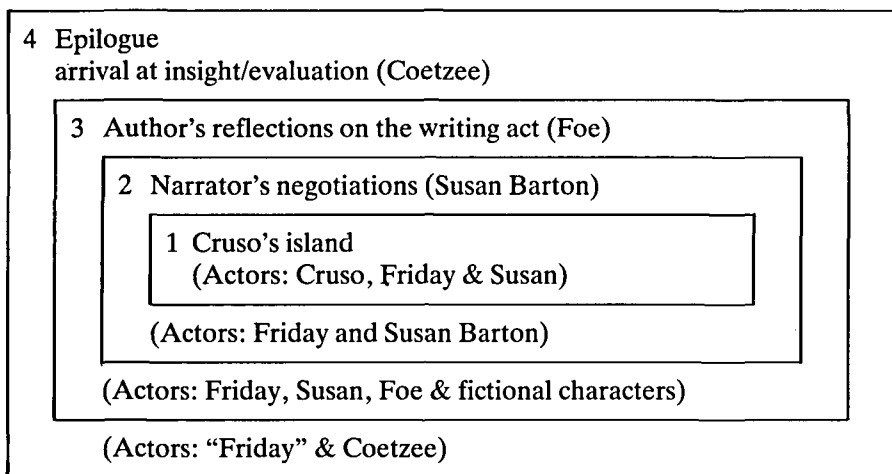
Concerning a postmodernist text such as *Foe*, then, one could reformulate Genette to point out that Coetzee's text apparently owes its existence as narrative to the fact that it self-consciously comments on its retelling or rewriting of other stories. However, whereas for Genette (1980) there can be no question of narrativity unless a story is told, in postmodernist fiction narrativity is exploited in a different manner in that these texts reject the traditional conception of a story as a "representation" of reality and expressly stress the artificial or "fabricated" character of the process of writing. The way in which such self-conscious reflection on the artifice of writing essentially informs the nature of narrativity has aptly been summarized in

Jefferson's (1980) characterization of the *nouveau roman* as that form of writing in which the adventure of the story rather than the story of an adventure is foregrounded.

In this regard Coetzee's rewriting of a classic tale of adventure seems to be an appropriate choice for bringing about a shift of emphasis from the adventurous content of Robinson Crusoe's experiences on his island to the narrator's quest for getting the newly focalized story told and written down. Coetzee employs a number of strategies to achieve this shift in emphasis, the most prominent of which is perhaps his segmentation of the text into four different sections. The space allotted to each section clearly testifies to the predominance of reflection on the story over an account of the events comprising the story content in that only the first section apparently deals with the "history" of Robinson Crusoe on his island, whilst the other three sections take the reader through the various stages of largely abortive attempts at writing up a particular story or stories. In fact, the segmentation of the text in four successive steps ranging from the past of Crusoe's adventures to the present of Coetzee's dramatized exploration of the possibility of a new story and a new language, actually creates the impression of an original story or history being enveloped in various layers of textual tissue. In Genettian terms these layers would concern different story or diegetic levels in which Crusoe's tale would be situated on the deepest level of embedding. The following diagram may be used to show how Coetzee's linear segmentation of the text could be collapsed onto Genette's (1980) model of different levels of narration:

(3)

NARRATIVE TEXT *Foe*



It should be clear from the above that the structuring of Coetzee's text provides a space for its own inbuilt commentary on the writing act. Indeed, both the dramatized and explicit reflections on aspects such as the nature of stories, the agents being supposedly adequately equipped to relay these stories, and the difficulties experienced in negotiating the writing up of the

narratives, are being compounded in the various segments of the text, in that the second level reflects on the first, the third looks back on both the second and first and the last retrospectively refocalizes the third, second and first levels indicated above. In all these levels, the focalizing and writing agents, though they may also enter the fictional world in the guise of actors, distinguish themselves from the actors *per se* in that they occupy the elevated position of being able to comment on the role of these actors within the stories they are trying to compose. In this regard, it seems significant that Susan Barton, as the feminist focalizer, narrator and recorder of the first three levels, is substituted by the contemporary authorial agent probably representing Coetzee in the last segment. This, of course, puts him in the privileged position of the ultimate focalizer of the previous three levels – a factor which necessitates a reassessment of the entire foregoing enterprise by the reader. At the same time, it also becomes clear, in retrospect, that the first section anticipates much of what is eventually only gradually and painstakingly being realized about the nature of narrativity and the relevance of the writing act in the three subsequent sections. It would appear that Genette's (1980) structuralist model provides a suitable framework for characterizing the various stages distinguished in Coetzee's text – one might at first be tempted to pretend that the various shifts from story to text to production may neatly be categorized into little boxes. In accordance with metafictional practice, however, Coetzee constantly transgresses any conventional notions of story in *Foe*, so that the Genettian levels are often simultaneously implicated in all four sections of the text. The diagram should therefore be regarded as a convenient means whereby Coetzee's transgression of conventional notions on narrativity may be traced.

Throughout the text the angles of perception seem to be predominant in that the different strategies exploited by Coetzee in the dramatization of the *histoire*, the act of narration and the processes of writing all emerge as functions of focalization. In this regard dramatization (in the sense of making stories of everything) essentially informs Coetzee's notion of narrativity, in that not only the *histoire* but also the processes of narrating and writing are presented as events being experienced by participants in the events. Such a procedure, of course, allows the makers of stories to enter the fictional worlds they are creating in the guise of actors experiencing the events, whilst at the same time as focalizing, narrating or writing agents reflecting on the make-belief worlds in which they may appear as "real" figures. Thus Susan Barton as the focalizer of Cruso's story is free to question the actors while sharing their life; and Foe as the supposed author of Cruso's, Friday's and Susan Barton's histories, enters the text to argue with the focalizer-narrator about the nature of the story; finally, Coetzee as the creator of the text *Foe* apparently also enters the fictional world as the supreme or ultimate focalizer in the function of an authorial agent who initially dictated the course of the preceding reconstruction of a possible "castaway narrative" in order also to suggest finally how the "real" story should have been approached or perhaps could be retold.

It should be clear from the above that, in Genettian terms, Coetzee's notion of narrativity is extended to include both the substance of a narrative

text and the conditions of its production. Therefore, although *Foe* is grafted onto a story that has all the typical qualities of a romantic adventure, Coetzee's rewriting of Daniel Defoe's account of Crusoe's eventful life favours the metafictional procedure of a "mimesis of production" (Hutcheon, 1980) over the conventional strategy of a "mimesis of product", usually faithfully adhered to in realist novels (such as, for instance, in the attempted enactment of the "true" experiences of Robinson Crusoe in Defoe's novel). Such self-conscious reflection on the writing act is, however, not merely "narcissistic" in Hutcheon's terms, but rather becomes a means whereby the author may covertly address certain moral, economic, social or political issues underlying such an enterprise in a contemporary context. This means, amongst other things, that certain contemporary discourses are not only inscribed into the text as a means of subverting so-called realist novelistic conventions, but that they themselves (notably the discourses of psychoanalysis and feminism) are in turn self-consciously scrutinized, questioned and even "transgressed" in the continuous reflection on the production of stories in the various sections that demarcate the progression of Coetzee's *Foe*. It seems essential to me, then, that in order to address the complex relations that a postmodernist text upholds with the reader and reality, one should explore not only the content of intellectual paradigms like deconstruction and psychoanalysis, but one should also analyse the particular construction that the text imposes onto its underlying theoretical frameworks.⁵ Such construction may subsequently be addressed in terms of Coetzee's collapse of Genettian levels in the four segments distinguished in his text.

3. Re-focalization of the story of the island on the level of the *histoire*

In structuralist descriptions of Genette's (1980: 27) level of the *histoire* defined by him as the "signified or narrative content" two elements of the story are usually stressed, namely the series of events in their chronological sequence and the participants and actors in these events. Hence Rimmon-Kenan (1983: 3) describes the underlying story as the level consisting of an enumeration of the narrated events as these have been abstracted from their arrangement in the text and reconstructed in their chronological sequence, together with the participants in these narrated events. In Genette's (1980) meticulous reading of Proust's novel, the author is primarily concerned with the surface structure of the text, whilst the underlying *histoire* may only be approached through the concrete narrative text and is, moreover, used as a mere backdrop against which textual deviances in the ordering of events, for instance, may be discerned. However, Coetzee's text clearly transcends such a definition, since core events from the underlying story of Defoe's famous adventurer Robinson Crusoe, on which the contemporary text *Foe* is grafted, need not be abstracted by the reader, but are indeed, be it selectively, retold in the first section dealing with life on the island.⁶ This means that the so-called signified or narrative content (Genette, 1980) becomes part of the narrative signifier; the abstract substance of the story is refocalized and integrated into the narrative discourse or text.

Such a strategy highlights the new role of the reader in coming to terms with a complex narrative signifier – instead of abstracting the core events comprising the substance of the story, what is required seems to be a comparison between the different versions of the depiction of Cruso(e)'s island. In Coetzee's rewriting of Defoe's text, deviations from the original story thereby indirectly provide a means for reflection on the substance of stories in general. In this regard it is worth noting that the changes brought about in Coetzee's text as far as a presentation of the core events and a depiction of the main participants in these events are concerned, largely result from the female castaway's focalization of the island and its inhabitants. In fact, perhaps the most notable liberty taken by Coetzee on the story level is the introduction of a new character into the fictional world of Cruso and Friday. This female castaway who is simultaneously participant in the events and focalizer of the fictional world provides a means whereby the historical fictional world may be invaded and the basic story thus transformed into a newly focalized narrative. In this regard Susan Barton's double role both as female castaway and as feminist focalizer is instrumental in bringing about the "translation" of a traditional "travellers' tale" into the contemporary discourse of a self-reflexive text, where readers' expectations are continually undercut. Even in this first segment of *Foe*, which supposedly provides the basic content of the text, it becomes clear that Coetzee is primarily concerned with telescoping the so-called basic story elements in a specific manner, thereby ensuring the transformation of an eighteenth-century tale of adventure into a postmodernist text reflecting on the nature of narrativity and the processes of writing. In subsequent sections this first segment, in its transformed and "contemporary" guise, remains an object of reflection, so that, in a sense, one may say that it does seem to constitute the abstractable "substance" or signified of the text in Genette's terms, even though this substance is itself already inscribed into the narrative text or *récit*.

It is, of course, the very familiarity of Robinson Crusoe's adventures that enables Coetzee to take certain liberties with the basic story elements, thereby ensuring that even this first level of the *histoire* is presented in such a way as already to provide a space in which to reflect on the nature of narrativity. Such reflection is concretized by resorting to a unique exploitation of narrative strategies: on the one hand, the self-conscious recording of the female castaway's "realistic" focalization of the island suggests a personalized experience of an historical fictional world; on the other hand, the dialogues between Susan Barton and Cruso, or the asides of the narrator addressed to a narratee, reveal conflicting ideas not only on the nature of life on the island, but also on the question of whether attempting a written record of the experiences of castaways would constitute a worthwhile enterprise. Thus an initial reinterpretation of the original text is explicitly signalled in the introduction of Susan Barton as the focalizer who would seek to put a different construction on the meaning of the events from a feminist point of view. However, such an attempted reinterpretation does not go unchallenged in that the focalizer's notion of Cruso and Friday is subtly undermined in this section by a competing "contemporary" view of Cruso, whereby the reader

becomes a witness, together with Susan Barton, to the "actual" opinions of the "real" Cruso. Naturally, such a strategy encourages the reader to reflect critically on the female castaway's refocalization of Cruso's island; and such critical reflection subsequently alerts one to the functioning of the sliding signifier in postmodernist fiction. The new perspective resulting from a feminist reinterpretation of Cruso's island is itself being questioned.

Be that as it may, in the first section of the text the unique presentation of the events and the chief actors participating in these events emerges as a function of focalization. The invasion of Cruso's island by a female castaway, who is the agent that focalizes the *histoire*, enables Coetzee to dramatize the basic elements of the historical tale of adventure by resorting to scenic presentations of key events and detailed descriptions of the two inhabitants and their environment. This exploitation of the conventional narrative technique of dramatization serves the purpose of introducing a sense of both authenticity and demystification into Coetzee's re-enacting of an eighteenth-century tale of adventure. Thus on the one hand, Susan Barton's apparently authentic experiences result in a blurring of the boundaries between fanciful imagination and stark reality. This focalizer-character is painfully aware of the discomforts of life on the island and experiences Friday's carrying of her, the hurtful piercing of her skin by a thorn, the sleeping arrangements in Cruso's dwelling place, the storm, Cruso's illness, their coupling, etc. as very "real" or "true" occurrences (in the sense of having been perceived with all her senses) within the boundaries of an established fictional world. On the other hand, the realistic description of the island with its pests and stark weather conditions serves as a powerful technique of demystification, whereby the romantic or fanciful images conjured up "for readers reared on travellers' tales" (Coetzee, 1986: 7) are deliberately parodied.

The extent to which the newly focalized story of Cruso actually approximates the story of Susan Barton herself, exemplifies Coetzee's dramatization of feminist rereadings of literary texts. Hence, the partially repeated self-focalization of her arrival on Cruso's island underscores Susan Barton's usurpation of the role of castaway on the level of Genette's (1980) *histoire* in an almost poetic use of language, which often serves to distinguish narration from reflection on narration in Coetzee's text:

'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. With slow strokes, my long hair floating about me, like a flower of the sea, like an anemone, like a jellyfish of the kind you see in the waters of Brazil, I swam towards the strange island, for a while swimming as I had rowed, against the current, then all at once free of its grip, carried by the waves into the bay and on to the beach.' (Coetzee, 1986: 5).

The use of metaphor in this passage suggests that Susan Barton sees herself as a "true castaway", in that she is described in terms that underline her identification with the sea. The importance of the sea is also stressed in an even clearer usurpation of the role of castaway in the self-conscious metaphorical depiction of Susan Barton's coupling with Cruso prior to his death:

'I lie against Cruso; with the tip of my tongue I follow the hairy whorl of his ear. I rub my cheeks against his harsh whiskers, I spread myself over him, I stroke his body with my thighs. "I am swimming in you, my Cruso," I whisper, and swim. He is a tall man, I a tall woman. This is our coupling: this swimming, this clambering, this whispering.' (Coetzee, 1986: 44)

Far from allowing herself to be "used" by Cruso as in the depiction of their first recorded coupling, the passive female castaway has been replaced by an active feminist agent who dictates the "rules" of love-making. Coetzee's dramatization of the psychoanalytic paradigm as a metaphor for writing, is subsequently made quite explicit in the feminist focalizer's deliberations on accessibility to Cruso's story at the close of the first section:

'Do you think of me, Mr Foe, as Mrs Cruso or as a bold adventuress? Think what you may, it was I who shared Cruso's bed and closed Cruso's eyes, as it is I who have disposal of all that Cruso leaves behind, which is the story of his island.' (Coetzee, 1986: 45)

It is quite clear that the introduction of Susan Barton, in her two-pronged role as female castaway and feminist focalizer, is informed by the discourses of feminism and psychoanalysis. However, Coetzee's dramatization of these two discourses is subtly countered by the strategy of occasionally quoting Cruso's words in order to suggest a critical reflection on the focalizer's claims. Hence, the usurpation of the role of castaway is implicitly challenged by Cruso when he urges the "invader" of his kingdom, in words that approximate Biblical language, to remember that "not every man who bears the mark of the castaway is a castaway at heart" (Coetzee, 1986: 33). In encounters such as these, the reader is alerted to the possibility that the focalizer may perhaps not be an entirely reliable observer – claims to the truthfulness and actuality of events that were "really" witnessed (and not merely told about) notwithstanding.

It gradually becomes evident that the use of dialogue, particularly where Cruso's "real" words are quoted, exemplifies another liberty taken by Coetzee with the core events of the underlying story. The fact that Cruso's speech often approximates religious discourse is significant, in that it supposedly provides an authoritative counterargument for the feminist focalizer's claim to a "true" experience of the fictional world. Thus a different function of the female castaway's focalization emerges: apparently without realizing it, she becomes the channel through which the "real" author's construction of the fictional world or his deliberations on the significance of "castaway stories" may be relayed. Indeed, if the vivid presentation of the events as experienced by the focalizer results in the favoured postmodernist technique of the questioning of the difference between fiction and reality, then the use of dialogue in the dramatized conversations between the focalizer and the chief actor highlights the distinctive postmodernist strategy of reflecting upon the way truth and reality may be shaped by language and story-telling. Thus some of the most illuminating statements on the nature of stories, the function of language or the meaning of life are to be found in the few recorded statements to which Cruso is prepared to concede in response to the probing

questions of the focalizer. For Cruso, only the barest essentials remain relevant: nothing he has forgotten is worth recording in a story, Friday does not need words because the "voice of man" may be heard in his singing and a true castaway has no desires outside the possibilities open to him on the island and he consequently considers it more important to leave behind his terraces, than to exhaust himself by writing up his adventures as a castaway. It is clear that these dialogues not only function to provide an air of authenticity to the focalizer's account of Cruso's story, but that they also serve to justify the necessity of telling the story at all.

In fact, in retrospect, Cruso's comments appear to anticipate in this first section Coetzee's notion of narrativity in that the significance attached to silence and the sounds of the island suggests the necessity of acquiring a new language. In this regard the different "voices" on the island are important – human speech (Cruso and Susan Barton distinguished from the mute Friday), the sounds of the animals and the wind (which Susan Barton tries to shut out by covering her ears and hence becoming "deaf") and the sound of a strange type of music emanating from Friday's flute. Whilst Cruso and Friday appear to be in harmony with their environment, the focalizer's belittling of Cruso's meaning, or her apparent failure to heed to the sounds of the island, serve to alert the reader to her possible unreliability as either a "true castaway" or a competent recorder of Cruso's story:

'So, if the company of brutes had been enough for me, I might have lived most happily on my island. But who, accustomed to the fullness of human speech, can be content with caws and chirps and screeches, and the barking of seals, and the moan of the wind?' (Coetzee, 1986: 8)

Apart from her indifference to the island, the reader also gets wise to the fact that the feminist refocalization of the level of the *histoire* has to be challenged the moment it becomes clear that Susan Barton in her selfconscious usurpation of the role of female castaway (the apparent authenticity of a firsthand eyewitness account notwithstanding) appears to be unable to probe the significance of what she focalizes. Hence, her first impression of Friday is that of "a man with a dazzling halo about him" (Coetzee, 1986: 5), yet she completely underestimates Friday's importance as a sustaining force both for life on the island and as a source for writing. Thus one is once again confronted here with the sliding signifiers of postmodernist writing – first a refocalization of Robinson Crusoe's island, whereby an eighteenth-century tale of adventure is both demystified and its suppression of the views of the opposite sex rectified; and then a relativization of this attempted feminist reinterpretation by means of contrasting perspectives on the "true" significance of castaway experiences. The suspicion that Cruso's and Friday's way of life on the island actually held the answer to the significance of what could be recorded, is also suggested by the fact that Cruso has matured into cultivating the value of reflection in various ways. Unlike the female focalizer's "objective" account of life on the island, Cruso's experience of his adopted way of life as a castaway is depicted as both immediate and intensely involved with his environment. Hence his habitual listening to the sounds of the island

and contemplating "the wastes of water and sky" (Coetzee, 1986: 38); also his being calmed by Friday's singing and his understanding of Friday's heeding to an inner voice inside him. It follows that such a "contemporary" depiction of Cruso suggests that the barrenness of the island, aptly depicted in the focalizer's demystification of the images usually conjured up by the words *desert ile* "for reader's reared on travellers' tales" (Coetzee, 1986: 7), is eventually disclosed as a positive factor, in that the seclusion of the island provides a space for reflection.⁷

Hence, although the focalizer admits to not always understanding Cruso's words (which means that Coetzee is deliberately exploiting or perhaps parodying the narrative technique of introducing unreliable focalizers or narrators into the text), their recording nevertheless enables the reader to sense that a deeper significance could probably be attached to the retelling of Cruso's story. That such a promise of a *significant* story never materializes in the subsequent sections dealing primarily with a dramatization of the reflections on the problematics of writing, may perhaps be ascribed to the failure of the focalizer to grasp the meaning behind Cruso's words or her inability to appreciate the significance of Friday's lack of speech. In this regard the metaphor of the "true castaway" functions to show up the limitations of human speech, thereby implicitly also revealing the problems encountered when trying to find "meaningful" stories worthy of the effort of retelling or rewriting.

It is clear that the exploitation of familiar narrative strategies such as descriptive detail and the use of dialogue in scenic presentations remains essentially a function of focalization in that everything is recorded as experienced by the actor-focalizer. In this regard it is important to remember also that the (*mis*)*interpretation* of experienced events and the reflection on Cruso's words are presented from the perspective of the "invader" into Cruso's and Friday's life. Coetzee extends the use of focalization also to the depiction of the characters on the island, thereby exploiting a typically postmodernist narrative strategy in that characterization becomes a function of focalization. One effect of this is that instead of an individualization of actors – a step usually performed in the transition from *histoire* to *récit* when actants or actors become fully-fledged characters – the focus is on the actantial roles the three main actors occupy in the text. In this regard, the supposedly "true" or "actual" feminist perspective as channelled through the female castaway serves two purposes: on the one hand the gliding signifier of postmodernist literature is exemplified in the number of actantial roles shared by the three actors; on the other hand, the arrogance of the feminist focalizer is disclosed in her assumption that after only a very short time on the island, she would be best suited to tell Cruso's story.

The almost infinite number of actantial roles the three participants in the events depicted on the story level may occupy, indirectly serves to suggest the foregrounding of the artificial nature of stories in postmodernist texts. Thus Susan Barton successively sees herself as a saved castaway, the second of Cruso's subjects and even at times a prisoner on the island as the victim of circumstances. Later she also performs the roles of nurse, lover and wife to Cruso. She is perceived by both Friday and Cruso as something cast up by the

waves, a porpoise or fish fit to be eaten. When the opportunity arises to escape from the island she is instrumental in the forceful removal of both Cruso and Friday, so that in her own eyes she acts as saviour, whereas Cruso and Friday would regard her as their gaoler. Finally, at the end of the section, she is probably regarded by the sailors as a bold adventuress but nevertheless sees herself as the only agent capable of telling Cruso's story.

Cruso himself as seen through the eyes of the female castaway emerges successively as a stranger, a mutineer, a castaway awaiting a saviour, a king, a hero and also a supernatural being capable of casting a spell on the seas. At the hands of his would-be saviour he finally becomes a prisoner and an exile and is unceremoniously cast away at sea (in a manner that gives rise to the suspicion of a parody of techniques resorted to in television soaps when the elimination of characters becomes necessary) the moment he has served his purpose as a possible source for the story to be told. Friday could be saviour, Negro, cannibal, slave, first subject, mutilated servant or saved castaway in the eyes of the focalizer. Cruso, however, draws attention to his singing and is calmed by his playing on the flute.

These roles are important because the arbitrary switching of functions enables the author to present his material from different angles, thereby not only dramatizing the constructed or fabricated nature of his text, but also continuously deconstructing the possibility of arriving at any "reliable" perspective on the "material" for his potential story or stories.

Since focalization is inextricably bound to the act of narration an indirect reflection on the art of story-telling is already entailed in the angle or perspective from which the events and their participants are presented to the reader. A much more explicit way of commenting on the retelling of Cruso's story is achieved through the technique of inserting stories within stories, thereby resorting to a well-exploited *mise-en-abyme* technique favoured in postmodernist writing. On the first level of narration such an interruption of the focalizer's relation of her experiences as a witness to life on the island serves to provide an indirect means of reflection on the art of story-telling. The focalizer, whilst supposedly trying to reconstruct Cruso's "history" on the island, with a view to giving a truthful account as the eventual teller of Cruso's story, is in fact telling the story of her own experience as a castaway, thereby suggesting that Cruso's story is only a pretext for indulging in her own personal experience. The relation of her own "history" prior to her arrival on the island re-enforces the impression that the focalizer cannot escape subjectivity, or perhaps that the only means to another's story is provided by one's own subjective experiences. This technique also bears witness to Coetzee's dramatization of feminist reinterpretations of literature – the suppressed experience of possible female castaways in eighteenth-century tales of adventure appears as a parallel story intersecting with the "actual" story of Cruso's island in his text.

The subtle commentary provided by the focalization of selective events and the insertion of stories within stories becomes more explicit when the relation of the focalizer's experience of life on the island is interrupted by reflective remarks on the nature of story-telling. Although the first section should

supposedly, according to a Genettian distinction between the underlying history, the concrete narrative text and the act of narration itself, be devoted to the core events of the story as experienced by the actors causing or undergoing such events, reflective comments are interspersed in either Susan Barton's self-conscious reminiscences on her own "adventure" as a female castaway, or they are included in Cruso's quoted speech. In this regard both the female castaway's questioning of Cruso and her futile attempts at locating a written record of his adventures disclose a particular view of the nature of castaway stories. For a would-be recorder of such stories it seems important to ascertain the "truth" of personal histories by speaking to the subject itself; it also seems important to capture the particularity of adventures by having recourse to a meticulous recording of daily activities in an authentic journal. In her actantial role of female castaway Susan Barton seems to be ideally disposed to record Cruso's story, since she is in a position to recount his history "... as I heard it from his own lips" (Coetzee, 1986: 11) and since she also has the opportunity to search for a supposed journal kept by Cruso. However, the blurring of the boundaries between truth and fancy is demonstrated in the contradicting stories Cruso apparently offers when questioned by the would-be recorder, so that she has to admit to the impossibility of determining the "truth" of (an)other's story: "So in the end I did not know what was truth, what was lies, and what was mere rambling" (Coetzee, 1986: 12). Similarly, she is thwarted in her attempts to locate a journal and hence tell a reliable and individual story: "... seen from too remote a vantage, life begins to lose its particularity. All shipwrecks become the same shipwreck, all castaways the same castaway, sunburnt, lonely, clad in the skins of the beasts he has slain..." (Coetzee, 1986: 18).

The fact that the presuppositions of the feminist focalizer cum female castaway are thwarted by Cruso's responses and behaviour again point to her apparent inadequacies as a reliable recorder of the story of the island. Thus the significance of Cruso's choice to leave behind his terraces rather than keep a journal containing a detailed record of his experiences is completely missed by the feminist focalizer. Only much later, when Susan Barton attempts to justify her preoccupation with writing to Friday by comparing it to his "hard labour" of the endless piling of stones whilst still on the island, does the reader get wise to the fact that the painstaking work on the terraces functions as a metaphor for writing. And only then, in retrospect, the importance of Cruso's reflective remarks on the meaning of his work is revealed:

"And what will you be planting, when you plant?" I asked. "The planting is not for us," said he. "We have nothing to plant – that is our misfortune." And he looked at me with such sorry dignity, I could have bit my tongue. "The planting is reserved for those who come after us and have the fore-sight to bring seed. I only clear the ground for them. Clearing ground and piling stones is little enough, but it is better than sitting in idleness." And then, with great earnestness, he went on: "I ask you to remember, not every man who bears the mark of the castaway is a castaway at heart." (Coetzee, 1986: 33)

It is clear that the relationship between Cruso and Susan Barton, particularly in the sections where the author resorts to dialogue, eventually discloses competing views on the nature of narrativity or the relevance of writing. Since the first section remains an object of reflection in subsequent sections of the text, the reader gradually discovers, with (or sometimes despite) Susan Barton, the actual significance of the actantial roles ascribed to both Cruso and Friday within the refocalized first section of Coetzee's text. Thus the almost prophetic tone of the last sentence quoted above gives rise to the suspicion that the "real" contemporary authorial agent may have spoken through Cruso; similarly, the continued "silent" presence of Friday in subsequent sections alerts one to his central function as the only "true" source for a potential probing of the meaning of castaway stories.

In summary one could say that in this first segment of *Foe* the transformation from a tale of adventure to a self-conscious reflection on the nature of narrativity is brought about by a number of narrative strategies ranging from a particular presentation of the events and participants comprising the basic elements of the story to a deliberate interruption of the story by means of direct and indirect commentary dealing with the problems experienced in reconstructing meaningful stories. In the following three sections these strategies are continued as two distinct procedures: on the one hand an extension of dramatization from story events to the event of story-telling; and on the other hand an elaboration of and increasing emphasis on explicit commentary on the problematics of writing.

4 Explicit enacting of the writing act – reassessment of the construction of castaway stories on the level of the *récit*

The second segment of the Coetzee text, distinguished above as "the narrator's negotiations", first of all consists of a dramatization of Genette's (1980) *narration* or act of narrating in the form of letters, thereby retrospectively reflecting on the first segment, which apparently contains the abstractable story of Susan Barton's refocalization of the island and its two actors from a previous fictional text. It also contains a dramatization of the negotiations of the narrator with the would-be author of the story of the island, whilst at the same time continuing the "histories" of Susan Barton and Friday during their sojourn in England after having been rescued from the island. Thus, while the linear segmentation of the text on one level seems to continue the "history" of two of the protagonists in the refocalized story of the island, on another level it simultaneously appears to encourage *retrospective* reflections on the conditions pertaining to a *prospective* writing up of a story which the reader has already been able to read in the first section of Coetzee's re-contextualization of Defoe's romantic tale of adventure. It is clear that in this section the technique of dramatization is extended to the problems arising from and the conditions pertaining to an attempted rewriting of an eighteenth century tale of adventure, thereby offering constant reflection on the relevance of such an enterprise in a contemporary context. Indeed, Coetzee's ingenious merging of "realistic" stories and "fictionalized" versions of reality

cannot but alert the reader to both the imaginative possibilities and the crippling limitations underlying selfconscious writing in a postmodernist text.

The epistolary form is selected to enable Susan Barton, through her written communication with the "historical" author Foe, to provide a detailed account of the tedious existence she and Friday have to come to terms with in England. It also enables her both to reply to queries supposedly raised by Foe on her account of Crusoe's story and to indulge in selfconscious reflection on her own refocalized version of the story of the island. This means that the reader has to keep track of the interarticulation of at least three story strands – the "original" story of the island and its contemporary rendering in Coetzee's text; also, the filtering of these discernible "histories" through another story in which the changing relationship between Susan Barton and Friday is gradually unfolded. Indeed, to a far greater extent than was the case in the first section, the reader is confronted with parallel "histories" and competing perspectives on the nature and production of stories.

Similar to its function in the first section, attention to detail is intended supposedly to enhance the credibility and "reality" of fictive events as these are focalized and reflected upon from a feminist point of view. One suspects that the manipulation of Daniel Defoe's core text is largely determined by the feminist narrator's desire to have exclusive accessibility to the "rights" of the so-called story of the island. Hence, the "justification" for Crusoe's convenient disposal at sea is "explained", in the first section, in terms of his apparent unsuitability as a story-teller:

'Let it not by any means come to pass that Crusoe is saved, I reflected to myself; for the world expects stories from its adventurers, better stories than tallies of how many stones they moved in fifteen years, and from where, and to where; Crusoe rescued will be a deep disappointment to the world; the idea of a Crusoe on his island is a better thing than the true Crusoe tight-lipped and sullen in an alien England.' (Coetzee, 1986: 35)

Similar to its function in the first section, the depiction of the suggested relationship of the female agent to Foe (as a substitute for Crusoe) evokes the psychoanalytic paradigm as a metaphor for writing in subsequent segments of the text. This is particularly evident in the third part, where the desire to have exclusive rights to the privileges of story-telling is extended to the function of writing itself, in that Susan Barton, in the coupling scene with the historical author, Foe, deliberately usurps the role of "begetter", in the guise of Muse, during their lovemaking: "She must do whatever lies in her power to father her offspring" (Coetzee, 1986: 140). However, the psychoanalytic paradigm for writing, which is of course evoked in all of the relationships enacted by Susan Barton in her actantial role of "supreme whore" throughout the text, is itself constantly undermined in different ways. In this regard the fact that Susan Barton and Friday, despite the reported "levelling" factors of shipwreck and destitution, never become lovers during the prolonged dramatization of their "intimate" relationship (Friday, one must remember, had grown to be like her shadow), must surely strike the reader as a most singular deviation from an otherwise firmly established textual pattern of personal

relationships. In a chain of switching positions set up by the other male actors in the text – from (dead) captain to aloof castaway to elusive author – Friday alone remains outside the actantial role of lover to Susan Barton. Given his apparent state of eternal submission to both his former master and his present mistress, such “untouchability” is indeed striking and will obviously demand close scrutiny in any informed reading of the text.

It is clear that Coetzee’s dramatization of feminist reappraisals of the meaning of “historical” narratives or the nature of writing is extended over three sections, comprising almost his entire text. However, in view of the fact that the reader is alerted quite early (in the first section already) to the discrepancy between the feminist focalizer’s claims to “truthful” experiences on the one hand, and her apparent limited powers of observation and deduction on the other hand, the explicit commentary offered by the feminist narrator on the nature of stories or the expertise of story-tellers apparently should not be accepted at face value. Thus, for instance, her derogatory remarks on Cruso’s labour on the island in the lines quoted above, serve to reveal her own lack of insight and do not substantiate the claim to superior powers of narration implicit in her statement. Nevertheless, illuminating reassessments concerning the refocalized version of Cruso’s story abound in passages of selfconscious reflection throughout the second segment of the text. To a reader actively engaged in the problematics of writing, it would appear that the self-appointed narrator of Cruso’s story, in the painful process of grappling with both the “reality” and the artificiality of writing, of necessity has to engage in a constant reassessment of her own contemporary refocalization of a classic tale of adventure. The reader is thereby subtly coerced into sharing the difficulties inherent in attempting a demystified version of romantic tales; which means that s/he has to be aware constantly of the demands of an intertextual consciousness in contemporary fictionalized versions of so-called “true” or “realistic” stories.

On a first assessment the extensive dramatization of the feminist reappraisal of the nature and production of stories explicitly foregrounds Susan Barton’s usurpation of the roles of both castaway and recorder of castaway stories in the second segment of the Coetzee text. Indeed, if the most prominent liberty taken by Coetzee with Defoe’s text concerns the introduction of a female focalizer on the first level, then the disposal of the original “hero” Cruso at sea and the relationship of the female narrator Susan Barton with both Friday and the author Foe in England point to the explicit attempt at reconstructing the story of the island on the second Genettian diegetic level distinguished above. The switching of roles within these relationships provides an indirect means of reflection on the changing conditions pertaining to the (re)construction of stories. Two functions formerly carried out by Cruso are taken over by Susan Barton and Friday respectively – Cruso’s role as castaway hero or source of the story of the island is taken over by Susan Barton in that she provides, in her own view, the only way to the “truth” of Cruso’s story; at the same time Cruso’s role as (silent) companion is assigned to an apparently indifferent and “impenetrable” Friday. In this regard it seems significant that the mediating role of Susan Barton is extended from

observer of a famous castaway to narrator of the particulars of a story eventually to be produced by a supposedly accomplished and reputable author. In such a dramatization of the circumstances pertaining to the writing of stories, Coetzee's reverting to a much more explicit commentary on the nature of narrativity and the problems of writing is, in fact, facilitated by Susan Barton's engagement in two *writing* activities – one of trying to record Cruso's story and the other of commenting on the problematics of narration in the form of letters addressed to the chosen author Foe.

As a result of the switching of actantial roles, the immediate conversations of the female castaway with the chief actor in an historical adventure are substituted by the monologic attempts at communication with Friday and especially by the elaborate written communication of the feminist narrator with the "actual" author of the supposed adventure. In this regard it is noticeable that, whereas there were different discernible voices on the island, in this second segment the functions of speaking (to a mute Friday who cannot participate in any "normal" conversation where more than one voice is heard) and writing (to an invisible author who neither acknowledges the letters nor bothers to reply to them) are primarily assigned to Susan Barton alone. Naturally, such a strategy provides an indirect means of self-conscious, or indeed subjective and "narcissistic" preoccupation with the "reality" of constructing stories, particularly as this concerns both Susan Barton's recording of her changing view of Friday and her detailed depiction of their strange existence as prospective characters in "Mr Foe's" writings. All of this whilst in the primary narrative of the second segment of the Coetzee text they are actually gaining a "life" of their own as fictional characters in their own right, enacting a new story concerning a different voyage. In this regard Susan Barton's attempts to justify their dreary existence in London in terms of the importance of story-telling reflect her reassessment of Friday's significance, in that Friday apparently has to be educated to appreciate the value of stories:

'Through his ears Friday may yet take in the wealth stored in stories and so learn that the world is not, as the island seemed to teach him, a barren and a silent place (is that the secret meaning of the word story, do you think: a storing-place of memories?).' (Coetzee, 1986: 59)

It should be obvious that Coetzee is engaged in an ingenious dramatization of the artificiality of both fiction and reality, thereby deliberately flaunting the negation of clear cut differences between the two concepts. Such a narrative strategy also bears witness to Coetzee's extension of the notion of narrativity, in that the favoured postmodernist technique of selfconscious writing, instead of interrupting the flow of a story, is itself being fleshed out to form the substance of a new story. In fact, this section, because of its extensive dramatization of the problematics of the writing act as exemplified in Susan Barton's engagement with both fictional characters and the supposed author of historical narratives, seems to be almost exclusively preoccupied with feminist reassessments of the nature of narrativity or the (pre)conditions for writing. It is no accident, then, that Susan Barton rejects the little narrative diversion apparently engineered by "Mr Foe". The girl that claims to be her

lost daughter is suspected of being a creation of Foe's, not a substantial being but a creature that was "father-born", and hence not to be reconciled with the version of the story she prefers to tell.

On a second assessment extensive dramatization serves to alert Susan Barton to her own shortcomings as the recorder of the story of the island and consequently results in a realization by the reader of the limitations inherent in feminist rereadings of "canonized" fictional texts. Thus her gradual reassessment of Friday, as exemplified in their changing relationships of first mistress and slave or proprietress and "child", followed by a process of "equalization" as poor, miserable fictional characters roaming the English countryside, serves to highlight the problematical issue of exploring a "transplanted" (and "decolonized"?) Friday as a possible source for a different story. The enigmatic, unco-operative and mute Friday continually frustrates attempts by the feminist narrator to probe the unresolved "mysteries" of the refocalized story of the island as presented in the first section. It is a dramatization of failed communication, in that Susan Barton, despite her realization of the potential of music and dance to "reach" Friday's soul, can only come up with an unacceptable imitation of Friday's music which fails to arouse his interest or ensure his participation.

Within the extensive dramatization of the act of narration, explicit reflective commentary on the refocalized version of Crusoe's story concerns various issues pertaining to the nature and relevance of writing. These issues range from critical observations regarding the style and (artistic) presentation of stories to philosophical deliberations addressing the substance of fictionalized experiences. Thus Susan Barton would, for instance, self-consciously comment on her attempted adherence to the apparent "rule" of chronological sequence required in "truthful" accounts of personal experiences or "histories":

'I have set down the history of our time on the island as well as I can, and enclose it herewith. It is a sorry, limping affair (the history, not the time itself) - 'the next day,' its refrain goes, 'the next day. . . the next day' - but you will know how to set it right.' (Coetzee, 1986: 47)

It is clear that on this second diegetic level the questioning of Crusoe's and Friday's stories is still imminent, thereby providing a discursive link between the two segmented parts. Indeed, that the proposed deviation from Defoe's tale was intended, is made quite explicit when the narrator Susan Barton, in deliberating on how to start telling the story of her sojourn on the island, suggests two different sets of events - the "Many Strange Circumstances Never Hitherto Related" (Coetzee, 1986: 67), forming part of the title of the story of "The Female Castaway"; and the even "stranger circumstances" originally ascribed to the male castaway Robinson Crusoe in Defoe's text and which are viewed by the narrator as possible inventions in order to ensure a more interesting story. These abstractions of the core events of the two possible versions may be compared as follows:

Susan Barton

Robinson Crusoe

the mutiny and murder on the
Portuguese ship

Cruso's castle

Cruso himself with his lion's
mane and apeskin clothes

the salvage of tools and
muskets from Cruso's ship

his voiceless slave Friday

the vast terraces they had
built, all bare of growth

the building of a boat, or at
least a skiff, and a venture
to sail to the mainland

the terrible storm that tore
the roof off our house and heaped
the beaches with dying fish

a landing by cannibals on the
island, followed by a skirmish
and many bloody deaths

the coming of a golden-haired
stranger with a sack of corn,
and the planting of the terraces

Thus the narrator herself performs an analytic operation usually carried out by the reader when trying to establish the relation between the narrative text (*récit*) and its underlying story or history (*histoire*). Here such a procedure is deliberately displayed as a writing strategy, thereby making explicit the text's reflection on the artificial nature of stories – the narrator laments, “Alas, will the day ever arrive when we can make a story without strange circumstances?” (Coetzee, 1986: 67). Naturally, such a procedure pinpoints the importance of textual reflection on the substance which supposedly determines the elements of a story. The comparison of the two sets of events offered in the text stresses both omissions from and additions to the core elements of the original story: on the one hand, Susan Barton's tale emerges as far less adventurous than that of Defoe's Crusoe – compare the event of the storm to that of the fight with cannibals; on the other hand, the participants in the events are presented in a different light – Cruso's main activity is the building of terraces and Friday is mute. It is clear that such explicit reflection on the first section of Coetzee's text unequivocally discloses the dual nature of the so-called “history” underlying the narrative text. Whereas the self-conscious focalization of herself as a female castaway indirectly pointed to her usurpation of the role of castaway in the first section, in reflective passages in the second segment of *Foe* it is made quite explicit that, whilst pretending to reconstruct Cruso's story, Susan Barton has actually superimposed her own recording as a female castaway onto the original adventures of Robinson Crusoe in the story she hopes to sell to the author Foe. For this reason the feminist narrator cum female castaway appears to be again ideally disposed, in her two-pronged role of both enacting a fictional existence and reconstruct-

ing possible stories to be "sold" to an esteemed eighteenth century author of adventurous histories based on "confessions", to focus on various questions surrounding the nature and production of stories.

In this regard the listing of the unresolved "mysteries" in her version of the story of the island takes up a central position in the constant reflection on the nature and significance of stories and serves to address the questions "any reader of our story will ask" (Coetzee, 1986: 86). These "mysteries" concern the different actantial roles ascribed to both Cruso and Friday in the refocalized version of the story of the island and may be indicated as follows:

What could be the significance of Cruso's endless toil on the terraces?

How did Friday come to lose his tongue?

What prompted his submissiveness to Cruso in a relationship where the roles of slave and master were duly observed?

Why did neither Friday nor his master desire the woman cast ashore on their island? And, finally,

What was Friday about when he paddled out to sea and scattered petals on the water?

These questions focus on different angles of writing, which are all, at some stage, "explained" individually in Coetzee's probing of the nature of narrativity and the conditions determining the production of stories throughout his text. In the second segment Susan Barton's reflective comments on each of these problems disclose crucial aspects of Coetzee's notion of narrativity and deserve some consideration here. The fact that Cruso's terraces, when considered from a distance by the narrator, resemble tombs rather than "fields waiting to be planted" (Coetzee, 1986: 83) is significant. These tombs are compared to the lasting pyramids erected in the Egyptian desert with the help of slave labour, suggesting that Cruso's preoccupation with moving stones and building walls could perhaps have originated from a desire to leave behind some monumental legacy. That such a legacy could be worth exploring by any story-teller, is subsequently suggested in the explicit evoking of the joint activity by master and slave as a metaphor for writing in a reflective passage such as the following:

"I must go, Friday. You thought that carrying stones was the hardest of labours. But when you see me at Mr Foe's desk making marks with the quill, think of each mark as a stone, and think of the paper as the island, and imagine that I must disperse the stones over the face of the island, and when that is done and the taskmaster is not satisfied (was Cruso ever satisfied with your labours?) must pick them up again (which, in the figure, is scoring out the marks) and dispose them according to another scheme, and so forth, day after day; . . ." (Coetzee, 1986: 87)

It is because of such direct linking between supposedly unfavourable colonized conditions on the island and the tedious business of writing that, in my opinion, readings which attempt a facile appropriation between the barrenness of the island and the supposedly sterile South-African (political)

landscape are sadly reductionist. What seems to be significant in the lines quoted above, is the narrator's clear reassessment of the meaning of Cruso's labour – compare Susan Barton's previous negative remarks in the passage quoted earlier from the first segment in this regard. Part of her "education" as a story-teller seems to derive from the insight that both the compulsory and the apparently non-functional aspects associated with Cruso's labour are important for an understanding of the narrator's task as mediating agent in the writing process.

However, such an apparent insight into the potential of Cruso's occupation as a metaphor for writing is countered by the narrator's questions concerning the absence of desire on the island:

' "Then, if I may be plain – and why may I not be plain, since talking to you is like talking to the walls? – why did you not desire me, neither you nor your master? A woman is cast ashore on our island, a tall woman with black hair and dark eyes, till a few hours past the companion of a sea-captain besotted with love of her. Surely desires kept banked for many years must have flamed up within you. Why did I not catch you stealing glances from behind a rock while I bathed? Do tall women who rise up out of the sea dismay you? Do they seem like exiled queens come to reclaim the islands men have stolen from them?" ' (Coetzee, 1986: 86)

It is clear that the extensive scrutiny of the frustrations encountered by Susan Barton in her actantial roles of female castaway and feminist focalizer and narrator, serves to alert her (and the reader) to the problems inherent in attempts to "re-construct" traditional stories of adventure (or "strange circumstances" for that matter) by resorting to psychoanalytic and/or feminist discursive practices. This is dramatized most potently in the scene where Susan Barton, after having spelt out the analogies between music, language and lovemaking as forms of communication, is forced to concede that Friday would for ever remain inaccessible to her:

'Tears came to my eyes, I am ashamed to say; all the elation of my discovery that through the medium of music I might at last converse with Friday was dashed, and bitterly I began to recognize that it might not be mere dullness that kept him shut up in himself, nor the accident of the loss of his tongue, nor even an incapacity to distinguish speech from babbling, but a disdain for intercourse with me.' (Coetzee, 1986: 98)

The psychoanalytic paradigm is also addressed in terms of the different "readings" of the island as either a "garden of desire" or a "garden of labour", which serve to evoke the competing contemporary notions of narrativity represented in the divergent interpretations Susan Barton and Cruso assign to their shared actantial role of castaway in the re-focalized version of the story of the island:

' "I ask these questions because they are the questions any reader of our story will ask. I had no thought, when I was washed ashore, of becoming a castaway's wife. But the reader is bound to ask why it was that, in all the nights I shared your master's hut, he and I did not come together more than once as man and woman do. Is the answer that our island was not a garden of desire, like that in which our

first parents went naked, and coupled as innocently as beasts? I believe your master would have had it be a garden of labour; but, lacking a worthy object for his labours, descended to carrying stones, as ants carry grains of sand to and fro for want of better occupation.”’ (Coetzee, 1986: 86)

Despite the unflattering remarks on Cruso’s work in these lines, the narrator obviously has to concede that the concepts of pleasure and hard work are mutually exclusive. If read in conjunction with the explicit approximation of the so-called “hardest of labours” with the laborious task of writing quoted earlier, Susan Barton’s greater awareness of the significance of Cruso’s view of the actantial role of a “true castaway” becomes apparent.

However, Cruso’s occupation is not the main focus of the narrator’s list of “mysteries” to be solved, since Friday features centrally in the remaining questions summarized above. Judging from the space allotted to the “mysteries” involving Friday, one would be inclined to think that the feminist narrator has also arrived at a better understanding of the significance of Friday’s characterization in terms of mutilation, slavery, loss and worship. In this regard it is interesting to note how the power of imaginative writing is used to “fill the gap” left by Friday’s nonexistent tongue: “I could not put out of mind the softness of the tongue, its softness and wetness, and the fact that it does not live in the light . . .” (Coetzee, 1986: 85). When read in conjunction with the extensive (and at times gory) speculation on how Friday could have lost his tongue, it becomes clear that the narrator’s fascination with Friday’s mutilation discloses a revulsion that blinds her to Friday’s artistic qualities. Even on the island Friday could play a flute; during their sojourn in London Friday not only manages the tune of the island on one of Foe’s recorders, but he also dons the latter’s wig and robes and loses himself in dancing. It would appear that similar to her focalization of Friday in the first section, Susan Barton does not at this stage seem to be aware of the implications of her reflective observations for the story she is trying to construct. Thus artistic activity is shown to involve both “the fingers with which we touch the clavichord or the flute”, and “the tongue with which we jest and lie and seduce” (Coetzee, 1986: 85), but despite Friday’s apparent remarkable skill at playing the flute, he is still described in terms of his loss only: “Lacking members of play, what is there left for beasts to do when they are bored but sleep?” (Coetzee, 1986: 85). Since the loss of Friday’s tongue is also the token of his supposed cannibal heritage, the narrator apparently cannot decide which actantial role best characterizes Friday, so that the notion of the savage, in her view, seems to counter his artistic abilities:

‘How like a savage to master a strange instrument – to the extent that he is able without a tongue – and then be content forever to play one tune upon it! It is a form of incuriosity, is it not, a form of sloth. But I digress.’ (Coetzee, 1986: 95)

This shows that Susan Barton has not yet come to terms with Friday’s *difference* and its potential relevance for the story she is trying to reconstruct. Even where the narrator resorts to an explicit comparison as a means of establishing a relationship between Friday’s apparent deprivation and the

potential to write, she does not go beyond recording the relationship in terms of a question:

“‘Is there something in the condition of slavehood that invades the heart and makes a slave a slave for life, as the whiff of ink clings forever to a schoolmaster?’” (Coetzee, 1986: 85)

Similar to the first recorded impression of Friday as “a man with a dazzling halo about him” (Coetzee, 1986: 5), the narrator again appears to be unaware of the significance of her observation regarding the supposed inherent qualities of slavehood. However, the actantial role of submissive slave dramatizes an ability to serve unselfishly and with devotion. Read in conjunction with his scattering of petals on the water, suggestive of some sort of offering, it would appear that Friday’s inner qualities are deliberately foregrounded, thereby alerting the reader to his spiritual potential – as opposed to Cruso’s preoccupation with physically taxing labour – for writing. It is clear that Friday has been elevated from an obscure and marginal servant in the first section to an object worthy of extensive reflection in the second segment of Coetzee’s text. In this regard it certainly seems a calculated strategy to present as the final mystery to be solved Friday’s reported scattering of petals over the place where the ship presumably went down. Even more suggestive of Friday’s central importance for the refocalized version of the story of the island is the fact that the narrator could bring herself to mention briefly the possibility that Friday’s activities could (or maybe should?) form the substance of the story she is trying to construct:

“‘On the sorrows of Friday, I once thought to tell Mr Foe, but did not, a story entire of itself might be built; whereas from the indifference of Cruso there is little to be squeezed.’” (Coetzee, 1986: 87)

Contrary to the self-conscious preoccupation with the artificial and constructed nature of stories, the question as to whose story to tell – that of Cruso’s indifference or that of Friday’s sorrows – constitutes implicit social commentary in that it exposes the underlying choices story-tellers and authors are invariably confronted with when attempting to compose a story. Hence, perhaps the most significant function of Susan Barton, in her actantial role as mediating narrative agent, is her consideration of possible protagonists for the story of the island – Cruso, the traditional castaway hero in his contemporary role as the architect of non-functional terraces; she herself, as the first female castaway who could present the protagonists and their activities from a different perspective; or Friday, the “silent” companion whose curious activity represents the final mystery, the “hole” in the story that requires that it be (re)addressed in different terms.

It would appear that the upshot of extensive reflection on the substance of stories at least leads to the insight, in this section, that Friday should be at the centre of any attempted rewriting of Defoe’s classic tale of adventure. At the same time the narrator has been forced to acknowledge the crippling limitations of the contemporary discourses in terms of which she has tried in vain to address Friday’s story. However, the final twist to this section is to be

found in the dramatization of the "journey" Susan Barton and Friday undertake to Bristol, presumably in order to give Friday back his freedom after the narrator has apparently abandoned all hope of solving the mysteries surrounding the story of the island. This final "voyage" concerns a dramatization of the "levelling" process in which Susan Barton and Friday finally come to share the actantial role of gipsies, roaming the English countryside as filthy outcasts of society and so running the risk of being exploited and humiliated by everyone. Ironically, once she has realized that "... a time comes when there are more important things than books" (Coetzee, 1986: 100), these deplorable circumstances result in some illuminations that have long evaded Susan Barton. The moment she inadvertently resorts to Friday's dance in a state of misery – and not as a calculated move to penetrate his indifference towards her – she surprisingly discovers its sustaining powers. A discovery of a related nature concerns one of the "strongholds" of civilization, namely personal cleanliness. To her own surprise Susan Barton, after having been accused of being a gipsy, has to admit to the fact of barely having washed on the road and "... feeling none the worse for it" (Coetzee, 1986: 108). Contrary to the depiction of her "true" experiences as a castaway on the island, this is a Susan Barton who apparently has finally come to terms with her environment. It is clear that Coetzee exploits the parallel of this dreary and relatively uneventful "journey" with the "voyages" undertaken by actual and would-be castaways to demystify the notion of a voyage as a metaphor for romantic "travellers' tales". The single instance of a strange incident concerns the discovery of the dead babe and the narrator's fascination with the bloody bundle, which had been "cast out" by unknown parties. Besides inviting speculation on the themes of lost children and cannibalism which have been reflected upon at various stages in the text, this discovery apparently primarily serves to alert Susan Barton to her responsibility towards Friday, regardless of his exploitability for the construction of stories:

'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.' (Coetzee, 1986: 111)

In summary one may note that both the extensive dramatization and the detailed explicit commentary on the nature of narrativity or the production of stories in this section, serve to highlight the feminist narrator's growing realization of the true significance of her refocalized version of a castaway story. In this regard it seems interesting that the epistolary form of the second section enables Susan Barton to keep up a kind of diary (suggestive of Cruso's journal which he did not bother to keep) in which the particularities of her experiences as a narrator could be meticulously recorded. However, the questions raised about the "mysteries" of the story of the island nevertheless remain provisional in this section and are again taken up in the next section when the narrator, to stick to her formulation of writing as a laborious business approximating Cruso's taxing dispersal of stones on the island, has to defend her arrangement of the marks on the paper to the "taskmaster", Foe.

5 Authorial reflections on the writing act – re-examination of the production of stories and the function of mediating narrative agents on different levels of *narration*

After an extended section in which the feminist narrator was given all the scope she could have wished for to indulge in monologic “confessions” (which, incidentally, suggests that she was given the opportunity to reflect upon the refocalized story of the island in an unrestrained manner), the third section is characterized by a dramatization of the relationship between narrative agent and author. This means that dramatization becomes the vehicle, via the dialogues between Susan Barton and Foe, for a superimposition of authorial reflections onto the extensive narratorial reflections the reader has already been confronted with, especially in the second segment of the text. The central mediating function of Susan Barton, as exemplified in her actantial roles of female castaway and feminist focalizer-narrator respectively, is thereby also structurally expressed. It seems significant that the second section of Coetzee’s text functions as a kind of bridge, linking the actors on the island and the author in England via the recorded impressions of a feminist mediating narrative agent. In this regard, one may recall Susan Barton’s self-conscious formulation of her importance as mediating narrator of their story in one of her monologues addressed to Friday in the second section of the text:

‘Or I bring a book to the scullery. “This is a book, Friday,” I say. “In it is a story written by the renowned Mr Foe. You do not know the gentleman, but at this very moment he is engaged in writing another story, which is your story, and your master’s, and mine. Mr Foe has not met you, but he knows of you, from what I have told him, using words. This is part of the magic of words. Through the medium of words I have given Mr Foe the particulars of you and Mr Cruso and of my year on the island and the years you and Mr Cruso spent there alone, as far as I can supply them; and all these particulars Mr Foe is weaving into a story which will make us famous throughout the land, and rich too.”’ (Coetzee, 1986: 58)

Whereas the first two sections were mainly concerned with the stories of Cruso and Susan Barton respectively, the self-conscious analysis of the “magic of words” in the third section eventually results in the suggestion that Friday should constitute the focus of writing in a contemporary context. Besides being explicitly debated in the dialogues between the two narrative agents, Friday’s increasing importance may also be gleaned from his switching of actantial roles in which he moves from slave and child to prospective writer. Whereas the previous section ended with the feminist narrator’s realization that Friday could not be delivered from slavery and would remain her responsibility like an unwanted and unloved child, the third section closes with the focus on Friday in the position of “master” in the foreground of the scene, whilst his self-appointed “keepers” have been relegated to the position of “worn-out” lovers in the background. It is significant, then, that at the close of the third section, which is also the conclusion to the story that Susan Barton has so painstakingly been recording in her “memoirs”, Friday is shown

to have been elevated from marginal figure (either subjecting himself to Cruso's rule or traipsing about as the shadow of Susan Barton) to main subject in the writing process.

It would appear that the reader has finally been allowed to share in the "illumination" bestowed upon the story-tellers as to which actor in the story of the island held "promise of fullness" (Coetzee, 1986: 89). Were it not for the extensive deliberations on various aspects involving the composition of stories, the reader might not have been prepared to accept the shift of emphasis from Cruso and Susan Barton to Friday. Notice, for instance, the didactic tone in the schematic outline of the ordering of events in the version of the story Foe would prefer to write:

'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 that 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.' (Coetzee, 1986: 117)

This is matched by the narrative agent's summary of the interweaving stories comprising the refocalized version of the story of the island:

'The story I desire to be known by is the story of the island. You call it an episode, but I call it a story in its own right. It commences with my being cast away there and concludes with the death of Cruso and the return of Friday and myself to England, full of new hope. Within this larger story are inset the stories of how I came to be marooned (told by myself to Cruso) and of Cruso's shipwreck and early years on the island (told by Cruso to myself), as well as the story of Friday, which is properly not a story but a puzzle or hole in the narrative (I picture it as a buttonhole, carefully cross-stitched around, but empty, waiting for the button).' (Coetzee, 1986: 121)

Naturally, such explicit emphasis on the constructed nature of the abstractable logical and chronological arrangement of events in the underlying stories (Genette's *histoire*) of "books" (Genette's *récit*), invites a (re)consideration of the arrangement of story strands in Coetzee's text and may be construed as providing internal textual "proof" of the contemporary author's subversion and extension of expected notions of narrativity – exemplified, for instance, in his segmentation of *Foe* into four different sections. Instead of adhering to the "rule" of logical sequence – beginning, then middle, then end – the basic structure of his text could perhaps best be described in terms of beginning (original story), then embellishments (selfconscious reflection on the problematics of writing), then discussion of the embellishments (dramatization of the argument between narrator and author), then return to the beginning (dramatization of the conditions for a novel rewriting of the story). It is clear that reflection on stories (or preoccupation with the *beginning* of stories in Foe's terms) far outweighs the relation of the stories themselves in Coetzee's text. However, it is the beauty of *Foe* that a number of different stories (either informed by some of Defoe's other books or else inspired by myths) are

interspersed among the reflections and embellishments on, for instance, the stories of Cruso, Susan Barton and Friday in the primary narrative of the text. Thus in the third section speculation on the different versions of the stories Susan Barton and Foe favour, is discussed in terms of the "applications" to be gleaned from the summary of a number of stories in which the female characters are shown to have led remarkably eventful lives (certainly full of "strange", if "sinful", "circumstances"), resulting from such actantial roles as those of thieves, murderers or whores. Since Foe's didactic purpose in telling Susan Barton these stories is made quite explicit, "... there comes a time when we must give reckoning of ourselves to the world ..." (Coetzee, 1986: 124), the reader is probably supposed to consider the possibility that the actantial role of feminist narrator could be extended to include the roles of Defoe's other chief female characters – notably those of thieves, murderers and mistresses (or whores). What seems particularly important about these "confessions" in which the chronological and logical events of personal stories are summarized, is the fact that they are all offered on the threshold of death and may therefore be accepted as "true". Besides suggesting that the story (and "life") of Susan Barton as feminist narrative agent cum female castaway is drawing to a close, the introduction of these "confessions" at this stage in the text also alerts the reader to the significance of the theme of death which informs Coetzee's text in all four its segments. One may consider in this regard manifestations of this theme in, for instance, Cruso's terraces approximating tombs, the preoccupation with cannibalism or the event of the "dead babe" in the previous two sections. However, in this third section Foe's authorial intervention seems to trigger reflections on the manner in which the occupation of writing seems of necessity to be informed by death.

It is clear that not only the construction, but indeed also the substance of stories are (re)addressed in the dramatized reflections offered in the form of an extended "argument" between the feminist narrator and the historical author in the third section of Coetzee's text. Already in the previous section it was pointed out that, "... 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" (Coetzee, 1986: 89). Whereas construction was a craft that could be learned, the determination of which episodes held "promise of fullness" depended "on the grace of illumination" (Coetzee, 1986: 89), which the author had to await patiently. In this regard the dramatization of the "argument" between the narrator and the author as to whose story to tell and on which part of the world to focus – Cruso and Friday on the island, or Susan Barton in Bahia – is used as a strategy to enlighten the reader as to the difficulty in arriving at an informed decision regarding the substance of stories. However, it would appear that in this third section the mediating narrative agent Susan Barton, after having gone through prolonged periods of waiting and extended processes of explorative preparation both on the island and in England, has finally reached the stage where she may confidently establish her right to defend her decisions to the author, "... I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire" (Coetzee, 1986: 131).

Despite such self-conscious awareness of her importance as *feminist* mediating agent in the writing process, Susan Barton's identity crisis (one remembers that she remarked on the "ghostlike" existence she and Friday were forced to lead whilst still in "Mr Foe's" house) appears to be much more pronounced in this section. Hence her "privileged" relationship to Foe is implicitly challenged by the possibility that she could share the status of "mere" actor with characters from some of his other stories in the scene where Foe's house is described as "...a gathering-place for actors" (Coetzee, 1986: 130). This remarkable dramatization of the artificiality of writing constitutes the climax to the dialogic encounters between Susan Barton and Foe. The shock of being confronted with fictional "actors" that seem to be at least as substantial as herself (the girl responds to her kiss and does not crumble at her touch) leads to a profound questioning of the entire former enterprise of writing:

'But if these women are creatures of yours, visiting me at your instruction, speaking words you have prepared for them, then who am I and who indeed are you? I presented myself to you in words I knew to be my own – I slipped overboard, I began to swim, my hair floated about me, and so forth, you will remember the words – and for a long time afterwards, when I was writing those letters that were never read by you, and were later not sent, and at last not even written down, I continued to trust in my own authorship.' (Coetzee, 1986: 133)

To these probing questions regarding the purpose of writing and the substantiality of fictional characters and narrative agents Foe has no reply other than to compare the author's task to that of an "unknown conjuror", dictating the lives of writers and "substantial bodies" alike:

'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.' (Coetzee, 1986: 131)

Thus it is made quite explicit that the extensive reflection on the nature of narrativity, or the "rules" regarding the construction of "histories", or the multiple "applications" that could be gleaned from artificially constructed stories, is not merely narcissistic but could indeed be construed as implicating the "rules" by which "real lives" are conducted in reality. The undecidability of the gliding signifier in postmodernist writing is seen to underlie reality as well: "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)

It would appear that the purpose of giving voice to the historical author only at this advanced stage in the text was to enlist his didactic abilities in providing the feminist narrator with the "illumination" she had so long awaited. In this regard the psychoanalytic paradigm is again explicitly evoked in the dramatization of the coupling scene, which serves both to mark the climax to the relationship between Susan Barton and Foe and to clinch their arguing about the substance and technicalities of writing. The theme of death is re-introduced by evoking cannibalism as a metaphor for writing – Foe bites

Susan's lip, sucks the wound and murmurs, "This is my manner of preying on the living" (Coetzee, 1986: 139), suggesting that the entire foregoing enterprise could be construed as a preliminary text supplied by the feminist mediating narrative agent to be "preyed upon" by the author for his own purposes. However, Susan Barton takes the initiative in their coupling, thereby adding the role of begetter to the Muse's traditional actantial role of goddess, in order to "... father her offspring" (Coetzee, 1986: 140).

Significantly, it is directly after this act that the question of Friday's position regarding Susan Barton's version of the story of the island is taken up again. Foe's final illuminating suggestions regarding the remaining unresolved mystery of the story constructed by the feminist mediating narrative agent should, however, be viewed against the reflections on Friday's role offered in the dialogic encounters between the chief protagonists in the writing process prior to this scene. In this regard the mediating narrative agent's initial remarks on her own limitations reflect her understanding gained through the dramatized relationship with Friday depicted in the second segment of Coetzee's text:

'The story of Friday's tongue is a story unable to be told, or unable to be told by me. That is to say, many stories can be told of Friday's tongue, but the true story is buried within Friday, who is mute. The true story will not be heard till by art we have found a means of giving voice to Friday.' (Coetzee, 1986: 118)

In the light of the contemporary authorial agent's attempt to "find a way in" by passing a fingernail across Friday's teeth at the close of the text, the narrative agent's words quoted above seem to be almost prophetic. However, Friday's very silence also makes him susceptible to narrative manipulation, since lacking the power of speech he has "... no defence against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others" (Coetzee, 1986: 121). In this sense Friday's "helpless silence" may be construed as exemplifying the artificiality of writing – the feminist narrator declares, "I say he is a cannibal and he becomes a cannibal; I say he is a laundryman and he becomes a laundryman" (Coetzee, 1986: 121). However, it is a silence that is also addressed in terms of the responsibility of the narrator by evoking the mother-child relationship between Susan Barton and Friday:

'What is the truth of Friday? You will respond: he is neither cannibal nor laundryman, these are mere names, they do not touch his essence, he is a substantial body, he is himself, Friday is Friday. But that is not so. 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.' (Coetzee, 1986: 121–122)

By assigning the actantial role of child to Friday (one remembers that at the close of the previous section the mother-child relationship was offered as a reason for Susan Barton's decision not to abandon Friday) the *responsibility* of writing in a contemporary context is suggested. It would appear that the very artificiality of stories and the undecidability of the gliding signifier in

postmodernist writing highlight the writer's task in utilizing the imaginative possibilities open to him in a responsible manner. The dilemma of an author confronted with the enigma of "silence" is thereby illuminated – on the one hand it lends itself to speculation and narrative manipulation; on the other hand it resists a final understanding of its "true" meaning. Thus the silence of Friday may be construed as exemplifying both the imaginative possibilities and the crippling limitations inherent in writing.

However, Friday's mutilation does not only concern the loss of his tongue, but also involves an even more "atrocious mutilation", the true extent of which is revealed to Susan Barton by her witnessing of Friday's dancing:

'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: 119–120)

Such a revelation finally discloses the real significance of Friday's mutilation – his double loss not only puts him beyond human language, but it also enables him to remain unaffected by the role of actantial lover to Susan Barton, to which, amongst others, his master and the author Foe succumb in the course of the text. Thus his "untouchability" derives from a double mutilation that puts him outside and above the contemporary discourses of psychoanalysis and feminism. If read in conjunction with the "final mystery" concerning Friday's scattering of petals on the water listed in the previous section, his double mutilation explains why his activities represent "a puzzle or a hole" in the refocalized story of the island. However, there is also a deeper significance to be gleaned from Friday's characterization in terms of lack or loss. That his mutilation actually makes him "more than human" is suggested by the fact that Susan Barton compares herself to the unbelieving Thomas, who did not trust his eyes, but had to touch the wounds of Christ as well before he would really believe. Thus it is made quite explicit, by the scene quoted above, that Friday takes on the qualities of a divine figure once the extent of his mutilation reveals the depth of his suffering. His actantial role of submissive slave supports his approximating of a Christ-like figure, in that he knows how to serve without complaint. Thus the reader is finally allowed to share the insight that Friday's double mutilation should not be taken as a mark of deprivation only, but that it should rather be seen as a measure of his superior divinity as well.

It is against such estimations of Friday's potential for writing, that the "illuminations" resulting from the coupling scene between Friday's "conjurers" or "makers" should be viewed. The final mystery regarding Friday's scattering of petals on the sea, commented upon by the feminist narrator in the previous segment, is taken up again and now accepted by Foe as the inexpressible "silence" recorded in the refocalized version of the story of the island:

'In every story there is a silence, some sight concealed, some word unspoken, I believe. Till we have spoken the unspoken we have not come to the heart of the story.' (Coetzee, 1986: 141)

Therefore, speaking in figures, Foe first suggests that Friday "... rows his log of wood across the dark pupil – or the dead socket – of an eye staring up at him from the floor of the sea" (Coetzee, 1986: 141), intimating that the task of narrative agents could be construed as being one of informed focalization, since Friday does not himself descend into the eye but leaves the task of exploring its mysteries to others. Susan Barton, on the other hand, subsequently evokes the figure of a mouth rather than an eye:

'Or like a mouth,' said I. 'Friday sailed all unwitting across a great mouth, or beak as you called it, that stood open to devour him. It is for us to descend into the mouth (since we speak in figures). It is for us to open Friday's mouth and hear what it holds: silence, perhaps, or a roar, like the roar of a seashell held to the ear.' (Coetzee, 1986: 141–142)

Thus the final illumination for the feminist focalizer and narrator of the story of the island comes with the realization that Friday's *difference* should be acknowledged, explored and accounted for in writing. Since Friday's double mutilation puts him outside and above the discourses of psychoanalysis and feminism, the need for a different means of communication or a new language is clearly indicated. The reader is returned to her focalization of the sounds of the island in the first section of the text, where the onomatopoeic quality of Coetzee's writing revealed the feminist mediating narrative agent's lack of insight in her rejection of the sounds of "... caws and chirps and screeches, and the barking of seals, and the moan of the wind. ..." in favour of the "... fullness of human speech" (Coetzee, 1986: 8). However, in the third section Friday's central importance for writing in a contemporary context is indicated by the feminist narrator's realization that it was necessary to try and "hear" what Friday's tongueless mouth was trying to communicate and hence perhaps succeed in probing the meaning of silence.

Since all of Susan Barton's efforts "... to bring Friday to speech, or to bring speech to Friday. ..." (Coetzee, 1986: 142) were fruitless, Foe suggests that he should be taught writing instead of speech, which means that deconstruction as a possible strategy for creative writing is finally explicitly evoked. It has implicitly informed the reflections on the writing act all along in the extended dramatization of both the "reality" or "substantiality" of fictional characters and fictional worlds and the "artificiality" of real life experiences throughout the text. Especially in the third section the prolonged scene of the fictional characters "brought to life" and imposed upon the supposedly "substantial" narrative agent clearly evokes the Derridean notion of the textualization of all experience, thereby convincingly demonstrating the need to eliminate the "borders" between fiction and reality. Thus, in the opinion of the historical author, writing is seen to underlie creativity and creation, also in a divine sense:

'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?' (Coetzee, 1986: 143)

However, this is not accepted without a counterargument by the feminist narrator, or perhaps rather co-author, of the story of the island:

'Whether writing is able to form itself out of nothing I am not competent to say,' I replied. 'Perhaps it will do so for authors; it will not for me. . . . As to God's writing, my opinion is: If he writes, he employs a secret writing, which is not given to us, who are part of that writing, to read.' (Coetzee, 1986: 143)

The outcome to these differences of opinion between the two "creators of stories" is not explicitly stated but implied in the closing dramatized scene of this section – that of the attempt to " . . . teach Friday his letters. . . ." (Coetzee, 1986: 145). As could have been expected, Susan Barton in the actantial role of teacher has little success of teaching Friday concepts like "house", "ship", "Africa" or "mother", which represent a summary of the aspects she suspects ought to be relevant or accessible to Friday. However, he fills the slate with a different kind of "writing", namely a drawing of " . . . open eyes, each set upon a human foot: row upon row of eyes upon feet: walking eyes . . ." (Coetzee, 1986: 147) which probably refers to his roaming of the English countryside in the company of his would-be "mistress" and suggests that he might have his own particular focalization of "voyages" undertaken under the guise of some assumed "worthy" objective, like trying to undo the injustices of slavehood or exploring the concept of a different kind of voyage as a metaphor for writing, for instance. The suggested reversal of roles, or switching of positions, which would elevate Friday from object of focalization to focalizing subject is rejected vehemently by the feminist focalizer-narrator, who has up to this stage in the text seen herself as the "director" of Friday's story. Thus she departs on another "journey", a lone stroll through the streets of London, in which she apparently arrives at an understanding of the roles of both Friday and Foe in her story – the former, though perhaps not a slave, was nevertheless probably a captive of her desire to get "their" story told; the latter had been indulged in writing " . . . the same story over and over, in version after version, stillborn every time. . . ." (Coetzee, 1986: 151). Such a realization of the apparent fruitless enterprise of writing appropriately announces the end to the primary narrative, in which the feminist focalizer-narrator has been the central figure, determining the shifting of actors occupying the positions of either slave or lover in the enactment of the psychoanalytic paradigm as a metaphor for writing. The final switch in actantial positions concerns the role of future author, in that Friday is discovered at Foe's desk, clothed in Foe's filthy robes and poised over his papers with " . . . a quill with a drop of black ink glistening at its tip" (Coetzee, 1986: 151), with which he finally manages to fill the page with " . . . rows and rows of the letter *o* tightly packed together" (Coetzee, 1986: 152). Thus it is left to Friday to write the "finish" to the extended exploration by both the feminist narrator and the historical author into the possibility of rewriting the story of the island. This implies that the exploitation of contemporary discursive practices, whilst it failed to result in the verbalization of the

“silence” of the story of the island, at least yielded the insight as to where to look for the “heart” or “eye” or “mouth” of a “new” version of the story.

6 Concluding remarks

The final explorative “voyage” of the text concerns the dramatized attempts of the contemporary authorial agent to carry out the “instructions” suggested by the “makers” of the refocalized story of the island as a result of the “illuminations” visited upon them in the course of their reflections on the problematics of writing. Since Susan Barton is conspicuously absent from this segment of the text, except where the contemporary author first quotes her words and then imitates some of her actions, it would appear that the function of the feminist mediating narrative agent has at last been exhausted. The extent to which her “replacement” both draws on her focalization and goes beyond her attempted rewriting of the story of the island reflects the measure of Coetzee’s dependence upon and transcendence of the contemporary discursive practices which informed Susan Barton’s actantial role of mediating narrative agent in the first three segments of his text.

True to the joint exploitation of both dramatization of and self-conscious reflection on the process of writing throughout the text, these two strategies also inform narration in the closing segment of *Foe*. However, there is a marked difference from the previous sections: instead of interrupting the flow of the story, or being fleshed out to become a different story in its own right, or forming the substance of dialogic encounters, reflection has become indistinguishable from dramatization in the self-focalization of the contemporary authorial agent’s investigation of the “legacy” left to him by previous narrative agents and his subsequent descent into the unexplored depths of the sea in order to gain access to “the home of Friday”. Whilst it is evident that this last dramatized explorative act goes beyond his predecessors’ attempts at probing the mystery of Friday’s presumed offering, the way in which every step seems to be determined by Susan Barton’s recorded “memoirs” simultaneously reveals the extent to which subsequent versions of the same story of necessity have to “prey upon” previous versions – writing apparently is always inevitably also rewriting. Given the central function of Susan Barton as mediating narrative agent in the text, and given Friday’s elevation to major subject in a proposed new version of the story of the island, it seems strange that the title of Coetzee’s text should be *Foe*. However, this is an acknowledgement of the “source” or the “beginning”, from which subsequent refocalized versions derive, which in turn inform the suggestions for another re-writing.

The need to continue rewriting the same story is informed by the insight that the core elements of any “history” (Genette’s *histoire*) may be regarded from different angles, which would result in different readings of their “meaning”, which could, therefore, be recorded in various narratives (Genette’s *récit*) all deriving from the same source. It is for this reason that focalization informs Coetzee’s text in all four its segments, since it demonstrates the gliding signifier of postmodernist writing – the re-focalization

offered by the feminist mediating agent opens up new angles to the historical narrative, which may in turn be re-focalized by subsequent narrative agents. This suggests that the only "access" to what has not been verbalized, the difference of Friday as embodied in his double mutilation and the various actantial roles assigned to him throughout the text, is provided by the re-focalization and attempted re-writing of the story of the island as these procedures have been filtered through contemporary discourses such as psychoanalysis and feminism. In this regard it seems significant that despite the continual questioning of Susan Barton's powers of focalization, it is her account of the story of the island, and not Crusoe's lost journal or Foe's non-existent writing besmudged by Friday, which in the end is available to the contemporary authorial agent at the close of the text:

On the floor is a dispatch box with brass hinges and clasp. I lift it on to the table and open it. The yellowed topmost leaf crumbles in a neat halfmoon under my thumb. Bringing the candle nearer, I read the first words of the tall, looping script: 'Dear Mr Foe, at last I could row no further.' (Coetzee, 1986: 155)

The contemporary authorial agent's subsequent descent into the depths of the sea, instead of using the sea to be cast upon a "desert isle", dramatizes the new angle from which the story of the island will probably be re-focalized and re-written. This implies that the first three segments of Coetzee's text, in which he has "quoted" Susan Barton's writing, could at most function as the starting point for a new story, acting on the recommendations offered by the feminist mediating narrative agent. The fact that the mediating role has been assigned to a female character, embodying various dubious "heroines" from historical narratives and also representing a form of "suppressed" discourse, is important because it suggests the necessity to (re)view fictionality, narrativity or reality from a different and as yet *unexplored* angle, thereby perhaps making it possible to eventually verbalize a truly *different* construction of fictionality and reality. In order to explore such a different construction it is, then, necessary to re-investigate the enigma presented by Friday in his many different guises and his emergence in the text from marginal figure to central object of reflection. For this reason it becomes necessary to descend into a place of death, "...where bodies are their own signs" (Coetzee, 1986: 157), showing that any attempted "re-writing" will have to come to terms with silence and so be able to address the significance of Friday's double mutilation, which apparently enables him to "communicate" even in death:

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)

The true power of speech seemingly emerges as silence, which explains why Friday is in the end the only means whereby the "truth" of story-telling may perhaps eventually be experienced. It also explains why the story of the island

never gets told in the present text, since Friday's private voice presents the sounds of the island, which are beyond the understanding of the focalizer and exceed the power of human speech. Thus the dramatization of the processes of writing serves the purpose of painstakingly preparing the reader for the realization that he should look at the fictional worlds, and their possible significance for an understanding of his own world, from a different perspective. Like Crusoe's tedious labour on the terraces, Coetzee's engagement in the problematics of story-telling can never be anything more than a preparing of the ground. It would appear that in terms of Crusoe's island only a castaway attuned to the absence of human speech would be able to sense that Friday's "singing" should be interpreted as "the voice of man". If there is any meaning to be gleaned from Coetzee's painstaking questioning of the power of language or the significance of story-telling it is perhaps the realization that the conditions of our particular discourses exclude a probing of the meaning of silence. However, the dramatization of the experience of Friday's inner world by the author in the last paragraphs of the book at least suggests the means whereby another voyage into the possibilities of rewriting a different story could perhaps be attempted.

Notes

1. In most studies on postmodernist fiction its self-conscious nature is singled out as one of its predominant features – see, for instance, Hutcheon (1980) where the term "narcissistic" is present in the title, whereas in Waugh (1984) the term "metafiction" is defined in the subtitle as "the theory and practice of *self-conscious* fiction" – my emphasis.
2. Coetzee's "rewriting" of Defoe's novel involves, amongst other liberties, dropping of the *e* from the name of the original character Crusoe and also changing the author's Frenchified Defoe back into the English Foe. For the sake of clarity I shall use Coetzee's version throughout unless Defoe's novel is implicated, in which case the full name Robinson Crusoe will be used.
3. Since I intend to refer mainly to Genette's (1980) global textual distinctions of story, text and narration, and since these remain largely unchallenged in his subsequent *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1988), I shall refer mainly to the earlier study. Naturally, Genette's (1982) work on intertextuality, entitled *Palimpsestes: La Littérature au Second Degré*, also suggests itself as a suitable point of departure for a reading of Coetzee's rewriting of the story of Robinson Crusoe. Dovey (1988: 331–332) has, in fact, defined Coetzee's text as a "literary palimpsest, superimposed upon an already jumbled layering of marks, a jumble which makes the original marks barely legible". However, apart from the unavailability of this work (it has not yet been translated into English) I am more interested here in analysing the narrative strategies employed by Coetzee in re-interpreting Defoe's text(s). Readers unfamiliar with French, may find Haffter's (1987) elucidation of Genette's (1982) model in his discussion of Bartho Smit's (1960) *Don Juan onder die Boere* enlightening. I shall assume familiarity with recent studies on the nature of postmodernist fiction and I shall refer to theorists such as Bertens & D'Haen (1988), Jefferson (1980), Hutcheon (1980) and (1988), McHale (1988) or Waugh (1984) where relevant. However, since my aim is to explore Coetzee's *unique* exploitation of postmodern narrative strategies, and since his preoccupation with the nature of stories permeates

- all four levels of his text, Genette's (1980) structuralist model seems to provide a more suitable framework for a tracing of Coetzee's notion of narrativity in *Foe*.
4. Teresa Dovey, in her study of Coetzee's novels, sees his narrative practice as "criticism-as-fiction" and maintains that *Foe* interarticulates with contemporary critical and theoretical discourses: "Via Susan Barton and her relationships with the Captain, with Cruso, with Foe and with Friday, Coetzee constructs an intricately developing debate amongst the discourses of feminism, post-colonialism and postmodernism, producing an almost too-fertile ground for criticism" (Dovey, 1988: 334).
 5. In this regard we may note that whilst her procedure of "criticism as pastiche" certainly makes explicit the intersection of contemporary critical and theoretical discourses in the novel, in my opinion, Dovey (1988) unfortunately does not adequately address the novel's textualization of these discourses, primarily because Coetzee's notion of narrativity is not sufficiently analysed.
 6. In regard to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* it is interesting that the essence of the narrative content is usually depicted in simplified versions of the text as these have specially been edited with a view to children's consumption, thereby ensuring that the substance of the text has become almost as familiar as the original text itself. Hence the basics of the text emerge as a classic traveller's tale depicting the adventures of Defoe's famous character Robinson Crusoe as the seaman who was shipwrecked and accordingly had to spend twenty-eight years on a desert island, only in the twenty-fourth year to be joined by a black man called Friday whom he had managed to rescue from a party of cannibals.
 7. Needless to say, I would not go along with readings of the barrenness of the island as being suggestive of the barrenness of the South African (political) landscape. Dovey (1988: 406 & 407) quotes reviews by Harriett Gilbert and André P. Brink in which the authors claim a direct link between Cruso's island and colonial attitudes in South Africa. Hence, Gilbert maintains:

Cruso's structure and control of his island is not unlike the rigorous example of the early South African settlers: tame the land, tame the black people, prepare a seedbed for posterity; building walls to enable a fortress mentality, monuments to the generations that follow. It is an isolationist mentality expressing suspicion and fear of intruders and rescuers, that is, foreigners. There is a need to resist and withstand change, poor communication and a lot of misunderstanding. The physical description of the island is evocative of South Africa: flat table top rocky mountains, strong winds, semi-Karoo scrub.

And André Brink says:

Die eiland is bar; Cruso bestee sy tyd daaraan om eindelose klipterrasse te pak wat geen aardse doel dien nie – tensy daar ééndag iemand sou opdaag met saad wat in die droë beddings gesaai kan word. Cruso wil ook nie gered word nie: hy is volkome genoegsaam in sy botte heersersbestaan saam met sy slaaf (en naderhand die vrou). (Die parallelle van hierdie skrikwekkende vereenvoudigde bestaan met 'n steriele politieke situasie soos dié in Suid-Afrika, sal die leser wel nie ontgaan nie!).

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