

Writing Space

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Summary

Writing Space explores the way in which language structures space with the help of lexical, syntactical, and semantic devices. Based upon an analysis of Susan's writing lesson given to Friday in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, a spatial reading of narrative is demonstrated. This includes a brief discussion on literacy as a prerequisite for writing, the site of the activity, and the theoretical framework within which spatialisation as a critical tool for literary analysis is not only consonant with post-structuralist thought but also a foremost means of ordering the world.

Opsomming

In hierdie referaat word die wyse ondersoek waarop taal strukture spasieer met behulp van leksikale, sintaktiese en semantiese middele. Daar word 'n ruimtelike lees van die verhaal gedemonstreer aan die hand van 'n analise van die skryfles wat Susan aan Friday gee in J.M. Coetzee se *Foe*. Die ruimtelike lees van 'n verhaal behels benewens 'n kort bespreking van geletterdheid as 'n voorvereiste vir skryf en die terrein van sodanige aktiwiteit, ook die teoretiese raamwerk waarbinne die benutting van ruimte as 'n onontbeerlike werktuig te voorskyn tree. Dit is nie alleen in ooreenstemming met post-strukturalistiese denke nie, maar ook die belangrikste middele om die wêreld te orden.

Writing and its corollary, reading, not only occupy but also structure space. After all, for writing to become the texture for reading it needs a surface, a page, or in the case of the example used below, namely J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986: 145), a "child's slate" upon which to inscribe itself. It also requires a place for the writer and the written which might be Blanchot's (1955: 33) "solitude", only to be matched by the site of the lone reader described by Benjamin (1970: 101). In addition, writing creates spaces in the shape of "fictional borders, territories, settlements" as Pavel (1986: 85) suggests in his *Fictional Worlds*. And finally, there is the space of literature and the book. Yet what concerns me here is not the space *of* writing, nor the space *in* writing but rather the way in which writing itself constructs space. This is not to say that writing - or language for that matter - takes priority over what is essentially a social production of space as Lefebvre (1991: 36) pointed out and of which writing and literacy are merely a part.

By highlighting the manner in which spatiality is sedimented in texts I simply wish to extend and bring to the surface of reading and criticism what Phillippe Sollers suggested:

Today, the fundamental question no longer concerns the *writer* and the *work*, but *writing* and *reading*, and consequently it is our task to define a new space in which these two phenomena might be understood as reciprocal and simultaneous, a curved space, a medium of exchanges and reversibility in which we would at last be on the same side as our language Writing is linked to a space in which time would have *turned* as it were, in which there would no longer be anything but that circular, operational movement.

(Sollers 1968: 237)

Sollers, who has to be seen here as one of many other writers representing the shift in theoretical thinking since the sixties, not only echoes Borges's (1964: 260) attempt to arrest the "successive nature" of language in his essay "A New Refutation of Time", but he also asserts the by now commonplace spatialization of the critical imagination¹ in the place of historicism's exaggerated concern with temporality. To be sure, both time and space are indispensable forms of any cognition, beginning with elementary perceptions and representations as Kant (1952) pointed out in the eighteenth century. But privileging a temporal determinism of genesis, defined by causal linear succession which forms the benchmark for post-Kantian history and criticism, including Bakhtin's useful notion of the *chronotope*,² is dependent upon the sovereign subject defining itself as a fixed *locus* or stable point. An interrogation of this transcendental subject or Cartesian ego was necessary in order to clear the ground for the current interest in spatial determinism of structure, where each unity, rather than being the result of development, is defined in terms of relations of proximity and distance.

Characteristically, Borges (1964: 274) speaks of "[D]eeds which populate the dimension of space" in his parable "The Witness" when literary criticism usually accounts for them in logico-temporal fashion; and Sollers is interested in simultaneity, reversibility and circularity. Both merely reiterate the primacy of spatiality in man's mode of existence and his relations towards the world, an insight already conveyed in Plato's *Republic* and *Timaeus*, and stressed by phenomenologists (e.g. Merleau-Ponty), psychologists (e.g. Piaget) and linguists such as Fillmore (1971), Wunderlich (1985) and Talmy (1983) among others. For Plato (*Timaeus*), geometrical space is the site of knowledge of the eternally existent, and space, light, line depth, number - the so-called Platonic solids - are involved in the arrangements triggering sensation. Similarly, geometrical space is the domain of *sinnliche Anschauung* (sensual/sensory perception) for Kant. Space, thus is related to

the body gazing whereas temporality is usually associated with memory.³ The centrality of spatial organization for human cognition probably stems from our empirical *physis*, whereby the body in its relation to its surroundings marks a space essentially hexagonal in nature: up - down, near - far, and left - right. Although the vertical - horizontal - distance configuration is common, three dimensional Euclidean space is by no means universal but merely a construct among others. Miller and Johnson-Laird in their study *Language and Perception* (1976: 59) explain the fact that all beings conceive and construct a space on the basis of a finite number of stable and isolatable elements each articulated to the other by the body's "motility" in space. Motility means the distinction which is made between those things a person is himself close enough to interact with and those things that he could interact with only if he (or they) moved. The late Michel de Certeau, referring to Freud's example of the famous *fort-da* game, speaks of a

basic experience: the child's differentiation of himself from his mother's body. Here the possibility of space and localisation (an "I am not alone") of the subject has its origins.

(De Certeau 1985: 144)

This example can be extended to Lacan's "mirror phase" which similarly marks an emergence from indifferentiation as essentially a spatialization defined by both a *here* and a *there* and a *same* and an *other*.

The *here* and *there*, relating the conceptual core of space to the living body, or what linguists following Bühler (1934) call an egocentred way of anchoring things in space, constitute deictic relations fundamental to language. *Deixis*, the Greek way for pointing or locating, refers to those aspects of a communication whose interpretation depends on knowledge of the context in which the communication occurs. Deictic terms for space such as *here* and *there*, *this* and *that* "introduce particulars of the speaker's and hearer's shared cognitive field into the message", as Rommetveit (quoted in Miller & Johnson-Laird 1976: 395) puts it. Deictic words include the personal pronouns *I* - *you* because their meaning is situationally determined, designating the position of the enunciator in relation to both the utterance and the receiver. Other deictic words in English, according to Miller and Johnson-Laird (1976: 539), include such verbs of motion as *bring*, *come*, *go*, *send* and *take* for they imply locations of origin and destination. *Deixis* also is often needed to relate the locative prepositions *in*, *on*, *at*, *by*, *on the right of*, *over*, *under*, *to*, *towards*, etcetera, to a referent as when Susan says in *Foe* (Coetzee 1986: 146): "*Come*, Friday, *I* said, let us return *to* our master" Deictic use of these prepositions, though, is

less common than their intrinsic use whereby a so-called primary object (figure) provides the point of origin or reference for the modal relation with a secondary object (ground) denoting typical neighbouring relations to other objects, for example, "Friday lay on his mat ..." (p. 145). Yet, in the words of Kittay and Godzich:

Deictics are the means by which language makes itself into something that can be referred to, and it is from this inaugural act of reference that all other forms of discourse reference will flow.

Deixis shows the very instance of discourse; it shows that discourse is *taking place*.

(Kittay & Godzich 1987: 20)

Discourse, however, is a prime function of language; and language in its dual manifestations of speech and writing appears to foreground spatial terms. Not only are these learned before temporal ones (cf. Wunderlich 1985: 69) but also time is often expressed spatially, for example "at this *point in time*" or "this cannot be done in such a *short space* of time", while locative indicators serve as inexhaustible source for metaphors, for example "to *home in on* something", "being *in the clear*". In addition, concepts and theoretical abstractions are usually formulated in relation to spatial structures, for instance the literary *corpus* or *system*, or the field theory of contemporary physics, not to mention the terms *text* (from *textura*) and *structure* (*structura* meaning building materials) which in themselves already signal spatiality.

While verbal expressions of space are linked to lived experience and to physiological perception generated by our sense apparatus, spatial ordering is not altogether ontogenetic but conceptual as Wunderlich (1985: 73) and Miller and Johnson-Laird (1976: 376) demonstrate. Different languages and cultures categorize spatial relations between objects differently and their various lexica contain numerous different designations for space. The spatial lexicon of English has an elaborate system of co-ordinates available for metric descriptions, place names, containers, pathways and boundaries; thus there are numerous labels for such properties as *length*, *area*, *volume*, etcetera, and containers such as *rooms*, *libraries*, *zones*, etcetera. Labels for landmarks include *buildings*, *trees*, *signs*, etcetera, whereas pathways include all those nouns referring to channels along which persons and objects move such as *roads*, *routes*, *passages*, etcetera. Labels for boundaries are *borders*, *contours*, *edges*, *ends*, *extremes*, *frontiers*, *limits*, *lines*, *margins*, *surfaces*, *thresholds* among others (cf. Miller & Johnson-Laird 1976: 376ff for a more exhaustive list). In addition to deictic expressions of space, locative prepositions and nouns, and verbs indicating positionality such as

stand, sit, hang, etcetera, as well as those referring to motion (*climb, lead*, etcetera), there are adjectives indicating dimensions such as *big - small, far - wide, tight, high - low*, etcetera, which construct spatial configurations in discourse. These can be either geometrical and positional, denoting location, or orientational, indicating directedness towards a goal. Localizing objects in space and determining trajectories involve specific cognitive modes which are sociohistorically and culturally mediated in as much as the mapping of spatial relations in and through language, apart from being dependent upon lexical and syntactical possibilities offered by different languages, ultimately rests on certain unexpressed epistemological and evaluative understandings of space.

With regard to epistemology or "the formal level", Miller and Johnson-Laird (1976: 57) say that either "relative or absolute theories of space dominate thought at one time or other". Whereas the Newtonian absolutist notion of space as defined by a coordinate system independent of any things the space might contain appeared to be taken as natural in modernity, relativist concepts where space is defined by spatial relations among things were current until the time of Descartes and re-emerged with Einstein's Relativity Theory. Irrespective of formal considerations, cultures and social groups valorize certain domains, sites and regions, something which is evident in the way in which particular positional terms, for example, *high - low, far - near* are semantically marked as either positive or negative and regions are divided into more or less valued spaces, for example, *sacred - profane, centre - margin, the familiar (home) - the unfamiliar*, etcetera. Certain sites can, furthermore, be invested with modalities of actions whereby, in analogy with the binaries *langue - parole* (De Saussure) and competence - performance (Chomsky), "paratopic space" according to Greimas (1979: 181) marks an area where competencies are acquired, whereas "utopic space" is a place

where the human doing surmounts the permanence of being, a place of performances (which in mythical narrative is oftentimes underground, underwater, or in the heavens).

(Greimas 1979: 181)

Interestingly enough, the privileging of writing in the place of speech, graphism rather than phoneticism - and by implication the visual instead of the audible - at the hands of Derrida involves a cultural as well as an epistemological shift, as does Sollers's emphasis upon *writing* and *reading* (occupying hand and eye and *not* the ear!). When Derrida claims in *Grammatology* that each language is itself primarily a writing he not only releases

language from its predominantly auditory sense in speech, itself dependent upon spatial organization such as proximity between speakers, but he also foregrounds an intrinsic rather than deictic and relative spatial ordering. By removing the *speaker* from the *utterance*, that is the *writer* from the *work*, Derrida, Sollers and others force the theoretical gaze upon a field marked by spatial relations among things rather than upon an imagined trajectory between an authorizing origin and the work as containing things.

Although the implications for literary theory and criticism arising from concepts such as these, together with those offered by Deleuze in *Logique du sens* (1969: 124, 131) and in his later collaborative work with Guattari (*Mille Plateaux: capitalisme et schizophrénie II* 1980: 149ff) concerning "maps of regimes of signs", are far-reaching, it is the activity of writing to which I wish to turn now. Writing as signifying practice permeates the world to such an extent in the age of printing or what Marshall McLuhan called the *Gutenberg galaxy* (1962)⁴ that its prerequisite, namely the very ability to write and read seems to be, if not taken for granted, at least desirable. Thus in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986: 144-147), Friday who cannot speak because of his mutilated tongue is taught by the narrator, Susan Barton, to write in order to elicit the story of the island from him:

When I opened my eyes^{*4} it was broad daylight and Foe was at his desk,^{*3} with his back to me, writing.^{*1} I dressed and crept over to the alcove.^{*2} Friday lay on his mat^{*3} swathed in his scarlet robes.^{*3} "Come, Friday", I whispered - "Mr Foe is at his labours,^{*1} we must leave him."^{*2}

But before we reached the door,^{*4} Foe recalled^{*2} us. "Have you not forgotten the writing,^{*3} Susan?" he said. "Have you not forgotten you are to teach Friday his letters?"^{*3} he held out^{*2} a child's slate^{*4} and pencil.^{*3} "Come back^{*2} at noon and let Friday demonstrate what he has learned. Take^{*1} this for your breakfast." And he gave^{*2} me sixpence,^{*5} which though no great^{*5} payment for a visit from the Muse, I accepted.

So we breakfasted well on new bread and milk, and then found a sunny seat in a churchyard.^{*3} "Do your best to follow,^{*2} Friday", I said - "nature did not intend me for a teacher, I lack patience." On the slate^{*3/4} I drew a house with a door and windows and a chimney,^{*3} and beneath it^{*3} I wrote the letters h—o—u—s. "This is the picture",^{*3} I said, pointing to the picture, "and this the word."^{*1} I made the sounds of the word house, one by one,^{*5} pointing to the letters^{*1} as I made them, and then took Friday's finger and guided it over the letters^{*2} as I spoke the word; and finally gave the pencil into his hand^{*2} and guided him to write h-o-u-s beneath the h-o-u-s^{*3} I had written. Then I wiped the slate^{*4} clean, so that there was no picture^{*3} left save the picture in Friday's mind,^{*3} and guided his hand in forming the word^{*2} a third and a fourth time, till the slate^{*4} was covered in letters.^{*5} I wiped it clean again. "Now do it alone, Friday", I said; and Friday wrote the four letters h-o-u-s,^{*5} or four shapes^{*5} passably like them; whether they were truly the

four letters,^{*5} and stood truly for (p. 146) *the word house*,^{*3} and *the picture*^{*3} I had drawn, and the thing itself, only he knew.

I drew a *ship in full sail*,^{*3} and made him write *ship*,^{*3} and then began to teach him *Africa. Africa*^{*6} I represented as a *row of palm trees with a lion roaming among them*.^{*3} Was my *Africa* the *Africa*^{*6} whose memory *Friday bore with him*?^{*3} I doubted it. Nevertheless, I wrote *A-f-r-i-c-a*^{*6} and guided him in forming the letters.^{*2} So at the least he knew now that all words were not *four letters long*.^{*5} Then I taught him *m-o-t-h-e-r* (*a woman with a babe in arms*),^{*3} and, wiping the *slate*^{*4} clean, commenced the task of rehearsing our four words. "*Ship*",^{*3} I said, and motioned him to write. *h-s-h-s-h-s* he wrote, on and on, or perhaps *h-f*; and would have *filled the whole slate*^{*4/5} had I not removed the pencil from his hand.^{*2/3}

Long and hard I stared at him,^{*2} till he lowered his eyelids^{*2/4} and shut his eyes.^{*4} Was it possible for anyone, however benighted by a lifetime of dumb servitude, to be as stupid as Friday seemed? Could it be that *somewhere within him*^{*3} he was *laughing at my efforts*^{*2} to bring him nearer to a state^{*2} of speech? I reached out and took him by the chin and turned his face toward me.^{*1} His eyelids^{*4} opened. *Somewhere*^{*3} in the deepest recesses of those black pupils^{*3} was there^{*1} a spark of mockery? I could not see it. But if it were there,^{*1} would it not be an *African*^{*6} spark, dark to my *English*^{*6} eye?^{*4} I sighed. "*Come, Friday*", I said, "let us return to^{*1} our master and show him how we have fared in our studies."^{*3}

It was midday. Foe was fresh-shaven and in good (p. 147) *spirits*.^{*3}

"Friday will not learn", I said. "If there^{*1} is a *portal to his faculties*,^{*4} it is closed,^{*4} or I cannot find^{*2} it."

"Do not be downcast",^{*3} said Foe. "If you have planted a seed, that is progress enough, for the time being. Let us persevere: Friday may yet surprise us."

"*Writing does not grow within*^{*3} us like a cabbage while our thoughts are *elsewhere*",^{*3} I replied, not a little testily. "It is a craft won by long practice, as you should know."

Foe pursed his lips.^{*4} "Perhaps", he said. "But as there^{*1} are *many kinds*^{*5} of men, so there^{*1} are *many kinds*^{*5} of writing."^{*3} Do not judge your pupil too hastily. He too may yet be visited by the muse."

While Foe and I spoke, Friday had *settled himself on his mat*^{*3} with the slate.^{*4} *Glancing over his shoulder*,^{*2} I saw he was *filling it with a design of*,^{*3/4} as it seemed, leaves and flowers. But when I came closer^{*1} I saw the leaves were *eyes, open eyes, each set upon a human foot: row upon row of eyes upon feet: walking eyes*.^{*3/4}

(Coetzee 1986: 144-147)

This excerpt taken from the third chapter (Coetzee 1986) is embedded in a discussion on speech in relation to writing wherein Foe suggests that "None is so deprived that he cannot write" (p. 144). It also forms part of a larger complex web of problems surrounding the conditions of possibility of narration which make up the book. I have italicized lexical items denoting space (representing words italicized in the original in bold) and numbered

them in accordance with my earlier description of spatial indicators for easier reference. Thus numbers *³ to *⁶ refer to localizing elements of language whereas number *¹ denotes deictic positionality and number *² motion or trajectory between what Fillmore (quoted in Talmy 1980: 233) calls "locative- sourcepath-goal". I have, furthermore, made a distinction between "containers", "zones", "landmarks" (*³) and "properties", "dimensions", "size" (*⁵) and "boundaries" (*⁴).

But before even engaging with spatial codes of writing on a verbal, cognitive level, writing, as evident in the quoted passage, is always already a space defined by the graphic pattern created by typology and lay-out. Thus, the ordered, segmented, horizontal lines conditioned by the phonetic alphabet not only weave the black letters across the white writing surface but the block of print sets itself off against the rest of the page by creating margins at its edges. (Marginalization is contingent upon writing while forgetting is a product of speech!) Mallarmé, sensitive to this particular space, dreamt of the ideal poem as a pure white page; and Foe, "In a life of writing books", speaks of the "trick" of planting "a sign or marker in the ground" (1986: 135) in order to anchor the narrative. Yet Susan, like a good commonsensical schoolmistress, despite her protestations to the contrary, invokes the dual aspect of language as auditory (speech) *and* graphic (writing) presentation when she teaches the mute Friday. She makes "the sounds of the word *house* one by one, pointing to the letters" (1986: 145), oblivious to the insight that "Writing is not doomed to be the shadow of speech", as Foe - in analogy to Derrida's theories - had suggested to her earlier (p. 142).

Although usually regarded as a mere instrument for the notation and presentation of language in a linear fashion, writing is not "a meagre system" (Gibson & Levin 1975: 171) because it lacks the ambiguity, ruses and richness of sound.⁵ Rather, it produces a new system of verbal-visual ordering which not only allows a text to be cut into portions which become exchangeable and reversible as suggested by post-structuralist criticism, but it also created literary forms such as the sonnet and concrete poetry. In addition, writing as opposed to speech makes possible such semantic extensions as produced by James Joyce in *Finnegan's Wake* (1939: 112) which play with the dual capacity of language: "... since that weird weekday in bleak Janiveer (yet how palmy date in a waste's oasis!) when ... looked at literature".

After all, without the printing press, to which Joyce refers, and writing as a space for reading consonant with the engagement of the visual, Derrida could not have elaborated his thoughts on margins, differences/deferments and erasures, for all these concepts are entirely dependent upon the writing

surface.

But turning now to the lexical, syntactical, and semantic markers used by language for the purpose of spatial ordering, we note that the *Foe* - excerpt begins with the opening of a border ("eyes"^{*4}) before locating the narrator, Susan, in relation to Foe "at his desk" by way of deixis. For the first sentence together with subsequent incidences under the label "come" and "there" are dependent upon the position of an enunciator, in this case Susan, who syntactically defines the point from which Foe can be seen with "his back" to her or which serves as a marker for the source of the trajectory implied by "come" and "there"; while Foe's position is implicit in the imperative "Take this for your breakfast".^{*1} Similarly, either Susan or Foe function as primary reference objects when the text speaks about "Do your best to follow", or "we must leave him", or "Foe recalled us", marking in each case a movement between two positions in the same way in which "guided him" denotes a move across space.^{*2} The use of locative prepositions^{*3} "at his desk", "at his labours", "on the slate" etcetera or "somewhere *within* him", "glancing *over* his shoulder", as well as the place of "a sunny seat in a churchyard", or the nouns "house", "letters", "ship with full sails" etcetera, all mark a particular site.^{*3} While the references to numbers and amounts^{*5} are obvious, those to specific geographical regions, "Africa" and England ("my *English* eyes"),^{*6} gain immediate semantic density within the context because they construct a binary opposition between Africa as the foreign, dark continent which lies far away and appears as unknowable and England as the near and familiar.

Given the fact that the quoted passage is largely set as dialogue it is not unusual that deixis is very prevalent. However, in as much as it also "models discrete or graded values" as Van Braak (1983: 73) puts it, whereby "the graded character of the opposition 'near-distant' typically expresses degrees of intensity" (Van Braak 1983: 74), a reading of the deictic relations between Susan, Friday, and Foe produces interesting results. For although Susan occupies, here and in the rest of the novel, the enunciative space in contrast to Foe, the latter dominates it due to his position as major reference object. Friday, in turn, despite deictically occupying the space of the utterance in the book and his close proximity to Susan, expressed in his dependence upon her during the writing lesson and further on in the text in the image of "the tyrant riding *on my shoulders*"^{*3} (1986: 148), is not only spatially subordinated in third position after Foe (male), and Susan (female) but is also the furthest removed. This paradoxical localization of Friday as someone so near and yet so distant which plays a decisive role in the signifiatory process of the novel, is largely supported by the semantic investiture of locative spatial indices referring to borders,^{*4} the site of writing,^{*3}

and the domain of literacy.

While "eyes" mark the border between an inside and an outside world forming, similar to Foe's "lips" and the "door", separating Foe's abode from the city, thresholds for an exchange between these spaces, their closure denotes an inability to cross from one realm into the other. Friday at one stage "lowered his eyelids and shut his eyes" and later on in the excerpt, Susan refers to the "closed" portal to "his faculties", thus indicating a dual impenetrability as regards two culturally valorized spaces: an interiority (soul) closed off behind the eyes and the mind or spirit. But even Friday's opened "eyelids" revealing "the deepest recess of those black pupils" prevent a crossing of the border into the interior because a deep recess, denoting an unfathomable space, merely shifts the boundary. Although it is the limit of interiority marked by depth which Western culture in the form of psychoanalysis seeks to pry "open", Friday's soul and "memory", linked syntactically to the region of Africa, remain inaccessible to someone like Susan. She, glancing across from the limit of her own, familiar English terrain, cannot penetrate Friday's foreign one. As Friday lacks the audible means of verbal language to set up his personal narrative, he is taught to write.

For this purpose, Friday is provided with a "child's slate", itself a bordered space, which, together with the mat on which he "had settled himself", a "sunny seat in a churchyard", and Foe's "desk" constitute the material setting, or milieu, of the site of writing. These sites are, again, invested culturally with certain properties and qualities which allow for what Van Braak (1983: 47) calls a "modal reading". Thus Foe, an author, has - contrary to Susan - a specially designated site for writing which Friday appropriates at the end of the third chapter (1986: 151), after also having shed "his scarlet robes" (p. 145) in exchange for Foe's (p. 151). The change of place from the (low) "mat" to the (higher) "desk" as well as the change of dress (container) are associated with "writing of a kind, rows and rows of the letter *o* tightly packed together" (p. 152). But neither changed position nor quantity of output - suggesting in the sameness of the letter *o* an inability to, as yet, produce the differences necessary for signification - lead to writing.

The domain of literacy, created by the ability to fixate words by means of scriptural recording with the help of the phonetic alphabet, eludes Friday. Given the context of his position within Coetzee's book, namely, on the one hand, that of the "slave" brought to England and freed by the benign Susan, and on the other that of the "helpless captive of (her) desire to have ... the story of the island" told (186: 150-151), literacy signals empowerment as well as further enslavement through exploitation. Lévi-Strauss in *Tristes*

tropiques (1955, 1978: 192ff) describes literacy as a form of enslavement because it affords state power better control over its citizens, who, as literate beings can proffer data and records for the very extension and intensification of that same controlling power. Although Lévi-Strauss's assessment might be coloured by the type of writing produced in ethnological literature as De Certeau (1988: 214) suggests, it unwittingly refers to the origin of the alphabetic writing system in the Middle East about 5 000 years ago (Gibson & Levin 1975: 167) where the Sumerians evolved it in order to keep concise ledgers (Gelb 1952, quoted in Gibson & Levin 1975: 156). Literacy thus seems to be contingent upon economic necessity and state control.

However, the domain of literacy is also an enabling one because, on the one hand, it would help Friday to use language "as will serve his needs" as Foe argues (1986: 149) while on the other, it is in Susan's eyes a paratopic space in which the desire "to be liberated" (p. 148) can be given shape. De Certeau (1988: 204) regards literacy in the form of writing not only as a mnemonic extension of speech but also as the condition of possibility of history. For it is in and through writing that the signifier, by being detached from an individual collective body, becomes transportable, allowing stories to travel across great distances. "Writing is an archive", says De Certeau (1988: 216), but in as much as Friday's "home" is the place "where bodies are their own signs" (Coetzee 1986: 157), the archive remains inaccessible. To be sure, Friday "fills" his slate with a pictogram of "walking eyes" (p. 147), but this kind of figure, contingent upon a haptic-visual experience of space, neither constitutes writing in the modern Western sense, nor is it sufficient for the appropriation of Friday's story by Susan and the author, Foe.

Yet, it is Friday's story, *his-story*, which is needed in order to complete Foe's narrative of Susan's adventures. Van Braak (1983: 48), referring to Lotman, notes in connection with narrative construction that

it is precisely because the impossibility of penetrating the boundary is part of the structure of any model of culture, that the most typical construction of the plot is movement across the spatial boundary. "The scheme of the plot appears as a struggle against the structure of the world."

(Van Braak 1983: 48)

However, Foe's plot-scheme of conquering Friday's *interiority* (territory) and colonizing it by way of a completed tale does not succeed, and a second first-person narrator takes over from Susan's narrative voice in the final chapter. This narrator seemingly repeats the quest at first when he searches Foe's abode, seeking the "sounds of the island" (1986: 154) from the mouth of the half-dead Friday. Yet, when he returns a second time to the place

which is designated now as the historical home of "Daniel Defoe, Author" (p. 155), he not only stumbles over the same mummified figures who are the actants of the first three chapters, but his eyes are caught now by Susan's letter to Foe, containing the opening lines of the very book the reader is just about to finish reading: "I could row no further" (1986: 5, 155). Coetzee's text thus while constructing a circular novelistic space, reminiscent of Borges's and Calvino's writings, no longer seeks to cross the boundary defined by Friday, but, by moving across the field of Defoe's writing, explores the limits of writing *about* natives and islands.

By positing Friday as both, boundary and limit for Foe's story, Coetzee's text not only constructs the silent body of Friday as the sign of an absence but also cleaves the already written with its own narrative of omission. In this way the book, marking an elliptical space, provides a critique of any attempts by others to write Friday's *his-story*, which, while still attached to the non-verbal signs of his bodily presence, await the writing by himself. However, the final paragraphs of the book show (1986: 156) that this narrative of omission is contingent upon a utopic space where, in the watery flows at the bottom of the "shipwreck", Defoe's writing merges for the narrator with the experience of the bodily proximity of Friday (Africa).

To be sure, neither narrative nor language operate on a purely spatial level, and temporality, denoted by verb tenses, temporal deixis ("now" - "then") and many other linguistic devices consonant with those named above, play a part in textual analysis. Yet, it would be wrong to equate narrative with temporality whereby its unfolding is seen to be dependent upon a "before and after", as is usually the case in criticism. Instead, by dissociating spatializing operations undertaken in and through writing from their traditional static quality of merely aiding characterization and setting, as has been illustrated with the help of the *Foe*-example, it becomes possible to articulate a logic of action (plot) based upon temporal succession as being necessarily tied to a logic of space. It might be argued that an assertion of the primacy of spatiality in "*writing and reading*", as suggested by Sollers in my opening paragraph, tends to produce a synchronic picture of a system without history. Earlier examples of spatial investigations such as Ernst Robert Curtius's (1948) research into the survival of ancient *topoi* (places invested with particular meanings)⁶ in late medieval and early modern literature, and Gaston Bachelard's (1969) depiction of archetypal sites such as houses or the realms of water and fire confirm this picture. But then Curtius and Bachelard merely looked at the *loci* or settings referred to in texts and not as spatial relations among things. However, by considering *Writing Space* and all its material conditions (linguistic, cultural, and social with respect to literacy) as the very possibility of constructing an archive, we

need not only be concerned with "the way in which spatial denominators model meaning" as Van Braak (1983: 75) puts it, following Lotman, but can also ask historical questions. These will be directed at spatiality as signifying practice, taking Kittay and Godzich's work in their study on *The Emergence of Prose* (1987) in which they look at socio-historically induced changes in the deictic positioning of the utterance as an example. Specific spatial ordering, evident not only in genre distinctions but also in the use of preferred localities (sites, domains, territories, etcetera) and in particular trajectories such as, for example, Coetzee's circular and reversible or Kafka's rhizomic one, is, after all not so much dependent upon "the writer and the work" as it is upon the kind of space produced by different societies at different times.

Notes:

1. Even a cursory glance at contemporary theoretical work will confirm the popularity of spatial investigations. While many of these use the term "space" simply metaphorically in order to localize the subject under discussion, the operation of "mapping", provided it proceeds in accordance with the strategies of "cognitive mapping" as for instance used by Lynch (1960), achieves more convincing results.
2. Bakhtin (1981: 84) when describing the *chronotope* privileges temporal rather than spatial denominators, showing his allegiance to Kant:
 Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.
 Continuing (p. 85) Bakhtin states categorically: "... in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time".
3. Emerson Faulke (1980: 130) suggests that:
 If it is the case that the auditory system has been specialized for the purpose of analyzing temporal patterns ... the visual system has been specialized for the purpose of analyzing spatial patterns.
4. Although a somewhat haphazard account of the far-reaching changes brought about by the technical invention of movable type, McLuhan not only pursues in detail the changes of perception contingent upon printing, but also hints at a very different conception of space in non-literate societies. This aspect, I feel, needs to be explored further, particularly as evidence should come to hand easily in a society like ours.

5. Jakobson (1985: 151) who foregrounds the speech aspect of language, which leads him to choose his examples for the illustration of "literariness" or the poetic function of language from Russian poetry, refers to the way in which a phrase can be made to mean fifty different things depending upon the speaker's tone. Although this example would corroborate Gibson and Levin's judgment, it not only blurs the different possibilities of expression provided by writing, but also reinstates the supremacy of speech.
6. It is interesting in this regard that Susan begins her writing lesson with the word "house" to be followed by "ship". While the former corresponds with Bachelard's assessment of the importance of shelter, the latter - although clearly referring to Friday's particular experience in the text - is seen by Curtius as a recurring *topos* symbolizing man's precarious safety amidst the stormy seas of life.

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