

COETZEE AND DEFOE:  
SELF, LANGUAGE AND THE WRITING OF HISTORY

by

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COETZEE AND DEFOE: SELF, LANGUAGE  
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## ABSTRACT

J.M. Coetzee's Foe challenges Robinson Crusoe by drastically altering Crusoe himself; by including the enigmatic Mr. Foe (Daniel Defoe) in the story; and by including Susan Barton on the island, a woman based on the heroine of Defoe's Roxana. The central conflict in Foe is Barton's attempt to have Mr. Foe chronicle her year on the island with Cruso (sic), who died on the ship back to England. Socially marginalized and figuratively voiceless by being female in the eighteenth century, Barton seeks a male to write her story. Yet Barton and Foe disagree on the nature of writing. Foe claims a mere chronicle of Barton's island episode is insufficient, and is, in fact, dull. Foe maintains that her story must be given plot, shape and more detail. Barton is adamant Foe keep to the island episode because that story will, she says, give her "substance", that is, her sense of self in the world. The conflict between Foe and Barton raises three central issues: authorial control; the nature of history-writing; and the relationship between language and self. All three issues reflect Foe's challenge to the substantial self underlying Defoe's fiction and much eighteenth century thought.

This thesis begins by comparing Robinson Crusoe and Foe to observe that the differences between the two reflect Coetzee's challenge to Defoe. The second chapter focuses on the conflict between Foe and Barton on history-writing,

suggesting that Barton's position implies that language is a neutral and transparent medium through which one views an objective world. Chapter two then traces the development of the autonomous individual from the Socratic Greeks to the eighteenth century, suggesting that the evolution of Barton's view of language both parallels, and is fundamental to, the autonomous self. Chapter three looks at the realist novel as exemplified by Robinson Crusoe, and at how it coincides with the rise of the autonomous individual. Chapter three then examines Defoe and his critics to observe how his penchant for disguise and his contradictory statements not only disturbed his contemporaries, but call his identity into question, an issue reflecting the theme of identity in Foe. Finally, chapter four focuses on Susan Barton's struggle to escape the stereotype of muse and achieve a sense of self. This chapter then follows Barton's attempts to rid herself of both Friday and the young woman claiming to be her daughter, the former symbolic of chaos and the unconscious and the latter Barton's fictional past as Roxana; two factors threatening her sense of identity and reality.

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## Introduction

My motivation for choosing J.M. Coetzee's Foe as a thesis cornerstone is based on an interest in history, historical fiction and the relationship between language and self, three issues central to Foe. Foe undermines Daniel Defoe's The Life & Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner, by drastically changing it.<sup>1</sup> Not only does Coetzee include the enigmatic Mr. Foe (Daniel Defoe) in his story, he adds another character as well-- Susan Barton-- who is loosely based on the heroine of Defoe's Roxana. Coetzee uses two of Defoe's novels and Defoe's biography to explore the boundaries between genres. Not only is biography assimilated into fiction, but Robinson Crusoe as literary giant and historical artifact is rewritten and its religious and philosophical assumptions challenged.

Genres such as fiction, biography and history-writing each have their rules. In fiction anything, theoretically, is possible. In biography, as in history-writing, there is the implicit assumption that the person or event is being objectively reported in neutral, transparent language that draws no attention to itself, but serves as a window onto

the subject. Foe challenges this implicit assumption by challenging the theory that language is objective and by exploring the relationship between language and self.

Cruso (sic), Susan Barton and Mr. Foe all express distinct views on language. Coetzee's Cruso is disdainful of talk and remains generally silent. Susan Barton considers language a neutral medium. Foe considers language an active, shaping force. These same three characters also express views on story which, appropriately, are analogous to their views on language. Cruso is indifferent to recounting his, or any other, story. Susan Barton believes story should mirror event. Foe considers story as part of a reader/writer relationship; not only must events be shaped, or, as Hayden White says "emplotted," but their ultimate interpretation cannot be completely controlled by the author.<sup>2</sup>

Lack of authorial control is a source of suffering for Susan Barton. Socially, economically and spiritually, Susan Barton is alienated. For alienation to be possible something must be at stake, and for Coetzee's Susan Barton, as for Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, it is the sense of self. Both Foe and Robinson Crusoe are studies in alienation; the latter attempting to faithfully portray the experiences of Crusoe on the island in neutral, objective language. Indeed, Anthony Burgess suggests Defoe is the first English language journalist, and journalism aspires to objectivity through



neutral language that does not clutter the subject matter.<sup>3</sup>

Morris Berman suggests that the view that language can be neutral was implicit in the thought of Bacon, Descartes and Newton, the fathers of the Scientific Revolution.<sup>4</sup> For Descartes, according to Berman, the individual is fundamentally separate from the world, and indeed, "mind and body, subject and object, were radically separate entities"(p. 34).

Descartes' view is founded, in part, on the assumption that language is neutral, that is, language does not effect what it describes, and therefore, the speaker or writer can feel safe that they are being objective in their observations.

Berman suggests that such neutrality excludes the individual from the linguistic fabric which enmeshed the medieval consciousness(p.162). I suggest that this exclusion is the alienation of both Defoe's Robinson Crusoe and Coetzee's Susan Barton. When Susan Barton asks Foe to return her "substance" she is asking him to heal the subject/object split, and analogously, the conscious/unconscious split.<sup>5</sup> Ironically, it is Susan Barton's insistence that language is neutral that underlies her alienation.

\*

Robinson Crusoe, on his island, is emblematic of Man versus Nature. He is Hobbes's alienated individual. Ian

Watt suggests that Crusoe stands apart from the generic stock as the first realistic character in English literature (a view not without critics) due to influences that are economic, political, philosophical and religious.<sup>6</sup> Crusoe is a Puritan. Virginia Birdsall suggests Crusoe's relationship with God is utilitarian: "The Bible, for Crusoe, proves a convenient book of instruction on the formulas one must follow if one is to control the Great Controller."<sup>7</sup> Crusoe's contrived, calculating, self-interested attitude reflects not only that of free enterprise, but also that of a political system endorsing individual initiative, a rationalist philosophy which reinforces the concept of self, and a religious system supporting the notion of free will. This overall emphasis on the individual as an independent entity stands in contrast to what Owen Barfield terms the Original Participation of medieval consciousness.<sup>8</sup> Original Participation implies a pervasive unity between individual and universe, (see chapter II).

Berman maintains that rationalist consciousness can be dated "(if such a thing can be dated) in the late sixteenth century, that so radically marks off the medieval from the modern world"(p. 75). This date coincides with the English Renaissance. M.H. Abrams suggests that the Renaissance is, in part, the rebirth or rediscovery of classical Greek culture and Greek rationalism, the full impact of which is

actualized in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; that is, the neoclassic period, which he dates as from 1660 to 1800.<sup>9</sup>

Like Berman, however, Abrams is aware of the difficulties in dating anything so diverse and amorphous as the history of human consciousness. Abrams suggests, therefore, that it is "more useful...to specify certain salient attributes of literary theory and practice, common to a number of the important writers of the neoclassic period"(p. 113), listing Dryden, Pope, Addison, Swift, Johnson, Goldsmith and Edmund Burke as adequate representatives. Abrams then goes on to say that literature, in the eighteenth century, was conceived to be an art that "must be perfected by long study and practice, and which consists mainly in the deliberate adaption of known and tested means to the achievement of foreseen ends upon an audience of readers"(p. 113). Control, craft, indeed a literary logic using the empirical evidence of successful literary artifacts are all characteristic of this definition, and are, significantly, analogous to the rationalism of Descartes and the empiricism of Bacon.

The eighteenth century was diverse, as are most. The Antiquarian movement, contemporary to Defoe, saw the re-establishment of the Society of Antiquities in England in 1707, a movement reflecting, according to Kenneth Clark,

nostalgia for a past more spiritually holistic.<sup>10</sup> The Antiquarian sensibility is also that which led to the Graveyard School of poets, suggests Clark, and eventually to the Gothic novel (p. 44). The Gothic novel celebrates passion and mysticism rather than control and order. Yet, on the other hand, the systematic collecting, cataloguing and studying of artifacts, whether from attic or burial mound, suggests an effort to make a science of the process of history-writing. Rather than nostalgia for an Age of spiritual unity, there is a wish to regain the Socratic ideal of rational, Apollonian control. Both the urge to make a science of history-writing and the urge for control in the Arts reflect the values of the mainstream neoclassical writers. D.P. Varma notes the contrast between neoclassicism and Gothicism, along with the values implicit in each, by quoting Coleridge's observation that: "The Greek art is beautiful...when I enter a Greek church, my eye is charmed, and my mind elated; I feel exalted and proud that I am a man. But the Gothic art is sublime. On entering a cathedral, I am filled with devotion and awe...my whole being expands into the infinite."<sup>11</sup> The mystic overtones are obvious.

Foe too has mystic overtones. Crusoe is at one with his island, wholly absorbed each evening by the spectacle of sunset. Susan Barton is the figure of alienation in Foe, due to her being a woman, her insistence that language is

neutral and her fear of her unconscious.

Coetzee's challenge to the perspectives implicit in Susan Barton's dilemma comes in three ways: by exploring the line between fiction and history-writing; his approach to the role of the author; and by exploring the relationship of language to self. Coetzee not only suggests that self is language-based, but that history is fiction, inasmuch as Mr. Foe insists on the necessity of shaping Susan Barton's island episode. The subject/object split is thematically paralleled in Foe by that of fiction and history, the former interior and subjective, the latter exterior and objective; Coetzee breaks down these distinctions. Coetzee not only threatens the autonomous self, but the historical artifact through his approach to Robinson Crusoe as alienation figure, and Robinson Crusoe as literary classic.

In analyzing the implications of Coetzee's rewriting of Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, this thesis is arranged in four chapters followed by a brief conclusion. Chapter one compares and contrasts Foe and Robinson Crusoe, and suggests that the distinctions reflect Coetzee's themes in Foe. Chapter two enters into the central conflict of Foe, which is Susan Barton's quest to convince Mr. Foe to chronicle her year on the island with Cruso. This quest raises the issue of the relationship between history-writing and fiction as well as calling into question Susan Barton's

view of language as a neutral medium. The realistic novel emerges in Defoe's lifetime, and parallels the rise of the autonomous individual, a rise which I trace from the Socratic Greeks to the eighteenth century. Chapter three takes up the novel/individual parallel, analyzing the relationship between the two. This analysis is followed by a study of Defoe himself, his penchant for disguise and contradictory statements, as well as his critical reception, the relevance of which is that it reflects, and sheds light on, the theme of identity in Foe. Finally, chapter four follows Susan Barton's attempts to achieve individual selfhood by exploring her role as muse; her efforts to rid herself of Friday, who symbolizes the primal chaos of the unconscious and is therefore a threat; and her refusal to accept the young woman claiming to be her daughter as such because this would force Barton to accept her fictional past as Roxana, which would undermine her sense of identity and reality.

S.B. is trying to achieve individuality  
 Friday represents the unconscious  
 the young woman is Roxana  
 4-15-11  
 written

## Chapter One

The distinctions between Robinson Crusoe and Foe offer clues as to the nature of Coetzee's project in rewriting Defoe. Not only are the starting points of the two stories different, but so are the islands, the amount of background provided, and Friday. Coetzee includes a woman on the island, and finally, the two Cruso(e)s are fundamentally different from each other, including the spelling of their names.

Defoe's Crusoe is a clever craftsman, tirelessly shaping his surroundings to maintain a semblance of European life on the island. Crusoe fortifies his stockade, builds a second shelter inland for his hunting expeditions, organizes, plans, keeps a diary. In contrast, Coetzee's Cruso is indifferent to his material comfort and surroundings. Cruso keeps no diary, reflecting his moody silence and disdain for both writing and talk. Significantly, Coetzee's Friday has no tongue and therefore cannot speak; he merely obeys verbal cues, making Cruso's relationship with Friday closer to one of master and dog than master and slave. Cruso loses himself (his self) each evening staring into the sunset, and remains thoroughly enigmatic until his death, one third of the way through Foe, on the ship back to England. Indeed,

whereas in Robinson Crusoe the first fifty pages of Volume I describe Crusoe's upbringing and the events landing him on the island, Foe begins on the island, and we never learn Cruso's past.

Defoe's island is alive with animals and lush with fruit and tall straight trees. Coetzee's island is a single rocky peak populated by monkeys and gulls, growing only bitter lettuce and stunted trees unfit for anything, let alone the two canoes Crusoe builds. There is also the issue of the ship from whose wreck Crusoe salvages every vestige of civilization, including muskets, seed and iron. Coetzee's Cruso never reveals the ship's location, and has with him only a single knife. Defoe's Friday is Caribbean Indian-- Coetzee's negroid.

Then there is Susan Barton, the woman marooned on the island and the narrator of Foe. Indeed, Susan Barton is more central to the novel than Cruso. Late in Foe a young woman claiming to be Barton's daughter appears, maintaining she has long sought Barton, a claim parallel to that which Roxana's daughter in Roxana makes after a similar appearance.

Coetzee's use of the Susan Barton/Roxana figure parallels Defoe's writing process inasmuch as both authors cull other stories to produce their own. (Recall that Robinson Crusoe is based on the experiences of Alexander Selkirk on a South Pacific island.) Fiction writers gather a diversity of



material, yet Coetzee's use of Defoe's biography, Robinson Crusoe and Roxana is particularly self aware. The issue of artistic awareness and authorial control is significant with regards Defoe because it is often difficult to judge just how much he possessed. Whereas many critics consider Robinson Crusoe an example of Puritan Confession Literature, in which Crusoe discovers God, others see Robinson Crusoe as a study of Hobbes's self-interested man living in "continuall Feare" of nature and the world overall. Defoe's own conflicting statements on religion and politics add to the critical confusion surrounding his work (see chapter III).

Yet one thing which Defoe does with particular control is change Crusoe from rash youth to mature man. The young Crusoe ignores his father's pleading to stay home and runs off on what he later calls "That evil influence", meaning the devil.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the thirty-some years Crusoe spends wandering, and on the island, his spiritual growth alternately flourishes then falters until, thrust into despair by a bout of malaria, he begins accepting every trial he meets as more food for spiritual development. Toward this end Defoe's terminology becomes religious as Crusoe's spirituality grows. For example, when Crusoe saves Friday's father and a Spaniard from cannibals who arrive intending to feast on their two captives, Friday explains that "he believed they [the two

cannibals who escape] would tell their people, that they were all kill'd by Thunder and Lightning, not by the Hand of Man, and that the two which appear'd (viz.) Friday and me, were two Heavenly Spirits or Furies, come down to destroy them"(Vol. II, p. 32). Later, in saving the English Captain who returns Crusoe home, the latter is spoken of as a "guardian angel"(Vol. II, p. 46).

In contrast the Hobbesian, economic reading of Robinson Crusoe focuses on Crusoe's dissatisfaction with the ample yield of his plantation in Brazil, that is, his usurious attitude toward nature. Crusoe joins in on a scheme for selling slaves to gain yet more wealth. Yet since "they could not publickly sell the Negroes when they [the planters] came home, so they desired to make but one voyage, to bring the Negroes on shoar privately, and divide them among their own plantations; and in a Word, the Question was, whether I [Crusoe] would go their supercargo in the ship to manage the Trading Part upon the Coast of Guinea"(Vol. I, p. 43-44). Thus Crusoe's greed, his "Desire of rising faster than the Nature of the thing [the plantation] admitted"(Vol. I, p. 42), results in his being marooned, for the ship is wrecked in a storm and Crusoe is the lone survivor. Crusoe's attitude toward nature is also seen in his continual battle to subdue and then domesticate the island. The impenetrable fortress

he builds reflects his fear of everything nature represents: chaos and the unknown.

There are numerous implications of Crusoe's attitude toward nature, and they underline the differences between Defoe's Crusoe and Coetzee's. The first is the irony, which Crusoe acknowledges, in that he could have stayed home and been economically successful, as he was in Brazil. Second, Crusoe's father is proved prophetic, having warned his son that high station (plantation owner) is more trouble than it is worth. *Crusoe talks of his father & his prosperity in Brazil*

On the other hand, Coetzee's Cruso never speaks of his father and has no economic aspirations. Cruso leaves the island, that is nature, virtually untouched; nor does he attempt to Christianize Friday, who is a nature figure. Indeed, Cruso's one pathetic activity in the shaping of his environment is clearing land despite having no seed to sow, because "it is better than sitting in idleness" (p. 33), and because the one law he observes, the one commandment, is that one must work for one's bread (p. 36). Yet neither law nor commandment is capitalized, implying that neither is founded upon Christian doctrine. Crusoe, in fact, rejects God by saying "Laws are made...to hold us in check....As long as our desires are moderate we have no need of laws" (p. 36). Crusoe is willing to let things run their course unmanipulated until circumstances demand otherwise. In effect,

Cruso rejects the Ten Commandments in favour of a modern humanism which, unlike Renaissance humanism, sees no need of a spiritual source.<sup>2</sup>

The terrible starkness of Cruso's metaphysic is illustrated in the scene where he instructs Friday to sing for Susan Barton. "Friday raised his face to the stars, closed his eyes, and, obedient to his master, began to hum in a low voice. I listened but could make out no tune. Cruso tapped my knee. 'The voice of man,' he said"(p. 22). A tongueless slave on a rocky island humming to the stars. There is even a bleak irony in Friday's mimicry of Cruso's "La-la-la" which, tongueless, is rendered "Ha-ha-ha"(p. 22).

Cruso teaches Friday to recognize only a few concrete terms, in effect, noises. Susan Barton wonders whether Cruso himself cut out Friday's tongue. She accuses Cruso of speaking "as if language were one of the banes of life" (p. 22). As noted, Cruso spends his evenings on a bluff staring into the sunset. "His visits to the Bluff belonged to a practice of losing himself in the contemplation of the wastes of water and sky....To me, sea and sky remained sea and sky, vacant and tedious. I had not the temperament to love such emptiness"(p. 38). What is emptiness to Susan Barton is fullness to Cruso, and one of the major themes of Foe: that at the edge of language exists not a silence

of emptiness, but a silence of fullness.<sup>3</sup> This silence is not anthropomorphized into the Christian Father; it is, however, life-sustaining, as the final scene in the novel suggests (see chapter IV).

For Susan Barton silence is a frightening emptiness and she cannot comprehend Cruso's willingness to let his own past die. She suggests Cruso record the surely remarkable events of his life, yet Cruso says: "Nothing is forgotten.... Nothing I have forgotten is worth the remembering"(p. 17). Indeed, whereas Defoe's Crusoe keeps a diary for as long as his ink lasts, and then makes his own, Coetzee's Cruso never bothers at all. Susan Barton argues that without detail "All shipwrecks become the same shipwreck, all castaways the same castaway"(p. 18), implying that self, identity, indeed reality, all lie in particularization. This attention to detail and realism is significant on two levels. First, it reflects Ian Watt's position on the attention to detail current in the philosophy of Defoe's contemporaries: "The parallel here between the tradition of realist thought and the formal innovations of the early novelists is obvious: both philosophers and novelists paid greater attention to the particular individual than had been common before"(p. 18). Second, the relationship between realistic detail and the delineation of self is one of Foe's central themes, inasmuch

as Susan Barton seeks her substance via a chronicle of her year on the island with Cruso. Yet whereas Watt writes of the birth of the individual, Coetzee aims at the reverse: the undermining of the autonomous self despite detail.

It follows from Cruso's indifference to the details of his own life that his sense of self is unimportant to him. Cruso's years on the island have not brought him around to accepting a Puritan God, but rather to something approaching the mystic Unity of medieval conscious as defined by Owen Barfield. In contrast, Defoe's Crusoe is a man obsessed by detail, lists, time, and control over his environment. In his obsessions Crusoe is not just defending his body, but his sense of self. By ordering the environment he establishes psychological breathing space for himself, thus reinforcing the subject/object split.<sup>4</sup>

Foe's narrative structure undermines the subject/object split to which Susan Barton clings. In Robinson Crusoe we have a comfortably realistic first-person narrative. In Foe chapter I is straightforward narrative, though one step removed, inasmuch as it is Susan Barton's own written-- not spoken-- version of her time on the island with Cruso. Chapter II becomes more intimate, being comprised of Barton's letters to Foe, beseeching him to write her story. Chapter III moves closer still, being first person past tense, and

has Barton facing characters from her past existence as Roxana. This confrontation threatens Susan Barton's sense of identity. Finally, chapter IV introduces a narrative voice as an actual presence in Foe. The changing narrative stances of each of the four chapters are like steps climbing from a written past up to a present-tense voice, the effect of which is one of increasing immediacy, of moving into the story. Simultaneously, Susan Barton's quest for self is being undermined by Mr. Foe's refusal to write her story as she wishes it.

Foe's conflict with Barton is based on their respective views on language and history-writing. Foe insists Barton's island episode is in itself inadequate as a story. Foe believes events must be shaped into stories, whereas Susan Barton believes the event need merely be described. This conflict is central to Foe. No such conflict exists in Robinson Crusoe. That Susan Barton seeks her sense of self through the story she wants Foe to write raises the issue of language and self. Defoe's Crusoe may well seek personal affirmation through telling his story, but this is never stated, nor is it a conflict, and therefore seems no issue. That Susan Barton seeks out Foe to write her story raises the issue of authorship. In Robinson Crusoe the preface states that Crusoe is telling his own story with only minor editing by the publisher. That the two Crusoe(s) differ on

the nature of language, identity and history-writing once again reflects Foe's concerns with these very things, whereas none of these are conflicts within Robinson Crusoe.<sup>5</sup>

The novel 'Foe' is concerned with the idea of who can be an author, narrator and a person can be



## Chapter Two

In section I of this chapter I will discuss the nature of the conflict between Susan Barton and Foe. What is at stake for Barton is her sense of self, her "substance", as she terms it. Central to this concern is Barton's view that language is a neutral medium, which in turn raises the issue discussed in section II-- that of history-writing as a form of fiction. Finally, inasmuch as the concept of the autonomous self is fundamental to both Robinson Crusoe and Foe, and rests on a view of language coincident to that held by Susan Barton, section III will trace the evolution of the autonomous self from the Socratic Greeks to the eighteenth century.

### I

Susan Barton argues with Cruso, maintaining that details "will one day persuade your countrymen that it [his story] is true, every word"(p. 18). Ironically, the man whom Barton seeks out to write her own story, Mr. Foe, insists that the details she supplies him are insufficient. There must be more. There must be intrigue, adventure and colour, and a central mystery. A realistic, detailed account

is simply not enough, even for readers of a supposedly true story. Thus the facts cannot speak for themselves. Susan Barton acknowledges this, but she still does not understand the transition from event per se to story. "Return to me the substance I have lost, Mr. Foe: that is my entreaty. For though my story gives the truth, it does not give the substance of truth (I see that clearly, we need not pretend it is otherwise)"(p. 51). She then notes that she has:

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. (p. 47)

In Susan Barton's opinion, the "set [ting] right" will not alter the incidents. She feels that what Foe will do is somehow adorn, liven, colour her time on the island without changing it. This view of language is echoed in the preface to Roxana, which begins:

The History of this Beautiful Lady, is to speak for itself: If it is not as Beautiful as the Lady is reported to be;...it must be from the Defect of the Relator's Performance; dressing up the story in worse Cloaths than the Lady, whose Words he speaks.<sup>1</sup>

On a literal level, this is exactly what Susan Barton wishes of Foe-- that he dress the story, but not in a disguise. Yet, if the words are clothes, Foe can only change one set for another; for the naked body of experience itself can only be known mimetically, not literally. Indeed Susan Barton tells Friday:

You do not know the gentleman, [Foe] but at this very moment he is engaged in writing...a 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. That 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. (p. 58)

Foe, however, cannot believe that their island life could have been so dull, which if so, threatens the story's public success. Thus, despite Susan Barton's eagerness for fame and wealth, she and Foe come into conflict:

You asked how it was that Cruso did not save a single musket from the wreck; why a man so fearful of cannibals should have neglected to arm himself. Cruso never showed me where the wreck lay, but it is my conviction that it lay, and lies still, in the deep water below the cliffs in the north of the island....As for cannibals, I am not persuaded, despite Cruso's fears, that there are cannibals in those oceans ....All I say is: What I saw, I wrote. I saw no cannibals; and if they came after nightfall and fled before the dawn, they left no footprints

behind....You remarked it would have been better had Crusoe rescued not only musket and powder and ball, but a carpenter's chest as well, and built himself a boat. I do not wish to be captious, but we lived on an island so buffeted by the wind that there was not a tree did not grow twisted and bent. We might have built a raft, a crooked kind of raft, but never a boat. (p. 53-54)

Foe the storyteller opposes Susan Barton the rationalist, who adamantly clings to what she considers the facts, blind to the story quality of her experience because to fictionalize her experience would be to fictionalize her and undermine her sense of self. Foe insists that Susan Barton supply him more detail and colour. She tries, then wonders:

Are these enough strange circumstances to make a story of? How long before I am driven to invent new and stranger circumstances: the salvage of tools and muskets from Crusoe's ship; the building of a boat, or at least a skiff, and a venture to sail to the mainland; a landing of cannibals on the island, followed by a skirmish and many bloody deaths....Alas, will the day ever arrive when we can make a story without strange circumstances. (p. 67)

Notably, all these invented circumstances are the very ones distinguishing Robinson Crusoe and Foe, suggesting that a similar process of invention may well have occurred in Defoe's writing of Robinson Crusoe in order to engineer its public success.<sup>2</sup>

Foe, however, wishes to go further than mere embellishment. He states that the island episode itself is not enough. The entire story must be broadened to include Susan Barton's life before ending up on the island, to include her search for her lost daughter in Brazil. Predictably, Susan Barton refuses. "As for Bahia...it is by choice that I say so little of it. 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" (p. 120-121). She refuses to see that her action of framing any particular set of events is itself an act of biased intervention, an attempt to shape reality toward her own end. Barton's end is self-affirmation, and recalls Wittgenstein's observation that: The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world."<sup>3</sup>

Foe and Barton conflict on three points: the focus of the story; the embellishment of drudgery; and also language itself. Though Susan Barton credits words with a certain magic, she nonetheless distinguishes chronicle from fiction; the words do not alter, only bring to life. Susan Barton does not acknowledge the active, tropic nature of language, let alone the changes inherent in making event per se story. And indeed, a saleable story is one that must pay as much attention to public tastes as truthfulness to any event

serving as its source.

## II

The heart of Susan Barton's dilemma is her belief that language is a neutral, transparent medium through which one observes an objective world. Indeed, this perspective is at the root of the sense of the self in the Western world, and is inherited from the Greeks (Berman, p.71). Hayden White suggests that this view of language is also the dominant perspective behind most history-writing since the eighteenth century (p. 123-128).

Susan Barton insists on Mr. Foe's being true to the events as she experienced them on the island. Yet on this very issue White notes:

Every history must meet standards of coherence no less than those of correspondence if it is to pass as a plausible account of 'the way things really were.' For the empiricist prejudice is attended by a conviction that 'reality' is not only perceivable but is also coherent in its structure. A mere list of confirmable singular existential statements does not add up to an account of reality if there is not some coherence, logical or aesthetic, connecting them one to another. So too every fiction must pass a test of correspondence (it must be 'adequate' as an image of something beyond itself) if it is to lay claim to representing an insight into or illumination of the human experience of the world....In this respect, history is no less

a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation. (p. 122)

Yet White notes Levi-Strauss's point that one must also step back behind the selection of material to the very creation of it, observing that the historian orders chaos by his preconceptions (p. 55). Indeed, any historical fact can be disassembled ad infinitum. For example, the question of the location of the source of the French Revolution: did it begin in Marat's bathtub or in the private rooms of other instigators; did it begin, symbolically, with the aristocracy's excesses at Versailles or with the disgruntled people who became motivated outside Paris yet acted inside the city? Levi-Strauss takes the issue further yet, suggesting, according to White, that facts can be:

resolved into a multitude of psychic moments. Each of these, in turn, can be translated into a manifestation of some more basic process of unconscious development, and these resolve themselves into cerebral, hormonal, or nervous phenomena, which themselves have reference to the physical and chemical order. (p. 55)

Here, then, is a regress from event to location, from biology to chemistry; a sort of fantastic voyage in search of the ultimate origin.

It is upon such a phantasmal first step, then, that

history-writing bases itself. The next step is to select the created data and shape a picture of the event accessible and acceptable to a particular body of readers. On this point White notes Levi-Strauss's view that "History is never simply history, but always 'history for', history in the interest of some...aim or vision"(p. 56). Persuading the reader of the correctness of the interpretation at hand, history becomes rhetoric. Indeed, White suggests that such persuasion "represents [a product of] decisions to ignore specific domains in the interest of achieving purely formal coherency in representation"(p. 57). That is, one of the guiding principles behind what is excluded in a given history is formal coherency.

What the historian does, maintains White, is bring to the "record...notions of the kinds of stories that might be found there"(p. 60); and when addressing the issue of narrative representation, the historian appeals to "some notion of the 'pre-generic plot-structure' by which the story he tells is endowed with formal coherency"(p. 60). This plot-structure, recognized by the reader, is then deemed valid. Though these plot-structures are, according to both White and Frye, limited in number, they are limitless in variation. As White notes:



The provision of a plot structure, in order to endow the narrative account of 'what happened in the past' with the attributes of a comprehensible process of development resembling the articulation of a drama or a novel, is one element in the historian's interpretation of the past. (p. 62-63)

The various histories of the French Revolution illustrate not only the variety of possible emplotments, but also the varying aims of the historians. As White explains:

the events which occurred in France in 1789-90, which Burke viewed as an unalloyed national disaster, Michelet regards as an epiphany of that union of man with God informing the dream of the romance as a generic story-form. Similarly, what Michelet takes as an unambiguous legacy of those events for his own time, Tocqueville interprets as both a burden and an opportunity. Tocqueville emplots the fall of the Old Regime as a tragic descent, but one from which the survivors of the agon can profit, while Burke views that same descent as a process of degradation from which little, if any, profit can be derived. Marx, on the other hand, explicitly characterizes the fall of the Old Regime as a 'tragedy' in order to contrast it with the 'comic' efforts to maintain feudalism by artificial means in the Germany of his own time. In short, the historians mentioned each tell a different story about the French Revolution. (p. 61)

History-writing involves the steps of creating the data, approaching it with an eye to the form best suiting the author's aims, then creating a coherent narrative. Yet the narrative, indeed the entire process, is language-based,

and language is tropic. The tropicality of language is, White suggests, the guiding force behind the forms history-writing takes (p. 115). Given that history lacks a scientific system of specific terms, like physics, for example, and that it is empirically unverifiable, history is at best a partial science for White, who observes that history's language is wide open, as highly tropic as is "natural language"(p. 72). An open, natural condition implies freedom, yet also necessitates keen rhetorical awareness on the part of the writer. For the historian, then, wallowing in what White calls the "conceptual anarchy that seems to signal...[history-writing's] prescientific phases"(p. 72) the formal options open are the four dominant tropes: "metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony"(p. 72). White suggests that a "science construed in the mode of metaphor...would be governed by the search for similitudes" (p. 73). Thus, formalizing the logic of metaphor would be the rule of procedure for this hypothetical science.

Implicit in a science guided by metaphor would be a rhetorical self consciousness; for metaphor functions by a cross application of characteristics. Metaphor may catch an evocative aspect of something, but does so by circuitous means. Metaphor yields finer results, yet demands keener awareness than mere direct reference. <sup>4</sup>

Yet it is the view that language is neutral that permits lack of rhetorical self consciousness. Indeed Nietzsche criticized historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries precisely for their faith in objectivity, in effect, limiting their own freedom, their own role, in history-writing.<sup>5</sup> This is exactly what Susan Barton wishes to do to Foe-- deny his active participation in her story.

This active participation is exactly what characterizes medieval consciousness, and therefore history-writing, up to the time of the rise of rational empiricism as a valid, if not dominant, perspective. Foucault notes that until the seventeenth century, "The history of a living being was that being itself, within the whole semantic network that connected it to the world."<sup>6</sup> For Foucault, the historian is the storyteller of any particular subject; he is its keeper:

Until the mid-seventeenth century the historian's task was to establish the great compilation of documents and signs-- of everything throughout the world, that might form a mark, as it were. It was the historian's responsibility to restore to language all the words that had been buried. His existence was defined not so much by what he saw as by what he retold, by a secondary speech which pronounced afresh so many words that had been muffled. The Classical Age gives quite a different meaning: that of undertaking a meticulous examination of things themselves for the first time, and then of transcribing what it has gathered in smooth, neutralized, and faithful words. (p. 130-31)

Foucault unwinds this notion further by comparing histories written by Jonston and Aldrovandi, the former's Natural History of Quadrupeds, and the latter's History of Serpents and Dragons. Jonston's, published in 1657, fifty years later than Aldrovandi's, categorizes and omits a great deal that the other includes. Aldrovandi:

offered the reader, and on the same level [that is, without hierarchizing] a description of its [the creature under discussion] anatomy and of the methods of capturing it; its allegorical uses and mode of generation; its habitat and legendary mansions; its food and the best ways of cooking its flesh.... Whereas in Jonston words that had been interwoven in the very being of the beast have been unravelled and removed. (p. 129)

Every linguistic thread is equally important to Aldrovandi, in that each gives support, tonality and distinction to the tapestry of serpents and dragons he is weaving, and of which he is a part. The absence of hierarchy implies that the historian's audience does not discriminate any one quality as more essential to identity, or concrete being, than any other. The Cartesian subject/object split is not functioning here, and the very concept of fiction versus objective history-writing seems not to exist to any absolute degree. For Aldrovandi, neither self, nor external facts independent of self, exist. This is a radically different attitude from that of Susan Barton, who symbolizes the

rationalism of Descartes and the empiricism of Bacon, views which seem to inform Defoe as well.

### III

As suggested earlier, the evolution of the autonomous self, and the rational empiricism underlying it, can be traced back to the Socratic Greeks. Berman suggests that "At some point between the lifetime of Homer and that of Plato, a sharp break occurred in Greek epistemology, so as to turn it away from original participation"(p. 71). A comparison of the epistemologies of Heraclitus, Lao-tzu, and the authors of the Bhagavad Gita, all contemporaries, clearly indicates they shared this sense of original participation. These three epistemologies emphasize the flux of existence, man's inextricable relationship with some pervasive force and advise that crediting abstract knowledge with absolute validity and independent existence misdirects one from the true nature of being.

Lao-tzu speaks of the Way:

A name for it is "Way";  
 Pressed for designation,  
 I call it great...  
 The Way is great,  
 The sky is great,  
 The earth is great...

Man conforms to the earth;  
 The earth conforms to the sky;  
 The sky conforms to the Way;  
 The Way conforms to its own nature.<sup>7</sup>

The Bhagavad Gita speaks of Supreme Soul:

The spirit of man when in nature feels the ever-changing conditions of nature. When he binds himself to things ever-changing, a good or evil fate whirls him round through life-in-death. But the Spirit Supreme in man is beyond fate. He watches, gives blessing, bears all, feels all. He is called the Lord Supreme and the Supreme Soul.<sup>8</sup>

Heraclitus speaks of Logos:

Although this Logos is eternally valid, yet men are unable to understand it....We should let ourselves be guided by what is common to all. Yet, although the Logos is common to all, most men live as if each of them had a private intelligence of his own.<sup>9</sup>

Thus we have Way, Supreme Soul and Logos, and in each the suggestion of something analogous to Barfield's original participation. Philip Wheelwright suggests that to a Greek of Heraclitus' time "whose mind would not have been conditioned...by the postulates of Cartesian dualism, the division between subjective and objective wore no such appearance of clarity and finality" (p. 15). Indeed Heraclitus' use of the fire image strongly relates to Foucault's discussion of Aldrovandi as noted in section II of this

chapter. Wheelwright observes that:

Fire, in Heraclitus' doctrine...is the yellow, flaming, heat-giving actuality while at the same time it stands for the Heraclitean principle of universal unrelenting change....In Heraclitus' thought, not only the ideas of thing and quality, but those of event and quality tend to coalesce and become confused. (p. 14-15)

Furthermore, for Heraclitus "a thing is nothing more than the complete set of all the qualities and powers that belong to and constitute it"(p. 31), which is the view Foucault ascribes to Aldrovandi and pre-seventeenth century historians in general.

Berman suggests that the,

separation of mind and body, subject and object, is a discernible trend by the sixth century before Christ; and the poetic, or Homeric mentality, in which the individual is immersed in a sea of contradictory experiences and learns about the world through emotional identification with it (original participation), is precisely what Socrates and Plato intended to destroy. In the Apology, Socrates is aghast that artisans learn and pursue their craft by 'sheer instinct', that is by social osmosis and personal intuition. As Nietzsche pointed out, the phrase 'sheer instinct', which in Socrates' mouth could only be an expression of contempt, epitomized the attitude of Greek rationalism toward any other mode of cognition. (p. 71)

In Plato's Ideal Form, and in Aristotle's Formless Essence, there is an implicit search for eternal Ground more concrete and stable than the mystically-overtone Logos. For Aristotle, when a given portion of water, for

example, cools or is heated, it remains the same water as before it underwent the change.<sup>10</sup> For Heraclitus this is not so, for the entire circumstance has also changed; time has gone on, and so to speak of the same body of water is to ignore the fundamental nature of life-- continual change. The shift to a view denying constant change is essential to the sense of the self as fixed and autonomous, as it provides the solid foundation upon which to rest. In both Aristotelian and Platonic thought there is an implicit separation of man from environment absent in Heraclitean thought.

To follow this development of the self further, I suggest that early and medieval Christianity, with its faith in man's embodying the Holy Spirit, arrests, for a time, one implication of Greek rationalism-- the spiritual alienation of the individual. Indeed, for the Catholic, Hell is envisioned as alienation from God, versus Heaven, which is Unification with God.

However, as Abrams notes, it is the rediscovery of Greek thought, preserved largely by Islamic and Jewish philosophers, along with the advent of socio-economic changes, which leads to the Renaissance and the rebirth of the autonomous individual(p. 156) or, as Foucault puts it, to the very emergence of man(p. xxiv), from a field of



unified Discourse.

As to the economic forces accelerating the rise of the individual, Berman points to the breakdown of the guild system in Medieval Europe. This breakdown resulted in the emergence of an artisan class which could sell its skills more independently. Thus, the technical information, the How-to, becomes a saleable commodity no longer a part of a secret tradition passed on orally from master to apprentice and functioning in a community to provide goods and services in a direct contract or barter fashion (p. 104). R.H. Tawney emphasizes the "chasm....Between the conception of society as a community of unequal classes with varying functions organized for a common end, and that which regards it as a mechanism adjusting itself through the play of economic motives to the supply of economic needs."<sup>11</sup> Chronologically, the "chasm" is that between the years 1500 and 1700(p. 262). Tawney also suggests that "the political thought of the Renaissance as well as business and economic speculation"(p. 262) were significant factors in the rise of the individual. He goes on to note that "The doctrine of the Restoration economist [was] that ...trade and tolerance flourished together [and] had its practical significance in the fact that neither could prosper without large concessions to individualism"(p. 17).

Both Defoe and Coetzee raise the issue of the individual. I suggest that in Defoe's lifetime the individual is at a drastic remove from a state of original participation, a concept I will now develop more fully. Owen Barfield observes that:

Once the fact of participation is granted, the connection between words and things must, we have seen, be admitted to be at any time a very much closer one than the last two or three centuries have assumed. Conscious participation, moreover, will be aware of that connection, and original participation was conscious. It is only if we approach it in this light that we can hope to understand the extreme preoccupation of medieval learning with words-- and with grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, logic and all that has to do with words. (p. 84)

Furthermore

The human word proceeds from the memory, as the Divine Word proceeds from the Father, the phenomena itself only achieves its full reality in being named or thought by man; for thinking in act is the thing thought, in act; just as the senses in act, are the things sensed, in act. (p. 85)

Barfield sees the fading of such participatory utterance as coincident with the advent of certain scientific inventions, in particular, the telescope. Barfield observes,

The popular view is, that Copernicus 'discovered' that the earth moves round the sun. Actually the hypothesis that the earth revolves round the sun is at least as old as the third century B.C..... The real turning point in the history of...science ...was... [that] this novel idea that the Copernican (and therefore any other) hypothesis might not be a hypothesis at all but the ultimate truth. (p. 49-50)

Until this time there had been no telescope to confirm the hypothesis with empirical evidence. Previously, Barfield suggests, all theories "saved the appearances" or suitably filled the gaps between man on earth and the angels turning the crank keeping the heavens in motion(p. 48-50). Implicit in such a view is a quality of fiction in, I suggest, all intermediary, utilitarian, explanation. Thus it is that Galileo is not imprisoned for teaching Copernicus' heliocentric hypothesis, but for teaching it as absolute truth(p. 50).

Though an absolute can only be postulated in comparison to something relative, an absolute is also, by definition, beyond the relative thing to which it has been compared. Herein lies the beginning of the separation of man from God, or what Foucault considers the very discovery of "life itself, for before the "eighteenth century...life itself did not exist. All that existed was living beings" (p. 128). That is, the very concept of life, or biology, is an abstraction, and requires, indeed implies, a Cartesian split before such an idea as life can even be conceived.

For a subject to be extracted from a context and studied, there must be something already standing apart to do the selection and study. Thus, for such an act to take place, a change in epistemology must occur, one in which man is no longer in a fundamentally participatory relationship with God. And indeed, though Robinson Crusoe is perhaps not the first realistic novel, or even a novel at all, it is certainly a step toward it, and its religious and philosophical values, as well as its being a market commodity, reflect many predominant aspects of the eighteenth century.

### Chapter Three

Section I of this chapter looks at the influences on, and characteristics of, the realist novel, and how these relate to the rise of the autonomous individual. Section II deals with Defoe's literary motivations, penchant for disguise, contradictory statements, as well as his critics, to observe how these issues relate to those of identity and self. This section also examines the relationship between the novel form and Defoe, that is, authorial control, as issue central to Foe.

#### I

Chapter two traced the history of the autonomous individual to the eighteenth century. It seems no mere accident that the realist novel finds one of its earliest manifestations at this time. In The Rise of the Novel Ian Watt lists seven characteristics, all present in Robinson Crusoe, reflecting the economic, political, religious and philosophical atmosphere of Defoe's day.

1) Defoe was middle-class, and given the middle class was only slowly emerging as a literate entity, it was Defoe's capacity for responding "to the new needs of...

[his] audience...[and an ability to] express those needs from the inside"(p. 59) that makes him so significant. This is especially significant at a time when the patronage system is being replaced by the revenues afforded author's by booksellers. The novel, then, arises independently of the patronage system. It becomes a market commodity, and as such is eschewed by the elite as an upstart and necessarily base literary form incommensurate with High Art. Defoe the novelist is seen in the same light.

2) Watt suggests that Defoe (and later Richardson) "are the first great writers in our literature who did not take their plots from mythology, history, legend or previous literature"(p. 14). This view overlooks a writer such as Thomas Nashe, author of The Unfortunate Traveller, often called a picaresque novel, and based, in part, on his experiences on the European continent in the late 1500's. Indeed, Nashe scholar J.B. Steane notes that while The Unfortunate Traveller defies categorization, it certainly influenced the development of the English novel.<sup>1</sup> It is also notable that the unfortunate traveller himself, Jack Wilton, has a realistic name, unlike another Nashe character, Pierce Penniless, whose name is, in Watt's terms, a "type name". Perhaps Watt's loophole in stating that Defoe and Richardson are the first great writers to

take their plots from other than traditional areas is the word "great". Yet, a literature dominated by culturally privileged males will certainly influence what is considered great and what survives. Indeed, Terry Lovel states that female authors were ignored despite producing two-thirds of the novels written in the eighteenth century (mostly Gothic and Romance).<sup>2</sup> Socially and educationally marginalized, women too chose plots peripheral to the dominant tradition. Such qualifications of Watt's thesis, however, do not undermine its fundamental claim that novels took their plots from areas other than mythology, history, legend or previous literature, and were generally aimed at a middle-class and or female readership.

3) Defoe gives serious, individualized voice to hitherto excluded segments of society: Roxana and Moll Flanders; fallen woman and criminal respectively. Such a project is consistent with the growing emphasis on the individual, economically, philosophically and religiously. Indeed, Watt suggests that Defoe's emphasis on autobiography over plot in Robinson Crusoe "is as defiant an assertion of the primacy of the individual experience in the novel as Descartes' cogito ergo sum was in philosophy"(p. 15). Furthermore, Watt maintains that:

Once Descartes had given the thought processes within the individual supreme importance, the philosophical problems connected with personal identity naturally attracted a great deal of attention. In England, for example, Locke, Bishop Butler, Berkley, Hume and Reid all debated the issue, and the controversy even reached the pages of the Spectator. (p. 18)

4) A natural extension of an emphasis on individual identity is naming. Whereas the tradition had been to use "historical names or type names" (Watt, p. 18), Defoe uses names that do not allude to any tradition or type or symbology beyond their own individuality. And of course, naming is crucial to Susan Barton with regard the young woman claiming to be her daughter, and also named Susan Barton (see chapter IV).

5) The movement toward delineating the individual is effected through detail such as names, physical features and personal history (Watt, p. 18). This too has its parallel in Foe, as was noted in section I of Chapter two, with regards Crusoe's indifference to his own past.

6) Watt also notes that in Robinson Crusoe there is significant emphasis on the description of the environment as a backdrop against which events occur (p. 26). This solidifying of the objective world, a world "out there", is consistent with the subject/object split at work, and implicit in the methodologies of Descartes, Bacon and



Newton. Thus space is stabilized in Robinson Crusoe as the island on which Crusoe spends twenty-seven years.

7) The time aspect of Defoe's time/space continuum implies that time is, for Crusoe, linear and man autonomous, rather than man, time and environment being inseparably relational. Watt notes that "Locke had defined personal identity as an identity of consciousness through duration in time; the individual was in touch with his own continuing identity through memory of his past"(p. 21). During his confinement to the island, Crusoe arguably comes to terms with God; that is, he evolves due to successive events occurring in time, and upon which he meditates. Thus time and event, and their recollection, are essential to Crusoe's sense of self, a self which is separated from an objectified space.

However, Watt's seven characteristics: social status of Defoe, plot, the individual, naming, detail, space and time, go only so far. Watt does not deal with women writers of the eighteenth century, nor does he mention the Gothic novel, which stands in complete antipathy to the rational realism of Defoe. Gothic, as a term, carries the negative connotations of the wild and barbarous Goths. Yet the Gothic revival, and its expansion from architectural term to include literature, follows closely upon the heels of Defoe. As noted in the Introduction, Kenneth Clark suggests that

the Gothic novel is the natural successor to the Graveyard School of poetry in the early eighteenth century. A brief list of titles hint the inclinations and imagery of this school: "Night Piece on Death" (1722); "The Complaint, or Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality" (1742); "The Grave" (1743); and, "On Seeing a Scull" (1749)(Varma, p. 28). The images used are: night, moon, owl, graveyard, ghost, that is, the darker, emotional side of man versus the conscious and rational side. Clark notes that "The Gothic poets had sung a faint discordant undertone to the Augustan harmony: the Gothic novelists screamed-- screamed in complete reaction to everything stuffy and probable. Reaction was their chief impulse"(p. 44).

I suggest that the conflicting values of the realist novel and the Gothic parallels one of the conflicts in Foe- that of Susan Barton's conscious self versus her unconscious. Historically, this conflict arises from many convergent influences, all of which emphasize the individual. As well as the social and philosophical influences listed by Watt there are economic factors which not only emphasize the self, but divide the individual psyche. Terry Lovel suggests that "Capitalism is Janus-faced"(p. 31), given that free enterprise has two sides: production and consumption. The ethics of production are suited to Protestant values of reserve, labour and frugality; while the ethics of

consumption tend toward indulgence, ease and spending. Thus, implicit in the emerging economic system in Defoe's lifetime is a psychological split with two divergent directions.

This divergence goes further. The urban workplace, as it was developing, and is indeed today, carries a clear demarcation between labour-time and that of leisure. This demarcation is made wider still by the workplace being in a different location from that of the home. Lovell suggests that,

The bourgeois public emerged in Europe in the early decades of the eighteenth century in institutions such as the coffee house while the simultaneous emergence of the bourgeois private sphere is associated with the privatization of family life-- the withdrawal of the bourgeois family from public hall to (with)-drawing room, from integrated home and workplace to domestic quarters in the suburbs. (p. 31)

The autonomous individual, then, is divided psychologically in terms of the contrasting values implicit in market capitalism and the changes engineered in family life, work and leisure. Viewed as a process, there seems evidence that in the eighteenth century there is a significant movement underway toward individualization, that is, man standing separate from environment. Furthermore, psychological divisions separate man from himself, that is, a conscious versus unconscious split. The novel reflects

this process of individualization, either exemplifying it as in the realist form, or reacting against it in the Gothic.

## II

It is likely that one reason Robinson Crusoe carries on for two more volumes after the account of Crusoe's stay on the island is the first volume's popular reception and Defoe's perpetual penury.<sup>3</sup> Yet if Defoe hoped to make money off Robinson Crusoe he would have to meet public tastes, which called for exotic adventures, at least if the tremendous popularity of The Thousand and One Arabian Nights, first translated into English in 1701, is any indication.<sup>4</sup> Certainly Defoe's experience as agent for Robert Harley, First Earl of Oxford (the man who got him out of Newgate) and his dozen years writing Mist's Weekly Journal, as well as various other tracts and pamphlets, honed his formal abilities and his capacity for adventure and intrigue. In his travels as agent for Harley, gauging the political climate, Defoe undertook many disguises. In a letter to Harley Defoe writes:

Tho I will Not Answer for Success yet I Trust  
in Mannagment you shall not be Uneasy at your  
Trusting me here. I have Compass't my First  
and Main step happily Enough, in That I am  
Perfectly Unsuspected as Corresponding with

anybody in England. I Converse with Presbyterian, Episcopall-Dissenter, papist and Non Juror, and I hope with Equall Circumspection. I flatter my Self you will have no Complaints of my Conduct. I have faithfull Emissaries in Every Company And I Talk to Everybody in Their Own way. To the Merchants I am about to Settle here in Trade, Building ships &c. With the Lawyers I Want to purchase a House and Land to bring my family & live Upon it (God knows where the Money is to pay for it). To day I am Goeing into Partnership with a Member of parliamt in a Glass house, to morrow with Another in a Salt work. With the Glasgow Mutineers I am to be a fish Merchant.<sup>5</sup>

Defoe's shape-shifting is worth dwelling on for two reasons. First, the issue of identity is raised, an issue central to Foe, and second, Defoe was vilified for his "Proteus-like abilities".<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Defoe's satiric tract "The Shortest Way with Dissenters" exhibited his skill at "posing as a fanatical high-churchman" (Blewett, p. 12), and also landed him in jail. A second edition of the same tract, with a "Brief Explanation attached...raised a cloud of pamphlets attacking him as a dissembler, a 'fox' a hatcher of 'hellish designs'" (Blewett, p. 12).

That Defoe was the object of an elaborate satire reflects the seriousness of his threat. Blewett observes that a piece titled,

The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Mr. D----- De F--, of London, Hosier, in its preface...also emphasizes Defoe's Proteus-like abilities at dissembling: The Fabulous Proteus of the Ancient Mythologist was but a very faint

Type of our Hero, whose Changes are much more numerous, and he far more difficult to be constrain'd to his own Shape....The Dissenters first would claim him as theirs, the Whigs in general as theirs, the Tories as theirs, the Non-jurors as theirs, the Papists as theirs, the Atheists as theirs, and so on to what Subdivisions there may be among us. (p. 11)

In short, no man of honour shifts from shadow to shadow in one disguise after another bringing his very self, values and identity into question. Though these reactions to Defoe are made on the field of political battle, the cry of foul play is curiously loud. For example, L.J. Davis notes how Charles Gildon, in "An Epistle to Daniel Defoe" attacks Defoe and Robinson Crusoe on the simple ground that it is fictional, quite unconvinced by Defoe's lengthy efforts to legitimate Robinson Crusoe as parable.<sup>7</sup> Davis suggests that,

The significant point...in this interchange between Gildon and Defoe is that for the first time the whole issue of a discourse based on fact or fiction as a discriminant is brought up front. For Gildon, the genre of Robinson Crusoe depends on the external criteria of its truth or falsity. (p. 157-58)

That such a strict yardstick is held up to Robinson Crusoe is significant in itself as it reflects Susan Barton's view of history and history-writing. As well, the fact of so much controversy over Defoe's identity, or lack of a stable self, reflects the issue of self in Foe.

Puritan aversion to lying supports the lengths to which Defoe goes to rationalize his fictionalizing. As Blewett suggests, seeing fiction as a form of lying, Defoe distinguishes two forms of the lie to validate his use of it. There is that form which seeks, by fictional means, to illuminate, instruct, and reform, and is thus "not really lying at all but a parable, or a story told for the purpose of the moral taken from it... [versus] the... whore's blush" (p. 14), that is, fiction for fiction's sake. And indeed, Defoe's tract "The Family Instructor" forbids "Novels and Romances" such as those by Aphra Behn and other known fabulators (Blewett, p. 14).

Not only does Defoe rationalize Robinson Crusoe by crediting it with moral content, but, the first two volumes of Robinson Crusoe carry prefaces by the publisher attesting,

the thing to be a just History of Fact: neither is there any Appearance of Fiction in it: And however thinks, because all such things are dispatched, [disputed] that the Improvement of it, as well to the Diversion, as the Instruction of the Reader, will be the same; and as such, he thinks, without farther Compliment to the World, he does them a great Service in the Publication. (Vol. I p. viii)

The pose is that Robinson Crusoe is a true story, one which will instruct the reader. It is nonetheless attacked, and therefore, Davis notes, in,

The Serious Reflections...of Robinson Crusoe, Defoe does not hesitate to include himself in the biblical tradition by saying that the only kind of falsehood that is excusable in narrative is the parable or allegory: 'Such are the historical parables in the Holy Scripture... and such, in a word, the adventures of your fugitive friend Robinson Crusoe'. (p. 157)

Not only is Defoe playing both sides in maintaining that there is moral instruction in Robinson Crusoe while at the same time enjoying popular success, Defoe then brings Crusoe himself into the act, as if to the witness stand at Defoe's own trial:

I, Robinson Crusoe, being at this time in perfect and sound mind and memory, thanks be to God, therefore, do hereby declare their objection is an invention scandalous in design, and false in fact; and do affirm that the story, though allegorical is also historical; and that it is the beautiful representation of a life of unexampled misfortunes...

Thus the author is defending himself on the basis of the testimony of his fictional character, and doing so in the court, so to speak, of the preface, which is supposed to be outside the fiction and therefore believable. Defoe thus violates this unwritten agreement between reader and author. He also breaks down the distinction between preface and story, bringing both into the arena of fiction, something Coetzee does in rewriting Robinson Crusoe as well as taking



liberties with Defoe's biography. Whether Defoe's explanation of allegorical moral content includes the preface is questionable. It is odd, however, that Defoe goes to such lengths to insist on the verisimilitude of Crusoe as an actual living being, for as he states himself, "The fable is always made for the moral, not the moral for the fable" (Blewett, p. 14). In effect, there is no need for Crusoe to be a living being. Rather it seems Defoe is addressing himself here to the popular reader seeking a true story of adventure rather than one seeking moral instruction. Either way, Defoe remains ambiguous.

Certainly Defoe is a contradictory character. For example, after going on at such length (as quoted) to Harley celebrating his disguises, Defoe does a complete turn in his Complete English Tradesman, wherein we read:

Trade is not a ball, where people appear in mask, and act a part to make sport; where they strive to seem what they really are not . . . . But 'tis a plain visible scene of honest life, shewn best in its native appearance, without disguise. (Curtiss, p. 12)

As noted in the Introduction, Virginia Birdsall suggests Crusoe views the Bible as a manual, as a "convenient book of instruction on the formulas one must follow if one is to control the Great Controller" (p. 28). Yet once again Defoe shows another side when,

"in his discursive writings... [Defoe] attacks the savage 'whose worship is merely the product of feare'" (Birdsall, p. 19-20). Defoe's hero Crusoe continually turns to God only in times of fear, though, and wonders, after falling sick and then recovering: "Had I done my part? God had deliver'd me, but I had not glorify'd him;...and how cou'd I expect greater Deliverance" (Birdsall, p. 27).

Birdsall goes so far as to suggest that the Earl of Rochester greatly influenced Defoe. This is a significant consideration given Rochester's religious views: "The religious believer, as well as being a failure, may... also be a fool" (p. 21). Birdsall concludes that, "It is Defoe the follower of Hobbes and Rochester who has the last word" (p. 23). Notably, Birdsall's statement implies two Defoe's, which are at odds with each other, reflecting the psychological split discussed in section I of this chapter.

The project at hand, however, is not to decide exactly what Defoe's views were on any subject. Rather it is simply to note the obviously chameleon-like nature of the man, acknowledge the often vicious criticism he received due to it, and to observe that the Defoe controversy raises the issue of identity central to Foe.

## Chapter Four

This chapter focuses on Susan Barton's attempts to achieve individual selfhood. Section I deals with Barton as narrator, and the issue of authorial control and reader response. If Susan Barton's "substance" rides on an account of her island episode she must control Foe's rendering of it. Section II discusses Susan Barton and the young woman claiming to be her daughter, and whose presence threatens to upset Barton's sense of identity. In examining Friday as a symbol of the unconscious, section III focuses on how this too threatens Barton's sense of identity. Barton's position both as muse and as the actual narrator of Foe yet again raises the issue of identity, and is the subject of section IV. Finally, section V covers the last brief chapter of Foe in which a narrative voice other than Barton enters the story.

### I

Foe is written in four chapters. The first is Susan Barton's account of the island episode. The second, and longest, is taken up by the letters Barton sends to Foe, who, after a fleeting appearance in which he agrees to

write her story, disappears. Susan Barton spends what amounts to half the novel writing letters to Foe, narrating her plight, then consigning the letters to a trunk. Chapter three opens with Barton having finally tracked Foe down, and is comprised of their dialogues. Finally, in chapter four, a narrative voice enters the story in an attempt by Coetzee to merge the fictional reality within Foe and the conventionally accepted reality outside the fiction and thereby confuse the two.

Yet it is ironic that Susan Barton narrates the first three chapters, for despite her protestations as to her own inabilities, she is, in fact, the writer within the fictional plane of Foe. On two occasions do Barton's own fictionalizing collide with the reality plane within the novel. The first is when she and Friday move into Foe's abandoned house, and she remarks on how different it is not only from what she had imagined, but-- and this is crucial-- from how she herself described it in one of her letters to Foe:

It is not wholly as I imagined it would be. What I thought would be your writing-table is not a table but a bureau. The window overlooks not woods and pastures but your garden. There is no ripple in the glass. The chest is not a true chest but a dispatch box. Nevertheless, it is all close enough. Does it surprise you as much as it does me, this correspondence between things as they are

and the pictures we have of them in our minds?  
(p. 65)

This is a confusing point in the narrative, for earlier, in her second letter to Foe, in chapter two, dated April 20th, she slips smoothly from a request that Foe take herself and Friday into his house as servants, to an actual first person description of herself delivering him breakfast, detailing him and his room, yet without any explanation or acknowledgement of what she is doing on a literary level. The second example of her own fictionalizing colliding with the reality plane of the novel is when she tracks Foe down at the opening of chapter three. She remarks once again upon his lodging (a different one than the previous) noting that "It is not as I imagined it...I expected dust thick on the floor, and gloom"(p. 113). Within the novel, then, fact and imagination confront each other, and the role and identity of the author are confused, for despite her seeking out Foe to do the job, Barton writes the novel which the reader holds in his or her hand (within the fictional plane of the story, of course). This is ironic.

Also ironic is that Barton's insistence on the neutrality of language is, in effect, what traps her in it. Attempting to reveal to Barton this maze she is in, Foe tells her a story. The story is that of a condemned woman who asks to

confess once more; adds to her list of crimes, then throws the entire confession into doubt by stating that her heart is so dark that she cannot truly know if her confession is sincere or not (p. 124). This inner darkness stands in opposition to what Susan Barton seeks: the light of the conscious and the rational which will banish any shadow threatening her. Revealing once again her faith in the consequences of a true account, Susan Barton responds to Foe's anecdote by saying that, "If I disagreed with the interpreter...I should rest most uneasy in my grave knowing to whom the story of my last hours had been consigned"(p. 124). Foe, however, says "To me the moral of the story is that there comes a time when we must give reckoning of ourselves to the world, and then forever after be content to hold our peace"(p. 124). Ironically, Susan Barton confronted this very issue of authorial control and reader response earlier in Foe when trying to communicate with Friday using pictures:

Consider these pictures, Friday, I said, then tell me: which is the truth? I held up the first. Master Cruso, I said, pointing to the whiskered figure. Friday, I said, pointing to the kneeling figure. Knife, I said, pointing to the knife. Cruso cut out Friday's tongue, I said; and I stuck out my own tongue and made motions of cutting it....Yet even as I spoke I began to doubt myself. For if Friday's gaze indeed became troubled, might that not be because I came striding out of the house, demanding that he look at pictures, something

I had never done before? (For, examining it anew, I recognized with chagrin that it might also be taken to show Crusoe as a benevolent father putting a lump of fish into the mouth of child Friday.) And how did he understand my gesture of putting out my tongue at him? What if, among the cannibals of Africa, putting out the tongue has the same meaning as offering the lips has amongst us? (p. 68-69)

Foe then goes on to tell Susan Barton another story, in which one of the jailers of a condemned mother agrees to adopt her child, at which the woman states: " Now you may do with me as you wish. For I have escaped your prison; all you have here is the husk of me "(p. 125). Her husk is her form, whereas her kernel, her essence (substance as Susan Barton terms it) will live on in her surviving child. This condemned woman's relationship with with her child parallels, to a point, Susan Barton's relationship with the young woman claiming to be her daughter. Barton seeks her substance, her place "in God's great scheme of things" (p. 126), through her story. Yet Foe suggests that, like the woman in the anecdote, Barton can find her place through the young woman claiming to be her daughter. Indeed, accepting the young woman as what she claims to be will reconnect Barton with her past, which, paradoxically, is a fiction.

The two anecdotes present two sides of the problem behind Susan Barton's seeking substance through the story Foe will write. The first anecdote is intended to undermine

the definitive statement, that is, the single correct version of any event, and therefore the flaw in Barton's insistence on the story mirroring her year on the island. The second anecdote affirms the immortality of the mother through the survival of her daughter, suggesting that the substance Susan Barton seeks cannot be had through chronicle, but only through the body, that is, her daughter (whom, ironically, and indeed tragically, Barton denies is her daughter).

## II

The young woman claiming to be Susan Barton's daughter claims her name is also Susan Barton. Her reasons for doubting this young woman are rarely made concrete. Still, when the woman says her father is named George Lewes the elder Susan Barton interrupts:

Then your name is Lewes, if that is the name of your father. It may be my name in law but it is not my name in truth. If I were to be speaking of names in truth, say I, my name would not be Barton. That is not what I mean, says she. Then what do you mean? Say I. I am speaking of our ture names, our veritable names.  
(p. 75-76)

Both women acknowledge a difference between names and "ture" or "veritable" names. These true or veritable names



are, it is implied, somehow beyond language, and thus remain unspoken and unwritten. Coetzee's device of calling both women Susan Barton renders naming neutral as a distinguishing factor, pointing instead to the physical as the site of essential identity (as suggested by Foe's anecdotes quoted in section I of this chapter). Coetzee's name play recalls Saussure's linguistic theory in which "Each sign in the [language] system has meaning only by virtue of its difference from the other. 'Cat' has meaning not 'in itself', but because it is not 'cap' or 'cad' or 'bat'."<sup>1</sup>

The young Susan Barton says she knows of the island and Bahia. The elder Susan Barton, struggling to make sense of this, suspects Foe of informing the young woman. Yet confronting Foe with this late in the book, he makes no answer other than to take her into his arms and kiss her, reminiscent of the zen slap in the face in response to the neophyte trapped in the habit of rationalism. Here and throughout, Coetzee places language-based identity into the realm of fiction, relegating it to the circumscribed, utilitarian arena of the everyday, while asserting that ultimate essence is beyond language.

Susan Barton's final evidence for disbelieving the young woman is her daughter is highly ironic:

The world is full of stories of mothers searching for sons and daughters they gave away once, long ago. But there are no stories of daughters searching for mothers. There are no stories of such quests because they do not occur. They are not a part of life. (p. 77-78)

Here Susan Barton, of all people, takes the story as precedent for actual life, in effect, basing fact upon fiction. She does this because she views narratives as perfectly mirroring actual events.

The inclusion of this daughter figure is worth dwelling on further. Late in Roxana the heroine's daughter appears, and is potentially disastrous in that she might reveal her past to her present lover. Similarly, the young Susan Barton is potentially disastrous to her elder namesake because she will reveal the latter's fictional background. Coetzee is thus suspending conventions of realism to make his point that self and identity are language-constructs, or fictions. Indeed, both Susan Bartons have predecessors in Roxana. Susan Barton is Roxana herself carried over in modified form into Foe, while the young Susan Barton is Roxana's daughter who has followed her from one fiction to another. Unconsciously Susan Barton knows this, yet consciously she denies it because of the threat it poses to her sense of self.

The reappearance of the young Susan Barton for a second time within Foe accompanied by the hitherto unseen Amy is

not enough to explain the fact that the elder Susan Barton nearly faints. The elder Susan Barton must have known that it was only in a dream that she took, and lost, the younger woman in Epping Forest. Yet if she does not make such a distinction between dream and waking reality then her reaction reinforces the connection between Barton's conscious and unconscious processes, and ironically undermines her entire conflict with Mr Foe as well as her philosophical viewpoint. However, if Barton's reaction is taken as an unconscious acknowledgement of her past as Roxana, we can see that she is close to having her conscious self completely redefined, in effect, destroyed. Indeed, as the young Susan Barton, Amy, Susan Barton and Foe all face each other, Foe asks Barton the very leading question: "when were you last in such company"(p. 130). Barton's defiant response is "Never"(p. 130). She then goes on to say that "I am as familiar as you with the many ways in which we can deceive ourselves. But how can we live if we do not believe we know who we are, and who we have been" (p. 130). Here she addresses the very issue of chaos and its control, of the subject/object split; for without these efforts at ordering and distinguishing a sense of self is impossible, at least to the degree and nature that Barton so desperately needs. Therefore, Barton's denial of the young woman's claim is essential to her sense of self.

When Susan Barton insists that "I am a substantial being with a substantial history in the world"(p. 131) she is again implicitly asserting the subject/object split, and her sense of autonomousness. And finally, she says, "I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire" (p. 131). Her desire is to concretize her identity. Not only does she assume freedom, that is, free will, which implies an unhindered entity operating against an objective backdrop, she also credits a realistic story with the weight of validating this sense of identity. These points recall those discussed at the start of chapter III as to the characteristics of the realist novel as a newly emerged form coincident to the emergence of the autonomous individual.

We see, then, that Coetzee is using the daughter figure as a device to throw Susan Barton's name, identity and her view of language into question. That is, Barton's sense of self is a fiction. At the same time, however, Coetzee asserts an unnameable essence to which Friday is in union, and of which he is a symbol.

## III

Susan Barton's relationship with Friday parallels that of the conscious to the unconscious in the Freudian sense that the conscious must keep the unconscious at bay. Her two approaches to Friday also parallel Hayden White's discussion of the concepts of the "Wild Man" and the "Noble Savage". White observes that,

the terms civilization and humanity...lend themselves to definition by stipulation rather than by empirical observation and induction...[and] In times of socio-cultural stress, when the need for positive self-definition asserts itself...it is always possible to say something like: 'I may not know the precise content of my own felt humanity, but I am most certainly not like that' and simply point to something in the landscape that is manifestly different from oneself. (p. 151)

In the above quotation White is discussing identity, and he suggests that the Wild Man concept serves as an indication of what man is not. The concept of the Noble Savage, derived from the Wild Man, "developed between the late fifteen and early eighteenth century" (p. 185) during a time of renewed identity crisis for European culture as it faced the dilemma of how to deal with the inhabitants of the New World. If approached in terms of the chain-of-being the native American is admitted too close for

comfort, and as well, complicates the validation of economic exploitation. The underpinnings of the chain-of-being imply common ground between all creation and grey any lines distinguishing peoples, for the level of Man in the chain is not itself divided or hierachized. As White notes, "The metaphysics of the chain-of-being idea renders unstable any attempt to draw, on its basis, a definitive distinction between natives and 'normal' man"(p. 189). Such an idenity crisis (with obviously immense economic and political implications) requires different criteria with which, or against which, to define the European culture and validate colonial practice.

Two stances are open to the colonizer: that of proselytization and conversion versus war and extermination; the former based on the chain-of-being, and what White terms a "continuous" attitude toward native peoples, and the latter a "contiguous" attitude. The former attempts assimilation, the latter rejection. Both views make use of the Wild Man as a device for clarification when faced by the actuality of a distinct (but yet to be determined whether essentially different) type of man. And here White notes that in earlier times the Wild Man concept was used to delineate the unknown, the "out there"(p. 153). But once the Wild Man is actually faced and then dealt with, that is, controlled, he becomes the Noble Savage.<sup>2</sup>

Yet if the Wild Man is only indicative of a perpetual fear and uncertainty as to the inevitable flaws in the metaphysical tapestry, then where does the Wild Man go once he runs out of geographical escapes? For the Wild Man represents, claims White, the perpetual need of society to "fill the areas of consciousness not yet colonized by scientific knowledge with conceptual designators affirmative of their own existentially contrived values and norms" (p. 153). Without any remaining geographical escapes, the Wild Man is interiorized (White, p. 153-54). He becomes the animal within, man's darker side. I suggest that Susan Barton and Friday stand as conscious and unconscious respectively, with the unconscious being endowed with the universal and intuitive properites versus the conscious which stands threatened, like an island fearful of being swallowed by the surrounding sea from which it emerged.

Susan Barton reacts in two ways to the unconscious. She tries to colonize it through teaching Friday European ways and language and also attempts to banish it, as seen in her attempt to return Friday to Africa, the Heart of Darkness. Significantly, Coetzee's Friday is negroid, not South American as is Defoe's. The connection with Africa reflects Coetzee's South African origins. Friday's mutilation stands as a critique of the present South African regime's

racial policy suppressing blacks and denying them a voice in their lives. However, it is also significant that Crusoe states that "the slavers" cut out Friday's tongue, and the slavers are "Moors"(p. 23), that is, black Muslims. Though possibly Crusoe is lying, this point also functions to turn the accusing finger from specifically white oppression to oppression itself.

Susan Barton's quest for self is rooted in her fear of Friday's silence within her, a silence she considers empty. Foe remarks to Barton that,

Friday is beckoned from the deep-- beckoned or menaced, as the case may be. Yet Friday does not die....To us he leaves the task of descending into that eye. Otherwise, like him, we sail across the surface and come ashore none the wiser, and sleep without dreaming, like babes. (p. 141)

*Friday* The difference between Friday and the other two characters-- Barton and Foe-- is language and the interior voice. This voice is what creates the sense of the self, and is what Friday does not feel threatened by losing. Friday can play at the edge of the void, at the edge of language, perhaps even worship it with his offerings of flower petals.

*Friday* Friday is a nature figure. He is nonlinguistic. He is likened to an animal at least nine separate times in Foe, and six of these references refer directly to his relationship with language. For example:



He is called Dog,

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My first thought was that Friday was like a dog that heeds but one master; yet it was not so. Firewood is the word I have taught him, said Cruso. Wood he does not know. I found it strange that Friday should not understand that firewood was a kind of wood, as pinewood is a kind of wood, or poplarwood. (p. 21)

In Locke's famous words, Friday is a "beast that abstracts not"; he can make no such intellectual leap.

Susan Barton's alternately contiguous and continuous attitude toward Friday parallels Defoe's toward religion and rationalism. Barton makes occasionally penetrating statements concerning life, language and self while alternately insisting on an unreconcilable subject/object split. Susan Barton epitomizes the mind/body dichotomy-- she comprehends, but does her best not to feel. Curiously, after having tried to return Friday to Africa, Barton speaks of him as her possession (p. 99). It is also significant that when Barton first speaks to Foe she asks him to "return"(p. 51) to her the substance she has lost, hinting yet again that she has some shadowy awareness of a past more spiritually and psychologically whole. Barton's notion of sending Friday back to Africa is a rationalist exercise in psychological self-surgery doomed to fail. Indeed, her effort at returning Friday to the jungles of Africa, that is, the chaotic and untamed regions of the world, parallels her effort at losing the young Susan Barton in Epping

Forest during a dream-- the chaotic and untamed region of her unconscious mind. Of course, neither Friday nor the young woman are so easily disposed of, as if they were independent creatures.

Susan Barton's self, her sense of place and the question of the substance which the artist Foe can supply hinge on the search for the secret of the island, the essential question of her story as Foe sees it. This revolves around Friday's practice of paddling a log out from the shore and sprinkling flower petals on a region of kelp-clogged ocean. As Foe notes,

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. I ask: Why was Friday drawn into such deadly peril, given that life on the island was without peril, and then saved. (p. 141)

This silence is a motif throughout Foe. Language surrounds, is surrounded, or is permeated by silence, or essence, which delineates it yet is not it; just as the essence of a cup is its capacity to be filled, that is, its emptiness, which is defined by its concrete form. Both aspects are necessary and relational. Friday symbolizes, and is, this emptiness and Susan Barton knows it: "the story of Friday ...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)"

(p. 121). Here the image is like that of the cup, implying that the emptiness, the buttonhole, is the yin to the yang of the button, together forming a wholeness paralleling the healthy union of the conscious and unconscious.

Coetzee trots out all the popular images for this unconscious: heart, eye, mouth, seashell, sea, Friday, forest. And it is from this unconscious that writing arises, or so Foe states (p. 143). Yet Foe also states that we cannot read God's writing, God who writes the world and all that is in it, because we "are his writing" (p. 143). Indeed, even "the waterskater, that is an insect and dumb, traces the name of God on the surfaces of ponds, or so the Arabians say. None is so deprived that he cannot write" (p. 143-44). In this sense Foe feels Friday too can write, as indeed anything which moves writes through responding to the active silence, the dynamism sourced in God, Logos, Way or whatever the term happens to be. Appropriately, Friday writes a page of O's when given the pen, for in Robinson Crusoe, for Friday and his people "to say "O" was to pray to their God Benamuckee" (Vol. II, p. 2).

Yet Coetzee's Friday does not say "O", he writes "O". Friday never demonstrates more than a dog's understanding of spoken language. That Friday is more predisposed toward writing than speech calls to mind Derrida's view that

writing is prior to speech.<sup>3</sup> Coetzee thus asserts the formative significance of writing, and history-writing, in establishing both a social self and an objective world, while also suggesting that such writing is fiction-like. The neutralized and transparent language that Susan Barton uses cannot give her substance; to Barton language is not her condition. She insists on standing apart from language and wants this independent self substantiated. Section IV develops Susan Barton's quest for self.

#### IV

Susan Barton manifests stereotypical male characteristics. She urges the indifferent Crusoe to order chaos-- the island, and illuminate darkness-- Friday, exactly what Defoe's Crusoe does. Susan Barton is the rationalist figure in Foe, and is intended as a device to undermine the stereotype of woman as intuitive earth-mother.

Both Barton and Friday are socially marginalized, the former as a woman, the latter as a racial minority. On the journey to Bristol, where Friday might take a ship to Africa, we see the reactions of locals to these two. Shoved to the social fringe they are labelled gypsies despite any explanation Barton offers. They are so labelled because they are without place, or rather, their place is the

fringe, and thus the terms gypsy is the most apt category in which to slot them. What is at work is the fear of chaos, the need to order, and thus name. Friday and Susan Barton are loose ends which must be tied.

Socially marginalized, it is appropriate that Susan Barton needs Foe to be her voice, and that Friday has no tongue at all. Both are literally and figuratively voiceless. As a woman seeking her "self", seeking to integrate herself socially and spiritually, Barton functions as an inversion of the tradition of the quest novel in which the male hero seeks contact with an inner self which will make him a fuller and more complete being. For Susan Barton, however, the everpresence of her inner self (Friday) makes her alternately fear, attempt to control, and reject this inner self.

Not only does Coetzee address issues of psycho-spiritual wholeness, but the traditional image of woman. Utilizing Susan Barton heightens the critique of Cartesian rationalism upon which the autonomous self rests, for as a woman, she is not-- stereotypically-- supposed to be as rational as a man. In the same way, Susan Barton's fear of the unconscious is all the more striking by her being female, as she is stereotypically supposed to be more intuitive.

Susan Barton is also cast in the role of muse. Yet

ironically she seeks out Foe, the writer. She does this to gain her place in the world. The muse thus tries to achieve realistic, individualized being. Seen against the backdrop of Robinson Crusoe as site of the emergence of the "realistic" individual, it is appropriate that this woman (marginalized figure) seeks acceptance into the social scheme. Indeed, the tradition of woman as muse functions to keep woman mythic, that is, role-bound. Mary K. DeShazer suggests one of the three main roles the muse has played for men is that of she who aids in achieving spiritual wholeness.<sup>4</sup> Given that Susan Barton is cast as muse, yet seeks wholeness herself, there is a reversal at work, for the gift of wholeness traditionally goes to the poet-- in this case Foe. Given also that Barton is cast as having what seems to be a stereotypically masculine psyche, her role as muse is ironic, for the muse is traditionally intuitive, holistic and creative, aspects Barton suppresses. The implication is that Barton should seek within herself for substance. Yet Barton seeks substance through Foe, and envisioning him at his writing table falling asleep, she "send[s] out a vision of the island to hang before you... so that it will be there for you to draw on whenever you need" (p. 53).

There is also a reversal at work in the manner in which Susan Barton inspires Foe. When they first have sex

Susan Barton says:

there is a privilege that comes with the first night, that I claim as mine. So I coaxed him till he lay beneath me. Then I drew off my shift and straddled him (which he did not seem easy with, in a woman). This is the manner of the Muse when she visits her poets, I whispered, and felt some of the listlessness go out of my limbs. (p. 139)

Susan Barton then "fathers"(p. 140) the offspring-- the story-- and, receiving her seed, Foe is then to give it birth. Indeed, in terms of role reversal, Foe refers to himself as "An old whore"(p. 151) and Barton says she thinks of him as "a wife"(p. 152).

Sexual intercourse occurs twice in Foe: once between Barton and Cruso, and once between Barton and Foe. Unlike her fictional counterpart Roxana, however, Barton suffers no Protestant turmoil over extramarital sex. Indeed, acknowledging that it is "a world of chance"(p. 30), Barton verges on atheism. Barton sees chance as lack of control, or order.

In a world of chance, is there a better and a worse? We yield to a stranger's embrace or give ourselves to the waves; for the blink of an eyelid our vigilance relaxes; we are asleep; and when we awake, we have lost the direction of our lives. What are these blinks of an eyelid, against which the only defence is an eternal and inhuman wakefulness? Might they not be the cracks and chinks through which another voice, other voices, speak in our lives? By what right do we

close our ears to them? The questions echoed in my head without answer. (p. 30)

These cracks are the silences, the spaces between the words; they are the unconscious, which, as in experiences of *deja vu* or intuition, occasionally make themselves heard-- illuminating the dim light of consciousness. Yet, as Susan Barton so often does, after giving voice to such eternal questions of the human experience, she then allows her pursuit of self to supersede.

Given the social role and stereotype of women in the eighteenth century, Susan Barton functions as both woman and individual emerging from the history of generic types. Her ironic role as muse heightens the sense of the individual casting off the shell of stereotype. Susan Barton needs, ironically, a male voice through which to escape this stereotype of woman as muse. And it is further ironic that Coetzee suggests the substance Barton hopes to gain is empty-- true substance is a formless essence that can only be written by the body, not the mind. The issue of essence will be discussed in section V.



## V

The final chapter of Foe is five pages long and is in two parts. Both parts open similarly, indeed are the same scene repeated, but they take different turns. This rewriting reflects Hayden White's theme that there is no one correct version of any event.

In the first part of the final chapter the narrator enters Foe's room and finds Foe and Susan Barton dead, while Friday is still faintly alive. Friday's pulse "is faint, as if his heart beat in a far off place"(p. 154). Prying open Friday's jaws Coetzee hears from his mouth "without a breath...the sounds of the island"(p. 154).

Why is Friday the only survivor? I suggest it is because he is closer to the island (nature) and because the wall of words is not solid enough to cut him off from what nature represents-- the life force. Friday is a better conductor of this force; he is free of linguistic resistance impeding the flow. Friday's sense of the kinetic reflects his conductivity. Recall his trance-like whirling, which, when Susan Barton tries it on the cold night in the damp barn, warms her and sends her off to sleep after having been "far away, [and she] had seen wondrous sights"(p. 103). It is also significant that during the storm on the island

Susan Barton observes that while Cruso shook and shivered with malarial fever, and she cowered, to her surprise Friday was perfectly at ease. "I had thought Friday would be terrified by the clamour of the elements....But no, Friday sat under the eaves with his head on his knees and slept like a baby"(p. 28). And furthermore, Friday "sail[s] across the surface of the eye and come[s] ashore none the wiser...[to sleep without dreaming like a] babe"(p. 141). Friday is none the wiser because he simply is.

I suggest that Susan Barton, Cruso and Friday indicate three stages of selfhood. Cruso stands somewhere between the strong sense of self to which Susan Barton clings and Friday, selfless as an animal. Cruso stands between, but closer to Friday. Cruso is approaching becoming a nature figure himself. As noted, he was in the practice of becoming one with the sunset, which Susan Barton observes:

One evening, seeing him as he stood on the Bluff with the sun behind him all red and purple, staring out to sea, his staff in his hand and his great conical hat on his head, I thought: He is truly a kingly figure; he is the true king of his island. I thought back to the vale of melancholy through which I had passed, when I had dragged about listlessly, weeping over my misfortune. If I had then known misery, how much deeper must the misery of Cruso not have been in his early days? Might he not justly be deemed a hero who had braved the wilderness and slain the monster of solitude and returned fortified by his victory.  
(p. 37-38)

The monster of solitude is rooted in Crusoe's sense of self. For solitude to be felt requires an objective self, and it is just this self which Crusoe has, to a degree, managed to put into a different perspective. If the self is no longer viewed as independent, but inherently relational, then there is no possibility of loss and no solitude. Thus we note Crusoe's aversion to language (self aggrandizement) and tools (devices for manipulating the external world). Crusoe's Buddhist view of self casts light on his seemingly paradoxical response to Susan Barton who has asked him why he does not make candles: "Which is easier: to learn to see in the dark, or to kill a whale and seethe it down for the sake of a candle"(p. 27). Crusoe opts for internal reshaping rather than external, and, once this work is underway, the division between internal and external begins to fade and something nearing Barfield's original participation is achieved. Crusoe's reference to learning to see in the dark (unconscious) also implies that he does not fear darkness, or selflessness, as does Susan Barton.

That many critics suggest Defoe's Crusoe discovers God on his island implies an island-as-monastery symbology. Susan Barton notes that Friday never interrupted Crusoe during these "retreats" to the Bluff (p. 38). The term

retreat connotes monastic withdrawal. Thus we see that Coetzee is inverting the two stories; in Foe there is Cruso unwinding self, whereas in Robinson Crusoe Crusoe finds himself and his relationship within God's great scheme of things. However, when Susan Barton asks about Cruso's seemingly futile ground clearing (futile given that he has no seed to sow) he remarks that planting will be for others, suggesting that he has not removed himself from the possibility of society altogether. As Cruso says, "I ask you to remember, not every man who bears the mark of the castaway is a castaway at heart"(p. 33).

In the second section of the final chapter the narrator enters Foe's room once again, and then enters the letter Susan Barton has written-- the story within the story. The narrator reads: "Dear Mr Foe, At last I could row no further"(p. 155). These are the words with which Foe opens. Yet the quotation marks end and the I of the narrator descends stalks of seaweed into the wreck. Susan Barton is discovered dead with the Captain, and then Friday too is discovered, half sunk in the muddy sand which is said to be "like the mud of Flanders, in which generations of grenadiers now lie dead"(p. 156). This reference to Flanders raises the question of time-- is it now two centuries later? We read on that the undersea wreck "is

not a place of words....It is the home of Friday"(p. 157).  
Friday's home is a timeless silence.

A great deal of the time the silence in Foe is seen in relation to language. Ihab Hassan suggests that "The literature of silence encloses a silence of fullness and another of vacancy, [and as such opposes Blake with DeSade]. One [Blake] beholds the world's body while the other [DeSade] stares at the mind's emptiness"(p. 7 ). Here again we face the mind/body dichotomy, the former half of which is personified by Susan Barton, the latter half by Friday, both of whom as individuals are incomplete as long as they exclude the other. Though clearly for Coetzee the silence embodied by Friday sings with the fuller more positive voice. Indeed the narrator discovers upon prying open Friday's jaws down in the wreck that:

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. (p. 157)

### Conclusion

That Coetzee uses Robinson Crusoe to unwind conventions of language, self and history-writing reflects his view that Robinson Crusoe stands as a literary cornerstone for those very things. As the many Defoe critics and social historians quoted in the preceding chapters observe, at least one aspect of the eighteenth century in England was a belief in the scientific method of Bacon and Newton, and a belief in free will, which implies an autonomous self functioning independent of its environment. This thesis proposes that one of Coetzee's main themes in Foe is to challenge this notion of an independent self, a self whose development I have traced from the Socratic Greeks to the eighteenth century.

Coetzee challenges the premises upon which Defoe's Robinson Crusoe rests: that language can be neutral, history-writing objective and the self autonomous. Coetzee inverts the control-oriented, self-obsessed, diary-writing Crusoe into the silent and materially indifferent Cruso. Unwinding conventions of self through Cruso, Coetzee simultaneously uses Roxana, in the form of Susan Barton, as marginalized person (woman) seeking individualized selfhood in the world. As an eighteenth century male of

middle-class background Crusoe's individuality and power are fairly solid, whereas Susan Barton must escape the powerlessness of the female stereotype. While Crusoe is relinquishing self, Barton desperately seeks it.

Language functions as a thin layer of sterile ground in Foe. While Defoe's Crusoe is an obsessive diary-writer, and Defoe himself seems to have engaged in a life-long battle of literary rhetoric defending himself and his writing as well as producing contradictory statements for public consumption, Coetzee's Crusoe eschews both writing and talk; Susan Barton clings to the idea that a chronicle will give her substance; and Friday is tongueless and mute. In the end it is the last of these, and most silent of them all-- Friday-- who survives longest, due to his sense of the kinetic. Friday is a vehicle for the enigmatic wave flowing out of his mouth and through the water in the final scene because in Friday the flow is unimpeded by the resistance of abstract language. As aware as Coetzee is of the formative role of language in terms of personal identity, he ultimately asserts a nonlinguistic Ground. Coetzee thus writes both politically and spiritually, addressing the nature of being in society and his idea of the absolute nature of being itself.

## Footnotes

## Introduction

1

Full title of the first of the three Crusoe books. The first is the most famous, being the account of Crusoe's arrival, stay and eventual departure from the island. Henceforth it is to this first book that I refer when mentioning: Robinson Crusoe.

2

Hayden White, Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 66. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

3

Daniel Defoe, A Journal of the Plague Year (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1970), p. 7. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

4

Morris Berman, The Reenchantment of the World (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 34. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

5

J.M. Coetzee, Foe (London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), p. 51. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

6

Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 19. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

7

Virginia Birdsall, Defoe's Perpetual Seekers (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1986), p. 28. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

8

Owen Barfield, Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, No year given), p. 33-34. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.



9

M.H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms 4th. ed., (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), p. 156. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

10

Kenneth Clark, The Gothic Revival (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), p. 19-20. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

11

D.P. Varma, The Gothic Flame (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), p. 15. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

## Chapter One

1

Daniel Defoe, The Life & Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1927), p. 16. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

2

Abrams notes that "With few exceptions...Renaissance humanists were pious Christians.... Whereas In our time 'humanist' often connotes a person who bases truth on human experience and bases values on human nature, rejecting the truths and sanctions of a supernatural creed"(p. 76).

3

Ihab Hassan, The Dismemberment of Orpheus (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 7. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

4

Though Crusoe's sense of self is not a conflict in Robinson Crusoe as it is in Foe for Barton. Crusoe simply does the seemingly natural thing, that is-- make his "self" as safe as possible, exactly where Barton and Cruso conflict.

5

Authorship does become an issue in Defoe's life insofar as in later Crusoe books the existence of Crusoe as a real person is questioned. In response, Defoe rationalizes lying in print and even invents a statement made by Crusoe himself assuring the world that he is indeed a living man (see chapter III).

## Chapter Two

1

Daniel Defoe, Roxana: The Unfortunate Mistress (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 1. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

2

Such an intimation suggests that indeed it is Foe that is closer to the "true" or "inside" story of Robinson Crusoe. Again, Coetzee clearly tries undermining Robinson Crusoe and conventional notions of history-writing.

3

Saul Kripke, Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 122.

4

This is not to deny that all language is metaphoric, in that it has no intrinsic relationship to its referent. I suggest, however, that the term "snake" achieves less of the reptile by that name than even the clumsy metaphor: the stabbed snake was a "live electric cable" whipping in the dirt, a phrase requiring a degree of literary contrivance.

5

Spurred to even greater than normal heights of irritability and abuse by perhaps an excess of pepper in his bratwurst, Nietzsche tars historians as "eunuchs" in the "harem of history" who destroy art (White, p. 32). Indeed White notes that, "Nietzsche hated history even more than he hated religion. History promoted a debilitating voyeurism in men, made them feel that they were latecomers to a world in which everything worth doing had already been done, and thereby undermined that impulse to heroic exertion that might give a peculiarly human, if only transient, meaning to an absurd world" (p. 32).

6

Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 129. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

7

Lao Tzu, The Way of Life, trans. R.B. Blakney (New York: The New American Library Inc., 1955), p. 77.

8

Bhagavad Gita, trans. Juan Mascaro (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972), p. 101.

9

Philip Wheelwright, Heraclitus (New York: Atheneum, 1964), p. 19. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

10

J.A. Weisheipl, "Aristotle," Encyclopaedia Britannica (Chicago: William Benton, 1970).

11

R.H. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1954), p. 19. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

## Chapter Three

1

Thomas Nashe, The Unfortunate Traveller, ed. J.B. Steane (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1985), p. 30.

2

Terry Lovell, Consuming Fiction (London: Verso, 1987), p. 43. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

3

In his Introduction to A Journal of the Plague Year Anthony Burgess notes that because Defoe's business was in "ruins" and his "wife and seven children near starvation" (p. 11) he went to work for Robert Harley from 1704 - 1713. And, noting that in the spring of 1719 Robinson Crusoe went into four editions, that: "Defoe was making money again" (p. 14), all of which suggests an erratic economic career.

4

M.P. Conant, The Oriental Tale in England in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1966), p. 14.

5

Laura A. Curtiss, The Elusive Daniel Defoe (London: Vision Press Limited, 1984), p. 12. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

6

David Blewett, Defoe's Art of Fiction (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), p. 11. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

7

L.J. Davis, Factual Fictions (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 157-58. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the essay.

## Chapter Four

1

Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1983), p. 97.

2

The Noble Savage is used either to satirize European pretension, that is, it is an ironic usage; or, as used by Rousseau, it is a romantic image of natural man (White, p. 191).

3

Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p.

4

Mary K. DeShazer, Inspiring Women (New York: Pergamon Press, 1986), p. 14-17.

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