

Problematizing Speech in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986)

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ABSTRACT. Whereas speech has always been considered in Western thought to be superior to writing since the former is nearer to originating thought, writing has been thought to be a contaminated form of speech because of its mediating and impure factors. However, the presence and originality of speech are subverted by interpretation, especially when it is put to writing. The speech-writing dichotomy applied to J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) reveals the ambiguous relationship between the female narrator's speech and the male writer's attempt to interpret her story artistically.

Key words: *Foe*, interpretation, speech, subversion, writing.

RESUMO. Problematizando a fala no romance *Foe*, de J. M. Coetzee. Enquanto a fala sempre foi considerada na filosofia ocidental como superior à escrita devido à posição da primeira junto à originalidade do pensamento, a escrita é ligada a uma forma de fala contaminada por causa de seus fatores mediatos e impuros. A presença e a originalidade da fala são subvertidas pela interpretação do discurso, especialmente quando este é transformado em escrita. A dicotomia fala-escrita aplicada ao romance *Foe*, de J.M. Coetzee, revela o relacionamento ambíguo entre a fala da narradora Susan e a tentativa do escritor Foe para interpretar artisticamente sua narrativa.

Palavras-chave: escrita, fala, *Foe*, interpretação, subversão.

In an interview with Coetzee on *Foe* and other novels Joanna Scott states "You construct an intricate frame around Susan's voice in the novel [*Foe*]. Most of the time she doesn't speak directly. She is quoted by Foe. I wonder what thoughts you have in retrospect about the various shades of her voice" (Scott, 1997). The problem of voice implying speech and silence is crucial in *Foe* and the author admits "lots of nesting quote marks, voices within voices" in the same interview. *Foe* is also filled with silences (Friday's), truncated speech (Cruso's), conjectures of possible speeches, interpretation of signs without voices, attempt at writing a story. To whom do the various stories belong? To Cruso? To Susan, the story teller? To Foe, the intended writer? Is silence as potent as language? Is there any such thing as historical truth, especially when one deals with a novel? In the case of *Foe* these questions are important since Cruso had died on the voyage home, Friday's tongue had been cut out, and Susan inescapably appropriates their stories just as the writer Foe tries to manipulate hers. Who speaks in *Foe*? What are the chief voices and how are they represented? Is there a struggle or conflict of voices?

How are voices imbricated on one another? What effects do voices and different speeches have on the development of the novel?

The aim of this research work is to analyze speech in J.M. Coetzee's novel *Foe* (1986) with regard to Susan Barton, the female narrator, in her attempt to transmit the story to posterity, and to the writer Foe's attempt at manipulating Susan's story by trying to write it down.

Speech and Writing

After Derrida's coining of the word 'logocentrism' in his trilogy *Writing and Difference*, *Of Grammatology* and *Speech and Phenomena* it has become clear how Western philosophy underscores binary terminology, especially in its emphasis on speech versus writing. In Western thought the pair is hierarchically structured with the first term inherently superior to the second. Speech has a connotation of immediacy, identity and presence; writing is deferment, difference and absence. If writing is secondary, immediacy of speech is an illusion because many terms associated to writing enter a discussion intended to privilege speech.

Socrates tells Phaedrus that teaching must take place orally rather than in writing. The terminology he uses is writing terminology since, he says, such truths are inscribed in the soul. Derrida (1981:149) remarks that it is strange “that the so-called living discourse should suddenly be described by a metaphor borrowed from the order of the very thing one is trying to exclude from it, the order of the simulacrum”. When dealing with the ambiguity of the words φάρμακον (poison) and φάρμακος (cure), Plato calls writing by the former and narrates the story of Thamus. The mythical story is about the Egyptian king Thamus and the god Thoth, the inventor of Geometry, Mathematics, Astronomy and Writing. Thoth offers writing as a gift to king Thamus but the latter refuses after considering its advantages and disadvantages. Thamus considers that writing is a dangerous gift because it substitutes mere inscription or alien, arbitrary and lifeless signs for the authentic living presence of speech. It may be a cultural development, he argues, since mankind may build a documentary archive, a memory beyond the oral tradition. This improvement, however, is rife with danger: man’s real powers of memory will rapidly decline since he doesn’t need to remember anything. He can simply look things up on demand! Teacher’s instructions will be rendered useless (Derrida, 1981:102) and the teacher’s authority through which authentic truth passes from one generation to another will be broken. Derrida (1981:135) thus distinguishes between knowledge as *memory* and non-knowledge as *rememoration*. One good type of memory is ἀναμνησις (unforgetting), a recollection of spiritual truths which the psyche has forgotten in its embodiment or confinement of the senses. Thoughts may be summoned to mind through wise teaching. The bad kind of memory is that which substitutes mnemonic devices for genuine, living wisdom, or rather, it simulates knowledge by a crafty resort, the shortcut remedy of writing.

Judaeo-Christian thought dealing with God’s creative word is an example of the above since the power of the λογος is to manifest itself directly in thought-made-deed. Written language is devalued in contrast to the authentic and spontaneous nature of speech. “If a speech could be genuinely present ... offered up in person in its truth, without the detours of a signifier foreign to it, if at the limit an undeferred logos were possible, it would not seduce anyone” (Derrida, 1981:71).

Writing is both *poison* and *cure*: on one hand, it is a threat to the living presence of authentic or spoken language; on the other hand, it is an indispensable

means for anyone who wants to record, transmit or somehow commemorate that presence. There is a *good* writing, engraved in the soul through the living remembrance of truths now revealed by the exercise of philosophical wisdom. There is the other *bad* writing that must always corrupt or pervert such wisdom, since it can only exist in the debased form of inscriptions, material marks, the dead letter of a mere supplement to speech.

Reading for Derrida involves taking seriously the elements that a standard reading disregards and overlooks. He sees a signifying force in the gaps, margins, figures, echoes, digressions, discontinuities of a text. When one writes, one writes more than one thinks (Selden, 1988:143). Logocentric logic has been coded as male; the other logic of ambiguity, silence, figuration and indirection is often coded as female (Jardine, 1985). A criticism of logocentrism causes a critique of phallogentrism. Hélène Cixous (1976) and Luce Irigaray try to find the relationship between *writing* and *the body*, or rather, the specificity of female biological and ideological difference; Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) try to find gender implications of the relationship between *writing* and *silence*. Adrienne Rich (1979) attempts to read the suppressed, distorted or disguised messages that women’s writing has encoded. Further, this applies to writings of Western male authorities that encoded the silence, denigration or idealization of the ‘other’. Said (1978) has shown that the Oriental is projected as the ‘other’ of the European. This brought about a rationale for oppression and exploitation in the European within the very discourse of modernism.

Western patriarchal culture has always privileged the primacy, immediacy and ideality of speech over the distance and materiality of writing. However, such a privilege has always been ambiguous. The privilege of writing has always been operative in colonial discourse since European culture has always seen its own form of literacy as a sign of superiority. Derrida claims that writing has been ‘repressed’ by the dominant culture of Western tradition. Writing can always pass into the hands of the ‘other’. The other can always learn to read the mechanism of his or her own repression. The desire to repress writing is a desire to repress the fact of the repression of the ‘other’.

The Voice of the Narrator

The narrator of *Foe* is Susan Barton, an adventurer in the style of Defoe’s other adventurer Roxana (Spivak, 1991:157), whose challenge to the hegemony of male consciousness in the Robinson

myth is constantly deliberate. Searching her long-lost daughter, Susan is shipwrecked on a desert island, saved by a tongue-less black man (Friday) and a European male dressed in monkey skins (Cruso). When they are rescued and she returns to England, Susan is determined to write and sell her memoirs titled with the pompous and sonorous wording "The Female Castaway. Being a True Account of a Year Spent on a Desert Island. With Many Strange Circumstances Never Hitherto Related" (Coetzee, 1987:67). She looks for and finally finds the hack writer Foe who is to transform her eyewitness account into readable fiction. The memory of things past will be the chronicle to be used and which, in turn, becomes the 'real' and 'historical' material from which the novel *Foe* is generated.

The struggle between telling by Susan Barton and writing by Foe is crucial to the understanding of the novel. The writer Foe suggests modifications in Susan's 'historical account': changes in the plot with the island story as a subplot of Susan Barton's general story of her search for her daughter. Even Cruso's story would be altered to suit readers (121). Barton fights a battle for self-determination to free herself from a male projection of what he thinks she should be. She wants to define herself in the way she deems suitable. "I am not a story, Mr Foe. I may impress you as a story because I began my account of myself without preamble, slipping overboard into the water and striking out for the shore. But my life did not begin in the waves ... I chose not to tell it [my adventures in Brazil] because to no one, not even to you, do I owe proof that I am a substantial being with a substantial history in the world. I chose rather to tell of the island, of myself and Cruso and Friday" (131). The struggle between the male and the female story tellers is not easy to win. Barton's position is extremely wary because she has already compromised on gender roles by adopting a masculine identity: on the ship and in England she claims to be Cruso's wife (45) to gain control of Cruso's affairs; she wants to be the 'father' of her narrative. "I am intended not to be the mother of my story, but to beget it" (126).

In *Foe* Susan has to cope with three narratives: Cruso's story, Susan Barton's story and Friday's story. With regard to the first narrative, Susan knows that it is an opaque fragment, hiding more than it reveals. This is due to the fact that sometimes Cruso is unable to distinguish truth from fantasy (12) and, to make matters worse, there is in the way his impairing philosophical attitude: "Nothing I have forgotten is worth the remembering" (17). In the

end Susan remains ignorant of Cruso's past and the circumstances of his arrival on the island. Nothing is disclosed from his memory. With regard to her own story, Barton resents Foe's attempt to take her out of the island's story. She reacts against the formation of a past and a story of loss and recovery of her daughter, as Foe has proposed. On the other hand, Barton's ambition to be rich through a strict truthful account of the story is full of holes. Foe remarks that Barton's island story "is like a loaf of bread. It will keep us alive, certainly, if we are starved for reading; but who will prefer it when there are tastier confections and pastries to be had" (117). Further, Friday's story is another mystery: "a hole in the narrative" (121). There is no access to the life and meaning of the tongue-less African: silence and emptiness bring forth Susan's despair: "In the beginning I would tell you the story of the island and, being done with that, return to my former life. But now all my life grows to be story and there is nothing of my own left to me" (133). The text is, nevertheless, rife with intriguing clues, or rather, symbolic acts if one would dive and enter Friday's symbolic sphere: petals (32), dances (92), rows of feet (147), dozens of the letter 'o' (152); sounds from his mouth (154) and breath (157).

It seems to be a leitmotif in Coetzee's novels that his narrators, and Susan is not an exception, are highly and purposely problematized. Attwell (1993), Clowes (1995), Jolly (1995) agree that in *Foe* Coetzee develops the problem of the narrator who commands discourse but proves to be inadequate to the subject at hand. Susan Barton is incapable of narrating the story of Friday in Coetzee's retelling of Defoe's novel of colonial origin. Barton constitutes a strange narrator because of her obvious constrictions and limitations. This reflects Coetzee's own position as a white male writer in South Africa. There seems to be a parallelism between Memmi's figure of the "colonizer who refuses" and the phenomenon of an academic elite that entertains subversive ambitions but is disaffected and disempowered (Watson, 1986).

Writer Foe tries to colonize Barton's narrative; likewise, Coetzee reflects on the colonization of the African novel by European parameters.

Why should a novelist, myself, be speaking here ... in terms of enmity with the discourse of history? Because ... in South Africa the colonization of the novel by the discourse of history is proceeding with alarming rapidity. I speak, therefore – to use a figure – as a member of a tribe threatened with colonization, a tribe some of whose members have been only too happy, as if their right, to embrace modernity, to relinquish their bows and arrows and their huts in the wilds and move in under the specious roof of the great

historical myths. ... I am pointing out that there is a battlefield, hard though that may be to believe. I am trying to trace some of the lines of force on that battlefield (Coetzee, 1987b:2).

Contrary to his earlier assault on colonialism, Coetzee's strategy is to present the faults of white South African authorship (Clayton, 1994). This fact and the narrative strategy to give an open mindedness to his fiction create a sense of continuity beyond the novel's last page and leave the end of the story in the reader's hand (Harrison, 1995). This may be corroborated by the book title *Foe* and the fictional author's name Foe as a metonymy of 'enmity' between the white writer and the native text and between the different readings of the text.

Susan, the Elided Female

The character Susan Barton doesn't appear in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), as actually no other woman does. Although Friday may be still seen to have been invested with a "feminine" role (stereotyped by a domesticated, passive, grateful, simple and devoted male), Crusoe's patriarchal environment is achieved through the Bildungsroman narrative in his progressive mastery over every one and everything (*his life, his island, his manservant, his sovereignty over other men*) without the intermission of any female. A blank or gap exists in the past and constitutes the postlapsarian situation of the female, or rather, the male plot to elide any subversive challenging equality in his domain. "The characters of the past have no value as explanation except insofar as they coincide with the characters of the future and the present" writes Levi-Strauss (Clement, 1986:7). This lack of community link and the female dependence on patriarchy are explained by Susan when she says: "What you know of your parentage comes to you in the form of stories, and the stories have but a single source" (91). Female history is thus "a book of myths in which our names do not appear" (Rich, 1973:24). In the battle for mastery that ensues, Susan conceives an alternative for woman's elision by assaulting patriarchy and overturning its corpus through speech. Speech is perhaps the least desire that Crusoe and Friday have to discuss reality. "The dark mass of the wreck is flecked here and there with white. It is huge, greater than the leviathan: a hulk shorn of masts, split across the middle, naked on all sides with sand" (156). It is the last remnant of history and memory to which both men have little desire to return to. No discourse is available to tell the reader the pre-wreck phase. Although Susan tries to elicit something from

Crusoe about it, the gap remains and the shipwreck will not tell its story and that of its crew. With regard to Crusoe's past, there is no *anamnesis* or unforgetting. Crusoe's deliberate silence and memory block completely hinder Susan's telling.

Susan enters into her own narrative when she is placed on a raft with her dead captain after the sailors' mutiny on board. From this point Susan's memory produces the chronicle of the island. It is presented in the first part of *Foe* between double inverted commas. In the speech narrative she leaves heavy marks and traces of the female within it, together with specific shades of real ruptures with patriarchy. She easily tells of patriarchy in England, in Brazil and on the ship as the female's economy from which she only escapes when her captain is killed and a spike pierces his eye. Temporarily she is free from the sailors' eyes, the captain's eye that gazed and othered Susan constantly. Seemingly, Susan has a new vision of the prelapsarian world. "There is destiny no more than there is nature or essence as such. Rather, there are living structures that are caught and sometimes rigidly set within historical and cultural limits so mixed up with the scene of History that for a long time it has been impossible (and it is still very difficult) to think or even imagine an 'elsewhere'" (Cixous, 1986:83). This trace of liberty is manifested in Susan's description of her alternative way as "like a flower of the sea" (5).

Freedom, however, is not long lasting and on her arrival on the island she immediately encounters patriarchy once more in the presence of Crusoe and Friday. The inscription of patriarchy transforms the 'flower' and subjects it once more by 'a long black-tipped thorn' that pierces Susan's foot (6). This phallic symbol hinders her from walking unaided and she is hoisted over Friday's back in a 'strange backwards embrace' (6) and given over to the master of the island, Crusoe. As from this moment her discourse boils down to 'haranguing interviews' with Crusoe, especially with regard to his restrictions in letting her roam the island. "While you live under my roof you will do as I instruct" (20), he menaces. Susan's subjective identification is precise: " 'I am on your island, Mr Crusoe, not by choice but by ill luck', I replied, standing up (and I was nearly as tall as he). 'I am a castaway, not a prisoner. If I had shoes, or if you would give me the means to make shoes, I would not need to steal about like a thief'" (20). She perceives that Crusoe is not interested in providing them (25) and he is determined to "brook no change on his island" (27) since "he had come to be persuaded he knew all there was to know about the

world ... [and] his heart was set on remaining to his dying day king of his tiny realm" (13-14). Consequently, there is no place for the female or, if there is a place, it will be in the hearth. This is proved when Susan becomes aware that Cruso's description of dangers on the island has been based on myths (26) so that her boundaries and her strict binding to domestic activities could be defined. Furthermore, laws are the laws of patriarchy, self-evident and no woman is allowed to question some or introduce others. Strange as it may seem, patriarchy is so "natural", "straight forward", "axiomatic" and "indisputable" on the island and elsewhere that laws are unnecessary (36).

Contrary to the apathetic Cruso, the castaway's most earnest desire is to escape. "It burns in me night and day, I can think of nothing else" (36). Susan's reaction is twofold, manifested through signs. First, she discovers a "private retreat" or rather, "a hollow in the rocks where I would lie sheltered from the wind and gaze out to sea ... the one place reserved for me on an island owned by another" (26). The other is a retreat into her inner self, away from the turmoil of the constant wind. "I made a cap with flap to tie over my ears; I wore this, and sometimes closed my ears with plugs too, to shut out the sound of the wind" (35). Perhaps this is what Clement defines as a refuge from patriarchy where the female dedicates herself to "reminiscences" (Clement, 1986:5) or "metaphysical alienation" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979:xvi). It is an imaginary zone where the female creates her world of desire during periods of exclusion. This world of desire looms in Susan's mind from her past and focuses on the free women of Bahia she had seen in her adventures. "In the cool of the evening the free women of Bahia don their finest clothes, put hoops of gold about their necks and golden bracelets on their arms and ornaments of gold in their hair, and walk the street ... The most handsome are the women of colour, or *mulatas* as they are called" (115).

Susan, the only person (Cruso is raving and Friday has to be captured) to accept rescue willingly, rises to subjectivity, power and self-determination on the HMS Hobart. Whereas Cruso is the fading male, Susan becomes the emerging female. The diaryless Cruso, the owner of an island with no monuments celebrating his stay, no seeds, merely exhibiting barren terraces, cedes without comments 'his island' and, consequently, his story. At his death Susan remarks, "It is I who have the disposal of all that Cruso leaves behind, which is the story of his island" (45). Susan takes upon herself the task of

appropriating Cruso's story and transmitting it to the outside world. It is the captain of the ship that encourages her to narrate 'her story'.

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

Soon she is aware that as a woman, she is inexperienced in the language of narrative control and perceives that even her telling will be limited by 'natural' phallogocentric discourse. Actually Susan has access only to this type of discourse which may be limited and limiting. If she cannot raise herself above male discourse and do the narrative herself, the trusting of her narrative to a male writer is likewise dangerous and detrimental to her and to her story. Further, she has little confidence in her own discourse since a female literary corpus is lacking and a tradition of female writers versed in the female 'language' is likewise non-existent. She may tell a simple tale to while the time but the characteristic features of the male hack author, public tastes, booksellers' demands for profit and, most of all, the art which needn't be truthful, she doesn't have. On the other hand, since she insists on being called Mrs. Cruso and not Susan Barton anymore, she seems to forfeit an independent cultural space. This is worsened by a sense of self since she thinks she can be a 'writer' only because and by means of the male author Foe. Memory is her greatest ally as the island, Cruso and Friday begin to be shaped and reshaped in her recollections. "All I have is my sandals. When I reflect on my story I seem to exist only as the one who came, the one who witnessed, the one who longed to be alone: a being without substance, a ghost beside the true body of Cruso. Is that the fate of all storytellers?" (51) This turmoil boils down to the fact that women necessarily either cannot think or can think in a male way. This is Susan's greatest conflict; otherwise she has to be relegated to a

theoretical, political, silent subtext of the novel. Despairingly she exclaims to the male writer, owner of the art of the narrative: "Return to me the substance [art] I have lost, Mr Foe: That is my entreaty. For though my story gives the truth, it does not give the substance [art] of the truth ... To tell the truth in all its substance you just have ... at your fingertips the words with which to capture the vision before it fades. I have none of these, while you have all' (51-52).

The Ambiguity of Speech

Contrary to what she states, actually Susan has the narrative art and the ability to put *her story* in writing. Proof of this is the first part of the book which consists of her complete narrative of her experience on the island, the epistolary collection of her non-communication with the writer Foe (second part) and the highly imaginative narrative dated 'April 21st' (51-52). Although restrained by patriarchy and incapable of completely escaping from male discourse, Barton's tale is legitimate and valid. "If we want to start something, we must ignore that our starting point is shaky. If we want something done, we must ignore that the end will be inconclusive" (Spivak, 1991:158). The fact that Susan moves into Foe's house, driven by the compelling need to express herself, confirms the possibility that the presumably inaccessible mode of expression is not entirely closed to her and that there is a possibility to write 'her story'.

I have your table to sit at, your window to gaze through. I write with your pen on your paper, and when the sheets are completed they go into your chest. So your life continues to be lived, though you are gone... your pen, your ink, I know, but somehow your pen becomes mine while I write with it, as though growing out of my hand. (65-67)

In this process she realizes how narrative is created: she may write and produce a series of events. They may be incomplete since there are gaps in her knowledge (the matter of Friday's tongue, for instance) (67) and Friday's story, or rather, the story of the tongueless and the voiceless is in inexperienced hands. "I don't know how these matters can be written of in a book unless they are covered up again in figures" (120). She realizes that language is either not flexible to bear a woman's narrative, or else it is simply not tailored for the purpose.

The writer Foe's turn comes in handy since he tries to put Susan's tale within a proper rigid structure.

We therefore have five parts in all: the loss of the daughter; the quest for the daughter in Brazil; the abandonment of the quest, and the adventure of the island; assumption of the quest by the daughter; and reunion of the daughter with the mother. It is thus that we make up a book: loss, then quest, then recovery; beginning, then middle, then end. As to novelty, this is lent by the island episode – which is properly the second part of the middle – and by the reversal in which the daughter takes up the quest abandoned by her mother. (117)

Actually, writing is a 'poison' and exemplifies the *différance* conceived by Derrida because of the deviation present between speech and writing. The Aristotelian and formally male straight jacket takes away all Susan's joy and makes her 'heavy-limbed' (117). Evidently she disagrees because male rigidity has considered the story of the island as a mere episode (she brushes away Foe's opinion that "the island is not a story in itself", 117) and relegated into a deeper silence Friday's untold story (she insists that "the true story will not be heard till by art we have found a means of giving voice to Friday", 118). Susan insists that the story of the island should be her story even though it has been told in several voices and to several hearers: Susan to Crusoe; Crusoe to Susan, in fragments and frequently in a contradictory manner; Susan to Foe; Foe to Susan in rejected variations; Friday's narrative or rather, "a puzzle or a hole in the narrative" (121).

At this stage Susan is becoming aware of the male trick and perceives how the male writer Foe treats the woman: for him Susan and her telling are next to nothing. In a long speech she insists on the original and 'truthful' plot of her story:

It commences with my being cast away there and concluded with the death of Crusoe and the return of Friday and myself to England, full of new hope. Within this larger story are inset the stories of how I came to be marooned (told by myself to Crusoe) and of Crusoe's shipwreck and early years on the island (told by Crusoe to myself), as well as the story of Friday ... I picture it as a buttonhole, carefully cross-stitched around, but empty, waiting for the button (121).

Committed to an alleged 'historical truth', she rejects the "cannibals and pirates" Foe proposes (121). Adamant to her original idea, Susan sticks to the notions of the essentials and accidents of her plot and rejects Foe's manipulations. Through such awareness, Susan is thus gaining strength in spite of the pressure the male Foe exercises on her and his endeavor to become the writer of Susan's tale and thus turn out to be "*Daniel Defoe, Author*" (155).

In Susan's case there seem to be three options so that she may appropriate herself of her own story

and reject male intrusion in her narrative: imitate the male voice, talk back or write through metaphor/metonymy (Bhabha, 1984). Susan chooses a compromise. Even though materially the writer Foe will finally give "art" to the narrative, she tries to "father" her own text.

So I coaxed him till he lay beneath me. Then I drew my shift and straddled him ... '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. 'A bracing ride,' said Foe afterwards - 'My very bones are jolted, I must catch my breath before we resume.' 'It is always a hard ride when the Muse pays her visits,' I replied - 'She must do whatever lies in her power to father her offspring' (140).

On moving to Foe's bedroom and straddling him Susan is parodying male discourse and inhabiting it with the aggressive purpose of showing how poorly it fits. Susan's narrative cannot "destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim except by inhabiting those structures" (Derrida, 1976:24). Furthermore, Susan's story, lying as it is in the realm of alienness of masculine literary authority, creates an anxiety of authorship. Within the male and patriarchal tradition her story will not be possible, marginalization is its fate and as a writer she will not have the strength to be an author in her own right. Her compromise to a marriage-type relationship boils down to the following: Susan will contribute with her intentions and basic facts; Foe will contribute with the practical patriarchal, albeit mediocre, language: "I was not intended to be the mother of my story, but to beget it" (126). This does not seem to be an entirely defeatist attitude. In fact, Susan is aggressive and active in her role as a muse (126) and asserts, "I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire" (131). In this cultural table-turning she dares to recognize Foe as her "mistress" and her "wife" and Susan's straddling of Foe may be interpreted as a firm attempt to reinscribe the part of woman in the creative process. (152).

Speech or telling tales is Susan's essence. In her memory there is the tale of the island which, in her demise or possible carelessness, would be lost. She carries the central theme as a task since she had been appalled by Cruso's lack of journal. Cruso's creative imagination is so languid that Cruso's recollections are practically worthless and sometimes false because of his reality-fantasy melange. On the other hand, Foe's or the male's almost instinctive feature to place a woman's narrative within his own limiting and stratified plot causes a reaction so that she, and

only she, would continue to be the owner of the tale. Verisimilitude is "the truth that makes your story yours alone, that sets you apart from the old mariner by the fireside spinning yarns of sea-monsters and mermaids, resides in a thousand touches which today may seem of no importance ... Touches like these will one day persuade your countrymen that it is all true, every word..." (18).

The supremacy of speech may be marred by writing since the writing is not hers but the male's. Susan's ambiguity lies in the writing which threatens her telling both in its manner and in its alleged truthfulness. The female's memory (knowledge) becomes remembrance (non-knowledge) in the male's hand since the male writer's art develops into a crafty strategy and knowledge simulation. On the other hand, Susan's speech is typically post-colonial and feminine because it tries to fill the gaps in Cruso's biography and reconstruct Friday's pre-island life. The gaps and silences of speech will make writing a poison causing the difference, since they would be substituted by fantasies and other wily devices. Nevertheless, the final product is the recuperation of the female voice which willy-nilly is listened to without any interference, losses or manipulations. The abrogation of the male's superior prerogative and the appropriation of speech become the first step for the establishing of the female voice as precursor of female writing.

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