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書寫失語主體：柯慈《敵人》中的賤斥與他者

Writing Aphasics, Encountering *Foe*: Between the Semiotic and the Symbolic

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To My Mother
獻給我的母親

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My heartfelt gratitude goes out to:

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My family and friends
and
My significant other, ichang.

Thank you for your unfailing support.

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國立政治大學英國語文學系碩士班

碩士論文提要

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論文提要：

本論文以柯慈 (J. M. Coetzee) 的小說《敵人》(*Foe* 1987) 作為分析文本，討論書中敘事者蘇珊．巴頓 (Susan Barton) 的書寫過程。《敵人》是部以丹尼爾．狄佛 (Daniel Defoe) 所著的《魯賓遜漂流記》(*Robinson Crusoe* 1719) 為藍本的後設小說。書中透過蘇珊多種形式的書寫描繪其漂流至荒島與重回英國間的經歷。有別於多數評論著重於書中的後設結構，本論文將討論重點置於「失語主體」與其「敵人」，探討蘇珊的書寫以及她與不同角色相遇所呈現的生命情境。論文中角色們的失語症狀是其各自在語言中所遭遇困境之隱喻，而書名所暗示的「敵人」則通指蘇珊在書寫過程中所遇見、相對於「我」之外的存有。

本論文架構主要透過語言與主體位置間的相互關係串聯。第二章「失語主體」 (Aphasic Subjects) 引用米哈伊爾．巴赫汀 (Mikhail Bakhtin) 對於主體「挪用」(appropriation) 語言的討論，進而分析書中角色「星期五」 (Friday) 的行為表述。雅各．拉岡 (Jacque Lacan) 對於分裂主體 (the barred Subject) 與大他者 (the Other) 的功能在第三章「書信與他者」(Epistles and the Other) 中成為閱讀蘇珊的書寫形式與其寫作慾望的的重要依據。第四章「面對賤斥體」(In the Face

of the Abject) 則透過茱莉亞・克莉斯蒂娃 (Julia Kristeva) 的「賤斥」 (abjection) 與「符號界」 (the Semiotic) 理論，將蘇珊與星期五之間不尋常的關聯視為主體與賤斥體的牽引關係，並將書中最後兩部分詮釋為象徵語言與符號傾向 (semiotic disposition)的對應關係。

Abstract

The present thesis takes a close look at J. M. Coetzee's novel *Foe*, a metafictional retelling of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Given the critical interests already attributed to the intertextuality of the two works, the current project seeks not to reinforce the relationship between the two, but to focus on Coetzee's creation alone. The thesis, entitled "Writing Aphasics, Encountering *Foe*: Between the Semiotic and the Symbolic," addresses issues that concern the writing of the protagonist Susan Barton, together with the encounters throughout her literary journey. While the "aphasia" ascribed to all characters functions as a metaphor that unifies all types of speech impediments, the term "foe" refers to whoever stands counter to Susan on her way to deliverance.

The organization of the thesis follows a series of theoretical approaches centering on the relationship between language and subjectivity. Bakhtinian theory introduced in the second chapter concerns a subject and its language appropriation, providing an interpretation to Friday's unusual performances. Meanwhile, Lacanian treatise given in Chapter Three discusses a subject essentially split in its dealings with the language of the Other, proposing a reading to the transformation in Susan's narrative style and her unrelenting pursuit of the writer Mr. Foe. The fourth chapter then identifies Susan as a Kristevan deject, who finds her existence threatened in the face of Friday's abject existence. The subject-abject dyad in turn helps determine the symbiosis between the symbolic language and the semiotic disposition in the final two sections of *Foe*.

CHAPTER ONE

THE UNFATHOMABLE *FOE*

"Perhaps it is so that all languages are . . . foreign languages, alien to our animal being. But in a way that is, precisely, inarticulate, inarticulable."

Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year* 197

Introduction

With a self-reflexiveness characteristic of every metafictional creation, J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* exudes richness in both thematic establishment and metaphysical reflection. The involvement of two additional characters, Susan Barton and Mr. Foe, in the reimagination of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* displaces the master-slave dyad that dominates Defoe's work, thereby transcending what "a large earthenware pot"[1] denotes and turning it into a highly self-conscious narrative. The thematic inclination that pervades *Foe* is well summarized by the image shared between the opening and the concluding scenes, in which the narrator submerges into the sea: "With a sigh, making barely a splash, I slipped overboard" (5, 155). For the narrator-protagonist Susan Barton, the dive is to mark the beginning of her journey that sends her adrift to an island, where she meets Cruso and Friday, the two characters prototypical of the master and the slave in Defoe's work. Meanwhile, the unnamed

[1] According to Virginia Woolf, the earthen pot is the only theme in *Robinson Crusoe*, and it symbolizes the imperial and materialist stance of Defoe's tale.

narrator, whose act replicates Susan's, appears in the last section[2] and comes across something ungraspable for all the characters in their secular pursuits. Such an image, displayed at the junctures where each section unfurls, foreshadows the exploration for something other and unknown. The emphasis of such gesture would in part reflect the characters' later expeditions.

Foe's philosophical preoccupation with language and representation finds manifestations in its subjects' linguistic behavior, as each is faced with a complication that either obstructs or limits his/her command of sign and language. In fact, characters in *Foe* all suffer from a varying degree of aphasic symptoms[3]. While Friday's mysterious performances indicate the signifying system that underpins his outward muteness, Susan's central narrative simulates a philosophical quest for an answer to the characters' wretched situation. At the same time, Susan's fixation on the unresponsive addressee Mr. Foe and the mute slave Friday manifests the fundamental prerequisites for her position as a desiring subject. As a result, *Foe* calls for a reading that focuses on not merely the dynamics between the characters, but also the extent to which the narrative style reflects and corresponds to the subjects in question.

The present thesis focuses on two problematics crucial to the reading of J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, one being the aphasic manifestations seen respectively from Friday and Susan, while the other being the esoteric Section Four that serves as the end of the novel. Friday's muteness and the progression of his series of performances would be most fittingly accounted for by Mikhail Bakhtin's discourse on language appropriation. Whereas Jacques Lacan's theorization on the Other as language and

[2] In order to better distinguish the four segments that constitute Coetzee's *Foe* from the five chapters that build up this thesis, the former are referred here as sections (i.e., Section One to Four), whereas the latter remain to be addressed as chapters.

[3] For a more detailed definition of aphasia, see *Chapter Two: The Aphasic Subjects*.

object *a* would not only elucidate Susan's epistolary journey, but also indicate the last two sections as a double and alternative endings to Coetzee's *Foe*. Meanwhile, to what is irreducible to the self-other dyad that permeates through the tale, Julia Kristeva's assertion on the abject and the semiotic would eventually support a reading that would make sense of Susan's paradoxical relation with Friday. Ultimately, the subject-abject relation between the protagonist and her slave is to serve as a parallel to the last two sections, whose symbiosis designates the mutuality between the symbolic and the semiotic.

Foe and Literature Review

Composed of four sections, with each following a different form of narration from the narrator-protagonist, *Foe* tells the story of Susan Barton, who in her writing summons the writer Mr. Foe to be the remedy for her lack in the authorial voice.[4] The story begins at a point where Susan finds herself abandoned on a boat as a result of a ship mutiny shortly after the failed attempt to locate her missing daughter. Out of exhaustion and desperation, she takes a leap for life and is washed up onto an island that is uninhabited, except for her rescuers Friday and his master Cruso. Much unlike their more literary counterparts, Coetzee's Friday is dumb due to tongue mutilation, while Cruso is reluctant to keep a journal. Eager to have her story on the island documented, Susan assumes the role of an author. However, her way to deliverance is deterred by her fear of lacking in the writer's art. Susan's only hope, therefore, lies in

[4] Each of the four major characters in Coetzee's *Foe* faces a different issue that either impedes or denies his/her ability to express him/herself. Friday is deprived of the ability of speech because of his tongue mutilation; Susan cannot properly represent herself owing to a lack of belief in her own account; meanwhile, Cruso's refusal to document his experiences and his absorption in physical labor keeps him silent most of the time, and Foe's absence on the scene in the early half of the tale greatly diminishes his authorial influences in the greater part of the novel. As the story later demonstrates, for characters like Friday and Susan, this lack is to propel them to perform deeds that further disclose the workings of language and representation.

the writer Mr. Foe, whom she regards as capable of polishing her story.

As the first two sections introduce the cumulation of Susan's writings to the writer, the narrative style gradually develops and takes on different forms.[5] Composed of a series of notes intended for the eyes of the writer Foe, Section One documents the three characters' interactions on the island, where Susan witnesses curious acts performed by Friday. The first section concludes with their rescue and Cruso's death en route to England. In the following section, while Susan and Friday wait at Mr. Foe's adobe for the writer's return, the narrative form gradually moves from journal entries to letters. Meanwhile, Friday exhibits another self-absorbing act, during which he dances and plays the flute while dressed in Mr. Foe's robe. The series of performances from the otherwise dumb character arouse in Susan a curiosity for further exploration; in no time, Friday's secrecy becomes the one mystery she seeks to solve. When the protagonist finally meets Mr. Foe in Section Three, her writing assumes a narrative style similar to a novel. The discussion over writing and storytelling between Susan and Mr. Foe makes the section a contemplation upon language and representation; meanwhile, it adds to the narrative a hitherto unseen self-reflexivity that helps examine the symbolic acts thus performed by such aphasic subjects as Friday and Susan. Section Three ends with Susan and Foe's joint consent to teach Friday how to write, in the hope of extracting stories from him. The final section sets itself apart from previous sections with the advance of an unknown narrator. In order to hear from Friday, the mystic narrator first explores the writer Foe's house, which is now in ruins, and hears from Friday the sound of the island. Then, with a plunge into the sea, the narrator again finds Friday in the wreckage of a sunken boat, and from his mouth flows out a stream, washing over the island and then

[5] The significance of Susan's transforming narrative, changing from notes (Section One) to diary entries, to epistles (Section Two) and finally to realistic narrative (Section Three), will be further discussed in *Chapter Three: Epistles and the Other*.

the earth. Sharing the same opening line, the last two sections offer alternative endings to Coetzee's *Foe*. Insomuch as they suggest a double choice between one and the other, the two sections might as well be treated as a collective unit that draws attention to the linguistic phenomenon between the symbolic and the semiotic.

Rich in style and complex in thematic exploration, Coetzee's *Foe* continues to evoke discussions over readings that range from historical, (post)colonial, post-structural to feminist perspectives. Normally the most commonly debated issue about Coetzee is whether the work is a direct comment on South Africa or an allegory for the more general human conditions. However, *Foe* evokes little historical reading as it is short of direct reference to South Africa. In fact, safe for the colonial feature bequeathed by Defoe's literary model, *Foe* contains few elements that are translucently African. Therefore, in the attempt to reduce *Foe* to "an allegory of contemporary Africa" (Post 145), the critic's only strategy is to read every relation within the novel as a metaphor for a colonial binary, forcing through argumentation and consequently making the essay unconvincing.[6] Between representational means and truth lies an unbridgeable gap that makes every rendition arbitrary[7]; thus, any discourse that declares itself to be true is problematic. On the other hand, as a work

[6] Naturally, the most obvious literary evidence proposed by Robert M. Post in his reading is to take Cruso as the oppressor, and Friday the oppressed. However, when he goes so far as to take Susan as "Mother Africa"(145) and Cruso's fever as the symbol for "the diseased South African government" (146), it becomes obvious that his opinion over South African Politics is greater than his interest in Coetzee's work, and that he means only to impose his political insight on the work, regardless of what the text might be otherwise. On the other hand, according to Marni Gauthier's contention, Coetzee's tale exposes "the ironic complexity of the relationship between history, fiction, and language on the one hand, and truth on the other" (4). As a result, the attempt to contain *Foe* within political reading without acknowledging the openness of the text sets itself onto a position that Coetzee's text fundamentally challenges. Post's case thus points out the potential problematic of all historical and allegorical readings.

[7] In an essay entitled "Foes: Plato, Derrida, and Coetzee: Rereading J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*," Frank England explores the ways in which *Foe* "resounds with two philosophical precursors" (5). By referring to Derrida's essay "La dissemination de Platon," the author identifies a discursive lineage that all three thinkers share in the discussion between speech, language and the gap between representation and the represented.

preoccupied with the writing of a female castaway, *Foe* calls for readings that closely follow the concept of *écriture feminine*.[8] Meanwhile, Coetzee's work is read as "feminist revisionism, a critique of the male appropriation of women's writing" (Wright 21), an "explicit vampirisation of the white woman's story and body by male appropriating forces" (22). In "Against Allegory," Derek Attridge warns against the fallacy that an allegorical reading might impart. According to him, such reading puts limit to Coetzee's deliberate polyphonic construction and subjects the text to the manipulation of a given hegemonic discourse. Instead of forcing one's opinion on Coetzee's work, one should instead show the utmost respect for the possibilities opened up by the text. What this thesis intends to do, therefore, is to propose a reading palpable under juxtaposition with certain theoretical frameworks, and a larger part of this thesis aims to stress the openness that Coetzee's work displays.[9]

Characters in *Foe* respond differently to Susan's aspirations to write a story, and the way each reacts not only characterizes the attributes of the role's aphasic symptoms but also potentially discloses the mechanism underlying the subject's application of language and representation. Susan's sole objective in her literary journey is to find a means to tell the truth, but her desire is not, or cannot be, properly shared by all the other characters. In the blank spot other than Susan's writings and (non-)verbal acts, there lies a silence that permeates through the entire tale. The

[8] Peter E. Morgan, in an essay that parallels Hélène Cixous's work to Coetzee's, contends that both writers, in a gesture he terms "decolonization," aim to "free the territory of female consciousness from male authority" (82). For him, postcolonial mission and *écriture feminine* share the same objective, i.e., "the need for a similarly dramatic revision of history" (83). Morgan contends that *Foe* is written just under such a premise, and as Coetzee picks on one of the most conservative tales in its moral, political, and religious sense, he adds in that "elided female in Defoe's society"(84), making her "strong enough not only to assault the patriarchy but to overturn its corpus" (85).

[9] It turns out that Coetzee himself is not drawn to the binary reading that so many critics find interesting. In an interview conducted by Richard Begam, Coetzee states that he finds the type of readings that confine his work within race and gender stereotypes to be "meaningless" (424). According to him, to fall so easily into the division between male and female, white and black means to surrender to the anthropological discourse based on Western cognition.

silences, regarded as aphasic symptoms throughout the present thesis, are prescribed with various meanings that help interpret each character's position as symbolic subjects. To Friday's mutilation that makes him mute and unable to be understood through language, some critics attribute colonial violence,[10] while to Mr. Foe's insistence on changing the story for better public appeals, others regard as the intruding hegemony of phallocentrism.[11] Meanwhile, Cruso's unresponsiveness and his bouts of fever might have to do with what Harold Bloom describes as "a melancholy creeping out of psycho-literary frustration as the hegemony that engenders and maintains the [young man] is exposed" (qtd. by Morgan 88). On the other hand, from the existentialist perspective, Coetzee's Cruso "harbors no illusions about the overarching structures constituting the faith of his predecessor" (Dragunoiu 312). The faithless man is certain that "there is no salvation, no 'promised land'" (314), and his silence "suggests a bid for authenticity and self-determination by means of a . . . rejection of language" (317). Both readings propose that Cruso's disbelief in representation is what essentially holds him from committing to a written account of his own story. Contrarily, instead of seeing Coetzee's utilization of silence as a motif that accentuates his point, Parry suggests that "the potential critique of political oppression is diverted by the conjuring and endorsing of a non-verbal signifying system" (153). To signify what is originally cast out and jettisoned is in fact to submit it to renarrativization, which eventually reduces the critical strength of the text.

As Coetzee does not provide enough textual evidences to support a solid theorization, the attempt to identify the unnamed narrator who appears in the last

[10] Dana Dragunoiu maintains that "silence is usually taken to signify the oppression and objectification of the silent individual" (317); contrarily, Friday's silence could also indicate "his deliberate absence from the I-Thou, I-It objectifying process of language" (318).

[11] See both Wright's and Morgan's essays.

section can only be made through extrapolations. Section Four, when singled out and put into juxtaposition with the previous sections, serves either as a comment on, or as a supplement to, Susan's literary journey. For those who treat the voice of the text as Susan's, the narrator could be the same Susan who persists in "seeking a means to use Friday as an informant in order to fill the hole in her narrative" (Parry 157). Or, it is an embodiment of "[t]he flowering consciousness of Susan" (Morgan 93), a sexuality no longer tyrannized now that it is outside signification. Still, some other critics find it unnecessary to identify the unnamed narrator, as the narrator "dissolves all previously established authorities" (Macaskill and Colleran 451) with his/her entry into the text; as a result, what is found in the place not intended for words is an "unpresentable presence of the text's historical moment" (454). Meanwhile, the "wordless story" that comes out of Friday's mouth "emerges and devours the other narratives by displacing Susan/ Coetzee's quest for meaning" (Wright 23), so that Friday's body is left behind, demanding to be read in "its own right" (24). Beyond the world of language and signification, the narrator, now free, submerges into a place where everything retains its materiality.

Contribution of the Thesis

Even while the theme on language and representation is self-evident in the novel *Foe*, there remain other motifs that are obscure and demand critical readings. The objective of the present thesis is then to look into two of the relatively untouched issues, including the signifying behaviors seen respectively from Friday and Susan, and the last two sections' function as double and alternative endings to *Foe*. Through examining the aphasic characters' utilization of the signifying system, together with the way language is deployed in different styles and forms throughout the narrative,

this thesis seeks to disclose the rather obscure parts of Coetzee's tale.

To better systemize the discussion, the present thesis designates the characters' signifying impediments as aphasic symptoms characteristic of the linguistic subjects in *Foe*. However, rather than its pathological sense, the adoption of aphasia in the thesis is approached through a phenomenological/ metaphorical angle. Characters' loss in full linguistic commitment manifests itself in various forms throughout Coetzee's tale; as a result, the dumb slave Friday, the silent master Cruso, the dubious protagonist Susan and the absent writer Foe are all viewed as aphasic subjects. Through a closer examination of the characters' aphasic expressions, the thesis gives a major part of the discussion to the excavation of the significance latent in the subjects' common lack.

Despite all the critical attention given to the mutilated slave Friday and the narrator-protagonist Susan Barton, critics' attempt to rationalize the two characters' silences as well as what ensues the complication have often fallen short. In fact, Friday's performances and Susan's literary excursion follow a similar path of maturation that demands critical attention, one that surpasses what has already been given.[12] Certainly, there are more to Friday's mutilation and puzzling acts than his being a symbol for the silenced and the oppressed. While the progressive modification of Susan's writing, seen together with the last section, has been noted as Coetzee's design in delineating the development of Western literature[13], little is said about how the alteration in narrative style reflects Susan as a subject. As the thesis demonstrates, the performative acts showcased by Friday on the island prove that he

[12] This thesis intends to focus on two of the most enigmatic characters in *Foe*, i.e. Friday and Susan Barton. For an elaborate discussion of Cruso, see Morgan's and Dragunoiu's essays.

[13] Dick Penner, in the essay "*J. M. Coetzee's Foe: The Muse, the Abused, and the Colonial Dilemma*," contends that the section arrangement in *Foe* resembles the development of Western literature, one that begins with epic, moving on to epistolary novels, followed by realism and finally arrives at surrealism.

has been under the influence of a signifying system prior to his arrival on the island. Meanwhile, his gradual incorporation of Western methods in later performances uncovers the ways through which language and ideology are assimilated. Friday's expressions through mediums of Western signification divulge that any type of representation is infiltrated with the others' words. Also, his case foretells Susan's futile attempt at giving a true account of her story, for as each individual must express through the others' medium, it is unlikely that anyone should possesses a voice exclusively self-oriented. By way of following Susan's epistolary journey, the thesis argues that her transformative narrative emulates the signifying process of a sign system; moreover, her writing reveals the subject's multifaceted relation with the Other as language and desire. In fact, the subject's fundamental relation with the Other will not only elucidate the advance of her aphasic symptom, but also demystify the desire structure that propels her frenzy pursuit in the one-way epistolary journey.

Rather than treating the last section as an immediate comment on, or a rethinking of, the previous three segments, the thesis proposes a reading that takes the last two sections as a double that supplies Susan's literary endeavor with alternative endings. In fact, the final section can very well be seen as what is "Other" to Susan's writing in previous sections. As Susan's appeal to tell a truthful story dwindles by the end of Section Three, the ensuing section can only be told through the narrative of someone "Other." [14] More importantly, whereas Section Three inscribes Susan's words and Friday's performances onto the symbolic level, the last section stages the opposite by introducing an unspecified narrator onto the scene that is "not a place for words" (157), where poetic languages abound and things are referred to by their

[14] Paralleled with Susan's self-Other relation previously mentioned, the relation between Section Three and Section Four is here conceived as one and the Other. The juxtaposition of the two, as a result, illustrates the alterity of language. This reading will be further developed in *Chapter Four: In the Face of the Abject.*

materiality. Ultimately, through outlining the advance of a linguistic subject, Coetzee presents in *Foe* a tale that meditates on the essential correlation between the self, the Other, and the abject, while layering it with subjectivity, the symbolic, and the semiotic.

Theoretical Approaches

The theoretical adoption in the present thesis intends to approach the issue of language and representation at the core of Coetzee's metafictional work. The discourses from Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Lacan, and Julia Kristeva are incorporated in the hope of shedding lights on the more obscure parts in the novel. While each theorist provides a different perspective in his/her teachings, jointly, their discourses concern language and its effects upon subjectivity. As a unifying topic that connects the theories and the novel, the discussion of language is therefore crucial in the organization of this thesis. The chapter arrangement thus follows the theoretical trajectory that well illustrates the advancement of a language subject. Starting from Bakhtinian development of language appropriation in Chapter Two to Lacanian concept of the divided subject in Chapter Three, and then to Kristevan treatise on language and the semiotic in Chapter Four, the order accounts for the development of a linguistic subject in the reverse form, so that each discourse lays bare the language effect that commences the emergence of a language subject.

The examination of Bakhtin's proposition on language acquisition would provide a preliminary understanding of an individual's acquisition and utilization of language and signifying system. Meanwhile, Lacan's discourse on the Other as language and object *a* would extend beyond the utilitarian aspect of language and reveal its dividing and propelling effects upon the symbolic subject. The concepts of

the abject and the semiotic provided by Kristeva, on the other hand, would address what is jettisoned by the self-other dyad in Lacanian thinking and ascribe significance to the unfathomable. From the characterization of language usage to the analysis of one's symbolic acquisition, and finally to the development on the semiotic, the discourses from Bakhtin, Lacan and Kristeva exposes the workings that underpin the construction of a language subject. By layering the theoretical discourses with the problematics of Coetzee's *Foe*, this thesis seeks to come up with a coherent reading to some of the more perplexing aspects in *Foe*.

Bakhtin: Language Appropriation

At a first glance, Friday's muteness seems bewildering and his performances incidental, and little can be said about how his silences and curious acts are characteristic of him as a subject. However, by referencing Bakhtin's treatise on language appropriation[15], the earlier part of the thesis aims to examine his performances as signifying expressions that point to his signifying influences.

In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin contends that language "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other"(293), and it "becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, . . . adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention." According to Bakhtin, language does not come in neutral forms, and is always inevitably overflowed with others' intentions. To expropriate others' language for one's usage equals "forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents" (293), and is therefore a difficult and complicated process. Similarly, an individual's "ideological becoming" relies largely on the assimilation of

[15] The Bakhtinian subject who appropriates others' language in his/her own ideological becoming does not retain the agency that belongs to the Cartesian subject. Instead, based on Bakhtin's characterization of such language subject, the "I" functions more like an empty signifier, which is to be filled with other's language and ideology. He/She does not retain anything authentically his/hers, everything he/she "is" is indebted to the other's influences.

others' discourses, and the attachment of one's speech on the others' discourse is illustrated by the distinction between "internally persuasive discourse" and "externally authoritative discourse" (345). By reading Friday's behaviors in the first three sections as a symbolic representation of the Bakhtinian language appropriation, this thesis seeks to uncover the rationale behind Friday's puzzling behaviors. Chapter One thus proves that due to his muteness, the silent slave is able to denote through physical acts a symbolic subject's acquisition and utilization of the signifying system.

Lacan: the Self and the Other

While Susan's expressions in *Foe*, compared to Friday's, are more explicit and even self-explanatory, her ever-changing narrative style and her one-way fervor for the addressee remain indecipherable. With the adoption of Lacanian theory on the Other as language and object *a*, the present thesis seeks to address each specific issue in a systematic manner. In fact, Lacan's extensive discourse over the self and the Other would provide a perspective to Susan's primordial relation with language and the structure of desire.

Lacan first defines the subject as "essentially a positioning in relation to the Other" (Fink, xii)[16] in the 1950s. The Other, or the more aptly phrased big Other, is attributed to language and law, "hence [it] is inscribed in the order of the symbolic." Since *Foe* features largely Susan's dealings with language, and her objectives being the attainment of a legitimate account, a parallel between her writing and the Lacanian Other as language will be drawn to unveil the significance of the protagonist's writing excursion. As a result, Susan's transformative writing divulges not only the ossification of her narrative, but also her position as a split subject.

[16] Fink's summary of Lacanian thinking is only quoted here to provide a general outlook towards Lacan's more convoluted discourse and its possible implications. The application of Lacanian theory in later chapters, however, will be quoted directly from the translation of his various seminars.

Meanwhile, the subject's submission to the Other as language is followed by a second operation called "separation," when the early mother-child relation is disrupted by the interference of the Name-of-the-Father. The intervention of this paternal metaphor "bars the child's easy access to pleasurable contact with its mother, requiring it to pursue pleasure avenues more acceptable to the father figure and/or mOther" (Fink, 56). As a consequence, the mOther's desire becomes fundamentally indecipherable to the child, and is ascribed the name "object *a*." Like a trigger, object *a* evokes the subject's desire. The adoption of the Other as object *a* will not only explain Susan's unfailing desire in her one-way epistolary journey, but account for its abrupt end in Section Three. Explicit in her one-way epistolary journey, the narrator's unfailing desire towards Mr. Foe replicates the formula of a subject's endless pursuit for the desired object.

Kristeva: the Abject and the Semiotic

While Susan and Friday share a relationship surpassing the self-other dyad[17], the juxtaposition of the two end sections cannot be easily dismissed as mere alternatives. The introduction of Julia Kristeva's theory on the abject and the semiotic in the thesis would grant access to what the discussion over the symbolic does not cover.

Julia Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror*, describes the abject as "the jettisoned object . . . radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (2). It lies between the self and the other, and it "disturbs identity, system, order" (4). The abject evokes repulsion, forcing one to turn away. Certainly, the mute

[17] Susan and Friday's relationship surpasses one that is normally ascribed to the self-other correlation. While Susan regards Friday as part of her self which she cannot do away with, in more than one passage, she also acknowledges an undeniable distaste for his existence. A greater part of Chapter Four is then devoted to the reading of this curious connection between the protagonist and the silent slave.

Friday in *Foe* reminds of the Kristevan abject. The repulsion Susan experiences after learning about Friday's tongue mutilation, combined with her attachment to him, makes Friday an abject in the Kristevan sense. According to Kristeva, abjection in its nascent stage refers to the child's rejection of the mother prior to the entry into the symbolic. The repressed maternal that underlies the advancement of language threatens the authority of the symbolic, causing horror. Abject language, manifests through rhythm and music, is "[a]t the same time instinctual and maternal" (136); it challenges the authoritative position of language and its subject. Kristeva terms it the semiotic, as opposed to the symbolic, designating it with "heterogeneous[ness] to signification" (139). By analogy, Friday's semiotic gestures, manifest in the rhythmic twirls and his six-note tune, are found in opposition to the ongoing symbolization of Susan's narrative. Besides, the symbolic and semiotic dyad is also applicable to the unraveling of the symbiosis between the third section's symbolization and the poetic imagination that overflows in Section Four.

Organization

This thesis embarks on an expedition that looks into Coetzee's metafictional creation. Like the unknown narrator who, in each of the two stages, extracts from Friday's mouth accounts that are ever truer to his "voice," this thesis seeks to demystify the symbolic significance and the structural meaning that underlies *Foe*'s literary design. The organization of the five chapters thus follows a trajectory that simulates the narrator's dive and offers in each section a different aspect of language and representation.

Chapter One: The Unfathomable *Foe*

Chapter one begins with a portrayal of the imagery central to J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, followed by a sketch of critical responses so far attributed to this metafictional work. Of all the historical, (post)colonial, post-structural and even feminist readings reviewed in this chapter, little is said about the metamorphosis that the narrative form undergoes and how this change is reflective of the narrator's literary pursuit and her position as a linguistic subject. Also, the interpretations given to the end section often fall short of specifying its relation with Section Three, as the final two sections jointly provides a two-fold ending to Coetzee's literary arrangements. With brief introductory notes on Bakhtin's, Lacan's, and Kristeva's theories of language and subjectivity, Chapter One sets up the discursive framework for the present thesis.

Chapter Two: The Aphasic Subjects

Following a joint reading with Bakhtinian discourse on language acquisition, the second chapter of the thesis features an examination of the characters' command of language and signifying system, with specific emphasis on Friday and his later performances. An overall inspection of the characters and their operations of language identifies the symptoms of aphasia shared by all. Among all the aphasic subjects identified in this chapter, Friday most obviously stands out for his distinguishing (non-)feature. In fact, unlike Defoe's Friday, who quickly acquires the language of the West, the muteness prescribed to the slave in Coetzee's adaptation not only deters but also helps accentuate the process of expressing oneself through media that are new and other. The second chapter of this thesis therefore incorporates Bakhtin's theory on the individual's appropriation of language and ideological becoming, in the attempt to further systemize how, in Friday's case, signifying system is appropriated

and how, through its workings, he assimilates ideology. Ultimately, Friday's mutilation, as well as other characters' aphasia, foregrounds the position of subject in relation to language, providing *Foe* a central theme largely eluded in *Robinson Crusoe*.

Chapter Three: Epistles and the Other

Joined with Lacanian treatise on the Other, chapter three centers on a delineation of Susan's narrative transformation, with specific emphasis on its form and one-way fervor. Following the discussion of language, the earlier part of this chapter draws a parallel between Lacan's theory of language as the Other and the transition of Susan's writings. As the entry into the symbolic order fundamentally splits the subject from his/her own self, the shift in Susan's narrative style also distances her work from her early objective.[18] The second part of chapter three, meanwhile, attempts to divulge Susan's obsessive urge to write, even when she never receives any response from the addressee. Her untoward desire might be best characterized by Lacan's theory of the subject's tireless pursuit of object *a*, another side to the multifaceted Other. As the Lacanian perspective would help argue, by the end of her narrative, Susan is further removed from the goal of her original design than ever before.

Chapter Four: In the Face of the Abject

To expound on the correlation between Susan and Friday, as well as the esoteric ending provided in *Foe*, the fourth chapter of this thesis goes beyond the self-

[18] Chapter Three argues that, from the passage in quotation marks (Section One-Two) to the prose-like narrative (Section Three), Susan's writing simulates an individual's entry into the symbolic order. As a result, the symbolization of her narration in the third section forever denies the attainment of her objective, i.e., to tell the truth about her story.

Other dyad and introduces the abject and the semiotic conceived by Kristeva. Decidedly, Susan's relation with Friday cannot be subjected to a mere dialogic bond between the self and the Other, not only because of their resemblances in one another's plight as symbolic subjects, but also for their ambivalent relationship. As it turns out, through reading Friday as an abject, Cruso's ex-slave becomes a reminder of what is at stake in Susan's own symbolic existence. By juxtaposition, the fourth section of *Foe* offers an account that largely echoes with the material presented in Section Three. The resemblance, presumably, makes the two sections each other's double. Therefore, when the two are seen as a representation of the Kristevan dialogue between the symbolic and the semiotic, their combined result furnishes Coetzee's tale with another dimension in its exploration of language and representation.

Chapter Five: Subject and its Discontents

The concluding chapter of this thesis sums up the main theme that underlies its reading of J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*. What fundamentally drives the discussion between signification and (re)presentation, as well as the correspondence among subject, abject and object, is the lack that first and foremost defines individuality. Coetzee's creation, unlike Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, is not about Crusoe the man, but rather an ensemble of all the characters, individuals who only find their positions in the world through cross-referencing each other. Ultimately, whoever contributes to the advancement of the "I" must occupy the place of "an enemy or opponent." Such is the role of foes in *Foe*.

CHAPTER TWO

THE APHASIC SUBJECT

"In every story there is a silence."

Foe 141

In a realist fiction such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, subject matters are portrayed by one authoritative voice, and the narratives a synthesis of the ideology it represents. What J. M. Coetzee does with the Crusoe theme in the metafictional *Foe* is finding the means to lay bare the complexities obscured by the text's rigid monotone. Thus, out of a work that propagates the transplantation of Western ideology, Coetzee develops a metafictional tale that "explore[s] the relationship between [the] arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers" (Waugh 3). In *Foe*, the theme commonly seen in metafiction, that "of frame-break, . . . of construction and deconstruction of illusion" (Waugh 14), is raised and developed by the silence that penetrates through the entire tale. It further manifests through the protagonist Susan Barton's concern with language and representation.

One of the most significant features that make *Foe* stand apart from Defoe's vision is the extent to which the characters self-consciously conduct themselves in terms of linguistic expression. In addition to the master-slave duo in Defoe's work, Coetzee brings in two new characters, the female narrator Susan Barton and the writer Foe. However, unlike Defoe's Crusoe, who ever so readily recounts his experience, Coetzee's characters all face issues that keep them from properly relating their stories. For not only do Cruso and Friday have newfound difficulties registering their own

experiences, Susan and Foe, in the meanwhile, also face issues that hinder their capacities in recounting theirs. As a result, by replacing the eloquent narrator of Defoe's novel with the unassertive speaker in *Foe*, Coetzee tactically brings down the authoritative voice that so dominates *Robinson Crusoe*. Short of a confidant narrative voice, *Foe* is told through a mixture of different methods by its various characters, making it a tale of heteroglossia.

Taking notice of the lack of full linguistic command commonly shared by all characters in *Foe*, Chapter Two is dedicated to the analysis of the linguistic symptoms that overshadows Coetzee's metafictional creation, with specific focus on the mute slave Friday. To each of the condition or complex that deters the characters from expressing properly, the present chapter aims to label symptoms of aphasia. As the thesis goes on to prove, the language disorder serves as a mechanism that propels characters to actions that further reveal their position as linguistic subjects. Among all the aphasic symptoms, Friday's muteness most tellingly embodies the silence that permeates the entire tale. Because of this, the dumb slave and his performances are to serve as the main focus of Chapter Two. By incorporating Bakhtinian discourse, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that while Friday's tongue mutilation hinders the immediate effect of colonization, it precipitates performances that further showcase his gradual assimilation of Western language system. On the other hand, Friday's adoption of Western means as a way of expression also makes Susan's pursuit of his "true" account an unrequited wish from the start.

Mapping Aphasia

While scholars' attempts to demystify linguistic disorders such as aphasia do not necessarily meet with a satisfying result, many manage to develop readings that

find meanings in the clutter of linguistic presentations. For instance, despite futile attempts to find the cause of aphasia, the study of aphasiology helps theorists and linguists alike to become aware of the structure of language system. Early in his career, Freud begins the study of aphasia on the premise of the localization model made famous by Broca and Wernicke. In *Freud and His Aphasia Book*, Freud contributes most of the discussions to the problematization Wernicke's prototype. Even though the book eventually does not provide a solution, during this project, the young physician for the first time in his career acknowledges the gap between language and the external object. In his study of aphasia, "object" designates a neutral word, which is used to "elicit meaning, or the production of a noun" (166); however, when the word later reappears in his discourse, it takes on the meaning of "the object of desire or fear that simulates cries" (166). From this Freud moves on to the treatise of the development of language. As Freud infers from the study of aphasia ideas that would later contribute to his discourse in psychoanalysis, in another case Deleuze also locates in his study of stuttering linguistic aspects that could potentially challenge the language system. In the article "He Stuttered," Deleuze asserts the effect brought about by a language that stutters. For him, the new forms of language that come from stuttering lodge in somewhere that is "*the outside* of language, but … not outside it" (112). In other words, "*[w]hen a language is so strained that it starts to stutter, or to murmur or stammer. . . then language in its entirety reaches the limit* that marks its outside and makes it confront silence" (Italics original 113). Accordingly, when language is forced to confront its limit, "[s]tyle becomes non-style, and one's language lets an unknown foreign language escape from it" (113). As it turns out, these foreign compositions made from unexpected linguistic occurrences are endowed with the capacities that potentially confront and challenge the legitimacy of language

system.

The shift in the study of language disorder entails a school of reading that focuses on the figurative meaning of silence. From the study of linguistic symptoms, Freud and Deleuze direct their interest at the issue of language that the symptoms help manifest. In fact, each concludes his discourse not so much by proposing a solution to the symptoms as by shifting the focus onto the impact brought to the language system. From there, the center issue concerning language impediments switches from locating the cause to speculating its symbolic significance in the larger linguistic context. The fracture in language, made explicit through the symptoms of aphasia and stuttering, displaces the negligence often attributed to silence in literary studies and demands a reading that further discloses the operation of language system. For critic like Patricia Ondek Laurence, who devotes an entire book on the reading of silence in Virginia Woolf's oeuvre, the importance in the "'narrative' of silence" cannot be overstressed. According to Laurence, Woolf's adoption of silences could be taken as what Barbara Johnson describes "a strategic rigorous decentering of the structure, . . . not by abandoning that structure but by multiplying the forces at work in the field of which that structure is a part" (qtd. in Laurence 16). In other words, silence reemphasized not only reveals the structure of language, but also unsettles language as the proper way of expression. The discursive clarity Laurence showcases here gives meaning to what used to be ineffable, and silence in this case is taken to serve the same self-referential function as the linguistic symptoms outlined by both Freud and Deleuze. Branching out from Freudian study of aphasia and supplementing with Deleuzian take on fractured language, Chapter Two treats the characters' silences in *Foe* as aphasic symptoms that could further disclose their position as linguistic subjects. As a consequence, this chapter does not seek to explicate the exact cause of the characters'

aphasia; instead, a larger part is given to the interpretation of the characters' linguistic symptoms and the significance they impart.

Aphasics in *Foe*

Even while characters in *Foe* all exhibits conditions typical of aphasics, each suffers symptom that greatly differs from the other. Cruso in Coetzee's adaptation bares little resemblance to the more famous prototype, whose frenzy in documenting the story finds no representation in *Foe*. Shortly after coming to the island, Susan notices that Cruso "[keeps] no journal," for he "[lacks] the inclination to keep one" (16). She later finds out that he "[has] no stories to tell" (34). At one point she remarks that he acts "as if language were one of the banes of life" (33). In fact, Cruso devotes most of his time to physical labor and occasionally "[loses] himself in the contemplation" (38). Thus silenced, the former colonizer is provided with an aphasic appeal formerly unseen, leaving the narrative to the hands of others. Meanwhile, in opposition to the obedient slave in *Robinson Crusoe*, who so eagerly parroting the language of his master, Friday reincarnated in *Foe* is kept from verbal expression for he "has no tongue" (22, 23). The tongue mutilation, done probably by a former slaver[19], robs him of "the only tongue that can tell [his] story" (67) and turns him into an irrecoverable aphasic forever denied of speech. Friday's unparalleled muteness, which helps bring along his unique expressions throughout the course of the tale, makes him the greatest mystery in Coetzee's *Foe*. On the other hand, the narrator-protagonist Susan Barton's seemingly eloquence is betrayed by the quotation marks that subtly hint at her actual lack of the writer's authority. Her writings, encased in quotation marks in the first two sections of *Foe*, are a compilation of notes and letters

[19] As Friday cannot by himself account for his past, there's no answer to the cause of his atrocious mutilation.

addressed specially to the writer, whom she judges to be qualified for retelling her story. In fact, she confesses that "[s]ome people are born storytellers; I, it would seem, am not" (81). The distrust in her own ability to write compels Susan to ask for the writer Foe's assistance, thus a greater part of her writing is done while "wait[ing] for [the writer] to appear, or for the book to be written" (66). Her unassertiveness despite apparent eloquence makes her an aphasic subject. For the most part of her narrative, Susan expresses her wish to meet the writer Foe, who remains absent half way through the tale, and the transformation of style in her writings marks her ever-growing eagerness for the writer's presence[20]. The writer's absence gets to a point where his house becomes Susan's temporary shelter, and his writer's guild turns into Friday's outlet for expression. When Foe finally shows up in the third section, the famed writer does not bring with him the full command of language; instead, his authority is constantly challenged by the protagonist during their heated debate in matters concerning language and representation. For one, Susan refuses Foe's proposition to "supply a middle [to her tale] by inventing cannibals and pirates" (121); she also rejected his idea to retell her intended story by "reducing the island to an episode in the history of a woman in search of a lost daughter" (121). As an author dethroned from his writer's position and questioned for his authority, Foe is therefore aphasic[21].

[20] The issue concerning the trajectory of Susan's writings would be more carefully dealt with in Chapter Three: Epistolary and the Other.

[21] As the title character, the writer Foe seems to demand a reading of his own. Calling to mind the writer "Defoe," Mr. Foe is stripped of his original title and turned against his own self in Coetzee's recreation. The metafictional aspects of *Foe* in every way challenge the story's rigid prototype, and the author, now dethroned from his position, finds himself questioned by his character (Susan). In fact, Mr. Foe's wretched situation, which is reflective of the author's crumbling position, is synonymous with the "Death of the Author" hailed by Roland Barthes. However, as much as the portrayal of the writer Foe is characteristic and representative of a notion so keenly acknowledged in contemporary literary criticism, for the coherence of the thesis, the discussion of Mr. Foe should serve only as great material for future projects.

The Silent Slave and Bakhtin

The ensuing part of this chapter intends to focus on the delineation of Friday's aphasia and the metaphoric significance of the performances incurred by such linguistic impediment. To Friday's dumbness that shadows his story with an impenetrable silence, the writer Foe maintains that "[in] every story there is a silence, some sight concealed, some word unspoken, . . . Till we have spoken the unspoken we have not come to the heart of the story" (141). Indeed, Friday's dumbness, represented as the most severe aphasic symptom among all, not only provokes curiosity from the protagonist, but also further epitomizes the silence that dominates the whole tale. Eventually, the protagonist's quest for Friday's untold story serves as a motif that help reflect on the tale's theme of language and representation.

Friday's utilizations of different external means during his moments of revelations are reminiscent of Bakhtinian treatise on language and the formation of ideological being. Saturated with a preordained dumbness, Friday's expressions are given in ways other than the verbal kind. Bakhtin's discourse on language would help elucidate Friday's acquisition and application of various signs following the development of *Foe*. According to Bakhtin, language "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other," and is "overpopulated . . . with the intentions of others." It "becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention" in a process called "appropriation" (*Discourse in the Novel* 293). Consequently, an individual's "ideological becoming" relies largely on the assimilation of others' discourses. The distinction between the "externally authoritative discourse" and the "internally persuasive discourse" is thus founded on the entanglement between others' discourse and one's speech. Friday's position as a linguistic subject in *Foe*, it would seem, allows him to demonstrate the mechanism expounded by Bakhtin.

The newfound attribute assigned to Friday adds complexities to the formerly one-dimensional character, who accepts his role as a colonized model almost too willingly; as a matter of fact, the latter Friday's seemingly inferior position as a colonized helps resist the dominance of the prevailing Western colonization. In *Foe*, Coetzee not only situates Friday among the racial minorities, but also exposes him to bodily mutilations that are unheard of by his early counterpart. The differences in race and language capacity thus set the two Fridays apart. Defoe's Friday, as noted in *Robinson Crusoe*, "ha[s] all the Sweetness and Softness of an *European* in his Countenance. . . . His Hair [i]s long and black, not curl'd like Wool", and "[t]he Colour of his Skin [i]s not quite black, but very tawny, . . . a dun olive Colour" (*Robinson Crusoe* 205). On the other hand, Susan describes Friday as "[b]lack: a Negro with a head of fuzzy wool, naked save for a pair of rough drawers" (*Foe* 5-6). Seen as social stereotypes, whereas Defoe's portrayal of Friday gives off characteristics of a cultured man, the slave presented by Coetzee comes across as rather savage and uncultured. With the change in ethnicity, Coetzee subjects his Friday to a position more commonly shared by the colonized majority, namely "the black" and "the savage." Meanwhile, under Crusoe's instruction, Friday in Defoe's tale begins "to talk pretty well, and understand the Names of almost every Thing . . . and talk'd a great deal" (213), yet the one in *Foe* knows only "as many [English words] as he needs" (21), for "[h]e has no tongue", and therefore "does not speak" (23). As a speaking subject, Defoe's character is ready at any moment to enact what Bakhtin terms the "appropriation" (*Discourse* 293) of language, through which the subject engages in his "ideological becoming" by experiencing "the process of selectively assimilating the words of others" (*Discourse* 341). The same process, however, is all the more difficult for Coetzee's Friday, since he is deprived of the

ability to speak and consequently alienated from having immediate and direct contact with the language system. As a result, Friday's limited appropriation of Western languages, documented in the first three sections of *Foe*, showcase how the Western symbolic system gradually seeps in and affects him as a linguistic subject.

Friday's Performances

Friday introduced at the beginning of *Foe* characterizes a subject denied of an access to proper linguistic utterance, but as the story develops, he gradually acquires different means of expressions. Supposedly, Friday's physical damage marks a break from whichever signifying chain he previously belongs, and he is further removed from his cultural habitat when trapped on the island. Therefore, the aphasia seen in the slave consists not only in the tongue mutilation that keeps him from verbal expressions, but also in the incongruent culture backgrounds that limit communication between him and other English speakers. As a consequence, under the influence of his old semiotic system and a possibly new one, Friday's expressions in *Foe* remain largely obscure and incomprehensible. In the clash between the slave's old "internal persuasive discourse"(*Discourse* 342) and the "authoritative discourse" at hand, "[t]he authoritative word demands that [one] acknowledge[s] it . . . and make[s] it [one's] own" (342-43). Through Susan's observation, Friday's premature attempts at adopting the Western means therefore testify to a subject's assimilation of an external, authoritative discourse.

Subjected to restricted means of expression, Friday's behaviors on the island remain only as mysterious segments in Section One. After Cruso's bidding, Friday's first expression consists of a song "hum[med] in a low voice" (22), which Susan can "make out no tune." As it turns out, throughout the course of the tale, the protagonist

will continue to have difficulty in comprehending Friday. When Cruso suffers a cold fever relapse a few days later, Susan witnesses the first gesture stemming from Friday's own will, as he "play[s] over and over again in his little reed flute a tune of six notes" (27-8). But when the repetitive tune grows increasingly irritating to her ears, Susan "dash[es] the flute from his hands." The two incidents considering Friday's earliest expressions demonstrate that, as a slave of the two western superiors, his expressions are sanctioned and controlled by his masters. Another move from Friday that so perplexes Susan takes place when she sees him paddle out to the sea in the log-boat "some hundred yards from the shelf into the thickest of the sea weed, . . . [reach] into a bag . . . and [bring] out handfuls of white flakes which he [begin] to scatter over the water" (31). For Susan, this discovery marks "the first sign that a spirit or soul . . . stir[s] beneath that dull and unpleasing exterior [of Friday]" (32). Prior to this event, Susan finds Friday's mutilation hauntingly horrifying and tries hard to avoid having contact with him[22]. In fact, the ritual-like gesture proves not so much Friday's possession of a soul as his being a symbolic subject, for the repeated tune of six notes and the scattering of flower petals are proofs of cultural influences and residues of a prior symbolic system, one that remains with him from the unknown past. It is no wonder Susan feels bewildered by them, for the actions, stemming from Friday's prior self-contained signification chain, retains its meaning only within that specific domain.

With a change of the surrounding, Section Two anticipates different manners that would further reveal Friday as a symbolic subject. Following their rescue and Cruso's death en route, Susan and Friday come to the United Kingdom. From a no man's island to a metropolis, Friday moves from a secluded place in which contact

[22] Susan's fear towards Friday's mutilation should be further treated in *Chapter Four: In the Face of the Abject*, where it is treated as a subject's response towards an abject,

with other sign systems is scarce to a city exploding with all types of symbols and signs. During their stay at the writer's adobe, Friday finds Mr. Foe's robe and wig, which Susan suspects to be "the robes of a guild-master"(92) from the society of authors. In no time, the discovery leads Friday to his most significant performance throughout the course of the novel:

> 'The robes have set him dancing, which I had never seen him do before. In the mornings he dances in the kitchen, where the windows face east. If the sun is shining he does his dance in a patch of sunlight, holding out his arms and spinning in a circle, his eyes shut, hour after hour, never growing fatigued or dizzy. (92)

Never in the prior disclosures has Friday conducted his behavior through any mode other than his own, and the dance marks his first attempt at incorporating Western means. During this moment, Friday's internal discourse obviously encounters the infiltration of an other's discourse. For the first time, the old sign system that he so relies on seems insufficient, and the lack of expressive means instigates him to seek solution from other semiotic system. The robes and wigs put an end to his previous slumber state and provide a channel for physical expressions. Even so, this Bakhtinian "moment of appropriation"[23] (*Discourse* 293), like all of the slave's preceding expressions, is not by any standard communicative:

> In the grip of the dancing he is not himself. He is beyond human reach. I called his name and am ignored, I put out a hand and am brushed aside. All the while he dances he makes a humming voice in his throat, deeper than his usual voice; sometimes he seems to be singing. (92)

Surrounded by English symbolic system, Friday gradually comes under the influence

[23] The moment of appropriation designates the occasion in which the individual "appropriates the word [of others], adapting it to his semantic and expressive intention" (294)

of its cultural imperative with the progression of Section Two. Here, his newfound expression is bestowed upon the writer's guild, which serves as a supplement to his language deficiency. Nevertheless, as esteemed by Bakhtin, "not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation. . . . many words resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them" (*Discourse* 294). With the variables inhabit in other's language, "[e]xpropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intension and accents, is a difficult and complicated process." Obviously, Friday's expropriation of the writer's outfit demonstrates an appropriation that falls short, and Susan's bewilderment towards his act only further attests to it.

The dance is soon followed by the return of the six-note tune, which Susan ventures to play along; however, Friday's unresponsiveness leaves her scheme to communicate with him unsuccessful. When Susan discovers a case of bass recorders in Foe's drawer, she leaves it where Friday can easily find, intending to see what he would make of it. On the next day, she finds him "spin[ning] slowly around with the flute to his lips and his eyes shut" (95). In fact, he "[has] so far mastered it as to play the tune of six notes." To interact with Friday, Susan takes the bass flute and tries to play in unison, but "[t]here [is] a subtle discord all the time, though [they seem] to play the same notes" (96). Still, Susan decides that "[a]s long as [she shares] music with Friday, perhaps [they] need no language" (97). However, her speculation is quickly overthrown when she attempts to make changes to the tune, hoping that he would follow, only to discover that he "persists in the old tune" (ibid.). Susan's failed attempt exemplifies the discordant nature between different bodies of semiotic system. Certainly, Friday's performances incorporate signifiers taken from the symbolic system that Susan is no stranger to, but since even people under the same semiotic

system cannot always agree on all significations, what the signifiers signify vary according to each subject's own understanding and command of the language. While the signifiers taken up by Friday designates specific signifieds to Susan's language system, as a result of an unsuccessful appropriation, the signs adopted in the slave's expressions are in fact emptied of their original meanings and filled in with different purposes. It gives reason to the lack of understanding between the two characters, as the protagonist's comprehension is founded on the Western semiotic system that is "other" to Friday.

The transition in the third section forecasts Friday's later dealings with the Western semiotic system; meanwhile, it is at this juncture that Susan wrongly supposes the slave's acquisition of Western language could assist him in telling his true story. Not long after the incident, Susan realizes that Friday "does not understand that [she is] leading him to freedom," and to him, "freedom is a word, less than a word, a noise, one of the multitudes of noises [she] make[s]" (100). What dawns on the protagonist is the uneven concepts that one signifier could be taken to signify, and so the same applies to the decoding of Friday's mystery. Susan thus goes on in Section Three to hypothesize that "[t]he true story [of Friday] will not be heard till by art we have found a means of giving voice to Friday" (118), for up to this point, "Friday has no command of words and therefore no defense against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others" (121). Only through the acquisition of Western language, Susan believes, can Friday properly account for his past with the utmost authenticity and precision. However, form Bakhtinian perspective, even if Friday does acquire the ability to command Western language in its written form, he still cannot express through method that is authentically his. After being torn away from his earlier signification chain and having encountered the

Western semiotic system, Friday is no longer capable of "telling" the untold story happening before his mutilation. For his expressions are saturated with Western ideology. Moreover, even if Friday were not forced to become exiled from his old semiotic chain, his story still would not be comprehensible to other subjects that are outside his semiotic chain.

Once Susan begins to teach Friday written language after Foe's bidding in Section Three, she becomes even more aware of the arbitrariness of signs; meanwhile, Friday betrays a reluctance to communicate as he embarks on the practice of using the writing slate. According to the writer Foe, "[w]riting is not doomed to be the shadow of speech" (141), so even while Susan's "efforts to bring Friday to speech, or to bring speech to Friday, have failed"(142), the dumb slave can still acquire the ability to write. For that matter, Friday's muteness should not in any sense impede his learning of written language, and writing, in this sense, could act as a suitable means to "make Friday's silence speak" (141). In addition, since "there are times when the words form themselves on the paper *de novo*, as the Romans used to say, out of the deepest of inner silences" (143), writing is deemed the best medium to quell Friday's silence and allow for self-expression. Following the writer's direction, Susan starts teaching Friday letters with a child's slate and pencil. When the heroine tries to convey to Friday the word "Africa", she draws "a row of palm trees with a lion roaming among them"; however, immediately she doubts "Was my Africa the Africa whose memory Friday bore with him?"(147). The arbitrariness of the linkage between the signifier and the signified again troubles and frustrates her. As full cultural transplant between subjects of different cultural origins proves improbable, the problem in the education of Friday remains unsolvable. Later, Susan finds Friday "[g]lancing over his shoulder" and secretly fills the slate with "row upon row of eyes upon feet: walking

eyes," but when she tries to take the slate, "instead of obeying me, Friday put three fingers into his mouth and wet them with spittle and rubbed the slate clean" (147). Friday's secrecy is shown here more than anywhere in the story; nevertheless, despite his strong disinclination to reveal himself, his muteness is disrupted by the slate, as well as other Western means that he is likely to come by.

The first three sections of the novel *Foe* chronicle Friday's gradual assimilation of Western semiotic system, and the end of Section Three implies a foreseeable future in which Friday is capable of writing his story, even though quite unlike the one Susan best hopes for. The third section concludes with Friday wearing the robe and the wig, sitting at Foe's desk writing. As observed by Susan:

> I turned back to Friday, still busy at his writing. The paper before him was heavily smudged, as by a child unused to the pen, but there was writing on it, writing of a kind, rows and rows of the letter *o* tightly packed together. A second page lay at his elbow, fully written over, and it was the same. (152)

Foe remarks that "[i]t is a beginning" of his learning, and Susan "must teach him *a*" on the next day. The series of *os*, despite Susan's suspicion, verifies Foe's previous judgment concerning Friday's ability to acquire language. By assuming the author's seat and taking his medium, Friday is presented as almost having a "voice" that can be distinguished from his former aphasic position. Even so, the slave's capability in writing a "true" account about himself remains unrealizable, and the idea of being "free" that Susan emphasizes so much all along will never become natural to the foreign subject.

This chapter gives its utmost attention to the examination of Friday as an aphasic symbolic subject, one who assimilates different modes of significations as he

is driven to different environments. Friday's complete silence and his irresolvable secret not only draw the other characters' attention but also arouse one's curiosity about his transformation as an linguistic subject. With the assistance of Bakhtinian discourse, this chapter demonstrates that the tasks Susan sets out to accomplish regarding Friday's freedom and his true story are not soundly based. Ultimately, Friday cannot revive his "free" state before his mutilation, just as he can never "genuinely" present his story that has long been supplemented. Coetzee's meta-fiction "appropriates" Defoe's thematic eloquence and "utters" what is left unsaid in the predecessor's discourse. By silencing Friday, Coetzee injects into Defoe's superficial character a complexity that frees him of a standard, static reading. *Foe*, as it turns out, does not intend to tell Friday's story; rather, it aims to show that what is left unsaid can never be fully recovered. The ever-changing truth, embedded within the intricate layers of signifying system, like Friday's mutilation, can never by any means be restored.

CHAPTER THREE

EPISTLES AND THE OTHER

"We do not write out of plenty, . . . we write out of anguish, out of lack."

Coetzee, *The Master of Petersburg* 152

"To whom this writing then? The answer: to you but not to you; to me; to you in me"

Coetzee, *Age of Iron* 16

"I is an other"

Écrits 96

Both Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* feature a protagonist-narrator who chronicles his/her story in a near obsessive frenzy. While the title of the former suggests a specific focus on the character Crusoe and the presentation of his "self," the latter indicates a concern with "[a]n adversary, antagonist, opponent"(OED), one "other" than the narrator Susan Barton. Such a transition marks a departure from Defoe's display of a Cartesian subject, whose rational thinking alone serves as evidence for his worldly existence; meanwhile, it makes way for Coetzee's portrayal of a structural being, whose self-reflexive language reveals the symbolic construct of her relational existence. Crusoe's account documents a colonizer's success in the transplantation of Western ideology, and it testifies to the success of English colonialism. Susan's writing, on the other hand, not only captures all the characters at their moments of silence and ineffability, but also meditates upon the workings of language and representation. What essentially distinguishes Susan's writing from that of her predecessor is the intention behind her

verbal acts, along with her ever-changing writing style. Being held back by a disbelief in her own authorial ability, Coetzee's protagonist lacks the eloquence bequeathed to Defoe's character; instead, she seeks the writer Foe's assistance to turn her writing into a legitimate narrative. Therefore, much of her writing is directed at the sole addressee Mr. Foe, whose absence for the most part of the tale only further precipitates her desire to write. Along the way, Susan's writing moves from the early note pieces in the first section of *Foe* to the diary entries and epistles in the second, and culminates in the realist narratives in Section Three. Since there is little evidence in the plotline to support a tangible explanation for the protagonist's preoccupation with epistolary writing, Chapter Three is thus dedicated to the disclosure of the more obscure aspects of Susan's writing in *Foe*.

The reading of Susan's narrative journey in this chapter will be paired with Jacques Lacan's discourse on the Other. By tracing the trajectory of the protagonist's transformative writing, Chapter Two seeks to divulge the significance underlying its various narrative forms. Also, a closer look at Susan's relation with the addressee Mr. Foe reveals the factor that essentially motivates her one-way fervor and guides her writing through the first three sections of the novel. Therefore, the involvement of the Lacanian discourse in this chapter serves to provide an insight to Susan's deployment of language and her desire. Out of the many facets attributed to the Other throughout the course of Lacan's career, two are crucial to the issues at hand: each being "the Other as language" and "the Other as Desire/ object *a*." Accordingly, the discussion of Susan's writing in the following will be separated into two main parts. Insomuch as Susan's literary quest epitomizes a subject's bipolar relation to the multifaceted Other, her deployment of language simulates a subject's position with regard to the Other as language; therefore, later development of her narrative makes her representative of a

Lacanian barred subject. Meanwhile, as the sole addressee to Susan's writing, Mr. Foe's function as a signifier for the Other's desire is disrupted when their encounter transgresses the distance required in every epistolary relationship and puts an end to her writing.

The Lacanian Subject

The distinction made between the ego and the subject in psychoanalytic discourses such as those of Freud and Lacan diverges from the belief in the conscious subject; it allows the reading of Susan Barton in this chapter to go beyond language structure and reveals the significance underlying the various styles of her narrative. While the characterization of aphasic subjects in the previous chapter already departs from the Cartesian tradition with the Bakhtinian focus[24], the exploration of Susan Barton's linguistic expression in this chapter will center on the psychoanalytic division between the ego and the unconscious subject. In his essay "The Freudian Thing," Lacan refers to Freud's "*Das Ich und Es* [*The Ego and the Id*]" as offering "the fundamental distinction between the true subject of the unconscious and the ego" (*Écrits* 347). Later, in "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious" (1957), Lacan proposes a question on the structural position of the "I" in signification: "Is the place that I occupy as subject of the signifier concentric or eccentric in relation to the place I occupy as subject of the signified?" (430). The issue then recurs in Lacan's *Seminar XI*, where he divides the act of language articulation into two stratifications, each being "the level of the enunciation (*énunciation*)" and "the level of statement (*énoncé*)" (*Seminar XI* 138). According to Lacan, "the I of the enunciation is not the same as the I of the statement, that is to say, the shifter which, in the statement,

[24] With the incorporation of the Bakhtinian discourse, the discussion of language subject in Chapter Two departs from the Cartesian focus and looks at the "I" as a combining result of other's discourses and ideologies.

designates him" (*Seminar XI* 139); in other words, the "I" in everyday speech is a signifying construct "determined retroactively" (139) by "Other" signifiers[25] at the level of statement. Thus the "I," or the ego presented in speech, is an illusion engendered by language effect. Therefore, at the level of enunciation, the subject, being "constituted as secondary in relation to the signifier" (141), is represented as "the barred S [$\$$]" in Lacanian algebra. The bar stands for the "first of the signifiers" (141) that fundamentally marks off the subject, and it coincides with "the first split that makes the subject as such distinguish himself from the sign in relation to which, at first, he has been able to constitute himself as subject" (141). At this level where the subject lies, "[w]hatever animates . . . belongs to desire" (141). The locus of desire not only corresponds to the Freudian unconscious, but points out the theoretical interest that first initiates the study of psychoanalysis. The schema on speech act reveals that the subject appears not in the statement; rather, it belongs to the unconscious. Lacanian theory thus provides a model based on which the chapter identifies the ego and the unconscious subject in Susan's narrative.

The Other as Language

Given the distinction between the "I" of the statement and that of the enunciation, the attempt to demystify Susan's writing inevitably involves the consideration of language and its Otherness in relation to a subject. While the concept of "the Other" takes on many different meanings throughout Lacan's discursive development, the schema of speech helps emphasize the aspect to which the signifier "[produces] itself in the field of the Other" (*Seminar XI* 207). The Other as language

[25] According to Lacan, "[t]he Other is the locus in which is situated the chain of the signifier" (*Seminar XI* 203). Thus the "I" in every statement comes forth with the support of the other signifiers.

is thus highlighted as the main factor in the development of a subject. Since the novel *Foe* features largely the protagonist's dealings with language, and her objective being the restoration of a voice that is rightfully hers, the discussion of Susan's writing in this chapter will incorporate the Lacanian concept of the Other as language in the hope of divulging the meaning of her transformative writing style.

Composed of notes and letters, the first two sections of the novel delineate Susan's undertaking of the epistolary journey while she ardently awaits Mr. Foe's authorial intervention. The protagonist-narrator begins her writing with the belief that she is incapable of writing a story herself, and that she needs the writer Foe, who alone possesses the writer's craftsmanship, to help her achieve a legitimate account. She expresses her lack of confidence by stating that "[s]ome people are born storytellers; I, it would seem, am not" (81). In another note she writes: "When I reflect on my story I seem to exist only as . . . a being without substance"(51)[26]. The absence of a voice, followed by the lack of substance in her being, designates Susan's precarious command over her own existence. Consequently, the narrator's main objective is to secure a sense of self by first chronicling her experiences on the island and then having her story told by Mr. Foe. Susan's earlier account in the first section takes the form of a series of notes through which she tells her story prior to her rescue[27]. The second section then follows with another compilation of messages and notes, starting with diary-like message, but becoming more like letters as the section draws to an end. From the early note pieces to the later letter forms that start insistently with "Dear Mr Foe" (92), the changes in Susan's writing format not only

[26] Like the way Friday's symptom is treated in the Chapter Two, instead of trying to find the cause that leads to her aphasia, Chapter Three seeks to focus only on the significance of Susan's aphasic symptoms.

[27] Beginning with her arrival onto the island where she finds Cruso and Friday, Susan's account in the first section documents their life on the secluded island. The first section of *Foe* ends with their rescue and Cruso's death on the way back to England.

reflect her increasing wish for the author's intervention, but also mark the emergence of the writer Foe's function as an epistolary addressee. However, Susan's earnest appeal in the first two sections fails to evoke any response from the writer Foe, and the supposedly reciprocal relationship remains only as a one-way correspondence throughout the first two sections.

Lacan's discourse on the difference between enunciation and statement would then be crucial in shedding light on Susan's writing scheme in the first half of the novel *Foe*. According to Lacan's schema on speech acts, the pronoun "I" in the statement does not represent the Lacanian subject; instead, it designates the ego that identifies with a certain image of the Other. As a result of the all-encompassing language, the subject can only be identified at moments of language rupture. For instance, Lacanian subject surfaces in the passing moment of "unconscious formations" (*Écrits* 713) such as a slip of the tongue.[28] In addition, the subject of enunciation can be detected in the French signifier *ne*[29] (*Écrits* 677). Whereas the negative word *ne* (not) serves no literal function in the negative *ne pas*, its intrusion in language seems to hint at another agency hidden behind the ego discourse. Therefore, Lacan contends that "[t]he subject of enunciation, insofar as his desire breaks through, lies nowhere else than in this *ne*" (*Écrits* 556). Nevertheless, the subject's emergence is immediately annulled by the signifier. For even while it marks the surging forth of

[28] In 1956, two years before Lacan proposes the reading on the French word "ne," he asked: "Will slips of the tongue, when they are stripped bare, make us grasp what is meant by the fact that they allow themselves to be summed up in the following formulation: that in slips discourse manages to overcome feigned significations?" (*Écrits* 394) The answer is the ambivalent yes/no. For even though linguistic cases like these seem to hint at yet another agency hidden behind the ego discourse, their surging forward by means of signifiers cancels the unconscious appeal and turns the irruptions into mere signification.

[29] Similarly, Bruce Fink adds that the word *but* in sentence such as "I couldn't help but . . ." also suggests the same apparently redundant word choice. According to Lacan, in such cases "[a] conflict seems to be played out . . . between a conscious or ego discourse, and another 'agency'"(Fink 39). He contends that the French *ne* and the occasionally English usage of *but* should be taken as signifiers that "[signify] the speaking or enunciating subject" (*ibid.*).

the unconscious, it loses touch with the signified the moment it becomes signifierized. By analogy, Susan's disapproval of her writing despite an indisputable eloquence in the narrative also suggests discordance between the ego of statement and the subject of enunciation. Indeed, the protagonist's self-denial that permeates her narrative bears a resemblance to the French signifier *ne*, which is indicative of the unconscious. In this case, the denial of her authorship in no way interferes with the development of the narrative, and through the insistence of this negativity, the narrative is able to offer a glimpse of the unconscious at work. Moreover, unlike the example provided by Lacan, the symbolization[30] of Susan's writing is detained on account of the quotation marks that enclose her writing in the first two sections.[31] As a result, Susan's writing retains the features of the unconscious.

Despite her wish for the writer Foe's intervention, Susan's writing in the first two sections would be closest to the story she aims to attain throughout the course of her narrative. Given the style of the writing, the early passages cannot be regarded as statements owing to the fact that those words, strictly speaking, are still in the process of being enunciated. Susan believes that the way to the realization of her tale and her lost being is dependent solely upon Mr. Foe, and she can never settle before the author finishes retelling the story. "My life is drearily suspended till your writing is done" (63), so writes Susan. From Lacanian viewpoint, however, the sentence should be interpreted instead as *her words are suspended till Foe intervenes and prescribes the words their final meaning.* Accordingly, the quotation marks that envelop her writing in the two sections function as a screen, so that the words are caught in the

[30] The word is equivalent to signifierization, both designating the process of "turning into signifiers" (Fink 65).

[31] The quotation continues to envelop Susan's writing until the third section, where she takes on the narrator's voice and thereby relinquishes the quotation marks in her narrative.

process of symbolization and therefore suspended between the actual statement and the act of enunciation. The not-yet-properly-symbolized words retain their position as empty signifiers, allowing whichever meaning attributed to them. It leaves a place for the submerged unconscious, so like the French word *ne*, Susan's notes open up a space for the emergence of the subject. Hence, unlike the fleetingness of the subject exemplified in Lacan's example, the subject in her writing is capable of retaining its arrival, for it has yet to go through any intimidation from symbolization. Consequently, sustained by the unconscious subject and having no delimitation caused by symbolization, Susan's early writing resembles the story she can best hope for.

As demonstrated in Lacan's schema of speech, the predominance of the signifier contributes to the disappearance of the subject. In fact, the role of the signifier can never be understated in that "[e]verything emerges from the structure of the signifier" (Seminar XI 206). However, the dominance of the signifier inevitably contributes to the disappearance of the signified. Lacan takes heed of this fundamental gap underlying the signifier-signified dyad and applies it to the rejection of the subject:

> The signifier . . . makes manifest the subject of its signification. But it functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject. There, strictly speaking, is the temporal pulsation of the departure of the unconscious as such. (207)

At the level where "the subject manifests himself in this movement of disappearance," Lacan sees "the *fading* of the subject" (207-208), which he then

attributes to the operation of alienation.

For Lacan, alienation consists in a *vel,* which obliges one to choose either being or meaning. The Latin word "vel" designates an alternative choice that automatically excludes the other option once the decision is made. In other words, it offers a choice that denies the possibility of retaining both options at once. The alternatives such provided "condemns the subject to appearing only in that division which if it appears on one side as meaning, produced by the signifier, it appears on the other as *aphanisis*" (*Seminar XI* 210). Lacan further explains the difficult position ascribed to the subject by noting that:

> If we choose being, the subject disappears, it eludes us, it falls into non-meaning. If we choose meaning, the meaning survives only deprived of that part of non-meaning that is, strictly speaking, that which constitutes in the realization of the subject, the unconscious. In other words, it is of the nature of this meaning, as it emerges in the field of the Other, to be in a large part of this field, eclipsed by the disappearance of being, induced by the very function of the signifier. (211)

Through this double bind, Lacan explains how the institution of language helps assign the subject's (non)place in alienation[32].

With Susan's assertion of the authorial position, the third section witnesses the ossification of her writing and the alienation of her unconscious subject therein. When the protagonist finally meets with the writer Foe in Section Three, her epistolary

[32] With the introduction of alienation, Lacan overturns the Cartesian saying "I think, therefore I am" and proposes instead "I am thinking where I am not, therefore I am where I am not thinking" (*Écrits* 430). For Lacan, the issue concerning the subject is never a matter of either/or, which indicates "either the act of thinking proves one's existence or the non-thinking brings about one's disappearance," but rather neither/ nor, where a subject is neither referable for a lack of language/signification nor attainable because language, as signifiers, always eludes the subject as a signified.

writing comes to a sudden end, and she begins to assume the role of a first-person narrator. From then on the protagonist forgoes her previous writing scheme and begins to present her story in prose narrative. Once stripped of the quotation marks, the words' prior suspension in the act of enunciation is terminated. Susan's writing is now subjected to the effect of symbolization, turning her words from former empty signifiers into passages of enunciated, authoritative statements. Her narrative is by now devoid of the possibility of hailing the subject, since "the signifier is a unique unit of being which, by its very nature, is the symbol of but an absence" (*Écrits* 17). As a consequence, the unconscious subject is no longer granted access in Susan's language, and with the cancellation of the subject's arrival, what remains in her writing is the ego constituted by signifiers. Like a signifier that replaces and bars the subject, Susan's narration in the third section usurps the space previously provided by the quotation marks and precipitates the subject's disappearance.

Beside the transition in style that so largely hints at the alienation of the subject, Section Three also finds the protagonist registering an interest in the arbitrariness of signification. Earlier in the second section, Susan raises a question regarding the gap between the real and the symbolic representation: "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?" (65). Her doubt concerns the predominance of the signifier in the creation of meaning; also, it showcases her awareness of the limitation in representation. Meanwhile, the protagonist's curiosity over the representation of things extends to the establishment of the subject, when, for the second time, she meets with the girl who claims to be her lost daughter. It makes her wonder if this girl's existence is made up of nothing but Foe's writings, conjured up by the writer's art; she questions that if she, too, could be a mere symbolic construct.

The possibility makes her self-reflexive of her own existence, leading her to ask questions such as "Who is speaking me? . . . To what order do I belong?" (133). For once, the protagonist is shaken with fear by the possibility that what she has so far believed in is susceptible to challenges, and that language cannot truthfully recount one's experience. It dawns on her, after this revelational moment, that language not only cannot construct, but banishes the subject: "[N]ow all my life grows to be story and there is nothing of my own left to me" (*ibid.*). Her lamentation over the loss is characteristic of the Lacanian alienation. However, this moment of clear insight turns out to be only transient, for even though she remains distrustful of language representation, Susan never renounces the aspiration to obtain a story of her own up to the end.

The Other as Desire/ Object *a*

Lacan declares in *Seminar XI* that "Man's desire is the desire of the Other"[33] (235), an idea that summarizes the fundamentals working behind the circuit of desire. It is the very concept that would grant this chapter an access to the understanding of Susan's desire in her writing. While earlier discussion in this chapter on language and the subject takes up one aspect of the discourse on the Other, the remaining paragraphs go on examining how the Other, now constructed as desire, functions in Susan's literary quest. Lacan contends that the statement "man's desire is the Other's desire" is "characteristic of an animal at the mercy of language" (525), thereby specifying one's encounter with language as the fundament of a desiring subject.

[33] The concept can be referred back to Hegel's philosophy. As acknowledged by Lacan, Hegel believes that "[m]an's very desire is constituted under the sign of mediation: it is the desire to have one's desire recognized. Its object is a desire, that of other people, in the sense that man has no object that is constituted for his desire without some mediation" (*Écrits* 182). The same concept reoccurs in Lacan's discourse, where he posits one's desire in that external Other. According to Lacan, the earliest example can be found in the early mother-child relationship, in which the child strives hard, first to understand, then to be, and finally to identify with the (m)Other's desire.

Indeed, there ensues after alienation a "second operation" called "separation," which "completes the circularity of the relation of the subject to the Other" (*Seminar XI* 213), leading one to an unrelenting pursuit of desired objects. In other words, the child's submission to the Other as language is accompanied by another operation that involves the subject's confrontation with the Other as desire. During this process, the already barred subject tries to fill up the mOther's lack[34] while corresponding to the mOther's desire. However, the mother-child relation is disrupted by the interference of the primordial signifier, known as the Name-of-the-Father. It designates "the signifier which, in the Other, qua locus of the signifier, is the signifier of the Other qua locus of the law" (*Écrits* 485). The intervention of this paternal metaphor denies the child's reliance on the mother and forces the child to seek out solutions[35] by means of fantasy,[36] so much so that the mOther's desire becomes perpetually indecipherable to the child. The mOther's desire then takes on the role of object *a*, through which "the subject separates himself off, ceases to be linked to the vacillation of being, in the sense that it forms the essence of alienation" (*Seminar XI* 258). It is "the cause of desire, . . . the object around which the drive turns" (*Seminar XI*, 243). In order to have a sense of completeness, the child can only follow wherever the

[34] For Lacan, "the child always represents for the mother a substitute for the symbolic phallus which she lacks" (Evans 118). However, as the child's presence can never entirely satisfy the mother, he/ she soon comes to realize that the mother desires the imaginary phallus. The child then "seeks to satisfy the mother's desire by identifying with the imaginary phallus" (*ibid*.). As a result, "the child is completely at the mercy of the capricious desire of the mother, helpless in the face of her omnipotence (*ibid*.).

[35] In the article "What Does Lacan Say About Desire," the writer Owen Hewitson quotes a passage from Freud, who proposes a similar view in his discourse on the nature of love. Freud contends that "[i]f we are to understand the love-objects chosen by our type as being above all mother-surrogates, then the formation of a series of them, which seems so flatly to contradict the condition of being faithful to one, can now also be understood. We have learnt from psycho-analysis in other examples that the notion of something irreplaceable, when it is active in the unconscious, frequently appears as broken up into an endless series: endless for the reason that every surrogate nevertheless fails to provide the desired satisfaction" (Qtd. by Hewitson *Seminar XI* 169). This passage demonstrates that Freud, too, perceives the metonymic nature of desire.

[36] Fantasy, in Lacanian algorithm, is represented as $(\$ \lozenge a)$, designating the barred subject's relation to the object *a*.

object *a* lies, resorting to fantasies that fulfill the lost mother-child unity. One's never-ending pursuit of desired objects is therefore a result of the unattainable signified, the mOther's desire that always already eludes the signifier. For Lacan, desire in this sense is metonymical, and it lies "in the signifying cut in which metonymy occurs" (*Écrits* 709).

The Lacanian blueprint on the causality between the barred subject and desire can find a metaphorical parallel in every epistolary correspondence, where the addressor takes the addressee as a signifier, an object *a* that leans toward the Other's desire. More often than not, an epistolary relationship begins with a single party's desire to form a textual relationship with an intended addressee. While the purpose behind every epistolary act varies in cases, the underlying desire that circulates between its involving correspondents follows the same structural design as one's pursuit of object *a*. In "Why Does a Letter Always Arrive at its Destination?," Slavoj Žižek puts forward the Lacanian assertion that "a sender always receives his/her own message in a reversed form" and that "the big Other returns to the subject his own message in its true form" (14). Hereby letters are seen as the medium endowed with the subject's desire, and the examination of its symbolic circulation helps exemplify its significance as an interface between the self and the Other. In fact, when an individual sends out a letter to another person, it is not so much the receiver that he or she intends to reach as the big Other's desire that the addressee signifies. The addressee's place as a signifier in the transmission of desire functions as a middle ground to denote the inaccessible desire of the Other. Therefore, who the addressee is matters no more than what the addressee signifies,[37] since the correspondence represents only one of the subject's many attempts in the pursuit of the Other's desire.

[37] As demonstrated in the essay "Seemingly Close, Really Distant: *Kafka's Letter to Felice*," where Chin-yuan Hu identifies the structure underlying every epistolary relationship in the reading of the real-life correspondence between Kafka and Felice.

Meanwhile, to sustain an epistolary relationship within the structure of fantasy, the distance between the two parties involved is a determining factor, for it brings about an illusion to the addressor that the other is the one desired object, so that the addressee can retain the position as a signifier for the Other's desire. However, once the required distance is transgressed, the subject, realizing the illusory nature of the addressee, will not be able to continue the correspondence.

Susan's one-way writing to the writer Foe is reflective of the Lacanian formula for fantasy, which designates the barred subject's relation to the object *a*. Even while Foe never asserts his position as an addressee by responding Susan's letter throughout their faux epistolary relationship, the protagonist still manages to exhibit a sustaining, if not increasing, desire to address him. In an attempt to have her story acknowledged by others, Susan makes a confidant out of Foe after she is told about "Mr Foe the author who [has] heard many confessions and [is] reputed a very secret man" (48). Their epistolary relationship therefore unfolds in the form of a confession, making Susan the confessant, and Foe the confessor.[38] To a certain extent, the confessional nature of their relationship justifies Susan's one-sided letter writing, but what really prompts her desire even when she never receives any response from Mr. Foe can only be attributed to the addressee's symbolic function. In the Lacanian symbolic setting, Susan's writing is motivated by object *a*, the Other's desire. Her need to locate a substitution that signifies that Other's desire finds its gratification in Mr. Foe, whose role as a signifier sets the course for Susan's epistolary journey. Her early statement "I have none of these [writer's skills], while you have all" (52) reveals her inclination to regard him as an ideal addressee upon whom she can bestow trust and confidence. In fact, during the writer's absence Susan once exposes the

[38] The confessional relation between writer and character can be further discussed with Bakhtin's discussion of confession, as expounded in Smith's book titled *Confession in the Novel: Bakhtin's Author Revisited.*

dispensability of Foe's function as an addressee by viewing him as a mere placeholder in their epistolary relationship: "To whom am I writing? I blot the pages and toss them out of the window. Let who will read them" (64). This moment of clarity reveals that not only does Foe's function as a signifier exceed his role as an actual being, but his place is subject to random substitution.

When the distance required of every epistolary correspondence is transgressed in the third section of *Foe*, the relationship between Susan and the writer comes to an inevitable end. After months of longing and waiting, Susan finally gets hold of the information about the author's whereabouts and his current abode. "It is not as I imagined it" (113), she said upon her arrival. The comment prophesies the situation she would later find herself in, as her epistolary endeavor becomes disillusioned after coming face to face with the addressee. Indeed, Foe's advancement onto the scene cancels his role as a signifier in this interplay of desire embedded in Susan's one-way writing, and she begins to notice the gap between what she has in mind of him and what he actually turns out to be. Section Three thereby features prominently the two characters' diverging opinions regarding the content of Susan's tale and the author's function in storytelling. Whereas Susan expects him to write about the story on the island, Foe is more interested in the story taking place in Bahia, where she once visited in the attempt to search for her lost daughter. While Foe thinks that characters should accept whichever roles assigned to them, Susan believes they need to retain their own voices. As their debate carries on, Foe gradually leaves behind his role as an empty signifier and begins to emerge as a critical, thinking being. In consequence, Foe can no longer serve as an addressee for Susan, and their epistolary relationship is thus put to an end.

Even though her writing in the novel *Foe* documents a subject's dealings with

the Other as language and desire, Susan never really sees clearly her linguistic position in the context of the symbolic order. Little does she expect, when she starts off orchestrating her story, that the language which she apparently has the ability to manipulate would come to shackle her down as a subject forever barred from itself. After breaking off her epistolary relationship with Foe in Section Three, Susan looks back on her earlier writing and asks herself "[w]hy do I speak, to whom do I speak, when there is no need to speak?" (133). By then, without a signifier to substitute for her desire for object *a*, the Other's desire, Susan finds herself lacking the drive for further writing. She is caught in a difficult situation in which she has to face not only her position as a barred subject but also her lack as a desiring subject. Meanwhile, as part of the symbolic system, Susan is deprived of the perspective that would grant her the knowledge of her actual position in the symbolic order. As a result, she never figures out the actual force that propels her nonstop writing even when there is no longer a distinct addressee. It also never occurs to her that the idea of an independent, self-assertive subjectivity is but a mere illusion, and that everything she "is" needs to be built up in a close relationship with the Other.

While Susan's attempt to secure her own story turns out futile by the end of the third section, the unknown narrator introduced in the final section of *Foe* manages to bring forth an account that eludes both Susan's effort and her symbolic position. The prominent significance attributed to the protagonist's writing derives not so much from its function as the tale's central perspective, but from the symbolic function of the ever-changing narrative style that spans the greater part of the novel. The juxtaposition of Coetzee's storytelling and Lacanian psychoanalysis in this chapter reveals how their respective work parallels with and responds to each other. In fact, Lacanian discourse proves a sufficient theoretical approach in resolving the enigma

underlying Susan's epistolary journey. As the narrative pieces in early sections gradually culminate into a clear authorial voice in Section Three, Susan's words come to be signified. Language overrides the unconscious subject, and what remains of the "I" is a mere linguistic effect. Susan's writing in the novel *Foe* therefore symbolizes a subject's initiation in the symbolic order. On the other hand, her devotion in the one-way correspondence can be verified by Lacanian discourse on the subject's relation to object *a*. Accordingly, Susan's abandonment of her writing project after the disillusion of the desired object leaves her literary aspiration unrequited; it also further attests to the fantastic aspect of her act. Therefore, the advent of an unknown narrator following the end of Section Three serves as a contrast to Susan's now diminished voice. Chapter Four of this thesis is thus dedicated to the understanding of the association between *Foe*'s final section and the previous three parts. With the fourth part of the novel *Foe* featuring a speaker who descends upon a place that is not for words, it offers a solution to Susan's quandary as a symbolic being, introducing a medium that potentially eludes language and its Otherness.

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CHAPTER FOUR

IN THE FACE OF THE ABJECT

"I began to look on him . . . with the horror we reserve for the mutilated."

Foe 24

The title "Foe" indicates a position situated on the "Other" side. It marks the place where all of the self's adversaries lie, while setting the self apart by declaring its solitude. Inasmuch as the word "foe" inspires a focus on the self-Other dyad and how the Other helps shape the ego, it also connotes the idea of being "hostile and inimical" (OED), thus implying that something which intimidates and threatens my position. In terms of the relationships between the characters in the novel *Foe*, the one belonging to Susan and Friday most tellingly represents the dynamic between the speaking "I" and the "foe who arouses fear." Clearly, for the narrator protagonist Susan Barton, Friday's presence serves not as a confirmation of her being, but rather as something that shakes her entire existence to the core. Adding to the variants that distinguish Friday is the tongue mutilation that incites in Susan the curiosity and horror not usually brought about by the Other. Given the situation at hand, one is compelled to wonder: What is this presence, this matter caught between I and the Other? What significance does it have over the formation of the self? These questions need to be clarified before any interpretation is given to the rather obscure relationship between Susan and Friday.

On the other hand, the structural arrangement of the four sections in *Foe*,

especially the last two, also requires attention in an attempt to ascribe meaning to its esoteric ending. Following Susan's earlier epistolary journey and its later culmination into realist writing, the third section marks the closure of her literary quest. What ensues is the introduction of an unknown narrator, along with the rather elusive account of the fourth section. With little resemblance in narrative but large divergence in style, Sections Three and Four of the novel take an oppositional position in relation to each other. In the meanwhile, the identical opening line "The staircase is dark and mean" (113; 153) shared by the two sections indicates their interchangeable function; in other words, both serve as alternative endings to Coetzee's tale. This double bind, this symbiosis of different narrative approaches, when juxtaposed, calls to mind the relationship between one and the other. As a result, a closer look at the dialogic relationship between the realism in the third section and the poetic imagination in the fourth would further reveal the significance underpinning *Foe*'s elusive end.

To look further into the Susan-Friday relation and to account for the dialogism of the final two sections, this chapter adopts the theory of Julia Kristeva on the abject and the semiotic. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva refers to "the repugnance, the retching that thrust me to the side and turns me away" (2) as characteristic of abjection. Having "only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*" (1), the abject, rather than securing a place for the self in the world, "does not cease challenging"(2) its position as a subject. The idea recalls the "horror" (24) Susan experiences upon knowing Friday's tongue mutilation. She then begins to perceive the silent slave in a different light than she does to Cruso and Mr. Foe. Therefore, where Susan strives to hold on to her precarious position as a subject, she also finds the horrible (non)presence of Friday as the abject looming before her. Meanwhile, in *Desire in Language*, Kristeva elaborates on the pre-mirror stage termed "semiotic

chora" (281) to designate a pre-symbolic phase prior to language, where rhythm and tone abound. The semiotic then becomes the opposite of the symbolic, serving the reverse function of the dominating language system. However, with the intervention of language, the semiotic can only be measured by the poetic discourse. Thus poetic language designates "the irruption [of semiotic rhythm] within the order of language of the anteriority of language" (32). In the case of *Foe*, the parallel between the last two sections conceivably embodies the dynamics between the symbolic representative of the third section and the semiotic that permeates the fourth. By referencing Kristevan discourse, this thesis argues that the horror Susan experiences is derivative of the threat to a subject's existence provoked by Friday's abject bearing; meanwhile, the subject-abject dyad evoked by the narrator and the slave is reflective of the novel's last two sections, whose contrasting pairing affords a diversity unforeseen in their early counterparts.

Identifying the Abject

"Abjection," according to Kristeva, "is coextensive with social and symbolic order, . . . one encounters it as soon as the symbolic and/or social dimension of men is constituted" (*Powers of Horror* 68). In other words, it becomes acknowledgeable once the subject is identified through language, and its manifestation, called "the abject," coexists with the object of the symbolic. What fundamentally distinguishes the object from the abject of the Kristevan sense is that, for the "I" involved in the symbolic, while the object "settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, [making] me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it," the abject, on the contrary, "draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (1-2). There, at "the border of my condition as a living being" (3) where the abject beckons me, lies a

"'something' that I do not recognize as a thing; a weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me"(2). It is "of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me" (2). Therefore, an abject is essentially "what[ever] disturbs identity, system, order" (4).

When facing the abject, however, "the spasms and vomiting, . . . the repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away" (2) protects the self and keeps its world from collapsing. Even while the abject never ceases confronting the self with its detestable presence, the "abject and abjection are my safeguards" (2) against the frailty of the symbolic. It marks the thin line between the world in which the self steadfastly stands and the unknown abyss where this "I," this existence that the self clings to, is non-existent. In ways that the existence of the object helps sustain the ego, the recognition of the abject retains the coding archetypical of the superego, thus "[t]o each ego its object, to each superego its abject" (2).

In *Foe*, the silent slave appears to Susan first as someone of other race and culture, but underneath his silence lies something characteristic of the Kristevan abject, whose haunting existence lingers across Susan's narrative. During their early encounter, the narrator finds him no more than a manservant of the rather intriguing Cruso, whose story she so eagerly seeks to tell. To her, the "Negro" is nothing but an alien Other. However, the scene in which Cruso puts the slave's tongue-less mouth to display marks for Susan the revelation of Friday's atrocious mutilation:

> Cruso motioned Friday nearer. "Open your mouth," he told him, and opened his own. Friday opened his mouth. "Look," said Cruso. I looked, but saw nothing in the dark save the glint of teeth white as ivory. "La-la-la," said Cruso, and motioned to Friday to repeat. "Ha-ha-ha," said

> Friday from the back of his throat. "He has no tongue," Said Cruso. Gripping Friday by the hair, he brought his face close to mine. "Do you see? he said. "La-la-la," said Cruso. "Ha-ha-ha," said Friday. I drew away, and Cruso released Friday's hair. "He has no tongue," he said. (22)

The discovery forever changes Susan's perspective towards Friday. In fact, the scene leaves such a bad taste in Susan's mouth that it haunts her in the remaining part of her writing.

As the abject announces its daunting presence in the face of the subject, Friday's tongue mutilation takes its toll on the narrator Susan Barton. Immediately after the scene where Friday's mutilation is revealed, Susan experiences a drastic change of outlook towards the silent slave. She writes: "now I began to look at him—I could not help myself—with the horror we reserve for the mutilated" (24), and the "horror of his mutilated state . . . made me shut him from my mind, and flinch away when he came near me" (32)[39]. Suddenly, Susan finds in Friday the "horror" characteristic of the Kristevan abject. As she perceives it, the severed tongue evokes that "dark revolts of being" within abjection, which "lies there, quite close, but . . . cannot be assimilated" (1). She cannot fight off the vivid imagery of "the root of his tongue closed behind those heavy lips like a toad in eternal winter . . . , [which makes her] shiver" (57). Like the abject, the cut-out tongue leads Susan to" the place where meaning collapses" (2), threatens her, inciting horror. It makes the narrator self-conscious about her own existence, leaving her with a keen sense of "how lively were

[39] Another example of her distaste for the tongue-less slave occurs in the passage where she writes: "I covertly observed him as he ate, and with distaste heard the tiny coughs he gave now and then to clear his throat, saw how he did his chewing between his front teeth, like a fish. I caught myself flinching when he came near, or holding my breath so as not to have to smell him. Behind his back I wiped the utensils his hand had touched" (24). For Susan, Friday is now something filthy and revolting, a defilement that one shuns away from.

the movements of the tongue in [her] own mouth"(24).

The Susan-Friday relationship characterizes the subject-abject association in which the latter threatens as well as fascinates the former. For a subject such as Susan Barton, who seeks to identify with the symbolic Other, the encounter with the abject potentially poses a threat to her symbolic existence. Much of Susan's being is at stake as she depends her entire existence on the act of storytelling; her being is "drearily suspended" until her story is retold through the craft of a proper hand[40]. Until Mr. Foe's participation, all she can do is to keep on writing, and language thus becomes the only means that sustains her precarious existence. At this delicate juncture, Friday's mutilation comes off as a threat to Susan, for it accentuates "the softness of the tongue . . . [and] how helpless it is before the knife, once the barrier of the teeth has been passed" (85), reminding her of the fragility of orality. The severed tongue makes her understand that she, too, might easily lose the tongue that grants her the access to language and speech. Meanwhile, Kristeva points out that "abjection is above all ambiguity"(9), where one finds "a composite of . . . condemnation and yearning" (10). Since the abject indicates "something rejected from which one does not part" (4), it is no wonder that Susan keeps the slave close at her side until "Friday has grown to be [her] shadow" (115). Ultimately, though the abject poses threat to an individual, it also helps secure one's symbolic position.

For someone that the abject stands so closely by, Susan's plight in *Foe* makes her representative of the "*deject*" outlined by Kristeva. Essentially one "by whom the abject exists," a deject refers to someone "who places (himself), separates (himself), situates (himself), and therefore strays instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing" (8). While it befits Susan's situation to identify her as a

[40] Susan refers to the writer's artful involvement as what would liberate her "from this drab existence" (63); she also mentions how her life is "drearily suspended" (63) until Mr. Foe finishes writing her tale.

"deject," a "stray" who stumbles on the way to literary deliverance, it is crucial to understand to what degree Friday's abject existence affects her on the way to locate subjectivity. According to Kristeva, a deject:

> Instead of sounding himself as to his "being," he does so concerning his place: "*Where* am I?" instead of "*Who* am I?" For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogeneous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic. . . . the deject never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines—for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject—constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh. A tireless builder, the *deject* is in short a stray. (8)

While much of Susan's literary quest involves the investment in the Other and the question of "Who am I," Friday's abject presence compels the narrator, now a deject, to ask "Where am I." For the most part, Susan's narrative is preoccupied with the pursuit of object *a*. By tracing the direction of the Other's desire, she secures for herself a name and an identity. Meanwhile, Friday's daunting interference removes her from that interest in the Other and leads her to question the very structure that makes her a language subject. To the extent that "Who am I" questions the relationships between subject and Other objects, "Where am I" concerns structures that sustain the symbolic. The remaining part of this chapter thus aims to address the structural issue proposed by the abject in *Foe*.

The Semiotic and the Symbolic

The separation and the alienation a child must go through prior to the entry into the symbolic represent that something must be renounced before the position of a

subject is secured. In terms of Lacanian thinking, it involves the denial of the mother-child bond as it gives rise to the dominance of the Other's language. It sets for the child, now a subject, a formula through which he/she embarks on an unrelenting pursuit of the object *a*. In the discussion of the pre-symbolic, Lacan's main purpose as a psychoanalyst is to theorize the structure of desire common to all; his discourse serves to illuminate the structure of subjectivity. For Kristeva, however, who comes to the Lacanian treatise with a background in Russian Formalism, the talk in matters concerning the symbolic reaches beyond the subject involved. In fact, with the legacy of theorists such as Mikhail Bakhtin leaving their imprints on Kristeva[41], it is inevitable and almost imperative that she should find ways to deal with the anteriority of language. Exactly what exists prior to the mirror stage and the symbolic? As language so arbitrarily signifies the world for the subject, right before the admission into the symbolic, might there be something, anything, which reaches through the child in the early stage? More specifically, Kristeva asks, if the mirror stage shows the infant any representation, and if only language encodes the "idealities" of a subject, then, "what about the paradoxical *semiosis* of the newborn's body, what about the *semiotic chora*, what about this 'space' prior to the sign" (*Desire* 281)?

Kristeva's interest in the pre-symbolic leads her to the discovery of the semiotic chora, which designates that most archaic stage prior to the child's arrival at the mirror stage. In the earliest three months, the newborn body is dominated by a mixture of early perceptions, feelings and physical needs. It marks a time when the infant exhibits the strongest attachment to the mother, while boundaries are still non-existent. During this phase, the "semiotic operations" (*Desire* 134) such as rhythm and intonation are "imminent to the chora prior to any signified spaciousness" (286).

[41] Much of the Kristevan thinking is indebted to Bakhtin, whose theory on the dialogism of language helps formulate some of her more significant discourses. Examples can be found in essays such as "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," where the argument follows and sustains Bakhtin's early discourses.

By two and a half months, the archaic dispositions such as voice, hearing and sight provide the infant a "threshold of space," whence emerge the earliest forms of discreteness (283). From this early "space," the child then develops a gradual detachment from the maternal, contributing to the initial distinction between the self and the (m)Other preparatory to the mirror stage.

As a response to the Lacanian focus on the symbolic, Kristeva finds in the semiotic the heterogeneity that, seen in poetic language, displaces the supremacy of language. According to Kristeva, poetic language contains the heterogeneity homologous to the semiotic operations (rhythm, intonation) of the pre-symbolic chora. In fact, there lies, in poetic language, "a *heterogeneousness* to meaning and signification" that coincides with what can be detected "in the first echolalias of infants as rhythms and intonations anterior to the first phonemes, morphemes, lexemes, and sentences" (133). To "this signifying disposition [that] is not that of meaning or signification," Kristeva assigns the term "the semiotic" (le sémiotique), suggesting "a *distinctiveness* admitting of an uncertain and indeterminate articulation because it does not yet refer . . . to a signified object for a thetic consciousness" (133). Whereas the symbolic arbitrarily signifies, the semiotic "designates . . . a disposition that is definitely heterogeneous to meaning" (133). Even while poetic language unsettles the position of the linguistic subject, the signifying apparatus that poetic language complies to makes it "an undecidable process between sense and nonsense, between language and rhythm . . . between the symbolic and semiotic" (135).

The Two-sided *Foe*

There is a curious ambiguity to the two closing sections of J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*. While Section Three concludes the narrator Susan Barton's literary journey,

Section Four witnesses the introduction of an unknown narrator and a version of Friday's unspeakable past. What is left off by the protagonist's futile literary pursuit in one part is picked up and reinvented in the other. Still, the fourth section neither explains nor resolves Susan's quandary; instead, it further puzzles the narrative. The realist style in the third section is contrasted with the poetic design in the fourth, and the only feature that makes the two otherwise contrasting sections resemble each other is the identical first line jointly shared: "The staircase is dark and mean" (113, 153). However, the opening line does not so much indicate as hint at the relation of the two sections, the juxtaposition of which poses some of the more obvious questions in *Foe*: So what is the significance of this juxtaposition? What is added to the narrative that already exhausts itself? Might there be some sort of dialogism involved between the narrative of the female castaway and the account given by the unknown speaker who remains after all else is lost? Also, what can be gathered from the identical opening line? Following the theoretical arrangement of the present thesis, the ensuing section intends to demystify the significance of Foe's ending through the views of Bakhtin, Lacan, and Kristeva.

Judging from Bakhtinian perspective on a subject's language acquisition, a larger part of the first three sections chronicles Friday's appropriation of Western signs for his performative acts, while the last section sets the slave free of symbolic influences and returns to him a "voice" previously denied him. Adding to Friday's gradual assimilation of the Western ideology is the narrator's attempt to render the slave's past in words; therefore, the early sections of *Foe* document Friday's involvement in language. In the meantime, the unidentified narrator in the final section guides readers through two stages of symbolic imaginations, setting Friday free of the symbolic restraint. In the first stage, the room opens up to the nameless

narrator at the beginning of Section Four, recalling Mr. Foe's dwelling. Susan and Mr. Foe are found long dead, and in the dark corner lies Friday with his teeth clenched. The narrator "press[es] a fingernail between the upper and lower rows [of Friday's teeth]" (154), trying to make him speak. A long while afterwards, his teeth part, and there is " the faintest faraway roar. . . the roar of waves in a seashell. . . and over that. . . the whine of the wind and the cry of a bird," and then, "[f]rom his mouth, without a breath, issue the sounds of the island." This utterance alone serves as a contrast to Friday's previous expressions that are loaded with English signs. Thus unaffected by the Western influence, Friday offers his story, one unprocessed by the Western signifying system. Meanwhile, the second part sees the narrator sliding into the water and arriving a place "not . . . for words . . . [but] where bodies are their own sign"(157). At this "home of Friday" (157), the narrator again tries to "find a way in" Friday's mouth, and to hear what he has to say:

> His mouth opens. From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through his body and out upon me; it passes up through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and the 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. (157)

When everything symbolic is torn down and laid bare, the stream issuing from Friday's mouth represents the materiality that cannot be signified. As a result, the latter stage proposes an end to Susan's quest and speculates a way through Friday's enigma.

The parallel between Susan's writing and the unknown narrator's language well illustrates the self-Other dyad in Lacanian discourse. The shared opening line

between the last two sections suggests that the two can either function as alternatives, or they should be treated jointly. Even while each section offers its individual account, when seen in the light of Lacanian discourse, the causality of the two sections serve as a greater metaphor for Susan's position as a barred language subject.

Following the conclusion to Susan's literary quest by the end of the third chapter[42], Section Four can only be narrated by someone "Other." As a subject barred in language, Susan's existence in the symbolic world relies solely on the Other, so the termination of Susan's voice means the advance of the Other's language. Therefore, the narrating voice in the fourth chapter represents the Other's overwhelming language quintessential to Susan's symbolic existence. Like the ever-present symbolic order, which makes possible the subject but also alienates it from itself, the narrative voice in the last section helps sustain Susan's story but at the same time denies its signified. Eventually, Susan's story is told, but it needs to be told through the unknown Other's language, hence barred from having her own.

The Lacanian perspective provides an interpretation of the connection between the last two sections; however, in terms of the subject matter included in each section, it does not seem satisfying. While it befits the section arrangement to view the two narrative voices as sharing the connection between the barred subject and the Other, the different language styles represented in each section suggest otherwise. If the unknown speaker in the fourth section stands for the Other's language, then it is only justifiable if the narrative turns out to be static, arbitrary, and thetic, as characteristic of the symbolic language. However, the final section of *Foe* offers the entirely opposite. In addition to the poetic language that abounds in Section Four, the narrator hears from Friday's mouth utterances that rise far beyond the

[42] As much as she wants to arrive at a "true" account of her experiences, her narrative becomes ossified and rigid when it turns into realist writing in Section Three. She assumes the position of a subject, and is alienated by the effect of language. This marks the end to her earlier objective.

symbolic language. As much as they cannot be easily defined and made sense of, the rhythm, the beating and the sound still demand critical attention.

The Kristevan definition of the semiotic operations, mostly detected in rhythm and intonations, finds its place in the fourth section of *Foe*. When the poetic language of Section Four is contrasted with the symbolic language in Section Three, it is clear that the final sections of the novel resemble that opposing positions between the symbolic and the semiotic. In the early sections, Friday represents an aphasic deprived of the access to speech; his expressions, saturated with Western signs, consist of the occasional performances documented by Susan. However, by the fourth section, the unknown speaker evokes from his mouth first the sound of the island and then a stream that overflows the surface of the earth. Such utterances, even if they were showcased previously, would have gone unnoticed by Susan, whose main concern is of the symbolic. Whatever flows from the slave's mouth does not (yet) signify or conjure any meaning. At the utmost, they recall only sounds from the distant past, resembling nothing more than "the roar of waves . . . the whine of the wind . . . and the cry of a bird" (157). Like rhythms and intonations characteristics of the semiotic disposition, these sounds and vibrations, coming from the slave, designate a heterogeneousness to the symbolic language.

Section Three and Section Four of *Foe* run parallel to the Susan-Friday association in that the latter, with its semiotic elements, contains features that belong to Kristevan abject. The main factor that essentially makes Friday an abject to Susan is the sense of horror induced by the slave's mutilation, which confronts her and threatens her existence. While Section Four does not have an effect on the third section in the same way as an abject taking its toll on the subject, the heterogeneousness contains within it works similarly by first exposing the anteriority

of language, and then challenging its thetic meaning. Like the association between the abject and the subject, the juxtaposition of the last two sections demonstrates that "this semiotic heterogeneity . . . is inseparable from . . . the symbolic function of significance" (*Desire* 134). Together, they resemble two extremes; one cannot exist without the other. As a result of this mutual dependence, "[h]owever elided, attacked, or corrupted the symbolic function might be in poetic language . . . the symbolic function nonetheless maintains its presence"(134). Regarding the last two sections, whereas the symbolic language in Section Three demonstrates "the thetic and predicative constraints of the ego's judging consciousness" (134), the poetic language in Section Four exhibits the "archaic disposition. . . that a poet brings to light in order to challenge the closure of meaning" (281). As a result, the symbolic Section Three and the semiotic Section Four stands as opposites. Nevertheless, their juxtaposition makes the conclusion of *Foe* a two-fold structure.

This chapter utilizes Kristevan theory for the examination of the curious Susan-Friday bond as well as the esoteric ending shared by the last two sections of *Foe*. By identifying Friday as an abject, the early part of this chapter accounts for the unusual bond between the female castaway and the silent slave. In addition, the subject-abject relationship mirrors the opposite positions of the symbolic representation of Section Three and the semiotic disposition in Section Four. With the emphasis placed on the oppositional dyads in this chapter, it would seem at first glance that this chapter concerns only binary oppositions. However, the significance of the abject and the semiotic always derive from the dissidence and the heterogeneity they conjure. In the face of abjection, the subject enveloped by the heterogeneity in language is a "deject" who finds his/her symbolic position challenged. He/She is thus a "stray," a "tireless builder" who finds it imperative to resituate him/herself in the

symbolic:

> He is on a journey, during the night, the end of which keeps receding. He has a sense of the danger, of the loss that the pseudo-object attracting him represents for him, but he cannot help taking the risk at the very moment he sets himself apart. And the more he strays, the more he is saved" (*Powers of Horror* 8).

Essentially a "subject-in-process" (*Powers* 135), the speaking subject keeps on finding him/herself amid the symbolic. Like the subject who persists in the pursuit of object *a*, the deject never stops his journey. Instead, he carries on.

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CHAPTER FIVE

SUBJECT AND ITS DISCONTENT

"I am a hole crying to be whole."

Coetzee, *In the Heart of the Country* 41

The present thesis takes a close look at J. M. Coetzee's novel *Foe*, a metafictional retelling of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Given the critical interests already attributed to the intertextuality[43] of the two works, the current project seeks not to reinforce the relationship between the two, but to focus on Coetzee's creation alone. The thesis, entitled "Writing Aphasics, Encountering *Foe*: Between the Semiotic and the Symbolic," addresses issues that concern the writing of the protagonist Susan Barton, together with the encounters throughout her literary journey. While the "aphasia" ascribed to all characters functions as a metaphor that unifies all types of speech impediments, the term "foe" refers to whoever stands counter to Susan on her way to deliverance. A recurring image seen in both the opening and the final scenes points to the thematic inclination of the tale: "With a sigh, making barely a splash, I slipped overboard" (5, 155). The image suggests an overlap between the moments in which Susan and the unknown speaker embark on their respective exploration of the unknown. Like the mysterious narrator that descends upon the final scene and, in two stages, uncovers Friday's tale, the reading

[43] Kristeva mentions how Bakhtin regards writing to be " a reading of the anterior literary corpus and the text as an absorption of and a reply to another text" (*Desire in Language* 69). The same applies to the reading of a text. For a reader, the comprehension of a certain piece of literary work involves an unending referencing of the other literary corpus. As a consequence, the reading of a creation such as *Foe* should not be restricted to its more obvious contributor alone.

proposed by this thesis adopts the same image as it strategically unravels Coetzee's *Foe* through each chapter. Therefore, the organization of the thesis follows a series of theoretical approaches centering on the relationship between language and subjectivity. Bakhtinian theory introduced in the second chapter concerns a subject and its language appropriation, providing an interpretation to Friday's unusual performances. Meanwhile, Lacanian treatise given in Chapter Three discusses a subject essentially split in its dealings with the language of the Other, proposing a reading to the transformation in Susan's narrative style and her unrelenting pursuit of the writer Mr. Foe. The fourth chapter then identifies Susan as a Kristevan deject, who finds her existence threatened in the face of Friday's abject existence. The subject-abject dyad in turn helps determine the symbiosis between the symbolic language and the semiotic disposition in the final two sections of *Foe*.

From Section One to Section Three

A series of performances from the dumb slave Friday puzzle while interest the narrator Susan Barton. Seeing Friday in a ritual-like gesture by scattering the flower petals onto the sea, Susan is convinced that there is "a spirit or soul . . . stirr[ing] beneath that dull and unpleasing exterior"(32) of Friday. However, the ritual, together with the six-note tune he occasionally plays, represents only the residue of Friday's previous language system. As exemplified by his later dance moves, his performance is a synthesis of different signs appropriated from the others. In Bakhtinian sense, his expressions are merely the expropriation of others' language and others' signs. Saturated with others' influences, they do not deliver any truth that the narrator hopes for.

Susan's writings in the first three sections of *Foe* consist of note passages,

diary entries, epistles and realist language. They recount the experiences and encounters from her literary quest. While this thesis does not put emphasis on the elaboration of different literary genres involved[44], the quotation marks that envelop her writings are a crucial element in the understanding of the early sections of *Foe*. It follows that the disappearance of these quotation marks in the third section contributes to the writing's culmination into realism. Seen from Lacanian perspective, such a transition in narrative style portrays the texts' movement into signification; meanwhile, it characterizes a child's entry into the symbolic order. As a result, the not yet signifierized passages in the early sections better resemble the subject than Section Three, where symbolic language dominates and the subject is alienated. In the same way the signifier loses touch with the signified, a subject is forever barred from his/her own self upon acquiring language.

Essentially antagonistic and opposing, as well as hostile and inimical, the term "Foe" designates not only the Other that stands in opposition to the "I" in the narrative, but also that abject who stands imminently right next to it. The recognition of the Other as language in Lacanian thinking splits this "I" into "the I of statement" and "the subject of enunciation," setting up a direction for the subject's desire. Thus alienated by language, the subject is fundamentally lacking[45]. It follows the structure of desire and seeks the direction of object *a*, hoping to regain the sense of wholeness derivative of the mother-child bond. Susan's ever-growing desire to write to Mr. Foe is emblematic of the subject's untiring pursuit of the object *a*. The termination of her writing occurs when their eventual encounter cancels Mr. Foe's function as a signifier

[44] Kristeva suggests that "any evolution of literary genre is an unconscious exteriorization of linguistic structures at their different levels" (*Desire in Language* 66); therefore, the different style that dominate each section of Susan's writing ought to reveal some aspects of the structure of language.

[45] The subject is lacking in a sense that its renouncement of the early mother-child bond prior to the symbolic denies the child the access to (be) the mOther's desire, leaving him/her desiring in the symbolic.

for the Other's desire. On the other hand, the significance of Friday's abject presence derives from the horror that threatens Susan's subjectivity. It reminds her of the thin line between existence and destruction that she precariously treads on. The repulsion she feels so strongly against his tongue mutilation protects her from having to confront the threat that can cost her subjectivity. As a subject in the face of an abject, Susan represents a deject in the Kristevan sense—namely, a stray who faces the imperative to constantly redefine her subjectivity, and who "in order to tally with its heterogeneity, must be, . . . a questionable subject-in-process" (135).

Section Four

At first glance, the fourth section of *Foe* comes across as an afterthought[46] to Susan's epistolary journey. When juxtaposed with the third section, however, the poetic language and the semiotic disposition afforded by this additional part supply a heterogeneity absent in Susan's writing. The semiotic, emerging from Friday's mouth in rhythms and tones, works against the thetic language of the symbolic. It proposes an alternative to Susan's quandary in storytelling, giving Friday a voice. Jointly, they present the novel *Foe* with a two-fold ending. Susan's fault comes from the presumption that Friday's performances can be understood and represented in words. For any interpretation given to Friday's utterances would reduce the heterogeneousness promised in poetic language.

The Coetzeean Motifs

There is, in the novel *Foe*, something appealing about Susan's writing and her

[46] Featuring a different narrative style and a previously unknown narrator, Section Four in no way sustains the narrative left off by Susan in Section Three. In fact, the two sections hardly resemble each other save for the identical opening line.

various encounters, the importance of which derives from the representation of a subject's involvement in language and its subsequent position in the symbolic. The narrative transition from note passages, diary entries and epistles to the realist writing not only demonstrates the process of signification, but also functions as a metaphor for the subject's alienation in the Other's language. On the other hand, Susan's response to Mr. Foe's absence[47] and Friday's presence also help reveal her structural position as a subject. While the former triggers Susan's pursuit of object *a* and commences her epistolary journey, the latter frightens the narrator by reminding the frailty of her symbolic existence. Through the reading of Susan's epistolary journey in *Foe*, this thesis calls attention to the dominant themes in Coetzee's metaphysical creation. To some extents, *Foe*'s concentration on the themes of writing and the self's confrontation with the abject serves to highlight two of the more dominant motifs in J. M. Coetzee's oeuvre. The contribution to the Coetzeean scholarship thus comes from the structural perspective offered by this thesis regarding the symbolic position of a subject.

Often stranded with an indescribable lack, Coetzee's protagonists turn to writing as a solution to their plights. The novel *Foe* sees the narrator Susan Barton in the act of writing as a way to cope with a sense of uncertainty and a lack of authority in her own voice. The ongoing writing process serves as a means to the pursuit of the desired object *a*. In a number of instances, Coetzee's other works[48] also feature

[47] Despite their eventual encounter in Section Three, Mr. Foe's effect on Susan proves far more lasting and strong during his non-presence in the first two chapters, where he still retains the role of the object *a*.

[48] The protagonists in both *Age of Iron* and *In the Heart of the Country* begin their respective writing simply because it is the only way to exist. The narrative frame for the first example bears a resemblance to Susan's writing, as it serves as the protagonist Mrs. Curren's letter to her daughter. For her, writing is the only medium that carries her through her dying days: "I wrote. I write. I follow the pen, going where it takes me. What else have I now?" (*Age of Iron* 108) As "a hole crying to be whole" (*In the Heart* 41), Magda in the latter example also tries to make meaning out of her desolate existence

characters that undertake the task of writing as a way to cope with their desolate existence. However, for whatever means the Coetzeean characters turn to writing as a solution, as in the case of Susan's narrative, they all depend on the signifying function of language.

The subject-abject dyad that sums up Susan's unusual connection with Friday also finds recurrence in many of Coetzee's other works[49]. As much as Coetzee's work concerns the involvement with the outsider[50], his protagonists often come to face with presences that are intimidating and revolting. The confrontation with the abject, adding to the characters' already dire situation, allows Coetzeean characters to explore, through the extremes, the defining constituents that commence the formation of the subject.

Epilogue

The present thesis approaches J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* with a structural perspective[51]. The theoretical discourses from Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva provide the anchoring points for the composition of each chapter,

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through writing. Taking language as the only medium between the self and the world, she asks: "if one cannot think of oneself in words, in pictures, then what is there to think of oneself in" (41)?

[49] In such cases as *Age of Iron* and *The Life and Times of Michael K*, the narrators find themselves confronted with the existence of the destitute and the outcast. Mostly they are accompanied by a sense of disgust, but also with a slight amount of fascination. For Mrs. Curren, the lifestyle and the state of existence which the vagrant Vercueil gives to himself evokes in her a feeling not dissimilar from Friday's mutilation in *Foe*: "Something in me revolts at the lassitude, the letting go, the welcoming of dissolution" (18). Vercueil's spit would be the emblem of his abject existence. The narrator's description of it is reminiscent of Kristeva's description of the abject: "The thing *itself*, I thought, shaken: the thing itself brought out between us. Spat not upon me but before me, where I could see it, inspect it, think about it. His word, his kind of word, from his mouth, warm at the instant when it left him. A word, undeniable, from a language before language" (18). Like that gob of spit that the vagrant spits on the ground, Vercueil's presence confronts Mrs. Curren with its abject presence.

[50] The Nobel Committee called him an author "who in innumerable guises portrays the surprising involvement of the outsider."

[51] The structural significance that belies the novel *Foe* is not only characteristic of the thematic concern of the Nobel laureate, but also representative of phenomena widely seen in the (post)modern scene.

allowing the thesis to effectively delineate the development of specific Coetzeean motifs latent in the novel *Foe*. This thesis offers a reading to the task of writing self-appointed by many of Coetzee's dissatisfied characters. It demonstrates that the structure of desire inherent in every writing project is what essentially sets the direction for the subject. Meanwhile, the subject-abject connection expounded in this thesis also resounds in the relationship between a typical Coetzeean protagonist and the abject projection of its antagonist. While the horror conjured by the abject works against the subject as a threat to its tenuous symbolic position, it confronts him/her with what must be rejected in order for him/her to "be."[52] As much as the Other confirms, the abjects rejects. The face of the abject evokes what cannot be conceived in the Other, revealing aspects about the subject uncharacteristic of its symbolic existence.

The self in language indicates someone discontented, a "subject-in-progress" (135) in the face of the heterogeneousness of foes and language. Marked with an irrecoverable lack, the subject is continuously in the process of searching for the Other's desire; at the same time, he/she is constantly scared and fascinated by the abject. The fundamental lack brought about by the symbolic position amounts to the discontent manifested in every subject, leading to the quest for the Other's desire. From the reading proposed by this thesis, the aphasia ascribed to the characters of *Foe* works as a greater metaphor that sums up every subject's lack. For Susan, the lack represents the discontent that serves as a backdrop for her aspiration to write, as for every other subject; meanwhile, it establishes a condition for the subject to desire. The indicator of the Other's desire, or the object *a* in Lacanian terminology, sets up

[52] The term "be" refers to the "being" in the symbolic.

the direction for the subject and propels him/her in the structure of desire[53]. It is what underlies Susan's epistle writing; it characterizes every writing task undertaken by the Coetzeean personas. In the meantime, the subject finds him/herself having to deal with the constant threat posed by abjection. As someone continually challenged for his/her position, the subject "continually but never definitively assumes the thetic function of naming, establishing meaning and signification, which the paternal function represents within reproductive relation" (138); instead, he/she is a subject-in-press, and his/her making a constant process. As someone "lost in the being of [his/her] being" (35), the subject keeps on writing.

[53] Magda refers more specifically to the sense of lack she feels; at the same time, she also meditates on the causality between language and desire. At one point, she raises the question: "Do you know what I feel like . . . Like a great emptiness, an emptiness filled with a great absence, an absence which is a desire to be filled, to be fulfilled. Yet at the same time I know that nothing will fill me, because it is the first condition of life forever to desire, otherwise life would cease" (114). In another passage: "Words alienate. Language is no medium for desire. Desire is rapture, not exchange. It is only by alienating the desired that language masters it" (26)

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