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# J. M. COETZEE'S *FOE*: A NARRATIVE OF DISLOCATION THROUGH ASSIMILATION

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## Abstract

This article rereads J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) and its intertextual bond with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) in the framework of cognitive poetics to shed light on the complex issue of canonicity in terms of content and form/style in *Foe*. To this purpose, Marie-Laure Ryan's notions of textual actual world (TAW) and accessibility relations are used along with Barbara Dancygier's concept of narrative space construction to examine how Susan Barton's narrative (the postcolonial account) anchors/accesses the already consolidated TAW of *Robinson Crusoe* (the colonial text) to dislocate the colonizer's secluded, monologic text by superimposing another psyche, through cognitive blending, upon it. Susan's narrative incorporates her constant awareness of the social mind to assimilate – rather than push aside – the colonizer's narrative by driving it out of its monologic state toward a dialogic, multivocal exchange in the contemporary postcolonial world where Cruso(e)'s story becomes a part of Susan's story.

## Key words

*J. M. Coetzee's Foe; textual actual world (taw); narrative spaces; conceptual metaphors; social mind; canonicity*

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## 1. Introduction

J. M. Coetzee's 1986 novel *Foe* engages critics of various backgrounds to rightly argue that, as Chris Prentice sums up, "*Foe* is a twentieth-century 'prequel' to that novel [*Robinson Crusoe*] that might be regarded as a fiction of literary 'drafting,' foregrounding questions – the politics and aesthetics – of inclusion and exclusion, shaping and framing, and of authority" (2011: 97–8). *Foe* is a modern day re-examination of the canonized (colonial) text of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. A female castaway named Susan Barton, cast out of the ship sailing from Bahia to Bristol by the mutinous sailors who have killed their captain, swims toward the landmark island of Cruso(e) to challenge Cruso(e)'s long celebrated authority. *Foe* is related in four chapters: first three chapters are narrated by Susan, but the last chapter has an unnamed narrator. In the first chapter, Susan reports and criticizes all she sees on the so-called "Cruso's island" (Coetzee 1986: 20) and, hence, highlights the contradictions between the two accounts provided by the two texts.

In her version, the island is a “*desert isle*” (Coetzee 1986: 7) which shelters Crusoe, an old man with no survival equipment – except for a knife – and no interest in writing down his his(story). Accompanying him is his slave Friday, whose tongue, Crusoe claims, has been cut by slavers. Having reached the shore, Susan joins these desperate men for a period of dull existence before they are saved by the crew of a ship that approaches the island. In contrast to Susan, Crusoe and Friday desperately resist being saved but are finally brought to the ship. Chapter one ends with Crusoe’s death and Susan and Friday’s moving on. Later chapters closely follow the manipulation of Susan’s account by Foe (the author Susan has chosen to write her story) and its final transformation to *Robinson Crusoe*, the colonial tale of a Christian survivor. Despite its brevity, the first chapter is a prominent instance of postcolonial re-writings whereby “Coetzee appears to be making a more fundamental challenge to the idea of history” (Head 2009: 25) through his method of interrogation of historical forces, a method which has resulted in many commentaries proposed by various scholars and critics.

First and foremost, there is the problem of canonicity. Derek Attridge argues that *Foe* “goes back to the beginnings of the English novel to explore the processes whereby certain narratives become canonized while others fail to gain a foothold” (2010: 27). To Attridge, canonization itself is a debatable process which is greatly affected by the apartheid. Believing that allusiveness, style and thematic focus are the three things in Coetzee which make his oeuvre canonical, Attridge proposes that Coetzee is trying to break the long imposed silence by using traditional canonical means to both enter the canon and to question it, concluding that Coetzee’s style “goes hand-in-hand with the intertextual allusiveness to reinforce the awareness that all representation is mediated through the discourses that culture provides” (1996: 173). Stating that “contemporary rewritings such as *Foe* are actually our most canonical texts, for they take canonicity as both their inventive premise and their textual subject,” Radhika Jones also agrees that Coetzee’s *Foe* exposes classics as “fragile, ephemeral things” (2009: 47, 46). The age-old relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in *Foe* has of course been a matter of controversy for numerous critics. Christopher Peterson, for instance, indicates that “Susan’s preoccupation with giving voice to Friday is consistently framed in terms of a language of penetration that would access his hidden interiority” (2015: 859). This is while Gayatri Spivak sees Friday as “the unemphatic agent of withholding in the text” and “the curious guardian at the margin,” (1990: 16) which establishes his fame as a resistant figure.

Struggle for power is found elsewhere in the text as well. Assuming both the Island and Crusoe as fictional, Jamie Snead discusses Susan and Foe’s battle for authorial recognition by asserting that Susan “is the physical manifestation of Foe’s own ideas and she represents the battle between author and character for absolute narrative control” (2010: 1). Similarly, Sarah Brouillette examines narrative strategies in Coetzee whose “tendency to undermine the status of any narrative representation of self-awareness” makes writing about his authorial self-consciousness “a tricky enterprise” (2007: 113).

Marco Caracciolo’s *J. M. Coetzee’s Foe and the Embodiment of Meaning* (2012) is among rare attempts to read Coetzee’s fiction by drawing on cognitive linguis-

tics and cognitive psychology. Focusing on the last chapter, Caracciolo proposes that “the conclusion of *Foe* is an allegory of interpretation in which the reader’s meaning constructions are projected onto the narrator’s exploration of an environment” (2012: 91–2). While regarding Coetzee’s narrator as the “heir to the nineteenth century tradition of investigative narrators who accompany the reader into an enigmatic storyworld,” Caracciolo is quick to point out that Coetzee’s *Foe* “gives a postmodernist twist to this tradition, since it is the narrator himself who lies at the roots of the reader’s puzzlement” (2012: 92).

By the same token, in this paper we attempt to shed light on the complexity of Coetzee’s ethics of assimilation in postcolonial times by examining how Coetzee’s postcolonial project of blending the two (colonial (*Robinson Crusoe*) and postcolonial (*Foe*)) texts responds to the colonialist (monovocal) canon and how the larger text of *Foe* exposes the strategies that are involved in the construction of the colonial (monovocal) fiction by juxtaposing the two spheres of fact and fiction and the transference and cloaking of fact within the final (fictional) account. Noting the significance of the first chapter in casting doubt on ‘the truth’ in Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, we have undertaken to focus on this chapter as the trigger point for the authorial conflict that becomes more manifest in form of heated arguments between Susan and Foe in later chapters. To this purpose, we bring together Marie-Laure Ryan’s theory of the textual actual world (TAW) and Barbara Dancygier’s narrative space construction strategies through blending as complementary approaches to look into the intricacies of Coetzee’s world construction, and focus on the dislocation and subsequent (inevitable) assimilation of the colonial world within the boundaries of the postcolonial. As such, we take issue with critical assertions like Susan Naramore Maher’s: “Despite his clever recreation of a seminal novel, despite his own mastery over language and form, he [Coetzee] cannot totally debunk Crusoe or Defoe” (1991: 35). We contend that Coetzee does not want to debunk either Crusoe or Defoe, but rather, he aims at including (but decentering) both – which is best shown through blending strategy whereby the interaction of the two narratives as two distinct but closely correlated spaces can be brought to the fore. In brief, the first chapter, acting as a metatext, “acknowledges the fictional status of its object text [*Robinson Crusoe*]” (Ryan 1991: 93), shedding new light on the complex issue of canonicity in Coetzee’s novel in terms of content and form/style.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Definition of Key Terms

Central to cognitive poetics is the idea that literary works act as the real world in a smaller scale. “The artist,” Jerome Bruner declares, “creates possible worlds through the metaphoric transformation of the ordinary and the conventionally ‘given’” (1986: 49). Within the semantic domain created by the artist, “the text may outline a system of reality: an actual world [TAW], surrounded by APWs”<sup>2</sup> (Ryan 1991: 112) projected by wishes, obligations, fears, goals, private minds, plans and dreams of the characters. The world thus created needs to be linked to the center by the so called accessibility relations to be possible. Highlighting

Kripke's idea that "possibility is synonymous with accessibility: a world is possible in a system of reality if it is accessible from the world at the center of the system," Ryan proposes accepting "a much wider range of accessibility relations" (1991: 31, 32) while dealing with fictional genres:

Since a text projects a complete universe, not just an isolated planet, two domains of transworld relations should be distinguished: (1) the transuniverse domain of the relations linking AW to TAW, and (2) the intrauniverse domain of the relations linking TAW to its own alternatives (TAPWs). The relations of the first domain determine the degree of resemblance between the textual system and our own system of reality, while the relations of the second determine the internal configuration of the textual universe. (Ryan 1991: 32)

On this basis, accessibility relations establish the relationships between TAW and AW. This is of utmost importance since the "distance between AW and TAW, as measured by accessibility relations, thus provides a fairly reliable indicator of fictionality, but not an absolute criterion [...] We regard a text as fiction when we know its genre, and we know that the genre is governed by the rules of the fictional game" (Ryan 1991: 46-7). Likewise, as we try to show, the more the text of *Robinson Crusoe* is revealed to be fictional (rather than a true account of a cast-away), the more it moves away from the actual world of reality we inhabit and the more its colonial nature (as an account constructed at the expense of repressing other possible worlds (Susan's and Friday's) is revealed.

Coetzee's postcolonial strategy through blending of these two independent, but closely connected TAWs can be further clarified through application of the complementary approach of narrative spaces as proposed by Dancygier. She approaches the text as a conglomeration of narrative spaces by modeling her theory on the priorly defined concept of "mental spaces" as "constructs distinct from linguistic structures but built up in any discourse according to guidelines provided by the linguistic expressions" (Fauconnier 1994: 16). These mental spaces are "small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action" (Fauconnier & Turner 2002: 40). Using mental spaces, we can construct meaning and understand daily communication. Though providing a clear explanation of how individual sentences may be subjected to overall storytelling goals is simply impossible – due to the complexity and length of fictional narratives – Dancygier explains that narrative is constructed through "emergence of partial narrative structures called narrative spaces [which are] primarily organized by various forms of narrative viewpoint" (2012: 36):

A narrative space has most of the features of a mental space ... set up through language expressions ... and further structured by grammatical choices such as person or tense. It has its topology, such as space, time ... [and] participants, some directly involved in the telling, called narrators, some being directly affected by the events, called characters, though there are also participants (intradiegetic narrators) who play both roles at the same time. (Dancygier 2012: 36)

Just like mental spaces, narrative spaces also function as constitutive elements of the conceptual blend which – linguistically speaking – refers to a dynamic, interpretive process during which mappings are created between temporary mental spaces. This process was brought to prominence by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner in *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (2002). Acknowledging that blends “arise in networks of mental spaces,” Fauconnier and Turner explain that in blending, “structure from two mental spaces is projected to a new space, the blend” (2002: 47) out of which a new blended mental space known as the “emergent structure” emerges. They further add: “Generic spaces and blended spaces are related: Blends contain generic structure captured in the generic space but also contain more specific structure, and they can contain structure that is impossible for the inputs” (2002: 47). As such, blending involves a dynamic process during which mappings are created between temporary mental spaces. During blending, “the viewer does not encode the facts as presented. Rather, we are prompted to integrate information from different domains” (Coulson & Oakley 2000: 176) to produce the ultimate meaning. These domains can be two experiences or two events: “Fauconnier (1994) suggests that [to construct meaning,] speakers utilize background knowledge, general cognitive abilities, and information from the immediate discourse context to help them decide when to partition incoming information and how to establish mappings among elements in different spaces” (Coulson & Oakley 2000: 178).

A similar process is involved in narrative construction as explained by Dancygier where the “emergent story results from the blending of all of the text’s narrative spaces” (2012: 36). Inspired by her predecessors’ definitions, Dancygier also uses blending in her elaboration of narrative space construction. She defines a narrative space as “a mental construct participating in the emergence of the story, having distinctive topology and narrative status, and linked to other narrative spaces in ways which prompt story construction” (2012: 36). This space, which is “set up through linguistic means” and is elaborated through some parts of the text, “is also subsequently enriched through blending and gradually starts functioning in the network leading to an emergent story” (Dancygier 2012: 37).

Of peculiar types of narrative spaces are the “representation space” and the “represented space” which constitute the “representation blend” and whose integration enriches the narrative. Before dealing with these two interrelated spaces and their role in Coetzee’s *Foe*, however, it should be noted that the method of application of these two concepts in this research significantly departs from (or rather expands on) Dancygier’s original application. In her case study of narrative spaces in Margaret Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin* (2000), Dancygier uses these terms to address objects such as paintings, photographs, etc. which by their very nature play an important narrative role through representing a snapshot of reality (representation space). She proposes that these objects function as narrative anchors that trigger narrative spaces which would hand in further explanatory cues to guide the readers’ comprehension (toward the represented space or the actual reality captured) by bringing the two spaces of representation and represented together in a final integration blend. Following Dancygier’s lead, we attempt to use these terms in a much broader sense to address the way in which

Coetzee's *Foe* can be read as a text which benefits from the existence of the representation blend. Instead of material objects such as paintings or photographs, however, we intend to show, Coetzee makes use of a prominent instance of blending during which mappings are created between two independent (main) narrative spaces (Or, rather, two independent fictional TAWs) of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Foe* as textual inputs. Interestingly, the essential characteristics of the two spaces of representation and represented – as defined by Dancygier – are preserved. Through Coetzee's blending strategy, past (*Robinson Crusoe*) and present (*Foe*) are integrated to give way to the emergent structure being constructed in *Foe*. Within this blended space, Defoe's novel is revealed to feature no more than the representation space, functioning as a snapshot of a partial reality (one that has been constructed by the monologic discourse of the colonizer). This is while the represented space (*Foe*, as the multivoiced space of postcoloniality) remains "the actual reality it [the representation space] captures, with its temporal and spatial features, identity of participants, as well as, crucially, topology available beyond what the representation shows" (Dancygier 2012: 45). In this sense, the represented space is the hidden background that needs to be explored and discovered through the clues dispersed within the narrative space. It is only "through a match of the representation space and the represented space" (Dancygier 2012: 47) that the final blend (*Foe*) is completed and the emergent narrative space is obtained in its entirety, hence the importance of cognitive blending as the authorial strategy utilized.

To be used in tandem with the priorly defined terms is the concept of the 'social mind' defined by Alan Palmer as the human capacity to read the minds of others. Indeed, the social mind is built on the reciprocal relationship of minds in any given society, hence presupposing intersubjectivity and situated cognition, two other terms that can be used interchangeably with the concept of the social mind: "We will never understand how individual minds work if we cut them off from the larger, collective units to which they belong" (Palmer 2010: 26). An important part of the social mind for Palmer, then, is "our capacity for *intermental thought*. Such thinking is joint, group, shared, or collective, as opposed to *intramental*, or individual or private thought." Like real minds, fictional minds, "form part of extended cognitive networks" (Palmer 2010: 26) embedded within storyworlds. In other words, a narrative describes fictional mental functioning of its characters to foreground their situated cognition, hence letting us (readers) recognize that like their minds, "our minds extend beyond the boundary of our skin and encompass the cognitive tools that we use" (Palmer 2004: 160).

As aforementioned, important to our situated cognition is the "the public nature of thought" (Palmer 2004: 134). From this perspective, Bakhtinian dialogicality and multivoicedness, in contrast to monovocality of the personal mind, form the premises of the concept of the social mind: "According to Bakhtin, consciousness never gravitates toward itself but is always found in intense relationship with another consciousness" (Palmer 2004: 153). This is why Palmer decides that every experience and thought of a character "is internally dialogic, filled with struggle, and is open to inspiration from outside itself" (2004: 153). Needless to say, dialogicality is an indispensable feature of postcolonial writings, as opposed to the



monovocality found in colonial, often canonized literary works. It is, therefore, an appropriate tool in approaching such monologic texts.

The social mind is introduced by Susan Barton to the monovocal environment of the primary (canonical) text of *Robinson Crusoe* to deconstruct its centrality as a canonical work and assimilate it. In this sense, Susan becomes a postcolonial agent “to restore equilibrium to the text whose imbalance is caused by colonizer’s monovocal account. The polyphony in Susan’s account stands for the heterogeneity of ideas in the postcolonial world that pushes the secluded world of the colonizer aside as only one of the available voices” (Saei et al. 2021: 200). Having deconstructed the centrality of the earlier text through dialogism, Coetzee’s *Foe* manages to assimilate this narrative as only one of the possible accounts of what really happened on that island.

### 3. Discussion

The primary scene of Coetzee’s *Foe* delivers its intradiegetic narrator, Susan, the character from Defoe’s lesser known novel *Roxana*, to the already consolidated narrative (TAW) of *Robinson Crusoe* by Defoe. Susan starts her tale abruptly by explaining her approaching “the strange island” (Coetzee 1986: 5) which prompts the reader to construct two mental spaces: the present space of Susan swimming toward the island and the past space of Robinson Crusoe doing the same. The common destination – and later setting – in both is of course the island which is soon to be confirmed as the landmark island of the earlier text of *Robinson Crusoe*. However, the island in the blended space of *Foe* is a far cry from its original depiction in Defoe’s novel where it served as an isolated space and formed the foundation of Defoe’s novel and his colonial project recorded within the focalizing account of the protagonist Robinson Crusoe and stemming from Crusoe’s “intramental, or private, individual thought” (Palmer 2010: 4).

Indeed, Susan’s arrival marks a fictional recentering during which ontological boundaries between the old and new TAWs are dissolved. Once the island is identified as Cruso(e)’s island, its function is clarified as a narrative anchor which opens up a narrative space soon revealed as a blend containing the old, colonial text of *Robinson Crusoe* and the developing, postcolonial account of Susan in *Foe*. Turk proposes that “[w]hen we read a novel whose intertext we know, our expectations are activated, completed, reversed, or frustrated not only by the narrative and discursive events within the novel we are currently reading but also by events within the intertext and by points of congruence and difference between the texts” (2006: 297). Clearly, in the case of *Foe* too, it is impossible to get hold of the emergent structure (the unfolding narrative of *Foe*) without taking the earlier text into careful consideration.

The correspondence between the focal participants in the blended space (Crusoe/Cruso and Defoe’s Friday/Coetzee’s Friday) is represented via identity mappings/connectors between them, an event which entails informed readership and awareness of the earlier text of *Robinson Crusoe*. Once this blend takes root in the reader’s cognition, s/he can partition the information into two distinct mental



spaces (structured by information from discrete cognitive domains) that allows the reader to cognitively access *Robinson Crusoe's* text as the background for the new text. Hence, it is easy to understand Coulson and Oakley's logic that in such cases, the "virtue of mental spaces is that they allow the addressee to divide information at the referential level into concepts relevant to different aspects of the scenario" (2000: 177). In short, by establishing partial mappings between cognitive models in different spaces in the network, blending makes for the projection of conceptual structure from space to space (which here operate on the larger level of narrative spaces, not simply mental spaces). Henceforth, the earlier narrative which retained its plausibility before the second narrative was forced upon it gradually loses its solid structure and falls prey to the strategic maneuvers of Coetzee's narrating character, Susan.

A superficial reading may treat the text of *Foe* as a possible world later added to the already established TAW of the story of *Robinson Crusoe* in line with comments about the possibility of the marginalized figures having a voice. In this sense, it would resemble the world of the colonized attaching itself to the world of the colonizer as "subversive intertextual revisions" (Prentice 2011: 99) in an attempt to be included. However, as Prentice rightly notes, this is not the case in *Foe*, "both because Susan is not a character in *Robinson Crusoe*, and even more significantly because Friday – who would be expected to be the focalizing character of a postcolonial revision – remains silent, his point of view largely inaccessible" (2011: 99). Such an approach, therefore, leaves the reader with nothing but inconclusive comments about the marginalized Friday's silence and the overall undecidability of the new text. To propose a solution, and while disagreeing that "the novel as a whole doubles and distorts Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*," (Uhlmann 2011: 93) we argue that *Foe* features not a possible world, but a complete TAW to deliver the point that only a part of this TAW – representation space – was shown to the reader at the expense of repressing other, equally important, co-existing possible worlds (those of the colonized and the marginalized). As such, counter-writing by Coetzee is not an attempt to distort the earlier text, but to add dimensions to the already consolidated and long celebrated TAW of *Robinson Crusoe*. This way, integrating the two spaces of representation and represented in the representation blend offered by *Foe* shrinks the world portrayed by Cruso(e) by embedding it within the limits of the larger text. Needless to say, by so doing, Cruso(e) and his outlook as the colonizer are removed from the center of his previously managed space.

The process of decolonization/assimilation within the representation blend takes place in a step by step manner, the first step being the introduction of Susan, a marginalized figure as a woman, into the text. Susan's abrupt intrusion instantly dislocates the centrality of the island and its colonialist aspects in the reader's mind by reducing her visit to the island to nothing but a temporary halt within the larger span of her journey during which her narrative anchors – and makes accessible – Cruso(e)'s narrative and embeds it within her own. Susan's narrative completes the before and after of her sojourn on the island through her account of her adventures following the trails of her lost daughter in Brazil and her later quest for being written down into a book. This way, the biggest blow to

the earlier text is delivered through the unsettling effect of its inclusion within the newer, more comprehensive, emergent text as only one part of a four-chapter novel. Expansion of Crusoe's world to Susan's world – through Susan's fresh, yet subjective, focalizing viewpoint – within the blend points toward the reality of existence of a larger world beyond, simultaneously dwindling Crusoe's self-built colonial world.

Concrete evidence from the two texts can clarify this point further. To many readers, the earlier text/representation space is “the archetypal colonialist island tale” (Lane 2006: 20) featuring “the amazing story of the man cast away on a desert island for twenty-eight years who not only survives but conquers his harsh environment, building shelters and fashioning clothing, setting up plantations and cattle herds, and even crafting that ultimate symbol of civilization: an umbrella” (Gallagher 1991: 169). Pinpointing Crusoe's heroic representation, David Medalie explains: “The movement in Defoe's novel **from shipwreck and despair to the** contentment of the reconciled and resourceful self on the island and then to rescue from it marks a specific trajectory of progressivist discovery and self-discovery” (1997: 46, emphasis in the original). This ideal man is capable of conquering nature as *the maker* and *the organizer*. Self-narrative provides Crusoe with the opportunity to stand in the center of his narrative and be a god-like figure. Furthermore, with the power of the pen, he focalizes his story without any intrusion. His world features the colonizer's monovocality and dominance:

My [Crusoe's] Island was now peopled, and I thought my self very rich in Subjects [...] How like a King I look'd. First of all, the whole Country was my own meer Property; so that I had an undoubted Right of Dominion. *2dly*, My People were perfectly subjected: I was absolute Lord and Law-giver; they all owed their Lives to me. (Defoe 1719: 203)

The world thus portrayed corresponds to the old state of affairs in the world, a state based on a dual system fixing the relationship of colonizer/colonized in an absolute form through “the production of differentiations, individuations, identity effects” (Bhabha 1994: 111). In this world, Crusoe stands for authority: “He is supreme creator of his island, dominant subject of his narrative, master of the material and the psychical. As the father of his island and of his narrative, he makes value out of ‘nothing’: the tabula rasa of his island becomes infused with his markings and his namings” (Maher 1991: 34). He owns/ rules things/ people once he names them.

Within this monovocal world, which has naturally come to prominence as TAW through exclusion/ deletions of other outlooks (co-existing possible worlds) and highlighting of certain others, the dominant's discourse rules. Having appropriated the space of the island, Crusoe has territorialized and stratified relationships within his kingdom by ordaining proper positions to his subjects. The formation of this world also owes much to the power of the ink and paper – instruments of writing – Crusoe holds in his hand and the separation of the island as a secluded place (reflecting Crusoe's/colonizer's isolated cognition incapable of interaction with other spaces). Defoe's project has proved so successful to the extent that

“Crusoe has transcended that text and come to inhabit space in our collective imaginations as a symbol of self-sufficiency and survival in solitary and strange situations” (Kraft 2007: 37). This effect was achieved because many of Defoe’s works, “made claims to veracity and actually convinced some readers that they were factual.” However, there were/are many readers who “had the pleasure of a double awareness of both fictiveness and a basis in the “real”—as do readers of contemporary historiographic metafiction” (Hutcheon 1988: 107). To them, the narrative fails to display facts. Coetzee’s counter-narrative, however, satisfies the yearning to have the whole picture, i.e. the representation blend. Indeed, Crusoe’s monovocal world is nothing other than the representation space forcing itself to the foreground. Coetzee’s counter-narrative challenges this representation space passing for TAW by joining it with the represented space in the integration blend. As such, it can be classified as an instance of bidirectional counter writings whereby, as Lane explains, the new text becomes more dynamically related to the old text. While being critical of the latter’s ideology, the new text “engages in a ‘two-way’ process, whereby its new readings add to the experience of reading particular canonical novels [...] the canonical novel is *not* seen as totally obliterated by the postcolonial critique, yet the colonial values revealed and rejected still provide a powerful lesson” (Lane 2006: 19).

More enlightening still is Patricia Waugh’s explanation of the paradox created through explaining metafictional author’s attempts to follow the “alternative worlds” theory in fiction: “Metafictional texts explore the notion of ‘alternative worlds’ by accepting and flaunting the creation/description paradox, and thus expose how the construction of contexts is also the construction of different universes of discourse.” Therefore, she concludes, “all metafictional novels have, finally, to engage with this question of the ‘truth’ status of literary fiction,” (1984: 90) an engagement which is best illustrated in Coetzee’s *Foe*.

Coetzee’s *Foe* plays with ideas of ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ to demonstrate “the existence of multiple Realities” (Waugh 1984: 89) or, rather, multiple possible worlds. He rewrites the colonial text to subsume it by bringing to the fore a comprehensive canvas on which to integrate the two spaces of (accentuated) representation and (attenuated) represented in the final representation blend. This strategy makes for de-centralizing the earlier text and its ideology while keeping it in the picture. It is within this blended space that Coetzee is able to question the premises of the colonial text and restore the equilibrium. His critical approach, of course, starts by attacking the very basis of Crusoe’s text, the island. Susan starts her description of the island as follows:

‘For readers reared on travellers’ tales, the words *desert isle* may conjure up a place of soft sands and shady trees where brooks run to quench the castaway’s thirst and ripe fruit falls into his hand, where no more is asked of him than to drowse the days away till a ship calls to fetch him home. But the island on which I was cast away was quite another place: a great rocky hill with a flat top, rising sharply from the sea on all sides except one, dotted with drab bushes that never flowered and never shed their leaves. [...] There were ants scurrying everywhere, of the same kind we had in Bahia,

and another pest, too, living in the dunes: a tiny insect that hid between your toes and ate its way into the flesh.... (Coetzee 1986: 7)

Susan's presence as an intradiegetic narrator plays an important role in foregrounding the latent represented space. Incorporation of the social mind – through Susan's constant narration and judgment which greatly benefit from and reflect current attitudes and beliefs in the society of her time – provides a new focalizing standpoint to view the happenings on the island. It enables Susan to record “events and conditions that are in many ways more plausible than those narrated in *Robinson Crusoe*” (Turk 2006: 304). Through her account which starts by featuring Friday – a figure of alterity – not Cruso(e) in order of importance, “a layered text begins to emerge, involving a raw narrative of experience embedded in epistolary frames” (Attwell 2015: 128). In Susan's account, “Cruso[e]’s island is neither a place of lush romanticism nor conducive to a pastoral vision, both being flourishing colonial tropes” (Medalie 1997: 51). It is rather so inhospitable that she concludes: “So if the company of brutes had been enough for me, I might have lived most happily on my island. But who, accustomed to the fullness of human speech, can be content with caws and chirps and screeches, and the barking of seals, and the moan of the wind?” (Coetzee 1986: 8). Having depicted, and exposed, the inhospitable island in her apparently unbiased account, she proceeds to approach “some kind of encampment” (Coetzee 1986: 8) which is no more than a hut and is hence utterly different from the place of comfort which “Cruso[e] termed his castle” (Coetzee 1986: 9). It is only at this moment that Susan narrates her meeting with the one and only figure of the authority whom readers know from the earlier text. She explains his features in the most disinterested form possible: A man “sixty years of age,” dressed like a waterman “on the Thames” triggers in her the thought of meeting a “mutineer” (Coetzee 1986: 8). Susan's short explanations about Cruso(e), whose name she casually delivers as Cruso not Crusoe, are followed by her descriptions of his encampment:

‘In the centre of the flat hilltop was a cluster of rocks as high as a house. In the angle between two of these rocks Cruso had built himself a hut of poles and reeds, the reeds artfully thatched together and woven in and out of the poles with fronds to form roof and walls. A fence, with a gate that turned on leather hinges, completed an encampment in the shape of a triangle which Cruso termed his castle. Within the fence, protected from the apes, grew a patch of wild bitter lettuce. This lettuce, with fish and birds’ eggs, formed our sole diet on the island, as you shall hear. (Coetzee 1986: 9)

Simple descriptions of how things are on the island by Susan gradually cast doubt on the reliability and plausibility of facts narrated by Crusoe. The more the readers get immersed in Susan's narration, the more they suspect ‘the truth’ they had encountered in the earlier text, a fact which highlights the representational nature of the earlier text. Furthermore, Susan's ubiquitous presence in the text in which she is both the narrating subject and an active participant challenges the hegemony of the established patriarchal/colonial order presented through

the earlier text. This effect is clearly depicted through dwindling of Cruso(e)'s space, which is concurrent with the expansion of Susan's space and her altered account of another marginalized presence, Friday, as a rather independent counter-presence – not the submissive slave of the earlier text. Within Susan's narrative, details of the earlier text are shown to be erroneous, exaggerated or coated in falsifications of fictional accounts. Susan's presence also questions the hegemony of the authorial discourse through her relentless engagement in discussions with Foe – the author with the help of whom she “wants to ‘father’ her story into history” (Spivak 1990: 8) – over priority of truth to fiction, however mundane and uneventful the former may seem to be.

Susan's words win over Cruso(e)'s words because Susan's account greatly benefits from the social mind implicated within her constant commentary regarding the events on the island. Susan is an instance of narrators that, Palmer suggests, can be said to have the social mind “because of their sensitivity to the presence of [fictional] minds of this sort within the storyworlds they have created” (2010: 14). Since Susan's mind is in “dialogic relationships with other minds,” (Palmer 2010: 95) it is capable of introducing multivoicedness to the text. The dialogic quality of Susan's mind that “has an oral quality [and] appears to be an unmediated record of a voice speaking in the first person” (Gallagher 1991: 186), enables the reader to follow her along and regard Susan as “concerned with truth, not fiction, though one could certainly see her as an artist in spite of herself” (Attridge 2010: 27). By restoring multivoicedness to the monovocal world of *Robinson Crusoe*, Susan restores equilibrium to the text: “Once dialogism enters the monovocal narrative [through Susan's social mind], it forces Cruso(e) to provide answers. Cruso(e), however, remains unbending and unwilling to share the details of his life and, hence, fails as a figure of (colonial) authority” (Saei et al. 2021: 200). Cruso(e)'s unwillingness to replace monovocality with multivoicedness is clearly expressed by Susan's comment: “It was as though he wished his story to begin with his arrival on the island, and mine to begin with my arrival, and the story of us together to end on the island too” (Coetzee 1986: 34). Susan's multivoicedness finally engulfs Cruso(e)'s isolated cognition and his monologic account, terminating “Robinson Crusoe's sole history-making on the island” (Saei et al. 2021: 200).

Long before the authorship game between Susan and Foe, Susan disturbs hierarchal forms as a woman taking hold of the story of a man. Her realistic attitude toward the island kingdom constantly challenges the earlier narrative of *Robinson Crusoe* within the blend and, hence, highlights Susan as a threat to the established hegemony and her text as postcolonial.

Once the project of re-matching the two spaces of representation and represented is set on motion and the island kingdom is stripped bare of its exotic qualities, Susan's postcolonial account moves on to disarm Cruso(e) himself as a colonizing agent portrayed in the earlier text. Cruso(e) gradually loses his authority as his instruments of colonization are removed one by one. Susan's account reinforces the idea that “Coetzee's Cruso has little of the vigor or determined resourcefulness of Defoe's protagonist” (Prentice 2011: 96). He is pictured as a white man incapable of dominion; a hallucinating man who believes the desert island he is wasting away on is under his command. This attitude is

bitterly criticized by Susan: “Growing old on his island kingdom with no one to say him nay had so narrowed his horizon – when the horizon all around us was so vast and so majestic! – that he had come to be persuaded he knew all there was to know about the world” (Coetzee 1986: 13). This Cruso(e) is no longer the agentive inscriber of detailed journals and the man who brings nature under his command. Within the boundaries of Coetzee’s strategically postcolonial blend, Cruso(e) is portrayed as a man not interested in keeping records: an old man who is unwilling to join in debates with Susan and who has never had ink or paper to jot something down:

‘What I [Susan] chiefly hoped to find was not there. Cruso kept no journal, perhaps because he lacked paper and ink, but more likely, I now believe, because he lacked the inclination to keep one [...] I searched the poles that supported the roof, and the legs of the bed, but found no carvings, not even notches to indicate that he counted the years of his banishment or the cycles of the moon.’ (Coetzee 1986: 16)

Through Susan, Cruso(e) loses credit not only as a colonial agent, but also as a man capable of affecting a change. In this regard, Attridge points out, Cruso(e) “shows none of the practical ingenuity or the spiritual intensity we expect from the figure of bourgeois resourcefulness we are familiar with.” He attributes such a failure to various causes like Cruso(e)’s “isolation from culture,” and hence “[losing] touch with its founding narratives and need for narrative”:

not only has he rescued very little from the wreck and made only minimal attempts to improve the quality of his life, he has kept no journal ... and has no desire to leave the island. He spends most of his time leveling the island’s hill into terraces—a parodic version of the canonic castaway’s taming of nature, since he has nothing with which to plant them. (2004: 76)

Cruso(e)’s indifference to noting down the details of his days on the island and making his own history and his point that “[n]othing I have forgotten is worth the remembering” (Coetzee 1986: 17) serve as evidence indicating that Defoe, the author of the earlier text, might have incorporated a lot of falsifications in emplotting the first story. In short, by removing Cruso(e)’s ink and paper, Coetzee stresses the invented nature of much of the written manuscript of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and proceeds to distance it from AW/ truth by pinpointing its nonfactual statements.

Finally, what degrades Cruso(e) even further is Susan’s depiction of Cruso(e)’s pointless activity in making terraces with “nothing to plant,” (Coetzee 1986: 33) which Susan logically contradicts by asking Friday: “would you and he not have been as fruitfully occupied in watering the stones where they lay and waiting for them to sprout?” (Coetzee 1986: 83) Cruso(e)’s irrational obstinacy that “I will leave behind my terraces and walls [...] They will be more than enough,” (Coetzee 1986: 18) which is uttered simultaneously with his confirmation that “planting is reserved for those who come after us and have the foresight to bring seed,”



(Coetzee 1986: 33) confirms Susan's rational objection echoed by Gallagher who postulates that "the meaningless construction of the terraces lays bare the hollowness at the core of empire-building" (1991: 173). Thus the imperial subject is exposed as engaging in pointless endeavor, much to the detriment of the ideal colonial representation.

Having robbed Cruso(e) of his island kingdom by confirming that "in truth the island no more belonged to Cruso than to the King of Portugal or indeed to Friday or the cannibals of Africa," (Coetzee 1986: 26) Susan's narrative undermines Cruso(e)'s authority by showing him as having almost no effect on the island. Cruso(e) loses ground to Susan because he is depicted as being no agent: "When I [Susan] had exhausted my questions to Cruso about the terraces, and the boat he would not build, and the journal he would not keep, and the tools he would not save from the wreck, and Friday's tongue, there was nothing left to talk of save the weather. Cruso had no stories to tell of the life he had lived as a trader and planter before the shipwreck" (Coetzee 1986: 34). Once Susan's project is completed, Cruso(e) is practically left with nothing. He becomes a hollow man on a hollow island. Nonetheless, the final blow to the myth of *Robinson Crusoe* is delivered through severing Cruso(e)'s tenuous bond with the island during their rescue. Having already fallen sick, Cruso(e) does not survive the ordeal and dies a few days before reaching England: "On the island I [Susan] believe Cruso might yet have shaken off the fever, as he had done so often before [...] But now he was dying of woe, the extremest woe. With every passing day he was conveyed farther from the kingdom he pined for, to which he would never find his way again. He was a prisoner, and I, despite myself, his gaoler" (Coetzee 1986: 43). Their rescue, which enables Susan and Friday, the marginalized figures, to continue their journey, marks the end of Cruso(e) whose (colonial) identity is bound to that of the island as the site of his (colonial, monovocal) dominance. Leaving the island behind results in deterioration of the Cruso(e)'s myth; separation from the island becomes his end. Susan's journey, however, takes on a new form. Equipped by Cruso(e)'s story and accompanied by Friday, she enters a new phase of struggling for her – and Friday's voice – to be heard through gaining recognition in writing: a writing which would bring to Susan's – and Foe's – attention the interrelated nature of Susan's and Friday's stories while bringing to the fore the ordeal she has to face as a marginalized character seeking a voice.

#### 4. Conclusion

Blending forms the foundation for Coetzee's postcolonial project in *Foe*. Defined as the process of online meaning construction, blending activates conceptual packets in the readers' mind through verbal and nonverbal prompts. TAW of *Robinson Crusoe* becomes accessible from TAW of *Foe* because the latter includes the earlier text's key characters as well as the main featured space through which the earlier text has risen to prominence, i.e. the island.

Through integration, then, the two TAWs – encapsulated within the space of the island – are simultaneously offered, which allows for the encounter between



the two worlds of postcolonial and colonial and the consequent polyphony that assimilates the colonizer's world within the boundaries of the postcolonial. Through this blend, Susan – a destabilizing, multivocal figure – steps into the world created by Defoe. The blend also enables readers to utilize background knowledge to establish identity mappings between Crusoe/Cruso, Defoe's Friday/Coetzee's Friday and, later, between Susan/Foe. Within the blended space of the new text thus created, Coetzee initiates his postcolonial project to remove the colonizing agent, Cruso(e), from the center in a step by step fashion. The more Susan's account is completed, the more the constructed nature of the earlier text is highlighted and the more it “slips toward fictionality, and its true genre is revealed, as the distance between AW [actual world of the reader] and TAW becomes too extensive to be bridged by the hearer's tolerance for exaggeration in narratives of personal experience” (Ryan 1991: 93). Susan's narrative, although fictional, casts doubt on TAW of Defoe's novel by exposing its fictionality through her direct engagement with the text whereby it distances the earlier text of *Robinson Crusoe* from the actual world through highlighting contradictions (manifest in descriptions of the island, Crusoe/Cruso and Friday/ Friday), nonfactual statements and fictional elements woven into the narrative of *Robinson Crusoe*. The island (the main setting of TAW of *Robinson Crusoe*) which was central to its narrative becomes only a place of temporary sojourn in the second narrative, a space for collision, conflict, and assimilation of the two narrative spaces in form of two mental inputs. This gives dimension to the deliberately shrunk (but embellished with fiction) TAW found in the earlier text and by so doing, removes the superiority of the colonizer's text echoing Dancygier's point that “whatever understanding a reader might acquire, it is not contained ‘in’ the story, but can only be arrived at through the interaction with it” (2012: 203). Susan's social mind – which highlights the metatextual nature of her text and represents the mind of the modern reader – incessantly questions the plausibility of the earlier text, casts doubt on its truth – through her apparently innocent portrayal of the state of affairs on the island – and adds dimensions to it. On textual level, this is interpreted as expanding TAW by bringing the latent represented space to the foreground. Through such a strategy, TAW of the earlier text acts as no more than a snapshot whose representation space proves to be a fake one (or rather a deliberately incomplete or defective one) as the elements are gathered to give way to the represented space. By the end of the first chapter, the representation blend is “fully integrated, through a match of the representation space and the represented space,” (Dancygier 2012: 47) quenching the modern day reader's thirst for filling gaps.

In addition, through Susan's social mind, Coetzee's intertextual blend accounts for the multivoicedness that starts to exist on the previously monologic island of Crusoe. Concurrent with this disclosure is the removal of colonial means of expression and authority from Cruso(e)'s dominion. The colonizer is removed from the scene once he is stripped bare of all his kingly signs so that at the end of the first chapter, it is Susan, not Cruso(e) who has “disposal of all that Cruso leaves behind, which is the story of his island” (Coetzee 1986: 45).

Expansion of Cruso(e)'s world to Susan's world points toward the reality of existence of a larger world beyond, simultaneously dwindling Cruso(e)'s self-built

colonial TAW and emancipating Susan and Friday. In the new TAW thus created, monovocality is dead in the person of Cruso(e) and is left behind with the island. Susan's moving on – accompanied by Friday after Cruso(e)'s death – stages their journey toward new challenges in a postcolonial world that needs to remain a world of plurality, multivocality, and undecidability. This is how Coetzee's cognitive challenge endows the reader with the novel sense of co-existing possibilities to perceive not only how things could have been, but also how they actually are, and how they are constantly affected by the exigencies (and cognitive manipulations) of the dominant, colonizing canon.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Foe* is a novel about canonicity and how it is determined – as evident in its relation to history, colonialism, the situation of women, writing and reading.
- <sup>2</sup> Alternative Possible Worlds

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