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### Author(iz)ing the Self: Autobiography, Self-Mastery, and Identity Construction in Defoe and Coetzee

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Author(iz)ing the Self:  
Autobiography, Self-Mastery, and Identity-Construction  
in Defoe and Coetzee

by

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### I

Autobiographical writing occupies a unique position among narrative modes. As a genre, it not only tells a story, but offers a platform for studying the shifting status of the self, language, truth, and authority. Normatively, autobiography intends to present a clear and accurate picture of the self in language. Patricia Meyer Spacks argues, for example, that “autobiographies affirm identity” and that “the autobiographer, attesting his existence by the fact of his writing, lives through his explanations, tacit or explicit, of how he came to be the person he is” (Spacks 1). To this end, autobiography seems to coincide with the goal of self-mastery. Based on this definition, three assumptions underlie autobiographical writing: first, that the self (or the “truth” of the self) exists; second, that it is accessible and knowable by the author; and third, that it can be adequately represented in language. Operating under these three assumptions, the autobiographical author views himself in a position of control over his own identity, so that self-mastery appears like a realistic goal. This aim of this study is to examine the ways in which the above assumptions about self-existence, self-knowledge, and self-representation become destabilized, along with any positivist claims to self-mastery and knowability, during the act of autobiographical writing. In her essay, “Authorizing the Autobiographical” Shari Benstock writes that

“autobiography reveals the impossibility of its own dream: what begins on the presumption of self-knowledge ends in the creation of a fiction that covers over the premises of its construction” (Benstock 146). I will examine two historical moments in which autobiography and its implications about selfhood, signification, and authorship were most prevalent, namely: the late seventeenth/early eighteenth centuries and the post-structuralist era of the late twentieth-century. This study will look primarily at Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Roxana* (1724) written in the eighteenth century, alongside J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* (1986), a reimagining of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana* that was written in the late twentieth century at the height of post-structuralism.

Many Defoe scholars attend to his protagonists’ desire for self-mastery, a central theme in Defoe’s works which Coetzee continues in *Foe*. In *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt describes Robinson Crusoe as the prototype of the self-made, capitalist man, motivated to dominate and control his surroundings in order to achieve mastery over his own condition. James H. Maddox identifies a similar pattern in Defoe’s protagonists, arguing that “Mastery of the Other in Defoe is an external emblem of self-mastery” (Maddox 669). Maddox uses the example of Moll Flander’s conscious exploitation of men and Crusoe’s massacring of the cannibals on the island—both acts of domination. Both Watt and Maddox posit that Defoe’s protagonists’ goal of self-mastery depends on their somewhat capitalistic and imperialistic abilities to exert control over their external

surroundings. In this study, I propose instead that, for both Defoe's and Coetzee's protagonists, the success or failure of self-mastery hinges on the autobiographical process, which is concerned with controlling the *interior* self.

Currently, there are very few intertextual investigations of *Robinson Crusoe*, *Roxana*, and *Foe*, which features the narrator Susan Barton. Defoe's *Roxana* is often overlooked in the recent scholarship on *Foe*, as most critics have centered their attention on its parallels with *Robinson Crusoe*. The aim of this study is to perform an integrative reading of the three texts to demonstrate how, together, they accomplish a specific narrative purpose to destabilize the three above assumptions that underpin autobiographical writing. Together, the three texts undermine the authority of the author and his/her claims to control over identity. I define "authorship" in this study as not only the act of writing, but the business of creating fictions, which can be rendered through written language, speech-acts, and behavioral performances. *Roxana*, for example, engages in few acts of writing besides the autobiography itself, but her propensity to create and perform new, ulterior identities is an example of her skill with artistry and authorship. Both Defoe and Coetzee draw attention to the special role that language plays in the process of representing, constructing, and discovering identity, and in doing so, suggest that the self is little more than a discursive construct.

In my discussion of the three texts, the “self” cannot be defined in any singular way. It is necessary, then, to identify the multiple “selves” that must be accounted for when examining the autobiographical process. The first is the *physical self* or body, a structure that takes on increasing importance for characters like Roxana, whose body operates as a tool for her performances, depending on which guise she chooses to wear. The second is the *metaphysical self*, or the idea of an “interior reality” that exists behind or beyond the physical body. All three narrators, at least at one point in their developmental trajectories, believe in the existence of a stable, unitary, and “true” interior reality to their identities. The third is the *authorial self* or writing subject. The authorial self writes the autobiography and assumes a position of authority and control over the fourth self, which is, the *objective self* or the textual self narrating the autobiographical text. Normatively, autobiographical authors attempt to create an image of the objective self that is perfectly symmetrical with the physical, metaphysical, and authorial self. For Crusoe, Roxana, and Susan, language (however ostensibly) operates as the connective tissue or fabric that holds these fragmented selves together, but Defoe and Coetzee reveal how the linguistic connections between these selves are tenuous at best.

As authors of their own autobiographies, Crusoe, Roxana, and Susan each work toward a similar goal of self-knowledge and self-mastery. Defoe and Coetzee demonstrate through their respective narrators how the authority of the

author and the possibility of self-mastery deconstruct during the act of writing. In doing so, they link the question of identity to that of authorship, asking: to what extent is the self its own author? Both authors' novels, I will attempt to show, are not only works of fiction, but noteworthy contributions to the philosophical discourses of the eighteenth and twentieth century respectively—two time periods in which normative notions of authority, identity, and language were becoming increasingly destabilized. Coetzee's post-structural re-imagining of Defoe's earlier novels extends Defoe's original themes of language and identity. Furthermore, it allows the dialogic parallels between eighteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy to come into focus. Therefore, the benefit of examining *Robinson Crusoe*, *Roxana*, and *Foe* intertextually is to demonstrate how Defoe and Coetzee, and eighteenth- and twentieth- century philosophical discourses, share a narrative purpose.

For the purposes of this study, it will be helpful to think of Crusoe, Roxana, and Susan Barton as the same character, or a “mono-character,” with a single developmental trajectory and narrative purpose. I define this term, “mono-character<sup>1</sup>,” as a single character who is featured in various texts, usually by the

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<sup>1</sup> While the term, “mono-character” is of my own devising, it is heavily indebted to James H. Maddox's critical approach to Defoe's narrators in his essay “On Defoe's Roxana.” Maddox proposes that Roxana's failure to attain self-mastery works to subvert the myth of self-mastery in Defoe's earlier novels, including *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*, and *Colonel Jack*: “*Roxana*...subverts this plot [of self-mastery], especially as it addresses the guilt and anxiety that the earlier protagonists are so skilled at leaving behind them” (Maddox 682). Particularly,



same author, but appears in a different form in each text; in most cases, the mono-character will be revealed through a chronological reading of the author's texts, because each "new" character serves as a revision of the last, while still maintaining some key traits of the original. Each individual character therefore represents a different moment in the mono-character's intellectual development. I will attempt to demonstrate in this study that Robinson Crusoe represents the earliest phase in the mono-character's development; that Roxana represents the next phase operating as a revision of Crusoe; and finally, that Coetzee's Susan Barton revises both Crusoe and Roxana, thereby extending the intellectual trajectory of the mono-character. For Defoe and Coetzee, the ultimate goal of each character is not to achieve self-mastery per se, but rather, to reach a level of understanding that recognizes the impossibility of self-mastery. Of the three characters, Susan comes closest to believing that there is no underlying truth to the self, that identity is nothing more than a myth of language, and therefore, that selfhood is beyond the reach of authorial control. All three of these works problematize notions of selfhood, signification, and authorship through the use of autobiography, and work to disrupt any positivist assumptions about self-existence, self-knowledge, and self-representation. But it may be useful, for the moment, to briefly examine these three assumptions separately before turning to Defoe and Coetzee's primary texts.

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Maddox views Roxana's character as a revision of Moll's, while in this study, I argue that Roxana operates as a revision of Robinson Crusoe.

## II

**(1) On Self-Existence:** Shari Benstock writes that there is a “coincidence of ‘ontology’ and ‘autobiography’” (Benstock 145). For the author, the autobiographical mode appears to authorize the self or one’s “being” through the act of writing. In other words, the assumption is that the self must exist if it is being written about. The ontological question regarding self-existence was one of increasing importance in the late Renaissance and came to a head in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. In *The Autobiographical Subject*, Felicity Nussbaum pinpoints the eighteenth century as “a time when identity and character are in particular crisis” (Nussbaum xiv). Descartes reconciled any uncertainty about the ontological status of the self during the late Renaissance. His *Discourse on Method* (1637) presented his seminal, “I think, therefore I am” approach to the question of self-existence, a claim he attempted to prove through logical, a posteriori reasoning. Charles Taylor identifies Descartes’ notions on selfhood as a “new subjectivism” which “gives rise to the notion of a subject in its modern sense...whereby we place ‘within’ the subject what was previously seen as existing” (Taylor 188). In other words, Descartes’ theories linked subjectivism to interiority. Taylor writes that, for Plato, “Ideas are ontic, the basis of reality; for [Descartes], they are the contents of the mind” (188). Renaissance conceptions of self-existence were thus more or less aligned with the idea of

stable, interior reality that existed within the physical self. But by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the question of self-identity re-emerged with full force. The turbulent political climate of Restoration Britain had a destabilizing effect on normative power structures and pre-conceived notions of authority. The political authority of the British monarchy, for example, had experienced a number of shifts in power between the Interregnum and Restoration, which consequently fuelled interrogations into the basis of authority structures more generally, thereby making room for questions about the authority and autonomy of the individual self. J.G.A. Pocock, in his *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, discusses this issue at length: “seventeenth-century men were still pre-modern creatures for whom authority and magistracy were part of a natural and cosmic order, and...the starting point of much of their most radical thinking was the unimaginable fact that, between 1642 and 1649, authority in England had simply collapsed” (Pocock 55). Such inquiries into authority laid the groundwork for a new wave of epistemological paradigms that threaded political, religious, and spiritual concerns together. Pocock continues that many political theorists view the seventeenth century as a drastic moment in British history in which “authority had disintegrated, and God had withheld his words as to where it was lodged, [so] the individual must rediscover in the depths of his own being the means of reconstituting and obeying it” (55). Michael McKeon describes the seventeenth century as having undergone an “epistemological transformation,”

(McKeon 27) in which philosophers began to question where authority lies, what constitutes truth, and how to define such nebulous concepts. The works of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and David Hume played key roles in this epistemological transformation of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Since “top-down” authority was for the first time in a long time being called into question, what resulted was, as Pocock has suggested, a turn toward individualism, subjectivity, and interiority that became increasingly epistemological. Locke and Hume, for example, began to pose questions in their respective works that take up from where Descartes left off, such as: if the self exists, what is its substance? What *constitutes* the self?

John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) confirmed, but extended Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am” stance, arguing that human identity must be connected to the self’s consciousness: “Consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things; in this alone consists personal identity...*Consciousness makes personal Identity*” (Locke 67-68). Extrapolating from Descartes’ original theory, Locke posits that being depends on the existence of consciousness. Consciousness, however, is not itself a substance, so it would be inaccurate to say that the self is “made up” of its own consciousness, according to Locke. Instead, the self simply “depends on Consciousness, not on Substance...it is the consciousness that goes along with

substance...This may show us wherein personal identity consists: not in the identity of substance, but...in the identity of consciousness” (Locke 74). It would be most accurate to say, then, that a personal sense of identity grows out of one’s consciousness, according to Locke. Later in the eighteenth century, the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume takes Locke’s position a few steps further, and argues that selfhood depends not on consciousness alone, but on the *perceptions* of the conscious mind. Presenting the seminal “bundle theory,” Hume suggested that the self is “nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivably rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement” (Hume 178). While Locke believed in the existence of a self, Hume disrupted such a notion in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), arguing instead that no underlying substance to the self exists, and if it does, it is not by any means knowable or accessible to us.

In the “long” eighteenth century, philosophers such as Locke and Hume anticipated post-structural theories of the self that emerged in the late twentieth century. By suggesting that notions of truth and selfhood may not be readily accessible, their work to some extent preempted post-structuralist theory, in which “critical discourses...aim to disrupt [notions of] mastery, truth-seeking, and systematic closure” (Selden 2). The French, psychoanalytic philosopher Jacques Lacan views the self, for example, as purely a linguistic construct, formed in the imagination, and rendered symbolically (Lacan, *Language of the Self*, 11). The

self, according to Lacan, is nothing more than a product of linguistic imaging that is constructed out of a fundamental desire for being. Identity is therefore the *story* of the self, rather than any substantive entity undergirding an interior reality<sup>2</sup>.

Michele Foucault, whose theories on the self are built out of Greco-Roman philosophy alongside eighteenth-century theorists, argues that the self is a product of various “technologies” which impose a set of power structures on the self, such as government or religion, which then “determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends of domination” (Foucault 225). Identity, for Foucault, is thus formed and governed by discourse, or structures of power and knowledge that are external to the self. Both Lacan and Foucault seem to extrapolate from Hume’s original theory that the metaphysical self-identity does not “exist” in the normative sense of the word. All three agree that the self has no definable or identifiable substance, but rather, consists of intrinsically immaterial constructs, such as perceptions, language, or power structures.

**(2) On Self-Knowledge:** Benstock argues that the assumption of self-knowledge is one of the most basic underpinnings of autobiographical writing. In other words, one must know oneself in order to present an accurate self-portrait. However, another assumption about self-knowledge is that an author can gain knowledge about the self during the act of writing, so that the autobiographical act leads to self-discovery, and in the long-run, self-mastery: “This coming-to-

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<sup>2</sup> Lacan’s theories of the self are especially relevant to Coetzee’s *Foe*, which addresses the issue of identity as a discursive construction through the character Susan Barton.

knowledge of the self constitutes both the desire that initiates the autobiographical act and the goal toward which autobiography directs itself. By means of writing, such desire presumably can be fulfilled” (Benstock 146). Selfhood, and the process of self-knowledge through autobiography, therefore took the form of an epistemological inquiry. Locke never attempts to answer the question of what, precisely, comprises self-substance. While he does confirm the existence of a self-identity, Locke did not believe that self-knowledge was as straightforward a business. If self-identity grows out of consciousness, self-knowledge would require an inherent capacity for self-reflexivity. This task would be simple enough if the self were a stable, monolithic entity. In *Imagining the Self*, Spacks argues that the substantiality of the self was becoming suspect in the eighteenth century, as “the eighteenth-century debate on identity became increasingly desperate in tone” (Spacks 3). While Locke confirms self existence as a truth in itself, he is careful to note that the self’s ontological dependence on consciousness presents some difficulties regarding its knowability: “the difficulty is this, that this consciousness being interrupted always by forgetfulness, there being no moment in our lives wherein we have the whole train of all our past actions before our eyes in one view...in all these cases, our consciousness being interrupted, and we losing the sight of our past selves, doubts are raised whether we are the same thinking thing, i.e. the same *substance* or no” (Locke 68). By referencing multiple “selves,” and demonstrating how the self can be fragmented through

memory and over time, Locke destabilizes the notion of the self as a stable, unitary construct, making its knowability an infinitely difficult business. He draws a distinction between the present, *recollecting* self and the past, *recollected* self which undoubtedly inhere in the same physical body, but occupy two different spaces.

Hume posits later that the self is in a constant state of flux and that “the mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations” (Hume 178). If there is no underlying substance unifying these multiple selves, the project of self-knowledge becomes nearly impossible. In fact, according to Hume, who is today known as one of the first truly skeptic philosophers in Britain, the task is actually impossible: “...had we any idea of the substance of our minds, we must also have an impression of it; which is very difficult, if not impossible, to be conceived” (164). Hume’s skepticism reached new heights by the post-structuralist era of the late twentieth century, in which the possibility of acquiring knowledge about reality was considered highly problematic. During the post-structural era, epistemological inquiries of the self were heavily grounded in language. This “linguistic turn” (Nussbaum 12) in epistemology permanently altered the method by which knowledge is acquired, not only about the self, but about history, politics, science, and religion as well. All access to knowledge of reality must necessarily be “mediated by language and



ideology” (Nussbaum 12), which is increasingly problematic given the inherent instability of language and meaning. Locke’s identification of words as “arbitrary signs” (Locke 405) of ideas laid the foundation for Saussure’s semiotics propounded in his twentieth-century work, *Writings in General Linguistics*. Locke’s distinction between “ideas” and “things” identifies the nuances of what Saussure calls “signified” meaning, demonstrating that the signified meaning of a word consists of an idea which only *refers* to a thing. Jacques Derrida, French philosopher and language theorist, later developed a theory positing that the gap between “signifier” and “signified” exposes the fact that meaning itself is deferred within this gap, and more significantly, that meaning cannot be located in any fixed location between the signifier or signified. Because language was becoming known as a highly slippery medium in the twentieth century, its authority as an epistemological tool was no longer viable. The possibility of self-knowledge depended on the existence of a stable language system, or more specifically, a system of representation that suffered no fissures or discontinuities.

**(3) Self-Representation:** Locke and Thomas Hobbes were among some of the original English philosophers to investigate the purpose and adequacy of linguistic representation, and as I already mentioned, paved the way for many post-structuralist thinkers. In Book III of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke writes that “Words, as they are used by Men, can properly and immediately signify nothing but *Ideas*, that are in the Mind of the Speaker...

signification...is limited to his *Ideas* and they can be Signs of nothing else” (Locke 405-408). Locke’s distinction between “ideas” and “things,” “corrected the habit of many seventeenth-century grammarians and philosophers of using the terms...almost interchangeably” (Hudson 336). According to Hudson, language was understood as originally “instituted by God” and that it “signified objects in the world by natural resemblance” (336). Locke therefore disrupted the prevalent belief that “word” and “thing” bore an intrinsic connection. The possibility of a completely lucid form of communication was now, in the eighteenth century, being called into question. It is possible that Locke based some of his theories on language on the seventeenth-century philosopher, Thomas Hobbes. In his *Leviathan*, Hobbes discusses the potential “abuses” of language, which occur “when men register their thoughts wrong, by the inconstancy of signification of their words; by which they register for their conceptions, that which they never conceived; and so deceive themselves” (Hobbes 21). Hobbes underscores not only the difficulty of linguistic representation, but more specifically, man’s lack of control over the use of his words, and how he often falls to self-deception while attempting to represent his ideas using language.

Though philosophers like Locke and Hobbes discussed topics such as self-identity and linguistic representation separately, a combined investigation of *self-representation* was not yet in their epistemological purview. The issue of self-representation through autobiography was never problematized in any real and

direct way until the twentieth century, even though the eighteenth century “[gave] birth to the form, meaning, shape, and texture of the great modern autobiographies” (Nussbaum 6). Before the eighteenth century, the autobiographical genre itself had no distinct form, even though, retroactively, we might identify certain works as “autobiographical.”

Montaigne’s *Essais* (1580), for example, operates somewhat like an autobiographical text even though it was written during the Renaissance, and therefore, predates the actual “birth” of the form. The opening to *Essais* warrants some examination, because in it, Montaigne presents the assumption that the self can adequately be represented textually: “I want to be seen in my simple, natural, and ordinary guise, without straining or artifice: for it is myself that I paint. My faults will show through vividly, and my native form...I assure you that I would have readily painted myself in the altogether and quite naked. Thus, reader, I am myself the matter of my book [Montaigne *Essais*]” (Wilner 7). Montaigne displays confidence that his text will be aligned with truth, and assures his readers that he will represent himself accurately. By asserting, “I am myself the matter of my book,” Montaigne equates self and text, as though both are somehow made up of the same physical “matter.” It seems, then, that for Montaigne there is little gap between the self and the textual representation of the self. In *Feeding on Infinity*, Joshua Wilner suggests that the passage “moves toward an identification of his writing with literal self-exhibition...where ‘matiere’ [matter] may be read

as ‘subject matter,’ but more radically...as the ‘matter’ out of which the book is made” (Wilner 129). Since, for Montaigne, self and text are made from the same matter, self-representation through autobiography proves to be an achievable task. Felicity Nussbaum describes this type of thinking as “dominated by the assumption of a self...that can be imitated textually...There is often an assumption [of] a reality, hidden behind appearances...and that representation in autobiography corresponds to it. In addition, these narratives presume that autobiographers are the source and center of the meaning of their texts” (Nussbaum 9). Therefore, assuming a position of authority, autobiographical writers could lay claim over the power of their signifiers to adequately and accurately represent the true, interior essence of their identities.

### III

As I have mentioned, the emergence of the autobiographical form was not accompanied in the eighteenth century by any explicit philosophical investigations into the form itself, as no one had yet published a work integrating the topics of selfhood and signification. I would like to suggest, however, that the topic of language, identity, and self-representation was indeed brought to the foreground in the eighteenth century, but not by a philosopher. Instead, Daniel Defoe, the journalist and author, carved out this unique position for himself among his contemporaries. Defoe played an important role in eighteenth-century

philosophical dialogues even though, superficially, he was not himself a philosopher. Chronologically falling squarely between Locke and Hume, Defoe contributed to, extended, and preempted the dominant philosophical discourses on language and identity in the eighteenth century. Defoe never published a treatise on the self or on language, but rather, employed the guise of fiction to extend the philosophical discourses of his time. By creating protagonists who engaged in the process of self-writing, Defoe probed at questions of self-knowledge, investigating whether the self is indeed a knowable construct, and if so, how is it to be known?

Defoe's novels subverted the myth of self-mastery presented in prior autobiographical works, such as Montaigne's and Augustine's<sup>3</sup>. For Defoe, self-mastery is defined by the three basic assumptions I outlined earlier, namely: the assumptions of self-existence, self-knowledge, and self-representation. Defoe's belief that the "self" is no stable, monolithic construct was likely based on Locke's. But I would suggest that Defoe may have not been entirely in agreement with Locke's views on the ontological status of the self. Locke never denied that the self necessarily exists, but based on Defoe's novels, there is some evidence that Defoe did not believe that the self was anything more than a discursive

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<sup>3</sup> Unlike these authors, however, Defoe is careful to employ the *pseudo*-autobiographical form rather than the autobiographical form. Charles Haskell Hinnant uses the term "pseudo-memoir" or "pseudo-autobiography" to describe Defoe's tendency to "treat...fictional narrators as if they were real persons" (Hinnant 203). Perhaps, for Defoe, the project of presenting fiction as though it is factual hints at the inherent "fictionality" of all ostensibly historical, autobiographical accounts.

construction and that identity is formed in language. For example, the following passage from Defoe's *Essay upon the Public Credit* (1710) seems to summarize his views on the self, even though the excerpt addresses the topic of credit:

[Credit] acts all Substance, yet, is it self Immaterial: it gives Motion, yet it self cannot be said to Exist: it creates *Forms*, yet, has it self *no Form*; it is neither Quantity nor Quality; it has no *Whereness*, or *Whenness*, *Scite*, or *Habit*. If I should say *it is the Shadow of something that is Not*, should I not puzzle the Thing, rather than explain it, and leave you and my self more in the Dark than we were before? [Defoe 8] (Wahrman 209-210).

While this passage explicitly refers to the issue of credit, it is most centrally about ontology and the difficulty associated with understanding metaphysical being. This passage therefore has implications that extend beyond credit alone, and possibly allude to the self. The relation between credit and selfhood was not uncommon in Defoe's time, as anxieties about credit took the same form as anxieties about selfhood. Credit as "mobile property" incited widespread distress for property-holders and lenders alike, due to its "imaginary" status: "the political individual needed a material anchor in the form of property no less than he needed a rational soul" (Pocock 111). Furthermore, since Locke had previously established that "every man has a property in his own *person*" that "no body has any right to but himself" (Locke, *Second Treatise*, 19), the relationship between property and selfhood was not unfamiliar to eighteenth century readers. Defoe's above passage therefore helps underscore the idea that "a sense of

property...could reinforce and moderate the sense of self” (Pocock 116). Given Defoe’s interest in language and identity, the passage could be a testament to Defoe’s ability to contribute to the dominant, eighteenth-century dialogue on selfhood without referencing the idea explicitly. If we were to replace the word “Credit” in the above passage with “The Self,” the text closely parallel the images of selfhood depicted in Defoe’s novels. For Defoe, the self “acts all Substance, yet, is it self Immaterial: it gives Motion, yet it self cannot be said to Exist.” Defoe’s notions of the self obviously do not refer simply to the human body, but rather to the interior, metaphysical construct, which “has it self no *Form*...no *Whereness, or Whenness, Scite, or Habit*.”

Furthermore, the passage does not only address the ontological problems with the self, but also the difficulty of *explaining* such a complex entity. Defoe discusses the difficulty of authorship or the complicated business of representing in language one’s precise, intended meaning: “If I should say *it is the Shadow of something that is Not*, should I not puzzle the Thing, rather than explain it, and leave you and my self more in the Dark than we were before?” Here, Defoe comments on the difficulty of representation, especially when the thing represented is so nebulous a construct as “credit” or the “self.” The meaning of the word “credit” is not readily explainable or knowable, given its uncertain ontological status, so for an author—even one as successful as Defoe—to attempt to explain it would necessarily “puzzle the thing.” If I am correct in sensing an

undercurrent in this passage that extends beyond simply a discussion of credit, this passage would be only one among many of Defoe's veiled attempts to discuss this topic of selfhood, signification, and authorship.

Similarly, Defoe's pseudo-autobiographies operate dually as works of fiction and of literary criticism and philosophy. According to critics Ian Watt and Michael McKeon, fiction and novel-writing were not yet clearly defined projects in the eighteenth century. Watt, however, identifies Defoe as one of the first "modern" novelists, since his novels embodied modern notions of individualism and capitalism. This labeling of Defoe as a novelist is a retroactive one, since genre boundaries were not yet developed and Defoe himself would not have identified as a novelist. Distinctions between history, philosophy, and fiction were therefore not quite recognizable by the time Defoe started writing his novels. For this reason, Watt argues that "both the philosophical and the literary innovations must be seen as parallel manifestations" (Watt 31). He suggests a dialectical reading of Locke's and Hobbe's discourses with Defoe's, as all three contributed to rising notions of individualism in political, religious, and social spheres. Similarly, McKeon posits that the development of genre in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had much to do with the newly developing distinction between factual data (which would later comprise historical writing) and fictional narratives, (later, novels). These genre distinctions, however, coincided with developments in epistemology: "By the time 'the novel' was beginning to be



accepted as the canonic term for prose fiction in the modern age, the epistemological transformation that is vital to its constitution as a genre had proceeded very far. Long before this terminological triumph, the battle was being fought not in the name of the novel but first of all in that of ‘true history.’ The sometimes easy acceptance of ‘romance’ under the heading of ‘history’ in the late seventeenth-century booklists therefore must not be allowed to mask the concurrent confrontation between two divergent views of how to tell the truth in narrative” (McKeon 27). Defoe falls under the category of authors McKeon highlights here, as Defoe also presented his works of “romance” or fiction “under the heading of ‘history.’” To this end, Defoe’s uncertain status allowed him to contribute to and critique the philosophical dialogues of his time, marking out his own position on what constitutes a “truthful” narrative, and more specifically, what constitutes the “truth” of identity.

What makes Defoe’s narrative purpose so original is his investigation into how language and identity are negotiated specifically by means of authorship and autobiography. It is critical, then, not to read Defoe simply as a novelist. While Watt argues that Defoe’s works embody all the techniques of “formal realism”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Watt’s term, “formal realism,” refers to the conditions or “procedures” that define the “modern” novel. According to Watt, modernity in novel-writing has to do with “the novel’s mode of imitating reality” in which the novel appears to serve as a “full and authentic report of human experience” and “satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms” (Watt 31-32).

that constitute novel-writing, he is careful to identify Defoe as a novelist working within a larger philosophical and social context that is not to be overlooked, especially because collectively, philosophical, social, and novelistic dialogues problematized and transformed prior notions of truth, individualism, and personhood.

J.M. Coetzee addresses the same questions in *Foe*, a text which operates not only as a fictional reimagining of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana*, but also as an extension of the original philosophical ideas on language, identity, and authorship embedded into the original works. The novel problematizes notions of signification, selfhood, and the discursive construction of identity through the process of autobiography. His narrative purpose therefore parallels Defoe's in real and distinct ways, as he too attempts to destabilize any positivist claims to self-mastery (namely the assumptions of self-existence, self-knowledge, and self-representation). Coetzee appositely takes up from where Defoe left off in the eighteenth century. Not unlike the case with Defoe, it would be somewhat of an oversight to ignore Coetzee's own contributions to the post-structuralist discourses of his own era, which, I suggest, are heavily indebted to eighteenth-century thinkers like Defoe. Just as Defoe responds to and critiques the thinkers of his period, so too does Coetzee for his own era. Coetzee engages with post-structuralist thinkers such as Adrienne Rich, whose well-known poem "Diving into the Wreck" (1973) plays a significant role in Coetzee's text. The poem

features a narrator diving into an old shipwreck, symbolic of her troubling journey to discover the “truth” of the wreck as opposed to the mythology she has heard about the wreck. Coetzee positions his narrator, Susan, in this role of the diver, as her autobiography follows the trajectory of her own journey toward self-discovery, only to learn, in the end, the impossibility of this task. Coetzee’s novel also parallels the efforts of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault to demonstrate how authorial authority becomes destabilized during the act of writing and the idea that the author does not necessarily authorize the meaning of his text. *Foe* also incorporates much of Lacan’s ideas on the discursive construction of identity, as his “Mirror Stage” and “Language of the Self” are particularly relevant to this post-structural reading of *Foe*. While Coetzee, like Defoe, is known and respected as a novelist whose narrative purposes are primarily considered post-colonial<sup>5</sup>, *Foe* serves as his own veiled contribution to the dominant post-structuralist discourse of his era.

#### IV

The chapters that follow are organized to chronologically represent the intellectual trajectory of the mono-character, starting with Crusoe, then Roxana, and lastly, Susan Barton.

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<sup>5</sup> This is not to say, however, that there are no post-colonial implications in *Foe*. Quite the contrary, there are many post-colonial readings of the novel which are not to be dismissed. My purpose, however, is to draw out the post-structural readings in *Foe*, which are often overlooked by literary critics.

In the next chapter, I will attempt to demonstrate how Crusoe represents the earliest stage of the mono-character's development. Defoe handles Crusoe's character with a great deal of irony. Despite Crusoe's ability to master his external surroundings, Defoe represents him as somewhat delusional and unable to understand his own interiority. Significantly, Crusoe misrecognizes his status as an author as that of an authority figure. Crusoe, who views himself as a master craftsman while he is stranded on the island, believes he has the ability to carve his identity into anything he wants, whether it is king of the island or master of Friday. Crusoe believes authorship makes him a creator of truths, rather than a creator of fictions. Defoe frequently undercuts Crusoe's authority and undermines his sense of selfhood, but Crusoe himself never catches on, and ultimately, never realizes that self-mastery is not an option. In the end, he views himself as a successful author.

Chapter 3 will focus on Roxana, who serves as a revision of Crusoe's character, bearing some striking resemblances to him while also displaying an intellect that is worlds beyond him. To this end, she is the next logical step in the mono-character's intellectual development. Like Crusoe, Roxana believes in the existence of a true, interior self—but she does not view herself in a position of control over this interior identity. Instead, she believes that the character or identity of the interior self is a function of external circumstances over which she has no control. She becomes a “whore for bread” (Defoe, *Roxana*, 28) after her

husband abandons her with no funds left to support herself or her children.

Throughout her life, Roxana, always accompanied by her faithful servant Amy, becomes the mistress of a slew of wealthy men, while stealthily acquiring massive amounts of wealth along the way. She frequently changes her identity, posing as a Turkish Princess as well as a Quaker, knowing full well that she can control her outer identities, if not her inner one. Roxana's claims to authorship therefore take the figure of performance, and she recognizes that her performances are fictive by nature.

In chapter 4, I propose that Coetzee's Susan Barton extends the intellectual trajectory of the mono-character instituted by Defoe. Susan's character conflates Crusoe and Roxana, and also integrates some of the plot from both of Defoe's novels. In *Foe*, Susan gets washed up on Crusoe's<sup>6</sup> island while on an ocean voyage in search of her lost daughter. She remains on the island with Crusoe and Friday (who in Coetzee's version is mute) until they are rescued. Crusoe, however, does not survive the ocean voyage, and Susan and Friday return to England, while Susan solicits their story to be written by a novelist, named Foe (which is, not coincidentally, Daniel Defoe's original name). The novel consists of her letters to Foe which document her experience on the island. But these letters turn out to be a form of autobiography, since she never gets a response from Foe and eventually stops mailing the letters. Susan's claims to authorship

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<sup>6</sup> Coetzee drops the "e" at the end of Robinson Crusoe's name.

manifest most clearly through her repeated acts of self-writing. In the beginning of *Foe*, Susan bears many resemblances to Defoe's Crusoe, as she believes in the authority of language and of her words as an author. She, too, seeks self-mastery, and hopes to discover the truth of her identity through the act of writing. But by the end of the novel, she reaches a level of understanding about language and identity that surpasses even Roxana's. Essentially, she recognizes her identity (the metaphysical, authorial, and objective selves) as myths of language. Susan is thus able to reach a level of awareness that Crusoe never achieves, and that Defoe only hints out with Roxana.

## Chapter 2:

### Signification and Selfhood: Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*

#### Introduction

Representing the earliest stage in the mono-character's intellectual development, Crusoe sets the stage for Defoe's narrative project. In his essay, "Defoe as Narrative Innovator," John Richetti writes that "The effect is to evoke an individual who is just and essentially himself...the narrative depicts Crusoe exploring his subjectivity" (Richetti, "Defoe as Narrative Innovator, 126). This emphasis on subjectivity and interiority coupled with Crusoe's peculiar obsession with language makes Crusoe the center at which theories on identity and language intersect. Autobiography, or the "pseudo-memoir" form, ostensibly allows for this linguistic "project of self-realization" (Richetti, "Defoe as Narrative Innovator," 149). More than just a novel, *Robinson Crusoe* amounts to a philosophical investigation of whether the truth of the self can be discovered in language, or more specifically, the language of autobiography.

Scholars have increasingly attended to why Crusoe writes, why he "engages in repeated and at times almost compulsive acts of autobiography" (Marshall 899), and what to make of his relationship with language. In his article, "The Parrot's Voice: Language and the Self in *Robinson Crusoe*," Eric Jager argues that, for Crusoe, "writing is an activity of considerable benefit to him"

(Jager 322) and that “Crusoe’s re-construction through language, considered against the commonplace of the silent solitary whose verbal functions...deteriorate in the absence of society, displays a remarkable initiative to the maintenance not only of language *per se* but also of oneself by means of language” (332). For Jager, Crusoe’s engagement with writing and autobiography serves a utilitarian purpose, and allows Crusoe to both escape the torture of solitude and maintain a sense of selfhood. John Richetti seems to agree on this point, arguing that Crusoe’s “casting of accounts is as admirable a feat in his context as mastering the tides and building a raft...Both are analytic acts, both involve a separation of the self from circumstances in order to master them by cooperating with their flow” (Richetti, *Defoe’s Narratives*, 40). For both Jager and Richetti, Crusoe’s persistent engagement with speech, writing, accounting, and autobiography is a means to achieving self-mastery. While on the one hand Crusoe’s self-directed speech acts and autobiographical projects may help him maintain his sanity in his solitary condition, this chapter suggests an alternative view of the role of language in Crusoe’s conception of his self-identity.

The aim of this chapter is to call into question what many critics have called Crusoe’s capacity for self-mastery by means of his language. In this chapter, I will investigate the extent to which Crusoe views language as an epistemological tool with which to discover the truth of his identity, and how Defoe almost always undermines Crusoe’s attempts at achieving self-mastery



through autobiography. Crusoe, somewhat delusionally, believes in an ontological component to language; that language somehow bears an intrinsic connection to being itself. Shari Benstock, in her essay “Authorizing the Autobiographical,” writes that “One definition of autobiography suggests that it is an effort to recapture the self...to know the self through ‘consciousness.’ Such a claim presumes that there is such a thing as the ‘self’ and that it is ‘knowable’” (Benstock 145-146). Crusoe, who has been “captured” or imprisoned by the island and has seemingly suffered a loss of control, feels the need to regain control over both his external circumstances and his interior world. To accomplish the latter, he attempts to “recapture” himself in writing, and believes this to be a manageable task. Language, for Crusoe, authorizes the existence of an authentic identity—a stable, fixed sense of selfhood which lies beyond the signifier, or what I call, the metaphysical self. For this reason, Crusoe engages in various acts of speech and writing throughout the novel, which reveal this latent desire to establish a holistic, stable sense of selfhood—the desire that “initiates the autobiographical act” (146). He writes in a journal, converses inwardly with himself, declares himself king and sovereign of the island—all in an attempt to assure himself of a verifiable and constant “truth” behind his identity, an essence of self. Defoe, on the other hand, works stealthily in the background to disrupt such positivist claims to self-construction and self-mastery. He treats his protagonist with a great deal of irony, in order to reveal to the reader, though not

to Crusoe himself, the impossibility of self-mastery and self-knowledge. While Jager and Richetti affirm that Crusoe's use of language allows him to gain self-mastery, I propose instead that Crusoe's self-maintenance is guaranteed only by his sustained illusions about language and identity; namely, that language verifies and authorizes the truth of identity. Unlike the further characters of the mono-character, Roxana and Susan Barton, Crusoe never comes close to realizing that the self may be nothing more than a discursive construct.

### **Crusoe's Delusions of Grandeur**

The desire for a stable sense of self makes sense for Crusoe, since, being cast away on the island, the threat of losing his identity is a real and genuine fear—either literally through death or simply by becoming an inconsequential “nobody” displaced from human society. He fears being “swallowed up” (Defoe 9) by the sea or by cannibals, and his persistent acts of speech and autobiography help him to combat this paranoid fear of erasure. Crusoe's main shortcoming, however, is that he never comes to realize that, while language may sustain him on the island, the reassurance it provides about his identity is purely illusory. The self he believes to be real and knowable is merely imaginary. Defoe drops many hints of this idea throughout the novel, thereby creating a sustained dramatic irony, as Crusoe never catches on to his own delusions.

The relationship between language and identity is first established at the very opening of Defoe's novel, in which Crusoe introduces himself to the reader. Language and identity converge in the symbolic status of Crusoe's name. He notes that his original name was "*Robinson Kreutznaer*, but by the usual corruption of words in England, we are now call'd, nay we call ourselves, and write our name *Crusoe*..." (5). Here, language is used as a means to control identity through the traditional, yet clearly problematic, act of naming. Language appears, to Crusoe, to provide a stable sense of selfhood through his name, but he only gives cursory attention to the fact that words so easily become corrupted and changed over time. Significantly, the shift from passive to active voice—"We are now call'd, nay we call ourselves, and write our name *Crusoe*"—calls attention to the character's desire to actively maintain control over his name and his identity through language, despite its inherent instability. This shift in nominal identity, however, could allegorically represent the fragility and flexibility of identity itself.

In the opening pages of the novel, Crusoe's character is depicted as anything but steady. He fluctuates between being the "prodigal" son, who obeys his father and remains in a middle-class station in England, and the rebellious son who defies his father and travels abroad in search of adventure. Richetti notes that Crusoe's

wavering pattern...is crucial in every respect. Not only Crusoe but the nature of his world are being defined. It is a world where 'nature' (a personal, internal reality, somehow given) and circumstances (that is, external...historical, social facts) seem to be complementary causes of action. Again, the self must in such a situation be both in and out of circumstances. Its 'nature' becomes a shifting and complex thing...sometimes sliding over into public patterns like the generalized figures of fiction (the rebellious son, the ambitious traveler, the heroic castaway, the repentant sinner (Richetti 26).

Richetti demonstrates the extent to which the self's internal "nature" or identity is at best a shape-shifting construct, and is dependent on external circumstances.

Quite keenly, Richetti comments on Crusoe's tendency to "slide" into different roles; that is, until some external force requires him to switch identities. But Richetti does not investigate here the role that language plays in Crusoe's pattern of shape-shifting. When deciding whether to be the Prodigal son or rebellious adventurer, he changes his mind numerous times before actually setting out on a ship bound for London. This decision appears like a commitment to one identity over the other, namely, the adventurous rebel, yet he doubts his decision once the ship is tossed and turned about in a turbulent storm. My interest in Crusoe's identity crisis is not the struggle itself, but the role language plays in it. While in the midst of the storm, Crusoe declares, "In this agony of mind, I made many vows and resolutions that if it would please God to spare my life...I would, like a true repenting Prodigal, go home to my father" (9). In this moment of agony, Crusoe trusts the authority of his many "vows and resolutions" to become the

“true repenting Prodigal.” But after the storm subsides and he is saved, he admits to having “forgot the vows and promises that I made in my distress” (10) and continues on with his adventures. This is a clear example of Crusoe's reliance on the performative effects of speech and its perceived ability to construct his identity. Clearly, he views speech as tantamount to a type of action, and believes that if he vows to become the Prodigal son, he actually will become one. The vow is initially legitimized, for Crusoe, by the empty signifiers he recites to himself. Crusoe's vows and promises to himself operate as a form of autobiography, as he attempts to linguistically recreate himself as the Prodigal son despite the fact that there is no truth to such a statement whatsoever. Yet even when his promise is revealed as a temporary outburst of emotion, he fails to recognize the problems with his original vow in the first place; that the words alone are guaranteed by nothing substantive and lack the authority they appear to have. He seems unaware of the possibility that identity may not be created by language, but rather, as Richetti notes, determined by temporal and external circumstance—which, being constantly in a state of flux, leave no possibility for stability.

David Marshall comments on how language so easily verifies truth and ontology for Crusoe. Marshall argues that Crusoe's first act of autobiography is when he inscribes the following text into the cross he has built on the island: “*I come on shore here on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, 1659*” (Defoe 52). Though he

inscribes this twelve days after his arrival on the island, the text “almost reads as a performative<sup>7</sup> speech act rather than a descriptive one, as if Robinson Crusoe has not really arrived on the island until he has declared himself to arrive” (Marshall 901). The fact that Crusoe believes language to be “performative” over “descriptive” verifies his faith in the creative capacity of language, as though he has re-created the event of his arrival in real life. This is not to say, however, that language does *not* have such a creative capacity. The difficulty with Crusoe is that he, unlike his more savvy author, does not conceive of language’s creative ability as a *fictive* function; instead, he believes that language has the ability to construct truth itself.

Crusoe’s assertions of identity also come in the form of self-proclaimed titles and labels for himself. Toward the end of the novel when an English ship appears with a crew of mutineers, Crusoe poses as governor in order to maintain control and sovereignty over crew and help suppress the mutiny. The label, “governor” is yet another example of Crusoe’s attempt to construct his identity, and a much inflated one at that. But since, upon the crew’s arrival, he was not dressed like an English governor, “I now appeared as another person, and spoke

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<sup>7</sup> Performative language, in this sense, is language that performs an action. To this end, Crusoe’s documentation of his arrival on the island operates like an actual “reliving” of the event. Descriptive language, on the other hand, is simply explanatory. Crusoe’s use of performative language indicates his belief that language and ontology somehow collapse into one another. He also uses descriptive language later when writing his journal, but again, does not see the linguistic description as removed from truth itself. In other words, Crusoe has trouble seeing what Saussure calls the “gap” between signifier and signified.

of the Governour, the garrison, the castle, and the like, upon all occasions” (213). In other words, he builds up the image of a powerful governor in the minds of the crew, and later, once “dress'd in my new habit” (216), he actively assumes the fictional role. This episode reveals Defoe’s awareness that language and identity are themselves somewhat theatrical by nature, rather than authentic and essentially real. Language, in this scene, functions like a script and the clothes like a costume. The identity of the governor was first constructed fictitiously through Crusoe's speech act, and then theatrically performed. This episode is representative of what generally occurs when Crusoe attempts to establish his identity through speech: he creates a role for himself, an alter ego—whether it be prodigal son, king, master, or governor—by speaking it into existence, and then goes on to perform it.

While it is true that, in the episode with the mutineers, Crusoe is fully aware that his identity as governor is merely a performance to deceive the crew, in most other occasions, he deceives himself. For example, he takes great pleasure in thinking “that this [island] was all my own, that I was king and lord of all this country indefeasibly, and had right of possession” (80). Crusoe therefore assumes this position of control, though he never actually questions the grounds for such far-reaching claims. Crusoe’s tendency to assume such a position of authority may operate as Defoe’s attempt to address the politically-charged question of what precisely authorizes authority. Does authority lie in the

proclamation itself? Is Crusoe king simply because he says so<sup>8</sup>? Crusoe's use of self-proclaimed labels can also be viewed as a form of autobiography, and is therefore an example of his attempt at displaying authority through authorship. Eric Jager comments on this, stating: "From his solitary role as author reconstructing himself in the journal, to his social role as 'king' and 'governor' constructing his fictional 'Authority,' Robinson Crusoe displays the ability to make and remake himself through language" (Jager 331). While Jager views Crusoe's writerly and creative abilities as an achievement, he fails to comment on Crusoe's lack of awareness that this authority is purely of his own devising, and therefore fictional. Rewriting himself as "king and lord" of the island, he imagines a new identity with the hope that a title so high in status will somehow match up to his true self. The statement expresses little doubt in this perceived identity as king, which he views as an "indefeasible" truth. In other words, Crusoe sees no difference between his authorial self and his imagined, objective self. Jager places little importance on this difference. He posits that Crusoe's journal, for example, helps him achieve a sustained sense of self, since "the past is both written and read by the same 'I.' The 'irreparable tear between the written account and the naked, lived moment' [Brown 588] recedes in importance when one

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<sup>8</sup> The question of where political authority lies and how it is justified was increasingly important in Defoe's time, just a few decades after the Restoration of the British monarchy. It is possible that Defoe intended to highlight the more political implications of Crusoe's self-proclaimed "king-like" status on the island in order to call into question the political authority of the British monarchy after the Restoration.



considers Crusoe's journal... as a daily function that translates the self from mental composure to written composition, as a scene of reflexive transactions beneficial to Crusoe's existence" (Jager 325). While Jager focuses on the more practical effects of journal-writing, he diminishes the importance of identity-fragmentation that, I believe, Defoe attempts to draw out. The difference between the "written account" and "naked, lived moment" (Brown 588) is the very fissure that Defoe is problematizing.

Extrapolating from Jacques Lacan's, "The Mirror Stage," George Gusdorf writes that autobiography "is the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image" (Gusdorf 33)<sup>9</sup>. This is precisely how Crusoe himself conceives of his own autobiographical acts. Shari Benstock, however, counters Gusdorf on this point, questioning "the measure to which 'self' and 'self image' might not coincide, can never coincide in language—not because certain forms of self-writing are not self-conscious enough but because they have no investment in creating a cohesive self over time" (Benstock 148). There are two ways to think about Benstock's point. First, Benstock proposes that a distinction be drawn between "self" (metaphysical self-identity) and "self image," (objective self-identity) and that these two are somewhat asymmetrical. Crusoe does not understand that his

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<sup>9</sup> Though this idea of "mirror" and the reflection of the authentic self was popularized by Lacan, it is possible that Defoe's engagement with these ideas of language and representation operates as a response to Book III of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in which Locke first questioned the relationship between words and reality: "Because men would not be thought to talk barely of their own imagination, but of things as they really are; therefore they often suppose the words to stand also for the reality of things" (Locke, "On Words").

imagistic self (as king) simply does not match up with his “actual” self, because this identity does not persist over time. Defoe eventually reveals that the island does not belong to Crusoe alone, but is inhabited and frequently visited by cannibals. By exposing the truth about the island's inhabitants, Defoe permanently disrupts Crusoe's self-identity as “king” and “lord”, and instead of acting king-like, Crusoe runs to the hills and hides in fear of the cannibals. The second way to consider Benstock’s point is to draw *no* distinction between “self” and “self image,” but rather to conceive of *both* as fictive constructs at the outset. In this second view, there is no “real” self that the “self image” must match up to; instead, the “real” self is, like the linguistic representation, also a construct of the imagination. This line of thinking is analogous with Hume’s theory that selfhood consists only in memory, and that on its own, the self is nothing more than a bundle of perceptions. This idea offers a further explanation for why Crusoe can have no “investment in creating a cohesive self over time” (148), since, in this second view, there is no cohesive self at all. Crusoe seems entirely unaware of either of these possibilities. But Defoe demonstrates, at the very least, that Crusoe's authorial desire to label himself as a king and lord does not authorize his actually *being* one.

While the speech-acts Crusoe engages in exemplify his faith in language’s ability to determine identity, there is some evidence in the novel that Crusoe actually recognizes the limitations of speech. It is for this reason that he does not

immediately assume the role of governor, and requires the costume in order to convince the crew of his position. Writing, however, takes on a different status for Crusoe. Because there is an element of permanence to writing, he seems to privilege text over speech as a more stable, reliable tool. While on the island, Crusoe frequently mentions his engagement with writing and the benefits of it: “I found pen, ink and paper, and I husbanded them to the utmost....while my ink lasted, I kept things very exact” (53). The “exactitude” offered through written language is significant, because it makes writing appear more substantive than speech alone. The permanence of ink also adds to its value in terms of its stability and constancy, unlike speech which is fleeting and subject to change with time and circumstance. This is why Crusoe asks that the crew sign a written contract verifying that they “would be entirely under and subjected to his commands” (195). Recognizing that a verbal promise is less reliable than a written one, Crusoe clearly values writing as a means for verifying truth.

Crusoe’s journal is his most literal attempt at autobiography and therefore represents his most fervent effort at writing his identity into existence. This act of constructing the self textually seems to support the idea that the self actually *can* be constructed and represented in language. Jager maintains a positivist position regarding autobiography and the possibility of self-construction: “the journal enables Crusoe to realize a cumulative sense of himself” (Jager 325). But Crusoe is not actually at liberty to fully engage in this act of self-writing, because, during

the act of writing, he is constantly aware of his limited supply of ink. The journal is therefore cut short after only a few months of writing because, “having no more ink, I was forc'd to leave it off” (Defoe 56). The process of self-construction through the act of writing is therefore constantly tempered with the threat of the ink’s disappearance. Consequently, writing no longer retains the preconceived permanence, legitimacy, or “exactitude” that it traditionally has. Because Defoe limits Crusoe’s ink, Crusoe’s “self” constructed in his journal is never fully formed, and even the part of the self that is written is constricted for the purpose of conserving the ink. This is why the journal captures only the banal actions and events of Crusoe’s first months, rather than Crusoe himself. Entries such as “Much rain all night and all day, no stirring out” (61) and “Rain all day” (61), though complete, daily entries, barely reveal very much about Crusoe, the man. Therefore, the text of the journal fails to represent or determine exactly who Crusoe is, as autobiographical writing intends to do. This is not to say, however, that if Crusoe had an unlimited supply of ink, he could have successfully formed his identity; rather, the limited ink allegorically represents the limitations of language itself and its intrinsic incapacity to either represent or construct an authentic identity.

It is important to note that Crusoe’s journal is not simply a failed attempt at constructing the self textually; it is, as Marshall notes, “one of a series of attempts to narrate his life as the strangely non-linear narrative keeps beginning

again and circling back on itself—alluding to, joining with, and diverting from other versions of Crusoe’s autobiography” (Marshall 899). Crusoe documents the written story of his arrival on the island, for example, three separate times: first, chronologically in the novel’s explanation of events (Defoe 38); a second time, when he explains his reason for keeping the journal (56); and lastly, in the journal itself (57)<sup>10</sup>. Given that his arrival on the island is also his birthday, much scholarship indicates that the arrival functions as a symbolic rebirth for Crusoe. His reiteration of this “rebirth” may be symptomatic of a paranoid desire to be reborn textually, to secure an identity entirely inscribed in writing. But across these three accounts, we find a very different Crusoe in each. In the first account, which is the pseudo-memoir itself, Crusoe writes, “I was now landed, and safe on shore, and began to look up and thank God that my life was sav’d in a case wherein there was some minutes before scarce any room to hope” (38). In the second account, Crusoe for the first time demonstrates some self-conscious apprehensions about writing and autobiography:

And now it was when I began to keep a journal of every day’s employment, for indeed at first I was in too much...discomposure of mind, and my journal would ha’ been full of many dull things. For example, I must have said thus: *Sept.* the 30<sup>th</sup>. After I got to shore and had escap’d drowning, instead of being thankful to God for my deliverance, having first vomited with the great quantity of salt water...and recovering myself a little, I ran about the

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<sup>10</sup> David Marshall also views Crusoe’s inscription on the cross stating his arrival as a form of autobiography (Marshall 906)—which would therefore serve as a fourth written account of Crusoe’s arrival on the island.

shore...crying out, I was undone, undone...I was forced to lie down on the ground to repose, but durst not sleep for fear of being devour'd (56).

Notice first of all that this is not a precise documentation of Crusoe's arrival, but rather an imaginative hypothesis of what he "must have said" in his journal.

Secondly, in this moment of recollection, he imagines a very different scenario from the one presented first in the chronological account of the novel. In the first account, the first thing Crusoe does is "look up and thank God that my life was sav'd" (38), while in the second, "instead of being thankful to God for my deliverance...I ran about the shore..." (56). While Crusoe does admit that when writing the journal he must have been in a "discomposure of mind," he believes that the result of such discomposure is that "my journal would ha' been full of many dull things" (56). He therefore does not account for the fact that the two stories he presents clearly contradict each other, and present two very different Crusoes. The third account in the journal makes no mention of either thanking God or vomiting and running about the shore. He simply writes that "I poor miserable *Robinson* Crusoe, being shipwrecked, during a dreadful storm...came on shore on this dismal unfortunate island...All the rest of that day I spent in afflicting my self at the dismal circumstances I was brought to...and in despair of any relief, saw nothing but death before me" (57). The journal account seems to document Crusoe's interior feelings, unlike the second, which describes his

particular actions upon arrival. He also writes in the journal that, “I slept in a tree...but slept soundly tho’ it rain’d all night” (57) which clearly contradicts the second account, in which Crusoe lies down, not in a tree, but “down on the ground,” but he “durst not sleep for fear of being devour’d” (56).

It is less important, for my purposes, to examine the factual variances in these three accounts of Crusoe’s arrival; what is more significant is that in these three separate scenarios, we find three different Crusoes entirely; distinct identities that shift in their representation. While one could argue that the separate accounts attempt to capture different aspects of the same event, as one recounts the physical events and another his interior feelings, it is still difficult to overlook the inconsistencies. Patricia Meyer Spacks argues that the variances across the three accounts demonstrate that “a writer’s immediate purpose determines his literary choices” and that “Defoe...reinforces Crusoe’s implicit contention that the process of recording—a process of selecting and preserving images on the basis of their significance—helps a man to come to terms with his experience” (Spacks 33). Like Jager, Spacks diminishes the fragmentations and inconsistencies that occur during the writing-process for the sake of highlighting how writing is actually beneficial to “coming to terms with” experience. I suggest, on the other hand, that it is likely that Defoe intended to produce some discomfort in his readers with these varied accounts, causing them to question the reliability of his protagonist. And it is worth repeating that such variances in

representation must not be overlooked. In the first account, Crusoe is clearly described as having a sort of religious and spiritual experience, thankful for his deliverance by God, while in the second, God plays no role in his arrival whatsoever. If the novel, the pseudo-autobiographical account, is written in a moment of recollection on Crusoe's part, we must question how the act of recollection could influence the "Crusoe" formed in the novel. For instance, Crusoe's conversion occurs later in the novel, but Crusoe the author/autobiographer is already converted by the time he writes the novel, so it makes sense that he would manufacture an identity that arrives on the island spouting thanks to God. David Marshall writes that "the strange interweaving of Crusoe's past and present autobiographical narratives and the repetition of autobiographical speech acts throughout the text contribute to the sense that the narrative of the *Life [and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe]* begins over and over again" (Marshall 903). If Crusoe's repeated accounts of his arrival on the island allegorize his rebirth, it becomes evident that Crusoe the author/autobiographer "gives birth" to a number of different Crusoes by means of his language. Benstock comments on this fragmentation between the autobiographer and the multiple selves depicted in the text:

the writing subject is the one presumed to know (himself)...The chain-link fence that circumscribes his unique contributions is language, representative of the very laws to which this writing subject has been subjected; that is, language is neither an external force nor a "tool" of



expression, but the very symbolic system that both constructs and is constructed by the writing subject. As such, language is both internal and external, and the walls that defend the *moi* [me] are never an entirely adequate defense network against the multiple forms of the *je* [I] (Benstock 149).

Benstock implicitly references in this passage the three assumptions underlying the autobiographical process that I outlined in the previous chapter: that there is a self; that it is knowable; and that it can be adequately represented in language. She also mentions a fourth assumption that is equally relevant; namely that the self is also a unified and essentially monolithic entity. Crusoe, the author/autobiographer who is writing retroactively must have made these assumptions in order to begin the writing process without realizing how the language system itself both contributes to and disrupts the process of imaginative self-construction. Defoe therefore demonstrates how Crusoe misreads language, and seems unaware of its function as the “very symbolic system that both constructs and is constructed” by Crusoe as author. In other words, while he attempts to maintain narrative control over his textual, objective self, he cannot grasp the ways in which the textual self is not only constructed by him, but by language itself, which imposes its own limitations on the author. Benstock comments on this lack of control on the part of the author, arguing that “language is both internal and external”: while the author’s linguistic project ostensibly appears an “internal” or private process, in which the author seems to control the

signifiers he uses, language still imposes an external force on the author, given its inherently unstable, fragmented nature.

Crusoe's faith in the stability of language guarantees his faith in the possibility of a stable, unified self born out of language. Mistakenly, he assumes that "an infinitely varied but unified self exists, and that writing and reading autobiography is morally and aesthetically rewarding" (Nussbaum 2). He does not realize the ways in which language operates against him, as it offers no unity, coherence, or stability. For this reason, the object in the text, "moi," has no "adequate defense network" against the multiple "je" or "I's" that constitute the writing subject. Crusoe's particular case exemplifies Defoe's ability to traverse deeply philosophical terrain. As I have already mentioned, prior to Defoe, there were few known dialogues or treatises that examined selfhood in relationship to signification. Defoe therefore played a specific role in the epistemological transformation of the eighteenth century. Essentially, he applied Locke's language theories (on the language system's lack of coherence and stability) to the issue of identity—thereby revealing how identity itself suffers the same fissures and discontinuities as the language that represents it.

### **Crusoe's Conversion and Spiritual Autobiography**

While Defoe calls into question such faith in the stability of language and the coherence of the self, it is necessary to investigate where this faith originally

derives from, and more important for my investigation, where does *Crusoe's* faith in signification and selfhood derive from? Crusoe does not display this faith at all times. In fact, when he arrives on the island, he asks the existential questions expected of one in his condition: "What am I, and all the other creatures, wild and tame, human and brutal, and whence are we?" (Defoe 74). Here, Crusoe displays some uncertainty about what precisely constitutes the self, if anything, and admits that he does not know exactly what the "self" is<sup>11</sup>. What, then, eventually led him to such certainty about the truth of the self and of language?

I propose that Crusoe's faith in signification and selfhood derives from two, related events: (1) his reading of the Bible and (2) his subsequent religious conversion. Reading the Bible initiates religious conversion for Crusoe, and conversion, I will attempt to show, is essentially an autobiographical experience—a *re-writing* of the interior identity from sinner to man-of-faith. As David Marshall argues, "the conversion experience authorizes... autobiography" (Marshall 904-905). In other words, Crusoe's conversion motivates him to engage in further autobiographical acts. If he can re-write himself as a man-of-faith, why not also a king, lord, and governor? Conversion therefore still requires the assumption of control. While, in Puritan terms, conversion is viewed as a gift

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<sup>11</sup> This doubt may explain his urge to write in the journal, possibly as an effort to convince himself of a unified self-identity underlying the physical body, which is knowable enough to be transposed in language. But because he is able to ask the question, "What am I?" even after he writes in the journal, there is some indication that even the act of journal-writing does not convince him of a stable sense of self. However, Crusoe the author/autobiographer who writes retroactively is undoubtedly convinced by the time he writes his autobiography.

of divine grace, it is possible that Defoe means to undermine this idea, and highlight the extent to which conversion operates more like the autobiographical experience. In doing so, he demonstrates how the *self* initiates conversion, rather than God. Crusoe, who spent most of his early days on the island “pensive and sad” (75) wants only to be happy, and in order to maintain sanity, he transforms his interior identity (at least in his mind) from a self-loathing sinner to a religious penitent. While he attributes his conversion to God, it is actually a product of Crusoe’s own authorship and autobiography<sup>12</sup>.

G.A. Starr views Crusoe’s reading of the Bible and subsequent conversion as the major turning point in the novel (Starr 111). Starr initially popularized the idea of Defoe’s narratives as “spiritual autobiography.” In *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography*, Starr defines the term as a journalistic account of one’s spiritual self: “Since every man is responsible for the well-being of his own soul, he must mark with care each event or stage in its development” (Starr 5). Spiritual autobiography therefore centers on the development of one’s interior, spiritual journey. For my purposes, however, I focus mainly on Crusoe’s conversion as a form of spiritual autobiography, so as to emphasize the primacy of the role of language in the conversion process.

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<sup>12</sup> The occasion parallels Crusoe’s former act of scattering corn grain outside his house, then attributing the growth of the corn a month later not to himself, but to God. He believes at first “that God had miraculously caus’d this grain to grow without any help of seed” (Defoe 63), having forgotten that the seeds were scattered by his own hand a month earlier, not God’s.

The problematic role that language plays in both Bible-reading and conversion remains largely unaccounted for in current scholarship. I propose that Crusoe's reading of the Bible permanently alters his engagement with language, further verifies its authority, and has significant implications for his own acts of autobiography. Eric Jager discusses Crusoe's conversion, but marginalizes the role of language, and like many critics, does not seem to view its role as necessarily problematic. For example, Jager cites J. Paul Hunter, who intellectualizes Crusoe by claiming that by means of the conversion, "Defoe dramatizes Crusoe's mental development through his heightened awareness of language, for words which Crusoe had previously used carelessly now become meaningful to him" (Hunter 159). Hunter is correct in noting that Crusoe's engagement with the Bible changes his relationship with language, and that words become more meaningful to Crusoe after he converts<sup>13</sup>, but that is precisely Crusoe's problem. Following conversion, Crusoe believes strongly in the power of signification, and maintains steady faith that words are somehow charged with meaning and truth; it is precisely this myth that, I believe, Defoe attempts to subvert. Crusoe's conversion narrative therefore exemplifies another one of Defoe's attempts to *problematize* meaning and language, rather than affirm its authority.

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<sup>13</sup> Although, prior to reading the Bible, Crusoe had already displayed some faith in the authority of language, evinced by his persistent belief in his verbal promises and self-labels.

Before Crusoe begins reading the Bible, he wavers between lamenting his dismal, solitary conditions on the island and glorifying his circumstance as an act of God's mercy, since he was the sole survivor of the shipwreck. Not unlike his prior oscillation between prodigal son and rebellious adventurer, Crusoe, now on the island, is once again faced with the decision of who he wants to be: an ungrateful sinner or a gracious man-of-faith. Having fallen gravely ill and increasingly depressed, Crusoe exclaims: "*Why has God done this to me? What have I done to be thus us'd?*" (Defoe 74). But then, almost in the same breath, he scolds himself: "*WRETCH! dost thou ask what thou has done!...Why is it that thou wert not long ago destroy'd?*" (75). Crusoe finds the answer to the question of his identity in the Bible. When he starts to read, "only having open'd the book casually, the first words that occur'd to me were these, *Call on me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me*" (75). He explains further that "the words were very apt to my case, and made some impression upon my thoughts at the time of reading them" (76). Crusoe begins to seriously internalize the words of the Bible, as they seem to be charged with religious significance. As he begins to read "every morning and every night...I found my heart more deeply and sincerely affected with the wickedness of my past life" (77). Not long after, Crusoe assumes the identity of a man of faith, and writes that the Bible has allowed him "to come to a true sense of things" (78). Crusoe believes that his reading of the Bible led to his religious conversion, which in turn

put an end to his mental disorder, or specifically, his pattern of wavering back and forth between sinner and man-of-faith. Crusoe's Bible-reading and religious conversion appear to offer him a sense of stability regarding his identity, since the comfort he feels is entirely interior: "My Condition began now to be...not less Miserable as to my Way of living, yet much easier to my Mind...I had a great deal of comfort within" (Defoe 77-78).

The Bible is therefore the source of truth, comfort, and stability. The book undoubtedly holds powerful significance for Crusoe in its ability to represent the truth and also to orient him toward the truth of his identity as a man-of-faith. The Bible therefore affirms the truth-telling capacity of language for Crusoe, and invests authority into the word. The reading-process, I believe, then initiates the writing process, because now fully convinced of the truth of language, Crusoe has no reason to doubt his own signifiers. In other words, reading the Bible authorizes Crusoe's own use of words in his autobiography. For this reason, Crusoe's conversion is the turning point at which he begins to have steady faith not only in God and the words of the Bible, but in himself and his own language. When Crusoe asks, "What am I?" he is not in search of his physical self or body, whose existence he has no doubts about. Instead, he is in search of his identity—a stable, metaphysical self beyond the body, invisible to his empirical eye. And for Crusoe, if God's identity can be found in the words of the Bible, his personal

identity can be found in his own language; and it is this realization that initiates the autobiographical act.

David Marshall notes that Crusoe's conversion echoes that of Augustine, who, in his autobiographical *Confessions*, writes that he "hears a chanting that instructs him to 'Take up and read; take up and read,' and opening the Bible to the words of Paul, he reads a passage that seems to speak to him directly" (Marshall 905). Marshall keenly notes that Crusoe, too, describes how he "took up the Bible and began to read" (Defoe 75). Crusoe, like Augustine, also believes that these words speak directly to him, as "the words were very apt to my case" (76); and later, when he opens the Bible again, Crusoe believes quite strongly that "these words were to me" (91). Therefore, the act of reading the Bible, reinforces not only the truth of God, but the truth of the existence of the spiritual self, whom this newfound knowledge is impressed upon. For Marshall, "Crusoe's conversion, echoing Augustine's conversion...takes place in a chain of autobiographies" (Marshall 905). Marshall argues here that Crusoe's conversion experience is intrinsically tied to his autobiographical experience, so that conversion is not only an act of finding God in language (specifically the language of the Bible) but finding the self. Notice, for example, that finding faith in God leads Crusoe immediately to turn inward: "I daily read the word of God, and apply'd all the comforts of it to my present state. One morning being very sad, I open'd the Bible upon these words, *I will never, never leave thee, nor*



*forsake thee*, immediately it occurred, that these words were to me” (Defoe 90-91). Crusoe therefore uses the Bible as a vehicle by which to turn inward and examine his own interiority; but to do so is to also assume that there is, in fact, a spiritual, metaphysical self to turn toward.

Conversion also motivates autobiography for Crusoe, because it allows him to re-examine his past life of which God and religion played no part, and therefore fashion a new life and “self”—a spiritual rebirth:

...beginning at the New Testament, I began seriously to read it...It was not long after I set seriously to this work, but found my heart more deeply and sincerely affected with the wickedness of my past life...I threw down the book, and... I cried out to Jesus...*thou exalted prince and savior, give me repentance!* This was the first time that I could say, in the true sense of the words, that I pray’d in all my life...Now I look’d back upon my past life with such horror...that my soul sought nothing of God, but deliverance...And I add this part here, to hint to whoever shall read it, that whenever they come to a true sense of things, they will find deliverance from sin much greater blessing than deliverance from affliction. But leaving this part, I return to my journal (Defoe 77-78).

Crusoe’s “serious” reading of the Bible allows him, at least ostensibly, to give birth to an entirely new Crusoe, and as Marshall writes, it is “the rebirth of conversion” that “makes the retrospective reflections of autobiography possible” (Marshall 906). Crusoe’s prayer itself operates like a form of autobiography, as it is also a type of language that urges the internal self toward its own refashioning. After finding God and his new self by means of the Bible, he believes he has been

given access to truth, allowing him to no longer ask questions such as, “What am I?” (74). It is this certainty about the self which motivates him to write the autobiography, as immediately after these lines declaring his newfound truth and deliverance by God, he writes, “I return to my journal.” The authority and truth of Crusoe’s language, as an author and autobiographer, is thus guaranteed to him based on his faith in the authority of God and the Bible: “God authors the events in Crusoe’s life...and the recognition of this authorizes Crusoe to write his own autobiography” (Marshall 903).

But if conversion is an autobiographical experience, like any autobiographical work, the writing (or conversion) process does not come without its own problems. Following his conversion, Crusoe displays a great deal of confidence in the new person he has become; one who is thankful and blessed in his circumstances, since they were ordained not by chance, but by God: “Thus I liv’d mighty comfortable, my mind being entirely composed by resigning to the will of God” (108). Crusoe never expresses any doubt in the success of his conversion, but years later, when chancing upon a terrifying human footprint in the sand, he exclaims: “Thus my fear banish’d all my religious hope, all that former confidence in God, which was founded upon such wonderful experience as I had had of his goodness, now vanish’d” (124). If anything has remained steady about Crusoe’s character, it is his tendency to waver back and forth between various identities. To Crusoe’s credit, he even takes note of this wavering pattern

momentarily: “How strange a checquer work of Providence is the life of man!...To day we love what to morrow we hate; to day we seek what to morrow we shun; to day we desire what to morrow we fear” (124). Defoe’s own voice comes through most vividly here, clearly commenting on the instability of identity. But for Crusoe, this moment of clarity is short-lived, as he eventually goes back to Scripture to regain his former security of both God and self: “I took up my Bible, and...It is impossible to express the comfort this gave me...I thankfully laid down the book, and was no more sad” (125).

The conversion process, like the autobiographical process, reveals itself to be anything but reliable, yielding no stable identity. Still, Crusoe continues to “convert” himself into any identity he chooses, unaware that these identities—whether king, lord, governor, master, or Christian—are momentary fictions and functions of his imagination, rather than any interior truth. Spacks also emphasizes the primacy of Crusoe’s imagination, especially in relation to his spiritual development. Spacks, however, views Crusoe’s imagination as a strength and resource to him on the island, not unlike Jager and Richetti. She maintains that “the tale of how a man painfully enlarges his emotional capacities by using the resources of his imagination is not the story Defoe claims to tell, but the power of Crusoe’s narrative derives largely from its roots in just such a drama of self-discovery...The imagination through its own energy helps release the trap of self” (Spacks 29). For Spacks, Crusoe’s imagination is the key to his eventual

self-mastery and self-knowledge, as his “dramatic development derives from increasing self-awareness” (50). Spacks presents an image of Crusoe that he himself would probably endorse. Few critics would deny that Crusoe is a highly imaginative character, but I believe Crusoe’s imaginative capacity, or what I been calling his authorial abilities, actually deceive him and cause him to buy into the myth of stable selfhood, authorized through a seemingly reliable language system.

While Spacks is correct that Crusoe’s imagination contributes to his sense of self, she (like Crusoe himself) does not read his various and short-lived identities as purely fictive or linguistic constructs. Autobiography, for Spacks, operates as a more or less stable means of asserting the truth of identity. She confirms that “spiritual autobiography can reveal the intricacies of the imagination...a force thus defining [Crusoe’s] ultimate identity” (Spacks 56). Spacks seems to be in agreement with Jager, who also argues that Crusoe’s engagement with language and autobiography help sustain his sanity on the island and eventually allows him to achieve self-mastery. A number of critics have therefore argued that Crusoe’s language essentially saves him on the island, as it is his faith in the Bible, God, and his own acts of autobiography that help him to combat the discomposure of a solitary existence. Language, for such critics and for Crusoe himself, serves a utilitarian purpose. But to see language in only these terms results ultimately in a misreading of language itself. This misreading combined with his misguided faith in his authority as author eventually drives him

to continuously “compos[e] himself through protean metamorphoses,” though he “never seems to arrive at a final or stable identity that could provide an authoritative or definitive stance from which to look back” (Marshall 906).

Though the novel could serve as a testament to Crusoe’s success as author and his ability to represent the truth of his identity—“a history of fact...[with] no appearance of fiction in it” (Defoe, “Preface”)—Defoe demonstrates throughout the course of the novel how the act of writing engages only with ideas, or as Locke argues, how words “stand for ideas in the mind” and not truth itself (Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, “Of Words”). Using Crusoe, Defoe questions whether identity is also merely an idea, a construct conceived in language which no amount of authorial authority could verify as essentially real or true.

### Chapter 3:

#### Authorship in the Figure of Performance: Defoe's *Roxana*

##### Introduction

Most critics agree that *Roxana* occupies a unique position among Defoe's protagonists. Richetti, G.A. Starr, and David Blewett have helped to generate a prevalent discourse on *Roxana*, attributing the novel's uniqueness to its dark, deeply disturbed, and damned anti-heroine. To this end, some critics have been quick to label *Crusoe* as a hero of self-mastery and *Roxana* an anti-heroine of self-destruction. *Roxana*, however, is not the complete antithesis of *Crusoe*. Representative of the second phase in the mono-character's development, *Roxana* bears some striking parallels with him.

Significantly, both characters believe in the existence of a "true" interior, metaphysical self, while Defoe, working in the background, offers evidence to the contrary. Throughout most of the novel, *Roxana* is convinced that her "true," interior identity is that of a whore. This is what Maddox calls her "private self" which she at one point calls the "Secret Hell within" [Defoe 305] (Maddox 674). Her character thus mimics *Crusoe*'s, in that she also assumes that the "truth" of the self necessarily exists and that it is knowable. Unlike *Crusoe*, however, she does not believe that this truth of the self can be adequately represented in language. Therefore, what distinguishes *Roxana* from *Crusoe*, and what positions

her above Crusoe's intellectual level, is that she believes that the truth of the self exists outside any forms of representation, and that even as author to her story, she has no authorial control over who she really is. Unlike Crusoe, Roxana believes that the interior self is formed not in language, but by external circumstances over which she has no control. She becomes a "whore for bread" (Defoe 28), sinning only for the sake of survival. But in doing so, she believes she permanently alters her interior self.

What also distinguishes Roxana's intellect from Crusoe's is her awareness of her precarious status as author, narrator, and autobiographer of her identity. She recognizes that being an author grants her the authority not to construct the truth of the self, but rather, to create external, fictional representations of the self. Ironically, after recognizing the limits of authorship, Roxana attempts to explore the full range of her authorial abilities by perpetually re-inventing herself through various measures of linguistic performance. Roxana's authorial and autobiographical abilities manifest most clearly through her various performances, and indeed, authorship takes the figure of performance in Roxana's narrative. Her dresses, equipages, masks, and words are the collective symbols that constitute the text of her performed identities. It is important to note that performance, for Roxana, is essentially fictive, and manifests only inauthentic representations of her "true" identity. Throughout the course of the novel, she shifts her identity numerous times, taking on the famous role of the Turkish

princess, a high-class courtesan, a Quaker, etc. Roxana recognizes each identity as a separate experiment in performance, unlike Crusoe who calls himself King of the island and actually believes his own fictions. It is over her fictive selves that Roxana attempts self-mastery.

Throughout most of the story, Roxana thinks the figure of identity is one she can easily apprehend. She perceives her identity as a two-fold structure<sup>14</sup>: a private self (or “Hell within”) that she has no power to control, overlaid by a public self, made up of multiple fictional personae which, as an author, she *can* control. By the end of the novel, Defoe undercuts both of these assumptions, and suggests that the structure of the self is not to be readily known<sup>15</sup>. While Roxana perceives identity as a more complicated structure than Crusoe, her thoughts on identity are still too binary and simplistic for Defoe, who seems to view the self as a deeply complex construct that poses various ontological difficulties as to its existence, knowability, and representability. Defoe undermines the idea that Roxana has a distinct, knowable center to her identity<sup>16</sup>. He also implies that Roxana’s performances may not merely be inauthentic postures that divide her “performed” self from her “real” self. Instead, he explores how the logic behind this binary operates, and by the end of the novel, exposes this logic as largely

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<sup>14</sup> This differs significantly from Crusoe, who views his identity as a more or less unified structure, unaware of the many ways in which his own self becomes fragmented over time.

<sup>15</sup> If Defoe’s narrative technique is, as Maddox suggests, a system of subverting his protagonist’s claims to self-mastery, Roxana is one of Defoe’s most poignant examples of a protagonist’s inability to achieve self-mastery.

<sup>16</sup> Though he does press this knowledge upon her until the end of the novel.



untenable. Defoe seems to deconstruct the idea that “fact” and “fiction” or truth and lies are such distinct, stable constructs. Identity, being a highly complex thing, may be the seat at which all logic distinguishing fact from fiction collapses completely. It is to this extent that *Roxana* operates within the largely epistemological framework of the eighteenth century. Just as genre boundaries that distinguished fact from fiction were beginning to materialize, investigations into truth and falsehood were also at large. And just as meaning and “truth” cannot be found within texts, neither can they be located within the structure of identity. Roxana’s story may suggest, then, that identity also operates like a text, which in her case, manifests through her many guises and performances. Identity, for Defoe, is a story with no central truth.

While Roxana may not grasp all of Defoe’s nuances regarding identity, her intelligence is still noteworthy. She does believe in a stable “truth” to her identity, which, in her mind, cannot be changed, but as I mentioned earlier, she has a more enlightened view of authorship than Crusoe. She does not see herself as capable of controlling the “truth” of her “self,” because she does not believe the truth of the self can be discovered in language. Language, to Roxana, is a tool for creating fictions, not truths. It is necessary to question why Roxana engages in the act of autobiography, then, if she does not believe that the self can be discovered in language. I suggest that Roxana writes the autobiography because she recognizes herself as a talented author of fictional identities, and the novel is

only one among many of her autobiographical acts. Her theatrical performances (as Turkish princess, Quaker, etc.) can also be read as forms of autobiography, since they are all fictive acts of self-reinvention. To this end, Roxana can be described not as an anti-heroine per se, but rather as one of the more successful and self-aware of Defoe's autobiographers, because she understands both the purpose and the limitations of authorship and autobiography.

But, as I have mentioned, Roxana is not the philosophical ideal of the self-aware author for Defoe. While she understands the limits of authorship and that her status as an author does not permit her leverage over truth, one of her major downfalls is her belief in an underlying, "secret" truth to her identity that she must keep hidden: "She believes she is really a whore rather than a loveable lady; really a carcass rather than a beautiful body" (Maddox 675). While the truth of her identity is abominable to her, it is a truth nonetheless. In an attempt to keep this identity secret, there is some indication that she, like Crusoe, takes her role as author to an extreme, and her attempts to mask her "true" identity behind various performances become increasingly problematic. Just as Defoe prevents Crusoe from exploring the full range of his authorship, he disrupts Roxana's belief that she can allow such fictions to take over her life. But in the end, all that is left of her identity is a vacancy, a palimpsest written over by various personae and stories. Perhaps, Defoe would say that identity is nothing more than such a vacancy. This paper is mostly in agreement with the claim originally posed by

Maddox, that Roxana “is a personality with an appalling missing center” (Maddox 674), except that I would add that Defoe’s ideas on this “missing center” refer not only to the specific case of Roxana, but to Crusoe, Moll, and all speaking subjects at large. Furthermore, the problem is not so much that the self has a “missing” center, but rather that there is no “center” to the self to begin with<sup>17</sup>.

### **The Theater of Identity**

The opening pages to Roxana’s autobiography require a close examination, not unlike Crusoe’s. Roxana, however, never mentions her name or its origins as Crusoe does. Instead, she begins her autobiography, “I was born, *as my Friends told me*, at the City of Poitiers...in France, from whence I Was brought to England” (Defoe 5). Julie Crane comments on this passage, arguing that, “the qualification ‘*as my Friends told me*’ might be...a mere convention, casting no doubt upon a sound enough assertion of ancestry; yet who can tell, in retrospect, where Roxana came from?” (Crane 12). Crane makes an astute observation about the immediate mysteriousness surrounding Roxana’s character and origins, but Roxana’s commentary on language and its relationship to identity must not be overlooked. Roxana cannot verify the certainty of her own birth for her reader, because she recognizes that the only means for “verifying” facts about the self and its origins is through language and stories. The opening line therefore

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<sup>17</sup> This is what Coetzee calls “pain of lack” rather than the “pain of loss” in *Foe* (Coetzee 91).

raises an implicit question about the knowability of the self, and more importantly, the medium by which one gains self-knowledge. Roxana problematizes not only autobiography here, but its counterpart in historiography. She does not take facts about her life for granted, displaying an acute understanding that “our access to a material reality is always mediated by language... What is at stake is, in part, the claim of objectivity in traditional historiography or whether ‘real’ or ‘true’ history can be known” (Nussbaum 12). Unlike Crusoe, whose religious faith grants authority to the word, Roxana seems suspicious of language’s claims to truth and objectivity<sup>18</sup>.

In the introduction, Defoe continues to characterize language not as a medium by which to access truth, but rather, a tool for Roxana’s fictive performances. Having moved as a child from France to England as a refugee, Roxana writes, “I retain’d nothing of *France*, but the language” (Defoe 5). Even though Roxana is not French, she is able to pose as French when she moves to Paris. Similarly, though she is not English,

I learnt the English Tongue perfectly well, with all the Customs of the English Young-Women; so that I retain’d nothing of French but the speech; nor did I so much as keep any Remains of the French Language tagg’d to my Way of Speaking, *as most foreigners do*, but spoke what we call Natural English, as if I had been born here (Defoe 6).

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<sup>18</sup> Roxana’s intelligence comes through vividly here in the introduction, possibly because the voice in this section is that of the older Roxana who reflects back on her former self. The novel features the voice of the older narrator speaking retroactively alongside the younger Roxana who, while cunning, is less philosophically savvy than her older counterpart. Roxana as narrator and as character represent very different figures in the novel.

Two important points about Roxana come into focus in this passage. First, Defoe is reluctant to provide any stable answers about Roxana's identity. Her ethnicity cannot be grounded firmly in either France or England, since being born in the former and raised in the latter, the singularity or purity of her identity is questionable from the outset. Secondly, Roxana takes pride in the fact that she can pass herself off as a true Englishwoman, even though she is a foreigner. This is one of her first performances. She even describes her parents as "People of better Fashion" rather than "the People call'd Refugees at that Time" (Defoe 5) so that even though she and her parents were refugees, their fashionable tendencies allowed them to masquerade as normal Englishman. Julie Crane writes that Roxana's introduction "prepare[s] us for some of Roxana's most salient characteristics, and for her ultimate tragedy, which is partly a tragedy of language: her simultaneous desire to be both known and thoroughly assimilated" (Crane 16). While Crane emphasizes Roxana's desire to assimilate, I would also stress Roxana's intense focus on appearances and theatricality; her desire is not necessarily to "thoroughly assimilate," because to do so would require her identity to be fully integrated into her surroundings. Roxana, however, only cares that she *appears* as if she belongs. Further on in her introduction, she describes her young self as "quick and smart in Discourse," (Defoe 6) demonstrating her skill with language, and possibly foreshadowing her abilities as a linguistic performer. She

frequently mentions her performative talents as a child, explaining that ‘I danc’d...naturally, lov’d it extremely, and sung well also, and so well that...it was afterwards some Advantage to me’ (6). The advantages of her artistic talents are not to be taken literally here, but rather serve as a precursor to her capabilities as a performer with the skill of artifice – a skill that is required of all authors as well.

Despite Roxana’s natural propensity for artifice, she still believes in an underlying truth to her identity. In the beginning of the novel, Roxana believes her identity is in line with normative, Christian morality. When Amy suggests that Roxana become a “whore for bread,” (Defoe 28) Roxana responds, “I’d die before I would consent, or before you should consent for my sake” (29). Clearly, the young Roxana displays less self-awareness than her older, narrating self. She resembles Crusoe here, believing that such vows and declarations guarantee the truth of her virtuous identity. In these early stages of her development, she seems unaware of her capacity to deviate from Christian norms. Amy, often considered Roxana’s alter ego, eventually convinces Roxana to bed the landlord, and Roxana is driven from a life of Christianity to one of sin. In doing so, she inverts Crusoe’s conversion story by “[giving] myself up to the Devil” (38). Both Crusoe’s and Roxana’s conversions result (at least in their minds) in a permanent alteration of interior identity. From the moment the young Roxana gives into the Landlord, she views her interior identity as essentially corrupted, incapable of

being pure again. Her conversion, however, must not be viewed in exactly the same light as Crusoe's. Crusoe's conversion, as I described in the previous chapter, is formed in language and is primarily an autobiographical experience. Crusoe believes he is able to rewrite his essential nature through willed desire and prayer. Roxana's conversion from Christian to sinner, on the other hand, is forced upon her not only by Amy, but by circumstance itself. In the face of poverty, she reacts almost passively, witnessing the breakdown of her conscience: "I receiv'd his [the Landlord's] Kindness at the dear Expence of Body and Soul, mortgaging Faith, Religion, Conscience, and Modesty, for...a Morsel of Bread...Poverty was my snare" (38-39).

Because Crusoe's conversion is formed in language and rendered autobiographically, it allows him to gain faith in language itself and its capacity to represent truth. At the same token, since Roxana's identity is altered not through language, but through external circumstance, she starts to recognize the extent to which language is somehow asymmetrical with truth; that her former signifiers which testified to the strength of her moral conscience, reciting "I'd die before I consent," (29) had no real substance and could not guarantee any truth about her character. Just as the stable order to her identity disintegrates, so too does the authority of the language system. For example, when the Landlord vows to save her from poverty and tells her that they shall live exactly as husband and wife, even though both were married to absent spouses, Roxana cannot bring herself to

trust his words without question. When he promises to love and support her all of his life, she asks him, “Must I depend upon your Promise?” (43). Unlike Crusoe, Roxana places little faith in verbal promises, knowing full well that her own promise to herself had so easily come undone. Even when the Landlord “shew’d me a Contract in Writing, wherein he engag’d himself to me; to cohabit constantly with me; to provide for me in all Respects as a Wife” (42) she is not convinced that any contract can actually make her his wife, and instead cannot conceive of herself as anything but his whore. The purpose of the contract is to allow her and the Landlord the freedom to view themselves as a legitimate married couple, but she refuses to accept even the outward label as the Landlord’s “wife,” believing it does not match up with her true identity as his whore: “We were to call one another Man and Wife, who, in the Sence of the Laws, both of God and our Country, were no more than two adulterers, in short, a Whore and a Rogue” (43). Roxana, however, has no problem *masquerading* as the Landlord’s wife, as long as she knows internally that it is a falsehood. After her conversion to sin, Roxana becomes sharply aware of the performative role of language in such contracts and labels, knowing full well that the signifiers serve to perpetuate the performance. To this end, Roxana differs significantly with Crusoe, who views contracts and self-labels, especially those in writing, as an authorized guarantor of truth.

Forcefully brought into the world of language and artifice, Roxana is now at liberty to explore her status as an author, knowing full well that while she



cannot control her inner being, she can reimagine and re-write her outer identity as many times as she likes. David Durant writes, for example, that “instead of suffering financial loss, Roxana pretends loss; instead of being seduced she seduces...*Roxana* moves from the story of a fall from innocence to a complex tale of a woman inventing that story in her life. Roxana’s experience becomes increasingly fictive” (Durant 526). What is significant about Roxana is that, while she creates these fictions to move ahead in life, she consistently remains conscious of her status as an author, or more specifically, as a master of artifice. Though she deceives others, she never attempts to deceive herself. For example, after the death of the Landlord, she “had now no Poverty attending me; on the contrary, I was Mistress of ten Thousand Pounds before the Prince did anything to me” (Defoe 65)—but she tells the Prince, her new prospective lover, “with some Tears, which, I confess, were a little forc’d, That I believ’d if Mr. — had liv’d, we shou’d have been out of Danger of Want; but that it was impossible to Estimate the Loss which I had sustain’d” (59). Roxana therefore confesses the overall theatricality of her life at large: “the dirty History of my Actings upon the Stage of Life” (75). When she assumes the identity of the Turkish Princess at the king’s ball, she comments extensively on the gown, describing the costume in the most intricate detail:

I return’d dress’d in the Habit of a Turkish Princess; the Habit I got at Leghorn, when my Foreign Prince bought be a Turkish Slave...the Maltese Man of War had...taken a

Turkish Vessel going from Constantinople to Alexandria, in which some Ladies bound for Grand Cairo in Egypt; and as the Ladies were made Slaves, so their fine Cloths were thus expos'd; and with this Turkish Slave, I bought the rich Cloths too: The Dress was extraordinarily fine...the Ground white, and the Flowers blue and gold, and the Train held five Yards; the Dress under it, was a Vest of the same, embroider'd with Gold, and set with some Pearl in the Work...to the Vest, was a Girdle...set with Diamonds for eight Inches either way, only they were not true Diamonds; but nobody knew that but myself (174).

This passage is an important one, as it testifies not only to the degree of Roxana's interest in exterior trappings, but more importantly, it suggests that the dress itself could be representative of Roxana—who prides herself in being extremely beautiful or “extraordinarily fine.” The dress, layered in flowers, gold embroidery, and diamonds (which, she is careful to note, are “not true diamonds”) signifies Roxana's knowledge of her own artificiality. It also highlights the intricate work and detail that goes into the fashioning of her exterior personas. The textile operates like the text of Roxana's fictive identity. Everett Zimmerman makes an astute observation about this passage, noting that it represents “Roxana's interests in geographical movement” (Zimmerman 231). Roxana is careful to narrate the many geographic spaces that both she and the garment have traversed, thus characterizing her interest in mobility. I would take this claim a step farther, and suggest that the dress signifies not only her interest in geographical movement, but Roxana's own mobility, which for her is both an external and internal experience. If the dress is a symbol of Roxana herself, it

would make sense that Defoe would employ such intricate detail to describe not only how it looks, but how it was formed across various geographical spaces, not unlike Roxana herself. Here, Defoe makes an important connection between the external, geographic terrain that Roxana covers in her travels and the internal terrain of Roxana's character, which itself is as fragmented and various as a map of Europe. Selfhood in this passage is by no means depicted as a monolithic structure, but rather as a series of layers that are influenced by various external circumstances, such as geographic travel. The complexity of Roxana's character comes into focus here. Her identity is less a "thing" than a space upon which various "selves" are impressed, and Roxana displays some awareness that this space operates largely like a theater that features a number of different performances. Appositely, it is in this scene that Roxana gains the name, "Roxana," which, she explains later, is not her true name: "the Gentlemen cry'd out, *Roxana! Roxana!* By —, with an oath; upon which foolish Accident I had the name *Roxana* presently fix'd upon me all over the Court End of Town, as effectually as if I had been Christen'd *Roxana*" (176). Her actual Christian name, we learn later, is Susan, though it is not "Susan" which serves as the title of her autobiography. By entitling the novel with one of Roxana's pseudonyms, Defoe underscores the fact that the character dissolves entirely into her performances so that no truth of her identity can be associated with her. Even by literary critics, Roxana is forever to be known as one who's performative self prevails over her

“real” self; that is, if there is a real self to be spoken of in the first place, a question that increases in importance for Roxana.

### **The “Real” Roxana**

There are two pivotal moments in the novel, in which Roxana begins to question the truth of her own subjectivity—the “real” self within. The first is her experience with “storm repentance,” (128) and the second is when she questions, after being completely financially secure, “*Why am I a Whore now?*” (202). These episodes of self-exploration are not so dissimilar from Crusoe’s self-inquiry in which he asks, “What am I?” (Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 174). But while Crusoe leads himself toward his Bible, and finds the answer to his identity there, Roxana finds herself unable to answer these self-directed inquiries. The first episode occurs when she asks herself, “*What must I be? What must be my Portion?*” (Defoe, *Roxana*, 126). In this scene, both she and Amy believe they face imminent death while on an ocean voyage that is caught in a turbulent storm. Fearing eternal damnation, Roxana “cry’d out, *tho’* softly, two or three times, *Lord have Mercy upon me*; to this I added abundance of Resolutions, of what a Life I wou’d live, if it should please God but to spare my Life but this one time; how I would live a single and a virtuous Life...doing Good” (126). Of course, after the storm subsided, “the Fears of Death vanish’d...and our Fear of what was

beyond Death also; our Sence of the Life we had liv'd went off, and...our wicked Taste of Life return'd, and we were both the same as before" (128).

Many critics, such as Richetti, liken Roxana's storm repentance to Crusoe's, as he experiences a similar event of getting caught in a sea storm and promising to become a Prodigal son if God were to save him (Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 9). The religious context of Roxana's storm repentance is worth noting, though, and it sets her apart from Crusoe's experience, because Crusoe vows to become a Prodigal son, while Roxana prays for religious transformation. For my purposes, it is more beneficial to compare Crusoe's conversion scene with Roxana's storm repentance, which figures as a desperate prayer for conversion. Her hope takes her so far that she at one point prays that "if ever it shou'd please God to spare me this one time from Death, it wou'd not be possible that I should be the same Creature again" (127). The passage resembles Crusoe's conversion scene, in which he similarly asks God to change his essential nature and turn himself away from his previous life of sin and disbelief: "... I cried out to Jesus...*thou exalted prince and savior, give me repentance!*" (Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 78). While Crusoe and Roxana's storm repentance scenes share some distinct parallels, mainly in their mutual failure to transform after the storm, their conversion scenes differ significantly. Here, Crusoe is successful while Roxana fails. From a Puritan standpoint, some might argue that Crusoe is *granted* conversion through God's grace, while grace is not extended to Roxana because

she is damned after her initial fall from innocence. From a non-Puritan perspective, however, it becomes clear that Crusoe's conversion occurs because he desires it, and more importantly, because he believes he has the power to re-write his essential identity as a man-of-faith. To this end, Crusoe's conversion is an autobiographical experience.

Roxana's character differs from Crusoe's, because despite her prayers, she does not actually have such faith in language, or in God, so it makes sense that her prayer would not be granted to her, as it is to Crusoe. Were Roxana actually to embrace Christianity after she arrived safely on land, that would require her to believe that she actually has authorial control over her interior identity; and that the language of prayer and autobiography wield enough power to alter her essential character—two possibilities she will not entertain, since she, unlike Crusoe, recognizes the limits of language. She cannot even articulate her prayer out loud, but instead expresses herself only inwardly, unlike Amy who “spoke aloud, and cry'd, and call'd aloud, like one in Agony” (126). Roxana cries only “within myself, and sigh'd, and mourn'd inwardly” (126). Roxana's interior prayer also distinguishes her from Crusoe, whose prayer is voiced out loud when he begs God to convert him. Roxana's silence is possibly Defoe's attempt to underscore the vacancy within Roxana's identity. Defoe implies here that, where Roxana looks for truth, comfort, and answers, she finds only an essential “lack” that cannot be filled, nor can it even be expressed. After arriving safely on land

after the storm, Roxana is extremely contemplative about the experience: “I know not what ail’d me, not I...I was in a kind of Stupidity, I know not well what to call it; I had a Mind full of Horrour at the time of the Storm, and saw Death before me, as plainly as Amy, but my Thoughts got no Vent, as Amy’s did; I had a silent sullen kind of Grief, which cou’d not break out either in Words or Tears, and which was, therefore, much the worse to bear” (129). Julie Crane comments on this passage, suggesting that as Roxana’s “developing inwardness...grows [it] becomes incommunicable. The novel is littered with voices and stories, all complete and understandable; only Roxana’s cannot be told” (Crane 20). The incommunicability of Roxana’s voice is worth noting, and has significant implications regarding her identity. This passage displays the first moment in which Roxana shows some suspicion that there is no interior self underlying her physical body; and the “horror” and “grief” she feels is the effect of this suspicion, as she recognizes that her interior character may not be as stable or knowable as she might hope—nor can she even verify its existence. This is what Maddox call’s Roxana’s “appalling missing center” (Maddox 674). Her silence is a sign of her essential voicelessness. Genuinely, she wants to believe that she is repentant, because if she were, she could start to view herself as a Christian, and take comfort in such an identity, as Crusoe does. Roxana admits that her desire to become a penitent Christian was merely opportunistic, and recognizes that she cannot actually *rewrite* her “self” as a penitent: “I had no thorow effectual

Repentance; no Sight of my Sins in their proper Shape; no View of a Redeemer or Hope in him: I had only such a Repentance as a Criminal has at the Place of Execution, who is sorry, not that he has committed the crime, as it is a Crime, but sorry that *he has to be Hang'd for it*" (Defoe 129). Roxana's inability to repent derives from her intense self-awareness. She knows any repentance would merely be another performance for the sake of survival (or spiritual survival in this case). But Roxana eventually recognizes her Christian prayers as simply another one of her fictions, as she has no power to actually transform her interior self; even more terrifying, she displays some uncertainty that there is an interior self at all.

In the second episode in which Roxana explores her interiority, she is older and having had many lovers and acquired more wealth than she could ever need, she asks herself,

*Why am I a Whore now? I could not...answer that I lov'd it for the sake for the Vice, and that I delighted in being a Whore...I cou'd not say this, even to myself, and all alone, nor indeed, wou'd it have been true...Necessity first debauch'd me, and Poverty made me a Whore at the beginning...But this was all over now; Avarice cou'd have no Pretence...now I was so far from Poor (202).*

This is one of the few passages in which Roxana explores her true subjectivity, what she believes is essential to her character. Her former question, "*What must I be? What must be my Portion?*" (126) is echoed again here. She recognizes that her motivations for initially converting to a life of vice were for the sake of



survival, and now that this is a non-issue, she questions what motivates her to continue a life of sin. If Roxana bore more resemblances with Crusoe, she might have experienced a real conversion at this point, and may have felt authentic repentance over her past. Instead, she resents her status as a whore only because she “cou’d not make myself known to my own Children, or form any Acquaintances in the World” (208). In other words, her desire to stop whoring is, once again, an opportunistic one. But because she believes her conversion to a life of sin permanently corrupted her character, she is also convinced that “the thing cannot be remedy’d now, but the Scandal of it...may be thrown off” (208). In other words, while she does not have the power to change her interior character, she can alter her outward appearance. Durant comments on this point: “She continues to think of herself as a person whose real self is disguised by her long life as a whore, but when she stops whoring, she finds there is no hidden self to reveal. Instead there is simply a new disguise: she replaces the Turkish dress with a Quaker one” (Durant 231). Durant suggests that Roxana has dissolved entirely into her performances, so there is no “self” underlying her being at all. Roxana also starts becoming suspicious of this possibility, especially when her authorial designs begin to fall apart.

In the final quarter of the novel, Defoe begins seriously to threaten the stability of everything Roxana was formerly certain of: first, that her talents as an author and master of artifice have no limitations; and second, that even if the

interior identity to the self is a detestable one, it exists nonetheless. Disrupting both of these assumptions, Defoe subverts any possibility of self-mastery for Roxana. When Amy first tells Roxana that she can become a Quaker by putting “off all your Equipages, and Servants, Coaches, and Horses; change your Liveries, nay your own Clothes, and if it was possible, your very face<sup>19</sup>” (Defoe 208), Roxana is thoroughly convinced that she is skilled enough in the art of artifice to pull off such a scheme. Just as Crusoe is confident in his authority as a creator of truths, so too is Roxana in her abilities as an author to create fictions: “There was not a Quaker in Town look’d less like a Counterfeit than I did: But all this was my particular Plot to be the more compleatly conceal’d and that I might depend upon being not known, and yet need not be confin’d like a Prisoner, and be always in Fear; so that all the rest was Grimace” (213). Roxana expresses the utmost confidence in her ability to have it all—she believes she can pose as a Quaker without sacrificing a public life. Authorship, by this advanced point in her “career,” is a simple enough task for Roxana. While she realizes she cannot completely erase “Roxana’s” identity, she can at least write over it without fear of exposure. This confidence, however, is threatened twice: first by the appearance of her former lover, the Dutch Merchant; and second, by a young girl named

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<sup>19</sup> Note, it is often Amy who pulls the strings behind Roxana’s character. Amy has often been read as Roxana’s “alter ego,” but there is some indication that she is actually the “author” within Roxana; the part of Roxana’s self that helps her execute her fictions. Terry Castle identifies Amy as “the secret sharer in Roxana’s life: she acts out her mistress’s fantasies, she accepts the functions Roxana projects, both consciously and unconsciously, onto her” (Castle 84).

Susan who claims to be her daughter. When she sees the Dutch Merchant in town, she tells her Quaker friend, “I am sure he don’t know me in this Dress, and I’ll take Care he shan’t see my Face, if I can help it; so I held up my Fan before my Face” (218). Later, when Roxana believes the Dutch Merchant is on the verge of discovering her, she “colour’d again as red as Fire” and “suffer’d a hundred Thousand Perplexities of Mind...my thoughts were all confus’d, and in the utmost Disorder” (220-222). Roxana experiences for the first time the anxieties of authorship. Aware that her performative identity operates like a text, she now begins to doubt her ability to be as convincing an author/performer as she has always been. Later, after the appearance of Susan, Roxana’s anxiety intensifies as she finds it increasingly difficult to manage the multiple identities she has authored over time. While masquerading as a Quaker on board a ship with her new husband, she suddenly learns, to her dismay, that her daughter Susan who knows about her past life as Roxana, is also aboard the ship:

If the Girl knew me, I was undone...I was to conceal myself, if possible, and yet had not the least room to do anything towards it: in short, there was no retreat; no shifting anything off; no avoiding or preventing her [Susan] having a full Sight of me; nor was there any counterfeiting my Voice, for then my Husband wou’d have perceiv’d it; in short there was not the least circumstance that offer’d me any Assistance, or any favourable thing to help me in the Exigence (276-278).

Authorship is no longer as simple or as easily executed a task for Roxana, as her multiple identities have now begun to surface at once. She cannot disguise herself

from Susan without exposing herself to her husband. So, unable to “shift...anything off,” she recognizes that her status as an author of fictions has become severely disrupted, and her former plan to “not be confin’d like a Prisoner, and be always in fear” has fallen apart. Imprisonment is tantamount to a lack of control, so for her to be imprisoned and limited by her own performed identities is the worst possible scenario for Roxana, who toward the end of the novel, grasps desperately for control over how she is perceived. According to John Mullen, her struggles as an author are visible even in the narration of the story itself: “the loose punctuation and accretive syntax (new clauses, new thoughts, constantly added on to the end of sentences) are signs of a writer in a hurry, they are also vividly suited to the struggles of ‘The Unfortunate Mistress,’ for these are not just her struggles to survive, but her struggles to make her life into a narrative” (Mullen xxv).

By the end of the novel, Roxana’s struggles with identity reveal themselves as not only narratological, but ontological. Defoe presents Susan not only as a character threatening the exposure of Roxana’s past self, but destabilizing Roxana’s very being. Allegorically, Susan’s function is extremely complex, and must not be read on solely a literal level. She represents the idea of a true, interior identity within the self. Sharing Roxana’s original, Christian name, she operates as “the very Counterpart of myself [Roxana]” (Defoe 329). Susan therefore allegorically represents the possibility that the truth or center of

the interior self can be known; hence, her sole desire is for her mother to “claim” ownership of her: “O! *says she*, She is my Mother; She is my Mother; and she does not own me...I believe she does not know me, but I know her; and I know that she is my mother” (305). Susan’s certainty alludes to the possibility of an intrinsic connection between Roxana and her “true” self, allegorized through Susan. Roxana, on some level, believes that Susan is actually her daughter, as she feels sincere tenderness for the girl: “No Pen can describe, no Words can express...the strange Impression which this thing made upon my Spirits; I felt something shoot thro’ my Blood; my Heart flutter’d...much ado I had, not to abandon myself to an Excess of Passion at the first Sight of her, much more when my Lips touch’d her Face” (277). Both pleasurable and painful, this moment is one of Lacanian *jouissance* for Roxana, who feels an intrinsic, even bodily connection with Susan, who is in fact the product of her own body. Allegorically, this tenderness is not love for Susan, but love for herself—an attachment to the idea that the truth of the self, the interior identity, must exist, and that it is authentically real and outside of language, as “no Pen can describe” and “no Words can express” it. Susan, for Roxana, represents the possibility of reuniting with the interior self, which she has kept hidden and buried for so many years.

Roxana therefore finds herself in a double-bind, manifesting in the “love-hate” relationship she has with Susan—which allegorically represents the love-hate relationship she has with her own interior identity. On the one hand, she

wants to claim Susan as her daughter, given the love and tenderness she inwardly expresses toward her. Her love for Susan is a testament to her own self-love. The idea of a stable, interior identity is comforting to Roxana (just as it is for Crusoe) because it provides the illusion of stability, at least on some level, to her turbulent life—even if that identity is one she detests. It is thus understandable that Roxana does not want Amy to murder Susan; she wants to continue to believe that the truth of the self necessarily exists, and more significantly, that it can be known or claimed. But on the other hand, she does not want to outwardly claim Susan as her own, because to do so would risk exposure of the “truth” of her identity, which she hates and intends to keep secret. So instead of killing Susan, she simply wants Susan out of her sight. To Roxana, the truth of identity cannot exist in the light; it must be buried and hidden away: “the Notion of being discover’d carried with it so many frightful *Ideas*, and hurry’d my Thoughts so much, that *I was scarce myself...*” (Defoe 274, my emphasis). The doubt and anxiety surrounding Susan is none other than the doubt and anxiety surrounding the self, which is proving to be a construct that Roxana understands less and less.

When Susan actually does disappear, along with Amy, Roxana is convinced that Amy has murdered the girl, and has a strong emotional response that leads her into a sustained silence: “I was struck as with a Blast from Heaven...like a Mad-Woman; I had nobody to speak a Word to, to give Vent to my Passion, nor did I speak a Word for a good-while, till after it had almost

overcome me” (Defoe 323). Again, Roxana’s silence appositely describes her character, which finally, has no verifiable voice from which to speak. The silence is thus rendered both outwardly and inwardly. The final pages of the novel are characterized by Roxana’s silence, possibly indicating that Roxana can have no certainty over her identity or even her desires. For example, while she clearly laments the death of Susan, she still seems somewhat relieved by it: “she [Susan] brought me even to the Brink of Destruction, and wou’d, in all Probability, have trac’d me out at last, if Amy had not by the Violence of her Passion...put a Stop to her; of which I cannot enter into the Particulars here” (328). It is uncertain as to what “Particulars” Roxana refers to—whether it is the particulars of the facts of what occurred or those of her actual feelings on the matter. Neither, at this point, is knowable—either by Roxana or her readers. Susan’s death itself is uncertain, as Roxana never verifies whether Amy actually murdered the girl or if she managed to silence her in some other fashion. Either way, Susan has virtually been erased from Roxana’s life. If Susan represents the possibility of knowing the self, her disappearance tragically destroys any such possibility for Roxana.

This unknowability of the self is allegorically represented through the fact that Roxana never provides any sense of finality to the end of her autobiography. Instead, she only drops hints of a future disaster, which she never actually narrates: “Here after some few years of flourishing...I fell into a dreadful Course of Calamities” (329). She does not specify what these “calamities” are, and

frequently, though unapologetically, explains her inability to finish narrating her story, using phrases such as, “I have not Time here to take Notice...”, “Tis enough to mention here...” and “I can say no more now...” (329). Durant comments on this lack of closure, arguing that “what makes the novel seem unfinished is that Roxana finally does not believe in her own reality either as success or as sinner. The joint perspective she has fostered throughout her life ultimately cancel each other out, leaving her no way of believing her life complete” (Durant 232). In the end, Roxana is neither a success, nor a failure; neither a sinner nor a repentant. She does not know her own motives, doubting even the authenticity of her repentance. It is difficult to comment on what Roxana has learned by the end of her experience, because her narration itself reveals very little of her interior thoughts. Julie Crane argues that “it is as though Defoe gives up on his heroine...he is defeated, as Roxana herself is defeated by the complex web he has created” (Crane 14). I would argue that Roxana’s silence is a willed effort on Defoe’s part to underscore that the self is no stable or knowable construct, whether it is formed by language, circumstance, or any other condition. Roxana’s silence and the inconclusiveness of her narration may therefore indicate that she has caught on to the knowledge that Defoe has pressed upon her: that while the public self is controllable, authors must inevitably face the difficulties of their craft; and that the private self is not only outside an author’s control, but outside the realm of knowability as well.



## Chapter 4:

### Exploring the Wreck: Coetzee's *Foe*

#### Introduction

*I came to explore the wreck...  
the thing I came for:  
the wreck and not the story of the wreck  
the thing itself and not the myth*

-Adrienne Rich, "Diving into the Wreck"

J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* incorporates the plot of both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana*, as it features Susan (Roxana's Christian name as well as her daughter's name) who is cast upon Crusoe's<sup>20</sup> island. But as I have mentioned in the introductory chapter, *Foe* also integrates the plot of Adrienne Rich's poem, "Diving into the Wreck," which is a good starting point to begin thinking about the novel. Manuel Jimenez writes that the poem "has been sometimes read alongside Coetzee's novel" (Jimenez 20) given the thematic parallels regarding Rich's and Coetzee's investigation of "the real and its representation" (21). There is evidence, though, that the parallels between the poem and novel are more than just thematic, and that their intertextuality is not just coincidental. Significantly, the "wreck" is a recurring symbol across *Robinson Crusoe*, *Roxana*, and *Foe*. Robinson Crusoe dives out to the shipwreck and rescues tools, provisions, and his

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<sup>20</sup> Recall that Coetzee drops the "e" in Crusoe's name.

Bible. Roxana, as Zimmerman notes<sup>21</sup>, frequently uses nautical imagery to describe her emotions, stating at one point that, “I call’d myself a thousand Fools, for casting myself upon a Life of Scandal and Hazard, when after *the Shipwreck of Virtue, Honor, and Principle*...I had safe Harbour presented, and no Heart to cast-Anchor in it” (Defoe, *Roxana* 162, my emphasis). Coetzee perhaps has taken notice of the recurring symbol in Defoe, but dramatizes its value in *Foe* by combining it thematically with Rich’s poem. Cast away on the island with Crusoe and the silent Friday, Susan Barton asks: “If we could dive to the wreck...we might save from it tools of greatest utility...Is there no way to explore the wreck?” (32). These lines may be taken literally, as an actual exploration of Crusoe’s old ship, but there is evidence that the wreck represents something more for Susan. Toward the end of the novel, Foe tells her, “We must make Friday’s silence speak,” (142) so that they can finally learn the truth behind his mutilation. Susan responds, “But who will do it? ...It is easy enough to...say what must be done, but who will dive into the wreck?” (142).

For Rich and for Coetzee, the wreck represents the same thing: the truth, the origin, the thing itself that exists beyond the discursive limits of signification, “the wreck and not the story of the wreck.” “Diving into the wreck” is

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<sup>21</sup> Zimmerman argues that the “constantly lurking [nautical] allusions gain force through repetition” and “hint at Roxana’s spiritual terrors. For example, such a simple word as the frequently recurring *bottom* acquires a powerful set of associations by the end of the novel: it refers to (1) ships, (2) a hiding place, and (3) the sea floor” (Zimmerman 230). Significantly, it is at the “bottom” of the sea floor that the wreck is located.

tantamount to searching for the truth outside all forms of representation. While many critics, Derek Attridge and Laura Wright most notably, explore the sociopolitical, feminist, and post-colonial themes in *Foe*, I would argue that, alongside these issues, Coetzee's novel parallels Defoe in that it, too, confronts the question of whether language is capable of answering anything substantial about truth. In questioning the authority of language, however, Coetzee extends Defoe's narrative purpose by simultaneously exploring the destabilizing effects of authorship. *Foe* therefore investigates how authors must negotiate between truth and representation.

Upon a close examination of Susan's character, it becomes evident that Coetzee has culled characteristics from both Defoe's *Crusoe* and *Roxana* to create Susan Barton. Conflating Defoe's protagonists, Susan continues the intellectual trajectory of the mono-character. She starts out exhibiting a number of similarities to *Crusoe*, such as his faith in language and the idea of a stable identity, but she matures intellectually and eventually embodies *Roxana*'s intense self-awareness. By the end of the novel, however, she exceeds the awareness of both *Crusoe* and *Roxana*.

In the beginning of the novel when Susan documents her life on the island in letters to the author, *Foe*, she employs both the epistolary and autobiographical forms in an attempt to display narrative control over the truth of her identity. It is to this extent that she resembles *Crusoe*. Notably, Susan makes the same three

assumptions as Defoe's Crusoe that lead her toward believing in the possibility of self-mastery: that there is a stable sense of selfhood or metaphysical identity beyond the exterior of the body; that it is knowable; and that it can be adequately represented in language. Also like Crusoe, Susan believes she has the authority to control and "discover" this identity through her language as an author. Susan is not only interested in discovering the truth of her own identity, though; much of the novel focuses on Susan's near obsession with discovering Friday's as well and her frustration with her inability to read him. Friday, a character operating outside language, resists interpretation, and his identity remains an open signifier. While Susan's narrative demonstrates the problems inherent in authorship, her relationship with Friday shows the destabilizing effects of readership and interpretation, which contributes to her intellectual development and her understanding of identity. During the process of her own identity-construction as well as her "search" for Friday, Susan begins to embody Roxana's level of awareness, but surpasses her as she begins to seriously doubt whether a stable, authentic edifice actually lies beyond the signifier of identity, a realization that comes in the form of a dramatic and disturbing climax. The novel ultimately questions whether the truth of one's identity can be discovered or whether identity is instead a function of linguistic imaging.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the ways in which Susan Barton, as the final stage in the mono-character's development, attempts to dive into the

wreck in order to answer the question of her own identity and of Friday's. I will examine how, as author or "father to her story," (Coetzee 123) Susan's frustration issues from a destabilizing realization that neither Crusoe nor Roxana fully achieve: that an authentic identity is not only beyond discursive reach, but potentially, completely unknowable for both the self and the other—even to those granted the (ostensible) authority of authorship.

### **Susan's Dive**

Coetzee clues us in early on that Susan's utter faith in the utility of language is also somewhat misguided. Like Defoe's Crusoe, she similarly conceives of words as epistemological tools for accessing truth. For example, she believes that if Friday had a tongue, he could explain the truth of how he was mutilated; but on the other hand, she cannot seem to get the truth out of Cruso<sup>22</sup>, who *can* speak, but whose stories "were so various, and so hard to reconcile one with another, that the more I was driven to conclude that...he no longer knew for sure what was truth, what fancy," so that "in the end I did not know what was truth, what was lies, and what was mere rambling" (12). Despite this clear evidence of the instability of speech, Susan still desires it more than anything else on the "island where no one spoke" (35). Cruso tells her, "we have no need of a great stock of words" (21). In other words, Friday and Cruso have no real desire

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<sup>22</sup> Coetzee's Crusoe differs significantly from Defoe's. In *Foe*, Cruso is a simple, taciturn, and relatively unambitious character who loves the island and has no desire to be rescued.

for speech. Here, Crusoe makes an important connection between desire and language, a connection formerly explored by Lacan. For Lacan, language is always already a function of desire: desire to communicate, to be understood, to learn the truth. And because desire emerges only where there is lack, all speaking subjects are marked by lack (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 168).

Crusoe remarks later on that “as long as our desires are moderate we have no need of laws” (36). The same, however, can be said of speech. Susan’s desires, unlike Crusoe and Friday’s, are not moderate, not because she is selfish or hedonistic, but because she is human<sup>23</sup>, while Crusoe and Friday are only partially recognizable as human given their persistent silence and limited needs. Susan is in a constant state of lack and utter discontent no matter where she is: “When I was on the island I longed only to be elsewhere...But now a longing stirs in me I never thought I would feel” (50).

Susan’s discontent and persistent longing evince her lack of a stable sense of selfhood. Like Defoe’s Crusoe, she passes through a number of roles: she was originally Susan Berton, and then Susan Barton, and then Mrs. Crusoe. She was formerly a member of the upper class, but now works as a servant. A vagrant both abroad and at home, she starts out traveling the seas in search of her

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<sup>23</sup> Though I explore Susan’s desire for language and identity as representative of a “human” condition, critics such as Laura Wright have argued that Susan’s discontent is rather a feminist issue (Wright 22). Wright does not explore language and identity specifically, but an argument can be made that Susan’s desire for signifying power is symptomatic of a feminine lack, namely, the lack of phallus.

daughter, and after returning to London, moves from home to home, none of which belong to her. Her frequent mobility is also analogous with the itinerant Roxana, except that while Roxana travels to acquire wealth and status, Susan's finances and social status deteriorate with every move, possibly allegorizing the slow disintegration of her sense of identity. With no stable ground beneath her, Susan remains plagued by the need to fill the space, the lack, within herself with meaning<sup>24</sup>. Just as Defoe's Crusoe combats his paranoid fear of erasure, Susan attempts to fill the space of her lack by engaging in various acts of speech and writing, which reveals a latent desire to establish a holistic sense of selfhood: she changes her name, solicits Foe to write her life-story, and writes letters about her life. The novel investigates and complicates Susan's desire for signification and selfhood in a number of ways, though I will focus here on two: first, through Susan's dependence on Foe to write her story; and second, how Susan—after getting no response from Foe, is forced to continue to author her story in her own words in letters to Foe, thereby engaging in a form of autobiography.

Because Foe is a real author, Susan trusts his authority to construct her identity, based on what she tells him about herself. Coetzee demonstrates here that one way of attempting to establish or confirm identity is through the language, or acknowledgement, of others. In other words, Susan needs Foe's

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<sup>24</sup> This desire is summed up nicely by one of Coetzee's other characters from his novel, *Disgrace*: David Lurie remarks that the purpose of language originates from "the need to fill out with sound the overlarge and rather empty human soul" (Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 4).

language to confirm her identity. Arguably, like Defoe's Crusoe, Susan does not know who she is: "When I reflect on my story I seem to exist only as the one who came, the one who witnessed, the one who longed to be gone: a being without substance, a ghost" (Coetzee 51). She therefore clings to the hope that her selfhood can be restored to her through Foe's language: "Return to me the substance I have lost, Mr. Foe: that is my entreaty. For though my story gives the truth, it does not give the substance of the truth" (51). She hopes that Foe's words will fill the space of her lack, to provide substance to her identity, unaware that words themselves are not substantive. Blindly, she wants to believe that signifiers actually have the authority they claim to, and that authors, who create the signifiers, also have this authority.

Foe, however, only functions as the absent "other" to Susan's story for the better part of the novel, because no matter how often she writes to him, she only finds silence in return. She explains "what it is to speak into a void, day after day, without answer" (Coetzee 80). Lacan discusses this void of silence between the speaker and other<sup>25</sup>: "If the first thing to make itself heard is the void, it is within himself [the patient] that he will experience it, and it is beyond the Word that he will seek a reality to fill this void" (Lacan, "Language of the Self," 9). In other words, the silent void of the other, or the emptiness caused by the lack of response, is felt internally within the speaker, and the speaking subject feels the

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<sup>25</sup> The speaker and other for Lacan are the patient and psychoanalyst, but the relationship is comparable to Susan and Foe.



need to fill that emptiness with something real, or beyond language<sup>26</sup>. Foe's silence makes her increasingly suspicious that she is not a substantive being, and further frustrates her desire to become one.

Susan displays some perseverance, though, because even though she eventually gives up on the hope that Foe will ever respond, she continues to write letters to him. It is therefore Susan who ends up writing the story in the first person, and thus, in the form of autobiography. Since she gets no help from Foe, she believes she can now attempt to reclaim authority over her story, and therefore, exert a degree of control over who she is and how she is represented. Given Susan's autobiographical aspirations, she must rely on the only tool available to her to construct this identity, namely, language: "Author, father, God, phallus, full Presence, Truth, Word, Law: all of these terms are part of Susan's desire to be 'father to my story' [Coetzee 123]" (Jimenez 12).

Initially, her faith in language makes her feel as though narrative control is achievable<sup>27</sup>, and she actively assumes the role of author: "I sat at your bureau this morning," she writes to Foe, "[using] your pen, your ink, I know, but somehow the pen becomes mine while I write with it" (Coetzee 66-67). She even writes, "I had not guessed it was so easy to be an author" (93). But as an

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<sup>26</sup> At this early point in the novel, Susan trusts in the authority of language to the extent that a response from Foe may have actually been enough to fill the void; it is later on in the novel that she begins to realize the instability of language and, arguably, searches "beyond the Word" to "seek a reality to fill this void" (Lacan 9).

<sup>27</sup> Not unlike Crusoe and Roxana

autobiographer, she “also suffers the same problems as any other author” (Jimenez 12). In other words, she experiences the loss of authority inherent in authorship, best described by Roland Barthes: “Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away: the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body of writing” (Barthes 1). Barthes’ “Death of the Author” and Michel Foucault’s “What is an Author?” both examine the author’s loss of authority, or “death,” in which the author must sacrifice control over the meaning or the “identity of the body of writing,” thereby severing the connection between author and text forever. While the author grasps for control, the text reveals itself to be something that resists control.

Neither Barthes nor Foucault examines in the above-mentioned works how the process of signification becomes infinitely more destabilizing during the act of autobiography, but their claims apply to autobiographical writing as well. Mistakenly, Susan assumes that the gap between the authorial self and the textual, objective self is non-existent and that the persona presented in the text will necessarily reflect her “true” self. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, what is unique to autobiography is that the author is both the subject who is writing and the object that is written; this is the distinction I outlined between the “authorial self” or writing subject and “objective self” featured in the text. Foucault discusses this paradox; he explains that, in all forms of writing, what emerges from the author is a “plurality of self” (Foucault 553). The problems of

authorship, or what he calls “the author function,” issue partially from the fact that the author “does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects—positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals” (553). The difficulty Susan experiences has to do with her attempt to maintain narrative control not only over her authorial self but also her objective self. Coetzee, I believe, depicts this textual self-doubling allegorically, through the mysterious arrival of Susan’s “daughter” who is also named Susan Barton.

The arrival of the young Susan is one of the most striking analogies to Roxana’s narrative, in which Roxana is destabilized by the sudden emergence of her daughter who begs her mother to recognize her and claim her as her own<sup>28</sup>. In *Roxana*, Susan allegorically represents the possibility of a “true” identity that is real, knowable, and that exists beyond language. Coetzee takes this allegory a step further in *Foe*, in which the young girl, bearing Susan’s name, also arrives unexpectedly and presents herself to Susan as her daughter. The older Susan, however, adamantly denies this, and is continuously mystified by the girl. Susan Barton does not realize that the girl *is* her daughter, but she is not the girl’s mother; she is her *father*—her author. Susan declares herself “father to [her] story” (123), and the young Susan Barton *is* the story, the “objective self” in

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<sup>28</sup> See chapter 3 on Roxana, pages 86-90.

Susan's text. Susan tells the girl, "You are father-born<sup>29</sup>. You have no mother. The pain you feel is the pain of lack, not the pain of loss" (91). The girl, father-born, is thus the textual representation of Susan: the "objective self" that can only be confirmed in language—and like all language, she is marked by the "pain of lack." This is why, when Susan attempts to figure out the girl's origin, she is unable to do so, because "what you know of your parentage comes to you in the form of stories" (91). Despite Susan's former faith in language, she starts now to develop Roxana's awareness about language; namely, that its truth-telling capacity is unreliable at best, especially when attempting to explain one's identity. In the world of the novel, the girl's identity could possibly be traced to Susan, but since the only knowledge of their connection comes "in the form of stories," there is no way to know the true origin<sup>30</sup> or identity of the girl. Further evidence that the girl is Susan's "objective" or textual self, comes in Part IV of the novel; a surreal, dreamlike sequence in which Coetzee seems to enter the novel himself and finds the dead bodies of all his characters: Coetzee describes the dead body of the young Susan Barton whose "face is wrapped in a grey woolen scarf. I

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<sup>29</sup> This connection between authorship and "the father" has been made by numerous theorists. Roland Barthes, for example, writes "The Author is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it...in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child" (2). Lacan also positions the father in the Symbolic order of language, which is made up of lack, substitution, and linguistic signs. It is the father's phallus which charges the signifier with its (ostensible) authority.

<sup>30</sup> Notice, again, how Susan's narrative parallel's Defoe's Roxana. Julie Crane, in her essay on Roxana, writes that "[Roxana] is faced with the workings of reality in the inescapable form of her daughter who has been growing to womanhood as she has been ageing, and who is ready to ask the most basic questions of origin" (Crane 24).

begin to unwrap it, but the scarf is endless” (153). The girl is literally shrouded in textile—or text—which surrounds and obscures her face to the extent that no amount of unraveling will ever reveal her true identity. When Susan denies all connections to the girl, it becomes clear that no authentic connection can be sought between the “authorial self” and the “objective self,” perhaps especially in autobiographical writing. While the author believes herself to be substantive, the identity written in the text is just a story, and therefore remains “ghost-like,” foreign, and unrecognizable. Hence, Susan Barton exclaims, “this child, who calls herself by my name, is a ghost, a substantial ghost” (132).

It is only after coming to this realization, that the young girl’s identity is dependent only on language, that Susan suddenly begins to doubt her own identity as author: “who am I? I presented myself to you in words I knew to be my own... When I was writing those letters that were never read by you [Foe]... I continued to trust in my own authorship” (133). In this pivotal moment, Susan recognizes the possibility that even her own identity, as the “authorial self,” is equally as ghost-like and unstable as the young Susan, the “objective self,” because Susan’s identity is also only dependent on language<sup>31</sup>. This climactic realization brings to light the fact that the former trust she had in her own being, as an author with narrative control over her identity, may have been merely an

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<sup>31</sup> This is not to say that the author’s physical body itself is not real, but that the concept of the author’s identity is, like the “objective self,” a linguistic construct. It is the Platonic ideal of identity, the authentic “thing” that exists beyond the signifier that is essentially imaginary.

illusion. Lacan discusses this fear of realizing the fragility of one's own identity when attempting to explain it to someone else (as Susan does in her autobiographical letters to Foe):

He ends up by recognizing that this being has never been anything more than his construct in the Imaginary and that this construct disappoints all his certitudes...For in this labor which he undertakes to reconstruct this construct for *another* [the psychoanalyst] he finds again the [feeling of] fundamental alienation...This ego...is frustration in its essence (Lacan 11).

Lacan testifies here that the entire concept of identity is in itself an imaginary construction or more simply, a story. It was Susan's attempt to "reconstruct" (recreate in language) her identity that led to this feeling of "fundamental alienation" or dislocation from herself. Coetzee depicts this fundamental alienation through the literal splitting of Susan's identities between herself and the young Susan, but what becomes clear is that both identities—the "authorial" and "objective" selves—are equally unstable, imaginary manifestations of the mind's desire that exist only in language.

In a fearsome, almost uncanny manner, Susan's previous suspicions prove to be true, that she too is "a being without substance, a ghost" (51). Like the girl's identity, her own can also only be confirmed through the unstable medium of language:

But now all my life grows to be story and there is nothing of my own left to me. I thought I was myself...But now I am

full of doubt. Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom too? To what order do I belong? (133)

This realization is Coetzee's manner of dramatizing Roxana's level of awareness at the end of her story. Roxana's refusal to narrate the end of her autobiography testifies to her suspicion that there may be no "truth" within the self to narrate. But in the above passage, Coetzee makes Susan's dawning realization quite explicit: "Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself." Having arrived at the realization, however terrifying, that there is no true metaphysical identity underlying her body, she experiences a crisis of being, and no longer knows how to categorize herself. She asks, "to what order do I belong?" It may be useful to look again to Lacan to examine this question.

Arguably, Susan belongs to the Symbolic order, the world of communication and linguistic signs which is also the order of the Author/Father. Like Susan herself, the Symbolic order is "lack" because it is marked by the desire for speech and signification. Despite the fact that Susan comes to the striking realization of the instability of authorship, authority, and language, she ultimately has difficulty accepting the fact that her own identity is a myth. She remains plagued by the desire to lay claim over what she can call a stable sense of selfhood. It is for this reason that, while she extends the intellectual trajectory of the mono-character, she by no means completes it. Her essential flaw is that, initially, she confuses the "story of the wreck" for the wreck itself. But even

when she recognizes the story as a myth, she still clings to the hope that the wreck exists and that it is real and knowable, without fully accepting that it, too, is a story<sup>32</sup>. When Susan laments, “I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom too?” she, in an almost Lear-like fashion, seems to be crying: “Who is it that can tell me who I am?” In the end, she is still questioning, “Is there no way to explore the wreck?” (32). But the wreck, or the truth of identity, Crusoe said is “broken by the waves and covered in sand” (32). In other words, to search for it is useless, because ultimately, it is inaccessible—unknowable.

The wreck is not a place of utility in *Foe*, as it is in Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, but a place that is essentially tied to myth. While Susan, as an author, attempted to retrieve her identity, “the substance I have lost” (51), she does not realize that her identity was always already lost upon her. And by attempting to create her identity by means of her own authorship, she ultimately finds that she is only capable of creating a myth, as identity reveals itself as merely an idea conceived in language, which, according to Lacan, inevitably “disappoints all certitudes” (Lacan 11).

### **Finding Friday**

Just as Susan believes in the truth of her own identity, she also has faith that Friday must have a “discoverable” identity, something that “stirred beneath

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<sup>32</sup> Note, for example, that Susan never actually sees Crusoe’s wreck, but only hears about it from him, who as we know, is an unreliable speaker.



that dull and unpleasing exterior” (Coetzee 32). If Susan’s narrative problematizes authorship, Friday’s does the same for readership. Susan’s problem with Friday is that she mistakenly assumes, as she does with her own identity, that Friday’s identity is a text and (also mistakenly) that all texts are readable. Stanley Fish’s “Interpretive Communities” argues that readers operate under a number of assumptions during the process of interpreting a text; the main one being that texts contain within them a single, fixed “meaning” (Fish 219) or what Roland Barthes calls a “single ‘theological’ meaning” (Barthes 1), constituting the “truth” of the text. Readers then believe they must extract this ostensibly stable and unchanging “truth” from the text. This is precisely what Susan attempts to do with Friday throughout the novel, as the lingering question in her mind is: “What is the truth of Friday?” (Coetzee 121). Part of her discontent issues from the fact that she simply cannot read him, as his silence renders him unreadable. Without a tongue with which to speak the truth, Friday cannot make available to Susan the origins of his identity, or rather, the story of his identity. Susan believes that the secret of Friday’s tongue must be unveiled, but of course, “the only tongue that can tell Friday’s secret is the tongue he has lost” (67). Friday is thus an open signifier that lacks a signified meaning. Coetzee, I believe, creates Friday to demonstrate that reading is not only an act of misreading, as Harold Bloom might argue, but an act of *non*-reading. In other

words, Friday represents the destabilization of interpretation. Perhaps one could even argue that Friday embodies the intrinsic silence of all texts.

Friday's "unreadability" is characterized through the fact that so few truths can be verified about him. Just when we attempt to pin down some veritable truth about his identity, like his tonguelessness for example, we find that even that cannot be confirmed. Lewis MacLeod claims that Friday's tonguelessness is itself a myth, because Susan never actually sees the missing tongue: "I guess merely, I have not looked into your mouth. When your master asked me to look, I would not" (Coetzee 85). MacLeod argues that the assumption that Friday has undergone a "radical mutilation" is therefore "derived not from Friday's body (which remains undiscovered) but from the pulse of eternal critical discourses" (MacLeod 7). For this reason, MacLeod believes it is possible that Friday indeed has a tongue, and that his silence is "a voluntary act...Friday has the capacity, just not the inclination, for speech" (7). But essentially, we readers, and Susan herself, can derive no real meaning from Friday's tonguelessness precisely because there is no way to know whether the symbol (the tongue) is actually there or not. The same can be said for Friday's other member, his phallus—which, like the tongue, has also been considered a symbol of desire and the signifying power of speech. When Susan sees Friday's robe swing open while he is dancing, exposing his naked body momentarily, it is unclear as to whether she sees evidence on his body of "a more atrocious mutilation" (119). Therefore, like his

tongue, Friday's phallus or castration also remains a mystery. When Susan attempts to understand Friday's silence, which she (as well as most critics) associates with his identity, she cannot figure out where his silence is derived from: a missing tongue or a lack of inclination for speech. She is also curious as to why Friday never attempted sexual intercourse with her, and does not know whether his lack of sexual desire derives from a missing phallus or, again, a lack of inclination. As symbols associated with Friday's identity, the tongue and phallus serve as open signifiers, not unlike Friday himself. It is to this extent that Friday remains unreadable. When critics such as Derek Attridge attempt to make meaning out of Friday's tonguelessness, arguing for example that it represents his oppression (Attridge 86), they fail to see the extent to which the tongue operates as a non-symbol. With no visible symbol, it is nearly impossible to derive symbolic meaning from Friday, as he seems to resist the act of meaning-making itself.

What, then, do we do with Friday? Arguably, Susan represents all of those who participate in literary criticism, as critics themselves seem to embody Susan's desire to dive into the wreck and discover the truth of Friday's identity<sup>33</sup>. But if Friday is rendered unreadable, critics, like Susan, find themselves in a double

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<sup>33</sup> Since, like Defoe's novel, *Foe* also operates dually as a work of fiction and literary criticism, it is possible that Coetzee uses Friday to critique the process of literary criticism and interpretation typical of the twentieth century. Perhaps, through Friday, Coetzee discourages structuralist approaches to literary criticism, which tended to privilege the idea of "extracting" meaning from the text, in favor of post-structuralist ones.

bind. On the one hand, if we simply mirror Friday's silence and say nothing, we miss out on the many discourses that derive from reading *Foe*; on the other hand, to say anything about Friday is possibly to misrepresent or recreate him. This issue of re-creation is worth examining for the moment, because according to Stanley Fish, all reading is essentially an act of creation on the reader's part: "meanings are not extracted but made and made not by encoded forms but by interpretive strategies that call forms into being" (Fish 220). In other words, readers create meaning based not on what is essential to the text, but rather, on the interpretive strategies they *bring* to the text. According to Fish, these interpretive strategies are formed by interpretive communities; so, for example, a critic operating within a post-colonial framework will likely apply post-colonial interpretive strategies to *Foe*. From such a perspective, Friday could be read (or re-written) as a victim of racial oppression, as Attridge suggests. Lewis MacLeod argues that the attempt of literary critics, and of Susan, to read Friday is actually an attempt to *write* Friday in their own terms: "Friday is...subject to the demands of dominant discourses and their tendencies to reconfigure meanings and identities" (MacLeod 6). Even Susan admits that it is her reading of Friday which gives shape to his identity: "Friday...has no defence against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others. I say he is a cannibal and he becomes a cannibal. I say he is a laundryman and he becomes a laundryman. What is the truth of Friday? ...What he is to the world is what I make of him"

(Coetzee 121-122). In other words, the truth of Friday is created not by Friday himself, but by the words of Susan, and according to MacLeod, also literary critics who attempt to “re-shape” or “reconfigure” Friday’s identity. I will return, then, to my original question: What do we do with Friday? Are we doing him an injustice by reading and writing about him? Appropriating him for our own discursive or political agendas?

I would argue that there is no harm in attempting to read or to write about Friday, and that the only thing we must be careful of in our acts of literary criticism is to *not* be like Susan. Susan’s problem is not that she attempts to read Friday, but that she assumes that there is a center or “truth” to his identity that can and must be revealed. In other words, Susan takes reading as a form of unveiling, and I believe that Coetzee presents Friday to remind us of what Locke originally claimed about language: that reading is an act that engages only with ideas and not truths. That being said, there are many ideas worth discussing and exploring regarding Friday, such as his purpose in choosing to operate outside all forms of normative language, and the ways in which he actually does engage in his own forms of expression, not through language, but through music and dance.

If MacLeod is correct in assuming that “Friday has the capacity, just not the inclination, for speech” (7), the purpose of his silence is worth exploring. Perhaps Friday’s unwillingness to participate in speech issues from the fact that he simply has no need for speech. Since he is not a speaking subject, he is not

marked by the “lack” of all speaking subjects, and therefore has no desire for language, for truth, or for anything else<sup>34</sup>. Susan clearly draws this connection between speech and desire: “Oh, Friday, how can I make you understand the cravings felt by those of us who live in a world of speech to have our questions answered! It is like our desire, when we kiss someone, to feel the lips we kiss respond to us” (Coetzee 79). Speech and desire, being other-directed by nature, both require the recognition and response from an “other.” But Friday, a fully interior, solipsistic character, has no need for an “other” the way Susan does, and clearly does not want Susan to attempt to read him. When he draws the picture of the “walking eyes,” for example, Susan “reached out to take the slate...instead of obeying me, Friday...rubbed the slate clean” (147). The picture of the walking eyes, along with Friday’s mysterious ritual of scattering petals in the ocean, indicates that he does engage with his own acts of symbolism, but his symbols do not operate the way Susan’s do, because he has no need for an “other” to read them. They are self-contained signifiers, intended only for himself. Susan, on the other hand, spends most of the novel waiting for a response to her letters from Foe, precisely because she, unlike Friday, wants to be read and understood by an “other.” It seems as though Friday, on the other hand, does not want to let Susan

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<sup>34</sup> Because I have discussed the application of interpretive strategies, I must admit to the strategies I myself use in my reading of Friday. Arguably, my reading of Friday derives from the view that language operates out of desire and lack, so that Friday’s willingness to opt out of language signifies a lack of desire. This idea will be examined in more depth in the following discussion.

enter his world of interiority, because doing so would allow her to read him, and would also suggest that there is something essential there to be read. There is some evidence that Friday's unwillingness to participate in language is symptomatic of his disbelief in its utility. In fact, Susan questions whether "somewhere within him he was laughing at [Susan's] efforts to bring him nearer to a state of speech" (146). This may be true, given that the few times that he engages in traditional acts of speech and writing (which is only when he is forced to by Cruso or Susan) he says "ha-ha-ha," (22) possibly laughing at or mocking Susan's desire for speech. When Susan gets him to write on a slate, he writes "h-s-h-s-h-s" (146), which could be his way of "shushing" her. Susan begins to realize that "it might not be mere dullness that kept him shut up in himself, nor the accident of the loss of his tongue...but a disdain for intercourse with me." (98).

Perhaps Coetzee keeps Friday separate and disconnected from Susan to demonstrate the extent of their difference. If we examine their relationship through a Lacanian scheme, Friday and Susan could be representative of two different Lacanian orders. As mentioned in the previous section, Susan resides within the Symbolic order, made up of substitution, desire, and linguistic signs. If Susan belongs to the Symbolic order, Friday belongs to the Imaginary order, which embodies what Lacan calls a "self-sufficiency of consciousness" (Lacan, "Mirror Stage," 6). The Imaginary order is without speech or desires, or more

specifically, represents the part of the subject's fantasy in which all desires are achieved. In this fantasy, the subject and the object of desire are one and the same; the barriers between them effaced (6). One could argue, then, that Friday allegorically represents this fantasy, this non-human ideal of existence, while Susan represents the human condition, marked by lack, desire, and persistent longing.

Friday's engagement with music and dance represents the ways in which he operates within the Imaginary order. His "self-sufficiency" of consciousness is visible through his engagement with music and dance, because even though they are forms of communication, they communicate only with the self. They are raw forms of expression which are not intrinsically other-directed. In other words, through music and dance, Friday finds a way in which to express himself that reaches beyond the discursive limits of language. Even Susan recognizes that "if there were any language accessible to Friday, it would be the language of music" (Coetzee 96). Music and dance both originate from the body, and are modes of communication which exist outside the realm of slippery signifiers. Therefore, they exist outside the realm of the Symbolic. Unlike normative speech, music and dance do not serve as a means to an end; they have no practical utility and serve as intrinsic ends in themselves. Like the body, music and dance "are their own signs" (157). They are, therefore, truly solipsistic activities, because while they can involve an observer, there is no *need* for one. When Susan attempts to



connect with Friday through music, she again is disappointed: “The music we made was not pleasing: there was a subtle discord all the time, though we seemed to be playing the same notes” (96). No matter what attempt Susan makes to enter Friday’s world, she finds herself invariably disconnected from him. The “language” Friday uses through music and dance is, like Friday himself, not a readable one. Still, Susan remains unaware of the impossibility of discovering Friday or exploring his “true” identity; that his engagement with music, though it is a type of language, is not an attempt to communicate with her.

Friday reminds us that, like his identity, texts contain no singular or central truth that can be accessed or extracted through the process of reading. As Rowland Barthes has argued, a text is “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (Barthes 1). Because, like all texts, Friday’s identity is not something that is essentially accessible to readers, any attempt to read Friday (whether from a post-colonial or post-structuralist perspective) will not prove ultimately “useful” in the utilitarian sense of the word—but interpretation is not a utilitarian activity. It is worth repeating that despite Friday’s “unreadability,” we need not remain silent about Friday. Instead, we must simply be aware of our own urges to dive into the wreck. While we may, like Susan, come up with any number of myths and stories about what we believe is the truth of identity and the truth of the wreck, we will never access

the wreck itself. In the end, Susan—along with all readers, authors, and literary critics, must acquiesce to its inherent “unknowability.”

## **Conclusion**

Significantly, in the last section of the novel, there is some indication that Coetzee himself admits to feeling, like Susan, the same frustrated desire for truth. In a dreamlike narration, Coetzee writes himself into his own story, and performs what Susan has been trying to do all along: he dives into the wreck. This final sequence is short, and divided into two parts. Arguably, these two parts are separate attempts to end the novel; the second being a revision of the first<sup>35</sup>. I base this idea on the fact that both sections seem to follow the same basic narrative trajectory: Coetzee enters Foe’s home and finds the dead bodies of the young Susan Barton, the protagonist Susan, Foe, and Friday<sup>36</sup>. In both versions, Coetzee attempts to find a way into Friday’s mouth: “his teeth are clenched, I press a fingernail between the upper and lower rows, trying to part them” (154). The vital difference between the first part (153-154) and the revision (155-157) is that in the revision, Coetzee finally dives into the wreck himself. “With a sigh, making barely a splash, I slip overboard” (155). The narration repeats almost

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<sup>35</sup> By keeping both these attempts in the final version of the novel, Coetzee self-consciously illustrates his own difficulties with authorship.

<sup>36</sup> Actually in the first section, Friday is alive, but in the revision, it is unclear as to whether he is alive or dead, but he is “half buried in sand, his knees drawn up, his hands between his thighs...” (157).

verbatim Susan's own language in the opening of the novel when she lands on Crusoe's island (5). Coetzee embodies Susan here, or at the very least, embodies her desire to "explore the wreck" (32).

The dark mass of the wreck is flecked here and there with white. It is huge, greater than the leviathan: a hulk shorn of masts, split across the middle, banked on all sides with sand. The timbers are black, the hole even blacker that gives entry. If the kraken lurks anywhere, it lurks here...I enter the hole (156)

If I am correct in assuming that Coetzee's wreck represents the same thing here as it does in Rich's poem, the hole that Coetzee enters is truth itself; the problem is that, as Crusoe warned, the wreck is not something that can ultimately prove to be useful. In a way, it is unexplorable and inaccessible even as Coetzee tries to enter it. It is huge, dark, and "banked on all sides with sand." The kraken, the mythological creature that Foe mentioned in passing to Susan (140), lurks with the wreck, so that somehow the truth of the wreck seems intrinsically tied to the myth or "the story of the wreck." Coetzee continues exploring, as "the stub of candle hangs on a string around my neck...though it sheds no light" (156). Despite the utter darkness, Coetzee continues to explore, swimming through the "soft, dank, slimy" (156) sand of the water. But despite these numerous obstructions, he manages at last to find Friday, and asks him, "Friday...what is this ship?" (157). Like Susan, and like we readers, Coetzee hopes to get an answer out of Friday, to learn the truth of the wreck:

But this is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday...I pass a fingernail across his teeth, trying to find a way in. 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 through the cabin, through the wreck (157).

Here we find that even Coetzee, the author of *Foe*, cannot access the truth of the wreck. Even his own words are “caught and filled with water and diffused.”

While he manages to get into Friday’s mouth, instead of finding a language there that will orient him toward truth, he is confronted with the “slow stream, without breath, without interruption.” This uninterrupted stream is precisely the opposite of the fragmented nature of language, the gap between the and signified, as “this is not a place of words.” Even while he is immersed within the wreck itself, its “truth” remains out of reach, whether with or without language. Based on this last section, we might conclude that the traumatic loss of authority Susan experiences in her role as author, her quest to find out the truth of her own identity and Friday’s, her unfulfilled desire to explore the wreck, is whole-heartedly experienced by Coetzee himself—and arguably, by all readers and authors of language.

## Chapter 5: Closing Remarks

The intellectual development of Defoe's and Coetzee's collective mono-character becomes visible when reading the novels in their chronological order. By employing the mode of autobiography, Crusoe, Roxana, and Susan each hope to achieve some level of self-mastery, whether it is confirmation of self-existence, self-knowledge, or self-representation in language. As I have discussed, Crusoe represents the earliest stage in the mono-character's development, believing that language is somehow symmetrical with truth, and therefore, that his own language as an author grants him the power to create truth, rather than fictions. Roxana, serving as a revision of Crusoe, extends Crusoe's level of understanding about the limits of language and authorship. But Defoe provides no clear indication that she sees identity as essentially a discursive construct. I have attempted to show that Coetzee's Susan surpasses both Crusoe's and Roxana's level of intellect, but significantly, I do not wish to imply that Susan necessarily provides closure to the problematic of identity. Susan recognizes, by the end of *Foe*, the role that language and signification play in the formation of identity, and that her position as an author is not one of authority. For Coetzee, Susan's narrative purpose is not to complete the intellectual trajectory of the mono-character, because to do so would seem to validate the myth of self-mastery. Instead, Susan realizes the impossibility of self-mastery, and in doing so extends the intellectual trajectory of both Crusoe and Roxana, without finishing it off.

Coetzee provides no sense of closure to Susan's story, a writerly move that once again parallels Defoe's treatment of Roxana at the end of her story.

I have suggested that, in the twentieth-century, Coetzee continues the intellectual trajectory of a "mono-character" initiated by Defoe over two hundred years prior. While much of the scholarship on *Foe* focuses on its relevance within the larger context of either post-colonialism or post-structuralism, it is important to consider, for the moment, the role of historicism in the development of Coetzee's novel. What motivates Coetzee to re-write Defoe's characters who were written so long before his time? It is possible that Coetzee's extrapolation of Defoe's mono-character may be a testament to how eighteenth-century concerns regarding language and identity have extended into the post-structural era of the twentieth-century. Even more significantly, Coetzee's novel highlights the extent to which the philosophical inquiries of the eighteenth century remain at large even in the twentieth-century and beyond.

It may be helpful to look at Coetzee's revision of Defoe's texts as just a singular example of how the post-structural era similarly re-imagines and revises eighteenth-century philosophical dialogues. I have already mentioned that Coetzee makes explicit in *Foe* ideas that were only implicit in *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana*. But another major revision that Coetzee performs is the necessary consideration of readership and interpretation in the investigation of authority and authorship in autobiographical writing. While authorship and the destabilization

of authority is clearly a major theme in Defoe's texts, readership and interpretation do not play as significant a role. Coetzee, however, operating under the influence of Foucault, Lacan, Barthes, and Stanley Fish in the twentieth-century, makes readership a central concern in Susan's development. Arguably, it is Susan's relationship with Friday and her realizations about the destabilizing effects of interpretation, which allow her to recognize that the self is not only the author of identity, but also a reader of identity. Friday, to some extent, operates as a stand-in for Susan, as her desire to know Friday parallels her desire to "discover" her own identity. Coetzee also develops this idea with Susan's relationship to the young Susan Barton. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, this relationship represents Susan's attempt to read her own identity in order to grasp its objective meaning. It is this process of reading (or more importantly, her inability to read) the text of her identity that eventually allows her to recognize her own "authorial" and "metaphysical" identity as a narrative structure that is not so readable or knowable.

Coetzee's work, however, should not necessarily be read as an improvement upon Defoe's. To close, I would instead like to stress the intellectual exchange between the eighteenth century and the post-structural era. It is important to note the extent to which eighteenth-century figures such as Defoe laid the foundation for post-structural works like Coetzee's. It is possible that, as Ian Watt has argued, the coincidence of the rise of the modern novel with

epistemological inquiries into the self posed by Hobbes and Locke helped initiate the turn toward individualism in the eighteenth century, which subsequently led to attempts to destabilize normative structures of authority. By problematizing identity and the stability of the “I,” Defoe’s work subverts the authority of language as well as that of authors. Arguably, it is this type of work that preempts Barthes’ “Death of the Author,” and Foucault’s “What is an Author?” both written during the post-structural era.

Defoe’s and Coetzee’s collective interest in authorship, language, authority, and identity are therefore not coincidental, and they require further investigation. Both authors, in their respective historical moments, utilize the form of pseudo-autobiography to attempt to expose self-mastery as a myth, and identity as a myth of language. More importantly, Defoe’s and Coetzee’s textual relationship reveals larger implications about the intellectual exchange that is still largely in motion between eighteenth-century and post-structuralist discourse.



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