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# J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and *Foe*: an Analysis of Postmodern and Political Representation

# J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and *Foe*: an Analysis of Postmodern and Political Representation

*Many literary critics have defined J.M. Coetzee's novels as postmodern works. This study intends to investigate what is understood by the concept of postmodernism and especially it intends to define the concept of the novel in such a paradigm. Apart from scrutinizing these novels both on a formal and thematic level, this analysis seeks to compare and lay bare a possible evolution in Coetzee's style of writing. To that end, some critical literary and thematic concepts will be made explicit. These elements are foregrounded by many critics as clear-cut postmodern artifacts and they will be especially useful in order to determine whether either of these novels can be clearly defined as a postmodern novel. Aside from this, if a stylistic or thematic turn is noticeable, it would be interesting to look for causes and solutions for this literary change. Could Coetzee be doing this out of personal or historical need, or is there another reason for this? Or do we need to change our perception of what a postmodern novel is or was? Hence these novels will be subjected to a literary and theoretic analysis. The results of this analysis will then be compared and linked up with possible causes. Moreover, they will be connected with the historical and political framework of South Africa.*

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*This study would not have been possible without the assistance of my promoter,  
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# 1. Introduction

Many critics have argued that Coetzee's novels adhere to postmodern properties. Nevertheless, there have been critics who have stated that Coetzee's work underwent a paradigm shift from postmodern to realistic.<sup>1</sup> To that end, I will analyse Coetzee's *Foe* and *Disgrace*, with regard to formal, thematic and political characteristics and I will draw conclusions to determine whether this shift really applies to his work. Finally, I intend to link up these considerations with South Africa's present-day politics. However, first I will provide a general overview of the two novels, Coetzee's life and the term postmodernism.

## 1.1. Historical, biographical and literary clarifications

In subsequent sections of this study, I will provide a formal and thematic analysis of *Foe* and *Disgrace*. To understand what I will be dealing with, I will include a short summary of both novels.

Coetzee's fifth novel, *Foe*, was written during the apartheid period. However, there is no direct reference to this time, because the story is set at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, it is a reworking of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. The story starts of when Susan Barton arrives on a tropic island after suffering from a shipwreck. She is immediately rescued by a black slave (Friday) and brought to the house of his owner, Mr. Cruso. In the following scenes we see Susan arguing with Cruso because she wants to leave the island. In the end, Susan, Friday and Cruso succeed in escaping the island when a ship sails past. However, on course for England, Cruso dies of a fever and Susan is left behind with the African, who is not even able to speak. In the following section, Susan talks of publishing her 'island story'. To that end, she is continually writing letters to an author called Foe. Moreover, she decides to stay at Foe's house until he returns from his duty. When he finally returns they start quarreling over Friday's identity and the fact that he cannot speak. Furthermore, Susan and Foe discuss how they will succeed in lifting the spell of muteness which dooms over Friday. In the end, the perspective changes and the reader is witness to a scene on the shipwreck, in which Susan, Friday and Cruso lie buried.

Coetzee's *Disgrace*, winner of the 1999 Booker Prize, is totally set in post apartheid South Africa. It is an account of a white South African (David Lurie), who teaches courses on communication at the *Cape Technical University*. At the onset, David is continually visited by a prostitute called Soraya, who works at an escort bureau. However, these visits do not interfere with his work at the university, because he follows through on his plans to direct an opera about the work

<sup>1</sup> Wright, Laura. Writing "Out of All the Camps": *J.M. Coetzee's Narratives of Displacement*. New York. Routledge 2006. p. 6.

of *Byron*. When Soraya decides to bring a halt to their relationship, David seeks a fitting replacement. Nevertheless, these women cannot satisfy him any more; until he meets a young student at the university (Melanie) with whom he immediately falls in love. This relationship will cause him a lot of trouble, because Melanie decides to tell her parents. David is then obliged to appear before a tribunal at the University, which will cause him to leave Cape Town and return to his daughter's farm. There he is witness of a brutal scene, in which he is severely burned, while his daughter is being raped by three black men. David is shocked when he finds out his daughter was raped, but Lucy remains calm: she does not want to confess to the police. Throughout the story David and Lucy continue to argue about the violence in South Africa. Lucy however, remains silent and does not want to talk to her father about this. As a sort of cure, David decides to work in an animal clinic. There he meets Bev Shaw, with whom he discusses Lucy's situation and with whom he decides to have sex again. In the end, David reaches a feeling of absolution, because his care for the dogs takes his thoughts away from his daughter.

Secondly, I will present a biographical overview of Coetzee's life and a short overview of South Africa's politics. These clarifications will be of importance to the literary analysis of Coetzee's novels.

John Maxwell Coetzee, novelist and academic, was born on 9 February 1940 in Cape Town, South Africa, some eight years before the beginning of the so called 'Apartheid period', an era marked by fierce racial segregation and public uprisings. VanZanten Gallagher<sup>2</sup> defines this period as an era 'that has given South Africa a peculiar modern history characterized by waves of protest and ebbs of governmental suppression.' It is self-evident then that Coetzee and many Afrikaners were offended and that this situation has greatly influenced both his private and academic life. Again Vanzanten Gallagher argues that:

given this turbulent history, the South African writer faces a unique and difficult situation. Is the primary responsibility of a writer living under apartheid to write or to fight, to produce works of art or to struggle to eliminate injustice and oppression?<sup>3</sup>

Apart from this, Coetzee, as a white South African writer, was faced with the problem of representing the black population in his literature. And because of the historical uprisings of the past, he needed to be careful in implementing racial divides into a fictional work. Especially

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2 VanZanten Gallagher, Susan. *A Story Of South Africa: J.M. Coetzee's Fiction in Context*. Cambridge. Harvard University Press. 1991: 2

3 VanZanten Gallather. *A Story Of South Africa* p.3

Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* faces this dilemma, because it is a novel that describes in detail the idea of a 'black peril'<sup>4</sup>, which implies that in the course of history white female South Afrikaners were repeatedly abused by black rapists. However, some critics acknowledge that the opposite idea of 'white peril' also frequently appears in the course of South African history.<sup>5</sup> As a result, this novel was heavily criticized, because as Graham argues, 'the black rapists (are depicted in Coetzee's novel as) representative of most black people in South Africa.' Consequently, among many critics this work has been received with acute discomfort because Coetzee has depicted the black South African as an overt rapist. As a result, Coetzee's take on the circumstances in the former and present-day South Africa is politically charged and one needs to question whether being a writer in South Africa implies adopting a stance on racial and gender issues.

What was significant in the early days of Coetzee's life was the geographical situation he lived in, Penner states that '[i]n his youth, Coetzee lived with his parents and grew up in 'about twenty different places in South Africa', primarily in the vast Karoo (...), the one hundred-thousand-square-mile tableland of desert and semidesert that covers two-thirds of the Cape province.'<sup>6</sup> So the environment of his upbringing has left a clear footprint in his novels, as is noticeable in his penultimate novel, *Disgrace*, in which Coetzee describes the landscape of the Eastern Cape:

[h]is daughter's smallholding is at the end of a winding dirt track some miles outside the town: five hectares of land, most of it arable, a wind-pump, stables and outbuildings, and a low, sprawling farmhouse painted yellow, with a galvanized-iron roof and a covered stoep.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from describing the environment where he grew up, his novels contain evidence of his stay in England. Especially his fifth novel *Foe* contains clear marks of the English city and countryside, where he passed his days working and studying.

Moreover, he grew up speaking both Afrikaans, with his family, and English, which he acquired at home. Especially the latter would be of great importance in his literary and academic career, as he attended classes and 'worked as a programmer for International Business Machines in London[...].' His academic career began in 1965, at the University of Texas, where he studied Beckett and English literature, in order to obtain a doctoral degree. However, he was not fully satisfied with his post at this university, which caused him to abandon Texas and move to the East

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4 Graham, Lucy Valerie, "Reading the Unspeakable: Rape in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*". *Journal of Southern African Studies*. nr. 2. 2003, p. 437

5 Graham. "Reading the Unspeakable". p. 437

6 Penner, Dick. *Countries of the Mind: The Fiction of J.M. Coetzee*. Westport (Conn.). Greenwood press. 1989. p. 10

7 *Disgrace*. p. 59

coast, where he worked both as an assistant professor and as a visiting professor from 1983-84 and fall, 1986-87.<sup>8</sup> Especially the latter years are of importance in the light of this analysis, because it was in 1986 that he published his fifth novel *Foe*, a work which could be labelled a reworking or parody of *Robinson Crusoe* and is mostly engaged with the narrative of writing. This is an aspect which will be of considerable importance to this analysis.

Next to being a novelist, Coetzee also has an academic degree in linguistics and literary studies. His principal investigations lie in the field of grammar and transformational grammar<sup>9</sup>, as he did some extensive research on the construction and function of the passive tense. Moreover, Coetzee obtained his doctoral degree with his study on Samuel Beckett and his so called 'minimalist approach', which Coetzee also applies in his own novels by using a minimal plot and by limiting the reader's view into the psychology of the characters. Furthermore, his novels are also greatly influenced by his essays on fiction and storytelling, because they show a marked emphasis on metafictionality, a concept which is inherently connected with postmodernism. Apart from Coetzee's life and interests, South Africa's political situation deserves critical attention. For example after 1994 South Africa entered a democratic era. The National Party did its best to alter apartheid's precarious situation and several bans on anti-apartheid groups were lifted. From then on South Africa entered the 'post-apartheid' era, also called 'the New South Africa'. Especially the general elections in 1994 had a vast impact on South Africa, bringing into life the ANC and the instalment of Nelson Mandela in the executive branch. As a result, many laws concerning segregation, land distribution and health systems were adapted to the new social needs.

Moreover, the newly installed legislation not only had political and social consequences, it also accounted for a modification of South African literature. As Poyner<sup>10</sup> argues, governmental issues and laws greatly influenced the cultural and literary production at the time. In the apartheid era, literature was severely limited by the public and political sphere. However, as post-apartheid came into being, this limitation disappeared because literature became a more individual and private matter, and as a result, literature had a definite political or social function. In other words, South African fiction greatly influenced the political and social system. In this regard, Poyner states that 'post-apartheid fiction reveals that the private can serve productively as a corrective to the public, suggesting that the "dichotomies" of public/private, political/ethical need reconceptualizing.'<sup>11</sup> Both Attwell and Harlow also acknowledge that writers during the apartheid needed to be aware of public issues, whereas in the post-apartheid these issues are of less importance.

In this regard, they state that:

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8 Penner. *Countries of the Mind*. p. 3

9 Penner. *Countries of the Mind*. p. 4

10 Poyner, Jane, "Writing under pressure: A post-apartheid canon?". *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. nr. 2, p. 103

11 Poyner. "Writing under Pressure", p. 105



under apartheid, to separate the political and the aesthetic--to insist that the aesthetic had its own priorities and demands--was to risk political censure, that separation is now widely endorsed. The liberalism of the new order is more accommodating than a revolutionary culture could ever be, to the re-invention of tradition, to irony, to play. Under apartheid, writers were expected to address the great historical issues of the time, whereas now they are free to write in a more personal key.<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, this statement defines post-apartheid works as being less politically endorsed. However, a preliminary thematic analysis of *Disgrace* shows that this novel does display social and political thematics, such as racist, gender and sexual issues. On the other hand, non-political and private problems – such as David Lurie's personal quest for truth and confession – are apparent as well. This train of thought is what Poyner defines as a 'reconceptualizing'<sup>13</sup> of the political/private divide. In the end, one could define *Disgrace* as a confessional novel, because it is structured as a quest for confession and a search for truth.

Moreover, Poyner defines the post-apartheid era as a period in which the private proliferates over the public and where, during the TRC hearings, self-reflection was necessary in order to re-establish order in South Africa. As a result, the literary production of the post-apartheid is marked by a 'proliferation of autobiographies and confessionals.'<sup>14</sup> In contrast to *Disgrace*, which is a post-apartheid novel, *Foe* cannot be adequately qualified as a confessional or autobiographical novel. The main reason for this lies in the fact that during the apartheid the TRC did not exist and as a result there was no space for confession. Moreover, there was less room for private matters such as personal confessions and the literary production was also severely criticized and subject to political censure. It is therefore safe to state that South Africa's historical situation greatly determined Coetzee's novels, as it is important to emphasize that Coetzee's academic work has influenced his literary work as well. Both these aspects influence how *Disgrace* and *Foe* deal with questions of representation and they have an impact on the way these novels are portrayed, in other words, these ideas indicate to which literary style these novels belong. As such, these ideas will be of importance in the next part of the analysis, in which I will provide an overview of some of the general characteristics of postmodern texts.

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12 Atwell, David. & Harlow, Barbara, "South African Fiction under apartheid". In: *Modern Fiction Studies*. Nr. 46.1, 2000, p. 4

13 Poyner, "Writing under Pressure", p. 103

14 Poyner. "Writing under Pressure", p. 103

## 1.2. Postmodernism/ity and representation

Before moving on to an analysis of these two novels, a general literary-theoretical framework must be established. As one can deduce from the header of this section, the paradigm of the 'postmodern' is concerned with a representational issue, especially with textual representation. Gregson<sup>15</sup> explains postmodernism as 'the move *away* from narrative, from representation'. Moreover, he states that 'what appears literal is in fact metaphorical'.<sup>16</sup> This is one of the issues that serves a predominant function in the analysis of postmodern texts and novels and this idea is further elaborated by Gregson<sup>17</sup>, who argues that 'the most important point for the anti-realist input into postmodernism is that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary.' In fact, this statement implies that a move towards metaphorical language is apparent, which means that any given *lexis*<sup>18</sup> does not stand univocally for the same concept. This idea is of particular relevance to Coetzee's postmodern writing and with respect to this, Saunders states that 'apartheid exploits linguistic foreignness by constructing a text that "say[s] one thing [and] means quite another".'<sup>19</sup> By foregrounding these words, Saunders explains that postmodern texts are essentially metaphorical in nature. As a result, the events which occur in these novels cannot be read literally, and are therefore difficult to represent. Moreover, in the postmodern paradigm, a sign can have a whole range of possible interpretations. These considerations will serve as a starting point for a later discussion of textual and thematic elements. For now, I will only focus on general aspects concerning Coetzee's novels.

Another general concept, apart from representational issues, is postmodernism's emphasis on ontological questions. McHale, for example, suggests that 'the ontological implies questions' concerning reality and existence.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, postmodernism can be defined as the study of the nature of being, existence or reality in general, as well as the study of basic categories of being and their relations.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Williams recognizes concepts such as paradox, contradiction, and a movement toward anti-totalization, as benchmarks for recognizing a postmodern artifact.

Yet postmodernism can also be understood in opposition to its counterpart, namely a realistic approach towards literature. In this respect, Williams explains that postmodern texts are primarily

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15 Gregson, Ian, *Postmodern literature*. London, Arnold, 2004, p. 2

16 Gregson, p. 7

17 Gregson, p. 3

18 Despite the conventional translation as "word", it is not used for a [word](#) in the grammatical sense; instead, the term *lexis* is used. However, both *logos* and *lexis* derive from the same verb [λέγω](#). (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logos>)

19 Saunders, Rebecca, "The Agony and the Allegory: The Concept of the Foreign, the Language of Apartheid and the Fiction of J.M. Coetzee". In: *Cultural Critique*, nr. 47, 2001, pp. 236-237

20 Williams, Raymond L, "Fuentes the Modern; Fuentes the Postmodern", In: *Hispania*, nr. 2, 2002, pp. 213-214

21 "Ontology". [Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia](#). 2009. Wikipedia. 25 March 2009  
<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ontological>>.

concerned with language-use and narrative, and less with the structure of plot and characters. In realistic fiction or literature on the other hand, the main idea consists of an empirical rendering of reality.<sup>22</sup> In the end Williams suggests that postmodern texts are constructs that can be identified through their 'unresolved contradictions, anachronical time and space and what he qualifies as a *double coding* (i.e. a juxtaposition of different elements).<sup>23</sup>

Other literary critics apply to postmodern culture the same qualifications as outlined above. Especially Ihab Hassan (1987) has worked extensively on postmodernism as a general and all-encompassing notion in both culture, literature and arts. To that end, he made a list of characteristics, which according to him apply best to a poststructural reading. In this study only four of these are relevant to the analysis of Coetzee's novels: in particular the idea that the fictional world is a difficult space to represent (*the 'unpresentable'*), which some critics see as evidence of a realistic approach to literature.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Hassan joins Williams in his defence of contradictions. He calls this the '*indeterminacy*' of the postmodern text, which means that it is full of ruptures and ambiguities. Thirdly, Hassan mimics Williams' anti-totalization concept, by arguing that postmodern novels are essentially fragmentary in nature ('*fragmentation*'). However, in particular, postmodern texts are known for 'blurring' generic boundaries, which Hassan defines as [*h*]ybridization, an idea which will be of great importance when discussing the metafictional and intertextual character of these postmodern works.<sup>25</sup> Especially this intertextual character can be linked up with Hassan's notion of hybridization, as Coetzee's novels repeatedly refer to and use elements from other novels and authors.

With respect to these remarks, most critics recognize *Foe* as a predominantly postmodernist novel, because of its playfulness with self-reflexive language, its metaphoricity and allegorizing potential. While this novel is exclusively an apartheid and postcolonial novel, *Disgrace* is said to depict the circumstances of post-apartheid. Consequently, the latter novel could have adapted itself, both on a literary and a linguistic scale, to the changing historical circumstances. To that end, in what follows, Coetzee's novels will be analysed from a metafictional point of view, to determine whether they really belong to the list of poststructural novels or whether they are more related to realistic texts.

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22 Williams, "Fuentes". p. 214

23 Williams, "Fuentes". p. 215

24 Hassan, Ihab, "Making Sense: The Trials of Postmodern Discourse". In: *New Literary History*, nr. 18, 1987. p. 445

25 Hassan, "Making Sense". p. 446

## 2. William H.Gass and the metafictional status of the novel

The purpose of this chapter is to determine whether Coetzee's novels really have metafictional potential. To that end I will begin with explaining the general types of metafiction and then proceed to a detailed analysis by providing particular examples from both novels. Particularly I will ask myself how metafiction is concerned with concepts such as Authorship, Metaphors, the Epistolary mode<sup>26</sup>, Metaphysical characters and verb forms.

### 2.1. Textual Metafiction, Historiographic Metafiction or Situational Metafiction: a general introduction

As stated above, this analysis argues for a reading of Coetzee's *Foe* as a postmodern construction. However to arrive at such a conclusion, a series of more specific characteristics needs to be outlined and explained. One of them is the self-conscious paradigm known in literature as 'metafiction'<sup>27</sup>, a term initially coined by Gass in 1970 and inscribed by Waugh as 'a mode of writing within a broader cultural movement often referred to as post-modernism.'<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, it is a concept closely related to postmodernism. However, this is refuted by some critics, as Schörkhuber<sup>29</sup> argues that '[t]he majority of theorists agree that metafiction cannot be classified as a genre nor as a definite mode of postmodern fiction.' In order to fully grasp what is meant by metafiction, Waugh states that:<sup>30</sup>

metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text.

According to this statement, metafictional strategies in South African fiction are not only and overtly concerned with textual strategies. These novels can also be defined as 'situational

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26 Penner, p. 128

27 Gass, William H, *In Terms of the Toenail: Fiction and the Figures of Life*. New York, Knopf, 1970, p. 5

28 Waugh, Patricia, *Metafiction: The theory and practice of self-conscious fiction*. London, Methuen, 1984, p. 21

29 Schörkhuber, Verena, *Metafiction in J.M. Coetzee's 'Foe'*. GRIN Verlag, 2007, p. 8

30 Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 2

metafiction<sup>31</sup>, which implies that many South African novels have a particular relationship with the cultural and political discourses of South Africa in the 1970's and 1980's.' Critics such as Atwell thus define Coetzee's work by stating that postcolonial texts juxtapose the postcolonial with the postmodern (metafictional).<sup>32</sup> In a similar manner, Schörkhuber states that Coetzee 'adopts postmodern strategies [...] for postcolonial purposes.'<sup>33</sup> As a result, situational metafiction implies that these forms of fiction self-consciously reflect both on the reality outside of the text and the historical surroundings in which the novel is contextualised. Moreover, this type of metafiction is concerned with South Africa's politics and as a result, Coetzee's novels also actively criticize and comment on its political situation.

With respect to the previous statements, Coetzee's work can either be defined as Textual Metafiction, which is only concerned with its own fictional status, or his work is part of those novels that deliberately question their historical and political surroundings. The third option is what some critics term 'historiographic metafiction' or 're-visionary fiction', a term which is introduced by Hutcheon and which implies that a work of fiction written in the present, self-consciously reflects and parodies a canonical text from the past.<sup>34</sup> I will proceed by providing the primary functions of this historiographic metafiction, as it will be of use in subsequent parts of this discussion. In this respect, Widdowson distinguishes six functions inherent in this type of metafiction.

Firstly, as I have already mentioned, he recognizes the fact that these contemporary novels rewrite canonical texts of the English tradition<sup>35</sup>. Secondly, he states that it is not the direct purpose of re-visionary fiction to parody the canonical text on which it is based. But its primary function lies in replacing the original and reworking its cultural status by adapting it to present definitions.<sup>36</sup> Thirdly, he is of the opinion that the original artifact needs to be taken into account, that it must not be forgotten. As a result, the original and new text are placed in a dialogic relation, and the reader has to be able to 'recall' the important elements of the canonical text. For example, Widdowson argues that *Foe* is a great example of this idea, as the reader must remember how Daniel Defoe established his characters, in order to understand the relationship between these two novels.<sup>37</sup> The fourth argument is invariably connected to the previous stance, as Widdowson states that the 'new' novels have a 'historicising tendency'. Which means these novels continually go back and forth

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31 Schörkhuber, p. 5

32 Atwell & Harlow, "South African Fiction", p. 4

33 Lin, Lidan, "J. M. Coetzee and the Postcolonial Rhetoric of Simultaneity". In: *International Fiction Review*, nr. 1 & 2, 2001, p. 123

34 Widdowson, Peter, "'Writing back': contemporary re-visionary fiction". In: *Textual Practice*, nr.3, 2006, p. 495

35 Widdowson, "Writing Back", p. 501

36 Widdowson, "Writing back", p. 501

37 Widdowson, "Writing Back", p. 503

between the present of its own and the past of its canonical counterpart.<sup>38</sup> Apart from this, he regards the older novels as untruthful accounts of history, which is why contemporary novels typically rework and revise these supposedly true historical accounts, inherent in these canonical texts.<sup>39</sup> In the end, Widdowson argues that contemporary novels are written with a clear political goal in mind. In other words, because the canonical works clearly adhered to a 'marginalising tendency'<sup>40</sup>, they need to be reworked in order to fit it in with present cultural norms.<sup>41</sup>

In conclusion, Widdowson indicates that contemporary novels typically function to revise 'cultural history' by 'writing back' to their canonical counterparts.<sup>42</sup> What distinguishes 'normal' textual metafiction from this type, is the fact that historiographic metafiction does not only draw attention to its own construction, however, it takes into consideration a whole range of mental and cultural processes as well.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, this type of novel seeks to lay bare the relationship of fiction to both history and culture. As I have already argued, it self-consciously revises cultural and historical norms by examining these norms in a previous work of fiction. Now that I have outlined some of the characteristics of this type of metafiction, I will discuss in subsequent sections the historiographic potential in Coetzee's contemporary novels. The purpose is to determine in what way these points are applicable to Coetzee's work and consequently determine in what way these aspects define these novels as postmodern constructs.

However, to begin with I will analyse how *Foe* and *Disgrace* examine their own structures, in other words, I will try to explain whether these novels deserve being called textual metafictions. With respect to the different types of metafiction, Schörkhuber argues that *Foe* is 'less overtly metafictional, however [she argues that] it still includes 'meta' elements that create 'alternative linguistic structures or fictions which merely imply the old forms [...]'.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, she explains that '[C]oetzee's metafictional work thus either directly examines its own construction as it proceeds or [...] comments or speculates about the forms and language of previous fictions.'<sup>45</sup> In this regard and with respect to *Foe*, Coetzee clearly opted to examine the novel's own structure and less the context in which it is set, as such, *Foe* cannot easily be called a situational metafiction, in contrast to what other critics have argued. However, his novel also examines and adapts previous works of fiction, as many critics define it a postcolonial re-writing of *Robinson Crusoe*. This is what Carstensen points out by stating that '[C]oetzee sets out to mock Daniel Defoe's mimetic narrative

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38 Widdowson, "Writing Back", p. 504

39 Widdowson, "Writing Back", p. 505

40 Widdowson, "Writing Back", p. 506

41 Widdowson, "Writing Back", p. 506

42 Widdowson, "Writing Back", p. 506

43 Nünning, Ansgar, "Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet: Towards an Applied Cultural Narratology", in: *Style*, nr. 3, 2004, p. 356

44 Schörkhuber, *Metafiction*, p. 7

45 McCaffery, p.16, quoted in Schörkhuber, *Metafiction*, p. 8

technique and concludes that reality is far too complex to be closed “between the covers of a book”.<sup>146</sup>

As Carstensen and many other critics explain, Coetzee does not use realist techniques, instead he chose to adapt Defoe's work to the models of the time, which evidently adhere to postmodern theory. This statement also explains that the reality which surrounds this novel can not easily be represented, which is also a typical poststructural notion. The ideas presented here are also repeated by Morgan, as he states that '[F]oe is a radical rethinking of Daniel Defoe's desert island myth, a postmodern re-vision of Defoe's sexual dynamics [...]'.<sup>147</sup> However, apart from reworking a canonical novel, metafiction is also concerned with the idea of 'Authorship', a term which I will outline in the subsequent part of this discussion.

## 2.2. Authorship and Metafiction

Moreover, in *Foe*, Coetzee represents this metafictional character and especially the idea of authorship through a metaphor which invokes the idea of 'fatherhood' over a text. Some critics suggest that the fight over authorship is typical of post-colonial novels and that this concept is typically deconstructive.<sup>48</sup> The following example explains the way in which Susan Barton, *Foe*'s principal character, reflects on her own story and how she wants to remain the author of this story (despite Foe's attempt to gain control of Susan's narrative). In this respect, Morgan states that:

Susan is preparing to 'father' (140) her own text. As Derrida says of deconstruction, Susan's narratives cannot 'destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim except by inhabiting those structures.'<sup>49</sup>

These ideas are also apparent from the following examples, in which the protagonists constantly argue about the status of and the authority over the narrative. For instance, Foe states that Susan 'must do whatever lies in her power to father her offspring'.<sup>50</sup> Later on, Foe again reflects on this stance, as he thinks of the origins of text and word, which according to him are the offspring of

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46 Carstensen, T, “Shattering the World-Mirror in Elizabeth Costello: J.M. Coetzee's Deconstructive Experiment”, In: *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, nr. 1, 2007, p. 84

47 See infra: (header) Counternarratives; Morgan, E.P. “Foe's Defoe and La Jeune Née: Establishing a Metaphorical Referent for the Elided Female Voice”. In: *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 1994, p. 81

48 Kossew, Sue, “The Politics of Shame and Redemption in J.M. Coetzee's Disgrace”, In: *Research in African Literatures*, 2003, p. 153

49 Morgan, p. 92

50 *Foe*, p. 140

a deeper religious source: '[m]ay it not be that God continually writes the world, the world and all that is in it?'<sup>51</sup> However, Susan Barton does not regard herself as an 'all-knowing' writer or as an author: "Whether writing is able to form itself out of nothing I am not competent to say," I replied. "Perhaps it will do so for authors; it will not for me".<sup>52</sup> Susan's words learn us that she does not agree with Foe's statement, because she is of the opinion that there is an 'all-knowing' Father who is creating narratives for us.

*Foe* as a result, is a novel which is overtly concerned with metafiction because it actively reflects and criticizes the works on which it is based and because its author is aware of this potential and has written his novel accordingly. In a similar way, Morgan points out that *Foe* 'is a text that willingly and self-consciously displaces itself, [and] that mimics and replaces the colonized voice.'<sup>53</sup> In this respect, the importance of Friday's muteness has to be underlined, as this character is of South African origin and acts as a metaphor for the colonized voice. Consequently, metafiction is evident in the way Susan and Foe discuss how they will make Friday speak and how they will establish him as a real character.

### 2.3. Metafiction and metaphors

As already mentioned, metafictional practice is concerned with authority over and submissiveness to a text. In this respect, Coetzee establishes Friday as a metaphorical figure, by deliberately silencing him. Because of Friday's limited narrative potential, Susan and Foe discuss Friday's narrative situation and reflect on how they can substantiate him into the text, by making him speak. The following example is indicative of this position, as Susan states that 'they must make Friday's silence speak, as well as the silence surrounding Friday.'<sup>54</sup> Friday's figure as it were, obliges both characters to search for a way to substantiate him as a character. And when Susan fails to do so, Foe argues that it is still possible to learn him things. Essentially, Coetzee has established his novel as an ontological substantiation of words and sounds into a text. It is structured – especially in the penultimate chapter – as a metafictional 'bringing into life' of a written and bodily artifact. Friday's silence can therefore be seen as a metaphor for Susan's quest to establish her story. However, its symbolic nature will be dealt with in greater detail in subsequent sections of this study.

Furthermore, MacLeod recognizes that Coetzee's novel resists intelligibility for the reader, while foregrounding language and discourse as its primary subject: '[i]t is a writerly rather than a readerly text, one that takes discourse itself as its primary referent without regard for readership or

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51 *Foe*, p. 143

52 *Foe*, p. 143

53 Morgan, p. 94

54 *Foe*, p. 142



accessibility.<sup>55</sup> Later on, again he stresses the importance of the novel's self-consciousness. To that end, Macleod states that Coetzee's work does not adhere to a historical approach. As is evident in the following quote:

[b]oth he and Friday choose rivalry and consequently produce a type of writing that 'operates in terms of its own procedures and issues in its own conclusions, not one that operates in terms of the procedures of history and eventuates in conclusions checkable by history'.<sup>56</sup>

MacLeod's statement is indicative of the whole novel's structure, as Coetzee, in this novel, is not primarily concerned with exact historical references. Its primary function therefore consists of examining its own narrative structure. Again, its characters think and act metafictionally, because both Cruso and Friday resist being appropriated by a historical discourse. As a result, *Foe's* characters resist the novel's characterization as a situational metafiction.

Apart from the narrative and the characters' self-conscious nature, *Foe* is also metafictional in the sense that its second chapter is structured as an epistolary account, which implies that the narrative consists of a correspondence via letters, between two or more characters. This idea is already evident, when in the opening lines of this chapter Susan states: '[i]n my letter yesterday I may have seemed to mock the art of writing.'<sup>57</sup> In what follows, I intend to determine in what way the inclusion of an epistolary narrative gives this novel a postmodern feel.

## 2.4. Metafiction and the Epistolary mode<sup>58</sup>

As I have already indicated, *Foe* has a rather fragmentary structure, and in one of these subdivisions Coetzee opted to include an epistolary narrative, which is structured as a correspondence of letters between Susan and Foe. In order to determine whether this particular form of narrative is postmodern, we need to mention that the nature of the epistolary mode<sup>59</sup> is by default reflective. For example, Susan is constantly contemplating the status of the narrative. Moreover, Penner argues that because of the self-reflective nature of the narrative, 'the result is that there is a

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55 MacLeod, Lewis, "Do We of Necessity Become Puppets in a Story?" or Narrating the World: On Speech, Silence and Discourse in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*", In: *Modern Fiction Studies*, nr. 1, 2006, p. 13

56 MacLeod, Lewis, p. 14

57 *Foe*, p. 52

58 Penner, p. 128

59 Penner, p. 128

rather long section of the novel in which stasis seems to be the controlling element.<sup>60</sup> And stasis means there are ruptures in the novel's chronology, which is a typical technique in postmodern texts. Penner calls this the 'disruptive quality'<sup>61</sup> of narrative:

[w]hen the letters return unopened, she continues to write to him, tossing the letters in a trunk. Here the momentum of the novel begins to falter as theories of narrative displace event. Barton's principal concern in this one-way correspondence involves the relation of fiction to life.<sup>62</sup>

The latter thought also explains that metafiction is essentially concerned with the relationship between life or reality and the fictional mode. Furthermore, Susan is also concerned with the truth hidden beneath the surface of Coetzee's work, yet worried about the 'pleasure for the readers'.<sup>63</sup> In this respect, Hutcheon recognizes the importance of the relationship between narrator and his/her audience, by stating that a postmodern text 'typically refuses the omniscience and omnipresence of the third person and engages instead in a dialogue between the narrative voice and a projected reader.'<sup>64</sup> In this respect, *Foe* differs from *Disgrace* in that the former has a first-person narrator who establishes a dialogue with the reader, while the latter has a third-person narrator, who does not engage with the audience. It is especially the appearance of a first-person narrator that constitutes a typical characteristic of postmodern writing. In contrast to this idea, Coetzee did not use a narrator of this type in *Disgrace*, which leads us to say that on this level *Disgrace* does not adhere to postmodern qualities. However, as is evident in chapter three, some of the characters begin to question their metaphysical identity.

## 2.5. Metafiction and the metaphysical status of the characters

We see this tendency emerging as Foe establishes his authority over the narrative, and from then on Susan begins to submerge herself in metaphysical doubt. Because she is not able to determine her role in the narrative, she questions every single element that defines herself. This is evident in the following passage: '[b]ut now all my life grows to be story and there is nothing of my own left to me. [...] But now I am full of doubt. Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself.

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60 Penner, p. 128

61 Penner, p. 128

62 *Foe*, p. 118

63 *Foe*, p. 63

64 Hutcheon, Linda, *Poetics of Postmodernism*. New York, Routledge, 1999, p. 250

Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom too? To what order do I belong? And you: who are you?"<sup>65</sup> So, rather than questioning the relevance of her story, she falters at the thought of not being anyone, to that end, she begins to question her identity and role in the reality of this fiction. Furthermore, metafiction is not only evident in what the characters think and say, it is also evident in Coetzee's opinions. For example, in one of the scenes of this novel, Foe's words could be an indication of Coetzee's viewpoints on writing. This is evident when Foe states that:

[i]n a life of writing books, I have often been lost in the maze of doubting. The trick I have learned is to plant a sign or marker in the ground where I stand, so that in my future wanderings I shall have something to return to and not get worse lost than I am.<sup>66</sup>

This example could easily be one of Coetzee's many statements about his views on authorship. However, next to this concern with narrative structure and the place of the characters within this narrative, Coetzee's writing essentially questions the status of words, tense and spelling. This is clearly evident in the following quote, as Foe states that:

[i]f we devote ourselves to finding holes exactly shaped to house such great words as *Freedom, Honour, Bliss*, I agree, we shall spend a lifetime slipping and sliding and searching, and all in vain. They are words without a home, wanderers like the planets, and that is an end of it.<sup>67</sup>

In *Foe*, Coetzee is thus essentially preoccupied with the function of words and its relationship with narrative structure. Moreover, these words have social, cultural and political implications as well. Most of these ideas are in the same way applicable to *Disgrace*, as will become clear in the following analysis.

## 2.6. Metafiction and verb forms

Nevertheless, this tendency is even more evident in Coetzee's *Disgrace*, as it is a novel which also discusses the peculiarities and uncertainties of language. It is a work in which linguistic and grammatical subjects are being investigated. In this respect, David Lurie, the novel's protagonist,

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65 *Foe*, p. 133

66 *Foe*, pp. 135-136

67 *Foe*, pp. 149-150

actively reflects on and adjusts his word-use. For example, he is of the opinion that words are imperfect, and subject to change. Some critics also argue that these words are complex constructions, which highlight social and morphological issues.<sup>68</sup> One example illustrates my point: "[I] demand you will never phone me here again, never. *Demand*. She means *command*."<sup>69</sup> Here, David revises Soraya's words, which indicates that she is not exactly clear about the status of their relationship. Next to this Coetzee is particularly fond of using foreign words written in italicized style. In this respect, Barnard points out that '[a] similarly intense and destabilizing scrutiny seems to be demanded by the novel's many italicized foreign words.'<sup>70</sup>

Consequently, Coetzee shows a greater concern with language and the lexicon than with the nature of storytelling (as is exemplified in *Foe*). On another occasion, Coetzee's preoccupation with metafiction is evident when David explains to his students the syntactic and semantic structure of nouns and verbs. For example, David explains the difference between the verb form 'to usurp upon', which means to intrude, and 'to usurp', which is the perfective form of the former. The difference between these two forms lies in the fact that 'to usurp' completes the act of 'usurping upon'. These remarks on syntax and semantics are predominant throughout the whole novel, and reflect how the narrative is structured. For example, the imperfective implies the continuation of an action, which means that an action does not reach its conclusion, while the perfective implies the conclusion of an act. These syntactic verb forms therefore mimic how the story progresses or imply a possibility of closure. Moreover, they are applicable to David's situation at the University and on Lucy's farm, and they are also indicative of the socio-political circumstances in South Africa. For example, the imperfective verb form entails that South Africa continues to face problems, because the violence and conflicts inherent in the apartheid period are still present. Therefore people encounter great difficulties in achieving a state of absolution. However, a symbolic conclusion is reached when David decides to put down the animals in Bev Shaw's clinic. Coetzee displays this conclusion by making David speak of the dogs in the perfective tense: 'burnt, burnt up'.<sup>71</sup> The same concern with these verb forms comes up when David thinks about all the perils he has gone through and what these have done to his life. As before, he explains the difference between the simple present, imperfect and the perfective verb form: '[t]he perfective, signifying an action carried through to its conclusion. How far away it all seems! I live, I have lived, I lived.' As a consequence, David's (novelistic) world is rendered by and through the functions of the verb form. For example, in the past he has lived a good life, which has now come to an end. That is why he speaks in the past

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68 Barnard, Rita, "J. M. Coetzee's "Disgrace" and the South African Pastoral", In: *Contemporary Literature*, 2003, p. 206

69 *Disgrace*, p. 10

70 Barnard, Rita, p. 207

71 *Disgrace*, p. 220

perfect (I have lived), while he reflects back on the duration of time he lived a good life, by using the imperfect.

The relationship between tense and social issues is also evident when David is locked up in Lucy's home, unable to do anything about his and his daughter's problems. And while he is being locked up, his thoughts turn to his limited linguistic abilities.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, David Lurie all of a sudden recognizes that all of his language and scholarly training has been in vain, and that language cannot stand in isolation, which means that it is always part of a larger system, with social and sociological ramifications. In this case he is the victim of society, unable to make a fuss about what is at hand in the new South Africa. He is unable to do anything, because he can only rely on the language of Western Europe, which is evident when David states that '[h]e speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in the darkest Africa. He is helpless, an Aunt Sally (...).'<sup>73</sup> It is evident that David does not speak the native language of the black South Africans, and that he is only capable of expressing himself in the language of the colonizers. Moreover, these remarks can easily be linked up with gender related problems. For example, when David Lurie calls Melanie's parents, he wonders whether her name should be spelled as Melanie or Meláni. As a result, the reader is at a loss about her origins: on the one hand she could have South African roots, on the other hand she could have non-African origins. Just as in *Foe*, metafiction is also connected with authority issues, as David and his daughter argue about their place in the narrative. To that end, they discuss which word applies best to David's situation. So, Coetzee again shows his concern with the choice of lexicon, a choice which has consequences for David's further involvement. The following quote is indicative of this stance:

[L]ong visits don't make for good friends. What if we don't call it a visit? What if we call it a refuge? Would you accept refuge on an indefinite basis? You mean asylum? It's not as bad as that, Lucy. I'm not a fugitive.<sup>74</sup>

In the end, both characters have different opinions on their authority over the narrative, because David does not think his 'exile' is such a serious matter. This discussion continues as David refuses to cooperate:

[I] was offered a compromise, which I wouldn't accept. What kind of compromise? Re-education. Reformation of the character. The code-word was *counselling*. And are

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72 Barnard, p. 211

73 *Disgrace*, p. 95

74 *Disgrace*, p. 65-66

you so perfect that you can't do with a little counselling? It reminds me too much of Mao's China. Recantation, self-criticism, public apology.<sup>75</sup>

Again, this example shows that David has a dispute with his daughter about the words that best fit in with the idea of counselling. However, on this occasion, roles are interchanged because David takes on an extreme point of view, while Lucy adopts a rather moderate view by stating that these kind of cases occur on a regular basis. These examples are thus indicative of the same ideas inherent in *Foe*, namely that the characters show a growing interest in the authority over the story.

In conclusion, *Foe* and *Disgrace* both have metafictional potential. However, the difference lies in the fact that both novels examine other metafictional concepts. For example, in (*D*) Coetzee opted for an examination of the novel's lexicon and for an analysis of the syntactic potential of the verb form. Moreover, these concepts are not analysed in isolation, because they are linked up with problems of a social and historical order. A great example of this idea, is the moment in which David is unable to do anything about his daughter's rape because of his limited knowledge of the language of colonized people. In contrast, *Foe*'s metafictional potential lies in its analysis of storytelling and authorship. *Foe* has a radical intertextual structure because it examines and revises its colonial counternarrative, *Robinson Crusoe*. Furthermore, metafiction also arises out of the characters' actions, as they self-consciously create stories for the reader. In the end, *Foe* is metafictional because it examines both its own structure and that of previous works, which it intends to parody.

By examining how Coetzee parodies canonical texts, I will go into greater detail on the definition of historiographic metafiction or 'counterdiscursive fiction'<sup>76</sup>, as other critics like to call it. Specifically, I will try to examine how these concepts apply to both of Coetzee's novels. To start with, I will provide two quotes that evoke what can be understood by counterdiscursive fiction. These ideas will then function as the basis for a short introduction and I will constantly refer to Widdowson's opinions concerning this type of fiction. In the end, I would like to compare how *Foe* and (*D*) respectively, deal with these assumptions.

## 2.7. Counterdiscursive strategies or plain intertextuality?

Postmodernists abandon the idea that any language-scientific, political, or aesthetic- has a privileged vantage point on reality; instead, they insist on the intertextual nature and social construction of all meaning.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Disgrace*, p. 66

<sup>76</sup> Kossew, p. 153

<sup>77</sup> Steven, Best. & Kellner, Douglas, *The Postmodern Turn: Chapter four: Postmodernism in the Arts: Pastiche*,

Crucially, postmodern writers implode oppositions between high and low art, fantasy and reality, fiction and fact. Spurning "originality," postmodern writers draw on past forms, which are ironically quoted and eclectically combined.<sup>78</sup>

The ideas contained in both statements echo what Hassan has repeatedly signalled in his defense of postmodern artifacts, that is to say, he defines these texts by stating that they are usually scattered along 'genre boundaries'.<sup>79</sup> The bulk of novels in this period are therefore 'hybrid' novels which, according to both Kellner and Hassan, use and abuse former literary conventions. However, we have to distinguish between novels that merely use information in an intertextual manner, while others deplete the 'dominant discourse' by 'writing back' to these texts and by deconstructing their 'assumptions'.<sup>80</sup> As a result, novels tend to be more postmodern when deliberately adjusting the focus and content of the dominant text. However, the author can also proceed in simply referring intertextually to other discourses, a procedure which is common in many literary works of standing, and not only in post-structural works.

With respect to these assumptions, many critics see Coetzee's *Foe* as a novel which – according to post-colonial rhetoric – opposes itself to the dominant and western notion of literary truth. Moreover, *Foe* belongs to a postmodern paradigm in the sense that it refuses one view and one view only. In this regard, Kossew suggests that 'Coetzee is dismantling narrative, in order 'to seek the continual erosion of any perspectives which might constitute or reconstitute themselves as conquering or containing ones.'<sup>81</sup> *Foe* is radically postmodern because it does not align itself with colonialist literature, and especially because this literature is revised, criticized and adjusted, as its perspective is too narrow. Moreover, *Foe* rejects a tunneled vision, an idea which Steven and Kellner acknowledge, by arguing that '[p]ostmodernists are typically multiperspectival in their sensibility, [and that they] typically believe that no single perspective, theory, or aesthetic frame can illuminate the richness and complexity of the world of experience, or the "text"'.<sup>82</sup> In contrast, the primary goal of *Disgrace* does not consist in 'writing back' or criticizing the colonizer's opinion, rather Coetzee used other works in order to establish the characters' identity.<sup>83</sup> As a result, Coetzee reflects on, but does not criticize Wordsworth or Byron's oeuvre<sup>84</sup>, *Disgrace's* intertextual potential is therefore less

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*Implosion, and the Popular*, Guilford Press, 1997, p. 5

78 Steven & Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn*, p. 6.

79 See 1.2. Postmodernism/ity and representation

80 Gardiner, 1987, p. 174 in Kossew, 2003, p. 154; Kossew, 2003, p. 153

81 Tiffin, 1988, p. 177 quoted in Kossew, 2003, p. 162.

82 Steven & Kellner, p. 10

83 Steven & Kellner, p. 11

84 In *Disgrace* Coetzee only used the protagonists from Wordsworth and Byron's oeuvre to establish his own characters.

pronounced and according to Beard, this 'intertextuality may be seen as another important device deployed in *Disgrace* to subvert Lurie's discourse.'<sup>85</sup>

*Foe* however, critically reflects on *Robinson Crusoe*, as this novel represents its foundational narrative. Both Coetzee's novels differ because they emphasize different political and textual approaches; for example, in (*D*) Coetzee only opted for applying (and thus not subverting) the work of other authors; Whereas *Foe*, typically mimics and subverts *Robinson Crusoe*'s intentions and politics. For example, Coetzee's novel critiques the politics of the colonialist era by applying textual techniques which totally differ from those inherent in a realistic novel such as *Robinson Crusoe*. In other words, *Foe* belongs to the postmodern genre, while *Robinson Crusoe* - a colonialist novel which depicts Crusoe's residence on a far-off island - is an account written in the realistic mode inherent to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the end, Coetzee did not revise but only applied the work of Byron and Wordsworth, while (*Foe*) can be defined as a parody or rewritten version of the colonial novel. To that end, Coetzee does not use but abuse a whole novel in order to get his point across. In this respect, Bongie suggests that:

[F]oe's incessant return to the sign of its own blindness, its parasitic attachment to once-told stories that it re-cites and re-vises without in any overt way overturning, is eminently deconstructionist in its epistemological concerns and its insistence on the necessity of inhabiting the very thing (that is, the language of colonialism, or, in Derrida's case, of metaphysics) that it puts into question.<sup>86</sup>

As I have already noted, most postmodern texts are receptive of the notion that a text does not contain one meaning but a whole range of possible meanings. This idea was first introduced by the french philosopher Jacques Derrida as *Différance* or *Deconstruction*. By rewriting and rethinking an 18<sup>th</sup> century novel, Coetzee highlights the assumption that reality can be represented by using different genres or approaches. In this respect, Coetzee opted to de-construct Defoe's novel by adjusting both its linguistic and thematical modes. For example, Bongie suggests that 'Coetzee's novel displays a series of tantalizingly obvious similarities to and divergences from its original model [...].'<sup>87</sup> One of these distinctions consists of presenting Cruso as a figure that houses another temperament than Defoe's Crusoe. Coetzee's Cruso is indifferent to the life outside of the island, whereas Defoe's Crusoe wants to get away from the island. Secondly, according to Bongie<sup>88</sup>, both

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85 Douthwaite, 2001, p. 157 quoted in Beard, Margot, "Lessons from the Dead Masters: Wordsworth and Byron in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*", *English in Africa*, nr. 1, 2007, p. 60

86 Bongie, Chris, "'Lost in the maze of Doubting": J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* and the Politics of (Un)Likeness", In: *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, nr. 2, 1993, p. 262

87 Bongie, C, p. 264

88 Bongie, C, p. 264



Friday and Susan constitute a radical move-away from Defoe's characters. For example, Friday is unable to speak, while his counterpart is an Indian who speaks a 'comically expressive pidgin'<sup>89</sup> and because Susan subverts the masculine world in *Robinson Crusoe*, by representing a sort of 'feminist "revisionism"'.<sup>90</sup> These examples also indicate some of the remarks I made about the status of historiographic metafiction. In particular they show that the reader needs to keep in mind how the original was written. The contemporary novel therefore stands in a dialogue with its canonic counterpart.

As a result, Coetzee's *Foe* contains enough proof to regard it as a typical postmodern de-constructive narrative. Moreover, as this de-construction is forcefully present, critics such as Kossew align *Foe* with those novels that contain counter-discursive strategies. Coetzee deliberately chose to 'write back'<sup>91</sup> and therefore criticize Daniel Defoe's novel, because the apparatus present in the colonial era did not remain in force once the imperial legislation had laid down its arms and because the ideas contingent in the former are subject to great criticism in post-colonial times. Consequently, Coetzee adopts de-constructive strategies – which are inherent to postmodern fiction – in order to refute Defoe's ideas.

Counter-discursive strategies are less poignantly present in *Disgrace*, as is evidenced by David Lurie's continuing interest in the Romantics of the European continent. As a result, both Coetzee and David do not as much criticize the tendencies of Imperial fiction. (*D*) neither refutes nor adjusts the master narratives contained in Wordsworth or Byron's poems. However, it deserves to be defined as a novel that implements the Masters' work into a post-apartheid setting. (*D*) is less de-constructive and as a result, less intertextual and postmodern. However, some intertextuality is present as its title is a reflection of some of the ideas contained in the poems of both poets. According to Beard, '[B]yron's self-exile was part of his perceived 'disgrace', as Lurie reminds his students, by stating that "[Byron] went to Italy to escape a scandal [which] affected not only Byron's life but the way in which his poems were received by the public".<sup>92</sup> Coetzee has thus grounded Lurie in Byron's character and his 'disgraceful' situation. They are also very similar because both characters can be defined as seducers. Furthermore, in *Disgrace* there are other characters which are also representative of the characters in Wordsworth and Byron's work. For example, Melanie is a clear impression of Byron's mistress *Teresa Guiccioli*, and Lucy a print of Wordsworth's Lucy. In the end, (*D*)'s intertextual potential is only relevant in order to create a basis for the depiction of the characters. However, it does have postmodern qualities, only its reference to other texts does not function in a de-constructive manner.

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89 Bongie, C, p. 264.

90 Bongie, C, p. 264.

91 Widdowson, P., p. 501

92 Beard, p. 63.

Nevertheless, some critics argue that Coetzee's *Disgrace* is a reworking of the 'pastoral novels'<sup>93</sup> of the 1930's and 1940's. Consequently, it does have some traits of a counter-discursive novel. However, Coetzee's novel also shows some aspects which were characteristic of these farm novels and in this sense it adheres less to counter-discursive strategies. For example, Coetzee asserts in *White Writing*<sup>94</sup> that the pastoral novel or *plaasroman*<sup>95</sup> denies the presence of the black slave and only accepts the appearance of the white farmer.<sup>96</sup> This failure to represent the colonial other is also forcefully present in *Disgrace* and is, as repeatedly signalled, a typical strategy of postmodernism. The idea that the story is continually focused on David Lurie and not focalized through the eyes of any of the black characters reinforces this assumption. Furthermore, Coetzee states that in this era South Africa was already in search for a language that could represent its nature and landscape.<sup>97</sup> These novels were therefore concerned with the idea of representation as well. Moreover, Coetzee states that South Africa is in search for a language 'in which Africa will naturally express itself, that is to say, a language in which there is no split between signifier and signified, and [in which] things are their names.'<sup>98</sup> With respect to such an assumption, he points to the *plaasroman* of Van den Heever. Coetzee argues that this type of novel is concerned both with 'romanticism' and with 'realism'.<sup>99</sup> The same terms could be applicable to Coetzee's novel. However I am of the opinion that romanticism should be replaced with postmodernism, because this analysis has proven that some scenes and formal aspects are inherently postmodern. Nevertheless, Coetzee's novel still continues to hover in between realism and postmodernism, which is indicative of the fact that the signifier cannot always be equated with the signified. This assumption differentiates Coetzee's novel from the farm novels of the 1930's. However, there are more differences between the two traditions than meets the eye. This has led critics to suggest that Coetzee's *Disgrace* is in fact written in the 'antipastoral tradition'<sup>100</sup>:

In *Disgrace*, Coetzee seems to have relinquished this earlier dream of a maternal and deconstructive pastoral mode. In the "new South Africa" of the novel, the urge to stake one's claim, to own, and to procreate is forcefully present. Hunger and denial are displaced by desire, and desire is figured (appropriately, since the plot concerns

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93 Coetzee, John Maxwell, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1988, pp. 5-6

94 Coetzee, J.M. *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 1988.

95 Coetzee, *White Writing*, p. 63

96 Coetzee, *White Writing*, p. 5

97 Coetzee, *White Writing*, p. 7

98 Coetzee, *White Writing*, p. 9

99 Coetzee, *White Writing*, p. 112

100 Coetzee, *White Writing*, p. 81

prostitution, sexual harassment, and rape) by way of phallic tropes-arrows, snakes, and the like.<sup>101</sup>

This statement suggests that Coetzee adjusted the thematics of the pastoral mode, by inserting a male narrator and focalizer and by pushing the female characters to the background. Furthermore, problems such as hunger and poverty which caused the farmers to move to the city, are not present in post-apartheid South Africa. That is why Coetzee makes his protagonist move from city to country instead of the opposite. In a similar way Barnard states that the 'old pastoral' distinction between country and city is subject to 'erosion'<sup>102</sup>. This causes people to move freely from city to country out of desire instead of poverty. Coetzee's *Disgrace* could be regarded as a counter-discursive narrative because of the fact that the certainties of the pastoral tradition are put into question and deconstructed. It is also counter-discursive because of the fact that a feeling of desire is present throughout the narrative, in contrast with the negativity that reigned during the previous epoch. In this respect, Barnard states that, '[if one focuses on] the picturesque figure of Lucy Lurie, doing peasant labor in her fields, among the flowers and the bees, *Disgrace* becomes legible as a potentially positive recasting of the tropes of the South African pastoral.'<sup>103</sup> In conclusion, Coetzee's *Disgrace* works in a counter-discursive way by rewriting the pastoral novels of the beginning of the twentieth century. However, Coetzee also works with normal intertextuality because he grounds his characters on the themes and characters inherent in Wordsworth and Byron's work. Nonetheless, in *Foe* Coetzee is even more preoccupied with rewriting colonial history and fiction. Next I will examine which formal aspects are characteristic of Coetzee's novels, and determine in what way Coetzee works with concepts such as coherence, simultaneous narration and fourth wall narration.

### 3. Fiction and representation

#### 3.1. Postmodern or other formal techniques?

Apart from investigating the general characteristics of postmodern texts, we also need to analyse these novels on a textual and formal level. As already mentioned, Coetzee is known for writing in the postmodern mode. However, in more recent works, there have been critics who have qualified his work differently. In other words, his recent writings have adopted other strategies, because Coetzee may have felt the need to adapt his work to the social and political changes in

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101Barnard, p. 205

102Barnard, p. 206

103Barnard, p. 220

South Africa. However, some critics still believe that Coetzee uses postmodern approaches, which contrast with realist and modernist techniques:

[t]his kind of novel self-consciously uses the trappings of what Fish calls “rhetorical” literary representation (omniscient narrators, coherent characterization, plot closure) [and that] this is what I mean by the typically contradictory postmodern exploitation and subversion of the familiar staples of both realist and modernist fiction.<sup>104</sup>

At first sight, this statement indicates some of the elements that will be of interest to this analysis, for example the type of narrator, the plot and the way in which the novelist employs characterization. In these respects, postmodern novels are mostly devoid of an omniscient narrator and resist a coherent characterization. Furthermore, most critics acknowledge that, in contrast to eighteenth-century narratives, both the continuity and closure of postmodern novels is undermined.<sup>105</sup> So these novels are above all fragmentary in nature, an aspect which I intend to explain in what follows. Furthermore, I will outline some of the techniques which are inherent to postmodern writing and investigate to what degree Coetzee applies these in his work.

### 3.1.1. Coherence and fragmentation

As I have just mentioned, postmodern novels resist a so-called 'master narrative'.<sup>106</sup> *Foe* is a good example of this concept, because it tends to resist an all-encompassing narrative. In this respect, it consists of four parts which all have different properties, whether it be the narrator, the narratee or the characters. Lidan Lin indicates this in the following quote:

[t]his insistence is evident in the manner in which Coetzee structures *Foe*. First, unlike Coetzee's other novels, which invariably contain a single narrative, the novelistic space of *Foe* is occupied not only by a narrative (Parts I and II) but by a metanarrative (Part III) which serves as a commentary on the production of the former.<sup>107</sup>

In contrast with some of the ideas in this statement, Coetzee's *Disgrace* has a single

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104Barnard, p. 45

105Barnard, p. 59

106Hutcheon, p. 5

107Lidan, p. 3

narrative, and is constantly focalized through its protagonist, David Lurie. Cornwell identifies this mode as a more conventional practice: '[t]he narrative situation of *Disgrace* is conventional: because an authorial narrator tells a story that is consistently focalized through the consciousness of the protagonist, David Lurie.'<sup>108</sup> However, many critics have suggested that the narrator acts according to the characteristics of a 'limited omniscient narration'<sup>109</sup>, which in contrast to the omniscient authorial narrator suggested by Cornwell, is a less conventional type of narrator. Furthermore, the novel uses a technique called the 'stream of consciousness', which means the reader is constantly aware of the protagonist's thoughts. Nevertheless, on account of the limited focalization, on some occasions the reader cannot enter the minds of other characters. Particularly the scene of Lucy's rape confronts us with this idea, because when David is locked up by the assailants, we can only enter David's mind. Therefore, we are not able to enter Lucy's psyche and David constantly wants to know what happened to his daughter. Consequently, this limitation blocks our view of racial and gender related problems in post-apartheid South Africa, because neither the reader nor the protagonist are able to occupy the female position. Coetzee thus presents the reader with a narrow focus on South Africa's socio-political situation.

As I have already indicated, *Foe* is a rather fragmented novel, because it is structured as a narrative with four different parts. I will proceed with explaining how these chapters are structured. For instance, the first chapter is structured as a 'travelogue'<sup>110</sup>, in which Susan acts as a homodiegetic narrator. The story is continually focalized through her viewpoint, as she tells the story of her arrival on the island, and her relationship with Friday and Crusoe. Furthermore, this chapter has an oral quality to it and it is written in the first person. As a result, it seems to be written directly for the audience, who acts as the receiver of the story.<sup>111</sup>

The whole second chapter is written in the epistolary mode and again the narrative is focalized through Susan's eyes. Just as is the case in (*D*), we could define it as a stream of consciousness of Susan's thoughts. She wants Foe to know her every little thought, by sending him a letter. Therefore, the primary addressee of this chapter is Foe, while the reader is only the secondary addressee. However, Foe does not return her letters, so in this chapter there is no real form of dialogue. Only on some occasions does Susan drop out of this epistolary form, for example, when she is talking to the captain at the harbour or to the little girl who calls herself Susan Barton. There is little dialogue because of the form in which Susan writes her story and because she spends most

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108 Cornwell, Gareth. "Realism, Rape, and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*". In: *Critique*, nr. 4, 2002, p. 312

109 Longmuir, Anne, "Coetzee's *Disgrace*", In: *Explicator*, nr.2, 2007, p. 119 ; An omniscient narrator is mostly characteristic of a text in the realistic mode.

110 Macaskill Brian. & Colleran Jeanne, "Reading History, Writing Heresy: The Resistance of Representation and the Representation of Resistance in J. M. Coetzee's "*Foe*"", In: *Contemporary Literature*, nr. 3, 1992, p. 452

111 VanZanten Gallagher, *A story of south africa*, p. 186-187

of her time with Friday, who is of course mute and therefore cannot speak with her.<sup>112</sup> This is different in chapter three, because Susan is able to establish a dialogue with Foe.

Furthermore, as is the case in (*D*), the third chapter evinces the use of this limited omniscient focalization. In other words, Coetzee opted for including a first-person narrator who speaks in the past tense.<sup>113</sup> However, in contrast with the monologue of the second chapter, here Susan engages in continual dialogue with Foe. She does this in order to negotiate with Foe the subject of her story. Moreover, just as in the beginning of the novel, she does not direct her story to a particular character, as only the reader serves as the audience in this chapter.<sup>114</sup>

In the final part, the narrator (who speaks in the first person) stands outside of the story. In other words, Coetzee uses a heterodiegetic narrator to tell his story. In this respect, there is some confusion in the ultimate chapter, because the reader does not know if the story is narrated by Susan Barton or another narrator. Only the last page of the novel reveals that it is not Susan Barton who is speaking but a neutral, omniscient narrator:

[S]usan Barton and her dead captain, fat as pigs in their white nightclothes, their limbs extending stiffly from their trunks, their hands, puckered from long immersion, held out in blessing, float like stars against the low roof. I crawl beneath them.<sup>115</sup>

As a result, this chapter has a more realistic feel to it, because as Waugh states:

[r]ealism, [...] paradoxically functions by suppressing this dialogue. The conflict of languages and voices is apparently resolved in realistic fiction through their subordination to the dominant voice of the omniscient, godlike author.<sup>116</sup>

As a result, the appearance of a heterodiegetic, omniscient narrator differentiates this chapter from all other chapters: there is no real dialogue in realistic fiction and no voices are in conflict. There is only one narrator, and no other character to whom he/she speaks. The story is therefore not mediated through another instance, narrator or character. By integrating such a narrator, Coetzee adds an 'elusive' aspect to this novel, which contributes to the ambiguous ending of the final chapter. Furthermore, (*Foe's* fragmentary nature - which is apparent in the way Coetzee structures his

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112 Marshall.K, *Teaching the Postmodern: Fiction and Theory*, Routledge, 1992, p. 20

113 Macaskill & Collieran, p. 452

114 VanZanten Gallagher, p. 188

115 *Foe*, p. 157

116 Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 6

narrators, spatial and temporal structure - reflects the primary concern of Coetzee's writing in the 1980's, namely its preoccupation with the authority of the storyteller.<sup>117</sup> Especially the third and final chapter exemplify this position, because Susan wants to establish her authorship over Foe. And she wants her story to be told according to her 'truth' and her values. In the end, the use of a heterodiegetic narrator highlights the novel's elusive conclusion and leaves doubts about who has the authority over the novel's conclusion. Apart from analysing the fragmentary structure and focalization of these novels, I will now determine whether Coetzee makes use of a 'simultaneous present tense narration'<sup>118</sup> or if he uses a conventional retrospective narrative.

### 3.1.2. 'Simultaneous present tense'<sup>119</sup> or retrospective narration?

Some critics define *Disgrace's* narrative situation as a case of 'simultaneous present tense narration'<sup>120</sup>. As I have already mentioned, the story is consistently focalized through the viewpoint of the protagonist. However, in contrast to a conventional retrospective narration – which implies that the characters 'live now and tell later'<sup>121</sup> - this story uses a simultaneous present tense narration. We could define this as a narrative in which the narrator tells the events as they occur.<sup>122</sup> In this regard, DelConte explains that 'the narrating-I is [also] the experiencing-I.'<sup>123</sup> Consequently, this gives a sense of immediacy to the story<sup>124</sup>, because the narrator is describing the events while he/she is living them. Moreover, this mode brings the reader closer to the events and lets the audience in on minute details. An example illustrates my point:

[h]e carries her to the bedroom, brushes off the absurd slippers, kisses her feet, astonished by the feeling she evokes. Something to do with the apparition on the stage: [...]. She does not resist. All she does is avert herself: avert her lips, avert her eyes.<sup>125</sup>

This example evinces the use of a simultaneous narration, as it exemplifies the appearance of

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117 VanZanten Gallagher, p. 192

118 DelConte, p. 428

119 DelConte, p. 428

120 DelConte, p. 428

121 DelConte, Matt, "A Further study of present tense narration: the absentee narratee and four-wall present tense in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace*", In: *Journal of Narrative Theory*, nr. 3, 2007, p. 428

122 DelConte, p. 428

123 DelConte, p. 428

124 DelConte, pp. 428-429

125 *Disgrace*, p. 25

a heterodiegetic narrator: an instance who stands outside of the story while assuming total control and having full knowledge. However, in contrast to *Foe's* retrospective narration<sup>126</sup>: '[a]t last I could row no further. My hands were blistered, my back was burned (...)'<sup>127</sup> Coetzee's use of simultaneous present tense narration is not a conventional form of narrating. Because, as DelConte argues, 'it doesn't have a clear, real-world analogue.'<sup>128</sup> Moreover, this technique erases the difference between experiencing and narrating, which leaves no room for reflection for the reader or narrator. Therefore, the narrator is condemned to report, rather than to criticize or evaluate<sup>129</sup>, which is only possible in the mind of the readers.

If one takes a look at *Foe's* narrative – especially chapters one and three – this retrospective narration does have a 'real-world analogue'. Because in real life, one tends to speak of events that happened in the past by using the past tense. Moreover, past tense retrospection does allow for reflection.<sup>130</sup> For example, when Susan arrives on the island, she is totally de-hydrated and she thinks that Friday wants to eat her: '[h]e reached out and with the back of his hand touched my arm. He is trying my flesh, I thought, and let my head sink: I have come to an island of cannibals.'<sup>131</sup> Susan's words are thus rendered in the past tense, which allows her to reflect on the situation. This is much more difficult when speaking in the simultaneous present tense.

Next to time restrictions, simultaneous present tense narration also needs to be approached from a spatial point of view. For example, an author can eliminate the spatial difference between acting and telling<sup>132</sup>, which means that the narrator is also the 'I' who experiences the events at that particular moment. The narrative location also tends to shift as the novel progresses. For instance, in *Disgrace*, David Lurie has to move from the city to the farmland of the Eastern Cape. In a conventional novel, characterized by retrospective narration, there is no real evolution in the character's location.

However, *Foe* cannot be defined as a conventional retrospective narrative, because its structure is more episodic than conventional. In this respect, DelConte states that 'episodic narration [...] lies between retrospective and simultaneous narrations.'<sup>133</sup> The reason for this is that in some of *Foe's* chapters<sup>134</sup> retrospection exists *within* the episode, while the reader does not know what will occur *in between* the episodes.<sup>135</sup> *Foe* is a good example of this assumption because the location of the narrative shifts dramatically in between the chapters, as the characters move from the island to

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126 Narrator describing/telling events after they have occurred; DelConte, p. 428

127 *Foe*, p. 5

128 DelConte, p. 429

129 DelConte, p. 430

130 The noun 'retrospection' is derived from the verb 'to retrospect', which means: 'to look back on'.

131 *Foe*, p. 6

132 DeLConte, p. 430

133 DelConte, p. 430

134 Chapters I and III

135 DelConte, p. 430



England. In this regard, one cannot define *Foe* as a conventional narrative, because it has a slightly episodic structure.

A provisional conclusion of both novel's narrative structure has shown that *Foe* displays some conventional traits. Albeit this is only the case in one or two of its chapters. For example, the first and third part exemplify a dialogic structure, which is inherent to conventional narratives. Furthermore, both chapters are written in the past tense as well, which is also characteristic of conventional retrospective narration. However, in the epistolary account and the last chapter there is no apparent dialogue. On the one hand, *Foe* evinces characteristics which bring it closer to a postmodern novel<sup>136</sup>. On the other hand it is conventional because of using a conventional narrative structure. *Disgrace* however, displays some postmodern characteristics throughout the whole novel. These range from using simultaneous present tense narration to using limited focalization. However, there exists some controversy on this, because some critics believe *Disgrace* has an authorial narrator, which is typical for a conventional story. Next, I will explain how both novels deal with concepts such as the 'absentee narratee' and the idea of a 'four-wall present tense' narration.

### 3.1.3. 'Absentee narratee'<sup>137</sup> and 'four-wall present tense'<sup>138</sup>

The appearance of a simultaneous narration in *Disgrace* also implies that both the narrator and narratee can be present at the moment of narration. However, in most simultaneous present tense narrations this is impossible, because the narratee cannot always be present when the narrator speaks.<sup>139</sup> Nonetheless, some novels do show evidence of a present or absent narratee, while others do not display any clue as to whether a narratee is present. For example, *Disgrace* is a typical simultaneous narrative and also evinces enough information to determine whether the narratee is present. These assumptions can be grouped under the header of what DelConte defines as the 'absentee narratee'<sup>140</sup>, which entails that the narratee belongs to the ontology of the narrator's world. However, the narrative structure cannot always guarantee the possibility of his/her appearance.

In contrast to an ontological narratee, the audience or reader can function as a narratee as well. DelConte defines this as 'an extradiegetic audience'<sup>141</sup>. Furthermore, because of the absence of a narratee, the audience gains a closer position to the narrative. Therefore, the reader acquires more access to the story. However the idea of an extradiegetic narratee is not directly of interest to this

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136 In chapters II and IV

137 DelConte, p. 431

138 DelConte, p. 434

139 DelConte, p. 431

140 DelConte, p. 433

141 DelConte, p. 433

analysis. What is of interest though, is the appearance of the ontological narratee and as such, only in the second chapter of *Foe* the ontological narratee does not appear on scene. In other words, Susan acts as the narrator and Foe is her narratee. However, because Foe resides in another place, he is not present on scene. Nevertheless, the existence of a narratee is still clear cut. In the remaining chapters an ontological narratee is always present, which means that in general, *Foe* distances itself from a postmodern novel. In the same way, such a narratee is continually present in *Disgrace*

Furthermore, DelConte defines a third and final characteristic, which he calls the 'four-wall present tense narration'.<sup>142</sup> This type of narration he equates with a 'heterodiegetic present tense' narration.<sup>143</sup> DelConte defines the four-wall present tense as a narrative that places the extradiegetic narratee (or reader) and the narrator on a different scale. Furthermore, he contrasts this narrative technique with the idea of an absentee narratee, by explaining that a four-wall present tense narrative draws the reader into the story, because it reduces the distance between the audience and the narrative world. In contrast, the four-wall present tense extends the difference between narrative world and ontological narratee. Similarly, DelConte states that 'the narratee is reminded that he/she is unable to interact with those events.'<sup>144</sup>

The effect that follows from this technique is one of frustration. This idea is present in both *Disgrace* and *Foe*, because in the former Coetzee depicts Lurie as a frustrated person, both on a sexual as on a social level.<sup>145</sup> Whereas *Foe* is all about the inability to open Friday's mouth and the inability to break his silence. The difference lies in the way this frustration is structured in both novels. For example, in *Disgrace* Coetzee applies DelConte's four-wall present tense technique to convey this frustration. In the most compelling scene, both the narrator and narratee are cut off from the narrative world: David is locked up in one of the house's rooms, while his daughter is violently raped by three black South Africans. DelConte states that '[d]avid is physically barred from the events during the assault.'<sup>146</sup> The reason for this stems from the idea that the story is structured through David's viewpoint. Therefore, the reader is also confined to David's focalization and encounters a similar sense of separation. The same is true for David's appearance in the disciplinary hearing. Graham suggests that 'during the disciplinary hearing [...] Melanie's account never reaches the reader, and Lurie, who refuses to defend himself, is accused of being "fundamentally evasive".'<sup>147</sup> Nevertheless, some critics disagree with these views, as they argue that 'the viewer/reader is implicated in pornographic violence [...]'.<sup>148</sup> Graham states that 'whereas the rape of

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142 DelConte, p. 434

143 DelConte, p. 434

144 DelConte, p. 435

145 DelConte, p. 441

146 DelConte, p. 443

147 Graham, Lucy Valerie, "Reading the Unspeakable: Rape in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*", In: *Journal of Southern African Studies*, nr. 2, Jun. 2003, p. 433

148 Graham, p. 442

Lucy remains off stage, Melanie's violation is 'luridly' represented via Lurie [...].<sup>149</sup> As a result, in the first part of the novel, the reader does have access to what happens "on stage". However, Graham is inconsistent with her own opinions: '[...] in the paragraph beginning "not rape, not quite that" the reader's perspective is destabilised, such that the distance between narrative voice and 'focalizer' collapses.'<sup>150</sup> As such, these two statements leave us with doubt about the way Coetzee represents Melanie's abuse and consequently it is not clear whether the audience really has access to this violent scene.

A similar sense of frustration is noticeable in chapter two of *Foe*. In this case, frustration arises out of the inability to communicate with Foe. For instance, Susan sends him letters but does not receive any letter in return. Susan finds herself distanced from her narratee and because of Foe's stubbornness, she is not able to interact with him. In contrast to *Disgrace*, chapters one, two and four are all devoid of a four-wall present tense narration. The narrator and narratee are therefore not cut off from the story and its characters. This assumption I intend to explain by providing some particular examples.

For instance, in the first chapter – which is an account of Susan's arrival on the island – she can constantly interact with other characters. So there is no sense of separation whatsoever and Susan finds herself on the same ontological level as the other characters. Similarly, because this is an account produced for an external audience, the reader and the narrative are not separated and the spectator of this chapter is subject to the words and actions of the characters. On some occasions Susan informs the reader of some particular details: '[this is] the spade with which Crusoe levelled his terraces (I shall have more to say of the terraces later) [...].'<sup>151</sup> The purpose of this chapter consists of introducing the reader to Susan's actions and her whereabouts.

The encounter between Susan and Foe in chapter three operates in a similar manner. The narrator or focalizer (Susan) is not separated from other characters. This leaves the reader implicated in the story, because there is no 'fourth wall' that bars the narrator or audience from the other characters, such as Friday and Foe. Therefore, chapter three does not evoke a feeling of frustration. Nevertheless, the final chapter foregrounds the use of a simultaneous present tense narration, which brings the reader closer to the events. However, this effect does not go hand in hand with a fourth-wall technique, because there are no real characters in the final scene. As such, the narrator and audience cannot be seceded from the narrative world. Nevertheless, a sense of distance is created because Coetzee uses a narrator who stands outside of the story. In other words, the focalization through Susan Barton's eyes in the three preceding chapters, is replaced by a

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149 Graham, p. 442

150 Graham, p. 443

151 *Foe*, p. 15

heterodiegetic narrator. The use of this narrator creates a sensation of confusion for the reader, because Coetzee provides no real indication of the narrator's identity. However, in comparison to *Foe*, the whole second part of *Disgrace* is marked by David's frustration, which is caused by the fact that he is not able to interfere with his daughter's activities.<sup>152</sup> This inability to interact could also be indicative of social or political problems:

[D]isgrace examines the effects of colonization on the colonizers rather than the colonized, and ultimately it wants readers (especially Western readers) to struggle with the fact that we cannot control the on-going ramifications of colonization.<sup>153</sup>

This example learns us that David's inability to change his daughter's situation could potentially act as a metaphor for the larger socio-political situation of the South African colonization. Furthermore, as Delconte argues, this novel investigates the consequences of the colonization for the colonizer. On this point both novels differ, because *Foe* investigates the situation of the colonized South African and not – as is portrayed in *Disgrace* – the consequences for the colonizer. In conclusion, Coetzee magnificently portrays some of the thematic distinctions between these two novels by using different narrative techniques. In *Disgrace* Coetzee chose to use a wall that separates the narratee from the narrative world. Consequently, the narratee is frustrated, because he/she is not able to alter history's course. In *Foe* the narrative world does not block the view of the narratee on South Africa's history. However, in contrast to *Disgrace*, not the colonizer is at its centre but the colonized. Apart from using some specific narrative techniques, Coetzee also uses some of the properties which Hassan defined as typical characteristics of a postmodern text. To that end, I will explain how Coetzee uses concepts such as 'confusion', 'disruption', 'closure' and 'contradiction' and determine in what way this makes his novels postmodern.

#### 3.1.4. The disruptive quality of postmodern works

Confusion and disruptions in the narrative structure are typical postmodern techniques. These qualities are especially noticeable in *Disgrace's* storyline, which leaves the reader confused and alienated. In *Foe* however, Coetzee does not actively display any of these techniques. As a result, the reader and narrator are less estranged from their textual surroundings. *Disgrace's*

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152 Graham, p. 443

153 Graham, p. 443

disruptive qualities are also obvious in the way Coetzee makes use of the 'free indirect discourse', which according to Knapp<sup>154</sup> effaces the distinction between the story's narrator and focalizer. As a result, the reader encounters great difficulties when evaluating this novel, and this leads to confusion. In this regard, Knapp refers to the many 'misreadings'<sup>155</sup> of Coetzee's novel. However, according to some critics, these misreadings can be rectified by defining the novel's narrative mode, which according to Knapp is not realist, because the realist mode aligns itself with an occidental 'model'.<sup>156</sup> Knapp also argues that this realist model cannot be used to counter the colonizer's viewpoints on literature, because this apparatus is innate to western literary society.

Furthermore, these misconceptions mostly lead to severe criticism, because many critics accuse Coetzee of being racist. *Disgrace* has largely been misunderstood, exactly because of Coetzee's free indirect style. Knapp argues that this technique is also applied by historians who mostly use their work to shield themselves off from criticism. Coetzee creates the same effect by limiting the difference between focalizer and narrator. As a result, many western scholars have misread it, because they have associated this novel with western realistic models. Coetzee however, resists the appropriative behaviour of these critics by deliberately using a free indirect speech. Moreover, this technique points to a problem for both the novelist and historian, namely that there exists uncertainty over 'who says what'<sup>157</sup>. In the end, Coetzee is largely misunderstood because of this confusion. For example, Sarvan defines *Disgrace* as a 'first-person narrative'<sup>158</sup>, which leaves the reader with only the words of this 'egocentric'<sup>159</sup> protagonist. As a result, many critics have aligned David Lurie's thoughts with Coetzee's perspective. However, Sarvan argues that a third-person narrator is present as well. The same is true of *Foe*, however, the difference with *Disgrace* lies in the fact that Coetzee decided to include a first-person narrator instead of a third-person narrator. In this respect, Fludernik states that realist fiction is mostly written in the 'first-person mode', a technique which is omnipresent in Coetzee's *Foe*. In *Disgrace* the narrator speaks in the third-person, which many critics see as less inherent to realistic fiction. These critics have also indicated the appearance of a limited omniscient narrator. However, according to other critics, the narrator in *Disgrace* could also be an omniscient authorial narrator, who knows and controls the narrative. This type of narrator is also typical for conventional novels. Consequently, there exists some confusion over what kind of narrator is present in Coetzee's post apartheid novel. Next, I will determine whether Coetzee is prone to use closure, which is typical for conventional forms of fiction.

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154 Knapp, Adrian, *The Past Coming to Roost in the Present*, Stuttgart, ibidem – Verlag, 2006, p. 81

155 Knapp, p. 82

156 Knapp, p. 82

157 Knapp, p. 82

158 Sarvan, Charles, "Disgrace: A Path to Grace?", In: *World Literature Today*, nr. 1, 2004, p. 26

159 Sarvan, p. 26

### 3.1.5. Open or closed endings?

Postmodern works normally resist being characterized as a closed and finalized story. However, Coetzee positions *Foe* in between the ideas of closure and 'open-endings', because on a metaphorical level, the narrator resolves the symbolicity that is represented through Friday's body by stating that 'bodies are their own signs.'<sup>160</sup> Finally, Friday can be represented, because Coetzee equates the signifier with the signified, which means Friday does not stand for 'something other'. However, the ending remains symbolic, even if the spell of muteness is lifted.

Nevertheless, on a narrative level, no real closure is apparent, because Coetzee does not provide a continuation for the events of the third chapter. According to Foe, Susan must 'teach him a'<sup>161</sup>, but Coetzee does not reveal if she ever succeeded in learning Friday to speak. Moreover, closure is also closely connected with the idea of 'rupture'. This is evident in the way Coetzee breaks off the third chapter by introducing a wholly unknown narrator and by effacing all characters except Friday. Macaskill and Colleran suggest that Coetzee 'dissolves all previously established authorities [and] offers in its place a substance and a silence.'<sup>162</sup> In the end, this silence is resolved only on a symbolical level, by opening Friday's mouth and allowing a 'slow stream, without breath, without interruption [to come through].'<sup>163</sup> In other words, Coetzee remains vague when bringing his novels to a conclusion and also self-consciously acknowledges this in the last but one sentence of *Foe*: '[i]t runs [...] soft and cold, dark and unending [...].'<sup>164</sup> In this case, the reader cannot be satisfied, because Coetzee leaves open a whole range of possibilities. In the same way Mackaskill and Colleran argue that '[*Foe*] does not offer the satisfaction of fulfillment, [because] it ends exasperatingly.'<sup>165</sup> Kossew recognizes this as well, as she states that *Foe* is typically postmodernist because it defies 'the satisfactions of closure'.<sup>166</sup>

The same ideas are true for *Disgrace*. For instance, when Lucy is pregnant of her child, Coetzee does not explain what the consequences will be for both David and his daughter. However, just as in *Foe*, Coetzee ends the story in symbolical manner, because David has to reach a state of personal absolution. This obliges him to confess and make up for past deeds. To that end, David will have to learn to set aside his egocentric temperament and try to establish a relationship with 'the other'.<sup>167</sup> In this case, the other is representative of either the black or female population. But in the

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160 *Foe*, p. 157

161 *Foe*, p. 152

162 Macaskill & Colleran, p. 21

163 *Foe*, p. 157

164 *Foe*, p. 157

165 Macaskill & Colleran, p. 21

166 Kossew, p. 190

167 Haraway, Donna, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, people and Significant Otherness*. Chicago, Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003, p. 3

end, the reader learns that David is unable to link up with these people and that is why Coetzee connects David symbolically with the fate of the animals, more particularly the dogs. By the end of the novel, David has learned to put down these animals with a sense for love and compassion. As a result, David reaches a symbolical absolution, which means that he has to learn 'to start at ground level. [...] "Like a dog".'<sup>168</sup> Lucy's statement learns us that the dog is a metaphor for David's search for absolution:

[t]he concluding irresolution of *Disgrace* depends on a kind of ontological empathy, or sympathetic vibration, between dogs and humans. More precisely, the erotics of engulfment and the vertiginous trace of bestiality informing the final tableau depend on an uncanny intimacy—an interchangeability both fetishistic and farcical—between dogs and women.<sup>169</sup>

Cooper's statement echoes what I have already outlined above, namely that postmodernism typically resists closure. Furthermore, Cooper aligns the symbolic nature of the novel's ending with an ontological question, which signifies that David is in search of his true identity and existence. Once this state of mind is reached, he will be able to feel empathy for a dog, which can also be extrapolated to empathy for women. According to Zembylas, Lurie has to 'relinquish his care of the lame dog, sacrificing the emotional investment he has made in it, [and as a result] Lurie [may] find some reconciliation with himself.'<sup>170</sup>

Nonetheless, on a thematical level Coetzee does not provide answers to put the story to an end. In other words, both *Foe* and *Disgrace* resist a thematical closure, because not all events and occurrences are clarified and concluded as thoroughly as needed. It is only through providing particular 'images' that Coetzee creates a sense of absolution. These figures are in most cases of a metaphorical nature. For instance, Friday's mouth could be a symbol for the liberation of colonized people and Coetzee also intends to turn David into a 'dog-man'. In this respect, both books remain postmodern, exactly because the endings are symbolical in nature. Particularly this symbolism distinguishes these novels from rather realistic novels such as *Robinson Crusoe* and points out the difficulties concerning representation. I intend to clarify this assumption by providing some telling examples from both novels.

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168 *Disgrace*, p. 205

169 Cooper, Pamela, "Metamorphosis and Sexuality: Reading the Strange Passions of *Disgrace*", In: *Research in African Literatures*. nr. 4, 2005, p. 36

170 Zembylas, Michalinos, "Bearing Witness to the Ethics and Politics of Suffering: J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, Inconsolable Mourning, and the Task of Educators", In: *Studies in philosophy and education : an international quarterly*, nr. 3, 2008, p. 3

### 3.1.6. The 'unpresentable'<sup>171</sup>

With respect to the previous assumptions, *Foe* is a good example of such a tendency, because in this novel the colonized South African remains in the background. These people are not represented adequately and that is why Coetzee deliberately establishes Friday as a black South African who has lost his tongue. As a result, the remainder of the novel consists of a struggle to make Friday speak. Furthermore, the idea that reality is not representable, stems from the idea that society is inherently unstable. Stouck suggests that because of this instability the 'psychology of the individual remains radically inaccessible, [and] that it is not possible to know and describe accurately what another individual feels or thinks.'<sup>172</sup> Coetzee is a master in 'not representing' the psychology of some of his characters. In *Disgrace* both the reader and protagonist are unable to access Lucy's mind, because she refuses to yield what precisely happened during her supposed 'gang-rape'; moreover, she refuses to be controlled by her father, because she wants to take control over her own faith and future. Coetzee's refusal to represent the psychology of the characters is a direct result of 'experimental'<sup>173</sup> games with narrative and storytelling. These are typical as well of the growing 'complexity'<sup>174</sup> of the postmodern paradigm. Furthermore, Stouck argues that the impossibility in representing reality is directly connected with 'a lack of dialogue'<sup>175</sup>. For instance, David in *Disgrace* and Susan in *Foe* do not readily engage in any form of communication and therefore do not know what the other characters feel or think. Susan is not able to communicate with Friday because of physical and ideological barriers. Similarly, David encounters great difficulties in suggesting his opinions to either the black community or his daughter. Nevertheless, when Coetzee does proceed with conventional representation, his fiction shows a tendency to place elements in opposition, which is also typical for postmodern novels.

### 3.1.7. Postmodernism and contradiction

With respect to the previous assumptions, Hassan has stated that postmodern texts are ambiguous and full of ruptures. Hutcheon repeats these ideas as she speaks of elements such as the 'multiple', the 'provisional' and the 'different', which give the postmodern novel an indeterminate feel.<sup>176</sup> For instance, *Disgrace* ending is rather ambiguous, because the reader can interpret its ending in many different ways. Moreover, its ending seems to suggest that in South Africa, many

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171 Hassan, "Making Sense", p. 445

172 Stouck, David, "Sherwood Anderson and The Postmodern Novel", In: *Contemporary Literature*, nr. 3, 1985, p. 311

173 Stouck, p. 311

174 Stouck, p. 311

175 Stouck, p. 313

176 Williams, *Fuentes*, p. 213



possibilities towards renewal remain open. Barnard states that '[C]oetzee refuses to make his novel the critic's friend and reminds us that the radically new, both in literature and in society, will be impossible to predict and difficult to welcome.'<sup>177</sup> So, by structuring his novel in this way, Coetzee seems to reflect what goes on in post-apartheid South Africa.

However, apart from *Disgrace*'s conclusion, there are other scenes that are indicative of such a tendency. For example, Francis Strode suggests that there exists a radical opposition between on the one hand David, who occupies a situation of internal exile and is in search of personal salvation, and Petrus, the masculine 'patriarch'<sup>178</sup>, who finds himself in an upward social spiral.<sup>179</sup> Petrus's situation could be defined as a 'movement of return towards proprietary interests'.<sup>180</sup> While David finds himself in an 'exilic movement', because of his resignation from a position of 'power'.<sup>181</sup> In fact, Coetzee's novel is premised upon a series of contradictions and parallels, which determine at length the structure of this work. Moreover, Francis Strode speaks of Melanie, who is almost abused, and Lucy, who gets raped, as typical representatives of the new South Africa.<sup>182</sup> This parallel also points out a paradox which is imminent in this era and which is also typical for poststructural works: namely the distinction which exists between the way Petrus's 'improved standing' is defined in racial terms and the 'loss' of Lucy which could be explained in terms of 'gender' constructs.<sup>183</sup>

In the same way, these contradictory elements exist in *Foe*; however, the difference lies in the fact that this work is mostly concerned with such issues as authority and authorship. Coetzee represents this concern through a series of quarrels between some of the fundamental characters such as Cruso, Foe and Susan. Each of these characters form couples that negotiate a position of authority over *their* story. In *Disgrace*, Coetzee is not as thoroughly concerned with the idea that certain characters want to establish their authority over one another. It is less a postmodern novel because the distinctions that exist between certain characters are representative of a larger, realistic context. *Disgrace* could almost be defined as an allegory for South African post-apartheid. Nevertheless, *Foe* does show some of these traits: Coetzee for instance, depicts Susan as a 'victim of masculinist and patriarchal hegemony'.<sup>184</sup> However, for the most part it is concerned with authority issues and throughout the story Susan stands in radical opposition to Foe and Cruso. Especially Foe is a real rival to her narrative ambitions, as Susan will eventually have to give in to Foe, because of his superior oratorical skills.

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177 Barnard, p. 223

178 Barnard, p. 204

179 Francis Strode, Timothy, *The Ethics of Exile: Colonialism in the Fictions of Charles Brockden Brown and J.M. Coetzee*, New York & London, Routledge, 2005, p. 222

180 Francis Strode, p. 222

181 Francis Strode, p. 222

182 Francis Strode, p. 221

183 Francis Strode, p. 222

184 MacLeod, p. 5

A limited number of critics state that Coetzee has established *Foe* as:

[a] conflict between Susan and Foe, (which) is not primarily ethical or political so much as it is narratological, and, by extension, ontological, insofar as the ability to narrate the world determines a character's presence as a "substantial being . . . in the world" (131).<sup>185</sup>

*Foe* stands in stark contrast to *Disgrace* because Coetzee's intent was not to allegorize South Africa's post-colonial past, but to implement a quest for narratological supremacy. Nevertheless, as I have already pointed out with the example of Susan, an allegorical tendency is also obvious in the way that Friday's narrative is structured. In contrast to Susan and the other characters – who are all liable to 'gender constructs'<sup>186</sup> - Friday is subject to a postcolonial, allegorical reading, which Coetzee depicts by either introducing a deliberate or a fortuitous silence.<sup>187</sup> This muteness is also the principle of the the greatest distinction between Foe and the other characters, because Friday's silence prevents other characters of appropriating his story. Furthermore, they are also separated by a different set of 'discursive signals'.<sup>188</sup> Nevertheless, all characters (and the author) act on the same level, which means they are all subject to 'larger forces' and 'unable to communicate the specificity of their stories'.<sup>189</sup> In the end *Foe* operates somewhere in between a postmodern and allegorical novel, with the emphasis on the latter. However, both novels do show indications of this paradoxical and contradictory nature, which is inherent to postmodern literature. These novels only differ in the way these contradictions fit or do not fit in with the world outside the novel. They are either applicable to a textual reading or to an external master narrative.

### 3.1.8. Elliptic structures

Furthermore, the multiple appearance of paradoxes and contradictory elements grants these novels a fragmentary nature. This is what Williams previously defined as anti-totalization, and what Hassan sees as fragmentation. For instance, *Foe* can be characterized by a typical 'non-linear'<sup>190</sup> plot. In contrast, Coetzee opts for a linear narrative in *Disgrace*, which gives the book a rather realistic feel. Moreover, this linear structure, combined with the simultaneous present tense, approximates

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185 MacLeod, p. 5

186 MacLeod, p. 6

187 MacLeod, p. 6

188 MacLeod, p. 14

189 MacLeod, p. 14

190 Shukla, Anu & Shukla, S, *Multiple Contexts and Insights*, Indian Association for Studies in Contemporary Literature, 2003, p. 44

the reader to both the novel and the historical reality that surrounds it. Coetzee's ninth book adheres to a realistic, linear ordering, without interruptions that seem to give his other works a postmodern quality. To prove this is the case, I will provide a condensed overview of the story's chronology: the story starts off when David – the novel's protagonist – has arranged a meeting with one of his prostitutes (Soraya); later on, when this *relationship* turns sour he looks for a suitable replacement with the same name and similar looks. But he is not satisfied, because she cannot give him equal sexual pleasure. The first few chapters therefore, seem to adhere to a linear temporal and causal ordering. The same is true for the remaining pages of the first part: when David needs to satisfy his sexual desires, he accidentally, but not in-causally comes across one of his students. Melanie – with whom he has a sexual relationship – gets him into a lot of trouble, which eventually will lead to his resignation from the Cape Town University. In this regard, the temporal structure is not disrupted, because all events follow up according to a causal canvas.

Nevertheless, in one chapter Coetzee deviates from this linearity. Here, David's viewpoint gets blurred, because Lucy's assailants lock him up in the bathroom. However, subsequent to the scene of Lucy's rape – which has a disruptive and fragmentary quality to it – all linearity is restored. In fact, only this chapter disrupts the continuation of the novel. Coetzee's *Foe* has a fragmented structure, not only because it has four different chapters, but also because at the opening of each chapter Coetzee omits certain information. For instance, the opening lines are illustrative of an in-medias res quality: '[a]t last I could row no further. My hands were blistered, my back was burned, my body ached.'<sup>191</sup> Susan's words indicate that her actions are the continuation of a previous scene. However, the reader does not know what happened beforehand. Only later on Susan explains what happened before she came to the island: ' "[I]et me tell you my story," said I; "for I am sure you are wondering who I am and how I come to be here.'<sup>192</sup> Coetzee shows another example of this elliptic quality by letting Susan wonder how Friday's tongue was cut out. Here, *Foe* only gives a hunch of possible explanations:

Perhaps the slavers, who are Moors, hold the tongue to be a delicacy, " he said. "Or perhaps they grew weary of listening to Friday's wails of grief, that went on day and night. Perhaps they wanted to prevent him from ever telling his story: who he was, where his home lay, how it came about that he was taken. Perhaps they cut out the tongue of every cannibal they took as a punishment. How will we ever know the truth?"<sup>193</sup>

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191 *Foe*, p. 5

192 *Foe*, p. 10

193 *Foe*, p. 23

This passage clearly stresses that the characters are unable to attribute a rightful truth to this 'unjust' situation. Furthermore, it is illustrative of the typical fragmentary state of the postmodern novel, because the reader is left to guess the truth behind both Friday and Susan's story. The novel's fragmented state is even more apparent because of the epistolary format in which Coetzee has written this elusive chapter. Coetzee adheres to this non-linear format by structuring the second part as a series of letters, which are even more fragmentary because Foe never really responds to them. Both the reader and Susan are obliged to guess what response would be adequate in this sort of situation, in which Susan is desperate for a revision of her story. In short, the epistolary format causes a form of stasis in the narrative, which is caused by a lack of dialogue. Therefore the fictional time elapses a lot slower than in normal narrative.

The elliptic structure becomes even more apparent in the third chapter, which ends with the following words: ' "Is Friday learning to write?" asked Foe. "He is writing after a fashion," I said. "He is writing the letter *o*." "It is a beginning," said Foe. "Tomorrow you must teach him *a*." '194 After these words Coetzee cuts off the story, which causes that the reader will never know if Friday will be able to write and speak. Moreover, the last chapter, with its elusive narrator, does not end according to conventional norms; with respect to this, Denis Donoghue states that ' "[t]he end of the book is ambiguous, [and he asks himself] who is speaking, in the last few pages [...]" '195

Coetzee's fifth novel is thus written with a sense of ambiguity, not only because of its four-part structure, but also as a result of its many ellipses and omissions, which leave the reader eager for information. Contrastingly, Coetzee opted for a linear and causal ordering of *Disgrace's* narrative, which gives the story a realistic and mimetic feel.

### 3.2. A thematic reading

Apart from analysing formal characteristics, I will also analyse these novels through a thematic scope, by examining how Coetzee establishes temporal and geographical settings and how he works with repetitive scenes. Furthermore, I will determine in what way Coetzee implements political items in his fiction. To begin with, Cornwell states that *Disgrace* is a de-realized novel.<sup>196</sup> However, he comes to this conclusion only by analysing formal characteristics: namely the use of the present tense.<sup>197</sup> Later on, he contradicts this statement by positing that '[...] the representational

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194 *Foe*, p. 152

195 VanZanten Gallagher, p. 189

196 Cornwell, p. 313

197 Cornwell, p. 312

mode of the novel appears to be conventionally realist.<sup>198</sup> Cornwell comes to this conclusion because of his emphasis on the geographical and temporal location in which *Disgrace* is set. More specifically, he argues that the action is situated in real places – for example, on Lucy's farm close to the *Grahamstown-Kenton* road in the *Eastern Cape*<sup>199</sup> - or in real time, situated after the years of apartheid, in the year 1997 or 1998.<sup>200</sup>

### 3.2.1. Geographical and temporal setting

In a similar manner, *Foe* contains a range of existing geographical locations, going from the province of *Bahia* to the suburbs of *London*.<sup>201</sup> Furthermore, Coetzee chose the general setting to be *England* and more specifically *London*, while the first part of the novel is set on an island close to the Brazilian coastline. In the end, only one setting is fictional: namely the street called '*Clock Lane*'. On other occasions, Coetzee only provides the reader with clues regarding the geographical setting. For instance, Foe states that '[B]razil is hundreds of miles distant [...]'<sup>202</sup>, while Susan claims that the island was ' "[t]en days out from port".<sup>203</sup> In the end, one does not know with certainty on which island Susan passed her lonely and hungry days. Coetzee puts even more of an emphasis on geographical locations in *Disgrace*, which is evidenced by the appearance of a shipload of towns, streets or suburbs.<sup>204</sup> Only a minority of these does not refer to an existing location: '*The Cape Technical University*' and some proper names such as *Farodia Rassool* and *Manas Mathabane*. With respect to the previous assumptions, Watt argues that realistic fiction needs a 'plot' with 'particular characters' who 'act in particular circumstances'.<sup>205</sup> When reading *Disgrace*, only the temporal setting can be sufficiently determined, as it is a brutal account of the post-apartheid cruelty at the end of the 90's. Coetzee includes many proper names, which in normal circumstances are indicative of a 'particular identity'.<sup>206</sup> However, these surnames are only parables for real individuals in South

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198 Cornwell, p. 312

199 "Grahamstown". [Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grahamstown) 2009. Wikipedia. 16 april 2009.

<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grahamstown>>. ; "Kenton-on-Sea, Eastern Cape". *Ibidem*. 16 april 2009.

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenton-on-Sea,\\_Eastern\\_Cape](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenton-on-Sea,_Eastern_Cape)>. ; *Disgrace*, p. 3 ; "Eastern Cape". *Ibidem*. 16 april 2009. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern\\_Cape](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Cape)>.

200 Cornwell, p. 313

201 An overview of existing towns and places in *Foe*: Bahia, Long Acre, Clock Lane, Stoke Newington, Covent Garden, Deptford, Dalston market, Epping, Cheshunt, Bristol, Slough, Windsor, Berkshire, Marlborough, Trincomalee, Calicut, Kensington Row, Whitechapel, Tyburn, Newgate, Mile End Road, Paddington, Epping Forest.

202 *Foe*. p. 13

203 *Foe*, p. 10

204 All these names have real-life referents: Green Point, St George's street, Meerlust, Hout Bay, Hillbrow, Ducati, Oriental Plaza, Oudtshoorn, New Bethesda, SAPPI industries: "Alfeld", [Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfeld). 2009. Wikipedia, 22 may 2009. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfeld>>. Sotho, Xhosa, Rhodes University, Kenilworth, Erasmuskraal, Settlers Hospital, New Brighton, Van DeVenter street, Rondebosch Common, Torrance Road, Kwa Mashu, Dock Theatre, Signal Hill, Wild Coast, Donkin Square.

205 Watt, Ian, *The rise of the novel : studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1974, p. 15

206 Watt, p. 18

Africa and do not remit to real-life referents. However, I will go into greater detail on the inclusion of names and places in subsequent sections.

Furthermore, some critics assert that '[...] Coetzee does not express an overt political stance in his literature; [and that] he does not answer questions after public lectures; [and that] he does not write realistic fiction.'<sup>207</sup> Indeed, critics characterize his fifth and most postmodern novel as 'literally, "emotionally distant", lacking intensity and urgency, avoiding his previous "excruciatingly direct representations of politics of pain".'<sup>208</sup> However, critics argue that *Disgrace* 'merged as arguably his most realistic and political novel, set firmly within the post-apartheid present of South Africa. At the end of the twentieth century, it seemed that perhaps Gordimer and Coetzee had engaged in a paradigm shift [...].'<sup>209</sup> Nevertheless, Wright asserts that even if Coetzee included a whole range of geographical and historical references, his work can still be aligned with 'conceptual' and 'allegorical' readings.<sup>209</sup> His novels are sometimes conceived as 'parables' of the South African land, because Coetzee refuses to be read through a realistic and overtly political lens. Wright rightly suggests that by condensing political themes, Coetzee still is complicit in politics, because of voicing a motion of resistance against the traditional literary representations of South African 'artists'.<sup>210</sup> Even if *Disgrace* is loaded with geographical references, it can still be excluded from 'traditional understandings' (of both) 'postcolonial and postmodern writing.'<sup>211</sup>

### 3.2.2. Character analysis and repetitive scenes

Coetzee's novels also need to be defined by keeping South Africa's social situation in mind. For instance, Cornwell says of *Disgrace* that it is set in a time in which 'all voices are permitted to be heard [...]'.<sup>212</sup> Nevertheless, Cornwell argues that Coetzee is not only concerned with a realistic display.: 'the verisimilitude of (its) representation is not the purpose of [its] portrayal.'<sup>213</sup> He suggests that a growing allegorical (in the sense of symbolic) tendency is noticeable, which subverts the realistic reading of this narrative.

However, some critics state that this novel includes two different views at the same time: namely a realistic stance, which can be compared with David's point of view and on the other hand a symbolic reading, which according to Cornwell needs to be defined as allegorical and put on par

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207 Wright, L. Writing "Out of All the Camps": *J.M. Coetzee's Narratives of Displacement*. (Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group). New York. 2006. p. 1.

208 Van Zanten Gallagher, p. 191

209 Wright, p. 9; Wright, L, p. 10

210 Wright, p. 7

211 Wright, p. 14

212 Wright, p. 14

213 Wright, p. 14

with Lucy's views.<sup>214</sup> On a thematic level, both characters represent another opinion. For instance, when David fights the unwillingness of his daughter to report her case to the police, he aligns her thoughts and actions with the spirit of oppression of the past.<sup>215</sup> Lucy on the other hand, represents the allegorical part of the equation, because she refuses to admit the existence of violence in present-day South Africa. According to Cornwell, she acts as 'a parable about the necessary expiation of white guilt in post-1994 South Africa [...]'.<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, Cornwell defines Lucy's silence as an allegory for post-apartheid South Africa. However, Lucy does not remain silent at all times, because sometimes she is obliged to discuss and take action; in short, Cornwell aligns these moments with the realistic part of this equation.<sup>217</sup> Lucy's words seem appropriate here: 'I am a dead person and I do not know yet what will bring me back to life. All I know is that I cannot go away'.<sup>218</sup> Cornwell argues that her emotions need to be redistributed and that the problems in her life need to be discussed. Furthermore, he states that 'it is not impossible that we are being asked by Lucy's response to the rape incident in *Disgrace*, to ponder the wages of white historical sin and contemplate the costs of genuine national healing and reconciliation'.<sup>219</sup> However, he says the alignment of this parable with a mimetic viewpoint is not unproblematic. In the end, Lucy's views hover in between symbolic and realistic readings.

Furthermore, the novel's repetitive quality is not only appropriate for a larger socio-cultural context, it also applies to an intra-textual level. In other words, David's abuse of Melanie is reflected in the scene in which Lucy is abused by the three black offenders. Nonetheless, these two scenes are not identical in all aspects, because in the first part of the novel Coetzee represents Melanie's scene with more detail and depth, while Lucy's rape is not represented at all<sup>220</sup>. Coetzee renders Lucy's rape by imposing a symbolical silence, which gives a postmodern quality to the circumstances at hand. In this respect, Cornwell argues that '[these] two acts are not identical.' However, other critics such as Knapp refute this by positing that '[L]ucy in her action draws parallels to Melanie's 'imagined' action earlier in the novel'.<sup>221</sup> However, both arguments act on a different level and this debate remains undecided. No consensus can be reached as to whether these two scenes really mimic one another. Moreover, these two opinions differ as well in their definition of what scene belongs to a postmodern reading and which to a realistic interpretation. For example, Knapp regards both scenes as realistic, because he does not pay attention to the ways in which these are represented. Cornwell however, distinguishes both scenes because they pertain to an alternate scale

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214 Cornwell, p. 316

215 Cornwell, p. 316

216 Cornwell, p. 317

217 Cornwell, p. 317

218 *Disgrace*, p. 161 quoted in Cornwell, p. 317

219 Cornwell, p. 318

220 Cornwell, p. 319

221 Knapp, p. 77

of representation.

Apart from scenic characteristics, an analysis of character traits also permits us to distinguish between realistic and symbolical modes. For example, Knapp aligns David's viewpoint - when he abuses Melanie – with an 'imaginative' conception of the world. In contrast, Knapp aligns the views of Melanie and her parents with reality.<sup>222</sup> The reason for this can be found in the fact that David's imagination reduces the figure of the other into nothing and because he is still part of a dying, romantic age. His views can therefore not be aligned with the characters who represent a rational take on matters.

In a similar manner, Friday, Foe and Susan represent contrasting sides of the same argument. Especially Foe and Susan are opposed because they argue about Friday's silence. Susan tends to be representative of a realistic opinion, as she has pronounced reservations about the possibility of the colonized to learn or to write. In contrast, Foe substantiates a symbolic argument by suggesting that God and not man, will make Friday speak. Susan confirms her attitude by stating that: ' "[a]s to God's writing, my opinion is: If he writes, he employs a secret writing, which it is not given to us, who are part of that writing, to read"'. Susan's statement obviously denies the idea that God can make people speak; in short, Susan does not believe in symbolicity nor does she believe that Friday will ever be able to utter a single word. When she returns to Foe after Friday's 'training', again she voices this disbelief. In the end, Coetzee does not have a preference for any of both opinions. Nevertheless, what is important is that – in a similar manner as Coetzee depicts in *Disgrace* - the novel deliberately sets some of its characters in opposition. Thereby, Coetzee emphasises that there does not exist one, all-encompassing solution, which is in its essence typical for a postmodern novel. Apart from analysing some character traits, I will now investigate if the narrators or characters shift from symbolic to realistic entities.

### 3.2.3. Metaphorical or literal status?

For a novel to be postmodern, it has to proliferate in paradoxes, indeterminate signs and tropes or metaphors. Coetzee himself has already asserted that he does not write political fiction and his novels show an abundant appearance of tropes and metaphorical signs. However, some critics suggest that his work includes signs that shift from allegorical, over metaphorical to established entities. This assertion is especially true for the novels that include either female narrators or animal entities. Furthermore, in some novels Coetzee paradoxically aligns his position with the status of the 'subaltern'<sup>223</sup> female in South Africa. Paradoxical, because in pre-colonial and colonial times the

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222 Knapp, p. 76

223 Barnett, Clive, "Constructions of Apartheid in the International Reception of the Novels of J. M. Coetzee", In:



female subject occupied an inferior position. Nonetheless, the female narrator does function as a concrete presence in novels such as *Age of Iron* or *Foe*, while in *Disgrace* the feminine characters occupy a marginal position<sup>224</sup>:

[...] the position of (Coetzee's) female narrators shifts from linguistic entity (Magda exists in large part only as a metaphoric critique of narrative construction) to meta-fictional interloper (Susan Barton attempts to control Daniel Foe's narrative of *Robinson Crusoe*) to Coetzeean persona (Elizabeth Curren occupies the same socio-economic, racial, and employment strata as her creator).<sup>225</sup>

This statement acknowledges that Coetzee's female characters evolve from metaphors to signified entities. However, in the case of *Disgrace* such an evolution is not apparent, because the feminine characters act out 'voiceless' positions and are represented accordingly.<sup>226</sup> Lucy, Melanie and Soraya are all submissive to the paternal figure of David Lurie, the white professor of communication studies. They do not possess the right to speak out, nor does Coetzee represent them in the same way as the protagonist; Lucy, David's daughter, is markedly absent in the novel the moment she gets molested. In the same way, she is absent from the first part of the novel, which points out that Coetzee has established *Disgrace* as a male-oriented narrative. In fact, in both novels Coetzee represents the female characters as symbolical entities; for example, Susan is a 'metafictional interloper'<sup>227</sup> and the three women in *Disgrace* are representative of a gender based stereotype which depicts women as submissive. But their symbolic definition is mostly the result of a lack of representation and active participation in the story. Only, *Foe* is more markedly postmodern because of the presence of a female protagonist and narrator, while in conventional novels such as *Robinson Crusoe* and to a lesser degree *Disgrace*, the protagonist is a male person. Therefore, no radical other is able to subvert conventional narrative techniques: '[...] when post-modernism denies the possibility of the coherent individual self, how is it possible ... to write about the "real" historical female subject in South Africa?'<sup>228</sup> This incoherent 'individual self' can be put on par with the female characters in Coetzee's fiction.

If Coetzee's female narrators do not evolve from symbol to signified<sup>229</sup>, so much does the dogs' representation change from a typical metaphorical portrayal in *Foe* to a literal representation

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*Journal of Southern African Studies*, nr. 2, 1999, p. 299

224 Wright, p. 56

225 Wright, p. 17

226 Wright, p. 56

227 Wright, p. 17

228 Ryan, P, p. 31 quoted in Wright, p. 57

229 In *Foe*, the female represents a metafictional entity, while in *Disgrace*, Coetzee deliberately silences all female characters.

in *Disgrace*: '[...] the animal signifies for itself, functioning as neither metaphor for black South Africans nor for white women [...]'<sup>230</sup> Contrastingly in *Foe*, the black and silenced South African Friday does stand for an extra-fictional entity and thus assumes an allegorical nature; in other words, he stands for the colonized other. Nevertheless, some critics acknowledge that the figure of the animal can act as a metaphor. For example, Wright looks at the sacrifice of animals through a biblical light, as she links up these sacrifices with the 'scapegoat' mechanism<sup>231</sup>: a tradition which for ages has shifted the blame to inferior objects such as women or animals. From early on in the novel in fact such a tendency is noticeable, as the black rapists rampantly both annihilate the dogs and gang-rape Lucy. On another occasion, Petrus, the landowner, does not care about two helpless goats and decides to tie them to a pole on a place without grass. Both examples indicate that animals or women can act as scapegoats for society. Moreover, the animal could have the potential to act as a metaphor for the black and feminine figure in South Africa. The idea that the postmodern is essentially indeterminate in its gestures, is thus exemplified in *Disgrace* by introducing this scapegoat figure. Wright argues that the audience could be 'alienated' when identifying with these scapegoats.<sup>232</sup> Identification with animals is very difficult, if not impossible. This thought has left many critics to ponder on the truthfulness of the claim that the animal in *Disgrace* embraces a symbolical nature. As a result, the previously cited idea, which states that the figure of the dog in Coetzee's fiction shifts from a symbolical order to a literal representation, could be vigorously true: '[t]he body of the animal, then, in particular the body of the dog that David "sacrifices" at the end of the narrative is a dog, not a symbolic representation of Lucy or of any of the other characters in the novel.'<sup>233</sup> As Lucy claims, David and herself should start at 'ground level'<sup>234</sup>, just like the dogs, which are themselves located, literally close to the ground, because they are inferior to man and are unable to act, speak or make decisions. In the end, Wright suggests that '[C]oetzee's writerly tendency, here as elsewhere, is to strip language of its metaphorical content and to reveal what lies beneath: the uninhabitable being of the other.' This statement is especially true for a novel such as *Disgrace* and is not so much applicable to *Disgrace*.

Moreover, in *Disgrace*, Coetzee does not only give the dog a metaphorical status, the feminine characters share the same characteristics as well. For instance, Lucy, Melanie and Soraya have metaphorical potential, because they are representatives of a subjugated feminine society. So much as the last two are symbols for the oppression on the basis of racist terms; both Melanie and Soraya are sexually abused by a white and male person, which is a situation that easily reminds us

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230 Wright, p. 51-52

231 Wright, p. 33

232 Wright, p. 122

233 Wright, p. 107

234 *Disgrace*, p. 205

of the colonial times: an era in which the white oppressor, coming from the western metropolis, suppressed the black community in South Africa.

In contrast to these characters, both David and Bev Shaw behave in a realistic way, representing a rational take on the matters at hand. These characters stand for what they really are, and are therefore much less symbolic, an idea which is evidenced by their behaviour with sick and dying animals. Moreover, David is very realistic in the way he treats his daughter, because he wants his daughter to confess to the police about the occurrences on the day of 'testing', the day he was brutally tortured and she violently raped. Petrus on his part, has an evasive feel to him. For example, when David asks him if he supposedly has any connections with the rapists, his reaction is rather escapist and unyielding. Similarly, Coetzee is considerably vague when he establishes Cruso's figure. For instance, when Susan asks him about the reasons for his stay on the island, he does not provide any, nor does the reader know what his real identity and origins are.

#### 3.2.4. The TRC and political representation

As I have said before, *Disgrace* is a rather politically endorsed novel, because in one of its key chapters the reader is witness to a hearing which reminds us of the TRC commissions at the end of apartheid. In one of these scenes, David is obliged to appear before a commission because he was charged with the supposed abuse of one of his female students. These scenes magnificently and realistically portray the many public hearings, held in the wake of apartheid violence. Coetzee presents us a well-documented account of how these hearings function in present-day South Africa. For instance, one of the chairmen states that ' "[t]he body here gathered, [...] has no powers. All it can do is to make recommendations".' This statement reflects what Van Zyl sees as the primary function of the TRC, namely that '[...] the power of the TRC to make recommendations to prevent human rights abuse in the future is extremely important.' Coetzee's work could be characterized as a parody of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation hearings; I use the term parody, as David Lurie's trial is held in a university setting, while in normal circumstances such hearings are held in legal locations. However, apart from this, these scenes realistically evoke the working of present-day TRC hearings.

On another occasion, David himself points out one of its principal characteristics, by suggesting that he has 'no challenge in a legal sense', but that he has 'reservations of a philosophical kind'.<sup>235</sup> One of the chairmen reiterates this idea: 'this is not a trial but an inquiry' [...] and [their] rules of procedure are not those of a law court.<sup>236</sup> With respect to these statements, Van Zyl asserts

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<sup>235</sup> *Disgrace*, p. 47

<sup>236</sup> *Disgrace*, p. 48

that these hearings must consist of 'strategies [that deal] with the past [which] must not become narrowly focused on attempts to prosecute.'<sup>237</sup> Both examples are illustrative of the idea that the TRC is a non-legal organisation, because its primary function consists of restituting past crimes. In fact, this chapter is filled with examples of the TRC's function and content. For example, when David states that 'he has admitted that he was wrong', the prosecutors want more: namely a full admission of the deeds he performed and an expression of repentance. Only when these stipulations are met, can amnesty be granted. In fact, these ideas reflect another of the TRC's principles, which stipulates that the commission only 'grants amnesty to persons who make full disclosure about the crimes they have committed.'<sup>238</sup>

*Disgrace* is also illustrative of the radical antithesis that exists between the post apartheid and colonisation movement. This idea is evident in Lurie's submissiveness to the TRC commission and in Lucy's rape: the white colonizer who during the colonial era had a superior role, now occupies an inferior position in comparison to his black counterpart. Coetzee illustrates these ideas by depicting a quarrel – over the possession of land and property - between black and white South Africans. These considerations are representative of the concept Van Zyl defines as the 'reconciliation process'<sup>239</sup>, which can 'only occur once black citizens are adequately compensated for years of discrimination in the areas of health care, housing and education.'<sup>240</sup>

Such ideas are thus realistically represented in Coetzee's post-apartheid epic. In his other novel, Coetzee assumes a rather moderate stance on the introduction of political themes in literature. The main reason for this lies in the fact that he pays more attention to the novel's symbolic and metaphysical qualities. Nevertheless, political resistance is present, albeit disguised by Coetzee's copious use of symbols and metaphors. This is apparent in the confusion that arises out of the existence or non-existence of Friday's tongue, because critics argue that Friday could potentially withhold information to both Susan and the reader. If one is of the assumption that Friday does have a tongue, then his muteness could be the result of either his refusal to speak the colonizer's language or of his refusal to adapt himself to western values. Dragunoiu is of the same opinion: '[t]he conflation of tonguelessness and castration suggests the political nature of Friday's disempowerment.'<sup>241</sup> However, Friday's political act of resistance is masterfully silenced because Coetzee does not represent him adequately and Susan has no certainty as to whether Friday really possesses a tongue: ' "[l]ook," said Cruso. I looked, but saw nothing in the dark save the glint of

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237 Van Zyl, Paul, "Dilemmas of Transitional Justice: The Case of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission", In: *Journal of International Affairs*, nr. 2, 1999, p. 2

238 Van Zyl, p. 8

239 Van Zyl, p. 4

240 Van Zyl, p. 16

241 Dragunoiu, Dana, "Existential Doubt and Political Responsibility in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*". In: *Critique*, nr. 3, 2001, p.

teeth white as ivory. (...) “Do you see?” he said. “It is too dark,” said I.<sup>242</sup> Its political nature is deliberately obfuscated by portraying the cavity of Friday's tongue as a dark hollow, which therefore is not accessible to the colonizer. Furthermore, Dragunoiu states that Coetzee is severely criticized because of 'conflating philosophical and political concerns'.<sup>243</sup> In this regard, Coetzee negates the political and historical realities in South Africa by portraying the other as metaphysically inferior to the occidental colonizer. As a result, the representatives of the black population in South Africa are beforehand defined as an inferior race, because it is 'an unalterable metaphysical fact'.<sup>244</sup> In the end, Coetzee deliberately dims the political nature of some characters and scenes, because he is more concerned with either metaphysical or representational matters. Nevertheless, some characters do have political reservations against the Empire and the colonization movement. Cruso for example, explicitly opposes to the colonizer, because he refuses to cultivate the 'terraces' on the island. According to Dragunoiu: 'cultivation of land is often used as a justification for appropriating the land from the barbarians: that is, land is for those who make the best use of it'.<sup>245</sup> But Cruso vehemently rejects to be characterized as a cultivator; consequently, his position cannot be aligned with the colonizer.

With respect to the previous assumptions, one could argue that Coetzee symbolically obfuscates *Foe's* political portrayal, which leaves questions about its relevance to real historical circumstances. Contrastingly, by including scenes such as David's hearing and the struggles about land ownership, Coetzee shows his concern with the political problems both in and after apartheid.

#### 4. Universal and local applicability

To continue with the assumptions I made about the applicability of Coetzee's novels to South Africa's political situation, I intend to clarify the distinction between local and universal allegories. However, to proceed with explaining such a distinction, first a definition of 'allegory' needs to be established, if such a definition exists, because no definition includes all significations of this term. To that end I will provide the definitions that seem most suitable for this discussion: 'allegory is a figurative mode of representation conveying a meaning other than the literal'<sup>246</sup> and 'allegories are nearly always applicable to larger issues'.<sup>247</sup> Both definitions emphasize the idea that the reader must

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242 *Foe*, p. 22

243 Dragunoiu, p. 14

244 Dragunoiu, p. 14

245 Clowes, p. 152, quoted in Dragunoiu, p. 15

246 “Allegory” [Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegory). 2009, Wikipedia, 10 May 2009

<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegory>>

247 “Allegory” [Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegory). 2009, Wikipedia, 10 May 2009

not only look at a story's literal meaning, but also keep in mind the underlying socio-political, historical or universal frameworks. Furthermore, there exists no real consensus among literary critics whether Coetzee's fiction is applicable to the political situation of South Africa or whether it can be applied to universal principles. However, one of these critics, David Attridge, gives a convincing explanation by arguing that few of Coetzee's novels are actually set in South Africa. Furthermore, he argues that if their setting happens to be South Africa, they are far removed both geographically and temporally from the facts at hand.<sup>248</sup> He suggests that such novels are more at ease with 'permanent human truths'.<sup>249</sup> With respect to these remarks, *Foe* could be defined as a novel that is not directly concerned with these political circumstances, because it is not even set in South Africa itself, but in England and on a far-off island. Consequently, my remarks on Coetzee's inclusion of names and places in *Foe* are not really relevant. To continue with the assumptions I made about the applicability of Coetzee's novels to South Africa's political situation, I intend to clarify the distinction between local and universal allegories. However, to proceed with explaining such a distinction, first a definition of 'allegory' needs to be established, if such a definition exists, because no definition includes all significations of this term. To that end I will provide the definitions that seem most suitable for this discussion: 'allegory is a figurative mode of representation conveying a meaning other than the literal'<sup>250</sup> and 'allegories are nearly always applicable to larger issues'.<sup>251</sup> Both definitions emphasize the idea that the reader must not only look at a story's literal meaning, but also keep in nt to South Africa in its own terms. Nevertheless, they are relevant to the so-called postcolonial period, because the references to places in England have to do with the imperialist struggle at that time. However, *Foe* could also be an allegory for the larger political situation of the postcolonial period, because there are many occasions in which Coetzee does not provide exact references with regard to the geographical setting. Apart from these assumptions, Attridge rightly points out that because of *Foe*'s intertextual nature 'no simple relation between historical report and fictional invention' is possible.<sup>252</sup> In spite of the richness in geographical details and the appearance of characters such as Friday, Coetzee's work is still more concerned with the relationship of its characters with the fictional work itself. This is evidenced by the continual debate over authorship between Foe and Susan. Furthermore, the indications concerning time and place are mostly 'ignored by allegorical interpretation' and the 'temporal and

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<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegory>>

248 Attridge, Derek, *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 71

249 Attridge, p. 71

250 "Allegory" [Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegory), 2009, Wikipedia, 10 May 2009

<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegory>>

251 "Allegory" [Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegory), 2009, Wikipedia, 10 May 2009

<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegory>>

252 Attridge, p. 73

the sequential [are translated] into the schematic: [which he calls] a set of truths [or] a familiar historical scene.<sup>1253</sup> Nevertheless, while a set of truths is applicable to *Foe*, the idea of a familiar historical scene is not. This set of truths could imply a moral outcome at the end of the story. For instance, this is evident in the way Coetzee ends the novel, by defining the words coming out of Friday's mouth as a 'slow stream, without breath'<sup>1254</sup>. As a result, Coetzee's *Foe* has a greater engagement with universal values than with a particular historical time or place. Nevertheless, such a type of engagement could lead to criticism, because some critics accuse Coetzee of deliberately dodging the political truths in his country. During the apartheid, this forcefully determined the status of a novel. However, when the democratic legislation was installed, such criticism was less apparent.<sup>255</sup>

Nevertheless, Coetzee's *Disgrace* was met with some severe criticism, because Coetzee supposedly depicted a negative picture of South Africa. The idea that critics blame him of establishing such a picture, is in itself an indication of the fact that this novel treats such national issues and not those of some other country. In contrast with this assumption, Attridge asserts that 'the issue is not simply one of changes arising from the end of apartheid, but of shifts elsewhere – notably in the United States – impacting upon a South Africa becoming increasingly absorbed into a global milieu.'<sup>256</sup> Therefore, Coetzee's *Disgrace* evokes the growing concern with global tendencies that begin to have an impact on South Africa. Similarly, David Lurie's figure could act as an allegory for the universal issue of rationalization, which is not only in force on the African continent, but also in the rest of the modern world.<sup>257</sup> In contrast, some elements point out that *Disgrace* could be a local or national allegory as well. For instance, in the description of Melanie's play, Coetzee makes a direct reference to the 'suburb' of Hillbrow, which according to Attridge, is a typical setting for describing South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy.<sup>258</sup> Furthermore, Coetzee directly establishes the link with the present-day country by pointing out that David and his daughter are part of the South Africa of 'these days'.<sup>259</sup> Contrastingly, because of *Disgrace*'s and postmodernism's resistance to closure and the problems with representation, Coetzee's novel does not offer a viable solution for the continuing problems of the time. Similarly, Attridge points to the irrelevance, of Lurie's chamber opera and of his care for the dogs, to the violence and the many legal trials of SA. In other words, by deliberately establishing an open ending and thus resisting in any way such closure, Coetzee is criticized because of not using his fiction to provide answers.

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253 Attridge, p. 46

254 *Foe* p. 157

255 Attridge, p. 68

256 Attridge, p. 16

257 Attridge, p. 166

258 Attridge, p. 167

259 Attridge, p. 165 ; *Disgrace*, p. 3

However, because Coetzee deliberately refuses to represent some of his female and black characters, he points out that South Africa's government needs to take into account some of its most pressing issues, namely that black slaves also deserve rights in the new SA. In the end, *Disgrace* hovers somewhere in between a universal and local allegory, because Coetzee either does not provide answers for the nationalistic problems or he does not represent racial or gender groups, with the idea of criticizing the ANC government.

Furthermore, Attridge asserts that an allegorical reading involves 'saying what a work is about'<sup>260</sup> or pointing out 'moral or political injunctions'<sup>261</sup> in it. He argues that, if a novel would not be read allegorically, there would be no place for interpretation.<sup>262</sup> Consequently, both Coetzee's novels can be interpreted both politically and morally and therefore they do not resist an allegorical reading. However, there is room for discussion about the allegorical status these novels advocate. In *Disgrace*, Coetzee seems to be prone to a more local allegorical reading, which means there are some direct references to SA's political instances such as the TRC or the ANC government. While in Coetzee's other novel, the greatest concern seems to be with questions about textual authority and with questions about the universal human condition. Albeit, there is also room for a local allegorical reading, because Coetzee deliberately includes the black South African figure, which indirectly points to the inferior position of the slave in colonial times. Also, Barnett suggests that the typical depiction of the dualism between colonizer and colonized can be seen as another version of the 'Manichean struggle'<sup>263</sup> in South African society between 'good and evil'.<sup>264</sup> Even if Coetzee situates *Foe* in a totally different time and place than colonial or postcolonial SA, it still indirectly refers to this location and period.

Moreover, to determine the status of Coetzee's novels, means taking into account the diversity of its readers. Critics point out that his canon has received both national and international attention and maybe such formal characteristics as parody, tropes and ambiguity are a reflection of such a diverse audience. Coetzee establishes his work as a postmodern construct, which could go hand in hand with the multiplicity of critical response his novels have received over the ages. For example, the use of an epistolary form in *Foe* could in fact be a means of describing the status of fiction to this audience.<sup>265</sup> The idea that there exists such a diverse audience and that there is an enormous diversity of people living in SA have lead Collieran to argue that '[i]n South Africa there is now too much truth for art to hold [...]'.<sup>266</sup> This statement can also directly be linked up with the

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260 Attridge, p. 36

261 Attridge, p. 36

262 Attridge, p. 36

263 Barnett, Clive, p. 300

264 Barnett, Clive, p. 300

265 Barnett, Clive, p. 288

266 Collieran, Jeanne, "'Position Papers: 'Reading J.M. Coetzee's Fiction and Criticism'", In: *Contemporary Literature*, nr. 3, 1994, p. 581



idea that SA's history and culture cannot be adequately represented, which, as this analysis has suggested, is a reflection of Hassan and Lyotard's postmodern concept of the 'unpresentable'.<sup>267</sup> In one of the few interviews with Coetzee, he also seems to suggest that he '[doesn't] have much interest in, or can't seriously engage [himself] with, the kind of realism that takes pride in copying the 'real' world.'<sup>268</sup> To ascertain whether this applies to his fiction, I will draw conclusions from the formal and thematic analysis, which I intend to link up with the previous assumptions.

## 5. Conclusions

In order to conclude this analysis, I will recycle Harlow and Poyner's statements about the paradigmatic shift in South African literature. As they have argued, apartheid literature was heavily influenced by political and public response. Contrastingly, they assert that so-called post apartheid literature situates itself in the private realm, where political influence does not have as much impact. Furthermore, such literature could even act as a 'corrective' for political items. Nevertheless, I believe that the comparison between Coetzee's novels learns us that the previous assumptions have to be called into question. Moreover, I would argue that in the case of this analysis these ideas have to be inverted, because critics have indicated that Coetzee's *Disgrace* can be defined as a rather radical and negative depiction of post apartheid politics, while by writing *Foe*, Coetzee has been criticized of deliberately dodging SA's politics. One could even say that Coetzee did not mind the criticism that his work brought about, because he continued writing in a style that suited him.

This style, one could argue, was in most cases of the analysis postmodern. For instance, I have repeatedly signalled that Coetzee has written *Foe* with the purpose of evaluating his own work: the characters are aware that they are part of a story which they adapt to their needs. Moreover, Coetzee has established this novel as a typical historiographic metafiction, because in its totality *Foe* reworks and subverts a previous canonical text. Furthermore, a formal examination has learned us that it is postmodern in the sense that it is a very fragmented novel. However, on some occasions it does not show such qualities: Coetzee decided to use a heterodiegetic narrator in the last chapter and a conventional retrospective narration over the course of the novel. By outlining concepts such as the fourth wall present tense and simultaneous narration we have learned that in some chapters a sense of frustration is apparent, which sometimes alienates the reader from the text. Other postmodern characteristics include a resistance to closure, using a free indirect discourse and a tendency towards elliptic structures. All these elements are inherent to *Foe* and evident in the way

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267 Colleran, p. 582

268 Coetzee, J.M. quoted in: Norris Easton, T. Kai, "Text and Hinterland: J.M. Coetzee and the South African Novel", In: *Journal of South African studies*, nr. 4, 1995, p. 591

Coetzee collapses the distinction between focalizer and narrator, leaves open possible endings and refuses to represent the black South African. On a thematic level I have argued that both novels contain geographical and temporal references to existing times and places. Nevertheless, in *Foe* these indications are so far removed from actual South Africa that their relevance needs to be questioned. In this respect, some critics have suggested that these references have no mimetic purpose, but serve to indicate a universal and moralistic reading. *Foe* is therefore not relevant to nationalistic items, however, it is indicative of human values. Moreover, these assumptions can be backed up by looking at the novel's political representation, which is essentially moderate and which Coetzee mostly disguises by representing scenes in a symbolical or metaphysical manner. Nevertheless, one can also look at such assumptions differently, as some critics have argued that, by obfuscating direct political representation, Coetzee is complicit in a resistance to politics. This is in itself also a political stance. However, one could also argue that Coetzee has deliberately used a black South African as an allegory for the colonial politics. Nevertheless, *Foe* can still be adequately defined a postmodern novel.

However, the question about the appearance of either one of these approaches<sup>269</sup> to literature is not always relevant to South Africa's situation, because either one could be an expression of or a reference to these politics. For instance, this can be achieved by blocking the reader's view on the psychology of the characters, which could be interpreted as a sign of resistance or indication on Coetzee's part of the idea that some of South Africa's inhabitants are in need of more critical attention. Coetzee achieves the same effect by focalizing *Disgrace*'s narrative through only one character or by blurring the distinction between focalizer and narrator with the use of free indirect discourse. Nevertheless, Coetzee has often been criticized because of using postmodern techniques, which are not provocative of a solution for South Africa's needs both on a cultural, social or political level. Contrastingly, one could also argue that by ending *Disgrace* in such an ambiguous way, Coetzee points to the many possibilities that remain open for South Africa's future. Nevertheless, *Disgrace* is also a novel which needs a realistic frame. For example, Coetzee makes direct reference to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. If this reference were not available, then it would be more difficult to determine the exact location and intentions of Coetzee's book. Even if this analysis has pointed out that *Disgrace* has more realistic potential than *Foe*, Coetzee's words still point to the opposite direction, because he resists writing in the realist mode. In this sense, Colleran's words are very much appropriate: 'in South Africa there is now too much truth for art to hold.'<sup>270</sup> In conclusion, maybe realistic fiction cannot enclose what postmodern fiction can.

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269 Postmodern or realistic

270 Colleran, p. 581

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