

**Rewriting *Roxana*:**  
**Eighteenth-Century Narrative Form and Sympathy**

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J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) rethinks, reinterprets, and makes new meaning of the past, betraying contemporary culture's desires and fears about our Enlightenment inheritance. As such, it is significant that the novel focuses upon the movements of a 'public' woman who traverses a simultaneously threatening and pathetic female identity, highlighting sympathy's shaping of relationships in the eighteenth century and suggesting the potential that sympathy may have for shaping relationships today. In this essay, I will be arguing that through its representation of eighteenth-century discourses of prostitution, *Foe* celebrates the potential of first-person narrative to provoke fellow feeling. By examining how the novel highlights eighteenth-century anxieties surrounding the development of sympathy for whores, we can see how *Foe* refigures our past, effectively emphasizing the capacity of individuals to develop feelings of responsibility for coerced agents.

Constructed within and around the plot of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Roxana* (1724), *Foe* tells the story of Susan Barton, a castaway who landed on an island inhabited by 'Cruso.' Once Susan and Friday are rescued from the island and return to England, Susan engages the writer Daniel Foe to help her publish her tale. The novel itself consists of Susan's own version of her experiences on the island, her letters to Foe, her first-person account of meeting Foe, and a fragmented third-person record of multiple encounters with Susan, Foe, and Friday. *Foe* calls upon the prostitute to insist that even the most ambivalent of figures may, through the telling of her own story, secure sympathy. Reviving discourses of eighteenth-century prostitution, the novel details the

whore's position as both dangerous and pathetic and reveals writing as a tool of that sympathy. Ultimately, analysis of Susan Barton's attempts to control her story through the manipulation of the affective valances of signification reveals how *Foe* constructs the first-person narrative as a means of cultivating sympathetic identification.

My insertion of *Foe* into a constellation of eighteenth-century texts argues for reading the novel within a carefully historicized Enlightenment, and it responds to a lack of specificity by critics who offer generalized claims about the relationship of Coetzee's novel to the eighteenth-century history it represents. My effort insists on the continuing relevance of the archive as 'a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow' (Derrida 1985: 36). Further, my analysis of narrative form in these novels argues that the insertion of recuperated eighteenth-century models of sympathetic reading into narratives marked by competing perspectives and elements invites the twenty-first-century reader to develop feelings of sympathy for those telling their own stories. Starting from Wolfgang Iser's articulation of the reader as a 'double-figure' who assumes a role offered by the text while juxtaposing that role against his/her own sense of self, I argue that *Foe* uses narrative perspective to place the reader in the simultaneous role of reader and writer/speaker (Iser 1989: 64). The identification of the reader with the writer/speaker 'involves incorporating the new experience. Consequently, the reader is affected by the very role he has been given to play, and his being affected does not re-invoke his habitual orientation but mobilizes the spontaneity of the self' (Iser 1989: 64). The reader of *Foe* is changed by playing the role of the first-person writer/speaker. Of course, as Iser has pointed out, the potential change of the 'habitual orientation' of the reader depends on 'the individuality of the text' (1989: 64). Thus, I argue that *Foe*'s particular rewriting of the past not only makes today's behaviors and values available for observation and evaluation, but it also—by offering eighteenth-century sympathetic models of reading that supplement the reader's assumption of the dual reader/writer role—encourages readers to make a past reality of sympathy their own.

Throughout this paper I use the terms sympathy and sympathetic identification. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines sympathy as, 'The quality or state of being affected by the condition of another with a feeling similar or corresponding to that of the

other; the fact or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another or others; fellow-feeling' (2010). The *OED* goes on to cite Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756), providing an eighteenth-century example, 'Sympathy must be considered as a sort of Substitution, by which we are put in the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected' (quoted in *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2010). According to this definition, sympathy requires identification. In order to feel sympathy for another, one must put himself/herself in another's place or see himself/herself in that other person.

Recent critical work has begun to acknowledge the continuing relevance of the past to contemporary notions of social responsibility or fellow-feeling. Peter Schneider, in the article 'Across A Great Divide,' makes clear the necessity of reexamining the legacies of Enlightenment at work in today's society (2004). Connecting this necessity to contemporary political events, Schneider writes: 'These growing divisions—over war, peace, religion, sex, life and death—amount to a philosophical dispute about the common origins of European and American civilization.' (Schneider, 2004, n.p.).

*Foe* offers a fictional reexamination of our Enlightenment origins by identifying continuities between the present and the eighteenth century through the lens of postmodernism. As an example of historiographic metafiction, Coetzee's novel represents what Linda Hutcheon, throughout *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, argues is a specifically postmodern genre of fiction that treats the past as provisional and indeterminate and explores the context dependent nature of value, challenging narrative singularity and unity (1988). Specifically, Hutcheon describes how, in order to signal the constructedness of history, authors of postmodern fiction deliberately expose narrative's didacticism, engender situational discursive elements, and challenge the objectivity, neutrality, impersonality, and transparency of the narrative.

Some critics have begun to address the frequency with which historiographic metafiction like *Foe* explore the continuities and differences between Enlightenment and postmodern culture. Amy Elias in 'The Postmodern Turn On (: ) the Enlightenment' suggests that this phenomenon can be accounted for by the identification, on the part of the novelist, of a postmodern event within the Enlightenment (1996). For Elias, this postmodern event is the appearance of the unspeakable other. In this formulation, Elias

gestures toward the ability of the genre to represent an alternative history of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Similarly, Susan Onega, in 'British Historiographic Metafiction in the 1980s,' sees a tendency in historiographic metafiction to highlight and problematize an Enlightenment dualism (1993). She writes, '[i]ndeed, the basic dualism that suffused the age of The Enlightenment, expressed for example, in the co-existence of the sentimental novel and the Gothic romance, helps explain the attraction that the Augustan Age, and also the Restoration and Early Nineteenth Century seem to have for writers of historiographic metafiction' (Onega 1993: 57). Onega also describes historiographic metafiction as a global phenomenon that 'enters the tunnel of time in order to recover the other, the suppressed, half of Western civilization and history: the mystical, the esoteric, the Gnostic and cabalistic elements which once formed an inextricable unity with reason and logic' (Onega 1993: 57).

Despite Onega's tendency to reinforce an Enlightenment binary between reason and its others, her efforts to examine historiographic metafiction's representation of alternative histories of subjectivity pave the way for a recognition of *Foe's* particular recuperations. Specifically, the multiplicities of divergence, convergence, and overlap between past and present that she acknowledges can be mapped in *Foe* to identify how the novel recuperates and revalues specific discourses within eighteenth-century culture to suggest that our Enlightenment inheritance may be emotional. Central to understanding J.M. Coetzee's presentation of an emotional Enlightenment inheritance is the novel's revival of eighteenth-century discourses of prostitution in which the prostitute functions as a key figure in debates about the limits of and potentials of individual responsibility. The ubiquitous eighteenth-century prostitute and the responses her presence provoked reveal the relationship between individual suffering and sympathy, and Coetzee's novel brings to life a context in which even the most miserable of streetwalkers, once able to make her suffering visible to others, can provoke sympathy.

Thus, throughout *Foe*, the reader encounters depictions of Susan Barton's relationship with prostitution. We first encounter her set adrift in a rowboat by a mutinous crew; she is accompanied by the body of the ship's captain for whom we later learn she has served as mistress. Shipwrecked on Cruso's island, Susan yields to the sexual advances of Cruso as well, 'I resisted no more but let him do as he wished'

(Coetzee 1986: 30). Against Crusoe's invocation of early eighteenth-century manners and expectations that women's sexuality be confined to marriage, she characterizes this coupling as inevitable and beyond moral judgment: '[i]n a world of chance, is there a better and a worse? We yield to a stranger's embrace or give ourselves to the waves; for the blink of an eyelid our vigilance relaxes; we are asleep; and when we awake, we have lost the direction of our lives. What are these blinks of an eyelid, against which the only defense is an eternal and inhuman wakefulness?' (Coetzee 1986: 30). Battered by the currents of her life and the ocean, Susan responds to Crusoe's physical desire but refuses to accept blame. Later in the narrative, Susan goes on to describe her trade as crucial to her independence. Dissatisfied with her beggarly and transient existence, she nevertheless refuses to assume the life of an ordinary woman, a maidservant or wife: 'I could return in every respect to the life of a substantial body, the life you [Foe] recommend. But such a life is abject. It is the life of a thing. A whore used by men is used as a substantial body' (Coetzee 1986: 126). As a mistress, Susan directs her own behavior, choosing to yield to the circumstances fate has brought her. As a maidservant or wife, Susan might be a 'substantial body,' but she would have value to others, not herself. Susan insists that her free trade of sexual favors be reexamined against the reality in which women serve as objects of male satisfaction. Accordingly, Susan 'cannot rest' and tirelessly seeks an alternative 'true story' (Coetzee 1986: 126) in which a woman's sexual behaviors could be more sympathetically understood.

As such, Susan represents the prostitute negotiating her position as helpless victim and responsible agent and recovers a specific thread of eighteenth-century prostitution discourse in which such negotiation provoked an emotional response. In particular, it recovers the ability of the eighteenth-century prostitute, despite being labeled a responsible agent, to provoke sympathy as a coerced victim.<sup>1</sup> Many critics have

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<sup>1</sup> W.A. Speck, in 'The Harlot's Progress in Eighteenth-Century England,' details a change in the period's representations of prostitution as related to the discovery of 'the tart with the heart of gold' (1980: 127). More specifically, he writes that, at the beginning of the century, prostitutes 'were brazen whores, painted strumpets, totally unregenerate hardened sinners, fit only for flogging in Bridewell. By the end of the century many influential voices were prepared to argue that prostitutes were not beyond redemption, but on the contrary were fit subjects for penitence and salvation' (Speck 1980: 127). Speck's analysis is problematic because it not only neglects the solicitations of sympathy, albeit more limited than later in the century, offered by early representations of the suffering prostitute, but also overlooks representations of the prostitute from the late eighteenth century that place blame on society. In contrast, I'm arguing here that

attempted to grapple with the apparently contradictory nature of the eighteenth-century prostitute's identity. James Grantham Turner, in *'The Whore's Rhetorick: Narrative, Pornography, and the Origins of the Novel,'* acknowledges the prostitute's rhetorical engagement with her various identities (1995). Similarly, Mary Jo Kietzman, in *'Defoe Masters the Serial Subject'* suggests that female criminals developed multiple identities and personae (1999).

While such work has been extremely important to our mapping of eighteenth-century prostitution's relationship to negotiations of individual identity in the period, Coetzee's rewriting of Defoe's *Roxana* in *Foe* helps us fully explore the impact of such identity negotiation upon intersubjective relationships. By detailing Defoe's discourse of the prostitute's multiple identities and its representation of the whore as simultaneous victim of circumstance and perpetrator of vice, we can better understand how Coetzee uses it to model sympathy for the pitiful object/responsible subject. In Defoe's *Roxana*, we see the eponymous character carefully define herself as object and agent. After her abandonment by husband and family leads to her eventual acceptance of her landlord's sexual advances and promise of financial security, she explains, 'I confess, the terrible Pressure of my former Misery [...] lay heavy upon my Mind' (Defoe 1996: 34). Yet she appeals to the notion of a woman's 'Honesty and Good Manners' as prohibitions to any illicit relations between them. In the next few lines, however, prohibitions become permissions. She explains, 'O let no Woman slight the Temptation that being generously deliver'd from Trouble, is to any Spirit furnish'd with Gratitude and just Principles' (Defoe 1996: 35). Roxana's sense of honor both demands and denies her capitulation to necessity, a capitulation she describes as that of which her 'own Conscience convinc'd [her] at the very Time [she] did it, was horribly unlawful, scandalous and abominable' and which she nevertheless hopes 'may move the Pity, even of those that abhor the Crime' (Defoe 1996: 39).

Roxana's plight clearly signals the insufficiency of traditional domestic values to compete with economic realities. She has suffered repeated disappointment at the hands of her kinsmen. While her husband's financial irresponsibility certainly most directly

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the ambivalence of the prostitute toward her own willed action and victimization becomes, in the early period, an opportunity for sympathetic identification later in the century.

contributes to her initial decision to embrace 'vice,' her father's decision to leave her inheritance in the care of her brother and his subsequent financial ruin, combined with her in-laws' refusal to assume responsibility for her as a member of the family provides a rationale for both her continual search for approval and her insistence on economic independence. As Marilyn Francus argues in her essay 'A-Killing Their Children with Safety': Maternal Identity and Transgression in Swift and Defoe,' Roxana's subversive behavior is rooted in her adoption of the personal and sexual freedom of men and not in a stereotype of female lust (2003). Her painful negotiations highlight the difficulties of defining female identity in the period.

In addition to reviving these struggles with the crafting of narrative identity, Coetzee's novel also foregrounds the problem of reader sympathy depicted in Defoe's *Roxana*. As such, Coetzee's presentation of this formal drama reconsiders eighteenth-century concerns about the ability of readers to feel for first-person narrators. In the eighteenth century, letters and memoirs posed a serious threat through their ability to elicit sympathy for suffering, to provoke sympathetic identification through the first-person form, and *Roxana* is an example of an earlier eighteenth-century prostitution narrative claiming to offer an instructive model of repentance but actually offering something else. In it, the narrating self describes a past and absent self, maintaining a distance from it that allows the reflection and repentance for which the narrator should, the editor assures us, be heard. We are told that the 'Reproaches of her Conscience' and the 'just Reflections' Roxana experiences at the end of her story 'abundantly justify ([and] are the profess'd Design of) the Publication' (Defoe 1996: 2). Accordingly, in the Preface we read:

In the Manner she has told the Story, it is evident she does not insist upon her Justification in any one Part of it; much less does she recommend her Conduct, or indeed, any Part of it, except her Repentance to our Imitation: On the contrary, she makes frequent Excursions, in a just censuring and condemning her own Practice: How often does she reproach herself in the most passionate Manner; and guide us to just Reflections in the like Cases? (Defoe 1996: 2)

We are invited to blame her past self and feel for only her present repentant self.

But Roxana never really repents. Her entire narrative is one excuse after another

for why she shouldn't take responsibility for her actions. Her 'confession' regarding her decision to become her landlord's mistress reads: 'the terrible Pressure of my former Misery, the Memory of which lay heavy upon my Mind, and the surprising Kindness with which he had deliver'd me, and withal the Expectations of what he might still do for me, were powerful things, and made me have scarce the Power to deny him' (33-34), and it functions not as a repudiation of her past but instead as a plea for exoneration. Similarly, she exhorts the reader, 'O let no Woman slight the Temptation that being generously deliver'd from Trouble, is to any Spirit furnish'd with Gratitude and just Principles' (Defoe 1996: 35). She claims her behavior is principled and just.

Roxana's later admissions of only superficial repentance, combined with the narrative's other countless examples of her deceptions, make one doubt whether Roxana is capable of telling the truth to herself let alone her reader. Upon her near shipwreck she relates:

I look'd back upon my Wickedness with Abhorrence, as I have said above; but I had no Sence of Repentance, from the true Motive of Repentance [...] in short, I had no thorow effectual Repentance; no Sight of my Sins in their proper Shape [...] I had only such a Repentance as a Criminal has at the Place of Execution, who is sorry, not that he has committed the Crime, as it is a Crime, but sorry that he is to be Hang'd for it. (Defoe 1996: 129)

Such admissions render what little credibility Roxana might have gained throughout the course of her narrative suspect and undermine the claims of repentance introducing and justifying the entire narrative.

Further, Defoe's ending in which 'Misery' is 'the only Consequence' of Roxana's 'Crime[s]' suggests that perhaps, like those before, this latest repentance is indeed insincere and thus unworthy of sympathy (Defoe 1996: 330). However, in the introduction to his edition of *Roxana*, John Mullan describes the eighteenth-century circulation of Defoe's text with a variety of happier endings. Of these endings he concludes: '[n]one of these would-be conclusions was written by Defoe, and none is to be found in this or any other recent edition of *Roxana*. All come from editions of Defoe's novel published in the half-century after his death; all are the inventions of publishers or the hacks that they employed' (Defoe 1996: viii). These endings suggest that despite the



many signs throughout the novel that Roxana does not feel responsible for her fate and that she is more willing to blame her husband, her in-laws, Amy, and her daughter than herself; despite her history with sham-repentance and the harsh ending Defoe offers as a suitable end for an irresponsible whore, publishers 'or the hacks that they employed' felt sympathy for her (Defoe 1996: viii). These eighteenth-century readers have accordingly acted on her behalf, disregarding Roxana's insincerity and writing her the very sympathy Defoe's text claims to withhold. One of the endings Mullan has excavated reads:

About three Months after this, madam Roxana was taken Sick, and though it was the Opinion of her Phisicians [sic], that her Distemper was Mortal, she was not in the least dismayed, but freely resigned her Soul to the Mercy of him who gave it, dying in Charity with all the World. She was buried according to her own Desire, in a private Manner, in Hornsey Church-Yard. (Defoe 1996: vii)

Here, Roxana not only dies peacefully but also 'in Charity with'—in affection, love, and sympathy with—others. This reader offers a sympathy that assumes the responsibility of seeing to Roxana's final wishes.

This ending suggests that, against the claims in Defoe's Preface that Roxana functions as a negative example, readers' feelings refuse to follow such instruction. Readers feel sympathy for Roxana regardless of her manipulation, dissimulation, or sham-repentance, and we can see in Amy a corresponding model for such reader sympathy. While Roxana explains how the 'terrible Pressure of my former Misery, the Memory of which lay heavy upon my Mind' has wracked her with guilt, Amy takes it one step further to argue that Roxana's sexual relationship with her landlord was not inappropriate (Defoe 1996: 33-34). Amy sees Roxana suffer from physical want and psychic distress, and she comes to her rescue regardless of strict notions of propriety or the law. As a witness to her troubles, Amy feels for and acts upon her behalf, modeling a sympathy not bound by sentimental modes. She feels sympathy because she recognizes Roxana as a victim of circumstance. Amy sees Roxana's 'choice' of prostitution as no choice as all. We read: '[y]our Choice is fair and plain; here you may have a handsome, charming Gentleman, be rich, live pleasantly, and in Plenty; or refuse him, and want Dinner, go in Rags, live in Tears; in sort, beg and starve; you know this is the Case,

Madam, says Amy, I wonder how you can say you know not what to do' (Defoe 1996: 40). Amy sees Roxana as a clearly coerced agent who can't be held responsible for her behavior, and we, following Amy's model, are free to sympathize with Roxana's plight despite its obvious challenges, first, to the institution of marriage, second, to the sanctioned flow of capital, and, third, to its potential to be merely another one of Roxana's opportunistic schemes.

As a whore who tells her own story, *Foe's* Susan revives this double potential for narratives told in the first-person by some of the most problematic and apparently unsympathetic of individuals, to elicit sympathy. Thus, *Foe* opens with Susan Barton's story of her experiences as a castaway. Immediately apparent are the novel's striking differences from and similarities to Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe*. These seemed to have spawned the abundance of critical interest in Coetzee's novel. Of course, *Robinson Crusoe*, in its long critical reception history, has been and continues to be studied as a representation of British imperial interests and economic individualism; it has come to represent, for many, the very global economic beliefs and practices that have come under so much scrutiny in our contemporary culture. Accordingly, many rewritings of Defoe's novel have provoked critique and approbation that seem ineluctably to correspond to the original's status as a document that, for better or worse, has come to embody the values of modern capitalist culture, and Coetzee's rewriting continues to generate a superabundance of criticism that considers its relationship to *Robinson Crusoe* and to the eighteenth-century culture it represents according to the variety of lenses through which *Robinson Crusoe* itself has been examined. Here, however, I'm arguing that the novel's re-presentations of *Roxana* and its eighteenth-century anxieties about the sympathetic identification provoked by narrative form present an argument on behalf of narrative's continuing potential to bring about feelings of sympathy.

The visibility of Susan's struggles with her story in *Foe* has led some critics such as Natascha Pesch, in 'Not Mission but Interaction: What Happens When Cultures Meet? The South African Robinsonade,' and Richard Lane, in 'Embroidering Narratives: Appropriating the Signifier in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*,' to interpret the novel as a general critique of the utopian promises of language (2001; 1990). I am arguing, however, for a more specific consideration of the ways in which the first half of the novel reveals the

particular role of individual interest in the novel's critique of narrative form. Thus, it is important that Part I relates Susan's experiences on the island, and, like many of Defoe's fictions, takes the form of a memoir. Charles Haskell Hinnant, in 'Moll Flanders, Roxana, and the French Tradition of the Pseudo-Memoir,' describes the narration of memoir as that in which 'the narrator's reflections are invariably subjective and personal, comprising discursive interludes, argumentative in mode, which seek to establish a relation to the reader distinct from the narrative itself. In these passages, the rhetorical structure of address is distinct from the narrative function, and the text becomes what Samuel Johnson called "a performance"' (2006: 204). In Part I of Coetzee's novel, like in Defoe's *Roxana*, Susan is 'a performer who stages her narrative' (Hinnant 2006: 204), performing for her reader. Throughout this first part, Susan, like we've seen Roxana do in Defoe's novel, attempts to manipulate the memoir form and establish an intimacy with her reader that provokes identification. For example, she writes:

For readers reared on travelers' tale, the words desert isle may conjure up a place of soft sands and shady trees where brooks run to quench the castaway's thirst and ripe fruit falls into his hand, where no more is asked of him than to drowse the days away till a ship calls to fetch him home. But the island on which I was cast away was quite another place. (Coetzee 1986: 7)

Signaling that she, like her reader, has read travel narratives and accompanied their heroes on fantasies of adventure and reward, she encourages identification through this similarity by attempting to insert herself into the reader's confidences. At the same time, she maintains her reader's interest, using her knowledge of the travel narrative genre to claim novelty.

In a similar play to her reader, Susan insists, 'There is more, much more, I could tell you about the life we lived' (Coetzee 1986: 26). Here, while she reasserts her ability to control the narrative and satisfy her reader and his narrative desires, she also clings to an idea of narrative that requires a strict adherence to factual event and demands an objective truth. She writes:

I would gladly now recount to you the history of this singular Cruso, as I heard it from his own lips. But the stories he told me were so various, and so hard to reconcile one with another, that I

was more and more driven to conclude that age and isolation had taken their toll on his memory, and he no longer knew for sure what was truth, what fancy. (Coetzee 1986: 12)

Her own keen desire to have found some sort of record of Crusoe's past on the island that would explain the man with which she was now forced to maintain such an intimate acquaintance reveals her privileging of verifiable fact. She explains, 'What I chiefly hoped to find was not there. Crusoe kept no journal [...]. I searched the poles that supported the roof, and the legs of the bed, but found no carvings, not even notches to indicate that he counted the years of his banishment or the cycles of the moon' (Coetzee 1986: 16). Such a record is valuable in its ability to provide a firmer foundation for her narrative performance, potentially increasing sympathetic identification between reader and narrator.

Upon her rescue, Susan is encouraged to publish her story, but, at this point, she refuses to give up control of her narrative. She describes her story's facts, which she here calls 'truth,' as being incompatible with art. We read:

A liveliness is lost in the writing down which must be supplied by art, and I have no art [...] I will not have any lies told [...] I would rather be the author of my own story than have any lies told about me,' I persisted—'If I cannot come forward, as author, and swear to the truth of my tale, what will be the worth of it? I might as well have dreamed it in a snug bed in Chichester.' (Coetzee 1986: 40)

She insists that the artifice of art might make her story come alive, but that it would also devalue it, that 'liveliness' might undermine the provocation of sympathy apparently natural to authenticity.

At this point, it is clear that Susan is struggling with the particular model of language Daniel Defoe detailed in his *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. In this text, Defoe has Crusoe explain the observation he has made over the course of his adventures regarding language's function as a tool of individual desire, writing: 'All that we communicate of [what we love, hate, covet, and enjoy] to any other is but for their assistance in the pursuit of our desires' (Defoe 1899: 2-3). According to this model of language: communication is purely a tool of individual impulses; we speak to others simply in order to secure our own interests, and we must

assess the extent to which another's sympathy (and the interest we must arouse to secure that sympathy) is compatible with our desire. The question for Crusoe and Susan remains: At what point is my interest in provoking sympathetic reader-response compromised by the process of that provocation?

What follows in Coetzee's novel are Susan's subsequent attempts to manage her desires for sympathetic reading by reconciling the performance of narrative with the supposed transparency of epistolarity. The narrative subsequently takes the form of a dated correspondence in which the first part of the novel has been enclosed. In this correspondence, it becomes clear that Susan has enlisted Foe, the author, to help her reconcile her own desire with that of her readers and write the 'true' and lively—in other words saleable—story of her time on the island. Thus, we follow Susan through a present tense account of her current situation and immediate reflections. Where Susan's narrative of the island is punctuated by intermittent self-reflexive statements intended to court the sympathies of her audience, the second part of the novel utilizes epistolary technique to elicit identification and sympathy from her addressee, Foe, and move him to the completion of her story. As she relates her own efforts to write this story, she laments that her first attempt 'is a sorry, limping affair,' 'the next day,' its refrain goes, 'the next day [...] the next day' (Coetzee 1986: 47).

The effects of such direct address upon the eighteenth-century reader that *Foe* represents have been carefully summarized by Martha Koehler, in *Models of Reading*: 'the process of sympathy begins with a perception of similarity to another person' (2005: 34). While Koehler is primarily interested in analyzing the failed moments of sympathy within *Clarissa*, *Evelina* and *Dangerous Liaisons*, she also acknowledges epistolarity's generalized ability to provoke identification through moments elicited by a process that Samuel Richardson describes as one where 'everyone [is] putting him and herself into the Characters they read, and judging of it by their own Sensations' (qtd. in Koehler, 2005: 73). Other critics have also emphasized the particular connection of the letter form to sympathy. Joanna Moody, in her introduction to a special issue of *Women's Writing* devoted to epistolarity writes, '[n]o other literary product can project us so intimately into the personal lives of their writers' (2006: 1); in the same issue, Nicole Pohl examines the letters of the Bluestockings as an extension of reciprocal sociability that uses sentiment to

connect individuals (2006). In *Romantic Correspondences*, Mary Favret emphasizes the promiscuity of letters, the 'looseness' that 'locks' the writer and reader in 'an intimacy' (1993: 24). The very form of the letter, in its ability to reveal the most private and intimate thoughts and feelings of the writer and to let us in on the secrets of the writer as they develop, prompts identification. The power of the letter to elicit reader sympathy depends on an appearance of authenticity made up of the first person perspective without the intrusion of an external narrator. It depends, as well, on the voyeurism that makes the reader a unique confidant.

Thus, in response to Susan's employment of such technique and her efforts to prompt his identification through an appearance of authenticity, Foe, as her correspondent, reemphasizes the potential interests of her readers in contrast to her own. He emphasizes the readers' desire for a story of 'loss, then quest, then recovery,' but Susan balks (Coetzee 1986: 117). This has led Patrick Corcoran, in his essay 'Foe: Metafiction and the Discourse of Power,' to argue that Foe critiques the process of storytelling to reveal its role in 'enslaving and oppressing mankind' (Coetzee 1986: 257). However, Susan is careful to explain that her silences are not defenseless, able to be 'reshaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others' (Coetzee 1986: 121). She describes them as 'chosen and purposeful,' her 'own' (Coetzee 1986: 122, my emphasis), and she insists, 'It is still in my power to guide and amend. Above all, to withhold' (Coetzee 1986: 123). Having already revealed her changed conception of truth, Susan rejects Foe's vision for its betrayal of her interest and demands the control of her story. Susan repeatedly attempts to convince Foe that this desire to fit her story within the confines he has outlined is not only a violation of her right to her own story but also ultimately empty. She continues, 'All of [my life before the island] makes up a story I do not choose to tell. I choose not to tell it because to no one, not even to you, do I owe proof that I am a substantial being with a substantial history in the world. I choose rather to tell of the island [...] for I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire' (Coetzee 1986: 131).

In addition, Susan continues repeatedly to insist on the ability of narrative to provoke reader sympathy. At one point, she creates an analogy between narrative and sexual intercourse: '[w]ho would venture to say that what passes between lovers is of

substance (I refer to their lovemaking, not their talk), yet is it not true that something is passed between them, back and forth, and they come away refreshed and healed for a while of their loneliness?' (Coetzee 1986: 97). Similarly, in another comparison of storytelling to physical intimacy, she describes: '[i]t is like our desire, when we kiss someone, to feel the lips we kiss respond to us. Otherwise would we not be content to bestow our kisses on statues, the cold statues of kings and queens and gods and goddesses? Why do you think we do not kiss statues, and sleep with statues in our beds?' (Coetzee 1986: 79). She continues, 'I say that the desire for answering speech is like the desire for the embrace of, the embrace by, another being' (Coetzee 1986: 80). In both of these descriptions we see Susan repeatedly emphasize the ability of her story to bring about sympathy.

Later, echoing Defoe's *A Vindication of the Press*, Foe apologizes for the 'grubby' reality of his authorship, describing himself as 'an old whore who should ply her trade only in the dark' (Coetzee 1986: 151), while Susan, echoing the Prefaces of both *Roxana* and *Moll Flanders*, protests, '[i]t is not whoring to entertain other people's stories and return them to the world better dressed [...] Am I to damn you as a whore for welcoming me and embracing me and receiving my story? You gave me a home when I had none. I think of you as a mistress, or even, if I dare speak the word, as a wife' (Coetzee 1986: 152). While Foe betrays the shame he feels at his being made simultaneous object and facilitator of another's unsavory and purely self-interested satisfaction, she insists on seeing his efforts in the light of affection. Again, the whore's story provokes sympathy.

The third part of Coetzee's novel represents the power of Susan's correspondence to elicit the sympathy of Foe. Susan tells of her reception by Foe upon her arrival at his garret:

I expected an answer, for never before had he failed for words. But, instead, without preliminaries, he approached me and took me in his arms and kissed me [...] Was this his reply—that he and I were man and woman, that man and woman are beyond words? (Coetzee 1986: 134)

Foe feels for her and manifests that feeling in a physical embrace. Despite Susan's initial ruminations on the inadequacy of language, it is clear that Susan's own story has brought about Foe's sympathetic response.

At this point, we have clearly seen how Coetzee's novel revives eighteenth-century discourses of prostitution and sympathetic identification. Coetzee's Susan, like Defoe's Roxana, represents the complication of female identity. As both perpetrators of crime and coerced agents, they are neither simply pitied as helpless objects nor simply spurned as culpable agents. Instead, prostitutes are able to provoke sympathetic identification in readers. In addition, Coetzee's novel represents the ability of first-person narrative to aid in the process of sympathetic identification, specifically through the memoir and epistolary forms as well as through the population of such forms with model reader-characters. Coetzee's novel, however, offers more than this. As historiographic metafiction, it also constructs this history of reading and feeling as an orientation of the contemporary responsible reader.

In taking the form of another first-person, present-tense narrative, the last section of the novel offers the reflections of a clearly modern narrator who has read Parts I and II – a fact that explains the quotation marks in which the earlier sections of the novel are enclosed. Ultimately, we see this modern reader/narrator grapple with the very conclusions Susan has reached in Part III about the powerful potential of first-person narrative form to elicit sympathetic response in readers. In Part IV, after a brief tour of Foe's garret and attempts to grapple with the 'pitch darkness' in which his 'matches will not strike,' – after the failure of the usual Enlightenment methods to gain understanding: 'gropes,' 'touches,' 'presses,' 'smells,' and 'hears' – the modern narrator is quickly displaced to a modern London. This departure, signaled by two asterisks and a description of the Blue Plaque of London with the words 'Daniel Defoe, Author,' precedes reflections on the experience of reading Susan's initial relation of her island story (Coetzee 1986: 155). Ultimately, the modern narrator describes, like Susan, slipping overboard. But where Susan told us of swimming to the island, our narrator seems to be pulled underwater to the wreck of a ship. He encounters the bloated bodies of Susan and the dead captain. He then finds Friday with 'the chain about his throat' (Coetzee 1986: 157). The modern narrator tries to speak, eventually realizing: '[b]ut this is not a place of



words [...] This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday' (157). From these lines Derek Attridge, in his essay 'Oppressive Silence: J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* and the Politics of the Canon,' compellingly concludes that Friday's silence is a call for a larger political project that will enable us to hear others' silences and that 'will entail a different mode of hearing' (1992: 231). Importantly, the modern narrator's response to Susan's narrative ends up suggesting the specific shape of this different mode. Specifically, we see the modern narrator model a sympathetic response to Susan's narrative and its silences through his embrace of Friday's speaking silence, as 'it beats against [his] eyelids, against the skin of [his] face' (Coetzee 1986: 155). Accordingly, the modern narrator, like *Foe* before him, models and encourages sympathetic identification as a result of the first-person narrative form. Through his modeled tears, we are invited to be similarly moved. Ultimately, in *Foe*, J.M. Coetzee revives eighteenth-century debates about reading printed material and its potential to elicit sympathetic identification. As such, it reveals how notions of an 'ethics of self-interest' and 'other directed ethics' are bound up with one another, representing the intersubjective potential of even the most complex identities (Spivak 1991: 182). It also provides a clearer model for a 'different mode of hearing' (Attridge 1993: 231), suggesting that hearing is feeling and that the feeling reader is both possible and responsible.

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