Susan and Friday
Rationality and Otherness in J M Coetzee’s *Foe*
ABSTRACT

This essay aims to study rationality and otherness in J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe*. Susan Barton, the female protagonist in the book, is rational and struggles for power and independence in the society of the Enlightenment where the story is set. She is seen as non-rational, less valuable and as Other of the white, European male due to her gender.

Friday is male, but non-white and he is perceived as Other as well because of the colour of his skin. Although Friday is mute he tries to communicate, but his ways of communication are often ignored by others.

Through the representation of these characters Coetzee subverts the conventional idea that rationality is linked to the white European male.

**Key words**: otherness, gender, rationality, Coetzee
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INTRODUCTION

Foe is a novel written by J.M. Coetzee in 1986, and it builds on Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe from 1719. In Coetzee’s novel, the female character, Susan Barton and the black slave, Friday are treated as less valuable due to gender and skin colour respectively. They are Others in terms of the white man as norm. Susan is white, but she is a woman, which gives her a position as “in-between” in the society of the Enlightenment. She is inferior to the white, Western males, but superior to Friday, who in such kind of society is seen as without voice, culture and history hence they are seen as non-rational and Other.¹

The rationality and superiority of the white man are the main themes in Robinson Crusoe and appears in Foe as well. However, Coetzee really challenges the norms and subverts the white, male European hegemony of the Enlightenment in several ways. Firstly, in Foe, Defoe’s male, rational and superior protagonist is displaced and reduced to a secondary position by the introduction of the new character Susan Barton. Secondly, Susan tries to learn Friday’s story by forcing him to speak without being “his voice”. Another way in which Foe challenges Robinson Crusoe is by the shift in the narrative perspective of the last chapter. Susan loses her narration to someone else, someone unnamed and ungendered, which makes the novel difficult to grasp. Such a narration is contradictory to the prevalent norm of rationality and suggests that both Defoe’s seemingly complete, rational story of Robinson Crusoe, and Coetzee’s alternative story of Susan, Friday and Cruso contain gaps and inconsistencies.

The aim of this essay is to describe and analyse the relationship between otherness and rationality in Foe. In the society of the Enlightenment, where the story takes place, rationality was the most important issue when it came to categorising people with a view to positions in society and legal and political rights. Women and black people were seen as non-rational, as Mary Klages mentions in her book Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed (168) and Ian

¹ Rationality means here being rational in actions and purposes, being an individual; during the Enlightenment only white men were seen as rational
Watt discusses in *The Rise of the Novel* (Weber qtd. in Watt 67). Women and families were obstacles to the men of the Enlightenment, whose primary goal in life was gaining power and making money (Watt 64, 67). The non-white people were seen as less valuable and primitive, and their aim in life was to serve the white man, which Ayobami Kehinde stresses in his article “Post-Colonial African Literature as Counter-Discourse: J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* and the Reworking of the Canon” (99-101).

My thesis is that through the representation of the characters Susan Barton and Friday, Coetzee’s *Foe* problematizes and subverts the conventional idea that rationality is linked to maleness and Europeanness.

Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and Edward Said’s *Orientalism* will provide a starting point of this essay. *Foe* will be analysed through these theoretical frameworks, because both de Beauvoir and Said discuss the issue of the Other. The first of the authors deals with woman as the Other, with the inferiority of women in Western society. The latter one describes the way dark-skinned people are treated by the Westerners as inferior to the white because of the colour of their skin. The issue of rationality will be introduced with the assistance of Stephan Kalberg’s essay “Max Weber’s Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Process in History” and the above mentioned Ian Watt and Mary Klages. Further analysis will be provided with the help of several articles concerning otherness and rationality. As Susan’s situation and actions cannot be fully understood without the background of *Robinson Crusoe*, some parts of the essay will deal with this novel and comparisons to it are necessary.

Numerous analyses of *Foe* have been made over the years since the book was published in 1986, but according to my survey, no one has researched on the issues of both otherness and rationality, which this essay is going to do. There are, however several works concerning the novel and post-colonialism or feminism, for example Teresa Dovey’s article “The Intersection of Postmodern, Postcolonial and Feminist Discourse in J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe*”
from 1989. In the paper she maintains that the novel is an allegory and that certain characters in the book represent certain discussions. For instance, Susan symbolises the feminist discourse, Crusoe the post-colonial one, and Friday the postmodern. Another interesting paper was written in 2008 by Andries van Oosterhout: “Giving Voice to Friday: An Evaluation of Key Concerns in J.M. Coetzee’s Foe: Writing, Reading and Silence”. The author of this essay discusses and illuminates the antagonisms between Susan and Foe and tries to explain Friday’s muteness. “(Hi)story in Search of Author(ity): Feminine Narration in J.M. Coetzee’s Foe” from 2012, an article written by Mina Mehrabadi and Hossein Pirnajmudding, discusses the importance of the protagonist and female narrator Susan Barton in the novel. “The Use of the Female Voice in three novels by J.M. Coetzee”, an article written by Lucy Valerie Graham in 1997 examines Coetzee’s use of female voices in Age of Iron, Foe and In the Heart of the Country. After accomplishing the survey it seems even more important to analyse these two examples of otherness and their relationship to rationality in Coetzee’s book.

In the theoretical background I will discuss the ideas and concepts that inform my understanding of the characters of Susan and Friday. The analytical section will apply these concepts and ideas to these two characters and an attempt to analyse the last puzzling chapter of the novel will be made.
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In order to analyse how conventional ideas of rationality are problematized in *Foe*, theoretical views on gender, colonialism, rationality and the Enlightenment will be given and discussed in the following sections. These theories are highly important, as they enable the analysis of actions and reactions of the characters in Coetzee’s book. I shall begin by giving a feminist perspective on rationality and gender.

**Woman as Other**

Simone de Beauvoir is one of the most famous feminists and she is the one who has developed the expression of woman as the Other. In her book *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir states that woman’s role has remained unchanged since ancient times (628), and that people are divided into two different ranks, and woman is the Other. She is an object, not a subject, not “a fellow human being” (267). A woman is considered irrational (632) and has “no sense of accuracy” (628). She is accused of believing in mysteries and lacks “the criterion of plausibility” (648).

Women are blamed for not wanting change. They are “born to suffer” (633) while those who put up a fight and struggle against adverse circumstances are men. De Beauvoir states that women are seen as “always trying to conserve, to adapt, to arrange, rather than to destroy and build anew; they prefer compromise and adjustment to revolution” (633). Women have a subordinate place in society, they are governed by men and the male order is a law for them (629). Women defend the “old” order and they are resigned and powerless (632-3). The resignation has taught them to be patient (633).

According to de Beauvoir, women are also accused of being docile and not participating in history. Spending their lives at home they are passive as “workers, black slaves, colonial natives” (629); they are obedient and are called “grown-up children” (629). A
woman does not know what happens around her, she is an “eternal child” (629). According to the male point of view, women lack male boldness (633).

The author of *The Second Sex* states that as a woman lacks technical training, she does not have the chance to be more dominant in society (629) and to grasp the masculine world (637, 643). Her skills at home are too simple and tedious to be considered as technical abilities (630).

A woman’s whole life is waiting. Her dependence on her husband makes her await his approval, gratitude, support and love (642). Women are perceived as being lazy and mediocre with no other interests than the household (642). De Beauvoir states that a woman’s “wings are clipped . . . she cannot fly” (636), because she cannot see the light in the future (636).

All the above mentioned features are seen as women’s characteristics contrasted with the masculine norm and are therefore considered to be inferior. This is how Woman is constructed: as the Other of Man.

**The Non-white as Other**

Susan Barton is not the only character in *Foe* who is seen as subordinate to the white man. Friday is another individual in Coetzee’s novel who is treated as the Other and is seen as inferior to white people due to skin colour. Edward Said is one of the most famous critics who has studied the othering of the colonized nations. In his book *Orientalism* he describes the way the West has perceived the Orient, the colonized countries, not as they were in reality, but as the Europeans wanted to see them. The natives were exploited by the West, which had greater military power and wanted to govern the “Oriental” people. As long as the natives remained silent, the Europeans could dominate them. Orientalism, the West’s projection of the East as exotic and unchangeable has resulted in objectification of its people (96). Abdel Malek, quoted in Said’s text, talks about the otherness of the Orient that is perceived by the West: “This ‘object’ of study will be, as is customary, passive, non-participating, endowed
with a ‘historical’ subjectivity, above all, non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign . . . other than itself in relationship to itself, posed, understood, defined – and acted – by others” (97). This Western way of perceiving the Eastern people makes them “homo Arabicus” or “homo Africanus” (97). Malek talks about “the hegemonism of possessing minorities . . . anthropocentrism [and] europcentrism” (97), which had an impact on the “direct relationship with non-European peoples” (97). Thus, Europeans – the subject, watch the Orient – the object (103).

The above mentioned issues are examples of how the non-white people were perceived by the West: as less valuable, as the Others of the Western European Male norm.

**The Enlightenment and Rationality**

The third perspective that will be used in this essay will outline a number of central ideas on rationality as it was understood in the Enlightenment’s period; the period that produced Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*.

Encyclopaedia Britanica explains the Enlightenment as an intellectual movement of the 17th and the 18th centuries’ Europe, and rationality was the most important issue of that development. The goals of rational man were knowledge, freedom and happiness.

Mary Klages describes the basic ideas of the Enlightenment, which, according to her, are similar to those of humanism (167) and she gives nine points of the essential concepts of the epoch. For the purpose of this essay, where rationality is one of the main themes, some of them will be cited here:

- There is a stable, coherent, knowable self. This self is conscious, rational, autonomous, and universal--no physical conditions or differences substantially affect how this self operates.
• This self knows itself and the world through reason, or rationality, posited as the highest form of mental functioning, and the only objective form. . . .

• In a world governed by reason, the true will always be the same as the good and the right (and the beautiful); there can be no conflict between what is true and what is right. . . . (Klages 167)

As a rather big part of this essay deals with rationality it is important to know the theoretical background of this issue. The German philosopher Max Weber divides in his works rationality into different kinds, which are summarized in the above mentioned Stephen Kalberg’s essay. Weber calls these four types of rationality “practical”, “theoretical”, “formal” and “substantive” (Kalberg 1148). Although he realizes that “rationalization, albeit often of a different kind” (Kalberg 1150) exists in other civilizations, he discusses these ideas in reference to the Western one (1149-50). The “formal” rationality, which is the most relevant one in this essay, is attached to areas of life connected with industrialization, especially with economics, law, bureaucracy and science, and denotes “universally applied rules, laws, or regulations” (1158). During the Enlightenment the “economic ‘rationalism’” was most developed in Holland and England (Kalberg 1151).

Rationality deals with order and “creating order out of chaos” (Klages 168). The creation of rationality leads to more order and an organised society with more functionality and stability. Societies are against disorder and they depend on dual oppositions between order and disorder. They affirm the predominance of order, and they need things that represent disorder, which in Western society is “‘the other’ . . . anything non-white, non-male, non-heterosexual, non-hygienic, non-rational” (Klages 168). Disorder must be removed from the society where order and rationality are crucial (Klages 168).
The rationality of the Enlightenment has been criticized because of its nationalism and the male, Euro-American rationality, and subjugation of women and non-Euro-Americans. Among those who defied the Western concept of “rationality-based morality” was Nietzsche. His ideas are described by Fuminobu Murakami in the introduction to Murakami’s book *Postmodern, Feminist and Postcolonial Currents in Contemporary Japanese Culture* (Murakami 1). Nietzsche unveiled that “‘good’ is . . . what is considered ‘noble’, ‘aristocratic’ and ‘high’, while ‘bad’ is ‘common’, ‘plebeian’ and ‘low’” (qtd. in Murakami 2). Nietzsche, however, approved power and justified the “will to power” (Murakami 2). He criticised Christianity for supporting the less fortunate. Fuminobu Murakami also cites Weber, who states that within rationality there is a “depersonalising force being exercised on people” (Murakami 2). Murakami maintains that in a society based on rationality people have to adapt to those who govern it, who “supposedly represent superior rationality and knowledge, [which results in] domination, oppression and a totalitarian and authoritarian society [where] the rationally weak are suppressed by . . . the rationally strong” (3). In such society, the wish for rationality can turn into something opposite than freedom and progress. Rationality, however, is considered as necessary to development and progress (Murakami 3).

Ian Watt talks in his book about the importance of rationality and economy which overshadow everything else in the enlightened man’s life. According to him, many economic theorists have used the rational character of Robinson Crusoe as an example of *homo economicus* (Watt 63). The focus on the economic individualism weakens other values, like family or group relationships and particularly sexual relationships. Sex at that time was seen as “one of the strongest non-rational factors in human life” (Weber qtd. in Watt 67) and was an obstacle to rationality and economy that must be controlled (Watt 64, 67). This new order appears everywhere where industrial capitalism dominates the economic structure (Watt 64).

In *Foe* Coetzee remodels the character of the Western man of the Enlightenment, which is at the focus of Defoe’s book. Coetzee’s Cruso differs from Defoe’s, not only by the
spelling of his name, but also in his behaviour. While the Crusoe of Defoe has all the characteristics of the white, rational man of the Enlightenment who can survive against all odds and take care of himself in any situation, Coetzee’s character is a disillusioned, shabby male with poor health who has resigned and excluded himself from the world around him. Defoe’s Crusoe is superior to black people who are portrayed as wild cannibals whom the white man has to civilise, teach Christianity and enslave, which is evident in his treatment of the character Friday. Crusoe is, as Maria Luz Suárez Castiñeira says in her article “Texts and Counter-texts: Foe versus Robinson Crusoe”, “the prototype of the British colonist” (163), and Friday, “the ignorant savage” (163), is “the prototype of the colonized native” (164). Coetzee’s Cruso has a slave too, but his Friday is mute, he has not got his own voice and cannot speak for himself.

In terms of female characters, Defoe’s Crusoe mentions his mother only a few times, leading the reader to believe that she is unimportant. By contrast, Crusoe talks about his father for several pages. Furthermore, Crusoe only refers to his wife and children in one sentence at the end of the book; women are thus absent from Defoe’s novel.

By introducing the new character Susan Barton, and by the representation of Friday as someone who defies all access to this though process, Coetzee’s Foe subverts the linkage of rationality and Western masculinity, the construction of woman as the Other and of the non-white as the Other.

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2 Cruso in Foe is spelled without the final e
ANALYSIS

In this section the actions of the characters Susan and Friday will be described and analysed. Firstly, Susan’s rationality and her actions towards Friday will be discussed. Secondly, the representation of Friday will be examined. At the end an attempt to analyse the enigmatic last paragraph of the novel will be made.

Susan, Gender and Rationality

Susan Barton, the female narrator and the main character in *Foe* very often acts independently and rationally. She is not like the women of that time are supposed to be, and she does not want to depend on men. She refuses to be like the females de Beauvoir describes in *The Second Sex*. According to the theories de Beauvoir describes, women are irrational (632) and inferior to men (267), which means that the white European male is the norm and woman is the one who is different in negative meaning: she is the Other and subordinate. Nevertheless, in *Foe* there is a different situation: Susan is the one who is rational and Cruso has resigned. He is not the strong character who represents the Empire. Neither does he want to enlighten Friday or civilise the environment. Instead of improving his life on the island and leaving traces of his presence there, his actions portray quite the opposite: he is silent and lethargic. Therefore, Susan willingly takes charge and sets goals. She works for changes and she is brave. She has ideas on how to improve the lives of the castaways or how to leave the island, while Cruso is apathetic and has no wish to change his life.

The “norm” of the white superior European male is subverted here: Cruso is moved to a second position and a woman is in charge. Through her behaviour, Susan challenges the male order in society and disrupts the male hegemony of the Enlightenment. Several times she demonstrates that she is rational, for example when she questions Cruso’s “stupid” labour with the terraces, where he does not grow anything, or when she has ideas of leaving the

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3 *Foe* is set in a society based on England in the Enlightenment period
island. In addition, by acknowledging that Cruso did not write any diaries, this demonstrates that Susan is more rational, since as Watt states, keeping detailed books was one of the rational man’s important issues (64).

Susan Barton behaves independently and acts in contrast to the prevalent idea described by de Beauvoir, that women have a subordinate place in society. They are dependent on men and controlled by them (de Beauvoir 629). However, there are some situations when Susan depends on several men. For instance, she depends on Cruso on the island: she needs water, food, shelter and shoes. During the journey back to England she relies on the captain on the boat, and still, after Cruso’s death she depends on him, because she is advised to pretend that he was her husband. Several times, when she and Cruso have arguments, she apologises afterwards or gives up the discussion and ‘holds [her] tongue’. Later on in the novel she depends on Foe. She can barely survive economically and gets small amounts of money from him. She also uses his house as a shelter. According to Susan, Foe is also the one who has the skills to write the story she wants to tell, the story of her, Cruso and Friday.

In addition to the occasions when Susan depends on men, there are also several situations in the novel where she is self-confident, firm and claims her independence. One of these situations is when she does not obey Cruso, as she “should”, as women are expected to do (de Beauvoir 629). She walks around the island against his will: “‘I am on your island, Mr Cruso, not by choice but by ill luck’, I replied, standing up (and I was nearly as tall as he). ‘I am a castaway, not a prisoner’” (Coetzee 20). Another example is when she makes the sandals herself, instead of waiting for Cruso to do it for her as he wants. She also shows her self-confidence when writing letters to Foe, because she believes that writing is quite a simple task. These actions of Susan exemplify subversion of the hegemony of the white European male in Coetzee’s novel.

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Foe is the male writer whom Susan asks to write the story of her, Friday and Cruso
Women are accused of being passive, obedient, “grown-up children”, or “eternal children” and do not know what happens around them (de Beauvoir 629), but this is not the case with Susan. This female protagonist of *Foe* works actively to make things happen, for example escaping the island, giving freedom to Friday, having her story told, and, at the end making money, gaining power and independence. The passive ones are Cruso and Foe, thus placing the white men in the space reserved for their Others.

According to de Beauvoir women are accused of lacking the “criterion of plausibility” (648) and their “sense of accuracy” is absent (628). Nonetheless, when Susan persuades Cruso to tell her about his and Friday’s past, he is unreliable, telling different stories all the time. Instead, it is Susan who possesses a sense of accuracy, she wants to know the truth, and she is aware of the fact that she cannot trust Cruso in this matter: “But the stories he told me were so various, and so hard to reconcile one with another . . . So in the end I did not know what was truth, what was lies, and what was mere rambling” (Coetzee 11-12). As said by Manuel Almagro Jiménez in his article “Father to my Story: Writing *Foe*, De-Authorizing (De)Foe” Cruso manipulates Susan by changing his story several times, thus her story cannot be reliable (11). Here it must be stated that the entire novel retells stories differently, displacing the understanding of truth and accuracy.

Susan’s urge to have her story told is partly because of her wish to preserve memories and partly to gain money and independence. She writes her story in letters to Foe and seems to do the writing well, and she thinks that creating a text can be quite a simple task. Nonetheless, at the same time she considers males as having greater linguistic skills than females and does not believe in herself concerning writing. According to Jiménez she sees males as those who can write better than her. She therefore accepts the male superiority in this matter and the “fact” that authorship is not for her, because she is a woman (15). However, Susan refuses to let Foe decide the content of her story. Suárez Castiñeira states in her article that the person who narrates is the one in control (168) and it is apparent that Susan is very
concerned about what will be written. As Jiménez says, Susan constantly fears that Cruso’s, Friday’s and her story will be regarded as many other stories fabricated by storytellers. She wants to convince the reader that she is telling the truth (11). Judie Newman maintains in her article “Desperately seeking Susan: J M Coetzee, Robinson Crusoe and Roxana” that Foe is an enemy to Susan, and she is afraid that he will take the story away from her and change it as he pleases. She also fears that he will erase her from the narrative and change Friday “into a happy slave and Cruso into a colonist and proto-capitalist” (2).

Susan has increasingly bigger difficulties getting in contact with Foe and she suspects that he might be hiding from her. There are moments when she believes that the story would be better if no woman was involved in it: “Better had there been only Cruso and Friday . . . Better without the woman” (Coetzee 71-2). This passage is as an allusion to Robinson Crusoe. But, on the other hand, without a woman the story would not be possible at all, because neither the apathetic, irrational Cruso nor the mute Friday would be able to tell it – both of them have their aversions to language. As said by Jiménez in his article, Susan wants to tell the truth, while Foe wants to invent the truth. She depends on his art and his ability to tell the story in an interesting way, a story which can be sold, so that they both can escape their poverty (14, 15). Both Susan and Foe want to gain money from the novel, even if they have different opinions on how to tell it. They both want to reach their goals, but by different means. However, Foe is only interested in writing a bestseller, and for Susan it is important to give voice to Friday. On the other hand, she does not want Foe to get control over her story, and she has her own opinion what to reveal or not: “I am not a story Mr Foe. . . . I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire” (Coetzee 131). It can be said that Susan’s urge to have her ‘true’ story told has two reasons. The first one is to make money and gain the independence – just like the men of the Enlightenment. The second reason is that she, as a second-class citizen, wants to give freedom to another oppressed person, Friday.
According to the Beauvoir’s theories, a woman’s whole life is waiting (642) and, indeed, much of Susan’s time consists of waiting. She waits for Cruso to make the sandals he promised her, later she waits to be rescued from the island, and after homecoming she waits for her story to be written and published, and by that for her independence. She also awaits Friday’s independence, so that she can finally be “free” and take care of no one but herself. However, even though she is forced to wait she does not do it passively. On the island she makes the sandals herself. She even has ideas how to get away from there, and in England she pressurizes Foe to hurry and write what she wants, not a story of his own imagination. All these examples prove her urge to be independent and show the boldness she possesses.

Taking care of home and family was another task left for women, and was the only interest they had (de Beauvoir 642). On the one hand, Susan travels to Brazil to look for her daughter, but, on the other hand, she denies the girl who says she is her child, and Susan does not say anything about her own past, whether she had a family or not. However, Susan cares for Friday. In some ways, he is “her” child, she cannot abandon him as Foe advises her to do and she feels responsibility for him.

As a woman Susan is supposed to have a family and to take care of it, but as the rational person she wants to be, she realizes that having a family complicates the desire of making money and gaining power. On the other hand, she has sex, first with Cruso, on the island, and later with Foe. As Watt mentions in his book, sex was one of the most irrational aspects in the rational society of the Enlightenment (67), and that is another issue that disrupts the values of that period.

Simone de Beauvoir says that women are blamed for not wanting change, they are “born to suffer” (633) and men are those who fight. Women are seen as “always trying to conserve, to adapt, to arrange, rather than to destroy and build anew; they prefer compromise and adjustment to revolution” (633). In Foe we can several times clearly see that Cruso and
even Foe are those who are passive. The one who fights is Susan, and she does not want to adjust. By her behaviour, by taking the initiatives she is the “revolutionary”.

As mentioned above, de Beauvoir maintains that a woman’s “wings are clipped . . . she cannot fly” (636), because she cannot see the light in the future (636). Susan’s mission is difficult: being a woman and having a subordinate position in society governed by men and at the same time wanting to be independent, makes the task problematic. She is both superior and inferior: she is white and she is a woman, which gives her a position in-between. As stated by Fiona Probyn in her article “J. M. Coetzee: Writing with/out authority”, Susan is between “the colonial master and the colonised” (2). According to her Susan is seen by many critics as questioning “power, authority and language” (1). She is, on the one hand, the one who has power, because of the colour of her skin, but on the other hand, she is a woman in the age of reason, which makes her less valuable.

**Friday, Post-colonialism and Rationality**

Another character in *Foe* personifies the Other of the white man is Friday. As Klages mentions in her book, Friday is male, but “non-white”, and by the process of Othering, this fact inevitably makes him “non-rational” (168). He is black and a slave, and personifies “savagery, cannibalism, unconsciousness, silence, and darkness” (Kehinde 102), and this casts him as Other. There are several examples in the novel where Friday is perceived as a savage in that when he is described as non-European, this is linked to ideas about cannibalism and servitude. In the very beginning he is described by Susan as having a “flat face”, “small dull eyes”, a “broad nose” and “thick lips” . . . “He reached out and with the back of his hand touched [Susan’s] arm. He is trying my flesh, I thought” (6). On page 104, when Susan finds Friday sleeping as a “normal” human she is surprised, because she thought that “savages [sleep] with one eye open” (104). Further, when travelling to Bristol they find a dead baby in a ditch and Susan then imagines Friday eating the corpse of the baby (106). During the same
journey they go into an alehouse and they are not being served because of Friday’s skin colour and of his lack of shoes (102). Moreover, on the island Friday is treated as a servant by Cruso, he is taught no more than the few words which are needed to serve the white man. As stated by Cruso “Friday [has] no need of words” (56).

On the boat, during their way back to London, Susan forces the crew to let Friday sleep close to his “master’s” door. This can be interpreted as a way of having him among the people he knows, but at the same time he has to sleep outside Cruso’s door, like a dog. Susan says that “he would rather sleep on the floor at his master’s feet than on the softest bed in Christendom” (41).

The indication of Friday’s lack of a tongue is another example of treating him like a savage, because the “savages” were not supposed to have language or history. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says in her article “Theory in the Margin: Coetzee’s Foe Reading Defoe’s Crusoe/Roxana” that “barbarians by definition do not speak language” (13). Friday’s muteness symbolizes the lack of voice of the colonised people. Susan’s thoughts about Friday being a cannibal indicate how she is affected by the Western world’s prevailing idea of the African’s and other colonized nations’ savagery (Kehinde 99).

When inhabiting Foe’s house together with Susan, Friday dances his “dervish dance” (Jiménez 13) dressed in Foe’s robe and a wig. During his spinning the robe stands around his body and Susan sees his nakedness underneath and she assumes that he is castrated, “unmanned” (Coetzee 119). Since the book almost exclusively contains Susan’s own interpretations and conclusions, the reader does not know for sure if Friday really lacks his “manhood” and his tongue. By being black, Friday is already the Other and the probable lack of his “manhood” deepens his subjugation. Thus, his “lack” of rationality deepens as well: he is black, without voice and he is not properly male either.

Friday does not speak, but he has several other ways of expressing himself. On the island Susan hears him playing a kind of flute. Later she sees him floating on a log of wood in
the sea scattering flowers, and in London he spins around disguised in Foe’s robe and a wig. When handed a piece of chalk, Friday starts drawing eyes with feet. All these things are his means of communication, but is there anyone to listen? Susan, albeit trying to learn his story and set him free, does not seem to understand or does not care for what Friday is trying to say. For her there are just two ways of expression: speech and writing. She seems to be blind to all the signs he sends. Kehinde calls such an example of perceiving the colonized people not as they are, but as the colonialists want to see them, as savages and cannibals, “a creation of the West” (99). Ania Loomba says in her book Colonialism/Postcolonialism that “The vast new worlds encountered by European travellers [Africa included] were interpreted by them through ideological filters, or ways of seeing, provided by their own cultures and societies” (Loomba 71). In other words, the way of perceiving the colonized people was convenient for the West, it justified the exploitation of the people and their countries. Said states in Orientalism that as long as the Orient stayed silent, the West could dominate its people (96). Foe utters the same thing to Susan: “For as long as he is dumb we can tell ourselves his desires are dark to us, and continue to use him as we wish” (Coetzee 148). In other words, it is convenient for the Western people not to understand the signs, because then they can continue their dominion over the Orient. Kehinde says in his article that “Friday possesses the history that Susan is unable to tell, and it will not be heard until there is a means of giving voice to Friday” (113).

However, despite her blindness to many of his signs Susan is the one who wants to give Friday a voice. Spivak states in her article that Susan is “the colonialist-who gives the native speech-and the metropolitan anti-imperialist-who wants to give the native voice” (13). Susan takes care of Friday, wants to set him free and educate him, take him “out of darkness and silence” [by building] a bridge of words” (Coetzee 60). Kehinde maintains that Friday “represents all human beings who have been silenced because of their race, gender or class” (111-12). In other words, the colonized people possess their history which the imperialists are
unable to tell, and the West only lets them talk according to Western norms. He also says that African history does not begin with the encounter with the Western world, on the contrary – this meeting puts an end to its splendour (115).

Friday has his past to reveal if there is anyone to listen. Susan is the one who on the one hand wants to learn his story, but on the other hand does not see, or does not want to see his ways of communication. Friday is a symbol of how the society of the Enlightenment treated the non-white people, as less valuable. Friday’s probable lack of a tongue and “manhood” deepens his subjugation and the European white male is a “norm”. Therefore, his muteness is convenient to the West: if no one knows his wishes, he can be used by the others.

The Mystery of the Ending
This last section of *Foe* seems to be surrealistic because of the difficulties to grasp what goes on. Several critics, such as Probyn and Suárez interpret this passage in different ways, with only one thing in common: that Susan loses her narrative power here, and that someone else, an unnamed and ungendered narrator takes over. He or she seems to visit different locations both unexpectedly and in different times. However, in all the places that the narrator (re)visits, Susan’s presence is accompanied by Friday and another man. Her body seems to be dried out, swollen or dead, but Friday’s is alive. From his mouth, the sounds of the island can be heard.

Suárez says in her article that Susan, who abandons the urge to tell her story “goes back to the island and . . . dives into the wreck to immerse herself in the mystic stream that comes from the mouth of Friday who emits the sounds of the island” (175). Friday seems to be alive, and the narrator says: “Though his skin is warm, I must search here and there before I find the pulse in his throat. It is faint, as if his heart beat in a far-off place” (Coetzee 154). This part of the chapter could be interpreted as Susan still wanting to learn Friday’s story and therefore that the silenced people are about to get their voice. The “far-off place” could be Friday’s own place, Africa, where Susan was about to send him when she wanted to give him
back his freedom: “He is a slave who is now free, that I am taking to Bristol to find him a passage back to his own people” (100). The pulse, even if faint, is still there. Maybe it represents that hope and independence are at hand. Possibly, Friday and the colonized nations are about to get their freedom and the centuries of colonial oppression have not yet taken the will to exist from them.

It is very depressing to envisage Susan giving up her urge to tell her own story and her wish to be the strong woman who desires the same things as men, and who competes to be their equal. If she gives up, the subversion of the male European hegemony has failed, and even if she learns something about Friday, she would not be able to disclose this information. We can only imagine and hope that Susan’s mission is possible, that Friday will succeed to communicate his story and that the Western people have the will to understand him. We can hope that they both will get rid of their otherness. Maybe Susan as the Other is dead and the other one who dives is her but now equal to both the men of the Enlightenment and to Friday? Perhaps the Susan as in-between has died, and instead, the free woman who gives freedom to Friday is alive? These are only speculations, because the author does not reveal more details.
CONCLUSION

The aim of this essay was to describe and analyse the relationship between otherness and rationality in *Foe*, and my thesis was that through the representation of the characters Susan Barton and Friday, Coetzee’s *Foe* problematizes and subverts the conventional idea that rationality is linked to maleness and Europeaness.

Susan Barton wants to be independent and equal to the men of the age of reason, when the white, European male is a norm. In many aspects she is the rational person of the Enlightenment. She has goals like making money and gaining power and independence. She comes up with new ideas and does not wait passively for things to happen. The white males around her, Cruso and Foe are reduced to a secondary position. By that the norms of the period are challenged and subverted.

Susan’s family ties are unknown, but she denies the person who claims to be her daughter, which further proves her rationality. On the other hand, she takes care of Friday like a mother, and she wants to learn his story. Even though she often fails to understand him, she does not want to treat him the way a rational man of the Enlightenment would, as a barbarian. Her rationality also comes short on the occasions when she does not believe in herself and when she thinks that men are more capable than her. This, I believe, is due to her gender and created by the prevailing ideas that women lack certain skills.

The last chapter in the novel complicates the interpretations of the story. The end is enigmatic and difficult to understand. There are several different studies of the passage having one thing in common, that Susan loses her narration and power here. One of the analyses says that Susan gives up the urge to tell her story, goes back to the island and dives into the wreck. I agree with this analysis. Maybe her diving into the wreck is a symbol of her involvement in Friday’s freedom process? Maybe her in-between position is going to disappear as well? I find it hard to believe that Susan would simply give up the urge to be an independent and equal person. It would be very difficult for me to accept such a failure of the subversion of the
male European hegemony, and that Friday’s story, if understood by Susan, would never be told.

Friday, male, but non-white represents otherness as well. Thus he cannot be rational from the Western point of view. He is perceived as a savage, and even Susan, who wants to learn his story and give voice to him, many times sees him as such a person. There are several situations in the story where Friday is treated as sub-human. The suggestion that he lacks his tongue and his genitals increases his oppression: he is a barbarian with no language and he is possibly less male, thus he cannot be rational according to the prevailing idea of that time. Nevertheless, when observing Friday’s actions it is easy to notice the opposite: even though he is mute, he tries to communicate, but there is no one around him who understands or wants to understand his ways of communication. Susan, even if seen as non-rational, but still superior to Friday, is an example of that. He is observed by her through her Western filter and thus not treated as an equal. Such a way of perceiving the “natives” justified the exploitation of the colonised people, or as Foe says to Susan, that as long as they do not understand Friday’s language they can do to him whatever they want. On the other hand, Susan’s wish to learn Friday’s story signals an awareness that he is worth listening to.
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