# 300 Years of Robinsonades

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Edited by

Emmanuelle Peraldo

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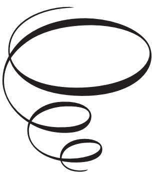

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# INTRODUCTION

# 300 YEARS OF ROBINSONADES

EMMANUELLE PERALDO

## 1. Robinsonades before Robinson: The origins and rise of the "genre"

The year 2019 marked the tercentenary of the publication of *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, a work that has had an enduring and widespread impact and become a universal myth. Ian Watt classifies Robinson with Faust, Don Juan and Don Quixote as "the great myths of our civilization." (Watt 1951, 95)[1] *Robinson Crusoe* has indeed become a myth, and in so doing it has eclipsed its original author. When it was published anonymously in London in 1719, the narrative of the adventures of a sailor who had allegedly spent twenty-eight years on a desert island was said to have been written by himself. Even though *Robinson Crusoe* met with instant success – it was immediately imitated, abridged, translated, rewritten and adapted – Defoe never claimed authorship, even if thanks to or because of Charles Gildon and his *Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Mr D_____ De F____* (1719), everybody knew that Defoe was the author.

At a time when fiction and the emerging genre of the novel were highly discredited, Defoe may not have wanted to be associated with that kind of writing, and although he has been considered by many critics as one of the fathers—if not *the* father—of the novel, he did everything he could to avoid being categorized among the authors of fiction, associated to lies and to the Augustan *falsum*. The anonymity of the publication of *Robinson Crusoe* contributed to its elevation to the rank of a myth because the text was not associated to a particular author, which gave it a universal

[1] He adds that "their basic plots, their enduring images, all exhibit a single-minded pursuit by the protagonist of one of the characteristic aspirations of Western man." (Watt 1951, 95)

dimension. Considering its many rewritings and adaptations, it can be said that a large part of the developed world is the author of this myth.

Paradoxically, even if he did not claim authorship for the text, Defoe published two sequels to *Robinson Crusoe*—the *Farther Adventures* (1719) and the *Serious Reflections* (1720)—that can be considered as rewritings of the original version as well as attempts by Defoe to capitalize on the success of the first part. Maurice Domino talks about "auto-réécriture" (rewriting oneself) to describe the fact that an author may write sequels or other versions of the same text. (Domino 1987) But the rewriting of *Robinson Crusoe* was not limited to Defoe's sequels: the bibliography of Robinsonades that Hermann Ullrich put together in 1898 gives 700 texts published between 1719 and 1898. It would be difficult nowadays to give an accurate figure of all the Robinsonades created over the past three centuries all around the world and in various media such as cinema, TV shows, (video-)games, comic books, but there must be hundreds or thousands of them. Gérard Genette reflected on the phenomenon of rewriting one text ("l'hypotexte") into a second one ("l'hypertexte") and here is how he defined the relation between the two texts: "By hypertextual relation I mean any relation linking text B (that I will call hypertext) to a previous one, text A (that I will call hypotext), on which it grafts itself in a way that is not that of commentary (…) B does not talk about A but could not exist on its own without A of which it results after a process of transformation."[2] Rewriting permits to transport ancient works into new contexts, which reinforces the universal and timeless dimensions of the myth. The reappropriation and transformation of Defoe's 1719 novel over the centuries has imprinted Crusoe's tale on the collective memory and the universality of this text is encapsulated in the title of Ann-Marie Fallon's 2011 book, *Global Crusoe. Comparative Literature, Postcolonial Theory and Transnational Aesthetics*. It has become a global myth of isolation and survival.

Is Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* the source of the myth of Robinson and of all Robinsonades though? There were indeed many maritime or insular texts before Defoe's, some of which directly inspired him, such as *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare (1611), William Dampier's *A New Voyage round the World* (1697), Woodes Rogers's *A Cruising Voyage*

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[2] The original quotation reads: "J'entends par [relation hypertextuelle] toute relation unissant un texte B (que j'appellerai hypertexte) à un texte antérieur A (que j'appelle hypotexte) sur lequel il se greffe d'une manière qui n'est pas celle du commentaire. (…) B ne parle nullement de A, mais ne pourrait cependant exister tel quel sans A dont il résulte au terme d'une opération (…) de transformation." (Genette, 13) My translation.

*round the World*[3] (1712) or Henry Neville's *The Isle of Pines* (1668) that Defoe very probably knew. The island is a recurrent fictional topos from medieval times and across different cultures. In Chapter 1, Françoise Dupeyron-Lafay argues that although it predates *Robinson Crusoe* by fifty years *The Isle of Pines* has been eclipsed by Defoe's text. Neville's short narrative (only 24 pages long) is in many respects pioneering and thought-provoking but has long been misunderstood, as a mere playful piece of sexual satire (pines being the obvious anagram of penis). Dupeyron-Lafay addresses its influence and posterity, how it can be regarded a matrix of Robinsonades and island narratives: in thematic, narratological and formal terms, notably because of its innovative proto-realistic dimension and its mixed generic status (it hybridizes the epistolary form, the pamphlet mode, utopia, dystopia and the travel narrative genre).

Chapters 2 and 3 also challenge the idea that Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* inaugurated the genre of the Robinsonade by going even further back in time: In Chapter 2, Emanuele Arioli argues that the desert island myth had already been explored by a thirteenth-century Arthurian romance—*Segurant or the Knight of the Dragon* (*Ségurant ou le Chevalier au Dragon*)—that had met with great success in its time and circulated from Italy to England and from France to Spain before mysteriously disappearing from the history of literature. Previously lost to modern scholarship, it was fragmented in manuscripts which were scattered throughout Europe; Arioli recomposed it from all the remaining fragments and episodes and presents it as a "proto-Robinsonade", also called "pre-Robinsonade". In Chapter 3, Beatrice Durand discusses *Hayy bin Yaqzan*, an allegorical novel by the Andalusian philosopher Ibn Tufayl (1105-1185 AD) which is one of the probable sources of *Robinson Crusoe*. She shows how Defoe takes from Hayy certain possibilities but differs with him fundamentally about naturally revealed divinity: Ibn Tufayl wrote Hayy's allegorical story in order to illustrate the natural powers of the human mind and its capacity to reach intellectual and spiritual perfection without any social or cultural input. When Defoe rewrites the topos of insular isolation, however, he is not challenging society and culture. Robinson was already a socialized adult when he was shipwrecked. He was not a *tabula rasa* and would never return to the state of nature. In the nature / culture debate of the Enlightenment, Defoe's novel takes a clear stand against all kinds of idealization of nature.

The section of our collection of essays on "Robinsonades before Robinson" questions the definition of the Robinsonade and asks why critics have seen *Robinson Crusoe* as the hypotext for so many later narratives,

[3] Woodes Rogers related the story of Alexander Selkirk who was actually marooned on a desert island and who has inspired the character of Robinson Crusoe.

whereas there had been a number of island stories before Defoe's. What made *Robinson Crusoe* stand out among all those wreck and insular narratives? According to Jean-Paul Engélibert, in *Robinson Crusoe* three insular themes concur, which explains why it gave rise to a new "genre", *i.e* the Robinsonade, and why it gave it its name: insular solitude, insular plenitude and the narrative experiments made possible by the topos of the island. (Engélibert, 28) On top of these themes, Defoe's text also provides the structure (departure; voyage; arrival on the island; isolation; salvation) and a character who stands for the typical eighteenth-century young man from the merchant class. And it is precisely the middle class that Ian Watt (1957) considers as a defining characteristic of the emerging genre of the novel: Watt sees the novel as a genre that developed in the social context of the rise of the Middle Class in England in the first half of the eighteenth century and Defoe has been considered by many critics, including Watt, as one of the fathers of the novel. In *The Rise of the Novel; Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (whose subtitle clearly mentions Defoe as an actor in the rise of the genre), Ian Watt wrote that "*Robinson Crusoe* is certainly the first novel in the sense that it is the first fictional narrative in which an ordinary person's daily activities are the center of continuous literary attention." (Watt 1957, 74) There have been disagreements on that issue, and some critics have voiced their hesitations on *Robinson Crusoe* as the first novel, in *Reconsidering the Rise of the Novel* (2000) for example. As for Defoe himself, he would never have called his writings "novels" and the "novel" is a label that was given by critics later in the eighteenth century. Similarly, the term "Robinsonade" was first coined in German in the preface to *Die Insel Felsenburg* by Johan Gotfried Schnabel in 1731, even if shortly after the publication of *Robinson Crusoe*, the name "Robinson" was already appearing in titles (*Der Teusche Robinson*, 1722; *Der Schlesischer Robinson*, 1723; *Der Amerikanishe Robinson*, 1724, etc). The concomitant emergence of the genre of the novel and of that of the Robinsonade, along with the immense popularity of *Robinson Crusoe*, might explain this remarkable posterity and the fact that Defoe's seminal text is always present somehow in Robinsonades, either because it is explicitly mentioned or because it reproduces its themes and structure, whether it be in the eighteenth century, at the turn of the nineteenth century or even in our very recent history. What happens to the Robinsonade once the socio-economic, political and ideological conditions of its emergence and development have disappeared? (Engélibert, 21)

## 2. The nineteenth-century Robinsonade: Mapping, Empire and Colonialism

Despite the persistence of some topoi and structures, the genre of the Robinsonade has evolved over the years. The moment when *Robinson Crusoe* was published was over-determined by the economic and political contexts of the rise of the British Empire and international trade. At the turn of the nineteenth century, it had led to so many rewritings that its fictional potential seemed to have waned and its progressive association with popular literature and imperial romance appeared hardly conducive to literary innovation. Moreover, the progressive mapping of the globe left fewer and fewer possibilities for desert islands to be found, and for the Robinsonade to be rewritten and reinvented. For example, in *The Swiss Robinson* by Johann David Wyss (1812), a family is wrecked on a desert yet very fertile island, which was highly improbable since the huge developments in navigation and exploration had left very few places unmapped; as Robert Clark suggests in the epilogue of the present volume, the uninhabited-but-fertile desert islands found in Robinsonade novels are pure fantasies, the wish-fulfilment dream of European colonialism.

Despite this changing context and the increasingly unrealistic claim that one could be stranded on a desert island fertile enough to rebuild a new life and civilization on it, the myth of Robinson resurfaced in R. L. Stevenson's and Joseph Conrad's fictions, and Julie Gay analyzes in Chapter 4 how they displaced and unmapped that myth, which is key to understanding their subversive and innovative geopoetics of insular adventure at the turn of the century. By transferring the myth from the Caribbean to the South Seas (in Stevenson's *South Sea Tales* and Wells's *Island of Doctor Moreau*), the Malay archilepago (in Conrad's *Victory*), or even the Scottish isles (in Stevenson's *Kidnapped*), those authors consistently displaced the narrative's tropes and especially the desert island motif, and highlighted both its persistence and the impossibility of faithfully rewriting it in the new, turn-of-the-century context.

The nineteenth century was a period marked by the industrial revolution, progress and scientism, and the authors who wrote Robinsonades at that period witnessed those developments and how they changed the world. In Chapter 5, Paule Faggianelli-Brocart focuses on Jules Verne who was highly influenced by *Robinson Crusoe* and who believed that the island was a model for society. Critical discourses on the myth of Robinson have abundantly underlined the importance of technical engineering in this prototype of imperial modernity. Isolated, the survivor displays his own value through the use of technical and scientific knowledge. Those skills are

the condition of his mastery on the island. Technical fascination and insularity are dominant motives and characteristics in the numerous writings of Jules Verne rooted in Defoe's myth. Faggianelli-Brocart focuses on *Deux ans de vacances* (1888), *L'Ile Mystérieuse* (1874) or *L'Ecole des Robinsons* (1882) and analyzes Jules Verne's surveying moments that exhibit the insular narratives and the obsolescence of settler utopianism in the age of technological and military expansion. By focusing on the collective trouble faced by the castaway during the panoramic sequences, this essay underlines how Vernian works display a critical perspective on colonial narratives, both repeating and rewriting them.

Technical progress went on and at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the birth and rise of cinematography gave birth to new media to create Robinsonades that had been limited to literature in the previous centuries.

## 3. In Crusoe's footsteps: Robinsonades, cinema and popular culture

Nowadays, with the huge popularity of video-games,[4] reality TV shows, series and movies, a book on Robinsonades cannot but deal with transmedial, transgeneric and transnational approaches, which is the subject of the second part of this volume that analyzes the bridges and comparisons between literature, cinema, television, children's literature etc. The Robinsonade wavers between the universality of myth and the particularity of the actual context in which it is written, of the medium it uses and the audience it addresses, which is why this volume is not an exhaustive presentation of all the rewritings of *Robinson Crusoe* but a selection of Robinsonades based on the inclinations and opinions of each of the contributors. Chapters 6 analyzes the movie *Anatahan* while Chapter 7 deals with a fiction (*Le Vrai Robinson* by Etienne Barilier) that itself deals with a reality TV show taking place on an island, thus providing a good insight into the *mise en abyme* of the rewriting of *Robinson Crusoe*. This part also tackles the very interesting issue of genres or sub-genres (Robinsonade and utopia/dystopia/heterotopias, science fiction, [post-]apocalyptic narratives etc.) and of the passage from a literary classic to various forms of popular culture.

As was said above, the island topos is a defining characteristic of the Robinsonade genre because of the isolation and the narrative experiments it triggers. In 2016, Ian Kinane published a book entitled *Theorizing Literary*

[4] Survival video-games like *The Forest* or *Minecraft*.

*Islands: The Island Trope in Contemporary Robinsonade Narratives* in which he offers a reflection on the culturally constructed trope of the island and its evolution from the colonial context of the eighteenth century to contemporary Western culture. Indeed, the desert island is a favorite topos of popular culture, as can be seen in the abundance of island narratives across diverse media. Kinane explores a vast corpus of popular texts, films, and television shows in his ambitious study, including fictions by Stacpoole, Lawrence, Golding, Tournier, Sage, Garland, and Martel; films such as *Mutiny on the Bounty* or *Cast Away*; series including *Gilligan's Island*, *Fantasy Island*, and *Lost*; and even reality shows like *Survivor*. The concept of the deserted island has been constructed by generations of Robinsonades that reiterated, reformulated and renewed it. Kinane's book shows how and why, while theorizing the concept of the Island (which he capitalizes to differentiate it from the geographical entity). Because islands are "both geophysical locations *and* imaginative topoi" (Kinane, 79), they are conducive to all kinds of adaptations and displacements. Indeed, with the development of space exploration, other planets, and more particularly Mars[5], have come to replace Crusoe's island in the Pacific Ocean.

Because of its isolating quality and because of the loneliness it brings about, the island is a recurrent *topos* in utopias and dystopias: the island, by definition, is outside of time and outside of space, a "negation of geography and time (*atopos*, *utopia* and always *achronos*)."[6] That malleability of insular space makes all displacements possible. In Chapter 6, Guillaume Gomot analyzes a movie by Josef von Sternberg, *Anatahan* (1953) whose action takes place in Japan and is based on a very famous historical event: during the Second World War, a group of Japanese soldiers shipwrecked on the small volcanic island of Anatahan, in the Mariana Islands; they remained there from 1944 to 1951, stubbornly refusing to believe in the capitulation of their country. But, as in many Robinsonades, the island is not as deserted as it seemed: a man and his partner, both Japanese, live hidden in the heart of the jungle. Sternberg's *mise-en-scène* shows how these soldiers, carried

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[5] Science fiction was born in the last third of the nineteenth century and was deeply influenced by the colonialist mentality of the time. Hence the popularity of the Robinsonade in U.S. science fiction, particularly in the 1960s when the "space race" was in full swing. *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* (1964), directed by Byron Haskin, who had previously directed *The War of the Worlds* (1953), *Conquest of Space* (1955) adapts the narrative of American conquest and domination on planet Mars. *The Martian* (2015) by Ridley Scott is another Mars-bound Robinsonade that is worth mentioning. National Geographic also produced a documentary and science fiction TV series entitled *Mars* in 2016.

[6] The original quotation reads: "négation de la géographie et du temps (atopos voire utopie, et toujours achronie)." My translation.

away by the desire that enslaves them, tear themselves apart for the beautiful Keiko (Akemi Negishi) in Anatahan's enclosed space. Bringing to their height the powers of filmic illusion, Sternberg directed his entire film in a gigantic studio, near Kyoto, with a Japanese team, choosing a very original enunciating system which superimposed the voiceover of a character narrator on the dialogues of Japanese actors throughout the film (it was the voice of the filmmaker himself, a new Robinson), and making *Anatahan* one of the most singular cinematographic Robinsonades. One can also notice the self-reflexive quality of the Robinsonade, commenting on the Japanese attitudes in the context of the second World War.

That self-reflexivity is also to be seen in Chapter 7 in which Ruth Menzies's analysis of *Le Vrai Robinson* (2003) by Etienne Barilier offers an original perspective on the links between canonical texts and popular culture through an analysis of remediation, *i.e* the representation of one medium in another. (Kinane, 177) By entitling his novel "the true Robinson", Barilier openly examines the complex web of truth and fiction that is so central to *Robinson Crusoe* whose preface states that "the Editor believes the thing to be a just History of Fact" and that there is no "Appearance of Fiction in it". (Defoe (1719) 1995, 4) The metatextual and intertextual dimensions of Barilier's novel are compelling: Robinson is a participant in a reality TV show, cast away on an island where he and his Mauritian companion, Virginie, must meet various challenges, to win the prize money. Barilier transposes the basic precepts of Defoe's novel to a radically different time, place and context, and includes familiar yet barely recognizable figures such as that of Friday. Narrated by the reality show's voyeuristic producer, the novel brings together elements from Defoe's text and other works, notably Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788), entangling the reader in an intricate satire of contemporary society while simultaneously undertaking an unsettling exploration of the porous limits between reality and representation, whether personal, literary or televisual. This chapter examines the connections between *Robinson Crusoe* and *Le Vrai Robinson*, analyzing the meticulously constructed interplay between them and between each text and the "real" world in which it is set, and it triggers a reflection on twenty-first century Robinsonades such as survival TV shows which can be pretty disturbing. A Robinsonade reflects on the world in which it is created and the recent Robinsonades are mostly critical.

## 4. Ecological Robinsonades: how can the Robinsonade change the world?

When I was a child, I remember reading *Les Enfants de Noé* (1987) by Jean Joubert, which relates the story of a family that was isolated in their house after a massive snow storm had deposited eight meters of snow and how they all progressively lose their minds. I was struck by that book because I was living in the Alps where there can be heavy snowfalls, and as I was a child the eight meters of snow did not seem that different from the amount of snow I could see from my window. Even if *Les Enfants de Noé* does not have all the characteristics of a Robinsonade, particularly because there is no displacement to a desert island or to another place since the family remains at home, it is a book that was aimed at children and we know how many Robinsonades belong to children's literature. Andrew O'Malley says that Defoe's novel, "a book that has on its surface so little to do with children", has had "so much to say about childhood." (O'Malley, 88) Robinsonades for children may help to educate them or to make them aware of a certain number of realities thanks to the appealing form of the adventure tale. In the light of global warming and climate disruption, that science-fiction Robinsonade of the 1980s, *Les Enfants de Noé*, may now read as an ecological fable or as an apotropaic message. By providing two very stimulating and timely chapters on ecocritical and ecopoetical readings of Tournier's Robinsonades, Part 4 proposes a very topical approach to the genre by focusing on the link between literature and the environment and how the Robinsonade and literature can awaken people's consciences and help make a difference in the world.

Rewriting *Robinson Crusoe* in the postmodern era consists in questioning that great myth of modernity and most postmodern Robinsonades criticize, subvert or even deconstruct the myth they are rewriting. It is the case of Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) whose title plays on the actual name of Defoe (Foe) and the concept of the enemy and in which the island episode is quite short. Instead, *Foe* questions the myth of Robinson from its genesis onwards by rewriting what preceded and what determined the writing of *Robinson Crusoe*. In Coetzee's Robinsonade, Daniel Foe says "the island is not a story in itself (…). We can bring it to life only by setting it within a larger story." (Coetzee, 117) Isn't that a perfect definition of the Robinsonade? Each author gives meaning to the isolation and solitude of their characters because by rewriting that story in different contexts, each author wants to reflect on a particular context. The insular episode in *Foe* stands for South Africa during the Apartheid for example.

In France, Michel Tournier is famous for the departure from the mythical hero, Robinson, that pervades his two novels *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (1967) and *Vendredi ou la vie sauvage* (1971)—the second one being the version for children. The titles erase Robinson and Friday replaces him. This inaugural inversion develops into a Robinsonade that dehumanizes Robinson at first before showing his attempts at proving he is a human being by submitting the animals and natural elements to his will and by proclaiming himself governor of the island. Chapters 8 and 9 both tackle Tournier's Robinsonade within the framework of ecology. Indeed, the myth of Robinson has been experiencing a new revival since the second half of the twentieth century thanks to the emergence, in several contemporary Robinsonades, of an ecological reading of the famous English settler's island adventures. In Chapter 8, Mathilde Bataillé tackles *Vendredi ou Les Limbes du Pacifique* by Michel Tournier and *L'Empreinte à Crusoé* (2012) by Patrick Chamoiseau. Those two novels put the same emphasis on the environmental question making it one of the central issues of the initiatory journey of the protagonists. That is one main difference with Daniel Defoe's novel in which many critics have said that the character's relation to the environment hardly changes as he settles down on the island. Marie-Hélène Weber says that "Robinson looks nothing like an ecologist or someone respectful of nature or animals."[7] (Weber, 37) Tournier's and Chamoiseau's books use the original Robinson's relation to nature as the starting point of a quest which will lead the central character to forsake his former *habitus* and experience a new relation to the world.

In Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the consequences of man's transformation of the land are very present though, either in the form of economic success (since the protagonist manages to develop a fruitful colony), or in the form of ecological disasters—a storm, a hurricane, an earthquake—that stand for divine retribution, as is stressed by the ecocritic Richard Kerridge: "ecological disaster is a punishment for human transgression, the necessary consequence of going too far, tampering with nature, usurping the place of divine providence." (Kerridge and Sammels, 3) The most frightening sign of this punishment in *Robinson Crusoe* occurs in the episode of the footprint that Chamoiseau puts at the core of his rewriting: one day, Robinson finds the print of a man's naked foot in the sand of his desert island, which surprises and terrifies him. That footprint can be seen as the epitome of the contact between man and nature. Robinson first imagines it is the Devil's, before concluding that "it must be some more dangerous creature." (Defoe (1719) 1995, 154) By this expression he means

[7] The original quotation reads: "Robinson n'a rien d'un écologiste ou de quelqu'un qui respecte la nature ou les animaux." My translation.

a savage, but of course, one could also read in it the danger of the action of man that leaves a trace, like a scar, on the pristine sand of the island.

In Chapter 9 which is written as an ecopoetic and ecophilosophical essay, Athane Adrahane seeks to tease out how Michel Tournier's rewriting of *Robinson Crusoe*'s character in *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* might help readers move forward onto the paths laid out by current ecological issues. Indeed, various images of the Earth emerge from this text, created in part by propositions in individual, social, and environmental ecology. At first, when confronted with Gaia, Robinson crafts a narrative that consists in enclosing the voices of the Earth rather than letting them bloom inside him as partners at the heart of his survival strategies. A different song then rises from limbo as soon as he starts cultivating stories shared with the non-human islanders. Learning to let himself be modified by rocks, colored by the light, or animated by flowers, Robinson starts perceiving the Earth as a person endowed with normative power. Yet another image of the Earth comes forth with the intrusion of Vendredi.

Those two chapters lay emphasis on the fact that postmodern Robinsonades are *reactions* to the myth of Robinson. They want to insist on the gap between myth and reality, and in the context of globalization and unbridled capitalism, that gap becomes highly parodic and even cynical. Lise Andries says about the Robinsonades of the end of the twentieth century that "they convey a sense of parodic distancing and progressive disenchantment."[8] (Andries, 23) Disenchantment may be the new realism, and postmodern Robinsonades express it in highly committed eye-opening narratives. Bearing in mind the idea that Robinsonades can be wake-up calls, the epilogue of this volume is a very original comparison made by Robert Clark between the Robinsonade and what has been happening in Great Britain in the past few years, *i.e* Brexit. Clark explores the relationship between Defoe's imagination and Locke's theory of political rights as being founded in the property rights of isolated men living in the state of nature. He notices the colonialist origins of Locke's story, and the colonial endeavors of Crusoe which ultimately depended on both removing the native inhabitants of fertile lands, and then concealing the act of removal. According to Clark, the denial of England's four-hundred-year history of atrocious exterminations now enables the electorate to dream of 'bringing back the empire'. Brexit's fantasies of insular trading success depend on delusions of guiltless colonial settlements which were nourished by *Robinson Crusoe*. Will post-Brexit Britain discover the truth hidden in the Robinsonade?

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[8] The original quotation reads: "s'inscrivent sur fond de distanciation parodique ou de désenchantement progressif". My translation.

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# Part 1:

# Robinsonades before Robinson

# CHAPTER 1

# THE POSTERITY OF HENRY NEVILLE'S *THE ISLE OF PINES* (1668), THE RESTORATION MATRIX OF ROBINSONADES AND ISLAND NARRATIVES

FRANÇOISE DUPEYRON-LAFAY

*The Isle of Pines* (1668) by Henry Neville (1620-1694) predates *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by fifty odd years, but it is eclipsed by Defoe's text[1] which has become a world classic and has reached the status of a universal myth. *The Isle of Pines,* although it is in many respects pioneering and thought-provoking in spite of its very brief and compact scope of twenty or so pages, is little known and has long been under-researched. Its publication in the Oxford Classics collection in 1999 in *Three Early Modern Utopias* (together with More's *Utopia* and Bacon's *New Atlantis*) represents a first step towards its revaluation. At that time, Susan Bruce, the volume editor, remarked: "Very little has been written on Henry Neville, still less on *The Isle of Pines*." (xlix)

The publication of a special issue of *Utopian Studies* (Vol. 17, No. 1, 2006) devoted to it is another telling index to this revaluation that is still in progress, showing us that Neville's seminal text (and pamphlet) deserves closer critical attention after being misinterpreted and dismissed by "earlier readers in the twentieth century" as "a playful piece of sexual satire scribbled by Neville with no serious purpose" (8) as Peter G. Stillman remarks in his Introduction to *Utopian Studies* or, as Adam Beach noted in

[1] In *Nulle Part et ses environs* (2003), for instance, Racault never mentions Neville and presents *Robinson* as the prototype of a new, as yet unborn, genre, namely the Robinsonade. (Racault, 374) Besides, he regards *L'Histoire des Sévarambes* (1677-79) by Veiras as the (French) prototype of classical narrative utopias. (Racault, 9) Likewise he situates the watershed for the new aesthetics of verisimilitude in 1675. (Racault, 17) Yet *The Isle of Pines* predates all this.

2000 about the reductionist readings[2] of the "tale" as "a scurrilous piece of Restoration pornography or a minor addition to the tradition of seventeenth-century utopian writing." (Beach, 21)

Indeed, would or could *Robinson* have been written without *The Isle of Pines*?[3] On the Oxford edition's back cover, it is enticingly defined as "an extraordinary fable and a precursor of *Robinson Crusoe*", "forthright in confronting sexual, racial, and colonialist anxieties". What this brief presentation does not evoke, though, is the text's formal and generic specificities. Neville's largely epistolary work contains a series of thematic (and ideological), narratological, and generic features that became paradigms for, and staples in, later island narratives, well beyond the Restoration period and outside its specific political and ideological contexts.

After a brief presentation of *The Isle*, of its particularly original construction and some of its keys themes and assets, this paper will deal with the posterity and enduring influence of Neville's text, some features of which can be regarded as the matrix of Robinsonades[4] and island narratives in English, such as Defoe's *Crusoe*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896), and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954).

*The Isle* is particularly remarkable for its elaborate technique of framing and embedded narratives by four different narrators. Two opening letters by Abraham Keek—who, as we shall see is *not* a fictional character—, written in Amsterdam between 29 June 1668 and 6 July 1668, precede and introduce the story proper, and are entitled "Two Letters Concerning the

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[2] Lurbe's 1994 paper testifies to this devaluation of *The Isle* (Lurbe,21) while fairly granting it a certain "*gravitas*" as a "fable" from which to draw a "lesson." (Lurbe, 21) Susan Wiseman in her pioneering 1991 paper on "Porno-Political Rhetoric and Political Theory" was the first to question this dismissive approach: "*The Isle of Pines* – which when it has been considered at all has been considered *only* as a pornographic fantasy of polygamy – addresses political questions." (Wiseman, 149)

[3] Defoe had in all likelihood read, or at least heard about, Neville's text although there is no evidence available to substantiate this. However, "Several commentators have claimed *The Isle of Pines* as a precursor to and a possible source" for *Robinson.* (Beach, 33) Yet, Keymer never mentions Neville and considers that "no single castaway narrative anticipates more than sporadic elements of Defoe's novel, however, and collectively they reveal nothing so much as the creative surplus generated in *Robinson Crusoe*. It is fair to assume that Defoe looked for raw material […] in stories of figures like Selkirk, but […] he was in the business of transformation, not imitation." (Keymer, xxiv)

[4] See Scholte about the Robinsonade genre and the real-life inspiration for *The Isle*, *i.e.* the adventurous voyage of the "Tweede Schipvaart" in 1598-1600. (Scholte,130-133)

Island of Pines to a Credible Person in Covent Garden" (Neville, 189), evoking the discovery of "2000 English people without clothes, only some small coverings about their middle", marooned on an island in the Indian Ocean "in Queen Elizabeth's time" when they were "but five in number." (Neville, 189) Then Henry Cornelius Van Sloetten is the first (framing) narrator "in a letter to a friend in London declaring the truth of his voyage to the East Indies." (190) The Dutch seaman's epistolary narrative (dated 22 July 1668) tells us how a storm led him and his crew to the Isle of Pines and it includes the recital (in direct speech) by William Pine, who himself introduces a fourth narrative (194-200), that is a written record by his own grandfather, George Pine, the first settler on the eponymous isle in 1589, after a storm and a shipwreck. William reads this record aloud to Van Sloetten and gives him a copy of it to take back to Europe. The storytelling is then taken up again (still in direct speech) by William (201-203), and then by Van Sloetten who concludes it (203-211), adding a final postscript to his letter. This complex narrative apparatus with its polyphony and different viewpoints is probably one of the reasons for the rediscovery of Neville's text and its revaluation since "today's readers are likely to be receptive to texts with multiple perspectives and (apparently) multiple authors who are untrustworthy narrators" and "are interested in the representation of the fictional as factual (and vice-versa) and engaged by the interplay among literary craft, political meaning, and psychological insight." (Stillman, 8)

Yet, strangely enough, George Pine's narrative was initially published on its own, in pamphlet form, in June 1668 and Van Sloetten's in July of the same year, also in pamphlet form, but "without Pine's narrative included in it—a frame, so to speak, lacking the picture it should enclose." (Bruce, xliv) "Later in July, or early in August, a new version of the text appeared, again in pamphlet form, conflating the two earlier pamphlets into one[5] and in so doing properly inserting Pine's narrative into the frame provided by Van Sloetten" (Bruce, xliv), thereby enabling the "conceptual links between the two halves of the text" and their "narrative congruence" (Bruce, xli) to emerge clearly.

George Pine's seven-page narrative had to be kept as a precious family heirloom "if any stranger should" chance to visit the Isle, that "[the Pines'] name be not lost from off the earth." (Neville, 200) It can be divided into two radically distinct parts: the first four pages are a story of survival

[5] "[…] it is possible that he did so in order to preclude interpreting *The Isle of Pines* merely as pornotopia." (Bruce, xli) Bruce ascribes the elusive meaning of the text to its "complicated publishing history" and its "comparative oblivion over the past 300 years" to its "salacious nature" that tended to obfuscate the "political critique" it was fused with (xxxvii) and which Wiseman addresses at length.

and resourcefulness, after Pine and four women (one of them, Philippa, a black slave) were marooned on a desert island owing to a violent shipwreck that killed the rest of the crew on their way to India to trade in Eastern commodities. It minutely describes their coming to terms with the situation, what they salvaged from the wreck—including a Bible, as will also be the case for Robinson—and how they put all this to the best use, built themselves shelters, devised means to make their everyday life as pleasant and comfortable as possible, managed to eat plentifully thanks to the bountiful fauna and flora available on the island, all this over a period of ten months. What is particularly striking in this first part is its emphasis on the sense of peace and plenty and the complete absence of external threats, such as wild beasts and wild people, since the castaways see "no footsteps of any, no not so much as a path." (195) The "disturbance" actually turns out to be internal, produced not by any wild, savage and "hurtful" (197) creatures but by the sloth and lust resulting from "idleness and the fullness of everything" (197), so that George and his female companions give up their Englishness and civilized mores. They become "bold" and shamelessly indulge in lust (Neville, 198), "having now no thought of ever returning home as having resolved and sworn never to part or leave one another, or the place." (199)

This marks a sharp break from the Robinsonade narrative pattern, and a brutal shift from a seeming golden age of innocence in the Eden-like isle to an exotic Restoration variation on the Fall. The posterity of George Pine—1,789 descendants by the time he reached his eightieth year and after fifty-nine years on the island (200)—is the result of initially unrestrained sexual licentiousness. (198) Besides, shortly before he dies, the eighty-year old patriarch autocratically makes his eldest son "King and Governor of all the rest" (200) which, in view of Neville's strong Republicanism, can legitimately be read as an attack on absolutism and on the conception of monarchy as patriarchal power. Significantly, Van Sloetten, who may be seen as the most authoritative narrator, refers to George's grandson William as "their prince or chief ruler" (192)—and later on as their "governor"—, but *never* as their "king".

Yet, when his grandson William takes over the narrative again, he insists on George's enjoining his son Henry "not to exercise tyranny", "exhorting him to use justice and sincerity" and not to "let religion die with him, but to observe and keep those precepts which he had taught them." (201) But, as William points out, "the depraved nature of mankind" makes "disorders" and "mischief" inevitable among "multitudes" (201), and he tells Van Sloetten a story of savagery and degeneration: the neglect of monthly Bible readings coincides with the Pines falling "to whoredoms, incests and adultery" (201) (and even rape), "so that what [his] grandfather

was forced to do for necessity, they did for wantonness." (201) The greatest offender is (unsurprisingly) John Phill, the second son of the *black* slave Philippa whose "savage" blood "rages in the bodies of the two worst offenders on the island." (Beach, 30) In order to "redress these enormities" (202), Henry and his counsel set up a series of six very punitive laws that sound like a harsh, condensed version of the ten Commandments, and prefigure Moreau's terrifying "Law" in Wells's novella. Nevertheless, peace and the respect of the law are never ensured permanently, as Van Sloetten's own narrative shows. Before he and his crew leave the Isle of Pines, they have to quell a rebellion instigated by another of the black Phills[6] that "threatened a general ruin to the whole state." (207) The Dutch are asked to intervene because the "governor" William Pine "found his authority too weak to repress such disorders." (207)

The various narratives, from the moment of the original Fall on (during George Pine's time), repeatedly contrast images of English weakness, uncivilized traits and degeneration on the one hand, and Dutch energy, industry, sound values, and power on the other. This is encapsulated by the symbolism of Van Sloetten's gift to the Pines when his ship first arrives on their isle: not only some knives, but "an axe or hatchet to fell wood" since the "old one which was cast on shore at the first, and the only one which they had ever had, being now so quite blunt and dulled that it would not cut at all." (192) Like the axe, they have lost their power, energy, drive, and regressed to the level of childish, helpless and voluptuous savages. Van Sloetten describes William's "palace" as primitive, "supported with rough unhewn pieces of timber", and merely covered "with boughs" (192) to protect it against the rain. It is actually the Dutch that symbolically legitimize his power and status by building him a more "lordly" palace before leaving the island, which "though much inferior to the houses of your gentry in England, yet to them […] appeared a very lordly place." (206) Throughout he uses the ethnocentric, patronizing language reserved for "savages". This could be read as a satire on the libertine mores of (Catholic) Restoration society (see Beach, 26) and a moral fable on England's sapped moral will and energy in contrast with the hardworking, enterprising (Reformed) Dutch.[7]

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[6] "It is hard to determine Neville's intention in writing *The Isle of Pines*. […] What is least likely, and yet what comes through most forcefully, is that Neville intended to represent interracial relations as dystopic. My sense is that Neville unconsciously chose the topical subject of African slavery in this text in an attempt to reconfigure evolving ideas about the bases of national identity." (Boesky, 180)

[7] "By depicting the patriarchal ruler of a remote island who preferred sexual relations with women to looking after his political affairs, it ridiculed both the depraved

*The Isle* "begins with a typical colonial encounter" between the Dutch and semi-naked "savages", quite "astonished" when they see a ship. "To readers in the history of European travel and exploration literature, this scene in which the natives marvel at Western clothing and technology is all too familiar. What makes this account so unusual, however, is that" the so-called naked natives speak English. (Beach, 21)

Of course, Neville's *Isle of Pines* takes on added significance by the light of the fierce Anglo-Dutch competition for "dominance of the spice trade in the East Indies" (Bruce, xli) from the early 17th century on, that escalated into the Anglo-Dutch wars (1665-1667).[8] It has been interpreted as providing "an explanation for Dutch ascendency" (Bruce, xlii) as opposed to the absence of "English labour" (xlii), as the ideal implicitly postulated. George Pine had for instance remarked in his narrative that the island "had it the culture that skilful people might bestow on it, would prove a paradise." (197) The culture and skill are never used either by himself or his indolent descendants who live almost naked, like "savages" – Van Sloetten repeatedly refers to this incongruous nudity in English speakers. (191)[9] Echoing G. Pine, Van Sloetten twice evokes the way the riches of the isle could have been used and exploited "had but nature [had] the benefit of art added unto it." (205) The place "would equal, if not exceed, many of our European countries" if properly managed, especially because "no question but the earth hath in it rich veins of minerals." (205) The postscript strikes

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morals of the Stuart court and the patriarchal political theory used by Charles II to defend his authority by divine right." (Mahlberg 2012a, 1)

[8] The visit of the Dutch to the Isle of Pines is "situated in the aftermath of the second Anglo-Dutch War in the summer of 1667", a "fateful summer for English fortunes", with the "Medway disaster" causing the destruction of much of the English fleet, "the loss of Surinam to the Dutch in the Treaty of Breda", the detrimental altering of the 1651 Navigation Act, all this reducing English power and giving the Dutch "significant advantages in the Spice trade" (Mahlberg 2012b, 63). Beach also emphasizes the ideological impact of the Dutch wars in *The Isle.* (Beach, 21-23)

[9] They have "great agility of body" when they dance but have "only vocal music" (207) because they never devised or built musical instruments (212) that Van Sloetten defines in his Postcript as "a happy means to express" oneself (212) and implicitly as the marker of a civilized state. Likewise, when he reached the island with his crew, the "naked islanders flocked unto [them], so wondering at our ship as if it had been the greatest miracle of nature." (191) By contrast, Van Sloetten defines the inhabitants of Calicut (India) as "civil and ingenious" (209) – in spite of their "odd customs" that somehow, have points in common with the Pines'. Their liking for refined adjuncts to their "apparel" such as "oils and perfumes" or "jewels" (209) implicitly presents them as more "civilized" (albeit exotic) than the naked (English-born) Pines, another way of blurring frontiers between the domestic and the exotic, the civilized and the wild.

a similar regretful note about "nature's abundance" that should be "manured by agriculture and gardening." (212) During their stay on the isle, Van Sloetten and his men behave in an enterprising and active way; they explore the island for six days and manage to chart it (205) before leaving, something the Pines never thought of, or cared about, doing after the second-generation Pines, as their numbers increased, "range[d] further in the discovery of the country, which they found answerable to their desires, full both of fowl and beasts." (201) This reflects the "common stereotype among republicans that warmer climates produced inferior, effeminate peoples, unable to build up significant military of colonial power." (Mahlberg 2012b, 65)

Whether in its complete version or not, *The Isle of Pines* "became an instant bestseller on the European market, with more than twenty foreign editions printed in five western European languages within a few months of its first publication" and "new versions of the story" printed in "contemporary newsbooks and gazettes". It even travelled "across the Atlantic to the American colonies." (Mahlberg 2012a, 1)

Its "lasting impact" led to "a selective, creative use of elements from Neville's story" in various pieces of fiction "that began soon after [it] came out, but continued long after the context of the original publication was forgotten" (Mahlberg 2012a, 16). *The Isle* is "engaged in the political debates of the time", especially the questioning of "unlimited monarchical power and patriarchal political thought" (Stillman, 9), so that the satire of the Restoration and the Anglo-Dutch relation could not outlive its specific context and be reproduced in later works. Yet, the fact that Robinson's original name is Kreutznaer (Crusoe being its English "*corruption*", 8; emphasis added), comes from good Protestant German stock (his father was a prosperous merchant from Bremen) may also be a distant echo of the Dutch substratum of *The Isle* and its morally virtuous associations. Unsurprisingly, the only island narrative that, like *The Isle*, which is supposed to be "A True Relation", can (partly) be defined as a "politically subversive literary hoax"[10] (Mahlberg 2012a, 16) is *Gulliver's Travels*, especially its first two books.[11]

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[10] "[…] in England, where the story was only published in pamphlet form, not as a news report, the hoax was soon exposed […]. In fact, by 1669 *Isle of Pines* had become synonymous with telling tall stories. The 'to the READER' prefacing a geological work on volcanoes, for instance, stressed that the following description of the 'late incredible Eruptions Aetna' should not be taken 'for a Rodamontado, or Isle of Pines.'" (Mahlberg 2012a, 6)

[11] Book I is paradigmatic in this respect: the verisimilitude and proto-realism of the opening (the minute presentation of Gulliver's background, training and first