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The Legacy of *Robinson Crusoe*: The First Novel in English as Catalyst for 300 Years of Literary Transformation

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***Robinson Crusoe*: The First Novel in English**

With the publication of *Robinson Crusoe* on 25 April 1719, Daniel Defoe made a career switch that not only established his own literary immortality, but also brought about “a watershed in English literature” (Hammond 67). A jack-of-many-trades, the then almost sixty-year-old Englishman, who had previously authored mainly satirical poems and pamphlets, turned his hand to a new mode of writing and presented what is now widely recognised as the very first novel in English. In the following years, he applied the same formula of narrating, in plain prose, the life experiences of an ordinary individual in *Captain Singleton* (1720), *Moll Flanders* (1720), *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), *Colonel Jack* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724). In these early novels Defoe laid the foundations for realist fiction by rendering his characters’ “material and phenomenal world with an unprecedented density and fine-grained immediacy and intricacy” (Richetti xvi-xvii). To maximise the realism of his fictional narratives, Defoe passed them off as genuine memoirs authored and related by the imaginary protagonists themselves and maintained the autobiographical pretence by omitting his own name from the printed texts.

The original title page of *Robinson Crusoe* presents the book as an account of the “Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures” of a shipwrecked Yorkshire mariner “Written by

Himself”¹ (2) and the novel opens with the title character introducing himself to the reader in the first person and in a convincingly conversational manner. Quite surprisingly considering his later reputation as the quintessential Englishman, a point to which we return later, Crusoe presents himself as the son of German migrants in the north of England:

I was born in the Year 1632, in the City of *York*, of a good Family, tho' not of that Country, my Father being a Foreigner of *Bremen*, who settled first at *Hull*: He got a good Estate by Merchandise, and leaving off his Trade, lived afterward at *York*, from whence he had married my Mother, Relations were named *Robinson*, a very good Family in that Country, and from whom I was called *Robinson Kreutznaer*; but by the usual Corruption of Words in *England*, we are now called, nay we call our selves, and write our Name *Crusoe*, and so my Companions always call'd me. (4, italics in original)

By acquainting his reader with a round character complete with a proper name and a family history, Defoe moves away from the allegorical tradition's preference for stock characters personifying human traits such as Virtue and Vice. Although Crusoe's adventures in the novel are fictional, albeit inspired by the survival of the Scottish sailor Alexander Selkirk on a desert island off the coast of Chile a decade earlier,² the reader is persuaded that they could have happened to someone in a similar situation and that Crusoe could well be a figure of flesh and blood. This appearance of truth, or verisimilitude, is realised through an impressive attention to authenticating detail, such as the inclusion of journal entries, measurements and monetary details, and the adoption of a plain language that befits the narrating protagonist, as is illustrated by Crusoe's opening statement cited above.

In the preface of *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe also emphasises the realism of his fictional text, by having an anonymous editor inform the reader that Crusoe's life story is “a just History of Fact; neither is there any Appearance of Fiction in it” (3). Interestingly, the fictional editor goes on to note the pedagogical as well as the entertainment value of the text,

¹ All parenthetical references are to the 1993 Norton Critical Edition edited by Michael Shinagel.

² Defoe may have learned of the survival story of Alexander Selkirk (1676-1721) through its publication in Captain Woodes Rogers's *A Cruising Voyage Round the World* in 1712 (see Rogers), or by means of the article that the famous journalist Richard Steele wrote about him in *The Englishman* in 1713 (see Steele).
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with Defoe perhaps seeking to justify his adoption of a plain narrative style that was so radically different from the stylised form that characterised “high literature” at the time. Despite the literary establishment’s reservations, the novel is immediately popular, with three further editions published by the end of the year and two sequels in respectively 1719 and 1720. *Robinson Crusoe*’s popularity, in no small part, is due to Defoe’s dexterous combination of an adventure story with a spiritual confession, both prevalent genres at the time. As the editor notes in the preface, the story’s merit lies not only in the fact that “the life of one man [is] scarce capable of greater variety” but especially in the “religious Application of [the narrated] Events”, with which he is undoubtedly referencing Crusoe’s spiritual development and eventual acceptance of the “Wisdom of Providence” (3). The novel, which opens with young Crusoe choosing a career at sea against his father’s advice and works towards his turn to religion, relates of his many misadventures at sea, including his weathering some severe storms, his enslavement by Moroccan pirates and his subsequent escape by fishing boat along the coast of West Africa, his investment in a slave-run plantation in Brazil and his brief involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. However, the imagination of most of Defoe’s readers has been captured far less by these story elements than it has been by the nearly three decades that Crusoe spends as a castaway on a small, uninhabited island near the mouth of the Orinoco River, off the Venezuelan Coast.

Especially Defoe’s compelling evocation of the desert island myth, enhanced by his choice of a lush Caribbean setting in lieu of the original barren island on which Selkirk was stranded, extended *Robinson Crusoe*’s reputation well beyond Britain and into the following centuries, right up to the present-day. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his famous pedagogical tract *Émile, ou de l’éducation* (1762), happily makes an exception for the “complete treatise on natural education” provided by Defoe’s castaway story when he dismisses books for “only teach[ing] people to talk about what they don’t understand” (262). *Robinson Crusoe* is to

teach Émile how “to raise himself above vulgar prejudices and to form his judgement on the actual relations of things, [by taking] on himself the character of such a solitary adventurer, and to judge every thing [sic] about him, as a man in such circumstances would, by its real utility” (Rousseau 263). It is important to note, however, that Rousseau is not recommending Defoe’s whole novel to Émile. Like so many after him, he is focusing on Crusoe’s time on the island or, as Ian Watt points out, on

a version [of the novel] freed of all “fatras” [as Rousseau termed it]; one which was in fact that of the myth. The story [Émile was to learn from] was to begin with the shipwreck and to end with the rescue. Émile’s book would be less instructive if it ended in the way Defoe’s actually does—with a return to civilization. (288)

Rousseau’s words of appreciation greatly contributed to readers’ fascination for Defoe’s treatment of the desert island myth. Over the years, this fascination has resulted in so many literary spin-offs that *Robinson Crusoe* not only stimulated the rise of the novel in English, but also succeeded in fashioning its own specific subcategory within the novelistic genre that it helped to establish, namely the Robinsonade.

Three Centuries of Robinsonades: Testimonies of The Changing Zeitgeist³

In 1836, Edgar Allan Poe observed that *Robinson Crusoe* had become “a household thing in nearly every family in Christendom” (270); by 1900, “at least seven hundred editions, translations, imitations” had appeared (Richetti ix). The term Robinsonade was coined a mere decade after the publication of Defoe’s original, by Johann Gottfried Schnabel (penname Gisander) in the preface to his 1731 novel *Die Insel Felsenburg*, and has since been applied to a wide range of fictional works that are written in the vein of *Robinson Crusoe* and focus on the survival of the protagonist(s) on a desert island (Harmon and Holman 453). Over the

³ Bekers 2001 offers a more elaborate, postcolonial commentary (in Dutch) on the literary impact of *Robinson Crusoe*.
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past three hundred years, Robinsonades have appeared in many languages and various media, with the source text often explicitly referenced in the title, as in Johann David Wyss's novel *Der Schweizerische Robinson* (1812), Jacques Offenbach's opera *Robinson Crusoe* (1867), Aleksandr Andriyevsky's 3D-film *Robinzon Kruzo* (1947), Silmarils's science fiction video game *Robinson's Requiem* (1994), or the reality game show *Expedition Robinson*, which first aired on television in 1997, to name but some striking examples. They have been created by authors as famous as Wilkie Collins, Jules Verne, Robert Louis Stevenson, Emilio Salgari, H. G. Wells, Beatrix Potter, Muriel Spark, Michel Tournier, Elizabeth Bishop, and the Nobel winners Derek Walcott and J. M. Coetzee. In 1932, Frans Hammenecker even penned a Flemish variant for the popular *Vlaamsche Filmkens* series of the Catholic publisher Averbode, quite predictably entitled *Een Vlaamsche 'Robinson Crusoe'* (1932).

The success of the genre of the Robinsonade is explained, to a large extent, by the appeal of the island setting that it borrows from Defoe's original. Like *Robinson Crusoe*, many of its variations have been interested in man's development in isolation (Hammond 71-72), man's mastery over his insular environment (Hammond 74), or the unlimited creative potential of desolate locations: "It seemed to me that all things were possible on the island," acknowledges one of the castaways in Coetzee's *Foe* (37). Despite their strong common denominator, the Robinsonades offer wide-ranging interpretations of their source text, with many, especially those written in more recent decades, far surpassing the category of survivalist fiction to which traditional definitions confine the genre.⁴ A constant is that the Robinsonades have been as much influenced by the mentality of their times as Defoe's prototype, confirming Salman Rushdie's observation that "works of art, even works of

⁴ The survival element is highlighted in traditional definitions of the Robinsonades as a work "written in imitation of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* [dealing] with the problem of the castaway's survival on a desert island" (Encyclopaedia Britannica) or as a work "similar to *Robinson Crusoe*, with a shipwreck on a desert island followed by adventures of survival" (Harmon and Holman 453).

entertainment, do not come into being in a social and political vacuum; and [...] the way they operate in a society cannot be separated from politics, from history” (92). Because of the Robinsonades’ shared story matter, the genre quite conspicuously exhibits the changing *Zeitgeist* of the past three centuries.

The original *Robinson Crusoe* offers a fictional testimony to the expansion of the British Empire, as is demonstrated by the unmistakably imperialist attitude of the title character. As soon as he has overcome his initial despair about being stranded on an uninhabited island, Crusoe claims the territory he has newly discovered as his rightful property: “to think this was all my own, that I was King and Lord of all this Country indefensibly, and had a Right of Possession; and if I could convey it ...” (73). When, after many decades of total isolation, he is joined on the island by other castaways, both native Caribbean and European sailors, he automatically extends his rule to them too:

My island was now peopled, and I thought myself very rich in Subjects; and it was a merry Reflection which I frequently made, How like a King I looked. First of all, the whole Country was my own mere Property; so that I had an undoubted Right of Dominion. *2dly*, My People were perfectly subjected: I was absolute Lord and Lawgiver; they all owed their Lives to me [...]. (174)

Crusoe’s assumed superiority over all others, regardless of their ethnicity, his repeated emphasis on his “Right of Dominion” and his insistence on “[reserving] to my self the Property of the whole” (220) in the final paragraphs of the text, prompt James Joyce to identify Defoe’s protagonist as the “true symbol of British conquest”:

[Crusoe] is the true prototype of the British colonist, as Friday (the trusty savage who arrives on an unlucky day) is the symbol of the subject races. The whole Anglo-Saxon spirit is in Crusoe: the manly independence; the unconscious cruelty; the persistence; the slow yet efficient intelligence; the sexual apathy; the practical, well-balanced religiousness; the calculating taciturnity. (323)

Particularly striking is Crusoe's imperialist behaviour towards Friday, the native Caribbean whom he believes to have rescued from a sacrificial cannibalistic death. Crusoe takes no interest in Friday as a person, nor in the man's language or culture; instead, he domesticates Friday pretty much like the wild goats he finds on the island (Hammond 73): "I was greatly delighted with him, and made it my Business to teach him every Thing that was proper to make him useful, handy, and helpful; but especially to make him speak, and understand me when I spake [sic]" (152). Without further thought, Crusoe imposes his language and will on Friday, thus downgrading him into the typical subservient position of the colonised.

This colonial dichotomy between sophisticated Britons and uncivilised others is also maintained by Scottish writer R.M. Ballantyne, whose young-adult novel *The Coral Island* (1857) appears at the height of British imperialism. When three English boys are shipwrecked on the eponymous island, their strikingly optimistic mood exudes the confidence that the Victorians have in Britain's imperial power in the middle of the nineteenth century: "What a joyful thing it is to awaken, on a fresh glorious morning, and find the rising sun staring into your face with dazzling brilliancy! [...] When I awoke on the morning after the shipwreck, I found myself in this most delightful condition" (40). The boys, who appear to have gleaned important survival skills from *Robinson Crusoe*, do not doubt the barbarity of the local population, as is clear from their assumption of the natives' cannibalism, even before they have become properly acquainted: when one of the "savages" gets ready to "cut a large slice of flesh from [a slain enemy's] thigh. We knew at once that he intended to make use of this for food, and could not repress a cry of horror and disgust" (208) and stop the man in his tracks.

A century later, *Lord of the Flies* (1954) gives expression to a radically different world view. The Second World War has left English novelist William Golding so disillusioned with mankind that in his adaptation, in which a group of British public

schoolboys survives a plane crash on a desert island as they are trying to escape from a third world war waging in the background, all savagery is situated in the supposedly civilised boys themselves. In the course of their island stay, the social rules to which the boys initially cling can no longer prevent their innate cruelty from getting the upper hand. By the time their rescue party finally arrives, one of the boys has been murdered, the protagonist is being hunted down by his former friends and the entire island is on fire. Having failed to behave like true Robinsons, the boys have switched positions in the hierarchy upheld in the imperialist texts of Defoe and Ballantyne; as the protagonist points out: “Just an ordinary fire. You’d think we could do that, wouldn’t you? Just a smoke signal so we can be rescued. Are we savages or what? ...” (188). In the novel’s closing lines, the rescue officer, too, expresses his disappointment with the boys’ behaviour. His reference to their Britishness as a measure of their civilisation, however, strikes one as particularly hypocritical, considering his own involvement in the war: “‘I should have thought,’ said the officer as he visualised the search before him, ‘I should have thought that a pack of British boys - you are all British aren’t you? - would have been able to put up a better show than that’” (222). As the officer’s striking word choice highlights, for Golding the assumed superiority of the British is exposed as a mere charade.

As already indicated in our discussion of the Robinsonade, ever since the so-called first novel in English gave expression to a white male character’s androcentric, Eurocentric and patriarchal perceptions of the world, this novelistic subgenre has widened considerably in terms of authorship and thematics. Women writers, for example, have fashioned their own versions of the castaway story, from Elizabeth Whittaker’s Victorian serial “Robina Crusoe and Her Lonely Island Home” (published in the *Girl’s Own Paper* in 1882-83) to Marianne Wiggins’s *John Dollar* (1988) and Libba Bray’s *Beauty Queens* (2011), resulting in Robinsonades featuring female instead of male (anti)heroines becoming a whole subgenre in

their own right. Often, the regendering of Defoe's archetypal story serves to question and trouble society's preconceived notions regarding gender roles.

Furthermore, writers from the margins of Europe's former colonial empires who have been "[writing] back with a vengeance" (Rushdie), especially from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, have reconsidered Defoe's dualistic take on the civilised European and the savage foreigner against the backdrop of colonisation and its consequences. In their postcolonial variations on *Robinson Crusoe*, which have been presented in verse and drama as well as in prose, the spotlight generally shifts from Crusoe to Friday and his descendants, who are not only given greater visibility, but also agency and even a voice. In "Crusoe's Journal" (1965) by St Lucian poet and dramatist Derek Walcott, the poem's colonised speaker attacks the hypocrisy of the Christianising mission of Crusoe, who "alters us/into good Fridays who recite His praise" but subsequently expects the "converted cannibals/ [to] learn with him to eat the flesh of Christ" (28). A decade later, in his play *Pantomime* (1978) Walcott takes issue with the colonial hierarchy presented in *Robinson Crusoe* in an extensive dialogue that ensues when Harry, the British owner of a hostel on the Caribbean island of Tobago, proposes to his black Caribbean factotum Jackson to mount a pantomime to entertain the guests. However, Harry soon reconsiders his suggestion to play *Robinson Crusoe* in reverse "and work up a good satire, you know, on the master-servant – no offense – relationship. [...] It could be hilarious!" (137). As Jackson becomes completely wrapped up in his role of Crusoe and starts commanding Harry, the latter does not appear ready to lose his privileges and orders Jackson back into his real-life servant position: "You will *not* continue. You will straighten this table [...], and we will continue as normal and forget the whole matter" (143). The tensions that the play-within-a-play generates between Walcott's protagonists illustrate how colonial dichotomies continue to reverberate in the former British colony of Trinidad and Tobago and other postcolonial societies.

In *Foe* (1986), South African author J.M. Coetzee draws on *Robinson Crusoe* to develop a metafictional commentary that addresses, but also transcends, the colonial question. Coetzee's Cruso features as a most reluctant and ineffective coloniser who has no interest in telling his life story. The shorter spelling of his name can be read as emblematic of the multiple ways in which he falls short of the expectations of readers familiar with Defoe's *Crusoe*. This prompts his later companion Susan to express her disappointment over the fact that Cruso has neither kept a journal nor planted any seeds on the island and only leaves empty terraces behind when he dies. Upon her return to England with Friday, Susan is unable to persuade the author whom she has asked to write down her adventures to do so on her terms. Coetzee's fictional Defoe therefore is aptly named Foe (also the real Defoe's original surname): like the real Defoe, he appears intent on eliminating Susan from his castaway novel in order to explore her experiences as a mother instead (as Defoe does in *Roxana*). For her part, Susan, despite her good intentions towards the tongueless Friday, appears as a foe too, as she is effectively holding *Crusoe's* servant hostage to her desire to have his story told and acknowledges that "he is to the world what I make of him" (122). Much to the regret of Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1993) and other postcolonial critics, Coetzee in his *Robinsonade* continues the colonial silencing of Friday, although the author does widen his critique of Friday's subaltern predicament by converting Defoe's native Caribbean Friday into an African who has (presumably) fallen victim of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and by drawing parallels with the patriarchal oppression of women.

While in *Foe* Coetzee's metafictional references to *Robinson Crusoe* invite reflection on the political consequences of past race- and gender-based exclusions from the literary canon, the embittered *Robinson Crusoe* figure who features in the author's 2003 Nobel lecture is voicing, by comparison, rather self-centred complaints about the infringement of his intellectual property rights. Drawing on the colonial discourses of

Robinson Crusoe, he is accusing the authors of the countless Robinsonades of anthropophagy and equates these “bands of plagiarists and imitators [who] descended upon his island history and foisted on the public their own feigned stories of the castaway life” to “a horde of cannibals falling upon his own flesh, that is to say, his life” with an even “more devilish voracity” than the actual cannibals, as they “would gnaw at the very substance of truth” (Coetzee, “He and His Man”). His conservative view regarding “the writing business” makes him sound rather like one who is clinging to the old, Eurocentric world view presented in Defoe’s original novel instead of one who is ready to embrace the deconstructive creativity and productive multiplicity of those who have been inspired by *Robinson Crusoe* to explore new artistic avenues, also well beyond the genre of the Robinsonade.

Defoe’s Pioneering Novel: A Watershed in the European Literary Tradition

In the three hundred years that have passed since the publication of Defoe’s pioneering novel, the genre has been adopted and adapted in a myriad of ways, both in content and in form. As demonstrated above, in feminist and postcolonial literature, as well as in literature of migration, Defoe’s story has been refashioned in order to lend voice to colonized and otherwise subjugated people. Writers hailing from those far-flung locations that are visited in *Robinson Crusoe* and in its sequels have replaced the outsider perspective of Defoe’s English traveller with the perceptions of the native population. As Zhuyun Song demonstrates in her contribution to this Special Issue entitled “Anti-orientalism in Guo Xiaolu’s *Village of Stone*”, Chinese-born British author and filmmaker Guo challenges the orientalist bias of Defoe’s narrator and of contemporary discourses on China by having her 2004 novel told by an autodiegetic narrator who is more intimately acquainted with Chinese society and draws a more nuanced portrait of her fellow countrymen. What is more, the protagonist of *Village of Stone* undertakes Crusoe’s journey in reverse, from margin to centre, as she sketches her own

relocation from a traditional fishing community on a remote island in China's South Sea to the capital of Beijing.

On a formal level, the genre of the novel that Defoe helped to found in 1719 has not only become the dominant mode in literature, but also pushed poetry and drama into the outermost margins of the literary field. Defoe's novel itself has come to be regarded as an icon of Europe's realistic literary tradition, a pioneering text that inspired writers on the European continent and that, along with other novels from Britain, helped to fashion the literary panorama of eighteenth- and especially nineteenth-century Europe. As products of a puritan society, conceived as part of a larger plan to educate the general public, the English novels were immediately perceived as 'different', not in the least because they emanated from a country whose history, politics and customs differed significantly from those of other nations on the continent. With their explicit realism, moderate tone and Protestant ethics, the anglophone novels offered something completely new to readers accustomed to the daring and 'unruly' plots of the French or Venetian tales, the Spanish picaresque or the many German plots centred on the figure of the bandit. The importance the British authors attached to the redefinition of social roles and hierarchies, the empowerment of women and common people caught other literary traditions in Europe by surprise. At the same time, the diversity of the novels that were produced in Britain lent them great appeal and boosted the success of the new genre outside Britain's borders.

The Italian reception of *Robinson Crusoe*, and of the novel in English at large, is the subject of Andrea Penso's article entitled "*Robinson Crusoe* and the Others: On the Early Conceptualization of the Anglophone Novel in Italy", which examines the role played by the Italian periodical press in the diffusion of information and reviews concerning the English novels in the second half of the 18th century. The article shows how the French mediation was fundamental for the introduction of the English-language novels to Italian readers, who had

become acquainted with the new literary phenomenon through French translations and reviews. With regard to the French reception of *Robinson Crusoe*, Emilie Sitzia in “Lost in Intersemiotic Translation? J. J. Grandville’s Illustration of *Robinson Crusoe*” reconstructs the role that illustrations played in the novel’s historical reception, with a particular focus on Grandville’s work and the 1840 Fournier edition.

The so-called ‘English novels’ of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are commonly perceived to be rather straightforward narratives which deal with a real-life, often topical subject, depicted with subtle irony aimed at social criticism, with the bucolic countryside as setting, or the hustle and bustle of London, or even the foggy places of the North. The novels that were produced varied greatly: from *Robinson Crusoe* to *Tristram Shandy*, from *Clarissa* to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, down to *Pride and Prejudice* and *Oliver Twist*. The notion of Englishness, however, must be considered with caution: whilst Defoe was an Englishman, as were many of the most notable authors of the time, the literary superstar of the early nineteenth century, Sir Walter Scott, was Scottish, and so were Robert Louis Stevenson and Arthur Conan Doyle, while Oscar Wilde was Irish. In fact, the aforementioned common perception of the eighteenth-century works of Defoe, Henry Fielding and Laurence Sterne all the way down to Jane Austen and Charles Dickens as belonging to a single tradition, hardly allows for the multitude and diversity of subgenres that have developed from that first novelistic ‘experiment’.

Thanks to its generic complexity, Defoe’s novel has had a profound impact on multiple genres. *Robinson Crusoe* has inspired later authors of island narratives, tales of survival and adventure romances, fictional life narratives, spiritual autobiographies, confessional literature and children’s stories. The genre also branches out in different directions, such as the historical novel, the gothic novel, the detective novel, the novel of manners, science fiction, and many more. Two contributions to this Special Issue discuss

examples, in German and in French, of the genre of the Robinsonade discussed above. Mathias Meert's article "Literature, Authorship and Childhood in Friedrich Forster's and Josef von Bány's *Robinson soll nicht sterben*" explores the theatrical, literary and intermedial representation of Defoe and his *Robinson Crusoe* in the fictionalised biography presented by Forster in his 1931 play and 1949 novella and von Bány's 1957 screen adaptation of Forster's Robinsonade. The discussion shows how Forster and von Bány, for example, experiment with the narrativization of the English author as a literary character in different media, investigating also the economic and ideological implications of literary authorship. Furthermore, the article deepens the role played by children's literature in these adaptations of *Robinson Crusoe*. In "*Vendredi ou les limbes du pacifique* van Michel Tournier: Natuurlijke mystiek en "onpersoonlijkheid"", Daniel Acke examines how in Tournier's 1967 philosophical revision of *Robinson Crusoe* the liminal experiences result in a profound change in the protagonist Crusoe, who chooses to stay behind on the desert island rather than return to Europe.

Whilst Meert's and Acke's articles are explicitly concerned with the intertextual legacy of Defoe's novel by focusing on re-imaginings of *Robinson Crusoe*, Helena Van Praet and Anthony Manu put the emphasis on genre developments more broadly, focusing on the contemporary writers Anne Carson and Lisa Samuels. *Robinson Crusoe*, itself a generic game changer, has after all paved the way for other writers to explore the boundaries of fiction through formal experimentation, generic hybridity and intermediality. Van Praet's article "Genre Developments in the 21st Century: Representation and the Network in Anne Carson's *Float*" reflects on Carson's contribution to genre developments in the 21st century, arguing that the conception of genre in *Float* hovers between print and digital textualities and showing how the collection reworks avant-garde techniques through an authorial yet decentred network aesthetic. In doing so, Van Praet positions Carson's engagement with

genre in between ‘past’ and ‘present’ movements, paying attention to the often-overlooked material dimension of generic scholarship. Anthony Manu’s contribution entitled “Narrative Coherence and Postcolonialism in *Tomorrowland* (2009) and *Tender Girl* (2015) by Lisa Samuels” investigates the ways in which the absence of a clear novelistic story relates to the exploration of multiculturalism in both works. It argues that, whereas a generic novelistic story structure could lead to story elements that echo a colonialist perspective, the hybrid poetic-narrative structures of Samuels’s texts are better suited to describe experiences that do not fit one’s culturally defined conceptual framework.

Two artists’ reflections close this Special Issue. Lisa Samuels, an American author based in New Zealand who was VUB Writer-in-Residence in 2019-2020, explores her relationship towards form and innovation in a discussion with VUB/FWO research fellow Hannah Van Hove. Elaborating on what she terms ‘transplace poetics’, a concept organic to her lifelong experiences of living and working in multiple countries and language sites, Samuels touches on what it means to imagine art practices that are situated in transplace: a transnationalism that is its own real condition, not a reductive or ephemeral ‘in-between’ but constellated intersections that are emplacement. In the final contribution to this Special Issue, Fouad Laroui takes us back to the beginnings and reminds us that, as *Robinson Crusoe* has accrued a substantial legacy over the years, so have potential predecessors been brought to light, beyond the Selkirk narrative mentioned earlier. His contribution “Ibn Tufayl et *Robinson Crusoe*” suggests that the medieval philosophical narrative *Hayy Ibn Yaqzân* by the Arab Andalusian writer Ibn Tufayl not only influenced Daniel Defoe, but was in fact a forerunner of the Enlightenment. Although it was written 900 years ago, Laroui shows how Tufayl’s work contains surprisingly modern views, many of which reverberate in past and current adaptations of *Robinson Crusoe*.

In conclusion, as the articles that comprise this Special Issue make clear, the legacy of *Robinson Crusoe* is nothing if not wide-ranging and far-reaching. Three hundred years on, it counts as a prototypical catalyst of genre development and canon diversification, while at the same time, as a canonized classic, it has become an icon of Europe's literary establishment and intellectual traditions. Literary authors from Europe and well beyond have responded, formally and/or thematically, explicitly and often implicitly, to *Robinson Crusoe* as life writing, confessional literature, travel narrative, adventure tale, island story, woman-unfriendly text, or as survival literature that has inspired comics, popular video games and tv programmes. The legacy of *Robinson Crusoe* will undoubtedly continue to brim with energy beyond its tercentenary year.

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