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Quoth the Parrot 'Where Are You?':

Nature and Civilisation in *Robinson Crusoe*

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Introduction

Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is among the earliest examples of the modern novel form and is, thus, a central work of English literature. It has influenced a vast number of similar narratives (creating the genre named 'Robinsonade'), and continues to do so in the present as is evidenced by several films, television series, and adaptations. When it was first published, it immediately became a huge success, prompting Defoe to write a sequel that appeared in the same year. The first, and by far the better-known, part, which forms the subject of my thesis, tells the adventures of an Englishman who, having escaped from home to go to sea, alone survives a shipwreck near a desert island. In order to make his life as tolerable as is possible under the circumstances, he engages in agricultural activities (including the cultivation of the soil and animal domestication), organises his daily tasks in an almost scientifically methodical way, enslaves an indigenous man, and generally tries to maintain what he can of European civilisation. In the end, having fought with cannibals, he leaves the island on an English ship with his slave Friday and takes the latter with himself to Europe.

The story's popularity might, in part, be explained by the historical moment that gave birth to it: British imperialism was on the rise, and Defoe's (and Crusoe's) home country was to become the dominant colonial power over the course of the next two centuries. The resourceful Englishman's efforts to survive on an island belonging to the Americas provides clear analogies with the activities of the 'official' colonisers. Not surprisingly, therefore, *Robinson Crusoe* is often seen as an example of the European man's struggle to maintain himself in an environment untouched by civilisation – in 'nature'. As such, the book has traditionally been regarded as a partly idealised prototype of (British) colonialism (Smit-Marais 103-4): Crusoe, in reproducing many of the practices common in technically advanced societies, such as creating complex tools, agriculture, and record-keeping, and even more perhaps in 'taming' Friday, "take[s] up the White Man's burden" (Kipling "The White Man's Burden" 1) and serves as a model for generations of colonisers to come. Not only does he manage to survive alone on a desert island but he also subjugates his surroundings to his own will and thus asserts the superiority of his civilisation.

Apart from its adaptations and its influence on the colonialist mindset, *Robinson Crusoe* has been the subject of a plethora of academic studies as well. While the novel has been approached in a wide variety of ways, one is probably justified in saying that the two main focus points have been the colonial aspects of the text on the one hand, and its role as a milestone in the history of realistic prose fiction on the other. One of the most influential Defoe scholars in the past few decades has been Maximilian E. Novak, who has written extensively on *Robinson Crusoe*. In his article "Novel

or Fictional Memoir: The Scandalous Publication of *Robinson Crusoe*" (2007), he discusses the puzzling question of how Defoe's text mixes elements of truth and fiction (207), and argues that the book is primarily a piece of fiction that strives to look like a real-life account for marketing purposes (220). In another article, titled "'The Sum of Humane Misery'?: Defoe's Ambiguity toward Exile" (2010), Novak looks at the novel's (and its sequels') portrayal of Crusoe's alienation as a result of his solitary life. It is this solitude and the distance from the 'civilised' world that leads the castaway to act as a coloniser: as John G. Peters argues, Crusoe tries to make sense of his devastating experience and, therefore, his main goal during his stay on the island is to affirm his own culture by creating a civilised space that stands apart from the surrounding wilderness (58-9). The idea that the coloniser brings civilisation into an otherwise uncultivated wilderness is one that has permeated the thinking of European explorers and settlers for centuries. This topic is further thematised in Dennis Todd's chapter "*Robinson Crusoe* and Colonialism" contributed to *The Cambridge Companion to* Robinson Crusoe (2018). According to Todd, Crusoe's new environment represents a threat as a result of its mysteriousness: "[t]he challenge of the New World is symbolized by that enigmatic footprint, a sign with an ambiguous referent – it may be a cannibal's, the Devil's, his own – a sign that does not yield up its meaning readily but which must be looked at more than once and reflected upon" (143). Crusoe is alone and deprived of many of the advantages of civilisation; consequently, he has to come to terms with the problems posed by 'nature' without significant outside help, and learn to adapt to his changed circumstances.

The theme of loneliness also plays an important role in Jacques Derrida's meditations on *Robinson Crusoe* in *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2009). One of the main points Derrida makes in this regard is that the loneliness of the individual as depicted in Defoe's novel is due to the protagonist's double 'nature': he is beast and sovereign at the same time. Both 'types' are necessarily outside society and not bound by its laws: the beast ignores the existence of rules as such and only follows its[1] own will, while the sovereign creates the rules and is, in a way, above them. Derrida argues that Crusoe unites in himself the fundamental loneliness of both extremes and that his being confined to an island foregrounds his sense of isolation (*The Beast and the Sovereign* 2.3-4). Following in Derrida's footsteps, David Baumeister examines *Robinson Crusoe* from the perspective of the human/animal binary that underlies the notion of sovereignty. Baumeister points out how human sovereignty, in general, is driven by "a certain tense proximity to animality" (162) and how Crusoe's stumbling upon a footprint of unknown origin reveals the binary logic of sovereignty (162). The power of the sovereign is based upon the assumption that his subjects are inferior to him: being surrounded by animals makes it easy for Crusoe to maintain the illusion of

1 Or even 'her' since the French term '*la bête*' is feminine.

being a superior creature but the moment another human being appears (at first only in the form of the footprint), this illusion is faced with a challenge, and the castaway retreats to his 'fortress' for a considerable period of time.

In my thesis, I will concentrate on *Robinson Crusoe*'s engagement with the binary opposition of nature and civilisation, which is at the basis of the colonial narrative. How does the text portray the concepts of nature and civilisation and in what ways does it reveal the artificiality of the dichotomy? In order to answer that question, I intend to use a deconstructive framework, which will facilitate a better understanding of the nature of binary opposites and how they are embedded in the exercise of power. This will be complemented by postcolonial theory's insights into the construction of coloniser and colonised identities. I will argue that, although *Robinson Crusoe* portrays attempts made by the protagonist to reinforce the dichotomy, on the whole, the novel functions as a deconstruction of the hierarchical distinction between nature and civilisation.

The main value of such a study lies in gaining a deeper understanding of the categories of the 'civilised' and the 'uncivilised' as they are represented (and deconstructed) in *Robinson Crusoe*. The relationship of civilisation and savagery is, in Peter Hulme's words, "the primary stuff of colonial ideology" (186-7): my thesis would, therefore, give an insight into an important aspect of the theoretical foundations of colonialism. The most important contribution to this particular question is to be found in Jacques Derrida's already mentioned *The Beast and the Sovereign.* Even though a significant number of other studies have been conducted which opt for a deconstructive approach to *Robinson Crusoe*, these typically examine questions relating to race and gender rather than civilisation and colonialism. To my knowledge, there are two recent exceptions worth mentioning: the article "Deconstructing Binaries in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*" (2021) written by Maryam Jehangir, Nijat Ullah Kahn, and Abdul Karim Kahn; and Dennis Todd's chapter on "*Robinson Crusoe* and Colonialism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Robinson Crusoe* (2018). The first of these discusses, among others, certain binarisms in connection with culture, society, and nature from a Saussurean perspective; nevertheless, it compresses such a wide array of topics in a relatively small space that it can hardly be considered to have exhausted the subject. The other text is an informative summary of the colonial aspects of the novel and contains some remarks on its tendency to blur the boundary "between civilized and savage, [and] colonizer and Other" (Todd 145-6) but provides no detailed analysis of *how* this 'blurring' is accomplished.

In the first part of the thesis, I will give an overview of the theoretical approaches used in the thesis. As stated, deconstruction will serve as the chief theoretical background. Deconstruction is primarily associated with the name of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, who first used the term in his book *Of Grammatology* (1967). Having said that, 'first use' as a concept is highly

problematic in the context of the approach described by Derrida: the 'first' appearance, the origin of something is always an artificial construct and not the actual beginning. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a real beginning because the source of a concept (or technically of anything, for that matter) can always be traced even further back in the past. The term 'deconstruction', for instance, is directly related to Martin Heidegger's *Destruktion*, which Derrida tried to translate into French as *déconstruction*: what the two notions have in common is the attempt to examine the constructions that are conventionally associated with a given word in a given cultural context (Gunkel 13). Derrida combines this endeavour with Ferdinand de Saussure's model of language, more specifically with the idea that words derive their meaning from how they differ from other words. The differences between words are, as Derrida argues in his seminal essay "Différance" (1967), by no means stable but fluctuate constantly, thereby altering each other's meaning. Thus, language consists of an unceasing interplay of signs – Derrida refers to this interplay as *différance* (with an 'a' rather than an 'e'), i.e. difference as a *process* rather than a *status*. It is this process of the formation of differences that makes it possible for languages (and systems in general) to exist; however, precisely because of this foundational role of *différance*, it is beyond our reach to define the term. *Différance* is a prerequisite of language, and since practically any definition would in some way involve the use of language, these definitions would inevitably result in circular reasoning: anything one can say about *différance* presupposes the existence of *différance*.

The way *différance* functions lays the ground for the emergence of dichotomies. Since meaning is produced by the differences between words, a concept regarded as possessing qualities that are mutually exclusive with, or at least very disparate from, the qualities of another concept can easily become part of a settled pair, with the one being always thought of and defined as the opposite of the other. This phenomenon leads to the genesis of an either/or logic, which comes to permeate the thinking of the users of the language in question. Such a binary approach is at the bottom of all dichotomies, including, obviously, the nature/civilisation pair, to the examination of which this thesis is dedicated.

Apart from deconstruction, I will have to rely on certain concepts of postcolonial theory in order to place *Robinson Crusoe* within a larger frame of historical and ideological development. To summarise the background of this theoretical approach, I will use Ania Loomba's book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (1998). It will be especially useful on account of its definitions of certain central terms and its chapter on the construction of racial and cultural difference. So as to how difference and *différance* play a crucial role in the geographical paradigm underlying colonialism, I will briefly explain Edward Said's argument about the traditional definitions of West and Orient as binary opposites (*Orientalism* 1978, 4-5). His contention is, if not in every detail but

in its general outline, also applicable to *Robinson Crusoe*: even though the fictional Island of Despair is not in the East, the geographical construct of the 'wilderness' as opposed to civilised Europe is very much present in Crusoe's colonial endeavour. Why this strict division between colonised and coloniser turns out to be unsuccessful can be explained by Homi Bhabha's concept of *hybridity*: where two 'worlds' meet, mixed identities emerge, which are pivotal in the formation of local cultural life (*The Location of Culture* 1994, 2-3). The culture thus produced unavoidably incorporates elements from the coloniser's traditions as well as from those of the colonised.

After the section on the theoretical background, the chapters will be divided into two larger parts: one about the protagonist's attempts to colonise the island, and one about the way hybridity contributes to deconstructing the nature/civilisation binary. In the first, I will discuss the diverse methods that aid Crusoe in his enterprise, and try to show how they all, to varying degrees, fail. These methods include agriculture, scientific observation, record keeping, time measurement, and taxonomy. I will argue that the (partial) failure of these efforts undermines the alleged superiority of civilisation over nature.

I will begin by looking at two Early Modern English texts, Virgil's *Georgics* in John Dryden's translation (1709) and Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* (1626): they had an important role in the formation of two discourses, both of which emphasise the victory of human civilisation over nature, one in an agricultural and the other in a scientific aspect. Both discourses are relevant for *Robinson Crusoe* since activities of both kinds (agricultural and scientific) are abundantly portrayed in the novel. I will first look at the *Georgics* and explain their importance for the reading public in early 18th century England. I will show how one can find parallels to Crusoe's agricultural activities in the Virgilian poems, and how both texts have a certain tendency to include pastoral elements besides the, on the whole more dominant, instructive passages. I will argue that the *Georgics*' portrayal of nature and civilisation raises certain questions about the hierarchical relationship between the two spheres, and use a passage from Aristotle's *Politics* further to illuminate this aspect of the poems. Then, I will examine the ways in which Defoe's reliance on the agricultural discourse of the *Georgics* transplants this deconstructive tendency into *Robinson Crusoe*.

In the next subsection, I will focus on Bacon's *The New Atlantis*, the other text apart from the *Georgics* that, as I will argue, plays an important role in the formation of Early Modern attitudes to the theme of civilisation. *The New Atlantis* had an enormous influence on the way the natural sciences were (and, in many respects, continue to be) viewed: thus, it is not surprising that it should have affected Defoe's handling of the scientific endeavours Crusoe undertakes during his stay on the island. Similarly to my analysis of the Virgil/Dryden text, I will discuss how *The New Atlantis*

undermines the notion of civilisation's superiority over nature. I will show how Crusoe's creating calendars, studying the weather, and identifying and growing plants mirror several of the activities carried out on the island conjured up by Bacon's imagination. I will further show how Crusoe's attempts to understand his environment eventually lead him to reevaluate his views – especially with regard to the hierarchical primacy of civilisation.

A crucial part of Crusoe's efforts to comprehend the natural world is creating catalogues and categories. Such catalogues and categories help him see the world in a more organised, orderly fashion than it would otherwise appear to him. To understand this 'tool' better, I will use Michel Foucault's book *The Order of Things* (1966): his concept of *taxonomia* will be useful in explaining how the so-called Classical era believed (in Europe, at least) in the possibility of creating flawless systems that cover all natural phenomena and thereby discovering a perfect order that underlies everything in the world. In this context, I will survey Crusoe's often moderately successful attempts to identify things: e.g. birds, plants, or which day of the week it is. Moreover, I will address the larger categories of civilisation and wilderness, the boundary between which the protagonist tries to maintain by building 'houses' with clearly delineated walls. Then, I will argue that this division is shattered as a result of the discovery of a footprint that insinuates the presence of another human being on the island.

In the second part of the thesis, I will examine several characters in terms of their mobility across the nature/civilisation binary. I will argue that the presence of hybrid characters (characters who can be said to belong both to nature and civilisation) questions the clear-cut boundary between the two realms. I will first consider some of Crusoe's domestic animals, namely the goats and the parrot, and try to demonstrate that the stereotypically 'civilised' traits and abilities these animals display undermine the idea that 'natural' beings are wild and uncultivated. I will first look at the goats and give examples of their tameness and gregariousness – the former of those qualities being at variance with Crusoe's tendency to violence. I will also point out how Crusoe, despite such tendencies, is clearly attached to the animals. In contrast to the goats' gentleness, the parrot's most remarkable attribute is its intelligence: I will discuss its adeptness at imitating English words and contend that this ability places the bird – as does amicability in the goat's case – in a liminal space between wilderness and civilisation.

Friday is another example of a hybrid character. I will briefly summarise some of the most prominent views that scholars have expressed about him since the 19th century and clarify the (mostly racist) reasons why he was deemed to be an unrealistic character in the past. Then, I will discuss the portrayal of physical appearance, the circumstances of his enslavement, his language skills, and his instruction in matters of religion. I will attempt a cursory comparison between him

and the character of the same name in J. M. Coetzee's novel *Foe* (1986) and call attention to the important linguistic difference between the two. By exploring these aspects, I will argue that Friday presents a mixture of attributes commonly associated with Western culture on the one hand and with 'wild' indigenous people on the other.

In the final section of my thesis, I will argue that Crusoe himself can be regarded as a hybrid character: although he ought to represent civilisation on the island, he possesses several traits that are often associated with the wilderness. I will discuss how the novel shows the protagonist in circumstances that are far from what is usually considered civilised: he is bound to wear uncustomary clothing made of goat skin, he is deprived of the company of humans, and he is prone to aggression as a response to his threatening environment. At the same time, I will argue that his exercise of sovereignty over the island also links him to 'nature' by emphasising his beastly qualities. I will call attention to a few instances in which Crusoe fashions himself as a monarch and point out how the text reveals the tendency to violence that underlies the role of the sovereign. Finally, I will show how the parrot's language competence foregrounds its master's beastliness.

Differences, dichotomies, dominions: a theoretical overview

Deconstruction

This is not the first sentence. There is the introduction to begin with. Or the table of contents. Or the title page. There is always something 'previous' that influences the interpretation of a text. Or, alternatively, there is nothing preceding the text as everything already belongs to it. "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 159). There is no *hors-texte*: there is nothing that is not part of the text, and the text cannot *be* outside its context. A text is determined by and intricately connected with everything that came before it, and the cultural environment in which it is produced. Consequently, it is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to define a beginning. It is impossible to avoid the influence of pre-existent texts and, consequently, impossible to create something essentially new and original. Jacques Derrida himself alluded to that impossibility when insisting that the notion of 'deconstruction' "imposed itself" (Gunkel 9-10) upon him rather than having been invented by him. Deconstruction challenges the traditional notion of the author as a father figure and should, therefore, not be regarded as the 'child' of a single person's mind (that of Derrida): on the contrary, deconstruction's roots go back to thinkers such as Martin Heidegger, Roland Barthes, or Michel Foucault, to mention only some of the most direct influences (Gunkel 9-10). As can be seen, deconstruction has close links with Barthes' theory about the "Death of the Author", which questions the author's absolute authority over the text (125-30). The role of the author as central is disputed by Barthes and by Derrida, partly because readers also actively create the text that they read, and partly because the author as the primal, or even only, source of a text, as its 'beginning', does not exist.

The theoretical approach(es) referred to as deconstruction focus(es) on sign systems and the ways they create meaning. Its main interests include the production and operation of texts and language, the formation of concepts and thought systems within a given cultural context, and binary oppositions and the hierarchies associated with them (Gunkel 59-61; Murfin 284-6). Of all binary oppositions, the dichotomy of written and spoken language has a special importance for deconstruction: "[o]f particular interest to Derrida, perhaps because it involves the language in which all the other dichotomies are expressed is the hierarchical opposition speech/writing" (Murfin 284). According to Derrida, in Western thought there is a "tendency to regard speech in positive terms and writing in negative terms" (Ibid. 284). Within the traditional binary, speech is seen as having a higher value than writing (a phenomenon to which Derrida refers as *logocentrism*). Derrida's aim is "to throw the order and values implied by the opposition into question" (Murfin

285). Deconstruction, in this and other instances, is an attempt to reveal the artificiality of widely accepted norms and viewpoints.

The importance of the written text is emphasised by Derrida in his talk (and later essay) "Différance" (1968) by a play with homophonous words. He points out that the difference between the term 'différence' and his famous neologism 'différance' is only perceptible in speech through reference to their respective spellings, their written forms. ("Différance" 4). Allusion to the script is essential for conveying the meaning of the text as the lexical ambiguity would otherwise make it incomprehensible. Thus, Derrida makes the reader/listener aware of the fallacy of *logocentrism*, the primacy of speech over writing. Using the same example, Derrida calls attention to how spelling conventions can reveal the limits of one's own cultural sphere. Talking about the letter 'a' in 'différance', he points out that "[t]he pyramidal silence of the graphic difference between the 'e' and the 'a' can function, of course, only within the system of ptionetic[2] writing, and within the language and grammar which is as historically linked to ptionetic writing as it is to the entire culture inseparable from phonetic writing" ("Différance" 4). The difference between the words 'différence' and 'différance' can only be perceived in writing but not in pronunciation: since the Latin alphabet is, in its purpose, phonetic, a spelling difference that is absent in pronunciation is a mark of the deficiency of the spoken form of the French language. This deficiency of spoken language and the recognition that the silent difference is definable only within a certain set of communicative conventions are reminders that the norms of a given culture are by no means universal even though they may appear to be such to those socialised within it.

The root of both 'différence' and 'différance' is the verb 'différer', which can mean either 'to be non-identical' (this meaning is conveyed by the noun 'différence') or 'to defer'. Derrida proposed the use of 'différance' as a compensation for the semantic narrowing in the word 'différence', which cannot be construed as a noun form of the verb 'to defer'. "Now the word 'différence' (with an 'e') can never refer either to 'differer' as temporization or to differends as *polemos*. Thus the word 'différance' (with an 'a') is to compensate economically – this loss of meaning, for 'différance' can refer simultaneously to the entire configuration of its meanings" ("Différance" 8). In short, 'différance' can be used for purposes for which 'différence' is insufficient.

The way Derrida understands the term 'différence' here relies on Ferdinand de Saussure's views on the functioning of language. For Saussure, communication is accomplished through sign systems: within a sign system (such as language), a given sign functions as a representative of a *thing* that exists in the 'real' world: "[w]hen we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present,

2 Relating to the production of speech sounds in the vocal tract.

the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign. [...] The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence" ("Différance" 9). In the absence of the 'real thing', communication must rely on substitutes, i.e. signs. It is the differences between signs that make it possible for a given sign to assume a certain meaning. To make this point clear, Derrida refers to Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1916): "[t]he conceptual side of value is made up solely of relations and differences with respect to the other terms of language […] The idea or phonic substance that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it" (Saussure 117-8). A sign can have no meaning on its own: it has to be viewed in relation to other signs within the same system. Language as a whole is an agglomerate of all the differences between signs, of all the ways in which signs relate to and interplay with each other.

The system produced by the differences between signs is a prerequisite for describing the world around as well as for being able to create and understand abstract concepts. More specifically, sign systems are indispensable for the kind of attitude to knowledge that, according to Foucault, was typical in what he calls the Classical age in Europe (approximately the 17th and 18th centuries). Since the genesis of *Robinson Crusoe* falls into this era, it is worth mentioning Foucault's notion of *taxonomia*: an epistemological approach which focuses on classifying phenomena in order to comprehend them. The philosopher argues that *taxonomia* was an important element of "the general configuration of knowledge in the Classical age" (Foucault, *The Order of Things* 81). As the dominant way of seeing the world, it defined the thinking of the era, and its main features can repeatedly be observed in Crusoe's scientific endeavours as well: *taxonomia* "treats of identities and differences; it is the science of articulations and classifications; it is the knowledge of *beings*" (Ibid. 81). *Taxonomia* is characterised by the will to place every existing thing in the right category within a well-designed system. In such a network of categories, as follows from the Saussurean notion of systems, each item is defined by how it differs from other items. Creating such categories so as to understand nature better was a central part of the scientific revolution that took place in the Classical age; furthermore, it is an activity of which there are, as I will show, numerous examples in Defoe's novel.

Since meaning is the result of the differences within language, a sign cannot be interpreted by reference to the signified object alone. "Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences" ("Différance" 11). Meaningful use and effective decoding of a sign are only possible within the larger framework of differences; for that reason, the thing itself can never be present in a sign system: "the signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself" ("Différance" 10). There is no presence in

language, the present is never present. Derrida writes about an "active interpretation, which substitutes incessant deciphering for the unveiling of truth as the presentation of the thing itself in its presence" ("Différance" 17). Language permits one to engage in a continuous act of decoding but it cannot convey or impart the thing itself because it does not *contain* the thing itself, this being confined to a state unmediated by a sign system.

The systematic interaction of differences, which produces meaning, is what is called *différance* by Derrida. Language "has not fallen from the sky" ("Différance" 11), it is not a God-given, prefabricated system, and, in consequence, the differences of which it consists cannot be such, either. Differences must come into being in some way, and Derrida advances the following solution: "we will designate as différance the movement according to which language, or any code, any system of referral in general is constituted 'historically' as a weave of differences" ("Différance" 12). Différance is the driving force behind the formation of differences and, thus, meaning. The meaning of the words 'Robinson Crusoe', for instance, is constantly reconstituted throughout the novel by the way the person denoted by them *differs* from those around him: the gentleness of his domestic animals highlights his beastly features and alters the reader's perception of him. This alteration is différance 'in action'. However, conventional – or, in fact, any – concepts or notions must be used with caution in this context: "[d]ifférance is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus, the name 'origin' no longer suits it" ("Différance" 11). Différance is the 'origin' of differences and it thus ought to be 'before' them and yet it is problematic to apply theses concepts to it. One is faced with similar difficulties when trying to give a definition of 'différance'. According to Derrida,

> if we accepted the form of the question [what is différance?], in its meaning and its syntax […] we would have to conclude that différance has been derived, has happened, is to be mastered and governed on the basis of the point of a present being, [which] eventually would come to defer of to differ […] ("Différance" 14)

Should one venture to define 'différance', it would inevitably become a concept, a word. But différance, because of its very role and function, eludes any attempt at being determined or pinned down through linguistic means.

Différance cannot be a word or a concept. Différance produces differences within language, and differences enable signs to be endowed with meaning. Therefore, words and concepts arise *as a result* of the work of différance. "[E]very concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences. Such a play, différance, is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a

conceptual process and system in general" ("Différance" 11). Since différance is what makes the existence of concepts possible, it is impossible for it to be a concept but is rather the interplay of differences that underlies the system.

The conception of language as a system of signs interpretable through their differences has a binary logic to it. Saussure's structuralist model "mirrors the logic of the digital computer, where the binary digits 0 and 1 have no intrinsic or positive meaning but are simply indicators and an effect of difference – a switch that is either on or off" (Gunkel 47). A 'language' built on the difference between two signs draws attention to how sign systems inevitably force their users to internalise a binary mode of thinking. Gunkel adds that "binary opposition […] also characterizes the fundamental structure of language and human condition, meaning that it is not possible to conceptualize or to say anything about binary opposition without utilizing and participating in the system or logical order it organizes" (47). This observation addresses an important difficulty related to discussing différance: it is not possible to talk about the production of language without recourse to language itself. One's thoughts are captives of language and its binary logic. At the same time, Gunkel's remark leads me to another topic that is of central interest to deconstruction, namely that of binary oppositions.

Binary oppositions form the basis of Western thought. They have dominated the European tradition of metaphysics since Ancient Greek philosophy (Derrida, *Limited Inc* 93). Dichotomies permeate human perception of the world and form the structure in which philosophers conceive of and formulate their ideas. "In other words, we typically make sense of ourselves and our world by deploying sets of terminological differences or binary oppositions" (Gunkel 43). Since it is an essential tool for understanding the world, binary thinking is not limited to philosophy but is omnipresent in everyday discourse.

The two parts of a dichotomy are never equal: it is implied that one of them always occupies a higher rank. According to Derrida, binaries are never at peace with each other: "[w]e are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand" (*Positions* 41). Binary oppositions always indicate a hierarchical relationship. They are not merely contrasting notions, they invariably entail a value judgment: "[i]f we think hard about these dichotomies, Derrida suggests, we will realize that they are not simply oppositions; they are also hierarchies in miniature. In other words, they contain one term that our culture views as being superior and one term viewed as negative or inferior" (Murfin 284). Within a given cultural context, one half of a dichotomy is always perceived to be of higher worth than the other.

Derrida names two principle means of questioning binary oppositions, *overturning* and *displacement*. The two together constitute what Derrida refers to as "*double séance*", double session (*Positions* 41). Overturning is simply an inversion of the hierarchy with the purpose of challenging the conventional value judgment (Gunkel 60). While it is an important step towards deconstructing a dichotomy, it still follows and reinforces the binary logic instead of transcending it. In the context of *Robinson Crusoe*, the 'pastoral' passages describing the beauties of the island represent an overturning of the hierarchy that places civilisation above nature; nonetheless, these passages maintain the dichotomous relationship of the two spheres. Displacement, the other tool proposed by Derrida, consists of the introduction of a new concept that was not present in the system previously: "[the new concept] is positioned in such a way that it both inhabits and operates in excess of the conceptual oppositions by which and through which systems of knowledge have been organized and articulated" (Gunkel 61). The new concept must be a concept that would not have been possible according to the rules of the dichotomy. Such a concept was not present in the system because it *could* not be present in it: it deconstructs the binary opposition precisely because it would have made no sense within its logical framework. In Defoe's novel, the characters I will designate (using Homi Bhabha's term) as 'hybrid' function as a displacement of the dichotomy: their form of existence cannot be understood through a binary view of civilisation and the wilderness.

The opposition of nature and culture, which is at the centre of my thesis, is specifically called into question by Derrida. In the first session of his seminar entitled *The Beast and the Sovereign*[3] (2009), he mentions that "for some time now I have been emphasizing the fragility and porosity of the limit between nature and culture" (15). The fragile nature of the boundary is not only the result of the occasional 'beastly' behaviour of humans but also of the highly developed social organisation of certain non-human animal species. An element of 'inhuman' brutality can be observed in the figure of the sovereign. The representative of power has "the exceptional right to place oneself above right, the right to non-right" (*B&S* 1.16). Exercising this prerogative "runs the risk of making the sovereign look like the most brutal beast who respects nothing, scorns the law, immediately situates himself above the law, at a distance from that law" (*B&S* 1.17). In their exclusive right to commit acts of violence, the sovereign can potentially behave like a brutish animal, like a beast. Crusoe, for example, frequently treats his 'subjects', the goats and the other animals, in a fashion that is by no means 'civilised' but brutal and violent. In turn, looking at the animal world, one can see several features that are reminiscent of human civilisation: "so many things that are so often attributed to and so naïvely reserved for so-called human *culture*, in opposition to *nature*" (*B&S* 1.14-5). Numerous intricate rules and social institutions conventionally

3 Henceforth: *B&S*.

associated with what one is used to calling culture can also be found among other animals, i.e. in nature. While culture is never completely devoid of 'subhuman' traits, nature, too, presents forms of highly organised cohabitation.

Without social organisation, every individual is a sovereign because every individual is a beast. Not being bound by social rules, not being bound by the law, everyone is free to exercise their will. Once rules are established, most members of the society thereby created must relinquish their sovereignty. At the same time, it is necessary for the proper functioning of the rules that certain individuals should retain their sovereignty. As a result, "sovereign and beast seem to have in common their being-outside-the-law. It is as though both of them were situated by definition at a distance from or above the laws, in nonrespect for the absolute law, the absolute law that they make or that they are but they do not have to respect" (*B&S* 1.17). The beast and the sovereign are connected through the fact that they are both immune to the rules. Since they create the law (the beast only for itself, the sovereign for a whole group), they must stand above, or at least outside it. "I believe that this resemblance explains and engenders a sort of hypnotic fascination or irresistible hallucination, which makes us see, project, perceive, as in an X-ray, the face of the beast under the features of the sovereign; or conversely, if you prefer, it is as though, through the maw of the untamable beast, a figure of the sovereign were to appear" (*B&S* 1.18). The beast and the sovereign constantly lurk behind each other's figure. This inescapable, and, for the ideal of a civilised, well-ordered society, unsettling, similarity is presented by Derrida in the form of an equation: "the beast becomes the sovereign who becomes the beast; there is the beast *and* [*et*] the sovereign (conjunction), but also the beast *is* [*est*] the sovereign, the sovereign *is* [*est*] the beast" (*B&S* 1.18). The state of the beast includes the possibility of sovereignty and the state of the sovereign includes the possibility of beastliness.

It is dangerous, however, to take the equation of the beast and the sovereign too seriously. Derrida warns about its risks by maintaining that, while one should not be a captive of binary categories, it is also essential not to ignore differences (*B&S* 1.15-6). On the one hand, one must recognise the fictitiousness of the nature/culture opposition and discover potential similarities between the two 'sides'; on the other hand, it is important to avoid drawing injudicious parallels and coming to precipitous conclusions on the basis of exaggerated analogies. "Every time one puts an oppositional limit in question, far from concluding that there is identity, we must on the contrary multiply attention to differences, refine the analysis in a restructured field" (*B&S* 1.16). Even after the artificiality of a boundary has been shown, a careful and discerning examination is necessary in order not to fall into the trap of a unitary view, a view that bluntly disregards variation and diversity.

In practically gaining power over the island and in subjugating Friday, Crusoe acts as a typical sovereign – and as such, he unites in himself the authority of the state with the brutal propensities of the beast. At the same time, the circumstances of his 'kingship' link him to a particular type of political hegemony that was of central importance to several European countries (England soon to become the most prominent among them): colonialism. Colonialism is the appropriation of a geographical area carried out by representatives of a polity, with the purpose of gaining some type of (usually economic) profit. It is typically accompanied by the settlement of people from the home country, and the subjugation and exploitation of the 'original' inhabitants of the area. In her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (1998), Ania Loomba defines colonialism "as the conquest and control of other people's lands and goods" (20). She further calls attention to the fact that the cohabitation of the old and the new residents tends to be attended by numerous difficulties: "Colonialism was not an identical process in different parts of the world but everywhere it locked the original inhabitants and the newcomers into the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history" (20). The activities of the coloniser influence every aspect of the life of a colonial society. "The process of 'forming a community' in the new land necessarily meant *un-forming* or *re-forming* the communities that existed there already, and involved a wide range of practices including trade, settlement, plunder, negotiation, warfare, genocide, and enslavement" (Loomba 20). The process of colonisation results in fundamental changes in the affected community, permeating all of its daily practices and its history.

The interrelation of colonialism and written texts produced in the context of colonised (or formerly colonised) societies forms the central interest of postcolonial studies. Any activity that colonised and coloniser engage in, be that trade, warfare, enslavement, or genocide, is intrinsically connected to texts produced within the same context: "[s]uch practices generated and were shaped by a variety of writings – public and private records, letters, trade documents, government papers, fiction and scientific literature. These practices and writings are what contemporary studies of colonialism and postcolonialism try to make sense of" (Loomba 20). These written texts express the effects of colonialism and, in their turn, influence colonial discourse.

Colonial discourse also plays a crucial role in the construction of colonised spaces. Geography, in general, does not exist on its own but is created by humans, and the way we think of geography is heavily influenced by our language use. As Edward Said explains in his foundational text *Orientalism* (1978): "both geographical and cultural entities – to say nothing of historical entities – such locales, regions, geographical sectors as 'Orient' and 'Occident' are men-made" (4-

5). Since understanding is only possible by imposing our own constructions on things, all classifications, geographical ones included, are necessarily artificial. "Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West" (Said 5). Pairs such as West and Orient, coloniser and colonised, civilised world and uncivilised world define each other because they are presented as opposites. Geography, like meaning, is produced by differences.

The narrative that portrays colonised peoples as subordinate has served the self-definition of Western civilisation as superior. "The construction of vast numbers of people as inferior, or 'other', was crucial for constructing a European 'self' and justifying colonial practices" (Loomba 112). Since, according to this logic, Europeans are more civilised, intelligent, and generally more advanced, it follows that they are entitled to govern the rest of the world. In reality, of course, such a view grossly simplifies the state of things as "there are enormous differences within each of these categories as well as cross-overs between them" (Loomba 112). Neither the 'coloniser' nor the 'colonised' is an integral, unified category, and the two are often intricately interwoven with each other. Thus, creating a clear-cut dichotomy would involve overcoming severe difficulties.

The encounter between coloniser and colonised produces liminal cultural spaces, which belong to both spheres but also differ from both. To describe such cases, Homi K. Bhabha uses the term 'hybridity': "[Bhabha's] contention was simply that, if borders and boundaries are ideological and geographical markers of separation, exclusion and difference, they are also spaces of emergence" (Jazeel 126). Where the two categories meet, 'hybrid' identities are formed, which defy an obvious distinction between coloniser and colonised. Approaching borders between different spheres as spaces characterised by mixed identities blurs the conventionally accepted boundary. Such a reinterpretation of dividing lines as intersections questions the validity of binary logic by pointing out the fragility of the limit between the two parts of a dichotomy.

Hybridity undermines the division of people and their cultures into well-defined categories. In consequence, cultural phenomena with hybrid features have a destabilising effect on the clear-cut paradigm imposed by the coloniser:

> [t]he hybrid object [...] retains the actual semblance of the authoritative symbol but revalues its presence by resisting it as the signifier of *Entstellung – after the intervention of difference*. It is the power of this strange metonymy of presence to so disturb the systematic (and systemic) construction of discriminatory knowledges that the cultural, once recognized as the medium of authority, becomes virtually unrecognizable. (Bhabha 115)

Hybridity questions the authority of the coloniser in cultural and other matters. Furthermore, hybridity can be interpreted as a form of ridiculing that authority: "[t]he display of hybridity – its

peculiar ‘replication’ – terrorizes authority with the *ruse* of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery” (Bhabha 115). Something akin to such mockery is also found in *Robinson Crusoe*, namely in the English sentences memorised by the parrot. Crusoe’s pet bird, by mechanically imitating its master’s speech, presents a slightly distorted version of the coloniser’s language. Even if the subversive qualities of hybridity do not automatically change the political situation (i.e. do not put an end to the rule of the invader), they defy the narrative that supports the coloniser’s cultural superiority: “[d]eprived of their full presence, the knowledges of cultural authority may be articulated with forms of ‘native’ knowledges or faced with those discriminated subjects that they must rule but can no longer represent” (Bhabha 115). When facets of the coloniser’s culture are intertwined with the traditions of the subjugated locals, the boundary between the two groups of people is shattered, and the dichotomy can no longer be maintained with the same efficacy. In Defoe’s novel, this is aptly illustrated by Friday’s religious education: while he is able to grasp many of the tenets of Christianity, the myths of his own tribe inevitably influence his understanding of his master’s creed. The result is a mixed form of the Christian faith which, though originally inculcated by Crusoe, is by no means identical with his approach. The form of religion that is thus formed transgresses, by virtue of its hybridity, the boundary between coloniser and colonised, thereby endangering the hierarchy guarded by the conquering power.

The coloniser can impose views and values on the colonised but such efforts ultimately damage the narrative about European hegemony by creating spaces that belong to two cultural spheres at once but to neither completely. Bhabha calls such intersectional spaces *interstices* and defines them as “the overlap and displacement of domains of difference” (2). Interstices confuse and resist binary systems by reinterpreting boundaries as having their own distinct cultural character instead of being mere dividing lines. In *Robinson Crusoe*, the enclosure created for the goats could be construed as an interstice: although Crusoe tries to construct (both in an abstract and a material sense) a solid wall between his living space and the rest of the island, thereby dividing the place into a civilised and an uncivilised sphere, the animals grazing immediately in front of his door blur that boundary as a result of their liminal existence. Having been domesticated by Crusoe, they come to have an identity that belongs both to the wilderness and to civilisation in the conventional European sense.

“The enlarging of the bounds of human empire”

Agriculture and science in two Early Modern English texts

As established in the previous chapter, texts do not contain the ‘presence’ to which they refer; instead, they rely on their linguistic and cultural environment in order to produce meaning. No text stands on its own but its context consists of other texts rather than the ‘reality’ that the text in question claims to portray. Thus, the present section relies on the preceding one in its understanding of textual meaning-making processes, and a legitimate interpretation of its contents is possible only within the wider context of literature pertaining to deconstruction. In a similar way, *Robinson Crusoe* depends on prior writings in its depiction of the success of civilised practices in the wilderness (implying a traditional hierarchy which is, of course, very much present in the novel despite its deconstructive tendencies). I will focus on two texts which display similarities with *Robinson Crusoe* in this respect: John Dryden’s translation of Virgil’s *Georgics* (1709) and Francis Bacon’s *The New Atlantis* (1626)[4]. With their respective foci on agriculture and scientific thinking, both phenomena classic examples of humanity overcoming nature, they had created a cultural atmosphere in which Defoe’s novel could (and still can be) read as a text advocating the superiority of civilisation over nature – a dichotomy that was to be used as a justification for European colonialism (Smit-Marais 103-4). At the same time, both texts (Dryden and Bacon) contain a number of inner contradictions – also reflected in Defoe’s novel – which already make a step towards displacing, or at least overturning, the dichotomy. In the case of the *Georgics*, Aristotle’s *Politics* will serve as a point of reference to elucidate some of these contradictions.

Georgics

Virgil’s *Georgics* played an important role in the poetic imagination of the 18th century and had an impact on Defoe’s literary output as well. Dryden’s translation of Virgil (1709), including the *Georgics*, was published ten years before *Robinson Crusoe*, and the genre of the georgic became (partly due to this translation) very popular, producing numerous imitations (Hunter, “Nature, Genre” 13-4). In order to understand its influence on Defoe’s novel, it is useful to consider one of the main insights about the genre in Joseph Addison’s essay on Virgil, which was printed as a

4 The anachronistic order might not at first appear justified: it is, however, my intention to start by discussing the primal level of agricultural mastery over the land and then proceed to the more abstract scientific mastery, which represents a later development.

preface to Dryden's work. Addison criticises the custom of classifying the *Georgics* as part of the tradition of pastoral poetry: in his opinion, "though the scene of both these poems lies in the same place" (298) – namely in a rural area –, the *Georgics* are distinguished by their task of "giving plain and direct instructions to the reader" (298) and thus have a more practical motivation. The pragmatic character of these poems understandably resonated with the enlightened, science-oriented world view of the 18th century's intelligentsia. The agricultural instructions which the poems provide to the reader have an obvious connection with the appropriation of uncultivated land for human purposes – much in the spirit of Crusoe's activities on 'his' island. Furthermore, the practical purpose of the genre links it to Crusoe's strictly matter-of-fact attitude in his dealings with his environment. James Paul Hunter argues that Defoe recalls the textual traditions associated the Virgil poems and "explores many of the same issues and functions that the georgic articulates for eighteenth-century poetry. In the central island portion of the novel, he sorts out the processes of Nature, climate, discovery, cultivation, labor, husbandry, and productivity in concrete, particular, and narrative working terms" ("Nature, Genre" 13). This can be seen especially in the detailed descriptions of tillage and animal domestication (*RC* 59-60, 80, 95, 109, 111-3, 163). In this way, the novel displays a notable thematic similarity with the georgic poetry produced by Defoe's contemporaries, i.e. Dryden and others influenced by his translation.

Robinson Crusoe uses Dryden's *Georgics* as a means of embedding the story of the ill-fated English sailor in a civilizatory narrative. The protagonist needs to overcome the obstacles presented by his hostile environment, and agriculture proves an essential tool to help him in his struggle. Hunter points out that exploration in the novel assumes the role of "instruction, and what has to be mastered once the self is ordered is Nature itself in all its particulars and variety and fundamental order" ("Nature, Genre" 13). To the castaway trying to survive, nature appears as the great antagonist that he has to understand, dominate, and exploit for his own purposes. This perspective corroborates the narrative of civilisation's triumph over the uncultivated wilderness, and agriculture, the domination and exploitation of land, is a crucial component of that narrative. 'Nature fashioned as the antagonist' is a trope that can be found repeatedly in the *Georgics*. The following passage, which is essentially a list of animals detrimental to the cultivation of crops, is a typical example:

> For sundry Foes the Rural Realm surround:
> The Field Mouse builds her Garner under ground,
> For gather'd Grain the blind laborious Mole,
> In winding mazes works her hidden hole.
> In hollow Caverns Vermine make abode,
> The hissing Serpent, and the swelling Toad:
> The Corn devouring Weezel here abides,

And the wise Ant her wintry Store provides. (*Georgics* 1.264-71)

The pests enumerated here are collectively labelled as 'foes': they surround the agricultural area and constitute a permanent danger to it. It is significant that the animals are referred to by the feminine pronoun 'her', thereby connecting the civilisation/nature binary with a traditional gender hierarchy. Through agriculture, civilisation subdues nature: feminised animals are overcome by victorious *man*kind – *la bête* is overcome by *le souverain*, to use Derrida's phraseology. The notion of the sovereign is also implied by the fact that cultivated rural land, which the text strictly divides from the non-human residents of the field by emphasising their antagonism, is designated as a 'realm', a political entity ruled by a monarch. The choice of the term calls into mind Aristotle's well-known statement that "man is by nature a political animal" (*Politics* 3). Places inhabited and/or controlled by humans are politically organised – cultivated fields and their neighbouring towns or villages are an example of such localities –, and political organisation, according to the Aristotelian view, elevates humans above the rest of the animal world.

While Aristotle's *Politics* accords to humans a superior place among animals, his treatise undermines the sharp distinction between nature and the political sphere – a tendency that is also present in the *Georgics*. One of the main tenets put forward by Aristotle is the natural origin of all political forms: "it is evident that the state is a creation of nature" (*Politics* 3); and: "man is *by nature* a political animal" (*Politics* 3, emphasis added). Although the exact meaning of notions such as 'nature', 'creation', or 'origin' (the last one not used by Aristotle but implicitly present in his claim) is highly controversial, it is easy to see that such a perspective as these excerpts represent does not endorse a clear boundary between the natural and the civilised. Furthermore, Aristotle sheds doubt on the position of man as the only political being by making a concession to other kinds of animals: "man is *more of* a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals" (*Politics* 3, emphasis added). That 'more of' is significant: it partially extends the political domain beyond humankind and acknowledges the complexity that can be observed in the social organisation of numerous other species. A similar concession to animals can be found in the passage of the *Georgics* quoted above. Having established the opposition of the 'rural realm' and its animal 'foes', the poem lists and characterises the more important pests, and some of their descriptions as well as the epithets applied to given species highlight their 'civilised' qualities. The reader learns, for instance, that mouses build 'granaries': "The Field Mouse builds her Garner under ground" (*Georgics* 1.265); moles are "laborious" and think about the future: "For gather'd Grain the blind laborious Mole, / In winding mazes works her hidden hole" (*Georgics* 1.266-7); ants are praised for their wisdom and also make preparations for the approaching cold season: "And the wise Ant her

wintry Store provides" (*Georgics* 1.271). The mention of ants, in particular, is relevant because of their high level of organisation; however, the power of forethought in the case of all three – mouses, moles, and ants – is noteworthy as it is the attribute that Aristotle deems to be the distinguishing feature of beings endowed with political potency. "For that which can foresee by the exercise of mind is by nature lord and master" (Aristotle, *Politics* 2). The one who can anticipate and take care of future necessities is entitled to govern others and to engage in public matters. By ascribing such abilities to certain non-human species, Virgil/Dryden's poem blurs the boundary between political animals (humans or, rather, men) and apolitical animals.

In *Robinson Crusoe*, several passages describe the fight against pests, forming a parallel with the warnings given by the *Georgics*. In one instance, the result of Crusoe's agricultural endeavours is endangered by plundering birds.

> I saw my little crop surrounded with fowls, of I know not how many sorts, who stood, as it were, watching till I should be gone. I immediately let fly among them, for I always had my gun with me. I had no sooner shot, but there rose up a little cloud of fowls, which I had not seen at all, from among the corn itself. (*RC* 89)

As in Virgil, wild animals are portrayed here as enemies to the human effort to cultivate the land. The fowls *surrounding* Crusoe's crop remind one of the "sundry Foes [which] the Rural Realm surround" (*Georgics* 1.264) and could well be part of the list quoted above. The use of the gun, a product of civilisation, against the non-human source of danger further underlines the binary division of the world into a civilised and an uncivilised sphere. Another example of violence against animals is Crusoe's treatment of his quickly reproducing cats:

> I had been concerned for the loss of one of my cats, who run away from me, or, as I thought, had been dead, and I heard no more tale or tidings from her, till, to my astonishment, she came home about the end of August with three kittens. This was the more strange to me, because, though I had killed a wild cat, as I called it, with my gun, yet I thought it was quite a different kind from our European cats; yet the young cats were the same kind of house-breed like the old one; and both my cats being females, I thought it very strange. But from these three cats I afterwards came to be so pestered with cats, that I was forced to kill them like *vermin*, or *wild beasts*, and to drive them from my house as much as possible. (*RC* 78, emphases added)

Crusoe feels compelled to kill the cats as they come to represent an inconvenience in his life; his victims are emphatically described as 'vermin' and 'wild beasts', in order to classify them as subhuman and uncivilised, thereby justifying their extermination. In comparison with the birds looting the crops, the need for justification is more acutely felt here by the reader since the agricultural aspect is oddly absent: if Crusoe has a specific practical reason for decimating his feline

companions, it is pretermitted. The only hint at any possible damage the cats might cause is the use of the verb 'pester', which links them to other, destructive animals, such as the fowls. A further link is the presence of the gun, with which Crusoe shoots the wild kin of his cats as well as the birds, and which can symbolise the struggle of civilisation against the wilderness; however, the hierarchical narrative involving the nature/civilisation dichotomy is not at all as straightforwardly delineated in the case of the cats as it is with the agrarian activities. As in the passage quoted from the *Georgics* discussed above, the dividing line between humans and other animals is not clear-cut here because the cats are descended from a domestic breed – although they presumably have wild ancestors on the paternal side. As a result of their lineage, they are partly associated with the civilised world and partly with the natural world, thus obfuscating the boundary between the two domains.

Probably the most fundamental contradiction in the *Georgics* is their simultaneous celebration of agricultural practices on the one hand, and of the unadulterated countryside on the other. Occasionally, the verses are almost Rousseauvian in their partiality for 'natural' things over the creations of humanity. The happy condition of the carefree shepherd is praised at length:

> The Swain, who, free from Business and Debate;
> Receives his easy Food from Nature's Hand,
> And just Returns of cultivated Land!
> No Palace, with a lofty Gate, he wants,
> T' admit the Tydes of early Visitants.
> [...]
> Unvex'd with Quarrels, undisturb'd with Noise,
> The Country King his peaceful Realm enjoys:
> Cool Grots, and living Lakes, the Flow'ry Pride
> Of Meads, and Streams that thro' the Valley glide;
> And shady Groves that easie Sleep invite,
> And after toilsome Days, a sweet repose at Night. (*Georgics* 2.640-64, emphases in the original)

The swain's life is devoid of the inconveniences which afflict urban populations: instead of noise, quarrel, and stressful work, he enjoys peace and quiet. There are no annoying visitors to disturb him, and no opulent artefacts to distract him from the beauties of nature. Nature, however, is not merely a source of aesthetic delight, it gives food in plenty and provides a safe space for the night. Despite Joseph Addison's insistence that the georgic is an altogether different type of poetry from the pastoral and the two ought not to be confused (298), the idealising view presented here is strongly reminiscent of the latter genre, popular both in Virgil's Rome and in baroque court culture. Bucolic poetry, though (or perhaps because) a product of urban culture, is typically at variance with

civic values (Segal 6): the passage quoted here depicts the country as a better, homelier place than the more polished city, and reflects an urban fantasy about the tranquil world of herdsmen. Shepherds are honest and unsophisticated, and, as opposed to the corrupt practices of the city, they know no deceit or imposture. Also, they can consider themselves kings of this Arcadian realm and relish its countless assets and blessings to their hearts' content. While the country is a place of innocence and simplicity, the city is infiltrated by extravagant foreign customs. The inclusion of several toponyms referring to distant places – Corinth, Persia, Assyria, and Arabia – calls attention to the exotic, non-native aura of the artworks associated with them. This emphasis, in turn, foregrounds the true Roman/English character of country dwellers. The "Antick Vests" (*Georgics* 2.649) of the Persian tapestry are contrasted with the "homely Walls" (*Georgics* 2.648) of the simple peasant, and the "foreign Scents" (*Georgics* 2.654) of the tinctures imported from Arabia with "the Sweetness of his Oyl" (*Georgics* 2.654). The hue of the shepherds' wool is "native white" (*Georgics* 2.652), at once a reference to the fact that it is free from artificial ornaments and to the colour of innocence; wool dyed with Assyrian paint, however, is interpreted as a sign of pride. While foreign products are plainly identified with vanity, corruption, and self-indulgence, the natives of the land are portrayed as modest, forthright, and virtuous. Another passage in the same book goes even further, and claims that real worth is to be found in nature unsullied by human activity.

> But much more pleasing are those Fields to see,
> That need not Ploughs, nor Human Industry.
> [...]
> Yet Heav'n their various Plants for use designs:
> For Houses Cedars, and for Shipping Pines.
> Cypress provides for Spokes, and Wheels of Wains:
> And all for Keels of Ships, that scour the watry Plains. (*Georgics* 2.616-25, emphasis in the original)

Fields untouched by human hand are deemed to be superior in beauty; moreover, wild growth does not necessarily imply a lack of practicality, either, as the trees of the forests can serve as excellent material for building houses, ships, and the like. Although the text does not deny the value of such human-made objects, it suggests that 'heaven' provides the necessary commodities at least as effectively as artificial methods do. Here, the hierarchy of nature and civilisation is partially overturned by asserting the superior functionality of nature in certain respects.

An idyllic portray of the landscape, akin to the celebration of the country in the *Georgics*, can be found in Crusoe's report of his discoveries made in the inner parts of the island. In his wanderings, he arrives in a delightful valley richly endowed with various natural resources.

> At the end of this march I came to an opening, where the country seemed to descend to the west; and a little spring of fresh water, which issued out of the side of the hill by me, ran the other way, that is, due east; and the country appeared so fresh, so green, so flourishing, everything being in a constant verdure or flourish of spring, that it looked like a planted garden. (*RC* 76)

Crusoe seems intoxicated by the beauty of his surroundings. In his enthusiastic praise of the scenery, he falls into a rather dull repetitiveness: both 'fresh' and 'flourish' appear twice in the same sentence, and the "constant verdure" of the territory is highlighted almost immediately after pointing out that it is green. By remarking that the valley looks like a man-made garden, he reflects on what wild plants can achieve on their own and what nature is able to accomplish without human assistance. In this aspect, he comes to a conclusion similar to that of the *Georgics*, namely that natural growth is no less, or perhaps more, valuable than cultivated plantations. The description of the panorama offers a number of other analogies: both texts mention streams passing through a valley, and both emphasise the lushness of the vegetation. Besides, the novel's use of Latinate words – 'verdure', 'flourish' – to express the beauty of the view reminds the reader of the atmosphere of Virgilian poetic diction; likewise, the anaphoric repetition of the adverb 'so' gives the sentence a prosodic rhythm that approaches verse, or at least heightened language. Nevertheless, Crusoe is not so overwhelmed by the aesthetic influence of his visual perceptions as entirely to forget his pragmatic, stereotypically English self. In what follows, he defines his own (needless to say, superior) position in relation to the fecund area and assesses the practical gains it can yield him.

> I descended a little on the side of that delicious vale, surveying it with a secret kind of pleasure, though mixed with my other afflicting thoughts, to think that this was all my own; that I was king and lord of all this country indefeasibly, and had a right of possession [...] However, the green limes that I gathered were not only pleasant to eat, but very wholesome; and I mixed their juice afterwards with water, which made it very wholesome, and very cool and refreshing. (*RC* 76)

Crusoe considers himself in possession of the area: he is the self-appointed king of the island. His idea is similar to the one expressed in the *Georgics*, namely that the shepherd is king of the land (2.659) – although, while Virgil's swain is content with enjoying the peaceful pleasures afforded by the countryside, Crusoe intends to exploit every resource to its full potential. The shepherd simply accepts what nature has to offer; Crusoe has civilizatory designs. His stance is an instance of the 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' trope, introduced by Mary Louise Pratt in her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992). The coloniser observes and evaluates the surrounding area: this activity characteristically involves "the mastery of the landscape, the estheticizing adjectives,

[and] the broad panorama anchored in the seer" (Pratt 205). The explorer (in this case, Crusoe), who claims to have sovereignty over the region, appreciates the beauty and practical advantages of the land; at the same time, he aims to subjugate it and to improve its useful qualities through by resorting to the tools provided by 'civilisation'.

As has been shown, *Robinson Crusoe* bears a strong resemblance to Dryden's translation of Virgil's *Georgics* in its portrayal of the relationship of nature and civilisation. Both texts contain elements that help to create and maintain a hierarchy in which civilisation has a higher position than nature; yet, both texts call attention to facets of nature, such as the highly advanced intelligence and well-organised behaviour of certain non-human animal species, or the beauty and utility of wild plants, that question the validity of such a one-sided view. Although the discussed passages, for the most part, follow the traditional binary, they revert the status of its two components in several ways, thereby destabilising the established hierarchical order. I must emphasise at this point that, as many parallels as there are between the novel and the *Georgics* in this respect, it cannot be conclusively ascertained whether Defoe was directly influenced by Dryden's work – and the question is ultimately of secondary importance. As Hunter nicely phrases, the connection between the two texts is not to be understood as "a source or allusion in the usual sense but a frame of reference that quietly [...] becomes part of the reach of the novel" ("Nature, Genre" 14). What matters is that *Robinson Crusoe* was written in a cultural environment in which the *Georgics* and their depictions of agriculture and nature were widely read and imitated, and the stance of the poems necessarily impacted the stance of other texts.

The New Atlantis

One of Crusoe's chief activities during his years on the island is his endeavour to understand the rules that govern natural processes and to use this knowledge for practical purposes. In a way, his whole narrative is a chronicle of his self-education. His intense scientific interest is obvious from his methodical observation of different kinds of natural phenomena, such as the weather, the seasons, the growth and uses of plants, and many others. Several writers and scholars have approached the text from a pedagogical angle, among the first, and perhaps most prominently, Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762): he thought Defoe's novel should be the first book a child reads because it captures the very essence of the natural sciences (162-3). It is in connection with this view of Rousseau's that James Paul Hunter addresses the role of education in *Robinson Crusoe* and interprets Crusoe's explorations as a form of scientific instruction: "what has

to be mastered once the self is ordered is Nature itself in all its particulars and variety and fundamental order" ("Nature, Genre" 13). The verb 'master' is to be understood here not only in the sense of exercising control over something but also as a process of acquiring knowledge. In the previous subsection, I looked at the former aspect in examining agriculture as a pursuit directed at the subjugation of nature; now, I will turn to the latter and explore how the novel's portrayal of the nature/civilisation dichotomy is influenced by the spirit of scientific inquiry. To do this, I will compare Crusoe's account of his observations and experiments with certain passages from Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* (1626), an unfinished tale about a journey to a distant island – and arguably one of the foundational texts of modern scientific thinking. This utopian narrative was instrumental in forming the general attitude towards the natural sciences, which began to thrive in the second half of the 17th century. In his article "Bacon's *New Atlantis* and the Fictional Origins of Organised Science", Peter Lucas comes to the conclusion that Bacon's "fictional creation provided a model on which organised science could later base itself" (120). *The New Atlantis* ushered in the scientific revolution, the "first stirrings [of which] had been felt by the time of Bacon's death and within just a few decades it was recognisably in full flow, bearing the unmistakable stamp of Bacon's ideas" (Lucas 120). The book laid down methodical axioms and defined goals that proved to be crucial for empirical scientific practices. Moreover, it was highly influential in the institutional organisation of science. It played an important role in the foundation of the Royal Society in 1660, an association that was anticipated by Salomon's House on Bacon's fictional island: "Salomon's House breathes the air of modern science: organised, systematic, experimental, pragmatic, progressive" (Lucas 120-1). Bacon's text introduces a new scientific stance by establishing practicality as a central feature of learning and research. Thus, apart from the similarity of the core story idea – European seafarers discovering a previously unknown island –, *The New Atlantis* is linked to *Robinson Crusoe* through the pragmatic aim they both attribute to knowledge.

The New Atlantis contends that the main objective of all scientific activity must be the extension of the scope of human power. The key passage in this regard is probably the declaration of the purpose of Salomon's House made by one of the so-called 'Fathers' to the travellers. "The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible" (*The New Atlantis* 51). The task of science is to help humans discover the laws of nature; nevertheless, the knowledge thereby gained is not considered an end in itself. In order to be of use to society, scientists have to pursue a course of study that can yield practical advantages and is in some way conducive to increasing the might of human civilisation. To Bacon's mind, the ultimate end of science is to ensure the hegemony of humanity: "*scientia potentia est"* – "knowledge is power" (attributed to Bacon). In

this paradigm, gathering information about the world and understanding its governing laws is a decidedly utilitarian quest. The importance for Bacon of the practical application of science is stressed by John Losee in his book *A Historical Introduction to the Philosophy of Science*, where he maintains that, in the Baconian system, "the ultimate goal of scientific inquiry is power over nature" (61). The view that humans need to make an effort to overcome nature, and that this effort is facilitated by scientific advancement, clearly supports a hierarchical distinction between civilisation and the natural world, and assumes the superiority of the former.

The occupations and projects of Salomon's House in many ways foreshadow the achievements of modern science. Its researchers are active in numerous areas, such as mechanics, meteorology, botany etc. They are able to build towers of extreme heights, which serve multiple purposes: "[w]e use these towers, according to their several heights, and situations, for insulation, refrigeration, conservation; and for the view of divers meteors; as winds, rain, snow, hail; and some of the fiery meteors also" (*The New Atlantis* 52). Studying the weather is a good example of how science accomplishes useful tasks: gaining a thorough knowledge of meteorology is not a mere satisfaction of curiosity, it contributes to a more productive agriculture. The compact functionality of the towers – at once observatories and storehouses – could be a symbol of this practical attitude: on the one hand, they assist to growing plants more effectively by enabling a better observation of the weather; on the other, they provide a place where the end product can be deposited. Another vital tool for enhancing agriculture is the study of plants. Salomon's House puts great effort into managing and exploiting the vegetation.

> We have also large and various orchards and gardens; wherein we do not so much respect beauty, as variety of ground and soil [...] We make [trees] also by art much greater than their nature; and their fruit greater and sweeter and of differing taste, smell, colour, and figure, from their nature. And many of them we so order, as they become of medicinal use. (*The New Atlantis* 54-5)

Again, the pragmatic aspect is paramount: in planting gardens, their aim is to create ideal circumstances for the crops; they are less interested in the aesthetic qualities of the result. This approach can also be detected in the emphasis they lay on the importance of the medical application of plants: they value their health effects above their beauty. Moreover, they are able increase the size of trees and improve the properties of their fruits, thus overcoming nature through artificial procedures.

Several of the scientific activities seen in *The New Atlantis* have their (more modest) parallels in *Robinson Crusoe*, and, as with Bacon's scientists, the primary interest for Crusoe in his inquiries into the workings of nature lies with their potential utility. He needs to have a fair

knowledge of the local climate and of the various plants in order to provide himself with sufficient nourishment. When it comes to meteorology, his observations are remarkably meticulous: based on his empirical findings, Crusoe creates a precise table, in which he documents the changes of the seasons (*RC* 81). He does what might be called a comparative analysis of the climate in calling attention to the differences between the prevailing conditions in Europe and those on his island: while, in the case of the former, the customary division is between a hot and a cold period, the latter is characterised by the alternation of wet and dry seasons. For the sake of exactitude, he notes that there are exceptions to these rules, inasmuch as the winds can influence the length of the rainy season. As indicated above, Crusoe's curiosity for matters of meteorology is closely linked to his agricultural pursuits. He quickly realises the necessity of being acquainted with the characteristics of the climate and points out its effects on the tillage:

> Finding my first seed did not grow, which I easily imagined was by the drought, I sought for a moister piece of ground to make another trial in, and I dug up a piece of ground near my new bower, and sowed the rest of my seed in February, a little before the vernal equinox. And this having the rainy months of March and April to water it, sprung up very pleasantly, and yielded a very good crop. (*RC* 80)

The failure of his first sowing makes Crusoe aware of the role of soil moisture and, using what he learned about the sequence of the seasons, he is able to determine the perfect time for planting the remaining seeds. The application of his findings brings speedy and favourable results, thereby demonstrating the usefulness of scientific observation. His knowledge of the climate is complemented by his efforts to collect information pertaining to botany: although he is by no means an exemplary scholar of the subject, he is sensible of its importance for his survival, and engages in its study accordingly.

> I searched for the cassava root, which the Indians, in all that climate, make their bread of, but I could find none. I saw large plants of aloes, but did not then understand them. I saw several sugar-canes, but wild, and, for want of cultivation, imperfect. I contented myself with these discoveries for this time, and came back, musing with myself what course I might take to know the virtue and goodness of any of the fruits or plants which I should discover; but could bring it to no conclusion; for, in short, I had made so little observation while I was in the Brazils, that I knew little of the plants in the field, at least very little that might serve me to any purpose now in my distress. (*RC* 75)

While he reveals a certain amount of familiarity with the flora of the American continent (he has heard about a type of root which is used for making bread), he confesses to be largely ignorant in the field. He tries but fails to find a safe means of assessing the possible benefits of plants, and the little knowledge that he possesses is of no use to him as there is apparently no cassava root in the

vicinity. By showcasing Crusoe's lack of expertise, the passage highlights the merits of science since his example functions as an illustration of the fate that awaits ignorance in need. In addition, the remark that wild sugar-canes are defective sheds further light on the importance of human cultivation and, indirectly, of the scientific study of nature in general.

Similarly to his explorations of nature, Crusoe's first attempts at craftwork are dictated by practical needs. Relatively early, he recognises the value of certain conventional household items:

> And now I began to apply myself to make such necessary things as I found I most wanted, as particularly a chair and a table; for without these I was not able to enjoy the few comforts I had in the world. I could not write or eat, or do several things with so much pleasure without a table.
>
> So I went to work; and here I must needs observe, that as reason is the substance and original of the mathematics, so by stating and squaring everything by reason, and by making the most rational judgment of things, every man may be in time master of every mechanic art. (*RC* 51)

By pointing out the different uses of chairs and tables, the passage stresses the eminently practical goal of Crusoe's handwork. Although he has little to no experience with such tasks, he argues that it is possible to attain proficiency in virtually any craft by relying on reason, which is the fountain of scientific thinking. His belief in the power of reason – as well as his emphasis on utility – is a reflection of the dominant philosophical discourse of Crusoe's (and Defoe's) time. This era saw the beginning of the Enlightenment and the rapid advance of the natural sciences, both of which were influenced by the writings of Francis Bacon. Robert Mayer selects the above passage as a representative example of the novel's stance towards the new ideas: it is "evidence provided by Crusoe for his declaration of a Baconian belief in the human capacity to master both nature itself and nature 'wrought or mechanical'" (189). Through his trust in rationality, Crusoe exhibits the confidence and optimism of his age regarding the potential of human intelligence: through reason, it is possible to understand and rise above nature. According to Mayer, *Robinson Crusoe* is "a lively illustration of the Baconian principle that 'commerce between the mind of man and the nature of things' leads to knowledge for 'the benefit and use of life'" (190). Again, the ideal of knowledge is closely tied to utility. From this perspective, the novel could be seen as an apotheosis of civilisation, and a celebration of its victory over nature with the help of reason. While it is certainly true that Crusoe's faith in scientific methods would support such an approach, the case is far from being so clear-cut. Among others, the narrative's very reliance on the civilizational discourse set in motion at least in part by Bacon's *New Atlantis* presents ambiguities in this respect.

The New Atlantis disconcerts the perception of the spaces customarily assigned to nature and civilisation, respectively. At the start of the narrative, it is clearly stated that the travellers are adrift in the middle of the ocean, far from any human dwelling. "So that finding ourselves, in the midst of the *greatest wilderness* of waters in the world, without victuals, we gave ourselves for lost men and prepared for death" (*The New Atlantis* 6, emphasis added). The Pacific Ocean is described as a 'wilderness', suggesting the absence of human population as well as the distance from developed regions, and thereby constructing a counter-image to the civilised West. Nevertheless, soon after, the seafarers arrive into "a good haven, being the port of a fair city" (*The New Atlantis* 7). This city is on the formerly unknown island of Bensalem. The travellers learn that the inhabitants are Christians and find them remarkably civil in their ways. Their achievements in the field of science have been discussed earlier. The high level of development that characterises this utopian state destabilises the binary notion of a civilised and an uncivilised world: in what was generally perceived as a barren wilderness, Bacon's narrator discovers a well-ordered society, which is in many respects more advanced than his own.

In the process of exploring the 'Island of Despair', Crusoe experiences a recognition similar to that of the travellers in *The New Atlantis*. Like them, he also once labels his surroundings as a "wilderness" (*RC* 86); however, as he gets to know his new environment better, he comes to question the absolute validity of the values and conventions of his own cultural background. "Crusoe learns that he needs a larger sense of order, and at the same time discovers the relativity of regional and cultural norms. Travel is discovery, and what is Nature in one place is not necessarily Nature in another" (Hunter, "Nature, Genre" 12). The idea of travel as a form of discovery connects *Robinson* with *The New Atlantis*: in both, the protagonist lands in an unknown territory and comes to reconsider the received understanding of fundamental concepts, notably those of nature, wilderness, and civilisation. In Crusoe's case, perhaps the most striking example of such a reinterpretation is his reasoning on the subject of cannibals.

> It is certain these people either do not commit this as a crime; it is not against their consciences' reproving, or their light reproaching them. They do not know it to be an offence, and then commit it in defiance of Divine justice, as we do in almost all the sins we commit. They think it no more a crime to kill a captive taken in war, than we do to kill an ox; nor to eat human flesh, than we do to eat mutton. (*RC* 131)

Here, Crusoe realises that different societies have different moral standards. Although he sees the reason for such differences in other peoples' ignorance of the 'true faith', he acknowledges that man-eaters are not accountable for their bloody deeds, which they view as normal. He upholds the supremacy of Christian values (another analogy with *The New Atlantis*) but concedes that it is not

the only acceptable code of behaviour. After initially regarding cannibals as savages, and himself as a just avenger, he now examines their most infamous custom by juxtaposing it with the consumption of animal meat in Europe, concluding that the two are not essentially different. Subsequently, he begins to recognise elements of comparable brutality in his own culture: he ventures that Christian soldiers are at least as guilty as cannibals: both kill their prisoners-of-war, except Christians do so despite their knowledge of divine justice (*RC* 131). Having thus relativized the crimes of the local tribes, he ceases to see himself in a position to pass judgement over their actions. His considerations blur the distinction between savages and civilised nations by pointing out that both are equally prone to committing acts of cruelty. According to the Western narrative, Europeans ought to reign supreme over the barbaric tribes of other continents, who lack culture, social order, and are therefore wild; yet, the two groups look very similar to each other here. One becomes aware of "the face of the beast under the features of the sovereign; or, conversely, if you prefer, it is as though, through the maw of the untamable beast, a figure of the sovereign were to appear" (Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign* 18). As he learns more about his new milieu, it becomes increasingly difficult for Crusoe to draw a clear line between the 'wild savages' in his neighbourhood and the 'civilised' residents of his home country. While the former have their own ethical guidelines, according to which it is permissible to eat their enemies, the latter are often unable to repress their bestial instincts, and thereby betray the fragility of civilisation as a construct.

In *Robinson Crusoe*, the depiction of scientific activities and the progress of civilisation in general relies on a discourse established, to a large extent, by Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis*. In this discourse, the accumulation of knowledge is considered an important tool for increasing the power exercised by humanity. The study of nature is directed by utilitarian principles: the value of learning lies in the practical use it is capable of yielding. This tendency is discernible in Crusoe's efforts to understand nature: in all his attempts, his main goal is to profit from what he learns. While this pragmatic attitude permeates *Robinson* as well as *The New Atlantis*, both texts throw doubt on its theoretical foundation. Bacon's utilitarian view is based on the concept of human civilisation, a concept that is partly challenged by his own tale but especially by Defoe's novel. Since one half of a binary is defined by how it differs from the other half, the reassessment of the term 'civilisation' inevitably involves a reassessment of the nature/civilisation dichotomy as a whole. Thus, similarly to its scenes relating to agriculture, the novel's parallels with *The New Atlantis* question the strict hierarchical opposition of nature and civilisation.

Catalogues and categories

Apart from tilling the land and observing nature, Crusoe's desire to integrate his island into civilisation can be seen in his efforts to impose his own categories upon the things that surround him. I have already mentioned some examples above while discussing the passages relating to meteorology and botany, respectively. Now, I will look at a number of other cases of categorisation and examine their implications in greater detail. Among the things Crusoe tries to do are identifying animals and plants, dividing time into distinct units, measuring objects, and recording the ensuing data. In general, he is led by a desire to preserve the division of the world into a 'wild' and a 'civilised' domain. His pursuance of these activities is an example of what Michel Foucault calls *taxonomia*, a phenomenon characteristic of the European mindset in the Classical age: *taxonomia* consists of creating overarching systems of understanding the world and putting every item reality presents in the right place within that system (*The Order of Things* 81). In Crusoe's case, and presumably in others as well, this obsession with categorisation represents a desire to understand his unknown and, therefore, menacing environment – but understanding something is also a way of conquering it. According to John G. Peters, Crusoe's main goal in classifying and systematically registering objects and phenomena is to assert the dominance of his own culture over the island: "[t]hroughout the novel, Crusoe seeks not to accommodate himself to the wilderness but rather to transform it into civilized space in order to affirm European culture and by so doing provide meaning for his shipwreck experience" (58-9). Making sense of adversities helps the castaway survive and appropriate the new territory. His practice of naming everything he encounters and keeping written records on various issues gives the impression of establishing order, a commodity he esteems highly amidst the apparent confusion and disorder of the wilderness. "[His habit of recording] enables Crusoe to keep a time line that orders events and feeds his rage for order in his unfamiliar environment and puzzling new world. He is obsessed by the idea of order during his entire stay on the Island of Despair [...]" (Hunter, "Genre, Nature" 10). Crusoe's methodical proceedings in all his pursuits act as a counterforce against the mysterious and frightful outside world. The order he thereby constructs is a characteristically Western one in its reliance upon scientific methods and its association to colonial expansion.

Since language plays a crucial role in forming the way people think, these practices not only express the narrator's Western perspective but also *determine* his perspective: they create a rail on which his thoughts are bound to run and, by embedding the 'wilderness' into a European scientific discourse, they contribute to the subjugation of the island to European hegemony. If one contemplates Crusoe from this point of view, he appears a propagator of Western cultural values.

Such an approach is certainly valid – as far as it goes; nevertheless, taking the argument further might be injudicious: having established that Crusoe 'civilises' the island, Peters makes the case that the text as such presents a civilizational narrative which illustrates the higher worth of European man. To Peters' mind, "[a]lthough Jean-Jacques Rousseau praised *Robinson Crusoe* for demonstrating the natural man's superiority over the civilized man (2: 49-55), this is precisely what the book is *not* about; [...] Crusoe consistently seeks to create an existence modeled after European civilization by appropriating the new world as his own" (Peters 63, emphasis in the original). There is no doubt that Crusoe does display such a proclivity on numerous occasions in the course of the novel but extending his intentions to the text as a whole seems slightly far-fetched. In putting forward his claim, Peters fails to distinguish between Robinson Crusoe the character and *Robinson Crusoe* the book; yet, this distinction is a critical one. Although it is true that Crusoe is resolved to organise and exploit everything around him, it is significant that many of his endeavours prove to be abortive in some way or another. In the following, I will try to show how the novel's examples of (partially) unsuccessful cataloguing and categorising question the superior position of Western civilisation despite the protagonist's best efforts to the contrary.

It must be noted in advance that imposing categories on the world is, in general, a completely arbitrary operation of the human mind; for that reason, any such attempt is ultimately hopeless and can never result in an accurate representation of reality. In this sense, Crusoe's – or, in fact, anyone's – undertakings in this direction are bound to miscarry. As Derrida argues in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, the act of categorising as such is, of necessity, doomed to failure. He pronounces the verdict: "The category is a signature of *bêtise*" (1.220). The human aspiration to build categories and to draw unambiguous lines between them is a clear sign of our *stupidity* and, at once, of our *beastliness* (the two meanings of the word *bêtise*). As David Farrell Krell summarises, "asininity [an approximative translation of *bêtise*] lies in the very desire to *define*, to determine absolutely, and to wish to conclude with confidence" (20). Defining, while being a typical feature of the Enlightenment, is also a beastly, asinine act. Thus, the interest in finding the definitive difference between humans and other animals – a recurring theme in Western thought – is itself an indication that the two are not distinct groups but belong to the same realm. Like other species, humans are not exempt from behaving in a 'beastly', that is, in a stupid or brutal fashion. Of course, it would be a mistake to suppose that all specimens are equally stupid and brutal, and that there is no variation at all but, while differences between given entities undeniably exist, categories based on these differences are mere constructs and not objective facts. In this light, Crusoe's obsession with order appears to be a mark of his 'beastliness' rather than an efficient tool of distancing himself from and conquering nature.

In spite of his persistence in trying to classify the island's flora and fauna, Crusoe remains largely unsuccessful in this domain. This is nicely illustrated is his first encounter with the bird population of the island. Driven by the taxonomic thinking of his time, he observes the birds but fails to recognise any specific species based on its chant, and kills a bird that he unconvincingly identifies as a hawk:

> I had no sooner fired, but from all the parts of the wood there arose an innumerable number of fowls of many sorts, making a confused screaming, and crying every one according to his usual note; but not one of them of any kind that I knew. As for the creature I killed I took it to be a kind of a hawk, its colour and beak resembling it, but had no talons or claws more than common. (*RC* 39-40)

Crusoe seems intent on making the reader believe that he has conducted a successful ornithological survey. He evidently wants to look knowledgeable about birds and draws several dubious inferences on the basis of his observations. He claims that the bird he killed is a hawk because of the similarity of its colour and its beak. Unfortunately, the analogy ends here as the specimen looks unlike a hawk in other respects: pointing out the two identical characteristics only serves to call attention to his 'expertise'. In the next paragraph, he stresses that he is "[c]ontented with this discovery" (*RC* 40); however, his self-assurance is far from being persuasive: he has no strictly factual reason to conclude that the dead bird is a hawk, and the credibility of his statement that the fowls cried "according to their usual note" (*RC* 40) is undermined by his own confession that there was "not one of them of any kind that [he] knew" (*RC* 40). Crusoe's confidence in this instance borders on the comical. Indeed, Dennis Todd considers this passage "one of the few moments of intentional humour in *Robinson Crusoe*" (142). His view is supported by the clumsy formulation "innumerable number" (*RC* 40), which alone makes it difficult for the reader to take the account entirely seriously. Although Defoe's writing is noted for its often careless and cursory style, such awkward word combinations stand out even in his prose. The narration makes fun of the narrator and debunks his conceit. The bird episode reveals Crusoe's ignorance, and, as Todd further argues, "[his] feeling of mastery [...] is delusional. He has imposed a subjective order on the island instead of seeing it accurately" (143). It could be argued that the delusion is not complete since the possession of a gun makes Crusoe master of the island in the *political* sense, i.e. a master who is able to assert his authority over their environment and who possesses an effective monopoly on violence; nevertheless, he is clearly deficient in *intellectual* mastery as is suggested by his perplexity upon being confronted with the unknown bird species. In his attempt to display his superiority by being able to define and categorise the birds, he merely reveals his own *bêtise*.

As regards the plants endemic to the island, Crusoe is not significantly luckier in exploring them than he is in identifying fowl. In another context, I have already examined the passage in which he hunts for potentially useful plants: Crusoe encounters different kinds of plants but he is unable to tell what they are and what their benefits might be (*RC* 75). He mentions the cassava root and its usage by Native Americans is but, similarly to the incident of the 'hawk', it is merely a way of showing off his 'expertise', the possession of this piece of information brings him no practical result, and, in the Baconian discourse of the natural sciences (on which the narration partly relies), useless knowledge counts as worthless knowledge. He manages to recognise aloes and sugarcanes; however, he does not 'understand' the one, and the other is unproductive for lack of cultivation: unlike more 'civilised' colonies, there are no slaves to till the land (*RC* 75). As with the birds, he claims to be satisfied with his reconnaissance trip despite his having accomplished hardly anything of practical value. The fact that he declares his satisfaction in almost identical words in the two cases is noteworthy: he is "[c]ontented with this discovery" (*RC* 40) after shooting at the birds, and he "contented [him]self with these discoveries" (*RC* 75) after the inspection of the flora. The similar formulations underline the analogy and draw attention to the contradiction between Crusoe's purported feelings and his actual achievements.

Among the most fundamental categories that Crusoe strives to maintain are the 'tame', 'secure', and 'homely' on the one hand, and the 'wild' and 'formidable' on the other. This division involves the nature/civilisation binary itself. His desire to create a safe space for himself and assign the rest of the island to the wilderness is at the bottom of many of his activities (Kelleher 26). The clearest examples of this tendency are his exertions to build fortified dwellings that shield him against the perils of the outside world. The idea occupies his mind almost from the very beginning of his stay on the island:

> My thoughts were now wholly employed about securing myself against either savages, if any should appear, or wild beasts, if any were in the island; and I had many thoughts of the method how to do this, and what kind of dwelling to make, whether I should make me a cave in the earth, or a tent upon the earth [...] (*RC* 43)

His fears are centred around the wild and the savage, and he deems building a 'house' the most efficacious way of defending himself against them. The fact that he carefully deliberates about the details of the task shows the importance he attributes to separating himself from the wilderness. Once he decides on building a tent (*and* a cave), he designs it with mathematical exactitude: the reader learns the precise parameters relating to every aspect of the construction process. (*RC* 44) Reporting the data in such a methodical fashion connects the novel to the style of scientific

treatises, which is also characterised by the abundance of numerical information. At the same time, this very precision (not only here but in many other passages) arouses one's doubts as to how far the narrator's memory may be credited: while realistic details can contribute to the verisimilitude of a story, providing too many – on the whole, insignificant – facts is likely to achieve the opposite effect. If one recalls that Crusoe purportedly writes his account years after the events described took place, the accuracy of his figures becomes suspect. It is true that he is able, in some respects, to rely on his journal but it is hardly to be supposed that he should have noted down such an amount of inconsequential particulars with his limited supply of ink. A possible explanation would be that such passages have a satirical edge directed at the Baconian discourse which permeates the language of the natural sciences. Such a hypothesis would be supported, to a certain extent, by Dennis Todd's above-quoted contention about the intentional humour in Crusoe's ornithological blunder: if the novel makes fun of the main character's scientific endeavours once, it might also happen in other instances. The other half of Todd's argument is, however, that examples of this nature are very rare in the book (142) – while the methodical recording of facts is spread all over the narrative. For that reason, it seems more probable that Crusoe's painstaking meticulousness mainly serves the purpose of adapting his narrative to the discourse of the Western natural sciences rather than satirising them. By imitating the practices followed by scientists in Europe, he avails himself of a civilised tool in his fight against the wilderness outside. This tool helps him create a distinct human sphere 'in the heart of nature', so to say. The isolation of this human sphere is further underlined by the way he describes the stakes forming its wall: they are "strong" and stand "very firm like piles" (*RC* 44). The fence as a whole "was so strong that neither man or beast could get into it, or over it" (*RC* 44). The adjectives 'strong' and 'firm' emphasise the efficiency of the tent as protection against savage intruders. The living space Crusoe thus establishes for himself is an attempt to generate a division between nature and tamed nature: in constructing the tent, he also constructs civilisation as a materialised concept.

The frontier between 'nature' and 'civilisation' as symbolised by Crusoe's fence comes to be questioned when he finds a footmark of unknown origin. The discovery shatters his former sense of order and safety and has a destabilising effect on his attempted taxonomic organisation of the world: "I was exceedingly surprised with the print of a man's naked foot on the shore, which was very plain to be seen in the sand. I stood like one thunderstruck, or as if I had seen an apparition. [...] How it came thither I knew not, nor could in the least imagine" (*RC* 117-8). Previously, the space outside of Crusoe's quarters was unambiguously assigned to the wilderness while his 'home' was reserved for the one human inhabitant of the island. Now, his sole right to the territory seems to be contested. According to Derrida, "[w]hat terrifies Robinson is the possible trace of the spectral

presence of another, another man on the island" (*B&S* II.46-7). The newly discovered evidence that there could be other people in the vicinity represents a disturbing factor to the clear distinction more or less successfully upheld so far. The fact that the print is that of a barefooted man indicates that he is not 'civilised', at least not according to European standards, since he wears no shoes – a further reason for Crusoe to construe him as a potential threat. It is significant that, having conducted a short investigation, and frightened out of his senses, Crusoe hurries to his fortification (*RC* 118), the building that he identifies with civilisation and that offers defence against the person who left the enigmatic footprint. On the way, he keeps mistaking plants for men (*RC* 118), a sign that the boundary between human beings and 'natural' objects has become blurred. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that he finds it impossible to *describe* the "wild ideas" (*RC* 118) which torment his mind: in other words, language, the faculty that supposedly sets apart humans from other animals, momentarily forsakes him, making his own identity uncertain. The language that he used in the past was suited to a binary paradigm, and as that paradigm is now revealed to be problematic, his means of verbal self-expression cease to be adequate. He appears to wish to counteract this loss of linguistic competence by resorting to a formulation that feels familiar to him and presumably to his readers as well: "I came home to my fortification, not feeling, *as we say*, the ground I went on" (*RC* 118, emphasis added). In using a set phrase and explicitly calling attention to its idiomatic character, he tries to anchor the account of his uncanny experience in everyday English speech, an effort that can be seen as a way of reassuring himself and restoring his unsettled world view. His sense of security suffers a lasting damage, nonetheless. As Paul Kelleher points out, "[t]he jarring sight of the footprint destabilizes and undermines the ideological landscape of the island" (26). The fragile framework in which Crusoe, up to this point, made sense of the world in general and his island in particular is fractured. "In so many ways", Kelleher argues, "Crusoe cultivates and maintains the distinction between the wild and the tame. The appearance of the mysterious footprint serves as an affront to this distinction" (26). Stumbling upon the footprint introduces something that resists classification based on the pairs 'wild' and 'tame', natural and civilised: the person is not civilised as Crusoe's countrymen would understand the term, and yet, neither is he completely different from them. As the unknown man does not fit into the traditional model, the discovery of his footprint means another failure of Crusoe's attempts at imposing categories, and displaces the dichotomy of nature and civilisation.

Similar failures attend the protagonist in his intention to register the passing of time as well as in his attempts to determine the amount and dimensions of different objects, such as his crops. For a calendar, he makes a wooden cross and cuts notches into to it everyday. This tool has a crucial role in his self-orientation because, as Eric Jager remarks, it "organizes a passage of time that would

otherwise remain an undifferentiated duration" (322). The practice of measuring time imposes an artificial order on events that helps economic organisation, and thus enables Crusoe to perform his daily activities in an orderly fashion. Having said that, his calendar, for all his efforts, turns out to be imperfect, and he eventually discovers that he lost a few days over the years: "I found at the end of my account, I had lost a day or two in my reckoning" (*RC* 79). This also spoils the religious order he wished to maintain since it means that he has observed Sabbaths on the wrong day. Besides, in many passages of his narrative, Crusoe purports to know with a surprising exactitude the size, weight, number etc. of the objects described – as seen in the case of the construction of his tent, for instance. Such precise knowledge implies the use of scientific methods of measurement, which could be interpreted as a victory of civilisation over nature; nevertheless, reporting about the result of his harvest, he appears less certain regarding the quantity of the various crops: "I found that out of my half pack of seed I had near two bushels of rice, and above two bushels and a half of barley, *that is to say, by my guess, for I had no measure at that time*" (*RC* 90, emphasis added). The seeds and their agricultural use represent the expansion of civilised space (see the section on "Science and agriculture in two Early Modern English texts"), and storing edibles is a characteristic of organised economy. From this point of view, the quantified catalogue of the goods ought to be the crowning of Crusoe's labour because it positions his products in a scientific and mercenary framework: on the one hand, making an inventory requires methodical observation and a knowledge of mathematics; on the other, it is reminiscent of merchants' practices and their relationship with their ware. Pointing out that he has no accurate means of ascertaining how plentiful the harvest actually is greatly diminishes the symbolic value of the inventory as a 'civilised' device. Moreover, this small confession makes one suspicious of the reliability of all the other data provided by the narrator.

By depicting how catalogues, categories, and calendars prove deficient and eventually unsuccessful, *Robinson Crusoe* highlights the inherent futility of the will to classify and, hence, of *taxonomia*. Throughout his time on the island, Crusoe tries to interpret his environment according to a scientific paradigm but his results repeatedly turn out to be erroneous, or at least dubious. Despite his endeavours to maintain the superiority of European culture and society, the novel illustrates the fictitious character of the hierarchy at the centre of his view of the world. On several occasions, the protagonist is confronted with occurrences and phenomena which call his ideas and values into question. In the case of the footprint, the very distinction between nature and civilisation, which Crusoe so ardently wishes to uphold, becomes vague, and the implied presence of a stranger unsettles the order imposed upon the island. While all the examples contribute to destabilising the dichotomy, the appearance of the foot effectuates its displacement.

Mobility across the boundary

The discovery of the footprint in the sand is not the only instance in *Robinson Crusoe* where an event has a destabilising effect on the binary understanding of nature and civilisation. Although it is one of Crusoe's main concerns that the distinction should be maintained and the dominance of European norms asserted, his efforts are continually challenged, partly by external factors, such as the footprint, his domesticated goats and parrot, or his servant Friday, and partly by his own thoughts as in the case of his reflections on the ways of the cannibals. Ironically, most of these attacks on his binary mindset are brought about by Crusoe himself: to mention but the two most evident examples, *he* tames the animals, and *he* teaches Friday English customs and the English language. At the same time, Crusoe is obviously aware of the danger his actions might inflict on the dichotomy, and in trying to create an enclosure for the goats, he reasons in the following way:

> But then it presently occurred to me that I must keep the tame from the wild, or else they would always run wild when they grew up; and the only way for this was to have some enclosed piece of ground, well fenced either with hedge or pale, to keep them in so effectually, *that those within might not break out, or those without break in*. (*RC* 112, emphasis added)

Crusoe realises the necessity of keeping the goats, if they are to be successfully domesticated, in a confined space instead of allowing them to wander freely. His reasoning reinforces the opposition of the wild and the tame, and draws attention to the importance of not letting the two mingle with each other: if the tamed get out of the enclosure, or the wild manage to get into it, the stability of the boundary is jeopardised. The hazard that Crusoe foresees here is precisely what will happen several times in the course of the story. As discussed before, Crusoe's house building projects result in the bipartition of the island into a civilised and an uncivilised province, and he wants to repeat this manoeuvre by erecting a fence as a barrier for his goats; however, as Tariq Jazeel notes, "borders and boundaries are [not only] ideological and geographical markers of separation, exclusion and difference, they are also spaces of emergence" (126). At the intersection of two domains, composite identities can develop, identities that combine the qualities of both sides. Homi Bhabha refers to such identities as instances of *hybridity* (2-3), and hybridity is precisely what Crusoe aims to avoid. The purpose of the enclosure is to separate the tamed goats from the wild ones, but it is the very act of enclosing them that generates the risk in the first place: should some of the animals succeed in crossing the fence, hybrid identities would emerge, threatening the dominant bipartite model. By extension, the danger attendant upon the proper functioning of the goat farm is applicable to the parrot, Friday, and Crusoe himself. In this part of my thesis, I will argue that all these characters

represent hybrid cases: they belong to both nature and civilisation, and thereby obscure the clear line between the two. One might object at this point that this section should contain the discussion of the footprints since the unknown savage could also be seen as a hybrid individual, who transgresses the boundary; or, alternatively, one could say that the present section in its entirety should belong under the heading 'Catalogues and categories' because the hybridity of the animals, Friday, and the protagonist himself undermines the attempts at strict categorisation. But, ultimately, no chapter division is wholly adequate and without its own inconsistencies. It would have been impossible to split the text into separate parts in such a way as to avoid overlaps completely – and thus, the very structure of the thesis illustrates the inanity of trying to impose categories.

Domestication and indoctrination

Poll and the others

The process of domestication conducted by Crusoe incorporates the animals affected by it into his own realm. By building an encircled abode for himself and secluding himself from the dangers outside, the castaway creates a space that can be constructed as civilisation through its difference from the surrounding wilderness. Civilisation indoors, nature outdoors. Nevertheless, when the goats and the parrot are tamed and come to live in Crusoe's immediate vicinity, they transgress the threshold between the inside and the outside (both in a literal and in a figurative sense), and pose a direct threat to the delicate construct by becoming hybrid creatures. I will first discuss how the mild nature of the goats subverts the fierceness associated with wild animals, and then proceed to the parrot's cleverness in its imitation of human practices, notably language.

The gentle behaviour of the goats once they accept Crusoe as their master undermines the notion of the animal as a wild beast. Their 'civilised' traits are emphasised repeatedly in the novel. At one point, Crusoe sets a captured specimen free because of its advanced age but, taking into consideration the general meekness of the species, eventually comes to regret it: "If I had let him stay there three or four days without food, and then have carried him some water to drink, and then a little corn, he would have been as tame as one of the kids, *for they are mighty sagacious, tractable creatures* where they are well used" (*RC* 111, emphasis added). In his experience, goats are characterised by considerable intelligence and docility, provided that they are properly treated. This observation gives him the idea of engaging in goat breeding on a larger scale: "And now I found that if I expected to supply myself with goat-flesh when I had no powder or shot left, breeding some

up tame was my only way, when perhaps I might have them about my house like a flock of sheep" (*RC* 112). As in so many cases, Crusoe's chief motivation here is of a markedly practical hue: his herd would serve the purpose of securing his future food provision. The goats would supplant the gun powder when it is gone – in other words, they would fulfil the function of one of the most characteristic symbols of technical advancement in Crusoe's possession. Accordingly, the goats themselves begin to be identified with civilised qualities in the process of their taming. Among others, the text highlights these qualities by likening the creatures to "a flock of sheep" (*RC* 112). Sheep are a traditional emblem of gentleness and innocence, and are, through the notion of the 'Lamb of God', closely linked to Christianity, which is in turn an integral part of European culture. Apart from that, mentioning that the goats would live around Crusoe's house reminds the reader of the animals' spatial proximity to the civilised domain, further blurring the boundary between wild and tame. Portraying the goats as gentle and innocent is especially significant because it forms a sharp contrast with the violence associated with the use of the gun powder which they are meant to replace: they appear more civilised than the people who are actually supposed to be civilised. One is reminded of Derrida's insistence that the typical marks of civilisation are by no means limited to humans; on the contrary, one can find among animals "so many things that are so often attributed to and so naïvely reserved for so-called human *culture*, in opposition to *nature*. (*B&S* I.14-5, emphases in the original). Animal societies can be at least as complex and sophisticated as human ones. Hence, it is a mistake to assume that non-human animals are mere beasts, and the picture that the novel paints of the goats reveals the error of such assumptions.

The goats' refinement and intelligence is discernible primarily in their gentle conduct and in their ability to adapt successfully to the order established by their captor. Most specimens the reader encounters are described as being excessively compliant. For example, Crusoe reports about the domestication of one the kids thus:

> [...] I tied [the goat] as I did before, to lead it away; but it was so tame with being hungry, that I had no need to have tied it, for it followed me like a dog. And as I continually fed it, the creature became so loving, so gentle, and so fond, that it became from that time one of my domestics also, and would never leave me afterwards. (*RC* 85-6)

Because of its readiness to abide by his wishes, Crusoe's new pet is likened to a dog, the species that is, of all animals, perhaps the most closely associated with the human sphere. The simile is tacitly present in the text at an earlier point, too, where the capture of the kid is recounted: "I made a collar to this little creature, and with a string, which I made of some rope-yarn, which I always carried about me, I led him along [...] (*RC* 85). Here, the resemblance to the common way of

walking a dog is unmistakeable. Similarly to how dogs are prepared to occupy a servile position in relation to humans, the little goat's assimilation into its new master's world is quickly effected. It becomes a permanent member of the household, shows unconditional devotion to Crusoe, and behaves towards him in a remarkably friendly, affectionate manner. There is no denying that its submissiveness is, at least in part, the result of its having been starved previously; what is noteworthy, however, is the novel's emphasis on the predisposition of goats for being so perfectly tamed. The portrayal of no other animal foregrounds the capacity for gentleness to the same extent as the passages about goats do. Their obedience and tenderness secure the goats' place among Crusoe's closest companions (the others being the parrot and the dog). In consequence, they make the distance between humans and animals increasingly narrower and, as Paul Kelleher argues, "one of the many ironies that emerges in the text is Crusoe's inability to recognize the ever-vanishing distinction between man and goat" (19). As the goats become Crusoe's domestics, the difference between them and humanity starts to disappear. This is illustrated in the narrative by the use of the masculine personal pronoun, which occasionally takes the place of the usual neutral pronoun: "I tied *it* as I did before, to lead *it* away" (*RC* 85, emphases added) but "I led *him* along" (*RC* 85, emphasis added) and, later, "I could have killed *him*" (*RC* 111, emphasis added). Naturally, there is nothing very extraordinary about thinking of one's pets as gendered persons rather than mere objects but the choice of pronoun is nonetheless indicative. The narrator's inconsistency in the use of pronouns when referring to the goats marks the fluidity of the animal/human boundary; yet, Kelleher's position can only be accepted with restrictions. On the one hand, goats and humans certainly come to be alike in many respects; on the other, however, the goats' tameness is to a great extent emphasised by its contrast to human cruelty. In explaining the function of the herd as a substitute for the finite gun powder, I have already alluded to an example of this disparity. It is more plainly expressed in Crusoe's journal entry for December 27 in his first year on the island:

> Killed a young goat, and lamed another, so that I catched it, and led it home in a string [...] by my nursing it so long it grew tame, and fed upon the little green at my door, and would not go away. This was the first time that I ever entertained a thought of breeding up some tame creatures, that I might have food when my powder and shot was all spent. (*RC* 57)

Again, the goat is depicted as naturally inclined to peacefulness and fidelity. The bucolic tranquillity it represents is reminiscent of Virgil's georgic poetry explored elsewhere: similarly to the idealised image of country life in those poems, the mixed status of the goats confuses the nature/culture binary. The specimen in question here refuses to leave its master's precincts and grazes near his door, the symbolic border between the wild and the civilised part of the island, thus inhabiting a

hybrid space – a space that Bhabha would call an *interstice*, a geographical and cultural area that belongs to both sides of a border (2). Crusoe's attitude seems exempt from the idyllic tendencies that characterise the shepherds engendered by poetic imagination; as Shawn Normandin points out, even though "Robinson Crusoe becomes a goatherd", he avoids "pastoral sentimentality" (123). Crusoe's behaviour stands in stark opposition to the innocence of the kid: the starting point of their 'friendship' is an act of violence on his side inasmuch as he "[k]illed a young goat, and lamed another" (*RC* 57). Following that, he forces the lame one to go with him, and, even after having nursed it for a long time and having discovered its sociability, his thoughts are mainly focused on using goats as a source of nourishment. As a result, the obliging, refined temperament of the goats is highlighted by the way it differs from Crusoe's cruelty.

While the horned ruminants of the island predominantly exemplify the gentleness of the animal kingdom, Poll the parrot also showcases its mental potential and appears to be at a more advanced stage of its initiation into human society. He learns to mimic language to a nicety so that Crusoe is frightened out of his wits when he is awakened by the bird's nocturnal monologue:

> [...] as the voice continued to repeat 'Robin Crusoe, Robin Crusoe,' at last I began to wake more perfectly, and was at first dreadfully frighted, and started up in the utmost consternation. But no sooner were my eyes open, but I saw my Poll sitting on the top of the hedge, and immediately knew that it was he that spoke to me […] (*RC* 109)

The passage lays stress on the parrot's level of proficiency: he is able to repeat English words flawlessly. The fact that Crusoe is deceived by the 'parroting' illustrates the close resemblance between the bird's talk and actual human communication. Poll, "the sociable creature" (*RC* 109), also observes a basic rule of polite conversation in looking into Crusoe's face while talking to him, showing that he is as adept at assuming civilised habits as are the goats. Like them, he is alternately referred to by the masculine and the neutral pronoun, with 'he' becoming increasingly dominant, which suggests that the narrator is inclined to think of him as a person rather than as one of the animals. Roland Borgards argues that Poll's mimetic performance denotes *similation* as well as imitation: "[t]here is some kind of change going on within the parrot while he is being taught human language. The talking parrot – even if not becoming human – develops a set of similarities to his human companion" (4). Borgards's theory is supported by Crusoe's act of giving the parrot a name: through his 'baptism', Poll is, to a certain extent, accepted as a member of society and is endowed with selfhood whereas the goats are all condemned to anonymity, and thus remain the objects of husbandry. By contrast, Crusoe never contemplates eating his parrot. Poll, for his part, is also clearly attached to human society as is evidenced by his reluctance to leave his master's residence

even though he could technically fly away (*RC* 109). Furthermore, the bird's 'progress' in towards civilisation is indicated by his spatial position when he addresses his sleeping language instructor: "[b]ut no sooner were my eyes open, but I saw my Poll sitting *on the top of the hedge*, and I immediately knew that it was he that spoke to me" (*RC* 109, emphasis added). The hedge of Crusoe's house is, of course, an interstice, another intervening space between nature and civilisation. The parrot's occupying this very place symbolises his hybrid identity, and this symbolic aspect probably contributes to Crusoe's terror. Having realised that the voice was that of his pet, he is still not completely reassured: "even though I knew it was the parrot, and that indeed it could be nobody else, it was a good while before I could compose myself" (*RC* 109). Crusoe's enduring state of panic conveys the impression that there is something deeper worrying him. The parrot, half-tame and half-wild, frustrates the more or less solidified boundary, which is maintained, in its material form, by the very hedge he is seated on, and his hybridity affects the man's mind in an unpleasant way. With the help of his skill in imitating speech, Poll has come too close to humanity and, therefore, imperils Crusoe's binary world view.

As a result of their being tamed, the goats and the parrot violate the boundary between civilisation and the wilderness, and thus, the specimens belonging to both species are hybrid creatures. As such, they embody what are regarded as tame as well as wild attributes. To differing extents, they both learn or already possess habits and skills deemed necessary in a civilised society. In the case of the goats, the remarkable gentleness and sociability they exhibit qualifies them as worthy dwellers of the human space established by Crusoe; as to Poll the parrot, his astuteness in imitating language, and Crusoe's comparatively egalitarian treatment of him – evidenced, for example, by the predominant use of the masculine pronoun and the bestowal of a name –, marks the bird's place closer to human civilisation than the place of any other animal in the text. Besides, all the domestic animals in the novel reside in an interstice, namely in the area directly surrounding Crusoe's home: this area is in part nature and in part civilisation, and, as a result, its inhabitants draw attention to the uncertainty of the boundary.

"The aptest scholar that ever was": Friday's education

The domestication of the goats and the parrot highlights the animals' similarity to humans and shows how Crusoe's activities can result in a blurring of the nature/civilisation boundary. Another important example through which *Robinson Crusoe* demonstrates that mobility between the two, according to the conventional view, separate spheres – the wilderness and the civilised world – can

take place is Friday's successful instruction in 'civilised' customs. Friday's remarkable facility at learning has often been pointed out (in fact, it is emphasised in the novel itself) and has been the object of some criticism over the centuries. Among others, Sir Leslie Stephen, the acclaimed historian and alpinist (and father of Virginia Woolf), was of the opinion that Crusoe's slave is far too clever to be a believable character: he is "no real savage, but a good English servant without plush" (54-5), and his portrayal is "singularly wanting as a psychological study" (54). Obviously, Stephen's position reflects the prejudices of his time against non-white subjects of the Empire; no doubt, he would have been happier to see a wild, brutal savage as epitomised, for instance, in the figure of Shakespeare's Caliban – a figure whose conspicuous want of civilised habits reinforces the Victorian Englishman's sense of global superiority. *The Tempest*'s portrayal of its indigenous character suits this need admirably; as Stephen Greenblatt writes, "Shakespeare did not shrink from the darkest European fantasies about the Wild Man; indeed he exaggerates them: Caliban is deformed, lecherous, evil-smelling, idle, treacherous, naïve, drunken, rebellious, violent, and devil-worshipping" (26). This image of non-European people facilitated the construction of the colonisers' superior role, and it is not to be wondered at that Victorian audiences delighted in such portrayals more than in Defoe's approach to the same character type.

The demeaning picture of so-called 'savages' lingered on well into the 20th century and influenced the way critics judged Defoe's Friday. In her book *Realism in Daniel De Foe's Narratives of Adventure* (1929), Gerridina Roorda still argues that the level of intelligence that Friday displays in his conversations with his master is highly implausible for a savage (55). A new attitude towards the topic – together with a critique of previous approaches – appears in J. Paul Hunter's 1963 article "Friday as a Convert: Defoe and the Accounts of Indian Missionaries": Hunter compares the relevant passages from *Robinson Crusoe* with the depiction of natives in contemporary historical documents, and comes to the conclusion that Defoe's characterisation of Friday is fairly accurate. Friday's quickness of mind when it comes to grasping the subtleties of Christian theology was seen by many as an unrealistic aspect of an otherwise eminently lifelike novel; according to Hunter, however, this restriction is unjust because "[s]eventeenth-century accounts of Indian missionaries indicate [...] that actual Indian converts responded just as Friday does" ("Friday as a Convert", 243). Friday's reactions upon first learning about the main tenets of Christianity seem to be modelled on actual reports on proselyte work among the American native populations of Defoe's time. Naturally, the persons described in these reports are also mere representations of the converted savages and, therefore, cannot be accepted as evidence that the portrait painted by Defoe corresponds to reality. Hunter's findings are interesting not because they show *Robinson Crusoe* in any way to be an authentic historical source but because they reveal the

effort behind Friday's portrayal to draw a faithful picture of colonial conversion practices. In this light, Friday's supposedly exaggerated intelligence emerges not as a 'mistake' but as an essential part of his identity.

What Sir Leslie Stephen took to be a sign of poor psychological insight is really a consciously designed feature based on carefully examined data. Friday's innate qualities and his rapid progress in language, religion, and other areas undermine the image of indigenous people as primitive and uncultivated. As Roxann Wheeler points out, three key notions that for a long time played a crucial role in positing European culture as superior are cannibalism, Christianity, and slavery ("'My Savage', 'My Man'" 835). In this paradigm, cannibals, pagans, and slaves are automatically regarded as inferior; nevertheless, Friday is gradually dissociated from all three 'failings' as a result of his indoctrination by his master, who in effect prepares him to be a member of his own community, modelled on English norms. Besides, the relatively humane manner – reminiscent of the 18th century attitude to domestic workers in England – in which Crusoe treats his servant also signals the acceptance of the latter into civilised society. Thus, for the most part, Friday's conversion turns out to be a success, and Gayatri Spivak is, in many respects, right in arguing that he is the very model of how a colonised individual is 'supposed' to behave: "[h]e learns his master's speech, does his master's work, happily swears loyalty, believes the culture of his master is better, and kills his other self to enter the shady plains of northwestern Europe" (14). While this picture is largely correct, the man's transformation is not entirely without its defects. There are a number of features, such as his persistent grammar errors and his difficulty in digesting the notion of the devil or of salvation through Christ, that betray Friday's non-English/non-Christian origin, thereby positioning him in a transitional state which accentuates his hybrid identity.

Even before Crusoe and the reader get to know Friday better, the 'Indian's' physical appearance sets him apart from conventional images of ethnicities living in the wilderness. He is described in great detail as follows:

> He was a comely, handsome fellow, perfectly well-made, with straight strong limbs, not too large, tall, and well-shaped, and, as I reckon, about twenty-six years of age. He had a very good countenance, not a fierce and surly aspect, but seemed to have something very manly in his face; and yet he had all the sweetness and softness of an European in his countenance too, especially when he smiled. His hair was long and black, not curled like wool; his forehead very high and large; and a great vivacity and sparkling sharpness in his eyes. The colour of his skin was not quite black, but very tawny; and yet not of an ugly, yellow, nauseous tawny, as the Brazilians and Virginians, and other natives of America are, but of a bright kind of a dun olive colour, that had in it something very agreeable, though not very easy to describe. His face was round and plump; his nose small, not flat like the negroes; a very good mouth, thin lips, and his fine teeth well set, and white as ivory. (*RC* 157-8)

Unlike the common perception of most American indigenous people, Friday's features are not rough and wild; on the contrary, in his face, 'European' characteristics dominate: his nose, his skin colour, and the softness of his lineaments remind Crusoe of the inhabitants of his own continent. His hair is also distinctly closer to what one would expect on top of a European head, and his thin lips represent a sharp contrast to the thicker ones popularly associated with people of colour. Furthermore, a high forehead and sparkling eyes are stereotypical signs of intelligence – a quality that comes to the fore in his later progress. All these attributes contradict the traditional image of the savage (of which Caliban would be the prime example). Indeed, Robinson O. Murphy argues that Friday "is not 'Native' at all, but a white man who happens to be tan" (186). On the whole, the novel's portrait of the slave seems to support this statement although one might as well say that Friday is a native who happens to resemble European standards of beauty (and who happens to be intelligent). Be that as it may, both approaches allow one to draw the same inference, namely that Friday's bodily appearance undermines the public perception of the 'wild' tribes of the Americas and brings him closer to Europeans than is convenient for the stability of their 'civilised' identity.

Friday's acquisition of the English language, a central component of his education, subjugates him to the cultural norms of his master's world. In surrendering to the rules of a foreign language, one tacitly (or, more appropriately, by the very act of speaking) accepts the underlying assumptions and patterns of thought associated with that language. This aspect of language is especially worthy of attention in examining a novel such as *Robinson Crusoe*, which is the product of what Foucault terms the 'Classical era'. In the episteme of this period, language is almost inseparable from thinking, "it is caught in the grid of thought, woven into the very fabric it is unrolling. It is not an exterior effect of thought, but thought itself" (Foucault 87). Language use in the 17th and 18th centuries reflects a mindset in which language is not perceived as an independent system but as a direct expression of ideas and, therefore, as a verbal representation of representation: in one word, *discourse*. This episteme supposes no pre-existing language that can be interpreted in different ways; rather, language is intermingled with and incorporated into thoughts, which renders the bond between cultural values and their linguistic expression particularly tight. Thus, in general but especially in the context of an 18th century novel, making an American indigenous person use a European language imposes a paradigm upon them that is not their own and forces them to think within its limits. This is illustrated in the scene where Crusoe names his slave and acquaints him with the basic 'house rules':

> In a little time I began to speak to him, and teach him to speak to me; and first, I made him know his name should be Friday, which was the day I saved his life. I called him so for the

> memory of the time. I likewise taught him to say master, and let him know that was to be my name. I likewise taught him to say Yes and No, and to know the meaning of them. (*RC* 158)

Characteristically for the close association between language and thought in the Classical age, the clarification of power relations is embedded into a rudimentary language lesson, thereby calling attention to the role of language in constructing social hierarchies. The slave receives an English word as a name, which ties him to his new community. The intention behind the choice of the name is purportedly to commemorate the day Crusoe saved Friday's life – which, by the way, coincides with the latter's enslavement. In this case, the naming helps to establish a hierarchical relationship between the two men: the name ought to remind the servant of the incident and of the gratitude he owes his master. At the same time, the fact that he is called Friday, a calendar unit, places him among the other objects of Crusoe's ordering passion. The significance of linguistic labelling in connection with keeping order is articulated by Murphy in discussing Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1623) as part of the genealogy of the Friday figure in J. M. Coetzee's novel *Foe* (1986): Prospero, in reprehending his servant Caliban in an eloquent manner and in giving him a name with slightly menacing overtones, "deploy[s] his European language as a means by which to call the indigenous other to order" (Murphy 183). Linking the fiercely disposed Caliban to a 'civilised' language provides Prospero with a tool to control the other, and Crusoe resorts to a similar technique in his eagerness to preserve order. The ambiguity of the word 'order' is important here: as a servant, Friday is *ordered* to refer to himself as 'Friday' so that he is *ordered* within a European system of classification (within the Julian Calendar). The two meanings coincide in the act of baptising the savage, and highlight at once Crusoe's performance of a hegemonic role as well as his desire to organise the world around him according to his own cultural paradigm – both ultimately expressions of the same power instinct. Having delineated the arrangement as it relates to Friday's side, Crusoe requests that he himself should be addressed as 'master', thus completing the hierarchy and making it even more explicit. Then, he proceeds to teach the words 'yes' and 'no' to his dutiful student – "hierarchy first, consent second" (Kelleher 12) as Kelleher dryly notes. No doubt, this commentary is justified to the extent that it sheds light on Crusoe's suspect pedagogical strategy; however, what Kelleher fails to notice is that imparting the knowledge of the affirmative and the negative is yet another way of asserting Crusoe's dominance. 'Yes' and 'no' represent the same binary logic that underlies Crusoe's notion of nature and civilisation, and they present Friday with two options: he can either say 'yes' or 'no' to his master's orders. In the one case, he embraces civilisation in the form offered by Crusoe; in the other, he condemns himself to remaining a 'wild savage'. For example, his readiness to comply with the command to refrain from eating human

flesh in the future decides whether he can become an esteemed member of Crusoe's household; alternatively, his fate is to be killed as a brutish sinner (*RC* 159). In either case, however, he will be judged from Crusoe's perspective and dealt with accordingly: whatever Friday chooses, European culture, with all its social codes and moral principles, has been irrevocably imposed upon him.

Language instruction is not only a means of establishing a hierarchy: Friday's knowledge of English enables him to be a civilised companion to Crusoe. As mentioned above, to the European mind in the Classical age, language exists only as communicated thought, as thought turned into words. Consequently, since speech is a carrier of views and values, imposing the discourse of one's own culture is an essential tool of 'civilising' outsiders. In accordance with this logic, Crusoe's primary effort in relation to Friday is directed at teaching him English:

> I was greatly delighted with [my new companion], and made it my business to teach him everything that was proper to make him useful, handy, and helpful; but especially to make him speak, and understand me when I spake. And he was the aptest scholar that ever was; and particularly was so merry, so constantly diligent, and so pleased when he could but understand me, or make me understand him, that it was very pleasant to me to talk to him. (*RC* 161)

For Crusoe, the ability to speak is foremost among the qualities necessary for a servant to be useful. Obviously, this can be explained by purely practical reasons: successful communication is imperative if he wants his orders performed properly. While such practical considerations, as has been amply demonstrated, are not foreign to Crusoe's mind, his marked joy upon finding Friday a quick learner suggests that he has other motives as well. The expression of his pleasure sounds like an intensified repetition of his sentiments towards his pets: the goats and the parrot delight him by virtue of the 'civilised' companionship they provide, and Friday, as a human, possesses even greater potential in this regard. Jager makes the point that the protagonist "employs language as a means of surviving solitude" (317). Speech serves as a proxy for social life, and this is what leads Crusoe to train his parrot to speak. Poll might imitate language extremely well but the newcomer, once he is acquainted with basic grammar rules and vocabulary, is actually able to construct meaningful sentences to express his own thoughts and thus participate in conversations. Having met Friday, "Crusoe finds the self-composing benefits of conversation increased [...]" (Jager 317). Being able to exchange words with someone is the source of such happiness to the castaway that he is now perfectly reconciled to the idea of staying on the island for the rest of his life, indicating that he deems Friday an adequate substitute for the benefits of civilisation that are not readily accessible in the place. The only thing he still yearns for is safety: "[a]nd now my life began to be so easy, that I began to say to myself, that could I but have been safe from more savages, I cared not if I was never

to remove from the place while I lived" (*RC* 161). The fact that, although he is afraid of the natives in general, he does not perceive Friday as a source of danger points to the latter's advancement: the slave is no longer a mere savage in his master's eyes. Like the animals, the savage has been tamed and, by being instructed in language, he has become a civilised partner for Crusoe.

Although Friday is portrayed as an exemplary student, his use of English is not free of imperfections, which emphasise his hybrid status between civilisation and his old tribe, and turn the language into an expression of hybridity. At one point, the text describes his English as "broken" (*RC* 170), and numerous direct quotes are included that illustrate his idiosyncratic grammar. In a book that relies primarily on first-person narration and, for understandable reasons, contains hardly any dialogue, their relative profusion lends Friday's sentences a certain prominence, which foregrounds his chaotic syntax. Here are a few randomly chosen examples: "[t]hey run, one, two, three, and me, and make go in the canoe; my nation have no canoe that time" (*RC* 164); "[y]es, my nation eat mans too; eat all up" (*RC* 164); "the boat full of white mans" (*RC* 171); "[m]e see much boat like come to place at my nation" (*RC* 171); and finally, the puzzling question: "if God much strong, much might as the devil, why God no kill the devil, so make him no more do wicked?" (*RC* 167). The novel is remarkably consequent in its depiction of Friday's grammar: the same mistakes come up repeatedly in his utterances, e.g. the lack of past tense and of the third person singular conjugation, the preference for the accusative over the nominative form of the first person singular pronoun, the overgeneralising use of the determiner 'much', the irregular plural of the noun 'man' etc. Such examples show the limitations of Friday's language competence: while he is fairly advanced in terms of vocabulary, there are several syntactic and morphological rules which seem to evade his attention. His distinctive language use becomes a mark of his intermediate status: his fluency and the range of his lexicon indicate a higher level of 'civilisation' but his recurring errors constantly remind the reader of his native provenance.

A comparison between Friday and Coetzee's character of the same name helps to elucidate the significance of the peculiar grammar found in *Robinson Crusoe*. Coetzee's version of the character is mute as a result of his tongue having been cut out (*Foe* 118). Scholars have read Friday's muteness in *Foe* in two principle ways: as a symbol of the colonised person's impotence (Nashef 75; Parry 44), and as a means of resistance against the coloniser (Goh 116; Murphy 182-3). Whether one sees Coetzee's Friday as a powerless slave in the hands of European interests, or as an expression of heroic defiance in the oppressor's face, he displays a conspicuous contrast to Defoe's Friday: Coetzee's exhibits either the one extreme or the other in his attitude towards the coloniser whereas Defoe's oscillates in the middle in a rather indeterminate fashion. The impotent Friday of *Foe* has been completely subjugated by civilisation while the resistant version of the same character

has managed to keep his identity intact – but his muteness forces the Friday of the novel published in 1986 to take sides, and thus maintain the dichotomy. The Friday of the novel published in 1719, however, disturbs the binary precisely by embracing his master's language and making it into his own.[5] On the one hand, the image of an indigenous person speaking fluent English has an unsettling effect on the European feeling of intellectual superiority; on the other, the grammatical inaccuracies subvert the prestige of the language by undermining its established conventions and by giving it an outlandish flavour. Thus, Friday's English discourse functions as an embodiment of the hybridity he and the domestic animals represent.

Friday's engagement with matters of religion further emphasises his hybrid identity and illustrates his faculty of reasoning. As mentioned above, he is rapidly converted to Christianity, revealing his mental adaptability. As soon as he has been acquainted with the elementary doctrines of the religion, he shows that he is, indeed, an apt scholar by asking questions that perplex his teacher. Having been told that God is immeasurably stronger than the devil, he notices the underlying contradiction (*RC* 167). Beside being a mark of his cleverness, the question destabilises the construct of Christianity by calling attention to a fundamental logical anomaly. This destabilising effect should not be exaggerated, however; Friday's curiosity is first and foremost an indication of his religious progress – at least that is how experts at the time interpreted such queries. As Hunter shows, contemporary missionaries, whose reports evidently influenced *Robinson Crusoe*, "considered [such] questions tangible evidence of sincere interest in the Gospel" and "of the beginning of the conversion experience" ("Friday as a Convert" 245). They thought the questions confirmed that "the Indians were responding positively to the Christian appeal" (Ibid. 246). Thus, Friday's inquiries are more likely to be signs of his acceptance and mastery of his master's belief rather than expressions of doubt. On the whole, he is willing to embrace Christianity and quickly grasps the concept of an omnipotent God – although his mind does not readily take in the significance of certain ideas, such as that of a divine redemption. Once he seems to have understood God's predisposition to pardoning the sins of his creatures, Friday's utterances impel Crusoe to a brief theological meditation:

> Here I was run down again by him to the last degree, and it was a testimony to me how the mere notions of nature, though they will guide reasonable creatures to the knowledge of a God, and of a worship or homage due to the supreme being of God, as the consequence of our nature, yet nothing but Divine revelation can form the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and of a redemption purchased for us, of a Mediator of the new covenant, and of an Intercessor at the footstool of God's throne [...] (*RC* 168)

5 In this regard, Friday is actually closer to Caliban, who uses the language learnt from Prospero to pour curses on his overlord (*The Tempest* 1.2.365-7).

Dispensing with an analysis of the subtleties of divinity, Crusoe's musing amounts approximately to this: as a result of not having grown up in a Christian environment, Friday is impeded in his comprehension of the redemption through Christ – his brain is not culturally 'programmed' to grapple such ideas, or, to revert to the Foucauldian terminology, such ideas are not part of his culture's episteme. Apart from the salvation, the figure of the devil also causes Friday problems: "I found it was not so easy to imprint right notions in his mind about the devil, as it was about the being of a God" (*RC* 167). In the case of God, his tribe's own similar entity, called Benamuckee, serves as a basis on which Crusoe can build his explanations, but as the devil, like the notion of a divine mediator, does not seem to have an equivalent in Friday's religion, the theology class is once again confronted with an obstacle. The differences between the two epistemes belonging to the two respective worlds underline Friday's mixed identity: while he is able to assimilate most of the intricacies of Christianity, certain elements are foreign to his thinking and he can only digest them by making an effort.

Through his intelligence and fast progress in fields such as language and religion, Friday undermines the idea of the 'savage' as an inferior human being, and transgresses the boundary between the wild and the civilised. Furthermore, his European-like physical appearance and his more or less fair treatment by Crusoe also contribute to this effect. By learning the English language, the slave is, to a certain extent, incorporated into Western civilisation, the social and moral norms of which he is bound to observe. As a result of assuming English habits – and thereby unsettling the European notion of what constitutes civilised identity –, Friday comes to blend in himself characteristics of both his old and his new culture. This is illustrated by his idiosyncratic language use and by the way his own episteme affects his understanding of Christianity. For these reasons, similarly to the domestic animals, he can be seen as an instance of hybridity that blurs the boundary between nature and civilisation.

Robinson runs wild

The goats, Poll, and Friday move from nature towards civilisation; they undermine the binary by assimilating the culture their master imposes upon them. Crusoe himself, in many ways, represents a reverse motion: in the course of the story, he is gradually released from the bond of civilisation and comes to resemble the people he would describe as savages. His solitary life enables him to act according to his own will, without the constraints necessary in an organised society. In many respects, of course, he tries to sustain the rules and traditions of his home country, e.g. in practicing

agriculture, in writing catalogues, or in converting Friday, but the success of these pursuits is debatable. Furthermore, he also has to grapple with the enemy inside. In his book *Defoe's America* (2010), Dennis Todd writes about Crusoe's attempts to overcome his "own sinful nature, that *wilderness within"* (32, emphasis added) and argues that, on the whole, the castaway is successful in maintaining his civilised identity (ibid. 37). While it cannot be denied that Crusoe is, indeed, surprisingly adept at turning his island into what is technically a colony, Todd's view is difficult to accept unreservedly on account of the various failed civilizational endeavours discussed in previous sections, and on account of the protagonist's own transition across the nature/civilisation boundary, which is to be handled in the present section. Crusoe's 'savage' qualities come to the fore in several instances, and manifest themselves in his wanderlust and in his visceral fears as well as in his tendency to brutality and to autocratic behaviour. Thus, in *Robinson Crusoe*, the coloniser himself assumes a hybrid identity as a result of his 'beastly' conduct. Indications of his beastliness include both his (social *and* geographical) isolation and his efforts to assert his sovereignty as well as the sovereignty of European civilisation. I will first look at the former of the two factors and discuss the ways in which Crusoe becomes detached from civilised values; then, I will show how his political supremacy inevitably entails a propensity for violence. In both parts, I will rely on Derrida's ideas about the socially outcast status of the animal, the rogue, and the ruler formulated in *The Beast and the Sovereign*.

"Reduced to a mere state of nature": the beast

Crusoe's island solitude is the outcome of his desire for leading a nautical life. He is not satisfied with the confines of his paternal home and of his native country: he wants to see the world and is eventually punished for his juvenile craving by what is essentially a prison sentence in a remote, desolate place. However, Crusoe's distance from civilisation is not only a matter of geography, it is also displayed in his thoughts and actions, which are often of a violent, beastly character, especially as they relate to the indigenous groups living in the vicinity. Violence is frequently inspired by fear and, indeed, he reveals a deep sense of terror when confronted with the potential perils of the wilderness – a sense of terror that is, no doubt, intensified by his uneasiness about his own "wilderness within" (Todd, *Defoe's America* 32). This inner savagery is expressed directly in his plans to inflict retribution on the cannibals and symbolically in his goat-skin garments.

The first sign of Crusoe's beastliness appears even before the island part of the novel, namely in his wish to go to sea. By deciding on becoming a sailor as opposed to contenting himself

with the English middle-class life that his father represents, the protagonist escapes from civilisation to seek his fortune on his own. His motivation for doing so does not seem to be any practical consideration but a simple longing for freedom: "[my father] asked me what reasons more than a mere wandering inclination I had for leaving [his] house and my native country, where I might be well introduced, and had a prospect of raising my fortunes by application and industry, with a life of ease and pleasure" (*RC* 1). The narration only imparts the father's inquiry, the son's answer remains unknown to the reader, leaving the impression that there is, in fact, no other reason than a taste for adventure. Crusoe is driven by a youthful impulse to 'break wild' and, in his flight from home, he disobeys the paternal command, an action that marks him as a 'rogue', an individual who, by his "savage or indocile behaviour, [...] goes away from the society to which [he] belongs" (Derrida, *B&S* 1.19). The community to which he belongs, the social group of which his family is a part, is the middle class. The father's self-avowed mediocrity and his praise of the golden mean identify the Crusoes as representatives of what is implied to be civilised society *par excellence*.

> He told me I might judge of the happiness of this state of life by this one thing, viz., that this was the state of life which all other people envied; that kings have frequently lamented the miserable consequences of being born to great things, and wished they had been placed in the middle of the two extremes, between the mean and the great; that the wise man gave his testimony to this as the just standard of true felicity, when he prayed to have neither poverty or riches. (*RC* 2)

The encomium of the family's social status continues but the central point is clear: the middle class is portrayed as the most desirable stratum of society, superior to both those 'below' and those 'above' it. The poor are exposed to adversity and have very limited or no access to the luxuries of life. Even though they live within society, they are unable to enjoy many of its benefits, such as sufficient food, education, or artistic entertainment, which are readily available for the bourgeois. The rich and powerful are, by contrast, plagued by the responsibility to govern and to carry out 'great' deeds. Though for different reasons, both extremes envy those in the middle, and both are partially excluded from civilisation: the one through its lack of education, and the other through the sovereignty bestowed upon it.[6] The upper and the lower classes, according to Crusoe senior, have good reason to contemplate embarking on hazardous projects abroad because of their unpleasant situation at home: "it was for men of desperate fortunes on one hand, or of aspiring, superior fortunes on the other, who went abroad upon adventures, to rise by enterprise, and make themselves famous in undertakings of a nature out of the common road" (*RC* 2). Since they do not epitomise civilisation to the same extent as the middle class, it is fitting for the very rich and the very poor to

6 Those in power positions are always, to an extent, outside the law and, therefore, the social order. See Derrida, *B&S* 16-8 as well as the next subsection of this thesis.

try their luck individually, that is, without the aid of society: to turn adventurers, vagabonds, 'rogues'. It is precisely the common way of things, however, that a person like the novel's hero should aim at in life. If Crusoe stays at home, "a life of ease and pleasure" (*RC* 1) awaits him. By following his irrational urges, he basically rejects the comforts of civilisation for a life of danger and uncertainty in 'barbarous' parts of the world. As Todd points out,

> Crusoe has had the savage in him from the beginning. Defoe's emphasizing Crusoe's 'rambling' or 'wandring Inclination' (*RC*, pp. 57, 58) can hardly have been accidental given the novel's New World setting, for Europeans thought that the Indians of America were savage precisely because they were a 'shifting, wandring People' (*Defoe's America* 37).

As a result of the idea (widespread at the time) that the supposedly nomadic lifestyle of the American native populations was the chief manifestation of their savage mentality, Crusoe's choice of career would have been seen as a clear sign of his inner wildness. Thus, the novel's very premise, the protagonist's inclination to seafaring, is an example of crossing the border between nature and civilisation.

The loneliness Crusoe must face once he arrives on the island, and the way in which he responds to some of the difficulties posed by that loneliness, are also tokens of his association with savagery. Solitude and selfishness were regarded at the time as qualities eminently characteristic of 'uncivilised' natives. As Pieter Verstraete explains, "due to their solitary way of life savage people among other things were said to be extremely selfish" (279). The fact that the protagonist is alone on a desert island links him to a stereotypical image of the 'savage'. Even though Crusoe is of English origin, his situation compels him to assume habits that are commonly associated with so-called savages. For instance, he is bound to kill the birds which attack his crops: such a course of action is obviously not uncustomary in agriculture but, in Crusoe's case, the need for an efficient and ruthless solution is intensified by his difficult circumstances – and thus, he resorts to what could be construed as selfish brutality. The centrality of food provision, exemplified by his defending his crops, is yet another mark, at least to the 18th century mind, of a beastly character: "[a]ccording to the intellectuals of that time, just like animals, [savages] thought only about their nourishment and conservation as if their minds were located in their stomach" (Verstraete 279). Savages were believed to think almost exclusively about eating and, therefore, the (understandable) stress Crusoe lays on protecting his harvest also connects him to the 'barbarous' people considered inferior to the 'civilised' European.

Crusoe's beastly 'nature' surfaces in a spectacular manner in his using goat remains as his everyday attire. He gives a detailed description of this attire:

> I had on a broad belt of *goat's skin* dried, which I drew together with two thongs of the same, instead of buckles; and in a kind of a frog on either side of this instead of a sword and a dagger, hung a little saw and a hatchet, one on one side, one on the other. I had another belt, not so broad, and fastened in the same manner, which hung over my shoulders and at the end of it, under my left arm, hung two pouches, both made of *goat's skin* too; in one of which hung my powder, in the other my shot. At my back I carried my basket, on my shoulder my gun, and over my head a great clumsy ugly *goat-skin* umbrella, but which, after all, was the most necessary thing I had about me, next to my gun. (*RC* 114-5, emphases added)

Practically every piece of clothing he wears is somehow related to goatskin: it is the most dominant component of his appearance – a picturesque symbol of his inner beastliness. This 'goatiness' is what leads Kelleher to contend that Crusoe, in a sense, turns into a goat: "simply put, Crusoe has rendered himself a virtual goat, from head to foot. He wryly comments on the 'barbarous Shape' of his clothing. But what exactly does Crusoe understand to be barbarous: the roughness of the construction, or the animal-like resemblance his clothing creates?" (20). As much playful exaggeration as there may be in this view, the protagonist's outward form unquestionably links him to the non-human part of the animal kingdom. It is true that the choice of material for the clothing has practical reasons (there is hardly any alternative available on the island) – that, however, does not reduce the symbolic potential of Crusoe's appearance. Although Kelleher allows the possibility that the 'barbarity' of the garments (emphasised by the narrator) might be a result of their primitive quality, he evidently gravitates towards the explanation that it is due to the goat-like look they lend to Crusoe. In discussing the scene where the human turned goat stares into the eyes of an actual, 'true-born' goat, Kelleher asserts that "Crusoe is catching a glimpse of the animal he now – empirically, matter-of-factly, on the very surface of his skin – embodies as a result of his own handiwork" (21). This statement clearly emphasises the importance of the protagonist's outward appearance in relation to his identity. Kelleher further calls attention to how the castaway's facial hair contributes to the general impression made by his dress and underscores the similarity to a goat (Kelleher 20). The picture the reader is in position to conjure up on the basis of the text does, indeed, make Kelleher's point seem convincing: on the outside, Crusoe has technically become a bipedal goat (equipped with an umbrella). Naturally, one ought not to ignore the tendency to ironic overstatement in Kelleher's voice but his argument nonetheless provides a significant insight. The goatskin clothes function as an external symbol of the internal predisposition towards beastliness that Crusoe displays in his flight from home and in other instances: since wild goats are (in the eyes of European society, at any rate) below civilisation, the main character's dressing in the way he does represents his 'descent' into the wilderness.

While his goatskin clothing illustrates his hidden nature symbolically, the deep fear that Crusoe experiences when confronted with the uncanny footprint in the sand reveals his inner 'beast' in a more direct way. Having ascertained that there is no one in the vicinity who could have left the mark, he hurries to his fortification, a building that can be seen as a civilised refuge that helps him escape from the menacing 'Unknown' lurking outside. "How [the footprint] came thither I knew not, nor could in the least imagine. But after innumerable fluttering thoughts, like a man perfectly confused and out of myself, I came home to my fortification [...]" (*RC* 118). The fact that his fright causes him to be 'outside himself' shows the unsettling effect of the discovery on the integrity of his human identity: his sense of cultural superiority is to a great extent reliant on the construct of the human as a well-defined, separate entity that is situated above the rest of nature. This paradigm, however, is now thrown into doubt: the sharp line between the civilised and the wild grows dim (see the subsection on "Catalogues and categories"). Coincidentally, the stability of his own self is disturbed, and he starts to ask himself whether the footmark may not actually be his own. In searching for the possible reasons behind this existential doubt, Derrida points out some of the implications of Crusoe's ruminations: according to Derrida, the uncertainty surrounding the mysterious person has a disconcerting effect on Crusoe's image of his self (*B&S* 2.48). Once the island's (hitherto) solitary resident conceives of the idea that *he* might have left the footprint that so terrified him, he is bound to question whether he is identical with the man he previously thought himself to be. To his mind, he is, or was, the representative of European civilisation in the middle of an uncultivated region of the world – but now, he realises that he could, in fact, be the unknown savage, the source of his anxieties. This realisation leads him to lose his certainty not only concerning the difference between Europeans and savages but also with regard to the clearly located position of humanity as a species distinct from all other animals. Accordingly, while running home in his affrighted state, Crusoe begins to recognise parallels between himself and wild animals:

> Whether I went over by the ladder, as first contrived, or went in at the hole in the rock, which I called a door, I cannot remember; no, nor could I remember the next morning, for never frighted *hare* fled to cover, or *fox* to earth, with more terror of mind than I to this retreat. (*RC* 118, emphases added)

Crusoe compares his hasty manner of withdrawal to that of hares and foxes. This association seems to corroborate his loss of certitude as to the solidity of the human as a concept. His fear, or at least the memory of his fear, inspires him to single out the traits that connect him to the 'subhuman' world: to the world of beasts.

Crusoe is prey to similar fears on account of the cannibals living on the nearby mainland. When he finds traces of their regularly consuming their 'meals' on his island, he is at once frightened and disgusted by them: "I entertained such an abhorrence of the savage wretches that I have been speaking of, and of the wretched, inhuman custom of their devouring and eating one another up, that I continued pensive and sad, and kept close within my own circles for almost two years after this" (*RC* 127). He dares not leave the immediate environs of his abode lest he should encounter the dreaded cannibals. They fill him with such loathing that he starts to contemplate killing them as a form of punishment: "night and day, I could think of nothing but how I might destroy some of these monsters in their cruel, bloody entertainment, and, if possible, save the victim they should bring hither to destroy" (*RC* 129). For a time, the desire to revenge their sins upon them fully occupies his thoughts. He devises different methods to massacre the feasters during their next sojourn on the island (whenever that might come to pass) and, his former composure of mind having partly returned, ventures several visits to the spot where the cannibals usually put their captives to death. However, Crusoe eventually recoils from carrying out any of his plans as the impropriety of his intentions occurs to him. The narration itself underscores the unjust brutality inherent in his scheme to act as an executor of God's purported will:

> [....] my spirits seemed to be all the while in a suitable form for so outrageous an execution as the killing twenty or thirty naked savages for an offence which I had not at all entered into a discussion of in my thoughts, any farther than my passions were at first fired by the horror I conceived at the unnatural custom of that people of the country [...] (*RC* 130)

The narrator himself deems his previous ideas cruel and barbarous: the fear occasioned by the danger of being eaten roused his aggressive instincts and prompted him to deliberate violent deeds. He comes to the conclusion that murdering the cannibals would not be justified even if it saved the lives of the people about to be consumed. According to Todd, Crusoe's meditations on this topic are, in the end, not only expressions of his inner 'demon' but also of the triumph of his rational self: "Crusoe swings between his lower energies and passions and his higher faculties, entangling himself in the very savagery he perceives in the cannibals and at the same time distinguishing himself from them as a civilized being" (*Defoe's America* 37). Nevertheless, this victory is merely temporary; even though Crusoe decides that he, as an outsider, is not entitled either to judge the customs of the natives or to hinder them in their actions that appear immoral when measured against European standards, this is precisely what he does when he kills the two men chasing Friday. In theory, he condemns his own instinct to punish the cannibals but he cannot resist doing so in

practice. The moment he is faced with a real-life situation and has to make a quick decision, his propensity for violence prevails over his reasoning.

Crusoe's choice to leave his home country, his solitary life on the island, his wearing goatskin clothes, his fears, and tendency to violent behaviour are all manifestations of his beastliness. In the course of the novel, this beastliness – the "wilderness within" (*Defoe's America* 32) as Todd calls it – comes to the surface and, in many instances, overpowers the protagonist's civilised upbringing. In Crusoe's own words, he is "reduced to a mere state of nature" (*RC* 90), wanting many of the benefits of culture and society. His being reduced to this 'savage' condition marks his transition from the domain of civilisation to that of the wilderness. His initial desire to go to sea, and even more his stay on the island, emphasise his hybridity and thus link him to Friday, Poll, and the goats.

"King and lord of all this country": the sovereign

When Crusoe kills Friday's two pursuers, on the surface level, he merely helps a fellow human being by saving his life; at the same time, however, and despite his previous meditations on the subject, he interferes with the customs of another culture and imposes his own norms upon it. He judges the deeds of the cannibals according the values of his own country and, having found the two men guilty, technically executes them. In doing so, he assumes the role of the state, or, in a vicarious form of action, even that of God – an action he formerly deemed wiser to avoid (*RC* 130-1). In resorting to violence in order to do what he perceives as morally right, he assumes the prerogative of the sovereign to punish his subjects. This is evidently part of his endeavour to impose the social norms of his own culture upon the island: to establish and preserve order, there must be a person who is, in a certain sense, above the law and has the power to enforce it. Being above the law, however, means that one is not bound by the law, or at least not to the same extent as other members of society: as Derrida explains, "the minimal feature that must be recognized in the position of sovereignty [...] is [...] a certain power to *give*, to *make*, but also to *suspend* the law; it is the exceptional right to place oneself above right, the right to non-right" (*B&S* 1.16, emphases in the original). The sovereign has a special status that enables him to treat the society under his control according to his own liking. This privilege – which can have varying degrees from constitutional monarchies to tyrannies – lends him an ambiguous character and "both runs the risk of carrying the human sovereign above the human, toward divine omnipotence [...] and, because of this arbitrary suspension or rupture of right, runs the risk of making the sovereign look like the most

brutal beast who respects nothing [...]" (Derrida *B&S* 1.16-7). As a result of his supralegal position, the figure of the sovereign approaches that of the beast. The similarity between the beast and the sovereign makes an obvious distinction impossible: "the beast becomes the sovereign who becomes the beast; there is the beast *and* [*et*] the sovereign (conjunction), but also the beast *is* [*est*] the sovereign, the sovereign *is* [*est*] the beast" (Derrida *B&S* 1.18, emphases in the original). The way the boundary between legal supremacy (sovereignty) and the complete absence of legal constraints (beastliness) is blurred by the ruler's arbitrary actions is vividly illustrated by the measures Crusoe takes in order to ensure his hegemony over the island. In the following, I will discuss three eminent examples of this tendency in *Robinson Crusoe*: the protagonist's self-fashioning as king and surrounding himself with servants and 'courtiers', the execution of the birds looting his crops, and his linguistic subjugation of his parrot.

There are several instances in which Crusoe fashions himself as a monarch ruling over the island – a role that foregrounds his being a social outsider. In listing the reasons why he should be contented with his situation, he describes his advantageous position thus: "if I pleased, I might call myself king or emperor over the whole country which I had possession of. There were no rivals: I had no competitor, none to dispute sovereignty or command with me" (*RC* 98). His privileged condition, however, is the result of his solitude – a fact that calls attention to how his sovereignty is connected to his beastliness: his kingship, if it can be called such, is only made possible by his socially outcast status. At an earlier point in the novel, upon discovering a particularly fertile valley, he expresses his joy over having the area as his own: Crusoe considers himself the undisputed overlord of the land surrounding him (*RC* 76). He is the 'monarch-of-all-he-surveys' (Pratt 201) and finds the idea of his supremacy extremely pleasing. This supremacy is closely related to his loneliness, a state that is at once a blessing and a curse. As Derrida remarks, "a sovereign is always alone (that is both his absolute power and his vulnerability, or his infinite inconsistency)" (*B&S* 2.7). Without his isolation from other human beings, Crusoe would probably not have the same dominant position (one should not forget that, in England, he was a mere commoner); yet, it is this isolation, the very means of his power, that hinders the perpetuation of the hierarchy he establishes. Since, due to the lack of a mate, he cannot produce issue, his possessions will never become hereditary. Obviously, this also means that the number of subjects following his commands is limited: "he is bereft of human interaction – a powerless king owing to his lack of subordinates" (Farr 546). The use of the word 'lack' is perhaps not entirely justified here as, even before Friday's arrival, the domesticated animals serve as 'courtiers' around their 'ruler':

> Then to see how like a king I dined, too, all alone, attended by my servants. Poll, as if he had been my favourite, was the only person permitted to talk to me. My dog, who was now grown very old and crazy, and had found no species to multiply his kind upon, sat always at my right hand, and two cats, one on one side of the table, and one on the other, expecting now and then a bit from my hand, as a mark of special favour. (*RC* 113)

Crusoe depicts himself as a king complete with a royal court and attendants. While there is definitely a strong element of the ludicrous in the picture drawn here, one cannot unreservedly claim that Crusoe has no subjects at all. At the same time, his association with these animals, and the fact that they form the society over which he reigns, underlines his (geographical *and* abstract) distance from what is commonly perceived as European civilisation: instead of living in or governing a community of 'intelligent' humans, he is degraded to be the sovereign of a group of beasts. The passage also stresses his loneliness among the animals, and the figure of his dog provides a poignant parallel with his own fate: it has not been able to reproduce and neither has he. The two are united by a seclusion from other members of their respective species, and this common seclusion is a reminder of Crusoe's beastly qualities: he is cast out of society like an abandoned dog.

In depicting himself as a king, Crusoe also points out the potential for violence immanent to a monarch's authority. Embedded into the jovial description of the dinner scene discussed above, he outlines the punitive possibilities at his disposal in a good-humoured, boasting tone:

> It would have made a stoic smile, to have seen me and my little family sit down to dinner. There was my majesty, the prince and lord of the whole island; I had the lives of all my subjects at my absolute command. I could hang, draw, give liberty, and take it away; and no rebels among all my subjects. (*RC* 113)

Crusoe seems to find pleasure in his power and the brutalities it enables him to commit. His being surrounded by animals and the acts of cruelty he contemplates in relation to them lend prominence to his 'subhuman' (or, indeed, very human) qualities. In the passage, the reader once again witnesses the manifestation of the protagonist's beastly side or, as David Baumeister puts it, the "tense proximity to animality, which appears at first glance to be its opposite, [but which] drives human sovereignty from the inside" (162). Crusoe's brutality is intimately tied to his sovereign status. The fact that his rule appears to be unanimously accepted and no one rebels against him further emphasises, by virtue of the contrast it creates, his own 'roguishness': he is a human behaving in a beastly way among non-human animals behaving in a civilised way. The difference between him and his 'subjects' as well as the deviation of this difference from traditional expectations confound the binary roles of human and beast by reminding one that humans

(especially in power positions) can be brutal and autocratic whereas animals can live peacefully in organised communities.

By killing the birds that pose a threat to his harvest, Crusoe claims for himself the monopoly of the state on violence. With the intention of maintaining order in his mind – such an order as is beneficial to *him* –, he condemns the pests to death:

> I was so provoked, that I could not have patience to stay till more came on, knowing that every grain that they eat now was, as it might be said, a peck-loaf to me in the consequence; but coming up to the hedge, I fired again, and killed three of them. This was what I wished for, so I took them up, and served them as we serve notorious thieves in England, viz., hanged them in chains, for a terror to others. (*RC* 89)

Designating the birds as 'thieves', a term that only makes sense in a society with a well-defined notion of private property, and explicitly imitating English legal customs show how Crusoe extends the norms of his own civilisation to the island, and places himself in the position of sovereign, endowed with the right to decide the fate of his subjects. Despite the appearance of legal formality, however, his personal motives shine through and reveal a self-interested disposition that is not inhibited by considerations of mercy – "the face of the beast [appears] under the features of the sovereign" (*B&S* 1.18). This can be seen in his admission the he performed the deed propelled by anger, fear, and impatience: he feels "provoked" (*RC* 89) and "could not have patience to stay till more came on" (*RC* 89). He is afraid that the plunderers will deprive him of his food and wishes their death (*RC* 89). These sentiments are, of course, perfectly understandable in his situation, and yet the tone of the passage suggests a certain aggression and an outburst of rage that exceeds what is strictly necessary from a practical perspective. Crusoe is not only prepared to commit acts of cruelty if this helps him achieve his goals but he also hangs the executed 'criminals' "in chains, for a terror to others" (*RC* 89). He claims that this method proved highly successful: "[i]t is impossible to imagine almost that this should have such an effect as it had, for the fowls would not only not come at the corn, but, in short, they forsook all that part of the island, and I could never see a bird near the place as long as my scare-crows hung there" (*RC* 89). He wants to underline the efficiency of the procedure but, as his own words betray, he cannot possibly have known the result in advance. It is much more likely that he chooses to hang his victims partly out of anger and partly out of a desire to assert his own role as the source and executor of the law, i.e. to display and reinforce his sovereignty. But it is precisely this display of sovereignty that sheds light on the brutality intrinsic to the actions of the person who is "the origin of laws, the guarantor of laws" (*B&S* 1.17). Those entitled to make the law are, as discussed above, to a certain extent outside the law and always in danger of being associated with others in a similar position, namely 'common' outlaws and 'wild'

animals: the sovereign, as a result of his status, has many features in common with the criminal and the beast (*B&S* 1.17). By giving an example of Crusoe's own inclination to acting violently, the hanging scene in *Robinson Crusoe* illustrates this affinity between sovereign and outlaw. Simultaneously, the treatment of the birds shows how the protagonist, in assuming the judicial power of the state, by necessity cannot avoid the beastliness inherent in that power.

Poll's use of language further illustrates how Crusoe's sovereignty is intertwined with beastliness. The parrot functions as an emblem of its master's solitary state on the one hand, and of his being part of the animal kingdom on the other. I have clarified above how solitude is an unavoidable part of the sovereign's condition: a political leader is bound to be alone – they exclude themselves from society by being in a superior and, therefore, exterior relative position to others. These others, in Crusoe's case, are almost exclusively his animals, especially the parrot. Until Friday's arrival, the bird is Crusoe's most prominent subject: "Poll, as if he had been my favourite, was the only person permitted to talk to me" (*RC* 113). Crusoe bestows upon Poll a limited 'knowledge' of the English language, making the parrot a prime example of his sovereignty over the island's fauna: so far, the imposition of his own culture appears to have been most successful in this basic language instruction. On the surface level, the bird's speech, apart from reinforcing Crusoe's sense of domination, gives him the impression that he has company; however, the words it utters ultimately come from Crusoe himself, and the parrot's cleverness consists mainly in the skilful repetition of previously learned lessons. Derrida refers to this repetition as "auto-appellation" and points out that Poll is, at least in this respect, scarcely more than a mere machine (*B&S* 2.86). By echoing its master's words, the parrot, in effect, underscores Crusoe's loneliness: the only companion with whom he can 'talk' is really himself – mediated through the bird. According to Peter DeGabriele, it is this mediation of his self that causes Crusoe's alarm upon being awakened by his pet: the castaway hears his own words in an uncanny, alienated form (4-5). The parrot's voice is basically a reproduction of Crusoe's voice, reminding him that he is, despite the illusion of social life provided by his domestic animals, very much alone. For the same reason, Poll makes Crusoe aware that he as a human is not essentially different from other animals.

In channelling back his own words to him, the bird highlights the animal-like qualities in its master's voice: the fact that the human speech that arouses Crusoe is coming from an animal's mouth blurs the distinction between the two and reveals the brute under the mask of the monarch. From this point of view, the parrot's question "[W]here are you, Robin Crusoe?" (*RC* 109) can be compared to the words of another literary bird, those of the raven in Edgar Allan Poe's well-known poem: like the recurring "nevermore" (*Works* 1304-8) in the latter case, Poll's interrogation raises

doubts about the narrator's position. The raven's mechanically repeated prophecy leads to uncertainty regarding the boundary between life and death:

> "Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil—prophet still, if bird or devil!
> By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—
> Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
> It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
> Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore.'
> Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore." (Poe, "The Raven" 91-6)

The narrator's beloved is dead and therefore, as the raven's sinister replies imply, will never be seen again by him. At the same time, however, Lenore is mysteriously present in the room: "a memory of the word of death and its afterimage both are revived through the tricks of sound and confused sense, thereby keeping the image of the one who is dead and gone from this world in some other form like that described in the poem" (Engel 134). The narrator makes an attempt to conjure up the figure of the dead woman and thereby anchor her in the world of life. Moreover, the raven itself can be considered an allegorical representation of the lady: since the French '*le corbeau*' (raven) is homophonous '*le corps beau*' (beautiful corpse), it is easy to see a connection between the two, and the similarity of the name 'Lenore' with '*le noir*' (black) is also suggestive (Engel 135-6). Poe's poem blurs the boundary between life and death by making a dead person interact with a living one – even if only in an allegorical manner. In an analogous way, Defoe's bird is a reminder of the precarious lines between nature and civilisation, animal and human, beast and sovereign, and of the protagonist's ambiguous place in these respects.

Crusoe has a tendency explicitly to present himself as a monarch ruling over the island. His penchant for rejoicing in and boasting of his own power emphasises his role as sovereign but at the same time lays the ground for further illustrations of his, in many ways, beastly character. This beastly side of Crusoe's (hidden under the guise of sovereignty, as it were) manifests itself in three main ways: in the fact that his special position is made possible by his status as a social outsider, in his inclination towards using his power to commit violent deeds (as evidenced, among others, by his resorting to capital punishment in the case of the 'thieves'), and, last but not least, in the parrot's repetition of the phrases taught by him. Thus, Crusoe's exercise of power underlines his brutal traits and, in consequence, his 'inner beast'. Through the protagonist's resemblance to the figure of the beast, the novel gives another example, besides the domestic animals and Friday, of how the border between nature and civilisation can be crossed, thereby calling attention the malleability and artificiality of that border.

Conclusion

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* contributes to the deconstruction of the nature/civilisation binary in various ways. The novel's reliance on two discourses prevalent in England at the time as well as and the protagonist's efforts to create and maintain order on the island lead to a destabilisation of the hierarchy in which civilisation is superior to nature. Furthermore, Crusoe's domestication of two endemic animal species and his educating Friday results in a hybridisation of the characters affected: the goats, the parrot, and the slave come to embody both the wilderness and civilisation, thereby blurring the boundary between the two allegedly separate realms. Apart from that, Crusoe's stay on the island changes him, too: while he shows signs of 'wild' behaviour prior to being shipwrecked, these tendencies become more pronounced over the course of the narrative. Thus, the main character, too, can be considered an example of hybridity.

Two civilizatory discourses, relating to agriculture and the natural sciences, respectively, play a crucial role in *Robinson Crusoe*. The two discourses were shaped by two texts that were highly influential in Early Modern England: Dryden's translation of Virgil's *Georgics* in the case of agriculture and Bacon's *The New Atlantis* in the case of science. The depiction of the cultivation of the soil in the *Georgics*, while affirming human superiority in certain respects, in many ways calls attention to the highly advanced state of several non-human animals and to the virtues of unrefined, 'natural' objects. In general, there are a significant number of passages in these poems that subvert the traditional hierarchy between human culture and the rest of the world. In relying on Virgil's agricultural/civilizatory discourse, Defoe's account incorporates both motifs: the triumph of civilisation as well as the features which question that triumph. A similar occurrence can be observed in the case of *The New Atlantis*: the text describes a far-away, previously undiscovered island where the local population is highly advanced in knowledge and technology. The narrative is, on the whole, a praise of the scientific pursuits envisioned in it but, as with Virgil, the picture presented is not unequivocal. This ambiguous quality can also be felt in *Robinson Crusoe* – which, in many instances, participates in the Baconian discourse –, thereby destabilising the dominance of civilisation within the dichotomy.

Crusoe's failure to categorise and classify everything he encounters during his residence on the island (and thereby assert the dominance of the scientific world view) illustrates the futility of *taxonomia*. Ultimately, it is not possible to create a system into which the whole world can be incorporated. The fact that this impossibility is repeatedly underlined in the novel directs the reader's attention to the limits of the human endeavour to comprehend and overcome nature, and thus undermines the alleged superiority of civilisation. Moreover, discovering the footprint of an

unknown person in the sand results in the displacement of the dichotomy in question as the presence of someone with an ambiguous identity has an unsettling effect on the binary order imposed by Crusoe.

Apart from the footprint, the domestication of wild animals (goats and a parrot) further contributes to the displacement of the nature/civilisation dichotomy by producing hybrid creatures, who exist on both sides of the boundary. In the case of the goats, their apparent gentleness creates a stark contrast to the often brutal behaviour of ostensibly civilised humans, while the bird is remarkable primarily for its intelligence. The goats display such tameness and amicability as seems to justify their inclusion in the so-called 'civilised' space. This inclusion does, in fact, take place when Crusoe creates an enclosure for them; or, rather, the goats come to occupy a space that is 'in-between', a mixture of the 'wilderness' and 'civilisation' – i.e., a hybrid space. Poll the parrot, while also fulfilling the role of a much needed companion for the castaway, is noteworthy first and foremost for being able to produce deceivingly human-like sounds and imitate Crusoe's words in a highly accomplished fashion. Mechanical though this repetition is, it is sufficient to obfuscate the traditionally accepted boundary marked by language competence between 'civilised' and 'non-civilised' beings.

Intelligence is one of Friday's chief attributes, too. His quickness at learning stands at odds with the traditional image of the 'savage': instead of being fierce, ignorant, and unwilling to be educated, Crusoe's servant is the very model of a smart and diligent student. As his master imposes upon him the tenets and values of European civilisation, Friday develops a personality that is, in several respects, an alloy of two different cultures. This mixed identity is exemplified by his idiosyncratic use of the English language and by his syncretistic ideas concerning matters of religion. Friday's mental capacities (which were, in the European view of the era, unlikely to be possessed by a 'savage') as well as the simultaneous presence of disparate cultural elements in his thinking and behaviour underline his hybridity. As in the case of the goats and the parrot, this hybridity contributes to blurring the boundary between nature and civilisation.

Finally, Crusoe himself is a hybrid character, uniting traits that belong to nature and civilisation, respectively, as the two notions are commonly understood. Such traits are already present at the outset of the novel (primarily in his desire to leave his home country and go to sea) and become increasingly prominent over the course of the story. Thus, Crusoe's movement across the boundary is the reverse of the one found in Friday's and the animals' case, but calls attention to the arbitrariness of construing nature and civilisation as distinct categories in an essentially similar way. The castaway's 'running wild' is further accentuated by his tendency to behave in an autocratic

manner: by fashioning himself as a sovereign, he necessarily, even if unintentionally, identifies himself with all the brutality and beastliness inherent in that role.

In certain ways, it might seem commonsensical to regard *Robinson Crusoe* as a book that supports the division of humanity and the world into a civilised and a wild, 'natural' sphere: it portrays a European man who, with the help of tools and knowledge derived from his 'advanced' cultural background, colonises a distant island and subjugates the 'natural', non-human world. Nevertheless, as I have tried to show, the novel is far from being so straightforward and contains numerous features that contradict such a simplistic, binary interpretation. While there are, doubtless, tendencies in Crusoe's account towards a hierarchical understanding of the difference between Europe and the rest of the world, the text poses several questions which subvert the notion of nature and civilisation existing as the two clearly delineated parts of a dichotomy.

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English abstract

Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe*. 1719. Ed. Doreen Roberts. Ware: Wordsworth, 2000.

This thesis examines the portrayal of the nature/civilisation dichotomy in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and argues that the novel functions, in many ways, as a deconstruction of that dichotomy. By doing so, my thesis facilitates a more nuanced insight into a classic work of English literature. Furthermore, it contributes to a better understanding of modern European colonial practices, which are often characterised by a binary division of the world into a civilised and an uncivilised sphere. Although several scholars have engaged in similar research concerning *Robinson Crusoe*, to my knowledge, no study has been written with the specific aim of assembling the different facets of the novel which undermine said binary division. In my analysis, I rely on ideas of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida and, to a lesser extent, on postcolonial theory (especially on certain concepts introduced by Homi Bhabha). This theoretical framework helps me to show that *Robinson Crusoe* presents ample ground for interpreting it in a light that contradicts the traditional colonialist approach to the text. The novel illustrates the vanity of imposing artificial systems and definitions on the world, and subverts the alleged hierarchical primacy of European culture. Moreover, by virtue of the fact that the main characters combine qualities conventionally associated with nature on the one hand and with civilisation on the other, the novel questions the existence of a stable boundary between the so-called 'wilderness' and the 'civilised' world.

Keywords: nature, civilisation, *Robinson Crusoe*, deconstruction, dichotomy, hierarchy, colonialism

German abstract

Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe*. 1719. Ed. Doreen Roberts. Ware: Wordsworth, 2000.

In der vorliegenden Arbeit wird die Darstellung der Dichotomie Natur/Zivilisation in *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) von Daniel Defoe untersucht: es wird behauptet, dass der Roman in vielerlei Hinsicht eine Dekonstruktion dieser Dichotomie vollbringt. Dadurch ermöglicht dieses Paper eine nuanciertere Einsicht in ein klassisches Werk der englischen Literatur. Darüber hinaus trägt es zu einem besseren Verständnis von modernen europäischen kolonialen Praxen bei, die oft von einer binären Teilung der Welt in eine zivilisierte und eine unzivilisierte Sphäre geprägt sind. Obwohl mehrere Forscher sich mit ähnlichen Recherchen in Bezug auf *Robinson Crusoe* beschäftigt haben, es wurde, sofern es festgestellt werden konnte, noch keine Studie mit dem spezifischen Ziel, die verschiedenen Facetten des Romans, die die genannte binäre Teilung destabilisieren, zu versammeln, verfasst. Um die Analyse zu unterstützen, werden sowohl Gedanken des französischen Philosophen Jacques Derrida, als auch die postkoloniale Theorie verwendet (besonders einige von Homi Bhabha eingeführte Begriffe). Dieser theoretische Rahmen hilft zu zeigen, dass es hinreichende Begründung gibt, *Robinson Crusoe* aus einem Gesichtspunkt, der der herkömmlichen kolonialistischen Deutung des Textes widerspricht, zu interpretieren. Der Roman veranschaulicht die Eitelkeit, die darin steckt, künstliche Systeme und Definitionen auf die Welt zu zwingen, und verstört das angebliche hierarchische Primat der europäischen Kultur. Überdies stellt der Roman, wegen seiner Darstellung von Figuren, die Eigenschaften, die einerseits mit der Natur, andererseits mit der Zivilisation assoziiert sind, in sich vereinigen, das Bestehen einer festen Grenze zwischen der sogenannten „Wildnis“ und der „zivilisierten“ Welt in Frage.

Schlagwörter: Natur, Zivilisation, *Robinson Crusoe*, Dekonstruktion, Dichotomie, Hierarchie, Kolonialismus

ANTI-PLAGIARISM STATEMENT

I hereby declare that I understand the notion of plagiarism and that this paper is my own work. Whenever I used the work of others, I acknowledged it according to the relevant academic requirements.

14.09.2023

Date

Signature