

**Postcolonial Problems in Cinematic**  
**Adaptations of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson***

***Crusoe***

Why Directors Still Try to Redeem *Robinson Crusoe*, and Why They Cannot

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## Contents

Introduction.....	3
1. <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> as Non-Literary Entertainment: The Pleasures of Seeing Crusoe’s Island With One’s Own Eyes.....	6
2. The “Blank Space” Speaks: Emancipating the Other Side.....	12
3. Island Narratives, Savagery and Power.....	20
4. Anticolonial or Postcolonial: Friday’s Problematic Symbolism.....	25
Conclusion.....	32
Bibliography.....	34

## Introduction

Countless volumes have been written about Daniel Defoe's *The Strange and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), one of the first English novels and the first and only well-known of Defoe's three-book series that deals with the picaresque adventures of Robinson Crusoe. In the longest of his adventures in the novel, he matures spiritually, passing 28 years marooned on a desert island. After the novel's immediate success in its own day, it has held a remarkably solid position in Europe's collective imagination as a wondrous adventure tale: as "the story England told itself as it went to sleep at night" (Green, *Dreams* 3). Not only one of the most successful adventure stories, Crusoe's tale has also occupied a central position in several academic and theoretical discourses, which have taken the story to exemplify what James Joyce calls "the whole Anglo-Saxon spirit" par excellence (qtd. in Hamm 118). Examples of these critical disciplines are Marxism, which often regards Crusoe either, following the example of Ian Watt (Ellis 39), as the prototype of capitalism or, paradoxically, as illustrating a desirable mode of labour as Marx does (Ellis 90), and postcolonialism, which often criticises the relationship between Crusoe and Friday. Edward Said calls Crusoe one of the West's "inaugural figures" (97), as the main character of "one of several [fables] that stand guard over the imagination of the New World" (96). He insightfully remarks that this is illustrated by the fact that "it is now virtually impossible to say anything simple about [those fables]" (97). The interest appears to be constant and timeless on the whole, as the mysteries that the Crusoe myth poses for critical enquiry change over time.

Much creative energy has gone into exploring the problems with which *Robinson Crusoe* presents modern readers. Literary adaptations include Michel Tournier's *Vendredi: ou Les Limbes du Pacifique* (1967) and J.M Coetzee's postmodern *Foe* (1986). These works enter into a critical dialogue with Defoe's original (Bakhtin qtd. in Meagher 149), as the authors, having read the original against the grain, put forward neglected counter-voices and,

in the term coined by Bill Ashcroft and others in their powerful book *The Empire Writes Back*, “write back” to the centre from the margins of the original (6). These written back-versions have also been extensively discussed in academic circles.

Less work has apparently been done on cinematic adaptations of *Robinson Crusoe*, even though these, too, are plentiful, as the tale is alluring for cineastes. Film versions are highly interesting, however, because they try to combine two ways of engaging with *Robinson Crusoe*, namely the allegorical and the straightforward adventure interpretation, whereas serious literary adaptations may tend to focus more on the former mode. In the postcolonial era, the story is necessarily politicised because of its infamous imperial attitude. Up until the 1960s, the “imperial topic” did not have to be “confronted” but could simply be taken as a given in adventure novels (*Dreams* 49; 335). Films nowadays, however, have to engage with the imperial topic to be accepted by audiences.

This thesis aims to identify the non-political appeal of the story for visualisation and the ways in which films try to pry the story from its colonial associations, mainly through trying to emancipate Friday. A change of storyline, however, is not enough to establish a representation that could be called “postcolonial,” and the figure of Friday is ultimately not emancipated. This becomes clear when the adaptations are analysed using a number of foundational postcolonial concepts, such as Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and *the Other*, and Homi K. Bhabha’s *Third Space*.

The development of the myth will be examined in four films. They are Luis Buñuel’s *Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1952), which is a relatively straightforward rendering of the myth, retaining many of the characteristics that have led to the criticism on the original story; Jack Gold’s *Man Friday* (1975), which subverts the story and uses Friday of narrator and anchor of the moral framework, instead of Crusoe; Caleb Deschanel’s *Crusoe* (1988), set in 1808 with Crusoe as a slave trader by profession, in which the voice-over has been dropped to

make way for a supposedly equal encounter between Crusoe and Friday (Meagher 153); and Rod Hardy and George T. Miller's *Robinson Crusoe* (1997), which keeps the original's diary-framework, but figures a Scottish Crusoe who has to flee Britain in fear of persecution because he has duelled for love, and who comes to accept Friday's culture and eventually fights cannibals alongside him. These films aim mainly for a Western audience, and were chosen because they engage with the relationship between Crusoe and Friday in a serious manner, whereas several other adaptations, such as Disney's *Lt. Robin Crusoe U.S.N* (1966), engage farcically with the story and by not asking to be taken seriously, may bypass critical enquiry into their stance on the imperial attitude.<sup>1</sup> The adaptations have had to change the relationship between Crusoe and Friday, either because they had this as a subversive political goal (Gold; Deschanel) or merely as a precondition for audience empathy with Crusoe (Buñuel; Hardy and Miller). They span half a century, and their strategies to cope with postcolonial problems vary accordingly. The films offer several themes that may clarify the crux of the problems that come with translating *Robinson Crusoe* to the mind-set and media of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Chapter 1 describes *Robinson Crusoe*'s original reception and argues that the gaps in Defoe's narrative are what interests audiences and artists. Chapter 2 examines in which ways filmmakers indulge in the visual exuberance of the Other side of *Robinson Crusoe*'s dichotomy. Chapter 3 argues that *Robinson Crusoe*'s island format precludes equality between the characters because power struggle is a recurring theme in the desert island genre, restricting its potential to offer a Third Space. Finally, chapter 4 argues that Friday remains symbolic in visual representation, and as he is not culturally specific, he is not emancipated.

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<sup>1</sup> The nationalities of the directors vary. Gold is a British director, adapted a British play, and cast American actors to portray the tribe. Hardy and Miller are Australian, Deschanel is American and Buñuel Aragonese, and he shot his picture both in Spanish and English. All films were released in Europe or English-speaking countries, however.

## 1. *Robinson Crusoe* as Non-Literary Entertainment: The Pleasures of Seeing Crusoe's Island

### With One's Own Eyes

In 1710, Daniel Defoe and his rival, Jonathan Swift, shared the same patron. This Robert Harley, however, received the latter at his front door, and the former at the back (*Dreams* 90). This is emblematic for the position Defoe had in his own day and age, according to Martin Green (90). Defoe was often mocked in literary circles, by the likes of Alexander Pope and other Scriblerians, for his austerity and encumbering, detailed style. John Gay called Defoe “a lively instance of those Wits, who...will endure but one Skimming” (qtd. in Rogers 39). Defoe was a prolific writer, nonetheless; he tried his hand at many genres, with every intention to be taken seriously (*Dreams* 91). James Sutherland therefore suggests that when he resorted to prose fiction and the adventure genre, rather than classically inspired genres or current social “controversy,” it was clear that Defoe was “coming down in the world” (25). However, although *Robinson Crusoe* is often not taken seriously as literature, it has proven highly fertile because of the singular “spots of indeterminacy,” as phenomenologist Roman Ingarden calls them (249), which Defoe asks readers to fill in by omitting descriptions of the sublime power of nature. This may be why the tale is so popular in adaptation.

It does not strain belief to assume that Defoe wrote *Robinson Crusoe* partly because of the popularity of travel narratives. They were England's most popular genre in literature from 1668 to 1708 (*Dreams* 71). This may further explain why the tale was poured into an autobiographical form, as the most celebrated popular traveller's tales, like Richard Hakluyt's and Sir Walter Raleigh's, were autobiographical. *Robinson Crusoe* was an instant success. Within seven years it was reprinted seven times in London alone, and it was “serialized...pirated, abridged, adapted and dramatized endlessly” from the start (*Story* 20). These rewritings and adaptations point to two significant matters. Firstly, it was not the brilliance of Defoe's literary style that attracted attention to the work as it was frequently,

without moral qualms or fear of loss of merit, rewritten. Secondly, its appeal was mainly aimed at the middle classes, rather than the literary elite (15). Sutherland suggests that Defoe, as one of the founders of the novel, to some extent even created a new readership. *Robinson Crusoe*'s homely lower-middle class hero and straightforward non-allusive style appealed to the working people that "could read, but... had neither the time nor the inclination to read very much" (26). Moreover, Defoe himself railed against snobbery in *The Compleat Englishman* (98), and stated that he wrote for the "unlearned" (*Dreams* 90), by which he often meant merchant classes who were not classically educated, like himself.

The island passage has been the sole survivor in the cultural memory of the three-book series Defoe devoted to Robinson Crusoe. According to Green, this is partly because the island passage is distinct, in its realism, from Crusoe's "picaresque wanderings" surrounding it (26), which makes it much more remarkable. For the same reason, it offers a more coherent plot and setting, and thus a more feasible object for adaptation. Furthermore, the emblematical potential of a man alone on an island is enormous.

The historical status of adventure literature as a "low genre" is crucial to Martin Green's argument in *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (49). He argues that adventure stories, of which *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* is a prime example, may be read as the "energizing myth" of imperialism (xi), encouraging Western European men to head out to strange lands and create value there by applying their Western capitalist commodifying conceptualisation, as Crusoe does (76). Green argues that Defoe wrote at the height of the "triumphal mood" of English imperial pride and excitement (7), as England had obtained "all the attributes of a [modern world] model kingdom" by 1688 (6), starting with Cromwell's attainment of the English monopoly on the Atlantic trade in 1657 (6). Defoe daringly announced that "trade in England makes Gentlemen" (qtd. in Ellis 2) and participated in the spirit of the times, advocating mercantilism and imperialism where others

writing from literature's centre rather than periphery, such as Swift, generally protested against capitalist values, according to Green (*Dreams* 90). One of the main reasons for the enduring perceived frivolity of the genre Green argues to be its lack of protest against the "crudest expansive thrusts of the modern system" (57).

Despite the politically active life Defoe led, it seems that *Robinson Crusoe*, although expressly written in its own merchant *Zeitgeist*, is precisely for that reason not societally engaged. In *Serious Reflections* (1720), the third of the *Robinson Crusoe* trilogy, Defoe calls his story an "allusive allegoric history" (qtd. in Ellis 8), but this seems to have been an attempt to secure for his fresh format of the novel a niche other than the label of "romance" in the traditional literary tradition, according to Ellis (8). The novel endorses dogmatic nationalistic values even in their inconsistency, rather than criticising them. For example, rather than examining the practice of slavery, Defoe condemns it as "miserable" when it befalls Crusoe and says that "it could be no worse" (17), while the first thing Crusoe does when his plantation prospers is buy a slave (31), and he embarks on his fateful journey to obtain slaves in Guinea (33), "for trifles" (32). Slavery was prohibited under English Common Law at that time, however, and the Abolitionist movement was gaining ground.<sup>2</sup> The sparse times the Scriblerians directly addressed the concept, they opposed it, in their literary personas at least (Richardson 3).<sup>3</sup> Defoe, however, does not take stance either for or against slavery; he simply accepts its existence as a plot-device. In the post-colonial area, the resistance to imperialist themes in the artistic climate has of course only grown further, although the same might not necessarily be said of popular entertainment.

Perhaps partly because of its moral ambivalence, *Robinson Crusoe* has been read as an archetypal text for the fatal naiveté which lay at the heart of early Modern European imperialism. The analysis of it as a complex political allegory could be seen as one of two

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<sup>2</sup> The legal precedent, based on Common Law, was established in case law in 1772 (Mowat 162).

<sup>3</sup> Their literary personas were quite distinct from their actual allegiances, as they actually subliminally supported the practice, as Richardson's book explores, but lofty literary conventions seem to have been generally against it.

distinct ways to engage with the story, in which philosophers use the allegoric potential of the story. The question that the tale poses, of how Western ingenuity would manage in isolation, has proven an inspiration for many political economists, philosophers, and social visionaries such as Rousseau and Marx, and has spawned numerous rewritings and allusions. It also offers a way into criticising the Western capitalist worldview for, among others, postcolonial thinkers.

On the other hand, however, there is its appeal as a relatively straightforward survival tale. It inspires readers' active engagement in the problems of survival, as readers are, Sutherland states, "[sharing] in [Crusoe's] efforts to create" (30). It has for a long time been a classic in children's literary education, either in its own form or recast in specially adapted, more homely versions such as Johann Davis Wyss's *The Swiss Family Robinson* (Story 77). Seeing that the delight the novel brings is not of biting satire, literary craftsmanship, or overt political engagement, however, and in view of the original readership of the novel, the latter a-political manner of interpreting the story might be regarded the most broadly influential in the popular imagination.

The visual potential of the story seems to be the main reason for its appeal to the imagination, and its "adaptogenic" quality (Groensteen qtd. in Hutcheon 10). It is exceedingly suitable for illustration and other visualisations, such as cinematic representation, in which, as David Blewett puts it in his work on the illustration of Robinson Crusoe, there is the advantage of immediacy rather than "a slow progression of words" (14). At some point, illustration even gradually began to replace the text (17).

Despite Defoe's own comments on his novel, *Robinson Crusoe's* lack of allegory, its beguiling naturalness, appears to have been the source for the only genuine period of critical praise in Britain, by the Romantics (Green, *Story* 27). Over the years, Crusoe's situation and attitude have proven to spark interest, rather than his theological ruminations. Green

provocatively states that “[T]he spiritual autobiography aspect of the book is unimportant. There is no question that Defoe made use of that form, that framework, for his story. But it seems to me that ... everything that is vivid and exciting in the book is independent from that framework” (*Dreams* 76). Other aspects of the novel, such as the narrative voice, the later inferred problematic ideologies, and even, to some extent, the character of Crusoe himself, who does not “reward [readers’] interest in personality” as he is dry, inconsistent and whole aspects of his personal life, such as his marriage, remain untold (*Story* 28), have perhaps also contributed little to the myth’s enduring character. Instead, it may be suggested that what is “vivid and exciting,” and led to the novel’s popularity, is that it allows readers to imagine the island and Crusoe’s manufactures, which forms an important part of the survival theme.

James Joyce has described Crusoe as “an architect, a carpenter, a knife grinder, an astronomer, a baker, a shipwright, a potter, a saddler, a farmer, a tailor, an umbrellamaker, and a clergyman” (qtd. in Mukherjee 25), but the objects that come from these occupations might be as interesting to a reader as the amazing versatility Crusoe displays, as there are so many of them and the process that went into creating them foregrounds their materiality, drawing attention to their appearance through their imperfection.

Defoe himself, however, does not exploit the potential for sumptuousness and the sublime that his setting offers. He wanted to dissociate himself from “exotic, improbable prose,” because the merit of the work lies in “its lifelikeness” (Ellis 8), which together with the novel’s focus on ascetic protestant ethics might be the reason Defoe does not indulge in evocative descriptions of either turbulent emotion or sublime nature but, as J.M. Coetzee put it, offers “[n]o large words, no despair, just hats and caps and shoes” (qtd. in Festa 459). Luscious descriptions of nature might have gone against the “modern system’s [18<sup>th</sup> century] disapproval of luxury” (*Dreams* 22). As Virginia Woolf complains, “Nature must furl her splendid purposes; she is only the giver of drought and water...[Crusoe] thinks of

Nature...but the important thing about a wood is that it harbours an abundance of parrots that may be caught” (22). Furthermore, when Crusoe buries the corpses of some of his dead shipmates, instead of musing on death, he explains that the sun would soon make them smell bad (Woolf 22). Another telling example may be found when Crusoe first surveys his island “to see what kind of place he is in,” and rather than describing his fantastical surroundings, describes all he lacks in his present condition (39). The same happens when Crusoe famously describes his feelings of mastery and right of possession over the island. He praises its “abundance of cocoa trees, orange, and lemon, and citrus trees” but continues by saying they are “all wild, and very few bearing fruit” (80), drawing the conjured vision back into the perspective of human utility.

What may be gathered from Woolf’s objections is the striking absence of the sublime in *Robinson Crusoe*. The concept of the sublime was popularised midway the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and Edmund Burke described it as a “delightful horror” at the overpowering forces of nature (qtd. in Abrams 355). The sense of humility before nature has been explored often in the arts, but is strangely absent from *Robinson Crusoe* for modern readers, it seems. Crusoe’s pragmatic narration consequently impedes readers’ perception of the island to some extent, and amid the details of Defoe’s descriptions, the actual sublime impressions the island makes remain a gap left for the reader to fill in, and the opportunities for extravagance in the descriptions seem hardly exploited. It may well be that what actually draws readers and gives the tale its enduring fascination is that which is left unsaid.

Daniel Defoe’s original audience seems to have been in large part non-literary, which can be seen from *Robinson Crusoe*’s participation in the eighteenth-century spirit of the times. *Robinson Crusoe* has sparked two radically different interpretative modalities, an allegoric and an adventure tale interpretation. The latter of the two may be seen as the most enduring in the popular imagination. An important reason for its appeal to the imagination might be the

peculiar opposition between the tale's potential for experience of the sublime and the dry style that Defoe actually employs, which inspires readers to use their imaginations fully.

## 2. The "Blank Space" Speaks: Emancipating the Other Side

Even though the myth's strength and lasting nature owes largely to the a-political nature of the novel, the two interpretative modes merge in the context of contemporary cinematic adaptation, and the narrative is necessarily politicised. The underlying unmarked preconceptions that enabled the adventure genre to function as the "energizing myth" of imperialism (*Dreams* xi), unconcerned with what may in this context be called serious literature's demands of societal critique, can in the modern post-colonial age no longer be silently endorsed, because of different norms and increased audience sensitivity. *Robinson Crusoe* can therefore not be rendered in its original form, as it has to pay increased attention to the figure of Friday. Edward Said, in his *Culture and Imperialism*, partly included in Ashcroft et al. (96), speaks of the "immense wave of anti-colonial and ultimately anti-imperial activity thought, and revision [that] has overtaken the massive edifice of Western empire" and draws attention to the fact that "[f]or the first time Westerners have been required to confront themselves not simply as Raj but as representatives of a culture and even of races accused of crimes" (96). This perception of the West as another culture among cultures, rather than the normative inscriber of what was perceived as the "blank space" on the map of other continents (Said 97), is acutely visible in the contemporary cinematic adaptations of *Robinson Crusoe*. To tell the tale without inciting unease among the audience, the myth has been changed from one about imperialist enterprise and control to one about cultural encounter, and the fable may be said to be inverted by contemporary film adaptations in several respects. The visual allure of the tale remains unhampered by this, however.

*Robinson Crusoe*'s moral framework is often seen as a symbol of Western imperialist thought on the whole, but many of the modern reworkings focus on what may be taken as the

Other, repressed side of the dichotomy apparent in Defoe's tale. Rather than focusing on ratio, they focus on mystique; rather than on logos, they focus on pathos; and rather than on the cultivation Crusoe brings, they focus on nature's formidability.<sup>4</sup> The inversion that the films bring about, by which they infuse the story with the sublime, to a degree, may become apparent along the lines of these three oppositions, which are well-suited for visual representation. Rather than that Crusoe overcomes what Defoe considered the secondary elements, on screen he is profoundly changed by the island. Contemporary film versions, even if they carry the same title, are therefore radically different from the original. Along with these changes, Friday's role in the narrative must be altered, both because his original role is nowadays considered unacceptable and because he functions as the triumphant personification of the themes Defoe's novel suppressed.

John Richetti, in his introduction to the 2001 Penguin edition, calls Crusoe "the man of action and administrator all at once" as his narrative is never carried away with its own "thrilling extravagance" (xxvii), but remains exact and efficient. Defoe's style in *Robinson Crusoe* could be called enumerative in places, which is not surprising seeing the number of objects and considerations that he fits into his story. This style makes reading *Robinson Crusoe* laborious, echoing Crusoe's hard work. The diary-device Defoe uses is highly suitable for compression, as the written rather than oral narration of the tale allows for tables and lists, not prohibiting but also not necessitating a spirited account of the facts. Examples of this can be found when Crusoe describes the different seasons on the island (85), in the journal format in which Crusoe enumerates the first days he spends on the island (57), and the list of advantages and disadvantages about his stranding on the isle (54). Directors, however, seem more interested in indulging in the paradisiacal aspect of the island as the materiality of the objects themselves, not their abundance per se, provides the possibility of creating an

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<sup>4</sup> Hélène Cixous gives an interesting description of some of the hierarchised oppositions and their associations from which these three examples have been taken in her essay *Sorties*.

aesthetic experience.

They tend to focus on the mystical aspect of the story, rather than Defoe's ratio. When Defoe's Crusoe lists the advantages and disadvantages of his marooned state, he states that "my reason began now to master my despondency, I began to comfort myself as well as I could...and I stated it very impartially, like debtor and creditor" (53). By weighing his fortune carefully he eventually finds out that there is in each situation something "to be thankful for" (54). One of the clear morals to the story is that ratio and staying unperturbed by violent emotions bring happiness and salvation. Crusoe's situation, however, is at the same time profoundly mystical; Defoe suggests that Crusoe is doomed and that his shipwreck and solitude is a punishment from God, and Crusoe has a portentous dream about Friday's apparition. When Crusoe falls ill in the novel, he reproaches himself for his past life and his rejection of his parents' advice, and comes to understand why the ultimately benevolent "God has appointed all this to befall [him]" (74). Buñuel turns these musings into vivid, absurd dreams. In these, the fever-thirsty Crusoe is bound to branches and standing in water coming up to his waist. His father appears, alternating between washing a hog and floating corpse-like in the water. He refuses to bring his thirsty son relief, telling him that God will not forgive him and that he will die like a dog. Buñuel seems to associate Crusoe's misery with the punishment of Tantalus, turning Defoe's benevolent God into a wrathful one. He creates an ominous undertone to his practical narrative that follows Defoe's closely on the whole. Deschanel's and Gold's Crusoes go crazy on their own. They cannot survive by reason alone, but need human companionship as they face the questions that haunt them.

In a famous passage of the novel, Crusoe finds a cannibal's footprint on the beach. He panics initially, but mocks his fear later, saying "O what ridiculous resolutions men take, when possess'd with fear! It deprives them of the use of those means which reason offers for their relief" (126). Defoe's Crusoe's universe works along the lines of Crusoe's own world

view. This coincides with Defoe's style, which Michael Seidel, following Ian Watt, calls "circumstantial realism," in which the "novel takes time to reproduce highly probable actions in highly recognisable contexts," and probability is a more important aim than symbolism (108).<sup>5</sup> On several occasions, however, the cinematic Crusoes face unsettling manifestations of the island's agency which are not explained away afterwards. An example of this in all films is the scene in which Crusoe tries to explain Friday about God and Satan, and Friday confuses him by asking him why God does not kill Satan. In the novel, Friday finally accepts Christianity, even though Crusoe admits he is not the best teacher. In the films, however, Crusoe has to mature psychologically by learning to be culturally relativist, accepting the fact that he cannot control everything and that all is not as it seems. In Deschanel, Gold and Hardy and Miller's films, it turns out that Crusoe is mistaken about the cannibals' barbarity, and Friday ultimately refuses to abide by Crusoe's rules. The emphasis on Crusoe's powerlessness and the occult ways of the world have definitively replaced the light of supposed ratio in the cinematic adaptations, and the cinematic Crusoes do not gain complete dominion over the island.

Green describes Crusoe as being "so busy, so inventive, so unerotic" (*Dreams* 20). Nothing outside of his concerns about survival and the practical bare necessities seems to truly disturb Defoe's protagonist. This is illustrated when Crusoe states (72):

Even when I was afterwards, on due consideration, made sensible of my condition, how I was cast on this dreadful place, out of the reach of human kind, out of all hope or relief....as soon as I saw but a prospect of living, and that I should not starve and perish for hunger, all the sense of my affliction wore off, and I began to be very easy.

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<sup>5</sup> Gold ridicules this in his film, as he features an improbable scene in which Crusoe and Friday fly in a self-made hang glider.

Crusoe hardly feels lonely “for when [he] began to regret the want of conversation, [he] would ask [him]self whether thus mutually conversing with [his] own thoughts, and ... God himself... was not better than the utmost enjoyment of human society” (108). In the films, however, the importance of companionship and feeling is emphasised. Buñuel hints at Crusoe’s longing for female companionship through several scenes with a dress Crusoe salvaged from the ship, and Hardy and Miller even build in an entire love subplot and turn Crusoe into a dashing, duelling, romantic. He and Friday agree that “what matters is how you die” and that they will die like warriors. Crusoe’s voice-over even begins with the line “And so my story begins, like so many other stories, with a woman...,” which is radically different from Defoe’s Crusoe’s fatal journey, which starts with dreams of economic gains and is about survival rather than heroic deaths. The cinematic Crusoe’s appeal to audiences’ empathy by their emotional hardships and human desires, rather than by their wisdom in abstinence.

In all the examined films, emphasis on visual lavishness and visual comic relief are abundantly present. To a large extent, these give substance to the aforementioned “spots of indeterminacy” in *Robinson Crusoe*.

Buñuel’s film, despite its otherwise relatively strict adherence to the rhetoric of the original, builds in queer moments of luscious nature and jocular scenes. When Crusoe wakes up famished after his first night the island, for instance, he



**Figure 1** Buñuel's egg scene

finds a bird’s egg. When he opens it, however, there’s a fully hatched chick

in it, so he closes it again and puts it back in the nest. The scene is accompanied by generous

birds' songs and the shot is a distinct moment, with its long close-up. Meanwhile, the voice-over appears to be composed from sentences from Defoe's novel describing in neutral, abstract terms his hunger, and is thus disconnected from the vivid story that happens visually. Immediately, nature's stubbornness and quirkiness contrasts with the, to contemporary ears, lofty-sounding lines of Defoe. Later on, Buñuel keeps to the enumerating structure of Defoe, but supplies this with bountiful images of the types of animals Crusoe finds and the work he is doing. He adds scenes with exotic animals not mentioned in the novel, such as tarantulas, armadillos and octopuses. The same goes for the other filmmakers here discussed, who also rather concentrate on the exotic, adding, for example, dolphins and orchids (Hardy and Miller). In Deschanel's film, there are several shots of starved Crusoe attempting to eat exotic insects. Whereas Defoe's Crusoe, when enjoying a "delicious vale," says it looks "like a planted garden," (80) this domesticity is not what interests modern audiences. Even though the films pay much attention to Crusoe's belaboured cultivation it is constantly set as competing against the resisting environment of the island. In Gold's film, when Crusoe builds an elaborate race track out of palm shoots to teach Friday about sports, for example, he is not only laughed at by Friday but his British habits comically contrast with the natural means he has at hand. The focal point is nature rather than Crusoe's cultivation. The medium of film easily allows for this by pan-shots of the island to emphasise Crusoe's futility and smallness (Deschanel; Hardy and Miller), or by close-ups on natural phenomena, allowing them to take up full attention without being filtered by Crusoe's narration.

All in all, the films focus on the effect of the unknown on Crusoe, rather than the other way around, and Friday comes to symbolise this exchange. He is empowered as a figure voicing the dominant norms the films champion, largely in accordance with the traits of the literary stock character of the noble savage, and embodies the above-mentioned Other side of the dichotomy. He is friendly and welcoming when Crusoe enters his territory and he

facilitates Crusoe's survival by teaching him his techniques, in the films. This differs greatly from Defoe's original, in which Crusoe does not learn from Friday, and Friday is his guest rather than the other way around. In the novel, the cannibals are blood-thirsty and Crusoe is clement, as he postpones attacking them because he believes that God has not yet given him the right. In the films, this is often turned around or shown to be based on mutual misunderstanding. In Deschanel's film version, Friday's people are not cannibalistic, but rather sacrifice individuals in a relatively respectable religious rite. The gravity of the occasion is signalled by the elaborate decoration of the sacrificial site with tropical flowers. The intended victim, whom Crusoe christens Lucky, does not flee the scene until after Crusoe attacks the tribe. This signals that he understands the procedure but only loses heart at the last moment. He is later recaptured by another member of the tribe, however, who completes the ritual. This nameless man, i.e. Friday, captures Crusoe, and saves his life later on by pulling him out of a bog. It is clear that this version of Friday, who refuses to learn Crusoe's language, is his equal.<sup>6</sup> When Friday is finally captured by the men who save Crusoe, former slave trader Crusoe has grown wiser and secretly sets him free. In Hardy and Miller's version, the cannibal tribe Nima, whom Crusoe encounters performing a horrible ritual slaughter involving human hearts, are dehumanised figures, wearing boar masks or painted like a skull, who oppress Friday's people. Both films deviate from the novel, in which the cannibalism that warring tribes inflict on each other is plain "cooking" (159), and make it much less casual and emphatically cultural.

The tribes have cultural ethics in the films, signalled by their rites and own languages, whereas in the original they are a blank space. In the novel, it appears as if the indigenous people hardly think about religion and ethics, and therefore have not developed a culture. They worship the comically named "Benamuckee," which Timothy Blackburn cleverly reads

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<sup>6</sup> The same emphasis on the importance of whose language and names are used may be found in Hardy and Miller, as Crusoe finally learns to use Friday's spirit name.

as meaning “much-good” (370), who does not punish sinners and is therefore probably not intended to be taken seriously. Friday is so in awe of Crusoe’s gun, that Crusoe jocularly comments: “I believe, if I would have let him, he would have worshipp’d me and my gun” (167). In the films, however, Crusoe has to negotiate his relationship with him, as Friday no longer functions, as James Sutherland puts it, as “essentially, a more versatile, articulate and amusing dog”(qtd. in Blackburn 362). When in Hardy and Miller’s film, Friday puts Crusoe’s foot on his shoulder to show his servility to him, parodying a much condemned passage in the book, it turns out to be a trick when Friday jumps up and grabs Crusoe’s gun to threaten him. This sets the tone for the relationship, explicitly distanced from the original. Crusoe’s own ethics are scrutinized, too. When he is shocked at Friday’s intention to eat a heart, Crusoe’s voice-over comments: “How could I ever have imagined being a friend to this savage? I saw now that he was from another world, one surely ruled by Satan.” Visually, however, it has already been made clear that Friday is worthy material for friendship, and Crusoe’s prejudices, which the quote signals as coupled to Christianity, will prove misguided. In both Miller and Hardy’s and Deschanel’s films, Friday manages to capture Crusoe by means of a simple booby-trap, and demonstrates his warrior techniques are as good as smug Crusoe’s.

Deschanel’s and Hardy and Miller’s film attempt to emancipate Friday in similar ways, albeit Deschanel arguably does it more sophisticatedly than Hardy and Miller, who have Friday exclaim “white men no good!” passionately. Gold tells the story from Friday’s viewpoint entirely, which Chapter 3 will elaborate upon. In Buñuel’s version, Friday’s emancipation is less apparent, but the hierarchic structure in which Crusoe’s reason prevails is subtly subverted. In all films the emancipation of the wild side of the island is clear, and as Friday is made a symbol of that, he is indirectly promoted to the normative side of life on the island. In the book, however, Friday is merely another episode and does not appear to symbolise the island’s side. The films focus on mystique, pathos and nature rather than on

rationality, reasonable contentment and cultivation, and thus radically depart from the original's logic. Crusoe has to learn, rather than teach.

### 3. Island Narratives, Savagery and Power

In her discussion of Deschanel's *Crusoe*, Sharon Meagher explains that she reads *Robinson Crusoe* as "a story about mastery...not just about mastery of the elements or Friday (as if that weren't enough), but of mastery of his own self," because Crusoe is "continually" rewriting his personal narrative "in an effort to find that unity which will allow him to understand himself and then take control of the script... [so that] he is no longer the victim of fate or chance" (150). However, she fails to mention another element that infuses the tale with associations of power struggle, namely that it is part of the tradition of island narratives such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, in which power structures are highly significant. As island tales are usually placed outside of society and time, they necessarily focus on the human being per se.<sup>7</sup> The mis-en-scene of an island offers an opportunity to focus on the clash between the uncivilised aspects of humanity and the societal norms and structures that individuals maintain even when they are isolated. Protagonists have to overcome adversity and subject the island to their routines to live, and therefore it could be suggested that the stories always involve a power struggle. This power struggle is further emphasised in the context of postcolonialism. Even though the films aim for equality of Crusoe and Friday, the theme of power struggle which manifests itself in the relationship between Crusoe and Friday complicates an equal relationship between the two. Robert Mayer states Gold's, Buñuel's and Deschanel's films function as what postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha's calls "in-between spaces" (37), but as the power struggle problematizes the literary surroundings of an island's potential for providing what Bhabha calls the "Third Space"

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<sup>7</sup> In this context, by "island tale" is meant a story in which an individual or small group lands on a desert, uncultivated island.

(*Cultural* 156), as an equivalent of “in-between spaces,” Mayer’s idea does not seem to work.

Homi K. Bhabha draws on poststructuralist thought for the term “Third Space” (156), a key term within postcolonial theory which designates the in-between “passage” through which the two places of “I and You” in a statement meet, and which brings “ambivalence in the act of interpretation,” as meaning is not stable and therefore unknowable (156). He promotes the Third Space as a “cultural *practice* [sic]” (157), because it frustrates claims of knowledgability or purity of cultures, and thus invalidates “hierarchical claims” (156). The “instability” of the Third Space is “productive” because it combats polarity and promotes hybridity (157), which is a more fruitful, inclusive way to engage with cultural differences.

Martin Green names most island narratives written after Defoe’s, adaptations of it, in *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, a survey of what he deems works spawned from the “literary archetype” of *Robinson Crusoe* (2), as they feature as “[their] main character...the Robinson Crusoe story, which grows and changes, responding” to new societal anxieties (1). His list includes works like *Treasure Island* and *Lord of the Flies*. However, Green takes the adventure genre as the uniting factor of all the works he discusses (5), while it may be more productive to study stories set on a desert island as their uniting factor separately. They may be similar not because they have spawned from the same source material, but because of the questions desert islands as setting pose.

In island narratives, protagonists are not part of any society on the island. They are entirely free. This separated condition is highly suitable for explorations into human nature unbound by societal givens. Crusoe finds the structure of protestant ethics indispensable, turning his cultural background into a supposedly natural condition, while Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, for example, expresses the savagery of human beings outside of society. Another instance of an exploration into the fundamental drive of an individual may be found in Robert Zemeckis’ 2000 film *Cast Away*, in which the protagonist looks at the portrait of his fiancée

Kelly daily and draws pictures of her inside his cave, which signals the constancy of his love for her and its importance for him even in his castaway state.

This contrasts with Benedict Anderson's descriptions of the "structure of the old-fashioned novel" (25) which describes several coinciding storylines happening within the same community or nation and yokes those together while their protagonists do not even necessarily have to meet. Benedict Anderson describes how the emergence of "print-as-commodity" (37) in the sixteenth century reinforced the "national imagination"(30), replacing the old binding factors, such as religion. Individuals came to feel they belonged to the same community in large part because they were bound within the same national borders.

Island novels, with their single protagonist, differ greatly from the form Anderson describes, and are at risk of taking on a one-sided viewpoint. As authors speculate on what remains of human beings after society is taken away, they necessarily structure their worldview at the cost of other modes of being, and protagonists triumph over adversity, be it in the form of overcoming oneself, others, or nature. *Robinson Crusoe* has a single normative framework from which the actions Crusoe undertakes may be explained, and he must suppress anything that deviates from his standards. This can be conceived of as a power struggle. In a postcolonial context, however, people have become more sensitive regarding the exertion of power and implicit normativity of culturally hegemonic discourses. As cultural relativism questions the idea of universal structures governing human behaviour, different behaviour or ethics can no longer be inherently be vilified, which has affected storytelling. In critical adaptations of *Robinson Crusoe*, the passive resistance of the surroundings Crusoe has to conquer in the novel, such as Friday's non-Christian background, is turned into the active counter-voice of the Other. This is an often used way, according to Helen Tiffin, to denaturalise the "'fixity' of alterity" (101), and "[unveil]... assumptions, subverting the text" (100). Crusoe's exertion of power over a submissive "blank space" (Said 97), is thus turned

into an explicit conflict between rival forces, which foregrounds the power struggle theme. The adaptations of *Robinson Crusoe* here discussed do this by turning Friday into the personification of the Other, while in the novel the encounter with Friday takes up a relatively short section, and he is simply one more strange and surprising adventure as Crusoe's first convert (Sim 27), rather than the symbol of the wilderness of the uncultivated island.

Jack Gold's 1975 film *Man Friday*, adapted from Adrian Mitchell's 1973 play, can be seen as an instance of cinematic "canonical counter-discourse," or writing back (Tiffin 100). In this version, Friday tells the story to his people, a hippie commune-like tribe. He ridicules Crusoe and his ethics and has obviously become the moral victor. Crusoe tries to teach Friday English ways, such as sports, the notion of possession and Christianity, which Friday initially all finds highly amusing. Meanwhile Crusoe attempts to exploit Friday by letting him do all the work, which Crusoe regards as the natural order of things. Friday refuses to do work that is not equally divided between the two of them, and Crusoe agrees to pay him. When Friday has collected 2000 gold coins, he keeps Crusoe to the promise Crusoe jocularly made, which stipulates that Friday now has enough money to buy all Crusoe's property. Crusoe is the farcical personification of Western capitalist values. When Friday eventually takes him to the island where his tribe live, Crusoe begs to be allowed to live with them, but they contend that Crusoe is "sick beyond magic" and refuse. Eventually, in the director's cut of the film, Crusoe commits suicide. Gold's film empowers the margin and denaturalises what used to be considered the set values along which the original narrative operates.

Despite the criticism on Western values as well as on *Robinson Crusoe* itself that *Man Friday* offers, and the alternative modes of being it suggests, it does not "[renew] the past, refiguring it as an 'in-between space'" as Mayer suggests (37), by remaining inconclusive, ambivalent, and leaving space for multiple worldviews. The island-tale format of the story restricts this possibility, as the power struggle and its necessarily hierarchic outcome of the

format do not allow for hybridity. In *The Commitment to Theory*, partially included in Ashcroft et al. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Bhabha points out that “the problem of the cultural emerges only at the signifiatory boundaries of cultures” (155). The clash between cultures is indeed powerfully visible in the relationship between Crusoe and Friday. However, Bhabha continues by quoting Fanon, saying that “the time of liberation is a time of cultural uncertainty....[a] ‘zone of occult instability where the people dwell’” (155). The necessary instability to liberate all individuals is not established in the films, as Gold’s, as well as Hardy and Miller’s, and to a lesser extent, Deschanel’s adaptations work according to a logic in which the “[c]ultures are...dualistic in relation of Self to Other,” against which Bhabha warns (156). They pit the two cultures against each other, rather than allowing the two to merge and demonstrating hybridity.

The films are polarised, because *Robinson Crusoe* works from an established culture colonising an island and the anticolonial answer, such as Gold’s film offers, has often been to plant an established Other culture on it in the form of Friday. The enigma that the setting of a desert island poses is what an individual is in essence, and when authors offer a normative answer, they may tend to base their stories on stable essentialism, which cannot provide a “moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity” (*Location 5*). What is more, the adaptations are all normative in their message about Crusoe’s misguidedness, so the valorisation and power struggle are not solved, which seems necessary to achieve a Third Space.

The desert island tale offers a unique chance to authors to muse on the substance of solitary human beings. As the protagonists are not tied to society, they exist freely. In mastering the island, however, they exert power and implement normative structures, which is acutely problematic within the context of postcolonialism. Island narratives run risk of being essentialist as they may be one-sided in its conclusions about human nature. The structure of

*Robinson Crusoe* restricts its possibility for offering a Third Space as conceived by Bhabha, which is necessary for true emancipation and postcolonial hybridity. In *Dreams of Adventure*, Green suggests that “[t]he adventure form carries its own imperialist message, despite the individual artist’s intentions” (335). The same might tentatively be said of the island form to which *Robinson Crusoe* adheres. The hierarchic structuring that the form often entails also forms one of the fundamental problems inherent to colonial and imperial thought.

#### 4. Anticolonial or Postcolonial: Friday’s Problematic Symbolism

In cinematic representation, Friday is a complicated figure. Not only is he an essential element in the films, in which learning and cultural transmission is a paramount theme side by side the theme of the subjugation of nature, but he is to personify both the Other’s reaction to that subjugation and the possibility of mutual open-minded cultural transmission.

Furthermore, cinema infuses *Robinson Crusoe* with visual specificity, which highlights new problematic aspects of the tale. From the postcolonial viewpoint, the medium of cinema may itself be criticised. Ankhi Mukherjee speaks of the “death of the triumphant romance of the [conventional] novel” (533), but the same “triumphant romance” might also have died in film, as the narrative essence of many films is not capable of capturing postmodern realities, just as Mukherjee discusses with regard to the novel. Additionally problematic about the medium of these adaptations is the aspect of the visually symbolic and the definitiveness of what it portrays. Friday has become both a symbol of colonial Otherness and the contemporary resistance against it, which are mutually exclusive, and is a figure whose depictions deploy what Graham Huggan calls “the postcolonial exotic” (421).

Geoffrey G. Hartmann has warned against compulsive rewritings of the past, as they may “[alienate] person into persona, self into role, and every intended revolution into a degraded repetition of the past” (qtd. in Mukherjee 534). This danger seems to lurk for reappraisals of Friday, too, as they mould him into a symbol of two irreconcilable things.

Mukherjee refers to J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, a fragmentary postmodern rewriting of *Robinson Crusoe*, as postcolonial because it does not try to achieve these things, but rather lets the gaps in the narrative speak for themselves and refuses to explain mute Friday's silence. This gives Friday the agency of not revealing his secrets. Stories that have immersion as their goal, however, and are therefore not self-reflexive, mostly function along the lines of the hegemonic discourse as that is the narrative logic to which the audience is used. In popular culture, narratives still often adhere to dichotomies. However, whether the attempts are fruitful or not, Hollywood films reflect changes in society and have not been able to ignore the postcolonial.<sup>8</sup> In view of the audience's appreciation of underdog figures, previously subaltern groups standing up against injustice has perhaps almost become a stock action hero story.<sup>9</sup> Director Quentin Tarantino, for instance, stated in an interview: "I want to do movies that deal with America's horrible past with slavery and stuff but do them like spaghetti westerns, not like big issue movies" (Tarantino). This reflects that, perhaps, anticolonial struggle is becoming a common theme. Mainstream representation on the whole, however, is perhaps yet to become postcolonial.

Mukherjee suggests that "the great societies that produced the great novels from the past have died" (533), which might theoretically render Anderson's descriptions of the effect of synchrony as a binding factor in society and the "old-fashioned novel," obsolete (Anderson 25). In the postmodern era, multiple realities may be adhered to instead of "a sociological landscape of fixity," of one common reality with one common time (Anderson 30). However, many feature films as well as novels work from a similar narrative basis which offers the aesthetic pleasure of tacitly structuring and giving meaning to daily life. The "romance"

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<sup>8</sup> "Hollywood" is meant here as a stylistic description evoking a certain audience expectation, denotative of certain relatively nonexplorative visual and narrative style, rather than a place of origin.

<sup>9</sup> The upcoming release of Tarantino's 2012 film, *Django Unchained*, which follows an escaped slave in a farcical action narrative, may illustrate this. The trailer's ominous taglines include "Freedom... and the pursuit of vengeance" in a persiflage of the United States Declaration of Independence, and "Django is off the chain" (*Django*)

which Mukherjee refers to may be interpreted as some novels' tendency to represent the world as orderly and meaningful. Film's narrative structure follows literature's closely, it appears, and adaptations might sometimes perhaps even be forced to be more linear, as film adaptations generally have to cut their adapted texts rigorously to fit it into two hours' material. Hutcheon suggests that there is a general premise that "realist film requires cause-and-effect motivation, basically linear and resolved plot development, and coherent characterization:" demands that are not necessarily made of other media (43). Feature films often use the same synchronic devices as literature, by introducing separate storylines and rapidly switching between scenes. Furthermore, Anderson speaks of "this extraordinary mass-ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption ('imagining') of the newspaper-as-fiction" (35), but the same may be said of feature films.

Striving for a broad appeal, films attempt to appeal to a community, whereas the notion of a community as a Self is problematized in critical theory, among others by Anderson, in the move to a cosmopolitan, cultural relativist worldview. As the identity of the Self is defined in relation to the Other, the structures narratives implicitly impose on their representations of reality still follow binary distinctions, as Chapter 2 demonstrates. This representation becomes problematic when its artifice is implicit. As no representation can capture realities, it is politically important that it demonstrates its artifice and inherent situatedness, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has brought to the attention. She warns against the "banality" of situations in which intellectuals, or, one might infer, artists, "represent themselves as transparent" (28).<sup>10</sup> Postcolonial realities are too manifold to be covered by any single speaker or artist, as Coetzee's protagonist, Susan, illustrates when she says of her hometown "[h]ow can you ever close [it] in a book?" (*Foe* 122). *Man Friday* might form an illustration of this problem. Although the film clearly attacks a parodied form of Western

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<sup>10</sup> Spivak's essay is specifically about the representation of subaltern groups, whereas this text deals with representation of counter-canon ideology that is not at all subaltern, but her ideas may still be valuable for the problems inherent in representation as a whole.

European ideology, Friday's tribe is little more than a Self, binary opposed to supposed Western capitalist values. The audience is invited to identify with the tribe, but it is not based on any apparent historical community. The free love lives Friday's people lead, as well as their preference for singing and dancing and their constant harmony is an, albeit positive, Orientalist fantasy that seems based on 1970s hippie ideals. For the point the film tries to make, this is very productive, but it seems difficult to speak of an emancipatory dialogue of sorts, and the fictional cultural Other is again covertly used as a foil for the Self. The linearity of the narrative films here discussed demands a naturalised dichotomy and an implicit single normative framework, and from this pre-postcolonial paradigm stories cannot be told in a way that would be consistent with conclusions reached in postcolonial theory.

Furthermore, Friday has over time become potentially emblematic because of his racial Otherness as well as the focus on him in postcolonialism, and the films do not supply him with a historically specific cultural background to counter this effect. In an interesting passage about one of the illustrated versions of *Robinson Crusoe* (55), Blewett calls attention to the likeness of some depictions of Friday and his body language to the graceful, well-built silhouette pictures on urns, as he was slowly coming to be fashionable as noble savage and was "[n]o longer a figure of pathos or comedy, and certainly not of grotesque subservience" (55). This view of Friday is in line with Defoe's admiring descriptions of him (162). Blewett dates the effect in England back to the illustrator Stothard in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The development probably started in France mid-Eighteenth century, where Jean-Jacques Rousseau popularised the idea of the noble savage (Blewett 55).



X Noble profile [Hamilton Collection of antique vases]



IX Rescue scene T. Stothard – T. Medland 1790

Figure 2 Classical profiles (Blewett 56) and Stothard's illustration (55)

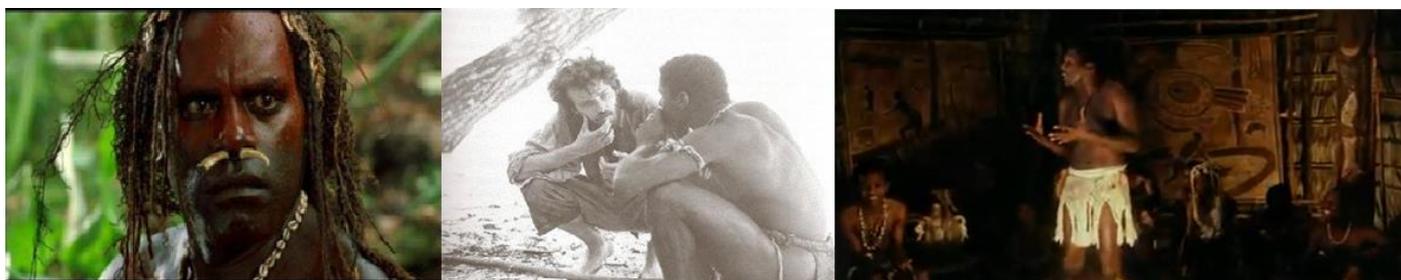
Buñuel has clearly taken over this imagery, just as he has taken much from the original frontispieces for the appearance of Crusoe.<sup>12</sup>



Figure 3 Buñuel's noble savage Friday

<sup>12</sup> This might signal his relative faithfulness to Defoe's novel, despite of its by then potentially antiquated paradigm.

Miller and Hardy's, Deschanel's and Gold's films, however, have turned Friday, whom Defoe calls an Indian, explicitly "not...like the Negroes" (162), in his novel, into a dark man dressed in supposedly traditional tribe attire. A reason for Deschanel's and Gold's association of Friday with African origins might be that Crusoe lets himself be called "Master" in the original, which connotes the trade in African slaves. Because cinema, as Hutcheon points out, must use "precise people, places and things" (43), it may seem a more suitable medium for the representation of Friday, as, paraphrasing Coetzee, it offer a place where bodies can be



**Figure 4** Left to right: Miller and Hardy, Deschanel and Gold's Fridays

their own signs rather than something else's (157). His visual rendering, however, is in all cases highly symbolic, as colonial history has made the figure as well as his position inextricably burdened with connotation and meaning. A simple change of storyline is not sufficient to let the figure speak for himself rather than act as an alternative for Crusoe's ways. Crusoe, on the other hand, is in all cases culturally specific as emphatically Protestant and British.<sup>13</sup>

Sharon Meagher poses that in the instances Defoe's Crusoe praises Friday, he praises Friday's likeness to himself, and it "is a matter of erasing the Other" (153). In Hardy and Miller's, Deschanel's and Gold's films this might be the main element that is changed, as Friday is praised mainly for his alterity. Meagher continues by saying that "Deschanel's film wrests the mantle of storyteller from Crusoe...[because of which] anti-colonial discourses rush in and overpower [Crusoe]" (153). Deschanel's film might be the most successful from

<sup>13</sup> Or American, as in Deschanel's film.

the viewpoint of postcolonial narrative as “there are no neat translations,” so it circumvents the mistake of “[reducing] everything to a single [Western] consciousness” (Meagher 154), but Friday’s symbolic status ensures the narration is still solidly Western.

Added to the problematic symbolism, another factor that influences the perception of Friday is what Graham Huggan calls “the postcolonial exotic” (421). Postcoloniality, which Huggan distinguishes from postcolonialism as it thrives on the market value of othering (421), often for a “Western metropolitan demand” (422), hampers postcolonial authors as “resistance emerges as a commodified vehicle of symbolic power” (422). The location of the island tale tempts artists to delve into the exoticism which finally restricts emancipation. This might be why Robert Mayer states that “[*Man Friday*’s] refusal to luxuriate in exotic locales and ‘surprising adventures’ constitutes its most resolute rejection of the objectionable politics of Defoe’s novel,” because it supposedly rejects the original to the extent that it denies the viewer enjoyment from the setting (45). Mayer does not explain, however, why he thinks that the film does not “luxuriate in exotic locale.” As the film abounds with white beaches and blue skies, it still speaks to the desert island fantasy, and Friday’s tribe especially contributes to this dream. Friday symbolises the exotic Other, as that draws audiences, and that position restricts what message his figure might possibly carry.

As Mayer suggests, “an anti-colonial rhetoric [is not necessarily] a post-colonial reappropriation” (44). Coetzee’s *Foe* might exemplify how postcolonial narration may be achieved, but Western feature films are bound to narrative rules and audience expectations that interfere with a radically postcolonial message, as their attempts to liberate Friday demonstrate. The symbolic position Friday has acquired through the ages and the interests linked to postcoloniality continually keep him in the position of exotic Other. This is not remarkable seeing that he himself is not portrayed as culturally specific, and therefore has no message of his own.

### Conclusion

Green's idea that Defoe's novel was able to uphold its imperialist undercurrent uncritically because it did not aim to belong to the literary tradition, even though imperialism and capitalism were criticised even in Defoe's own day and age, seems plausible (49, 57, 90). Over time, however, among other things because different philosophies took up Crusoe as a symbol for the Western capitalist mentality, the tale gained a more complex interpretation than that of simple adventure tale, namely that of political allegory. Postcolonial authors, such as Coetzee, have used this potential to write back critically to the Western ideological centre, but the allegorical interpretation is perhaps not what makes the story appealing for visual adaptation. It is more likely that this appeal comes from the opposition between the tale's potential for descriptions of experience of the sublime and Defoe's refusal to indulge in them, which creates a major gap for readers and filmmakers to fill in.

One may wonder, however, whether the cinematic adaptations really are retellings of the same story, because in many respects they advocate the exact opposite of what Defoe did. Their focus is on the natural, emotional and the mystical elements that Defoe suppresses in favour of the cultivation, ratio and logic appreciated by eighteenth-century English protestant merchants. Friday comes to be Crusoe's teacher rather than the other way around, not only because audience sensitivity towards colonial practice has increased and directors need to respond to this, but also because Friday becomes the symbol of the wild side of the island that is preferred over Crusoe's conscientiousness and homeliness.

The adaptations necessarily engage with postcolonial emancipation, but having this as an element of the plot does not ensure a postcolonial narration, as Coetzee's *Foe* arguably manages to achieve. The political and entertaining modes of interpreting *Robinson Crusoe* cannot easily be combined, as they demand different narrative conventions. The films' attempts to do so, however, are fascinating, because charting them allows for in-depth inquiry

into the problems of representation and into the symbolic status of a subject's interference with its ability to carry its own message.

One reason that the films do not succeed in emancipating the Other, lies in the structural features of *Robinson Crusoe*'s island format. As the genre of desert island tales offers artists an opportunity to comment on human nature, it tempts them to be essentialist. What is more, the tales may revolve around a power struggle because the authors' perception of human nature becomes apparent from the hierarchizing structures that their protagonists deem necessary to impose on their desert islands. This prevalent theme in island novels restricts their potential for operating as the Third Space necessary for postcolonial multiculturalism, in which the recognition of hybridity invalidates claims of hierarchical opposition. Crusoe and Friday symbolise opposing qualities, and the implicit value judgements of the films' messages, made more acute in a postcolonial context, ensure that they cannot be equals.

Narrative film, as a medium, also interferes with the adaptations' attempt for postcolonial representation. Audiences' demand for the "postcolonial exotic" keep Friday in the position of the Other. What is more, the films' narratives need an Other to structure their message. Even though it may theoretically appear as if a visualised Friday, played by an actual actor, may more easily bypass his problematic symbolic status, in these films that is not the case.

When the films are compared with key concepts from critical postcolonial theory, it becomes clear that the emancipation of Friday cannot be achieved from the viewpoint of conventional, Western narration; it is only possible if Friday speaks from a culturally specific, non-Western position. However, in that case, he would probably no longer be a Friday.

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