

Jean-Michel Racault. *Robinson & compagnie: aspects de l'insularité politique de Thomas More à Michel Tournier*. Paris: Éditions Pétra, 2010. 374pp. 29€. ISBN 978-2-84743-033-2.

If the robinsonade has remained a significant sub-genre of fiction since the eighteenth century, the contemplation of this variation on a theme of Daniel Defoe is becoming a sub-genre of the criticism of the novel, from Martin Green's *Robinson Crusoe Story* (1990) to Jean-Paul Engélibert's *La Postérité de Robinson Crusoe* (1997). Jean-Michel Racault's *Robinson & compagnie*, the most recent study to join the sub-genre, attempts to show why the robinsonade was and remains an important literary form—why the pattern of shipwreck, redemption on the island, and return to Western society is so fertile for European literature. He argues that so far from being a somewhat primitive writer with unexamined ideas, Defoe had one of the most complex minds of his time, passing on that complexity to a host of future authors fascinated by the possibilities inherent in Crusoe's narrative. Defoe's treatment of guilt, isolation, the concept of the self, the fear of the other (in the form of the cannibals), Crusoe's socialization with the coming of Friday, his attempt at establishing a kind of contractual government among the settlers, and his emergence as the governor of his island with the suppression of the mutineers all raised serious questions for his time and for the centuries that have followed.

Part of a series on "des Îles," Racault's book begins with a section on Thomas More's *Utopia*—a revisit to a work that was a key reference point for his own book on Utopias. Racault states the difference between the robinsonade and the Utopia succinctly. In a robinsonade, an isolated character (or a group) struggles to survive and actively transforms the surrounding nature; in a Utopia, a character arrives at an already formed, ideal society for which he usually expresses his uncritical admiration. Since it is already perfect, there is nothing to change. If Utopias depict an ideal society, they nevertheless depend on a dialectic with the real world; similarly, the robinsonade creates a dialectic with the original place of departure, through the creation of a society that, by its relative simplicity, serves as a critique of the outside world. If it is not always on a literal island, the robinsonade nevertheless always has an island mentality. It does not offer perfect solutions to the political, economic, social, and psychological problems of the civilized world in the manner of a Utopia, but rather a new way of seeing them.

In approaching his subject, Racault uses Gérard Genette's concept of "hypertextualité." There were robinsonades before Defoe co-opted the form, and to some extent, versions of the Crusoe story written after Defoe's work modify the ways in which we view the original. The chapter on Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is excellent in this regard. Defoe

had probably read the Dryden-Davenant version and certainly knew of the political struggles of those wrecked on Bermuda who inspired Shakespeare. Crusoe as the magician Prospero? Caliban as a Friday incapable of adapting to his master's whims? And if Ibn Thofail's Hayy ben Yaqdhân and Gracian's Andrenio give us directions in which Defoe might have gone (but, for the most part, did not), so Jules Verne's wind-blown balloonists, remnants of America's Civil War, show how Crusoe's recreation of human development, with his pottery and bread-making, might have taken shape with the influence of nineteenth-century science.

In his examination of *Robinson Crusoe*, Racault attempts to reconcile the realism of the style with what he considers to be a symbolic pattern in line with the interpretations of G.A. Starr and J. Paul Hunter. He provides three detailed readings of the novel in the form of the seeming miracle of the European grain growing on the island; of the cave with the goat; and of Crusoe's assuming his role of "master" over Friday. With this last reading, I would only object that Crusoe's reading of Friday's gesture in placing Crusoe's foot on his head hardly includes Crusoe's wishful interpretation that Friday would be his servant forever. The notion that the making of bread has religious connotations is hardly a stretch, but surely such echoes are drowned in the wealth of economic ideas that pulse through the text. Of these three, the least convincing is the view of the cave with the goat as representing Crusoe's sinful life while the second cave is a kind of experience of Heaven. It may well be asked how the latter view fits with his decision to store his gunpowder there or his sense that he would be able to hold off the cannibals from such a fortress. Finally, in respect to another interpretation, while no one would quarrel with Crusoe's guilt over disobeying his father, we may properly wonder whether, in accord with contemporary religious thought, Crusoe's father did not have a duty to choose a calling more in keeping with his son's "wandering Fancy."

In Racault's view, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, exists for us as a complex myth that deserves serious treatment. In his final chapter, he severely criticizes Michel Tournier's *Vendredi* (1967) for departing so thoroughly from the pattern established by Defoe while attempting to replace it by what to Tournier's mind must have seemed a narrative that teaches a better moral. His *Vendredi* rejects what Crusoe has to offer by way of knowledge and instead teaches Crusoe a great deal, some of which Crusoe hopes to impart to the boy who has fled to the island to avoid the very life on the *Whitebird* that draws Friday to leave the island. To Racault's mind, Tournier's work seems now a somewhat dated product of the worship of the third world and of the "primitive." Despite Tournier's attempt at attaching various philosophic trappings to his savage, Racault argues that he did little more than replicate the original ideals of Club Med. While Tournier's sympathy for the oppressed third-

world peoples in Europe seems genuine enough, Racault appears to find what he considers the vulgarization of the robinsonade unforgivable.

Although most of the essays in the volume have been published separately, and although some sections are repetitious, it is a valuable study, not only for the interpretations of individual works but also for the varied viewpoints. The readings of More's *Utopia*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and Verne's *L'Ile mysterieuse* against the historical background suggested by each work are excellent. Racault argues that they all comment mainly by way of absence. For example, Crusoe is on his island during almost the entirety of the reigns of Charles II and James II. There appears to be no political commentary, yet, as Racault suggests, in the failure of absolutism, the establishing of toleration, and the gradual development of contractual relations, politics plays a critical role on Crusoe's island—a role it could not play in England at that time. Similarly explorative are Racault's discussions of the relationships of the writings of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and Jean-Jacques Rousseau to *Robinson Crusoe*. As I suggested at the beginning of my review, there have been other studies of this kind, but none with such original insight into the potentialities of the subject.

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Leon Guilhamet, *Defoe and the Whig Novel: A Reading of the Major Fiction*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010. 243pp. US\$56.60; CAN\$70.75. ISBN 978-087413-089-8.

Leon Guilhamet proposes an alternative story of origins for the eighteenth-century English novel, one that considers "Whig culture" to be the most important influence on the development of the form, and one that considers Daniel Defoe to be the key figure in its rise. Even after his withdrawal from direct political activity, Guilhamet argues, Defoe maintained his commitment to Whig revolutionary principles, but "transferred his political, cultural, and social concerns to the realm of fiction." Taken together, Defoe's major works of fiction "create a series of Whig myths, which helped to form British culture in the early eighteenth century and influenced it far beyond that time" (15).

At the same time that he pursues a reconceptualization of the rise of the novel, Guilhamet wants to demonstrate that Defoe was a more accomplished writer of fiction than he has sometimes been given credit for. Though he often wrote in haste, Guilhamet insists, Defoe displayed a consistent sense of purpose in his novels. Charges that he advanced contradictory ideas as occasion (or financial need) demanded stem, in large measure, from the confused state of the Defoe canon after a half-