

MAN'S RETURN TO NATURE: AN ECOCRITICAL APPROACH TO TOURNIER'S

VENDREDI OU LES LIMBES DU PACIFIQUE

by

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(Under the Direction of Jonathan F. Krell)

ABSTRACT

Ecocriticism, a holistic approach to literature that seeks to examine the relationship between man and his environment, maintains that literature cannot be approached in a way that sets man and nature in opposition to each other. Instead, it must be approached in a way that examines man as part of an ecosystem; he is neither master nor slave to it, but simply one part of an intricate system.

In *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*, a contemporary adaptation of *Robinson Crusoe*, Michel Tournier shows us that if man is to be complete and content, he cannot continue to view himself as existing apart from the natural world. He must instead begin to view himself as being part of the entire ecological system. Tournier demonstrates that if the natural world is to survive, man cannot continue to overpower his surroundings; he must learn to live in harmony with them.

INDEX WORDS: Michel Tournier, Robinson Crusoe, ecocriticism, ecology in literature

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my sister Jodi who has helped me to remember that at some point, you have to stop studying a problem and start doing something about it.

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I would like to thank Dr. Craige, Dr. Raser, and Dr. Krell for their advice throughout this process. They have taught me many new ways of thinking that I would not have otherwise been exposed to. To that end, I would especially like to thank Dr. Krell, who first introduced me the works of Michel Tournier and who has been an invaluable teacher and mentor.

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Chapter I. Introduction

The last several decades, and especially the last several years, have witnessed the emergence of ecocriticism, a holistic approach to texts that examines the perceived relationship between man and nature, as well as the role that nature and the environment play in the humanities. This approach to literature has shown itself to be especially relevant given the growing environmental crisis. Following in the path of feminist and post-colonial criticism, both of which examine the relationship between the majority and the minority, ecocriticism seeks to study the relationship between man and his environment. In many ways, the environment may be considered with women and the colonized population as oppressed and ignored beings. Ecocriticism maintains that literature may be approached in a way that examines man as part of an ecosystem; he is neither master nor slave to it, but simply one part of an intricate system.

In a contemporary adaptation of *Robinson Crusoe*, Michel Tournier shows us that if man is to be complete and content, he cannot continue to view himself as existing apart from the natural world. He must instead begin to view himself as being part of the entire ecological system. In *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*, Robinson has to decide whether or not it is his right to civilize the island of Speranza. Although Robinson initially believes that civilization must overpower nature, Tournier shows us that this idea is false, and that “civilization”, in this instance, is synonymous with “domination”. While trying to overpower Speranza, Robinson feels a constant tension between the cultured, civilized life that he has established and the more primitive, natural state of being that he has experienced. This tension ceases once Robinson, thanks in part to Vendredi, is able to abandon the society with which he is familiar and

incorporate himself into nature. Tournier thus demonstrates that if the natural world is to survive, man cannot continue to overpower his surroundings; he must learn to live in harmony with them.

Robinson arrives on the island, a product of his Western upbringing. Alone on the island, he is the sole representative of civilization. Tournier creates a feeling of tension between Robinson and his surroundings throughout the novel. The text opens with a demonstration of nature's fury; Robinson and his companions are helpless against the storm that capsizes the ship. Once on the island, Robinson finds himself at odds with virtually every aspect of his surroundings. His angry murder of the wild goat demonstrates his hostility towards the natural world that seems to be punishing him. His weeks on the island are marked by menace: the hot sun, the inhospitable jungle, the murder of the goat, and the vultures that constantly hover over him. His sole desire during this time is to escape and to return to civilization. Robinson sets to work making the island a cultivated environment once he acknowledges the impossibility of rescue. He is attempting to re-create Western civilization. While doing so, he rarely takes the ecosystem of the island into consideration. Instead, his initial relationship with the island, which he has christened Speranza, is self-serving and anthropocentric.

While creating his new civilization, Robinson exists in philosophical isolation from his surroundings. The establishment of his "village" distances him from Speranza. As a result, he views all intimacy with the land as something base, something shameful. For Robinson, a descent into the *souille* (mire) is synonymous with insanity. The *souille* represents a complete break from the civilization that he is holding onto. In an effort to maintain his sanity, Robinson establishes an island calendar and a charter. Western culture has instilled in him the idea that time proceeds in a linear fashion. Robinson is troubled when he realizes that he has no idea how much time has passed since the shipwreck. He thus imposes linear time onto the island by

establishing a calendar that marks the passage of time in a familiar way. The marking of time creates tension between Robinson and the island. While the water clock runs, Robinson is the Governor and order reigns. He is tempted by the *souille* and the freedom that it represents, but he is able to resist so long as the clock ticks. Each time the clock stops and time ceases to matter, Robinson abandons his duties and allows himself to descend to a more natural state. As he spends more time on the island, he begins to catch glimpses of “another island”, a version of Speranza that is warmer and more welcoming than that which he had previously known. The “other island” is not a physical island, but rather a psychological state of Robinson’s. The visions of this island initiate the process of transformation. By catching glimpses of this other island, Robinson begins to see that he can exist harmoniously with Speranza.

Robinson’s revelation regarding Speranza is delayed by Vendredi’s arrival. With a new companion, Robinson reverts to the cultural practices that he once knew. “The dualism of spirit and matter (or mind and body)” that “provided a rationale for ranking humans above ‘nature’, human above brute [. . .] and white above colored” (Craigie 9, 10), is evident in Robinson’s assertion that Vendredi is “au plus bas degré de l’échelle humaine” (*VLP* 146) simply because he is colored. Instead of viewing Vendredi as a companion in his solitude, and thus an equal, Robinson sees him as less than human: someone to be treated as a slave.

It is not only his skin color that renders Vendredi distasteful to Robinson; his affinity with the natural world is something that Robinson does not comprehend. Robinson’s inability to understand Vendredi’s close relationship with nature can be traced directly to the Judeo-Christian story of creation, which establishes man’s right to rule over the other creatures of the earth. According to this ideology, not only is man separate from nature, he is superior to it (L. White 9). Robinson’s relationships on the island bear the hallmarks of this creation story.

Speranza may fulfill many roles for Robinson, but he does not ever consider her as an equal. Once Vendredi arrives, Robinson never questions his right to treat him as an inferior being. According to Robinson, Vendredi's skin color and his cultural heritage are sufficient qualifications for domination. It is Robinson's assumption that he is superior that leads to tension between Vendredi and him. Vendredi's Dionysian nature often bursts through his apparent submissiveness, frustrating Robinson. The tension between the two, like the tension between Robinson and Speranza, builds until it is finally released by the explosion of the cave, which is caused by Vendredi.

The explosion marks the pivotal point in the novel. Robinson's psychological ties with civilization are completely severed once the material trappings of civilization are destroyed. With the cultivated island gone, Robinson is free to exist in the "other island" that has seduced him for so long. At this point, his relationships with Vendredi and with Speranza are completely inverted. He is no longer the master of either. Instead, Vendredi begins to guide him, showing Robinson how to exist as part of an ecosystem. He has completely discarded his previous notions of civilization. Whereas Robinson's previous existence on the island can be considered Promethean, his new existence is decidedly Dionysian. Vendredi represents the best attributes of Dionysus: a love of nature, a love of laughter, a love of life. Through Vendredi's guidance, Robinson comes to see that man is no different than any other animal and must exist as part of a whole.

The myth of Robinson Crusoe is above all a myth of solitude. According to Arlette Bouloumié, "[l]es effets de l'absence d'autrui sur le comportement, la pensée, et la perception de Robinson est le sujet philosophique de *Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique*" (45). While the absence of a conventional Other is apparent, the island, personified as Speranza, assumes the role

of an Other that is totally strange to Robinson. Robinson is left without human companionship by which he can define himself. After several days on the island, he laments the lack of human companionship: “La solitude n’est pas une situation immuable où je me trouverais plongé depuis le naufrage de la *Virginie*. C’est un milieu corrosif qui agit sur moi lentement, mais sans relâche et dans un sens purement destructif. [. . .] A Speranza, il n’y a qu’un point de vue, le mien, dépouillé de toute virtualité” (*VLP* 52,53). The lack of other viewpoints causes Robinson to doubt his own senses. By renaming Speranza and associating the island with an old lover, Robinson creates another presence to alleviate his solitude. He begins to define himself through his relationship with the island. Once he is able to define himself, his relationship with the island starts to evolve. He is no longer wholly repulsed by Speranza’s otherness. His moments of repulsion become fewer and fewer, until his disgust lies with himself, and not with Speranza. Robinson is able to recognize the beauty of Speranza, but he is still unable to incorporate himself into nature. There is always a separation between Robinson and his surroundings; his periods of bestiality where he is closest to Speranza fill him with disgust when he is at his most civilized.

Robinson and Speranza’s relationship becomes more and more complex as the novel progresses, and Speranza alternately assumes the roles of mother and of lover. Robinson’s attitude towards Speranza as a lover is alternately one of domination and one of reverence. The first time that Robinson thinks of Speranza as a woman, he associates her with “le très profane souvenir d’une ardente Italienne qu’il avait connue jadis” (*VLP* 45). The fact that the memory is “profane” implies that Robinson will relate to Speranza in a way that is decidedly non-spiritual. The profanity that Robinson attributes to Speranza is the clearest when he finds Vendredi in the *combe* (valley): “Il s’agit d’élever sa colère, de lui donner un ton plus pur, plus sublime. [. . .] Il s’adresse à ses filles, les mandragores, et les prévient contre leur mère, la terre adultère” (*VLP*

177). He seeks solace in the Bible, but his interpretation of the passages that he reads condemn Speranza, turning her into a seductive whore. This passage stands in direct contrast to his interpretation of readings from the Song of Songs. In that passage, the Lover is inextricable from the Earth, and Robinson reveres Speranza as his beloved. The alternation between profanity and reverence mirrors the way that men have viewed the earth for centuries. It is either something to be condemned and tamed, or something to be romanticized. While Robinson is becoming closer to Speranza, he is still separate from her.

Prior to the explosion, Robinson becomes a part of Speranza only when he views her as a mother. This is especially evident when he goes into the cave. He enters into the cave in order to seek out the most intimate parts of the island. For Robinson, the cave represents “sa vie seconde-celle qui commençait lorsque, ayant déposé ses attributs de gouverneur-général-administrateur, il arrêta la clepsydre ” (VLP 101). In this ‘second life’, “Speranza n’était plus un domaine à gérer, mais une *personne*, de nature indiscutablement féminine” (VLP 101,102). The cave, shaped like a womb in the belly of Speranza, cradles Robinson while he retreats from the civilization that he has created. When Robinson casts aside the constraints pressed upon him by Western civilization, he is able to appreciate the other island that he believes exists. Instead of oppressive solitude, Robinson feels closer to Speranza than he had above ground. At this point in the narrative, Robinson is closer to nature than he has been before. Even though he is in the cave, he can see everything going on above ground. He also realizes how fluid time is. His life is no longer regulated by the relentless ticking of the clepsydra (water clock); instead, his conscious thought moves so freely between past and present that he has no idea how long he has been inside the cave. When he emerges, he is unable to decide whether a recess into the cave is good

or bad. Back above ground, he is again unable to abandon the dualistic thinking that comes so naturally to him: a recess into the cave can only be one of two absolutes: either good or bad.

Speranza on her own is not capable of transforming Robinson into a more natural being. In order to for him to completely transform, all ties to his previous way of life have to be cut. Simple rebirth is not sufficient; he must be reborn and then learn a completely new way of life. Before his transformation he is in the process of destroying Speranza. Under the tutelage of Vendredi, Robinson comes to realize that he must view himself as simply one part of a whole. Both Robinson and Speranza flourish once Robinson understands that he cannot continue to abuse the land. Speranza and Robinson, with the help of Vendredi, enter into a relationship that is mutually beneficial. This relationship between man and nature is so strong that Robinson succeeds in rejecting civilization when it is again offered to him. At the end of the novel, the departure of Vendredi and the arrival of Jeudi brings Robinson in a full circle: he began as the master of Speranza and Vendredi, descended to the position of their student, was elevated to the rank of equal, and is finally able to teach the lessons that Vendredi and Speranza once taught him.

Robinson's life on Speranza can be divided into two periods: the restricted, contrived life that Robinson leads before Vendredi causes the cave to explode, and the free, natural life that the two lead after the explosion. The first part of the book is marked by strong oppositions. Robinson's perceived superiority over Speranza and Vendredi is the direct result of the civilization that he has been raised in. The idea that Western man is the rightful ruler over the earth can be traced to the Judeo-Christian creation story, which puts forward the idea that man is subordinate only to God. European scholars would later build on this idea and designate the white, Western male as the highest ranking among human beings. Robinson's attitude of

domination manifests itself in three ways: his extensive cultivation of the island, his sexual relationship with Speranza, and his perceived racial superiority over Vendredi.

The second part of the book, which begins with the explosion in the cave, allows Vendredi to become Robinson's teacher. Vendredi, whose Dionysian nature connects him to the natural world in a way that Robinson has yet to understand, shows Robinson how to forge a relationship with Speranza that is marked by equality, not dominance. Finally, Speranza herself assumes a significant role throughout the narrative. The lack of companionship begins to destroy Robinson's sense of self. Speranza therefore takes the role of the Other, which allows Robinson to maintain his sanity. It also allows him to retain vestiges of his previous life in England and as a result remain separate from the island. Speranza also takes on the role of Mother. It is her assumed maternity that allows Speranza to help Robinson in his transformation from a civilized Englishman to a natural being similar to Vendredi. Finally, it is Robinson's perception of time that marks the totality of his transformation. Whereas before the explosion he measured every minute and every hour, he now admits that "depuis que l'explosion a détruit le mât-calendrier, je n'ai pas éprouvé le besoin de tenir le compte de mon temps" (*VLP* 219). Robinson perceives that time has become circular, signifying his complete integration into his ecosystem.

Chapter II. The Demiurge: Robinson's illusory order

Like the Demiurge in his tarot reading done before the shipwreck, Robinson's immediate task on the island is to create order and civilization. He arrives on the island after the shipwreck and finds it completely devoid of human life. He has stumbled upon an island paradise, virtually virgin territory. The island's Edenic quality is evoked by Tournier in a passage that eloquently describes the extent of Robinson's solitude: "Puis il attendit, les lèvres serrées, semblable au premier homme sous l'Arbre de Connaissance, quand toute la terre était molle et humide encore après le retrait des eaux" (*VLP* 31). Not only is Tournier evoking the island's Edenic qualities, he is also creating a parallel between Robinson and Adam. Like Adam, Robinson is completely alone. Since he is the sole human being, he is unchallenged in his authority, much like Adam in his authority over Eden. Adam's right to reign over the earth is a virtually undisputed interpretation of the Judeo-Christian creation story. Most accepted versions leave little room for an interpretation of equality; the first man's dominion over the earth comes straight from God. According to some scholars, the Judeo-Christian tradition is the basis of Western man's superiority over his surroundings.

By gradual stages a loving and all-powerful God had created [. . .] the earth and all its plants, animals, birds, and fishes. Finally, God had created Adam and, as an afterthought, Eve to keep man from being lonely. Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And,

although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image. Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. (L. White 9)

According to the story, God first creates all of the earth and everything contained therein; and since it all needs a master, he creates man in his image. As a result, man believes that he is one step below God. Man is then given Eden to rule, and according to some versions of the passage, is given jurisdiction to name the animals and the plants. Thus the major Western religion creates a relationship of master/servant between man and nature that can be traced back to the beginning of mankind.

The Judeo-Christian creation story stands in direct contrast with the beliefs held by ancient Greeks, whereby all elements of nature had their own guardian spirits.

In Antiquity every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own *genus loci*, its guardian spirit. These spirits were accessible to men, but were very unlike men; centaurs, fauns, and mermaids show their ambivalence. Before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or dammed a brook, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation, and to keep it placated. By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects. (L. White 10)

The potential for this sort of pagan animism is present on the island in two forms: the giant cedar that often serves as a sort of protector for Robinson, and Robinson's "daughters" the mandrakes. The cedar, which is often present during Robinson's spiritual metamorphosis, has the potential to console him after the shipwreck: "Un cèdre

gigantesque qui prenait racine aux abords de la grotte s'élevait [. . .]. Lorsque Robinson s'éveilla, une faible brise nord-ouest animait ses branches de gestes apaisants. Cette présence végétale le réconforta et lui aurait fait pressentir ce que l'île pouvait pour lui, si toute son attention n'avait été requise et aspirée par la mer" (*VLP* 18). Likewise, it is this same tree that witnesses his initial descent into the cave, and that is finally uprooted after the explosion in the cave. The mandrakes also serve as a type of "genus loci". Although their humanity is simply a projection of Robinson's affection for them, he nevertheless imagines them as his daughters. Since legend says that the mandrake grows "from the semen ejaculated by a hanged man" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 634), Robinson only finds the plant in the comb, the deep valley that Robinson imagines to be Speranza's vagina. He often attributes human characteristics to them, which allows them to play the role of the "genus loci" of the comb. However, like his Christian ancestors, Robinson is often indifferent to the "feelings of natural objects". In his mind, a tree is nothing but that which provides shade and wood. He never considers the natural effects of his cultivation; his only concern is for himself and for his own needs. His indifference naturally results in a profound alienation from the island. This is especially evident when Robinson comes into direct contact with other animals:

Le sentiment de sa dérélition assagi par la vue de ses champs labourés, de son enclos à chèvres, de la belle ordonnance de son entrepôt, de la fière allure de son arsenal, lui sauta à la gorge le jour où il surprit un vampire accroupi sur le garrot d'un chevreau qu'il était en train de vider de son sang. [. . .] Une autre fois, alors qu'il cueillait des coquillages sur des rochers à demi immergés, il

reçut un jet d'eau en pleine figure. Un peu étourdi par le choc, il fit quelques pas, mais fut aussitôt arrêté par un second jet qui l'atteignit derechef au visage avec une diabolique précision. Aussitôt la vieille angoisse bien connue et si redoutée lui mordit le foie. (*VLP* 47-48)

These encounters leave Robinson feeling more alone than ever. Instead of finding joy in what are his only interactions with other living beings, he laments his alienation from the outside world. He considers nature to be something entirely different from himself, and so is unable to find solace in the fact that he is surrounded by abundant life. He is in no way alone, even though he lacks human companionship.

Naturally, Robinson's initial thought once he finds himself alone on the island is one of survival. With very few resources on hand, he logically relies on his surroundings in order to provide for himself. He thus begins his attempt at survival much like early man: as a hunter-gatherer. Robinson lives off what he is able to find and kill on the island. As Tournier writes, Robinson "consacra les semaines qui suivirent à l'exploration méthodique de l'île et au recensement de ses ressources. Il dénombra les végétaux comestibles, les animaux qui pouvaient lui être de quelque secours, les points d'eau, les abris naturels" (*VLP* 43). It would seem that Robinson is acting in a manner that would best incorporate him into an ecosystem; he is, after all, using the natural resources that are available to him. What lacks in this relationship is reciprocity and equality. In order to truly be a part of the island's ecosystem, he must stop considering himself as the most important component. He must instead consider which of his actions are the most beneficial to the entire ecosystem. Robinson is, however, an exploiter; he takes whatever will most benefit himself with no consideration of its effects on the island.

Robinson is initially happy to survive off what he can find on the island. As soon as he realizes that this will not sustain him in a civilized manner, he sets to work cultivating the land. At this point, Robinson's attitude toward Speranza changes. He is no longer content to merely survive. In his own words: "Je sais maintenant qu'il ne peut être seulement question ici de survivre. Survivre, c'est mourir. Il faut patiemment et sans relâche construire, organiser, ordonner" (*VLP* 52). For him, mere survival is equivalent to the loss of everything that connects him to his past life. Survival, here a sort of animalistic existence void of writing, of reading, and of conscious reasoning, signifies insanity.

What Robinson intends to do in order to maintain a familiar way of life is to reestablish the western hierarchical model of living. Betty Jean Craige traces the history of such a model in her book *Laying Down the Ladder: The Emergence of Cultural Holism*. She writes: "From Plato we inherited both a belief in an unchanging order governing the earth's biological diversity and a propensity to dichotomize everything --into oppositions of spirit and matter, stasis and flux, mind and body, self and world, culture and nature, the intellectual and the political" (Craige 3). According to Craige, such dualism results in the perceived superiority of human over nature, man over woman, white over black. Our civilization has ranked intellect and reason highest, and Robinson is no different. According to such ideology, Robinson's capacity to reason gives him the right to conquer the island. Craige writes that "[s]uperiority carried with it the right to dominate, control, possess, exploit, destroy" (Craige 4). Robinson immediately shows himself to embody all of these attributes. He is not content to take only what he needs for day to day survival on the island. He instead cultivates several acres of land when a very small plot would have been sufficient to sustain one person.

Robinson evolves from a hunter-gatherer, to a subsistence farmer, to a large-scale farmer in a very short period of time. His progression mirrors the progression of mankind. Tournier notes this, saying : “Comme l’humanité de jadis, il était passé du stade de la cueillette et de la chasse à celui de l’agriculture et de l’élevage” (*VLP* 47). Lynn White, Jr. also discusses this progression in his essay entitled “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis”.

In the days of the scratch plow [. . .] subsistence farming was the presupposition. But no peasant owned eight oxen. [. . .] Thus, distribution of land was no longer based on the needs of a family but, rather, on the capacity of a power machine to till the earth. Man’s relation to the soil was profoundly changed. Formerly man had been a part of nature; now he was the exploiter of nature (White 8)

Robinson immediately establishes himself as an “exploiter of nature”. His cultivation of the island is staggering in both its extent and futility. He tills acre upon acre of land, breeds fish and shrimp in small ponds, and keeps a huge supply of preserved fruit, meat, cheese and fish on hand. When he discovers a way to make sugar, he finds himself with 90 gallons of molasses that harden into a giant cake. Robinson has enough food to sustain a village. Naturally, he discovers that the island’s resources are not inexhaustible. After a long period of productivity and extreme abundance, he finds himself at the beginning of a potential crisis. As the earth begins to dry up, “il ne pouvait plus se dissimuler que s’il ruisselait intérieurement de lait et de miel, Speranza s’épuisait au contraire dans cette vocation maternelle monstrueuse qu’il lui imposait” (*VLP* 113).

Robinson’s ecological crisis closely mirrors the current state of the world; like mankind, he has abused the land to the point where it is virtually unusable. Harold Fromm describes the abusive relationship between modern man and the earth in his essay entitled “From Transcendence to Obsolescence: A Route Map”. In discussing man’s inability to connect with

the earth, Fromm says the following: “Oblivious of his roots in the earth or unwilling to acknowledge them, intent only upon the desires of his unconquerable mind, [modern man] refuses to see that his well-nurtured body and Faustian will are connected by fine tubes--a ‘life-support system,’ if you wish--to the earth” (Fromm 36). Like the modern man that Fromm describes, Robinson is unaware of his fragile connection to the earth. What he assumes to be permanent is in fact ephemeral, a fact that he is incapable of recognizing until it is almost too late.

Robinson’s capacity to dominate is not limited to agriculture; his mastery of Speranza extends to the femininity that he attributes to the island. The representation of the earth as a feminine entity is not a new concept, but Tournier takes it to a bizarre new level in his portrayal of the relationship between Robinson and Speranza. For the greater part of the novel, the only two characters are Robinson and Speranza, so their interaction often takes on the quality of human interaction. The name that Robinson gives to the island introduces the idea that the island is feminine in Robinson’s mind. “Speranza,” which, as we have already seen, he associates with “le très profane souvenir d’une ardente Italienne” (*VLP* 45) whom he knew in England, reveals Robinson’s true attitude towards his surroundings. “Speranza,” implying spiritual hope, is also associated with something very non-spiritual, whereas “ardent” carries the connotation of warmth, passion, and fervor. Used together in this context, Robinson chooses a name that is heavy with sexual and corporeal implications. True to this image, Speranza’s terrain is continually associated with the female body in a manner that implies sexuality and fecundity.

When Robinson initially travels inland after the shipwreck, he travels through terrain that is untouched by man. Robinson’s initial impression is one of overwhelming force. His first trip inland forces him to battle with the overgrown jungle. In this sense, he is forging his way

through virgin territory. When it seems that the island will overpower Robinson, he masters nature by murdering a goat. Robinson's action recalls the ritual sacrifices of Biblical patriarchs; just as the Judaic god Yahweh placed men above the goats that they were sacrificing, Robinson's senseless, violent murder instantly places him in the dominant position. He judges himself to be superior not only to the other animals on the island, but even to life itself. His is not an act of self-defense, which could be excused; it is an act of fear and of arrogance that stems from his profound separation from the natural world.

The image of man's conquest of virgin land is one that was particularly appealing to Robinson's contemporaries. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the height of the exploration of the Americas. The written accounts of colonists praised the fertile earth that provided them with unmatched bounty (Kolodny 174). The abundant fertility of the land described by some colonists stands in direct opposition to the more violent accounts made by others.

Those who had initially responded to the promise inherent in a feminine landscape were now faced with the consequences of that response: either they recoiled in horror from the meaning of their manipulation of a naturally generous world, accusing one another, as did John Hammond in 1656 of raping and deflowering the "naturall fertility of comelinesse," or, like those whom Robert Beverley and William Byrd accused of "slothful Indolence," they succumbed to a life of easeful regression. (Kolodny 174)

Kolodny's analysis of early American colonization applies to Robinson's own undertakings on the island. His excessive cultivation becomes an act of "raping" and "deflowering". His actions against the island's resources become actions against Speranza. Much as man is placed above

nature in a traditional hierarchical system, man is also placed above woman. Robinson's capacity to reason is therefore perceived as being superior to Speranza's capacity to produce life. Although Robinson treats Speranza as a cherished lover, he still places himself in the dominant position. Even as he recites the Song of Songs, a beautiful passage from the Bible that exalts the narrator's beloved, Speranza lies before him in an attitude of submission : "Or ce matin-là avait une splendeur nuptiale, et Speranza était prosternée à ses pieds dans la douceur des premiers rayons du levant" (*VLP* 134).

At the point when Robinson begins his sexual relationship with Speranza, he also begins the transformation from the civilized, ordered man that was first introduced and the natural creature that he becomes by the end. Although he is still unable to cut all ties with his civilization, he spends more and more time on the "other island" that continues to tantalize him. During his liaisons with Speranza, his body becomes increasingly connected to the earth, so much so that even his beard takes root in the soil (*VLP* 138). His mind, however, persists in the dualistic thought to which it is accustomed. He continues to view Speranza as something opposite to himself. Even his profession of love to her, a quotation from the Song of Songs, evokes the earthy, corporeal qualities that such dualistic and stereotypical thinking often associates with women. Whereas the male speaker focuses on the beauty of his beloved and on her fertility, the woman focuses on the activities of her beloved. The portrayal of the woman in this passage is passive while the portrayal of the man is active; the topic of the passage is *her* beauty and *his* virility. Throughout the first portion of the book, Robinson remains separate from Speranza; he always possesses the intellect, she the ability to procreate, which is considered inferior to his capacity to reason.

The feeling that Speranza has betrayed him marks the height of Robinson's separation from nature. After he finds Vendredi in the comb, he experiences all the anguish of a lover who has been wronged. His interpretation of certain Biblical passages condemns Speranza as a whore and symbolically divorces the two. He quotes a passage from Hosea to his daughters the mandrakes, saying : "Plaidez contre votre mère, plaidez/Car elle n'est plus ma femme/Et moi je ne suis plus son mari" (*VLP* 177). The divorce from Speranza also signifies his divorce from the land itself. In a strange paradox, the height of this separation causes Robinson to understand that his earthly reign over Speranza is about to end. He is not yet ready to completely embrace that idea, and so puts it aside, but it is only in total separation from Speranza that he can even consider the possibility that he is not the superior being

The arrival of Vendredi causes Robinson to fully revert to his status as the Governor. Vendredi, an Araucanian native, has a connection with the natural world that is distasteful to Robinson. In spite of the fact that Robinson has an intimate relationship with Speranza, he is still entrenched in the dualistic idea that he is Human and Speranza is Nature. Vendredi, however, has an affinity to nature that baffles Robinson. Vendredi seems to understand the workings of the natural world in way that suggests that he is simply part of the ecosystem in which he lives. Robinson's first indication of Vendredi's deep connection to nature is the relationship that develops between Vendredi and Tenn, the setter that also survived the shipwreck. Soon after Vendredi arrives on the island, Tournier writes that "Robinson aperçut l'Araucan qui jouait tout nu avec Tenn. Il s'irrita de l'impudeur du sauvage, et aussi de l'amitié qui semblait être née entre le chien et lui" (*VLP* 145). Vendredi is clearly more comfortable naked, in a natural state, and playing with the dog than he is with Robinson, who treats Vendredi as an indentured servant.

As Robinson spends more time with his new companion, he comes to realize that Vendredi understands Speranza in a way that is wholly alien to Robinson. Lacking the civilization that defines Robinson, Vendredi seems to understand the brutality that is part of nature. His view of Speranza is not a romanticized one; he is able to recognize that nature is at times cruel and dangerous, and that in order to be a part of the ecosystem, man cannot be disgusted by this brutality. Instead, he must understand that survival often equals brutality. Vendredi's treatment of the tortoise appears to Robinson to be some sort of cruel torture:

Sur un tapis de cendres brûlantes, il avait posé une grosse tortue qu'il avait fait basculer sur le dos. L'animal n'était pas mort, loin de là, et battait furieusement l'air de ses pattes. Robinson crut même entendre une sorte de toux rauque qui devait être sa façon de se plaindre. Faire crier une tortue ! [. . .] Quant au but de ce traitement barbare, il le comprit en voyant la carapace de la tortue perdre sa concavité et se redresser lentement sous l'action de la chaleur, cependant que Vendredi se hâtait de couper avec un couteau les adhérences qui la retenaient encore aux organes de l'animal.
(*VLP* 169-70).

What seems to be senseless torture to Robinson is actually very practical: out of the carapace, Vendredi creates a shield that cannot be pierced by weapons. For Vendredi, survival is a question of the survival of the fittest; he is stronger than the tortoise, and so can use the tortoise to make a defense that will render him stronger than other men. Whereas Robinson has tried to tame the landscape, Vendredi is a part of the disorder. His is a Dionysian nature, close to the natural world, prone to disorder, with a certain volatility that is at times quite menacing.

The volatility in Vendredi's nature reflects the threatening side of nature that has been almost completely subdued by man. In his essay entitled "Speaking a Word for Nature", Scott Russell Sanders quotes D. H. Lawrence, saying, "'When one comes to America, one finds [. . .] there is always a certain slightly devilish resistance in the [. . .] landscape'" (184). By the end of the twentieth century, however, America has been almost completely tamed. There is very little of the "devilish resistance" that Lawrence saw in the American landscape. Vendredi, however, seems to embody the idea that nature cannot be subdued by culture. Try as he might, Robinson finds it virtually impossible to tame his companion's wild nature. Like the island itself, Vendredi may be outwardly docile, but underneath his laughter and spirit are always ready to bubble over.

Vendredi's affinity to the natural world and his race seem to be inextricably linked in Robinson's mind. He writes in his log-book: "Dieu m'a envoyé un compagnon. Mais, par un tour assez obscur de sa Sainte Volonté, il l'a choisi au plus bas degré de l'échelle humaine. Non seulement il s'agit d'un homme de couleur, mais cet Araucanien costinós est bien loin d'être un pur sang, et tout en lui trahit le métis noir" (*VLP* 146). Whites have always seen non-whites as being closer to nature, as Craige, discussing Charles Darwin, reminds us: "In Darwin's argument we see that racism and sexism have the same philosophical foundation: a dualism of culture and nature, predicated on the dualism of spirit and matter, which privileges white over colored and male over female. Colored is closer to nature than white; woman is closer to nature than man" (Craige 17). Robinson, being white and cultured, logically imagines himself superior to Vendredi. He sets about eradicating all traces of Vendredi's connections to the natural world; clothing is a necessity, work is demanded, laughter is punished. As the governor, Robinson forces Vendredi to become his slave. It is a source of immense frustration to Robinson that

Vendredi does not love and respect him in the manner he deserves. In his mind, he has given Vendredi the gift of culture, an invaluable gift that should be repaid with gratitude.

By the end of the first portion of the book, Robinson has established himself as the undisputed master of the island. He has created a society that is as advanced as possible; he has enough food to feed many people, has had a love affair with the island itself, and has a slave to do his bidding. Despite the many luxuries that he has created for himself, he continues to feel the pull of a purer life, one which he calls the “other island”. As the tension between Robinson, the “other island,” and Vendredi continues to build, Robinson begins to wonder if the order that he has imposed on the island may, after all, be illusory. Perhaps he remembers Van Deysse’s tarot reading before the shipwreck that foretold a similar outcome:

C’est le demiurge, commenta-t-il [Van Deysse]. L’un des trois arcanes majeurs fondamentaux. [. . .] Cela signifie qu’il y a en vous un organisateur. Il lutte contre un univers en désordre qu’il s’efforce de maîtriser avec des moyens de fortune. Il semble y parvenir, mais n’oublions pas que ce demiurge est aussi bateleur: son œuvre est illusion, son ordre est illusoire. Malheureusement, il l’ignore. Le scepticisme n’est pas son fort. (7)

As predicted above, Robinson refuses to accept that his order is a fragile illusion. No sooner does it occur to him that this might be the case that he puts the thought aside. It isn’t until Vendredi sends the ordered island crashing to the ground that Robinson abandons his old ways of thinking.

Chapter III. Inversion and Reversion on Speranza

If Robinson is a Promethean figure, concerned with order, hard work, and culture, then Vendredi is decidedly Dionysian. In *The Mirror of Ideas*, Tournier writes of Dionysus:

This madman knows existence and embraces it without qualms, even its most dubious aspects. He embodies fertility, and nothing is created without intoxication, without darkness, without taint. Because his is the cult of life, he fully accepts that which is inseparable from life: violence, sickness, and death. A joyous pessimism is his philosophy. (*MI* 62)

Tournier could just as easily be describing Vendredi, who embodies many qualities generally attributed to Dionysus: a joyous, but often destructive, thirst for life; the upset of traditional order; and a deep connection to the natural world. In Vendredi's case, all three of these attributes fuse together to lead Robinson to a new, holistic way of understanding the island.

Vendredi's capacity to embrace life is a foreign concept to Robinson. A good Protestant, he is chiefly occupied by hard work and discipline. The Island Charter, an almost ridiculous document given the circumstances, chains him to a monotonous existence that contains very little joy. Temptation is his constant companion; when he is closest to the island he feels the pull of civilization and when he is at his most civilized, memories of the *souille* constantly beckon. Vendredi, utterly free from such societal constraints, exemplifies the "joyous pessimism" that Tournier attributes to Dionysus.

While Vendredi certainly is full of joy, there is no doubt that he is equally full of destruction. His laughter, which infuriates Robinson, is spontaneous and happy, but often leads to self-destruction. His laughter is described in various parts of the narrative as an "éclat de rire"

which is “lyrique,” “irrepressible,” and “dévastateur.” Tournier gives the impression that Vendredi’s outbursts of laughter are full of joy and mirth, but have a destructive quality that cannot be repressed. Vendredi’s outbursts of laughter are always followed by punishment; Robinson is so incensed by this expression that he strikes the boy. Vendredi’s laughter is often a result of Robinson’s religious teaching. Unable to understand the “si bon et si puissant” (*VLP* 149) God of which Robinson speaks, Vendredi laughs aloud. Robinson’s anger thus stems from a combination of insults. Not only is Vendredi blaspheming, he is ridiculing Robinson’s religious beliefs. According to Tournier, laughter is inherently superior. In *The Mirror of Ideas*, he writes that “[t]he laughing man expresses his superiority, the crying man his inferiority, in relation to the person or situation provoking their reaction”(10). Vendredi’s laughter is therefore an inversion of the traditional racial hierarchy. Robinson places himself above Vendredi, and yet by laughing Vendredi unconsciously makes the statement that he is superior to Robinson.

The explosive quality to Vendredi’s laugh implies that he is a volatile creature. This quality finally manifests itself in the explosion in the cave. Caused by a moment of pleasure during which Vendredi is smoking Robinson’s pipe, he sends the cave crashing in on itself like a “jeu de construction” (*VLP* 184). Here again both joy and destruction mingle: in order to describe devastating destruction, Tournier uses the innocent and pleasurable image of a child’s toy. The explosion can be interpreted as a sort of inverted Big Bang. It mimics the Big Bang theory of creation, in which the chaotic earth exploded into order, but in an inverted manner; instead of chaos leading to order, here order explodes into chaos. Vendredi, here representing the chaos of nature, will in turn lead Robinson to full incorporation into the ecosystem.

From the perspective of a restrained, ordered, Protestant, Vendredi often seems to be a “madman.” Dressing the cacti, nothing more than a game to Vendredi, represents to Robinson

the total failure of his civilizing mission: “Pour Robinson, la disparition de Vendredi, les cactées parées et l’assèchement de la rizière traduisaient unanimement la fragilité et peut-être l’échec de la domestication de l’Araucan” (VLP 162). The drained rice field is no less significant. Drained in attempt to save Tenn, Vendredi thinks only of his friend, not of the ramifications of a lost food source. Robinson, who undoubtedly ranks his own needs over those of Tenn, is angry to discover that he has lost a field. Because Vendredi ultimately destroys everything that Robinson has achieved, Robinson is forced to reconsider the value of his excessive cultivation. Admitting that he, like Vendredi, is weary of the ordered island, Robinson begins to appreciate Vendredi’s whimsical nature. Through Vendredi’s constant inversion of everything that he encounters, Robinson finally embraces a more holistic understanding of the natural world.

The explosion is the definitive moment where Robinson’s ties to civilization break. Prior to the explosion, Robinson glimpsed the “other island” and the “other Vendredi,” but his connection to Western civilization remained stronger than the temptation to dwell permanently on the “other island”. The explosion destroys years of extensive cultivation that resulted from Robinson’s fear of the *souille*, and he witnesses the undoing of all he has achieved. Horrified by the destruction, the more “civilized” part of his psyche considers killing Vendredi, while at the same time the part of him that was tempted by the “other island” admits that “l’île administrée lui pesait à la fin presque autant qu’à Vendredi”(VLP 188, 89). Such a revelation is wholly surprising to Robinson, but it allows him to defer to Vendredi:

Vendredi, après l’avoir libéré malgré lui de ses racines terriennes, allait l’entraîner vers *autre chose*. A ce règne tellurique qui lui était odieux, il allait substituer un ordre que lui était propre, et que Robinson brûlait de découvrir. Un nouveau Robinson se débattait dans sa vieille peau et

acceptait à l'avance de laisser couler l'île administrée pour s'enfoncer à la suite d'un initiateur irresponsable dans une voie inconnue. (*VLP* 189)

Tournier describes above the actual moment where Robinson rejects his old life and allows Vendredi to become his teacher. As stated in Chapter II, Robinson's actions toward the island prior to the explosion showed no consideration of the environment. Neil Evernden, discussing man's relationship with the environment, writes, "[o]ne who looks on the world as simply a set of resources to be utilized is not thinking of it as an environment at all. [. . .] The whole world is simply fodder and feces to the consumer, in sharp contrast to the man who is in an environment in which he belongs and is of necessity a part" (99). He goes on to create a fitting analogy: the man who treats the environment casually is compared to a tourist, whereas the man who is part of the environment is similar to a resident. He continues, "[t]o the tourist, the landscape is merely a facade [. . .]. The resident is [. . .] a part of the place" (Evernden 99). While he is speaking in general terms, he could very easily be describing the relationships between Robinson, Vendredi, and the island. Like the man that Evernden describes, Robinson has been a "tourist" for many years. Although he depends on the land, it remains a useful tool, a pretty backdrop. Even at the height of his adoration for Speranza, he appreciates the landscape as the setting for his endeavors, not as the environment where he belongs. In his mind, he still belongs to England; that is his permanent place of residence. Vendredi, on the other hand, is a "resident" of the island. He understands it in a way that is entirely impossible for Robinson.

The incident with the tortoise, which I also discussed in Chapter II, perfectly demonstrates Vendredi's deep comprehension of the island. While Robinson reacts in horror to what he sees, Vendredi realizes that if he is to survive, he must take certain measures. Robinson tends to embrace the sublime elements of Speranza; the Dionysian quality of Vendredi permits

him to embrace every aspect of the natural world despite its cruelty. Robinson is therefore the passive “tourist,” observing the native; Vendredi is the inhabitant who knows exactly what survival in a harsh environment entails. It is only logical that he should have to show Robinson, the “tourist,” the way to become a “resident.”

As a result, Robinson’s agricultural order is destroyed and he reverts to his previous method of finding food: hunting and gathering. Robinson’s obsessive cultivation was a central focus of the first portion of the novel, but the second part contains no mention of agriculture; the cultivated island has completely disappeared. Instead, Robinson and Vendredi survive on what they can kill. They are sometimes hunters (Vendredi lies in his hammock and shoots birds using a blow gun) but are primarily fishermen. Whereas hunting is an active, masculine activity, fishing is decidedly passive. Tournier writes: “The hunter is an active ‘primary.’ [. . .] Fishing, on the contrary, is wrapped in mystery and silence. No one knows what waits or what happens beneath the mirror of the waters” (*M*, 22). Fishing furthermore is feminine in nature. In contrast with the active sport of hunting, fishing forces the fisherman into a passive role; he must sit and wait until the fish come to him rather than actively tracking his prey. Fishing’s dependency on water strengthens its tie to the feminine. In his book *Tournier élémentaire*, Jonathan F. Krell discusses the association of the four elements (earth, water, air and fire) to a specific gender:

Selon toute la tradition de l’imaginaire, la terre et l’eau, féminines pour le grammairien, le sont aussi pour l’imagination: ce sont des substances lourdes, consistantes, froides et humides. Le feu et l’air -- mots masculins -- possèdent des qualités dites masculines: la légèreté, la volatilité, la chaleur et la sécheresse. [. . .] En termes psychanalytiques, les éléments masculins sont liés aux activités de la sublimation--la création artistique

ou intellectuelle--tandis que les éléments féminins sont plus directement liés aux fonctions reproductrices. (17)

By becoming a fisherman, Robinson creates a connection between himself and the water. This then creates an association between himself and the feminine that is entirely different from the connection previously forged while he viewed Speranza as his sexual partner. In that case, he was still the aggressor, still the exploiter. His new status as fisherman allows him to depend on the earth's resources, but on its own terms; he cannot track fish, he must wait for them. Even Vendredi's method of hunting birds involves a certain passivity; instead of tracking them, he waits for them to fly over his hammock. This new manner of hunting serves as an antithesis to the murder of the goat in the first chapter of the novel; Robinson has come far from the virile aggressor that he once was.

Also part of the Dionysian character is a profound connection to nature. Vendredi is so closely connected to nature that there is no separation between himself and the natural world. The chaos that accompanies Dionysus is perhaps what creates the link between the god and the natural world. Nature is, after all, based on chaos and interconnectedness rather than order (Howarth 75). In discussing the movement of science toward a holistic way of viewing the world, William Howarth writes that "[t]oday science is evolving beyond Cartesian dualism toward quantum mechanics and chaos theory, where volatile, ceaseless exchange is the norm" (78). "Chaos" and "volatile," two adjectives perfectly fitted for Dionysus, also adeptly describe Vendredi. His penchant for inversion infuses chaos into Robinson's neatly ordered world.

Vendredi's connection with the natural world transcends his species. In one episode, he cares for a baby vulture much as its own mother would, even chewing grubs and spitting them into the baby's mouth. Robinson is sickened by this process, which occurs before the explosion

and his subsequent tutelage under Vendredi. For Robinson, vultures evoke threatening images of death and decay, a natural evocation, since they prey on the carcasses of dead and decaying animals. Many ancient cultures, however, revered the vulture for these very same qualities. His is a necessary role: “[T]he bird might well have been regarded as a regenerative agency for the life forces contained in decomposing matter and refuse of all sorts from the very fact that it lived off carrion and filth; in other words, as a cleanser or a sorcerer who ensures the cycle of renewal by transforming death into new life” (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1074). In Robinson’s mind, the outward appearance of the vulture masks its natural necessity. Vendredi bears no such prejudices. By ensuring the survival of the fledgling vulture, he ensures the perpetuation of the life cycle.

Vendredi’s connection to Dionysus further manifests itself in his battle with the giant goat. Chevalier and Gheerbrant underline the animalistic qualities of Dionysus: “In Dionysiac legends and worship such prolific beasts as goats and bulls often occur, bulls and goats being his favourite sacrificial victims” (292). In a similar vein, Vendredi often

se faisait un jeu de défier les boucs qu’il surprenait isolés. Il les forçait à se coucher en empoignant leurs cornes, ou encore il les rattrapait à la course et, pour les marquer de sa victoire, il leur nouait un collier de lianes autour du cou. Un jour pourtant, il tomba sur une sorte de bouquetin gros comme un ours qui l’envoya rouler dans les rochers d’un simple renvers de ses cornes énormes [. . .]. Vendredi dut rester trois jours immobile dans son hamac, mais il parlait sans cesse de retrouver cette bête qu’il avait baptisée *Andoar* et qui paraissait lui inspirer une admiration mêlée de tendresse.

(VLP 195)

Eventually, Vendredi kills Andoar: a sort of Dionysian sacrifice. His triumph is not that of man over beast, but rather the victory of one animal over another. In fact, the feeling of triumph is wholly absent from Vendredi's victory. As Robinson watches in the days and weeks that follow, he realizes that Vendredi gives to Andoar all of the respect that a worthy adversary deserves.

For Vendredi, this respect is shown by making Andoar fly and sing. His intention is to make a giant kite of Andoar's skin, and an Aeolian harp out of his head and entrails. Andoar's flight results from the combination of many things: Andoar must give his life and his skin, Vendredi must give his time and his hard work, Robinson must give his urine to preserve the hide, and the island must provide the wood for the frame and the wind to fly. Andoar's flight is a product of the ecosystem; it could not have been achieved without all of the components needed. Reflecting on Andoar's flight, Robinson writes in his log-book: "Andoar, c'était moi. Ce vieux mâle solitaire et têtu avec sa barbe de patriarche et ses toisons suant la lubricité, ce faune tellurique âprement enraciné de ses quatre sabots fourchus dans sa montagne pierreuse, c'était moi"(VLP 227). Like Andoar, Robinson also transforms into an aerial creature: "Robinson se conçoit maintenant comme un être aérien, assumant les qualités des symboles aériens [. . .]. Robinson est désormais une créature de la lumière et de l'air" (Krell 163). If Robinson perceives himself to be an aerial being like Andoar, then he must also be a product of the entire island.

Vendredi also promises to make Andoar sing. He transforms his skull into an Aeolian harp, a musical instrument that depends on the wind to create sound. Robinson understands the music from the harp as an instantaneous symphony:

La harpe éolienne. Toujours enfermé dans l'instant présent [. . .]. C'est aussi le seul instrument dont la musique au lieu de se développer dans le temps s'inscrit tout entière dans l'instant. Il est loisible de multiplier les

cordes et de faire rendre à chacune telle ou telle note qu'on voudra. Ce faisant, on compose une *symphonie instantanée* qui éclate de la première à la dernière note dès que le vent attaque l'instrument. (VLP 227)

Like the harp, Robinson has become instantaneous in the sense that he lives fully in the moment. His transformation from the bearded patriarch to a more natural being mirrors the transformation of Andoar from an old mean goat to a harp that creates beautiful music. Andoar's song is harmonious; both the tones themselves and the creation of the song are a culmination of nature's efforts. Robinson's incorporation into the ecosystem could not be possible without a cooperative effort on the part of nature, just as Andoar's flight and his song would not be possible without the cooperation of many.

Chapter IV. Space, Time, and Language on the Island

The cave in which Robinson stores his food supply plays a significant role in the novel. As I previously discussed, the cave is the site of the explosion that initiates the final step of Robinson's transformation, and it is also the site of the first stage of Robinson's transformation from a dualistic thinker to a holistic thinker. During Robinson's rule as the governor of the island, he gives very little thought to the different possibilities which the island offers. He sees the world in absolutes: either he is the civilized Englishman who must resist all interaction with nature because it would be considered base, or he is a beast who wallows in the muck. In his mind the island exists for one purpose: to be cultivated. All interaction with the island equals the *souille*, towards which he feels an intense fear and aversion. As a result, he considers the cave as nothing more than a useful tool. Since he has the tendency to categorize the world into dichotomies, he cannot consider the idea that it is impossible to divide everything so easily.

Once Robinson stops the water clock and puts aside his role as governor, he begins to perceive Speranza as a person instead of "un domaine à gérer" (*VLP* 101). As a result, Robinson slowly becomes aware of the idea that the cave resembles "la bouche, l'oeil ou quelque ature orifice naturel de ce grand corps" (*VLP* 102). Once in the cave, Robinson recognizes that he is in the midst of a transformation: "Ayant pris conscience de la métamorphose où il était engagé, il était prêt maintenant à s'imposer les plus rudes conversions pour répondre à ce qui était peut-être une vocation nouvelle" (*VLP* 102). His descent into the cave becomes a regression back to the maternal womb, a common interpretation of a cave. According to Chevalier and Gheerbrant, "[w]omb symbolism is universally connected with manifestation, natural fertility and even with spiritual regeneration" (1122). Since Robinson returns to the symbolic womb while he is already

undergoing a metamorphosis, he can clearly see Speranza for the first time:

[I]l ne sentait nullement séparé de Speranza. Au contraire, il vivait intensément avec elle. [. . .] La solitude de Robinson était vaincue d'étrange manière -- non pas *latéralement*, -- mais de façon *centrale*, nucléaire, en quelque sorte. Il devait se trouver à proximité du *foyer* de Speranza d'où partaient en étoiles toutes les terminaisons nerveuses de ce grand corps, et vers lequel affluaient toutes les informations venues de la superficie. Ainsi dans certaines cathédrales y a-t-il souvent un point d'où l'on entend, par le jeu des ondes sonores et de leurs interférences, les moindres bruits, qu'ils proviennent de l'abside, du chœur, du jubé ou de la nef. (VLP 103-04)

By regressing to the womb, Robinson symbolically returns to his origins (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 170). In this case, he burrows deep into Speranza to return to his primordial beginnings. In doing so, he forges a connection with Speranza that allows him to see the true nature of the island; he experiences natural existence on the island almost as if he were the island itself. The image that Tournier creates in this passage is one of hyper-awareness: Robinson is acutely aware of everything on the island while at the same time existing blissfully apart from the very island in which he is hidden.

This state of hyper-awareness allows Robinson to use the cave as a place of contemplation. The idea of residing in a cave calls to mind Plato's famous allegory in *The Republic*, about which Chevalier and Gheerbrant write the following:

The cavern is its [the world's] image. The shadowy light which flickers upon its walls comes from an invisible sun, but it points the way the soul

must follow in search of the good and true. Upward ascent and meditation upon which is above stand for the path the soul must follow to ascend to the seat of the intellect. In Plato, the symbolism of the cave carries not merely cosmic, but ethical or moral significance as well. The cavern and its shadow- or puppet-show represent this busy world from which the soul must escape to contemplate the real world of ideas. (167)

True to Plato's allegory, Robinson "ascends to the seat of the intellect" while in the depths of the cave. Like the men in Plato's allegory, he meditates on that "which is above." For Robinson the "seat of intellect" is not intellect in the traditional sense of the word. Instead he sees the waves, the trees, the animals, and the smells of the island. The cave itself is an inversion of the cave which Plato describes. Instead of the "busy world" from which he must escape, it serves as a sanctuary where Robinson can seek refuge. He has descended into the cave to escape from the civilization that he has reconstructed on the island. The absolute silence in which Robinson finds himself underground allows him to live more vividly in the island. This offers an interesting insight into Robinson's psyche. Whether above or below ground on the island, he is in a state of absolute solitude. The civilization that he has constructed allows him to imagine the presence of others on the island, and so the cave offers a refuge from his busy life as governor. If he were to allow himself to embrace his role in the ecosystem and realize that his reconstruction of civilization is not necessary, he would have no need of the cave. Robinson is unable to do so at this point in his development, and the cave serves as a necessary point of departure for the transformation that he will undergo. Speranza reveals herself to him in a myriad of new ways; his sojourn in the cave opens him up to the image of Speranza as a mother in addition to the image of Speranza as a woman.

Tournier uses the image of a cathedral to complete the idea that Robinson is at the very center of everything, able to sense every small movement or noise made by Speranza. The image of a giant cathedral during this moment of transformation creates a significant tie between religion, nature, and the transcendence that can be achieved through both. As the place of worship for Christians, the cathedral is undeniably linked with Western civilization and religion. As I discussed in Chapter II, Christianity often sets itself against nature. The cathedral, however, is generally seen as a peaceful place of worship where Christians can go to appreciate the grandeur of God and of His creation. This grandeur is evoked by the tall, often ornately carved columns that imitate the height and foliage of trees. Baudelaire makes the connection between nature and the cathedral in his poem “Correspondances”:

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
 Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
 L’homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
 Qui l’observent avec des regards familiers. (1-4)

By comparing “nature” with a “temple,” Baudelaire creates a correspondence between the natural world and a place of worship. “Vivants piliers,” used in conjunction with temple, reinforces the correspondence between the two. The verticality of Baudelaire’s “vivants piliers” naturally draws the reader’s thoughts toward the skies, the traditional domain of God. Thus Baudelaire creates the idea that Nature leads to spiritual transcendence. It is only logical that the cave, nature’s refuge where Robinson can meditate and escape the pressures of every day life, is compared to a cathedral and thus directs his thoughts upwards.

As a result, Robinson is at the very center of Speranza, like the nucleus of a giant cell. For the first time, he is part of the island. He is not yet completely incorporated: the image of a man as the nucleus still suggests an anthropocentric model in which Robinson is the chief

component. It must be noted, however, that although he is at the neural center of Speranza, he is also part of a vast network of cells and nerves without which the organism could not survive, as an ecosystem cannot survive without a vast network of organisms working together to sustain it. Robinson has not yet abandoned his perceived role as the principle component of this network, but by descending into the belly of Speranza, he has taken the initial step towards incorporating himself into the ecosystem.

The separation between Robinson and Speranza further manifests itself during their sexual relationship. During this period, Robinson frequently attributes language to Speranza. The ability to spontaneously create language is a uniquely human characteristic. In his essay “Nature and Silence,” Christopher Manes writes, “[n]ature *is* silent in our culture (and in literate societies generally) in the sense that the status of being a speaking subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative” (15). He attributes this to both the Humanist movement of the Renaissance and to the Enlightenment, when the emphasis in rhetoric was placed on humans and their capacity to reason. He contrasts the western concept of a silent environment with the ideology of animistic cultures:

[F]or animistic cultures, those that see the natural world as inspirited, not just people, but also animals, plants, and even ‘inert’ entities such as stones and rivers are perceived as being articulate and at times intelligible subjects, able to communicate and interact with humans for good or ill. In addition to human language, there is also the language of birds, the wind, earthworms, wolves, and waterfalls --a world of autonomous speakers whose intents (especially for hunter-gatherer peoples) one ignores at one’s peril. (Manes 15)

It is precisely the capacity for language that seems to separate Robinson from Speranza so profoundly in the first portion of the novel. For Robinson, language is his principle link to civilization. It is so important to him that he sets down rules in the Island Charter stipulating that all thoughts must be spoken aloud. His reasoning is that “[p]erdre la faculté de la parole par défaut d’usage est l’une des plus humiliantes calamités qui me menacent. Déjà j’éprouve, quand je tente de discourir à haute voix, un certain embarras de langue, comme après un excès de vin” (VLP 72). In order to retain his capacity to reason and his capacity for abstract thought, Robinson depends on his abilities to read, to write, and to speak. These three things are what separate him from the *souille*, and therefore from the island. He thus succeeds in creating yet another dichotomy between nature and culture; although nature endows him with the capacity to speak, his culture gives him the knowledge to read and to write. All three abilities combine to make him feel as civilized as possible.

Inherent to civilization is the need of other people. Since Robinson is a product of Enlightenment thinking, we can assume that he has very little knowledge of animistic culture, and therefore does not perceive Speranza as being able to articulate herself. This, however, presents a problem for Robinson. The solitude on the island wears on him so heavily that he needs someone to communicate with. After all, “the solitary word is that of a fool” (Tournier, *Mirror* 70). Without a listener, Robinson is just talking to himself when he talks aloud. As a result, he starts to give language to Speranza. In order to do so, he attributes to her passages from the Bible, an ironic choice. A Quaker, he has found great solace in Biblical passages since the shipwreck, and so his choice is logical. However, the eradication of animistic cultures is entirely the fault of Christianity. If according to Manes animistic cultures believe that language is not a

uniquely human attribute, then Robinson unknowingly validates the very culture that the Bible has helped to discredit by giving Speranza the capacity to speak.

Although Robinson gives Speranza a voice of sorts, that voice is only a projection of Robinson himself. This then raises the question of agency. Nature, as a marginalized subject, can never truly speak for itself in a manner that eliminates the possibility of human projection. Certainly one can argue that nature can communicate; in fact there seems to be a very elaborate communication system among most animals. However, the communication system in the natural world is non-verbal, and an attempt to interpret nature's mode of communication runs the risk of simply being a projection of that particular interpreter's perception of nature. In a memorable incident just after Robinson has begun the "voie végétale" (*VLP* 121), a spider bite causes his penis to swell to the size of a tangerine. He perceives this episode in the following way: "[C]et accident revêtait une signification morale indéniable. Sous les espèces d'une piqûre d'araignée, n'était-ce pas en vérité une maladie vénérienne qui l'avait frappé [. . .] ? Il y vit le signe que la voie végétale n'était peut-être qu'une dangereuse impasse" (*VLP* 122). The "signe" that Robinson takes from this incident is completely arbitrary. Already doubting his actions, he naturally interprets the spider bite to be a venereal disease. What may be a simple manifestation of the sometimes cruel side of nature is here evidence of Robinson's moral projection onto the island.

As Robinson's civilization on the island becomes increasingly developed, his relationship with Speranza becomes increasingly complex. Their connection is no longer a simple matter of superiority and inferiority. Instead, Robinson is torn between the civilization that he has established and the more natural existence that he has experienced when he is physically close to—or one could even say intimate with—the island. The moment of change between these two

planes of existence can be tied to the water clock that Robinson found aboard the *Virginie*. In his mind, marking time with a clock is a mark of civilization. The regular ticking of the water dropping through the mechanism allows him to know how much time is passing. He is able to mark the hour, the day, the month, the year. While the clock marks the hours and days, Robinson is governor. The moment that the clock ceases to function, he considers himself to be on vacation.

The idea of linear time, here represented by the clock, is an idea that is distinctly Western. Nature functions in a cyclic manner; the expression of history in the form of a line is a concept created by man. Whereas native people tend to situate historical events in relationship to nature, Western culture tends to situate them in reference to numbered years and named months. Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, indigenous Americans related everything to the cycles of the sun or the moon, or perhaps to the seasons (Krech). European notions of the passage of time, however, are completely arbitrary. Shephard Krech III writes, “[w]ith regard to the elapse of time, or fixing a past or future event, many Native Americans calculated the passage of years by linking their lives to a distinctive nature or social-historical event: such and such happened when I was so high or when my father was a boy” (Krech 570). The duration of days, months and years as marked by the Western calendar are linked to nature, but we largely forget their natural reference. The passage of time is marked by the names given to the natural cycles. The earth and moon could cease to rotate and orbit, but Western calendars could march on, and thus time could as well. True to his cultural upbringing, Robinson situates events on the island in relation to his island calendar, which was established the day that he began running the clock. This ties him tightly to his old way of life, since he marks the passage of time in a way that is characteristic of civilization.

When Robinson stops the water clock, Tournier writes: “Le temps était suspendu. Robinson était en vacances. [. . .] Ainsi donc la toute-puissance de Robinson sur l’île--fille de son absolue solitude--allait jusqu’à une maîtrise du temps! Il supputait avec ravissement qu’il ne tenait qu’à lui désormais de boucher la clepsydre, et ainsi de suspendre le vol des heures...” (VLP 93). The lack of linear time, marked by the cessation of the clock, means several things: an escape from discipline, a vacation from gubernatorial duties, and an opportunity to commune with the “other island.” The stopped clock signifies the suspension of time; without the incessant ticking, time does not exist. While it is suspended, Robinson is cut free from the civilization that has previously constrained him. As a result, he is introduced to the “other island”: “Il y avait quelque chose d’heureux suspendu dans l’air, et, pendant un bref instant d’indicible allégresse, Robinson crut découvrir une *autre île* derrière celle où il peinait solitairement depuis si longtemps, plus fraîche, plus chaude, plus fraternelle, et que lui masquait ordinairement la médiocrité de ses préoccupations” (VLP 94). Reflecting back on this moment, Robinson is struck by the innocence that he felt. In what amounts to a comparison between Robinson’s efforts to cultivate the island and the island itself, Tournier inverts the typical dichotomy of culture and nature. Western thought traditionally ranks culture above nature. In this case, however, the “other island” is warm and inviting while the cultivated island is cold and formidable. Tournier describes Robinson’s second life as one where he and the island are equal. The reader therefore sees Robinson’s subsequent abandonment of civilization as a positive action.

Robinson ceases to dominate Speranza while he is not a slave to linear time. His perceived superiority over Speranza is directly related to ego and to the cultural belief that Man

is superior to Nature. Kenneth White discusses the idea that as the ego becomes increasingly important, man becomes more deeply separated from nature. He attributes the modern idea of separation between Man and Nature to Descartes :

Avec Descartes et la modernité, le paradigme n'est plus Créateur-créature [comme au Moyen Age] ni voyageur-monde (mythologue en mouvement), mais sujet-objet, et l'homme moderne a un projet précis : devenir maître et possesseur de la nature. Au fur et à mesure que progressent la modernité et le modernisme, le sujet devient de plus en plus sujet (jusqu'à finir sur le divan du psychanalyste) et l'objet de plus en plus objet, d'où s'ensuit la séparation totale de l'être humain et de la terre, une terre qui n'est plus considérée que comme matière utile. (K. White 23)

Chronologically speaking, Robinson has not yet arrived at the era of psychoanalysis. Tournier however, presents to his readers a psychoanalytic portrait of a Robinson subjectified through his logbook. When reading his entries, it is as if he is on the psychoanalyst's couch and the readers are the psychoanalyst. The ego is the most developed aspect of Robinson. His link to Western civilization, and therefore the Western importance of self, completely separates him from Speranza.

The suspension of time and Robinson's consequent descent into the cave allow him to temporarily abandon his ego and the notion that he is superior to Speranza. According to Neil Evernden:

Since Descartes [. . .] [n]ot only are we not a part of an environment, we are not even part of a *body*. We, the "real" us, is concentrated in some disputed recess of the body, a precious cocoon, separate from the world of

matter. Far from extending our “self” into the environment as the territorial fish does, we hoard our ego as tightly as we can. (98)

Once the explosion in the cave breaks Robinson’s tie to his ego, he can extend himself into the environment. Prior to the explosion, Robinson’s sexual relationship with Speranza served as a physical extension of himself that resulted in his perception that he and Speranza were visibly joined in the mandrakes. Despite this perception, his “self” remained apart from the natural world.

Toward the end of his transformation, Robinson notes the change in his perception of time:

Ce qui a le plus changé dans ma vie, c’est l’écoulement du temps, sa vitesse et même son orientation. Jadis chaque journée, chaque heure, chaque minute était *inclinée* en quelque sorte vers la journée, l’heure ou la minute suivante, et toutes ensemble étaient aspirées par le dessein du moment dont l’inexistence provisoire créait comme un *vaccum*. Ainsi le temps passait vite et utilement [. . .]. Mais cette circularité du temps demeurait le secret des dieux [. . .]. Pour moi désormais, le cycle s’est rétréci au point qu’il se confond avec l’instant. Le mouvement circulaire est devenu si rapide qu’il ne se distingue plus de l’immobilité. (VLP 218-19)

Robinson has finally become such a part of the ecosystem that time is immaterial to him. He ceases to mark the passage of time and lives fully in the moment, an eternal present. When the *Whitebird* arrives on the island, Robinson is shocked to discover that he has spent twenty-eight years there. Invited to return home to England, he finds himself so completely incorporated into

the ecosystem that he chooses to remain on the island and rejects Western civilization in favor of a more natural way of life.

V. Conclusion

By the end of the novel, Robinson is almost fully incorporated into the ecosystem; he has ceased to view himself as an individual in the sense that he does not place himself above the island as a whole. However, the question remains: would Robinson, who is now so fully removed from civilization, willingly return if given the opportunity? For Daniel Defoe, the answer is simple. Robinson is a product of civilization, and civilization is superior to nature. His return to England is therefore natural and expected. Tournier's Robinson does not have so easy a choice. He has spent a significantly longer time on the island and had a drastically different experience. So when offered a place aboard the *Whitebird*, Robinson realizes that his true home is the island. He is so different from "civilized" men that he can no longer imagine living among them.

When the *Whitebird* first arrives, Robinson sees a panoramique vision of his life on the island:

Comme un mourant avant de rendre l'âme, il embrassait d'une vision panoramique toute sa vie dans l'île, l'*Évasion*, la souille, l'organisation frénétique de Speranza, la grotte, la combe, la survenue de Vendredi, l'explosion, et surtout cette vaste plage de temps, vierge de toute mesure, où sa métamorphose solaire s'était accomplie dans un calme bonheur. (*VLP* 234)

In a matter of seconds, Robinson flies through his time on the island and sees his metamorphosis in fast-forward. Like a dying man, Robinson now faces the greatest transformation: will he remain on the island, or embrace another transition and go from one life to the next? The phrase "comme un mourant avant de rendre l'âme" implies that the return to life in England would force

him to render his soul to civilization, which, as demonstrated by the actions of the sailors, contains a cruelty and heartlessness that Robinson has quite forgotten.¹

The sailors aboard *Whitebird* allow Robinson to contrast his old self against the new. They arrive on the island as much a product of civilization as Robinson once was. They thoughtlessly exploit its resources, much as Robinson once did:

Déjà les hommes grimpaient le long des troncs à écailles pour faire tomber d'un coup de sabre les choux palmistes, et on entendait le rire de ceux qui poursuivaient les chèvres à la course. Robinson pensait, non sans orgueil, aux souffrances qu'il aurait endurées, à l'époque où il entretenait l'île comme une cité-jardin, de le voir livrée ainsi à cette bande fruste et avide. Car si le spectacle de ces brutes déchaînées accaparait toute son attention, ce n'étaient ni les arbres stupidement mutilés ni les bêtes massacrées au hasard qui le retenaient, c'était le comportement de ces hommes, *ses semblables*, à la fois si familier et si étrange. (VLP 237)

Robinson is struck by the sense of familiarity that he feels watching these men, which can be attributed to the fact that he sees some of his old self in their behaviors. At the same time that he sees something familiar, he finds the men to be strange. He is so removed from the way that they are behaving that it must seem almost like a bizarre dream. The contrast is striking: Robinson, who has reverted to a more primal way of life, has a fundamental understanding of the natural world that far surpasses that of the sailors. His view of the world is quite ahead of his time. The sailors, on the other hand, who represent the civilization that Robinson has abandoned and must be, according to their ideology, superior to nature, are here seen climbing up tree trunks to find food. The image is decidedly apeish; it shows a backwards step in evolution that stands in stark

contrast to the perceived notion that civilization is superior to nature. The image succeeds in destroying the traditional nature/culture dichotomy, since Robinson, being more in tune with the natural world, is decidedly superior to the civilized Englishmen.

This passage strongly emphasizes the brutality that the sailors exhibit towards Speranza. As readers who have followed Robinson on his long journey, we are perfectly aware of the “souffrances qu’il aurait endurées.” Tournier has shown us that happiness on Speranza cannot be achieved by mastering her. In this passage, however, it is as if time is repeating itself and Robinson’s initial destruction and mastery of the island has multiplied. The futility of the sailor’s actions is therefore clear, and is underlined by Tournier’s use of the images of “ces brutes déchaînées,” “les arbres stupidement mutilés,” and “les bêtes massacrées au hasard.” It seems as though Robinson is watching these men in a barbaric act of war. It is clear that if these men continue to wage war on Speranza in this fashion, they will surely turn her into a desolate wasteland. If Robinson exhausted Speranza with his relatively small efforts at cultivation, surely a group of men doing the same thing would deplete her resources to a frightening extent. Tournier thus creates a fitting allegory for the condition of the environment in today’s world. Like the sailors, who can be considered civilization’s ambassadors on the island, modern civilization has waged a long war against nature. Clearly, nature is losing. “Les arbres stupidement mutilés” and “les bêtes massacrées au hasard” sound alarmingly familiar. Just as the sailors have no connection to Speranza, we are so removed from our natural origins that it is virtually impossible for us to realize the environmental ramifications of our way of life.

This is not true of Robinson. He has truly learned to live in harmony with the natural world. Whereas the island’s resources were depleted during Robinson’s cultivation, Speranza

thrives when Robinson ceases to perceive himself as superior. The arrival of the *Whitebird* and of other men fully shows the damaging effects of a careless society on nature: “Il était indiscutable que la visite du *Whitebird* avait gravement compromis l’équilibre délicat du triangle Robinson-Vendredi-Speranza. Speranza était couverte de blessures manifestes mais, somme toute, superficielles, qui disparaîtraient en quelques mois” (VLP 249). Fortunately, the *Whitebird* spent so little time on Speranza that her wounds are fairly superficial. Nevertheless, they are present; Speranza is exposed to society for only a couple of days, but the effects are vast and obvious. Tournier thus demonstrates that if the natural world is to survive, man cannot continue to overpower his surroundings; he must learn to live in harmony with them as Robinson has. Otherwise, the wounds on our own ecosystem, inflicted over hundreds of years, will be so profound that there will be no chance that they will disappear.

¹ Nine years after the publication of *Vendredi*, Tournier published a short story titled *La fin de Robinson Crusoe*. The story finds Robinson and Vendredi back in England after their rescue (Tournier wrote a conclusion to Defoe’s *Robinson*, and not to his own *Vendredi*). Both are drunkards, Vendredi is a thief, and neither is able to stop dreaming of the island. They are utterly incapable of integrating themselves into society. Robinson here calls to mind Don Quixote; he is an old fool continually chasing a dream, society’s outcast and the perpetual object of its mockery.

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