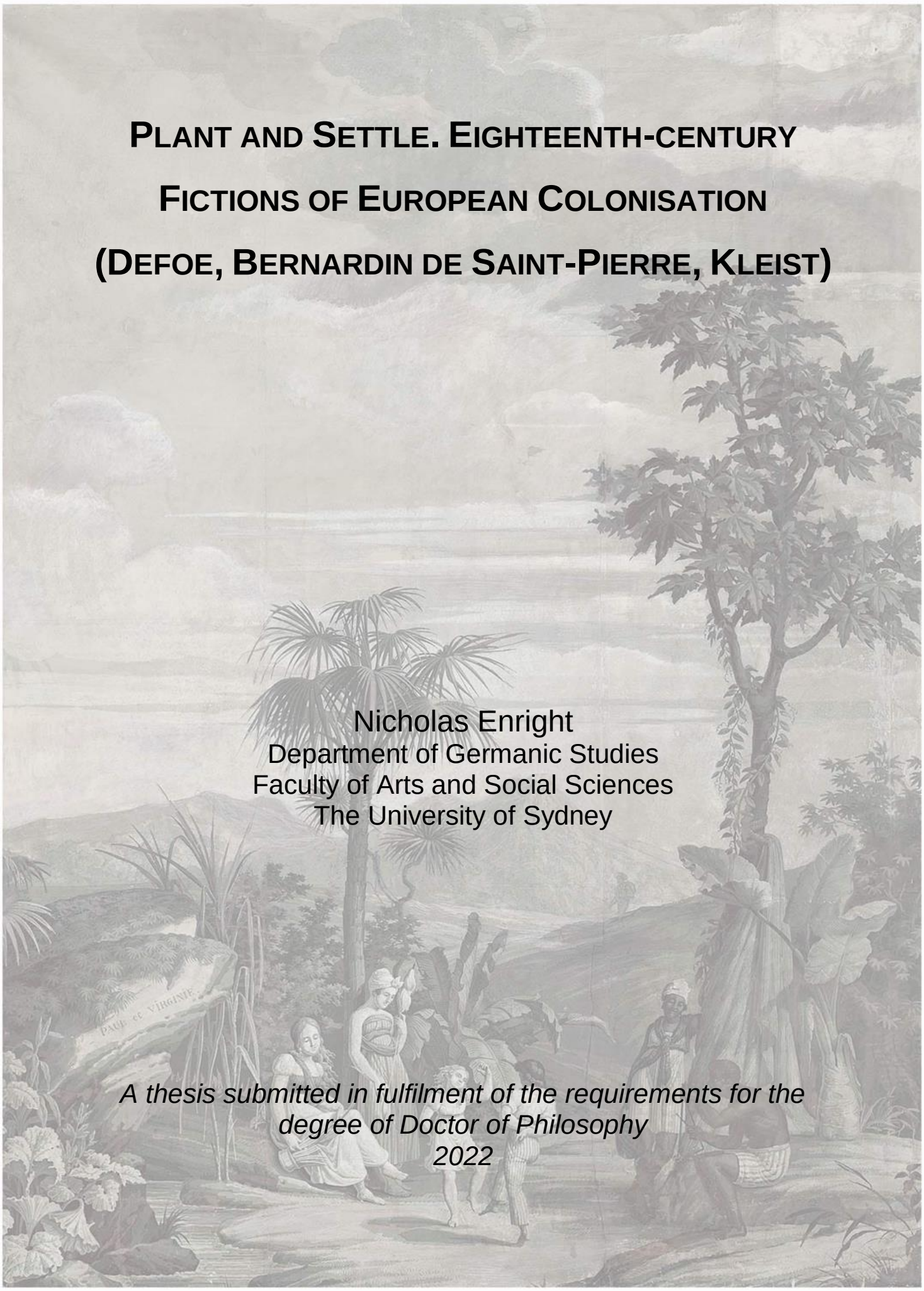
PLANT AND SETTLE. EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTIONS OF EUROPEAN COLONISATION (DEFOE, BERNARDIN DE SAINT-PIERRE, KLEIST)



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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This is to certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purpose.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

> The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to.[1]

At the end of the nineteenth century, British author Joseph Conrad articulated, with characteristic irony, an opposition that has only gained traction in cultural discourse ever since: the utopian "idea" of European colonisation versus its more sordid and problematic reality. Focusing on the period in European discourse *before* such scepticism became predominant, this thesis aims to reconstruct that idea via the early modern period's main medium and propaganda tool: the book. More specifically, this thesis scrutinises the role played by literary fiction, showing how texts like the immensely popular novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and the eighteenth-century fictions it inspired presented a particular version of European settlement of the non-European world as a benign and noble enterprise. As shall be argued, they did this by drawing on metaphors of cultivation, propagation and by framing conquest as an act of gardening that had an indelibly improving and civilising influence wherever it was applied. Harmoniously planting and settling the colonies, and reproducing the

[1] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. by D.C.R.A Goonetilleke. 2nd ed. (Toronto: Broadview Literary Texts, 1999), 72.

European homeland in the process, was the ideal that carried these narratives – an ideal, nonetheless, that systematically masked its own violent and destructive tendencies.

The idea of colonisation as a benevolent paternal act of husbandry and gardening has a long history in Western thought and cultural production. One of the first examples is the Garden of Eden, which although "planted" by God as it is stated in the bible, nevertheless relied on Adam and Eve to "cultivate" it to prevent it from running wild or, conversely, from withering away into a state of vegetative stagnation. Deriving from their stewardship of Eden the first two humans garnered the right to inhabit it – though Eve's fall from virtue soon rendered this divine arrangement void, forcing the pair's expulsion. Adam was cast as a redemptive figure ever since. Cultivation and paternal custodianship are strongly affinitive notions given that 'cultivation,' 'colony' and 'culture' all share a common root word, the Latin verb *colere*, meaning 'to tend,' 'to cultivate' but also 'to settle the soil with homesteads and cities.'[2] It is from *colere* that the words *colonnus* ('settler') and *agricola* ('farmer') are derived, the romanticised figure at the heart of Antique author Vergil's agricultural poem *Georgics* (29 BC); the Greek word γεωργός, geōrgos, signifies "one who works the earth."[3] Finally, the old English *husbonda*, encompassing at once the idea of agricultural steward, house-dweller and "progenitor"[4] – literally and

[2] Bernhard Siegert, "Cultural Techniques: Or the End of the Intellectual Postwar Era in German Media Theory." *Theory, Culture & Society* 30:6 (2013), 48-65, in particular: 56.
[3] The word *Georgics* derives from the Greek word γεωργός, geōrgos, that is farmer, or "one who works the earth." Written in Latin, Virgil's *Georgics* also employs the Latin word *agricola* (farmer), which derives from the Greek *agrios* (wild, monstrous, savage).
[4] "husband, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2017.

metaphorically, the figure that spreads his 'seed' – unifies the semantics of colonisation once and for all into an all-encompassing web of labour, reproduction and patriarchal lineage.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, however, the word colony "signifies simply a plantation" – at least according to the father of modern political economy, Adam Smith (*Wealth of Nations,* 1776).[5] More than anything, this definition reflected just how synonymous the Atlantic plantation system with its regime of luxury, slave labour and colonial racism had become for the colonial endeavour and, further, how forward-looking, secular notions of private property, marketisation and commodification (of people as much as land) had penetrated deep into the European consciousness. Secular ideas around labour, property and land ownership, so Max Weber argued, were the means by which the northern countries of Europe (particularly England) worked themselves, both mentally and physically, onto their faraway islands out in the ocean.[6] Yet, the problematics of colonisation, in particular of conquest, dispossession and slave labour, also weighed heavily on the European conscience. Because planting and settling necessarily involves a process of *displanting* and *displacement*, Europeans required a language to circumvent and circumscribe the moral and ethical quandary of empire, and to frame the

[5] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* [1776], ed. R.H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner; textual ed. W.B. Todd (Vol. II of the Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith), 2 vols. Oxford, 1976, II, 558.
[6] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [1904-5] (New York; London: Norton Critical Editions, 2009).

event – to borrow a concept from Mary-Louise Pratt – as "anti-conquest."[7] Today, the legacy of this learned "strategy of concealment,"[8] specifically with regards to land, property and labour, continues to live on in words like *aid*, *development*, *fair trade* and *gentrification*. In the eighteenth century, the benevolent empire's vocabulary consisted in terms like *planting, mutual benefit* and most of all: *improvement* and it was the garden – this enclosed, and thus manageable Edenic space with its intendant metaphors of cultivation, propagation, civility and civilisation – that united these principles into a single, irreducible image: that of the ideal colony to be planted and settled.

Placing the accent on fictional literature to access this complex and problematic terrain is apposite not just because the phantasm of planting and settling already represents a kind of 'fiction,' existing in the headspace of wishful thinking and make-believe. Moreover, this perspective draws on the capacity of literature in a functionally differentiated society[9] to freely imagine potential possible worlds and articulate collective fantasies, hopes and fears where other text types have more limited possibilities to do so. Precisely because the colonial garden is a *potential garden*, and colonial planting is associated with so many – technical as well as ethical – unknowns, literary fictions present in their capacity to trial, test and process

[7] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 7.
[8] Christopher Hedges, "Recognizing the Language of Tyranny." (7 February 2011) https://www.truthdig.com/articles/recognizing-the-language-of-tyranny [Accessed March 2017].
[9] Niklas Luhmann, "Frühneuzeitliche Anthropologie. Theorietechnische Lösungen für ein Evolutionsproblem der Gesellschaft." In: idem., *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik. Studien zur Wissenssoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft*. Bd. 1. (Frankfurt a. M. [1]1980), 162-234; here: 172.

assumptions about the distant venture of settling the 'new world.' They are the 'thought experiments' that nourish and invigorate the "dream enterprise"[10] of European colonialisation. Yet, in their lucid and dreamlike quality, such fictions also render the problematic and violent side of colonisation all the more 'legible.' In this unintended function, they represent an ideal lens for investigating the unstable moral and ethical terrain on which European colonisation was founded and forged.

This thesis shall investigate the problematics of settler colonialism through the prism of three key literary fictions of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in particular: Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Jacques Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel *Paul et Virginie* (*Paul and Virginia*, 1780) and Heinrich von Kleist's novella *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* (*The Betrothal in St. Domingo,* 1811) – texts in which the fantasy of planting and settling, so I argue, is at its most productive and virulent. Connecting these fictions is not only their enormous popularity or the well-known fact that they all cite, revise and rewrite each other. Equally unifying is the way in which each of them combines a dynamic of gardening with the setting of a far-away island at a remove from European society. Islands, like gardens, are small, unassuming spaces in which social, economic and power-political relationships have always been hotly contested and negotiated. In their assumed manageability and self-sufficiency, they are consistently appropriated for all kinds of ideological agendas and utopian

[10] Jill H. Casid, *Sowing Empire. Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xiii.

imaginings.[11] This truism could not be more applicable to the famous island fictions in focus here. In all instances, the controlled environment of the island proves instrumental to each text's capacity to expound, aggrandise – but in some instances also disrupt and unsettle – imperial fantasies of cultivation and 'improvement.'

Three differing cultural and linguistic (English, French and German) traditions make up the text corpus of this thesis, yet ultimately their differing national provenience is not so much at issue here. The eighteenth century is still guided by a common pan-European enlightenment culture; it is not yet dominated by the nationalisms of later centuries. Therefore, in light of this common cause and impetus, the main task of this thesis is identifying what changes and revisions the European project of planting and settling undergoes over time. My contention is that it is possible to read *Robinson Crusoe*, *Paul et Virginie* and *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* as respectively marking the beginning, middle and end of the paradigm of planting and settling in European literature – before an overarching sense of disenchantment and *Conradian* pessimism gradually descends on the European settler colonial project over the course of the nineteenth century.

[11] Sarah Phillips Casteels, "New World Pastoral: The Caribbean Garden and Emplacement in Gisele Pineau and Shani Mootoo." *Interventions* 5:1 (2003), 12-28; in particular: 14.

2. Historical background: 'The green empire'

This thesis concentrates on a period roughly spanning the years 1650 to 1810. In global history terms, the historical focus lies on the so-called 'Age of Discovery/Expansion,' or the cusp between what Ottmar Ette has theorised as "the first and second waves of accelerated globalisation."[12] This was a time when, as is well recorded, a major shift occurred in the global geopolitical landscape. As part of the Reformation movement, the countries of northern Europe (England, France, the Netherlands, in particular) began to challenge Iberian supremacy on the European continent and in the new world. They went about this not only by mounting a technological, economic and naval offensive against the Catholic South, but also by waging a war of ideas, pitting their more benign imperial ambitions, centred on 'planting and settling' their colonial possessions, against the 'evil empire' of Spain and Portugal supposedly only interested in gold and riches. As historians James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew explain:

> The English and Dutch, meanwhile, in self-conscious Protestant reaction to Catholic success in America, cast themselves as "planters" and maritime commercial traders, articulating ostensibly more limited claims to New World dominions based on agricultural property in land more than divine evangelical right over "heathen" peoples, though they proved no less flagrant in their violent displacement of Amerindians and enslavement of Africans.[13]

The northern identification with 'planting' and 'trading,' as described by Dew and Delbourgo, was possible in the first place because by the eighteenth

[12] Ottmar Ette; Mark W. Person, *TransArea: A Literary History of Globalization* (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2016), 11-12.
[13] James Delbourgo; Nicholas Dew, "Introduction: The Far Side of the Ocean." In: idem. (eds.), *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World* (New York; London: Routledge, 2008), 9.

century a colonising movement based on principles of agricultural 'improvement' and planting had already emerged in Europe, in particular in the British Isles. In this 'agricultural' or "landlord's revolution"[14] lay the ideological roots of the transformation of the Atlantic world into a "plantation machine"[15] with its distinct political, economic and cultural dispensation. According to Richard Drayton, the ideology of improvement "owed much to the long tradition of Judeo-Christian belief that 'the earth and the fullness thereof' were intended for humanity's benefit."[16] "The ideal of improvement as a justification for European expansion around the globe," John Gascoigne writes, "was part of the ideology of exploration and empire from the time of Columbus who, on his first voyage to the Americas, left seeds for sowing in the New World."[17] Columbus' sowing activities emblematised the new traffic of people, plants and animals between the metropole and plantations that would permanently and irrevocably transform the non-European environment – the so-called "Columbian Exchange" described by Alfred Crosby Jr.[18] It typified a European attitude of exploiting the new world for its natural riches and, where necessary, "inscribing a domination into blood and soil founded in the fantasy of molding ecosystems with godlike arrogance."[19] *Sowing, weeding,*

[14] Robert C. Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
[15] Trevor Burnard; John Garrigus, *The Plantation Machine. Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
[16] Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the 'Improvement' of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 270.
[17] John Gascoigne, *Encountering the Pacific in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 84.
[18] Alfred W. Crosby Jr., *The Columbian Exchange. Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Conn.; London: Praeger, 2003).
[19] Tomaz Mastnak; Julia Elyachar; Tom Boellstorff, "Botanical decolonization: rethinking native plants." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32 (2014), 363-380; here: 367.

transplanting and *grafting* represent just a few of the 'cultural techniques' European colonists would employ on the 'wild' and 'unruly' non-European environment in the attempt to adapt it – biologically and culturally – to Western interests and conceptions of abundance, productivity and 'improvement.'[20]

The 'green' nature of this endeavour in turn proved conducive to the higher moral ground that northern colonisers assumed, understanding themselves as benefactors and improvers rather than as violent and oppressive aggressors. It should be noted with Delbourgo and Dew, however, that while this particular form of colonisation may have presented itself as the more benevolent and benign, it proved no less consequential in its exploitation of land, resources and people. Sowing seeds as a "basic paternal gesture of founding colonies"[21] is as representative of a masculinist drive to subdue and stake possession as the violent conquest and forced religious conversion attributed to the supposedly 'gold-hungry' Spaniards. The underlying argument, based on the Roman principle of *res* or *terra nullius* ("nobody's thing," "no man's land"), states that land that is not made arable and productive is effectively common property. So 'armed,' Europeans created a legal basis for colonising areas inhabited by so-called 'primitive peoples' and exploiting them for diverse economic purposes.[22]

[20] Cf. Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
[21] Jill H. Casid, *Sowing Empire*, *op. cit.*, xvii.
[22] For a discussion see Dieter Heintze, "Terra Nullius. Von einer langlebigen Fiktion." In: *Georg-Forster-Studien* X, ed. Horst Dippel & Helmut Scheuer (Kassel: Kassel University Press, 2005), 219-264.

Several conceptualisations have been in the scholarship in order to describe this particular iteration of European colonialism, albeit with differing degrees of critical veracity: "imperial relandscaping,"[23] "Green Imperialism,"[24] "Benign Empire"[25] and "romantic colonisation"[26] represent just four possible alternatives. This thesis heeds the more critical of these approaches which acknowledge the green empire's participation in the machinations of colonial and imperial power. As Christopher Hedges explains, "[e]mpires communicate in two languages […] the language of command and force," and a "softer" language that "employs the vocabulary of ideals and lofty goals and insists that the power of empire is noble and benevolent."[27] This tension is reflected, in the green empire's case, across a range of linguistic and semiotic markers, but ultimately crystallises, or so I shall argue, in two contrasting rhetorical images: the garden versus the plantation. The former image is 'rooted' in a Judeo-Christian tradition that frames colonisation as a nostalgic and beneficial act of husbandry. It manifests in Edenic notions of "planting Christianity" in the tropics or inducting the "noble savage" into the family of "civilisation." The latter image of the plantation, on the other hand, is centrally imbricated with the project of modern capitalism and its rationalising and utilitarian tendencies. It is synonymous with slavery. 'Planting the garden' is a much more attractive and alluring idea than the arduous clearing of vegetation, digging of

[23] Jill H. Casid, *Sowing* Empire, op*. cit.*, 95.
[24] Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism. Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[25] David Armitage, "The Elizabethan Idea of Empire." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 14 (2004), 269-277.
[26] Deidre Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[27] Christopher Hedges, *op. cit*.

trenches, transporting of slaves or the back-breaking labour of cutting, crushing and boiling cane required to sustain a plantation. Thus, the garden presents as an ideal rhetorical device or even metaphor for the plantation wherever arguing for the legitimacy and magnanimity of empire is concerned.

3. *Utopia*: The island and European settler colonialism

The focus of this thesis is on gardens and plantations which are located on an island. Islands, like gardens, hold a unique place in the collective imagination, and despite their diminutive status, have been – and will most likely continue to be – at the centre of some of the most significant planetary developments. [28] Michel Foucault once theorised, or came close to theorising, the connection between islands and gardens when he identified the ship that "goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens"[29] as one of modernity's the most defining *heterotopias*, or 'real existent utopias.' What this thesis strives to show, specifically, is how a certain discursive gravity and traction of the island during the early modern period coalesces and converges with the project of planting and settling. As shall be argued, islands become the preferred locus of this project, an affinity that is legible and negotiated, above all, in *fictional works* of the period.

[28] David Chandler; Jonathan Pugh, "Anthropocene islands: There are only islands after the end of the world." *Dialogues in Human Geography* 11:3 (2021), 395-415.
[29] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16:1 (Spring 1986), 22-27; here: 27.

Why it was that the island witnessed a valorisation in the first place, though, might be attributed to what J. H. Parry has described as "the discovery of the sea."[30] Advancements in sea-faring, naval exploration and maritime expertise in the early modern period were the motor that enabled the project of European expansion and overseas colonisation. Within this context, islands and insularity took on key strategic importance. As Ottmar Ette and Mark Person explain:

> In the first phase of accelerated globalization, archipelagic and transarchipelagic connections take on a tremendous significance. […] Deploying from the secure bases of these islands, strongholds on the continent were established so that the dominance of the Iberian interlopers over vast areas of land was organized and enforced from within the insular structures of the cities: an island strategy that differed fundamentally from the territorial or continental course of action involving an advancing frontier, as it would later come to be so successfully applied on the North American continent.[31]

Islands represented ideal locations because, unlike large and expansive continents whose vast interiors loomed as a dangerous unknown, they were easily accessible and manageable.[32] Small, self-contained and isolated, they facilitated essential operations such as the coming and going of ships, the replenishment of supplies and the gathering of know-how. "In the era of commercial capitalism," John Gillis therefore observes, "coasts and islands were the core and the continents the periphery of geographical transfers of capital, people, and knowledge."[33]

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[30] J. H. Parry, *The Discovery of the Sea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).
[31] Ette; Person, *op. cit.*, 11-12.
[32] As Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith contend, to the extent that islands "look like property" (that is, to the extent that their small size appears to invite their capture by a synoptic gaze), they are likely to appear not merely as ideal states but also as 'ideal colonies,' bite-size parcels of territory that stir fantasies of symbolic possession. In: Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith, "Editors' Introduction." In: *Islands in History and Representation*, ed. idem. (London: Routledge, 2003), 1.
[33] John Gillis, "Taking History Offshore: Atlantic Islands in European Minds 1400–1800." In: *Islands in History and Representation,* ed. Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith (London: Routledge, 2003), 19-31; here: 29.

Denis Cosgrove has theorised these set of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century developments as the rise of an "oceanic globalism." By the eighteenth century, he notes, European cartography would register the division of the world into a "land hemisphere," dominated by Europe, and a "sea hemisphere," dominated by the vast expanses of the Pacific Ocean.[34] Concomitantly, as historians and cultural theorists tell us, England was developing its own sense of 'insularity' and apartness, in both a geographical and cognitive sense, from continental Europe. In his seminal work of 1954, *Land und Meer* (*Land and Sea*), Carl Schmitt argued that by the sixteenth century England's island status was transformed from the "land-bound, soil-bound" logics of feudalism to the mercantile spatiality of a "maritime existence cut off from land and embracing all the oceans of the world."[35] In a similar assessment, Jeffrey Knapp contends that the English made a virtue of their status as an island at a remove from the European continent, harnessing its power as part of their expansion into the new world. The convergence of expansionist and isolationist rhetoric gave rise, during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, to what Knapp's study describes as a colonialism "indistinguishable from insularism."[36]

[34] Denis Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
[35] Carl Schmitt, *Land and Sea* (1954). Trans. Simona Draghici (Corvallis, OR: Plutarch Press, 1997), 50.
[36] Jeffrey Knapp, *An Empire Nowhere: England, America, and Literature from Utopia to The Tempest* (Oakland CA: University of California Press, 1994), 12. Diana Loxley has also noted the shift from the fundamentally anti-expansionist insularism of classical and medieval Europe to the post sixteenth-century elevation of "the motif of the island" into what Loxley describes as "the theme of colonialism." In: Diana Loxley, *Problematic Shores: The Literature of Islands* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 131.

Interestingly, more than anywhere, this newfound territorial integrity and the corresponding ideas of British statehood[37] and "imagined community,"[38] that is "taking pride in its ideal being as Britannia, a 'world divided from the world,'"[39] manifests itself in literary works of the period. It informs works like Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610-11) and Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness* (1605), but most of all Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). More's book was one of the first to employ the setting of the island to imagine an ideal society, establishing a new, eponymous genre that inspired hundreds of imitations over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While More insists on Utopia's status as a hypothetical 'non-place,' even contemporaries would have understood the island society at its heart as a metaphor for the social and political reform of early modern England. But as Gillian Beer also reminds us, the choice of an island as the setting for utopian visions and imaginations also casts a certain pessimism over the reformative potential of the project of social perfection.[40] Certainly, the sheer scope and ambition of More's reformative programme, too, seems to imply that the project of utopia is only possible if displaced to a far-off, still unformed and unpossessed elsewhere.

Reflective of the expansionist undercurrent in *Utopia* is the way in which the book addresses the core issue of colonialism, certainly of settler colonialism:

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[37] See Philip E. Steinberg, "Insularity, Sovereignty and Statehood: The Representation of Islands on Portolan Charts and the Construction of the Territorial State." *Geografiska Annaler* 87:4 (2005), 253-265.
[38] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Revised and extended edition (London: Verso, 1991), 6-7.
[39] These famous lines stem from of Ben Jonson's play *The Masque of Blackness* (1605).
[40] Gillian Beer, "Discourses of the Island." In: *Literature and Science as Modes of Expression*, ed. Frederick Amrine (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer, 1989), 1-27.

that of land, materials and resources. Farming and agriculture assume central importance in More's imagined society, manifesting for instance compulsory instruction of all Utopians in the art of husbandry;[41] as does the idea of Utopia as a lusciously planted Eden:

> They [the Utopians] set great store by their gardens. In them they have vineyards, all manner of fruit, herbs, and flowers, so pleasant, so well furnished, and so finely kept, that I never saw thing more fruitful nor better trimmed in any place.[42]

But, as J. C. Davis points out, *Utopia* also raises the problem of "supply and demand," that is the issue "of balancing a finite amount of materials with a potentially infinite amount of desire for those materials."[43] It provides provisions for how the "waste and unoccupied ground" of one's neighbours may be made green and fertile, "sufficient and fruitful enough for the many if only people have the will so to transform it, instead of being left barren, fit only to feed very few."[44] The rhetoric of 'wasted,' 'unoccupied' and 'fallow' ground was, of course, a cornerstone of justifications the dispossession of indigenous peoples amid England's expansion into, and colonisation of, the new world.

Hence, as Anthony Pagden contends, More's work can be seen as "the best known, but least discussed, celebration of the possibilities of colonization."[45] Frederic Jameson similarly argues that "*Utopia* is […] the prototype of the

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[41] Thomas More, *Utopia* (1516). In: *Three Early Modern Utopias*, ed. Susan Bruce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 51.
[42] *Ibid.*, 54.
[43] J.C. Davis, *Utopia and the ideal society. A study of English utopian writing 1516-1700* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 9.
[44] Thomas More, *Utopia* (1516)*, op. cit*., 63.
[45] Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the World. Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-c. 1800* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995), 76.

settler colony, and the forerunner of modern imperialism," and explicitly includes in the notion of the settler colony the Zionist formulation wherein '"the people without land' supposedly meet 'the land without people.'"[46] Equally significant is the fact that, already, *Utopia* explicitly links the vision of a green empire, rooted in agrarian tenets and principles, with that of an insular empire, propelled by maritime and naval imperatives – thus countering the hitherto posited opposition of these two paradigms in Western historiography.[47] It postulates a connection between the colonial fantasy and *topos* of the island and the virtue/value of husbandry, gardening and planting. While gardening and planting represent the objective of European activity, the island provides the ideal space for realising this dream – crystallising in the image of the garden-island to be planted and settled enduringly for posterity.

4. New terrain: From *Utopia* to *Robinson Crusoe*

If Thomas More's *Utopia* can be credited with inaugurating the fantasy of the settler colony in literature, Daniel Defoe's breakthrough novel *Robinson Crusoe* of 1719 delivered the most elaborate and detailed meditation on the possibilities of colonisation of any other literary text to date. *Crusoe* was born out of the utopian tradition, yet, as one of the first 'novels' in English

[46] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso 2005), 205. Similarly, Susan Bruce reads More's Utopia as a prototype for the logic of modern settler colonialism, wherein an "anti-Arcadian urbanism" displays "remoteness from a pastoral sensibility." Cf. Susan Bruce, "Utopian Justifications: More's Utopia, Settler Colonialism, and Contemporary Ecocritical Concerns." *College Literature* 42:1 (2015), 23-43; here: 33-34.
[47] Cf. C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* (London: Longman, 1989), 80-81.

language,[48] also signalled a radical departure from the model of collective perfection that had previously (and one-sidedly) defined the genre. Documenting one man's shipwreck and subsequent colonisation of an uninhabited island, the text announced a new kind of subjectivity, reflecting changing social and political conditions and, above all, the inward-focused, yet outward-looking mindset of the emergent middle-classes. As Antonis Balasopoulos argues, in literature, the development from More's *Utopia* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is tantamount to a shift in the semantics of insularity from a metaphor of the body politic to a metaphor of property-based individualism. For Balasopoulos,

> [t]he significance of insularity as a means of spatially imagining a new kind of subject – rational, inwardly turned, acquisitive, and instrumental to the project of national expansion – is the retrospectively obvious lesson of the vast popularity of a text as foundational for the eighteenth century mythology of bourgeois modernity as it is for the literary history of colonialism: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719).[49]

By the twenty-first century, Crusoe would no longer be seen (as he had been in previous centuries) as an exemplar of *natural man*, but instead as prototype of the *homo economicus* of modernity, anxiously sequestered off from the world via a bulwark of property, capital holdings and picket fences.[50] Such a reading somewhat obscures, however, the involvement of Defoe's novel in Atlantic history and the early modern English colonial endeavour. Published in 1719, at a crucial juncture in global history, *Robinson Crusoe* manifested the idea of empire and settler colonialism that

[48] See Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), 60-92.
[49] Antonis Balasopoulos, "Nesologies: island form and postcolonial geopoetics." *Postcolonial Studies* 11:1 (2008), 9-26.
[50] See Robert P. Marzec, "Enclosures, Colonization, and the Robinson Crusoe Syndrome: A Genealogy of Land in a Global Context." *boundary* 2 29:2 (2002),129-156.

had been developing in English and European discourse for centuries. It did this by way of a powerful and distinctly literary vision of colonisation, interspersing contemporaneous scientific theories of agricultural "Improvement"[51] with highly idealised images of Crusoe's husbandry and planting of the fictitious island. Literary fiction is instrumentalised here in its function to model history, and thus shape and form cultural discourse, but also to fantasise and mythologise the same 'reality,' such as in the famous scene in which Crusoe impregnates the 'virgin ground' of the island with his barley seeds, thereby making it 'English.'

At the same time, *Crusoe*'s status, legacy and influence within cultural production also transcended the specific temporal and spatial context in which it was produced, early eighteenth-century England. Still today, the 'ripple effect' of *Robinson Crusoe* can be registered across a highly diversified, transnational landscape of artistic and textual production.[52] According to Martin Green, only the Bible can compete with *Robinson Crusoe* in sheer volume of translations and reproductions it generated,[53] a feat already suggestive of the kind of ideological battle in which both books had become implicated. In its own century alone, Defoe's text garnered a string of imitations and adaptations, inspiring a whole new genre, the

[51] "[T]he open ideology of improvement is in fact most apparent in Defoe." In: Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Vintage: London, 2016), 88.
[52] See Jakub Lipski, *Rewriting Crusoe: The Robinsonade across Languages, Cultures, and Media* (Ithaca, NY: Bucknell University Press, 2021).
[53] Martin Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), 72.

Robinsonade.[54] In Ann Marie Fallon's words, Defoe's text "created an early script for the European colonial project at the beginning of the eighteenth century," largely due to the new sense of "cosmopolitan selfhood" its protagonist embodied.[55] The ease with which Crusoe seemed to navigate the world, a symbolic extension of the emerging British empire's evolving naval prowess and cosmopolitan outlook, served as a paradigm that not only boys and men,[56] but also entire nations (above all the landlocked nations of continental Europe) aspired to emulate.[57]

5. Conceptual framework: The desert island and cultural techniques

The concern of this thesis, nevertheless, is not so much on the emulation of certain, punctual features of the Crusoe narrative or its plotline of shipwreck, maroonage and rebirth. Rather, this thesis examines how Crusoe furnished a potent literary model for navigating and negotiating the *terra incognita* of European colonisation and settler colonialism at a time when this project was at its most foundational and emergent. That model, simultaneously a fantasy that sat deep in the colonial imagination, was the topos of an island, gardened, planted and settled, in service of European

[54] The name of the new genre was coined by eighteenth-century German author Johann Gottfried Schnabel. See: Johann Gottfried Schnabel, *Insel Felsenburg. Wunderliche Fata einiger Seefahrer* (1731-1743). 3 Bände. Mit einem Nachwort von Günter Dammann. Textredaktion von Marcus Czerwionka unter Mitarbeit von Robert Wohlleben (Reclam: Frankfurt a. M., 1997).
[55] Ann Marie Fallon, *Global Crusoe. Comparative Literature, Postcolonial Theory and Transnational Aesthetics* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 1.
[56] See Karen Downing, *Restless Men. Masculinity and Robinson Crusoe, 1788-1840* (Basingstoke, UK; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire: A Geography of Adventure* (London: Routledge, 1997).
[57] Defoe's novel produced more imitations and adaptations in the German-speaking world than anywhere else. See Jürgen Fohrmann, *Abenteuer und Bürgertum: zur Geschichte der deutschen Robinsonaden im 18. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1981).

notions of improvement, augmentation, productivity and personal as well as national wealth. It shaped enormously influential texts like Jacques Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel *Paul et Virginie* (1780) and Heinrich von Kleist's novella *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* (1811).

The precursor of the verdant, luscious and abundant *garden-island* – its *sine qua non –,* nevertheless, is the 'desert island' setting upon which all three fictions ultimately rely. An iteration of another of modernity's fantasies, the *tabula rasa*, the desert island represents that vacuous and virginal space awaiting a saviour – the Western bourgeois subject – to wrest it from its hollow and defect state, and 'invest' it with history, value and meaning. Two senses of the word 'desert' are implied here: deserted, as in *unpossessed,* or *no-man's land*; and desert, as in *fallow* and *uncultivated*, both of which possess moral, practical as well as strategic dimensions. For one, that the island is uninhabited proves conducive to the moral high ground and innocence on which Crusoe's narrative and the legitimacy of his empire ultimately relies. While Robinson may spend his time lamenting his solitude, the truth is that an island unpopulated and 'uncivilised' is an island on which Crusoe can declare himself "King and Lord of all this Country indefeasibly" (*RC*, 117) without the slightest stain on his conscience.

For another, as a device of controlled and calculated isolation, the desert island form simulates, through fictional means, one of the most paradigmatic and productive epistemological scenes of modernity: the experiment. To draw on Hans-Jörg Rheinberger's theory of experimental

systems, the novel designs a world whose reality represents an open-ended "experimental writing game,"[58] a powerful "machine for making the future,"[59] whereby obvious connections to Ernst Bloch's concept of "hope" as a foundational stone of utopia are apparent.[60] At the same time, in the economy of the narrative, the desert island is also a space in which the fictional characters go about the everyday business of sowing, planting, gardening or kneading the bread that sustains their vision of the 'wonder' of European civilisation, as in the famous scene in *Robinson Crusoe*. In this regard, its function is also like that of a *medium* – a surface for inscribing and re-inscribing the virtue and value of husbandry.

To analyse and describe what it is the protagonists 'do' to the desert island in order to subdue and cultivate it, realising their utopian ambitions in the process, this thesis adopts a perspective of German media theory called "cultural techniques" (Ger. *Kulturtechniken*).[61] Cultural techniques has not typically been applied to the study of the enterprise of colonisation and colonial systems, which is surprising given that the origins of the word *cultura* like *colonia*, both derived from the verb *colere*, meaning to cultivate or to settle, are deeply embedded in a millennia-long history of colonisation,

[58] Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, "Experimental Systems, Graphematic Spaces." In: *Instituting Science. The Cultural Production of Scientific Disciplines*, ed. Timothy Lenoir (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 296.
[59] *Ibid.*, 291.
[60] Cf. Judith Brown, "Ernst Bloch and the Utopian Imagination." *Eras Journal 5.* Available online: https://www.monash.edu/arts/philosophical-historical-international-studies/eras/past-editions/edition-five-2003-november/ernst-bloch-and-the-utopian-imagination [Accessed 26 September 2022].
[61] Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*. *Trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

conquest and expansion.[62] Broadly speaking, this perspective is interested in how cultural (one could add: colonial) systems perpetuate themselves through a range of calculated technological and medial operations. Defoe's text, and the subsequent texts to be analysed, lend themselves to this focalisation, on the one hand, because his narrative, centred on the emergence of a garden-island colony, quite literally pivots on a set of botanical techniques: the foundational *enclosure* of the island landscape into parcellated plots, the *sowing* of seeds for future propagation, the *transplantation* of plants, people, animals and things to the island; but also the corresponding operations of anti-propagation, typically buried deep within the narrative: *clearing, erasure, uprooting, displanting*, *enslavement*, and so forth. Therefore, in the chapters that follow, a significant part of the focus goes to the formal mechanics of planting and settling the desert island. How do the texts uniquely stage the act of colonisation as a technological process? What specific cultural techniques of propagation and anti-propagation, planting and displanting, are observable in each?

On the other hand, as Uwe Wirth explains:

> Cultural techniques such as grafting necessitate cultural techniques of transmission. It is not sufficient to merely establish a botanical technique, in order to (literally) organise the physical transition between different plant parts by way of a link. You also have to establish a medial technique in order to facilitate the communicative passage between different temporal and spatial contexts.[63]

[62] See Bernhard Siegert, "Kulturtechnik." In: *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. Harun Maye, Leander Scholz (Munich: Fink, 2011), 95-118; André-George Haudricourt, "Domestication des animaux, culture des plantes et traitement d'autrui." *L'Homme* 2:1 (1962), 40-50.

[63] Uwe Wirth, "Nach der Hybridität: Pfropfen als Kulturmodell. Vorüberlegungen zu einer *Greffologie*." [After hybridity: Grafting as cultural model. Preliminary considerations towards *greffology*] In: Ottmar Ette, Uwe Wirth (eds.), *Nach der Hybridität. Zukunft der Kulturtheorie*

Wirth draws on Deleuze's concept of the *greffe,* or the *graft*, to capture not only the latent botanical symbolism of writing, of inscribing with the help of an implement, but also the imitative copy-paste-like operations involved in transmitting culture. "Culture is understandable as grafting," so he contends;[64] or with Deleuze: "*Écrire* veut dire *greffer*. C'est le même mot."[65] The concern for the imperatives of writing, propagation and transmission find a poetological equivalent in Crusoe's salvaging of "Pens, Ink, and Paper" (*RC*, 74) from the ship as a way of salvaging the life of his *récit* itself. In these powerful tools of diffusion and dissemination, Defoe's novel re-enacts one of the imperatives of empire-building at the beginning of the eighteenth century: that *advertising* the act of conquest is as crucial as *performing* it.[66] Moreover, it anticipates one of the key insights of post-modernity: cultural production as a syncretic process of *replication* and *recycling*. Recognising the syncretic make-up of culture represents a step towards dismantling the aura of authenticity historically ascribed to the European canon. Defoe's novel is doubly 'grafted' in the sense that it furnished posterity with a blueprint that proved infinitely replicable, while also being born out of the forms of cultural production and expression available in the early-modern historical occasion. A second concern of this thesis, therefore, is how the texts summon influences, re-write and revise one another, thus weaving the intricate, if also epigonal textual 'web' that is

(Berlin: edition tranvia/Verlag Walter Frey, 2014), 13-36; here: 16. The translation is my own.

[64] Uwe Wirth, "Nach der Hybridität," *op. cit.*, 16.

[65] *Ibid.*, 20.

[66] See Philippe Despoix, *Die Welt vermessen. Dispositive der Entdeckungsreise im Zeitalter der Aufklärung.* Trans. Guido Goerlitz (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009).

culture. What similarities and differences are perceptible, and what changes does Crusoe's 'script' undergo with time? To what extent do the fictions engage and reflect on the contemporary scientific and political discourse of colonialism; but also: at what point do they develop their own dynamic, transgressing the boundaries of scientific rationality and/or empirical probability? What specifically 'literary' qualities do the texts possess?

The perspective of cultural techniques, specifically the operations of *grafting* and *transplantation*, also opens up new ways of dissecting the dynamics of colonial power in such narratives – and not just because, alongside the compass and gunpowder, the book supposedly represented one of the foundations of 'Western technological and cultural superiority' over so-called 'subject peoples.'[67] As a metaphor for how supposedly antithetical elements conjoin, intermix, cross-pollinate and converge in the intercultural encounter, grafting is relatable to contemporary discussions around 'hybridity' and the potentially unsettling and subversive ambivalence it stands for. In the context of colonialism, however, where asymmetrical power relations are involved, the model of grafting "implies a particular form of *cultural dominance*" and a "position of superior authority," as Wirth argues. "It allocates the colonised the role of a wild base material which requires

[67] Roy Wolper argues that in the first centuries of European globalisation, between 1500 and 1800, three technical advancements came to shape the way Europe defined itself in relation to the outside world: the compass, gunpowder and print media. In these artefacts the idea of European superiority crystallised on a navigational, militaristic and medial level. In: Roy S. Wolper, "The Rhetoric of Gunpowder and the Idea of Progress." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31:4 (1970), 589-598. On the significance of the book in the colonial context see Michael Harbsmeier, "Writing and the Other: Travellers' Literacy, or Towards an Archaeology of Orality." In: *Literacy and Society*, ed. Karen Shousboe & Mogens Trolle Larsen (Copenhagen, 1989), 197-228; Michael Harbsmeier, "Buch, Magie und koloniale Situation. Zur Anthropologie von Buch und Schrift." In: *Das Buch als magisches und als Repräsentationsobjekt,* ed. Peter Ganz (Wiesbaden, 1992), 3-24.

improving by way of the coloniser's quasi-horticultural interventions."[68] For the purposes of this thesis, the metaphor of grafting presents as a way of understanding the gesture and attitude of domination behind the project of planting and settling. Written and published amid the rise of settler colonialism, how do the texts go about negotiating a European presence in the non-European world? What structures of tutelage and custodianship do they imagine, but also, what forms of convivence, cohabitation and intermixture with a projected non-European Other do they envisage? What arguments do they present for the legitimacy of European empire, and where do they define its limits? These are some of the questions that this thesis shall pose.

6. Structure, aims

This thesis draws on areas as diverse as area studies, the history of science, ecocultural studies, the history of race and slavery, postcolonial studies, gender studies, among others. Such a consciously learned border-crossing strategy forms part of the attempt to engage with, albeit not in an all-encompassing nature, the project of settler colonialism and European colonisation in its ideological, technical, medial, semiological and aesthetic dimensions.[69] Alongside *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), two further texts make up the body of this thesis: French author Jacques Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel *Paul et Virginie* (*Paul and Virginia*, 1780) and German author

[68] Uwe Wirth, "Nach der Hybridität," *op. cit.*, 29. The translation is my own.
[69] Walter D. Mignolo, "Second Thoughts on The Darker Side of the Renaissance. Afterword to the Second Edition." In: idem., *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor, 2003), 427-457; here: 441–2.

Heinrich von Kleist's novella *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* (*The Betrothal in St. Domingo*, 1811). Their relevance to this investigation is not just tied to the immense popularity or cultural impact they have had (during the decade of the French revolution, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's book went through more reprints than any other fictional work; Heinrich von Kleist has emerged as one of German literature's most canonical figures). Rather, as I shall argue, these are the texts that develop the fantasy of settler colonialism described in Defoe's fiction, *Robinson Crusoe*, more poignantly than any other of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Literary authors of the eighteenth century were highly attuned to what was transpiring on the global stage. By 1800, as the transatlantic system was at its "apogee"[70] and the number of enslaved working in the plantations reached correspondingly record levels, faith in the redeeming qualities of the European colonial project was rapidly dwindling. Consequently, through *Robinson Crusoe, Paul et Virginie* and *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*, I believe it is possible to read the beginning, middle and end phase of the colonial project of planting and settling in European literature.

The thesis is structured into three main chapters. In **chapter one**, I return briefly to the perspective of cultural techniques and broach the problematics of propagation and de-propagation – *gardening*, *planting*, *labour* but also: *clearing*, *displanting* and *enslavement*. My aim here is to reconstruct a segment of the intellectual history of settler colonialism through three key

[70] Philip Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 113.

figures: Francis Bacon, John Locke and Daniel Defoe. This discussion then provides a platform for **chapter two**, in which I read *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), firstly, as an inheritor of the ideas of Bacon, Locke and Defoe. However, my main goal here is to extract and distil the optimistic model of colonisation, of planting and settling a desert island, that makes its career in eighteenth-century literary and cultural production. I also read Defoe's novel in conjunction with one of the most important examples of early British Caribbean writing: Richard Ligon's *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbados* of 1657. In **chapter three**, I investigate Jacques Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's French-language novel *Paul et Virginie* (*Paul and Virginia*, 1780). I show how Bernardin's novel develops and critically revises the programme of *Crusoe* under the influence of the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as well as his own his own experiences as a botanist and one of the first environmentalists. Finally, in **chapter four**, I analyse Heinrich von Kleist's German-language novella *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* (*The Betrothal in St. Domingo*, 1811). Set during the slave uprising of the Haitian Revolution, Kleist's novella is a critical and taboo-breaking confrontation with the fiction of European settlement as a blissful life of planting and settling the colonies, as imagined by Defoe and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. Kleist's text dismantles that fiction by way of a vehement deconstruction of the racist structures that historically sustained it.

By reading key works of the Western literary canon from a critical perspective of the European colonial project, rather than through the prism

of their national and linguistic affiliations, this thesis aims to join dots where rigid disciplinary boundaries once pervaded. It will challenge the ambiguity of the concept of 'colonialism' and argue for a more nuanced and historically defined approach to this area of study (settler colonialism, maritime colonialism). The thesis will reconstruct a segment of the 'imaginary history' of settler colonialism, while also deconstructing the ideological framework at its core. Given the historical reach of this project which continues to weigh on the present, this thesis has wider implications than the scope of the eighteenth century. In the era of the Anthropocene, amid a growing awareness of man-made climate change and mankind's geological impact, the legacy of settler colonialism is more relevant than ever before. By relating its transformative agenda with a masculinist drive to order, subdue and domesticate, the approach followed here is conducive to ways of imagining alternative histories and forms of agency beyond the perspective of 'the coloniser.'

1. THE THEORETICAL ROOTS OF SETTLER COLONIALISM: BACON, LOCKE, DEFOE

1. Introduction

The aim of this introductory chapter is to reconstruct, through selective reading, the 'pre-history' of the idea of the settler colony in European discourse and thus build a foundation for the discussion of aesthetic and literary texts to follow. To achieve this, I draw on the work of three key thinkers of modern secular culture: Francis Bacon, John Locke and Daniel Defoe. That the European settler colonial project engendered a massive transformation and upheaval on a global scale has become common wisdom in twenty-first-century cultural production and scholarship. As James Belich writes,

> European empire dominated one and a half continents for a century or so. European settlement came to dominate three-and-a-third continents, including Siberia. It still does. It was settlement, not empire, that had the spread and staying power in the history of European expansion, and it is time that historians of that expansion turned their attention to it.[71]

Explaining the spread and staying power of settler colonialism, historians like Alfred W. Crosby[72] and more recently Tomaz Mastnak et al[73] have considered transformations on the level of the environment and 'biota,' while postcolonial studies scholars have assessed its lasting impact on non-

[71] James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 23.
[72] Alfred W. Crosby Jnr. (1986), *op. cit.*
[73] Mastnak; Elyachar; Boellstorff, *op. cit.*, 363-380.

European societies and cultures.[74] Leading researchers in the fields of ecocriticism and ecofeminism such as Val Plumwood, furthermore, have linked these tangible historical developments with the rational and anthropocentric impetus of Western philosophy since Aristotle, with its systematic inability to recognise mankind's dependence on, and belonging to, the natural world.[75]

By visiting the work of figures like Bacon, Locke and Defoe – three key figures in the genealogy of Western rational thought – we gain insight into the intellectual history of a very real and transformative remaking of the world through the settler colony. While recognised as major theorists of European society and culture, many of their key ideas were formulated within or with a view towards a colonial framework. They extolled the potential advantages of settling the new world, but also grappled with issues such as dispossession, deracination, enslavement and genocide, and developed a language to manage and circumvent the associated moral and ethical baggage. Guiding this chapter, therefore, is the hypothesis: that in the context of settler colony, planting and settling are always connected with a concomitant process of *displanting* and *displacement*. In reality, the two

[74] See Robin A. Butlin, *Geographies of Empire: European empires and colonies c.1880-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Tracey Banivanua Mar; Penelope Edmonds, *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on race, place and identity* (Eastbourne: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, truth telling, and reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010); Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A theoretical overview* (Eastbourne: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Lorenzo Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
[75] Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

are mutually inclusive, yet in discourse and theory, one is frequently posited as a justification for the other and attributed greater moral purpose.

2. The settler ideology: Francis Bacon, *Essays* (1625)

Francis Bacon is known as a champion of the scientific revolution, of anthropocentrism and, above all, for formulating the idea of the mastery of nature at the core of modernity. His theory of nature is less of an issue here than his ideas on colonisation, which form an important part of that theory. According to Sarah Irving, Bacon's attitude towards English expansion into the new world betrays deep-seated anxieties about the colonial venture, centred around the encounter with 'the wilderness' and 'the native.'[76] However, he also provides a justification for English expansion, emphasising the potential benefits for humankind and progress – while also downplaying the drawbacks and potential conflict that might arise.

His ideas on colonisation are, first and foremost, indebted to an 'Edenic narrative' which held particular currency in the early modern period.[77] According to Grove, the image and metaphor of the original garden was central to Europeans' attempts to "characterise, identify and organise their perceptions of nature at the expanding colonial periphery."[78] In his essay 'Of Gardens' (1625), for instance, Bacon writes that "God Almighty first planted a garden" and he associates the garden with "elegance and civility."

[76] Sarah Irving, "'In a pure soil': colonial anxieties in the work of Francis Bacon." *History of European Ideas* 32 (2006), 249-262.
[77] Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western culture as a recovery narrative." In: *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. idem. (Norton: New York, 1996), 132-162.
[78] Richard H. Grove, *op. cit.*, 13.

The garden represents “greater perfection” than all other forms of building and human design.[79] Nevertheless, after the fall of man, knowledge attached to the garden was effectively lost. In other writings, he affirmed that European empire and the discovery of new lands represented the possibility of “restitution and reinvesting [...] of man to the sovereignty and power [...] which he had in his first state of creation.”[80] Colonial ventures, so Bacon contended, promoted exploration, navigation and the scientific study of nature.[81] Implicitly, Bacon argued that European expansion and exploration was a necessary condition of mankind’s return to the civilisation and mastery of nature it had once possessed in Eden.

Bacon was also a man of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, holding the office of the Attorney General and Lord Chancellor of England. He was intimately involved in the workings of government and took an active role in defining English colonial interests in America, thinking that English settlers could “be seen as ‘planting’ a Paradise in historical time.”[82] This concern for the more pragmatic interests and ambitions of the English nation culminates in the essay ‘Of Plantations’ (1625), his most important text on colonisation and for some a paradigmatic formulation of the idea of settler colonialism.[83] Envisaging how colonisation might work ‘on the ground,’ Bacon advises English colonists on how to subdue the new-world environment how to best

[79] Francis Bacon, “Of Gardens.” In: Francis Bacon, *Essays* [1625], ed. Michael J. Hawkins (London: J. M. Dent, 1994), 118.
[80] Francis Bacon, “Valerius terminus: Of the Interpretation of Nature.” In: *The Works of Francis Bacon*, eds. J. Spedding; R. Ellis; D. Denon (Longmans: London, 1859), Volume 3 215-252: here: 222.
[81] See Mastnak et al, *op. cit.*, 365.
[82] *Ibid.*, 366.
[83] Ibid.

subsist there. They are to identify the plants to grow and establish plantations, giving preference to those that "grow speedily," do not "ask too much Labour" and "are nutritious."[84] Gardening is crucial to surviving in the harsh "wilderness" of America, hence "[t]he people wherewith you plant ought to be gardeners, ploughmen, labourers, smiths, carpenters, joiners, fishermen, fowlers, with some few apothecaries, surgeons, cooks, bakers." Gardeners top Bacon's list of colonial professions, in contrast to the "scum" and the "wicked"[85] people whom he strictly advises against sending to the colonies.

His vision of the settler colony is also couched in the language of "planting" and the "plantation" throughout. What exactly does he infer with these terms and what are their relationship to the idea and image of the garden? English usage of the word *planting* as a synonym for *colonisation* traces to the sixteenth century when the English 'planted,' that is conquered and settled, Ireland.[86] Sixteenth-century travel writer Richard Hakluyt was one of the first English writers to use the term in the context of the colonisation of America, conceiving of settled colonies, or "plantings" as he calls them, as a means of occupying lands "yet unpossessed" by Spain and Portugal.[87] Only from the mid-seventeenth century onwards do the words 'plant' and 'plantation'

[84] Francis Bacon, "Of Plantations." In: *Essays* (1625), ed. Michael J. Hawkins (London: J. M. Dent, 1994), 88.
[85] *Ibid.*, 88.
[86] Key references in this context are Sir John Davies, *A Discovery of True Causes why Ireland was entirely subdued […]* (London: [W. Jaggard] for Iohn Iaggard, 1612); Edmund Spenser, *A Vewe of the Present State of Irelande, A Prose Treatise on the Reformation of Ireland* (1633), in: *Irish Chronicles* (London: 1598). For a discussion see Nicholas P. Canny, *Making Ireland British 1580–1650* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[87] Richard Hakluyt, *Divers Voyages Touching the Discovery of America and the Islands Adjacent* (1582). With Notes and Introduction by John Winter Jones (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1850), 8.

in particular become increasingly synonymous with the plantation system based on 'market agriculture' – the harvesting of tropical plant commodities on large estates for profit – rather than purely 'subsistence agriculture.'

Bacon's use of the term 'planting' and 'plantation' falls somewhere in-between these early modern and eighteenth-century definitions. On the one hand, the essay contains tangible connections to English commercial dealings in America (for instance in its mention of the "tobacco of Virginia");[88] and details economic structures vaguely suggestive of the capitalism emerging in the plantation societies of the Americas. The interests of all labourers, Bacon firmly implies, should ultimately be to increase the power and profit of the plantation owners.[89] On the other hand, his conception of the plantation is much more general. Planting, in Bacon's sense, not only denotes a means of garnering subsistence but also the 'planting in' of people. In other words, in Bacon's conception, 'to plant' is to populate and settle the colonies with English subjects.

The question that arises then is: how are the English colonists supposed to deal with the non-English people they inevitably encounter during this enterprise? In the most cited passage of the essay, Bacon's preference is for a "*Plantation* in a pure soil; that is where People are not displanted to

[88] For a discussion of Bacon's associations with the Virginia Company of London see Francis Bacon, *The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 754.
[89] Francis Bacon, "Of Plantations," *op. cit.*, 89.

the end, to Plant others. For else it is rather an Extirpation than a Plantation."[90] Yet, as he also explains at the conclusion of the essay:

> When the plantation grows to strength, then it is time to plant with women as well as with men; that the plantation may spread into generations […]. It is the sinfullest thing in the world to forsake or destitute a plantation once in forwardness.[91]

While "displanting," or extirpation, represents an undesirable outcome of settlement, the sheer scope and scale of the undertaking envisaged by Bacon suggests it can scarcely be avoided. Even when Bacon finds it acceptable to "plant where savages are," this is only so long as the "savages" themselves do not effectively plant. The colonists are to "use them justly and graciously, with sufficient guard nevertheless."[92]

Despite its appeals to English virtue and purity, Bacon's essay exemplifies an emergent "mindscape" of American settlers (to borrow a term coined by Kenneth Olwig),[93] resting on superior force to assert dominion over place. In Mastnak et al's assessment, "planting the colony" in Bacon's sense cannot be understood without a concurrent operation of "displacing the native." In this respect, his text may ultimately be read as a blueprint for colonial invasion. As they argue:

> Bacon described colonization as a massive operation of planting and "displanting". […] As a huge planting and displanting enterprise, planting, in turn, was 'rooted' in conquest—figuratively and literally. […] Once 'planted in' themselves, the colonists planted a garden in the new world in imitation of the almighty God's creation of the

[90] *Ibid.*, 90.
[91] *Ibid.*, 90.
[92] *Ibid.*, 90.
[93] Kenneth Olwig, *Landscape, Nature, and the Body Politic: From Britain's Renaissance to America's New World* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), xxxi.

> Garden of Eden. But the “gardeners” worked side by side with the “diggers up of trees, roots”. Planting necessarily involved displanting.[94]

Thus, reading Bacon reminds us of the uprooting, displacing and destructive power of the project of settler colonialism. Gardening the world in the search of a lost Eden was heralded as a progressive and restitutive enterprise, albeit with limited concern for the biota and people that were ‘displanted’ in the process.

3. The legal justification for settlement: John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1689)

In Bacon, the gravity of the garden as a rhetorical figure is clearly perceptible. In its associations with civility, elegance and scientific discovery, the positively loaded concept of the garden and gardening serves to redeem and repair the ills of colonial planting and, above all, ‘displanting.’ Yet, there is a caveat in his vision in that he provides no argument justifying English expansion into America other than an appeal to the vacuous idea of ‘purity.’ At best, his argument is based on a tautology. Over the course of the seventeenth century, nevertheless, several English writers would attempt to fill the conceptual lacuna evident in Bacon’s theory. These included, but were not limited to, Samuel Purchas, John Winthrop and – most important for the current discussion – philosopher John Locke. Locke’s name is synonymous with the schools of empiricism, liberalism and the discipline of

[94] Mastnak et al, *op. cit.*, 364-5.

natural law. Though his ideas on civil society and the origins of property are speculative and general in nature, as Barbara Arneil explains,

> [t]he development of natural-law theory […] was firmly rooted in the colonial expansion of Spain, Holland, and England. Grotius and Locke used natural law to reach positions justifying their country's claims in disputes over colonization in the new world. Grotius is a defence of Dutch colonial aspirations on the sea, Locke's response, […] constitutes a similar colonial defence, only of English interests on the land.[95]

On the whole, Locke like Bacon is emphatic about the prospect of a territorially expanded England – even though as Vicki Hsueh affirms, his later writings, based on his experience as secretary to the Lords Proprietors of the colony of Carolina (1669-1675) and treasurer to the Council for Trade and Foreign Plantations (1673-4), "complicate – and perhaps even undercut – the self-assured presentation offered by the *Two Treatises.*"[96] The crux of Locke's colonial theory can be found in the chapters 'Of Property' and 'Of Conquest' in the *Second Treatise of Government* (1689). Here, he grapples with two main questions: 'How did private property first arise?' and 'Who has just title to appropriate lands belonging to others?' Building on his criticism of Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* (1680) in the *First Treatise,* Locke challenges the idea of the divine right and authority of kings tracing all the way back to the fatherly rule of Adam. Instead, he famously posited the notion that individual labour, and not dynastical privilege, grants the right for *any man* to appropriate and own property:

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[95] Barbara Arneil, *John Locke and America: The Defence of English Colonialism* (Oxford England: Clarendon Press, 1996), 135-6.
[96] Vicki Hsueh, "Unsettling Colonies: Locke, 'Atlantis' and New World knowledges." *History of Political Thought* 29:2 (2008), 295-319; here: 297.

> He that, in obedience to this command of God, subdued, tilled, and sowed any part of it, thereby annexed to it something that was his property, which another had no title to, nor could without injury take from him. […] And hence subduing or cultivating the earth, and having dominion, we see are joined together.[97]

Note how Locke's reading of history and natural law is couched in the same Edenic narrative as Bacon's text 'Of Gardens,' connecting the act of gardening in particular – a sacred act ordained by God – with an inalienable right to establish dominion over place – the "soil" that is cultivated and improved through the planter's hand. In this maxim, the colonial dimension of Locke's natural law theory crystallises.

Locke formulated these ideas at a time when the situation in England had far surpassed the state, or stage, of society that his writings described.[98] That America, on the other hand, is very much at the forefront of the philosopher's mind can be gleaned from his famous declaration in paragraph 49 of the chapter 'Of Property': "Thus in the beginning all the world was America, and more so than that is now ; for no such thing as money was any where known."[99] In total, "America" and the "Amerindians" surface twenty times throughout the course of the chapter, in relation to questions of subsistence, property ownership and government. While the comparisons he draws ostensibly serve a philosophical purpose (i.e. to highlight the different stages of development in which Americans and Europeans find themselves), the context in which they appear suggests that

[97] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 114-115.
[98] Cf. *ibid.*, §35, 114: "It is true, in land that is common in England, or any other country, where there is plenty of people under government, who have money and commerce, no one can enclose or appropriate any part without the consent of all his fellow-commoners."
[99] *Ibid.*, 121.

Locke's real aim is to stake a legal claim to America by presenting a logic of rightful versus wrongful use, and thus ownership, of the land. For example, Locke notes that "[t]he wild Indians in north America don't have fences or boundaries," and "the wild woods and uncultivated waste of America" pale in comparison to "ten acres equally fertile land […] in Devonshire."[100] Throughout his analysis of the origins of property, he constantly invokes the principle of *Vacuum Domicillium*, or 'Waste Land'[101] (a principle first applied by the Romans), to justify English claims to American soil:

> And the same measure [for land-ownership] may be allowed, as full as the world seems : for supposing a man, or family, in the state they were at first peopling of the world by the children of Adam, or Noah ; let him plant in some inland, vacant places of America […].[102]

Bhikhu Parekh explains Locke's reasoning here as follows:

> Because Indians had no property in land, the English were fully entitled to compel them to live closer together and to acquire the 'surplus' land […] He was in no doubt that these arrangements were in the interests of all concerned. He was prepared to admit that Indians might see things this way, but was convinced that in the long run they would 'think themselves beholden' to the English. In Locke's view, English colonization not only did them no harm, but also respected their natural rights and conferred on them great economic, moral, cultural, scientific, and political benefits. If the obstinate Indians resisted the settlers, they would have behaved irrationally, and '[might] be destroyed as a lion or tiger, one of those wild savage beasts.'[103]

Thus, Locke's ideas on property are not only commensurable with the argument made by Bacon in 'Of Plantations,' they further buttress the case

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[100] *Ibid.*, 116.
[101] Cf. Barbara Arneil, *op. cit.*, 141-142.
[102] Locke, *op. cit.*, 115.
[103] Bikhu Parekh, "Liberalism and Colonialism: A Critique of Locke and Mill." In: *The Decolonization of Imagination: Culture, Knowledge, and Power,* ed. J. N. Pieterse and B. Parekh (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995), 81-98; here: 88.

made there for English settlement of America. Where Bacon's work contains the locus of the idea of planting and settling, Locke provides the legal framework for the 'displanting' that any colonial endeavour in America would necessarily entail.

4. The rhetoric of benevolence: Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (1726)

English writer and journalist Daniel Defoe has earned the reputation as a key figure in the history of British colonialism. Postcolonial scholar Edward Said once characterised him as one of the most assertive writers in the British literary tradition regarding colonial expansion and possessions, saying that the idea of a "surveyed territorial greater Britain" – that is, the idea of England as the centre of a vast network of colonial satellite territories – really crystallised for the first time in Defoe.[104] Though it was the novel, above all *Robinson Crusoe* (1719-1720), that truly propelled his name into the popular consciousness,[105] Defoe famously admitted that "writing on trade was the whore I really doted on."[106] Attributable to his name are hundreds of journalistic pieces, historical commentaries and treatises which, heavily geared towards trade and commerce and often heavily propagandistic, trumpeted the cause of asserting Britain's place on the world map.[107]

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[104] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 70.
[105] See Ian Watt, *op. cit.*, 60-92.
[106] Daniel Defoe, *Defoe's Review*, *ed. A. W. Secord. Facsimile edition, 22 vols.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), I, 214.
[107] The exact number of works attributable to Defoe is an ongoing matter of debate. For a discussion see Maximillian E. Novak, *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions. His Life and Ideas* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3-5.

Defoe contributes yet another dimension to the case made for colonisation and settlement already outlined by Bacon and Locke. A journalist first and foremost, he is deeply concerned with the positive image of then newly united Kingdom of Britain as a benign, rather than aggressive power and prepared to employ a whole gamut of tropes and rhetorical figures in order to achieve this end. A good illustration of his specific concern with placing a positive spin on empire is *The Complete English Tradesman* of 1726, a book primarily designed to vindicate the merchants and planters involved in frontiering new territories and expanding Britain's trade activities overseas. Throughout the text, British subjects are set against a treacherous cycle of evils perpetrated by – we need only read between the lines a little – Britain's arch enemy, Roman Catholic Spain. "[T]he rising greatness of the *British* nation, is not owing to war and conquests, to enlarging its dominion by the sword, or subjecting the people of other countries to our power" – or so Defoe invokes the 'black legend' of an evil Iberian empire through the characteristic tropes of "war," "conquest" and most notably the "sword." By contrast, British power, or so Defoe claims, "is all owing to trade, to the encrease of our commerce at home, and the extending it abroad,"[108] a sign of its supposed greater benevolence.

As such, Defoe's text is a paradigmatic expression of the pastoral power Britain sought to project during the early modern occasion. Everywhere the

[108] Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman In Familiar Letters; Directing Him in All the Several Parts and Progressions of Trade [...] Calculated for the Instruction of Our Inland Tradesmen; and Especially of Young Beginners* (London: Charles Rivington, 1726), 382-383.

British venture, they go as enlightened cultivators and champions of progress, having an indelibly beneficial impact on the cultures and peoples with which they come in contact:

> We have not encreased our power, or the number of our subjects, by subduing the nations which possess'd those countries, and encorporating them into our own, but have entirely planted our colonies, and peopled the countries with our own subjects, natives of this island; and, excepting the negroes, which we transport from *Africa* to *America*, as slaves to work in the sugar and tobacco plantations, all our Colonies, as well in the islands as on the continent of *America*, are entirely peopled from *Great Britain* and *Ireland*, and chiefly the former; the natives having either removed farther up into the country, or by their own folly and treachery raising war against us, been destroy'd and cut off.[109]

There is a pronounced sense of moral magnanimity here – but also a certain taken-for-grantedness with regards the institution of slavery and the dispossession of the indigenous people of Caribbean and America. Enslaved Africans labouring on the plantations are treated like the natural property of British colonists, dehumanised and objectified. Defoe is also establishing a contract between 'conquest' and 'settlement,' thus expanding on the ideological and legal arguments already mounted by Bacon and Locke. The moral high ground belongs to the settlers who only kill ("destroy") to defend themselves – oblivious to the fact that the settlers took the land from the natives and drove them away and forced them to rebel.

The contribution of Defoe's writing to the can be seen in its particular attendance to the rhetorical dimensions of settler colonialism. Defoe can be credited with taking the idea of planting with its attendant moral and legal concerns and developing it into a succinct, if also highly selective historical

[109] *Ibid.*, 382.

narrative of British innocence. That he was able to adopt such a stance is indicative of his position as a freelance journalist and historian working in early-eighteenth century London – looking back towards a history that, in Bacon's time, was just beginning to unfold.

5. Conclusion

By reading Francis Bacon, John Locke and Daniel Defoe together, this chapter reconstructed a segment in the thought history of the European settler colony. As was demonstrated, all three writers express the common desire for national agency within a colonial framework. Starting with Bacon, English expansion in the new world was embedded in an Edenic narrative of restitution, involving the 'planting in' of people as well as plants and animals for the purpose of enduring English settlement. Yet, even Bacon cannot avoid tending to the destructive and detrimental aspects that any planting exercise would entail. While a justification for the 'displanting' of indigenous peoples is still largely inchoate and unformed in Bacon's essay 'Of Plantations' (1625), by the time of Locke's *Second Treatise* (1689) and Defoe's *The Complete English Tradesman* (1726) there is a clear sense of greater sophistication and depth to the argumentation. The respective contribution of Bacon, Locke and Defoe to discourse is tantamount to the development of the ideology, the legal framework and the rhetorics of settler colonialism.

The objective of this chapter was to lay the foundations for the ensuing literary analysis. In what follows, I shall show how the problematics and

arguments addressed by Bacon, Locke and Defoe not only gain entry into literature of the eighteenth century, but are also amplified and magnified in the process. The literary model of the desert island fiction serves as a model for managing the problematic and violent side of colonisation, even if rendering the unstable moral and ethical terrain of European colonisation all the more 'legible.' By the time of Kleist's novella *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* (1811), however, literature is summoned in its subversive role to deconstruct and ultimately destroy the hitherto dominant fantasy of a lushly planted colonial garden island.

2. PLANTING EMPIRE: DANIEL DEFOE'S *ROBINSON CRUSOE* (1719-20)

Dear Mr. Crusoe,

Please stay home. There's no need for this ruse of going on a trading journey, in which more often than not the goods you are trading are people like me, Friday.

- A Letter to Robinson Crusoe, from Jamaica Kincaid[110]

1. Introduction

This chapter reads Daniel Defoe's enormously influential novel *Robinson Crusoe* of 1719 through the lens of settler colonialism. My aim is to show how Defoe's text, though outwardly about one man's unlikely shipwreck, is actually the subtle, yet fervent plea for the large-scale colonisation and settlement of the new world. Defoe develops and transfigures the fantasy of a colony planted and peopled with English subjects, as articulated by Bacon and Locke, through the fictional scenario of a journey to and subsequent 'planting' of an uninhabited island. Yet, as shall be argued, *Crusoe* also revises this fantasy to reflect a vastly altered historical reality – a reality that Defoe himself described in *The Complete English Tradesman*:

> [E]xcepting the negroes, which we transport from *Africa* to *America*, as slaves to work in the sugar and tobacco plantations, all our Colonies, as well in the islands as on the continent of *America*, are entirely peopled from *Great Britain* and *Ireland* [...].[111]

By the early eighteenth century, the term 'planting' is synonymous with the slavery-based *plantocracies* of the British West Indies and a class of

[110] Jamaica Kincaid, "A Letter to Robinson Crusoe, from Jamaica Kincaid." Online: https://books.substack.com/p/diary-a-letter-to-robinson-crusoe (Accessed 15.11.2019).
[111] Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, *op. cit.*, 382.

privateering plantation holders – the so-called *West-Indian planters* – who held enormous power and influence in these burgeoning new-world societies. Though unspecific about the exact identity of Crusoe's island, situated somewhat vaguely "near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoque" (*RC,* frontispiece), a set of allusions scattered throughout Defoe's novel nevertheless suggest it lies somewhere within the Caribbean. Just before the storm renders Crusoe a lone castaway on the deserted island, for instance, he realises that "there was no inhabited Country for us to have recourse to, till we came within the Circle of the *Carribbe-Islands,* and therefore [we] resolved to stand away for *Barbadoes*." (*RC*, 47) In another scene, centred around the dream of a female settler, the text relates: "I dream'd I was at *Barbadoes*, and that the Market was mightily stock'd with provisions […]."[112]

The geographical proximity of Crusoe's island to the Caribbean, in particular Barbados, suggests that the frontier narrative at the heart of Defoe's novel is as much about *a single, specific settler colony* as it is about *the hypothetical settler colony*. In the passages quoted above, a single word, "*Barbadoes*," is employed with calculated effect to condense an entire scene – the tropical bounty and wealth of the then legendary English sugar colony, channelled through an all-too familiar colonial "dream." However sparse, however passing this referentiality may seem, the underlying symbology is far too striking not to investigate further.

[112] Daniel Defoe, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (London: Taylor, 1719), 199. All further citations from the novel will appear in-text in the form of the initials *FRC* followed by a page number, for example (*FRC*, 300).

In order to demonstrate the imbrication of *Robinson Crusoe* with the history of colonial Barbados, I read it in conjunction with a text that has been ascribed a formative role in early British Caribbean writing:[113] Richard Ligon's *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbados* of 1657. Based on first-hand observations made between 1647 and 1650, Ligon's text is the most detailed account of a seventeenth-century English settler colony that we have. This book, which has not yet been considered as a source for Defoe's fiction, documents the 'sugar revolution' that took place in Barbados, precipitating the rise of a predominantly 'white' planter class. By reading Crusoe's history alongside Ligon's own piece of Caribbean historiography, some fundamental similarities between the texts on the level of the biography, narrative, rhetorical strategy and argumentation respective to the act of colonisation and settlement shall emerge. At the same time, through its exploitation of a range of literary devices and techniques, like symbolism, allusion, metaphor, Defoe's novel seems to do everything in its power to avoid and elide its own programme; it is a novel about sugar that is *not* about sugar. Herein lies the literary text's unique prerogative to embellish reality and mystify its own participation in the machinations of colonial power.

The chapter is structured into three parts. In the first section, Defoe's novel shall be situated within the greater context of Atlantic colonisation and the

[113] See Keith Albert Sandiford, *The Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

geopolitical struggles of the seventeenth century. As shall be illustrated, the protagonist's accidental arrival and subsequent 'planting' of the island is symptomatic of the dominant ideology of English expansion at this critical juncture in history. The second section then challenges the pastoral innocence attached to the character of Crusoe. Drawing on a rhetorical figure that surfaces in Ligon's account of the sugar colony of Barbados, that of "*Sweet Negotiation*," I insist that we read more critically (and commercially) into Crusoe's transformation of the Caribbean island into a "plantation" through acts of agrarian "improvement." In the final section of the chapter, I analyse Crusoe's problematic as that of a Creole settler and address the novel's central concatenation of race and slavery.

2. Planting empire: *Robinson Crusoe* and the ideology of English expansion

To posterity, *Robinson Crusoe* became known as the heroic tale of one man's heroic triumph over the odds. Defoe had loosely based his novel on the story of real-life Scottish castaway Alexander Selkirk, who after four years of being stranded on Juan Fernández island was reportedly found rambling, incoherent and not half the sovereign figure readers may recall from the later fiction.[114] Crusoe, by contrast, spends twenty-eight years on his island and in this time asserts his mastery over the land, imposing an artificial order upon it so that he can declare himself "King and Lord of all this Country indefeasibly" (*RC*, 117). Reflecting on this sense of mastery,

[114] Cf. Woodes Rogers, "Account of Alexander Selkirk's Solitary on Juan Fernandez Island for Four Years and Four Months." In: *A Cruising Voyage round the World* (London, 1712), 125-131, esp. 129.

James Joyce once wrote that "[t]he true symbol of the British conquest is Robinson Crusoe,

> who, cast away on a desert island, in his pocket a knife and a pipe, becomes an architect, a knife-grinder, an astronomer, a baker, a shipwright, a potter, a saddler, a farmer, a tailor, an umbrella-maker, and a clergyman. He is the true prototype of the British colonist, as Friday (the trusty savage who arrives on an unlucky day) is the symbol of the subject races.[115]

Contemporary scholarship almost unanimously sees Crusoe (although not in any triumphalist sense) as a victor, who as "the very embodiment of the masculine, imperial impulse"[116] asserts dominance over the foreign environment,[117] the non-European Other[118] and the feminine alike.[119] Recognition of the novel as a panegyric on the masculinist drive to colonise and domesticate may not have pleased its author, however, who for his part laboured to show his protagonist as anything but a conqueror. For a good portion of his travels and island sojourn, Crusoe is portrayed as an anxious figure, a passive agent in many of the circumstances that befall him and even an unwilling colonist. He suffers in his solitude and understands his banishment from the sphere of 'civilisation' as a "Punishment" (*RC,* 156) that can only be atoned for in the "Labour of planting" (*RC*, 160) that he undertakes in order to survive and subsist on his "*Island of Despair*" (*RC*, 81).

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[115] Dominic Maganiello, *Joyce's Politics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 109.
[116] Dennis Todd, "*Robinson Crusoe* and Colonialism." In: *The Cambridge Companion to "Robinson Crusoe*, ed. John J. Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 142-156; here: 143.
[117] Robert Marzec, "Enclosures, Colonization, and the Robinson Crusoe Syndrome: A Genealogy of Land in a Global Context." *boundary* 2 29:2 (2002), 129-156.
[118] Roxann Wheeler, "'My Savage', 'my Man'. Racial Multiplicity in 'Robinson Crusoe,'" *ELH* 62:4 (1995), 821-861.
[119] Robyn Wiegman, "Economies of the Body: Gendered Sites in *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana*." *Criticism* 31 (1989), 33-51.

The novel is based on a complex rhetorical argument that positions Crusoe as a victim rather than as an aggressor within the colonial framework and context of expansion depicted. In the analysis to follow, I shall attempt to unpack and decipher this argument and the ideology underpinning it. As shall be shown, the shroud of innocence in which Crusoe's island sojourn is packaged is symptomatic of the discourse that sought to negotiate the occasion of England's nascent empire. Within this context, the terminology of 'planting' is absolutely integral, denoting a rhetorically benign construct, linking English colonisation to 'cultivation' rather than 'conquest.' Through Crusoe's biography, Defoe's materialises the legacy of thinkers like Bacon and Locke regarding the legitimacy and righteousness of English 'planting and settling' of the new world.

2.1. Western Designs, green and golden empires

Historically speaking, the frontier myth of Defoe's novel corresponds to the context of shifting power relations between an Iberian-Catholic South and Anglo-Protestant North described in this thesis' introduction ("The green empire"). The narrative takes the form of a first-person retrospective told from the point-of-view of Crusoe, who looks back on events that largely took place in the 1600s. In the first line of the novel Crusoe relates: "I was born in the Year 1632, in the City of *York* [...]" (*RC,* 1). The novel identifies 1661 as the year of Crusoe's departure from England (*RC*, 7), although the Errata attached on page 364 of the first edition informs us that this date should in fact read 1651. By the time Crusoe becomes marooned on the island it is

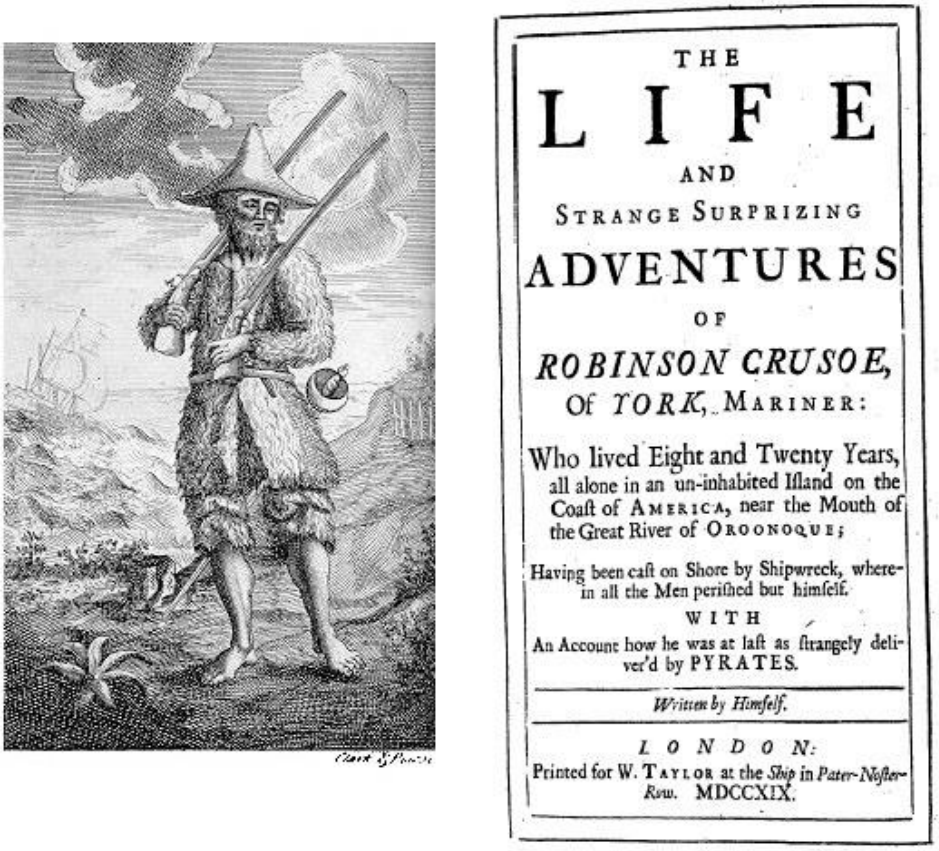
1659 (*RC*, 74). This places his journey to the Caribbean in the 1650s, during the short-lived Commonwealth led by the Puritan Oliver Cromwell (1653-1658) that ended the period of English civil war (1642-1651).

Unlike the novel's title proclaims, the western trajectory that Crusoe's travels take is not so 'strange and surprising' when read against this background of national upheaval and the colonising expeditions that Cromwell, a former military general, initiated in the wake of his ascendency. In 1655, the so-called 'Western Design' was launched, a campaign to capture the Spanish West Indies and thus undo Spain's stronghold over coveted trade and commodity routes in the Atlantic.[120] The campaign met with limited success as the Spanish held onto Hispaniola (today Haiti), but nevertheless ceded Jamaica to Cromwell's commanders Penn and Venables. Concurrently, a significant shift was occurring in the Atlantic economy: profit-driven capitalist enterprise was asserting itself in the form of sugar, tobacco and cotton production, which experienced a boom, largely as a result of the short-lived Dutch occupation of Brazil from 1630 to 1654. From 1650 on, however, the newly incorporated colonial territories of Jamaica and Barbados began to challenge Brazil as the foremost producer of sugar, precipitating the rise of British and French pre-eminence within the transatlantic economy.[121]

[120] Cf. Matthew Harrington, *"The Worke Wee May Doe In The World." The Western Design And The Anglo-Spanish Struggle For The Caribbean, 1654-1655* (Dissertation) (Florida State University, 2004).
[121] See Matthew Edel, "The Brazilian Sugar Cycle of the Seventeenth Century and the Rise of the West-Indian Competition." *Caribbean Studies* 9:1 (1969), 24-43.

The parallels between Crusoe's journey to an uninhabited island and these early modern geopolitical and ideological struggles may not be obvious from the frontispiece with its pronounced sense of heterogeneity and of the everyday. Verbose yet unassuming, the title divulges some of the most appealing details of the text, including the exotic and far away setting, "an un-inhabited Island on the | Coast of AMERICA, near the Mouth of | the Great River of OROONOQUE," and the pronounced sense of adventure and discovery, which would no doubt have been alluring for curious eighteenth-century audiences. On closer inspection, the location of Crusoe's island in the Orinoco is in fact deeply symbolic, invoking not only Aphra Behn's prose work *Oroonoko* of 1688, but more significantly one of England's most paradigmatic colonists: Sir Walter Raleigh, author of the *Discovery of Guiana* (1595) and *The Historie of the World* (1603-1616), the latter of which Defoe even held in his personal library.[122] Being a mythical river that according to Columbus flowed directly into Paradise,[123] Raleigh had sought gold and riches on the Orinoco and in turn requested Queen Elizabeth's permission to settle it, a scheme which Defoe attempted to revive via an article published in the *Weekly Journal* on 17 February 1719, just two months before the publication of *Robinson Crusoe.*[124]

[122] Cf. Olive Payne and Helmut Heidenreich (ed.), *The libraries of Daniel Defoe and Phillips Farewell: Olive Payne's sales catalogue* (1731) (Berlin: H. Heidenreich, 1970), 57.
[123] Cf. Andrew Lambert, *Crusoe's Island. A Rich and Curious History of Pirates, Castaways and Madness* (Faber & Faber: London, 2016), 52.
[124] Daniel Defoe, *An Historical Account of the Voyages and Adventures of Sir Walter Raleigh [...]* (London: W. Boreham, 1719). For a discussion see Maximillian E. Novak (2001), *op. cit.*, 546.



THE
LIFE
AND
STRANGE SURPRIZING
ADVENTURES
OF
ROBINSON CRUSOE,
Of *YORK*, MARINER:

Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un-inhabited Iſland on the Coaſt of AMERICA, near the Mouth of the Great River of OROONOQUE;

Having been caſt on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men periſhed but himſelf.

WITH

An Account how he was at laſt as ſtrangely deliver'd by PYRATES.

Written by Himſelf.

LONDON:
Printed for W. TAYLOR at the *Ship* in *Pater-Noſter-Row.* MDCCXIX.

John Clarke and John Pine, frontispiece, etching. In: Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner* (London: Taylor, 1719), vol. 1.

Nevertheless, as an economic historian of the eighteenth century, Defoe knew that the British had arrived late to the area around the Orinoco (today's Venezuela) and thus had "lost the Sovereignty of the Richest, most Populous, most Fertile Country in the World; a Country richer in Gold and Silver than *Mexico* and *Peru* [...]."[125] He was sceptical about whether such exploitation actually generated any lasting wealth and development, instead favouring settlement as a means of "encreas[ing] the Wealth, Strength and

[125] Daniel Defoe, *A Plan of the English Commerce: Being a Complete Prospect of the Trade of this Nation, 2nd ed.* (London, 1730), 41.

Prosperity of England."[126] From Britain's 'lack,' Defoe in turn extracted a virtue: "by the meer Force of indefatiguable Application," he wrote in *A Plan for the English Commerce* (1728), the English have "planted, inhabited, cultivated those inhospitable Climates" and "brought them to be the richest, most improved, and most flourishing Colonies in all that Part of the World."[127] Through the efforts of the likes of Cromwell, "new settlements and plantations [have been] made, new colonies placed, and new governments formed in the uninhabited islands, and the uncultivated continent of *America*"[128] – whereby their newly 'cultivated' state is advanced as a justification for Britain's dominion over the Caribbean and North American colonies.

In other words, England's colonies were prosperous because they had to be made verdant and fertile; Spain's colonies, by contrast, were faltering because they relied too much on gold. Defoe transfigured this background of competing visions of empire by depicting Crusoe's island set on the mouth of the Orinoco as a place of relative dearth and infertility so that Crusoe ends up referring to it as an "*Island of Despair*" (*RC*, 81) and is left wondering "*Can God spread a Table in the Wilderness*?" (*RC*, 110). Everything that could be seen a potential source of corruption has been placed at a remove. Money, in the form of "*European* Coin, some *Brasil,* some Pieces of Eight, some Gold, some Silver" (*RC*, 66), is worthless in this sanctuary, or laboratory rather, of Crusoe's purely self-

[126] *Ibid.*, 367.
[127] Defoe (1730), *op. cit.*, 306.
[128] Defoe (1726), *op. cit.*, 383.

determining labour consisting in his "Harvest and Husbandry" (*RC*, 145) towards the "Improvement" of the island (*RC*, 156). In one well-known scene, Crusoe establishes the worthlessness of "a Parcel of Money, as well Gold as Silver," saying "[t]hat I would have given a Handful of it for a Gross of Tobacco-Pipes, or for a Hand-Mill to grind my Corn; nay, I would have given it all for Sixpenny-worth of *Turnip* and *Carrot* Seed out of England, or for a Handful of *Pease* and *Beans*, and a Bottle of Ink [...]" (*RC*, 152-3). Reduced to a single propagandistic image, the respective difference between England and Spain was that of a benevolent green empire, captured in the image of seed, versus an evil Iberian empire, symbolised by the cross.

Cleared of the precious minerals so coveted by popes, kings and the nobility, Crusoe's island contains the seeds of a subsistence empire forged by a class of northern planters, traders and missionaries. Crusoe draws parallels between the "Barbarities pracitis'd [by the *Spaniards*] in *America*, [...] where they destroy'd Millions of these People" (*RC*, 206) and other violent Catholic practices, such as the "*Inquisition*" (*RC,* 290) and the dogma and demagogy of the Catholic religious leaders (*RC,* 257). Then, in the third, more religious installation of the novel, *The Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe* (1720), he applauds the role of Dutch and English missionaries who came to the New World as "Benefactors, not as Conquerors," [129] noting that "where-ever Christianity has been planted or profess'd nationally in the World, even where it has not had a *saving* Influence, it has yet had a

[129] Daniel Defoe, *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe: With his Vision of the Angelick World. Written by himself* (London: W. Taylor, 1720), 218.

civilizing Influence."[130] Crusoe likens his passage on a number of occasions to that of the exodus of the Israelites (*RC,* 100; 260; 292), thus invoking a narrative that was then salient among English Protestants, in particular Puritans: the idea of being an 'elect' people with a mission to return their land to God's true religion.[131] In a climate of religious persecution many English Protestants chose to leave England to seek deliverance in the 'wilderness' of America where Stuart power had less reach and influence. Crusoe's discourses on the island echo this experience of religious persecution:

> In the first Place, I was remov'd from all the Wickedness of the World here. I had neither the *Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eye, or the Pride of Life.* I had nothing to covet; for I had all that I was now capable of enjoying: I was Lord of the whole Mannor; or if I pleas'd, I might call my self King, or Emperor over the whole Country which I had Possession of (*RC*, 151).

Tellingly, his newly won spiritual freedom and conviction culminates in a fantasy of conquest that parallels Cromwell's own struggle as Lord Protector to gain dominion over the whole country.

2.2. "Barbadoesed": Crusoe as a deported criminal

But who exactly is Crusoe and in what relation do these elite inflections (Raleigh, Cromwell) stand to the everyday and common aspects of the character, the source of his appeal for generations of readers? Is his westward trajectory an imperial foil (the history of the British empire 'in

[130] *Ibid.,* 129.
[131] Larry Gragg, *'Englishmen Transplanted': The English Colonization of Barbados 1627-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003), 6.

miniature') or is there indeed a more personal and nuanced side to his story? Frederic Jameson's observation that "[u]topia is [...] the prototype of the settler colony," wherein '"the people without land' supposedly meet 'the land without people'"[132] seem poignant here. The novel goes to great lengths to represent the protagonist as a 'migrant-prone,' settler personality, being landless or without "Station," and thus deeply conflicted by the dynamic "push and pull" of empire.[133] At the beginning of the novel we are informed that Crusoe stems from a family of migrants, his father "being a Foreigner of *Bremen*" and his name an Anglicisation of the German *Kreutznaer* (*RC*, 1). But the details of Crusoe's own flight from England are also characteristically cryptic and allegorical, unravelling as a kind of textual riddle inviting deciphering on the behalf of the reader. They take the form of a parabolic argument between father and son, inflected with philosophical arguments about the merits of a life of property and propriety, the "middle Station of Life" (*RC*, 3) as his father calls it, versus the protagonist's rebellious "wandring Inclination," his being "satisfied with nothing but going to Sea" (*RC,* 2).

Several interpretations of Crusoe's "wandering" tendency have been proposed: while Wheeler links it to the allure of riches made possible by a colonial slave workforce,[134] others such as Fallon and Lambert read Crusoe's wandering fancy more generally as the reification of Britain's

[132] Fredric Jameson, *op. cit.*, 205.
[133] Cf. Klaus F. Zimmermann, "European Migration: Push and Pull." *International Regional Science Review* 19:1-2 (1996), 95-128.
[134] Wheeler, *op. cit.*, 827.

newfound cosmopolitan outlook[135] and naval prowess.[136] But even if Crusoe's wandering could be explained through the prism of colonial opportunity or the "pull" factor of empire, this still does not explain why the character's recurring inclination is framed as a deviant, pathologised desire justifying "Punishment" (*RC,* 103). For example, in the novel's second part, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, the protagonist is yet again gripped in his home in Bedford by "the Desire of seeing my new Plantation in the Island, and the Colony I left there" (*FRC*, 2), a wish he subsequently dismisses as "the Product of Vapours, sick Minds, and wandring Fancies" (*FRC*, 3).

In other words, although a necessary condition of his eventual heroism, Crusoe's "wandering" is framed in the novel as a structural problem in need of resolution; in light of inferred connotation of deviance, its affinity to the concept of *vagrancy* is striking. Dennis Todd suggests that "on a figurative level, the pattern of Crusoe's life is that of transported criminals." He explains: "[t]ransportation was a punishment but, because it was granted as a pardon for a capital sentence, it was seen as a merciful reprieve. Crusoe comes to understand his life on the island similarly: he believes he has been cast away as a "punishment for my sins, but [...] he has been "*singled out ... to be spared from death*" and given a chance to reform."[137]

[135] Ann Marie Fallon, *op. cit.*, 40-41.
[136] Cf. Lambert, *op. cit.*, 52.
[137] Dennis Todd, *op. cit.*, 151.

Crusoe's 'crime' is only ever reasoned in metaphorical and cryptic terms, but in Defoe's other new-world novels, such as *Captain Singleton* (1720), *Colonel Jack* (1722) and *Moll Flanders* (1722), the charge of criminality and deviance is more concrete. Without exception, the characters in these novels are of lower social extraction who go to the new world as convicted felons. There, they constitute a motley crew of pirates, buccaneers, criminals, prostitutes and indentured servants, calling to mind Linebaugh and Rediker's reconstruction of early modern Atlantic history as a revolutionary constellation of sailors, slaves and commoners. [138] Cumulatively, these narrative threads point to a high degree structural similarity in Defoe's novelistic work. They suggest that, despite obvious nominal and ontological differences between the characters, the energy of these texts reside in the common promise of individual reform and self-betterment in a colonial setting at a far remove from the criminal cesspits of Europe. More specifically, 'planting' and the 'plantation' figure centrally in Defoe as an avowed pathway to a settled, law-abiding life of greater economic, moral and spiritual prosperity.

An avid supporter of human mobility in its many forms,[139] Daniel Defoe pleaded on many occasions the cause for sending felons and convicts to the colonies to work as indentured servants on British plantations: "They go there poor, and come back rich," he wrote about British settlers in *A Plan*

[138] Peter Linebaugh; Marcus Buford Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).
[139] Cf. Daniel Statt, "Daniel Defoe and Immigration." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24:3 (Spring, 1991), 293-313.

for English Commerce; “there they plant, trade, thrive, and increase; even your transported Felons [...] have, by turning their Hands to Industry and Improvement, become rich substantial Planters and Merchants.”[140] He also stressed the wider social good that would come from unburdening the British penal system and curtailing the “Kidnapping trade” that preyed on “young vagrant and indigent people.”[141] But Defoe was hardly the first English writer to promote England’s acquired territories as settling grounds for would-be colonists. As early as the reign of Elizabeth I, “*transplantation*” was used to denote an incentive-based re-settlement scheme of “superfluous poor” English people to the newly colonised territory of Ireland.[142] In his essay ‘On Plantations’ (1625), philosopher Francis Bacon, on the other hand, strictly advised against sending “scum” and “wicked” people towards the American colonies, instead maintaining that “[t]he people wherewith you plant ought to be gardeners, ploughmen, labourers, smiths, carpenters, joiners, fishermen, fowlers, with some few apothecaries, surgeons, cooks, bakers.”[143]

However, if Defoe’s novel situates Crusoe’s rebellious flight from England in the period between 1651 and 1661, this is because the Cromwell years

[140] Daniel Defoe (1730), *op. cit.,* 364.
[141] “[W]hat is the reason, that in order to supply our colonies and plantations with people, be sides the encouragement given in those colonies to all people that will come there to plant and to settle, we are obliged to send away thither all our petty offenders, and all the criminals that we think fit to spare from the gallows, besides that we formerly called the kidnapping trade, that is to fay, the arts made use of to wheedle and draw away young vagrant and indigent people, and people of desperate fortunes, to fell themselves, that is, bind them selves for servants, the numbers of which are very great.” *Ibid.*
[142] Cf. Anon., “A religious and easy course offered for the transplantation into Ireland of the superfluous poor people in England; and means for the provision of them.” In: *Records and papers relating to Ireland, temp. Elizabeth I (1558–1603)*. British Library Western Manuscripts: Cotton MS Titus B XII: 16th century, Nr. 93, fo. 399.
[143] Francis Bacon, *Essays*, *op cit.*, 88.

represented a particularly salient moment in centuries-long debate around the fate of poor, impoverished and 'undesirable' societal elements. Cromwell himself was instrumental here by insisting that the Caribbean be maintained as a stronghold of favourable commerce between England and its colonial periphery. As Lord of the Protectorate, he capitalised on the exchange value Barbados held for the realm, intensifying a campaign to send British felons, in particular the Irish and Scots, to the frontier territory. The verb 'to Barbadoes' entered the English language as the euphemism for this programme of expelling criminal, miscreant and undesirable segments of society to England's outlying colonial territories.[144]

Crusoe's improvement of the island from "Wilderness" to a "planted Garden" (*RC*, 117) is a powerful invocation of Gauri Viswanathan's finding that the modern novel serves the national interest under the aegis of personal growth.[145] His planting is not explicitly framed for its social and political use-value to the mother country, rather the detailed first-person perspective of an inward-searching "I" captures its genuine rehabilitating and therapeutic effect for the individual: "I was surpriz'd, and yet very well pleas'd, to see the young Trees grow; and I prun'd them, and led them up to grow as much alike as I could; and it is scarce credible how beautiful a Figure they grew into in three Years" (*RC*, 124). Crusoe learns to see beauty in the island he once viewed with disdain and his self-consciousness is steered away from

[144] Jill Sheppard, "A Historical Sketch of the Poor Whites of Barbados: From Indentured Servants to 'Redlegs.'" *Caribbean Studies* 14:3 (1974), 71-94, in particular: 73.
[145] Gauri Viswanathan, "Preface to the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition," in: idem., *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2014), xvi.

vagrancy towards (in Viswanathan's terms) more "normative social desires."[146] Eventually, just as the island itself is incorporated into the body and psyche of the coloniser,[147] his archaic regime of "digging, planting, fencing" (*RC*, 272) is incorporated into the cycle of island life, transmitted down through an artefact of written culture – the "Letter" that he bestows on a posterior generation of colonisers (*RC*, 328). Towards the end of the novel, an English boat arrives, governed by a group of mutineers who intend to maroon the ship's captain on Crusoe's island. The protagonist is sympathetic to the captain and decides to help him and the loyal sailors retake the ship and leave the worst mutineers on the island to settle the new colony. It is an act of punishment, yet a merciful and just exercise of power, mirroring real experiments in Britain's colonial peripheries premised on the belief that "[t]illing the soil on these remote and isolated islands would render criminals virtuous."[148]

3. Sweet negotiations: Robinson Crusoe and Richard Ligon's *True and Exact History of Barbados* (1657)

Robinson Crusoe is, as these literary instantiations of a nascent regime of peopling and settlement indicate, an early literary reflection on the importance of mobility towards the cathartic nourishment of empire. But what about the commodities that were, in economic terms, the real source of the empire's wealth and nourishment, for instance the sugar production

[146] *Ibid.*, xv.
[147] See Rebecca Weaver-Hightower, *Empire Islands Castaways, Cannibals, and Fantasies of Conquest* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 11.
[148] David Lowenthal, "Islands, Lovers, and Others." *Geographical Revie*w 97:2 (2007), 215.

that supposedly reached its "apogee"[149] in the eighteenth century? What does the novel have to say, if anything, about sugar's well-known propensity to travel from one place to the next, thereby penetrating new geographical, economic and cultural frontiers? Historians tell us that the genus *saccharum* (sugar cane) has been travelling for several thousands of years – from its origins in south-east Asia, to its discovery by Persians and then Greeks between the 6th and 4th centuries BC, right through to its passage into Spain and Morocco in the 10th century AD and beyond.[150] Approached from the *long durée*, the introduction of sugar cane into the Atlantic basin followed from the westward movement that had long shaped sugar's historical trajectory. And yet, sugar took on a whole new meaning once transplanted into the triangular space of transatlantic capitalism. Passing through 'the machine' of the New World plantation system (a system which the British in particular pioneered),[151] sugar reached levels of ubiquity, consumption and appeal that was unprecedented in human history, fed by and feeding into a 'culture of sweetness' that soon assumed global proportions.[152] Revealingly, Crusoe is always looking for ways to satisfy his sweet tooth, whether through sugar, chocolate (*RC*, 64; 307; 325) or even the grapes that he cultivates as an alternative source of sweetness when these commodities are not available to him (*RC*, 116).

[149] Philip Curtin, *op. cit.*, 113.
[150] See Stuart B. Schwartz, *Sugar plantations in the formation of Brazilian society. Bahia, 1550-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 3-15.
[151] Trevor Burnard; John Garrigus, *op. cit.*
[152] Stanley Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985), 38-39.

Sweetness is also at the heart of Richard Ligon's *True and Exact History of Barbados* (1657), the most important contemporary account of the so-called 'sugar revolution' that occurred in British-controlled Barbados in the seventeenth century. The concept of "sweet Negotiation of Sugar"[153] enlisted by the author as an alluring mnemonic device represents a complex, multi-layered metaphor that, nevertheless, in its primary meaning invokes this complex history of sugar's several-centuries-long transplantation. A syrupy reckoning of sorts, Ligon's negotiation presses, boils down and refines the otherwise abrupt shift to saccharine monoculture, plantation agriculture and dense populations of enslaved Africans implemented by English colonists in Barbados over the course of just some decades, from 1625 to 1650. A contemporary perspective on the plantocratic society that emerged in the wake, the actual 'historical' impetus of the work is largely captured in the story of the origins of Barbadian sugar monoculture itself: in common with other colonising narratives, here Ligon asserts heroic beginnings – a tendency that I argue is relayed and even amplified in Defoe's fictional text *Robinson Crusoe*. Where Ligon's account pre-figures the legend of sugar's magical origins, Defoe's novel re-enacts the occasion of sugar's introduction onto his own island as a proud and symbolic moment of personal and national history.

[153] Richard Ligon, *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes* [...] (Peter Parker: London, 1673), 108. All further citations from the work will appear in-text in the form of the initials *HB* followed by a page number, for example (*HB*, 10).

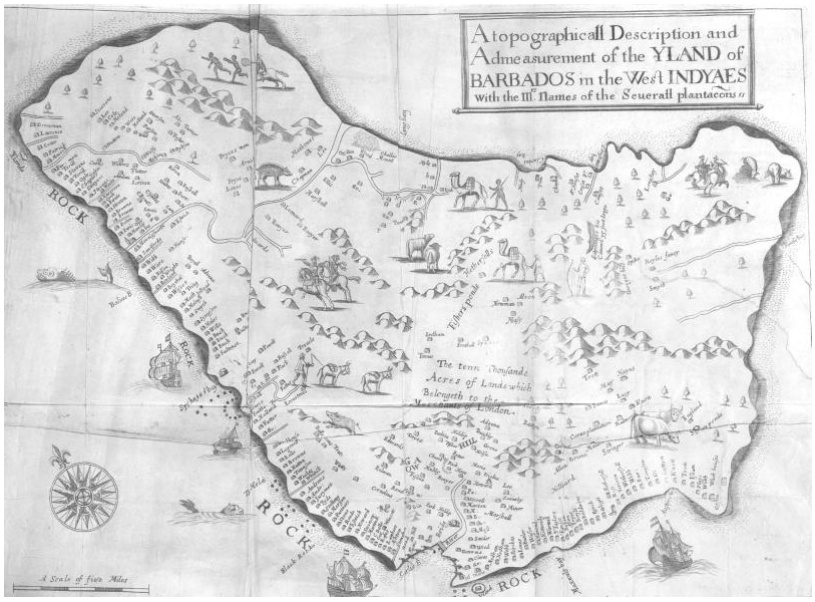
3.1. "By new directions from Brasil": Ligon's account of the Barbadian sugar revolution

Ligon's account of the early history of Barbados nevertheless holds fast to a trope that had an established place in colonial narratives: the arrival as a heroic act that nullified all other claims of possession and ownership. For instance, that the island of Barbados had been inhabited by several Amerindian tribes, most notably the Arawaks and Kalinago, for several hundreds of years before Spanish and Portuguese slave-raiding missions starting in the early sixteenth century effectively brought an end to permanent indigenous settlement,[154] barely figures at all in his account. Several stages of Barbados' early European history are re-lived as if for the first time, such as when upon landing he immediately sights "the high, large, and lofty trees, with their spreading branches, and flourishing tops" (*HB*, 20) – the native bearded fig-trees (*Ficus citrifolia*) whose hanging aerial roots supposedly influenced the European naming of the island in the Portuguese *Os Barbados* or its Spanish derivation *Los Barbados*, meaning 'the bearded ones.' Evidence of a Spanish presence on the island, on the other hand, is only captured in tiny remnants, such as in observations of introduced plants and wildlife (*HB*, 66-84).

The party of English mariners who landed in 1625 and claimed the island in the name of King James I, so Hilary Beckles informs us, "were the first Europeans to set in train a programme for its colonisation." [155] The

[154] Hilary Beckles, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to the Nation-State* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1990), 1-6.
[155] *Ibid*., 7.

legendary status that this landing party had already attained by the 1640s is intimated by Ligon himself: “I will beg leave, to deliver you a word or two, what hath been told me by the most ancient Planters, that we found there, and what they had by tradition from their Predecessors” (*HB*, 23). As David Smith points out, this represents one of the rare occasions in the *History* in which the author abandons an ‘autoptic’ perspective “asserting the priority of direct observation” in favour of “received wisdom.”[156] Through the medium of legend, we learn that Barbados had been established as a proprietary colony under the auspices of the wealthy London merchant of Flemish extraction, the Courteens (*HB*, 23). The settlement was successful, but did not go undisputed, since the family failed to take out a patent for colonisation from the king.[157]



John Swan, “Map of Barbados,” etching. In: Richard Ligon, *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes* [...] (Peter Parker: London, 1673), frontispiece.

[156] David Smith, “Brief Introduction.” In: Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, ed. David Smith (e-text, 2014, 5th edition), xvii-xviii. Smith adopts the term “autoptic” from Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World* (New Haven, 1998), 51-87.
[157] *Ibid*, x.

Ligon provides some details as to how the early settlement was organised, and how the colonists experimented with various form of subsistence so as to achieve self-sufficiency. But very soon his attention turns to the canes that within just a few years established themselves "to be the main Plant, to improve the value of the whole Island" (*HB*, 24). To this day, no one knows exactly who was responsible for introducing sugar cane onto the island of Barbados, as Columbus had famously done in Hispaniola during his second voyage of 1493.[158] Differing accounts credit the Dutchman Pieter Brower,[159] the Englishman James Holdip or Sir James Drax,[160] the first man to make his fortune by growing sugar on the island. More certainty, however, exists around where the sugar cane plantings came from. Ligon asserts that "[s]ome of the most industrious men, having gotten Plants from *Fernambock*, a place in *Brasil*, and made tryall of them at the *Barbadoes*; and finding them to grow, they planted more and more [...]" (*HB*, 85). The cane's transfer from newly established Dutch Brazil made sense for a number of reasons: above all, Pernambuco was the largest and richest sugar-producing region in the world at the time, producing in Ligon's opinion "excellent" quality white sugar that Barbados would be fortunate to be able to replicate (*HB*, 86). Hence, Brazil was an important source of knowledge for aspiring Caribbean planters. Upon his arrival in 1647,

[158] See Schwartz (1985), *op. cit.*, 15.
[159] Matthew Edel, *op. cit.*, 30.
[160] See David Smith (2014), *op. cit.*, vii: "A contemporary [...] Scott attributes the first planting of sugar to James Holdip and James Drax: "the sugar cane had been had from Brazile... and was first planted by one Colonell Holdup, who was the first that made sugar in Barbados, but it came to little untill the great industry and more thriveing genious of Sir James Drax engaged in that great worke who brough[t] Collonell Holdups essay, to soe great perfection...." Sloane MS, f. 60r.

Ligon was told that sugar production had more or less developed by trial and error, though he also credits English advancements in cane cultivation to an exchange between Barbados and Brazil: “by new directions from *Brasil*, sometimes by strangers, and now and then by their own people, (who [...]) were content sometimes to make a voyage thither, to improve their knowledge in a thing they so much desired” (*HB*, 85).

Ligon’s account of early English settlement in Barbados positions itself apologetically vis-à-vis the planters and their efforts to establish a monoculture of sugar made possible by “new directions from Brasil.” It furnishes a myth of the Atlantic trade as owing to the ingenuity of a select group of European men when in reality, we know that “the Atlantic was not the autonomous creation of heroic European men but a transformative mixing of men and women from Africa, the Americas, and Europe, the results of whose coming together no one group could predict or fashion.”[161] Nevertheless, his account is piecemeal at best, and at times it even verges on the hermetic. Indeed, Ligon frequently refers to the art of sugar cultivation and refinement as a “secret” or a “mystery” that long eluded any rational attempts to understand it (*HB,* 85). There is no one ‘figure’ that can be credited for the sugar’s introduction and thus, in cultural history terms, all the *History* leaves is a gaping speculative lacuna. Enter the Englishman Crusoe?

[161] James Delbourgo; Nicholas Dew, “Introduction: the Far Side of the Ocean.” In: idem. (eds.), *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World* (New York; London: Routledge, 2008), 8.

3.2. Crusoe's sweet negotiation

Robinson Crusoe may read as the very antithesis of Ligon's *History* given the latter's proudly advertised historical and scientific pretext ("True and Exact History"; "Illustrated with a Map of the Island, as also the Principal Trees and Plants there" etc.). But the texts are more similar than first perceptible: both pivot on an initial scene of personal crisis against a united historical background of national turmoil during the turbulent period of the English civil war. As we informed, the royalist Ligon has been ousted by the very parliamentary forces that Defoe's novel appears to defend, finding himself "a stranger in my own Countrey, and therefore resolv'd to lay hold on the first opportunity that might convoy [sic] me to any other part of the World [...]" (*HB*, 1). Both exiles of civil war, albeit positioned on the opposing side of politics, Crusoe and Ligon are part of the same diasporic movement and 'Atlantic crossing' that saw thousands of English subjects settle in the Americas.

Furthermore, Crusoe's path bears a striking resemblance to the vectors of movement, transfer and transplantation described in Ligon's autobiographical text. Before becoming shipwrecked, Crusoe travels to Brazil – albeit not to Pernambuco, as in Ligon's account, but to neighbouring Bahia ("*All Saints Bay*" or "*Bay de Todos Los Santos,*" [*RC*, 38]). By this stage, the late 1640s and early 1650s, Bahia had overtaken Pernambuco as Brazil's main centre of sugar production and the slave trade – "a position

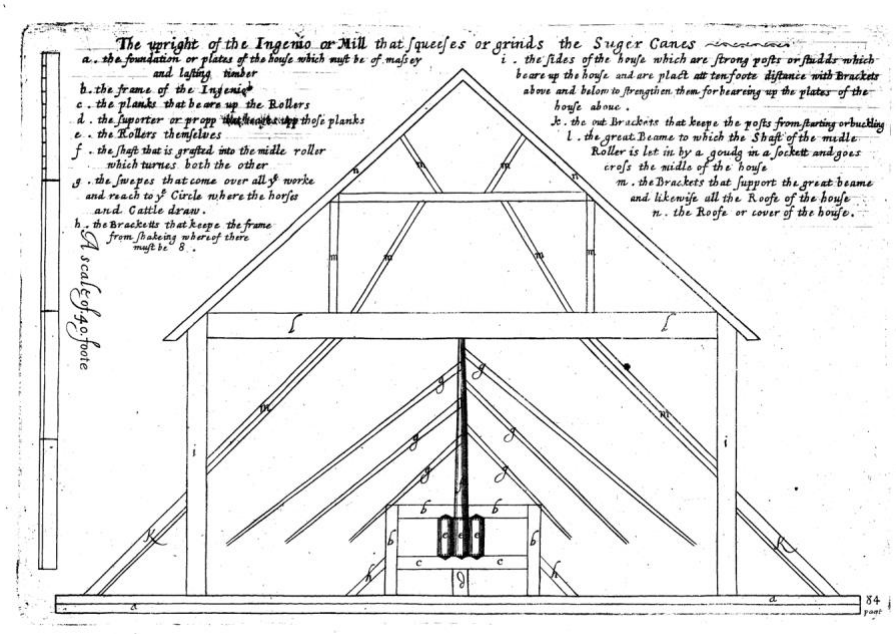
it would maintain for the next century and a half," according to Schwarz.[162] Crusoe's account of Brazil is matter-of-fact and economic; he barely dedicates more than a few pages to a period that nonetheless spanned four years. He wastes no words regarding the purpose of his visit:

> I had not been long here, but being recommended to the House of a good honest Man [...], who had an *Ingenio* as they call it; that is, a Plantation and a Sugar-House. I lived with him some time, and acquainted my self by that means with the Manner of their planting and making of Sugar; and seeing how well the Planters liv'd, and how they grew rich suddenly, I resolv'd, if I could get Licence to settle there, I would turn Planter among them [...] (*RC*, 38-9).

This passage is evidence that Defoe was familiar with the reputation Dutch Brazil had in the 1600s as a hub of exchange within the Atlantic economic system. In almost exemplary terms, Crusoe learns all the necessities of being a planter, from knowledge of sugar's cultivation and production through to gaining access to the all-important sugar mill or "*Ingenio*" – a borrowing from Spanish (itself a corruption of the Portuguese word *engenho*), encapsulating the idea of the mill's ingenuity. This is not simply a term that Defoe's text employs to generate exotic effect; rather, given its preponderant position in the sequence of events, the mill is invoked as a central, if not fetishised piece of colonial machinery. Ligon's *History* is marked by an even stronger fetishising tendency, containing some of the most detailed illustrations of the ingenio, boiling and curing houses of any contemporary account, a feature advertised proudly in the work's frontispiece.[163] These illustrations are a testament to the level of

[162] Schwartz (1985), *op. cit.*, 178.
[163] For a discussion see John E. Crowley, "Sugar Machines: Picturing Industrialized Slavery." *The American Historical Review* 121.2 (2016), 403-436.

industrialisation that Barbados had reached in just a few decades, after beginning humbly with “a very small Ingenio” (*HB*, 85), as Ligon explains.



John Swan, “Ingenio,” etching. In: Richard Ligon, *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes* [...] (Peter Parker: London, 1673), 84.

In social and demographic terms, Marcus Vinicus De Freitas finds that Defoe’s depiction of Brazil in *Robinson Crusoe* is on the whole reconcilable with the historical situation it was aiming to reflect. “In the late seventeenth century,” De Freitas writes, citing figures from Stuart Schwartz’ study of colonial Brazil, “60% of the Brazilian planters were immigrants;” hence “[n]ew planters, like Crusoe, would have been very welcome in such a situation.”[164] Less convincing, De Freitas argues, is however the way in which Crusoe exits Brazil: that Crusoe would need to go to Africa personally

[164] Marcus Vinicius De Freitas, “The Image of Brazil in Robinson Crusoe.” In: *Portuguese Literary and Cultural Studies*, iv–v (2000), 457-8.

to buy slaves for his and his fellow planters' Bahia plantations is not realistic given that "the number of slaves who were brought to the colony was not small, as the novel suggests, but increasing."[165] Indeed, the logic of this awkwardly conceived *deus ex machina* only begins to makes sense once Crusoe becomes shipwrecked and starts projecting the grief of losing his profitable plantation in Brazil onto the island around him.[166] In other words, Crusoe needed to go in search for slaves in order to be conveyed to his deserted tropical island in the first place. Then something happens that revolutionises the way in which he garners his subsistence: Crusoe discovers stalks of barley miraculously growing on his island.

His initial response is to treat this blessing as an act of divine providence, though he later recalls emptying a bag of chicken feed on the same spot where the stalks were now growing. To add to this intrusion of the exotic, Crusoe also finds stalks of rice which he suggests he may have carried over from Africa (*RC*, 91). The scene may just be one of the first literary examples for what historian Alfred Crosby termed the *"*Columbian Exchange*"* – the transcontinental movement of people, plants, animals, technologies and ideas that effectively 're-made' the Atlantic biologically

[165] *Ibid.*

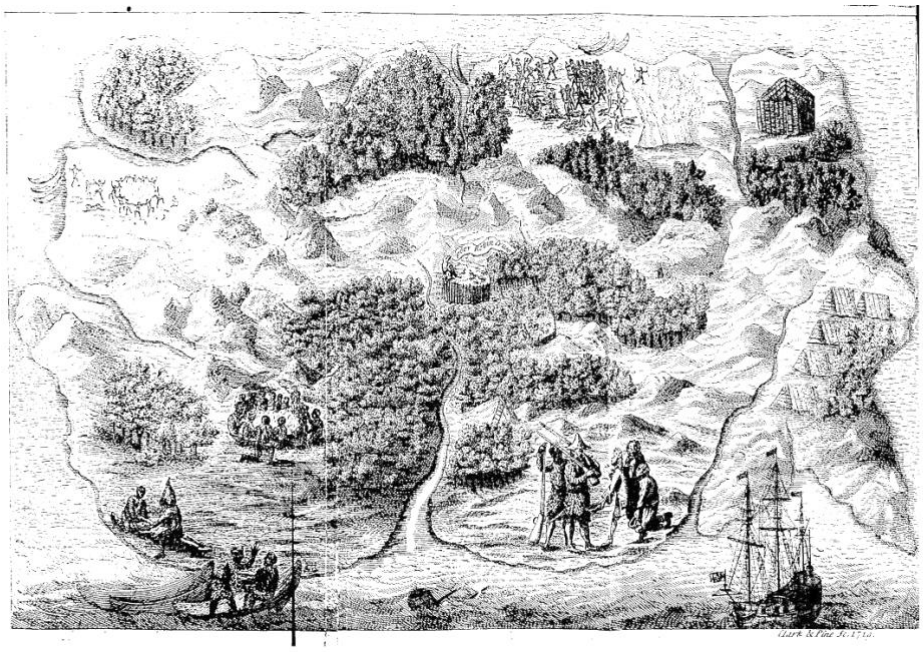
[166] Cf. "[M]y subsequent Mistakes of the same kind had been the Means of my coming into this miserable Condition; for had that Providence, which so happily had seated me at the *Brasils,* as a Planter, bless'd me with confin'd Desires, and I could have been contented to have gone on gradually, I might have been by this Time; *I mean, in the Time of my being in this Island,* one of the most considerable Planters in the *Brasils,* nay, I am perswaded, that by the Improvements I had made, in that little Time I liv'd there, and the Encrease I should probably have made, if I had stay'd, I might have been worth an hundred thousand *Moydors;* and what Business had I to leave a settled Fortune, a well stock'd Plantation, improving and encreasing, to turn *Supra-Cargo* to *Guinea,* to fetch Negroes; when Patience and Time would have so encreas'd our Stock at Home, that we could have bought them at our own Door, from those whose Business it was to fetch them [...]" (*RC*, 230-1).

and culturally.[167] Unpacking the intrinsic colonial implications of the scene, Jill Casid reads the sprouting of "*English* Barley" (*RC*, 90) on Crusoe's island as an instatement of "the discourse of imperial rights of possession through the technology of transplantation." [168] It catalyses Crusoe's transition into the role of colonial farmer so that eventually he can boast not just one, but all in all "three Plantations" (*RC*, 196) scattered across the island.

Admittedly, Crusoe's unintended act of transplantation does not involve sugar cane. Nevertheless, by allowing the buds of a subsistence economy to shoot first, Defoe's novel adheres to a sequence of telluric appropriation already familiar to us from Ligon's account of how English settlers established sugar on Barbados. In a later episode of the novel, Crusoe undertakes his famous topographical and botanical survey of the "*Island of Despair*" (*RC*, 81), discovering an abundance and bounty he never knew was there; this marks the point in which the novel slips, and almost imperceptibly so, into a mode of tropicality from an erstwhile temperate representation of the island environment. With phrases like "I found" and "I saw" Crusoe steps into the role of the colonial prospector. Among other things he finds "a great deal of Tobacco, green, and growing to a great and very strong Stalk" (*RC*, 72). As if this discovery of an established colonial cash crop were not enough, further perusing unearths a figurative goldmine: "I saw several Sugar Canes, but wild, and for want of Cultivation, imperfect."

[167] Alfred W. Crosby Jr. (2003), *op. cit.*
[168] Casid (2004), *op. cit.*, 110.

Crusoe's finding the sugar cane in a wild and apparently self-propagating state fulfils an all-too enduring colonial fantasy: it compounds the implied innocence of the earlier miracle of the barley by this time asserting indigeneity, thus doing away with the necessity of transplantation altogether – an all-too intrusive intervention of 'culture.' Yet, as the sign of his conflicted desire, Crusoe states that "I contented my self with these Discoveries for this Time, and came back musing with my self what Course I might take to know the Vertue and Goodness of any of the Fruits or Plants which I should discover" (*RC*, 115). His ascription of "Vertue and Goodness" to the cornucopia of fruits and plants now spread before him echoes Ligon's praise of sugar's "benign faculty" (*HB*, 85) in the *History*. Together, both texts participate in the myth of Britain's benevolent green empire.



Anon., "Crusoe's Island as depicted in Daniel Defoe." In: Daniel Defoe, *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe: With his Vision of the Angelick World. Written by himself* (London: W. Taylor, 1720).

While his commercial plantation may not come to fruition during his time on the island (without a market, what would be the value? Locke would ask),[169] the novel's second, lesser-read instalment, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, foresees its realisation. Crusoe returns to his Caribbean island to find a burgeoning colony, albeit persisting in the state of rural simplicity. But just as he is preparing to leave the island, Crusoe is recommended to "a certain very honest Fellow, a *Brasil* planter of his Acquaintance, who had fallen into the Displeasure of the Church." The Spaniard appointed as governor of the island suspects the man is a "Heretick in his heart, and [...] has been oblig'd to conceal himself for Fear of the Inquisition" (*FRC*, 214).

This detail is important because it identifies the man as an Inquisition-fleeing Sephardic Jew – a paradigmatic, albeit ambivalent "figure in the history of transatlantic trade and the New World capitalist economy.[170] The background of Inquisition and exodus to which the passage alludes is actually grounded in real historical developments: as Dutch Brazil was reconquered by Portugal in 1654, most so-called C*onversos* or *New Christians* fled or were expelled, many of them seeking refuge in the

[169] "[W]hat would a man value ten thousand, or an hundred thousand acres of excellent land, ready cultivated, and well stocked too with cattle, in the middle of the inland parts of America, where he had no hopes of commerce with other parts of the world, to draw money to him by the sale of the product? It would not be worth the enclosing, and we should see him give up again to the wild common of nature, whatever was more than would supply the conveniencies of life to be had there for him and his family." In: John Locke, *op. cit.,* Chap. V. Of Property. Sec. 48.

[170] Cf. Bruno Feitler, "Jews and New Christians in Dutch Brazil, 1630-1654." In: *Atlantic diasporas: Jews, conversos, and crypto-Jews in the age of mercantilism, 1500-1800*, ed. Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 123-151.

neighbouring British and Dutch-administered colonies.[171] At roughly the same moment in history, in the mid-1650s, Cromwell formally permitted re-admission of Jews in England following their expulsion in 1290[172] and established parts of South America (e.g. Surinam) and the British Caribbean as safe-havens for Jewish immigrants. [173] Crusoe's receptiveness to the "very honest fellow" thus reflects a general policy of greater toleration towards religious minorities in the British and Dutch territories.

Ultimately, though, Crusoe is well-disposed to the man on the score of his commercial utility. Because of the extensive capital, trading connections, skills and experience they brought to the transatlantic system, Dutch and English colonial authorities specifically welcomed Jews to settle in America and the Caribbean in the hope that their presence would stimulate economic development.[174] Contemporary accounts even held that Jews controlled the Brazilian sugar industry[175] and Stuart Schwartz asserts that

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[171] Lionel Abrahams, "Menasseh Ben Israel's Mission to Oliver Cromwell." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 14:1 (1901), 1-25; here: 5.
[172] As Holly Snyder points out, however: "Converso merchants had been operating in London with official connivance since the reign of Henry VIII." In: Holly Snyder, "English markets, Jewish merchants, and Atlantic endeavors: Jews and the making of British transatlantic commercial culture, 1650-1800." In: *Atlantic diasporas: Jews, conversos, and crypto-Jews in the age of mercantilism, 1500-1800*, ed. Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 52.
[173] Gordon Merrill, "The Role of Sephardic Jews in the British Caribbean Area during the Seventeenth Century." *Caribbean Studies* 4:3 (1964), 32-49, in particular 39.
[174] *Ibid.*, 39.
[175] Jan Nieuhoff, "Remarkable Voyages and Travels into Brazil, and the best parts of the East Indies. Translated out of the Dutch," in: John Churchill, *Collections of Voyages and Travels*, Volume 2 (London, 1732), 135: "Among the free inhabitants of Brazil that were not in the company's service (Dutch West India Company), the Jews were the most considerable in number, who had transported themselves thither from Holland. *They had a vast traffic beyond all the rest, they purchased sugar mills and built stately houses in the Receif. They were all traders, which would have been of great consequence to the Dutch Brazil, had they kept themselves within the due bounds of traffick*" (my emphasis).

a common-held, yet "exaggerated" perception was that "most of the Brazilian engenhos were held by New Christians [i.e. Jews]."[176] This background of centuries-long economic competition between Christians and Jews and the attendant accusations of usury is perceptible in the critical stance the Spaniard of Defoe's novel takes to the Sephardic Brazilian planter: "[T]ho' I hate his Principles, [...] I would not have him fall into their [the Inquisitors] Hands" (*FRC*, 214). The more liberal Crusoe grants the man asylum and allots him a plantation, noting his possession of "some Materials for planting Sugar Canes, with some Plants of Canes; which he, I mean the *Portugal* Man, understood very well" (*FRC*, 215).

Crusoe takes the cane's introduction through a Jewish immigrant as the signal to take flight from his island colony, abruptly concluding: "I have now done with my Island, and all Manner of Discourse about it; and who ever reads the rest of my *Memorandum's,* would do well to turn his Thoughts entirely from it [...]" (*FRC*, 215-216). This confirms that the foreseen conclusion of *Robinson Crusoe* is indeed the moment of sugar's introduction onto the island. However, the antagonistic potential of that pivotal moment is captured in the palpable sense of anxiety present in the sudden rupture in narration. The introduction of the sweet commodity of sugar into the Caribbean, so the Spaniard's loathing of the man's "Principles" suggests, hardly represents an uncontroversial moment in the island's or the empire's history; already aware of its exploitative potential, Ligon circumvents the scandal of sugar's ascendency through the euphemistic

[176] Schwartz (1985), *op. cit.*, 266.

language of ‘sweet negotiation’ in the *History*. As part of its own negotiation, Defoe’s novel reverts to a well-trodden trope of shifting agency for the ‘dirty business’ of sugar to an already culturally maligned Jewish merchant figure (Shakespeare, Marlowe et al). To the reader at home, nevertheless, the episode is a disagreeable, albeit palatable concession that cannot spoil the sweet taste of Britain’s green empire.

4. Creolising Crusoe. The politics of race, domination and servitude in *Robinson Crusoe*

The protagonist’s hesitant admission of an outsider as a means of stimulating economic activity nevertheless raises the question of the political organisation of Crusoe’s island colony. That Crusoe is able to afford the man this privilege at all is owing to his ascendency to the position of “Governour” (*RC*, 318), granting him the right to people, populate and administer the island as he pleases. This title is in itself striking because unlike the grander “King” and “Lord” that accompany the character’s conquest of the island’s biota, it conjures very real associations to the British West Indies where ‘governor’ denoted the colonial administrator figure that presided over *plantocracies* like Barbados, Jamaica and Antigua. Crusoe figures that his newly acquired “Subjects” (that is, the mutineers coerced into settling the island) must be pleased that the “Governour was an *English* Man” (*RC*, 318). The cursive text echoes similar emphatic instatements of Englishness throughout the novel – Crusoe’s “*English*” neighbour in Brazil, the “*English* Barley” that magically (or not so magically) sprouts on the island –, that at once convey strong national interest and

attach a sense of innocence to the ascription; as an Englishman, Crusoe can boast being a more lenient ruler (*RC*, 320).

But exactly how "*English*" is Crusoe given the remove at which his island is located not just geographically, but also economically, socially, politically from the 'mother country'? Crusoe spends over thirty years absent from England in the new world, eventually rising to the role of the colonial administrator of a tropical colony: is it therefore possible to contend that he undergoes a process of 'creolisation' [177] – a potentially unsettling transformation at odds with the idea of his ongoing, unblemished loyalty-relationship to England? If so, how does this manifest poetically and aesthetically in *Robinson Crusoe*? And furthermore: how does Defoe's text negotiate the terms of settlement and co-existence with the non-European Other? What is the novel's relationship to the institution of race and servitude?

4.1. "I prepar'd to go to England with all my Wealth": Crusoe as an absentee planter

The novel's stance on these questions, in particular the issue of Crusoe's 'creolisation' and participation in the institution of slavery, can be gleaned from the circumstances surrounding Crusoe's ownership of a new-world plantation. While on his return trip to England, Crusoe unexpectedly regains

[177] "The English term 'creole' is derived from the Portuguese *Criolulu* (Spanish *criollo*) meaning 'native,' via the French *créole*, meaning indigenous. [...] From the seventeenth century to the nineteenth, however, the most common use of the term in English was to mean 'born in the West Indies,' whether white or negro." In: Bill Ashcroft; Gareth Griffiths; Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. 3rd ed. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 50-1.

ownership of the Brazilian plantation that he thought lost during his twenty-eight-year captivity, receiving money, an estate and a stockpile of tropical commodities:

> I was now Master, all on a Sudden, of above 5000 *l. Sterling* in Money, and had an Estate, as I might well call it, in the *Brasils,* of above a thousand Pounds a Year, as sure as an Estate of Lands in *England* [...] (*RC*, 338).

The eventuality has been typically read as yet another awkward foil that sits jarringly with the moral fable of the island: Crusoe becomes rich but through none of the industry and application that he had exhibited just some pages before. Though unrealistic, Crusoe's acquisition of this 'easy money' begins to make sense when read in conjunction with the negative attitudes metropolitan audiences were known to harbour towards British overseas merchants and settlers, thinking them culturally and 'degenerate.' Note the language in which the restitution is framed: not in the new-world terminology of the "plantation" (Defoe was otherwise very receptive to colonial nomenclature),[178] but instead in the old-world vocabulary of the "Estate," and indeed one worth as much as "an Estate of Lands in *England*." According to Michael Shinagel,

> Defoe's prose betrays [Crusoe's] self-consciousness about terming Crusoe's plantation an 'estate' but the idea of having a plantation worth thousands of pounds was a delicious concept to contemplate, particularly when the overseas plantation was the equivalent of an English estate worth 1000 pounds a year [...].[179]

[178] Cf. Jill Casid's discussion of the terms "*palisado,*" "*savanna,*" and "*Ingenio*" in *Sowing Empire* (2004), *op. cit.*, 105-113.
[179] Michael Shinagel, *Daniel Defoe and Middle-Class Gentility* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 130.

But his self-conscious terming of his plantation and 'estate' belies more than just the desire on Crusoe's part to achieve economic equivalency with the real owners of such estates. Similar fantasies of a triumphant return to England frequently resurface throughout the novel: "I had a Right of Possession; and if I could convey it [the island], I might have it in Inheritance, as compleatly as any Lord of a Mannor in *England*" (*RC*, 117). Eventually, we learn that rather than return to Brazil to tend his plantation, Crusoe indeed decides "to go for *England* with all my Wealth" (*RC*, 341), transplanting and transvaluing his New World fortune back into an idyllic vision of England's green and rolling hills, set in rural Bedfordshire. Crusoe's farm in rural Bedford exemplifies how, through the culture of landscape gardening, imperial power could effectively be re-imagined, re-constituted and repurposed as open garden pasture – a picturesque *locus amoenus* with virtually naught relation to the material spoils of empire:

> I went down to my Farm, settled my Family, bought Ploughs, Harrows, a Cart, Waggon-horses, Cows, Sheep; and, setting seriously to Work, became in one half-Year a mere Country Gentleman; my Thoughts were entirely taken up in managing my Servants, cultivating the Ground, Enclosing, Planting, &c. and I lived, as I thought, the most agreeable Life that Nature was capable of directing, or that a Man always bred to Misfortunes was capable of retreating to (*FRC*, 7).

By making Crusoe an absentee planter, instead of orchestrating his return to the newly re-conquered Portuguese Brazil to tend to the running of his plantation himself, Defoe is not only attempting to steer the protagonist's desires around the perquisites of production and *re*production. More importantly, as a calculated act of literary defiance, he is trying to 'buy' him greater social capital among England's elite and reading classes.

But the image of Crusoe as the image of middle-class English gentility also conceals a darker side. As Defoe wrote in *The Complete English Tradesman*, “excepting the negroes, which we transport from *Africa* to *America*, as slaves to work in the sugar and tobacco plantations, all our colonies, as well in the islands as on the continent of *America*, are entirely peopled from *Great Britain* and *Ireland* [...].” He also wrote, “[w]e have [...] *entirely planted* our colonies, and *peopled* the countries with our *own* subjects, natives of this island” (my emphasis).[180] The subtle distinction between the activities of “planting” and “peopling,” attributed to British settlers, versus the imported labour of African “slaves” inheres in a myth of British success in the Caribbean as owing to the British skill and managerialism alone, while Africans are all-too easily removed from the ideal realm of European husbandry. Instead, they are assigned a role of natural subservience based on their inferred ‘lesser talents’ or ability to merely ‘follow instruction.’ According to Kamau Brathwaite, as a result of slavery in places like Jamaica and Barbados, creolisation “involving black and white, European and African, in a fixed superiority/inferiority relationship, tended first to the culturation of white and black to the new Caribbean environments.” [181]

Crusoe’s status as “Master of an Estate” belies the fact that the very fortune to which he as acceded owes to his being an absentee slave owner – and *not* to any capital he has generated through his own labour. Included in his

[180] Daniel Defoe (1726), *op. cit.*, 383.
[181] Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 11.

Brazilian inheritance is a written statement detailing exactly "how the Estate was improv'd, and what it produced a Year, with a Particular of the Number of Squares or Acres that it contained; how planted, how many Slaves there were upon it [...]" (*RC*, 337). Similar such documents, such as the real Barbadian sugar baron Henry Drax's infamous *Instructions for the management of Drax-Hall* (1679) held in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, attest to the level of rationality and calculation with which the plantations of Barbados were managed.[182] Defoe seems to have recognised how integral – crucial even – the slavery then prominent in the Atlantic world was to England's tropical commodities trade (if Crusoe's desperate attempts at procuring African slaves from Guinea are anything to go by). And yet, this recognition does not translate into any qualitative appreciation of the value of that labour or indeed the violence behind it. Nor does it manifest in their representation as anything more than 'chattel,' captured in the cold enumeration of facts and figures and the uniform language of the "*Negro.*" The 'blank space' of the African in Defoe's text is disproportionately filled, on the other hand, with Crusoe's monotonous discourses on how he propagates and improves his island kingdom through paternalistic acts of insemination, transplantation, grafting and enclosure – a tendency replicated throughout much of the planter literature of the early British West Indies.[183]

[182] See Peter Thompson, "Henry Drax's Instructions on the Management of a Seventeenth-Century Barbadian Sugar Plantation." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66:3 (2009), 565-604.

[183] Cf. William Belgrove, *A treatise upon husbandry or planting. A regular bred, and long experienc'd planter, of the island of Barbados; And may be of great use to the planters of all the West-India Islands* (Boston: 1755). Here, again, there is a complete focus on the romanticised figure of the European husbandman and tedious detail is afforded to the

4.2. The plantation family: The doctrine of reciprocity in Ligon's *History*

The connection between *Robinson Crusoe* and the institution of slavery runs far deeper than the episode in Brazil suggests on its own. Instances of enslavement and servitude in fact consistently punctuate the novel, from Crusoe's own enslavement in the Mediterranean and his purchasing of "Negro" slaves in Brazil, right through to Friday's voluntary bondage and beyond. Crusoe is both enslaved and enslaves as demands for labour surface and new opportunities for enrichment present themselves. Even if these opportunities arise within the parameters of ostensibly divergent and thus supposedly irreconcilable contexts and concepts of slavery (Mediterranean, Dutch-controlled Brazil, the Caribbean), to Crusoe the distinction between them is negligible. For instance, when he attempts to prepare his Bahian plantation for larger scale sugar cultivation and is in want of personnel, he "found more than before, I had done wrong in parting with my Boy *Xury*" (*RC*, 39) – referring to the North African companion that he had previously sold off into slavery to secure his own freedom. While Crusoe's matter-of-fact language does convey a certain taken-for-grantedness around the institution of African slavery, his failure to procure cheap labour in an illegal operation to the coast of Guinea and the mistake of Xury's release clearly demonstrate that there are also limits to his empathy. Defoe's thematicisation of these limitations could be taken as a call to secure sources of labour elsewhere, but it could also signal an

imperatives of climate, the seasons, de-weeding, dunging, irrigation, harvesting, et cetera. An African presence in the work is restricted to the instructions given to the husbandman relating to the management of slaves.

attempt to engage with an emerging debate around the future and longevity of British slavery and the British colonies in general.

When Crusoe first purchases his Brazilian plantation, he says "the first thing I did, I bought me a Negro Slave, and an *European* Servant also" (*RC*, 42). This distinction between African slaves and European servants again suggests that Defoe was familiar with the background of Richard Ligon's *True History of Barbados* and the second, more delicate side of the "sweet negotiation" described therein: in historian Keith Sandiford's words, "the desire to win a tenuous and elusive legitimacy for an evolving ideal of Creole civilization, conflicted by its central relation to slavery and its marginal relation to metropolitan cultures."[184] Ligon's *History* is generally considered the first comprehensive account of the "mixed labor pattern" [185] that persisted until Barbados eventually moved to a model based solely on African slavery: "The Island is divided into three sorts of men […]," Ligon explains, "Masters, Servants, and Slaves," the final group comprising both "Negroes" and "Indians" (*HB*, 43). Though he does not call into question the institutions of slavery and indentured servitude[186] and while he defends the planters against the metropolitan stereotype of them as morally and culturally degraded, describing them instead as "[l]oving, friendly, and hospitable one to another [...]" (*HB*, 57), he often criticises their harsh

[184] Sandiford, *op. cit.*, 3.
[185] Cf. Mintz, *op. cit.*, 53.
[186] The question of which condition was the more severe (white servitude or black slavery) is still a matter of ongoing debate. Ligon famously pleaded that it is European servants and *not* enslaved Africans, who "have the worser lives," as "[t]he slaves and their posterity, being subject to their masters forever, are kept and preserv'd with greater care than the servants, who are theirs but for five years, according to the law of the Island" (*HB*, 43). For a discussion see Hilary Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715*. 1st ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 115-139.

treatment of slaves and servants alike. This culminates in the plea that planters extend greater humanitarian "care" (*HB*, 43) towards plantation labourers – striking a more even balance, as Laura Martin argues, between the forces of "economism" and "paternalism."[187]

Therefore, one could argue that the *History* represents the attempt to negotiate the terms a new, reformed creole identity reconcilable with the paternalistic model of servitude to which Ligon was more accustomed. The projected image of the plantation regime is of something that more resembles a family, based on "reciprocity,"[188] rather than the model of violent subjugation and extreme profit orientation that was widely observable in Barbados at the time.

4.3. Friday's reciprocity

The relationship that Crusoe builds with Friday is perhaps the closest the novel comes to intimating a form of servitude not based solely around swift financial gain, but instead on a paternalistic model of reciprocity. On the surface, the figure of Friday forms part of the novel's reflection on the supposed contrarieties of civilisation and savagery, represented through the elusive figure of the cannibal, out of whose arms the character literally comes running to become Crusoe's "faithful, loving, sincere Servant" (*RC*,

[187] Laura Martin, ""Servants Have the Worser Lives": The Poetics and Rhetorics of Servitude and Slavery in *Inkle and Yarico's* Barbados," in Swaminathan, S.; Beach, A. R. (eds.), *Invoking Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century British Imagination* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 115-132.
[188] Susan Scott Parrish, "Richard Ligon and the Atlantic Science of Commonwealths." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 67:2 (2010), 209-248.

247). His good-natured arrival is symbolic and significant in light of the violent frictions that had characterised the Anglo-Indian relationship during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, as memories of the massacre of Powhatan (1622) and the Tuscarora and Yamasee Wars (1711-1715) still lingered.[189] Through the Carib Friday, Crusoe garners a chance for reconciliation and rapprochement with the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, and the opportunity to redeem the image of England by proving himself a good *"Master."*

Johann Baptist Zwecker (Artist), Dalziel Brothers (Engraver), "Robinson Crusoe rescues Friday." In: *The life adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, mariner, with an account of his travels round three parts of the globe, with illustrations by Zwecker, engraved by Dalziel* (New York: George Routledge Sons, 1870-1879), 213.

[189] For a discussion see Dennis Todd, *op. cit.*, 146-150.

A possible literary source for the character is the famed story of Inkle and Yarico from none other than Ligon's *True History*. This tragic romance of how a shipwrecked English merchant, Inkle, survives on the help of the warm-hearted Arawak girl Yarico, whom he eventually betrays by selling into slavery (*HB*, 65), was expediently appropriated to the cultural memory as a metaphor for European betrayal of the 'subject races' in general, inspiring a series of dramatisations and adaptations throughout the eighteenth century.[190] According to Laura Martin, the story of Inkle and Yarico exemplifies the tensions of economism and paternalism at the heart of Ligon's critique of Barbados: by selling the "paternally idealised *Indian* Maid" Yarico into slavery, Inkle effects a transition in the figure from "free born" noble savage to a commodity.[191] As a supposed measure of his greater paternalism, Crusoe demonstratively recoils from commodifying Friday's labour as he had wanted to do to "my boy *Xury*" (*RC*, 38). As Dennis Todd contends, "Crusoe himself never calls Friday a slave, referring to him instead as a "servant," "companion," "assistant," and "grateful friend. [...] [A]lthough he treats him as his subordinate, he never treats him as chattel." [192] However, one must wonder to what degree this fickle attentiveness to nomenclature and the air of benevolence that it intends to project might indeed belie a gesture of enslavement. While Friday is objectively "free," he is no less indebted to Crusoe. Defoe reverses the order of Ligon's tale by casting the European in the role of rescuer, so that as

[190] Cf. Frank Felsenstein, *English Trader, Indian Maid: Representing Gender, Race, and Slavery in the New World. An Inkle and Yarico Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
[191] Laura Martin (2016), *op. cit.*, 123-4.
[192] Todd (2018), *op. cit.*, 150.

repayment for Crusoe's help Friday makes "all the Signs to me of Subjection, Servitude, and Submission imaginable, to let me know, how he would serve me as long as he liv'd" (*RC*, 244). The implied logic of this act of voluntary servitude is not so much Friday's innate childish loyalty, but rather the idea that Crusoe's fatherly tutelage is preferable to that of the Cannibals or indeed the Spanish, "a Race of Men, who were without Principles of Tenderness" (*RC*, 203) – a common rhetorical device employed in the war of words and images between the European empires. In other words, by choosing Crusoe, Friday is making a rational decision; and by placing the onus on Friday, Crusoe's 'mastery' cannot be regarded as a form of coercion.

Likewise, in the context of Ligon's *History* and its vision of a future for Barbadian slavery, being a good master is positioned as a way of increasing the willingness of slaves and servants to perform economic tasks in exchange. In more apologetic accounts of British plantations, the cruelty of some plantocrats, and the institution of slavery in general, are explained away as the apparent 'lesser evil' when compared to the alternative of life in Africa or even England.[193] These represent just some of the authenticating practices used to argue the legitimacy of slavery, before the British plantation system, in the wake of abolition, transitioned to a system wholly founded on economic dependence in wage labour.

[193] Cf. Edward Littleton, *The groans of the plantations, or, A true account of their grievous and extreme sufferings by the heavy impositions upon sugar and other hardships relating more particularly to the island of Barbados* (London: M. Clark, 1689]).

Though a system of slave labour is never nominally installed on Crusoe's island, negotiating a presence of sugar presupposes some form of colonial labour force; and failing the injection of "the blood of Africa,"[194] this task inevitably falls to the "*Indians.*" Crusoe absorbs Friday into the patriarchal structure of the plantocracy, in which he acts as something that resembles a go-between, mitigating hostility between the Europeans and Caribs through his more measured noble savagery.[195] In the second instalment of the novel *The Farther Adventures*, just prior to the moment of sugar's introduction, Crusoe assigns Friday's father, the newest member of the colony, to employ the "seven and thirty Indians liv[ing] in Nook of the Island [...] as Servants to be maintain'd for their Labour, but without being absolute Slaves; for I would not permit them to make them Slaves by Force, by any Means." The inferred reciprocity of the exchange is no less indicative of dependence, for as we are told these had "no Manner of Business or Property to manage" (*FRC*, 192-193).

4.4. Racial codes: 'Whiteness' and 'blackness' in *Robinson Crusoe*

The society that emerges on Crusoe's island colony is a shockingly modern and 'new-world' one not only in light of this system of ostensibly voluntary labour, but also in light of its multi-ethnic and multi-faith composition, encompassing a mixture of Protestant Englishmen, Catholic Spaniards,

[194] Antonio Benítez-Rojo; James E. Maraniss, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective. 2nd ed.* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 5.
[195] The privileges he affords Friday mirror measures taken by English planters in the beginning eighteenth century to integrate certain "key" individuals into the inner "family circle" of the plantation patriarchy. See Keith Mason, "The Absentee Planter and the Key Slave: Privilege, Patriarchalism, and Exploitation in the Early Eighteenth-Century Caribbean." *William & Mary Quarterly* 70:1 (2013), 79-102.

native Caribbeans and Sephardic Jews. Crusoe touts its progressiveness, proudly claiming that

> I never so much as gave the Place a Name; but left it as I found it, belonging to no Man; and the People under no Discipline or Government but my own; who, tho' I had influence over them as Father and Benefactor, had no Authority or Power, to Act or Command one way or other, farther than voluntary Consent mov'd them to comply (*FRC*, 217).

Imagining himself as a benevolent 'father' figure, Crusoe places himself at the symbolic centre of the political and – one might argue in light of the attendant metaphors of reproduction – *racial* order of the colony that sees national ties and tensions (English, Spaniards) evaporate into the unity of colour and 'race' (white/black). According to historians like Winthrop Jordan and Steve Garner, the larger and more exploitative the Atlantic plantation system grew over time, the more salient and powerful concepts of race, in particular whiteness and blackness, informed the identificatory practices of the colonisers. Jordan argues that from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, there were a number of shifts in the terminology that English colonists used to describe themselves in relation to other colonial populations: "From the initially most common term Christian, at mid-century, there was a marked drift toward *English* and *free*. After about 1680, taking the colonies as a whole, a new term appeared – *white*."[196] He links the emergence of a common white identity to the "threat of revolt" from the enslaved populations,[197] while Garner explains it through the prism of free and unfree labour in the plantation system: "It took generations for the joint

[196] Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1968), 95.
[197] *Ibid.*, 95.

interests of the Irish, Scots, and English to coincide, in other words for "free labour" to refer unequivocally to Whites, and "unfree" labour to refer to Blacks, the freedom of the former deriving explicitly from the unfreedom of the latter."[198]

Unsurprisingly, it is Friday, the Atlantic person of colour, who is the first one to recognise the common "white" identity of the Europeans on Crusoe's island: "He [Friday] told me that up a great way beyond the Moon, that was, beyond the Setting of the Moon, which must be *W.* from their Country, there dwelt white bearded Men, like me" (*RC*, 255). Just as Friday is "Africanised" through Crusoe's gaze suggesting feminisation and servitude,[199] Friday's referring to the Europeans as "white bearded Men" seems to engender the opposite, implying a sense of hyper-masculinity that arguably serves to naturalise European domination over supposed 'subject races.' As it happens, this new terminology surfaces at a time when the Europeans feel the most threatened, facing an insurgency from the native Caribbean population who, so Crusoe relates, never quite shake their anthropophagic ways. Crusoe says:

> I was fill'd with Horror at the very naming [of] the white-bearded Man, and going to the Tree, I saw plainly by my Glass, a white Man who lay upon the Beach of the Sea, with his Hands and his Feet ty'd, with Flags [native plants], or Things like Rushes; and that he was an *European,* and had Cloaths on (*RC*, 276).

[198] Steve Garner, "Atlantic Crossing. Whiteness as a Transatlantic experience." *Atlantic Studies* 4:1 (2007), 117-132; here: 122.
[199] Wheeler, *op. cit.*, 848.

Initially horrified and (it seems) threatened by the presence of another European, Crusoe's fear soon turns to sympathy followed by rage, not least because in this image of a white man squirming in the makeshift shackles of indigenous tropical plants he almost certainly confronted with a vision of his own fatal destiny. Eventually, the Europeans emerge victorious over the rogue "Savages," claiming as booty five women whom, as is agreed, shall be divided among the men. While this interracial union is presented as a necessary condition for the multiplication of the settlement, Crusoe makes it very clear the coloured women are less preferable to "some women from *England*" that Crusoe had promised to send to the "*English* Men" (*RC*, 363) before departing the island. Crusoe describes the women as "well-favoured, agreeable Persons, both in Shape and Features, only tawny; and two of them, had they been perfect White, would have passed for very handsome Women, even in *London* [...]" (*FRC*, 86). On the one hand, the "tawniness" of the women suggest that they are caught in the crossfire of interracial colonial desire, reflecting the reality that interracial sex was widely practiced in the British Caribbean despite the legal measures introduced to curtail it.[200] On the other hand, Crusoe's language conveys an exaggerated sense of deficiency, reflecting how the new hierarchies of colour and race supplanted religious difference as the supposedly more reliable and stable

[200] In 1644 the Antigua Assembly passed a law against miscegenation, forbidding "Carnall Coppullation between Christian and Heathen;" the Antiguans defined "heathens" as Negroes and Indians and devised a sliding scale of punishments. In the same year the Antiguans passed another law punishing incest with death – proof of how highly regulated the "biopolitics" of the colony in fact were. See Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (1972; repr., New York: Norton, 1973), 228.

marker of cultural difference.[201] Again, as with Friday who is earlier also described as “not quite black, but tawny” (*RC*, 243), the lighter complexion of the women is positioned as an irreducible sign of their natural subservience and greater propensity to work with (for) the Europeans: “The Woman, who was their Interpreter, was bid in the next Place to ask them, if they were willing to be Servants, and to work for the Men who had brought them away, to save their Lives; at which they all fell a Dancing [...]” (*FRC*, 87).

This marriage of race and labour within the framework of plantocracy forms as an indelible part of the Crusoe’s appropriation of the island’s resources as the romance of his botanising and husbandry. Even when not enunciated, the ligatures of race are apparent in Crusoe’s self-confident bravado, lingering between the black letters running across the white paper. Winthrop Jordan’s finding that the Anglo-Atlantic subject relies on the Atlantic person of colour is thus no exaggeration. “Defoe continues the story of the fall, liberation, and rise of the Anglo-Atlantic subject achieved *through* the Atlantic person of colour.”[202] Without Friday and the image of unwavering obedience he represents, Crusoe’s heroism and mastery would not be possible. But by extolling so ostentatiously the mastery which by pivots on Friday’s negation, Crusoe only betrays his own underlying anxieties and insecurities – anxieties about his own incompetency, deficiencies, fantasies

[201] See Carol Barash, “The Character of Difference: The Creole Woman as Cultural Mediator in Narratives about Jamaica.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies, Special Issue: "The Politics of Difference"* 23 (1990), 407- 428. Barash argues that the centrality of religious difference gave way in British narratives about Jamaica in the late eighteenth century to constructions of African sexual difference.
[202] Jordan, *op. cit.*, 95.

and latent homoerotic desires. In this sense, Crusoe is as symptomatic of how even in the very moment of its ascension, English fears of losing possession of itself as well as its possessions were rife, as Edward Said and Nathan Flynn have argued.[203] To 'creolise Crusoe' is thus to place him within a field of imperial domination, but also to recognise the subversive and unsettling potential that rest therein, not least because it is the "white" male body itself which appears to be at stake.

5. Conclusion

This chapter read Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* as a foundational representation of the settler colony in European literature. Firstly, it showed Crusoe's arrival to be symptomatic of the English discourse of colonisation that had been evolving for centuries. In the depiction of Crusoe as a planter-settler, Defoe's novel lends paradigmatic expression to the phantasm of planting and settling the new world, as theorised by philosophers like Bacon and Locke. In a second step, this chapter highlighted the links between Defoe's novel and Richard Ligon's *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (1657). As was demonstrated, Crusoe's story bears a striking resemblance to the West-Indian planters, that is, the English colonists who amassed massive fortunes through their Caribbean sugar plantations and whose lives and lifestyles Ligon documented over a period of three years, from 1647 to 1650.

[203] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, *op. cit.*, 70; Christopher Flynn, "Nationalism, Commerce, and Imperial Anxiety in Defoe's Later Works." *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 54:2 (2000), 11-24.

That Defoe was able exploit the symbolic value of Barbados in the first place, derived from the fact by 1719, when *Robinson Crusoe* was first published, it and several other islands of the Caribbean had been made British colonial possessions. Islands like *Jamaica* and *Barbados* (just like *Île de France* or *St. Domingue* for the nascent French empire) represented ideal and ripe terrain for the economic and resource-acquiring projects that drove European expansion and colonisation. Crusoe's settlement of the island is thus timely and symbolic against this historical backdrop of rapid national economic growth, and it is logical that Defoe would set his tale of renewal and rebirth not in his own time (the early 1700s), but instead in the mid-1600s – the birth hour of the 'British West Indies.' Though the Caribbean islands remain elusive throughout the narrative, their image is nevertheless perceptible in the sort of place the "desert island" eventually becomes under Crusoe's auspices. In the twenty-eight-year period he is stranded there, Crusoe transforms the island less into something that resembles less of a pristine tropical Eden utopia, than a plantation, complete with a nascent regime of cultivation, capitalist production and slave labour. Cuban novelist Antonio Benítez-Rojo's conceptualisation of the Caribbean as "la isla que se repite," or *the repeating island*,[204] that is, an island rendered replicable and indistinct by the uniformity, if also banal predictability applied to it by European colonists and invaders, is particularly pertinent here.

[204] Benítez-Rojo; Maraniss, *op. cit.*, 1-5.

Still, Crusoe's awkward, guilt-ridden departure from his island in the second instalment of the novel does leave a question mark looming over the projected innocence of the colonial society that has been founded. As if foreseeing the crisis that his planting, displanting and enslaving will eventually result in, Crusoe 'abandons ship' and commits his island-colony to the afterlife to be re-imagined and re-invigorated by anyone but himself. In the next chapter, I consider Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's French-language novel *Paul et Virginie* (*Paul and Virginia*, 1788) as the attempt to do just this: to reform, improve and ultimately rescue the settler colony from the abandon it suffers through Defoe's protagonist. As I shall argue, just as *Robinson Crusoe* stages the 'birth' of the settler colony in European literature, *Paul et Virginie* imbibes the spirit of the reformative, middle phase of the same project.

3. RECOVERING EDEN: JACQUES-HENRI BERNARDIN DE SAINT-PIERRE'S *PAUL ET VIRGINIE* (1788)

1. Introduction

Unlike *Robinson Crusoe*, the French-language novel *Paul et Virginie* (*Paul and Virginia*, 1788) was actually based on the author's real-life experiences of living in a European settler colony. In 1768, at the age of 31, Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre left his French homeland for far-off Île de France (today *Île Maurice*, or Mauritius) with a post as captain-engineer. Any hopes of finding paradise were dashed, however, when Bernardin discovered an island in the grips of rampant financial speculation and environmental devastation wreaked by excessive farming and plantation agriculture. The experience led him one of the earliest proponents of conservationism, campaigning for better and more durable administration of agricultural and economic development on the island.[205] Reflecting on his time in Île de France many years later in the philosophical work *Harmonies de la Nature* (1815), Bernardin de Saint-Pierre wrote:

> C'est un spectacle digne de l'attention d'un philosophe, de voir les défrichés d'une colonie naissante, au sein d'une île nouvellement découverte. C'est là que les cultures de l'homme contrastent de la manière la plus frappante avec celles de la nature. J'ai joui fréquemment de ces oppositions, dans un voyage que je fis à pied, en 1770, autour de l'Ile de France.[206]
>
> To contemplate a rising colony as it clears ground on a newly discovered island is a spectacle worthy of a philosopher's attention. It is there that man's culture works

[205] See Grove, *op. cit.*, 248.
[206] Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Harmonies de la Nature* (Paris, 1815), Vol 1: 184.

> most evidently in opposition to that of nature. I often appreciated these contrasts in a voyage I took on foot, in 1770, around the Ile de France.[207]

Bernardin's scepticism towards European settler colonialism was in stark juxtaposition to the trenchant optimism of Daniel Defoe, whom he had nevertheless idolised as a child. According to his biographer, Bernardin had found solace reading *Robinson Crusoe*[208] and, at 12 years, presumably under influence of Defoe's fiction, embarked on a voyage to Martinique aboard his uncle's ship. (The French colony of Martinique was situated just a few hundred kilometres from "the mouth of the Orinoco," the inferred location of Crusoe's island.)

In 1788, *Paul et Virginie*[209] appeared as the fourth instalment of the multi-volume work *Études de la Nature* (1784-1788), an ambitious, philosophical project inspired by Bernardin's friend and mentor, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. A sentimental, coming-of-age tale about two Creole children born and raised in Île de France, the novel immediately struck a chord with contemporary European audiences amid a climate of intense social upheaval and political uncertainty. According to some accounts, *Paul et*

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[207] Translation is that of Giulia Pacini, "Environmental Concerns in Bernardin de Saint Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 18.1 (2011), 87-103; here: 96.

[208] "Chaque soir il s'endormait avec Robinson dans quelque agréable solitude, défrichant la terre, plantant des arbres, lisant la Bible, élevant des palissades, et se défendant seul contre une armée de Sauvages." In: Louis Aimé Martin, *Essai sur la vie et les ouvrages de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre* (Paris: 1820), 18.

[209] Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984); Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginia* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1858). E-Publication by Project Gutenberg: https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2127 [Last accessed 14 September, 2022]. All further citations from the French version of the novel will appear in-text in the form of the initials *PeV* followed by a volume number and a page number, for example (*PeV*, 2). All citations from the English version take the initials *PaV Engl.* plus a page number, for example (*PaV* Engl., 20).

Virginie was "read more than any other book"[210] during the decade of the French revolution and represented "the most reprinted French prose fiction of the eighteenth century."[211] The novel attracted an international cult following, inspiring numerous toys, souvenirs and household objects.[212] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre even named his own flesh-and-blood children after the fictional protagonists in a token expression of the age's prevailing bourgeois sentimentality.

The novel's exotic island setting was undoubtedly one of the contributing factors to its immense popularity and success, yet more so its vision of a radically new social order at a far remove from French society. *Paul et Virginie* centres on the story of two mothers – one noble, one *paysanne* – and their flight to Île de France resulting from public infamy in their native Normandy and Brittany. In an isolated corner of the island, they give birth to two children and raise them according the principles of nature, beyond the strictures of class. But just as the children are approaching adolescence and amorous feelings are developing between them, a distant aunt summons Virginie to France to receive her inheritance. A two-year separation period ensues, during which the two youths barely exchange words. But the novel ends tragically when, upon Virginie's return to the

[210] Carolyn Vellenga Berman, "Creole Nation: *Paul et Virginie*." *Creole Crossings: Domestic Fiction and the Reform of Colonial Slavery* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 57-87; here: 57-8.
[211] Lieve Spaas, "'Paul et Virginie': The Shipwreck of an idyll." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 13.2 3 (2001), 317.
[212] See Paul Toinet, *Paul et Virginie. Répertoire bibliographique et iconographique* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1963).

island, her ship sinks, she perishes and, as a result, the entire family dies of heartbreak.

The secondary literature around *Paul et Virginie* has tended to focus heavily on its relationship to republican politics, the overthrow of the *ancien régime* and the birth of the French nation.[213] This is understandable in light of the novel's central themes of class conflict, escapism and recovery, and given that its publication coincided with the outbreak of the French revolution. More recent scholarship, nevertheless, has since parted with the idea that the Mauritian setting is a foil that merely replicates social and political conditions in Europe. Greater attention is being afforded to the colonial dynamics of the novel, including the status of Île de France as a settler colony and the specifically Mauritian accent of the protagonists' upbringing and education. Carolyn Berman, for instance, refutes Roddy Reid's claim that the colonial setting is incidental to the novel's depiction of radical societal change, instead arguing that this setting is absolutely central to the new ideal of family, kinship and nation espoused therein. The "settler colony [serves] as model for [imagining] a new kind of national community," she writes.[214]

[213] See Roddey Reid, "Paul et Virginie: "Family" and the Politics of the Sentimental Body in Prerevolutionary France." In: idem., *Families in jeopardy: Regulating the Social Body in France, 1750-1910* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 101-136; Marie-Claire Vallois, "Exotic Femininity and the Rights of Man. *Paul et Virginie* and *Atala*, or the Revolution in Stasis." In: Sara E. Melzer, Leslie W. Rabine (eds.), *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press,1992), 178-197.
[214] Carolyn Vellenga Berman, *op. cit.*, 82.

This chapter, too, analyses the involvement and participation of *Paul et Virginie* in the project of settler colonialism. However, ultimately I challenge the notion that the novel's vision of a new social order is all that 'novel.' That Bernardin embeds his story of Edenic recovery in the historical context of an established French colony, casts some doubt on the authenticity and projected innocence of the *petite société* ("little society") at the novel's centre. The protagonists are driven by the incessant need to plant and improve Île de France, and by so doing ensure their enduring settlement of the island. They also participate in slavery. So 'entangled' in the machinations of European expansion and the project to plant and settle the new world, Bernardin's text falls back within the orbit of Defoe's fiction and the patriarchal discourses of colonisation that informed it. As an attempt to redress (yet not completely repel) the violence of planting, displanting and slavery, Bernardin's novel can be seen as representing the reformative, middle phase of the settler colony project in literature.

Developing this hypothesis, the current chapter is structured into four parts. Firstly, I consider Jean-Jacques Rousseau as an important source for the reformative agenda of *Paul et Virginie*. I show how Rousseau's philosophy of "nature" implicitly endorses the colonial ethos of *Robinson Crusoe.* Secondly, I turn to the "little society" at the centre of Bernardin's novel, showing its indebtedness to Rousseau (and by extension Crusoe). In a third step, I consider how ecological and political concerns specific to Mauritius shape the novel's narrative of education and reform. Finally, I investigate

the novel's participation in the institution of slavery and the question mark left over its 'revolutionary' agenda as a result.

2. "Removed of all its rubbish": Rousseau's reading of *Robinson Crusoe*

Paul et Virginie draws its reformative impetus from two main sources. The first of these was Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's own experience as a traveller, observing first-hand the state of the colony of Île de France over a period of two years, from 1768 to 1770. The second, more theoretical source was the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Bernardin was a close personal friend and disciple of Rousseau, sharing with him a love of botany, an interest that reflects in the prominence of plants and horticulture in *Paul et Virginie*.[215]

Rousseau is otherwise known as an important political theorist, a pedagogue and one of the first representatives of a 'romantic' perspective on nature. According to Muthu Sankar, "European imperialism itself was never the sustained object of Rousseau's trenchant criticism."[216] His critical attitude to imperialism must instead be gleaned from punctual moments of outrage and malaise, such as in the fictional character Saint-Preux's damning account of the "destruction" wreaked by "greedy Europeans" on "the coasts of Brazil," "in the rivers of Mexico and Peru," and even as far as

[215] Timothée Léchot, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Bernardin De Saint-Pierre et la 'Botanique De l'Odorat' (2012)." In: Claire Jaquier, Timothée Léchot (eds.), *Rousseau botaniste. « Je vais devenir plante moi-même ." Recueil d'articles et catalogue d'exposition, Fleurier, Pontarlier* (Éditions du Belvédère, 2012), 57-66.
[216] Muthu Sankar, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 13.

"the extremities of Africa"[217] in the novel *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761).

It might seem paradoxical, therefore, that Rousseau was an enthusiastic reader of Defoe's novel about one Englishman's colonisation of a deserted Caribbean island. Except, Rousseau needed Crusoe's example in order to advance his own educational programme to rehabilitate the individual that he thought society and history had so disfigured. The culmination of this project was the educational treatise *Émile ou De l'éducation* (1762). In a passage that has long mystified commentators, he famously singled out *Robinson Crusoe* as the one exemplary book of "natural education" for his imaginary pupil Émile to read and emulate: "What is this marvellous book? Is it Aristotle? Is it Pliny? Is it Buffon? No, it is Robinson Crusoe," he affirmed.[218] The endorsement no doubt helped *Robinson Crusoe* to become a staple of children's literature for centuries to come. But even Rousseau conceded that Crusoe's heroism was only possible under the condition that the text be "cleared of its rubbish" (Fr. "débarrassé de tout son fatras"[219]) – a reference to the imperial and capitalist schemes, first and foremost slavery, through which the character effortlessly strikes it rich. Rousseau insists that "the novel, cleared of all its rubbish, begins with Crusoe's shipwreck, and ends with the coming of the ship that bears him from it," and thus effectively

[217] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Eloisa: or, A series of original letters collected and published by J.J. Rousseau. Translated from the French* (London: H. Baldwin 1784), III, 122: 25-29.
[218] "Quel est donc ce merveilleux livre? Est-ce Aristote? est-ce Pline? est-ce Buffon? Non; c'est Robinson Crusoé." In: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile ou de l'éducation* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1992), 210-211. Translation is my own.
[219] *Ibid.,* 211. Translation is my own.

turns a blind eye to the episodes in colonial Brazil in which Crusoe becomes wealthy.[220]

In short: Rousseau's endorsement of *Robinson Crusoe* was based on a selective reading that actively filtered out and, in a way, inspired forgetfulness towards the capitalist framework in which Crusoe's tale of survival was embedded. By raising the work's pastoral and bucolic elements above its participation in a history of the slave trade and colonial dispossession, he had essentially, if inadvertently, played into the benevolent image the early British empire sought to project at this moment in history.

Selective filtering of the "rubbish" that is empire was nevertheless crucial to the reformative programme of *Émile* and the idealised figure of the "*élève de la nature*" (Engl. pupil of nature) at its heart. Nothing was more at odds with the universe of the pure and sovereign self, as Rousseau imagined it, than the evils of luxury, slavery and mortality symbolised by the Spanish empire's dealings in America.[221] Rousseau envisaged his fictitious pupil instead "busy with his castle, his goats, his plantations"[222] somewhere on the foothills of the Swiss alps. In another scene in the treatise, Émile

[220] "Ce roman, débarrassé de tout son fatras, commençant au naufrage de Robinson près de son île, & finissant à l'arrivée du vaisseau qui vient l'en tirer [...]." In: *Ibid.*, 211. For a more thoroughgoing discussion of Rousseau's interpretation of Defoe's novel see Denise Schaeffer, "The Utility of Ink: Rousseau and *Robinson Crusoe*." *The Review of Politics*, 64:1 (Winter, 2002), 121-148.

[221] Largely thanks to Rousseau, this idealised notion of a radically autochthonous and pristine Helvetic island refuge sequestered from all the ills of the world became a *topos* in late-eighteenth-century discourse which several writers, including German author Heinrich von Kleist, in turn appropriated to their own intents and purposes. See Chapter 4.

[222] "qu'il s'occupe sans cesse de son château, de ses chèvres, de ses plantations." In: Rousseau (1992), *op. cit.*, 211. Translation is my own.

assumes custodianship of the land through the innocent planting a seed, an act of colonisation deemed "more sacred and respectable than the one Nunez Balboa took of South America in in the name of the king of Spain, in planting a standard on the coast of the South Sea."[223] Sowing the ground represents a foundational act of colonisation,[224] and as Alan Bewell maintains, archaic and though it appears, it formed the basis of "a new form of territorial possession, one in which Europeans marked their claim to a place by remaking its nature."[225] Robinson Crusoe sowed seeds on his island to symbolically make it his property, and thus by extension, "English." Similarly, Émile scatters his seeds in what reads as the eccentric performance of the same, purportedly more benign form of 'green imperialism.' An educational treatise supposedly against the corruptive influence of society on the individual, Rousseau's book lent tacit support to the paradigmatic legal argument of settler colonialism: that property rights invariably go to those who cultivate, work and through this cultivation 'improve' the land.

[223] "plus sacrée & plus respectable que celle que prenoit Nunes Balboa de l'Amérique méridionale au nom du roi d'Espagne, en plantant son étendard sur les côtes de la mer du Sud." In: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile ou de l'éducation. In: Collection complète des œuvres de J. J. Rousseau. Tome quatrième : Contenant les IV premiers Livres d'Émile, ou de l'Éducation* (Paris, 1782), 127.
[224] Cf. Richard Drayton, *op. cit.*, 1-25.
[225] Alan Bewell, "Traveling Natures." *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 29:2-3 (June/September 2007), 89-110; here 101-102.

Anon., "Emile watering his garden." In: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emilius; or, A treatise of education. Translated from the French of J. J. Rousseau, citizen of Geneva, 3 Vols.* (Edinburgh: A. Donaldson, 1768), Vol. 1, 25.

2.1. The 'anti-colony colony'

Émile was written at a time when a prevailing air of cultural relativism coincided with a new wave of European expansion and discovery. Just as prominent intellectuals like the Encyclopaedists in France denounced European conduct in the new world as contrary to the humanitarian ideals of the enlightenment,[226] the 'discovery' and mapping of the South Sea

[226] In 1770, Raynal and Diderot's monumental *Histoire des deux Indes* was published, containing a scathing critique of European treatment of non-European peoples and the institution of slavery that sustained the luxury commodities trade.

introduced a theme of renewal and redemption into European discourse. The South Sea discourse of the late eighteenth century nourished the European imagination with new possibilities of appropriation and incorporation – and to this even the most inward-looking and insular philosopher was not immune. In his novel *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), Rousseau seized on contemporary accounts of supposedly uninhabited Pacific islands[227] to distil an image of prelapsarian wilderness diametrically opposed to the "desert" state that European commerce had rendered of the continent of America:

> J'ai séjourné trois mois dans une île déserte et délicieuse, douce et touchante image de l'antique beauté de la nature, et qui semble être confinée au bout du monde pour y servir d'asile à l'innocence et à l'amour persécuté [...].[228]

> I made a residence of three months in a desert and delightful island, which afforded an agreeable and lively representation of the primitive beauty of nature, and which seems to be fixed at the extremity of the world, to serve as an asylum to innocence and persecuted love [...].[229]

When Saint-Preux, the male protagonist of the novel, returns from his Pacific voyage and steps inside Julie's garden located on the Swiss estate of Clarens, the famous *Élysée*, he cannot help crying out, "O Tinian! O Juan Fernandez!"[230] in an outpouring of sentimentality that extolls the gardener Julie's inner beauty, her uninflected moral "virtue," as much as the wild, mesmerising beauty of the garden itself. This conflation of feminine purity

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[227] Specifically, Rousseau drew on Richard Walter's *A Voyage Around the World in the Years MDCCXL, I, II, III, IV by George Anson* (London: John and Paul Knapton, 1748). In a letter dated 18 March 1757, Rousseau asked Mme d'Épinay to borrow a copy. He received the copy on 26 March. See: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Correspondance complète*, ed. R.A. Leigh, letters 489, 494.
[228] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 2 Vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1993) IV, 3, 24.
[229] In: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Eloisa*, *op. cit.*, III, 28.
[230] *Ibid.,* III, 116.

and the purity of uncolonised ground typifies the rhetoric of the Clarens estate as a kind of "anti-colony colony,"[231] at a remove, yet still strangely complicit in the workings of patriarchal society.

Still, Rousseau's philosophy of nature and its search for Edenic beginnings is pervaded by a central tension insofar it demonstrates that under the conditions of modernity the kind of Eden it envisages is only possible when meticulously – perhaps obsessively – crafted and cultivated. What, in the case of the Elysium garden, at first glance has the appearance of "a 'pure' or 'virtuous' environment untouched by the imprint of European hands and customs"[232] in fact reveals itself to be a painstakingly crafted and well-tended product of human design – in Jean Starobinski's words: "[a]n artificial entity that conveys the *illusion* of wild nature. An 'artificial wilderness.'"[233] Likewise, Émile's education, premised on the idea of freeing the child's natural energies, is contingent on the pedagogue's exercising full and unchallenged sovereignty to, in a sense, 'colonise' him. One could question, therefore, to what extent Rousseau's reformative programme based on a deep cultural scepticism is truly emancipatory; or, conversely, whether it is simply the rhetoric of a purportedly more benign paternal figure (be this the gardener, the traveller, the educator or indeed the *philosophe*) whose designs it realises.

[231] See Jill Casid (2004), *op. cit.*, 114-127.
[232] Grove, *op. cit.*, 224.
[233] Jean Starobinski, *Rousseau. Eine Welt von Widerständen*, *aus dem Französischen von Ulrich Raulff* (Frankfurt a. M. / Wien: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1988), 166. Translation is my own.

In any case, the fusion of two elements: a projected "wilderness" (be this the pupil, the uninhabited island, the garden, woman or the foreign Other) and a corresponding masculine drive to subdue and 'cultivate' is precisely what lends Rousseau's philosophy of "purity" and "nature" its sense of problematic innocence. Ostensibly isolationist, purist and stoic, Rousseau's philosophy of nature is undermined by its own expansionary and domesticating impulses which situate it firmly within the framework of European colonial ideology. Recovering Eden may not entail the same as it did for Bacon, Locke and Bacon, that is, a recovery narrative committed to the cause of commercial progress; nonetheless, it is important to recognise that the Edenic garden, just like the sentimental vision of mediaevalesque feminine virtue and chastity embodied by Julie, itself represents a patriarchal fantasy, belying a gesture of control and dominance.

3. "Dans une île presque déserte": The anti-colony colony of *Paul et Virginie*

Together with *Émile*, *Julie* formed part of a larger *back-to-nature* movement that gained popularity on the eve of the French revolution. Though Rousseau imagined his protagonists sowing and cultivating their own little empire somewhere on the foothills of the Swiss alps, the fantasy of remote rural life and the sentimentalised figures at its centre, the *élève de la nature* travelled widely, inspiring a new wave of experimental literature in its wake.[234] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel *Paul et Virginie* represents one

[234] Cf. Nicolas Pethes, *Zöglinge der Natur: der literarische Menschenversuch des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2007).

of the more potent and influential examples of this new cultural and literary movement – even if the far-off setting of Île de France represents a major departure from his Swiss friend's notorious nativism.[235] The formative influence of Rousseau can be gleaned, first and foremost, from the novel's central scenario of a natural education, developed through the title characters, two *enfants de la nature*, who are raised at a remove from society unencumbered by harmful societal pressures. Nothing could appear closer to the prelapsarian paradise imagined by Rousseau than the idyllic centred around the two mother figures Madame de la Tour and Marguerite, the children Paul and Virginie and their two "slaves" Domingo and Marie. In the moment of narration, however, the characters have vanished and the novel's idyll has long since disintegrated; all that remains of this "*petite société*" ("little society"), as it is innocently termed, are the ruins of "two small huts" and the "overgrowth" (*PeV*, 109) which serve as the elegiac visual reminder of the humble community that once inhabited and cultivated the terrain. Our narrator, a European traveller bearing a striking resemblance to Bernardin himself, relays the story in third-person retrospective, as recounted to him orally by an elderly Creole man (*le vieillard*, or old man), the family's neighbour who is stylised as a kind of Homeric storyteller figure.

Mediated through these multiple narrative perspectives, the story of the colony's founding assumes the character of a foundational history with vaguely mythological and legendary elements. Not surprisingly, while the

[235] Cf. Giovanni Aloi, "Botanical Decolonisation: In Defense of Cultivars." In: *Beyond Plants Blindness: Seeing the Importance of Plants for a Sustainable World*, ed. Mark Wilson, Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Dawn Sanders (The Green Box, Berlin, Germany, 2020), 22-32; esp. 27.

old man's account centres around the mother-duo of Madame de la Tour and Marguerite as well as the two children, it is the peripheral male figure of Monsieur de la Tour that is first mentioned and ascribed agency within the story:

> En 1726 un jeune homme de Normandie, appelé M. de la Tour, après avoir sollicité en vain du service en France et des secours dans sa famille, se détermina à venir dans cette île pour y chercher fortune (*PeV*, 111).

> Monsieur de la Tour, a young man who was a native of Normandy, after having in vain solicited a commission in the French army, or some support from his own family, at length determined to seek his fortune in this island, where he arrived in 1726 (*PaV Engl.*, 37).

This masculine, pioneering plotline will serve as a foil to the maternal Edenic tale of re-birth centred around the novel's other characters. As a fortune seeker, Monsieur de la Tour is associated with the sorts of desperate men that according to Bernardin's friend and contemporary Pierre Poivre flocked to Île de France in approximately the same historical moment: "Reckless and ignorant men, thinking of nothing but themselves, have ravaged the island, destroying the trees to make a fortune [...] leaving nothing for their successors but arid lands."[236] But almost immediately the novel debunks the idea of Mauritius as a commercial frontier territory: the island is continually described in economically unfavourable terms or as too remote to engage in any kind of meaningful commerce with the Indies: "[d]ans ce temps-là surtout, où cette isle faisoit peu de commerce aux Indes" (*PeV*, 114); or: "dans cette isle sans commerce" (*PeV*, 152). Consequently, none

[236] Pierre Poivre, "Discours prononcé par P. Poivre à son arrivée à L'Isle de France aux habitants de la Colonie assemblées." In : J. Salles (ed.), *Oeuvres complètes de Pierre Poivre, précédées de sa vie* (Paris, 1797), 210. Translation is my own.

of the characters have any prospects for striking it rich in Mauritius, which is why Monsieur de la Tour parts for neighbouring Madagascar "in the hope of buying some negroes there" ("dans l'espoir d'y acheter quelques noirs" [*PeV*, 112]). His demise at the hands of a "pestilent fever" ("fièvres pestillentielles") serves as a cautionary reminder of the limits of the colonial endeavour, intimating how apparent moral depravation and greed can quite literally result in decomposition and even death.

Precisely because of the ominous associations of masculinity and "man's culture" in the novel, femininity figures (just as in Rousseau's *Julie*) as a redemptive and salvific force in the novel. But it is also framed as a problem, itself in need of resolution. As has been widely established, *Paul et Virginie* hinges upon the symbolic scenario of woman's fall from virtue.[237] The fall structure is already embedded in the novel's opening scenario of flight and escape: Marguerite, a simple and poor peasant woman from Brittany, has fled on her own to Île de France because a premarital relation leaves her pregnant and socially outcast. Madame de la Tour, for her part, has been left a widow after her illegitimate husband travelled to Madagascar where he contracted a tropical disease. The same 'lapsarian' structure recurs multiple times throughout the story, for instance in the 'threat' of Virginie's sexual maturation which precedes her departure for mainland France.

[237] Marie-Claire Vallois (1992), *op. cit.*, 178-197; Chris Bongie, ""The Shadow of What One Will Be": Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's Insular Relations." In: idem., *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literature* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998), 79-125, esp. 112-117; here: 189; Pratima Prasad, *Colonialism, Race, and the French Romantic Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 27.

In light of these representations of woman, opinions about the pivotal role ascribed to femininity in the novel vary greatly: while Prasad recognises its emancipatory power, arguing that "paternity is erased" [238] owing to the central predominance of maternal education in the novel, commentators like Vallois and Bongie, by contrast, see the matriarchal idyll as a deftly crafted instrument of patriarchal authority.[239] Both Vallois and Bongie posit a link between the novel's central theme of colonisation and the contemporaneous discourse of femininity, largely dominated by Rousseau's ideal of sentimental woman. In Vallois' assessment, Bernadin's novel equates the feminine with the exotic, that is, a mysterious and unruly energy requiring domestication.[240]

Seen from this vantage point, the 'fall from virtue' structure provides a rationale for the mothers' founding of a "little society" not only at a remove from France, but also one sequestered from the rest of Île de France – an 'island within an island.' Madame de la Tour resolves to cultivate a small piece of ground together with her Madagascan "slave" Marie that, like the Clarens estate in Rousseau's *Julie*, is earmarked for subsistence rather than profit:

> Dans une île presque déserte dont le terrain était à discrétion elle ne choisit point les cantons les plus fertiles ni les plus favorables au commerce; mais cherchant quelque gorge de montagne, quelque asile caché où elle pût vivre seule et inconnue [...] (*PeV*, 112).

> Desert as was the island, and the ground left to the choice of the settler, she avoided those spots which were most fertile and most favorable to commerce: seeking some

[238] Pratima Prasad (2009), *op. cit.*, 27.
[239] Cf. Chris Bongie, *op. cit.*, esp. 112-117.
[240] Marie-Claire Vallois (1992), *op. cit.*, 189.

> nook of the mountain, some secret asylum where she might live solitary and unknown, she bent her way from the town towards these rocks, where she might conceal herself from observation (*PaV Engl.*, 38).

Set against the fields of plantation monoculture euphemistically described as "cantons favourable to commerce," the "gorge de montagne" in which Madame de la Tour opts to settle aims at the re-creation of a prelapsarian space *before* the arrival of European commerce. Amplifying the sense of innocence of the scene, also widely noted in scholarship, is the tendency to feminise and maternalise the Mauritian landscape: here through the image of a mountain gorge, elsewhere in topographical features such as "The Three Breasts" ("Les Trois Mamelles"), which the narrator divulges is "so called from the form of its three peaks."[241] By equating the pure feminine body with the metaphor of virginal, uncolonised ground, the text reactivates a trope commonly found in colonial texts of American discovery.[242] It also invokes the contemporary image of Mother Nature as a rhetorical symbol of the revolution – foreseeing the figure of Marianne, whose exposed breasts were meant to symbolise perennial, motherly subsistence of the French masses.[243] When La Tour initially meets Marguerite she is nursing Paul on her breast ("elle [...] allatait son enfant" [*PEV*, 113]) in a *clin d'œil* to Rousseau's assertion that breastfeeding played a crucial role in a child's (and thus the nation's) development.

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[241] "[A]insi nommée parce que ses trois pitons en ont la forme." A footnote goes on to explain that far from merely inferring physical likeness, "[c]e sont en effet de véritables mamelles ; car ce sont d'elles que découlent beaucoup de rivières et de ruisseaux qui répandent l'abondance sur la terre" (*PeV*, 130).

[242] Most notably, Jan van der Straet's famous drawing *Discovery of America: Vespucci Landing in America* of 1587-89. For a discussion see Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988 [1975]), xxv.

[243] Marie-Claire Vallois, "Gendering the Revolution: Language, Politics, and the Birth of a Nation (1789–1795)." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100:2 (2007), 423-446, esp. 436.

Louis Lafitte, "Enfance de Paul et de Virginie," etching. In: Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie* (Didot: Paris, 1806).

3.1. "*Enceinte, défrichement*": Cultural techniques in the novel

This opening scene plants the seeds for the "little society" as a kind of 'anti-colony.' But in a further invocation of organic feminine corporality and fertility, the land on which the two families reside is referred to by the old-man narrator as an "enceinte" (Engl. enclosure). In its secondary meaning (Engl. pregnant), this terminology irrevocably invokes the occasion of Madame de la Tour's pregnancy with Virginie and carries associations with the walled garden, or *hortus conclusus*, that symbolises Mary's virginity. Innocent and unassuming as it appears, the enclosure is nevertheless sealed through a demarcation of European property rights and ownership. Significantly, it is not the two women but the *vieillard*, or old man, who performs the act of enclosure to (re-)instate paternal power in the novel after the vacuum left by Monsieur de la Tour's colonial demise:

> Je dis à ces deux dames qu'il convenait, pour l'intérêt de leurs enfants, et surtout pour empêcher l'établissement de quelque autre habitant, de partager entre elles le fond de ce bassin, qui contient environ vingt arpents. J'en formai deux portions à-peu-près égales : l'une renfermoit la partie supérieure de cette enceinte [...] (*PeV*, 114-115).

> I told the two friends that for the future interests of their children, and to prevent the intrusion of any other settler, they had better divide between them the property of this wild, sequestered valley, which is nearly twenty acres in extent. They confided that task to me, and I marked out two equal portions of land (*PaV Engl.*, 41).

While stylised as a kind of ascetic who, as he himself attests, "lives a solitary life, without wife, children or slaves" ("[je] passe ma vie seul, sans femme, sans enfants, et sans esclaves" [*PeV*, 191]), the children actually refer to the old man explicitly as "père," and as Jeanne Britton points out, "Bernardin's creole "vieillard" and the modern European who serves as the

novel's extradiegetic narrator call each other father and son," linking them in a "figurative bond of paternity."[244] Through his own account, which readily cites ancient Greek and Roman authors such as Xenophon, Pythagoras and Virgil, the old man emerges as the representative of an ancient, patriarchal knowledge tradition that juxtaposes with the myopic modern commercialism embodied by the late Monsieur de la Tour. As he informs us, his very presence on the island owes to his having "traversed a large part of Europe, and several regions of America and Africa" (*PeV*, 193), presumably – just as Rousseau's fictional character Saint-Preux had done – bearing witness to the full displays of human cruelty and sorrow wrought by European imperialism:

> Après avoir parcouru une grande partie de l'Europe, et quelques cantons de l'Amérique et de l'Afrique, je me suis fixé dans cette île peu habitée, séduit par sa douce température et par ses solitudes. Une cabane que j'ai bâtie dans la forêt au pied d'un arbre, un petit champ défriché de mes mains, une rivière qui coule devant ma porte, suffisent à mes besoins et à mes plaisirs (*PeV*, 193).

> After having travelled over many countries of Europe, and some parts of America and Africa, I at length pitched my tent in this thinly-peopled island, allured by its mild climate and its solitudes. A cottage which I built in the woods, at the foot of a tree, a little field which I cleared with my own hands, a river which glides before my door, suffice for my wants and for my pleasures (*PaV Engl.*, 140).

Like Saint-Preux's island of Tinian, the old man's "ermitage" (*PeV,* 194), as it is named, functions as a refuge from European empire, providing a space for the 'anti-colony' of the novel to blossom. Building on the notion of *enceinte* or enclosure, the old man's discourse invokes a second cultural technique of colonisation, that of *défrichement*, or *clearing* (of trees and forestland, predominantly). This may at first glance seem contradictory

[244] Jeanne M. Britton, *Vicarious Narratives* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 128-132.

given that Bernardin's philosophy, as we remember, describes *défrichement* as a negative form of cultivation in diametric opposition to "nature": "C'est un spectacle digne de l'attention d'un philosophe, de voir les *défrichés* d'une colonie naissante."[245] In the discourse of new world colonisation, such as in Guisan's *Traité sur les terres noyées de la Guiane* of 1788, the French verb "défricher" denoted the initial clearing of land to make way for the artificial irrigation systems and cycles of propagation and harvesting that powered the plantation machinery.[246] The oppositional term "en friche" refers to the quality of being fallow or uncultivated; in Rousseau's *Julie,* this quality is valorised, albeit tautologically, because the ideal for which it stands, a pristine and untouched landscape, is generated precisely by way of its opposite: clearing to facilitate potential propagation. Similarly, if the old man of Bernardin's novel adopts the concept of *défrichement* positively – "un petit champ défriché de mes mains" –, it is because this operation represents a necessary act in the founding and propagation of the 'anti-colony colony' existing for sustenance and beauty rather than profit.

Such is the paradox of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's fictional gardening utopia: that while the island colony arguably becomes something profoundly more beautiful through such re-landscaping, it nevertheless remains a colonised landscape, irrevocably altered and transformed through the European hand. *Enclosure, clearing, insemination, transplantation* and *grafting* represent a trusted technical apparatus by which the novel's characters remake the

[245] Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1815), *op. cit.*, Vol 1: 184. My emphasis.
[246] Cf. Jean Samuel Guisan, *Traité sur les terres noyées de la Guiane, appelées communément "Terres-Basses", sur leur dessèchement, leur défrichement, leur culture & l'exploitation de leurs productions* (Cayenne: Imprimerie du Roi, 1788).

island, albeit under the guise of sentimental love, devotion and 'anti-conquest.'[247] Paul and Virginie embody this rhetoric of 'anti-conquest' more than any other of the novel's characters. Stylised as Adam and Eve,[248] theirs is a union consecrated above all through acts of gardening: "These nuts produced two cocoa-trees, which formed the only records of the two families; one was called Paul's tree, the other, Virginia's."[249] Such instances of erotically charged propagation and improvement carry real ideological potency. Paul's incessant planting and transplanting of various trees and plants is calculatingly pitted against the antithetic image of "monuments" and "triumphal arches" (*PeV*, 197), the overt symbols of imperial conquest. In Bernardin's travelogue *Voyage à l'Île de France* (1773), the corresponding indictment and endorsement of a purportedly more benign form of 'green empire' reads: "The gifting of a useful plant is in my opinion more precious that the discovery of a goldmine or a monument."[250]

The characters' planting of the island towards an Edenic paradise is presented as a means of sealing the bonds of interpersonal union and channelling latent emotion and desire. And yet, their relentless sowing and landscaping demonstrate that the bonds of nation and the *patrie* are not so easily broken. In one scene, Madame de la Tour and Marguerite inscribe a

[247] Cf. Mary Louise Pratt, *op. cit.*, 7.
[248] "[T]els dans le jardin d'Éden parurent nos premiers parents, lorsque sortant des mains de Dieu, ils se virent, s'approchèrent, et conversèrent d'abord comme frère et comme sœur. Virginie, douce, modeste, confiante comme Ève; et Paul, semblable à Adam, ayant la taille d'un homme avec la simplicité d'un enfant."
[249] "Il naquit de ces deux fruits deux cocotiers, qui formaient toutes les archives de ces deux familles; l'un se nommait l'arbre de Paul, et l'autre, l'arbre de Virginie" (*PeV*, 143).
[250] "Le don d'une plante utile me paraît plus précieux que la découverte d'une mine d'or, & un monument plus durable qu'une pyramide." In: Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Voyage à l'Île de France, à l'île Bourbon et au cap de Bonne-Espérance* (Paris, 1773), 205. Translation is my own.

tree called “Les Pleurs Essuyés” (Engl. The Burial-Place of Tears) with the name of their birthplaces “Bretagne” and “Normandie,” sowing wheat, strawberry and pea seeds to implant typically ‘French’ vegetation into the Mauritian soil. Inspired by this nostalgic act of transplantation, their “slaves” Domingue and Marie give the name “Angola and Foullepointe” to two areas “where the grass from which they made baskets grew and where they had planted a calabash tree (“où croissoit l’herbe dont ils faisoient des paniers, et où ils avoient planté un calebassier”) – the visual reminder of their “birth places in Africa” (*PeV*, 142-143). In the effort to revive a prelapsarian paradise on Île de France, the novel’s characters inevitably end up producing replicas of their respective homelands, Europe and Africa. Their planting arguably strengthens, rather than diminishes the image of the French empire by re-codifying it away from the nightmare of a plantation machine towards the picturesque image of a rural pastoral hamlet.

4. Bernardin’s Mauritius: Ecology and education in *Paul et Virginie*

Paul et Virginie is, as this analysis of the novel’s opening scenario demonstrated, indebted to the same ideological background of property and ownership as the texts studied thus far. Despite the image of maternal and infantile innocence it projects through the *petite société*, the novel upholds the paradigmatic legal argument of the settler colony project: that a right to inhabit supposedly ‘vacant land’ invariably goes to those who cultivate, labour and through this cultivation ‘improve’ it. But exactly how important is an understanding of the specific colonial context of Île de France to a

reading of *Paul et Virginie*? Bernardin's own classification of the work as a "pastorale" (*Préambule*, 1806 edition) seems to want to lull the reader into a sense of the French colony as a timeless rural romance with zero relation to the outside world. Recent interpretations of the novel, however, have challenged this assumption, linking the recovery narrative at the centre of the novel with the author's first-hand experience of living in the colony.[251] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre visited Île de France from 1768 to 1770, but to his dismay he discovered an island ravished and exploited for its natural products and wonders. In his travelogue, *Voyage à l'Île de France* of 1773, he relates how, after an initial golden age, the island and neighbouring Bourbon became inundated by all sorts of desperate characters from all over the French empire,[252] intent on "re-establishing their fortune on the public ruin."[253] In short, "everyone was discontent, wanted to strike it rich and then quickly clear out again."[254] Summarising Bernardin's resulting interest in conservationism and ecology, Grove writes:

> As with [the French naturalists] Poivre and Commerson, it was awareness of the destruction of the endemic fauna and flora of Mauritius which stimulated Saint-Pierre's particular discourse on nature [...]. His main preoccupation [...] concerned the steadily increasing power of western man to change nature as he colonised the world.[255]

[251] See Giulia Pacini, (2011), *op. cit.*, 87-103.
[252] "bankrupts, ruined libertines, mischief-makers; crooks, who driven from Europe by their crimes and Asia by their unhappiness, dared to re-establish their fortune on the public ruin" ("des banqueroutiers, des libertins ruinés, des fripons; des scélérats, qui chassés de l'Europe par leurs crimes, & de l'Asie par nos malheurs, tenterent d'y rétablir leur fortune sur la ruine publique"). The translation is my own.
[253] Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1773), *op cit.*, 177-178.
[254] "Tous font mécontents, tous voudroient faire fortune & s'en aller bien vîte" (own translation). In: *Ibid.*, 180.
[255] Grove, *op. cit.*, 248.

A child of the late enlightenment, Bernardin made it his life's work to educate 'western man' to live more harmoniously with the natural world, especially the colonial environment which he had come to subdue and inhabit.[256] This combined interest in colonial ecology and pedagogy can be gleaned across his whole breadth of work, from the *Voyage à l'Île de France* (1773), to the *Études de la Nature* (1784-88), of which *Paul et Virginie* was the fourth and final instalment, right through to Bernardin's *magnus opus*, the *Harmonies de la Nature* (1815).

In what follows, I bring Bernardin's interest in ecology, pedagogy and the specific historical situation of Mauritius to bear on a reading of *Paul et Virginie*. Having accepted that the novel participates in the project of settler colonialism, I read the subsequent chapters of the text, in particular those focusing on the character of Paul, as the attempt to expound an alternative – better and improved – trajectory for the colony. Through's Paul depiction as a kind of 'eco-warrior,' that is, Bernardin's novel models the sorts of virtues and qualities that any settler should ideally strive to embody. But the novel's interest in improving on the materialised reality of Île de France does have its blind spots, most notably the institution of slavery which occupies a jarring place in the narrative. While ecological concerns are at the forefront of Bernardin's reformative programme, reflecting in central predominance of plants and gardening in *Paul et Virginie*, the novel's treatment of slavery

[256] For Saint-Pierre's contribution to the field of pedagogy see Tal Gilead, "Reconsidering the Roots of Current Perceptions: Saint Pierre, Helvetius and Rousseau on Education and the Individual." *History of Education* (Tavistock) 34.4 (2005), 427-439; Marco Menin, "Le poignard d'Arria. Éducation et vertu chez Bernardin de Saint-Pierre." *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de La France*, 122:2 (2022), 307-20.

and slave labour is ambivalent and, as shall be argued, not compatible with the text's otherwise progressive and emancipatory political agenda.

4.1. Paul versus the governor

The concerns for conservationism, ecology and an interest in moulding and forming the ideal settler are reconstituted in *Paul et Virginie* through the constellation of Paul and one other character in the novel: the governor La Bourdonnais. The only historical personality to figure explicitly in the narrative, Bertrand-François Mahé de La Bourdonnais (1699-1753) is the main representative of the colonial system that links Île de France to the mother country. As governor and patriarch, his role in the narrative resembles that of a father figure. When, at the end of the novel, Virginia tragically perishes off the coast of the Île de France, it is La Bourdonnais who is responsible for having her body inhumed, enacting his powers to administer over life and death in the colony. Otherwise, the character proves instrumental in encouraging Madame de la Tour to send Virginie to France to be educated by her wealthy aunt:

> Les bureaux m'ont écrit à ce sujet d'user, s'il le falloit, de mon pouvoir ; mais ne l'exerçant que pour rendre heureux les habitants de cette colonie, j'attends de votre volonté seule un sacrifice de quelques années, d'où dépend l'établissement de votre fille, et le bien-être de toute votre vie. Pourquoi vient-on aux isles ? n'est-ce pas pour y faire fortune ? (*PeV*, 166-167)
>
> I have received official letters, in which I am ordered to exert my authority, if necessary, to that effect. But as I only wish to employ my power for the purpose of rendering the inhabitants of this country happy, I expect from your good sense the voluntary sacrifice of a few years, upon which your daughter's establishment in the world, and the welfare of your whole life depends. Wherefore do we come to these islands? Is it not to acquire a fortune? (*PaV Engl.*, 107)

As the citation suggests, his interest in Virginie's inheritance is less motivated by the benefits it promises her and her immediate family, than by the economic gains it would yield for the colony as a whole.

As a historical figure, La Bourdonnais is otherwise recognised as being a force of progress and 'modernisation' on Île de France, intent on transforming it into a profitable spice and trading colony. According to historian and biographer Léon Guérin (1807-1885), the crowning achievement of his tenure as governor was his transplantation of colonial plants that were thought to be suitable for growing in the tropical climate of Mauritius: sugar, as well as cotton and indigo for the export back to France, and cassava (manioc) for the cheap and plentiful sustenance of the African population of Île de France.[257] In his travelogue *Voyage à l'Île de France* (1773), Bernardin praises the useful properties of manioc, while also recognising La Bourdonnais' efforts to propagate the plant in Mauritius:

> Ce végétal se multiple aisément. M. de la Bourdonnaye l'a fait venir d'Amérique. C'est une plante fort utile en ce qu'elle est à l'abri des ouragans & qu'elle assûre la subsistance des Negres. Les chiens n'en veulent point.[258]
>
> This vegetable is easily propagated. M. de la Bourdonnaye [sic] introduced it from America. It is an extremely useful plant, both as a shelter from hurricanes and as a source of subsistence for the negros. Dogs will not touch it. (Translation is my own)

Pierre Poivre, the naturalist who is often considered a model for Paul claimed that he "ought to be regarded as the father of the colony for his

[257] Léon Guérin, *Histoire maritime de France*. *Vol. 4* (Paris: Dufour et Mulat, 1844), 210.
[258] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1773), *op. cit.*, 208-209.

introduction and patronage of agriculture." [259] However, Poivre also criticised those in La Bourdonnais company for their (in his opinion) superficial attempts of introducing and cultivating new plants like the manioc in Île de France.[260]

Antoine Graincourt, "Portrait of Bertrand-François Mahé de La Bourdonnais (1699-1753), French admiral, ca. 1751-1800)," oil on canvas. Collection Musée de la Compagnie des Indes.

In many respects, the fictional character Paul embodies the antithesis of La Bourdonnais as a figurehead of plantation monoculture and colonial propriety. When La Bourdonnais proposes that he travel to the Indies to engage in commerce and thus rescue Virginie from submitting to her aunt, he vehemently retorts:

> Pourquoi voulez-vous que je quitte ma famille pour je ne sais quel projet de fortune? Y a-t-il un commerce au monde plus avantageux que la culture d'un champ qui rend

[259] "doit être considéré comme le fondateur de la colonie, puisqu'il est le premier qui ait établi l'Agriculture." In: Pierre Poivre, *Voyages d'un philosophe; ou observations sur les moeurs et les arts des peuples de l'Afrique, de l'Asie et de l'Amérique* (Yverdon, 1768), 27. Translation is my own.
[260] Cf. Grove, *op. cit.*, 196.

> quelquefois cinquante et cent pour un? Si nous voulons faire le commerce, ne pouvons-nous pas le faire en portant notre superflu d'ici à la ville, sans que j'aille courir aux Indes? (*PeV*, 164)

> And why do you wish me to leave my family for this precarious pursuit of fortune? Is there any commerce in the world more advantageous than the culture of the ground, which yields sometimes fifty or a hundred-fold? If we wish to engage in commerce, can we not do so by carrying our superfluities to the town without my wandering to the Indies? (*PaV Engl.*, 104)

More specifically, in his mention of "yields" and "the culture of the ground," Paul serves here as a direct mouthpiece for Bernardin's personal brand of "physiocratic conservationism."[261] Bernardin was, as the 'physiocratic' half of this ascription suggests, not an opponent of agriculture *per se,* but rather emphasised that there were limits to the use of nature for human ends. "[C]ommercial temptations and the deforestation they entailed – on Mauritius, as in France – risked changing the country's climate, backfiring economically, and causing the general collapse of society," so Giulia Pacini summarises the clarion call issued by Bernardin with reference to the specific situation of Île de France.[262]

Thus, Paul and La Bourdonnais feature in the narrative as representatives of two very different forms of cultivation: one for subsistence ensuring the longevity of human settlement in Mauritius; the other for short-term profit. This distinction reflects above all in Paul's depiction as a kind of 'eco-warrior' intent on planting, restoring and improving the island's vegetation and ecology. Grove and Kapor read the character as the fictional embodiment of Pierre Poivre, the physiocrat responsible for transplanting numerous

[261] *Ibid.*, 247.
[262] Giulia Pacini (2011), *op. cit.*, 97.

species of plants from the East Indies to Mauritius and establishing the first botanical garden there. Pierre Poivre and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre were intimately acquainted through their common involvement in Île de France's botanical garden. Kapor writes of Commerson and Poivre: "They regarded the island as a laboratory for conducting all sorts of real or fictional experiments, social as well as ecological. Thus Bernardin's novel is deeply embedded in experimental, scientific discourse."[263]

Ephraïm Conquy, *Portrait of Pierre Poivre* (1835), lithography.

Paul's gardening – his incessant sowing, planting and transplanting of different, often obscure types of vegetation – is reminiscent of the way scientists like Poivre and Commerson envisaged Île de France might be transformed into a rich botanical garden:

[263] Vladimir Kapor, "Shifting Edenic Codes: On Two Exotic Visions of the Golden Age in the Late Eighteenth Century." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 41.2 (2007), 219.

> Sa main laborieuse avoit répandu la fécondité jusque dans les lieux les plus stériles de cet enclos. Diverses espèces d'aloès, la raquette chargée de fleurs jaunes fouettées de rouge, les cierges épineux, s'élevoient sur les têtes noires des roches, et sembloient vouloir atteindre aux longues lianes, chargées de fleurs bleues ou écarlates, qui pendoient çà et là le long des escarpements de la montagne (*PeV*, 138-139).

> His industrious hands diffused the riches of nature over even the most barren parts of the plantation. Several species of aloes, the Indian fig, adorned with yellow flowers spotted with red, and the thorny torch thistle, grew upon the dark summits of the rocks, and seemed to aim at reaching the long lianas, which, laden with blue or scarlet flowers, hung scattered over the steepest parts of the mountain (*PaV Engl.*, 71-72).

In another scene of the novel, the legacy of Pierre Poivre is referenced more directly. To celebrate the birth of Paul, the fictional narrator gives Marguerite an Indian coconut, which she plants beside a small pool of water in the hope that it will sprout into a tree, the so-called "Repos de Virginie" (Madame de la Tour does the same for Paul). Growing amid Paul and Virginie's trees are the Madagascar periwinkle as well as "sweet basil, which has the odour of the clove" (*PaV Engl.*, 78). Pierre Poivre famously attempted to naturalise the clove to Île de France after encountering the spice during a voyage to Batavia (today's Jakarta) in 1753. But his acclimatising project met with failure when the man assigned to tend to the seedlings, Jean Baptiste Christian Fusée-Aublet, director of the experimental garden of Île de France, supposedly sabotaged the experiment by pouring boiling water onto the young plants, claiming that *muscadet* could not be acclimatised to the island.

4.2. "Greffé / grafted": Planting the creole nation on Île de France

The climactic moment of Paul's planting, nonetheless, is his famous "amphitheatre" of plants. Along with Virginie's own garden and Julie's *Élysée*, the amphitheatre is without doubt one of the most poignant representations of an ideal garden in French literature.[264] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's engagement as a professional botanist is mirrored in the vegetal universe described in the novel as a rich, bewildering mix of lemon, orange, tamarind and date-palm trees, agathis, Persian lilac, pawpaw, almond, mango, avocado, guava, Jackfruit rose apples, Barbary fig, thorny torch thistles and poincianas (*PeV*, 138). Kapor views the fastidious attention to nomenclature in *Paul et Virginie* a further re-iteration of Bernardin's earlier travelogue: "If the technical botanic terms may seem to jeopardize the readability of the text, their meaning can be traced to an authorial intertext. Indeed, most plants mentioned in *Paul et Virginie* were first described in Bernardin's first published work, *Voyage à l'Ile de France*."[265]

There is another aspect, related to the novel's central theme of education, that is relevant here: the political function of plants and gardens to model ideal political communities. As plant studies scholar Giovanni Aloi writes, "by definition, gardens are ideological islands. Perimeters, boundaries, fences, walls – a garden is a miniature state [...]."[266] Julie's Elysium perfectly

[264] See Catherine Larrère, "Du jardin de Julie au jardin de Virginie." *Dix-huitième siècle* 33 (2001), 497-506.
[265] Kapor, *op. cit.*, 225.
[266] Giovanni Aloi, *op. cit.*, 25.

illustrates this axiom. Entering the orchard symbolically situated at the centre of Clarens, Saint-Preux finds “no exotick plants, nor any of the products of the Indies,” but rather “all those which were natural to the soil.”[267] Autochthonous vegetation substitutes foreign, introduced species, whereby pejorative use of the terms “exotic” and “Indian” here inscribes itself the novel’s central critique of empire – again, to quote Foucault, of the ships that go “as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens.”[268] Unsurprisingly, the orchard is directly pitted against the “costly” and artificial Chinese garden, and the English garden at Stowe supposedly “modelled after the fashion of different countries.”[269]

Paul’s garden, by contrast, is precociously exotic, cosmopolitan and heterogenous, blending native and introduced vegetation to form one (seemingly) harmonious, egalitarian whole. As such, though inspired by Rousseau’s philosophy of nature, *Paul et Virginie* has the potential to be read as a very different – culturally heterogenous, multi-ethnic – model of a colony to rival Clarens with its obstinately nativist and purist agenda. In one scene, Paul communicates to Virginie his intention to recreate the island as a mix of Europe and Africa:

> Paul lui écrivit une lettre fort longue, où il l’assurait qu’il alloit rendre le jardin digne d’elle, et y mêler les plantes de l’Europe à celles de l’Afrique, ainsi qu’elle avoit entrelacé leurs noms dans son ouvrage (*PeV*, 189).

[267] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Eloisa*, *op. cit.*, III, 128.
[268] Michel Foucault, , *op. cit.*, 244.
[269] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Eloisa*, *op. cit.*, III, 147-148.

> Paul also sent her a very long letter, in which he assured her that he would arrange the garden in a manner agreeable to her taste, and mingle together in it the plants of Europe with those of Africa, as she had blended their initials together in her work (*PaV Engl.*, 136).

In another scene, the old man inscribes the Latin poet Virgil's well-known panegyric to country life, the *vie champêtre*, into the trunk of a native tacamahac-tree,[270] thus memorialising the *petite société*'s bond with their adopted homeland by way of an act of *gravage* (Engl. engraving). The image of the carved tacamahac mirrors the process by which Paul and Virginie are themselves "grafted" ("greffé" [*PeV*, 119]) to their place of birth to become 'Creole.'[271] Linking these episodes is a cultural technique, that of *greffage* (grafting), or *gravage* (ingraving), involving the intermixture of supposedly antithetical elements to create a new, in-between entity. Grafting as a technological intervention, as well as a cultural model, stands in glaring contrast to Rousseau, the arch-nemesis of unsettling and transgressive forms of intermixture:

> Tout est bien sortant des mains de l'Auteur des choses, tout dégénère entre les mains de l'homme. Il force une terre à nourrir les productions d'une autre, un arbre à porter les fruits d'un autre; il mêle et confond les climats, les éléments, les saisons ; il mutile son chien, son cheval, son esclave ; il bouleverse tout, il défigure tout, il aime la difformité, les monstres [...].[272]

> Everything is good as it comes out of the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man. Man forces one land to nourish the products of another region, a tree to bear the fruits of another plant; he mixes and confuses the climates, the elements, the seasons; he mutilates his dog, his horse, his slave; he

[270] The tacamahac (Fr. tatamaque) is a native tree of the neighbouring island of La Réunion (18. c. Île Bourbon).
[271] Chris Bongie, , *op. cit.*, 85; Jill Casid, "Inhuming Empire. Islands as Colonial Nurseries and Graves." In: Felicity Nussbaum (ed.), *The Global Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press 2003), 279-295, here: 280, 289; Giulia Pacini, "Grafts at Work in Late Eighteenth-Century French Discourse and Practice." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 34:2 (2010), 1-22.
[272] Rousseau, *Émile, op. cit.*, 5.

> upsets everything, disfigures everything, he loves deformity, monsters. (Translation is my own.)

In other words, Rousseau saw the contemporary trafficking and transplanting of plants, animals and humans in the service of empire as further proof of how humankind was straying even further from God's creation. In Bernardin's novel, by contrast, grafting is invoked both in its stabilising function (the transmission of cultural knowledge through writing and engraving) as well as in its potential to engender an ambivalent, 'third' space with highly destabilising, yet revolutionary results: here, the children's Creole identity and the mixed identity of the colony in general. Reflecting their status as new world 'transplants,' Paul and Virginie's commitment to the technique of grafting and the associated cultural model of heterogeneity stands out from the other characters' designs to merely replicate their respective homelands on Mauritian soil. As Chris Bongie holds: "By virtue of their second generation status, Paul and Virginie are more open than their elders to the possibilities of "indigenization," that creative grounding in one's native land out of which an "authentically" creole society might emerge from the shadow of its Old World antecedents [...]."[273] In her own reading of the novel, Carolyn Berman argues similarly that the "settler colony [serves] as model for [imagining] a new kind of national community,"[274] qualitatively different to and even at odds with the emerging French nation.

[273] Bongie, *op. cit.*, 110.
[274] Carolyn Vellenga Berman, *op. cit.*, 82.

5. Good master, bad master. Slavery and reciprocity in *Paul et Virginie*

The novel's treatment of slavery, on the other hand, does cast some doubt onto the integrity and innocence of Bernardin's multi-racial, multi-ethnic utopia. Published in 1788, just three years before the outbreak of a slave uprising in the French colony of Saint-Domingue, *Paul et Virginie* appeared at a time when public outrage against the 'crime' of enslavement was on the rise. In France, just as in Britain, the abolitionist movement was gaining traction under Jacques Brissot and *The Society of the Friends of the Blacks* (founded 1788), while the republican movement, under the leadership of Robespierre, called for the abolition of slavery in France and its colonies. Given this mounting political momentum, one would expect Bernardin's position as an enlightened intellectual to be politically aligned with the republican cause and friend Rousseau, who is known for his vehement damnation of slavery in the *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality* of 1755. Still, views differ widely with respect to the novel's stance on slavery. While Conny Cassity, investigating the text's anti-slavery assemblages, argues that Bernardin's position is one of "sympathy in the face of [...] the horrific legacy of slavery and racial intolerance," [275] Anna Neill's stance is more ambivalent, suggesting that "the problem of slavery points to this little society's contractual difference from itself."[276]

[275] Conny Cassity, "Caught by the Throat: Anti-Slavery Assemblages in *Paul et Virginie* and *Belinda*." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 31:1 (2018), 99-115; here: 115.
[276] Anna Neill, "The Sentimental Novel and the Republican Imaginary: Slavery in *Paul and Virginia*." *Diacritics* 23:3 (1993), 36-47; here: 46.

Despite a critical focus on slavery in *Paul et Virginie*, abolition does not represent part of the reformative agenda of the novel. In fact, as I argue, the novel, reacting to the historical situation with which Île de France and its governor La Bourdonnais were faced, even delineates a path of reform and, ultimately, the enduring survival of the institution. To quote once again a passage from Bernardin's travelogue *Voyage à l'Île de France*:

> On en donne trois livres par jour à chaque Negre pour toute nourriture. Ce végétal se multiple aisément. M. de la Bourdonnaye [sic] l'a fait venir d'Amérique. C'est une plante fort utile en ce qu'elle est à l'abri des ouragans & qu'elle assure la subsistance des Negres. Les chiens n'en veulent point.[277]

> Each negro is given three pounds a day for sustenance. This vegetable is easily propagated. M. de la Bourdonnaye [sic] introduced it from America. It is an extremely useful plant, both as a shelter from hurricanes and as a source of subsistence for the negros. Dogs will not touch it. (Translation is my own.)

The extract – in particular the concluding the remark that even dogs will not touch the shrub – more or less paraphrases the dismal failure of starchy plants like manioc and breadfruit as 'cheap subsistence for slaves' in the French and British colonies. But it also provides contemporary recognition of the role La Bourdonnais had played in expanding the institution of slavery in Île de France – the 'human resources' envisaged to cultivate the manioc shrub as well as the more commercially lucrative crops of sugar and indigo. Modern historians Teelock and Sheriff describe that role as follows:

> Labourdonnais personally took charge of acquiring slaves for the island and undertook the massive construction projects in Mauritius: roads, houses, the port, a naval base, the Botanic Gardens etc. The whole infrastructure of Port Louis, the capital, in the eighteenth century could be said to have been built mainly by slaves,

[277] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1773), *op. cit.*, 208-209.

> but it must be recognised, also by French *engagés* and free skilled people from various parts of the world.[278]

Between 1735 to 1746 – precisely the period in which *Paul et Virginie* is set – governor La Bourdonnais worked towards establishing Mauritius, not neighbouring Réunion (then Île Bourbon), as centre of slave trade in the Mascarenes.

In his travelogue *Voyage à l'Île de France*, Bernardin reflects on the inhumanity of the conditions faced by slaves in Mauritius in the years 1768-1771, yet at no point does he actually explicitly denounce the institution or call for its abolition. One hundred years before, English traveller Richard Ligon was confronted with the violence and excesses of slave labour in colonial Barbados, culminating in the plea that planters extend greater humanitarian "care" (*HB*, 43) towards plantation labourers to ensure their 'reciprocity.' As was shown, the doctrine of reciprocity is re-configured in Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* through Crusoe's efforts to become a loving father and better "master" to his "servant" Friday. Demonstrating its entanglement in this same discourse of reciprocity, yet also the more drastic situation of the 'pre-revolutionary' 1780s, Bernardin's novel envisages a similar pathway of continuity through reform, namely through the exercise of even greater maternal and brotherly devotion.

[278] V. Teelock and A. Sheriff, "Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean." *Transition from Slavery in Zanzibar and Mauritius* (African Books Collective, 2016), 25-43; here: 33. See also Richard Blair Allen, "The constant demand of the French: The Mascarene slave trade and the worlds of the Indian Ocean and Atlantic during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." *The Journal of African History* 49:1 (2008), 43-72.

It does this through two contrasting episodes designed to convey a respective lesson of being a 'good master' versus a 'bad master.' The first of these scenes concentrates on the plight a female maroon who has fled a brutal slave owner and planter. Appearing to the Virginie one day at the habitation, "almost wasted to a skeleton" and with nothing covering her body but "a piece of coarse cloth thrown around her," she throws herself to Virginie's feet and details the abuse she has suffered:

> « Ma jeune demoiselle, ayez pitié d'une pauvre esclave fugitive ; il y a un mois que j'erre dans ces montagnes demi-morte de faim, souvent poursuivie par des chasseurs et par leurs chiens. Je fuis mon maître, qui est un riche habitant de la Rivière-Noire : il m'a traitée comme vous le voyez »; en même temps elle lui montra son corps sillonné de cicatrices profondes par les coups de fouet qu'elle en avait reçus (*PeV*, 126).

> "My good young lady, have pity on a poor runaway slave. For a whole month I have wandered among these mountains, half dead with hunger, and often pursued by the hunters and their dogs. I fled from my master, a rich planter of the Black River, who has used me as you see;" and she showed her body marked with scars from the lashes she had received (*PaV Engl.*, 56-57).

When the children return her to the planter, the mere sight of Virginie's "elegant form" ("la taille élégante de Virginie" [*PeV*, 128]) and the sound of her "sweet voice" ("le doux son de sa voix" [*PeV*, 128]), is enough to make him throw his hands to God and promise to repent. In a later scene, the children encounter a troop of maroons, who, having seen what these "good little white people" ("Bons petits blancs," [*PeV*, 135]) had done for their compatriot, are positively disposed towards them. According to Richard Blair Allen, maroonage represented "the principal danger feared by colonists"[279] in Île de France, as colonial administrators like La Bourdonnais

[279] Richard Blair Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Laborers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 35.

made attempts – albeit temporary fixes – to curtail it. “Fugitive slaves on the Ile de France,” Allen continues, “elicited the same feelings of fear, anxiety, and revulsion they inspired elsewhere in the slave-owning world.”[280] Thus, the depiction of the maroons as friendly and obliging to Paul and Virginie was not reflective of the historical situation on the island, nor of the dangers of constantly registered in Bernardin’s travelogue *A Voyage in Île de France*. In this case, ‘sugar coating’ the encounter between black and white appears to serve a consequential propagandistic function: namely of conveying to white masters that if *they* were to reform, fugitive slaves and maroonage may be a thing of the past. As the fugitive maroon woman even says to the children, voicing this clarion call: “Since there are still some good white people in this country, I need not die yet.” (“Puisqu’il y a encore de bons blancs dans ce pays il ne faut pas encore mourir” [*PeV*, 127].)

Personifying an opposite, more benevolent form of slavery are the mothers Madame de la Tour and Marguerite and their two “slaves” Domingo and Marie. Ultimately, though, the latter’s standing in the novel is ambivalent: on the one hand, as was typical of colonial literature, they are cast as naive ‘stock African figures’ who are at best afforded one-dimensional character development. On the other hand, their standing in the *petite société* is supposed to reflect a new spirit of egalitarianism and fraternity between enslaved Africans and their “good” white, European masters. Cultivating a

[280] *Ibid.* For further analysis of maroonage in French literature see Rachel Danon, *Les Voix Du Marronnage Dans La Littérature Française Du Xviiieme Siècle* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015).

utopian existence that substitutes the bonds of race with those of mutual subsistence and benefit, the two European women

> lisaient dans les yeux de leurs esclaves la joie qu'ils avoient de les revoir. Elles trouvaient chez elles la propreté, la liberté, des biens qu'elles ne devaient qu'à leurs propres travaux, et des serviteurs pleins de zèle et d'affection (*PeV*, 118).

> discerned in the looks of [their slaves] the joy which their return excited. They found in their retreat neatness, independence, all the blessings which are the recompense of toil, and they received the zealous services which spring from affection (*PaV Engl.*, 46).

But as Berman points out, the novel's ideal of domesticity is "surprisingly compatible with slavery,"[281] largely because (I would argue) the envisaged utopia is ultimately a utopia of labour rather than one of true sentimental attachment and symbiosis. Domingo's wife Marie who, so we are informed, was "born in Madagascar," is valorised above all for her skill in crafts typical of an east African,[282] while Domingo for his part is identified as "yoloff" (Woloff, a West African ethnic group inhabiting today's Senegal, the Gambia and Mauritania) and praised for his farming abilities. Based on Teelock and Sheriff's study of the slave trade in the Indian Ocean, nevertheless, Domingo's roots do not reflect the realities at this time where the larger majority of enslaved persons (more than ninety per cent) was of east African provenance.[283] His west African identity and, indeed, his very name conjures stronger associations to France's prized Caribbean colony

[281] Berman, *op. cit.*, 68.
[282] "Elle étoit née à Madagascar, d'où elle avoit apporté quelque industrie, sur-tout celle de faire des paniers et des étoffes appelées pagnes, avec des herbes qui croissent dans les bois. Elle étoit adroite, propre, et très fidele. Elle avoit soin de préparer à manger, d'élever quelques poules, et d'aller de temps en temps vendre au Port-Louis le superflu de ces deux habitations, qui étoit bien peu considérable" (*PeV*, 117).
[283] V. Teelock, and A. Sheriff, *op. cit.*, 25-43.

Saint-Domingue, a name synonymous with enormous wealth, but also the excesses of the Transatlantic slave trade *per se*.[284] When revolution eventually broke out in Saint-Domingue just a year after it did in continental France, leading to a bitterly contested and violent racial war (the Haitian Revolution, 1791-1804), the reverberations were so strong that Prussian author Heinrich von Kleist penned a novella (*Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*, 1811), depicting the event as a horror scenario of black revenge. In Bernardin's more optimistic and rose-coloured vision of the French slave system, by contrast, the lingering violence of slavery is subsumed under the metaphor of cultivation and the sentimental familial ties that convey a sense of plantation life as rural bliss. Domingo is imagined as an integral and fully integrated part of the "colonial family" at the centre of the novel, happily performing his domestic duties with all the rigour of a "good slave":

> Celui de Marguerite, appelé Domingue, était un noir yolof, encore robuste, quoique déjà sur l'âge. Il avait de l'expérience et un bon sens naturel. Il cultivait indifféremment sur les deux habitations les terrains qui lui semblaient les plus fertiles, et il y mettait les semences qui leur convenaient le mieux. Il semait du petit mil et du maïs dans les endroits médiocres, un peu de froment dans les bonnes terres, du riz dans les fonds marécageux ; et au pied des roches, des giraumons, des courges et des concombres, qui se plaisent à y grimper. Il plantait dans les lieux secs des patates qui y viennent très sucrées, des cotonniers sur les hauteurs, des cannes à sucre dans les terres fortes, des pieds de café sur les collines, où le grain est petit, mais excellent ; le long de la rivière et autour des cases, des bananiers qui donnent toute l'année de longs régimes de fruits avec un bel ombrage, et enfin quelques plantes de tabac pour charmer ses soucis et ceux de ses bonnes maîtresses (*PeV*, 116-117).

> Margaret's slave, who was called Domingo, [...] was still healthy and robust, although advanced in years: he possessed some knowledge, and a good natural

[284] As Christopher Miller points out: "Between 1640 and 1700 the French took 75,000 slaves into their colonies; from 1700 to 1760, 388,000. The prodigious rise of Saint-Domingue began in the 1730s, marked by huge importations of slaves, producing the richest colony on Earth. French slave exports from Africa peaked in the years leading up to the Revolution, with an average of twenty-seven thousand slaves transported per year between 1781 and 1790." In: Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle. Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 22.

> understanding. He cultivated indiscriminately, on both settlements, such spots of ground as were most fertile, and sowed whatever grain he thought most congenial to each particular soil. Where the ground was poor, he strewed maize; where it was most fruitful, he planted wheat; and rice in such spots as were marshy. He threw the seeds of gourds and cucumbers at the foot of the rocks, which they loved to climb, and decorate with their luxuriant foliage. In dry spots he cultivated the sweet potato; the cotton-tree flourished upon the heights, and the sugar-cane grew in the clayey soil. He reared some plants of coffee on the hills, where the grain, although small, is excellent. The plantain-trees, which spread their grateful shade on the banks of the river, and encircled the cottage, yielded fruit throughout the year. And, lastly, Domingo cultivated a few plants of tobacco, to charm away his own cares and those of his mistresses (*PaV Engl.*, 43-44).

In this passage, Jennifer Yee's assessment rings true that "*Paul et Virginie* [...] repeats what was already a well-established idealization of exotic nature as a prelapsarian paradise (albeit one dependent on the 'natural' subservience of African slaves)."[285] The violence of slavery is effectively circumvented in the image of something that resembles more a slave provision ground than a plantation field, in which the colonial transplants "sugar-cane," "coffee," "tobacco" comingle with European plants harmoniously and naturalistically to render the effect of a picturesque landscape.

As a character Domingo proves conducive – or the very least, not entirely incompatible with – La Bourdonnais' dream of transforming Mauritius into a burgeoning sugar colony, 'nourished' by African labour. Therefore, Jill Casid is justified in her assertion that Bernardin's vision of harmonious "attempted intermingling of transplants" [286] becomes *problematic* precisely in the moment that the attention is shifted from the product to the agent of such grafting and transplanting. As Derrida writes: "Écrire veut dire greffer. C'est

[285] Jennifer Yee, "Exoticism and Colonialism." *The Cambridge Companion to French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 151-167; here: 156.

[286] Jill Casid (2003), *op. cit.*, 288.

le même mot"[287] – "Writing means grafting. It's the same word" – whereby, as Wirth points out, grafting approaches a form of copying and plagiarism (Ger. *Abschreiben*) rather than simply writing (Ger. *Schreiben*).[288] Similarly, one might question the authenticity of Bernardin's utopia given that is so dependent on the pre-existing colonial arrangement of French imperialism. Though the novel is genuinely emancipatory in certain respects (for example, its representation of Mauritius as a multi-ethnic and multicultural society),[289] there are too many elements of Bernardin's vision of a new cultural and biological community – the classically educated coloniser, the governor figure, the African field labourer, the "triangulated family romance" of French Transatlanticism[290] re-configured through the *petite société* – that belie a lingering old-world vision of a new-world reality. The Edenic paradise imagined in *Paul et Virginie* is not a postcolonial projection, but rather a garden whose destiny is fully and firmly in the hands of a select group of European 'cultivators.'

[287] Jacques Derrida, "La Dissémination." *La Dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 319-407, here: 395.
[288] Uwe Wirth, *op. cit.*, 21.
[289] Cf. William Kelleher Storey, *Science and Power in Colonial Mauritius* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1997), 11.
[290] Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle*, *op. cit.*, 5.

Charles-Melchior Descourtis after Jean Frédéric Schall, "Paul and Virginia returning the maronne to her master." Scene one in set of six prints based on Bernadin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1795).

Dufour & Cie after Jean Broc, "A 'Papier Peint' Wallpaper Panel from the Series 'Paul et Virginie'" (Paris, ca. 1823) [Detail].

6. Conclusion

This chapter read Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's eminently successful and influential novel *Paul et Virginie* of 1788 as a representation of the reformative, middle-phase of the eighteenth-century European project of settler colonialism in literature. As was shown, there is much that links this story about a "little society's" settlement of the island of Mauritius to Daniel Defoe's novel about one Englishman's colonisation of a deserted Caribbean island. Both fictions pivot on the far-off island setting as a vehicle for the socially marginalised protagonists to create an existence away from the strictures and pressures of European society. And in both instances, planting and husbandry are invoked in both narratives as a means of ensuring the enduring 'subsistence' of the European settlement.

Published seventy years apart, however, there is also much that separates *Paul et Virginie* from Defoe's fiction of 1719. If Crusoe's transformation of an uninhabited tropical island into a luscious garden-plantation reifies with particular veracity Bacon's ideology of colonial planting and its underlying ethos of mastery, Bernardin's novel is more attuned to the cultural impulses of the late enlightenment, above all the philosophy of friend and contemporary Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Bernardin's own engagement as a physiocrat and botanist in Île de France during the years 1768-1770 also meant that he was deeply aware of the devastating impacts farming and plantation agriculture ("man's culture") could have on environments.

As a measure of its reformative spirit, *Paul et Virginie* abandons the classic colonial narrative of masculine success inaugurated by Crusoe and instead develops an opposing tale of female virtue and "natural" childhood education far away from the ills of society. It enlists the novel's protagonists, above all Paul, as 'eco-warriors' who through restorative acts of cultivation, gardening and planting undo the damage wrought by overzealous colonisation. Still, in the attempt to regain access to an Edenic utopia, it was clear that the postlapsarian vegetation needed to be dealt with, and indeed through a series of tried and tested 'cultural techniques,' such as enclosure, clearing, transplantation and grafting. The novel's commitment to these age-old technologies of paternal custodianship, in addition to its tacit endorsement of African slavery, is what confirm the "little society's" status as an 'anti-colony colony' – a colony at a remove, yet still complicit in the machinations of colonial and imperial power.

In the final analysis, Bernardin's novel advances a highly ambivalent and problematic vision of the French settler colony – ambivalence that it is only compounded in the final pages of the text by Virginie's drowning and the subsequent demise of all members of the "little society." The episode, based on the historical shipwreck of the Saint-Géran in 1744,[291] has typically been read as yet another trial of female virtue, where, by choosing to drown instead of disrobing in order to rescue herself, Virginie preserves both the sense of innocence inscribed in her name and that of her family as

[291] See Françoise Lionnet, "Shipwrecks, Slavery, and the Challenge of Global Comparison: From Fiction to Archive in the Colonial Indian Ocean." *Comparative Literature,* 64:4 (2012), 446-61.

well. Yet, as Chris Bongie points out, the melancholic climax of the novel reminds the reader that the insular society of the novel is not that far removed from the fatal interventions of the established colonial system. “Her dead body washes back into the narrative,” he writes, “and becomes the object of two potentially competing narratives: colonial and creole.”[292] In Jill Casid’s reading of the final tableau, Virginie’s inhumation through the governor La Bourdonnais signals the re-instatement of colonial authority in the novel. “Constituted not by the spawning of children but by transplanting, inhuming, and translating,” she writes, “paternal authority is represented as flexible, transportable, capable of reconciling in one space maternity and paternity, colony and metropole, under the guise of egalitarian friendship.”[293]

As with Crusoe’s abandonment of his island, one must wonder whether the macabre ending of *Paul et Virginie* is the text’s tacit admission that the happy family romance of the French settler colony is but an impossible pipe dream. Virginie’s death embodies the downfall of a creole future, intimating that “the collective ending […] cannot move forward but only back: back into the degraded world of colonial narrative, on the one hand, and back into a desirable past that is now nothing more than an irrecuperable memory.”[294] In the next text to be analysed, Heinrich von Kleist’s novella *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* (1811), this precarious tension between life and death, nostalgic colonial past versus hopeful postcolonial future, is taken to the

[292] Chris Bongie, *op. cit.*, 118.
[293] Jill Casid (2003), *op. cit.*, 293.
[294] Chris Bongie, *op. cit.*, 11.

extreme in a high-stakes, taboo-breaking tale of colonial betrothal amid a violent racial war. As I shall argue, Kleist's novella stages the downfall of the settler colony and its ideology in literature. Once again, the female body serves as a pivotal testing ground for assessing the viability of the happy family romance promulgated by authors like Defoe and Bernardin.

4. UPROOTING SLAVERY: HEINRICH VON KLEIST'S *DIE VERLOBUNG IN ST. DOMINGO* (1811)

1. Introduction

Of all the fictions studied thus far, the German author Heinrich von Kleist's novella *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* (*The Betrothal in St. Domingo*) is, historically speaking, the most specific and immediate. Set in 1803, during the late stages of the Haitian Revolution in the disintegrating French colony of Saint-Domingue, "als die Schwarzen die Weißen ermordeten"[295] ("when the blacks were murdering the whites"[296]), only eight years separated the dramatic historical events described in the novella from its publication in the Berlin periodical *Der Freimüthige,* from March to April 1811.[297] At the heart of this novella, which continues to divide and polarise the scholarship, is the story of a romantic encounter between a Swiss mercenary fighting on the side of the French, Gustav von der Ried, and a mixed-race girl, Toni Bertrand on a plantation in the possession of black revolutionary Congo Hoango. Gustav, who chances upon the plantation in search of supplies and a safe passage for his relatives the Strömli family, is captivated by the

[295] Heinrich von Kleist, *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo. Erzählung*, *hrsg. von Mario Leis* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2017), 3. All further citations from the novella will appear in-text in the form of the initials VSD followed by a page number, for example (*VSD*, 5).
[296] Heinrich von Kleist, "The Betrothal in Santo Domingo." In: *German Romantic Novellas: Heinrich Von Kleist and Jean Paul*, *ed. Frank G. Ryder and Robert M. Browning* (New York: Continuum, 1985), 136. All further citations from the novella will appear in-text in the form of the initials VSD followed by a page number, for example (*BSD Engl.*, 237).
[297] The story originally appeared under the title *Die Verlobung* in the magazine *Der Freimüthige, oder Berlinische Zeitung für gebildete, unbefangene Leser*, in instalments, from March 25 to April 5, 1811. In July 1811 it was published in the Viennese literary magazine *Der Sammler*. It was published later, without modification, with the definitive title *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* in the second volume of *Stories* (*Erzählungen*) in 1811. In November 1811, Kleist committed suicide in Berlin-Wannsee.

beauty and grace of the girl, seduces her and offers her his hand in marriage. But the story takes a dramatic, fatal turn when Congo Hoango returns to the plantation and a series of intrigues and miscalculations undoes the bond established between the pair – whereby Gustav, feeling betrayed by Toni, calls her a "whore" before shooting her and then himself.

Not surprisingly, *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* has been the focus of intense scholarly interest and debate which has peaked in recent years. The novella's central themes of race, slavery and revolution have ensured its appeal to contemporary global audiences for whom these issues possess ongoing existential relevance.[298] Amid a tendency to read the novella as a defence or apology of European colonisation, including the racist attitudes that powered and enabled it, a new wave of literature has emerged, emphasising the text's inherent ambiguity and complexity. Kleist's novella has been condemned for perpetuating and reinforcing racist attitudes and stereotypes about Africans and mixed-race people,[299] but also

[298] The burgeoning number of articles on this novella, not to mention Reinhard Blänkner's 2013 dedicated anthology *Heinrich von Kleists Novelle* Die Verlobung in St. Domingo. *Literatur und Politik im globalen Kontext um 1800*, containing eleven separate contributions by scholars from a range of disciplines, are a clear testament to this. Cf. Reinhard Blänkner (ed.), *Heinrich von Kleists Novelle* Die Verlobung in St. Domingo. *Literatur und Politik im globalen Kontext um 1800* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2013). For the contemporary relevance of Kleist's narrative also see Carl Niekerk, "The Legacy of Enlightenment Anthropology and the Construction of the Primitive Other in Kleist's *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*." In: *Heinrich von Kleist: Style and Concept*, ed. Dieter Sevin; Christoph Zeller (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 231–244.

[299] See Marie Biloa Onana, Der Sklavenaufstand von Haiti. Ethnische Differenz und Humanitätsideale in der Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts (Cologne: Böhlau, 2010), 152-160; Marlene Daut, *Tropics of Haiti: Race and the Literary History of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World, 1789-1865* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 298.

praised for imagining the possibility of future cohabitation, or "convivence,"[300] beyond the plantation system.

Building on this recognition of its fundamental ambivalence, this chapter reads *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* as a complex and ultimately damning reckoning with the settler colony and its core ideology. That ideology was the same to be first theorised by the likes of Bacon and Locke and popularised in canonical works of literature such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Paul et Virginie*. Uniting these fictions was their vision of the colonies as a blissful family life of planting and settling the colonies against an otherwise sordid backdrop of 'displanting,' racism and slavery. Kleist's novella invokes this same romantic idea of family by staging the open-ended potential of revolution – literally – as a marriage between the races, albeit never surpassing the transient state of a "betrothal." Eschewing the happy ending, the novella stages the very collapse and breakdown of a century-long literary romance about the European colonial endeavour.

In other words, Kleist's novella engenders, by way of a poignant literary deconstruction, the end of the 'noble and benevolent' project of the European settler colony, as imagined in eighteenth-century literary fiction. Towards proving this hypothesis, my argument consists of four main steps. First, I begin with an historical overview of the French colony of Saint-Domingue, thereby establishing a link between Kleist's text and

[300] Ottmar Ette, "Kleist – Karibik – Konvivenz. *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* als Erprobungsraum künftigen Zusammenlebens." In: *Heinrich von Kleists Novelle* Die Verlobung in St. Domingo. *Literatur und Politik im globalen Kontext um 1800*, ed. Reinhard Blänkner (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2013), 187-224.

contemporary discourses of colonisation, slavery and race. Then, granting separate attention to the narrative's three 'colonised' figures Congo Hoango, Babekan and Toni, I demonstrate the three stages of Kleist's deconstruction (simultaneously three different modes of agency within the revolutionary framework). While I read the Congo Hoango's storyline as one of violent resistance to European colonial rule, I interpret Babekan's primarily as one of subversion. Finally, I turn to the dynamics of trust, loyalty and betrayal between the betrothed couple, Gustav and Toni. I read this interaction as a manifestation of interracial desire which, shaped by sexist and racist relations, culminates in the novella's final tragedy.

2. "Dies unselige Eiland": A brief history of colonial Saint-Domingue

Die Verlobung in St. Domingo portrays the French colony of Saint-Domingue in a state of crisis and insurrection like it had a never experienced before – a complete collapse in relations between its inhabitants and a total overthrow of the pre-existing political order. It is, to quote the text itself, "ein in Empörung begriffenes Mohrenland" (*VSD*, 8), "a land of Moors gripped by indignation." [301] "Indignation" only begins to account for Saint-Domingue's three-hundred-year colonial history characterised by a rapid and ramshackle process of planting, peopling and settling. From the time of its 'discovery' by Christopher Columbus in 1492 until the outbreak of revolution in 1791, this half-island measuring just 22,000 km^2 (an area smaller than Kleist's birthplace of Brandenburg) witnessed some of the

[301] The translation is my own. The English-language translation by Ryder and Browning does not always convey the meaning of the German original faithfully.

most drastic changes of any other European colony of the early modern era. Not surprisingly, the history of Saint-Domingue is imbricated with the other Caribbean islands and the colonising enterprise by which landscapes were transformed and re-designed to meet the exigencies of the plantation system. Botanical transplants like sugarcane, indigo, coffee and the coconut palm were all introduced to Saint-Domingue from Brazil, just like they had been to Barbados and Jamaica. Meanwhile, for a time the number of enslaved brought to the colony to work these cash crops outnumbered anywhere else in the Americas: between 1784 and 1790, forty per cent of Transatlantic slave trade disembarked in Saint-Domingue.[302]

Even before the colony gained international notoriety as the site of the Haitian Revolution, Saint-Domingue's stature as a place of enormous wealth and excess was legendary. Owing to its then world-leading output of sugar and coffee, Saint-Domingue was known as France's 'pearl of the Antilles,' a standing that Kleist's novella references, if subtly, in the opening sentence "auf dem französischen Anteil der Insel St. Domingo" (*VSD*, 3) ("in the French part of the island of Santo Domingo" [*BSD Engl.*, 136]). Fantasy, imagination and projection were integral to the colony's history. When the male protagonist of Kleist's novella Gustav von der Ried remarks, "Ach, hätte ich [mein Heimatland] niemals verlassen und gegen dies unselige Eiland vertauscht!" (*VSD*, 7) ("Would that I had never left my homeland for this unfortunate island!" [*BSD Engl.*, 139]), thus invoking the motive of *die*

[302] David Geggus, "Saint-Domingue on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution." In: *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, ed. David Geggus and Norman Fiering (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2009), 3-20; here: 7.

seligen Inseln or ‘the fortunate isles,’ the speculated location of an earthly paradise, he is situating himself, however unintentionally, within a wider literary discourse of conquest and colonisation. Gustav’s nostalgia for a paradise lost is just one instance in the novella where the colonial fantasy collides jarringly with the historical realities of the ‘indignation’ of enslaved people.

Sébastien Leclerc, “Sucrerie” [sugar plantation]. In: Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre, *Histoire Générale des Antilles habitées par les François* (Paris: Thomas Jolly 1667-71), Vol. 2, facing page 122.

2.1. "L'aristocracie de l'épiderme" [303] : Historically grown race relations in Saint Domingue

The category of race played an instrumental role in forging Saint-Domingue's hierarchical, plantocratic system of government. In the context of the Haitian Revolution, deep-seated racial tensions played out violently and virulently in (sometimes) unexpected and surprising constellations. However, it took a long time for Saint-Domingue's distinct political culture to form and develop. As historian John Garrigus explains:

> In Saint-Domingue's rough-and-tumble seventeenth-century buccaneer society, race was not the obsession it would later become. Early censuses did not distinguish between "whites" and "mulattoes," but between free and enslaved residents.[304]

Spearheading the development towards more racial polarity and racist thinking was the transition from a 'mixed' labour system to one almost wholly reliant on 'black,' that is, African slave labour – the root cause of the epic conflict between "Schwarz und Weiß" depicted in Kleist's novella.

The culture of the colony was substantially predicated on fickle racial distinctions and demarcations, but it was also characterised by the very opposite of racial essentialism: *mixité*, *métissage*, *créolité.*[305] In this respect, too, the author Kleist was attuned to the colony's unique dynamics, penning

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[303] This phrase, meaning 'the aristocracy of the epidermis' in English and representing the attempt to classify a caste of 'pure' white colonists in Saint-Domingue, is attributable to Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'isle Saint-Domingue* (1789).

[304] John Garrigus, "Redrawing the Colour Line: Gender and the Social Construction of Race in Pre-Revolutionary Haiti." *Journal of Caribbean History* 30:1-2 (1996), 28-50; here: 29-30.

[305] Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 1-32.

the first work of German-language fiction to cast the liminal figure of the female *mestiza*, or mixed-race, as a main character. Sexual licence between the races – or what Doris Garraway in her book *The Libertine Colony* refers to as "interracial libertinage"[306] – was rife in the colony and, as in many colonial contexts, represented a strong 'drawcard' for potential European settlers and travellers. As the Swiss observer Justin de Chantrans noted upon visiting the colony in 1782: "[I]n a country where white men far outnumber white women, the former cannot do without women of colour, whereas [...] the climate, in concert with nature, invites them to indulge in her pleasures."[307] Yet, racial intermixture was by no means an uninflected and unproblematic affair. Miscegenation between whites and blacks was deemed a *mésalliance* (a principle in French marriage law banning union across classes), and colonial administrators consistently engaged new measures to curtail it, fearing the rise of a belligerent class of *affranchis* or *libres,* free(d) property-owning people of colour.[308] In interracial relationships, betrothals and marriages such as the one depicted in Kleist's narrative, it was more often than not the mixed-race partner that carried the burden, or penalty, of stigmatisation and social exclusion, as Garraway demonstrates convincingly.[309]

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[306] *Ibid.*
[307] "[D]ans un pays où les blanches sont en bien moindre nombre que les blancs, ceux-ci ne peuvent se passer des femmes de couleur, attendu que [...] le climat, de concert avec la nature, les invite néanmoins à ses plaisirs." In: Justin Girod de Chantrans, *Voyage d'un Suisse dans différentes colonies d'Amérique pendant la dernière guerre: avec une table d'observations météorologiques faites à Saint-Domingue* (Neuchâtel: Imprimerie de la Société Typographique, 1785), 157. Translation is my own.
[308] Garraway, *op. cit.*, 199-207.
[309] *Ibid.*, 207.

2.2. Kleist and Haiti

The Haitian Revolution, the historiographical term assigned to the struggle for decolonisation of Saint-Domingue,[310] nevertheless signalled the end of the fantasy of white dominance in the colony. Lasting thirteen years, it was the first successful modern-era campaign led by a group of colonised and enslaved people to oust a foreign European imperial power, resulting in the birth of Haiti, the world's first independent 'Black Republic.'[311] And yet, in the minds of contemporary European observers 'St. Domingo' became a universal signifier for a horror scenario of black revenge. The events in St. Domingue/Haiti sent shockwaves through much of Europe and were the focal point of widescale public debate that played out virulently in print culture. [312] Few Europeans, even the continent's most celebrated philosophers,[313] engaged with the root cause of the revolution – exploitative racialised slavery –; nor did they recognise the enslaved as genuine actors with a legitimate claim for freedom and self-determination. [314]

[310] The scholarship around the Haitian Revolution is extensive. See Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995b); Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004); Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004); Nick Nesbitt, 'The Idea of 1804.' *Yale French Studies. The Haiti Issue: 1804 and Nineteenth-Century French Studies*. Ed. Deborah Jenson. 107 (2005), 6-38. For a comprehensive collection of literary fictions of the Revolution, including by much neglected Haitian authors, see Marlene Daut; Grégory Pierrot; Marion C. Rohrleitner, *Haitian Revolutionary Fictions: An Anthology* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2021).

[311] Brandon R. Byrd, *The Black Republic. African Americans and the Fate of Haiti* (Philadelphia: Penn Press, 2019).

[312] See David Geggus, "Print Culture and the Haitian Revolution: The Written and the Spoken World." In: *Liberty! Egalité! Independencia! Print Culture, Enlightenment, and Revolution in the Americas, 1776–1838*, ed. David S. Shields (American Antiquarian Society, 2007a), 79-96.

[313] See Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

[314] Hence, Haitian anthropologist and historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot's described the historiographical discourse around the Haitian Revolution as an act of 'silencing': not because there was no interest in Europe in events taking place across the Atlantic (on the

Overwhelmingly, the revolutionaries were portrayed as a marauding black mob bent on retribution against their white masters.

Pierre Martinet, "Massacre des Blancs par les Noirs." In: Abel Hugo, *France militaire: histoire des armées françaises de terre et de mer de 1792 à 1833* (Paris: Delloye, 1833) tome 1.

Heinrich von Kleist's personal affiliations with the Revolutionary upheaval, for instance his 1807 incarceration in the same French prison in which the legendary Haitian general Toussaint L'Ouverture (the 'black Spartacus') had perished just four years earlier, are well noted.[315] Saint-Domingue's

contrary), but because the Haitian Revolution was collectively framed as a non-event. See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

[315] See Sander L. Gilman, "The Aesthetics of Blackness in Heinrich von Kleist's "Die Verlobung in St. Domingo." *MLN* 90:5 (1975), 661; Gonthier-Louis Fink, "Das Motiv der Rebellion in Kleists Werk im Spannungsverhältnis der Französischen Revolution und der Napoleonischen Kriege." *Kleist-Jahrbuch* (1988/89), 64-88; Michael Zeuske, "Die vergessene Revolution: Haiti und Deutschland in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts.

demise as a colony was inextricably linked to the downfall of the *ancien régime* in France and the Napoleonic Wars that affected Kleist personally as a German living under Napoleonic occupation. Kleist was well-informed about the events on the other side of the Atlantic and well-versed in the literature of the Haitian Revolution. We know this not only due to the presence of certain inflexions in *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* which suggest the author had consulted specific historiographical sources,[316] but moreover because of the specific conflict situation the novella elaborates. Kleist's interest in distinct social and political situation of the colony reflects in the fact that all three of Saint-Domingue's caste system – whites, mixed race and blacks – are represented in *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*.

Aspekte deutscher Politik und Ökonomie in Westindien." *Jahrbuch für Geschichte vom Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas* 28 (1991), 289-90, 292-293; Herbert Uerlings, "Preussen in Haiti? Zur interkulturellen Begegnung in Kleists 'Verlobung in St. Domingo,'" *Kleist-Jahrbuch* (1992), 189, 193; Buck-Morss, *op. cit.*, 837; Susanne Zantop, "Changing Color: Kleist's "Die Verlobung in St. Domingo" and the Discourses of Miscegenation." In: *A Companion to the Works of Heinrich von Kleist*, ed. Bernd Fischer (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 2003), 192; and Paul Michael Lützeler, "Europa oder Amerika? Napoleons Kolonialkrieg in Santo Domingo und Kleists literarischer Widerstand." In: *Kontinentalisierung: Das Europa der Schri*ftsteller (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2007), 122-25.

[316] Numerous works have been cited as possible inspirations for the novella, including Louis Dubroca's scathing, anti-black propaganda text *Vida de J.J. Dessalines, gefe de los negros de Santo Domingo* of 1806 (Ger. *Geschichte der Neger-Empörung auf St. Domingo*, 1805), Marcus Rainsford's pro-revolutionary *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* of 1805 (Ger. *Geschichte der Insel Hayti oder St. Domingo besonders des auf derselben errichteten Negerreichs*, 1806), and Justin Girod de Chantrans, *Voyage d'un Suisse dans différentes colonies d'Amérique* (Ger. *Reisen eines Schweizers in verschiedene Kolonien von Amerika*, *1782 auf Französisch erschienen und 1786 ins Deutsche übersetzt*). Kristina Büttner argues that it is possible Kleist's interest in the revolution was sparked by conversations he had during his stay on the Aare island in Switzerland with his landlord Nikolaus Gatschet (whose relative perished in St. Domingo). See Birthe Kristina Büttner, "Die Entdeckung Saint-Domingues in der Schweiz. Einflüsse von Kleists Zeit in der Schweiz auf Die Verlobung in St. Domingo." In: *Heinrich von Kleists Novelle* Die Verlobung in St. Domingo. *Literatur und Politik im globalen Kontext um 1800*, ed. Reinhard Blänkner (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2013), 107-140; here: 105. Bernd Fischer points out that Kleist's Swiss acquaintance Heinrich Zschokke engaged intensively with the revolution, publishing accounts of it in his journals. See: Bernd Fischer, *Ironische Metaphysik: Die Erzählungen Heinrich von Kleists* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1988), 101-102; and Heinrich Zschokke, "St. Domingo und die Negersklaven." In: *Miscellen für die Neueste Weltkunde* vol. 69 (29.8.1807).

In what follows, I shall attempt to unpack the dynamics of power in Kleist's novella, paying specific attention to the specific problematics of each of these groups. If denial and disbelief was a characterising trait of the European discourse of the Haitian Revolution (a symptom, one might argue, of the belief in white innocence and the idea of the colonial family), then Kleist's narrative is notable in its abandon of all taboos and its biting portrayal of the deep-seated conflicts that drove the revolutionary violence. Kleist uses these conflicts towards a poignant and categorical dismantling of the power structures that guided colonial Saint-Domingue (and similar settler colonies), as shall be my general line of argumentation.

3. Domingo Unchained: Congo Hoango and the cause of the Black Revolution

While most of the novella centres around Gustav's attempts to court the young *mestiza* girl Toni against the efforts of her *mulatta* mother Babekan and the tension between these three characters, Kleist's text nevertheless begins with a lengthy prologue devoted to the story of former slave turned revolutionary Congo Hoango. This frame narrative introduces the reader to the cause of the black revolution through the prism of Hoango's dispossession and murder of a certain Herr Guillaume von Villeneuve. Being one between a white planter and a black slave, the battle between the pair is not just any showdown, but rather one of paradigmatic importance for the revolutionary upheaval and its roots in the plantation system's violent tendencies and racial inequalities.

Names, titles and etymology always assume an important role in Kleist's narratives, and *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* is no exception. Though several historical sources have been posited for the character of Villeneuve, none of these attributions is entirely convincing.[317] Just as the honorific "Herr" and "von" (Fr. Monsieur de) of his name point to noble origins, his surname suggests membership to an elite class of land-owning families. Perhaps somewhere in his paternal lineage there was a frontiersman, the founder of a new city. In the historical context of Saint-Domingue and its plantation system, Villeneuve's position approximates that of a *grand blanc* ('big white'),[318] deriving from his ownership of slaves and a sizeable plantation with opulent living quarters and numerous outbuildings.[319] Congo Hoango's enslaved status, on the other hand, is indicated by the title given to Villeneuve of "sein Herr" ("his master"). The narrator insists on labelling the character simply as "*Neger*" ("negro"), but this racial epithet masks the complexity of his origins as well as his 'reinvention' through the Transatlantic slave trade. His first name speaks of an institution widely practiced in Saint-Domingue, according to historian Laurent Dubois, of generically renaming slaves *Congo* after their African origins.[320] That Kleist

[317] Gerhard Schulz reads Villeneuve as an anagram of 'Neufville,' the doctor who supposedly treated Kleist for impotency during his trip to Würzburg. See: Gerhard Schulz, *Kleist. Eine Biografie* (München: C. H. Beck, 2011), 151. Brüggemann believes there may be a connection to Arnald von Villanova, a 13th and 14th century alchemist who theorised water. See Diethelm Brüggemann, *Kleist. Die Magie* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004), 305.

[318] See Philippe Girard, "*Rebelles* with a Cause: Women in the Haitian War of Independence, 1802–04." *Gender & History* 21:1 (April 2009), 60-85; here: 61.

[319] Vance Byrd reads the character as "the epitome of a colonial slaver and patriarch." In: Vance Byrd, "Family, Intercategorical Complexity, and Kleist's *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*." *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 92:3 (2017), 223-244; here: 231.

[320] "As the Atlantic slave trade expanded over the eighteenth century, west-central Africa became the largest source of slaves deported to the Americas. [...] In Saint-Domingue, these slaves were categorised under the generic term "Kongo" (which at the time was

was familiar with this background can be gleaned by his translation of Henry Bolingbroke's *Voyage to the Dememerary* of 1807[321]: "Man hat bemerkt, daß diejenigen, die aus den Völkerschaften von Kongo und Elbo abstammen, geschickter und gelehriger sind, als die übrigen Afrikaner."[322] Congolese men and women, so the text states citing the rationale of the slave trade, were regarded as better slaves due to their apparent greater skill and docility (*Ger.* Gelehrigkeit). The name *Congo* reflects this historical situation of deracination, enslavement and erasure, however his surname *Hoango* suggests something vastly different. Paul Michael Lützeler proposes that the surname might be related to the term for a male priest in Haitian Vodou: *Houngan*, a figure notorious for inciting revolt and insubordination.[323] Thus, as an aptronymic, 'Congo Hoango' might be read as something like 'the slave who does not obey his master.'

usually spelled "Congo"). They made up the majority of slaves imported into the colony, accounting for 40 per cent of the imports during the eighteenth century." In: Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, *op. cit.*, 40.

[321] The actual source of Kleist's translation is Louis de Sevelinges' *Voyage sur les bords de la Méméray* (Mercure de France, 1810). However, Sevelinges' text was itself the abridged translation of Henry Bolingbroke's *Voyage to the Demerary* (1807). For a discussion see: Frederick H. Wilkens, "The Source of Kleist's Review: *Über den Zustand der Schwarzen in Amerika*." *Modern Language Notes* 46:2 (1931), 111-118.

[322] Louis de Sevelinges, *Über den Zustand der Schwarzen in Amerika. Aus dem Frz. von Heinrich von Kleist* (Berliner Abendblätter Nr. 10-12, 12.-15. Januar 1811). In: Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe. Hrsg. von Helmut Sembdner* (München: DTV, 2008), 440-443; here: 442. The original English reads: "[I]t has been remarked of the African negroes that those of the Congo and Elbo nations were the better adapted and quicker at acquiring a knowledge of a trade than any others [...]." In: Henry Bolingbroke, *A Voyage to the Demerary, Containing a Statistical Account of the Settlements There, and of Those on the Essequebo: The Berbice, and Other Contiguous Rivers of Guyana* (London: Richard Phillips, 1809), 141. The French citation (Kleist's source text) reads: "On a remarqué que ceux qui proviennent des peuplades de Congo et d'Elbo, sont plus dociles et plus industrieux que les autres Africains." In: Louis de Sevelinges, *Voyage sur les bords de la Méméray* (Mercure de France 22 December 1810), 430-435; here: 433.

[323] See Paul Michael Lützeler, "Zu den Exempeln in *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*." In: *Kleists Erzählungen und Dramen: neue Studien*, ed. Paul Michael Lützeler and David Pan (Würzbug: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001), 35-48; here: 38.

3.1. Whose side are you on anyway? The narrative perspective

There is a third character that needs to be accounted for here if we are to fully understand how the politics of slavery, revolution and figure in Kleist's novella: the third-person omniscient narrator. Gone is the reliable, first-person style of narration adopted in *Robinson Crusoe* and, to a comparable extent, in *Paul et Virginie* ("These are historical and true events…"). This narrator is deeply ambivalent; above all, he wears his subjectivity and ideological bias on his sleeve, such that his entanglement in colonial epistemology is made transparent for the reader. Indeed, critical mention of the macrohistorical context in phrases like "die unbesonnenen Schritte des Nationalkonvents" ("the ill-considered actions of the French National Assembly" [*BSD Engl.*, 136], referring to the French legislature's decision to abolish slavery in 1793) und "Taumel der Freiheit" ("mad rage of freedom" [*BSD Engl.*, 144]) belie the narrator's deep personal scepticism vis-à-vis the cause of the black revolution.[324]

The fact that Kleist's novella is set in the later, more volatile stages of the Haitian Revolution, during the so-called 'massacre of the whites' sanctioned by black general and future emperor of Haiti Jean-Jacques Dessalines in 1803, only compounds the degree of ideological charge and bias that inform the narrative perspective. As the incipit of the novella reads:

[324] According to Herbert Uerlings, neither Kleist's novella nor his translation of Louis de Sevelinges' article demonstrate any significant bias for the cause of the Black Revolution ("eine konsequente Parteinahme für die schwarze Revolution"). On the contrary: The sections of the article that Kleist translated selectively argue for the maintenance and extension of the colonies ("Erhalt und Rentabilität der Kolonien"), albeit on the proviso that the working conditions of slaves is improved ("durch eine Verbesserung der Arbeitsbedingungen der Sklaven"). In: Herbert Uerlings, *op. cit.*, 190-191.

> Zu Port-au-Prince, auf dem französischen Anteil der Insel St. Domingo, lebte, zu Anfange dieses Jahrhunderts, als die Schwarzen die Weißen ermordeten, auf der Pflanzung des Herrn Guillaume von Villeneuve, ein fürchterlicher alter Neger, namens Congo Hoango (*VSD*, 3).

> At Port au Prince, in the French part of the island of Santo Domingo, on the plantation of Monsieur Guillaume de Villeneuve, there lived at the beginning of this century, when the blacks were murdering the whites, a fearsome old Negro by the name of Congo Hoango (*BSD, Engl.*, 136).

Immediately apparent is the discursive and even sensational nature of the narrator's speech: "at the beginning of this century, when the blacks were murdering the whites" and "a fearsome old Negro," which conjures up the violent images and anecdotes, no doubt familiar to Kleist's readership, of blacks indiscriminately butchering their white victims.

At the same time, there is a distinctly ironic, fairy-tale-like quality to the way in which the narrator describes the showdown as one between 'the big, bad villain' Congo Hoango and his 'poor, innocent victim' Villeneuve. The effect of this subtle irony and satire is that any clear moral division between the two sides of the conflict becomes blurred. As the next few lines of the novella read:

> Dieser von der Goldküste von Afrika herstammende Mensch, der in seiner Jugend von treuer und rechtschaffener Gemütsart schien, war von seinem Herrn, weil er ihm einst auf einer Überfahrt nach Cuba das Leben gerettet hatte, mit unendlichen Wohltaten überhäuft worden. Nicht nur, daß Herr Guillaume ihm auf der Stelle seine Freiheit schenkte, und ihm, bei seiner Rückkehr nach St. Domingo, Haus und Hof anwies; er machte ihn sogar, einige Jahre darauf, gegen die Gewohnheit des Landes, zum Aufseher seiner beträchtlichen Besitzung, und legte ihm, weil er nicht wieder heiraten wollte, an Weibes Statt eine alte Mulattin, namens Babekan, aus seiner Pflanzung bei, mit welcher er durch seine erste verstorbene Frau weitläuftig verwandt war. Ja, als der Neger sein sechzigstes Jahr erreicht hatte, setzte er ihn mit einem ansehnlichen Gehalt in den Ruhestand und krönte seine Wohltaten noch damit, daß er ihm in seinem Vermächtnis sogar ein Legat auswarf [...] (*VSD*, 3).

> This man, who came originally from the Gold Coast of Africa, and who in his youth seemed of a loyal and upright nature, had been overwhelmed by his master with innumerable [favours], because he had saved his life on a voyage to Cuba. Not only did M. Guillaume give him his freedom on the spot and assign him a house and holdings upon his return to Santo Domingo; he also made him a few years later, and contrary to the custom of the country, the overseer of his very considerable estates, and, since he did not wish to re-marry, gave him instead of a wife an elderly mulatt[a] from his plantation by the name of Babekan, with whom his was distantly related through his deceased first wife. Indeed when the Negro had reached his sixtieth year he retired him on a handsome pension and crowned his beneficent deeds by remembering him in his testament with an inheritance (*BSD Engl.*, 136).

Praise of Congo's "loyal and upright nature" in his youth and his rescue of Villeneuve during an excursion to Cuba speaks – albeit with a touch of irony – to a colonial fantasy perfected with virtuosity by writers like Defoe and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre: that of the obedient slave. We might read this opening passage as the attempt to fathom Congo Hoango's naughty behaviour from a distinctly 'white' perspective: why would he, after his master Herr von Villeneuve gifted him his freedom, an early retirement, a companion and even a considerable inheritance – why would he not be satisfied and still bear such a grudge? In other words, after all that paternal, that is material, care afforded to him by his kind master Villeneuve, why would Congo not be grateful and *reciprocate*[325] this with his unwavering and unconditional loyalty to the plantation system instead of participating in the "Gemetzel" (*VSD*, 13), that is "butchery," of the Haitian Revolution?

On the surface, Congo Hoango comes away from this story appearing as nothing more than an irrational and deplorable monster bent on levelling scores with Villeneuve. Yet, digging deeper into the reasons for his current

[325] Reciprocity, the contract of mutual benefit signed by master and servant or slave, was the glue binding the Caribbean plantation society's paternalistic model of governance together. By extending paternal care towards select members of the plantation workforce as Villeneuve does to Hoango, planters hoped to forge quasi-familial ties and ensure the lasting survival and longevity of slavery and the plantation system. Cf. Laura Martin, *op. cit.*

rebellion yields a much more ambivalent picture: “eingedenk der Tyrannei, die ihn seinem Vaterland entrissen hatte” (*VSD*, 3), “remembering the tyranny that tore him from his [fatherland]” (*BSD Engl.*, 136) – drawing the reader’s attention to the act of deracination that robbed Congo of his dignity and humanity in the first place. All of a sudden, Hoango’s actions are not so irrational and Villeneuve’s “Wohltaten” are debunked in all their paternal naivety: they are only ‘good deeds’ from the perspective of the white value system which believes that freedom, property and material security could ever replace the sinews of family and community.

3.2. Congo Hoango’s ‘anti-plantation’

Confronted with a narrative voice that is clearly sympathetic to the cause of the white planters, the reader (even more so, the contemporary reader) is delegated the responsibility of reading against such subjectivity and recognising that there is another side to this story.[326] Ultimately, there is enough evidence in this exposition to explain Congo’s indignation and radicalisation for the cause of Jean-Jacques Dessalines rather than Toussaint L’Ouverture. L’Ouverture, who is quoted as saying “a good child must show submission and obedience to his mother,”[327] envisaged a semi-autonomous Saint-Domingue – independent, but still loyal to France –, though this more tempered stance backfired when in 1803 he was arrested and extradited to France where he was would eventually be executed.

[326] For more on the difficulty of reading Kleist’s novella see Anthony Stephens, *Heinrich von Kleist. The Dramas and Stories* (Berg: Oxford/Providence, 1994); Yixu Lü; Anthony Stephens, “Die Verführung des Lesers im Erzählwerk Kleists.” *Kleist-Jahrbuch* 1994, 104-117.
[327] Quoted in Philippe Girard, “*Rebelles* with a Cause” (2009), *op. cit.*, 61.

L'Ouverture's successor Jean-Jacques Dessalines, on the other hand, was not so conciliatory in his stance towards the imperial 'parent.' On 1 January 1804, he proclaimed the new state of Haiti, swearing an "eternal hatred of France"[328] and in the new 1805 Constitution, he promised that "no white man, whatever his nationality, shall henceforth set foot in this country as master or proprietor, nor shall he in the future acquire property here."[329]

Kleist's novella has absorbed this historical background of competing visions for the future of Saint-Domingue/Haiti by enlisting Congo Hoango as supporter of Dessalines and, rather than ascribe him paper and the quill – symbols typically associated with the 'enlightened' figure of L'Ouverture –, make it his duty to procure the "Pulver und Blei" required to banish the whites from Haiti's shores for good (*VSD*, 5). The objective correlatives of his "indignation" towards slavery, Congo's "gun powder and iron" are an explosive display of the author Kleist's well-known *Sprachgewalt,* or 'language violence.'[330] Indeed, there are many displays of such violence in *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* which, together, serve to weaponise with particular force the grotesque collision of a nostalgic colonial fantasy, the dream of universal white dominance in the European colonies, with the harsh reality of insurrection and rebellion. Upon being gifted his freedom by Villeneuve, the first act Congo committed was the same thing Kleist

[328] Anon., "The Declaration of Independence, 1 January 1804." In: David Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014), 179.
[329] Quoted in Tadeusz Lepkowski, *Haiti. Vol. 1* (Casa: La Habana, 1968).
[330] See Helmut Arntzen, "Heinrich von Kleist: Gewalt und Sprache." In: *Die Gegenwärtigkeit Kleists. Reden zum Gedenkjahr 1977 im Schloß Charlottenburg zu Berlin,* ed. Wieland Schmidt (Berlin, 1980), 62-78; Anthony Stephens, *Kleist – Sprache und Gewalt. Mit einem Geleitwort von Walter Müller-Seidel* (Freiburg i.Br., 1999).

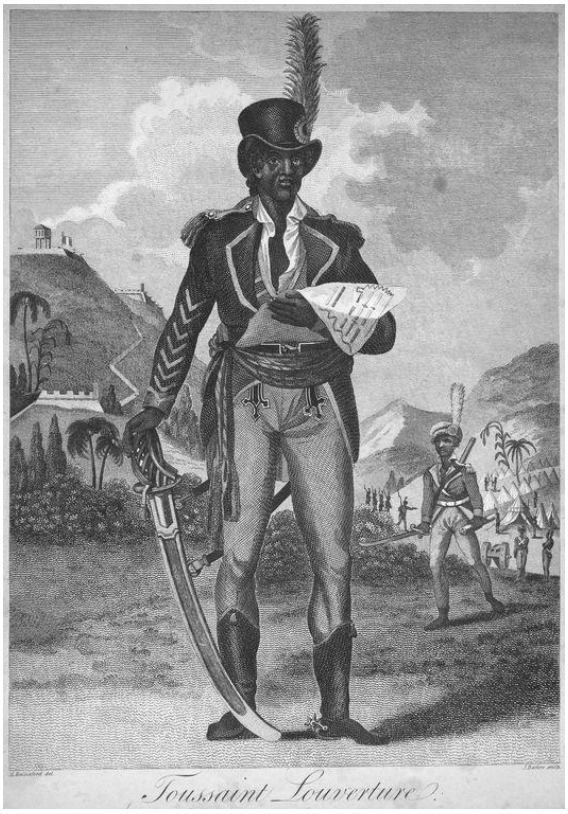
fantasised about doing to the French emperor (but famously ended up doing to himself): "[er jagte] seinem Herrn die Kugel durch den Kopf"[331] ("he put a bullet through his master's head"). Then,

> [er] steckte das Haus, worein die Gemahlin desselben mit ihren drei Kindern und den übrigen Weißen der Niederlassung sich geflüchtet hatte, in Brand, verwüstete die ganze Pflanzung, worauf die Erben, die in Port-au-Prince wohnten, hätten Anspruch machen können, und zog, als sämtliche zur Besitzung gehörige Etablissements der Erde gleich gemacht waren, mit den Negern, die er versammelt und bewaffnet hatte, in der Nachbarschaft umher, um seinen Mitbrüdern in dem Kampfe gegen die Weißen beizustehen (*VSD*, 3-4).

> [h]e set fire to the house in which the latter's wife and [their] three children, together with the rest of the whites in the settlement, had taken refuge, ravaged the whole plantation, to which the heirs, who lived in Port au Prince, could have laid claim, and, when all the buildings belonging to the estate had been razed, marched about the neighbourhood with the Negroes he had gathered and armed, to help his brothers in their fight against the whites (*BSD Engl.*, 136-137).

This scene of incredible cogency and significance for the narrative marks Congo's transition from unfathomable villain to freedom fighter. Rather than heed the edict of reciprocity and play the 'good slave,' Hoango commits the ultimate act of disobedience: he sets the settlement on fire, "desolates" the plantation, kills its inhabitants, thus rendering it useless and invalidating any claim the ancestors of Monsieur de Villeneuve would have had to inherit it. The result of these interventions, one might say, is something that resembles an *anti-plantation* – a calculated inversion, literally a "razing to the ground" of the estate and with this the projected utopia of the plantation as one big, happy adopted family.

[331] In a December 1805 letter to Otto von Lilienstern, Kleist ends his complaint about Napoleon's tyranny with the hope: "Warum sich nur nicht Einer findet, der diesem bösen Geist der Welt die Kugel durch den Kopf jagt." In: Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, hg. v. Ilse-Marie Barth et al. (Frankfurt a. M., 1987), Bd. 4, 352.



Marcus Rainsford, "Toussaint Louverture," engraving. In: Marcus Rainsford, *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (London: Albion Press, 1805).

Manuel Lopez Lopez Iodibo, "Desalines," engraving. Copied from: Juan Lopez Cancelada, *Vida de J. J. Dessalines, Gefe de los negros de Santo Domingo* (Mexico City: Mariano de Zúñiga y Ontiveros, 1806).

3.3. Real family matters. The politics of kinship in *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*

Read alongside the historical development of slavery in the French Caribbean, Congo's actions represent a genuine form of resistance to a system that itself had installed lasting and violent mechanisms to ensure its ongoing survival. But inasmuch as his resistance takes aim at the ideology of 'the plantation as family,' the conflict depicted in *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* represents a very tangible and visceral struggle over the terms of family and kinship ties under slavery. The novella centres around the plight

of four fictional families in particular: the Villeneuves, the Hoangos, the Strömlis and the Bertrand family. As the scholarship has noted, two very different concepts of kinship pervade: an expansive "Stamm der Neger" (*tribe/race of negroes*) versus a genealogically and biologically stringent "Geschlecht der Weißen" (*lineage/race of whites*).[332] To a certain extent, this distinction can be understood as a symptom of the treatment of Africans as 'primitive peoples.' But the narrator's use of such terminology also resembles that which Orlando Patterson refers to as the "natal alienation" experienced by the enslaved as a result of being "alienat[ed] from all formal, legally enforceable ties of "blood," and from any attachment to groups or localities other than those chosen for him by the master."[333] Denying enslaved Africans familial ties and viewing them as working and reproducing machines rather than living and breathing human beings, was conducive to the economic imperatives of the plantation.

Patterson's theory of "natal alienation" is particular apposite to the novella's treatment of the Hoango family and Congo's paternity of his two sons Seppy and Nanky. The younger son Nanky is introduced with the addition of the relative clause "den Hoango auf unehelichem Wege mit einer Negerin erzeugt hatte" (*VSD*, 6) ("who was an illegitimate offspring of Hoango and a Negro woman" [*BSD Engl.*, 138]). This description, specifically the terms "unehelich" ('illegitimately,' 'outside of marriage') and "erzeugt" ('to beget') suggest that the boy's conception was an unwanted consequence of sexual

[332] Kai Köhler, "*Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*." In: *Kleist-Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung* (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2009), 121-127; here: 126.
[333] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 7.

intercourse. Similarly, Nanky's half-brother Seppy (whose name holds associations to the pigmentation melanin, and thus to the tyranny of race) we learn was conceived earlier with another woman, which further belies the suggestion of Congo's promiscuity. Both children are referred to at intervals either as "Negerknaben" ("negro boys") or as "Bastardkinder" ("bastard children"), clearly derogatory terms indicating their supposed illegitimacy due to being conceived outside the bounds of marriage.

The characterisation of the family by the narrator is reminiscent of the issues of kinship discussed by contemporaries like Justin Girod de Chantrans and Moreau de Saint-Méry, who respectively travelled and lived in pre-revolutionary Saint-Domingue. In Chantrans' account written in the decade before the Revolution, male slaves are described as being resistant to marriage and only interested in satisfying their base demands:

> Isolated and withdrawn, no slave thinks of reproduction. Marriage, far from attracting him, frightens him away. He much prefers to obey his inclinations, and his inclinations are inconstancy.[334]

But, as a further manifestation of its double-voicedness, Kleist's text allows us to read *against* such stereotyping, for as we are informed: "Nanky and Seppy, both bastard children of old Hoango, were very dear to him, especially Seppy, whose mother had [recently died]" (*BSD Engl.*, 160).[335] This rare instance of personal narration, conveying Congo's inner affection

[334] "Chaque esclave isolé, replié en lui-meme, ne songe donc guere à se reproduire. Le marriage, loin de l'attirer, l'effarouche. Il obéit plus agréablement à ses penchans, & ses penchans sont L'inconstance." In: Justin Girod de Chantrans, *op. cit.*, 149.
[335] "Nanky und Seppy, Bastardkinder des alten Hoango, waren diesem, besonders der letze, dessen Mutter kürzlich gestorben war, sehr teuer" (*VSD*, 36).

for his biological children, contradicts the pseudo-science of race and its inferences about racial determinism. It is the second time that the narrative explicitly mentions Congo's late wife; the first instance occurs in the novella's exposition where we are informed that part of Villeneuve's gift to Congo was "instead of a wife (because he did not wish to remarry) an old mulatta named Babekan [...], with whom he was distantly related through his deceased first wife" (*BSD Engl.*, 136). There is a story of personal loss here that resonates above the historical context of extreme, yet artificial 'race-loyalty.' Is it possible that Congo's late wife succumbed to a physical injury in the same way as Babekan's late husband Komar and indeed Babekan herself, who suffers from a permananent case of tuberculosis (Ger. *Schwindsucht*)? According to Junius Rodriguez, the harsh conditions of labour in the French colony of Saint-Domingue reflected in a rate of mortality that was higher than anywhere else in the western hemisphere.[336]

Though a question mark hangs over the death of Congo's late wife, the paternalistic gesture of Villeneuve's contrived altruism is fairly transparent: In a further attempt to garner Hoango's child-like loyalty and affection, the planter gifts the *mulatta* Babekan – a distant relative of Congo's wife no less ("weitläufig verwandt") – as a consolation prize for the loss of a sexual 'mate.' Congo's categorical rejection of this fixed arrangement, nonetheless, is communicated through a pointed use of the modal phrase "nicht heiraten *wollte*" ('did not *want* to remarry'). In the novella's dramatic

[336] Junius Rodriguez, *Encyclopedia of Slave Resistance and Rebellion* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2007), 229.

final tableau, Congo agrees to permit the Europeans' safe passage in exchange for his sons Nanky and Seppy whom the Strömlis had previously taken hostage – whereby an extreme form of 'direct blood loyalty' replaces his more tenuous commitment to 'race.'[337] Motivated by nothing more than their own pure self-interest, the diametrically opposed forces of 'black and white' are forced to reconcile their differences (even if momentarily) and at the expense of idealistic goals. Congo's miraculous rejuvenation ("Er verjüngte sich," [*VSD*, 4]) no longer carries the connotations it did at the beginning of the narrative, that is, of regaining of life and vitality through violence, instead yielding to something that may be described as a life-for-life approach. This is a radical position in itself, but a warranted response to the institution of slavery and the 'social death' (Orlando Patterson) inflicted on the enslaved.

4. The *mulatta* and the white foreigner: Babekan as subversive revolutionary warrior

The novella's treatment of revolutionary violence and its roots in a deeply entrenched system of biological racism does not end with the story of black revolutionary Congo Hoango. Rather, the commentary is further explored through the encounter between Gustav, a Swiss mercenary fighting on the side of the French, and two mixed-race women, Babekan and her young daughter Toni. Gustav, who happens upon the plantation in search of safe passage for his relatives the Strömli family, is fascinated by the beauty of the fifteen-year-old *mestiza* Toni and is successful in securing her trust

[337] Vance Byrd, *op. cit.*, 223-244.

against the efforts of the *mulatta* Babekan, who wants nothing more than the whites' destruction. By all appearances, the plight of the black Revolution fades here into the prospect of an alliance – in the form of *Verlobung*, or betrothal – across racial divides. Yet, as will become clear over the course of the encounter, a peaceful reconciliation of the racial tensions is next to impossible when it still labours under strain of historically grown inequality, racism and exploitation. As I shall attempt to show, the reason why Gustav and Toni's romance fails is because it is still indebted to the lingering culture of racism and colonial desire that was historically rife in Saint-Domingue.

Appearances are somewhat deceiving when it comes to Kleist's male protagonist Gustav von der Ried. For most of the novella, the narrator refers to him somewhat vaguely as "der Fremde" ("the stranger," "the foreigner"), articulating his status as a stranger both to the plantation and Saint-Domingue while sparing him the racialisation afforded to the novella's characters of colour. The distinction important because throughout the novella Gustav's 'alibi' is that he is not French but Swiss-German, and thus to a certain extent exonerated from the present malaise of racial war and its historical underpinnings in colonial racism. Appealing to the notion of his Germanic innocence, Gustav explains to the mother-daughter duo upon arrival in the plantation:

> Ich bin ein Offizier von der französischen Macht, obschon, wie Ihr wohl selbst urteilt, kein Franzose; mein Vaterland ist die Schweiz und mein Name Gustav von der Ried. [...] Ich komme von Fort Dauphin [...] und meine Absicht ist, Port au Prince zu erreichen, bevor es dem General Dessalines noch gelungen ist, es mit den Truppen, die er anführt, einzuschließen und zu belagern (*VSD*, 7).

> I am an officer with the French forces, but, as you can no doubt see for yourself, no Frenchman. My fatherland is Switzerland and my name is Gustav von der Ried. [..] I come from Fort Dauphin […] and I am trying to reach Port au Prince before General Dessalines succeeds in cutting off and besieging it with the troops under his command (*BSD Engl.*, 139-140).

But while at intervals Gustav attempts to position himself as a helpless and hapless victim of revolutionary violence, his ideological position vis-à-vis slavery and the Revolution unravels in the course of the encounter with Babekan and Toni. When confronted by Toni with question how the whites had managed to so attract the ire of the blacks the character responds: "Through the general relationship that they, as masters of the island, had with the blacks, and which I, to tell the truth, would not undertake to defend, but which had existed thus for centuries!" (*BSD Engl.*, 144)[338] – the 'but' reading as an ambivalent vindication of the system of slavery and the socially and politically engineered structure of white dominance in Saint-Domingue.

Gustav nevertheless meets a formidable adversary in the person of Babekan, the novella's main agent of subversion and intrigue. When he first happens onto the plantation and is met by the character, his exclamation "Bei Maria und allen Heiligen" (*VSD*, 5) ("Mary and all the saints!" [*BSD Engl.*, 137] and her consequent opening of the door have been suggested to invoke the memory of *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, the revolutionary who had

[338] "[D]urch das allgemeine Verhältnis, das sie, als Herren der Insel, zu den Schwarzen hatten, und das ich, die Wahrheit zu gestehen, mich nicht unterfangen will, in Schutz zu nehmen; das aber schon seit vielen Jahrhunderten auf diese Weise bestand!" (*VSD*, 14).

died in the same French prison in which Kleist was imprisoned in 1807.[339] The allusion might be seen as indicating the prospect of is an amicable reception given L'Ouverture's more measured stance towards Napoleon and the French empire. But Babekan's name, acoustically similar to the Old French word *barabacane* (Engl. barbican) meaning the outer defence of a castle, is already at odds with this notion of enlightened hospitality and common universal values. In the racial war that has erupted in Saint-Domingue her role, so it is explained, consists in luring the "white and creole refugees" into the compound, promising "aid and favours," with the intention of entrapping them there until Hoango can deliver fatal punishment (*VSD*, 4).

The racial and gendered ascription "Mulattin" (Fr. *mulâtresse*; Engl. *mulatta*) is an especially significant one in the context of the revolutionary war unfolding in Saint-Domingue/Haiti. According to commentators like the pro-French writer Jean-Louis Dubroca, mulattas played a special role in the Haitian Revolution. In the German-language edition of his well-known pamphlet *La Vie de Toussaint-Louverture* (1802)[340] – a text with which Kleist was undoubtedly acquainted through his readership of the *Minerva* journal[341] –, Dubroca claims that the female negresses and mulattas were particularly aggressive participants in the campaign to rid Saint-Domingue/Haiti of its white inhabitants:

[339] This reading is based on a transliteration of the German "Alle Heilige" to the French "*Tous les Saints"* and "Öffnen" to "*Ouverture,*" together 'Toussaint L'Ouverture.' Cf. Ottmar Ette, *op. cit.*, 207.
[340] Louis Dubroca, *La vie de Toussaint-Louverture, chef des noirs insurgés de Saint-Domingue* (Paris: Dubroca Librairie, 1802).
[341] See Gonthier-Louis Fink, *op. cit.*, 74.

> The negro and mulatto women played an indelibly active and direct part in all kinds of crimes and horrors […]; and perhaps more whites were killed by their hands than by those of the blacks; indeed, the premeditated barbarities and cruelties for which the black soldiers have been reproached pale in comparison.[342]

Conducive to this rhetoric was a stereotype that had long shaped Saint-Domingue discourse: the woman of colour as tropical temptress. Caribbean voluptuousness and sensuality personified in the woman of colour was a notoriously strong drawcard for the colonies and the subject of intense discussion in Saint-Domingue literature. Contemporary writers frequently theorised women of colour, mulattas in particular, as being naturally more beautiful, libidinous, sensual and thus more dangerous than European women.[343] This latter attribute was especially rife in times of crisis and upheaval. For instance, in Justin Girod de Chantrans' travelogue *Voyage d'un Suisse dans les Colonies d'Amerique*, written on the eve of the Haitian Revolution, women of African descent, particularly mulattas, are represented as the cunning seducers of hapless white men:

> These women, naturally more lascivious than European women, flattered by their control over white men, have collected and preserved all the sensual pleasures [*voluptés*] they are capable of. Enjoyment [*La jouissance*] has become for them an object of study, a specialised and necessary skill [used] with worn-out or depraved lovers, whom simple nature can no longer delight.[344]

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[342] "Ueberhaupt nahmen die Negerinnen und Mulatinnen einen sehr thätigen und unmittelbaren Anteil an den Verbrechen und Gräueln aller Art, welche die Unfälle dieser Colonie so scheußlich gemacht haben. Immer und überall sahe man sie bey den gräßlichsten Scenen; und vielleicht kamen durch ihre Hände mehr Weisse um, als durch die Hände der Schwarzen [...]." In: Jean-Louis Dubroca, "Geschichte der Neger-Empörung unter der Anführung von Toussaint-Louverture und Jean Jacques Dessalines." In: *Minerva* (1805), Bd. 53, 434-464 & Bd. 54, 71-158; here: Bd. 54, 121. Translation is my own.

[343] Cf. Doris Garraway, *op. cit.*, 207-239.

[344] "Ces femmes, naturellement plus lascives que les Européennes, flattées de leur ascendant sur les blancs, ont rassemblé, pour le conserver, toutes les voluptés dont elles font susceptibles. La jouissance est devenue pour ells l'objet d'une étude particulière d'un art très recherché & necessaire en même tems avec des amans usés ou dépravés que la simple nature ne peut plus émouvoir & qui ne veulent pas renoncer à ses bienfaits." In: Justin Girod de Chantrans, *op. cit.*, 181.

Moreau de Saint-Méry, a white Creole planter and writer whose wife and daughter even happened to be women of colour,[345] largely echoed Girod de Chantrans' sentiments. He wrote:

> The whole being of a *mulâtresse* is given over to sensual pleasure and the flame of this goddess burns in her heart so as only to be snuffed out with life itself [...]. Even the most inflamed imagination can conceive of nothing that she has not fathomed, concocted, experienced.[346]

Pervaded by an exaggerated sense of threatening femininity, such portrayals only compounded the stigma attached to the woman of colour: whether in her role as a sexual predator or revolutionary warrior, the *mulâtresse* was postulated as the one element that threatened the whole fabric of Saint-Domingue society.

Seemingly modelled with this discursive backdrop in mind, Babekan is depicted as a cunning agent and warrior who manipulates and manoeuvres in order to further the revolutionary cause and fulfil the mandate handed to her by Congo Hoango. Yet, Babekan's black-and-white conviction actually belies a much more ambiguous reality. As mixed-race women, Babekan and Toni occupied a precarious, 'in-between' position in Saint-Domingue society, owing largely to the optics of skin colour and the attendant question, especially potent in the context of revolution, of where their political loyalties

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[345] See Laurent Dubois, *op. cit.*, 68.

[346] Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'isle Saint-Domingue* (1789), 104. For a discussion of similar stereotypes in the British Caribbean see Hilary Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 147; Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 14-17.

lie: were they black or were they white? For Gustav, a white man traversing "mitten durch ein in Empörung begriffenes Mohrenland" (*VSD*, 8) ("a land of Moors gripped by indignation"), the difference has life or death implications. As Zantop explains,

> In "Die Verlobung in St. Domingo" it is Gustav who is faced with the task of "reading" skin color under extreme duress. While he seeks clarity […], his two "texts," the mulatta Babekan and her "mestiza" daughter Toni, are presented as ambiguously located between black and white and, therefore, as hard to decipher.[347]

Gustav's understanding of race relations is clearly strained by the context of the black Revolution which prevents him from ever fully trusting the mother-daughter-duo. Babekan understands this perfectly, for as she relates to Toni: "[H]is imagination […] was so filled with Negroes and blackamoors that if a lady from Paris or Marseilles had opened the door to him, he would have thought it was a black woman." (*BSD Engl.*, 143)[348] Hence, throughout the encounter with Gustav, she speaks the language of race, racial similitude and appealing to a common sense of victimised whiteness in order to garner any ounce of confidence she might inspire in him:

> Was kann ich, deren Vater aus St. Jago, von der Insel Cuba war, für den Schimmer von Licht, der auf meinem Antlitz, wenn es Tag wird, erdämmert? Und was kann meine Tochter, die in Europa empfangen und geboren ist, dafür, daß der volle Tag jenes Weltteils von dem ihrigen widerscheint? (*VSD*, 9)

> How can I, whose father came from Santiago de Cuba, help the shimmer of light that appears in my face when day breaks? And can my daughter, who was conceived and born in Europe, help it that the bright day of that part of the world is reflected in hers? (*BSD Engl.*, 140)

[347] Susanne Zantop, (2003), *op. cit.*, 191-208; here: 199.
[348] "[S]eine Einbildung war ganz von Mohren und Negern erfüllt; und wenn ihm eine Dame von Paris oder Marseille die Türe geöffnet hätte, er würde sie für eine Negerin gehalten haben" (*VSD*, 12).

The question that arises then is exactly to what purpose does Kleist's novella reify and recourse to the tropes of revolutionary warrior and tropical temptress through the figure of Babekan: is it to in order to 'silence' the Revolution (Michel Trouillot) in a way that denies the non-European characters their legitimacy and self-determination? Or in order to undermine such stereotypes? Haitian studies scholar Marlene Daut recently argued for the former. While she notes that Kleist's tale is "primarily meant to underscore the human tragedy and epistemological problems involved in violent Revolutions," Daut believes that ultimately it "presents female Revolutionaries of color […] as demonic or pitiful."[349] Loster-Schneider, on the other hand, understands Babekan as representing a model of subversion and agency in the sense of Bhabha's theory of hybridity. Babekan harnesses "her cultural double perspective towards a virtuous mimicry of male fantasies of the moor and the female."[350] In this reading, Babekan's clichéd behaviour, mannerisms and speech serve an important – above all, theoretical – function in the narrative: to confront and subvert the racist stereotypes about Africans and mixed-race with which Gustav comes equipped. In the end, Babekan's distrust of the whites is not completely unfounded. Again, as with Congo Hoango, there is an attempt to actually explain her hatred of the whites as the result of the lived experience of slavery, for instance her years of enslavement to Villeneuve

[349] See Marlene Daut, *op. cit.*, 298.
[350] Gudrun Loster-Schneider, "Toni, Babekan und Homi Bhabha? Zu Problemen kultureller und ästhetischer Hybridisierung in Heinrich von Kleists "Die Verlobung in St. Domingo."" In: *Das Europa der Aufklärung und die außereuropäische koloniale Welt*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006), 228-248; here: 244.

and the betrayal she experiences through Toni's biological father, a wealthy Marseille merchant by the name of Bertrand. His denial of paternity of Toni (historically, a frequent occurrence in the interracial relationships between wealthy white men and black female slaves in colonial societies) induced Villeneuve to punish Babekan with sixty whip-lashings, leaving her with a permanent disability.

L. Labrousse; Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur, "Danse de Negresà St. Domingue," a hand-tinted engraving from the series 'Costumes de différents Pays' (1797). Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Marcus Rainsford, "A benevolent Female of Colour," engraving. In: Marcus Rainsford, *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (London: Albion Press, 1805), 234-235.

5. The Libertine Colony: Toni, Gustav and the dialectics of interracial desire

Unlike Babekan, whose zealous behaviour reflects the conviction that in war there is no room for ambiguity, her daughter Toni occupies a much more grey, in-between space in the narrative. This is largely a function of being *mestiza*, or mixed-race, precariously situated between ethnicities and cultures.[351] The daughter of a European man, the Marseille merchant

[351] Kleist's recourse to terms like the *mulatta* and *mestiza* have been explained through the prism of compatriot Immanuel Kant's theoretical text *On the Different Human Races* (1777).

Bertrand, and a mulatta, Toni's story is one of a conflicted sense of belonging against the backdrop of fickle racial and nationalistic demarcations. On the one hand, as Loster-Schneider points out, she is only 'white' insofar as biology and the accident of birth have determined she is; culturally, she is much more indebted to her Caribbean surroundings and her upbringing through Babekan and Congo Hoango.[352] On the other hand, Toni expresses a palpable desire to trace her European roots, for instance when she naively asks Gustav at the beginning of their encounter, for no other reason than their common European heritage, if he is acquainted with her father Bertrand (*VSD*, 12). By the end of the encounter her loyalties have shifted such that she can defiantly proclaim to her mother: "I am a white and am engaged to the youth, whom you imprison; I belong to the same lineage that you battle it out with."[353]

But if Toni's story elucidates anything, it is the failure of the novella's other characters to recognise her as a legitimate actor, driven by her own desires for freedom and agency. Toni wears her precarious identity on her body and is instrumentalised in this reductive physical function to serve their self-serving motives and interests. Her noticeably lighter, yellow shade of skin colour, her "ins Gelbliche gehend[e] Gesichtsfarbe," makes her "besonders

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Yet, the representative function of these racial categories within the narrative (i.e. for different degrees of blackness or whiteness) is also reminiscent of Saint-Domingue author Moreau de Saint-Méry's aforementioned text *Description de l'isle Saint-Domingue* (1789). In the notorious skin theory developed therein, the *métis* is placed on a scale of a possible nine types of black and white intermixture, two grades closer than the *mulâtre* to the 'whitest' of these the *sang-melé*. In total, the text hierarchises a possible one hundred and twenty-eight possible combinations of black-white miscegenation.

[352] Gudrun Loster-Schneider, *op. cit.*, 241.

[353] "[I]ich bin eine Weiße, und dem Jüngling, den ihr gefangen haltet, verlobt; ich gehöre zu dem Geschlecht derer, mit denen ihr im offenen Kriege liegt […]" (*VSD*, 38). My translation.

brauchbar" ("especially useful") for Babekan's schemes (*VSD*, 4). Combined with the white clothing she adorns, or is made to adorn (*VSD*, 5), Toni is weaponised to lure unsuspecting white men like Gustav into the plantation.

5.1. The Mary-Yarico complex: Racialised models of femininity in the novella

Gustav's interest in the girl, for his part, is primarily motivated by the life-threatening situation in which he find himself and the desperate attempt to establish loyal allegiances amid the uncertain turmoil of racial war. Similar examples of women of colour aiding and harbouring European men from the black Revolutionaries were not unheard of in the context of the Haitian Revolution.[354] In his attempt to establish inroads with Toni, Gustav faces the problem of 'reading' her loyalties through the signals, signs and marks present on the body. As Zantop argues, Kleist "problematises the simple theories [of race, of mixed-race individuals] that this reading process, while never granting ultimate certainty, requires at the very least contextual knowledge – that is, a solid understanding of personal histories and collective history – if it is to yield any insights." The encounter is dominated by Gustav's "inability to read historically grown race relations."[355] In the

[354] A noteworthy example is the anecdote of the "benevolent Female of Colour," described and pictured in Marcus Rainsford's *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (1805). Rainsford was a soldier who served for many years with the British Army in the British West Indies. He visited Haiti in 1799, where he was imprisoned and sentenced to death. According to his account, Rainsford was visited at least three times in his cell by an unknown woman who aided and abetted him. See Marcus Rainsford, *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (London: Albion Press, 1805), 234-235.
[355] Susanne Zantop, (2003), *op. cit.*, 199.

words of Loster-Schneider, Gustav is "overscripted" [356] with colonial knowledge and stereotypes which blur and obfuscate his perception of Toni.

This challenge of reading the ambiguous "text" (Zantop) that is Toni culminates in the famous footbath scene. According to Weigel, the dilemma facing Gustav here is exactly what model of femininity ("Weiblichkeitsmuster") – one may add: *racialised* femininity – the girl inheres given her mixed-race heritage.[357] Two antithetical models of the feminine frame the encounter. The first of these is conveyed through the narrative relayed by Gustav of an anonymous female slave who, after refusing her white master's sexual advances, was sold on into a presumably harsher and crueller life of slavery (*VSD*, 14). In its basic plotline the narrative loosely follows the famous seventeenth-century tale of Inkle and Yarico, the story of an Englishman's betrayal of his Caribbean rescuer and lover, albeit with one notable plot twist: coaxing him into bed under the pretence of forgiveness, the slave woman venges the man's betrayal by infecting him with yellow fever. The addition marks the transition of the sweet Yarico figure of popular legend from victim to perpetrator. Indeed, for Gustav, it serves is less as an indictment of himself – of his potential malintent towards Toni – than as a signal of the yellow-skinned *mestiza*'s looming betrayal.[358] The fact that the woman in the story is a slave, and presumably of African heritage, is a telling detail which further reinforces

[356] Loster-Schneider, *op. cit.*, 238.
[357] Sigrid Weigel, "Der Körper am Kreuzpunkt von Liebesgeschichte und Rassendiskurs in Heinrich von Kleists Erzählung *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*." *Kleist-Jahrbuch* (1991), 202-217; here: 210.
[358] For a more thoroughgoing analysis of the meaning of the colour yellow in the narrative, see Ottmar Ette, (2013), *op. cit.*, 206-213.

and bolsters the stereotype of the woman of colour as a conniving tropical temptress. Von der Ried even asks Toni in the wake, as if completing the substitution in his mind, “ob *sie* wohl einer solchen Tat fähig wäre?” (*VSD*, 15) (“whether *she* would be capable of such an act?” [*BSD Engl.*, 145]). Then, while being led by Toni into the quarters of the slayed planter Villeneuve, sensing his own substitution, “a sense of unrest” comes over him “like a vulture about his heart” (*BSD Engl.*, 146) and he expresses the desire to escape from the plantation back into the wilderness, to the safety of blood family. At intervals, Toni’s countenance is described in terms similar to the enslaved woman’s “wilder Wut” (“savage fury”): “indem sie *wild* aufstand” (*VSD*, 22) or “die *wildeste* Verzweiflung im Herzen” (*VSD*, 33) – though, as is typical for Kleist, these ascriptions of *Wildheit* (Engl. savagery or unwieldiness) also hold the positive connotation of *being human, having agency, defying authority*.

All the more reason why, in an attempt to steer against such an image of threatening femininity, a second plotline is introduced: that of Gustav’s deceased fiancée Mariane Congreve. Already the name conjures associations to the immaculate figure of Mary, in addition to the virtuous revolutionary heroine of Marianne, whose exposed breasts came to symbolise the new regime’s plentiful, quasi-maternal subsistence of the French masses.[359] Congreve’s story is similarly symbolic, if also violent: when Gustav was found guilty by the revolutionary tribunal of being a political offender, it was her and not him who was sent to the guillotine to

[359] Marie-Claire Vallois (2007), *op. cit.*, 436.

pay for his crimes. Thus, whereas the anecdote of the infected slave woman contains a parable warning against female indecency, her story is one of positive female martyrdom; like Virginie, the self-sacrificing heroine of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel, she places the desires, fantasies and codes of the community before her own. Again, it is no accident that such a model of virtuous femininity coalesces with the argument of race and a notion of benevolent whiteness to which Gustav appeals throughout the encounter, remarking on the "entfernte" (*VSD*, 16) and then "wunderbare Ähnlichkeit" (*VSD*, 18) ("distant," "wonderful similarity") Toni shares with his late fiancée.

Are Gustav's overtures to be seen as a calculating and sinister manipulation, or are they instead the innocent, if also awkward actions born of desperation? Babekan's seemingly innocuous observation at the beginning of the narrative that "Ein Weißer, der verfolgt wird, ist vor der Tür und *begehrt* eingelassen zu werden!" (*VSD*, 5; my stress) ("There is a white man, on the run, standing at the door [desiring] to be let in" [*BSD Engl.*, 138]) contains a subtle clue here. Beyond its idiomatic meaning of demanding or requesting entry (Ger. *Einlass begehren*), the verb 'begehren' carries with it the innuendo of erotic desire (Ger. *Begehren*, *Begierde*). Indeed, Gustav's pursuit of Toni belies a certain taken-for-grantedness of the girl's subservience and sexual availability, beginning with the self-explanatory manner in which he 'handles' Toni's body: "indem er sie lebhaft an seine Brust drückte" (*VSD*, 12) ("pressing her actively against his breast") or "[d]er Fremde, der, mit seinen beiden Händen, ihren schlanken Leib umfasst hielt"

(*VSD*, 17) (“the stranger, who was holding her slim body with both hands” [*BSD Engl.*, 146]). An attitude of conquest also pervades the verbal level when in order to garner her favour to the side of the whites, Gustav “whispered jestingly in her ear: whether perhaps it would take a white man to win her favor?” (*BSD Engl.*, 147).[360] By attempting to discredit his rival Konnelly, “a young Negro neighbor” (*BSD Engl.*, 146), such as in the question: “Fehlt es ihm denn an Vermögen, um sich häuslich, wie du es wünschest, mit dir niederzulassen?” (*VSD*, 17) (“Is it that Konnelly doesn’t have the means to set up the kind of household you would like?” [*BSD Engl.*, 146]), Gustav invokes a trope that was especially volatile in the context of Revolution – black-white competition – to establish who is the proper ‘Herr’ over Toni.

5.2. On the precipice of Eden

Little doubt that these tactics revivify with particular intensity the deep-seated conflicts and animosities at the heart of the plantation system. Assuming a position of natural dominance over the woman of colour, Gustav’s actions speak to the culture of interracial libertinage and colonial miscegenation that was historically rife in St. Domingue. At the same time, as Ette and other have pointed out, Kleist’s narrative also gestures towards the possibility of co-existence beyond the rigid strictures of colonialism.[361] Once the pair have consummated their union and Gustav has symbolically

[360] “[A]ls Gustav ihr scherzend ins Ohr geflüstert: ob es vielleicht ein Weißer sein müsse, der ihre Gunst davon tragen solle?” (*VSD*, 17).
[361] Cf. Ottmar Ette (2013), *op. cit.*

bequeathed Toni with the golden cross given to him by his late fiancée Mariane, he describes how their life might look like if they were to leave St. Domingo:

> Er beschrieb ihr, welch ein kleines Eigentum, frei und unabhängig, er an den Ufern der Aar besitze; eine Wohnung, bequem und geräumig genug, sie und auch ihre Mutter, wenn ihr Alter die Reise zulasse, darin aufzunehmen; Felder, Gärten, Wiesen und Weinberge; und einen alten ehrwürdigen Vater, der sie dankbar und liebreich daselbst, weil sie seinen Sohn gerettet, empfangen würde (*VSD*, 20).

> He described to her the small property, free and unencumbered, which he owned on the banks of the Aar; a house comfortable and roomy enough to shelter her and her mother, if the latter's health would permit her to undertake such a journey; fields, gardens, meadows, vineyards; and an old venerable father, who would receive them gratefully and kindly, because she had saved the life of his son (*BSD Engl.*, 149).

Gustav presents Toni with an alternative to the nightmare of the plantation and revolution, culminating in the image, reminiscent of the pastoral Swiss utopia depicted in Rousseau's *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloise*, of "fields, gardens, meadows and vineyards" and "a venerable father." This was an idyll that held strong persuasive power and allure for eighteenth-century audiences, including the author Kleist. From 1801 to 1802, fleeing political as well as personal turmoil, Kleist sojourned in the Swiss Aar and, as his many letters testify, encountered there the closest thing to an earthly paradise.[362] It impacted his particular vision of Eden which could not have deviated more sharply from the more exotic fantasies of Daniel Defoe or

[362] Cf. Kleists letter to friend Heinrich Zschokke dating from 2 March 1802: "Ich habe mir eine Insel in der Aare gemiethet, mit einem wohleingerichteten Häuschen, das ich in diesem Jahre bewohnen werde, um abzuwarten, wie sich die Dissonanz der Dinge auflösen wird." And to sister Ulrike Kleist dating from 1 May 1802: "— Übrigens muß ich hier wohlfeil leben, ich komme selten von der Insel, sehe niemand, lese keine Bücher, Zeitungen, kurz, brauche nichts, als mich selbst." In: Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe, hrsg. von Helmut Sembdner* (München: DTV, 2008).

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. In the novella *Das Erdbeben in Chili* of 1807, for instance, Eden is described in very European terms as “ein dunkles, von Pinien beschattetes Tal,”[363] a “dark valley cloaked in the shadow of pine trees.” In *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*, this same imagery is invoked in order to gesture towards another reality – an alternative course of things, far removed from the catastrophe of the modern European colonial endeavour. While in the “wilderness” [“Wildnis” (*VSD*, 8)] of St. Domingo, in search of Gustav’s relatives in a bid to storm the plantation and free Gustav from Congo Hoango, Toni is placed next to the “Stamm einer Pinie” (*VSD*, 34), the trunk of a pine tree. In order to reach Toni, Gustav’s uncle Herr Strömli has to move slowly and cautiously over the tangled roots that cover the path: “Er bewegte sich langsam über die den Weg durchflechtenden Kienwurzeln, dem Stamm der Pinie zu” (*VSD*, 34). The scene, in particular the symbolic manner in which Strömli is forced to pause and contemplate the rhizomatic entanglement that impedes any sense of linear movement, is one of the truly utopian moments in the novella. By intimating at Toni’s potential induction into the “Stamm” of the Strömli family through the invocation of a Swiss Eden, the scene infers, if momentarily, a dissolution of the racial dissonances that otherwise pervaded colonial Saint-Domingue/revolutionary Haiti.

Nevertheless, as Gustav’s constant regressions into the colonial headspace of domination and conquest demonstrate, the foundations upon which this

[363] Heinrich von Kleist, *Das Erbeben in Chili. Erzählung, hrsg. von Martin C. Wald* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2019), 11.

future utopia rests are extremely fragile. During the footbath scene, for instance, while Toni is symbolically positioned on her knees below him, he finds himself contemplating the girl's beauty, deciding "er hätte, bis auf die Farbe, die ihm anstößig war, schwören mögen, dass er nie etwas Schöneres gesehen" (*VSD*, 16) ("except for the color of her skin, which was repellent to him, he would have sworn that he never beheld anything more beautiful" [*BSD Engl.*, 146]). These jarring and highly loaded moments in the novella support Susanne Zantop's finding that Gustav's perception of Toni is indebted to a dialectic of interracial desire: "caught between attraction and repulsion."[364] One sentiment can just as easily collapse into the other. In the end, Gustav's underlying disgust crystallises in the novella's final sequence when, after having bound the protagonist to the bed in an effort to save him, Toni appears before him carrying the black infant son of Congo Hoango Seppy in her arms. For Gustav, fixated on the physiognomy of racial difference, this disturbing apparition cohabitates with the idea of Toni as a tropical temptress. Calling her a "whore" in a fit of rage ("Hure!" [*VSD*, 41]), he shoots her through the chest before "blowing his own brains out" in the realisation of his mistake (*VSD*, 41). In lieu of a defiant scenario of re-birth and re-invention out of the doldrums of colonial domination, death and desolation are the final images left with the reader in the novella's tragic conclusion.

[364] Zantop (2003), *op. cit.*, 202. As Robert Young has argued, at the heart of contemporaneous European racial theories and constructions of Others is an obsession with racial hybridisation, or what he calls 'colonial desire.' According to Young, the colonial discourse's fascination with hybridisation and miscegenation is based on a structure of "simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action." In: Robert C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 161.

6. Conclusion

These developments can leave little doubt that Kleist's novella contains a damning critique, rather than a defence of apology of European colonisation. Gustav's violent outburst at Toni, drudged up from the depths of a deep-seated colonial mindset, is the last desperate plea of a system witnessing in its own demise at the hands of the enslaved and disenfranchised. Threatened by Toni's agency, whose subservience he takes for granted, Gustav retreats to the headspace of colonial dominance, shooting holes through her coloured body which he subconsciously fears and despises. Conveyed through the mystified uncle's admonishment "Du unheurerer Mensch!" (*VSD*, 39) ("You monster!" [*BSD Engl.*, 163]), Kleist's novella leaves no space for ambiguity that Gustav's actions are deplorable and his fears unfounded.

The encounter between Gustav and Toni only builds on the conflict that permeates the lives of the novella's other characters, Congo Hoango and Babekan. Linking all of these storylines together is a history of colonisation, slavery and white dominance in the plantation system, packaged and marketed innocuously as a blissful rural utopia among family members. Set amid the dissolution of this system, Kleist's novella delineates three alternative pathways of revolution, as was demonstrated. Whereas Congo Hoango's story was characterised by a commitment to violent resistance, resulting from his lived experience of deracination and enslavement to Herr Villeneuve, Babekan's storyline was one of subversion, the masterly performance of stereotypes and clichés attributed to the *mulâtresse* figure

in the European pseudo-science of racial theory. Toni's story, the most modern and divergent of the three pathways, recalls the ambivalent lived experience of mixed-race people being on the precipice of different ethnicities, cultural ties and loyalties. By trusting Gustav and contesting the simple classification of all whites as evil, Toni demonstrates her capacity for free thought and agency, yet these are precisely the characteristics that paradoxically seal her tragic fate. In the end, Gustav's actions only confirm the deep-seated distrust for whites harboured by the novella's two other 'coloured' characters.

Together, these three plotlines engender a deconstruction of the idea of the plantation as a family that had historically powered colonial French Saint-Domingue. Situated within a wider historical and discursive framework, the constellation described in the novella returns us to the place where we began this thesis. Gustav's behaviour, his lingering sense of white innocence and miscomprehension of the underlying indignation that fuels the resistance and subversion around him is the inheritance of Crusoe and the *petite société* of Bernardin's novel. Kleist's novella has been criticised for reifying and perpetuating certain "endurious epithets" – "Neger," "Mesitza," and "Mullatin", as well as certain tropes of the Haitian Revolution, for example of the mixed-race 'tropical temptress,' and for its unfiltered violence that continues to shock and disturb even contemporary audiences. Yet, *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* is an illustration that only by involving and confronting such power structures head-on can they truly be dismantled. Within the context of the thesis, Kleist's novella was shown to put an end –

a definitive end – to the dominant fiction of European colonisation, as popularised among others in the canonical works of Daniel Defoe and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre: that of ‘planting and settling.’ While Kleist’s narrative may offer a glimmer of hope for future co-existence between the different ethnicities and cultures, as Ottmar Ette has argued, the violent ending of the novel suggests that this utopia is impossible if racist ways of thinking are allowed to persist in the way that had been dominant until the Haitian Revolution.

CONCLUSION

This thesis assessed the part played by fictional literature in imagining the European settler colony. Harmoniously planting and settling the colonies, and reproducing the European homeland in the process, was the ideal that informed these narratives – albeit culminating, in each case, in a uniquely different version and vision of what the settler colony could be. How did the texts individually stage the act of colonisation? What specific cultural techniques of propagation and anti-propagation, planting and displanting, were observable in each? What discursive influences did the text summon, but also: what specifically 'literary' qualities did the texts possess? Finally, how did the texts go about negotiating a European presence in the non-European world? What arguments did they present for the legitimacy of the settler colony, and where do they define its limits? Following my analysis of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Paul et Virginie* (1780) and *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* (1811), I draw some final conclusions in relation to the questions posed in the introduction of this thesis.

With regard to the act of colonisation and the role of cultural techniques in the novels, my analysis showed how the central fantasy linking these fictions was that of an ideally planted and populated island colony. This fantasy was, as was shown in chapter one dealing with the theoretical roots of the settler colony, itself indebted to an Edenic narrative that gained traction in the early modern period. The early modern European colonial project, as imagined by Francis Bacon, John Locke and Daniel Defoe, positioned itself as a green enterprise, a material as well as discursive act

of gardening and planting which sought the restitution of Edenic abundance through establishing European dominion over the world. In each fictional text that was analysed – be this in the religious inflections of Crusoe's journey to an uninhabited island, the recovery narrative elaborated in *Paul and Virginie*, or Gustav's nostalgia for the 'fortunate isle' in *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* – European expansion into the new world was in some form or another indebted to the dream of recovering an original garden paradise.

At the same time, venturing into the *terra incognita* of the new world was also associated with a set of complex challenges and problems, as was shown. The idea that subsisting colonial subjects, and thus the long-term project of the settler colony, was ever going to be easy is thwarted right at the beginning of Crusoe's sojourn on his "*Island of Despair*" (*RC*, 81), when, in the face of the wild, unenclosed and infertile landscape, the character literally spends his first night sleeping up a tree. Precisely because the colonial endeavour was shown to be associated with so many uncertainties and unknowns, 'cultural techniques' played a pivotal role within the narrative development, facilitating the characters' subjugation and colonisation of the island. This tendency was most observable in *Robinson Crusoe* and *Paul et Virginie*, the more optimistic of the three fictions, where techniques of clearing, enclosing, grafting, transplanting featured prominently in the protagonists' attempts to cultivate paradise and re-create part of their homelands in the process. However, marked differences in the scope and scale of their cultivating activities were also discernible. Whereas Crusoe's planting of an uninhabited tropical island were shown to be indebted to

Baconian ideas of human mastery and the infinite utility of the natural world, the crux of Saint-Pierre's novel *Paul et Virginie,* set in an already established colony and known for proffering an early form of environmentalism, was that there were limits to such an enterprise. In Kleist's narrative set in the Haitian Revolution, on the other hand, the question of cultivation has already been replaced with that of labour. Tellingly, the first act the formerly enslaved Congo Hoango performs upon securing his freedom is "razing the ground" and "desolating" the plantation in a calculated inversion of the green empire's rhetoric of benign propagation and improvement.

'Planting the island' and dealing with the postlapsarian vegetation in the process, figured in the texts as an avowed pathway to both material and metaphysical fulfilment, frequently culminating in highly moralised inflections instilling the 'virtue' and 'value' of planting. However, as was demonstrated in chapter one, planting and settling are necessarily connected with a concomitant process of *displanting*, *displacement* and other forms of 'anti-propagation' such as *clearing, deracination* and *uprooting*. Attending to the ethical and moral quandary of colonial dispossession represented the second challenge common to all texts analysed. In *Robinson Crusoe*, schooled in arguments developed by Bacon, Locke and Defoe himself, this negotiation manifested above all in the casting of Crusoe as a paternal benefactor and cultivator who, by improving the island, had earned the right to possess it. Clearly straining under the pressures of late-enlightenment cultural relativism, Bernardin de Saint-

Pierre's novel *Paul et Virginie* drew on metaphors of virginal purity and feminine virtue in order to frame the little society's colonisation of Mauritius as an innocent act of maternal and brotherly love. But again, their 'improvement' of the island's vegetation and topography, even if stemming from a purportedly more benign, 'ecological' mindset, served as an implicit justification for their assuming ownership of the mountain gorge in which they had unwittingly taken up residence.

A separate, yet related issue was that of slavery which occupied a central, if also jarring place all three narratives. Just as the new-world plantation marked the moment in which the garden, a landscape of subsistence, was transformed into one of profit, the system of African slave labour on which it subsisted was predicated on prolonged, dehumanising acts of deracination, natal alienation and disempowerment. By abiding by a doctrine of 'reciprocity' (premised on the idea that the bonds of family, culture and community could be substituted by those of the 'plantation family,' if slave owners only extended greater "care" towards the enslaved), both Defoe and Bernardin's fictions conformed to the dominant perspective of the eighteenth century. Like the ideology of improvement, reciprocity formed part of the 'script' that was designed to ensure the longevity and preserve the 'good face' of the settler colony in spite of its more violent and destructive tendencies. In chapter four of this thesis, I showed how Kleist's novella *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* essentially deviates from the script of reciprocity, showing the correlation between the current malaise of revolution and the act of deracination that robbed the enslaved characters

and so many other ‘slaves’ of their dignity and humanity: “eingedenk der Tyrannei, die ihn seinem Vaterland entrissen hatte” (*VSD*, 3) (“remembering the tyranny that tore him from his [fatherland]” [*BSD Engl.*, 136]).

If *Robinson Crusoe* provided “a script for the European colonial project at the beginning of the eighteenth century,”[365] as Ann Marie Fallon has claimed, then the texts analysed here demonstrated how this script nevertheless underwent some drastic changes over the course of time. As I have attempted to show, it is possible to read *Robinson Crusoe*, *Paul et Virginie* and *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* as respectively marking the beginning, middle and end phase of the European colonial project of planting and settling in literature. Yet, ultimately, I understand these changing phases and faces of literature less as a function of their chronology, than of their differing perspectives on the settler colony project, which transcend the distinct temporal and spatial contexts in which they were created. In assessing their divergent visions of planting and settling the colonies, the competing agendas and cultural attachments – not to mention the varying experience and intellect – of the authors also need to be considered.

Concerning the questions of the texts’ engagement with non-fiction sources and their distinctly literary qualities, this thesis has attempted to show the indebtedness of each fiction to a wider discursive formation encompassing a broad spectrum of scientific, religious, political, artistic and other forms of

[365] Ann Marie Fallon, *op. cit.*, 1.

cultural production. As was demonstrated, the function of literature within the discourse of European colonisation is anything but as mere 'supporting evidence' for extraliterary knowledge; instead, fictional literature was proven in its capacity to test, verify and stabilise – but also potentially correct and destabilise knowledge about the distant venture of settling the 'new world.' It was also invoked in its ability to embellish historical reality and thus indelibly and lastingly shape the collective imagination and memory. The fact that Daniel Defoe modelled Crusoe's island sojourn on earlier accounts of colonisation and settlement of the new world meant that his novel was not just imagining the birth of the settler colony, but also implicitly re-writing the history of the British West Indies 'in miniature.' In *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*, by contrast, embodying the unreliable narrator with a palpable sense of irony and subjectivity meant that the idea of objective historical 'truth' became problematic and, ultimately, alienating. In this regard, Kleist's text might be seen an early example of "historiographic metafiction."[366]

Finally, with regard to the structures of tutelage, custodianship, cohabitation and intermixture envisaged in the novels, the analysis showed that eighteenth-century authors were already developing sophisticated ways of thinking about the global flows of people, multicultural societies and complex identities that European expansion and colonisation would inevitably set in motion. They did this largely through the language of plants

[366] Cf. Bernd Engler, "The Dismemberment of Clio: Fictionality, Narrativity, and the Construction of Historical Reality in Historiographic Metafiction." In: Bernd Engler and Kurt Müller (eds.), *Historiographic metafiction in modern American and Canadian literature* (Paderborn: F Schöningh, 1994), 13-33.

and botanical metaphors, such as transplantation and grafting, which, as we saw in the example of *Paul et Virginie* and *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*, needed not only serve ideas of European superiority and the natural subservience of supposedly 'inferior peoples.' It is perhaps no wonder, then, that in postcolonial theory and literature today, botanical and agricultural terms and metaphors like *diaspora*, *déracination*, *rhizome* and *hybridity* are being invoked like never before as a way of decentering Western myths of 'cultivation' and 'civilisation,' projected towards an imagined Other, be this the 'wild' plant, the 'unruly' landscape or the 'naive' and 'child-like native.' A *way out* of this paradigm, one could argue, is being forged by postcolonial authors today in that in the wake of half a millennium of European dominance they are devising and imagining forms of counter-authority, subjectivity, flourishment and agency beyond the dystopia of the 'colonial garden.'

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List of Abbreviations

BSD Engl. *– The Betrothal in Santo Domingo (English version).*

HB *– A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes.*

PaV Engl. *– Paul and Virginia* (English version).

PeV *– Paul et Virginie*.

FRC *– The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*.

RC *– The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner.*

VSD *– Die Verlobung in St. Domingo.*

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