

# **BAKHTIN'S THEORY OF THE LITERARY CHRONOTOPE: REFLECTIONS, APPLICATIONS, PERSPECTIVES**

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Nele Bemong, Pieter Borghart, Michel De Dobbeleer,  
Kristoffel Demoen, Koen De Temmerman & Bart Keunen (eds.)



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*Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives*

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# The Chronotope and the Study of Literary Adaptation: The Case of *Robinson Crusoe*

Tara Collington

In the “Concluding Remarks” to the chronotope essay, Bakhtin offers the following passage to explain the complex relationship between a work of art and its socio-historic context:

The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation, as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers. Of course this process of exchange is itself chronotopic: it occurs first and foremost in the historically developing social world, but without ever losing contact with changing historical space. We might even speak of a special *creative* chronotope inside which this exchange between work and life occurs, and which constitutes the distinctive life of the work. (FTC: 254)

While Bakhtin seems to be referring to the myriad possible interpretations of a work of art by current and future generations of readers<sup>1</sup>, I would suggest that one very specific interpretive act seeks fully to engage a work within various socio-historic contexts, allowing it to be creatively renewed: the process of adaptation. In reworking a familiar story according to existing social, cultural, and aesthetic norms, the adaptor ensures its “subsequent life” in a new context. While I will not pursue the notion that this situation constitutes its own special chronotope, I will argue for the centrality of the chronotope to understanding the theory and practice of adaptation.

One of the most common strategies of adaptation is, of course, to update the source by situating the story in a more contemporary and hence more accessible setting. Although Bakhtin himself does not discuss adaptation, with the transposition of spatial and temporal coordinates so often at play, the chronotope would seem a concept ideally suited to the field of adaptation studies. However, this concept has played a fairly limited role in theoretical discussions of adaptation, aside from some notable exceptions in the field of film studies.

This paper proposes a reflection on the potential of the chronotope as a heuristic tool in the field of adaptation studies. My goal is to situate the chronotope in the context of adaptation studies<sup>2</sup>, specifically with regard to perhaps the most central treatise in the field of literary adaptation, Gérard Genette’s *Palimpsests: Literature in*

*the Second Degree*, and to draw attention to perhaps one of the most overlooked works in the field of adaptation studies, Caryl Emerson's chronotope-inspired *Boris Godunov: Transpositions of a Russian Theme*. I will demonstrate how the chronotope might be used in the study of literary adaptation by examining the relationships between Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, its historical sources, and Michel Tournier's twentieth-century adaptation of the Robinson story, *Friday*. My analysis draws upon three of the semantic levels of the chronotope presented in the introduction to this volume: (1) chronotopic motifs linked to two opposing themes: enthusiasm for European colonial expansionism and skepticism regarding the supremacy of European culture; (2) major chronotopes that determine the narrative structure of a text; and (3) the way in which such major chronotopes may be linked to broader questions of genre.

Since its publication in 1719, *Robinson Crusoe* has inspired numerous literary and film adaptations, even giving rise to a specific term, the "robinsonade", to describe an adventure narrative in which the protagonist struggles to survive in a natural setting far from civilization (O'Malley 2009). An analysis of the network of Robinson intertexts seems almost obligatory in theoretical discussions in the field of adaptation studies, whether the focus is on cinematic adaptation (Stam 2000: 66-7; Mayne 1988: 13-9), literary adaptation (Genette 1997: 357-67; Sanders 2006: 106-12), or a more general theory of adaptation (Hutcheon 2006: 143, 170). In fact, the Robinson story fits H. Porter Abbott's definition of what he terms "masterplots": "recurrent skeletal stories, belonging to cultures and individuals that play a powerful role in questions of identity, values, and the understanding of life" (2002: 192).<sup>3</sup> For Abbott, masterplots are often closely linked to certain character types and also to certain literary subgenres (2002: 45). In engaging in a comparative study of three varieties of "robinsonades" (historical narratives, Defoe's novel, and Tournier's novel), I am deliberately revisiting an oft-discussed intertextual matrix for several reasons. In focusing solely on written narratives, I am deliberately dissociating adaptation theory from questions of medium specificity, agreeing with Linda Hutcheon that "not all adaptations necessarily involve a shift in medium or mode of engagement, though many do" (2006: 170). The choice of these specific texts is also in response to Genette's (in my view, mistaken) assertion that the temporal and spatial transpositions effected by Tournier have little impact on our understanding of this adaptation. In undertaking a chronotopic analysis of the texts in question, I hope to demonstrate the importance of such diegetic transpositions. Finally, in engaging in a chronotopic analysis of the relationship between source and target texts, I hope to demonstrate the heuristic potential of the chronotope as a tool for the study of adaptation, and also to suggest that it may serve as the foundation for a Bakhtinian theory of adaptation

## The Chronotope in Adaptation Studies

Aside from literary studies, the chronotope is most often deployed as a tool for analysis in film studies, as film effects the visual concretization of space and unfolds over time. Among film scholars, Robert Stam was probably the first systematically to use a Bakhtinian methodology to forge an approach to comparative cinema studies that considers broad questions of history and genre while examining the representation of time and space in a film by studying aspects of setting, decor, pacing and rhythm as well as technical aspects relating to camera work. Film functions by reactivating well-recognized generic models (borrowed from literature or specific to film); therefore, the extent to which a film conforms to or deviates from the model (from our horizon of expectations), determines, in large part, our understanding and appreciation of the work in question. Stam's two monographs on cinematic adaptations of literature, *Subversive Pleasures* (1989) and *Literature Through Film* (2005a), as well as his introduction to a volume of articles on film adaptation (2005b), do in fact mention the chronotope briefly, pointing out its usefulness as a conceptual category but not according it a central role in adaptation theory. Stam and other film scholars use the chronotope not only to examine the relationship between a literary source and a film, but also to examine relationships between films as subsequent adaptations of a source text are produced. In the same vein, the chronotope may facilitate a comparative analysis of films within a specific subgenre. Thus, while some critics are concerned with the specific challenges of transferring a literary text to the screen, others use the chronotope as a means of structuring the comparison of shifting spatio-temporal frameworks between films, that is, within the same medium.<sup>4</sup>

In the field of literary adaptation, the most sustained examination of the theory and practice of adaptation remains Genette's *Palimpsests*. This systematic and highly-detailed account of the various processes and types of adaptation remains the cornerstone for all current criticism. More recently, as in the field of film criticism, scholars have begun to debate possible approaches to the study of literary adaptation, although no common consensus seems to have been reached, as studies adopt a wide range of approaches: those based in structuralism, genetic criticism and source-studies, and broader cultural-studies approaches (Cox 2000; Deppman, Ferrar and Grodon 2004; Scolnicov and Holland 1989; Groensteen 1998). As well, over the past decade or so, criticism has focused on shared strategies of adaptation common to various media (Mercier and Pelletier 1999; Plana 2004), and on the intersection between adaptation and the related notions of intertextuality and appropriation (Bouillaguet 1996). Interestingly, Bakhtinian methodologies have not made as substantial inroads in the field of literary adaptation as they have in cinema studies. For example, two recent studies of adaptation theory, Julie Sanders's *Adaptation and Appropriation* and Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation*, mention Bakhtin only in passing, and then only to evoke concepts such as "carnival" (Sanders 2006: 72) and the "dialogic" (Hutcheon 2006: 21).

I intend to argue for the centrality of the chronotope in a potential theory of adaptation and will juxtapose two differing perspectives regarding the significance of spatio-temporal transpositions in adaptation theory by contrasting Genette's *Palimpsests* and Emerson's *Boris Godunov*. In their studies of techniques of adaptation, both Genette and Emerson propose the dissociation of the story itself (considered a static norm along the lines of Abbott's "masterplot") from its temporo-spatial framework (which provides the locus for dynamic change). However, the two critics differ radically in the importance they accord to such transpositions. I will begin by briefly examining Genette's view on spatio-temporal transposition, and then will discuss in greater detail Emerson, whose own view of adaptation is firmly grounded in Bakhtinian literary criticism, and who uses Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope in order to outline a theory of adaptation.

In *Palimpsests*, Genette clearly distinguishes between "*diegetic* transposition" involving changes to the "diegesis", or "the spatiotemporal world" where the story takes place, and "*pragmatic* transposition, or a modification of the events and actions in the plot" (1997: 294). According to Genette, "transposition operates precisely [...] by dissociating action and diegesis: e.g. by transferring the same – or almost the same – action into another world" (ibid.: 295). He terms changes to the spatio-temporal world "*transdigetization*" and acknowledges that it does not occur "without at least some changes in the action itself", noting that diegetic transposition "inevitably and necessarily entails a few pragmatic transpositions" (ibid.: 296). Genette treats other types of changes to the representation of time as a function of "potential transformations of the narrative mode" (ibid.: 286). Thus, he views changes to the temporal order – what he calls "temporal reshuffling" involving analepses and prolepses (ibid.: 286) –, as well as changes in the duration and frequency of events, as a function of narrative, analogous to changes in narrative voice.

To return to the category of diegetic transposition, Genette proposes a vast array of possible changes that it might encompass, including changes to a character's name, age and gender or nationality. He is also careful to single out as a separate category the case of "diegetic modernization" which involves the "wholesale transfer of an ancient plot into a modern setting" and the practice of anachronism, or "larding an ancient plot with modern stylistic or thematic details" (ibid.: 310). Whether or not an adaptation embarks on a wholesale modernization of the temporo-spatial framework, Genette contends that "the habitual movement of diegetic transposition is a movement of proximization: the hypertext transposes the diegesis of its hypotext to bring it up to date and closer to its own audience (in temporal, geographic, or social terms)" (ibid.: 304). In other words, adaptors rely on various types of diegetic transposition involving temporal, geographic and social translation as a means of actualizing a work for a contemporary target audience. For Genette, since diegetic transposition is merely one of many types of transposition at the adaptor's disposal, the impact of diegetic transposition on the potential reception of an adaptation can vary greatly. For example, in his analysis of Tournier's *Friday*, Genette points out that the French author shifts both the temporal framework of the story (from 1659 to 1759)



and its spatial framework (from an island in the Caribbean to an island in the Pacific) but then dismisses the significance of these changes. Genette deems the temporal framework to have been simply “arbitrarily transferred”, and he contends that the “change in oceans [...] has no real thematic function” (ibid.: 369). In this case, Genette seems to dismiss the possibility of according any significance to a diegetic transposition, a position with which, I think, Emerson would strongly disagree.

Emerson accords a far greater importance to diegetic transpositions, and this leads her to re-conceptualize the very nature of adaptation. In fact, Emerson’s approach to adaptation is premised on the chronotope. In her comparative study of various versions of the tale of Boris Godunov, she asserts that most discussions of adaptation are plagued by a confusion regarding the use of the terminology:

Among the distinctions most often blurred is that between medium and genre. Problems ascribed to the one are often problems of the other. Discussions of transposition often delineate, for example, the move from novel to film. But to see the shift along that axis is misleading. Film, unlike the novel, is not a genre but a medium. Its equivalent would be print, or marble, or the acoustic building blocks of music – not a sonata or a sonnet. Genre has its conventions, medium its material constraints. [...] Medium merely provides the material within which genre operates. (1986: 4-5)

Emerson thus suggests that we need a definition of genre that is conceptual, and not a function of the notion of medium and turns to Bakhtin’s chronotope for help. The chronotope allows Emerson to distinguish between trans-media and trans-generic adaptations:

[...] if we conceive of genre in terms of chronotope, then a shift in medium may or may not occasion a shift in genre. The important changes in a narrative take place not when the medium shifts but when the chronotope changes. Within a new chronotope the events may be the same, but the probability and the significance of events happening in a certain way will have changed. There is a change in the evaluative aspect, the moral quality, of the narrative. (1986: 8)

Emerson compares various versions of the Boris story in a variety of what she terms “media”; that is, in history, folk-tales, drama and opera. She demonstrates how specific adaptors exploit the resources of their chosen medium (music in the case of opera), but she primarily focuses on generic or chronotopic transpositions, and what they might tell us about the importance of the story in shifting cultural contexts. For Emerson, these chronotopic shifts prove as interesting, if not more, than any shift in media:

Masterpieces in a genre, powerful conceptualizations of a certain sort of time and space, always contain more than a given epoch can absorb. When these works are built upon in later times, different aspects of form

emerge as significant and thus encourage different patterns of response, specific ‘counterversions’. A theme is *freed* from one context into another, and this liberation is the first step in transposing a theme. Across genres, in response to changing political needs and changing concepts of art, a known story accumulates new contexts and yet remains recognizably of one piece. (1986: 9)

As previously noted, film scholars have demonstrated that, while the chronotope may be a useful tool for examining inter-medial adaptation between novel and film, it also provides a tool for studying intra-medial adaptations. Adaptation can thus be understood not only in terms of a shift of medium, but also in terms of shifting temporo-spatial frameworks within the same medium. A change of the dominant chronotope, the overlapping of chronotopes, or the introduction of a new chronotope in subsequent versions of the same story reflect different cultural preoccupations and can account for the diversity of audience reactions to retellings of the same tale. I will turn now to an analysis of three instances of the Robinson masterplot, examining how a chronotopic approach might help us to trace shifting cultural preoccupations from historical sources to Defoe’s literary text to one of its many subsequent adaptations.

## From Historical Narrative to Fictional Narrative: *Robinson Crusoe* and its Sources

Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* is generally acknowledged to have been inspired by a variety of historical sources such as accounts of various shipwrecks and published travel journals. Without engaging in an exhaustive study of possible sources, I have decided to focus on two of these real-life adventures as being of particular interest because of their wide-spread dissemination during the ten years prior to the publication of Defoe’s novel and also because of the significant chronotopic differences between these sources and the literary work they may have inspired.<sup>5</sup>

The first account concerns the story of a “Moskito Indian” marooned for three years on an island in the Juan Fernandez archipelago (some six hundred kilometers off the coast of Chile), published by William Dampier in his *New Voyage Round the World* (1698: 84). The second, more famous account, relates the adventures of a young Scottish sailor, Alexander Selkirk, who was also left on an island in the Juan Fernandez archipelago in 1704 after quarreling with the captain of his ship. Selkirk spent four years and four months on the island before being rescued. Edward Cooke and Woodes Rogers, both captains on the expedition that inadvertently found Selkirk, each published their own versions of the rescue in 1712, while in 1713 the journalist Richard Steele published an article in *The Englishman* in which he recollected having met Selkirk shortly after his return to civilization. Roger’s account stresses that Selkirk kept himself employed “in reading, singing Psalms, and praying; so that he said he was a better Christian while in this Solitude than ever he was before, or than, he

was afraid, he should ever be again” (1712: 5). Steele similarly highlights the fact that, after quelling thoughts of suicide, Selkirk reconciled himself to his condition through reading the Bible and through devoting himself to the hard labor of mastering his new surroundings. Indeed, he was so attuned to his environment and way of life that he had no real thought of leaving, and would later wax nostalgic about his island home: “When the Ship which brought him off the Island came in, he received them with the greatest Indifference, with relation to the Prospect of going off with them, but with great Satisfaction in an Opportunity to refresh and help them. The Man frequently bewailed his Return to the World, which could not, he said, with all its Enjoyments, restore him to the Tranquility of his Solitude” (1714: 172-3).

Although it is possible to debate whether or not Defoe *directly* adapted one or more of these sources, these historical narratives clearly formed part of the common popular imagination at the time. Two aspects of these tales are worth noting in terms of potential diegetic transformations to a readily-recognizable masterplot: (1) the time-frame of the island sojourn is fairly limited (three or four years); and (2) the island itself is situated in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Chile thus being, from a European perspective, on the far side of the world.

In suggesting that *Robinson Crusoe* is perhaps a literary adaptation of these historical sources, I am interested in two significant diegetic transformations effected by Defoe. First, the prolongation of the temporal frame: Defoe’s protagonist spends 28 years, 2 months and 19 days on the island. Second, Defoe chooses to relocate the spatial context of the action. Crusoe’s ship is sailing on the Atlantic side of South America, in the Caribbean, and he is shipwrecked on an island off the coast of Venezuela. Why should Defoe choose to decontextualize such a well-known story? Tournier, reflecting on the novel he chose to adapt, concludes that the new location was probably motivated by a desire to capitalize on cultural associations with this nearer location, the Caribbean, in the age of colonial expansion, being ultimately richer in connotations than the Pacific (1977: 217-8). In other words, Defoe situates his literary adaptation in a location his target audience could easily appropriate and associate with a particular colonial world view.

Paul Smethurst reaches a similar conclusion, stating that the Caribbean had “a ‘special place’ in the European imagination because it marked the first frontier between the Old World of Europe and the New World of America” (2000: 225). In *Robinson Crusoe*, the representation of the island space is therefore “typical of the colonialist discourse that articulates the empty place, the almost-nowhere place, the place without history and without culture” (ibid.: 224). Defoe’s displacement of the action from the Pacific to the Caribbean thus fully exploits an image already present in the collective consciousness of his audience, that of the island paradise waiting for the arrival of the European settler to fully realize its potential – an element absent from the historical narratives where mere survival is at stake. I would add that this spatial transposition situates the action in an ocean frequently crossed, at the heart of maritime commerce, where one might expect a rapid rescue. The fact that Robinson’s

exile lasts more than twenty-eight years exploits the spatio-temporal tension between historical reality and literary contrivance. The irony of Robinson and his island remaining unnoticed in a region so amply explored clearly situates Defoe's rendering in the realm of fiction and distinguishes it from its historical precursors.

While film adaptations of *Robinson Crusoe*<sup>6</sup> tend to focus only on the shipwreck and the meeting with Friday, it is important to remember that the novel comprises no fewer than five sea voyages and one long journey across France on foot. As well, right from the very first sentence of the novel, a major theme seems to be the idea of adapting to new circumstances and, indeed, of profiting from them:

I was born in the Year 1632, in the City of *York*, of a good Family, tho' not of that Country, my Father being a Foreigner of *Bremen*, who settled first at *Hull*: He got a good Estate by Merchandise, and leaving off his Trade, lived afterwards at *York*, from whence he had married my Mother, whose Relations were named *Robinson*, a very good Family in the Country, and from whom I was called *Robinson Kreutznaer*; but by the usual Corruption of Words in *England*, we are now called, nay we call our selves, and write our name *Crusoe*, and so my companions always call'd me. (Defoe 1994: 4)

In effect, this sentence gives us the chronotopic model that governs all the subsequent action: Robinson will undergo a series of displacements and in each case he will try to acquire material security. Against the advice of his father, young Robinson opts for a life of adventure and tries his hand at international trade. During his first voyage, he is saved from a shipwreck; during the second, to Africa, he sells his merchandise for a profit. During a third voyage to Africa, his ship is attacked by a Turkish vessel, and Robinson is taken captive to become the slave of the captain. In fact, Robinson spends two years in captivity, tending his master's garden before contriving an escape. After all sorts of adventures, he finds himself in Brazil where he lives for several years, buying a plantation and cultivating the land, and, in spite of his own experience as a slave, acquiring a black slave of his own. These preliminary voyages serve as a *mise en abyme* for the fourth ill-fated voyage that ends in the shipwreck on the deserted island. The fifth sea voyage recounts Robinson's return to his island years after his rescue. The island has been colonized by Spanish settlers to whom Robinson bequeaths tracts of land. He happily enumerates the improvements made to the island by the colonists and notes that twenty or so children have been born to the settlers (ibid.: 220). In Defoe's version of the story, the island is no longer the tranquil refuge of a solitary man, but rather a bustling colony experiencing an economic and demographic boom. The island space has been tamed.

To this mastery of space can be added mastery of time, even without traditional tools for measuring its passage. Although Robinson states that "as for an exact Reckoning of Days, after I had once lost it, I could never recover it again", when he is rescued he learns that he has in fact "kept a true Reckoning of Years" (ibid.: 179). Defoe's

Robinson succeeds in mastering time and also in harnessing the cycle of nature on the island for agriculture; eventually, thanks to the birth of the settlers' children, he will also see the temporal continuity of a human presence on the island guaranteed.

In Bakhtinian terms, I would identify a "colonial chronotope"<sup>7</sup> as the central structuring principal of Defoe's novel. Robinson's project on the island resembles his project in Brazil and even his chores when a captive: his task is to take a series of circumscribed spaces (the garden, the plantation, the island) and impose on them an agricultural rhythm. We see the creation of a colonial plantation, surrounded by a hostile wilderness on which the colonist attempts to impose order. The fluidity of time, marked by the monotony of a series of indistinguishable days, is segmented and organized by the settler. As other critics have already so aptly noted, Defoe's novel can be considered "the prototypical colonial novel of the eighteenth century, if not in all of English literature" (McInelly 2003: 1), thus creating a new novelistic sub-genre. At the time Defoe composed his text, the European colonial project was still in its infancy, still promising and prosperous. The European who braves the test of solitude proves equal to the task: he succeeds in his colonial project, exploiting the natural space and imposing on it his orderly routines and daily rhythms. Furthermore, he emerges from his trial unscathed, his Christian piety stronger than ever. Not until the early twentieth-century, after increasing failures and various wars for colonial independence, does the colonial novel begin to register the moral degeneration of its protagonists (I am thinking in particular of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, published in 1902), which leads me to *Friday*, Michel Tournier's mid-twentieth-century adaptation of the Crusoe story.

### *Friday: A Twentieth-Century Adaptation of Robinson Crusoe*

I have already mentioned that Tournier makes two important diegetic transpositions in his literary adaptation of the Robinson story. First, he delays the action by a full century, situating the shipwreck in 1759. Several critics have noted that this date marks the publication of Rousseau's *Emile*, in which the author proposes one single book as the object of study of his pupil: *Robinson Crusoe*.<sup>8</sup> Not that Rousseau recommends reading the entire book; rather, "this novel stripped of all of its irrelevancies, beginning with Robinson's shipwreck on his island and ending with the arrival of the ship which comes to take him away, will form both Emile's amusement and his instruction" (Rousseau 1969: 455; my translation). This passage seems to provide the guiding principle for most subsequent adaptations (whether literary or cinematographic) of Defoe's text, as the story is reduced to the essential shipwreck and struggle for survival. The twenty-eight years that Tournier's Robinson spends on the island thus cover the years 1759 to 1787. This is, of course, the period that sees the beginning of the end of the French colonial empire, and later of the English empire as well. The Treaty of Paris at the end of the Seven Years War resulted in the loss of Canada and several other colonies, including Dominica in the Caribbean. The independence

of Haiti would soon follow. This period is also marked by the War of Independence in the United States and announces the Civil War to follow.<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that Tournier's Friday is half Araucanian (indigenous Chilean) and half African. He is a visible product of a century of colonization, exploitation, and the forced relocation of Africans, his mixed race serving as a reminder of the slave trade at the heart of colonial commerce in the New World. In Defoe's novel, the exploitation of supposedly inferior races is a given: there is no question that Robinson will have a black slave in Brazil and another slave on the island. Furthermore, rather oddly, Defoe's Friday has very little to offer Robinson other than his labor. In Tournier's adaptation, Friday is clearly more independent, and more capable than Robinson of living in harmony with the island. For example, during his first night on the island, Friday refuses Robinson's food and instead "chewed constantly some sort of wild berry, making Robinson wonder for a moment where he had found them" (Tournier 1997: 136). Tournier's Friday thus taps into resources overlooked by Robinson. The temporal context in which Tournier situates his adaptation encourages the reader to re-evaluate the colonial project of the preceding century and also to re-evaluate the portrait of Friday found in Defoe. While it is true that Defoe's Friday very quickly learns to accomplish any task Robinson sets for him, it is also true that he has no insight to offer in return: he more closely resembles what one might imagine a European outsider to be like rather than the indigenous person he is supposed to be.

Aside from this temporal transposition, I have already mentioned that Tournier chooses to adhere more closely to (possible) historical sources of the Robinson tale, situating his adaptation on the island of Juan Fernandez.<sup>10</sup> Tournier's Robinson finds himself on a Pacific island, far from Europe and the colonizing imperative governing the Caribbean, an island which, far from being a blank slate for the European capitalist imagination has a strong temporo-spatial identity. The island space seems impossible to conquer, always threatening to revert to overgrown nature. This island may also be said to be "out of time", in the sense that this region of the Pacific Ocean, unlike the Caribbean, is not firmly associated with historical events relating to European colonial expansion. Once shipwrecked, Robinson loses track of the historical progress of the century and, unlike his literary precursor, loses his very ability to track time. In fact, the narrator tells us that "Robinson felt himself cut off from the human calendar as much as he was separated from mankind by the expanse of waters, reduced to living on an island in time as well as in space" (Tournier 1997: 47).

Tournier's Robinson, like Defoe's, tries to organize the island space and impose the calendar of colonialism. As a youth, this Robinson had to memorize aphorisms taken from Benjamin Franklin's *Almanac*, and once on the island he engraves them onto wooden signs, decorates his cave with mosaics of words, and even hoists himself up with a precarious sling to carve onto a rock face: "*Do not waste time, it is the stuff of life*" (Tournier 1997: 131).<sup>11</sup> He desperately tries to imprint onto the very space of the island a conception of time utterly foreign to it, that of the industrious colonist. The irony, of course, is that once Robinson has completed his colonizing project, he has all too much time to contemplate his solitude. Eventually, Friday inadvertently

blows up not only all the outward signs of civilization on the island, but also the water-clock which Robinson had used to mark the passage of time. The island then returns to its pre-colonial identity, or rather, Tournier's Robinson learns that the island was not a blank slate upon which he could impose a new spatio-temporal identity. Robinson comes to realize that his domination of the island was illusory. In his book *The Postmodern Chronotope*, Smethurst identifies in Tournier's work what he more specifically terms a "post-colonial island chronotope" (2000: 235-41) in which the representation of time and space lead the reader to a re-evaluation of the colonial project, to adopt a skeptical view of such endeavors, and to accord more importance to the indigenous perspective.

I would like to return to the idea of living on an island in time as well as in space, as this evokes for me a particular chronotope identified by Bakhtin. I am thinking of the threshold chronotope so prevalent in twentieth-century literature. The threshold chronotope presents a tightly circumscribed space, literally or metaphorically a transitional space between two worlds. Temporally, it presents a suspended moment of change or crisis, detached from the normal flow of biographical and historical time (FTC: 248). The island of Juan Fernandez seems to me to be just such a liminal space far removed from the ebb and flow of historical time, a space in which Robinson undergoes a radical transformation of his identity. After the explosion, Robinson writes in his log-book:

What has most changed in my life is the passing of time, its speed and even its direction. Formerly every day, hour, and minute leaned in a sense toward the day, hour, and minute that was to follow, and all were drawn into the pattern of the moment, whose transience created a kind of vacuum. So time passed rapidly and usefully, the more quickly because it was usefully employed, leaving behind it an accumulation of achievement and wastage which was my history. (Tournier 1997: 203).

Previously, the passage of time was inscribed in the very space of the island, leaving its trace in the form of monuments. Now, Robinson is acutely aware of the cyclical nature of time, the eternal return of the seasons, of the shrinking of time to one essential moment:

For me the cycle has now shrunk until it is merged in the moment. The circular movement has become so swift that it cannot be distinguished from immobility. And it is as though, in consequence, my days had rearranged themselves. No longer do they jostle on each other's heels. Each stands separate and upright, proudly affirming its own worth. And since they are no longer to be distinguished as the stages of a plan in process of execution, they so resemble each other as to be superimposed in my memory, so that I seem to be ceaselessly reliving the same day. (Tournier 1997: 204)

In fact, the original French title of Tournier's novel, *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* [*Friday or the Pacific Limbo*], conveys the idea of being suspended in time and space. Limbo is, of course, a liminal state of suspension between life and grace, a place where non-baptized souls await the second coming. Tournier's protagonist thus finds himself in a state of suspension, awaiting rescue and reintegration into society. However, as Anthony Purdy (1984: 222) notes, "the *limbo* of the book's subtitle refers precisely to the time and place of Robinson's spiritual metamorphosis". Tournier's Robinson, offered redemption in the form of rescue, makes a surprising decision. He chooses to stay on the island, rejecting what he thinks of as the "degrading and mortal turbulence of the times in which they lived", in favor of the "eternal present, without past or future" (Tournier 1997: 226). In fact, he seems to be rejecting the legacy of colonial history, thinking to himself that he will console Friday regarding the decision by telling him "what he had learned [...] of the horrors of the slave trade and the life that awaited the blacks in the plantations of the New World" (ibid.: 230). (I note in passing that Friday, unaware of these details, opts to sneak away secretly and join the vessel, leaving Robinson apparently alone.) Given that the world seems to have become hell on earth, Tournier's Robinson opts to remain in limbo, in the quiet antechamber of the island, his choice hearkening back to Alexander Selkirk's nostalgia for his lost island paradise.

Tournier's literary adaptation of both Defoe's novel and the historical sources of the Robinson story is structured by the interaction of a series of superposed chronotopes. First, there is the colonial chronotope encompassing the circumscribed natural space on which the colonist attempts to inscribe the rhythms of commercial agriculture and the weekly patterns of European Christian civilization (calendar time, clocks to measure the passage of time, Sunday as a day of rest, etc.) which links this adaptation to Defoe's text. However, this colonial chronotope is undermined by diegetic transformations which situate the action outside the geographic heart of colonial maritime expansion and hundred years later than the original, by the presence of a mixed race Friday who actually knows how to live off the island without resorting to Robinson's contrivances, by Robinson's rather pathetic attempts to literally engrave his vision of time on the space of the island, by the destruction of the water-clock and the various buildings and monuments of Robinson's created civilization, and by the protagonist's rejection of a return to a world governed by a colonial model gone wild, in which slavery and cruelty rule. This destabilisation of the colonial chronotope underlines the failures of the colonial project. However, I would not go so far as Smethurst in proposing the creation of a new post-colonial chronotope in Tournier's novel. After all, despite its title, the character of Friday still occupies a peripheral role in this twentieth-century adaptation of the Robinson story. In a novel that readily shifts from a first-person (Robinson) to a third-person omniscient narrator, Friday is never accorded a narrative voice. I therefore see in Tournier's adaptation the deformation and destabilisation of an existing generic pattern, rather than the full-fledged creation of a new novelistic subgenre.



This destabilized colonial chronotope is furthermore undermined by the shifting narrative perspective that includes introspective journal entries that in no way resemble Defoe's protagonist's matter-of-fact journal in which he records his doings. Tournier's *Robinson* engages in philosophical meditations on the nature of his identity and on his perception of time, musings which suspend the chronological forward momentum of the narrative and create a chronotope of the threshold. The chronotopic transpositions effected by Tournier, as well as the deformation and juxtaposition of these two predominant chronotopes – one clearly reflecting the expansionist enthusiasm of the eighteenth-century novel and the other signaling the introspection and self-doubt of the twentieth-century novel – create a tension at the heart of Tournier's adaptation that provokes a re-reading of its literary source. Where Defoe's novel boasts of the ingenuity and industry of the solitary man, Tournier's text points to the fragmentation of personal identity once distanced from the structuring framework of historical time and 'civilized' spatial contexts. In choosing to remain on the island Tournier's *Robinson* calls into question the value of the European conceptualization of the rapport between humans, space and time, in which we seem inevitably to choose to exploit our surroundings for maximum profit. As Emerson notes, "[t]ransposition can do more [...] than merely provide a focus for viewing generic innovation. It can serve as indication of changes in cultural sensitivity from one era to the next. Within the same culture, different elements emerge and expand at different times to carry the weight of the story" (1986: 209). In short, the transposed chronotopic framework of Tournier's adaptation reflects a new socio-historic sensibility proper to its mid-twentieth-century context: a profound uncertainty and skepticism regarding the civilizing potential, durability, and moral righteousness of the colonial project.

## Epilogue

Having undertaken a comparative study of three instances of the *Robinson* story, I would argue that the chronotope, far from being limited to the study of changing settings, encompasses a much broader spectrum of changes which for Genette would be separate concerns; that is, pragmatic, diegetic, and narrative transpositions. Using the chronotope as a heuristic tool in the study of adaptation, we can examine not only the obvious shifting of the temporo-spatial setting of a given story, but also questions relating to the representation of this fictional world and to the narration of events. Within a new chronotope, the duration, frequency, unfolding and significance of events may change. Furthermore, as Emerson (1986: 209) notes, changing chronotopes may also account for changes in the representation of the characters who inhabit the textual space (recall Abbott's notion of character "types" associated with particular masterplots). In addition, the chronotope allows us to address another important type of textual relation termed "architextuality" (Genette 1997: 1, 4); that is, a given work's relationship to its generic model. Given that major structural chronotopes are linked to the formation of distinct literary genres, a chronotopic approach to adap-

tation encourages us to compare the adaptation and its source in terms of their ability to conform to or deviate from generic models that establish our horizon of expectations. The chronotope also allows us to consider overlapping or competing temporospatial frameworks within a single text, a situation Genette does not address but which is crucial in the study of adaptation. As I have demonstrated in my analysis of Tournier's *Friday*, an adaptation may, on one level, reactivate the chronotopic models and generic expectations of its source, only to destabilize and distort these models in order to undermine the specific ideological perspective of its source. Finally, I would argue that the chronotope addresses an aspect of adaptation which Genette does not, namely the particular socio-historic context of the adaptor. For Bakhtin, the lived chronotope of the author becomes reflected in the fictional chronotopes of the work of art. This assimilation of a historical consciousness by a work of art is, to my mind, absolutely crucial in the field of adaptation studies. Why after all, do we persist in reworking and retelling familiar tales? Perhaps because we have a basic need to see canonical stories re-framed in such a way as to reflect changing values, changing self-perceptions, and a changing understanding of the world around us. A Bakhtinian approach to adaptation studies, one which has at its heart the chronotope, would provide a viable theoretical framework for examining the myriad facets of the adaptive situation, would also be flexible enough to account for transpositions in both genre and medium, and would therefore be useful in the study of both literary and intermedial adaptation

I will conclude with an anecdote demonstrating why I think it is crucial to accord greater importance to spatio-temporal transpositions, and the extent to which such concerns have been marginalized, not only in adaptation studies, but in terms of a more general understanding of our relationship to literature. In 1966, the Chilean government decided to assign new names to the two principal islands of the Juan Fernandez archipelago, Más Afuera and Más a Tierra, renaming them respectively Alejandro Selkirk Island and Robinson Crusoe Island (Bizzarro 1987: 268-9). While the historical link to Alexander Selkirk (the Scottish mariner stranded on the archipelago for just over four years) is evident, as I have repeatedly noted, in the fictional universe of Daniel Defoe, the famous protagonist never set foot on any Pacific island, being stranded in the Caribbean. This expedient transfer of spatial coordinates to serve particular socio-historic ends (perhaps, in this case, to attract tourism by foregrounding an implicit, if false, literary association in the popular consciousness) demonstrates the same type of under-appreciated chronotopic transposition that I have been highlighting, only this time a fictional chronotope has determined a historical fact rather than historical circumstances determining fictional chronotopes. If only the Chileans had waited a few more years for the publication of Tournier's literary adaptation of Defoe, they could have more accurately renamed the island "Friday".

## Endnotes

1. Bakhtin is quite clearly preoccupied with the richness of possible subsequent interpretations of a given work of art as meanings are generated by new readers in new socio-historic contexts. Elsewhere, he notes: "Trying to understand and explain a work solely in terms of the conditions of its epoch alone, solely in terms of the conditions of the most immediate time, will never enable us to penetrate into its semantic depths. Enclosure within the epoch also makes it impossible to understand the work's future life in subsequent centuries; this life appears as a kind of paradox. Works break through the boundaries of their own time, they live in centuries, that is, in *great time* and frequently (with great works, always) their lives are more intense and fuller than are their lives within their own time" (2002b: 4).
2. In a forthcoming article entitled "A Bakhtinian Approach to Adaptation Studies", I argue for an even broader use of Bakhtinian concepts in the study of adaptation by discussing carnival, speech genres and dialogism, as well as the chronotope. The short section devoted to the chronotope in this more general, purely theoretical discussion of Bakhtin in the context of adaptation studies therefore echoes several passages treating the chronotope in the present longer study.
3. Sanders uses the term "master-texts" to describe Abbott's category (2006: 108). Ian Watt (1951) goes so far as to accord the Robinson story the status of a "myth", an assessment seconded by Michel Tournier, who states that every generation seems to need to view itself through the prism of this particular story, resulting in its many subsequent retellings (1977: 219).
4. For studies employing the chronotope to examine cinematographic adaptations of novels, see Collington (2002) and Massood (2005); for comparative studies using the chronotope to examine films within a specific subgenre, see Flanagan (2004), Massood (2003) and Vlasov (1996).
5. The various historical sources that I will draw upon are all available electronically through Early English Books Online and Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Short excerpts of these documents are also helpfully reprinted in the Norton Critical Edition of *Robinson Crusoe*.
6. See, for example, Luis Bunuel's *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1952), Jack Gold's *Man Friday* (1975) and Rod Hardy and George Miller's *Robinson Crusoe* (1996).
7. I have elsewhere discussed the colonial chronotope within the context of French literature. See Collington (2006: 206-7).
8. Jeffrey Hopes (1996) analyses the appeal of the desert island to Rousseau and the influence of Defoe on the French author. Lise Gauvin (1999), in her analysis of several different rewritings of the Crusoe story, also comments on the later temporal context and its importance to Robinson's understanding of his relationship with writing and with history.
9. For a further discussion of the implications and intertextual allusions of these temporal changes, see Jean-Paul Englibert (1997: 101-3, 116-21) and Anthony Purdy (1984: 224).
10. In fact, the French author includes a scene not found in Defoe's novel but appearing in the historical accounts published by both Rogers (1712: 6) and Steele (1714: 172) recounting Alexander Selkirk's fall off a cliff while pursuing a goat. Selkirk only survived because the goat fortunately broke his fall. However, in Tournier's version, Friday suffers this misadventure and not his master (1997: 187-8).
11. See Anthony Purdy (1984: 224-32) for an extended discussion of the importance of Franklin's ideals for Tournier.

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