

# From Crusoe to the English Patient, or the Transition from the Western Humanist Enlightenment Subject to the White Male Colonialist<sup>1</sup>

Ana Moya Gutiérrez  
University of Barcelona  
anamoya@ub.edu

## Abstract

The following essay reads Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, published in 1992, against Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Defoe's novel has become a classic in colonial literature, in so far as it comprises the ideological apparatus sustained by the European powers in their colonial expansion. Such ideological construct has been overtly questioned and deconstructed in post-colonial literature and Michael Ondaatje's text is a good example of it. A contrastive analysis of these texts helps to reveal the different strategies at work in each of them and their contribution to creating an ideological construct which both reflects and intervenes in the cultural context in which each of these texts has been produced.

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) has traditionally been associated with the origins of the English novel. Whether Defoe's work may be considered the first novel ever written in English or not—and the matter has been widely explored by feminist scholars,<sup>2</sup> for instance—the truth is that *Robinson Crusoe* is one of the earliest novels written in English.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, the history of the novel in English traces its origins to the late 17th, early 18<sup>th</sup> century, identifying the construction of a central narrating subject as one of its hallmarks. The novel is born, thus, in the Enlightenment, where Western discourses of the subject center around its homogeneity and consistency, while consequently underlining its central position in the production of meaning. Indeed, the work of Descartes and Locke, for instance, argues for individual experience as the basis of all knowledge.<sup>4</sup> This Enlightenment notion of subjectivity was attained partly by defining the European subject in opposition to other subject positions which would accordingly be dominated or annihilated in the process. If the subject was defined as European, white and male, otherness became a space occupied by the non-European, non-white and/or non-male.

The origin of the novel in English coincided with the European colonial project, which may also account for its participation in this discursive field concerned with the construction of a universal and homogeneous subject.<sup>5</sup> In this connection, it has been argued that the novel is itself an imperial genre, not only in theme, nor by virtue of the historical moment of its birth, but in its formal structure, in the construction of the narrative voice which holds its structure together. As Firdous Azim argues,<sup>6</sup>

The status of this central narrating subject acquires significance when allied to the contemporary linguistic and philosophical task that was an attempt to define the subject as homogeneous and consistent, and to delineate the constituents of the citizen-subjects brought into being by the Western Enlightenment discourse.

Following this line of thought, the translation of imperialism into the novelistic genre is not limited to its thematic concerns, but refers to the formation of the subjective positions of the colonizer and the colonized within the colonial terrain, given that the narration in the novel is also dependent on the centrality of the narrating subject. This notion of the centrality of the subject and of the homogeneity of its narration had also come into being within the colonizing enterprise.

Alan Sinfield's (1983, 1) understanding of literature as *intervention* may be relevant at this stage. Sinfield argues that the constructions that may be found in literature are not just responses to society, but rather *interventions*, which means that they feed back "possible images of the self in relation to others, helping society (some sectors more than others) to interpret and constitute itself". Sinfield's critical position may be relevant if applied to interpreting the origins of the novel and, similarly, reading Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in this light may also be illuminating when trying to come to terms with the way/s in which the West has constructed itself in relation to the Orient. In this connection, Edward Said (1978, 1, 3, 5-6) affirms his well known conviction, according to which:

The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences ... The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience ... [W]ithout examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period ... The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony ... The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be "Oriental" in all those ways considered commonplace by an average nineteenth-century European, but also because it *could be*—that is, submitted to being—*made* Oriental.

In *Robinson Crusoe*, and as Peter Hulme states,<sup>7</sup> the early chapters somehow comprise European colonial history for the reader. The story is moulded on the Puritan self-confession narratives. The Puritan journal is an immediate and transparent recording of everyday experience which would on retrospective reading reveal to its writer patterns not obvious in the sensations of the lived moments. As such, in the Puritan journal the individual subject is at the center of experience, which will enable him to produce meaning.

To this end, Defoe constructs a solid, consistent, unifying narrating subject that will hold the story together and pull it towards meaning. The story is narrated in the first person by Crusoe himself, a sailor from York who explains the 28 years he spends on a deserted island in memoir form. His experience is thus an individual, personal one. Crusoe comes from a wealthy, middle class, well-educated family. By going to sea, he defies the 'Law of the Father', challenging his filial duties, so that his journey becomes also one of spiritual redemption that will reconcile him with himself in the three spheres of family, society and religion. The pattern followed will accordingly be one of sin—punishment—repentance—salvation. A pattern that pulls the personal, individual

experience presented in the text towards meaning. As an eighteenth century man, Crusoe is affirmed in the text as a rational creature. As such, he is not only at the center of the universe but, what is even more important, his rational capacity enables him to make sense of the world around him, to produce meaning. Moreover, Crusoe is a rational creature who has the aid of religion. Religion becomes his comfort, his spiritual companion, his guide, and most of all his means towards the rationalization of experience. And because religion supposedly gives man certainty about his existence, it enables Crusoe to make sense of his experience on the island, thus enforcing his capacity to fix meaning.

*Robinson Crusoe* is also a celebration of the middle class work ethic. The island is a space where Crusoe is allowed to progress from hunting to farming to manufacturing, thus tracing an evolution from a more primitive to a more developed society (Dabydeen 1999, 106). Crusoe manages to do this by applying his learned skills to the different tasks he sets himself out to do. So his story becomes an allegory on industry and development. He is a capitalist, exploiting nature to make it profitable and so transforming the island somehow into a middle class utopia. His process of accumulation defines him as the modern economic individual. His is a story of economic success, underlining the value of private enterprise as propeller of progress. Very much in line with the new times, Crusoe's philosophy of life is akin to such eighteenth century thinkers as Benjamin Franklin, for instance, who in *The Way to Wealth*,<sup>8</sup> emphasizes such values as individualism ("God helps them that help themselves") and industriousness ("early to bed, and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise"; "There are no gains without pains"; "be industrious and free; be frugal and free"), bringing together material and personal progress and improvement ("what you do when you run in debt; you give to another power over your liberty"), which are presented one as consequence of the other.

Furthermore, Crusoe's method of rising in the world mainly through trade—African slaves particularly—also places him as a man of his time. In fact, his movements—as traced in the early chapters of the novel—make commercial sense. In this connection, his obsession with finances is legendary. After thirty years of careful management by others in his absence, Crusoe has not only become the owner of a Caribbean island but also "master ... of above £5,111 sterling in money, and ... an estate ... in the Brasils, of above a thousand pounds a year" (Defoe 2001, 224).

But *Robinson Crusoe* is, of all things, a colonial utopia. On the island, Crusoe tries not only to survive, but to reproduce the Western civilization that he has lost. Crusoe dominates the world around him, consistently mapping the island by giving names to different places. Thus he domesticates the wilderness, rationalizing the world around him. His rule, as Hammond states (1993, 74), "is one of reason and order". In this sense, though Crusoe is alone on the island, his experience reveals him as a cultural being. To this end, the narrative evolves around the ways in which his experience enables the subject to construct and define itself. Individual experience is empowered further by Crusoe's use of the autobiographical memoir. And so Crusoe's identity, though affirmed from the start, will be most obviously redefined when faced with otherness. Peter Hulme (1986, 175-222) reads the novel as a parable of the self, which he relates to the ideological construction of the Caribbean within European discourse, and which may be related to Said, as argued above. According to Hulme, the time between Crusoe's discovery of the footprint on the beach and the arrival of the cannibals is the period when his notion of self finds itself most under threat. This period preludes the mythical colonial encounter between Crusoe and Friday, which ends the parable of the self by definitely fixing Crusoe's identity as white, Anglo-Saxon, middle

class, Protestant and male.<sup>9</sup> James Joyce will also see Defoe's text as prophetic of empire:

The true symbol of the British conquest is in Robinson Crusoe ... The whole Anglo-Saxon spirit is in Crusoe; the manly independence and the unconscious cruelty; the persistence; the slow yet efficient intelligence; the sexual apathy; the practical, well-balanced religiousness; the calculating taciturnity. (in Richetti 1987, 67)

So Defoe's novel exemplifies the extent to which Europe has, in the past few centuries, consolidated itself as subject and by extension sovereign. Robert Young (1990, 17) argues that,

showing the extent to which Europe's other has been a narcissistic self-image through which it has constituted itself while never allowing it to achieve a perfect fit. This can be allied to Derrida's critique of 'a certain fundamental Europeanization of world culture'. Derrida has sometimes been criticized for the generality of phrases such as 'the history of the West', or the claim that his work involves a critique. It is this sovereign self of Europe which is today being deconstructed, of 'Western metaphysics' ... In its largest and perhaps most significant perspective, deconstruction involves not just a critique of the grounds of knowledge in general, but specifically of the grounds of Occidental knowledge.

Deconstruction for Young thus involves the decentralization and decolonization of European thought. It involves the analysis of the dialectics of the center and the margin which articulate the power relationships between metropolitan and colonial cultures. It implies, ultimately for him, the deconstruction of the concept and authority of the category *the West*. And in all this, Young argues, deconstruction is akin to postmodernism, at least in so far as postmodernism has to do with the West's "cultural awareness that it is no longer the unquestioned and dominant center of the world" (Young 1990, 19). Indeed, Young rightfully points out how postmodernism brings along with it an awareness of historical relativity, one which undermines any notion about the absoluteness of the Western master narratives of history.

Linda Hutcheon (1988, 59), following this line of thought, elaborates on this idea when she states that "When the center starts to give way to the margins, when totalizing universalization begins to self-deconstruct, the complexity of the contradictions within conventions—such as those of genre, for instance—begin to be apparent". This explains, Hutcheon goes on to argue, why the "assertion of identity through difference and specificity is a constant in postmodern thought" (1988, 59). Finally, Hutcheon (1988, 58) argues that the move to rethink margins and borders is a move away from centralization with its associated concerns of origin, and that the local, the regional, will be reasserted as the center becomes a fiction.

Ania Loomba (1998, 66), on the other hand, makes another relevant point in this direction when she draws an explicit relation between post-structuralism and post-colonialism, stating that,

... scholars such as Bernal, Said or Spivak have contributed to, indeed extended, the discrediting of the project of the European Enlightenment by post-structuralists such as Foucault. The central figure of Western humanist and

Enlightenment discourses, the humane, knowing subject, now stands revealed as a white male colonialist. Through its investigations, colonial discourse analysis adds this powerful new dimension to the post-structuralist understanding that meaning is always contextual, always shifting.

In this critical atmosphere, once more Sinfield's notion of literature as *intervention* seems to be adequate for a consideration of Ondaatje's novel, at least in so far as it may bring along with it an awareness of literature as a cultural artifact, and by extension throw light on the critical interest of a contrastive analysis of such two texts as *Robinson Crusoe* and *The English Patient*.

Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) has often been described as a post-colonial novel, at least in so far as it presents the reader with a number of parallel ex-centric narratives, emerging out of a disintegrating centre. These narratives alternate to explore the theme of identity, while they overlap obliterating individuality and question the nature of identity itself. Ondaatje presents us with the stories of Hana, Kip and Caravaggio as peripheral to a central one, which is the story of the patient that Hana is taking care of. We do not know who the patient is, since he is completely burned and thus physically unrecognizable and he seems to be unable to remember his name (his identity is thus blurred):

He was interrogated again. Everything about him was very English except for the fact that his skin was tarred black, a bogman from history among the interrogating officers ...

He had rambled on, driving them mad, traitor or ally, leaving them never quite sure who he was.

... All that is missing is his own name. There is still no clue to who he actually is, nameless, without rank or battalion or squadron.<sup>10</sup>

The central character of the tale is thus somehow a fiction, since he is assumed to be English (thus 'the English patient') when in hospital, and the stories that develop around him explore the identities of a number of ex-centric characters but seem to be unable to absolutely determine the identity of the central character. In this way, at the core of the novel we have a void, a gap (in the Derridean sense), a periphrasis,<sup>11</sup> a fiction even? (following Hutcheon above). Ondaatje's novel thus not only does not attempt to produce and fix meaning, but it overtly questions the nature of meaning itself, pulling the reader at one and the same time in and out of its own center. The text, thus, and in line with Hutcheon as discussed before, seems to consciously adopt a postmodern stand, constructing itself on this central gap or void, one that will in consequence make the alternative peripheral stories possible.

The novel begins in a Tuscan villa, where the English patient is spending his last days. The villa has been used as hospital during the war though it is now abandoned. It becomes not only the reader's referent for the time dimension of the novel, but also a microcosm of the world itself. Thus the villa, like Crusoe's island before, becomes "a vehicle for social, political and moral reflection" (Phillips 1999, 121). The time is April 1945, at the end of WWII, a relevant historical landmark separating a colonial from a post-colonial world. The world before the war is still a colonial world, whilst the future is post-colonial. Interestingly in this respect, while Crusoe's novel is written in a context of colonial expansion, one of affirmation of an ideological code—in the terms in which it has previously been discussed—Ondaatje *writes back*<sup>12</sup> at a moment when colonial expansion is given the final death blow by paving the way for the questioning and

subversion of the colonial ideology affirmed by Defoe's text. Past and present intersect during the war in Ondaatje's novel, which sets out to explore this historical and ideological turn. The world of Katharine, dead, and the English patient, unknown, burned, is the world before the war, the world of Europe's exploration and discovery of Africa. The world of Hana, Kip and Caravaggio is the future. None of them are European, yet the three are trapped in a European war and the end of war, with the symbolic death of the patient, will enable them to face the future. In this way, the "English patient" may be read as an image of the Europe which needs to be left behind, where this Europe that is now questioned and somehow rejected is precisely Crusoe's Europe. A line may thus be drawn that will relate Robinson Crusoe to the patient as forefather, as predecessor. Indeed, like Crusoe before him, the patient is also an adventurer-explorer. But now this European subject has disintegrated, being questioned and revealed as a white male colonialist by the ex-centrics, who will replace him to become the new explorers (Loomba as quoted above).

We are introduced to Hana, a twenty-year-old Canadian nurse. Hana leads a nomadic and anarchic existence in the villa, which is presented as an escape from her roles both as woman and member of the allied army. She has lost her father, lover and son, and so she now somehow rebels against her identity, symbolically putting aside all the mirrors in the villa and cutting her own hair. This is an interesting point, particularly if Ondaatje's novel is read as *intervention*. Hana symbolically gives up her femininity at this stage in the text, retreating from the world to take care of the English patient. She gives up her roles as daughter, lover and mother, that is to say, her roles as woman in society. In a novel that questions the dominant discourses of colonial ideology, a reference—though indirect still at this stage in the novel—to the empire as a patriarchal institution seems definitely desirable, while it also reveals a movement towards the integration of feminism within the new critical approaches to meaning and subjectivity, as referred to before.

Hana substitutes the world for the patient, and her gradual discovery of the patient becomes symbolic of her progressive coming to terms with her own world so that she can face the future. She retraces from a world full of noise to the silence of the villa San Girolamo. This silence is filled with the stories that are going to be read. Hana reads from the books in the villa's library to the patient. Three books are relevantly mentioned, *Kim*, *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Histories* (The text by Herodotus that belongs to the patient).<sup>13</sup> The first two are related to the colonial past of India (Kip) and Canada (Hana and Caravaggio) respectively, while Herodotus's text is closely associated with the patient and his understanding of history. The time space between Herodotus and the patient may also be read as symbolising the development, establishment and supremacy of Western civilization, being this—as has been shown—the space that Crusoe represents. These stories read are juxtaposed to the story that the patient tells in the novel, and we are told how for Hana, they "... became half her world" (7). However, relevantly enough, we also read that,

So the books for the Englishman, as he listened intently or not, had gaps of plot like sections of a road washed out by storms, missing incidents as if locusts had consumed a section of tapestry, as if plaster loosened by the bombing had fallen away from a mural at night ... [Hana] was not concerned about the Englishman as far as the gaps in plot were concerned. She gave no summary of the missing chapters. She simply brought out the book and said "page ninety-six" or "page one hundred and eleven." That was the only locator. (7-8)

In the same way, the story that the patient tells also contains gaps and blank spaces. Furthermore, his is a story narrated in a series of apparently chaotic and disconnected narrative flashbacks that are laid before the reader for him/her to make sense of. The patient narrates his own story in the first person narrative voice, yet refers to himself in the third person, so that he plays with focalization to construct a certain confusion as to his identity.<sup>14</sup> Thus, instead of the consistent, solid, central narrating subject of Defoe's work, we are now presented with narrative chaos, Ondaatje's text repeatedly pulling the reader towards the questioning and even the lack of definitive meaning.

Hana alternatively reads from these stories and listens to the patient's, so that his own story becomes for Hana a fiction that stands alongside the other fictions that she is reading. The patient's history is repeatedly deconstructed by the three peripheral characters, so that the text insistently affirms its own instability of meaning. Thus the novel undermines the notion that history is objective and stable, exploring instead the possibility that there may be different readings of history, and by extension different histories.

In the story that the patient tells, which is located in Egypt in the thirties, we are introduced to Katharine, the other female character in the novel. Katharine is first introduced as a story teller—"I fell in love with a voice" (144), the patient tells us—and she is symbolically narrated to us by the patient. In fact, we never have direct access to Katharine in the story. She becomes a text which is read to us by the patient. Once more, therefore, attention is drawn to the textual nature of history, rather than to history itself, and even to the intertextual nature of meaning.<sup>15</sup> The patient explores, discovers and maps the desert in the same way in which he explores, discovers and maps Katharine. Associations are constantly drawn between the desert (the colonial body) and Katharine (the female body), between male domination and colonial domination. Katharine (British/Eurocentric) somehow precedes Hana (Canadian/Ex-centric) and so her death is necessary for the emergence of Hana, who will be given her own voice. Hana can utter her final "*I am sick of Europe, Clara. I want to come home* [original italics]" (296), because she is preceded by Katharine, whom she redeems, somehow also *writing her back*. And so, if the patient colonised Katharine's body, now it is Hana who explores and dominates the patient's body. In this manner, once more the female and the colonial are brought together in this text, at least in so far as both are *constructed* as others to the central white male.

Caravaggio is the other Canadian character in the novel. He is a thief and his abilities have been put to work during the war, when he was working for the allies. Hana tells us that,

*There is a man named Caravaggio, a friend of my father's. I have always loved him. He is older than I am, about forty-five I think. He is in a time of darkness, has no confidence. For some reason I am cared for by this friend of my father.*  
[original italics] (61)

Caravaggio is a figure of the past for Hana, associated with her lost father. He is physically handicapped, as his thumbs have been chopped off by the nazis. He is juxtaposed to Kip, the Sikh sapper, the novel's most powerful image of youth and physical presence, not only in his relation to Hana but also as a consequence of his job, one that constantly challenges his physical integrity, which both the patient and Caravaggio have lost. Kip is a crucial character in the novel because he is the novel's look to the future. Indeed, while Friday was silenced and read by Crusoe, Kip redeems

him by having a voice of his own, one that subverts Western master narratives of history, paving the way to a new multicultural future:

One bomb. Then another. Hiroshima. Nagasaki ... My brother told me. Never turn your back on Europe. The deal makers. The contract makers. The map drawers. Never trust Europeans, he said. Never shake hands with them. But we, oh, we were easily impressed –by speeches and medals and your ceremonies. What have I been doing these last few years? Cutting away, defusing, limbs of evil. For what? For *this* to happen? ... I'll leave you the radio to swallow your history lesson ... When you start bombing the brown races of the world you're an Englishman ... They would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation. (285, 286, 287).

With his rejection of the Eurocentric reading of history (encapsulated here in his interpretation of the dropping of the atomic bombs at the end of WWII), Kip gives the novel an overtly postcolonial character. Lorna Sage (1992, 23) argues, in this connection, that,

So you could say that the theme of *The English Patient* is the terminal sickness of Englishness/Europeanness, the death of the patriarchal scarecrow. The World War only truly becomes that with the dropping of the atomic bombs, which—for Kip (named a bit, I suspect, for Kipling)—abolishes for ever the notion that civilization is white. This however, isn't allowed to upset the fragile family meanings the novel has put together, which survive precisely because they're hardly there at all. The reader—or this reader, anyway—emerges with the feeling of having been imprisoned in a cricket-cage: you're in collusion with the author, you don't want to know how utopian it all is. Now you see it, now you don't, as with so much in contemporary fiction.

Ondaatje finally closes the novel with Kip: “Kirpal's left hand swoops down and catches the dropped fork an inch from the floor and gently passes it into the fingers of his daughter, a wrinkle at the edge of his eyes behind his spectacles” (302). In this way the text ultimately looks to the future.

I have argued that Ondaatje's text has often been read as a post-colonial novel, drawing relations between post-colonialism, post-structuralism, postmodernism and even feminism to highlight the novel's questioning of the Western master narratives of history, and most particularly of colonial history. It seems to me that reading *The English Patient* against *Robinson Crusoe* helps in discussing the effectiveness of the strategies used in *The English Patient* not only to displace the humanist Enlightenment subject from its central position, but, what is more relevant, to highlight the need to do so to make way to a multicultural post-colonial world. Successfully drawing on the textual nature of history, Ondaatje's novel focuses on the need to release such readings of history as will pull towards plurality and openness, ultimately towards a new multicultural world.



## NOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a shorter paper of the same title read at the IX Congreso AEEC, “El impacto de la carta canadiense de derechos y libertades (1982-2002). Perspectivas Europeas”, Salamanca (Spain), 28-30 Nov. 2002.

<sup>2</sup> A reference to the feminist seminal work by Dale Spender *Mothers of the Novel*, published by Pandora in 1986 seems inevitable here. Spender acknowledges her discovery of a tradition of women writers before Jane Austen which she traces back to the late seventeenth century and which leads her to affirm that “Jane Austen was the inheritor of a long and well-established tradition of ‘women’s novels’” (1). She ultimately concludes her introduction by contending “that women were the mothers of the novel and that any other version of its origin is but a myth of male creation” (6).

<sup>3</sup> J.R Hammond (1993, 67), for instance, argues that “There had, of course, been works of fiction prior to 1719 but these were not *novels* as we would recognize them today. What was new about Defoe’s narrative was its convincing air of verisimilitude and the fact that its central character is a solid, believable individual with an inner life of remarkable consistency and power”.

<sup>4</sup> Richetti (1987, 53) makes a point, in this connection, that “The emergence of what we now call the novel is in part a symptom of the philosophy and psychology that emerged in the seventeenth century in the works of thinkers like Decartes and Locke, who argued that individual experience and perception were primary, the foundation of all knowledge”.

<sup>5</sup> In the case of the British Empire, though colonial expansion can be traced back to Elizabethan England, the historical hazards of the late 16th and 17th centuries delayed almost all explorations and settlements until the late 17th century, when the country attained the religious, political and social settlement that would impulse imperial expansion further.

<sup>6</sup> Firdous Azim (1993, 10). In this book, Azim carries out a consistent analysis of the relations between the rise of the novel in English and the rise and development of the British Empire.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Hulme (1986, 185) explains how the early chapters of the novel “recapitulate the European ‘history of discovery’: the first tentative voyages down the West African coast, the entanglement with Islam, the crossing of the Atlantic, even the movement of Brazilian expertise to the Caribbean which was essential to the early economies of the English and French islands”.

<sup>8</sup> B. Franklin (1706-1790) wrote this essay for the 25th anniversary issue of his *Almanac*, the first issue of which appeared in 1733. All references made are to the edition by Gottesman et al. (1979, 267-274).

<sup>9</sup> Hammond (1993, 73) explains how “Crusoe gives [Friday] his name, clothes him, and teaches him the rudiments of English; he insists on being called Master; he teaches Friday the basic skills necessary in a competent and dutiful servant. In all this Friday becomes an extension of Crusoe’s domain, one more possession to be moulded to his will ... In teaching Friday the arts of husbandry he is repeating the civilizing process he has himself undergone and is seeking to mould him into a likeness of himself”. Dabydeen (1999, 107) also argues that the relationship between Crusoe and Friday “is a paradigm of the master-slave relationship, in which the slave is depicted as being grateful to his master for saving his life. One of the excuses for slavery is that it was benevolent ... Crusoe saving Friday is a re-enactment of the myth of salvation. Friday is devoted, he is glad to learn, glad to serve and happy in his servitude ... Crusoe also

---

saves his soul by turning him into a Protestant, and this missionary benevolence justifies the master-slave relationship”.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Ondaatje (1993, 96). All further references will be to this edition and will be integrated in the text.

<sup>11</sup> Genette (1982) uses the concept of periphrasis to refer to a figure that opens up and exists in a gap or space between sign and meaning.

<sup>12</sup> The phrase “the Empire writes back” was coined by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989), though it has subsequently become a commonplace in the field of post-colonial studies.

<sup>13</sup> They are not the only mentioned ones, but I would suggest they are particularly relevant. There are, though, references also to others such as *The Charterhouse of Parma* or Tacitus’s *Annals*, for instance.

<sup>14</sup> I am following here Rimmon-Kenan’s notion of focalization (1983, 71-85).

<sup>15</sup> We can read the reference to Anna Karenina that we find in Ondaatje’s novel (237) as an illustration of Julia Kristeva’s understanding of intertextuality (Allen 2000, 8-61). Later on in the novel, there is an interesting reference in this connection to the Marseillesse. Hana sings (“Singing in the voice of a tired traveller, alone against everything. A new testament. There was no certainty to the song anymore, the singer could be one voice against all the mountains of power. That was the only sureness. The voice was the single unspoiled thing” (269)), and she is listened to by both Kip and Caravaggio. The reference is to what the Marseillesse means not in itself as text but as intertext.

## WORKS CITED

- Allen, Graham 2000: *Intertextuality*. London: Routledge.
- Ashcroft, B. et al. 1989: *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge.
- Azim, Firdous 1993: *The Colonial Rise of the Novel*. London: Routledge.
- Dabydeen, David 1999: “From Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)”. *Post-Colonial Theory and English Literature*. Ed. Peter Childs. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP. 104-107.
- Defoe, Daniel 2001 (1719): *Robinson Crusoe*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Franklin, Benjamin 1979 (1757): *The Way to Wealth. The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Volume 1. Eds. Gottesman et al. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company. 267-274.
- Genette, Gérard 1982: *Figures of Literary Discourse*. New York: Columbia UP.
- Hammond, J.R. 1993: *A Defoe Companion*. London: Macmillan.
- Hulme, Peter 1986: *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797*. London: Routledge.
- Hutcheon, Linda 1988: *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London: Routledge.
- Loomba, Ania 1998: *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge.
- Ondaatje, Michael 1993 (1992): *The English Patient*. London: Picador.
- Phillips, Richard 1999: “From ‘The Geography of *Robinson Crusoe*’”. *Post-Colonial Theory and English Literature*. Ed. Peter Childs. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 120-127.
- Richetti, John 1987: *Daniel Defoe*. Boston: Twayne.

- 
- Rimmon-Kenan, Schlomith 1983: *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London: Routledge.
- Sage, Lorna 1992: "A Fragile Family". *The Times Literary Supplement* 4667 (September 11): 23.
- Said, Edward 1978: *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient*. London: Penguin.
- Sinfield, Alan. ed. 1983: *Society and Literature 1945-1970*. London: Methuen.
- Spender, Dale 1986: *Mothers of the Novel*. London and New York: Pandora.
- Young, Robert 1990: *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London and New York: Routledge.