

Kylie Crane (Rostock)

Robinsonades Revisited: Materials and Archives in the Archipelagic Mode

Abstract

Robinson Crusoe (the story) and Robinson Crusoe (the character) can be found in all sorts of places, in all sorts of guises: kids' books, reality TV shows set on 'exotic locations' pretending at games of survival, newspaper articles, advertisements, films, documentaries, songs, on maps, and in other novels. The materials afforded by Defoe's text – the story, the character, and specifically also the 'stuff' – are basically what constitutes the Robinsonade, with some aspects emerging as particularly iconic (e.g., palm tree island, footprints, shipwreck). In this contribution, I argue that the 'tradition' of the Robinsonade can be understood as a reframing of Defoe's novel, even as it centres it, and I draw attention to the materials of and in the text to reckon with, and break from, an absolute privileging of Defoe's novel (e.g., as 'first' or 'primary'). I specifically employ archipelagic thought as a mode of critique to examine such ideas of adaptation, intertextuality, and reception. foregrounding the different, non-hierarchical and non-linear ways in which knowledge is generated and circulated, I suggest, is recognising the function of the Robinsonade as also imparting a kind of knowledge of that does not pretend to be complete, but rather approximate. Two novels set in the Pacific – Waanyi author Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* and Taiwanese author Wu Ming-Yi's *The Man with the Compound Eyes* – serve to exemplify the ways attention to materials and archives, salvaged and abandoned, can shape critique in the archipelagic mode.

1 APPROACH ONE: Robinson Crusoe in the UN

Robinson Crusoe (the novel), and the Robinson Crusoe (the character), were at the table during the drafting of the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The very fact that interpretations of the text and the character can be disputed in the framework of the drafting of resolutions at the UN means not only was it known to many, if not all, of the members present. That specific interpretations were debated further suggests that certain ideas from the text are so familiar that they can be approached from different angles, shaped in different ways, and yet still recognisable as Robinson Crusoe-esque, or as Robinsonades. This is, in a sense, the function of the Robinsonade: imparting a kind of knowledge of Robinson Crusoe that does not pretend to be complete (cf. e.g. Fallon 2018: 207, Seidel 2008: 182, and below).

Jessica Whyte proposes, in her account of the drafting of the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights, that the encounter "was an argument about whether this 'man' was endowed with a human personality and individual rights by nature, or whether this personality could be developed only in a community and these rights granted only by the state" (Whyte 2014: 301). As Whyte notes, Friday was not part of this discussion; he was excluded, cast aside. The delegates were apparently not only comfortable with using a novel to argue to role of the individual with respect to society, but also seemingly comfortable with excluding the *most obvious* counterpoint – Friday's existence, his people's presence – that would render the discussion obsolete.

In Joseph R. Slaughter's account, it was the Belgian delegate who suggested that rather than the assumption that "the individual could only develop his personality within the framework of society; it was, however, only necessary to recall the famous book by Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, to find proof of the contrary" (as quoted in Slaughter 2007: 47). The Australian delegate consequently withdrew their initial proposal that suggested otherwise, only for the Soviet delegate to

sponsor the very same changes. The latter argued: "The example of *Robinson Crusoe*, far from being convincing, had, on the contrary, shown that man could not live and develop his personality *without* the aid of society" (as quoted in Slaughter 2007: 48), noting that Robinson has "at his disposal the products of human industry and culture, namely, the tools and books he had found on the wreck of his ship" (as quoted in Slaughter 2007: 48). Contradictory interpretations of the relations between the individual and society, different 'readings' of the same text, are able to coexist – even at the table in the drafting of this UN declaration.

There was, notably, no debate about *Robinson Crusoe*'s place at the table: Neither Whyte nor Slaughter suggest that the delegates needed to spend any time describing the novel (or its protagonist). The assumption was that all members seated at the table would recognise the story and require no further explanation, even if the points made with it starkly differ.¹ The text's canonical – singular – status affords its capacity to be rather *unsingular* in interpretation. Its capacity to be 're-framed' – to draw on the *framework* of this collection – is a function of its canonical status.

This episode is evoked to articulate discussion of the story as one of solitude (requiring little community) or shipwreck (emphasising, at least, the material remains of society). One key aspect of the debate at the UN appears to be the extent to which society is irrevocably connected to, evoked by, its material cultures, or "the products of human industry and culture" as Slaughter suggests (Slaughter 2007: 48). The castaway, here, occupies a tenuous position in relation to other things that have been cast away. Discordant notions of salvage and scavage, of flotsam and jetsam, fold into the text. Louis James asserts:

Crusoe salvages everything he needs from the wreck, even pen, paper, guns and ammunition, and lives a paradigm of bourgeois respectability, even down to his cat, dog and his umbrella. Yet he is also portrayed as mere 'natural' man, struggling with his bare hands against the environment, and forced to make for himself the most basic objects – a spade, cooking pots and bread from seed he has had to plant. Magically, both images of Crusoe exist side by side, and few readers question the contradiction. (James 1996: 7)

In what follows, I will dwell, a little, on the castaway, and, with more insistence, on the idea of *castaways*, that which has been 'cast away' (even if the 'away' is a convenient fabrication).

The reliance of the castaway on castaways – that which, like Friday, has been cast aside – suggests an attentiveness to materials, not only textual. The inventory of castaways evokes a sense of relations connecting seemingly disparate places. In pursuing these hypotheses, I include two Robinsonades from the Pacific Rim. These novels transpose the aftermath of slavery and colonialism, some sense of a "shipwrecked modernity" (Mentz 2015), a coming-into-being of *homo oeconomicus*, or the other shades of Crusoe readings, to the modern era. Specifically, they reckon with the Anthropocene, the global environmental crisis, and the imbalances of representation, power, and economic stability. Crusoe's shipwreck, with its abundance of fortunate inventory – an inventory imbricated in modernity's projects (e.g. slavery, colonisation) – gives way to the debris of modernity figured as

¹ Even as, and this is another observation drawing from Slaughter's account, the delegates shared a similar education. Slaughter writes "the novel's dissemination and globalization [is] in part the effect of colonialism and a cosmopolitanism whose prestigious institutions of higher education most of the UDHR drafters shared as alma maters" (Slaughter 2007: 82).

a junk island (Alexis Wright) or trash tsunami (Wu Ming-Yi). Our itinerary begins with Crusoe.

2 A CRUSOE ISLAND: Textual Materials

Of *Robinson Crusoe*, Ian Watt, in his long-influential *Myths of Individualism*, suggests "[t]he story shows how an ordinary man, quite alone, is able to subdue nature to his own material purposes, and eventually to triumph over his physical environment" (Watt 1957: 151). For Watt, this is a triumph of labour, and not of scavenging; nature is resource, physical environment, something to be conquered. Robert P. Marzec focusses on the interconnections between (settler) colonialism and land ownership in his account, suggesting that enclosure materially and ideologically incorporates the resource of land. In arguing that Defoe's *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-1727) is a precursor to *Robinson Crusoe*, Marzec links practices of "cataloguing" (Marzec 2007: 3) to ownership and domination: "It was in the enclosure act that the ideology of imperialism became a material reality" (ibid.). Where these critics, amongst many others, have emphasised controlling, containing and otherwise colonising environments as constitutive for the Crusoe myth, I want to pursue the avenue of materiality, paying particular attention to the materials, tools, and entanglements suggested in the novel. This then becomes the grounds, or rather point of departure, for thinking about *Robinson Crusoe* itself as a mythical archive, and the ways these material entanglements are imagined in two more recent novels.

Attending to the materials Crusoe has 'at hand' is, in the act of inventory, an assertion both of their potential as well as of his dominion over them: Indeed, Crusoe's salvation derives from Crusoe's acts of salvage. From some of these materials, Crusoe is – most genius-like – able to fashion the most complicated objects (the umbrella, for instance); at other moments, he laments the length of time (and mass of material) it takes him to manufacture a simple board. The chance of such material entanglements are figured in the novel as serendipitous, acts of a Christian God that privilege the believer. They are prefigured in specific ways in earlier episodes in the novel.

Taken aboard a Spanish vessel in the 'adventure' off the African coast that prefigures his time in the Caribbean, Crusoe readily sells Xury – along with some skins – to furnish himself with the requisite funds to return to England. Against the background of the materials, the tools, and the food (and seed) that Crusoe later salvages from the shipwreck, this act is a privileged jettisoning. Xury, in the mentality that shapes this part of the narrative, becomes inventory; his value as a person is secondary to his economic value, his utility to Crusoe worth more than his survival as a person. Crusoe also consents to smuggling slaves into Brazil. Humans – Africans – are reduced to an illegal commodity, exchanged for such things as "Beads, bits of Glass, Shells, and odd Trifles, especially little Looking-Glasses, Knives, Scissars, Hatchets, and the like" (Defoe 1994: 31).

When Robinson Crusoe retrieves tools and materials from the ship as a process of salvage, this in a sense foregrounds the way in which certain Robinsonades configure specific moments of Robinson Crusoe as a practice of salvage. This also entails attention to the tools of analysis and of world-building, evidently, but also a particular attention to materials, that is, objects, things, stuff.

3 APPROACH TWO: Ways of Waste, Cast Away

After washing ashore, locating a source of water, and having a long sleep in a tree, Crusoe looks to the ship "where I hop'd to find something for my present Subsistence" (Defoe 1994: 36). And he does find "something", quite a lot of somethings: First he fills up on "Bisket" and finds some Rum, from which he takes "a large Drain, and which I had indeed need enough of to spirit me for what was before me" (ibid.: 37). Crusoe then decides he will need a raft in order to salvage from the shipwreck those things he "foresaw would be very necessary", including: "all the Planks or Boards [...] that I could get, [...] three of the Seamens Chests" "the first of these I fill'd with Provision, viz. Bread, Rice, three Dutch Cheeses, five Pieces of dry'd Goat's Flesh" and some European Corn (the rats had been in the barley and wheat), "several Cases of Bottles" including cordial waters and "five or six Gallons of Rack" (ibid.: 38). He then notes that the tide has turned and has washed away his coat, shirt and waist-coat, and so he replaces these items. But this is not his greatest concern. He is rather concerned with finding "Tools to work with on Shore, and it was after long searching that I found out the Carpenter's Chest, which was indeed a very useful Prize to me, and much more valuable than a Ship Loading of Gold would have been at that time" (ibid.).

In his first thirteen days on shore, Crusoe has made the journey to the shipwreck eleven times. On the twelfth, he finds razors, scissors, knives and forks, as well as some money. "I smil'd to my self at the Sight of this Money. O Drug! said I aloud, what art though good for? Thou art not worth to me, no not the taking off of the Ground; one of those Knives is worth all this Heap; I have no Manner of use for thee [...] However, upon Second Thoughts, I took it away" (ibid.: 43) and with this, and a storm brewing, Crusoe gives off to the shore.

Dalby Thomas, in a treatise to encourage investment into trade with the 'West Indian' colonies writes a rather extensive list of manufactured goods required by planters in the Caribbean: "All their Powder, Cannon, Swords, guns, Pikes, and other Weapons ... Axes, Hoes, Saws, Rollers, Shovells, Knives, Nails and other Iron Instruments ... Saddles, Bridles, Coaches ... their Pewter, Brass, Copper and Iron Vessells and Instruments, their Sail Cloath, and Cordage ... all which are made in and sent from England" (as quoted in Collingham 2018: 52-53). Thomas' *An Historical Account of the Rise and Growth of the West-India Collonies* was first published in 1690, not quite 30 years prior to the publication of *Robinson Crusoe*. The list outlines a very specific material exchange between England and the 'West-India Collonies', that, in its echoes of the goods salvaged by Crusoe, works to further imbricate the latter's material entanglements in slavery, exploitation and other imperial projects. Particular plantation politics and procurements buffer particular privileged persons against the odds, the elements, and the consequences of disaster.

In *Robinson Crusoe*, more space is spent on Crusoe retrieving stores and tools from the ship than narrating the shipwreck itself: The event of the shipwreck is discrete, its implications are much longer and larger. This inventory is crucial, as it establishes the setting and the tools with which he will forge his existence. Crusoe's incessant writings of *inventory* – both in the shipwreck salvaging scenes and later in the novel – attest to the extent in which this is an *invention* of the world he inhabits.

The kinds of materials and tools Robinson Crusoe is able to, and inclined to, salvage from the shipwreck are the tools and materials with which he will – quite literally – construct his world. For, to the extent to which the Caribbean island

upon which he finds himself is considered or constructed as bereft of culture, agriculture, and other kinds of sustenance, in the mindset of imperialist Europe (which he brings with him), he depends on that which he can salvage from the ship. Indeed, these are the very tools through which Crusoe is able to 'add value' to his surroundings, or rather extract the natural wealth (e.g. through monocultures) into producing 'surplus'.

"To an archaeologist" William Rathje and Cullen Murphy explain in their book *Rubbish! The Archaeology of Garbage*, "ancient garbage pits or garbage mounds [...] are always among the happiest of finds, for they contain in concentrated form the artifacts and comestibles and remnants of behavior of the people who used them" (Rathje / Murphy 2001: 10). Garbage, discards, and waste, as much as tools, are the items preserved (in middens!) from older societies, and these remnants often find their way into special museum cabinets. Our knowledges of past societies derive, partly, from rummaging through rubbish.²

The roles of materials, and of considering the contingencies of what is 'left' or 'left over', are crucial to thinking through some of the literary re-thinkings of the story of Robinson Crusoe. These texts – and I focus later on Waanyi author Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* and Taiwanese author Wu Ming-Yi's *The Man with the Compound Eyes* – suggest that what is left after the modern shipwreck, after the storm of modernity, is no longer imagined as a fortunate list of providential provisions, but rather a jumble of junk.

4 A CRUSOE ARCHIPELAGO

There is another sense in which the novel derives from materials: Defoe's novel derives its story from that of Alexander Selkirk, one of the 'origins' of the tale. I mention this (perhaps well-known) point in order to stress how deliberating on the use of materials gives rise to an archipelagic reading of Robinsonades more broadly.

Selkirk lived as a 'castaway' for some four years in the Juan Fernandez archipelago on an island Más a Tierra (closer to land), off the coast of Chile. This island is now called Robinson Crusoe Island. Más Afuera (further out) – *not* the island Selkirk lived on – is now known as Alexander Selkirk Island. So we have an archipelago of Robinson Crusoe's islands, comprising the island where the novel is set, somewhere in the Caribbean near Trinidad, the island of the precursor Más a Tierra, now called Robinson Crusoe Island, which is where Selkirk was castaway, which is, in turn, next to the Alexander Selkirk Island, both off the coast of Chile. And, to further entangle histories with geographies, there is another Robinson Crusoe Island in the Pacific, where it forms part of Fiji, one in Baden-Württemberg, and at least three in the United States of America. The chain of Crusoe islands stretches across the globe.

Ottmar Ette, in his consideration of the Caribbean, stresses

dass wir gleichsam 'unter' den topographisch identifizierbaren Inseln immer schon andere Inseln vorfinden, deren Bilder und Vorstellungswelten zum Teil über lange Jahrhunderte und enorme Distanzen hinweg im Raum zirkulierten und an der Findung und Erfindung neuer Inselwelten nicht selten entscheidenden Anteil hatten (Ette 2011: 22).

² I would like to stress: partly. Practices – encoded as ritual, tradition and/or everyday – and stories – be they written or oral – as well as those forms that encompass both are other ways in which knowledges are passed through time.

This term, 'Inselwelt', is for Ette "das Bewusstsein einer fundamentalen Relationalität" which places "die 'eigene' Insel in eine Vielzahl von Bezügen und Beziehungen zu anderen Inseln, Archipelen oder Atollen, aber auch zu Kontinenten" (ibid.: 26). Ette suggests the terms multi-archipelagic, inter-archipelagic and trans-archipelagic in order to grapple with the various dimensions of relations that emerge when thinking through island worlds. The metaphorical import of the archipelago is inseparable from the 'literal' meanings, as the editors of the volume Ette's essay was included in stress in their introduction (Ramponi/Wendt/Wilkens: 2011: 8). A chain of islands, as the archipelago suggests, gives way to a chain of meanings. Crusoe's island/Robinson Crusoe Island is of itself already archipelagic: Not-entirely discrete sites connected through specific relations shaped by history and geography.

Ann-Marie Fallon avails herself of the archipelago in thinking about Robinsonades to "connect[] each story to the next, a chain linking all of them with familiar boundaries and characteristics" (Fallon 2018: 213). She writes: "We recognize Crusoe in our own time but subtly changed" where "[e]ach island remains familiar and yet, in their dissimilarity and their changing contours, they transform the literary and political geography of *Robinson Crusoe*" (Fallon 2018: 213). For a Robinsonade to be recognisable as such, there is no specific list of criteria which all must be met. Instead, there appears to be a set of conditions, ideas, notions, etc. which may or may not be adapted, and that in fact may be applied very loosely. Intertextual relations in the archipelagic mode are relations of confluence as much as derivation, of a coming together of flowing ideas, rather than the meeting of a hard set of criteria.

The kinds of adaptations may apply to content, to narrative mode, or to a slightly more amorphous mode of commentary on a specific situation through a constellation of figures and materials. A Robinsonade might include characters from Defoe's novel, might use the names or a specific constellation; a Robinsonade might play with the 'deserted island' setting, or might re-dress the myth of desertedness outright; a Robinsonade might employ the narrative structures of Defoe (specifically: a journal, lots of lists), or might shift this form to other formats (transforming into reality TV, for instance); a Robinsonade might pick up on some of the basic mythical structures (in the Barthesian sense of "a formless, unstable, nebulous condensation, whose unity and coherence are above all due to its function" [Barthes 2000: 119],³ "solitude" and survival, for instance), or might work to expose these as myths, in the other sense of myth as being an 'untrue' story. The relations between Robinsonade and *Robinson Crusoe* might, further, be negotiated by way of other Robinsonades (as in, for instance, the TV series *Lost in Space*, where the relation to *Robinson Crusoe* is – at least according to the Wikipedia article on Robinsonades – mediated through *The Swiss Family Robinson*, see Anon.: Robinsonades). Such relations, which might give rise to a chain of relations, are, in my interpretation, inherently archipelagic.

Re-framing Robinsonades through materials in the archipelagic mode means attending, in particular, to the role of castaways: Somewhat to the role of the narrator/protagonist, who is, has been, or seeks to be cast-off from 'the world', but, here, predominantly to the role of the materials. The materials entail both the sto-

³ "Myth is a *value*, truth is no guarantee for it; nothing prevents it from being a perpetual alibi: it is enough that its signifier has two sides for it always to have an 'elsewhere' at its disposal. The meaning is always there to *present* the form; the form is always there to *outdistance* the meaning" (Barthes 2000: 123).

ryworld, which treats *Robinson Crusoe* itself as an archive from which materials can be 'borrowed', that is adapted, adopted, or altered, as well as the narrated materials. In the archipelagic mode, this is explicitly *not* a gesture understood only in terms of faithfulness to some kind of however-defined original. It is rather more like what Linda Hutcheon describes as "de-hierarchizing impulse, a desire to challenge the explicitly and implicitly negative cultural evaluation of things like postmodernism, parody, and now, adaptation, which are seen as secondary and inferior" (Hutcheon 2006: xii). An archipelagically informed model of textual analogies, instead, suggests relations that constitute origins as not singular, but rather steps on the way; Linda Hutcheon suggests "we may actually read or see that so-called original after we have experienced the adaptation, thereby challenging the authority of any notion of priority" (Hutcheon 2006: xiii).

There are thus (at least) two, intertwining, dimensions that mark Robinsonades of particular interest in this archipelagic mode, and both relate, albeit in different ways, to an idea of an archive. The first, which I will not stress so heavily in this contribution, is the textual preoccupation with the mode of story-telling: who is telling the story, for whom, under what circumstances, and what is left out (unreliability and/or the politics of literary voice, for example as emerging as a thread through J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, Muriel Spark's *Robinson*, Flavia Company's *The Island of Last Truth*, Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, as well as the two novels I turn to below). A trove of tales in the Robinsonade mode shifts *Robinson Crusoe* from its distinguished position as a venerable source to something more of a treasure chest, dress-up box, if not out-right *Trickkiste*. *Robinson Crusoe* provides materials, perhaps, but they also come from elsewhere (stolen, borrowed, adapted). It is in this sense, too, that Defoe borrowed from Selkirk, adapted from Thomas, and transformed his own writings (e.g. *Tour*). This applies to stories as well as to stuff, objects, tools, and other materials. Materials, or inventory, become the stuff from which imaginations, inventions and interventions arise. Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* and Wu Ming-Yi's *The Man with the Compound Eyes* are exemplary for this.

5 AN ISLAND FOR WILL: Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*

Alexis Wright's novel *Carpentaria*, first published 2006, is epic in scope. It has been broadly received in academic criticism and beyond (winning the Miles Franklin Award, for instance). For this contribution, it is the final image of Will Phantom, an indigenous inhabitant of far-north Queensland in Australia, stranded on an island of debris that constitutes my main interest. In particular, the ways in which the novel motivates thinking through the frames of Robinsonades, as re-dressing allegorical readings of islands, and of constituting livelihoods from salvaged goods. Accordingly, attention is paid to the ways in which materials give rise to worlds, and the ways of living in the present, the Anthropocene, encoded by the text.

The storm(s) so central to Crusoe's fortunes give way to the power of cyclones, but also to weather (and even climate) in Wright's novel. Individual providence is extrapolated to global condition. In Alison Ravenscroft's interpretation – which centres another character from the novel, the ambiguous Elias Smith – the novel "refus[es] to provide a steadying ground. [...] Yet it is this reading practice before Indigenous textuality that contributes in important ways to the very destabilization of the Western knowing subject" (Ravenscroft 2018: 370). In this, and other, senses, *Carpentaria*'s relations to *Robinson Crusoe* are not derivative. More 'traditional' understandings of adaptation, of clear trajectories leading from original to

'copy', fall apart very quickly when the grounds upon which they are built – be it the authority of the author, the idea of ownership of a story, or the certainty of an approach or attitude – no longer hold. The island upon which Will finds himself (the passive construction is an awkward remnant of these very frameworks of knowledge!) itself challenges such notions.

Will Phantom finds himself, then, on an island of debris, washed out from the land after a cyclone has hit his troubled hometown of Desparance. Where Will exercises his will in previous episodes in the novel – responsible for a fire that wreaks havoc on the Desparance town tip and for the bombing of a nearby mining site – his presence on an island of waste, a conglomeration of debris that has formed after the cyclone has hit, seems to be an image of submission to forces larger than the self. Destruction is rendered creative, exploding rifts into the precarious orders of the town – and, metonymically, the nation-state – discursively querying by force of fire, bomb and cyclone. Specific knowledges are required, the novel suggests, to adapt to a place so open to change, where shorelines shift and river paths move. The island itself offers a powerful metaphor for exploring knowledge, suggesting site and flow, manifestation and metaphor. In a more material sense, the island of waste is an image that redresses the hubris of 'will', and acts as a commentary on the environmental devastation that marks the Anthropocene.

The conglomeration of debris on the island is foregrounded by the beginning episodes of the novel, which sees Will's mother, Angel Day, forging a livelihood, a subsistence, out of the discards of others. The house of Will's childhood, for instance, is constructed out of and decorated with refuse salvaged from the tip. Angel Day's salvaged collection from the rubbish tip constitutes the materials with which she forges her survival. This is a "[p]recarious modernity" (Wright 2006: 25), nonetheless one for which she is praised: "Bureaucratic people from the *Aborigines* department [sic] said she had 'Go'" (ibid.: 16). As Nina Jürgens has argued, "[i]n diesem 'littoralen' Raum kommt den angespülten, sich ablagernden Sedimenten von Zivilisationsmüll nicht nur kulturabbildende, sondern vielmehr kulturbildende Funktion zu" (Jürgens 2016: 639).

These images – and functions – fold through into the images of the island. Enumerations of different objects that have washed ashore on this island *comprised of* such objects are striking: "The waters poured dead fish. Sodden spinifex grasses. Sticks. Green wood. Branches. Plastic. Plastic Malanda bottles. Green bags tied up with rubbish" (Wright 2006: 492-93). Will must engage in this debris, this waste, to forge his survival, in a manner that echoes the behaviour of his mother on the rubbish tip. In contrast to Crusoe – and as commentary on Crusoe – there is no illusion of Will being able to select the inventory to facilitate his survival. This is not serendipity in action, but the waste of a (shipwrecked) modernity. Wright's novel does however suggest that it is not only *human* life that must forge its survival under such conditions: With time this island gives way from the junk and detritus to life, as "astonishing plants grow in profusion [...]. All manner of life marooned in this place would sprout to vegetate the wreckage" (ibid.: 495).

The accumulation of debris on the island in *Carpentaria* is therefore not strictly that of the well-known postcolonial trope of the shipwreck, though it is perhaps a close cognate. The movement of materials, in fact, is in quite the opposite direction to the shipwreck as the debris here is swept seaward *from* the land. Wright's novel offers, in Laura Joseph's interpretation, "an alchemical genesis in its rearrangements of the matter of waste. [...] Through this creative refiguration of

waste material, the modern nation is disfigured and ultimately torn; literally culminating in an island of matter floating away from the nation" (Joseph 2009: 5).

Carpentaria's archipelagic qualities have been noted elsewhere. Laura Joseph, for instance, suggests "the dynamic, disobedient, alchemical and archipelagic material elements of the gulf country are harnessed to challenge juridical, discursive and economic claims to the region made by both the nation and international corporations" (Joseph 2009: 2). Another scholar, Demelza Hall, is more insistent on this mode of interpretation, thinking through the heterotopian qualities of the island in an archipelagic mode (cf. Hall 2013); and whilst Elizabeth McMahan rejects the idea of the town (though: not specifically the island) as a heterotopic space, she upholds the potential for an archipelagic reading of the novel more broadly (cf. McMahan 2013). The hermeneutic openness of the text is stressed as being integral to this notion: The epic scope and flowing landscapes give rise to any number of *interconnected, related, and yet separate* understandings of the novel – not the least through citational practices, that is, interpretative archives employed to constitute the materials of scholarly inquiry, practices that lend themselves to an archipelagic framework.

In this sense, amongst others, *Carpentaria* might be anti-Robinson-Crusoe in impetus. However, negated relations still constitute relations, and, crucially, limiting the novel to an analysis of its negative relations would mean forgoing its potential worldings, ignoring the ways the novel comes to terms with the very destabilizations Ravenscroft suggests, and neglecting to grapple with the consequences of large-scale interventions into the environment depicted. The island of debris that constitutes the instable grounds of Will's existence gives way, now, to another shifting mass of castaways in the Pacific Rim: The Great Pacific Garbage Patch in Wu's *The Man with the Compound Eyes*.

6 AN ISLAND FOR ATILE'I: Wu Ming-Yi's *The Man with the Compound Eyes*

The image of Wu Ming-Yi's 2011 novel *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (which I read in English, translated from Chinese by Darryl Sterk) that most patently resonates with these deliberations on the Robinsonade is that of the character Atile'i forging an existence on an amorphous conglomeration of junk from the Trash Vortex: A Pacific trash island. A second-born son,⁴ Atile'i has been jettisoned from his Pacific society who live on an island called Wayo Wayo. His seafaring skills means he survives, if only barely, an ordeal on the open seas, to be washed up on, not grounds, but debris: other material, like himself, jettisoned and floating on the Pacific Ocean.

And so Atile'i discovers he "was beached on an island. Apparently boundless, the island was made not of mud but of a multi-hued mishmash of strange stuff, and there was a weird smell hanging in the air" (Wu: 31). It "sometimes looked like a giant floating cage" (ibid.: 39) and is "a rootless place, the cemetery of all creation" (ibid.: 40). Some creatures who eat bits of the island "eventually became part of the island. Atile'i thought he too might end up becoming part of the island" (ibid.). The accumulation of debris is shifted by currents, until it crashes onto the shores of Taiwan, and into the lives of the protagonists there.

The various threads of the novel allow for various worldings within the space of the novel; worldings that come crashing together in the events of the tsunami of

⁴ Crusoe is a third-born son, though the middle son has disappeared.

trash and its aftermath on the shores of Taiwan. One story-thread concerns Alice, an inhabitant of Taiwan of Chinese descent, who is having to forge her existence after the death of her Danish partner. Her story is told in the first-person, to the very specific effect that this narrative thread is only revealed at the close of the novel as being rather unreliable: Alice's son was not victim of the accident that claimed her partner, as we are led to believe, but died much earlier.⁵ Stories belonging to the Wayo Wayo people find articulation together with the songs and (hi)stories of Hafay, indigenous owner of a café near Alice's house, as well as the narrative thread that entangles Alice's story with an approximation of storyworld truth. In this way, amongst others, Wu's novel is a deliberation on story and questions like who has the right to tell which stories, who can understand them, and who might believe them, in particular in postcolonial contexts.

Modernity, in its shipwrecked manifestation, is inevitably negative in its material effects in Wu's rendition (cf. also Chou 2014: 5): It accumulates unseen as poison from plastic factories as well as plastic debris, is unwanted as tourists, and unbidden as trash tsunami. For Shiuuhuah Serena Chou, these accumulations articulate local manifestations of global environmental damage:

Through protagonist Alice's resentment of the cliché reading of Haven as the 'last virgin land,' Wu builds his conception of 'the local' around the themes of global capitalist expansion as part of the border project of reconstructing an environmental globality characterized by discontinuities, multi-linearity, and multiplicity. (Chou 2014: 5)

Insofar as *The Man With the Compound Eyes* narrates a shipwreck, the proportions have shifted from mercantile trade ship to Pacific-wide gyre of pelagic waste.

That trash might tell stories is a mainstay of Discard or Waste Studies. In Wu, this notion is articulated specifically: "Each piece of trash that floated here seems to have brought a story with it from across the sea, because anything that's been thrown away has its own tale to tell" (Wu: 182). Deliberations on the Plastic Pacific in the novel draw on findings by activist scholars, including that of Charles Moore (cf. Wu: 121 and also Moore/Phillips 2012). Wu is also careful to think through the repercussions of 'making do' with the aftermath: Inhabitants of Taiwan become beachcombers, specifically connecting the inventory of waste with the materials for stories. A character called Ming forges the connection thus:

When I started to 'categorise' all this trash I was amazed at all the strange, smashed-up stuff that turned up: the body panel of a scooter, a stroller, condoms, needles, bras, nylons, etc. I often wonder who the owners were and in what circumstances they threw these things out. [...] I'm more concerned about the residents of the tribal villages. They once depended on coastal planting and fishing to make a living, and now they can only get by picking the trash on the beach. (Wu: 181)

The novel gives multiple perspectives, different stories, different worldings of trash. Theo D'Haen offers a succinct summary of three places that 'worldings' came into being in "Worlding World Literature" (cf. especially D'Haen 2016: 7-8) by referencing Martin Heidegger, Edward Said, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Within the frameworks of the latter two (Said and Spivak), worlding is closely

⁵ At least in my reading. Shiuuhuah Serena Chou and Chen-Hsing Tsai Robin apparently either do not trust the eponymous man with the compound eye's intervention that Alice's son had in fact passed earlier, or there is a particular inflection of the work of the translator that shifts the meaning of this passage from the original (cf. Chou 2014; Robin 2018).

linked to cultural contact zones – particularly those marked by uneven power stakes (especially as pertains to the postcolonial world). For D'Haen, these concerns are linked to those of world literature – a field, debate, and approach much too substantial to address here. The one point I would like to draw from D'Haen's contribution is the shifting shape of the text: "Every time a text is actualized, by its being read or performed, another interpretation arises attuned to its new circumstantiality" (D'Haen 2016: 7). A sense for this "new circumstantiality" and the shifting shape of the text resonates with work done in the mode of the archipelago.

Multiplicities of stories – encapsulated by the eponymous man with the compound eyes – and abundancies of waste link survival to inventories, forging relations across time and space. *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, like Wright's *Carpentaria*, is a Robinsonade in the archipelagic mode.

7 A ROBINSONADE ARCHIPELAGO

In the trope of 'island-hopping', travellers use the visual presence of an island on the horizon to motivate movement. The very presence of another island on the horizon suggests a destination, although it is by no means a *final* destination, as it may give way to travels to a further island. For travellers, human and non-human, of limited technological prowess, the process of 'island-hopping' offers a manner of traversing large distances. If we imagine the world as a 'World Archipelago' (e.g. Depraetere 2008), as a series of islands rather than as structured around continents, or conceived through its oceans, as in the Spilhaus Projection of the globe (e.g. Spilhaus 1942: 433), 'island-hopping' comes into its own as the primary mode of movement that characterises human and non-humans inhabiting the earth. In stressing materials – textual and trash – such a mode of movement – of adaptations, of framings and of creating – also emerges as a powerful way for thinking through textual (and trash!) relations.

We might be 'familiar' with the myth of Robinson Crusoe, but we might also read Wu or Wright before we 'get to' Defoe. We might also have watched *I am a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!* (or *Ich bin ein Star, holt mich hier raus!* – the German version) or have delved into the television world of *Lost* or films such as *Castaway* or *The Martian* before we recognise their Robinsonade tropes. When Brian Russell Roberts evokes William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) as a Robinsonade, alongside the ABC television series *Lost* (Roberts 2016: 6), it is precisely this counter-intuitive gesture – that *The Tempest*, first performed over 100 years prior to the publication of Defoe's novel, might be considered within the generic logic of the Robinsonade, itself named for Defoe's novel – that the archipelago promises as model. Any island might serve as a point of departure, no island is necessarily destination. The relations between otherwise disparate places forged through journeys (whether in canoes or within canons) give rise to itineraries of meanings. Robinsonades, like *Carpentaria* and *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, are meditations on the materials which we are left with, from our own specific entanglements with our material worlds as well as from the narrative forms we apply to make sense of these worlds.

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