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Postcolonialism, the Anthropocene, and New Nonhuman Theory: A Postanthropocentric
Reading of *Robinson Crusoe*
Sten Pultz Moslund

Abstract: This article illustrates the relevance of postanthropocentric theory (e.g., New Materialism, Object-Oriented Ontology, and Actor Network Theory) to postcolonial studies of literature and addresses the task, suggested by Dipesh Chakrabarty, of stretching postcolonial ideas of subjectivity to include the human-nonhuman entwinements made visible by the reality of the Anthropocene. By outlining postcolonial criticisms of postanthropocentric theory, the article highlights common ground between the two theories and argues for new perspectives that postcolonial studies may take from that common ground. It illustrates these new perspectives in a combined postcolonial and postanthropocentric reading of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)—a novel that the article positions as an imperialist cultural icon as well as the dawn of a highly anthropocentric imaginary in Western culture. In this respect, the article’s reading of *Robinson Crusoe* does three things: 1) Uncovers the conjunction in the novel of an anthropocentric and imperial imaginary and illustrates how (imperial) literature contributes to the cultural suppression of human-nonhuman entwinements; 2) draws on postanthropocentric theory to show how human-nonhuman divisions cannot be sustained even in literature that triumphantly celebrates human exceptionalism; and 3) suggests how a postanthropocentric reading may combine with a de-ontologization of race. The article argues that something always escapes anthropocentric representation, and alterity is inevitably let into any narrative through the connotative and aesthetic work of any referent to reality.

Keywords: postcolonial studies, postanthropocentric theory, New Materialism, Object-Oriented Ontology, Actor Network Theory, the Anthropocene, imperial literature, *Robinson Crusoe*

I. Introduction

The range of postanthropocentric theories in circulation since the new millennium—New Materialism, Speculative Realism, Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), and Actor Network Theory (ANT)—represent a major change in contemporary thought. In various ways, these theories offer views on the world and reality that differ profoundly from the anthropocentric presumption of human exceptionalism that has dominated particularly Western productions of knowledge and behaviour—from the Enlightenment to the current crisis of anthropogenic global warming. With different points of emphasis—and with new analytical concepts and theoretical vocabularies, such as Bruno Latour’s “human-nonhuman hybrids” and “actants,” Jane Bennett’s “thing power,” Stacy Alaimo’s “trans-corporeality,” and Graham Harman’s

“surplus of reality” and “object withdrawal”—postanthropocentric theories seek to disrupt our habitual humanization of the world by theorizing the ontology of more-than-human realities and visualizing the agency of and human entanglements with nonhumans.¹

Accordingly, postanthropocentric theory spotlights the fact that nonhuman forces—from quarks, electrons, and microbes to hammers, earthquakes, and global warming—shape and condition human life and sociocultural realities. It also transforms how we, in modern society, intellectualize and imagine nature, culture, society, subjects and objects, language, and representation—even our basic perception of what counts as the political. No longer seen as a humans-only affair, the political is de-anthropocentricized, too, to include representations and social agencies of nonhumans as part of a shared “social life of things” (Mol 255).²

This philosophical shift raises an important question: What role will a field like postcolonial studies play in relation to such a major theoretical upheaval? At first glance, postanthropocentric and postcolonial theories appear to be a bad fit. Given the prevalence of human-to-human concerns in postcolonial studies (in all their social, cultural, political, and linguistic transmutations), postanthropocentric theory’s concentration on nonhumans and more-than-human ontologies may seem an unhelpful diversion of attention from urgent matters of disempowerment and suffering caused not by gamma rays, internal organs, or trees but by other humans. Posthuman thinking theorizes not the empowerment (or attainment) of human subjectivity but its relative dissolution, not the history of interhuman power struggles but a decentralization of human history altogether. This is a criticism voiced by several scholars,³ including, most famously, Paul Gilroy. Gilroy worries that an academic relativization of the human will remain blind to or even desensitize the history of colonial dehumanization, just as he senses a risk that an overshadowing concern with the Anthropocene in the humanities will allow for a banalization of other anxieties, such as the

suffering caused by racialization (“Every Breeze” 3-4, 7, 10). As he notes, racialized people already have a (continuing) history of being deprived of their subjectivity, of being exiled from humanity as exploitable “objects among other objects” (5) and “judged to belong to nature rather than to history” (11).⁴

On the other hand, the inclusion of new postanthropocentric perspectives is growing in postcolonial and decolonial studies. Dipesh Chakrabarty has made an inspiring appeal to initiate a shift of scale in postcolonial studies away from the exclusively human-human level. He suggests that global warming and the Anthropocene throw postcolonial studies into a new phase; like most sciences and other fields of study, they must reconsider the human as inescapably entangled with the nonhuman. In an effort to expand postcolonial thinking and “adjust itself to the reality of global warming” (Chakrabarty 1), our conception of the human “needs to be stretched beyond where postcolonial thought advanced it” (11), which entails a “doubling” of the human figure as “human-human” and “nonhuman-human” (14-15). Likewise, in *The Great Derangement* (2016), Amitav Ghosh draws on postanthropocentric perspectives to reflect on how the Anthropocene necessitates cultural and political restructurings of human thought and behaviour in order to re-cognize the planet’s alien aliveness and human reality as “animated by nonhuman voices” (73).⁵

II. Overlaps Between Postcolonial and Postanthropocentric Concerns

Yet postcolonial theory might not even have to stretch very far beyond itself to rethink the human as entangled with the nonhuman or to “adjust . . . to the reality of global warming.” This is a central point in the first book-length attempt to bring together postcolonial studies and postanthropocentric theory, *Coloniality, Ontology and the Question of the Posthuman* (2018), edited by Mark Jackson. Both fields are concerned with crises of the human which

they ascribe to a hegemonic and violent Western conception of the human and adjunctive epistemologies of modernity and capitalism. As Jackson puts it, the history of European humanism boils down to a divisive “speciesism” (“Introduction” 10) that separates human “cognition and self-consciousness from the natural world” (“Ecologies” 30). Originally based on the normative and invisibilized constitution of the knowing human subject as white, Christian, middle-class, and male—simply summarized as “Man” by Sylvia Wynter (“Unsettling” 260-61)—European humanism has historically excluded others from “legitimate participation” in the political (Jackson, “Ecologies” 30). These others range from non-males, non-whites, and non-Europeans to nonhumans, who are all in one way or another thought of as the deficient and subjacent Others of Man, lacking in subjectivity and reduceable to passive objects of knowledge, systemic exploitation, and resource extraction. Hence, the anthropocentric exceptionalism targeted by postanthropocentric theory “has a history that is itself the product of Euro-modern colonial forces” (Jackson, “Introduction” 10-11). The figure of the human that enables capitalism and colonialism is closely interlinked with the thinking and behaviour that has led to anthropogenic climate change.⁶

Postcolonial studies and postanthropocentric theory also draw closer when we consider the significance of otherness in their confrontation with the hegemonic “conceptual apparatuses” (2) that undergird colonialism, racism, and environmental destruction. Divisions between culture and nature as well as the human and the nonhuman have never been as impervious in postcolonial and decolonial studies as in imperialist and Eurocentric thought and theory—quite the contrary. Jackson mentions Édouard Glissant’s “rhizome” as a concept, among many others, that challenges Western nature-culture boundaries and rethinks “a multiple relationship with the other” (“Introduction” 14).⁷ Moreover, postcolonial and decolonial studies increasingly explore resistances to human exceptionalism in anti-reductive

epistemologies of non-Western cultures and philosophies that were marginalized by Western knowledge systems.⁸ Like postanthropocentric theory, the many Indigenous epistemologies that precede it conceive of human thought, affect, and agency as deeply shaped by and integrated with material ecologies. In this context, postcolonial qualms about postanthropocentric theory are not so much about its deanthropocentricizing inclusion of nonhumans as much as its general blindness to antecedent non-European epistemologies and ontologies (Jackson, “Ecologies” 37, 48).⁹

The blindness to Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies overlaps with postcolonial criticism of the notion of the “Anthropocene,” which scholars such as Gilroy (“Every Breeze” 11), Rosi Braidotti (“Posthuman” 2), Angela Willey (999-1000), Monirul Islam (122), Lisa Tilley (169), and Carlo Bonura (223) assess as a universalizing term that elides the differences in human conditionalities produced by imperialism, race, and gender. As long as postanthropocentric theory on the Anthropocene fails to historicize the figure of the human, it implicates all humans as the cause of climate change and depletion of biodiversity, which obscures Western (mostly male-driven) industrialization, capitalism, and overconsumption as key factors in such crises. Donna Haraway, for this reason, suggests the Capitalocene as a counter-concept that foregrounds fossil-fuelled capitalism and consumerism as the main catalysts of global warming and planetary devastation.¹⁰ Scholars like T. J. Demos use the term “Plantationocene” to describe “a sub-category” of the Capitalocene; the phrase refers to the economy of the plantation system and its particular “nexus of corporate colonialism, slave labor, and commodification of nature.”¹¹

If we look specifically at postanthropocentric theory in relation to literature, the latter is only casually mentioned by Chakrabarty and Jackson. Ghosh, on the other hand, examines the Anthropocene and its history partially through a literary lens. He calls for “a transformed

and renewed art and literature” (*Derangement* 162) that is capable of addressing the inconceivably vast reality of the Anthropocene that has “become impossible to exclude, even from texts” (63), while simultaneously regretting primarily Western but also modern Asian literature’s complicity in what he calls the “great derangement” of human thinking that lies at the root of global warming. He contends that, since the onset of modernity, the majority of literary narratives have significantly contributed to the anthropocentricizing erasure of nature-culture entanglements and the illusion that humans have freed themselves from nature’s material circumstances to become their own masters and creators (135).¹² In addition to Ghosh’s book, an increasing number of published articles explore the representation of the Anthropocene in mainly recent postcolonial literature.¹³ So far, this research concentrates on the question of how to read for evidence, traces, and problems of the Anthropocene as well as the need for new language and forms of representation that are capable of grasping the reality of human-nonhuman relationships that the Anthropocene has forced us to recognize.

However—and this point is partially acknowledged by Ghosh—human-nonhuman hybrids and nonhuman agencies already proliferate in the postcolonial literary heritage as part of its efforts to decentre European subjectivity. Consider, for example, the profound challenge to imperial ideology, capitalist exploitation, and human exceptionalism evoked by the jungle in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) or the animist religion in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) that exposes Judeo-Christian insensibilities to nonhuman life. Or consider how, later, nature’s otherness plays a central role in Aimé Césaire’s, Derek Walcott’s, Wilson Harris’, and Glissant’s dealings with the “traumas of conquest” (Harris, “Author’s Note” 8) that have saturated Caribbean landscapes. To Harris, “no one and nothing lives outside of nature” (“Legacy” 1), but imperialism has “helped push this present age into a numb insensibility to the life of the Earth” (“Canaima” 3). Therefore, he urges readers to see how, in fiction, “[t]he life of the earth” is

“sensitively woven into the characters that move upon it . . . so that we may speak of a humanity whose feet are made of mud or land or water[,] . . . to attune us to our being on an earth that moves as we are moving on it” (“Theatre” 263). Consider in the same light human-nonhuman entanglements in Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* (1972) or Mahasweta Devi’s *Pterodactyl* (1995), to mention but a few examples from a vast body of literature.

III. Tasks Ahead in Postanthropocentric Studies of Postcolonial Literature and the Example of *Robinson Crusoe*

I agree with Jackson that the future role of postcolonial criticism is creative, capable of re-imagining how “things, and so thought, could be otherwise” (“Ecologies” 46). As he puts it – with reference to Kant’s Copernican distinction between human comprehension of reality and the nonhuman world in and of itself – as postcolonial scholars we can either dispute the implication “that the rational human is limited to a northern European character, all the while holding on to Kant’s deeply persuasive distinction” (“Ecologies” 27-28) or we can “challenge this distinction itself” by problematizing “the nature-culture distinction upon which it depends” (28). According to Jackson, the latter involves a reimagination that understands and foregrounds “interdependence” as “the condition of emergence for anything whatsoever,” which is the first step for a future politics of care (49).

I see literature’s creative task as one of engendering a sensitivity to human-nonhuman realities and interdependences, a sensitivity that may already be invited by literary works (as in the texts mentioned above) but has rarely been heeded until now. In such cases, literature may represent a creative space of knowledge and discovery that already contributes to an epistemological shift away from the “Eurocentric epistemological model of human exceptionalism” (Jackson,

“Ecologies” 25), whether in new Anthropocene fictions or through postanthropocentric re-readings of older works.

Though many important discoveries lie ahead in postanthropocentric studies of postcolonial literature (old and new), I believe the task of epistemological decolonization also involves a postanthropocentric re-engagement with the West’s imperial cultural heritage—for instance, as I will illustrate, in the form of critical readings of ever-popular Eurocentric and anthropocentric classics such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Critical readings of imperial literature can spotlight how human-nonhuman divisions cannot be sustained even in literature that triumphantly celebrates human exceptionality: that novels of imperial heroes, when read from within a postanthropocentric imaginary, show such heroes to be always already nature-culture hybrids and deeply entangled with and co-created by nonhuman reality.

One such founding hero is, of course, Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. A cultural figure much larger than the character itself, *Crusoe* continues to range among “the great myths of our civilization” (Watt 95) that live “in the imagination mainly as a triumph of human achievement and enterprise” (97). It is only in the history of revisionary analyses (from the modernists through to postcolonial readings) that *Crusoe* stands out as “the menacing symbol” (119) of a reality that has become increasingly clear—what Ian Watt identifies as “the calculating gaze of colonial capitalism” that translates everything, including humans, into growth, progress, and objects of possession (100). Today, the “menacing symbol” includes our knowledge of the Anthropocene. *Crusoe* may be rethought, accordingly, as a cultural figure that epitomizes the dominant perception of reality at the dawn of the Anthropocene or, more precisely, the Capitalocene/Plantationocene. *Crusoe* is a prime example of Ghosh’s argument that “it was in exactly the period in which human activity was changing the earth’s atmosphere”—around the mid-1700s—“that the literary

imagination became radically centered on the human” (*Derangement* 66) and, not least, “the individualizing imaginary in which we are trapped” (135).

The following analysis will show, first, how Crusoe’s capitalist/imperialist/racist ordering of the world is undergirded by an anthropocentric division of the human and the nonhuman, which, according to Ghosh, illustrates literature’s critical part in suppressing the entwinement of human and nonhuman beings and agencies in the cultural cognizance of coloniality (*Derangement* 65). Secondly, and with emphasis on critical creativity, I will suggest a particular aesthetic mode of reading—an *aesthetic* mode of reading—that releases conceptualizations of the human and nonhuman from the anthropocentric grip we have inherited from imperialist realism. “Aesthetic” in this context refers to the original Greek sense of *aīsthētic*—perception by the senses—which stresses the sensory element of aesthetic appreciation and adds an embodied dimension to the act of reading. My argument, shared by a number of postanthropocentric, postcolonial, and decolonial scholars, is that an embodied imaginary and apprehension of reality (*aisthesis*) potentially harbours a greater heterogeneity of relations with matter-reality (the reality of matter and objects) than abstract concepts and categorizations.¹⁴

Crusoe’s language appears to manage a colonization of all of perceivable reality in the novel, leaving nothing outside his anthropocentric and imperialist vision and control of the real. Yet I contend that this dimension of his language is incapable of sustaining itself once certain aesthetic qualities of the literary text are brought into play in combination with a postanthropocentric approach. Once that happens, realities in the novel, other than the one controlled by Crusoe’s perception of things, begin to emerge: realities that swarm with the agency of nonhuman actors and transcorporeal entwinements of humans and nonhumans. In the second part of my analysis, I will suggest how a postanthropocentric reading can also combine with a release of language from its

colonization by racist ideology, not in opposition to poststructural deconstructions of Crusoe's racializing language but as an additional form of critique that radically de-ontologizes race.

A key argument throughout the analysis is that Crusoe's anthropocentric and racializing language, like any employment of language, does not use up all of the reality it describes. That is, there is always an excess of reality that escapes Crusoe's definitions of objects and phenomena; this ultimately disturbs Crusoe's reductive representation of the world, puncturing it with holes of silence and destabilizing it with the accumulation of other meanings and significations. Moreover, alterity and non-human entanglements are inevitably introduced into the literary work through the connotative and aesthetic work, or agency, of reality referents. Hence, as much as language is Crusoe's primary vehicle in reducing or suppressing the unruly heterogeneity of the real to give shape to his anthropocentric/Eurocentric ordering of things, language (specifically its aesthetic openness) is also the medium by which a reality in excess of his divisive categories slips into the novel.

IV. Crusoe's Anthropocentrification of Reality

Postcolonial readings of *Robinson Crusoe* approach the novel primarily as a work of human-to-human affairs, critiquing its promulgation of individualism, capitalism, imperialism, and racism.¹⁵ Such readings do not connect their critical points about human-human inequities with modernity's creation of a strong anthropocentric outlook on reality. Whether Marxist, historicist, poststructuralist, or postcolonial, such readings show how Crusoe turns everything into discursive constructions. Yet precisely because they remain safely within the analysis of reality as a discursive construction, these critiques never examine the profound (but silent) significance in the novel of human-nonhuman or nature-culture divisions. In fact, it may be argued that nonhumans are (unwittingly) made to play a dumb and passive part in postcolonial readings of *Robinson Crusoe*

and, in that way, they largely repeat the great division in the imperialist imaginary between creative human subjectivity and inert nonhuman matter. Nature is passive in Watt's reading, too. Watt identifies the "ultimate message of the story" (101) as the final conquest and pacification of nature: "[W]herever the white man brings his rational technology there can only be man-made order, and the jungle itself must succumb to the irresistible teleology of capitalism" (101). Secondly, postcolonial readings of *Robinson Crusoe* make visible the racist construction of the native Crusoe befriends and renames Friday, but that is usually where they stop, with no suggestion as to what reality might be if there is a reality outside Crusoe's racializing categories. A postanthropocentric challenge to racism ventures beyond, as I will demonstrate, the cultural construction itself.

Crusoe's capitalist/imperialist/racist ordering of the world is built on a fundamentally anthropocentric division of human-nonhuman reality, or mechanisms of "purification," as Latour calls it (*Pandora's Hope* 214), which comprehend the subject as pure subject and the object as pure object (i.e., as pure binaries that are not in any way entangled). In *Robinson Crusoe* the sense of a purified human subject, the narrative "I," is, for example, universally increased by the introspective mood of the novel (conveying a disembodied human consciousness in lonely dialogue with itself): "[A]s to deliver my thoughts from daily poring upon them[,] . . . my reason began to master my despondency, I began to comfort myself as well as I could" (Defoe 83). Correspondingly, objects are purified as objects by their global representation as existents belonging to a qualitatively different (without depth or complexity) and distinctly externalized reality: "I saw abundance of fowls, but knew not their kinds, neither when I killed them could I tell what was fit for food" (71), "I saw . . . [an] abundance of cocoa trees, orange, and lemon, and citron trees; but all wild, and very few bearing any fruit" (114). Much of the divisive representation of reality and the sustained illusion of an exceptional human presence autonomously produced by itself—unaffected by nature while acting upon it—is naturalized by the novel's narrative point of view.

The combination of what I summarize as a disembodied inward emotional eye and an outward rationalizing eye coincides with, and is further reinforced by, another dominant (and often noted) feature of Crusoe's narrative: the persistent translation of the world into use value. Externalized phenomena (like sun and water) do not appear in any emotional or sensuous mode of comprehension, nor do they prompt questions about human existence as such. Crusoe refers to such phenomena primarily when they make themselves useful as resources—as food, tools, and building materials—in his various endeavours: “[T]he nature and experience of things dictated to me . . . that all the good things of this world are no further good to us than they are for our use” (Defoe 140). This is how we read nonhumans if we read the novel anthropocentrically: we read words like “sun” and “water,” “fowls” and “trees” as referents to externalized objects whose significance hinges on their transformation by human ingenuity into objects of human use or consumption. To borrow some expressions from Harman, objects are reduced in this way from their heterogeneous (and ultimately withdrawn) existence to “a general equipmental effect,” and we lose sight of such reductions because “[e]quipment in action operates in an inconspicuous usefulness, doing its work without our noticing it” (*Tool-Being* 45).

The only other way (i.e., less reductive and utilitarian) in which nonhumans gain significance in Crusoe's comprehension of the world is when they pose a threat to his life or to human reason and emotion or to the supposed autonomy of his human will. In fact, Crusoe frequently ascribes agency to nonhumans in such circumstances, as with the “raging wave” that sinks the ship—“[I]t took us with such fury, that it upset the boat at once” (Defoe 64)—and the pulsing violence of heat on the island—“I pulled off my clothes, for the weather was hot to extremity” (144). Crusoe's depiction of the nonhuman as hostile hardens the externalization of nature's forces as something that is radically separated from human nature. The powerful agency of nonhumans, just like their passive existence, appears as if in a realm outside the human sphere,

without order or direction. It is violent, savage, irrational, mechanical, meaningless—like the “fury” of waves or the “fowls of many sorts, making a confused screaming” (72)—and something that has to be overcome and harnessed lest the human be “reduced to a meer [sic] state of nature” (130).

Of course, Crusoe’s perception of nature as alternately utilitarian and antagonistic is connected to his struggle for survival, but in a postanthropocentric/postcolonial reading, the plot of survival shifts to one of sustaining the distinction between nature and culture toward the final triumph of the modern European subject in control of a tamed, nonhuman, matter world. Once established on the island, Crusoe begins sorting and ordering space. He domesticates wild animals, grows crops, makes furniture, builds a fortress, and establishes human time (days, weeks, months, years).¹⁶ In the process, everything we read about is transformed by the impression of an increasingly humanized reality that keeps expanding across a retreating wilderness. Again, Crusoe’s “equipmental” language plays a central role in creating this impression insofar as it almost clinically clears the text of affective and bodily sensations of things. As Nancy Armstrong writes, “[i]t is as if, having dislodged *sensation* completely from referents in the world, Defoe can shift the theatre of domination from nature . . . to human nature and the world of consciousness” (187; emphasis added). She implies that a bodily and sensate—or aesthetic—apprehension or representation of reality is generally less successful in upholding the illusion of human exceptionalism than a more “equipmental” use of language. In this light, the overlap of anthropocentrism, imperialism, and capitalism begins to stand out in *Robinson Crusoe* inasmuch as the two most powerful ways in which sensation is “dislodged . . . from referents” happens through Crusoe’s imperialist discourse and the language of counting. Crusoe famously begins to (re)name the place (and, later, Friday) and take possession of all that is in it through a fusion of anthropocentric-imperialist speech acts: “I was king and lord of all this country indefeasibly[,] . . . completely as any lord of a manor in England” (Defoe 114); “I had the lives of all my subjects at

my absolute command” (157). The heterogeneous complexities and singularities that may lie hidden in referents to material reality, “all this” and “the lives of all,” disappear entirely from view because of their abstraction into formal categories of power, territorialization, and possession: “king,” “lord,” “country,” “my subjects,” “my absolute command,” “manner,” and “England.” A parallel reduction of reality is executed via the violent translation of lives and beings into calculable objects by disembodied and abstract enumerations (the primary reality mode of modernity’s “economic man”): a leopard’s skin equals the value of twenty ducats (55), the black child Xury equals “60 pieces of eight” (54); Crusoe describes a felled cedar in reductive measurements (“five foot ten inches diameter at the lower part next the stump, and four foot eleven inches diameter at the end of twenty two foot” [138]); and, later, he diminishes the value of human (or what he calls “savage”) lives to a listing of twenty-four kills (237).

Such are the workings of Crusoe’s rational and economic realism. The human-nonhuman and inner-outer divisions of his narrative point of view, his “equipmental” descriptions of nature, the language of conquest and possession, and his transformation of matter-reality into abstract numbers all work to establish an absolute division of reality into pure subjects and pure objects or pure culture and pure nature. Crusoe’s realism creates the persuasive impression of an honest and commonsense account of the-world-as-it-is, which seems to effortlessly self-expand and stretch out across all of the real to become the only reality, transparently represented and explained as all there is. It is a realism that makes any notion of human-nonhuman hybrids and entanglements seem absurd or scandalous, if not entirely inconceivable in the first place. As Ghosh writes, “[h]ere, then, is the irony of the ‘realist’ novel: the very gestures with which it conjures up reality are actually a concealment of the real” (*Derangement* 23).

V. The Limited Reach of Crusoe’s Anthropocentric Language

However, if we read a little closer, Crusoe's anthropocentric hold on reality in the novel is far from definitive. One of the only readers to have discovered this is Virginia Woolf. In a short text that, among other things, criticizes Robinson Crusoe's "shrewd, middle-class, unimaginative eyes" (31), Woolf observes that, although Crusoe is invested in subduing "all elements to his design" (32), astoundingly, he "notices only a tenth part of what is going on round him" (31). Her primary example is the unidentified "creatures" Crusoe briefly mentions on his journey along the African coast before the shipwreck. "We are much more alarmed," she writes, "by the 'vast great creatures' that swim out in the night and surround his boat than he is" (31). Woolf suggests that this inattentiveness is a manifestation of how not everything in the novel's depiction of reality is "capable of a rational explanation" or reducible to Crusoe's version of things (31). A creative postanthropocentric reading of the novel might begin by following Woolf's example of paying more attention than Crusoe to the existents that appear in the novel. If we do so, we will discover that Crusoe's perception of things does not fill out all of the story's reality and, arguably, a larger and far more hybrid and heterogeneous reality proliferates in disobedience to Crusoe's language of anthropocentric reifications, quantifications, and toolifications (even if this was never Defoe's intention).

Defoe's novel is made of language of course, and, as shown, language is crucial to Crusoe's anthropocentric subject-object, human-nonhuman, culture-nature purifications. Correspondingly, the capacity to speak in the novel reifies the exceptionality of human consciousness and imagination. Whereas the human (i.e., Crusoe) speaks, Defoe represents everything else as either inarticulate noise (like the birds and the storm) or incommunicative silence: "I was alone, circumscribed by the boundless ocean, cut off from mankind, and condemned to what I called *silent life*" (164; emphasis added). "Silent life" refers not only to Crusoe's own silence (in the absence of a conversant) but also to the language-less silence of things and nonhuman phenomena around

him—hence his fear of degenerating into the muteness of nature. Crusoe’s perception of objects as mute also implies that he presumes them to be passive or, at most, to embody an unproductive (and sometimes threatening), directionless state of indistinctness and incoherence. “Inarticulate” comes to mean “uncreative.” In a postanthropocentric perspective, however, it is precisely the muteness of objects and the world of matter—issued by unresponsive gaps, omissions, and silences in Crusoe’s language—that reveals the limits of his anthropocentric knowledge regime.

Language sometimes breaks down for Crusoe as he attempts to describe everything he sees on the island, leaving some remarkable holes and gaps in his descriptions of reality. Much of the island’s flora and fauna is unfamiliar to him, and he does not have any names for them, as with the unnamed coastal beasts that alarm Woolf: there are birds he has never seen before (Defoe 71, 123, 186), “wild creatures” which only resemble hares (128), and a diversity of plants which he has “no notion of, or understanding about” (112). Some landscapes, too, are hard to define, as in the case of a “plain open” landscape that he can best describe as something in-between “savannah” and “meadow-land” (155).

Such uncertainties or holes in Crusoe’s language occur repeatedly throughout his narrative (and are of course a common issue in European colonial and settler literature). They may not change Crusoe’s primarily utilitarian perception of nonhuman phenomena, but, silently (and if we allow them to attract our attention), the holes do something else: they are holes in Crusoe’s anthropocentric descriptions of the world that mark limits of Crusoe’s perception of reality and betray the existence of a larger reality in the novel than his. In the gap between “savannah” and “meadowland,” for instance, something escapes or partially withdraws from Crusoe’s definitions and the consequent reductive appearance of nonhumans as equipmental value. I suggest that the withdrawal of reality in the gap between “savannah” and “meadowland,” of the reality of objects from Crusoe’s definition, imparts no less than a language-independent reality that exceeds linguistic

description, or at least the linguistic description at Crusoe's disposal. In Harman's terms, Crusoe's language does not manage to "use up the reality of things" ("The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer" 186)—or we could say, like Timothy Morton, that the silent withdrawal of reality from definition in such gaps subverts Crusoe's "metaphysics of presence" (Morton, "They Are Here" 176). To Morton, capitalism's proprietary relationship with nonhumans depends on the illusion of their "full presence in the commodity format" (*Humankind* 23) (or, I suggest, their full presence as calculable objects), and capitalism works accordingly, like imperialism and racism, to prevent or obliterate the withdrawal of objects from such specific modes of knowability (98-99). We may, in this way, register a non-semantic or nonhuman agency at play within the novel's representation of reality, an agency that resists the language Crusoe has brought with him to the island.¹⁷

Yet in a postanthropocentric imaginary, nonhuman realities actively intrude upon the text not only when language ceases to function or gaps in definitions emerge that unsettle the lucidity of the Crusoe-governed image of reality. Language is also open to the intrusion when the aesthetic affordances of words are allowed greater play in our reading of the novel (as should be allowed within an aesthetic and allusive form like literature). Just as reality withdraws from cultural definition with Crusoe's inability to describe it or in the absence of names for various phenomena, the reality referred to by a bright and clear word like "meadow" also withdraws from any finite and specifically anthropocentric meaning if we release its aesthetic affordances—that is, if we read a word like "meadow" not as a two-dimensional categorial denominator but as an aesthetic word through which a story summons the appearances and sensations of existents to flesh out its characters' embodied, or, rather, "trans-corporeal," environments, to use Alaimo's term for how human and nonhuman bodies are inescapably enmeshed.

We assume we already know what we mean when we say "meadow" (and the word works pretty well that way in a purely informational, or "equipmental," mode of communication), but if

we slow down and pay attention to the complexity of the reality to which it refers (more than, for example, Crusoe's ten percent), the great heterogeneity of nonhumans that are compressed into this shorthand reference to something bigger begins to decompress and crowd our reading with many existents "in excess of their association with human meanings, habits and projects" (Bennett 4). When read aesthetically, as the hybrid of a sign and a sensed thing (Latour, *Never Been Modern* 133), the word "meadow" transmutes into vague and unspecific (imagined or remembered) percepts and affects of colours, textures, shifting shapes, and shades of light, as well as heterogeneities represented by the sensations of grass, scrubs, plants, flowers, dirt, or weather, perhaps even sensations of warmth and movement and sounds of animals and insects.

This is a central point in *Friday* (1967), Michel Tournier's literary "inversion" of *Robinson Crusoe*, as Latour describes it ("Attempt" 472). If anything, Tournier's novel is about the visualization of nonhuman agencies in shaping Crusoe's experience of reality, his emotional life, and the conditions of his existence. Tournier takes a word like "meadow" from Defoe's novel and populates it with an incalculable heterogeneity of matter-reality. In *Friday*, the "meadow" is "a vegetable world" and an "amorphous" and "intricately contrived mass" of "minute living entities" (Tournier 59).¹⁸ By releasing the reality of objects from their reduction by automatized structures of perception and habitualized uses of language, Tournier experiments with aesthetic—or affective and sensate—appearances of things that dissolve any of the clear body-mind, inner-outer, subject-object, and human-nonhuman divisions that inhabit the prosaic and enumerating language of Defoe's *Crusoe*: "A warm breath set the leaves stirring. . . . He pictured his own lungs growing outside himself like a blossoming of purple-tinted flesh, living polyparies of coral with pink membranes, sponges of human tissue" (Tournier 193). In Tournier's novel, such aesthetic foregrounding of a more-than-human reality reconfigures the human in de-anthropocentricizing ways. The human begins to emerge as an aeolian being. The breath and flesh and forms of Crusoe's

body and mind, emotions and sensations, re-emerge as folds in the breath, flesh, and forms of the nonhuman world. Reality appears through a human imagination and perceptual apparatus, but the appearance of reality in this mode is already blended with and part of a nonhuman world. Gilles Deleuze (already a major figure in postanthropocentric theory) rightly observes that in Tournier's novel it is the island, not Crusoe, who is the main character ("Michel Tournier" 53). Tournier's Crusoe does not change the island or nonhuman reality as much as the island changes him. It alters his face and body, modes of thinking, perception of things, imagination, emotions, and desires.¹⁹

However, Defoe's Crusoe is no less "other-made," to borrow Jackson's term ("Ecologies" 20)—that is, co-shaped by other-than-human forces. The only difference between *Robinson Crusoe* in this regard and a work like Tournier's *Friday* is that this fact is obscured by Crusoe's anthropocentric language of utility, possession, enumeration, and surface divisions. If we re-read the story with a postanthropocentric sensitivity to the novel's silent realities, none of the nonhumans in *Robinson Crusoe* is actually passive. In fact, nonhumans reveal themselves as the primary agents in the novel, making Crusoe's adventure happen in the first place: their challenge to his existence generates the entire plot, just as his ability to survive depends, all along, on their agency and solidarity.

VI. Crusoe as "Other-Made"

I have demonstrated how, in *Robinson Crusoe*, nonhuman phenomena emerge from the background, as it were, to the centre of attention when they constitute threats or when they are harnessed and reshaped as resources that the main character can use and control. In reverse, whenever they support Crusoe's existence, nonhuman agencies are automatically explained away by other means, not least by his accounts of his own industriousness and creativity. This is particularly clear in Crusoe's six-page-long account of the hard work it takes to produce a loaf of

bread (Defoe 129-35). Crusoe marvels at the complexity of knowledge and labour involved in the production of such a simple thing: “the strange multitude of little things necessary in the providing, producing, curing, dressing, making, and finishing this one article of bread” (130). Watt (and Karl Marx before him) notes that Crusoe shows how something familiar has become unfamiliar; Crusoe makes visible the separation of production and consumption that already in the early eighteenth century had made the labour behind commodities invisible to modern middle-class merchants and consumers (like Crusoe and his readers). However, the disclosure of a human-human reality of labour exploitation obscured by capitalism that Watt foregrounds (102-05) is also emblematic of the way he, like Crusoe, fails to see all the nonhumans that are equally crucial to the production of bread.²⁰ Crusoe and his readers (then and now) may marvel at the Marxist rediscovery of physical labour but are never occasioned to marvel at a rediscovery of nonhuman agencies in bringing about a single loaf of bread—or in the production of anything human.

Crusoe’s fascination with human work and ingenuity directs his readers’ attention only to the complexity of human effort in the making of bread—the tools to be invented and made (spade, rakes, cutters, a hearth, etc.) and the subsequent labour of the human body (digging, sowing, tilling, raking, reaping, etc.). However, if we “follow the actors,” which is how Latour explains the ANT method (*Reassembling the Social* 12), the production of bread re-emerges in the novel as one big network of entwinements and human-nonhuman hybridizations. If we pay attention to and gather all the bread-related referents or actors (human and nonhuman) that are scattered on the six pages (Defoe 129-35)—e.g., “crop,” “harvest,” “invention,” “utensils,” “trees,” “firewood,” “coals,” “burning,” “seed,” “ground,” “growing,” “sun,” “rain,” “water,” “heat,” “climate,” “season”—a great human-nonhuman assemblage comes into view that teems with interacting participants and mediating forces (material and immaterial) in the production of bread. Simple purities of subjects and objects, human and nonhuman agencies dissolve into many impure hybrids, as in the mix of

human and nonhuman actants in a single phenomenon like “firewood.” Crusoe’s inclusion of even such a complex nonhuman as “growing” (so quotidian yet so inescapable and, essentially, foreign to final comprehension) betrays a contradictory history running through Crusoe’s anthropocentric account of bread-making: the onto-history of human and nonhuman entanglements and sociabilities without which Crusoe would not even exist. Or, in terms of Alaimo’s re-theorization of human corporality as “trans-corporeality,” his human body is enmeshed with nonhuman bodies and, from that perspective, nature can no longer be posed as “mere background”; nature and the embodied human subject reveal themselves as continuous and inseparably entwined (2).²¹

A similar analysis can be made, and in much greater detail, of the whole novel and all of Crusoe’s activities. When the real is amplified in this way, released from anthropocentric reductions, Crusoe’s life and the entire cultural project he represents re-emerge as deeply “folded into nonhumans” (Latour, *Pandora's Hope* 189), no less so than in the so-called primitive cultures. Crusoe fears that he will be “reduced to . . . meer [sic] . . . nature,” but the novel’s hidden, silenced, and unconscious reality is that Crusoe and all of his kingdom have never been and never will be anything other than a human-nonhuman hybrid. What emerges is a novel vibrating with nature-culture and human-nonhuman hybrids that go unregistered by the main character and are curbed by his many enlightened, Christian, and subliminal styles of denial. To give a last example, in Crusoe’s interpretation it is a Christian Father who offers good fortune: “I frequently sat down to my meat with thankfulness, and admired the hand of God’s providence, which had thus spread my table in the wilderness” (Defoe 140). Whenever Crusoe recognizes nonhuman agencies as cooperating with his own inventiveness, willpower, and wellbeing, he immediately re-humanizes these agencies with a religious anthropocentrism. Things are handed to Crusoe by a God who is the spitting image of his own white, European, male sense of self.

Postanthropocentric theory, in all its variations, is about adding reality rather than subtracting it. As illustrated, this may work as a significant and, in our times, imperative contribution to a postcolonial decentring of the “Eurocentric epistemological model of human exceptionalism” (Jackson, “Ecologies” 25). It challenges the (neo-)imperial assumption that “the rational human is limited to a northern European character” to repeat Jackson (Jackson, “Ecologies” 27-28), not by reclaiming this figuration of the human for all humans but by problematizing “the nature-culture distinction upon which it depends.” As I hope to have shown in my re-reading of the human-nonhuman relationship in *Robinson Crusoe*, the ground that is opened by a combined postanthropocentric and postcolonial approach is full of possibilities for new and unorthodox productions of meaning—including radical reconsiderations of “what counts as semiosis, who or what participates in the work of signification, and what the boundaries are around how we know sociality and political participation” (Jackson, “Ecologies” 25).

To this point, my analysis has hardly even mentioned Friday. Based on his concerns about the possible devaluation of racism and human-to-human atrocities by sophisticated “debates about the boundaries of the human” (Gilroy, “Every Breeze” 7), Gilroy is right to encourage postanthropocentric theory to start speculating “on how the concept of the Anthropocene might function differently if the history of racial orders and concepts could be taken fully into account” (11). In the next section, I examine how a postanthropocentric reading of imperialist literature might contribute to a supplemental (rather than a rival) critical perspective in the postcolonial/decolonial analysis of racism.

VII. Toward a Postanthropocentric Critique of Racializing Representations

The argument that colonial and racist categories of the human are predicated on or entwined with anthropocentric human-nonhuman divisions—what Jackson calls the “speciesism” of

imperialism, which I referred to above—could be nowhere clearer than in *Robinson Crusoe*.²²

Crusoe's great divisions and delusional mastery over nonhumans are reassigned to the interhuman sociality that is added to the plot once natives enter the island. They are othered by Crusoe as less-than-human throughout the novel, as "savages" (Defoe 203), "cannibals" (210), "wretches" (221), "barbarians" (187), and "creatures" (235)—indeed, as a threatening intrusion by human-nonhuman hybrids into a space of white European culture and civility. Having banished the threat of disorder and the savage rule of nature and nonhumans from his island (in Crusoe's deranged idea of reality), it returns in infrahuman form. In Frantz Fanon's formulation of the same point, "the Negro," to the white man, "symbolizes [a] biological danger. . . . To suffer from a phobia of Negroes is to be afraid of the biological. For the Negro is only biological. . . . Negroes are animals" (165). Crusoe sees himself as "distinguished from such dreadful creatures" and the horrific "degeneracy of human nature" they represent to him (Defoe 172).

Previous postcolonial readings show how *Robinson Crusoe* constitutes a literary inauguration and justification of the colonial world order and how racialization exiles Friday from humanity—reifies him as subhuman and a slave by nature.²³ Racial reification is dramatized, too, in J. M. Coetzee's rewriting, *Foe* (1986), in which Crusoe cuts out Friday's tongue—an act that creates an absolute and disturbing silence in the text in place of Friday's story and inner emotional life. The question is: What can a postanthropocentric reading add to such insights?

I will explore this question by rereading a popular passage from *Robinson Crusoe* in conjunction with my proposition, illustrated above, that Crusoe's anthropocentric/imperialist language does not use up all of reality. This time I will allow the unruly bodily agencies of referents to crowd out the language of Crusoe's racial logic with other meanings. The passage is one of Crusoe's first descriptions of Friday:

He was a comely handsome fellow, perfectly well made; with straight strong limbs, not too large; tall and well-shaped. . . . He had a very good countenance, not a fierce and surly aspect; but seemed to have something very manly in his face, and yet he had all the sweetness and softness of a European in his countenance too, especially when he smiled. His hair was long and black, not curled like wool; his forehead very high and large, and a great vivacity and sparkling sharpness in his eyes. The colour of his skin was not quite black, but very tawny; and yet not an ugly yellow nauseous tawny, as the Brazilians, and Virginians, and other natives of America are; but of a bright kind of a dun olive colour, that had in it something very agreeable, tho' not very easy to describe. His face was round and plump; his nose small, not flat like the negroes; a very good mouth, thin lips, and his fine teeth well set, and as white as ivory. (Defoe 208-09)

The passage reiterates the slave owner's reification of black bodies "as labour, as capital and as brute[s]" (Gilroy, "Every Breeze" 5). And, although Crusoe notes how Friday's limbs, hair, skin colour, and facial and cranial shapes significantly differ from the ascribed inferiority of Amerindian and African phenotypes, his meticulous description is no less an exercise in racial categorization and hierarchization. The passage shows, and indeed performs, the over-determination of the visible by abstract sociocultural and political categories, to paraphrase Sarah Ahmed (131). That is, explicit sensuous impressions (so scarce in large parts of the novel) are evoked while simultaneously being translated into very specific and reductive social prejudice about status, intelligence, and human value.

Yet such illustration of the racist construction of visible reality does not, on its own, show the existence of another reality outside the construction. This is a criticism that has been launched against poststructuralist approaches by recent new materialist interventions in critical race studies. Poststructuralists have produced important theory on the body, but mainly on how "various bodies

have been discursively produced” (Alaimo 3). While new materialists subscribe to the deconstruction of naturalized power hierarchies and essentialisms (like race), they object to poststructuralism’s silence about reality outside language or socio-cultural constructions of the real.²⁴ Inspired by Latour (among others), they believe that poststructuralism, by writing off non-linguistic reality, goes too far. Even as it interrogates social dualisms (essentializations of man and woman, white and black, the self and the other, the West and the rest), poststructuralism sustains and even entrenches another dualism, society and nature, by insisting on the purity of the social, the cultural, or the discursive construction, which appears unaffected by nature or anything nonhuman. When it comes to the analysis of race, Xin Liu identifies an impasse in the exclusion of reality outside language: If it is true that our perception of reality is always already delimited by an oppressive “cultural imprint” or “construction,” she argues, “then it remains unclear how to read differently within the ‘racially saturated field of visibility’” (138). In other words, we depend on something other than the discursive construction—an extra-discursive reality—to be able to perceive and think beyond a reality constructed by race or to be able to create a non-racializing language or mode of reading.

To move beyond the impasse contradiction and offer a more radical de-ontologization of race, scholars inspired by postanthropocentric theory suggest a renewed attention to the appearance and withdrawal of matter-worlds. Although they express their critical analyses in different ways—Jasbir Puar, for example, refers to an “ontogenetic dimension” that is “prior to representation” (215), while Mayra Rivera writes of a “carnal imaginary” (118)—postanthropocentric critics generally share a conception of reality as a matter of emergence rather than presence. The term “emergence” denotes not the full presence of reality (which easily implicates a naïve positivism or foundationalist essentialism) but the always incomplete and unfinished appearance and withdrawal of reality: emergence is “not teleological, mechanical, and transparent” (Saldanha 16). Along with

emergence, postanthropocentric scholars suggest as a critical modality bodily or sensate (i.e., aesthetic) perceptions of reality. The “complex qualities of sensation” are central in Rivera’s “poetics of the flesh” (in writing and reading) because they convey “the silences, disruptions, and opacity that characterize the body’s relation to the world” (4). For her part, Puar argues that bodily affects and experiences may occur prior to the “representational weight” of racialization (191).²⁵ Thus, the extra-discursive reality postanthropocentric scholars suggest in their attempt to apprehend a reality outside racializing language or modes of reading is not an essential or positivist or completely knowable reality. It is, rather, the appearance of an open multiplicity of possible realities, which can be made available to thought if we pay attention to the potential heterogeneity of bodily or sensate perceptions of the world.

If we reread the above passage from *Robinson Crusoe* from a perspective of reality’s embodied or sensate emergence and withdrawal, Crusoe’s vision clearly causes Friday to appear through the prism of stable, universal essentialisms that predetermine Crusoe’s (and the reader’s) perception of the human in front of him. The passage also creates the illusion of presence and completeness. Crusoe even attempts to demarcate indeterminate and amorphous qualities like “sweetness” and “softness” as specifically European qualities. However, as much as racialized ideology winds through Crusoe’s description (and creates a hierarchical social reality), so do the material elements he attempts to subjugate to its order. Crusoe cannot avoid letting in the connotative unruliness of matter (i.e., an expanded aesthetic reality) along with the words he uses, such as the sense data of “long and black” hair, “strong limbs,” and “teeth.” The “biological and the ideological” emerge simultaneously, as in Rivera’s “carnalizing” formulation (158). Friday’s body emerges simultaneously as “flesh and not” (158)—that is, as undecided matter and hegemonic intention. If we agree that there is the slightest divergence between the emergence of Friday’s body

as flesh and Crusoe's symbolic perception of it, we may speak of a limited reach of Crusoe's racist language within the matter-world of the text.

VIII. The Limited Reach of Crusoe's Racist Language

Fanon sought to transform language in ways that would cause it, as Jackson explains, to evoke materiality differently from imperialist language ("Ecologies" 43). Wynter, expanding on Césaire's, Fanon's, and Glissant's visions for a Caribbean philosophy of being, urges racialized people to take charge of "the Word" (or Logos) and deprive it of its imperialist semantics ("Beyond" 639). Arguably, language and its signifying power also change when new ways of reading language are introduced. Hence, we must take care not to read sensate referents like "skin," "black," "hair," "lips," and "nose" the way Crusoe considers them: as flat, conceptual, and categorizing referents to socio-political identifications such as race. Instead, we should refill them with other affordances that are already part of their connotative and evocative power as words (in my reading, their sensate or aesthetic affordances). Reading the passage from a perspective of sensate emergence, we see that amorphous alterities begin to multiply within the complex image of perceived reality that emerges along with Crusoe's racist organization of the visible. A noun phrase like "strong limbs" may fill up with a non-semantic elongated bone-and-muscle-sensation or the amorphous sensation of the warmth and soft elastic firmness of skin and soft subcutaneous tissue; the words describing Friday's hair may fill up with all kinds of haptic sensations of smoothness (or perhaps stringy coarseness), and a word image like "teeth" may read haptically as the emergence of a glinting whitish hardness. As in my re-reading of Crusoe's "meadow" and the assemblage of nonhuman referents that crowd his account of the production of bread, I am amplifying the human-nonhuman "work of signification" (Jackson, "Ecologies" 25) in Crusoe's descriptions of Friday's body that cannot be eradicated by his racist reductions of reality. The aesthetic emergence of

Friday's body through the words employed by Crusoe exceeds Crusoe's racist representation. We may also note a mute withdrawal of reality from Crusoe's racializing mastery in his perception of the "dun olive" colour of Friday's skin that has "in it something . . . not very easy to describe" (Defoe 211)—here is another "hole" in Crusoe's ability to arrest the unruly semiosis of reality. In a postanthropocentric reading of the passage, Crusoe's referents start exceeding his racializing gaze as they fill with extremely many "variables" (Morton, *Humankind* 82)—that is, as they fill with more reality of "fleshy" (Rivera) heterogeneities than his racial logic can handle. In Alaimo's words, "the human is always the very stuff of the messy, contingent, emergent mix of the material world" (11). Or, to put it differently, the resistance of matter reveals itself in this reading of Friday's body as the inability of Man's racializing (or, for that matter, orientalizing) discourse to switch off other meanings in words or other sensate emergences of the matter-reality to which they refer.

As in a poststructuralist analysis, a reading like this denaturalizes racist discourse, but it does so through the evocation of a matter-world rather than the infinite play of signifiers within the prison house of language. It also does more than destabilize categories with uncertainty, as in Roxann Wheeler's reading of the passage as one of the novel's key expressions of racial ambiguity and "partially collapsed boundaries of difference" (Wheeler 846). A postanthropocentric reading makes visible a withdrawal of reality from racial categories altogether, which happens through the very excess of emergent significations.

IX. Deracialization and a New Human Subjectivity in the Anthropocene

Urging speculation about how the concept of the Anthropocene might inspire us to "become more comprehensively estranged from the Anthropos in the Anthropocene" and "salvage a different, and perhaps re-enchanted human from the [earth's] rising waters and transformed climates," Gilroy (very) loosely suggests "the adoption of unorthodox interpretative angles," which,

along with an undiminished alertness to the continued (and currently rising) social instrumentalization of race, may allow us to visualize “an open category of humanity that is wholly incompatible with race and raciality” (“Every Breeze” 11). Arguably, the unorthodoxy of postanthropocentric theory and its reconceptualization of reality as heterogeneous appearance (among other things) offers one way of realizing a reality “outside the racial nomos” (11) or a means of unlearning the racial disciplining of perception. Elsewhere, Gilroy rightly argues that “[t]he human sensorium has had to be educated to the appreciation of racial differences” (*Against Race* 42). Granted, the reading above of the short passage from *Robinson Crusoe* does not imagine a wider social space liberated from its colonization by racial corporeal schemata but suggests at least one way of unteaching, or decolonizing, the sensory apparatus that the realization of such a space also depends on.

Against racism’s ideological reductions, Friday’s body resumes an irreducible matter-reality in my reading (the embodied emergence of colours, skin, bones, muscle, and sensations of hard, soft, smooth, or coarse surfaces) that ultimately calls forth the “irreducible otherness in all bodies,” to use Rivera’s expression (158). Friday’s (at least partial) re-emergence from beneath racializing categorizations also presents unorthodox ways of re-imagining human subjectivity in the Anthropocene. These re-imaginings resonate with the postanthropocentric reading of *Crusoe* as “other-made” that I presented in the first part of my analysis. When read as embodied and always already “other-made,” Defoe’s characters cease to inspire the enchantment of an autogenic and rational subjectivity capable of abstracting itself from anything—a subjectivity to which Friday, slave-made from the beginning, will of course never be fully admitted by *Crusoe*. Instead, these “other-made” characters may come to inspire a re-imagination of the human as, in Braidotti’s formulation, a “post-anthropocentric subject” (“Posthuman” 22). The postanthropocentric subject is not a non-subject; nor is it without agency. It is, however, a relational subject: an embodied form of

subjectivity tied into and co-produced by nonhuman agencies. It is not a purified subject but a “non-unitary” subject (“Posthuman” 22) that cuts across “previously segregated species, categories and domains” (22) and exists because of its sharedness “with multiple others” (25). Crusoe and Friday, when read as embodied and relational subjects, are in the world together in this manner, but this is a shared conditionality that is concealed by Crusoe’s and Defoe’s anthropocentric and Eurocentric/racist conceptualizations of the human.

X. Conclusion

Postcolonial and decolonial studies have a crucial role to play in shaping new human subjectivities for the world to come because they connect the violence of resource depletion, capitalist consumption, and the violence of the Anthropocene with the physical and epistemic violence of hegemonic power against Indigenous populations, their land, and their alternative modes of inhabiting the earth (historically and prospectively). Literature, too, plays a central role insofar as it is one of the most important cultural and existential spaces of reflection (historically and prospectively) through which we mirror and reimagine, and thus re-shape, the ways we are in the world with others, both human and nonhuman. As stated, a postanthropocentric re-engagement with postcolonial and Indigenous literatures—with their alternative epistemologies and ontologies—can contribute to the postanthropocentric task of creatively enhancing our ability to recognize the complexity of human-nonhuman entanglements and their entanglements, in turn, with human-human relationships and inequities. With respect to Ghosh’s claim that most literature, since the onset of modernity, has contributed to an anthropocentric erasure of nature-culture entanglements, a postanthropocentric branch of postcolonial criticism can also disclose the perpetuation of such inherited structures in postcolonial literature and its historical contexts.

The main work of creating a new language and new representational forms with which to grasp and convey—or make emotionally salient the slow violence of the Anthropocene is bound to take place in readings of new as well as canonized Indigenous and postcolonial literatures. But the task should also involve a postanthropocentric re-reading and re-teaching of inherited imperial narratives and their persistent cultural icons. The anthropocentrizing erasure of nature-culture entanglements that Ghosh identifies in modernity’s literature is all over the place in our imperial literary heritage where it is clearly coupled, in various ways, with racist Western exceptionalisms—in Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, and Karen Blixen’s *Out of Africa*; in colonial poetry like James Grainger’s book-long plantationocene poem *The Sugar Cane* (1764); and in a host of imperial travel literature ranging from the work of Christopher Columbus to that of David Livingston. Thanks to decades of postcolonial criticism, works like these can no longer be read without contestation of the racializing and oppressive imaginaries and practices they build on and exercise (consciously or unconsciously). As we are increasingly forced by the Anthropocene to recognize human-nonhuman entanglements, a conjoined task lies ahead to ensure that this heritage can never again be read without critical attention to the anthropocentric logic it builds on and exercises as a deep current of its capitalist and racist venture. My analysis of how human-nonhuman divisions cannot be sustained even in strongly Eurocentric, anthropocentric, and racist imaginaries is but one of the many forms this work may take.

To be sure, postanthropocentric/postcolonial re-readings of postcolonial and imperialist literature will not reduce carbon dioxide emissions, but, along with the imaginative innovations of new literature in the Anthropocene, they are part of the massive task of unlearning the anthropocentric and colonial categories that have helped build the worldview behind excessive consumption and unsustainable exploitation of the Earth’s resources. Wynter calls for the creation

of a “changed quality of consciousness” (“Beyond” 643) based on new perceptions of reality moving “from a loss of trust in physical nature to a loss of trust in our modes of subjectivity” (641). My hope is that these kinds of re-readings can contribute in a small way to this new creation.

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Notes

¹ Although there are many overlaps within the broad theoretical turn that I choose to refer to heuristically as "postanthropocentric theory," there are also great differences and disagreements. One major difference, for instance, is that New Materialism and ANT see objects as coming into being through their actions and relations, whereas OOO and speculative materialism see objects as fundamentally existing prior to their actions and relations—i.e., the fundamental and irreducible

being of objects ultimately withdraws from their relations with anything else, which is to say that the reality of objects withdraw from their interpretations by anything else, including human knowledge. However, my purpose is not to pinpoint all the theoretical divergences in the field but to show how various perspectives cast new light on reality in literary works. This article mostly draws on New Materialism's and ANT's ideas about object agencies and hybridizations of the human and the nonhuman (supplemented by perspectives from OOO scholars Morton and Harman). For a lucid account of differences and shared ground between OOO, ANT, and New Materialism, see Harman's *Immaterialism*.

² For a discussion of the inclusion of nonhumans in expanded notions of the political, see also Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* (138-42) and "An Attempt at a 'Compositionist Manifesto'"; Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* (129, 162); Haraway's concept of "making kin"; Braidotti's concept of "zoe" in "Posthuman Critical Theory" and "The Politics of 'Life Itself'"; and Morton's concept of "humankind" in *Humankind*.

³ See, for example, Jackson's "Introduction" (7).

⁴ Although not targeted at postanthropocentric theory, the same concern is expressed in Wynter's work; she points to social Darwinism and the "purely biological" ("Columbus" 148) idea of the human that lies at the heart of colonial systems of racialization, i.e., the idea of white superiority and black inferiority as biologically determined (see "Columbus" 157-59). See also Yusoff on the inhuman objectification of black subjects (35-40).

⁵ See also Mbembe, who calls for the inclusion of human-non-human entanglements and object agencies in all scientific fields: "[T]he dualistic partitions of minds from bodies, meaning and matter or nature from culture can no longer hold. . . . We can no longer assume that there are incommensurable differences between us, tool makers, sign makers, language speakers and other animals or between social history and natural history." Yusoff's *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* is one of the first book-length examinations of the Anthropocene from a postcolonial and critical race studies perspective. On postcolonial interventions in posthumanist theory, see Banerji and Paranjape.

⁶ On the conflation of modernity and coloniality, imperialist subject-object divisions, and projects of epistemological decolonization, see also Ashcroft; Quijano (178); Wynter, "Columbus" (146); and Mignolo, "The Prospect of Harmony."

⁷ Other examples that might be added are Glissant's "planetary consciousness" (150, 164, 146) and Spivak's suggestion of "planetarity" (71). These concepts of epistemological renewal radically defamiliarize human identity regimes by placing "history itself in the forces of nature" (Spivak 94) and recognizing the alterity of our planetary inhabitation.

⁸ For long lists of examples, see Jackson, "Ecologies" (48, 54). For studies that already combine postanthropocentric theory with studies of Indigenous epistemologies, see Muecke, Sundberg, and Millner. Postanthropocentric thinking and postcolonial ecocriticism already have obvious interfaces, too, as for instance in DeLoughrey and Handley's definition of "postcolonial ecology" as "a complex epistemology that recuperates the alterity of both history and nature, without either to the other" (4). However, see Jackson for the argument that the concern for the "more-than-human" in postcolonial ecocriticism has proceeded through a predominantly anthropocentric lens ("Introduction" 3).

⁹ See also Last (63), Ghosh (*Derangement* 64), and Sundberg (35, 38).

¹⁰ See Malm and Hornborg for a similar argument: the anthropogenic of global warming as "sociogenic" (66). For a decolonial critique of the Anthropocene, see Collard et al. (327). See also Yusoff's thorough criticism of what she terms "White Geology" and Nixon's compelling study of the poor in the global South as the principal casualties of the "slow violence" of global pollution, resource depletion, and climate change. See also Ghosh for arguments that Asia has contributed

significantly to modernity's carbon footprint since the eighteenth century (*The Great Derangement* 120-22).

¹¹ See Moore et al. for a nascent study of the Plantaionocene as a historicizing term that replaces "the species-level thinking of the Anthropocene" (4) with an awareness of social and racialized distributions of precariousness. See Haraway for the "Chthulucene" as an alternative term, and Demos for the "Gynocene".

¹² See also Ghosh (*Derangement* 64-65 and 120-25). See Clark's skepticism about realist narratives: the "still-dominant conventions of plotting, characterization and setting in the novel," he writes, "need to be openly acknowledged as pervaded by anthropocentric delusion" (191).

¹³ See, for example, Byrne, Johns-Putra, Jones, Mackey, Pinkus, and Singh for articles that explore the the Anthropocene in recent postcolonial literature.

¹⁴ For examples of similar ideas about the embodied and sense-aesthetic challenges to abstract thinking and colonizations of the sensible/sensibilities in postanthropocentric, postcolonial, and decolonial theory (some of which I return to later in the article), see Alaimo (2); Bennett (4, 29-30); Coole (101, 105); Morton (*Humankind* 99, 112); Deleuze (*Essays* 150, 159); Rivera (4); Mignolo (*The Darker Side* 76-77); and Mignolo and Vázquez. For readings of postcolonial fiction that see a challenge to imperialism in sensate, or aiesthetic, appearances of human-nonhuman entwinements, see Moslund's *Sensuous Geographies*. This emphasis on the aesthetic also connects with the wider idea in the object-oriented strand of postanthropocentric theory that things exist in an ultimately aesthetic mode. In all such accounts, "aesthetic" is not understood as a discursive category or category of judgment, as in the Kantian tradition, but as a mode of appearance of objects. In my use, as in the New Materialist use of the term, it is a mode of appearance in which strong dualities like text and matter, human agency and nonhuman passivity, or "cognizing agent" and "world" (Jackson, "Aesthetics" 17) are dissolved. For a wider argument against Kantian notions of the aesthetic and suggestions for its replacement by a decolonized *aesthesis*, see Jackson's "Aesthetics."

¹⁵ See Tiffin, Brantlinger, Said, Boehmer, Hulme, and Wheeler for postcolonial interpretations of *Robinson Crusoe* that focus on human-human relations.

¹⁶ See, for example, pp. 77, 81, 86, 119.

¹⁷ The reality of phenomena that exceeds Crusoe's narrow conceptions of it opens to other cultural interpretations of the real (e.g., Indigenous Carib, Arawak, and Taino ontologies), but these are obliterated in *Robinson Crusoe* by acts of epistemic violence, epitomized in Crusoe's erasure of the cultural life and interpretations of the world of the person he calls Friday. In Yusoff's words, "extraordinary possibilities in relation to the earth were wiped out" (31).

¹⁸ My approach to language in Defoe's novel as well as in the example from Tournier joins in the postanthropocentric search for new conceptions of language and representation. Jackson is particularly inspired by Kohn, who does not see semiotic activity as an exclusively human or linguistic affair (Kohn 42). All of the living world is "the product of sign processes" (Kohn 9) and "multispecies relations" (Kohn 9), including human-nonhuman interrelations, are possible and comprehensible only because of "our partially shared semiotic propensities" (9). "A plant protecting itself from . . . insect attack participates in a semiotic interaction" (Jackson, "Ecologies" 45), Jackson explains, and so humans, too, participate in semiotic interaction with other beings. This includes language, which, to Kohn, "is nested within broader [human and nonhuman] forms of representation" (15). As Jackson concludes, "[t]he source of sign making does not come from a mind projecting out onto a mute signless world, but emerges in relationships of becoming and unfolding between . . . social systems" ("Ecologies" 44). Whereas Crusoe distinguishes his essential being and his language from the supposedly inarticulate nonhuman environment around him, it is

precisely the “bio-semiosis” (“Ecologies” 5) of the island’s nonhuman existents that co-shape the vivid language in Tournier’s and Walcott’s rewritings of *Robinson Crusoe* (see Walcott below).

¹⁹ A similar re-shaping of Crusoe and his language by the island’s nonhuman matter-reality is achieved in Walcott’s “The Castaway,” which enacts a tedious rotting away of the old for the emergence of new creativity:

Godlike, annihilating godhead, art
And self, I abandon
Dead metaphors: the almond’s leaf-like heart,
The ripe brain rotting like a yellow nut
Hatching

Its babel of sea-lice, sandfly, and maggot. (10, ll. 23-28)

²⁰ Marx makes the same point (66-69). See Morton’s *Humankind* on the limits to a postanthropocentric imaginary in Marxism.

²¹ Once again, the signifying power of words is read differently in a postanthropocentric analysis like mine. Words like “firewood” or “growing”—or “crop,” “trees,” “coals,” “burning,” “seed,” “sun,” “rain,” “heat,” and “climate,” for that matter—are read in a way in which “they are not just about the world” but are “also in important ways in it” (Kohn 30). That is, the signifying power of a word like “growing” does not begin and end with Crusoe’s anthropocentric and equipmental narrative about the world. When Crusoe refers to how his crops are “growing” (Defoe 130), my reading amplifies how “the work of signification” (Jackson, “Ecologies” 25) in the word—its “semiotic force” (Jackson, “Aesthetics” 18)—derives mainly from the complexity of more than human referents, or “broader semiotic webs” (Kohn 43) that, by implication, already participate in this single word.

²² For expressions of this argument, see Latour (*We Have Never Been Modern* 97); Morton (“They Are Here” 167); Jackson (“Introduction” 10); Jaeger (229); and McGrane (47).

²³ For examples of postcolonial readings of *Robinson Crusoe* as a work that justifies colonialism and reifies race, see Hulme, Wheeler, Brantlinger, and McGrane.

²⁴ For examples of new materialists who object to poststructuralism’s silence about reality outside language, see Saldanha (12), Rivera (9), and Liu (141, 142).

²⁵ Likewise, Liu suggests re-attending to “all perceptual modalities” with a “wild associational and synesthetic conversion” (146), and Morton suggests that we explore the collapse of the human-nonhuman boundary in sensate experience, which, fundamentally, teems with entanglements and nonhuman agencies: “I see red because yttrium waves are splashing onto me” (*Humankind* 112). We also find ideas of bodily sensations and affects as critical modalities in decolonial theory. A “decolonial aesthesis,” according to Mignolo and Vásquez, revalidates sensibilities and perceptions of reality that have been silenced or “made invisible or devalued by the modern-colonial order.”