

# Articulating Differences: Practices of Comparing in British Travel Writing of the Long Eighteenth Century

---

Nadine Böhm-Schnitker

## 1. Introduction

The time frame from the Glorious Revolution to Romanticism – the time frame of the long eighteenth century – is crucially defined by an increasing dominance of comparative practices that are fundamentally “entrenched in networks of circulation of bodies, artefacts, discourses and ideas”, as we argue in the introduction to this edited collection (16). In that context, the modern novel emerges as a symptomatic genre that provides ample opportunities for comparisons on all literary levels, first and foremost certainly on the level of the characters in a system of contrasts and correspondences together with the level of narrative transmission (see the contribution by Hartner/Schneider).<sup>1</sup> Comparisons are understood as the outcomes of comparative *practices* and, as such, they are “interwoven with the interests and perspectives of the ones who compare” (Epple/Erhart 2020: 16). They do not only occur intraculturally – for example with reference to modes of behaviour in different social classes or with regard to different genders – but also interculturally, predominantly with reference to other cultures and ethnicities. The texts under consideration here – Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* (1688) and Daniel Defoe’s *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner* (1719) – vicariously and imaginatively negotiate such comparative practices and they reflect on the fundamental interdependence of self and other in the emergence of the modern Western individual by a generic hybridity that combines (auto)biographical

---

1 On different types of comparing in narrative fiction, see also the contribution by Anne Lappert in this volume.

ical with travel writing: the emerging novelistic ‘individual’ or ‘self’ is thus crucially articulated with the ‘other’ encountered abroad. A generic hybrid, Behn’s novella represents a mixture between a memoir of the author herself, a biography of its main character Oroonoko, a novel, an Oriental romance, a heroic tragedy, and a New World travel story (see Gallagher 2000: 13). Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* is equally defined by overlapping genre conventions, as this fictional autobiography draws on both travel writing and the spiritual autobiography.

The genre of the novel develops at a time when British colonial expansion is in the midst of a “shift from a subsistence-based to profit-oriented colonial economy dependent on African slaves” (Wheeler 1995: 825). However, the work force required for plantations, e.g. sugar plantations, was rather diverse between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, and thus both the actual interethnic encounters of the emerging Empire as well as the genres negotiating such encounters draw on quite diverse “racialized differences competing for dominance”, including “religion, national origin, ownership of property, or skin color” (Wheeler 1995: 839); thus, “emergent racialized categories of difference are indeed produced” in order to legitimate and undergird social stratifications between ‘masters’, ‘servants’ and ‘slaves’, but they “are not stable in either the literary or social text” (852). Indeed, skin colour seems to take on a new significance after 1680 (see 839), and hence I employ it as a particular focus point in this article on practices of comparing in British travel writing of the long eighteenth century.

In a social context, comparative practices can be considered paramount cultural practices that are employed for social stratification in the contact zones of colonial encounters. In the literary field, comparative practices crucially impact on the construction and authority of narrators, the construction and constellation of characters, the very notion of ‘character’ as well as the construction of space. It is my aim in this chapter to explore the cultural relevance of comparative practices in the emerging novel genre as a literary negotiation of British colonial expansion that is articulated with the emergence of the ‘individual’ as marked by categories of difference such as race, class and gender. For that end, I will focus on the interconnection between the literary construction of and interaction between characters and spaces as mediated by different kinds of narrators. I will show that the literary ‘individual’ emerges defined by a close articulation of economic/capitalist, political/colonial and social discourses that shapes and determines the viability of subjects in the

long eighteenth century. Comparative practices are the means by which this subject gains its contours.

The strong generic impact of travel writing on the development of the novel in the long eighteenth century is reason enough to underline the relevance of “spatialization” in the genre (Herman 2002: 263), in the sense that narratives are “systems of verbal or visual prompts anchored in mental models that have a particular spatial structure. More exactly, narratives represent the world being told about as one having a specific spatial structure” (264). Travel writing enacts such a narrative construction of space and ties it closely to the characters that experience these spaces. It is the character narrators defined by ‘whiteness’ that guide readers into new and unseen spaces in which intercultural encounters occur. Spatial structures also impact on the possible interactions between the traveller with the people inhabiting the spaces encountered. Hence, my approach to comparative practices is defined by a double-focus on characters and spaces and their construction in the transnational contexts of travel writing. The “unparalleled popularity” (Batten 1978: 1) of travel writing in the eighteenth century is rooted in *practices* of comparing that comprise close observation and description of the environments and people encountered as well as collecting, sorting, classifying, contextualizing and naming (see Epple/Erhart 2015: 10). Drawing on postcolonial studies, I will focus on the co-emergence of ‘individuals’ and ‘environments’ in the intimate intertextualities between travel writing and the novel in the long eighteenth century (see Reckwitz 2003: 283).

The increase in publications on the intercultural encounter with the ethnic other in the British empire coincides with a transition of power forms: In a Foucauldian paradigm, the long eighteenth century is associated with a turn to biopower and, tied to that, the emergence of racism in the context of a biological understanding of ‘races’ that impacts on the way in which intercultural encounters become envisaged (see Foucault 1990: 137-143). While biopolitics represent a form of power intent on managing, securing and prolonging life (see 137-138), racism is the concomitant ideology and technology to safeguard the function of killing within such a power form (see Lemke 2003: 161) that develops more fully during the second half of the nineteenth century (see Foucault 1990: 149). As Thomas Lemke elucidates, racism serves to generate a norm; the norms producing a ‘normal’ body rely on practices of comparing to ascertain deviations from established norms, to evaluate differences and to structure interventions (see 162). Practices of comparing serve as the praxeological articulation of an emerging biopolitics with racism during the long

eighteenth century, and this applies both to the construction of an Anglo-Saxon 'whiteness' as a norm and an African 'blackness' as a deviation from the established norm that only emerges through comparative practices that also need to tackle a complicated colour spectrum between these emerging 'poles'; hence, I will concentrate particularly on practices of comparing with the *comparata* being characters and the *tertium comparationis* being skin colour, social status, habitus, modes of behaviour and ways of thinking as markers of an emerging concept of 'race', while the agents performing the comparison are either narrators or characters. As Angelika Epple has shown, 'race' as a category of difference pertaining to human beings can be understood as an effect or outcome of comparative practices: "Comparing simultaneously creates similarities and differences in respect to a *tertium* (such as race). Overcoming racial discrimination in everyday life would mean overcoming discourses on racial comparisons" (2020: 323). An analysis and critique of racism thus needs to tackle comparative practices in particular. In Behn and Defoe, skin colour begins to be singled out as a central determiner of racial difference that allows for the classification and social stratification of bodies; this distinction turns into the central focus for racialized practices of comparing in the respective texts and it is these that deserve further scrutiny. My guiding hypothesis is that 'skin colour' as an analytical focus point may serve as a turnstile that interconnects questions of the expansion of Empire in its ideological, economic and spatial scope and helps to make 'self' and 'other' visible in interethnic encounters, in which 'self' and 'other' co-emerge as discursive products of travel writing.

Within the context of British Empire-building, "comparing as a globalized practice was perceived as practice of modern dominance, a tool of power, which perpetuates related relations of hegemony and subordination, center and periphery, sameness and difference" (Rocha Teixeira 2019: 6) and as a marker of modernity more generally (see Foucault 1974): "the encounters, conflicts, and entanglements of different cultures and the evolution of a comparative scholarly methodology were just two sides of one coin: the making of so-called 'Western' modernity" (Epple/Erhart 2020: 25). Hence, comparisons serve as discursive practices that construct the binaries they purport to describe. In transcultural encounters, however, comparisons are made reciprocally and may provide a means of resistance (see Rocha Teixeira 2019: 7). While taxonomies certainly represent the result of comparative practices as power/knowledge, they do not remain uncontested. Their cultural plausibility hinges on perspective, and hence narrative perspective is an important focus

for the analysis of the (fictional) (auto)biographies chosen here. Postcolonial studies have significantly shaped the way in which Behn's and Defoe's narratives have been read. They raised awareness that, in travel writing, travellers "never look on places anew or completely independently but perceive them instead through an accretion of others' accounts" (Youngs 2013: 9). The whole undertaking of travel writing consequently represents a complex effort of cultural hermeneutics in the connection of intercultural encounters, a reflection on perception and its intermedial coding, as well as its translation into cultural forms. It is perhaps not surprising that travel writers set their tales in heterotopic spaces – colonies, islands, ships – and present the described interactions between characters as a kind of experiment that diminishes the tales' direct social impact.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the picaresque structure of the stories allows for the description of only loosely connected scenes that need not describe a continuous sphere of the real but that only present selections of possibilities. The comparative practices employed, however, clearly "contribute to shaping, ordering, and changing the world" (Kramer/Rohland 2021: 3), and have a crucial impact on the development of racism (see e.g. Wheeler 1995: 822–823; 852).

## 2. Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko* (1688)

Aphra Behn's 1688 novella *Oroonoko* became paradigmatic both for its importance for the development of the novel – there is an intertextual impact on Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), for instance – despite the fact that it is interspersed with what we would now consider racist descriptions of its main character. The novella's ideological ambivalence is reflected on several literary levels, among them prominently the level of genre and the level of the narrative situation that is characterized by a clear difference between the narrating and the experiencing I of the novella's author-narrator.

*Oroonoko* provides an early example of the close connection of comparative practices, the embodiment of social positionalities and an emergent racism in a biopolitical context. Its cultural legacy reveals the wider repercussions of

---

2 A heterotopia serves as "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 1986: 24).

Behn's articulation of the literary value of prose fiction, gendered author positions and racialized notions of slavery. Being considered "the first English narrative with an African hero" (Gallagher 2000: ix-x), *Oroonoko* represents a novelty in terms of its production, its subject matter and its narrative strategy. The story centres on the fate of the African prince and later king Oroonoko as well as of his wife Imoinda. In close succession, both are abducted from Coramantien, an English trading port situated in today's Ghana, and taken to the English colony of Surinam in the mid-1660s that Behn claims to have visited herself in 1664.<sup>3</sup> Depicting the triangular trade between Britain, Africa and the West Indies, the author-narrator throws into relief the different memory traces that the characters take with them to the colony. In this setting, transcultural memories come to intersect; they "migrate from one continent to another with individuals. [...] As migrants carry their heritage, memories and traumas with them, these are transferred and brought into new social constellations and political contexts" (Assmann/Conrad 2010: 2). Behn's *Oroonoko* constructs transcultural memories of slavery as defined by multiple categories of difference and, more specifically, multiple intersections of race, class, and gender. With that, comparative practices become paramount for the different kinds of encounters set in the fictional space of Surinam. Furthermore, *Oroonoko* is fraught with questions of authorization and negotiations of power that are frequently played out on bodies. The novella performs the containment of a slave rebellion or revolution, ending with the representation of Oroonoko's dismembered body re-united by 'a female Pen' for commercial re-production.

The colonial space in Surinam serves as a paradigmatic heterotopia (see Foucault 1986: 27) that allows for both a collision and a rearrangement of forms of knowledge and transcultural memories, thus provoking a plethora of comparative practices that define the narrative stance significantly: The author-narrator compares the Carib Indians of Surinam with the Coramantiens, and each group with the British settlers as well as 'common' slaves; she compares her own position in the colony with other representatives of power and with her former situation; she compares the power hierarchies in Surinam with those in Britain; she compares her gendered position with other options of narrating and compares her narrating with her experiencing self etc.

---

<sup>3</sup> "During the trade war that broke out in 1665 [...] Behn traveled to the Low Countries on a spying mission for King Charles II" (Greenblatt 2013: 1005). Surinam, or Willoughby-land, was an English colony from 1650 to 1667.

Oroonoko, in turn, compares different kinds of behaviour, e.g. his own code of honour, with the other social groups represented in the novella; he compares himself with 'common' slaves and draws conclusions for his future social position. These comparisons are very visibly embodied, which is shown by the care the novella takes to describe characters' bodies, particularly Oroonoko's, and especially his gory end; the narrator's position is equally embodied as an overt, female author-narrator who, on the level of the real author, represents the first British woman to earn her living by her pen.

The complex articulation of the act of writing as a gendered practice with new constructions of memory is already stressed in the novella's paratext. In 'The Epistle Dedicatory', the author-narrator states that the following narrative is "a short Chronicle of those Lives that possibly wou'd be forgotten by other Historians, or lye neglected there, however deserving an immortal Fame" (5). In her recovery of lives that remain excluded from dominant historiographic discourse, Behn draws attention to a gendering in historiography by way of an implicit comparison: while male historiographers would most probably have overlooked her subject entirely, she as a female historiographer does record the biography of a black slave. This comparison between male and female historiographers with a view to their subject choice is geared towards an economic consideration: only as a novelty can the text be turned into a commodity – *Oroonoko* is a text that needs to be 'sold', it is an object of exchange between the writer, her patron and a wider public readership. Novelty is constructed by telling the tales of peoples deemed hardly representable as main characters in literature and by emphasising the exotism of both the characters and their different settings: "If there be any thing that seems Romantick, I beseech your Lordship to consider, these Countries do, in all things, so far differ from ours, that they produce unconceivable Wonders; at least, they appear so to us, because New and Strange" (7). In the paratext, the author-narrator defines both her narrative as well as her role as a narrator by a way of thinking in terms of identity and difference; the novella can thus be understood as the result of diverse comparative practices.

She opens her narrative with a central distinction between the native inhabitants of Surinam and peoples that, in contrast to these, can be turned into slaves.<sup>4</sup> While the Surinamese are governed by a hegemony based on consent, slaves can be dominated by force according to her account:

---

4 However, there is a central contradiction in the author-narrator's account when she mentions "Our Indian Slaves, that Row'd us" (*Oroonoko*, 1997: 51), which illustrates the

So that they being, on all Occasions, very useful to us, we find it absolutely necessary to caress 'em as Friends, and not to treat 'em as Slaves; nor dare we do other, their Numbers so far exceeding ours in that *Continent*. Those then whom we make use of to work in our Plantations of Sugar, are *Negro's*, *Black-Slaves* altogether. (*Oroonoko*, 1997: 11)

Correspondingly, the native Indians are widely idealized in the novella, while the slaves, stemming mainly from Coramantien, are subject to a more complicated representational regime. Oroonoko being one of them, he needs to be singled out in different terms but skin colour, and the central category of difference here is class. As a king, Oroonoko embodies the title-giving oxymoron of the "Royal Slave" and thus represents an oddity in the general class of slaves, clearly marked by their skin colour and their presumed subservience in the text. This classification of peoples becomes most obvious at the moment when Oroonoko, himself a slave trader, is betrayed by his trading partners and sold into slavery. Once part of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, he becomes subject to a different system of classification because his skin colour turns him into a tradable commodity as soon as he leaves Coramantien and with it the social context in which he is distinguished as a king; the Middle Passage over the Atlantic marks his entry into a heterotopia in which the laws of the land are suspended. Or, as Catherine Gallagher has put it:

the fact that the colonists were making up racialized slavery as they went along in the seventeenth century and that it was a local institution at the heart of an intercontinental enterprise led to marked discrepancies in the way Africans were perceived in the different 'worlds' of the trade. (2000: 9)

The author-narrator throws into relief the practice of racialization via skin colour when she, as a character in her own right, meets Oroonoko in Surinam and reveals who can be turned into a slave and who cannot. For example, Oroonoko's tutor, a French-man and a Christian, who belongs to Oroonoko's entourage when he is abducted, is the only one who remains a free man in Surinam, purportedly because he is a Christian (see *Oroonoko*, 1997: 40), a creed Oroonoko refuses to adopt. While, first and foremost, the marker here seems to be religion, it is also centrally skin colour: Oroonoko's French tutor is the only white member of his entourage; 'freedom' and 'whiteness' thus

---

instabilities of such categories are between the 1660s and 1680s and how contradictory the discourse on these differences can be correspondingly.

become conflated and associated. Oroonoko's perceived difference, however, needs to be adapted and assimilated to European (beauty) standards in order that his enslavement can be understood as a problem at all in the context of the novel's Eurocentric ideology:

He was pretty tall, but of a Shape the most exact that can be fancy'd: The most famous Statuary cou'd not form the Figure of a Man more admirably turn'd from Head to Foot. His Face was not of that brown, rusty Black which most of that Nation are, but a perfect Ebony, or polish'd Jett. His Eyes were the most awful that cou'd be seen, and very piercing; the White of 'em being like Snow, as were his Teeth. His Nose was rising and *Roman*, instead of *African* and flat. (13)

In this racist idealization, Oroonoko's 'Africanness' is recognizable only with regard to his blackness, but a blackness that distinguishes him from 'typical' Africans who are defined by a "brown, rusty black" (13). The text indeed betrays a clear subdivision of the human continuum into those that can and those that cannot be enslaved. As part of this process of narrative assimilation, Oroonoko is made intelligible by reference to two different forms of art: in the quotation, his beauty is likened to a *statue* of blackness, and, in the novella more generally, he is portrayed as the protagonist of the *heroic tragedy*. As a beauty ideal, he becomes a textual commodity that the author-narrator herself can turn to profit; commodified beauty yields exchange value. Towards the end of the novella, however, his idealized body disintegrates entirely. Outside of the novella's established artful and artificial norms, Oroonoko becomes unintelligible, a disintegrated body (see Butler 2004: 30). Behn's novella reveals that Oroonoko is only intelligible by way of his assimilation to European conventions, and otherwise quite outside of the boundaries of 'the human' as constructed by these comparative practices.

As Oroonoko dies, the contours of the author-narrator, the heroine of the *autobiography*, come to be delineated all the more clearly. While the initial comparative practice articulated in the paratext distinguishes the female historiographer from her male colleagues by way of her subject choice – the biography of a black character hitherto allegedly unwritten – the main body of the text employs comparative practices that finally lead to the substitution of the biography with the autobiography; they help to fashion the female writer as authoritative author persona claiming cultural distinction in the face of the utter destruction of her subjects:

They cut *Caesar* in Quarters, and sent them to several of the chief *Plantations*: [...]. Thus Dy'd this Great Man; worthy of a better Fate, and a more sublime Wit than mine to write his Praise; yet, I hope, the Reputation of my Pen is considerable enough to make his Glorious Name to survive to all Ages; with that of the Brave, the Beautiful, and the Constant *Imoinda*. (Oroonoko, 1997: 65)

What remains after the death of the subjects of Behn's biography, is her *autobiographical* self, the self that emerges as a consequence of her travels to Surinam. She returns with a story to sell and a self to promote. She represents herself as a female writer who is able – like Shakespeare in his own day – to grant literary eternity to her characters.

The construction of the author-narrator's individuality not only coincides with the destruction of her racialized protagonists but also with her masterly representation of space. Apart from her implicit comparison of herself both with Oroonoko and Imoinda, Behn also assumes a dominant role by way of spatialization. The author-narrator is the one to create the spatial structure of Surinam and to present a particular hierarchy of spaces that is also reflected in the mapping of the territory. Apart from mapping the territory (all texts analyzed here also include maps), the author-narrator describes spaces so as to set a scene for encounters and figural dramas. One short paragraph introduces the setting of the main action in the novella for Oroonoko: "The Scene of the last part of his Adventures lies in a Colony in *America*, called *Surinam*, in the *West-Indies*" (8), where the inhabitants live "so like our first Parents before the Fall" (9). The native inhabitants of Surinam are thus compared to the biblical Adam and Eve before sin came into the world. Surinam is portrayed as an Edenic space, a space in which actual experiences and historical events are still suspended in a mythical realm. This Eden is then constructed as the uninscribed foil for the events to come in the colonial space, in which slaves from "*Coramantien*, a Country of *Blacks* so called" (11), arrive to work in the plantations. That the cultural encounters staged in this setting contribute to the emergence of the white, western individual becomes conspicuous in a scene staged particularly for the native inhabitants of Surinam. Together with Oroonoko, the author-narrator and several other persons decide to travel to an "*Indian Town*" (47) and concoct a surprise visit as

we, who resolv'd to surprize 'em, by making 'em see something they never had seen, (that is, White People) resolv'd only my self, my Brother, and Woman shou'd go [...]. By degrees they grew more bold, and from gazing

upon us round, they touch'd us; laying their Hands upon all the Features of our Faces, feeling our Breasts and Arms, taking up one Petticoat, then wondering to see another; [...] In fine, we suffer'd 'em to survey us as they pleas'd, and we thought they would never have done admiring us. (48)

While it is the native inhabitants here who seem to appropriate the power of an observing gaze and prove transgressive in their haptic exploration of their others, the tables are soon turned. After making numerous enquiries about these strangers with a fisherman who mediates between the Surinamese and the “White People” – they ask “If we had Sense, and Wit? If we cou'd talk of affairs of Life, and War, as they could do?” (49) – the fisherman soon ascertains comparability (see 49). The author-narrator, however, concludes that the Surinamese prove so ignorant and gullible that “it were not too difficult to establish any unknown or extravagant Religion among them; and to impose any Notions or Fictions upon 'em” (49). This scene nicely illustrates the fact that comparisons are practices in particular historical and social contexts imbued with power hierarchies. ‘*Doing comparisons*’ (see Epple/Erhart 2020: 20) depends on social status and the author-narrator, while granting the Surinamese some agency in this situation, soon reveals that the “White People” wield epistemological power to which the native inhabitants do not have access in Behn’s narrative. Nevertheless, the encounter, quite literally, renders the contours of the author-narrator and her entourage visible; thus, comparative practices throw into relief the connection of whiteness and (epistemic) power embodied in the author-narrator once more. The reader learns that the skin the Surinamese touch is white, they learn what the author-narrator wears and the skills she has. Her ‘self’ is shaped in this encounter by the touch of the Indians, and it is a self whose characterization is directed as in a play by the author-narrator herself. She is the one to allocate roles and to highlight particular discoveries over others in a scene she herself has set.

The orchestration of arriving and leaving, presenting and hiding, permitting and forbidding is dependent on the author-narrator’s strategies of spatialization. The individual and the surrounding environment are equiprimordial in *Oroonoko*. When the author-narrator learns about gold in the Amazonas, the river is described as being “almost as broad as the River of Thames” (51); this ‘almost but not quite’ similarity between the respective rivers illustrates how comparative practices subject Surinam to an English mapping. Historically, however, this power over space and gold is lost as the colony is ceded to the Dutch, a process that is frequently aligned with the Glorious Rev-

olution that ends the Stuart dynasty in favour of King William of Orange (see Monika Class' article in this volume). As a staunch supporter of the Stuarts, Behn can only cling to the patronage by her Jacobite dedicatee Lord Maitland in 1688. The literal abduction of Oroonoko from Coramantien is transposed into a logical abduction that suggests that economically successful authorship by female writers is possible, albeit at the price of the utter commodification of the racialized other. *Oroonoko* as a text paving the way for the emergence of the novel thus closely aligns female middle-class authorship with whiteness and singles out skin colour as a crucial if not yet dominant racial signifier.

### 3. Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* "occupies a crucial place in literary history's account of the emergence of the modern English novel and for that matter of the beginning of the modern European novel" (Richetti 2018: xiii). Postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said "have looked especially at cultural forms as the novel", because he considers it "immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences" and, like Richetti, singles out *Robinson Crusoe* as the "prototypical modern realistic novel" that, symptomatically, deals with "a European who creates a fiefdom for himself on a distant, non-European island" (1994: 9-10). Said further considers Robinson's founding "a new world, which he rules and reclaims for England" as closely intertwined with the novel genre (Said 1994: 74). There are two issues at stake in these evaluations: Firstly, there is an odd slippage between England and Europe which is indicative of the co-emergence of a notion of 'whiteness' that is not clearly defined by nationality and the novel; secondly, the novel is established as the medium and central receptacle for articulations of aesthetic, economic and political discourses that allow for such an English/European modern identity to develop in contradistinction to 'the new world'. With comparisons as central cognitive practices defining modernity, the following analysis is an attempt at unravelling these interdependences that are constitutive of the 'modern' subject of the eighteenth century. Both the emergence of the modern novel and the emergence of the 'English/European' 'modern' subject envisioned as an 'individual' are rooted in comparative practices that intersect and ossify over time as myths of this origination.

"Robinson Kreutzaer" or later "Crusoe" (*Robinson Crusoe*, 2007: 5), the novel's hero and autodiegetic narrator, is of German descent, which might be the

reason to construct the 'modern' subject as white or *European* rather than more specifically *English*. *Robinson Crusoe*, crucially, indicates the Anglo-Saxon roots of the Englishness presented in the novel. As Laura Doyle has convincingly established, this proves part and parcel of the contemporary articulation of discourses on Anglo-Saxonism, racism and freedom; besides, it indicates a "key shift in English self-fashioning, a turn away from a classical and Briton lineage and toward an Anglo-Saxon, Germanic one, a genealogy hereafter creating the nativist freedom legacy at the core of Whig ideology" (2007: 198). More generally, she traces "modern race ideologies to the Atlantic economy" and shows

that in England a prior formation of racial thinking – predating its full-scale slave trade and linking race to a freedom legacy – has given rise to its plot, its purchase, and its force in (at least) the English-language Atlantic world. That is, in early seventeenth-century England, under conditions of civil war and an emergent capitalist economy, the coupling of race and freedom issued in the notion that true history entails the progress of a race toward religious, economic, and political freedom. [...] Ultimately, the notion of freedom as a racially inherited desire provided the mythic teleology of the English-speaking Atlantic world, one that still propels the speeches of its leaders. (Doyle 2007: 195-196)

Doyle describes a symptomatic connection between race, economics, politics and religion that also serves as the foundation of a view of history as directed from the desire for freedom to its eventual realization inherent in this mythic Anglo-Saxon genealogy which is bolstered further by legal discourses (see Doyle 2007: 198-199).

'The' novel offers a highly hybrid and variable genre for the further negotiation of this interconnection. As a commodity in its own right, the novel contributes to turning "the racialized rhetoric of liberty [into] a transatlantic phenomenon, embedding it deep in the structures of English-language narrative" (Doyle 2007: 200). The very language of the novel fundamentally hinges on its close ties with Britain's colonial expansion as an articulation of economics, politics, religion, and history as markers of British identity as 'white'. Anglo-Saxon whiteness is thrown into further relief in trans-Atlantic encounters as mediated in and by travel writing that *Robinson Crusoe* relies on as a generic precursor. Eve Tavor Bannet has highlighted the close interconnection between Britain's colonial itineraries and Robinson's route of travel:

Giving Robinson's voyage such geographical specificity on what was British shipping's standard circum-Atlantic route to and from the Americas, enabled epitomes to make *Robinson Crusoe* a story about the perils that Robinson faced as a mariner in a dangerous multinational Atlantic world, dominated by Barbary pirates, Africans, and Caribs, as well as by the Spaniards and Portuguese. (2018: 130)

It is Robinson's encounters and indirect comparisons with these nationalities and ethnicities constituted as the others of Anglo-Saxon whiteness that further define the character. *Robinson Crusoe* represents the literary embodiment of the articulation of Whig economics, politics, Puritanism and a rhetoric of freedom as the norm of the subject of the emerging realism of the eighteenth-century novel. Defoe's novel draws its plot motivation from Britain's trans-Atlantic ties in its search for 'new' worlds and workforce in triangular trade connections as depicted in *Oroonoko* and makes Robinson emerge as an individualized *homo economicus* (Watt 2000 [1957]: 63) who is clearly marked as white and male. This emergence is made possible, among other things, by a racialized spatial politics with its concomitant comparative practices as well as by a closeting of homosocial desire by way of its transference onto the island as a heterotopic space.

In a first step, the very opening of the novel may serve to illustrate the emphasis on Robinson's German roots and his close connection to trade:

I Was born in the Year 1632, in the City of York, of a good Family, tho' not of that Country, my Father being a Foreigner of Bremen, who settled first at Hull: He got a good Estate by Merchandise, and leaving off his Trade, lived afterward at York, from whence he had married my Mother, whose Relations were named Robinson, a very good Family in that Country, and from whom I was called Robinson Kreutznaer. (*Robinson Crusoe*, 2007: 5)

While this opening decidedly introduces Robinson as an *individual* – by way of starting with the first personal pronoun 'I' and the indication of his family genealogy together with his father's migratory background and social stratification – the paratext underlines the *exemplary* function of this individual for the reader in order to justify as well as perform a concentration on the middle classes in literature. In the "Preface", the fictional editor argues that "If ever the Story of any private Man's Adventures in the World were worth making Publick, and were acceptable when Publish'd, the Editor of this Account thinks this will be so" (*Robinson Crusoe*, 2007: n.p.). His simultaneous function as both individual and ex-

emplum reveals the novelistic reliance on comparative practices – individual life stories need to be compared with a view to their 'tellability' (Baroni 2014), and since their tellability depends on a deviation from established norms, it is justified by way of defining sensational adventures as didactic *exempla* that invite readers to compare their own life stories with the *exemplum*.

Quite in line with the tradition of the spiritual autobiography, Robinson goes on to recount his sinful tendency to disobey his father who recommends, in a direct and explicit comparison of different classes,

the upper Station of *Low Life*, which he had found by long Experience was the best State in the World, the most suited to human Happiness, not exposed to the Miseries and Hardships, the Labour and Sufferings of the mechanick Part of Mankind, and not embarrass'd with the Pride, Luxury, Ambition and Envy of the upper Part of Mankind.<sup>5</sup> (*Robinson Crusoe*, 2007: 6)

This paternal norm, however, lacks tellability in the novel, whereas Robinson's deviation from this norm becomes constitutive of the genre's plot lines – comparative practices are thus integral to the emergence of the novel more generally in that an interest in character depends on comparative practices on the side of authors, narrators and readers with regard to the difference between individual fictional characters and established social norms. While the novel's plot conforms to one of its generic precursors, the spiritual biography, in that it leads Robinson from his sinful life and disregard for both father and God through repentance to 'salvation', it is the time of repentance on the island that becomes the core interest for the narrative in *Robinson Crusoe*. It is exactly the deviation from the – religiously sanctioned – norm that generates 'interest' in both the senses of the motivation for reading and economic turnover. While one of the eighteenth-century ideals for a good life is moderation, the novel genre's *raison d'être* depends on the outcome of readers' evaluations of the deviations from the norm that generate interest. On the intratextual level, Robinson's disregard for established norms allows him to generate interest in an economic sense, too, since his journeys turn him into a successful businessman whose time on the island translates into money (see Spivak 1990: 6): Robinson owns a plantation in Brazil that generates profit for him even without his presence.

---

5 On social comparisons between classes in Defoe's novel and beyond, see the contribution by Hartner/Schneider in this volume.

Defoe's story is set "on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River OROONOQUE" (Defoe 2007: title page, n.p.) – the river that divides Guyana from Surinam – and thus in the vicinity of Behn's Surinam. While the setting at the river alludes to the name of Behn's protagonist, the two early novels are interconnected by intertextual ties with *Robinson Crusoe* consolidating the generic reliance on travel writing combined with the (auto)biography. Another central intertextual convergence lies in the descriptions of the respective narrators' others, and these descriptions are fraught with insecurities regarding the way in which the respective 'object' is to be narrated; it is this insecurity in the process of narration that reveals the crucial role of comparative practices as a basis of both modernity and the modern novel. As a generic conglomerate, the novel makes the white 'individual' emerge by way of comparative practices intended to reveal the similarities and differences between 'self' and its 'other'. 'Capturing' the other – either as slaves or as objects of narration – proves an endeavour fundamentally dependent on comparative practices. Both *Oroonoko* and *Robinson Crusoe* show that it is decidedly *practices* that are geared to render the resulting descriptions of the respective others in any way reliable, trustworthy and stable in a narrative. The narrative strategies employed for 'producing' the other in discourse are frequently characterized by repetitions intended to fix meanings; however, such iterative narrative practices may inject insecurities in the versions presented whenever they entail variations and contradictions. Symptomatically, in the process of reception and in the multiple adaptations and appropriations of *Robinson Crusoe* (see Richetti 2018: 15), these insecurities were frequently harmonized. As Rivka Swenson has shown, "Crusoe's errors and self-contradictions are the signal evidence of his own foregrounded composition-and-revision methodology (omitting, expanding, transposing, consolidating, making-things-up)" (2018: 20). There is a decided rift in what he narrates in his journal as a contemporary record of the experiencing I and how he represents the entries retrospectively (see Swenson 2018: 20-21); what is more, the limited supply in ink and paper on the island renders it questionable how extensive the journal actually is and (see *Robinson Crusoe*, 2007: 56; 89), consequently, how reliable Crusoe's narrative can be on the basis of this 'journal'. "In the journal, two voices overlap awkwardly" and construct a narrative mismatch of different versions of "two Crusoes" (Swenson 2018: 21), so that ultimately, the novel tells the story of "a writer who overtly manipulates his story and audience, shaping by hindsight, reading the present into the past, omitting and compressing toward an end, forging a chain of

narrative reciprocity" (25). Clearly, it is the concatenation of events that is crucial and the question of whether these narrative concatenations add up or create inconsistencies. The novel thus invites practices of comparing both on the intratextual and on the intertextual level, and it is such networks of cross-references and strategies of narrative suture that prove fundamental for the discursive construction of eighteenth-century modernity.

While Behn installs an I-as-witness as narrator that moves increasingly into the centre of attention as her actual object, Oroonoko, slips from view, Defoe's novel is narrated by an I-as-protagonist, further characterized by a large difference between narrating and experiencing I, or what Rivka Swenson calls the "hindsight-version" of the narrator (Swenson 2018: 20). The ways in which Oroonoko and Friday are described bear multiple similarities that may also account for the fact that Friday is frequently considered to be a black character in readings or adaptations and appropriations of the novel (see Wheeler 1995: 823). The conflation between otherness and blackness rests on the conception of Friday as a slave, a conception, however, that frequently slips from 'slave' to 'servant' to 'man' in the novel and consequently proves highly slippery, reflecting "a larger cultural uncertainty about the significance of racial difference in the early eighteenth century" and its concomitant social stratification (Wheeler 1995: 821-822). For Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, I argue that comparative practices abound because they prove central for the hermeneutic process of encountering and understanding the island, its possible inhabitants and himself. Robinson implicitly compares the island to places he is familiar with and subjects it to comparable conceptual mappings. When he surveys the island from an elevated point of view, thus exerting the visual power of the male gaze over the landscape, he comments:

I descended a little on the Side of that delicious Valley, surveying it with a secret Kind of Pleasure, (tho' mixt with my other afflicting Thoughts) to think that all this was my own, that I was King and Lord of all this Country indefeasibly and had a Right of Possession; and if I could convey it, I might have it in Inheritance, as completely as any Lord of a Mannor in *England*. (*Robinson Crusoe*, 2007: 85)

His cognitive grasp of the island is coded by political notions of sovereignty and economic as well as legal notions of possession and inheritance as established in *England*, which serves as a conceptual blend (see Fauconnier/Turner 2002) to hermeneutically appropriate the island. The male gaze that awards him a "secret Kind of Pleasure" surveying the landscape (Defoe 2007: 85, my

emphasis) additionally entails the pleasure of voyeuristic desire and eroticizes Robinson's relation to the landscape (see Turley 2003: 3). Such eroticization is transferred onto his 'subjects' in his kingdom and becomes most visible when he observes his "Man Friday" (Defoe 2007: 175). The island and its people are thus tied together metonymically, shedding light upon one another by proxy; spatialization and characterization closely intersect. Such conceptual blends in the narrative serve as central comparative practices that allow insights into the ways in which Robinson Crusoe subjects the island and all its inhabitants to his cognitive mastery, which, as the 'sovereign' of the island, pre-empts himself from the process. While, in Robinson's narrative discourse, the comparative practice of blending presents a form of constructing different semantic fields as congruent, a focus on the metonymical practices of concatenation, of creating the "Collection of Wonders" (217) that constitutes the narrative, is a way to understand both Robinson's narration and himself. In the following, I am going to focus on the interrelation between Robinson Crusoe and Friday as well as Robinson and the island as central aspects for the complex articulation of the emergence of the modern individual under "the ideology of industrial capitalism" (Watt 2000: 67), the emergence of racism as part of a colonial discourse and the emergence of the novel genre.

While the "primacy of individual economic advantage has tended to diminish the importance of personal as well as group relationships, and especially those based on sex" (Watt 2000: 67), it is homosocial desire that eroticizes the relationships on the island. Similarly, with Friday, Crusoe "enjoys an idyll without benefit of a woman – a revolutionary departure from the traditional expectations aroused by desert islands from the *Odyssey* to the *New Yorker*" (Watt 68). After Watt, several critics have added a focus on sexual orientation to Robinson's readings as "*homo economicus*, *homo faber*, religious figure, [...] a masculine adventurer, an imperialist [...] or] as an individual" (Downes 2010). Peter Hulme has established a reading of *Robinson Crusoe* as a "colonial romance" (1986: 208), situating "the true romance [...] between Crusoe and Friday", a relation charged with "erotic delight" on Crusoe's side (212). Hans Turley emphasizes Robinson's "homosocial relationship with Friday" and argues that his "[w]andering seems to become the repressive mechanism for his unarticulated desires, his undetermined identity" (Turley 2003: 5); hence, Robinson's travels as a form of colonial expansion appear correlated to his homoerotic desire that is partly fulfilled in interethnic encounters (see Poole 2014: 169). Melissa K. Downes maintains that the novel is defined by "a sexually coded imperialism" (2) that relies on "ordering principles and bound-

aries" whose transgression "would be highly threatening, particularly since such divisions are, themselves, unstable narratives" (3), thus underlining the importance of the disavowal of this desire for the viability of the emerging modern subject. In the wider context of queer theory, one cannot but agree with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who argues that "the structuring of same-sex bonds can't, in any historical situation marked by inequality and contest *between* genders, fail to be a site of intensive regulation that intersects virtually every issue of power and gender"; drawing on Michel Foucault, she highlights that "modern Western culture has placed what it calls sexuality in a more and more distinctly privileged relation to our most prized constructs of individual identity, truth, and knowledge" (1993: 245). Hence, the modern individual that is represented in the realist novel – i.e., the novel that makes the enmeshment of individual identity, truth and knowledge co-emerge – is a construction based on the intersection of sexualities and imperialism; in *Robinson Crusoe*, this fundamental amalgamation is played out in the encounters between the colonizer Robinson, the island and his 'other', Friday.

Stereotyping is one of the strategies Robinson employs to render his picaresque narrative cohesive with regard to his rendition of 'character'. This focus on an 'other' as well as the suppression of the erotic dimension of this relation help to divert attention from the wider colonial project of exploitation and to direct attention at the comparative practices required to decide whether the 'other' poses a threat or not. Stereotyping serves to render plausible the slippage between the terms designating Friday's status as either 'slave', or 'servant' or 'man' (see Wheeler 1995) since some descriptions need to be "anxiously repeated" to stabilize the respective subject positions (Bhabha 2008: 95). Crucially, as Homi Bhabha argues, colonial discourse is "structurally similar to realism" with regard to its representational strategies of representing the colonial other as "at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (101). Furthermore, stereotyping is akin to fetishism in that

The fetish or stereotype gives access to an 'identity' which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it. This conflict of pleasure/unpleasure, mastery/defence, knowledge/disavowal, absence/presence, has a fundamental significance for colonial discourse. For the scene of fetishism is also the scene of the reactivation and repetition of primal fantasy – the subject's desire for a pure origin that

is always threatened by division, for the subject must be gendered to be en-gendered, to be spoken. (Bhabha 2008: 107)

It is through stereotyping Friday that Robinson can get access to his own (modern, realist, white etc.) identity. Stereotyping strongly relies on comparative practices,<sup>6</sup> cognitive strategies that correspond to subconscious processes of desiring haunted by racism. Robinson's whiteness and masculinity only emerge as such after dominating and subjecting Friday (see Poole 2014: 170). To that effect, Friday must be held in place by practices of stereotyping (Bhabha 2008: esp. 94-95, 101-102) and it is this comparative practice that highlights the many intersections that define the 'modern' individual in the novel.

### 3.1 Racialized Spatial Politics in *Robinson Crusoe*

Making the island his own, Robinson follows an established script of colonization, declaring the island as uninhabited and wild, and thus as subjectable. Robinson fashions himself as 'master' in several ways, as a spatial master of the island, and as a master of his 'subjects', be they human or animal: "it was a merry Reflection which I frequently made, How like a King I look'd. First of all, the whole Country was my own meer Property; so that I had an undoubted Right of Dominion. 2dly, My People were perfectly subjected: I was absolute Lord and Law-giver; they all owed their Lives to me" (*Robinson Crusoe*, 2007: 203). The life on the heterotopia of the island is thus characterized by economic anachronisms – Robinson as a capitalist entrepreneur and colonizer still combines several different functions in his own person quite contrary to

---

6 With regard to stereotyping, I take a detour from Epple's and Erhart's evaluation of Bhabha's approach, while I otherwise follow their definition of comparative practices. Epple and Erhart argue that postcolonial approaches often "repeated the dichotomies of 'colonial powers' and the 'colonial other' within their studies. This repetition has to do with the postcolonial interest in analyzing 'othering,' as Homi K. Bhabha would have it"; thus, these approaches place an emphasis on "the construction of the Other through comparison" rather than on "the very practices of comparing" (2020: 17). In my view, the process of stereotyping as a crucial strategy of othering is decidedly a comparative *practice* as it needs to be performed in any encounter with the other (who can challenge those practices by employing mimicry, for instance, which is a performative *practice* in its own right, see Bhabha 2008: 122-123). Stereotyping, in Bhabha's sense, is processual and hence requires constant iterations of comparative practices.

established divisions of labour (see Schmidt 2012: 193) – and, at least for contemporary readers, by political anachronisms since the absolutist reign along the lines of the Stuart dynasty Robinson imagines for himself has been abolished after the Glorious Revolution in 1688, which, however, only occurs after Robinson is rescued in the 1686 of the story world. For contemporary readers, the story world prompts and invites comparisons between their own political and economic structures and Robinson's with a view to the question in which contexts an individual can thrive and prove sovereign.<sup>7</sup>

The *terra incognita* of the island that Robinson explores is not restricted to the surface of the island, it is also and decidedly the spaces below ground that serve Robinson's "colonial project" (MacDonnell 2020: 2) at a time when "subsurface resource extraction began to play a principal role in catalyzing Britain's transition to industrial capitalism" (5). While Robinson marks the island by way of its spatial demarcation, cultivation and labour (see 10) as his own, it is the space below ground that serves as the ideal space of subjection, as Kevin MacDonnell argues:

The subsurface environments in Defoe's fiction fulfill and, in some cases, restore the Edenic fantasy of unoccupied colonial space in a way that topographical surfaces could not. The ideal conditions for colonial occupation in the eighteenth century would have looked a lot like the subsurface environments Defoe constructs: malleable, abundant, and unpopulated. Alongside the seemingly inexhaustible supply of resources and commodities Defoe locates beneath the surface, he also uncovers core features of the national and racial character of British identity. (2020:18)

It is Robinson's cave in particular that represents a central space that negotiates not only the topological value of 'above' and 'below' the surface, but also the social and sexual significance of the cave apart from its economic one (see Poole 2014: 169-170). Generally, the cave is a space whose access Robinson carefully regulates, particularly when Friday appears on the island. The close

7 With such an interplay of space and time in the novelistic setting, the island can be further described as a chronotope, defined by Mikhail Bakhtin as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature", so that time "thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (1981: 84). Importantly, this has effects on the representation of characters (see 85). Thus, the Robinsonade reflects on the emergence of the eighteenth-century individual as a product of several intertwining discourses.

connection between the presence of others and the protection of the cave already becomes clear when Robinson spots another human being's footprint "on the Shore, which was very plain to be seen in the Sand" (Defoe 2007: 130). This find sets off a bout of paranoia in Robinson: "like a Man perfectly confus'd and out of my self, I came Home to my Fortification, not feeling, as we say, the Ground I went on, but terrify'd to the last Degree, looking behind me at every two or three Steps, mistaking every Bush and Tree, and fancying every Stump at a Distance to be a Man" (130). It is after this event that he profess-edly calls his cave "my Castle" where he sought refuge "like one pursued" (131). Even when he dares to leave his 'Castle', he it is not without a feeling of being followed and "haunted with an evil Conscience" (134). The trace of another, the very index of presence, suffices to make him secure his cave as a fortress – a symptom that may be diagnosed as a case of "homosexual panic" (Sedg-wick 1985: 91) *avant la lettre*. The trace of the other is finally 'fleshed out' by Friday, whose life Robinson saves and whom he consequently turns into his servant. The island is a space defined by Robinson's homoerotic desire (see Poole 2014: 170) that is clearly set off from the spaces of 'civilization' to which he returns after his sojourn on the island: only a few sparse sentences de-scribe that he marries and has three children in England after his return, but he quickly leaves them for further adventures after his wife dies (*Robinson Cru-soe*, 2007: 256). Crossing theses spaces by travelling, Robinson interconnects them for triangular trade and his desire for travelling similarly triangulates his homosocial desire.<sup>8</sup>

---

8 A further indication of homosocial desire is Robinson's moustache. On his slave-trading voyage to "Guiney", he falls into the hands of a Turkish pirate, who ordered Robinson "to lye in the Cabbin to look after the Ship" (Defoe 2007: 18); the duties of the household slave Robinson thus seem to entail sexual services (see Turley 2003: 7-8). After this homoerotic experience, he trims his beard in a Turkish style up to his "eleventh Year of [his] Residence" on the island and beyond (Defoe 2007: 123): "as I had both Scissars and Razors sufficient, I had cut it pretty short, except what grew on my upper Lip, which I had trimm'd into a large Pair of *Mahometan* Whiskers, such as I had seen worn by some *Turks*, who I saw at *Sallee*" and "they were of a Length and Shape monstrous enough, and such as in *England* would have pass'd for frightful" (127). Considering that "The savage and the Christian are the most important racialized categories between Europeans and others that help produce and maintain a sense of European superiority" (Wheeler 1995: 828), it is noteworthy that Robinson retains a style with much cultural effort that must remain associated with a Turkish pirate who enslaved him in several senses. Clearly, intercultural comparative practices would distinguish Robinson from

Interestingly, after coming across the footprint, Robinson already dreams of encountering a “Savage” (Defoe 2007: 167) and, in his dream, this savage is admitted to his cave: “he kneel’d down to me, seeming to pray me to assist him; upon which I shew’d my Ladder, made him go up, and carry’d him into my Cave, and he became my Servant” (167-168). The actual man that Robinson calls Friday only arrives more than one year after this dream, and then the regulations of access fall differently: “I carry’d him not to my Castle, but quite away to my Cave, on the farther Part of the Island; so I did not let my Dream come to pass in that Part, viz. That he came into my Grove for Shelter” (Defoe 2007: 173). While in the dreamscape, Robinson is ‘free’ to admit Friday to his Castle, and with it to the central symbol of a phallic fortress of identity, he cannot do so in the reality of the story world. The regulations of access are different in the dream and in the ‘real’, which first and foremost highlights that something needs to be regulated here, or, alternatively, that something needs to be narrated differently as wished for in the ‘dream’ – granting Friday access to the private places of the island that is metonymically connected to Robinson’s body. With this juxtaposition of the dream and the real, the novel invites intratextual comparative practices that allow conclusions by way of the very contiguity of the respective scenes.

When Robinson describes Friday as he lies asleep in the cave after his rescue, he clearly fetishizes Friday’s body in that he comments on body parts individually, again by a sort of listing. As Melissa Downes has shown, “The similarities of Crusoe’s blazon of Friday to his other continual narrative listings of his possessions, both land and objects, show this relationship between self, possession, and the erotic. [...] Indeed, within early eighteenth-century mercantilism the erotic is tied to dominating and possessing both humans (wives, mistresses, and slaves) as erotic possessions and to possessing land and material objects” (2010: 8). Focusing on comparative practices, this passage adds further aspects to this eroticized stock-taking. *Robinson Crusoe* reiterates Oroonoko’s description in many respects, and thus the novel relies on intertextual comparative practices that help to reiterate and solidify a stereotype of the colonial ‘other’ that creates a lasting myth. The following description can thus be seen to be “part of a framework of comparative practices that have been established through repetition and routines, cultural habits, and historical patterns” (Epple/Erhart 2020: 18):

---

gentlemen in England, where he would appear to be ‘frightful’ and would be subject to othering in his very country of origin.

He was a comely handsome Fellow, perfectly well made; with straight strong Limbs, not too large; *tall* and *well-shap'd*, and as I reckon, about twenty six Years of Age. He had a very good Countenance, not a fierce and surly Aspect; but seem'd to have something very manly in his Face, and yet he had all the Sweetness and Softness of an *European* in his Countenance too, especially when he smil'd. His Hair was long and black, not curl'd like Wool; his Fore-head 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 of an ugly yellow nauseous tawny, as the *Brasilians*, 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. (Defoe 2007: 173; my emphases)

Based on this indirect form of an intertextual comparison, Friday and Oroonoko share that they are “tall” and of a good “Shape” (see *Oroonoko*, 1997: 13), have straight black hair (although due to the “Aids of Art” in Oroonoko’s case, *Oroonoko*, 1997: 14) and “very piercing” (13) or sharp eyes, diverge in skin colour from their peers and have some similarity to Europeans (see 13). Even though Friday is a Carib Indian and not of African descent, the narrator deems it necessary to point out that his hair is not “curl'd like wool” (*Robinson Crusoe*, 2007: 173), a mention which, despite its negation, together with the similarity to Oroonoko’s description, might account for the fact that Friday is frequently portrayed as an African in Robinsonades. What is more, his description hinges on precisely such comparative practices that make him emerge and solidify as Robinson’s ‘other’, which goes to show that “[c]omparing is a ‘relationing’ activity that goes way beyond stating mere differences” (Epple/Erhart 2020: 17). The contours of both Robinson and Friday are being constructed by “doing comparisons” (20). Robinson places Friday on a racialized continuum spawned between ‘Africanness’ and ‘Europeanness’; Friday’s difference from ‘Africans’ goes hand in glove with similarities to Europeans that are clearly gendered: While there is something “very manly” in Friday’s face, he shares with Robinson some European features, defined by a rather feminine “Sweetness and Softness” (*Robinson Crusoe*, 2007: 173).

Despite racial and sexual ambiguities, comparative practices help to establish the novel’s modern subject as ‘white’ with the Anglo-Saxon European as the norm. This norm is further defined by an inclination to freedom rooted in this racialized origin, a freedom for example in the realm of religion (see *Robinson Crusoe*, 2007: 203), options of capital expansion or in the freedom of

movement ingrained in the colonial enterprise. However, what remains foreclosed in this construction is its dependence on the exploitation of its 'others', be that humans or islands. It is the deep level of the novel, the exploitation of what is below the surface level of the earth, in other words, it is what happens in the cave that forms the 'subtext' of both the novel and its 'modern' individual. Comparative practices of the 'below' and the 'above' of the wider context of *Robinson Crusoe* undo the closeting of the exploitative and extractive foundations of the novelistic construction of the modern, white individual.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that comparative practices prove crucial in the emergence of the novel genre in the long eighteenth century. Relying, as it does, on generic precursors such as travel writing and the (spiritual) (auto)biography, the novel closely ties the construction of the modern individual to its colonial others, whose construction, in turn, depends on comparative practices that become solidified by processes of cultural iteration. The modern individual is clearly defined by the racialized marker of whiteness that is rooted in an Anglo-Saxon genealogy of 'Englishness', further associated with industrial capitalism, colonialism, (religious) freedom and heteronormativity. Literary authorship is a function of this conglomerate of intersecting discourses and defined by its own strategies of narrative mastery.

In *Oroonoko*, Aphra Behn's author-narrator emerges at her most overt in the interethnic encounters set in the heterotopic space of the colony. She is literally thrown into relief when she is touched, observed and described by Surinamese Indians as an experiencing I in the colonial encounter, and she is fully established as a white female author with a story to live by after the demise of her biographical subjects. Commercially profitable female authorship is enabled through the author-narrator's commodification of her subjects, and through her emergence as white in the process of establishing skin colour as a central signifier of social privilege in the novel. This authorization of the white, female writer hinges on stereotyping both the Surinamese and the Coramantiens. This discursive practice is closely articulated with strategies of spatialization that subject interethnic encounters to a colonial mapping and *mise-en-scène*, calibrated by the generic hybridity. The mixture of travel writing and the (auto)biography equally characterizes Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as the paradigmatic modern novel; implicit intertextual com-

parative practices help to congeal generic conventions over time, which shape collective processes of meaning making and may even impact on the interpretation and appropriation of extraliterary experiences (see Gymnich/Neumann 2007: 40; 46) as the plethora Robinsonades, both literary and real, illustrates. Hence, the way in which the novelistic subject is constructed can be shown to have a wider impact on general cultural subject constructions. *Robinson Crusoe* is a central text in defining English identity as 'white' in the sense of the Anglo-Saxon genealogy of its main character that is closely tied to capitalist structures of mercantilism and processes of colonial expansion. By the same token, the viability of modern subjects as presented in the novel hinges on the foreclosure of homosocial desire, a desire transposed onto travelling, exploring and expanding the narrow confines of "the upper Station of *Low Life*" (*Robinson Crusoe*, 2007: 6). The exploitation of resources and human beings comes to be legitimized through discourses of freedom and (God-granted?) success tied to this subject; the articulation of colonialism, capitalism, Puritanism, racism and heteronormativity requires some further disentangling in order to resist its detrimental effects for people(s) and environments alike.

The white, middle-class individuals of the modern novel that normalize these subject positions for their corresponding readership, are discursive effects of comparative practices as central strategies of modernity that define and delimit the viability of subjects as well as the options of interaction with their others and their (spatial) contexts. The performative power and particular functionalizations of comparative practices thus clearly require further critical unravelling, as they have been shown to be foundational for forms of exploitation that continue to riddle our present.

## Bibliography

Assmann, Aleida/Sebastian Conrad. "Introduction". *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses. Practices and Trajectories*. Ed. Sebastian Conrad. New York: Palgrave, 2010, 1-16.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Forms and Time of the Chronotope in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. 84-258.

Baroni, Raphaël. "Tellability." *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Last modified April 2014. Accessed online, 02 August 2021. <https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/30.html>.

Batten, Jr., Charles L. *Pleasurable Instruction: Form and Convention in Eighteenth-Century Travel Literature*. Berkeley: California University Press, 1978.

Behn, Aphra. *Oroonoko: An Authoritative Text, Historical Backgrounds, Criticism*. Ed. Joanna Lipking. New York: Norton, 1997 [1688].

Bekers, Elisabeth. "Creative Challenges to Captivity: Slave Authorship in Black British Neo-Slave Narratives." *Life Writing* 15.1 (2018): 23-42.

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008.

Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2004.

Das, Nandini and Tim Youngs (eds.). *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe*. Edited with an Introduction by Thomas Keymer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [1719].

Downes, Melissa K. "Erotic Bo(u)nds: Domination, Possession, Enclosure and the Self in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*." *The Erotic in Context*. Ed. M. Soraya García-Sánchez, Cara Judea Alhadeff, and Joel Kuennen. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010. 171-182.

Doyle, Laura. "Reconstructing Race and Freedom in Atlantic Modernity: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*." *Atlantic Studies* 4.2 (2007): 195-224.

Eckstein, Lars. *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic: On the Poetics and Politics of Literary Memory*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006.

Epple, Angelika. "Inventing White Beauty and Fighting Black Slavery: How Blumenbach, Humboldt, and Arango y Parreño Contributed to Cuban Race Comparisons in the Long Nineteenth Century." *Practices of Comparing: Towards a New Understanding of a Fundamental Human Practice*. Ed. Angelika Epple, Walter Erhart, and Johannes Grave. Bielefeld: Bielefeld University Press, 2020. 295-328.

Epple, Angelika and Walter Erhart. "Die Welt beobachten – Praktiken des Vergleichens." *Die Welt beobachten: Praktiken des Vergleichens*. Ed. Angelika Epple and Walter Erhart. Frankfurt: Campus, 2015. 7-31.

Fauconnier, Gilles and Mark Turner. *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.

Felski, Rita. *The Limits of Critique*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015.

Felski, Rita and Susan Stanford Friedman. "Introduction." *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses*. Ed. Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. 1-12.

Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias." Transl. Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism* 16.1 (1986): 22-27.

Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1971.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Vol. 1. London: Penguin, 1990.

Gallagher, Catherine, ed. *Aphra Behn: Oroonoko; or, the Royal Slave*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.

Gautier, Gary. "Slavery and the Fashioning of Race in *Oroonoko, Robinson Crusoe* and *Equiano's Life*." *The Eighteenth Century* 42.2 (2001): 161-179.

Greenblatt, Stephen, ed. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Major Authors*. 9th ed. New York: Norton, 2013.

Gymnich, Marion and Birgit Neumann. "Vorschläge für eine Relationierung verschiedener Aspekte und Dimensionierungen des Gattungskonzepts: Der Kompaktbegriff Gattung". *Gattungstheorie und Gattungsgeschichte*. Ed. Marion Gymnich, Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning. Trier: wvt, 2007, 31-52.

Hartner, Marcus. "Placing Prospero's Island: (Post)Colonial Practices of Comparing in the Academic Reception of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*." *FIAR* 12.1 (2019): 73-85.

Herman, David. *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002.

Hulme, Peter, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Hulme, Peter, ed. *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797*. London: Methuen, 1986.

James, Erin. *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015.

Lemke, Thomas. "Rechtssubjekt oder Biomasse? Reflectionen zum Verhältnis von Rassismus und Exklusion." *Biopolitik und Rassismus*. Ed. Martin Stin-gelin. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2003. 160-183.

MacDonnell, Kevin. "Beneath Defoe's Island: Imperial Geopolitics and the Inorganic Economy in *Robinson Crusoe*." *Philological Quarterly* 99.1 (2020): 1-24.

Murphy, Robinson. "Black Friday, Queer Atlantic." *Research in African Literatures* 49.2 (2018): 182-198.

Pettinger, Alasdair and Tim Youngs, eds. *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing*. London: Routledge, 2020.

Pool, Ralph J. "Tourniers Analyse von Defoes *Robinson Crusoe*." *Gefährliche Maskulinitäten: Männlichkeit und Subversion am Rande der Kulturen*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2014. 163-202.

Reckwitz, Andreas. "Grundelemente einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken: Eine sozialtheoretische Perspektive." *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 32.4 (2003): 282-301.

Richetti, John, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to "Robinson Crusoe"*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Rocha Teixeira, Susana. "Introduction: Doing and Undoing Comparisons in the Americas from the Colonial Times to the Present." *Forum for Inter-American Research* 12.1 (Jun. 2019): 6-11.

Rohland, Eleonora and Kirsten Kramer. "Introduction: On 'Doing Comparison' – Practices of Comparing." *Contact, Conquest and Colonization: How Practices of Comparing Shaped Empires and Colonialism around the World*. New York [et al]: Routledge, 2021. 1-16.

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1994.

Schmidt, Johann N. "Von der Restauration bis zur Vorromantik." *Englische Literaturgeschichte*. 5th ed. Ed. Hans Ulrich Seeber. Stuttgart and Weimar, 2012.

Sedwick, Eve. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

Sedwick, Eve. "Axiomatic." *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. Simon During. London: Routledge, 1993. 243-268.

Spivak, Gayatri. "Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's Foe Reading Defoe's 'Crusoe/Roxana'." *English in Africa* 17.2 (1990): 1-23.

Swenson, Rivka. "Robinson Crusoe and the Form of the New Novel." *The Cambridge Companion to "Robinson Crusoe"*. Ed. John Richetti. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 16-31.

Tavor Bannet, Eve. "Robinson Crusoe and Travel Writing: The Transatlantic World." *The Cambridge Companion to "Robinson Crusoe"*. Ed. John Richetti. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 128-141.

Thompson, Carl, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*. London and New York: Routledge, 2016.

Thompson, Carl. *Travel Writing*. London: Routledge, 2011.

Turley, Hans. "The Sublimation of Desire to Apocalyptic Passion in Defoe's Crusoe Trilogy." *Imperial Desire: Dissident Sexualities and Colonial Literature*. Eds. Philip Holden and Richard J. Ruppel. London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. 3-20.

Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. London: Pimlico, 2000 [1957].

Wheeler, Roxann. "My Savage,' 'My Man': Racial Multiplicity in *Robinson Crusoe*." *ELH* 62.4 (1995): 821-861.

Youngs, Tim, ed. *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.