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Robinsonade Against Colonialism and National Socialism: Alexander Moritz Frey's *Der Mensch* (1940)

Paola Mayer/Rüdiger Mueller

Abstract *Circa 1938 verfasst der wegen antinationalistischer Ansichten aus Deutschland geflüchtete A.M. Frey im Schweizer Exil die Geschichte* Der Mensch, *die einen blonden, herrschsüchtigen Deutschen darstellt, der mit einer schwarzen Insulanerin auf einer öden Insel strandet. Der Text setzt sich mit zwei Intertexten auseinander, Defoes* Robinson Crusoe *und dem biblischen Genesis-Mythos, um sowohl Kolonialismus wie auch Nationalsozialismus schonungslos zu dekonstruieren. Frey entlarvt die fehlerhafte Argumentation für die essentialistische sowie die kulturgeschichtliche Überlegenheit der weißen ›Rasse‹, wodurch er nicht nur den ideologischen Rassismus, sondern auch den Glauben an eine positive, zivilisatorische Auswirkung der europäischen Kultur anprangert.*

Titel *Robinsonade kontra Kolonialismus und Nationalsozialismus: Alexander Moritz Freys* Der Mensch *(1940)*

Keywords *Nationalsozialismus; Kolonialismus; Robinsonade; Alexander Moritz Frey (1881-1957); Daniel Defoe (1660-1731)*

Introduction

A white European man having to survive on an uninhabited Caribbean island together with a dark-skinned indigenous person – this plot is instantly recognizable as the basis for a Robinsonade. When the island in question has just emerged newly formed from the ocean and the two humans stranded on it are a man and a woman, however, a further, secondary intertext is equally recognizable, »ein Schöpfungsnarrativ« (Seefried 2022: 160), the biblical Genesis story. The latter text is a myth of origin and of the fall from grace, the former a colonialist statement in which race relations are presented: the civilizing

Paola Mayer (University of Guelph); Rüdiger Mueller (University of Guelph) ;
pmayer@uoguelph.ca; mueller@uoguelph.ca;
https://orcid.org/0009-0001-4997-5314;https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6463-475X;

and saving of the savage by the more advanced and therefore superior human, the whole anchored in the notion of Providence. What kind of response to these texts can one expect when the author reworking their ingredients is a political exile from Nazi Germany, writing in the late 1930s? Subversion is the most likely answer, and subversion is indeed what one finds in Alexander Moritz Frey's (1881–1957) *Der Mensch*. To be more precise, Frey creates a Robinsonade in order to deliver a condemnation of colonialism as an essentially racist, unjustifiable endeavour, based on a belief in the superiority of the white »race«[1] which is at once fallacious in its premises and toxic in its effects. In so doing, he simultaneously enacts a taking back or refutation of Daniel Defoe's (c. 1660–1731) model of benevolent colonialism and uses its scenario to comment on the most aggressive racist and imperialist ideology of his own age, namely National Socialism. Through the allusions to the biblical creation myth and through its treatment – or perhaps non-treatment – of religion, *Der Mensch* also enacts a taking back of certain notions at the core of Christianity, notably those of original innocence, of the possibility of an earthly paradise, and of Providence, which is common to its two intertexts. The present essay aims to explicate these theses, reading what is perhaps Frey's most devastatingly pessimistic text as a commentary on his own time, on the phenomenon of racism, on the fallacies of religion, and on human nature per se.

Both Robinson Crusoe and the unnamed German who is the protagonist of *Der Mensch* are convinced of the superiority of white men over other races, but the reasons for this putative superiority are different. Furthermore, whereas Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as a whole confirms its protagonist's position – which indeed accords with the author's own –, the narrative mode and outcome of *Der Mensch* question and gradually dismantle the claim of superiority. In both texts, the justification for the racist position must be sought in the protagonists' assumption that Europeans are civilized whereas others are not. This assumption is tested through the protagonists' self-reflection and development, the effect that isolation has on them and on the vestiges of civilization they carry with them, and above all their relationship to the non-white Other. In one case the test succeeds, in the other it fails. Though Crusoe is alone on the island for twenty-five years, then on it with Friday as sole companion for a further three years, he remains what he was: a white European Christian, solidly grounded in his faith in Providence and in the beliefs and practices of his nation. Indeed, as a result of the process of reflection that his life on the island prompts, he is a better representative of European religion, customs and technological advancements at the end than he was before the shipwreck. From this vantage point, he is able to instruct Friday and »elevate« him to his own level, thus confirming the superiority claim of European civilization, as defined by these three elements. For the novel as whole, Crusoe's success proves the intrinsic value of what he represents.

The reverse obtains in Frey's text. His protagonist does not remain what he was but rather regresses to a savage state, both mentally and physically. His relations with the non-white Other involve no attempt at instruction or elevation to his own status but rather naked exploitation and debasement. Although he is never alone on the island, he

1 Seefried speaks of the inhumanity of such an »Überlegenheitsphantasie« (Seefried 2022: 160).

feels lonely because he considers the indigenous woman who lands with him there an inferior: his racism prevents him from seeing her as a companion, an equal, which her loss of speech only exacerbates. This isolation does not prompt critical self-reflection as was the case with Crusoe. He has no religious faith to ground him and give him hope. Most importantly for our purposes, the markers of difference which should bolster his belief in white European superiority slowly but surely crumble under the eroding effects of the island's primitive conditions, so that at the end all that is left of his cultural baggage is his conviction that white and blond is beautiful, black is ugly and inferior, and this pernicious and irrational attitude is all he successfully teaches his children. For the novella as a whole the European's failure thus exposes the intrinsic flaws of his values. They are not only morally abhorrent but unsound in their premises and incapable of sustaining the test of a hostile environment. By contrast to Defoe, the views of protagonist on the one hand, author and reader on the other, diverge sharply. Frey's text indicts European civilization as ephemeral, illusory, based on false premises and actually harmful in its effects.

Since *Der Mensch* is generally unknown (and until now not easily obtainable),[2] a plot summary may be helpful. An unnamed European man lands on a Caribbean island where the indigenous people at first intend to kill him, but, thanks to a »Machtprobe« which he passes due to his »europäische Überlegenheit«, they come to fear and accept him as ruler of their society. Like Crusoe, this protagonist thus has an experience as what we might call colonial overlord: Crusoe was for a time owner of a plantation and of slaves in Brazil; while Frey's character has not technically enslaved the natives, but does rule them despotically and causes them to work for him. The text is silent as to the nature of the »Machtprobe« and of the »Überlegenheit« but we can speculate that it likely involved superior knowledge and not improbably technology. It is hardly likely to have been a test of physical strength, which is not intrinsically European. In this too, a parallel to Crusoe might be found, a point to which we will return. It is also worth noting that it later emerges that the man is a German, but Frey chooses not to highlight it at this point, referring to him repeatedly as a European – the comment intended by the text is thus one on European civilization in general, though we will argue that specifically German considerations are at play.

Whereas Crusoe is shipwrecked on the uninhabited island on his way to purchase slaves, in *Der Mensch* it is a whole island that is wrecked, swallowed by the sea as a result of a seaquake. The outcome is the same, however: both protagonists save themselves on an island that is completely uninhabited; with the difference that, whereas Crusoe's island is well provided with both flora and fauna, the one in *Der Mensch* has newly emerged from the sea as a result of the same quake, and is thus nothing but bare rock and mud, devoid of vegetation, and visited only by sea birds whose droppings provide the basis for future – limited – plant life. A further crucial difference must be noted: whereas Crusoe is able to salvage numerous accoutrements of civilization (guns, gunpowder, tools, clothing, foodstuffs etc.) from the ship, nothing is salvaged from the previous island by

2 The text was published in 1940 by Querido Verlag, then again in 1950 by Vineta but has been out of print since then. It is now available in a new edition (*Der Mensch und andere Erzählungen*, Elsinor Verlag, 2021).

Frey's protagonist beyond a couple of planks of wood, the mat he had been lying on and the clothes he was wearing. As already mentioned, this protagonist does not have to wait twenty-five years for his Friday: one of the indigenous women was in a boat at the time of the disaster and immediately joins him on the island.

In both texts communication is problematic: in Defoe's temporarily, in Frey's permanently. Friday and Crusoe do not speak the same language and initially communicate by signs, but Crusoe soon teaches Friday – an adept and quick pupil – English so that real intellectual exchange becomes part of the relationship. Meaningful communication remains unattainable for Frey's protagonist although he already knew the indigenous Caribbean language. The woman can understand him from the start but cannot respond because she has lost the power of speech and never regains it, in spite of his attempts – sometimes benevolent, then increasingly violent – to teach her. Determined to have the solace of human speech, the man then begets three children from the woman (it hardly need be said that he does not request her consent); two of these, a boy and a girl, turn out white and blond like the father, the third, another boy, black like the mother. The father teaches them language, at first German, but soon abandons that in favour of the Caribbean language of his former island. He privileges the white children who notice the neglect of their brother and take advantage of it to torment and victimize him, forcing him to do all the work. The mother is now disregarded by all and one day disappears, without anyone searching for her or grieving over the loss. When the children are teenagers, all three men lust after the girl; the father tries to make use of his putative overlordship to take her, but it now emerges that he had not established a dominion of fear over his children as he had over his earlier indigenous subjects. The blond son makes use of one of their few wooden implements to kill him. The boy then wounds his black brother and takes possession of his sister. The text ends on these acts of savagery.

Biological Essentialism Deconstructed

As this ending indicates, Frey differs from Defoe in that he is sharply critical of the protagonist, both plot outcomes and elements of figural narration serving to underline the fallacies in the latter's thinking. As scholars have argued, while the belief in the superiority of white Europeans is maintained in *Robinson Crusoe* and elements of racist thinking are undeniably present, we are not dealing with straightforward biological essentialism (cf. Gautier 2001: 169). The description of Friday exemplifies the ambivalence: on the one hand, he is a very positive character, on the other he is portrayed in terms that bring him close to European appearance. Physically, Friday is »comely« in appearance and in Crusoe's eyes this comeliness lies in the absence of both African and Indigenous traits: he looks »not […] as the *Brasilians*, and *Virginians*, and other Natives of America« (Defoe 1995: 149; emphasis in original). In this regard the two protagonists are parallel in that they equate blackness and specific features with ugliness. Friday's skin colour is »not quite black« nor conforming to the Caribbean stereotype: »The Colour of his Skin was […] very tawny […] a bright kind of dun olive Colour«, »His hair was long and black, not curl'd like Wool« and »his Nose small, not flat like the Negroes, a very good Mouth, thin Lips« (ibid.: 148 et sqq.). He is endowed with excellent personal qualities: intelligence, warm

emotions and a natural morality. It must be said that his goodness is evinced by his eagerness and aptitude to absorb the Christian religion and European mores. Put another way, the Other is judged positively to the extent that he is willing to shed his Otherness and thereby affirm European superiority.

This in itself militates against biological essentialism, since it is possible for the non-European to become as good as – or indeed better than many – Europeans by embracing European civilization. To this must be added that Crusoe, reflecting on Friday's natural goodness, notes specifically that savages have the same faculties and the same good qualities as Europeans and often make better use of them (cf. ibid.: 151). He concludes that they are in no way inferior to Europeans except that they do not have knowledge of the true religion and thus wander in darkness and sin. To explain Defoe's position, Gary Gautier has coined the concept of an essentialism that is diachronic rather than synchronic: Europeans are superior not per se and for all time, but at that given moment in history, on the basis of the true religion and of the »improvements« of learning, science and technology (Gautier 2001: 169). In other words, Crusoe is superior to Friday because he is a Christian, because he is not a cannibal, because he can read and write, wears clothes, and has a gun; but that superiority will cease to exist when Friday has fully attained all these achievements. According to this model, the text's claim for European superiority is not based on race, though the description of Friday cited above partly undermines this. We will be arguing that Frey attacks this diachronic justification for superiority as well as the essentialist one, and that herein lies one reason for his »Crusoe« being returned to the most primitive conditions, without the benefit of any technological accoutrements.

Frey's protagonist is a firm believer in biological essentialism. He is indeed a biological essentialist of the most simplistic kind, who not only thinks but also feels that white is good and attractive, black bad and repulsive, in fact, not even quite human. Having become the despotic ruler of the island people, he gives free rein to his sexual appetites, taking whichever young girls he chooses as »Beischläferinnen« only, never as spouses, and having any offspring resulting from these encounters killed immediately because »Ihm hatte gegraut vor den Bastarden, schlimmen Mischungen aus seiner blonden Herrschsucht mit dem unterwürfigen Wesen der bronzebraunen hässlichen Insulanerinnen« (Frey 2021: 28). Since he can and does choose whichever girls he wishes, it must be concluded that in his eyes all the island women are ugly, and it is thus no stretch to conclude that they are ugly because they are bronze brown. Blondness, by contrast, would seem to be a virtue. Perhaps oddly, given the benefit he gets from indigenous submission, he also regards submissiveness as a vice to be discouraged in children. »Herrschsucht« presumably is a virtue. One is surprised by this until one remembers that Frey is writing this text in the late 1930s in exile from Nazi Germany, having fled because his outspoken opposition to Nazi ideology put him in danger of arrest. It is not difficult to recognize in »blonden Herrschsucht« an apt allusion to the Nazis' most prized traits. The notion of a hierarchy of master race and inferior races, the one destined to command, the others fit only for menial service, is subtly reflected in this valuation. As the protagonist's attitudes unfold, he emerges more and more clearly as a prototype of Nazi racial ideology. Alone on the newly emerged island with an indigenous woman, he feels nothing but repulsion for her, again dwelling on her »ugliness.« When he copulates with her,

he does so only to produce children, having to suppress his disgust at her appearance, and deliberately taking her from behind, so as not to see her face:

> Er überwand seinen Ekel, unterstützt von der Brunst, die nach zwei Jahren enthaltsamen Lebens heißer in ihm aufkochte, und gesellte sich dem Weibe zu. Er nahm sie, wie ein Tier das Tier nimmt, – voll Absicht so, um ihr häßliches, breitgefaltetes Gesicht in der Umarmung nicht sehen zu müssen, um nur das Ziel der Befruchtung zu erreichen, um sie trächtig zu machen wie ein Gefäß, aus dem er Geschöpfe hervorgehen lassen wollte, die ihm den grenzenlosen Schauder vor der Einsamkeit vertreiben sollten. (Ibid.: 44)

When he has children, he increasingly neglects and disadvantages the dark-skinned one, »je mehr er der Mutter zu gleichen begann.« (Ibid.: 45) Conversely, the daughter is »die Schöne« (ibid.: 50) simply because she has blond hair and white skin. His rejection of the non-white Other is thus as much visceral repulsion as intellectual prejudice and in this too it alludes to Nazi vituperation of other races. The colonial relationships that result from this attitude are quite different from those modelled by the Crusoe-Friday relationship.

The Master-Servant Relationship

Central to Defoe's and Frey's texts is an unequivocal master-servant relationship. Both begin with a symbolic gesture of abject subjection to a superior being on the part of the indigenous person, a self-abasement resulting from a mixture of fear and gratitude. Friday, grateful to the man who has just saved him from being eaten by his enemies, but terrified by his seemingly magical ability to make horrible noise and dispense death from afar, prostrates himself before Crusoe and puts the latter's foot on his head (Defoe 1995: 149). In *Der Mensch*, the indigenous woman, believing that the white man caused the quake that destroyed her people to punish them for what he deems poor behaviour while he chose to spare her, prostrates herself before him and puts his foot on her neck (Frey 2021: 30). This moment, incidentally, puts beyond doubt the deliberate intertextual relationship to Defoe's novel. In both texts, the relationship thus initiated is one in which the white man assumes mastery, even possession of the indigenous servant, who obeys orders unquestioningly. When Crusoe first realized cannibals had visited his island, he had a dream in which he rescued a prisoner from them, who then shows him the way to the mainland. As a result of the dream, he decides to get one or more savages in »my Possession« (Defoe 1995: 144) and »to make them entirely Slaves to me« (ibid.: 145). His appreciation for Friday's good qualities means that Crusoe never reduces him to slave status, nevertheless a hierarchical element shapes their relationship from the start. The matter of names illustrates this particularly pithily: Crusoe never asks the savage's name, he simply imposes a new one, one deliberately chosen to be a constant reminder of the debt of gratitude owed, since Friday was the day Crusoe rescued the savage (cf. ibid.: 149). Equally tellingly, he does not inform Friday of his own name, dubbing himself simply Master (cf. Novak 1997: 117). From the start and throughout, the Master's orders are to

be carried out, his likes and dislikes respected, his teachings accepted and followed. Nevertheless, the relationship is not without quid pro quo. Not only did Crusoe indeed save Friday's life, he then improved that life by civilizing the savage – something that twenty-first century readers may regard as a dubious benefit, but that Defoe clearly did not question. Crusoe improves Friday's material existence by sheltering him in the cave, clothing him, teaching him agriculture, and giving him bread, fruits and vegetables to eat, eventually instructing him in the use of firearms. Even more importantly he improves Friday's moral existence by teaching him to accept European social taboos – notably against cannibalism – and inducting him in Christianity, the one true religion that will result in the salvation of his soul. The instruction of Friday is done by example and by kindness, by showing the benefits of the European way rather than by imposing them. As a result, a true friendship and mutual affection develops between the two, so much so that Friday's devotion to Crusoe is compared to that of a child for his father (Defoe 1995: 151) – a comparison that at once captures the positive, caring dimension and the imbalance of the relationship. Various scholars have thus read the novel as modelling a good, benevolent form of colonialism, one that would see the colonizer treating the colonized with kindness, honesty and respect, and that would benefit the colonized by imparting on them the advantages of Christianity and European technology.[3]

In *Der Mensch* no element of quid pro quo mitigates the hierarchical nature of the master-servant relationship. As one might expect, given the protagonist's attitude described above, his relationship to the non-white Other is one of ruthless exploitation unalleviated by any element of kindness and respect. On both islands, his mastery involves sexual exploitation of the women[4]; on both islands the only evidence of communication with the indigenous people takes the form of giving commands or meting out punishment. The quake that destroyed the first island catches the European in a characteristically colonial moment: surveying his dominion from a height (here the roof of his palace), considering that he needs to order the natives to cut some trees that are obstructing his view of the sea. As we later learn, he never worked himself, his sole activity was that of imparting orders. The woman's act of submission was not an isolated instance: on the previous island, when he, the European, sat in judgement over any islanders who had done »etwas Verbotenes« – obviously forbidden by him – they would often prostrate themselves before him (Frey 2021: 30).

The man's relationship with his woman Friday continues the same pattern of oppression. Once again, the act of naming symbolizes taking possession of the Other. The violence implicit in this act is more overt here than in Defoe's novel, where it is disguised by the fact that Friday accepted the name willingly. Here, the woman vehemently protests

3 Scholars are divided as to whether Defoe is blind to the violent elements of British colonialism and thus sees it as benevolent by contrast with the brutality of the Spanish conquests in the New World (e.g., Hulme 1986: 199; McInelly 2003: 7 et sqq.), or whether he is criticizing British practices and proposing a change in strategy (e.g., Todd 2018: 143–145).

4 Seefried rightly terms it »Abwertung des weiblichen Körpers« (Seefried 2022: 160), focusing on the body but largely neglecting indigeneity and ethnicity in her short observations on ›otherness‹ and ›foreignness‹ (ibid.: 160–164).

the first, Caribbean name he assigns her, whereupon he relents and inflicts on her a German name; she continues to protest for the rest of her life, but he disregards her unhappiness and continues to use the imposed name. The choice of name itself (Lisbeth) shows a further denigration, since it is the name of an unattractive servant with whom he had sex and whom he later came to dislike. The text, which is often figural narration, is quite open about the fact that his relationship to her is one of naked exploitation: »Nein, lieben konnte er sie nicht; nicht einmal begehren. Aber er wollte sie sich dienstbar machen« (Frey 2021: 39). This means, in addition to ordinary service such as preparing shelter and food, getting what he desires out of her (»aus ihr herausholen«): at first human sounds, then, when that fails, children. And his method includes kindness only to the extent that he thinks it might help her relearn to speak; when that fails, he does not hesitate to try the effect of beatings. His justification for this exploitation, though it should be stressed that he himself does not regard justification as necessary, is that he sees her as less than human: »sie war ein unschönes, reizloses Tier, das gut anpacken konnte« (ibid.: 30); when she is pregnant, he »behandelte sie sorgsam wie ein kostbares Stück Vieh, das keine Fehlgeburt erleiden, kein totes Junges werfen durfte.« (Ibid.: 44) As this language suggests, his attitude to the children to be produced is the same, which will later be confirmed by the way he treats them. As already mentioned, there is no other side to the relationship with his woman Friday. Not only is there no kindness, no trust, no affection, but he does not attempt to »civilize« her in any way. He does not try to teach her anything beyond speech, and that only so that he may alleviate his solitude by hearing human language. Even the rescue which prompted her act of submission was a fallacy: he did not save her from drowning in the seaquake, chance saved her. Still, she thinks he has godlike powers by which he destroyed the others but saved her. He does nothing to instigate that belief, but neither does he try to dispel it, instead making use of it to cement his domination.

One can draw a parallel from the micro level of individual relationships to the macro level of the state. Todd has argued that the Crusoe-Friday relationship models the benevolent colonialism with its economic exploitation but also its civilizing of the savages which Defoe believed in and wished to promote (Todd 2018: 150–154). Likewise, the relationship of the German man with his »Lisbeth« reflects the violent, unashamedly exploitative nature of Nazi imperialism grounded in racial ideology, though around 1938 Frey could not yet suspect the enormity of its atrocities. On the evidence thus far, one could conclude that Frey is using *Robinson Crusoe* to oppose an acceptable model of colonialism not based on racism against an unacceptable one based on the theory of racial superiority. But this is not the case, his attack on colonialism is more radical and comprehensive than that. To illustrate this, we now turn to his treatment of the putative superiority of civilized man.

Deconstructing European »Civilization«

As discussed above, in *Robinson Crusoe* the claim for the superiority of Europeans, on which Crusoe's mastery over Friday also rests, hinges on the ostensible benefits of European civilization. Frey takes these up and puts them to the test, by reducing the living

conditions on the island to ground zero. One by one they fail this test, raising the question: of what value is civilization if it cannot be reproduced, if it crumbles in the face of adversity, even in the mind and behaviour of its exponent? The markers of civilization that occur in both texts can be identified as follows: religion (its specificity as Christianity is crucial in Robinson Crusoe, immaterial in *Der Mensch*); a set of norms and taboos that make social organization possible, including the attitudes of submission and dominance on which social hierarchy hinges; language as tool for communication; and, last but certainly not least, the material inventions such as weapons, tools, and consumer goods, which make life more comfortable – what we might refer to as technology for convenience.

In the conceptual world of Defoe's novel, technology would be considered merely a tool, but, from the vantage point of a comparison with Frey's tale, it is revealed to be the most important element, crucial to Crusoe rescuing Friday, to the superiority he asserts over Friday, and perhaps most importantly, to Crusoe remaining a civilized European. Crusoe is able to rescue Friday from his enemies because he has a gun, and Friday prostrates himself in submission before Crusoe only in part out of gratitude, but mainly and most immediately because he is struck by terror and awe at the noise of the gun and in view of this mysterious, unfathomable means of dealing death. When he understands that the gun was the implement of death, he regards it as a sort of god, talks to the gun and implores it not to kill him. In addition to that, everything that enables Crusoe to maintain his distinctness from savages (his dwelling, the agricultural activities and hunting that provide his food, his clothing) depends on the tools and goods – and again, most especially on the guns – that were shipwrecked with him. These are all things that came with him from Europe, that he did not and could not have recreated for himself.

Frey poses the question, what happens if all the technological accoutrements of civilization are removed from the civilized man? He answers it by doing just that, removing them. The European and his woman Friday find themselves on the new island with nothing but her wooden boat and the few planks and mat on which the man was lying. No weapons and no tools accompany them, and the man is unable to create any, beyond a few primitive wooden implements of no particular usefulness. He is not even able to make fire, one of the earliest discoveries of primitive man, though it is unclear whether it is because he lacks the means or the knowledge. Without these technological advancements, all the material comforts and achievements of civilization vanish at once: man and woman are reduced to sheltering in a cave lined with seaweed, eating sea birds and crustaceans raw. And even these most primitive comforts are the achievements of the indigenous woman. The man neither teaches her how to find and prepare their food and shelter nor does he take any hand in the work. Without the aid of European-made tools, it is clear that a member of an indigenous society is better equipped to survive in the wilderness than a European. One claim to superiority of civilized man over the savage confirmed in *Robinson Crusoe* is thus instantly dismantled in *Der Mensch*. Crusoe had found clothing on the ship, and, thanks to the pins, needles, and thread he found there, was able to make more. Clothing is a particularly visible marker of civilization that distinguishes him from the savages. When Friday arrives, Crusoe very quickly makes him clothes. The usefulness of these on a tropical island may be doubted, and Friday at first finds them uncomfortable, but the intention is clearly to indicate his embracing of European civilization, so

that clothes function as a marker of his progress and elevation. In *Der Mensch*, the process goes the other way: the woman always was and now remains naked; the man has only such clothes as he wore at the time of the quake, which disintegrate in time, and he lacks either the initiative or the knowledge to manufacture any out of materials around him. He himself notices with concern that physically he resembles the woman more and more: they are both naked, his skin is burned by the sun to a hue close to hers, his hair is long and unkempt like hers, and they both smell like carnivores (Frey 2021: 41). Not only the markers of civilization represented by clothes and combs are thus gone, even the marker to the claim of racial superiority, the white skin, now exists only in his mind.

After many years on the island, the man discovers buried in the sand a wooden box containing European artefacts, evidence of an advanced degree of civilization: written documents, jewelry, a portrait of his mother – it should be noted that these are all items of European manufacture, only the box was made on his first Caribbean island. But, unlike the goods salvaged by Crusoe, these items are useless and frivolous, of no possible value or meaning to children born in a state of nature, or even to the European transposed to that state. The paper indeed has succumbed to nature and been reduced to pulp. The comment on civilization, that so much of its accoutrements are useless and frivolous luxuries of no relevance to the harsh necessities of existence, cannot be accidental. As mentioned earlier, the text does not reveal how the German man passed the »Machtprobe« that made his despotic rule of the first island possible, but it seems the more likely that some product of technology played a role in it, in view of what happens on the second island: neither physical strength nor his intelligence cause him to establish any such ascendancy over his children. They do not fear him, and his son kills him unconcernedly and with ease. The difference in the conditions in the two texts reveals that technology is the key factor in establishing the superiority of the European encountering indigenous people, and a superiority thus established amounts to little more than might is right, a grim observation well suited to the political realities of Europe on the eve of the Second World War.

Religion plays a crucial role in *Robinson Crusoe*, not only as the most important benefit of civilization imparted to Friday, but because it keeps Crusoe what he is – a civilized European – throughout the twenty-five years of his isolation. Prior to the shipwreck, Crusoe was not a particularly good Christian, »I had liv'd a dreadful life, perfectly destitute of Knowledge and Fear of God« (Defoe 1995: 96), but religion initiates a process of reflection that makes him a better person. When he finds that he, alone of all those on the ship, has survived, he asks himself why he has been saved, and concludes that God, in his infinite mercy, has placed him on the uninhabited island as a punishment for his sins and as an opportunity to redeem himself.

> I then reflected that God, who was not only Righteous but Omnipotent, as he had thought fit […] to punish and afflict me, so he was able to deliver me […] 'twas my unquestion'd Duty to resign myself absolutely and entirely to his Will […] also to hope in him, pray to him, and quietly to attend the Dictates and Directions of his daily Providence. (Ibid.: 114)

Thanks to his self-reflection and Bible study, he becomes a better Christian and later a good teacher for Friday. His belief that he is in the hands of a wise and merciful Providence grounds him and gives him hope so that he never despairs, never doubts the values of his religion or his culture. When he encounters the cannibals twenty-five years later, he is still what he was, a representative of European culture and a Christian, dressed to the best of his ability, engaged in agriculture, cooking his food, reading his Bible, and still hopeful of returning to civilization.

As to relations with others, several scholars (e.g., Wheeler 1995: 828; Gautier 2001: 169) have argued that Christianity, rather than race, is the primary marker of difference between the savage and the civilized man, and the chief justification for Crusoe's domination over Friday. When he saves Friday from being eaten, Crusoe reflects that this is perhaps why he himself was spared, so that he could not only rescue this »poor savage« from death, but also save his soul by instructing him in the true religion. Being an instrument of Providence justifies Crusoe's assumption of the role of master. Todd argues that, in seeing himself as the instrument of Providence, Crusoe constitutes a parallel to divine right monarchy, and to the justification for colonialism in general (Todd 2018: 150, 153 et sqq.). Once again, the novel establishes a parallel between the micro and macro levels, and an affirmation of colonialism – at least, of gentle, benevolent colonialism.

In *Der Mensch*, religion plays a role chiefly by its absence. This is not to say that it is not important, rather, it is evoked specifically to be debunked. For the indigenous woman, her religiosity proves to be a form of delusion born of ignorance and contributing centrally to her abject state. By believing that he brought about the seaquake which killed all her people and saved only her, she attributes to him the role that Crusoe attributes to divine Providence.

The European, like Crusoe, had not been a good Christian before the disaster, had, indeed, not been in a church since his boyhood. The overwhelming catastrophe which has overtaken him does not prompt a renewal of faith; the text pointedly rejects this possibility: »Er kniete nieder, überwältigt, er faltete die Hände, was er, seit er als Schulknabe eine Kirche in Deutschland verlassen hatte, niemals mehr getan. Aber er betete nicht« (Frey 2021: 29). As with Crusoe, escape when so many have died prompts reflection as to why, though with a twist: not, why was I saved, but rather why was this particular woman out of all the islanders saved. He dismisses the possibility that she has been saved for him, so that he would not be alone, because how can a single human justify attributing such importance to himself: »Woher schöpft man die Fähigkeit, nach Vorgängen wie den gestrigen und Zuständen wie den heutigen, auch nur daran zu denken, man vermöge sich wieder wichtig zu nehmen?« (Ibid.: 33) And indeed, as Frey has constructed the situation, there is no gainsaying that such an explanation would be absurd. Her gender and the notion that she was given to him so that he would not be alone allude to the Genesis story, which is thus taken back, not only because it is absurd to regard this one man as important, but also because the gifts in this instance are so questionable. The woman is unsatisfactory as a companion, not just because she is not white which is only a flaw in the man's eyes, but because she has lost the gift of speech. In this respect, the Crusoe-Friday encounter is reversed. Though he could not understand what Friday said, Crusoe is gladdened to hear human speech after so long. In *Der Mensch*, the man is driven to despair by the realization that her human speech cannot be recovered, that he

is consequently doomed to silence for the rest of his days. Further, the island on which the two find themselves, though newly created, is no garden of Eden, being utterly desolate and barren, devoid of any flora and fauna. This is a new beginning as geologists and evolutionists describe it, not a biblical one. The place taken in both intertexts by the guiding hand of Providence is thus void in *Der Mensch*, and so the faith and hope that sustain Crusoe are not possible. Solitude and silence, even the empty sky, are oppressive and threaten dehumanization. Far from being a gift or a promise this new beginning offers nothing that would be a reason for gratitude or faith, life itself being more a burden than a good in these circumstances. The protagonist thus travels the opposite path than Crusoe: reaffirmation in atheism rather than in faith.

The markers of civilization featured in both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Der Mensch* include language and speech, but these are more prominently addressed in the latter than in the former. In both it is speech that ends solitude and establishes human relations, but its absence does not drive Crusoe to the brink of despair as it does the protagonist of *Der Mensch*, who feels in danger of lapsing into a bestial state without it. In Defoe's novel, European language, specifically English, not only establishes a relationship between Crusoe and Friday, but constitutes the first step in the latter's induction into European civilization. The process unfolds unproblematically since Friday is a quick learner.

By contrast, in *Der Mensch* speech and language fail, both as means of establishing interpersonal relations and as vehicle for imparting civilization. Having failed to help his woman Friday recover the power of speech, he solves the problem by producing offspring to whom he can teach language. The solution seems to work at first but quickly becomes problematic. He begins to teach them a European language (German), although he himself has not spoken it for a long time – thus far paralleling Crusoe. But unlike Crusoe, he soon abandons the attempt because he feels that German – like the jewelry he finds and throws away again – is irrelevant to this setting, its words are not appropriate semantic equivalents to the signified objects. He then teaches them the Caribbean language of his first island, but the communication thus enabled remains limited and becomes ever more so. Unlike Crusoe, he does not use language to impart to his children the benefit of European knowledge: no intellectual exchange in the form of conversations about social organization, religion, philosophy, science occurs; thus, they know nothing beyond the concrete world of the island. Instead, language serves solely as a means of communicating about immediate needs or tasks, which are extremely limited in the island setting. Nor is language used to establish affective bonds or to exchange thoughts; as it emerges towards the end of the tale, the man and his children are strangers to each other, with no understanding of or interest for each other's personalities – something that will prove fatal for the man. It is noteworthy that, though he had imposed a name on the woman, against her evident opposition, he does not give names to his children, justifying it to himself first by the argument that names are unnecessary where only five people are present, then, that they are too alien for him to name. As naming is recognized as a way of taking possession of things and people (cf. Nowak 1997: 111 et sqq.), this omission is a sign as much of his declining *Herrschsucht* as of his disinterest. All the markers of his presumed superiority are crumbling along with civilization in him, defeated by the force of a hostile environment.

The final marker of civilization to be considered are the norms and taboos governing social relationships, which are necessary to make coexistence and social organization possible. These would include absolute prohibitions against certain behaviours, but also dictates such as respect and obedience towards one's elders, particularly one's parents, which form the basis for hierarchy. These are fundamental, not just to advanced societies such as the European one, but to any stage of civilization that involves social organization, and even to other herd animals. Defoe's novel to some extent recognizes this: Friday displays such social virtues as gratitude, respect for one's elders (his father as well as Crusoe), obedience to those above him in the social hierarchy. Nevertheless, Defoe chooses to turn the taboo against cannibalism into a crucial marker of difference between the indigenous peoples as savage and the Europeans as civilized. Crusoe therefore imparts to Friday his abhorrence of this practice and weans him from it by means of tasty animal meats such as boiled or roasted kid. This instance of education serves to justify Crusoe's assumption of dominion by establishing his moral superiority. It thus serves the same function as Crusoe's induction of Friday into Christianity, but in a more immediate and visceral way, as most readers of whatever time and religion will recoil from the prospect of cannibalism.

In *Der Mensch*, Frey takes up the notion of a taboo as marker of difference between the civilized and the savage, not in order to confirm that difference as Defoe does, but rather in order to reverse the pattern of *Robinson Crusoe*. Instead of elevating the savage to European morality, the European abandons even the last cornerstone of civilization and returns to savagery at its most basic, namely the stage prior to any social organization as defined from the Eurocentric vantage point. *Der Mensch* too addresses this issue by ocusing on a basic taboo. The taboo against incest occupies the same functional and symbolic place that the one against cannibalism has in *Robinson Crusoe*. In accordance with the new meaning assigned to it, however, it appears at the end, ushering in the final deposition and defeat of the European. As the European's white-skinned and blond daughter passes through puberty, he begins to desire her sexually, and to regard his sons as potential rivals. Horrified at first by his own thoughts, he rapidly not only accustoms himself to the notion of incest, but even begins to justify it in a manner that denies the validity of moral dictates. In fact, he denies the validity of any authority but that of his arbitrary will: »Warum eigentlich nicht? Wer hat mir zu gebieten? Wessen Gesetze gelten hier? Die meinen. Gar keine. Gar keine? Das erkenne ich nicht an. Denn was ich tue, ist richtig getan und rechtens. Also gelten meine Gesetze« (Frey 2021: 50). This hubristic self-elevation to godlike state, the culmination of any tyranny, could be regarded as a perverse product of civilization but it also marks a return to the state of nature in the protagonist's thinking and behaviour. It leads him to the thought that there are too many humans on the island, that is, too many males. At the next meal he asserts his dominance over his sons in the way the alpha male of any animal group would do: by taking the best bits of meat away from them. Finally, he takes hold of the girl, orders his sons to stay away, and leads her towards the cave. It is at this point that the blond son, who also has been lusting after the girl, kills his father and takes possession of his sister. The father, who should have taught his sons the incest taboo, does just the reverse: he models the deed and acts as a catalyst for it, just as he conceives the notion of killing his son before the son performs the act of patricide.

The protagonist's death at the hands of his son highlights how completely he failed to assume the role of teacher so ably carried out by Crusoe. It emerges that he has not taught his children any of the moral beliefs, of the attitudes and behaviours that make social organization as understood by Europeans possible and that prevent – or at least regulate – violence. Indeed, there is no evidence that he taught them anything beyond language. He has not taught them respect for their elders and has not provided them an example of familial love, since he treated their mother as a servant or worse, a domestic animal, and he did not love the children, merely using them to fill the emptiness of the island. Consequently, they have no love or respect for either parent, regarding the mother's disappearance with indifference, tolerating the father, then removing him when he becomes a rival. After this the sons behave as any animal would, attacking each other in their rivalry for sexual rights over the female. The protagonist, ironically, has neglected to teach his children even those myths that make the tyranny of one man possible. Religion is one such myth – as we have seen it causes the woman to revere him –, others could be the notion of the common good or that of the wisdom of the leader or elders. He still believes he is lord of the island, but that notion is only possible in a social organization – European civilization – and he failed to elevate his children to any stage of civilization. He has left them in the state of nature, and there only the law of the physically strongest prevails, to which the European succumbs. The conclusion of this text is thus a bitter and pessimistic realization that the force of environment, combined with the basic selfishness of human nature, easily prevail over the achievements of civilization, which completely crumble before these.

Conclusions

It now becomes clear why this text is titled *Der Mensch*. It is an investigation of the human animal and what it will do, left to itself and put in a position of power over others. Further, it is an exploration of the myths by which civilization maintains itself, their power to withstand adverse environmental conditions, and their effect on human relations. By setting up the experiment of return to the most hostile and primitive living conditions, tempered only by the ideological baggage in the minds of the first generation, Frey reckons with the two intertexts of this tale, refuting the myths they would perpetuate and exposing the flaws of their ideologies. In a notebook containing thoughts on disparate subjects, written during his Swiss exile, Frey expressly rejects the story of an original earthly paradise – and indeed religion as a whole – as an untruthful and harmful fairy tale: »[Das Märchen vom Paradies] ist ein gefährlicher Schwindel, unter dessen einschläferndem Bild der Mensch unfähig wird, klar die Gefahren zu sehen, denen er ausgesetzt ist durch das eigene Herz, so dass er seiner Aufgabe nicht nachgehen kann – der Aufgabe, ohne Gott und ohne Paradies auf dieser von tausend bösen Kräften heimgesuchten Erde das schlimme Leben in ein besseres zu wenden.« (Frey undated) By his depiction of the newly created island Frey eliminates the dangerous illusion of the Genesis tale, and with it the notion of a benevolent god guiding the fate of his creatures which also grounds Robinson Crusoe (the character and the novel). Yet, when a human is indeed left to himself to face the task of creating a better world the outcome is utter failure. The

failure is caused by human nature with its innate egotism, but also fostered by one of the worst ideologies the human mind has created: that of a hierarchy of races or peoples. Here Frey's response to his primary intertext with its affirmation of colonialism enters.

At the outset of this paper, we cited Gautier's opposition between an absolute and unalterable biological essentialism and a diachronic essentialism that grounds superiority in the achievements of civilization, such as religion, morality, and technology. As we claimed then and have now shown, Frey addresses and refutes both models. The claim based on race is false: it rests on characteristics that are merely skin-deep or socially constructed and whose desirability is equally artificial because it is a matter of arbitrary preference. Worse, the effects of this ideology are pernicious for both the putative inferior group, which is exploited, maltreated, and forced into subjection, and for the putative superior one, whose worst traits of egotism, despotism and idleness are promoted. By showing the failure of civilization to curb harmful tendencies of human nature, or even to maintain itself in primitive conditions, Frey likewise refutes the diachronic model. The only claim to European superiority that is not refuted, since it is removed from the picture, is technology. But that, unsupported by an ethics or a faith in whose service it can claim to do good, amounts to no more than the superiority of the man or the group with the most effective weapons, which is a more destructive version of the law of the fittest – an apt and bleak comment on a Europe about to be overrun by Nazi imperialism.

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