

Chiara Mengozzi

On Recognition, Duplication, and Self-Creativity in Colonial Contexts: Hegel, Fanon, Tournier

Abstract: This article posits that no form of self-creation, personal or collective, occurs without engaging into an agonistic relation with the other, be it through negation, incorporation, inventive translation, or frontal struggle. Examining how intellectuals concerned with anticolonial fights have appropriated Hegel's master-slave dialectic provides an excellent entry point for understanding what specific facets these agonistic dynamics take on in colonial contexts. After identifying the main elements of novelty that Frantz Fanon and Michel Tournier – my two case studies – introduce into Hegel's account (involving the racial identity of the servant and the master, the narrative sequence, the point of view, and the reader), the chapter explores how these two authors conceive of the transition from the material violence of struggle to true emancipation and mutual recognition, opening up new ways of thinking about self-creativity (i.e., the capacity to reinvent oneself) as an intersubjective enterprise of shared sense-making.

Keywords: G. W. F. Hegel; F. Fanon; M. Tournier; translation; master-slave dialectic; recognition; postcolonial

No form of self-creation occurs without engaging into an agonistic relation with the other, be it through struggle, negation, incorporation, or *mimicry*.¹ This applies to the different dynamics that preside over the constitution and the transformation of identity (whether personal or collective), as well as to the transformative processes inherent to literature and to critical thinking. To put it abruptly, it is true that *world-making* is *self-making* (in that humans, as self-reflexive beings, inject into the meaningless reality the fiction of a transcendental meaning), but self-making always comes from the other. What we call *our* language, culture, or identity do not belong to us, even though we are responsible for and to them, but they are rather the place of a fundamental dispossession. "I have only one language, it is not mine" wrote Derrida in *The Monolingualism of the Other* (1996), meaning by this performative contradiction that our language is not

1 On *mimicry* as a subversive act, although often non-intentional, see Bhabha (1994).

only contingently heteronomous (it could be the language imposed by the oppressor), but it is so in a more fundamental way, since every language we consider as ours comes from “the other”, precedes us and configures in advance the very possibility of saying “I” or “we”, of defining ourselves. And yet, it is precisely within this codified system of norms, rules, and competences coming from the other that we struggle to find our own language, to create our unique voice. Similar dynamics are at work if we replace “language” with “identity”, “culture”, or “literary tradition”. In the beginning, we might say, was the translation, both in metaphorical and literal senses, if it is true that many literary traditions locate at their very origin a translated text from a foreign language: for instance, the translation by Livio Andronico of Homer’s *Odyssey* into Saturnian verses, which is largely acknowledged as the inception of Latin written literature. Yet, translation is ambivalent by definition, insofar as it implies, to a greater or lesser degree, both admiration and rivalry, reproduction and innovation. It is about incorporating the other’s voice and instilling the sound of your own. Thus, if self-making is always a re-making, the opposite is also true: iteration always produces a remainder, generates deviations.

These agonistic processes of incorporation and transformation that can be subsumed under the concept of “translation”, considered in a broad sense, assume specific nuances in colonial contexts: as Robert Young put it, “a Colony begins as a translation, a copy of the original located elsewhere on the map. New England. New Spain. New Amsterdam. New York. Colonial clone” (Young 2003, p. 139). Nevertheless, as we will see, this translation of the “motherland” might become a matter of dispute, an object of contention between colonisers and colonised, while the re-production of the self and the other (not only places, but also natives are to be transformed into a copy of the masters) ends up expressing the unfounded character of the dichotomies imposed by colonial systems. In other words, this “re-production” is revealed to be as much about violence, control, and discipline (on the side of the masters) as it is about mimicry, parody, and defiance (on the side of the colonised).

This chapter deals with a case of “traveling theory” (Said 1983; 2000), namely the remarkable fortune, among intellectuals and writers concerned with anti-colonial struggles, of Hegel’s chapter about master-slave dialectic, where the philosopher posits that consciousness becomes self-consciousness through a competitive relation with the other. More precisely, this study focuses on two re-appropriations of Hegel’s chapter that at first sight may appear to be diametrically opposed: Frantz Fanon’s penultimate chapter of *Peaux noires, masques blancs* (1952), “Le Nègre et Hegel”, which constitutes the link between his reflections on the alienation of the Black and those on struggle and violence in *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961), and Michel Tournier’s philosophical novel, *Vendredi ou les*

limbes du Pacifique (1967), which inaugurated a new strain of postcolonial narratives inspired by the history of Robinson Crusoe and Friday, considered by Hegel, in the *Philosophical Propaedeutic*, as a synthetic illustration of the two figures of self-consciousness.

Fanon and Tournier do not intend, in any way, to accurately interpret Hegel's chapter within his system of thought, but they rather isolate it from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* considered as a whole and engage in a dialogue with it in order to comprehend whether and to which extent Hegel's struggle for recognition might provide the means for grasping and subverting power relations between masters and servants, colonisers and colonised people. Although they insist on quite opposite factors and strategies to neutralise colonial power, both Fanon and Tournier write back to Hegel with the common aim of decentring and decolonising European knowledge,² that is of exposing (and overcoming) its heuristic limits when it comes to understanding the colonial condition. We might object that Hegel never mentions the colonies nor the slave system in his chapter, and that criticising his argument for something that goes beyond the scopes of his analysis sounds partially illegitimate. Nevertheless, according to Susan Buck-Morss (2000; 2009), we should read the most famous chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* while keeping in mind not only the French Revolution, but also and especially one of its most impressive outcomes outside Europe, the emancipation of slaves in Haiti led by Toussaint Louverture. This was an episode of world history that Hegel was certainly informed about, and that largely upset Europeans' consciences, in that it revealed a simple but scandalous and unmentionable truth, the fact that power relations are always reversible, that colonialism can be defeated, and that we can become at any time the other's other. If Buck-Morss' hypothesis is correct, then the effort made by numerous postcolonial intellectuals of decentring and decolonising European thinking turns out to be twofold: it deals with both tracing the vicissitudes and transformations of western modern concepts and theories when these are re-appropriated overseas, *and* with the reframing of their genealogy, that is bringing to light their obliterated colonial origin.³

² See Renault (2018), who identifies in Fanon five different strategies and methods of displacement and decolonisation of European knowledge. On this topic, see also Renault (2011) and Gordon (2008).

³ In my article, however, I will not address the genealogy of Hegelian thought but rather its dissemination. The contradiction that emerges from this paragraph (if Hegelian dialectics emerges in relation to the colonial context of Haiti, why should it not be possible to apply it to the colonial context?) is only apparent. First, because Buck-Morss's studies on the possible origins of the famous Hegelian chapter on the master-slave dialectic are subsequent to Fanon's and Tour-

Fanon's and Tournier's texts are creative, unfaithful translations, whose specific features depend not only on biographical or spatial-temporal aspects, but also on the discursive *genre* within which Hegelian philosophical argument is re-inscribed, a political essay and a novel, respectively. Fanon and Tournier contest the alleged universalism of European philosophy, by introducing four main elements of novelty in Hegel's account. First, they implicitly denounce Hegel's racial neutrality by attributing to the allegorical figures of the master and the servant a precise, racial identity. Secondly, they develop the narrative potential of Hegel's scene by imagining different sequels that would set again in motion the stuck situation in which the two figures of the consciousness are left by Hegel at the end of his chapter. Third, their texts address a particular target audience. Fanon's implied readers were the Blacks and Creoles from overseas territories of France, and the colonised from the countries that were still waiting for independence. In this respect, we better understand the need of a western mediator (Sartre) for a book (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 2004) that did not seem to address a European readership, just like the other writings by Fanon and by intellectuals of *Négritude*.⁴ On the contrary, Tournier's novel, even though it is a homage to Friday, and more generally, to "this huge and silent mass of immigrant workers in France, [to] all those Fridays shipped to us from the third world" (Tournier 1977, p. 229),⁵ is not addressed to them. It is rather directed to those "fool and blinkered Robinsons that we all are", to "our consumer society [which] is sitting on them [immigrant workers], [and which] parked its fat and white butt on this dark skinned people reduced to absolute silence" (Tournier 1977, p. 230).⁶ Finally, Fanon and Tournier choose a precise point of view, from

nier's reflections, and second, because origin and reception are two distinct problems that need to be analysed as such: even assuming that Hegel was inspired by the Haitian revolution (something Fanon and Tournier were probably unaware of), this does not mean that his model is necessarily adequate to describe that context. In retrospect, however, the link between the Haitian revolution and the Hegelian chapter brought to light by Buck-Morss perhaps helps to explain why so many postcolonial intellectuals, even in recent times, keep returning to the famous Hegelian chapter. See, among others, Thiong'o (2012).

⁴ André Breton wrote the preface to *Cahiers d'un retour au pays natal* by Aimé Césaire (1971); Robert Desnos to *Pigments* by Léon-Gontran Damas (1937), and Jean-Paul Sartre to *Portrait du colonisé: précédé du portrait du colonisateur* by Albert Memmi (1980) and to *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*, edited by Sédar Senghor (1947).

⁵ It is worth mentioning that at the very end of Tournier's novel, Robinson decides to stay on the island, while Friday steps onboard the vessel headed to Europe.

⁶ To be more precise, Tournier's original intention was to dedicate the book to "those three million Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians, Senegalese, and Portuguese upon which our society rests, and whom we never see, never hear", but he then rescinded this dedication, explaining that "the

which the reader is supposed to follow the adventures and misadventures of the struggle for recognition. Unlike in Hegel's chapter, where the philosopher's concern for reciprocity is reflected in what can be called – narratologically speaking – “zero focalisation”, Fanon and Tournier insist on the impossibility of transcending our condition of “situated-beings”. So, while Fanon mostly adopts the point of view of the slave and does not hesitate to make use of the first-person narrative, Tournier makes the radical choice to keep the focus on the master, Robinson, thus presenting to the reader the paradox of a novel whose protagonist is Friday (as announced by the title), but where his voice and point of view are never staged as such. Tournier's Friday is one among the numerous, inscrutable figures of natives that populate colonial European novels, and whose opacity and silence are both signs of the violence inflicted upon them, and means of resisting the colonial appropriation of their voice.⁷ The choice of a precise focalisation allows Fanon and Tournier to foreground what it concretely means to occupy (and dwell in) the position of the master and the servant, respectively, namely what consequences this reversal can entail for the two consciousnesses from their distinct points of view.

Let us have a closer look at how Hegel's account is transformed by its uses in new times, places, and *genres*.⁸ What interests Fanon first and foremost in the Hegelian narrative is the reciprocity of recognition: “at the foundation of Hegelian dialectic – he writes – there is an absolute reciprocity which must be emphasised” (Fanon 2008, p. 179). The reciprocity of the two consciousnesses in Hegel not only represents the synthesis, the desideratum announced in the opening lines of the chapter (“Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged”),⁹ but it also concerns the thesis, the very premise of the open “struggle for prestige” – as Kojève defines it in *The Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* – (1980, p. 7) whose outcome will be the polarisation between the autonomous and non-autonomous consciousnesses of the lord and the servant (at the beginning – Hegel writes – “they recognise themselves as mutually recognising each other”).¹⁰ Yet, if Fanon affirms that there has not been any open

recipient seemed to me too great, too respectable, too distant from me, and I did not have any chance to ask the permission to pay this foolish tribute” (Tournier 1977, pp. 229–230).

⁷ On this and other ambivalences of the European colonial novel, ranging from Joseph Conrad to J. M. Coetzee, see Brugnolo (2017).

⁸ On Fanon and Hegel, see also Sekyi-Otu (1996, pp. 24–31); the first chapter in Gibson (2003); Honenberger (2007).

⁹ Hegel (1977, p. 111).

¹⁰ Hegel (1977, p. 112).

conflict between white and black, colonisers and colonised, it is because, according to him, the starting point in the colonial context radically differs from the one imagined by Hegel. In the Hegelian narrative, the two consciousnesses start from a condition of equality: “Thus the movement is simply the double movement of the two self-consciousnesses. Each sees the other do the same as it does” (Hegel 1977, p. 112). This means that the roles of the lord and the servant are the result of a free choice, according to which the two subjects decide to risk their life or to serve the other. In the colonial situation, on the contrary, the roles of the lord and the servant are assigned from the beginning: if the two poles are already given, then the dialectical movement cannot even get started.

It is crucial to make explicit this fundamental premise of Fanonian argumentation because all the other divergences from the Hegelian model are grounded upon it.

- a) The white man has never been interested in recognition from the slave, who is de-humanised from the beginning: being a “movable good”, just like cattle – as formalised by the *Code noir*, in force almost without interruption from 1685 to 1848¹¹ – the black slave, strictly speaking, has never reached the status of white man’s other, he is simply considered as subhuman. That is why Fanon writes that “the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work” (Fanon 2008, p. 172).
- b) The slave, for his part, instead of acknowledging his dignity in the object of his work, has strived to become like the master: he has strongly interiorised the values of the colonial system and tried to whiten himself. This would explain both the internal split of the black and creole subject, and the cultural alienation of their elites.
- c) Finally, the main difference from Hegel resides in the place and the role that Fanon attributes to the struggle, which arises at a different stage of the relation between the subjects. Fanon agrees with Hegel on the crucial importance of the struggle and quotes from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*: “It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; only thus is it tried and proved that the essential nature of self-consciousness is not bare existence, is not the merely immediate form in which it at first makes its appearance” (Fanon 2008, pp. 169–170). And yet, Fanon completely reverses Hegel’s argument. “For Hegel, the struggle is what posits the asymmetrical relation between the self-consciousnesses in the first place” (Teixeira 2018, p. 109), the

¹¹ Slavery in French colonies was first abolished by a Decree of the National Convention in 1794 during the French Revolution, but then it was re-established in 1802 by Napoleon, who also restored the *Code noir*.

master being unilaterally recognised by the slave. The dialectical reversal according to which the slave will turn out to be the master's master, and the master the slave's slave, does not lead to any further struggle. For Fanon, on the contrary, as we have seen, there was not "an open conflict between white and black" (Fanon 2008, p. 169), that is it was not the struggle that determined the polarisation between the two consciousnesses, since the asymmetry was the very starting point. But Fanon adds something else. He affirms, quite surprisingly, that:

[o]ne day the White Master, without conflict, recognised the Negro slave. [...] Historically the Negro, steeped in the inessentiality of servitude, was set free by his master. He did not fight for his freedom. [...] The Negro is a slave who has been allowed to assume the attitude of a master. The white man is a master who has allowed his slaves to eat at his table. One day a good white master who had influence said to his friends, "let's be nice to the niggers..." [...] The upheaval reached the Negroes from without. The black man was acted upon. Values that had not been created by his actions, values that had not been born of the systolic tide of his blood, danced in a hued whirl round him. [...] The black man contented himself with thanking the white man [...]. (Fanon 2008, pp. 169–171)

Since Fanon was certainly aware of the numerous slave rebellions during French colonisation (the most prominent of which was the Haitian revolution), he intends to underline with these sarcastic remarks that the upheavals undertaken so far by the former slaves are insufficient, incomplete, and after all, irrelevant. They certainly fought from time to time, but it is as if they did not, first of all because the representation and the historical memory of the abolition of slavery have been entirely "re-colonised" by the motherland, as is demonstrated by the numerous paternalistic paintings and statues scattered over French soil that stage France's benevolence and former slaves' gratitude.¹² It is as if the unilateral decision of general and unconditional emancipation made by France in 1848 had wiped out not only the memory, but also the irrefutable value and impact of previous slave resistance and rebellions. Secondly, because black men's recognition has been merely legal and thus formal and did not change in any way the concrete relations of domination and subordination in French colonies. "Let the colonies perish rather than a principle", proudly claimed Victor Schoelcher in *Des colonies françaises: abolition immédiate de l'esclavage* (1842), in line with the abolitionists that had participated in the parliamentary debates during the

¹² See, among the most renowned examples, the painting by François Auguste Biard, *L'abolition de l'esclavage dans les colonies françaises* (1848), or the monument in honour of Victor Schoelcher (1896–1897), in Cayenne, with the inscription: "À Victor Schoelcher, la Guyane reconnaissante".

French Revolution. One must not forget, however, that both his book and their passionate speeches were mostly intended to persuade French planters and bourgeois that their economic interests were perfectly reconcilable with the revolutionary ideals of freedom, equality, and fraternity, since the ancient slaves would continue to work on plantations, assuring the prosperity of colonies and their motherland.¹³ In short, give the slaves political rights and a salary, and they will work for you willingly and better. Even in Haiti, where the revolution of the ancient slaves successfully led to independence, the plantation system has never been questioned, neither during the revolution nor in the aftermath of emancipation; after all, the chiefs of the black revolution were themselves plantation owners. Consequently, as Fanon put it, the juridical equality between white and black, guaranteed by the abolition of slavery in 1848,

did not make a difference for the Negro. He went from one way of life to another, but not from one life to another. [...] the Negro knows nothing of the cost of freedom for he has not fought for it. From time to time, he has fought for Liberty and Justice, but these were always white liberty and white justice; that is, values secreted by the masters [valeurs secrétées par les maîtres]. (Fanon 2008, p. 172)

In other words, the Negro, *volens nolens*, has not fought for his authentic freedom, but for a form of liberty and justice that was compatible with the values and the economic interests of the ancient masters.

What options are left to the former slaves in order to become the agents of their own liberation, once they had finally stopped putting the white mask on their face, grateful to sit at the master's table? They will certainly never get authentic freedom, neither by turning towards the product of their own work (since no *Bildung* can be provided by the alienated labour on the plantations), nor by recognising themselves in an alleged African identity prior to European colonisation, thanks to the rediscovery and revival of ancient negro civilisations, as celebrated by the poets of *Négritude*. This is first because this fact would not “change anything in the lives of the eight-year-old children who labour in the cane fields of Martinique or Guadeloupe” (Fanon 2008, p. 180), and secondly, because crystallising oneself into an essentialist negro identity provided by past history precludes the very possibility to re-invent oneself: “I am not a prisoner of history – writes Fanon – I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny. I should constantly remind myself that the real *leap* [le véritable *saut*] consists in introducing invention into existence” (Fanon 2008, p. 179). Thus, it is solely through an open and violent struggle, in Fanon's view, that the Black

¹³ See the parliamentary debates during the French Revolution, reported by Césaire (1960).

will achieve emancipation, and pave the path to a new human world, finally freed from oppression.

Here we touch upon one of the most controversial points of Fanonian reflection that deserves further explanations. If throughout *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008), Fanon views violence as mostly *metaphorical* and *internal* as a part of the development of black consciousness (black people have to negate the internalised white gaze, to kill the white man within), at the end of the book, he starts outlining the transition towards another kind of revolutionary violence, *material and external*, that he will extensively theorise in the *Wretched of the Earth* (2004). Faced with the structural violence of colonialism, oppressed people cannot but fight back violently, simply because they can no longer live in such a miserable state of hunger, suffering, and humiliation. This counter-violence – which arises as a spontaneous insurrection, as a physical, impulsive reaction to the unbearable conditions and injustices perpetrated by the colonial regime and needs to be channelled into an organised revolutionary struggle – takes tangible form in a series of violent, terroristic deeds, and has a precise, identifiable goal: the political independence of Algeria. Fanon – it is true – does not disqualify this kind of violence. However, even though he considers it necessary, he also considers it insufficient on its own. If revolutionary violence simply consists of replacing European elites with the local ones, if it is a mere “transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period” (Fanon 1963, p. 152); in short, “if it leaves the systemic structure of colonial relations intact” (Kawah 1999, p. 243), ending in the reproduction of the same traits of western hypocritical humanism that depends on the subordination of its “others”, it turns out not to be revolutionary at all. As Samira Kawash convincingly puts it, the “instrumental violence” aiming at inverting power relations between colonisers and colonised in Fanon’s pages seems to be supplemented by another kind of violence, an “absolute violence” that does not imply open combat with the enemy, terroristic attacks, or any other kind of violent empirical acts: “Decolonisation – writes Fanon – which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a programme of complete disorder” (Fanon 1963, p. 36).¹⁴ If the reactive violence has a un-alienating effect for black people, in that it puts in their hands the power of auto-determination, the second kind of violence, by shaking the Manichean colonial order to its foundation, has a deeper and universal liberating outcome, in that it makes possible the emergence of a

¹⁴ Kawash reads Fanon’s reflections on violence through the lens of Walter Benjamin’s distinction between mythical and divine violence. On Fanon and violence, see also Carofalo (2013a; 2013b); Mellino (2013).

new human world, which will not be predetermined by the colonial past, but whose features are still unknown, unforeseeable. However, if the subject of the first kind of violence is clearly identified, who or what would be the agent of the second, “world-shattering violence” (Kawash 1999, p. 239) that would interrupt the past, threatening the reality as a whole? What may this creative violence look like? And finally, how can the escalation of violence from the two parts be prevented, ceasing the infernal circle of destruction? In Fanon’s reasoning, all these questions remain outside representation as blind spots of his argument, partly because Fanon refrains from attributing in advance a shape to the world emerging after decolonisation, and partly because he is well aware that no dialectical necessity binds together the two moments, the destruction of the old order, and the inception of a new one finally released from the burdens of the past.

In conclusion, by bringing the racial and colonial issues into the abstract Hegelian narrative, Fanon contests the alleged reciprocity that qualifies the starting point of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic. In this way, he also makes the normative frame that precedes any intersubjective relation explicit. The encounter with the other never occurs in a discursive vacuum, but is on the contrary saturated with discourses, inextricably bound by prejudices, framed by a deforming lens, in the absence of which the other would probably not even be visible to us. By the same token, Tournier’s *Vendredi ou les limbes du pacifique* (1972) stages the intersubjective relation between the master and the slave as pre-determined by the normative frame of meaning supplied by colonisation through the figures of Crusoe and Friday. This normative frame, however, is not immutable and fixed once and for all. On the contrary – as Fanon reminds us – it is possible and necessary to imagine some breaking points that may pave (or not) the way for a new beginning after the abolition of racial and colonial privileges. Those breaking points – in Fanon’s narrative – are brought about by the violent struggle of colonised people against colonisers, while in Tournier’s novel they are to be found in the limits and contradictions intrinsic to colonial domination: as we will see, Friday never engages into an open struggle against Robinson, he rather seems to confront the master with the absurdity and the arbitrariness of his power. But how precisely will those breaking points pave the way for a genuine decolonisation? Why are both the slave and the master metaphorically killed, suddenly finding themselves freed from the structure of domination? Similar to Fanon’s reluctance and incapacity to give an account of the transition from material violence towards true emancipation, this question remains without a clear answer in Tournier, as if it were the blind spot of his novel. Friday will trigger (inadvertently or deliberately, it is hard to say, since his consciousness is left outside representation) a massive explosion that, starting from the cave where

Robinson hid 40 tons of gunpowder, destroys what Robinson achieved in all those years through the exploitation of Friday's labour: the residence burns, domesticated animals run away, plantations are devastated. But why, after everything has blown up, did Robinson not restore the ancient order as he stubbornly did before? An explosion after which no further restoration of the ancient model seems possible, but only a *re-start from somewhere else*,¹⁵ does not explain anything, it is just a narrative and conceptual ellipsis. It would be probably too easy to answer to this objection that, being a novel, it is not meant to logically explain every step. As a matter of fact, Tournier's novel has no claim to be realistic. As Defoe before him, Tournier invites us to a series of extreme thought experiments: what if I found myself in an insular world without others? What if, all of a sudden, another consciousness emerged? And what if this consciousness were not another "me", but an indigenous whom I am not able to see as a subject? These "*what if*" exercises are, in some respects, similar to those already posed by Defoe's novel. The difference between the two lies both in the *content* and the *form* of their narrative answers. Tournier's novel – I argue – is challenging, in that it does not simply invite us to venture into alternative paths with regards to his predecessor, but it brings us face to face with our spontaneous resistance to even conceive of paths other than those taken by western civilisation in its historical development. In other words, instead of presenting the deviation from the original plot imagined by Defoe in realist terms, Tournier's novel openly plays with the codes of realism that inform the majoritarian strain of serious European literature after Defoe in order to provoke in the reader the feeling of a progressive departure both from the source-text and from so-called realism, as if any path differing from the mere reproduction of the western history and civilisation would exclusively belong to the realm of the improbable and of the fantastic. But is it truly realist and reasonable to transform a remote island¹⁶ into a clone of England? "If you must live on an island in the Pacific – Tournier asks – hadn't you better learn from a native well versed in methods adapted to local conditions rather than attempt to impose an English way of life on an alien environment?" (Tournier 1977, p. 189).

Tournier enjoys concocting the new, (non)human world arisen from the ashes of the old one; Fanon, on the contrary, refrains on purpose from portraying the new world that awaits us. Yet the fact remains that neither can provide the

¹⁵ See Thiele (2012).

¹⁶ In Defoe's novel, the island is located in the Atlantic Ocean, not in the Pacific as in Tournier, who probably wanted to get back to the event that actually inspired Defoe's novel, a shipwreck in the Pacific.

causal and narrative link that would lead from destructive to creative violence; neither knows what the second looks like, and who would be its agent.

After the shipwreck of the *Virginia*, Robinson first seeks to escape from the island by fabricating a small boat; once this project has failed, he plunges into despair and starts doubting the existence of everything, himself included;¹⁷ in a third moment, he reacts to the temptation of animality (“With his nose on the soil he ate unnameable things. He pooped himself and rarely missed the chance to wallow in the soft warmth of his own dejections”),¹⁸ and desperately tries to preserve his human nature. In the absence of other models, he reproduces step by step his ancient society: he builds a shelter, recovers his thoughts in writing, immerses himself in work, rapidly retracing all the stages that led from hunting and gathering to the Neolithic revolution. He methodically explores every corner of the island, rationalising and exploiting its resources: “From now on, I want, I demand all around me be measured, proved, certified, mathematical, rational... I would like each plant to be labelled, each bird provided with a ring, each mammal branded.”¹⁹ At the peak of his almightiness frenzy, he solemnly declares himself the absolute governor of the island and establishes an elaborated law system, including a civil, moral, and penal code: “The inhabitants of the island, provided that they think, are required to do it loudly and clearly... Whoever has polluted the island with excrements will be punished with one day of fast.”²⁰ Some time later, he will also rediscover sexual life (unsurprisingly erased from Defoe’s puritan novel) – an issue that, contrary to what all the interpreters of the novel believe, far from introducing a positive suspension and transgression of the capitalist order to which the “diurnal” Robinson voluntarily submits himself, is meant to strengthen the reproductive logic of the novel, insofar as it transposes on the desert island the genital Oedipal sexuality aimed at procreation: in a rose meadow, identified with the maternal womb, he copulates with the mother-island, *Speranza*, and mandrakes grow in the spot where he used to ejaculate.

17 On the *other* as the structure of perception, see the Deleuzian interpretation of Tournier’s novel (Deleuze 1969). For a critique of Deleuze’s approach, see Mengozzi (2017).

18 All the quotations from Tournier’s novel are taken from Tournier (1972). If not indicated otherwise, all the translations are mine. “Il mangeait, le nez au sol, des choses innommables. Il faisait sous lui et manquait rarement de se rouler dans la molle tiédeur de ses propres déjections” (Tournier 1972, p. 38).

19 “Je veux, j’exige que tout autour de moi soit dorénavant mesuré, prouvé, certifié, mathématique, rationnel. [...] Je voudrais que chaque plante fût étiquetée, chaque oiseau bagué, chaque mammifère marqué au feu” (Tournier 1972, p. 67).

20 “Les habitants de l’île sont tenus pour autant qu’ils pensent, de le faire à haute et intelligible voix [...] Quiconque a pollué l’île de ses excréments sera puni d’un jour de jeûne” (Tournier 1972, p. 74).

So far, the novel has proceeded under the sign of duplication. Robinson restlessly strives to transform the island into a copy of the society he knew before the shipwreck, while Tournier follows in Defoe's footsteps by reproducing his predecessor's hypotext. The narrative voice of the novel also reproduces itself by means of a curious and apparently unjustified device, which has always been neglected in previous interpretations: the events that occur on the island and in Robinson's mind are systematically reported twice: first, through a homodiegetic narrator (Robinson), and then through an extradiegetic one, who nevertheless always maintains Robinson's focalisation. This second voice seems perfectly in line with Robinson's account, but gradually introduces some slight, almost undetectable incoherencies and discrepancies, such as ironic adverbs, and sarcastic commentaries or syntagms that express uncertainty, sowing doubt in the reader as to whether Robinson's voice and point of view are to be considered as totally reliable.²¹ It is precisely this unusual narrative strategy that anticipates and evokes from the beginning the central dynamics of the novel, which poses the iterability as the condition for creativity: the possibility of a new, inaugural act – the novel shows – is opened by, and occurs in, the temporal gaps that separate the different steps within the sequence of the iteration of sameness. This endeavour to redirect the normative and authoritative weight of the past by introducing shifts in the chain of repetitions (of practices, concepts, and canonical works) lies at the very core of the postcolonial "writing back".

Just as even the most "faithful" literary re-writing to the source-text cannot but imply a dialectic between continuity and innovation,²² in the same manner, regardless of Robinson's will, his attempt to reproduce his previous society on the island cannot but fail and take unforeseen turns. While Defoe's Robinson, in his egocentric delirium, goes as far as to affirm that his solitary conversations with himself and with God are more enjoyable than any other pleasure provided by human company,²³ Tournier shows that, in the absence of others, the system re-built with such an effort goes round in circles, revealing itself as simply ridiculous and essentially absurd. On the one hand, the order imposed by Robinson (an order based on the correlation between capitalism and genital sexuality sub-

21 See for example, among many occurrences, the ceremony whereby Robinson officiates Friday's submission.

22 On the transformative power of adaptation and its capacity to shed new light on the source-text, see Hutcheon (2006).

23 "This made my Life better than sociable, for when I began to regret the want of Conversation, I would ask myself whether thus conversing mutually with my own Thoughts, and, as I hope I may say, with even God himself by Ejaculations, was not better than the utmost Enjoyment of humane Society in the World" (Defoe 2007, p. 115).

ordinated to the reproductive function) shows itself to be a completely pointless enterprise (for whom are the tons of rice cultivated? To whom is the legislation addressed? “The vanity of the whole enterprise appeared to him all of a sudden, overwhelming, indisputable”).²⁴ On the other, this same order is derailed and goes uncontrollably wrong (he copulates with his mother!). Nevertheless, Robinson, during all these solitary endeavours, will never question his administration, which seems to him the only possible guarantee against the impending risk of animality, as if humanity as such could be reduced to the features of western societies.

After the arrival of Friday, Robinson is no longer only a capitalist father, but he also becomes a slave-owner. There is no open conflict at stake between the two, because the roles of the master and the slave are already assigned by the normative frame of colonisation: convinced of his own superiority (“God sent me a companion. But for a quite obscure tour of his Holy Will, he chose him down to the lowest degree of the human scale”),²⁵ Robinson subjugates Friday and commences to civilise him. He does not need the recognition of the savage, but only his work. At first, Tournier pretends to obsequiously follow Defoe’s model. In reality, he introduces some ironic twists into the plot imagined by Defoe, for instance by presenting the ceremony of Friday’s submission in a grotesque and exaggerated way, or by turning Friday into a salaried slave, which is obviously meaningless considering the absence of a community: “He pays Friday. Half a gold sovereign each month. At first he had taken care to put an interest rate of 5.5% on the whole amount. Then, considering that Friday had mentally reached the age of discretion, he allowed him the free disposal of his arrearage”.²⁶ A closer look, however, reveals that Tournier’s novel departs from Defoe’s in more subtle ways, insofar as it shows that the polarisation of the roles between the master and the slave may be fragile from the outset, already when Friday’s submission seemed absolute. Robinson must recognise that his mastery is not self-evident, that his alleged control over Friday comes up against more and more insurmountable obstacles. Let us enumerate some of them.

24 “La vanité de toute son œuvre lui apparut d’un coup, accablante, indiscutable” (Tournier 1972, p. 124).

25 “Dieu m’a envoyé un compagnon. Mais, par un tour assez obscur de sa Sainte Volonté, il l’a choisi au plus bas degré de l’échelle humaine” (Tournier 1972, p. 146)

26 “Il paie Vendredi. Un demi souverain d’or par mois. Au début il avait pris soin de placer la totalité de ces sommes à un intérêt de 5,5%. Puis considérant que Vendredi avait atteint mentalement l’âge de la raison, il lui lassa la libre disposition de ses arrérages” (Tournier 1972, p. 148).

- a) “I would not venture to tell him ‘love me’, because I am all too aware that for the first time I would not be obeyed”,²⁷ writes Robinson in his logbook. This order “love me!” – which expresses the master’s most secret desire to be not only obeyed, but also loved by the servant – is clearly a double bind: the servant cannot follow the order without simultaneously infringing it, since genuine love has to be spontaneous by definition.
- b) Friday’s behaviour demonstrates that the subversion of the order imposed by the master starts where least expected. Friday, for instance, executes all Robinson’s orders to the letter, including the most senseless ones (waxing the stones of the road; filling a hole by digging another, and so forth), and he does so without any resistance, introducing, on the contrary, the pleasure and the amusement where the master sees nothing other than humiliation. Without ever rebelling, Friday, in an unexpected and unintentional way, lays bare Robinson’s power, brings to light its absurdity, lack of foundation, and perversion.
- c) Colonial ideology and power are fundamentally contradictory. On the one hand, they postulate an essential dichotomy between human masters and subhuman slaves in order to legitimise subjugation; on the other, they aspire to eradicate native cultures and replace them with western languages, religions, institutions, and know-how, that is to turn the savage into a master’s copy. It is therefore not surprising that the savage might adopt and internalise behaviours that seemed to be an exclusive prerogative of the master. Friday, as a matter of fact, behaves like the master and, notwithstanding Robinson’s prohibition, will end up smoking his pipe and copulating with Speranza, also giving birth to striped mandrakes. What has therefore happened to the colonialist axiom of the insurmountable divide between “us” and “them”? And where is the boundary between mimicry and mockery?
- d) Although the coloniser would like to turn the savage into a copy of himself, the outcome of this transformative endeavour will never be a perfect match. Friday continues to maintain a relationship with the surrounding world which is beyond Robinson’s control and comprehension: “Friday must regularly dwell in this part of the island, leading a life there at the margins of the order and devoting himself to mysterious plays whose meaning he was unable to grasp [...]. These were clues to a secret universe which Robinson did

27 “Je ne me risquerais jamais à lui dire ‘aime-moi’, parce que je sais trop que pour la première fois je ne serais pas obéi” (Tournier 1972, p. 154).

not have the key to".²⁸ In particular, in his free time, Friday establishes a relationship with nature and animals which, in Robinson's eyes, is unsettling and mysterious. For instance, he plants some bushes the other way around, but surprisingly these continue to grow and prosper; he dresses up some cactuses with cloth and jewellery retrieved from the wreck, and enjoys the company of this uncanny cortege; he refuses to distinguish between useful and noxious animals, and between domestic and wild, establishing the same disturbing intimacy with the dog, Tenn, and with some baby vultures, whom he feeds with maggots from his own mouth;²⁹ finally, as Robinson notes with a certain amount of surprise, Friday does not adopt a relationship of domination with animals, but treats them as equals, refusing to consider any other way of killing an animal than that of single combat, giving the latter an equal chance to survive.

In short, Robinson initially strives to build an auto-referential system on the island which blindly reproduces eighteenth-century England in a totally different environment. However, it is precisely at the time when he attempts to incorporate the otherness represented by Friday as one of the system's components that it reaches its crisis point: "Not only did the savage not blend harmoniously with the system, but – as a foreign body – he threatens to destroy it".³⁰

Admittedly, there is still a long way to go from these critical points to the authentic emancipation of the slave. Neither the intrinsic and structural weakness of colonial domination, nor the ironic and playful twist given by Friday to Robinson's order, nor the regrets of the master, necessarily lead to the end of the relationships of dominance and dependence. In Tournier's novel, as earlier in Fanon, it is the slave's action that might neutralise them, but the content of this action remains undetermined: as mentioned above, Friday secretly smoked Robinson's pipe in the cave, and the massive explosion that results from this deed involves the suspension of the ancient order.

What is certain, in contrast, is that this rupture with the past is both destructive and creative: "He realised that his influence on the Savage had been zero. Friday had imperturbably – and unconsciously – prepared and then provoked

28 "Vendredi devait séjourner régulièrement dans cette partie de l'île, y mener une vie en marge de l'ordre et s'y adonner à des jeux mystérieux dont le sens lui échappait. [...] était les indices d'un univers secret dont Robinson n'avait pas la clé" (Tournier 1972, p. 163).

29 This dichotomy between domestic/useful and wild/noxious animals is an important feature of Defoe's novel. See Armstrong (2008, pp. 5–48).

30 "Non seulement l'Auracan ne se fondait pas harmonieusement dans le système, mais – corps étranger – il menaçait de le détruire" (Tournier 1972, p. 164).

the cataclysm that would foreshadow the onset of a new era.”³¹ In the aftermath of the explosion, the systematic exploitation of the island’s resources is interrupted in favour of a subsistence economy; Robinson stops tyrannising his companion and adapts himself to Friday’s ways of life; his copulations with Speranza come to an end when he discovers another sexuality, elemental, aerial, and solar – as Robinson says – that allows him to powerfully enjoy the contact of his body with the surrounding world; he embraces a symbiotic relationship with nature, and he gets involved in a series of plays with his companion, “that in the past he would have judged incompatible with his dignity”.³² This way, even the sad memories of their previous relationship of dominance and subordination can be sublimated thanks to the parodic performances of the master-slave dialectic: they exchange their roles (Friday wearing Robinson’s clothes and vice-versa), and they re-experience each step of their relation as a sort of cathartic act, as if to suggest that “the roles of the servant and the master, of the primitive and the civilised, became merely masks, always reversible” (Brugnolo 2017, p. 210). In a word, the instrumental relations to the other (whether human or not) falls away, giving way to a ludic one.

One might object that this is a very naive and utopian conclusion: isn’t such a new beginning but a rehabilitation of the myth of the noble savage? Isn’t Tournier simply giving voice to the western inner hope to be finally freed from the oppressive order that we ourselves established by projecting onto “the primitive other” the salvific action that we are not able to undertake alone? After all, we know that Robinson secretly awaited and wished for the cataclysm that finally occurred. Imagining the relationship between Europe and the rest under the sign of a “fair play” is certainly suggestive, but can the act of playing transform the general framework that contextualises and conditions our relation with the other? Ultimately, the act of playing is just a suspension of the current order, a way to put it into brackets.

Instead of judging naive this kind of conclusion, it would be more appropriate to understand its historical reasons by mentioning two facts. First, Tournier – unlike Fanon who represents the natives’ point of view and feels free to openly criticise idealised African primitivism embodied by Negritude – writes as a European white man. For this reason, not only does he choose to take Robinson’s point of view so as not to fall into the trap of speaking for the subaltern, but he also considers it crucial to recognise the intrinsic value of native cultures

31 “Il se rendait compte que son influence sur l’Auracan avait été nulle. Vendredi avait imperturbablement – et inconsciemment – prépare puis provoqué le cataclysme qui préluderait à l’avènement d’une ère nouvelle” (Tournier 1972, p. 154).

32 “Qu’il aurait jugés autrefois incompatibles avec sa dignité” (Tournier 1972, p. 192).

(here represented by Friday) as alternative (and not inferior) paths in human history (let us recall that Tournier wrote this novel after he followed Lévi-Strauss' classes at the *Musée de l'homme* in Paris). Secondly, after the independence of most colonies in the 1960s, and the arrival to France of massive flow of immigrants, the stress can be no longer put on the struggle, but rather on how to learn to encounter difference and thereby live with others. Tournier's novel takes up and develops what Fanon evokes only fleetingly in the very conclusion of *Black Skin, White Masks*, where, drawing away from the two false alternatives of domination and subordination, he resolutely affirms the primacy of the "you" in the intersubjective relations: "Superiority? Inferiority? Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself? Was my freedom not given to me then in order to build the world of the You?" (Fanon 2008, p. 181).

Whether realist or not, by focusing on the playful interactions, Tournier's novel urges us to think of an alternative to the instrumental relation with the other that used to characterise Robinson's order, and opens up a new way of conceiving self-creativity as an intersubjective enterprise that allows us to bypass the need of the struggle while preserving the opacity of the other, since in order to play with someone, you do not necessarily need to know the other's identity, nor assume the transparency of their inner reality. This way, unlike most postcolonial intellectuals, Tournier does not raise the question of otherness in terms of speech that would be, first, conquered, extorted, or denied, and then given or taken, but he apprehends it in more pragmatic terms: what can we do together? What if we thought of the other as not a limitation but as the very condition of my agency? How do we reciprocally implement, enlarge, and intensify each other's capacity to act? Moreover, through the practice of playing, Tournier's novel relocates the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman, challenging the exclusive identification of alterity to a human face. As Huizinga put it in *Homo ludens* (1949), the play exceeds the traditional categorical antithesis, such as truth/falsity, good/evil, wisdom/madness, nature/culture. In the play, biology (animals play like us, that is, freely, within a precise spatio-temporal frame, in order to have fun and learn) reaches and mingles with culture (the rule of playing, freely accepted but absolutely binding, is to be the model for societal life, similarly based on a delicate balance between freedoms and obligations). In a word, in the act of playing the porosity between nature and culture becomes apparent.

It must also be said that the novel does not end here, with Robinson and Friday cheerfully playing together.³³ Unlikely as it may have seemed, the relationship between Robinson and Friday is far from being represented as a timeless idyll. On the thresholds of the book, Friday affirms his freedom, vanishing from the island as well as from Tournier's fictive universe. In the same way we freely get out of a play, without giving any particular reasons, he simply leaves.

Bibliography

- Armstrong, Philip (2008): *What Animals Mean in Modern Fiction*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Bhabha, Homi K. (1994): "On Mimicry and Man. The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse". In: *The Location of Culture*. London, New York: Routledge, pp. 85–92.
- Bru gnolo, Stefano (2017): *La tentazione dell'altro. Avventure dell'identità occidentale da Conrad a Coetzee*. Rome: Carocci.
- Buck-Morss, Susan (2000): "Hegel and Haiti". In: *Critical Inquiry* 24. No. 4, pp. 821–865.
- Buck-Morss, Susan (2009): *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Carofalo, Viola (2013a): "Con il coltello alla gola. Attualità della teoria della violenza di Frantz Fanon". In: *Zapruder* 31, pp. 96–106.
- Carofalo, Viola (2013b): *Un pensiero dannato. Frantz Fanon e la politica del riconoscimento*. Udine: Mimesis.
- Césaire, Aimé (1960): *Toussaint Louverture: la Révolution française et le problème colonial*. Paris: Le Club français du livre.
- Césaire, Aimé (1971): *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. Preface by André Breton. Paris-Dakar: Présence africaine.
- Damas, Léon-Gontran (1937). *Pigments*. Preface by Robert Desnos. Paris: Éditions G. L. M.
- Defoe, Daniel (2007): *Robinson Crusoe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles (1969): "Michel Tournier et le monde sans autrui". In: *Logique du sens*. Paris: Minuit, pp. 350–372.
- Derrida, Jacques (1996): *Le monolinguisme de l'autre*. Paris: Éditions Galilée.
- Fanon, Frantz (2004): *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Fanon, Frantz (2008): *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press.
- Gibson, Nigel C. (2003): *Fanon's Postcolonial Imagination*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gordon, Lewis R. (2008): "Décoloniser le savoir à la suite de Frantz Fanon". In: *Tumultes* 2. No. 31, pp. 103–123.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (1977): *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Arnold Vincent Miller (Tr.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

33 At least not the first version of the novel, before Tournier adapted it for young adults.

- Honenberger, Phillip (2007): "Le Nègre et Hegel: Fanon on Hegel, Colonialism, and the Dialectics of Recognition". In: *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 5. No. 3, pp. 153–162.
- Huizinga, Johan (1949): *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Hutcheon, Linda (2006): *A Theory of Adaptation*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Kawash, Samira (1999): "Terrorists and Vampires. Fanon's Spectral Violence of Decolonization". In: Anthony C. Alessandrini (Ed.): *Frantz Fanon. Critical Perspectives*. London, New York: Routledge, pp. 238–258.
- Kojève, Alexandre (1980): *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press.
- Mellino, Miguel (Ed.) (2013): *Fanon postcoloniale. I dannati della terra oggi*. Verona: Ombre corte.
- Memmi, Albert (1980): *Portrait du colonisé, précédé de Portrait du colonisateur*. Preface by Jean-Paul Sartre. Paris: Gallimard.
- Mengozzi, Chiara (2017): "Les Marges de l'homme en jeu aux limbes du Pacifique". In: *Revue Romane* 52. No. 2, pp. 260–281.
- Renault, Matthieu (2011): *Frantz Fanon: de l'anticolonialisme à la critique postcoloniale*. Paris: Édition Amsterdam.
- Said, Edward (1983): "Traveling Theory". In: *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. London: Vintage, pp. 226–247.
- Said, Edward (2000): "Traveling Theory Reconsidered". In: *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 436–452.
- Schoelcher, Victor (1842): *Des Colonies françaises: abolition immédiate de l'esclavage*. Paris: Pagnerre.
- Sekyi-Otu, Ato (1996): *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Senghor, Léopold Sédar (1947). *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Teixeira, Mariana (2018): "Master-Slave Dialectics (in the Colonies)". In: *Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*. No. 2, pp. 8–12.
- Thiele, Kathrin (2012): "The World with(out) Others, or How to *Unlearn* the Desire for the Other". In: Lorna Burns/Birgit M. Kaiser (Eds.): *Postcolonial Literatures and Deleuze: Colonial Pasts, Differential Futures*. Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 55–75.
- Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa (2012). *Globalectics. Theory and the Politics of Knowing*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Tournier, Michel (1972): *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Tournier, Michel (1977): *Le Vent paralet*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Young, Robert (2003): *Postcolonialism. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.