The Meeting of two worlds:

Michel Tournier's Friday and Robinson: life on Speranza Island

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> *Over the past few decades the encounter between Robinson and Friday has taken on a significance that Daniel Defoe was a thousand leagues from even suspecting.*
> Michel Tournier, *The Wind spirit*:189.

In 1967, the French novelist Michel Tournier achieved instant renown with the publication of his first novel, a rewriting of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, entitled *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (the English title is simply *Friday*), which received the Grand Prix du Roman of the Académie Française. In 1971, the author published a rewritten version for children, *Vendredi ou la vie sauvage* (translated into English as *Friday and Robinson: life on Speranza Island*), which has sold about three million copies in France alone. Almost 25 years after its publication, the novel is still being read by thousands of French schoolchildren every year. Furthermore, it has been said that by the year 2000, *Friday and Robinson: life on Speranza Island* will no doubt have been read by every living French person (*Histoire* 88).

Tournier repeatedly insists that he himself prefers *Friday and Robinson: life on Speranza Island* to the longer *Friday*, and that he considers the children's version to be vastly superior to the longer adult one. In 1993, the author told me that the condensed *Friday* is by far "his greatest success, in France as well as abroad" (*I*2).[1] Translated into a dozen or so languages, the popularity of the children's text is attested by the edition in braille and the pirate editions which have appeared in recent years in a number of countries, including Estonia and Iraq. To put it in Tournier's own words: "Sadam Hussein considered that the Iraqi children could no longer do without my *Friday*." The author himself travelled to Tallin to mark the illegal publication of the book in 1990, when Estonia was still a Soviet republic (*I*1).

At a symposium on children's literature, organised a year ago in Sweden by the President of the International Research Society for Children's Literature, Maria Nikolajeva, I spoke briefly about *Friday and Robinson: life on Speranza Island,* in a paper devoted to the question of boundaries between children's and adult fiction in Tournier's texts. Although time does not permit us to consider this aspect of his writing here, it is necessary to point out that Tournier's own view regarding the status of this text has evolved significantly since it was first published. What he obviously considered at the outset as a retelling for children, he now categorically calls an improved version which can also be read by children, but was not written specifically for them.[2] Tournier says he regrets that his novel is called a "children's book", maintaining that there are merely two *Fridays*, one of which is the "rough copy" and the other, the so-called "children's version", the "good copy" (Joxe 53). However, critics and readers do not generally agree with the author, and for the purposes of this study, *Friday and Robinson: life on Speranza Island* is a children's text.

While speaking about Tournier at last year's symposium in Stockholm, it was drawn to my attention that a publication of the Swedish Institute for Children's

Books on the theme of Robinson included in its bibliography the two versions of Tournier's Robinsonade, which illustrates the success of both texts beyond the borders of France. Tournier's Robinsonade for children seemed to me of particular interest in the context of this conference devoted to "Other Worlds, Other Lives", especially in light of the fact that South Africa also has its celebrated version of the Robinson Crusoe myth, in JM Coetzee's *Foe*. Furthermore, Tournier's, Coetzee's, and Defoe's versions of the Robinson Crusoe story were the object of a comparative study at a conference on "Literature, Voyage and Quest", which I attended in New Zealand in 1992. Indeed, Tournier's *Friday* for adults has not escaped the attention of South African scholars. In 1986, Catherine Glenn, from the University of Cape Town, published an article entitled "La Robinsonnade de Michel Tournier: quelle réécriture?" in *French studies in Southern Africa*. The version for children has not, however, attracted the same attention, as, unfortunately, is so often the case, even in France, of the books which some of the greatest French authors have devoted to young readers.

According to Tournier, the character of Robinson Crusoe escaped from the work in which he first appeared, to become, like Faust, Don Juan or Tristan, a "mythical hero", "the property of all mankind" (*WS*183). Following in the tradition of so many authors before him, the French novelist renews the myth of Robinson Crusoe, thus ensuring the survival of the mythical hero and fulfilling what he sees as the writer's function: the irrigation and renewal of myths (*WS*160).[3] "I reinvent myths", says Tournier (Blume 7). A myth which is not continually given new life must inevitably die. In *The Wind spirit*, Tournier defines myth as "a fundamental story", "a story that everybody already knows" (*WS*156–57). It is for that reason that myth offers the writer a particularly powerful vehicle, as Tournier himself explains: "Myths assure complicity. By manipulating Robinson Crusoe I am manipulating the reader" (Blume 7).

Because Crusoe is ''one of the basic constituents of the Western soul'' (*WS*183), his choice as protagonist of Tournier's novel allows the author to engage in a meaningful reflection on Western man, thus taking his place in a long tradition which includes Paul Valéry, Jean Giraudoux, Saint-John Perse, and Jules Verne, to mention only a few of the French authors who have retold the Robinson Crusoe story. (Tournier himself mentions several other writers of various nationalities in the very interesting chapter he devotes to *Friday* in his autobiography *The Wind spirit*).

Tournier's retelling of the Robinson Crusoe story no doubt goes further than those of his predecessors, as it elevates Defoe's Man Friday to the title role. It is perhaps unfortunate that the English translation of the title does not respect more closely the original French, in which Robinson does not even receive billing, immediately suggesting that Tournier's intention is to subvert Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.[4] The transformation of Friday into a ''mythical hero'' was rendered possible by ''the age of anthropology'', explains Tournier in *The Wind spirit*: ''No doubt it was inevitable that at first only Crusoe would achieve the dimension of myth, for it was not until recently that the science of anthropology was developed and the great colonial empires were simultaneously dismantled. [...] over the past few decades the encounter between Robinson and Friday has taken on a significance that Daniel Defoe was a thousand leagues from even suspecting'' (*WS* 188–189).

When Tournier now claims that he did not rewrite the second *Friday* for children, but rather to improve upon a novel with which he was not satisfied, he cites as one of the main sources of discontent the omnipresence of philosophy. Tournier had become a novelist only because he was forced to give up a career in philosophy when he failed the *agrégation*, and the retelling of his first novel reflects his desire to leave philosophy behind (*I*2). Tournier nonetheless insists that the shorter version of *Friday* retains an important, if implicit, philosophical charge, which continues to be quite relevant. In 1993, he stated that its subject matter was still "the burning question of the hour": "The confrontation of the Indian Friday and the Englishman Robinson is a major current events topic. It is the problem of the Third World, and when Friday arrives, it is the Third World knocking at the door of the industrial world" (*I*1).

It is the meeting of these two worlds and the resulting confrontation with the "Other" which make this text particularly interesting in the context of this conference.[5] Tournier told me he is convinced that children sense the importance of the problem he seeks to present, a problem which he formulates in the following very simple question: "What is Robinson going to do faced with the coloured outsider who appears before him?" To illustrate children's understanding of this dimension of his novel, Tournier refers to his visits to classrooms where students present theatrical adaptations of *Friday and Robinson: life on Speranza Island*. The role of Friday is inevitably filled by a child from the Third World, either a child from black Africa – from Mali or Senegal –, an Arab child, or sometimes even the child of a Portuguese immigrant (*I*1). Tournier originally considered dedicating the adult version to "all of France's immigrant workers, to those silent masses of Fridays shipped to Europe from the Third World – some three million Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians, Senegalese, and Portuguese on whom our society depends and whom we never see or hear, who have no right to vote, no trade union, and no spokesperson" (*WS* 197).

Tournier thus renews the Robinson Crusoe myth for the modern world, presenting "the confrontation, through Robinson and Friday, of West and Third World, and that of Frenchman and immigrant workers" ("Writer" 182). He adds new life to the myth by investing it not only with 20th century ethnography, philosophy, and psychology, but also with sex, money, and politics. It is the inclusion of the latter in a book read by children which bring the author up against, in his words, "walls of censorship" in most countries. One is told, says Tournier, that a "good children's book" avoids these topics, and the author adds sarcastically: "Everyone knows that children have neither sex, politics or money" (*I*2). Tournier feels that this censorship is particularly pronounced in the English-speaking world, and suggests that the lack of success of *Friday and Robinson: life on Speranza Island* is largely due to the inclusion of these subjects considered taboo in children's literature. (Tournier is convinced that children's books in the United States must conform to the Walt Disney model, and goes so far as to speak of a monopoly.)

Although Tournier acknowledges that in rereading Defoe's novel, he was unable to forget his years of study with Claude Lévi-Strauss at the Musée de l'Homme, Paris's museum of anthropology, he admits that in retelling the story of the 18th century Englishman, Robinson, and the Araucanian Indian, Friday, his intention was not really to write "an anthropological novel". In *The Wind spirit*, the author describes the rich subject of the "genuine" anthropological novel, which remains to be written, that of "the confrontation and fusion of two civilizations personified by two representative narrators" (*WS* 190). Gérard Genette points out that Tournier's rewriting of Defoe's novel is not a *"transfocalisation",* because the novel remains focalised on Robinson, rather than presenting the European from the point of view of the "savage". He concludes that the true *Friday*, in which Robinson would be seen, described, and judged by Friday, remains to be written (Genette 424). It is true that Robinson continues to be the central figure of Tournier's novel, which traces the European's metamorphosis, but the spiritual rebirth of the man of the Old World takes place under the tutorship of the New World Friday. Even though Friday does not narrate the story, Tournier effects changes in narrative voice which reflect his desire to focus more closely on Robinson's companion. Defoe's novel is narrated uniquely in the first person, which limits everything to his point of view. Tournier's first novel is a combination of third person narration and a logbook in the first person. The author goes even further in the children's version, where Robinson's logbook entries are eliminated, leaving only the third person narrator, and thus increasing the distance between the reader and the novel's European hero.

Although Friday may not be what Catherine Glenn calls the ''positive pole of an ethnographic novel'' (Glenn 91), his prominent billing in the title is nonetheless justified. The differences between Defoe's novel (the ''hypotext'' in Genette's terminology) and Tournier's two retellings (the ''hypertext'' and the ''hyper-hypertext'' Genette 425) revolve around the role assigned to Friday. In Tournier's mind, Defoe's most ingenious embellishment of historical fact was precisely the invention of Friday (*WS* 181). Quantitatively, Friday's role is increased in both hypertexts. In Defoe's novel, Friday is not introduced until the story is about two-thirds over, whereas in Tournier's adult version he appears at precisely the midpoint, in the seventh of 12 chapters. The novelist allots an even greater role to Friday in the children's version, where he arrives on the scene in the seventh of 16 chapters. However, as we shall see, it is the qualitative role assigned to Friday which changes most significantly from the 18th century novel to the 20th century retellings, as Tournier himself points out in *The Wind spirit*: ''What was Friday to Daniel Defoe? Nothing: an animal, at best a creature waiting to receive his humanity from Robinson Crusoe, who as a European was in sole possession of all knowledge and wisdom'' (*WS* 188). For Defoe, the relationship between Robinson and Friday is that of the Western coloniser and the ''savage'', the Christian evangelist and the pagan. The presence of Friday merely confirms the values of the civilisation Robinson has left behind and is now reconstructing on the island. This seems initially to be the case in Tournier's novel also, but the reader soon realises that the newcomer immediately begins to undermine the European civilisation recreated so painstakingly by Robinson.

Gilles Deleuze devoted an essay to the adult *Friday*, entitled ''Michel Tournier et le monde sans autrui'' (''Michel Tournier and the world without others''), which Tournier included as a postface to the revised paperback edition of the novel. However, the great myth of solitude symbolised by Robinson Crusoe is, as Tournier reminds us in *The Wind spirit*, a story in two complementary parts: ''before Friday and with Friday'' (*WS* 193). As we have seen, it is the second part which is by far the most important in both of Tournier's novels. The French author is interested in ''the elimination of every last vestige of civilization'' in a man subjected to inhuman solitude, and the subsequent creation ''from nothing of a new world'', guided by Friday, ''still more virginal, more bereft of civilization than Robinson even after his bath of solitude''. The main difference between Tournier's Robinsonades and his predecessor's is summed up by the French novelist in the following terms: ''Thus my novel was intended to be both inventive and forward-looking, whereas Defoe's was purely retrospective, confined to describing the restoration of a lost civilization with the means at hand'' (*WS* 190–191).

When Robinson realises that he will not be found and that he cannot lauch the boat he has built, a period of hopelessness and dejection follows, during which he allows himself to degenerate into a state of animality, wallowing in the mud like a pig and crawling on all fours. (The dog Tenn, the only other survivor of the shipwreck, refuses to have anything to do with the wild animal which Robinson has become.) The mudhole period could be seen to symbolise a return to the primordial silt of Genesis, from which will emerge a new man, a new Adam on this paradisiacal island of Speranza.

Realising that he is on the verge of madness after an hallucination which almost claims his life, Robinson decides that he must take his destiny in hand and fight to maintain his humanity in this world "without others". As Robinson puts it: "It's hard to live like a human being without anyone to help you." Thus he sets about "civilizing and putting order into his island" (*FR* 41), painstakingly reconstructing European civilisation, in what Tournier calls the age of administration" (*WP* 194). Agricultural production and the accumulation of vast stores, the domestication of animals, the construction of a house, church, museum, and eventually a fortress, lead him, in the words of David Gascoigne, to "colonial delusions of grandeur": he appoints himself Governor of Speranza Island, assumes the rank of general, and draws up a constitution and a penal code. However, he often feels crushed under the weight of his onerous tasks and numerous official duties. This maniacal administration of Speranza, in the absence of others to govern and with whom to trade, seems like the folly of a madman, and even Robinson is led sometimes to question its wisdom. However, notes the narrator in parentheses, Robinson hoped that some day "a companion, or perhaps even several companions, would turn up" (*FR* 30).

The companion for which Robinson was hoping was, says Tournier, "another Englishman, another Robinson Crusoe" (*WS* 193–194), and not a true "Other" in the form of a Black or an Indian (Friday is at once both Negro and Indian, and the narrator suggests that this "difference" may be the reason he has been singled out as the next victim of his fierce tribe's ritual sacrifices). The arrival of Friday seems at first to offer a justification of Robinson's elaborate organisation of the island, providing him with a recruit to fill the various roles prescribed by his colonial system. Friday is to be "the kingdom's sole 'subject', General Crusoe's only soldier and Governor Crusoe's only taxpayer," writes Tournier in *The Wind spirit* (*WS* 194–195). Like his predecessor, Tournier's Robinson thus sets about integrating the ‘‘savage’’ into the ‘‘civilized’’ order he has imposed on Speranza. Friday is seen strictly as someone to whom Robinson ‘‘could teach civilization’’ (*FR* 56). In Defoe’s novel, the meeting with the savage merely confirms the hero’s confidence in the values of European civilisation, and Man Friday accepts with admiration Robinson’s way of life, values, religion, and language, thus acknowledging the superiority of European civilisation. As Tournier remarks in his reflexions on Defoe’s novel: ‘‘Once properly broken in by his master Crusoe, Friday could never aspire to anything more than to be a good servant. The idea that Crusoe might have been able to learn something from Friday would never have occurred to anyone before the age of anthropology’’ (*WS* 188–189).

At first Tournier’s novel seems to follow the same pattern: Friday puts on a pair of trousers, learns English, learns to ‘‘clear ground, plow, sow, harrow, transplant, hoe, mow, reap, thresh, grind flour, knead dough and bake bread [...] milk the goats, make cheese, gather turtles’ eggs and make an omelet out of them, to mend Robinson’s clothes and shine his boots’’, in other words ‘‘he had become a model servant’’ (*FR* 55–56). The narrator continues with a touch of irony: ‘‘Friday had learned to be a soldier when his master was the general, a choir boy when his master prayed, a mason when he was building, a porter when he went on a journey, and a beater when he hunted; and he had learned to chase the flies away with a palm frond when his master was taking a nap’’ (*FR* 56). Eager to please and show his gratitude to Robinson, who had saved his life, Friday good-naturedly applies himself to the most absurd tasks his master sets him. In spite of the apparent similarities between Defoe’s and Tournier’s accounts of the encounter of the Englishman and the Indian, the contemporary text begins to diverge significantly from the hypotext as soon as Friday appears on the scene. The Araucanian will ultimately have the opposite effect in Tournier’s novel, confirming Robinson's doubts about the validity of a system based on the exploitation of nature and man.

As Tournier points out in his autobiography, Friday's "mere presence is enough to shake the island's organizational structure, for it is clear that he understands none of it, and Crusoe, who at last sees himself with Friday's eyes, is forced to take the measure of his own madness" (*WS* 195). Adopting the point of view of Friday, the narrator states that the Indian did not understand "all this organization, all these rules and ceremonies", nor even the point of the cultivated fields, domestic animals and houses. Robinson explained to him that "this was what people did in the civilized countries of Europe, but Friday didn't see why they had to do the same thing on a desert island in the Pacific" (*FR* 59). Tournier points out the ethnocentricity of Defoe's novel in *The Wind spirit*: "Crusoe's attitude toward Friday was of the most ingenuously racist sort and heedless of his own self-interest. If you must live on an island in the Pacific, 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?" (*WS* 189).

As soon as Friday has a moment or two of freedom away from the surveillance of his tedious master, "all these white man's obligations were forgotten and Friday was an Indian again" (*FR* 64). He reverts to his carefree life in perfect harmony with the world around him, shedding his clothes and inventing mysterious games which remain incomprehensible to the European. Friday dresses the cacti in Robinson's most precious possessions, the magnificent garments and jewels salvaged from the ship; he drains the rice paddy to save Tenn, and thus undoes, in a few minutes, months of back-breaking labour. Robinson's discovery of the Araucanian's "secret camp," where he clandestinely leads the life of an

Indian, causes the European to muse jealously: "If the life of a savage could be so amusing what was the use of all his work and all the duties he set himself?" (*FR* 67–68). Friday's antics reveal to Robinson the existence of the *"other island"* (*F* 91), of another order very different from the one he has imposed on the island, thinking it to be universal. Doubts have already set in, but the routine continues: "Robinson kept pretending to be the governor and commanding general of the island. Friday pretended to work hard in the interest of civilization" (*FR* 69). However, in the words of Anthony Purdy: "More than 150 years before Lévi-Strauss, Robinson starts to discern – beneath the apparent stupidity and clumsiness of his black servant – the disconcerting forms of another dimension of human experience, the dark promise of "*la pensée sauvage*" (Purdy 232–233).[6]

Friday's instinctive resistance to assimilation into the colonialist order eventually results in its destruction. Knowing that he will be severely punished for smoking his master's treasured china-bowl pipe, Friday throws it into the cave where Robinson has carefully stowed the kegs of gunpowder from the shipwreck, thus provoking a catastrophic explosion and inadvertently destroying all trace of the "white civilization" which Robinson had built up over so many years. Robinson is not even angry, as if he had been hoping for such a disaster. In an article devoted to the rewriting of *Friday*, Tournier resumes the children's version in the following terms:

> [...] after having vainly tried to colonize the desert island and civilize Friday, Robinson realizes that he has made a mistake. A catastrophe – the explosion of the powder kegs that he was storing in a cave – destroys his work and marks the turning point. From then on, it is Friday who calls the tune and who is going to teach Robinson how one must live in an island of the Pacific ("Quand" 7).

Henceforth, the roles are reversed: it is Friday who initiates and teaches, while Robinson observes and imitates his new mentor.[7] Robinson is no longer a ''master'' and ''father'' or ''grandfather'' (*FR* 75) figure, but rather a ''brother,'' and even a twin brother. Tournier explains: ''The couple child-adult is found in the couple Robinson (beard and goat skins) and Friday (nudity and giggles). In the end, the beard and goat skins fall, and the two friends, become alike, give themselves over to savage games'' (''Quand'' 7). Having shed his clothes, shaved his beard, and bronzed his fair skin (previously protected by the broad goatskin sunshade Friday had always held over his head), Robinson is now the mirror-image of Friday. Robinson will even pray to the sun-god to make him identical to Friday. Only when he treats Friday as a human equal to himself, can Robinson see him clearly and appreciate his gifts and respect his cultural differences.

Their new life together is by no means free from feelings of hostility. It is over the question of Friday's exotic cuisine that they have their first argument. A quarrel would have been unthinkable in the old days before they were equals, because then, as the narrator explains, ''Robinson was the master and Friday simply had to obey'' (*FR* 81). Friday ingeniously invents a form of role-playing or psychotherapy to deal with their aggressive emotions. He constructs a bamboo and coconut dummy of Robinson, which he beats after Robinson kicks their dinner of snake and insect stew into the sand. In like manner, Robinson creates a sand-Friday that he uses for the same purpose. This displacement of their anger allows them to remain always ''polite and friendly'' toward each other (*FR* 83).

It is also Friday who invents a form of psychodrama in which the reversal of roles allows the two companions to come to terms with the negative feelings left over from their past relationship of master/slave. In order to fully understand the significance of this scene, it is necessary to return to the moment when Friday, pursued by two Araucanians, is unintentionally saved by Robinson.

Wisdom dictates that Robinson should side with the stronger majority rather than with the victim, but when he aims at Friday, Tenn bumps his arm and he accidentally kills one of the pursuants.[8] Thus their relationship begins with a misunderstanding, and Friday ironically showing his gratitude to his unwilling saviour: "He crawled over to Robinson, touched his head to the ground, and groped for Robinson's foot which he placed on his own neck in token of submission" (*FR* 51). This passage reflects the key scene in Defoe's novel, in which Robinson humiliates Friday by putting his foot on the back of his neck. A later scene, which reverses the roles, clearly symbolises the inversion of the myth which is at work in Tournier's novel: Friday, disguised as Robinson, plays the master and Robinson must play the role of the slave Friday: "If Friday was Robinson, the Robinson of old, master of the slave Friday, then Robinson must transform himself into Friday, the Friday of old, the slave of Robinson" (*FR* 83).

Robinson, who sees the *Whitebird* as "a messenger from a civilization to which he had no desire to return", and the boat and its "civilized men" as bearers of "destruction and disorder", knows that he cannot return to England (*FR* 111–112). In a phrase of the French text, unfortunately omitted in the English translation, Robinson reflects on the *"vie idéale"* he has attained on the island with Friday (*VVS* 146). The "*vie sauvage*" which they have been leading on the desert island is no longer a "forced *intermezzo*", as Carminella Biondi calls it, but has become an alternative and superior way of life, based on the harmony between man and the elements (Biondi 245). In the final pages of the novel, Friday leaves the island secretly on the *Whitebird*. In the adult version the reader is given no explication of this disturbing event. In the children's version, however, the author felt it necessary to offer a partial explanation, and it is suggested that the fine schooner offered the charm of an irresistible toy for the playful Friday. Remembering the mate's gruesome stories about the lucrative slave trade, Robinson falls into a deep despair, imagining the sad fate of his free-spirited companion, no doubt already shackled in the hold of the *Whitebird*, and destined to a life in chains.

Defoe's novel was in fact a monument to the glory of European values, which for men of the 18th century were absolute and universal. There is no meeting of two civilisations in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, because, notes Tournier, ''Crusoe alone was in possession of the *only* civilization that existed'' (*WS* 190). It is not surprising that, on rereading the 18th century novel, the contemporary author should be struck by the ethnocentrism of his predecessor, and that Tournier's retelling should reflect the 20th century ethnographic studies of Claude Lévi-Strauss and others. At the Musée de l'Homme, Tournier had learned that ''there are no 'savages', only men living in civilizations different from our own and most rewarding for us to study'' (*WS* 189). In Tournier's retelling of the Robinson Crusoe story, writes Carminella Biondi, ''the role of guide towards the transcension of a system which degrades man no longer belongs to the civilized White, but to the savage Black, to him is also assigned the task of reconciling man with nature'' (Biondi 249).

The original French title, *Vendredi ou la vie sauvage*, certainly conveys much more effectively the author's intentions in retelling, by means of inversion and subversion, the Robinson Crusoe myth, in order to make of Friday a 20th century ''mythical hero''. Friday's ''*vie sauvage''*, which replaces Robinson's ''civilization'' is, in fact, a superior life in harmony with the world and all its creatures. The conclusion of the novel, however, remains ambiguous and certainly raises some troubling questions. It is Friday who naively abandons the savage, ideal life on the island, to which he has initiated the European, in order to adopt inadvertently a life in chains in Robinson's ''civilized'' world. Friday is replaced on the island by another white man, or rather a white boy, the red-haired Estonian cabin boy, Jaan, whom Robinson renames Sunday because "Sunday is the day of rest, the day of laughter and games" (*FR* 118). The "Other" with whom Robinson is about to begin "a new life [...], a life as beautiful as the island that was waking in the mist at their feet" (*FR* 118), is, in fact, a younger version of Robinson himself, a sort of "twin son" or clone. Perhaps Millicent Lenz is correct in suggesting that Tournier, "working in the tradition of the Robinsonade, has gone beyond the form to shape a myth of eternal self-renewal" (Lenz 28). In any case, the problematic of the "Other" seems paradoxically to bring us back to the "Self " in Tournier's Robinsonade. Perhaps we could even question Friday's promotion to the role of "mythical hero". At any rate, Tournier certainly does not offer a demotion of Robinson. Is the English translation of the title ultimately more appropriate? Certainly, it is Robinson, standing godlike on a pinnacle of the Pacific Island with his newfound miniature double, bathed in the light of the rising sun, and not Friday in chains in the hold of the English schooner, who assumes a mythic stature in the final pages of *Friday and Robinson: life on Speranza Island*.

Notes

1 On October 18, 1993, Tournier taped his answers to questions I had put to him in two letters earlier that year. All references to this "interview" by correspondence and cassette tape are in the text and abbreviated *I*1. Two interviews with Tournier at his home in Choisel on May 25, 1994 and July 7, 1994, will be referred to respectively as *I*2 and *I*3. All translations of excerpts of these interviews are mine, as are all translations of quotations from articles published in French.

2 This question is dealt with at length in a chapter devoted to Tournier in a study which is forthcoming, in French, on great French novelists who have written for children between 1945 and 1995.

3 Tournier's texts are abbreviated as follows: *Friday (F), Friday and Robinson: life on Speranza Island (FR), Vendredi ou la vie sauvage (VVS),* and *The Wind spirit (WS).*

4 Tournier told me he considers the American translation by Ralph Manheim excellent, but the author laments the fate of the book in the United States and in the English-speaking world in general, when it has been so successful in many other countries. The version for adults was published in the United States by Doubleday. As Doubleday has a large children's department, the author proposed that they also publish the children's version, but they were not interested. Tournier regrets that the book, published by Knopf, which does not even put out children's books, was more of ''an intellectual curiosity than a true book for children'', and therefore entirely without success (*I*1). Whereas about three million copies have been sold in France, the modest two thousand copies printed in the United States have not sold (see Petit 178–179).

5 At a conference I co-organised, in October 1992, at Brock University on ''La Présence de l'autre'', I gave a paper on the specular images of the Other in the adult version of *Friday*. The paper will be published, in French, in the proceedings of the conference.

6 *La Pensée sauvage* is the title of one of Claude Lévi-Strauss's most important works, published in 1962.

7 The author himself finds he can learn from a younger native. Tournier seems to enjoy being put on the spot one day in the classroom by a Chilean boy who questions him about the araucarias Robinson and Friday climb on Speranza, which is located off the Chilean coast. The child asked the writer if he had ever seen ab araucaria: ''Nobody can climb ab araucaria. [...] in my country, they are called 'the despair of monkeys' because not even a monkey can climb ab araucaria'' (*I*2).

8 In her article on the adult version, which considers *Friday* as a rewriting of the Scriptures, Catherine Glenn suggests that Robinson misreads Genesis in an attempt to occult the story of Cain and Abel, the first fratricide (Glenn 97), an interesting reading in light of Robinson's unsuccessful murder attempt.

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Emotion's web:

the fluctuating dynamics of Susan Cooper's worlds

carole scott

In a recent article in the *British Sunday Telegraph* entitled "How to Swap Universes", Adrian Berry features Heisenberg's Principle and the related theory that "we live not in a single universe but in an infinite number of parallel ones". While Berry discusses the inspiration of the Uncertainty Principle as it relates to computer designers, the notion of parallel worlds is a familiar device to readers of fiction, and one that has found expression in a significant number of children's books. In such books, the boundaries between the other worlds and the "real" one are usually distinct. The children may enter the parallel world down a rabbit hole, through a mirror, a wardrobe, or a bedroom wall, or across an ocean, space, or time. In Susan Cooper's sequence *The Dark is rising*, however, the concept of parallel worlds is infinitely more complex, and approximates more closely to extensions of Heisenberg's vision of "matter continuously 'fluctuating' between one state of reality and another, [and] exist[ing] in an infinite number of universes simultaneously."

The five work sequence, *Over sea, under stone, The Dark is rising, Greenwich, The Grey King* and *Silver on the tree*, is very traditional in many ways. Its ideological stance is explicit and conventional, envisioning good and evil warring for the heart of humankind and ultimate possession of the Earth. Its incorporation of the Arthurian legends is also unremarkable, involving the grail myth, and the Christianised vision of Arthur as the redeemer who will come again to save an imperilled world. The three children, Simon, Jane and Barnabas Drew, who are introduced at the beginning of the sequence and play significant roles in three of the books, exhibit the standard behaviour expected of an ordinary middle-class English family. Yet, despite these conventional and expected elements, the books provide a remarkable dynamic between the ordinary and the extraordinary, a dynamic that is neither contrast nor synthesis, but a fluctuation between parallel realities that are neither separate nor the same.

Although a divinity is not present either as a persona or a force in Cooper's moral landscape, this landscape is nonetheless recognisably Christian, and the design of her universe holds strong echoes of the Miltonic in its conception. Like Milton's *Paradise lost*, where God has created the earth to hang from heaven above by a golden chain, with hell far beneath, Cooper presents a comparable mapping of the physical and philosophical geography of her universe, though the reader must wait until the final book for Will's explanation to his brother Simon:

> This where we live is a world of men, ordinary men, and although in it there is the Old Magic of the earth, and the Wild Magic of living things, it is men who control what the world shall be like. ... But beyond the world is the universe, bound by the law of the High Magic, as every universe must be. And beneath the High Magic are two ... poles ... that we call the Dark and the Light. No other power orders them. They merely exist. The Dark seeks by its dark nature to influence men so that in the end, through them, it may control the earth. The Light has the task of stopping that from happening (*Silver* 14).

This pictorial image, though comforting to those who prefer a spatially defined orientation, is simplistic rather than revealing because it omits the essential building blocks of Cooper's universe. Cooper breaks the frame of conventional high fantasy, for, as she attempts to limn the outlines of her received world, she concomitantly deconstructs them by positing a fluctuating universe of force fields which define the real boundaries of her reality. These force fields depend upon and arise from the relativity of human perception and the dynamics of human relationship and emotion.

It is Barnabus Drew, the most artistically gifted of the ordinary children in the sequence, who first breaks the frame of conventional perception when he realises that the map the children have been trying to decipher is after all not a map but a perspective sketch. He also discovers that the clues it gives define a series of relationships between geographical features, relationships which depend on shifting perspective as well as changing points of orientation. For example, the tallest stone which marks the first point of perception appears that way only from a certain vantage point; it is in fact smaller than some of the others. Its shadow cast at the moment of the setting sun defines the perspective from which the next landmark may be observed, and the path to the grail is pointed out by a shaft of moonlight revealed only at one particular point in its fluctuating cycle. Here, at the beginning of the five book sequence, these messages about the relativity of perception are intriguingly mysterious rather than disorienting, and rely on natural rather than supernatural forces. Similarly the shapeshifting representatives from the Dark appear in this first book to be cases of mistaken identity or disguise rather than powerful and diabolical emanations that can take a variety of forms.

As the sequence continues, the intricacy of the perceptual shifts and of the fluctuation between realities increases dramatically. Where *Over sea, under stone* is dominated by the Drew family, and remains completely within the ordinary, everyday world, with only suggestions of deeper forces, the second work, *The Dark is rising*, introduces a new child protagonist, Will Stanton, seventh son of a seventh son, and the last of the Old Ones to be born into the world. Unlike the

Drews who are sufficiently sensitive to have glimpses into other worlds but belong to the ordinary human one, Will straddles several existences in his day-to-day life, experiencing slippages of time, relativities of place, and a dual character that is both 11-year-old boy and Old One, outside of time.

Taking the name of the entire series as its own specific title, *The Dark is rising* is the most central and the most successful of the works. Beginning on the evening of Will's 11th birthday, the occasion on which he will first realise his dual identity, the book allows the reader to share the boy's growing apprehension of a familiar world suddenly going out of focus; the animals behave strangely, the weather becomes menacing, Will's state of mind becomes heightened and then filled with terror ''beyond imagining''. He awakens on his birthday to be transported to another world whose hidden rules are absolute, but faintly ascertained, and their violation perilous. He learns that he is not an ordinary boy, but one who has extraordinary gifts, is given extraordinary knowledge, and must bear a burdensome responsibility and undertake a special mission for the future of the world and of humankind.

His dual nature spans the two worlds: at certain times he experiences a ''doubling'' so that his physical presence appears in two worlds simultaneously; at others he may feel ''a strange jolting sensation, as if the whole world had shuddered''; (*Dark* 155) most interesting are the states when one world is superimposed upon the other so that he exists simultaneously in both. This merging of the ordinary with the extraordinary worlds is of especial interest in Cooper's work, as though the fabric of reality is torn and the other world intrudes. This state where the ''two worlds meet ... so closely'' (*Dark* 131) is almost unbearable to Will, and devastating to ordinary mortals who must be protected from such knowledge; on several occasions the Old Ones must erase such memories from ordinary people's minds.

While Will represents the child divided between two states of being and perception, Bran Davies, the young Welsh boy who first appears in the fourth book of the series, *The Grey King*, exemplifies the child whose perspective is single, but whose place in time is uncertain. King Arthur's son, he is snatched from his birth time and raised in the 20th century. Unlike Will, who thought himself an ordinary boy in an ordinary family, Bran has always felt himself to be unique, a near-albino with white hair and tawny eyes whom other children reject as different. When Bran and Will embark on magical adventures in fantastic worlds, Bran's understanding and self-knowledge grow. But passing through the boundaries between worlds is according to the accepted rules of fantasy, by means of special pathways, magical words or talismans. And Bran is given the mortal right to choose his own time and identity, selecting the ordinary world of human relationships rather than a legendary position in Arthur's timeless world.

Cooper presents the openings between the worlds in a variety of ways. There are tangible representations that symbolise the passage between the ordinary and extraordinary places: gigantic doors that can be passed through; mazes of mirrors that yield to special words; clefts in rocks and underground stairways; bridges of light over oceans; magical talismans that open walls of rock. But more subtle and more vivid are the emotional paths between the two states of being.

Emotions provide both the web that binds the worlds together, and the filaments that Cooper images as doors or channels between the two. But again her visual picture does not do justice to the complexity of her concept, for it is clear that the ''separate'' worlds are intertwined, as are people's emotions. The more sophisticated image of ''matter continuously 'fluctuating' between one state of reality and another, [and] exist[ing] in an infinite number of universes simultaneously'' is hard to capture in visual image; like so many scientific hypotheses of dynamic functions and interrelationships, we cannot visualise it in natural form and must use approximate metaphors to express the sophistication of the relationships.

Some examples of the ''channeling'' between worlds are helpful to our understanding. The first describes Will's need to reclaim the Six Signs of the Light that he has hidden in another century. He has recreated the moment of concealment by moving back to the time 16 centuries before when the Roman amphitheatre at Caerleon was constructed and he slipped the Signs into a hollow in the stone. He needs now to move to the present to reclaim it, and elicits a strong emotion in the Centurion who has served as his guide:

> The homesickness was a throbbing ache like physical pain, and suddenly Will knew that the answer was here in the air, in this moment of simple unprotected longing with a man's deepest, simplest emotions open and unguarded for strangers to hear and see. This was the road that would carry him ... He let his mind fall into the longing, into the other's pain, as if he were diving into a sea; and like water closing over his head the emotion took him in. The world spun about him, stone and grey sky and green fields, whirling and changing and falling down into place not quite the same as before, and the yearning homesick voice was soft in his ears again but the voice was a different voice (*Silver* 37).

In this case Will has glided through the centuries by following the flow of emotion from the Roman centurion to the American archeologist 16 centuries later. Yet it is clear that this journey is only a momentary and fantastical linking of two different episodes, for Will and Merriman leave the modern site in their car although they had arrived in Roman times.

A very different example of the doorways between worlds that emotion creates is offered by fallen human beings, agents or possible agents of the Dark, whose conflicted emotional state, often bordering on madness, offers a pathway for evil. Merriman's former liege man Hawkins who betrays his lord's trust is perhaps the most sympathetic of these because of the poignancy of his fiercely repressed nostalgia and longing for the Light; the vicious Caradog Lewis of *The Grey King* and *Silver on the tree* is thoroughly contaminated and his violent threats and actions make him a welcome instrument of the Dark; the bigoted Mr Moore of *Silver on the tree* who rants on about the immigrants of colour, is a smaller and far more ordinary example; Will ponders,

> The mindless ferocity of this man, and all those like him, their real loathing born of nothing more solid than insecurity and fear ... it was a channel. Will knew that he had been gazing into the channel down which the powers of the Dark, if they gained their freedom, could ride in an instant to complete control of the earth (*Silver* 54).

The landscape of the psyche depicted by Cooper not only finds echoes and bonds in the natural landscape but, again reminiscent of Milton's *Paradise lost*, is also revelatory of a moral, almost allegorical universe. The ongoing war between the Light and the Dark that shapes and is revealed through human history also finds expression through individual human emotion, which serves both as the channel and as the expression of this deep conflict. For emotion is not simply depicted as a pathway or a form of magical transportation between worlds; the intricate dynamics of human relationship and feeling weave the pattern and create the fabric from which Cooper's very universe is constructed.

Her sense of the fluctuation of emotional worlds creates a dramatic and disturbing reality, providing an emotional veracity that provides penetrating psychological and philosophical insights. The reality, immediacy and power of emotion are brilliantly depicted in Cooper's work, and serve as the true lineaments of her universe, underlying the older, creaking metaphors and conventional depictions of the battle between good and evil. It is the tension generated by the forcefields of emotion that concomitantly hold the various parallel worlds separate yet inseparably linked.

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Signs of the times

joy heale

> "To change this country by writing, by telling people about other people and showing how much they have in common." (*Rebecca's horse*, Allan Jermieson, Tafelberg 1988)

One of the harshest parts of apartheid was that it kept us apart. It seems as if we hardly dared mix with "others", until we stood together so peaceably in those election lines in April 1994. Only inside the pages of books could the colour bar be safely crossed. My brief thesis here is that our children's books *did* dare to cross such barriers, suggesting to their readers that social change was on its way, and preparing our future voters for such a time.

At first, in our publications, such friendships were restricted to the well-off white child and the son of a servant or a farm worker. A typical local story of nearly 20 years ago describes two boys on a farm.

> They swam, dived and frolicked in the water. When they were exhausted, they clambered onto a smooth rock ... There they lay, naked in the sun, brown body beside white, two happy boys in the warm summer sun.
> (*Tongelo*, Catherine Annandale, Perskor 1976)

In the final chapter, Martin (the white boy) leaves the village school, which Tongelo (the black boy) did not attend, and is destined to go "to the big school" to come home only during the holidays. He reassures his friend,

> "Never mind, Tongelo, we'll always be friends. No school is going to make any difference to us! It will always be the same."

> But, of course, [says the author] it never was quite the same again.
> (*Tongelo*, Catherine Annandale, Perskor 1976)

Contrast that situation with a book of 1995, *Khetho* by Dennis Bailey. In this, a white boy finds himself at school with his father's gardener. Forced into companionship by his well-meaning parents, he finds the situation uneasy.

> It wasn't that I didn't want a black friend. I just wanted to be free enough to choose.
> (*Khetho,* Dennis Bailey, Heinemann 1995)

Let us go back to the Soweto riots of 1976, when the pupils themselves protested against the enforced use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction and other grievances in their education system. Professor Elwyn Jenkins, in his *Children of the Sun*, marks this as a key date:

> The children's uprising of 1976 marked the liberation of South African English children's books from a taboo on matters of race and politics. ... As the pace of political reform has increased and South African society has become freer, more and more children's and youth novels on these themes have been published, exploiting the greater tolerance of what may be published and children may read.
> (*Children of the Sun*, Elwyn Jenkins, Ravan 1993)

In the Cape, things were happening as well.

> ... ever since Yusuf, Andre's seventeen-year-old hero, had instructed him and the other children to stay off school, the days had grown long and complicated. Nothing seemed to be happening in Woodstock: all the action was in the Cape Flats townships, or in Cape Town itself. It was rumoured that students in Athlone had burnt down their school. At another school they'd kicked the headmaster down the stairs ... The truth was that the boy wasn't too keen on burning his school down ...
> (*The Sound of the Gora*, Ann Harries, Heinemann 1980)

Published in Great Britain, *The Sound of the Gora* was quickly banned here for several years. Not only did it present the 1976 riots in Cape Town to young readers, but it also dared suggest that respected persons classified white might actually have nonwhite blood in their ancestry.

For years, children's books in South Africa have been published with the hope of being chosen by education authorities as prescribed books for class study, and which could therefore be sold by the thousand. Such books could not possibly question "the system". The attitude of Authority remained that "It is forbidden to ask why it is forbidden". But from that year on, publishers such as Ravan Press risked their money in creating children's reading which did challenge the system.

> One day the farmer said we must move off his farm at the end of the month. He said we must live on the other side of the Tugela River. We could not move because we had no homes to go to. The farmer was angry and the police burned our homes down. They forced us to move across the river. We made shelters from leaves and branches. (*The Story of Mboma*, by Mboma Dladla as told to Kathy Bond, Ravan 1979)

This was No. 1 in the Msinga easy reading series "drawn from the autobiographies of children" and priced (in 1979) at only R1,25. Ahead of its time, there were no more in this series. But such books were the beginning of the harsh light of day in our youth literature.

In an unusual departure from the standard innocuous formula, a book from the popular Daan Retief Book Club portrayed a boy imagining his father away on military service on the border. He moulds his plasticene into a plane, a jeep, a boat, as he dreams of joining his father, then finally into a gun. His teacher comments ...

> ''Out of his dream came something very well made. Look here, it looks exactly like a real machine gun. Give it to me, Jimmy. I want to put it on my table. Then we can see it every day and remember our brave men on the border ...''
> (*Jimmy goes to the Border*, Andrew McCallaghan, Daan Retief 1983)

This book caused considerable adverse reaction, as children of eight or nine were not supposed to read books about war. Nor were they to question the pass laws or the police.

The older children at school had made up a song:

> Beware that policeman,
> He'll want to see your pass,
> He'll say it's not in order,
> That day may be your last!
> (*Journey to Jo'burg*, Beverley Naidoo, Longman 1985)

Published in Great Britain this book was also banned in South Africa.

Our children's literature has not ignored the sadness of forced removals:

> Armien breathed in the fresh salty air and waved to the people on the beach. He wished that he still lived here instead of on the hot and sandy Cape Flats.
> (*Armien's fishing trip*, Catherine Stock, David Philip 1991)

Of course, Armien had lived in the salt-savoured fishing village of Hout Bay until his family and others were forced to leave under the Group Areas Act. Catherine Stock reminds us that ''Of the original community of 200 families in 1967, only about 74 remain today.''

The concept of "Home" is strongly emotive for young readers. How many picture books show an animal searching for a home! (Both Owl and Eeyore did so in the *Winnie-the-Pooh* stories.) So for human beings to be forced out of their homes by other human beings under the Group Areas Act was one of the most shameful happenings of our apartheid years.

> The new laws were like hot wind drying leaves and flowers. People had to close their shops, take down their curtains, take up their beds and cupboards, trunks, plates, pots and children and move to the edge of the city. Bulldozers pushed over every house. ... And if you go to look at District Six now ... it's all gone.
> (*Ouma's autumn*, Patricia Schonstein Pinnock, African Sun Press 1993)

Forgetting the hope of making prescribed book jackpot fortunes, our South African authors began to write of reality, sharing the horrors, exposing the injustice and the poverty. Even more surprising, our publishers published the books. First published in Afrikaans in 1987, *The Ink bird* is set in a township near Bloemfontein.

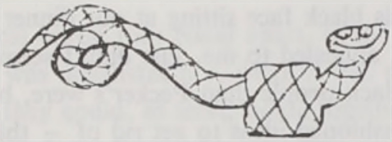
> The first time the Casspirs came, Adam remembered, there were many more. They were full of policemen in blue riot uniforms. All day long there had been trouble in the streets and at the schools. The children started throwing stones. Then the Casspirs arrived and a thunderous voice over the loudhailer: "Go back to your homes! Get off the streets!" ...
> The Casspirs began spitting smoke and rubber bullets. The people in the street screamed and started running. ...
> Mme sat thinking for a long time, her hands folded on her big stomach as though it hurt her to think.
> "It's because we don't understand each other," she said after a while, and the pain in her stomach was in her eyes and in her voice too.
> "Who?" Edward asked. "Who doesn't understand?" ...
> "Our people, Edward," she said with difficulty. "The people of our country."
> (*The Ink bird*, Maretha Maartens, Tafelberg 1989)

The "unwanted" quality created by apartheid is described by Dianne Case:

> ''And you children get away from here,'' he roared, glaring directly at me. ''You coloureds have your own beach.'' ... and her Uncle Reg says sadly:
> ''This is not our country. We have no say here. We don't belong here. This is not our country.''
> (*92 Queens Road*, Dianne Case, Maskew Miller Longman 1991)

While the inequality of South Africa hits hard in Lesley Beake's *Serena's story*:

> My younger children were sick and I needed the money for medicine, and food to make them better. So I sold little Thandi to the white people who came to the location looking for a child to help them in their big Johannesburg home. Sold her for thirteen rands a month, and her food and room. Then I watched her drive away with them, sitting in the back of their big white car, and I knew that she would never go to the teachers' college and she would never be anything at all.
> (*Serena's story*, Lesley Beake, Maskew Miller Longman 1990)



School integration

In 1989, I was busy writing a book of my own: *Scowler's luck* about a class of girls and boys on a hiking/camping adventure in the Fish River Canyon. I wanted the children to be black and white, mixed quite naturally, as they were at the private school in which I had taught. ''No'', said the editor. ''If you mix the colours, then that must be the point of the book. People will see it that way''. So, reluctantly, my story was of an all white class.

The next year, 1990, appeared the shattering book, *Homeward bound* by Lawrence Bransby, featuring the first black boy in a white school. There, the mixing of the colours certainly was the point of the book. And the book was, as Elwyn Jenkins describes it, ''an indictment of the education system and its values''.

In the same author's *Down Street*, a white schoolboy dares to make friends with a coloured girl. He is duly beaten up by the girl's coloured friends and thrashed by his own headmaster, whereupon he asks,

> "Why is what I did such a crime? ... Was it the fact that I was in school uniform or that she was a coloured, sir?"
> (*Down Street*, Lawrence Bransby, Tafelberg 1989)

In the award-winning book *The Kayaboeties*, a gang of white children eager to form a musical group face up to the inclusion of Sam, a black boy. All sorts of social difficulties intrude.

> "Why?" I said sullenly. "They never mind when our other friends sleep over. What's the difference?"
> But I didn't need Chris to explain it to me. Sam wasn't our other friends. The idea of his black face sitting at our dinner table and sharing our bathroom with us – much as it appealed to me, just didn't seem feasible. Our parents were a lot more decent about black people than Pecker's were, but only up to a point. They still had a lot of old-fashioned ideas to get rid of – things they'd had drummed into their heads when they were children, which were stuck there now, and difficult to get out again.
> (*The Kayaboeties*, Elana Bregin, Maskew Miller Longman 1989)

Sam is accepted. But we have yet to see a book about a gang of black boys similarly welcoming in a lone white.

Books started to criticise the poor state of black education, even suggesting that black children wanted to go to school ...

> Annie pulled a face. "I never liked school! There were too many children in one room, she complained, "and sometimes the teachers beat us if we were late and didn't have books." She looked at Thoko. "You can already write your name! Why do you want to go all that way? It is too far and horrible if it is raining."

> Thoko did not know what to say. How could she explain the longing she felt? Just to have a *chance*. But there was no way she could do it.
> (*Thoko*, Brenda Munitich, Tafelberg 1993)

The language problem is clearly shown by David Brindley in *Chief!*:

> One of Chief's problems was that in their home his parents spoke Xhosa, his father's language, and occasionally English. But at school he had to speak Setswana, because at that time most primary school lessons were conducted in African languages. ... Miss Lesang would ask the class to tell her the imports and exports of a certain country – and shout at Chief's inability to recall the facts, which he knew well in his home language.
> (*Chief!*, DJ Brindley, Centaur 1990)

Lesley Beake, in a Foreword to *Café Thunderball*, explains:

> Seth's story happened in the days before political unrest tore Natal apart, in the days when education was inadequate, when housing was unsatisfactory, when it was still a battle for each family to make ends meet. But they could, at least, battle together as families without having to also fight the nameless face of township violence.
> (*Café Thunderball*, Lesley Beake, De Jager-HAUM 1993)

Today's youth novels march boldly into many taboo areas: *A Pot of winter* by Maretha Maartens opened the unmentionable topic of teenage pregnancy; *Down Street* by Lawrence Bransby gave a compassionate (if desperate) look at love across the colour bar; *Blue Train to the moon* by Dianne Hofmeyr tackles the question of AIDS.

Today's youth live in a world of violence, of home-made guns, of sudden deaths.

> I suppose part of this story began when my brother blew himself up at the Border. It was just the sort of jerky, dumb thing that he would do. I know it sounds pretty

> rough just to say it right out like that, but it seems to me that people always try to glamorise death when someone dies young – it always has to be tragic and dramatic.
> (*Into the valley*, Michael Williams, Tafelberg 1990)

In Michael Williams' *Into the valley* it is sad and bitter.

It is worth noting that in the field of indigenous nonfiction, in August 1994, President Mandela personally praised the series "They fought for freedom", saying that the publishers (Maskew Miller Longman) had had the courage to conceive the project when it was "less fashionable to do so". Started in 1992, this series now includes simply written biographies of such as Chris Hani, Oliver Tambo and Steve Biko.

Our children's literature has helped us through a shameful era – by keeping us aware of what was wrong, and what could be put right. Our books have looked at our times, and ahead of our times.

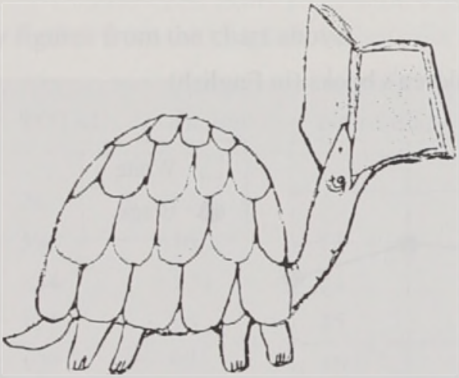
The age of the charming little story of a black boy in the jungle surrounded by wild animals is over. Today's jungle is made by city streets. Or, as for *Ashraf of Africa*:

> The library is quiet and cool with a jungle of books to choose from. Slowly, Ashraf stalks the shelves for something special. Something wild and untamed. ... Ashraf has seen Africa wild and untamed captured in a book ...
> (*Ashraf of Africa*, Ingrid Mennen & Niki Daly, David Philip 1990)

Ever and again, I am drawn back to the words in one of the first children's books to paint an honest picture of African rural life; one of the first South

African books to offer a picture of hope. Now long out of print, *Fly, eagle, fly!* by Christopher Gregorowski told the old allegory of the eagle chick reared amongst the flightless farmyard chickens and having to learn how to fly. At last, from the top of a mountain, it does. Though intended as a more human parable, this seems to me to describe the opportunity offered us in our South African children's literature. Our books, too, are already taking wings.

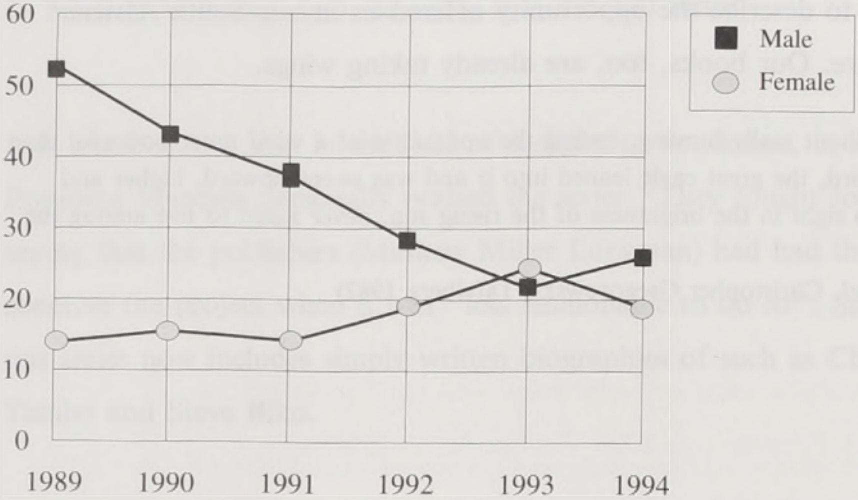
> And then, without really moving, feeling the updraught of a wind more powerful than any man or bird, the great eagle leaned into it and was swept upward, higher and higher, lost to sight in the brightness of the rising sun, never again to live among the chickens.
> (*Fly, eagle, fly!*, Christopher Gregorowski, Tafelberg 1982)



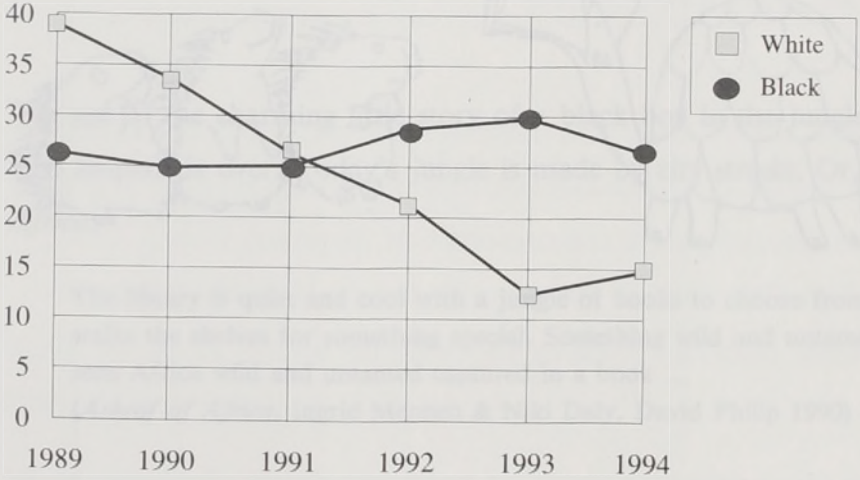
Some statistics on South African children's books in English

researched by Jay Heale

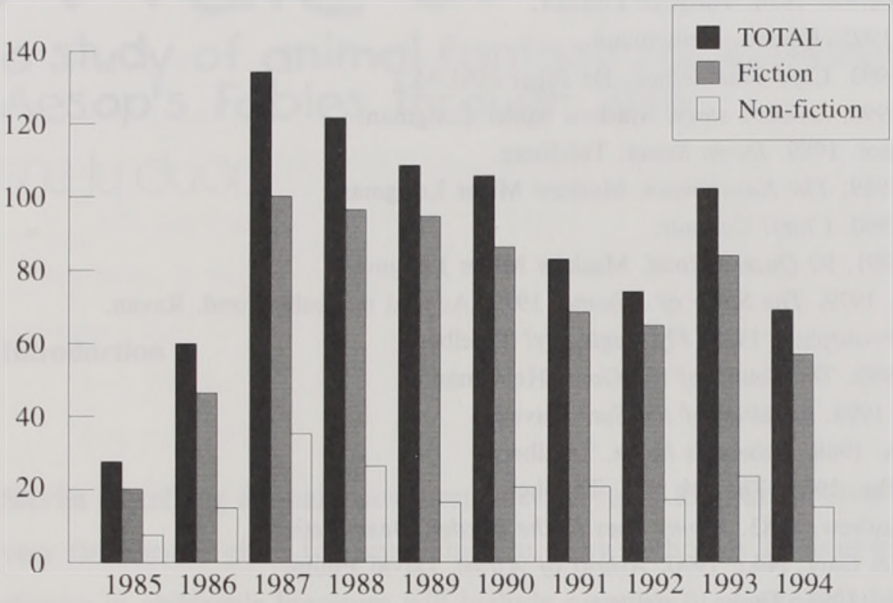
Male/female central characters in S. A. children's books (in English)



White/black central characters in S. A. children's books (in English)



Total number of children's books (in English) / with Fiction, Non-fiction split



Actual yearly figures from the chart above:

Year	TOTAL	Fiction	Non-fiction
1985	26	22	4
1986	59	46	13
1987	134	100	34
1988	121	96	25
1989	109	93	16
1990	105	87	18
1991	84	66	18
1992	77	61	16
1993	100	81	19
1994	68	57	11

(as at 18. 1. '95)

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