

Shifting Perspectives in Two Mid-Twentieth Century Robinsonades

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By the mid twentieth century, the global colonial landscape had shifted considerably. The imperial power which Britain, in particular, had enjoyed since its plantation of Ireland in the sixteenth century and its subsequent expansion into Africa, India, and the Americas, was gradually waning, and with it the period of high empire, which had lasted roughly from the sixteenth- to the nineteenth century. The defeats suffered by Britain during the Second World War (which left the country economically bankrupt), as well as the increasingly vocal demands for independence by nationalist movements from within several British colonial territories (spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi's Indian National Congress), meant that British empire was on the decline, and a blanket policy of peaceful disengagement of British forces from these territories was adopted by Harold Macmillan's conservative government in the 1960s, to ease further hostilities.¹

Conversely, at a time of British wholesale decolonization, both the United States and France were engaged in attempts to prop up their imperial superiority in the face of changing winds. Though the United States ostensibly opposed British colonialism (the American Revolutionary War of the late eighteenth century was fought, after all, to establish a republic

¹ D.K. Fieldhouse has noted that the Second World War is the primary reason for bringing about a 'fundamental change in European attitudes to empire', and that it 'weakened the [British] will to rule'. See Fieldhouse, *The Colonial Empires: A Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth Century* (London,: Macmillan, 1982), p. 403. Of course, the intricate politics of Britain's colonial legacy are far too detailed to sketch, here, even in outline. For a more precise discussion of British decolonization and the end of British high imperialism, see Philippa Levine, *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2007); Brandon Piers, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781-1997* (London: Random House, 2007); Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonisation* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006); Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Book, 2004); Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (London: Abacus, 2001); Judith Brown, *The Twentieth Century: The Oxford History of the British Empire – Volume IV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Stephen J. Lee, *Aspects of British Political History, 1914-1995* (London: Routledge, 1996); and Trevor Owen Lloyd, *The British Empire, 1558-1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

from British rule in North America), in reality, the country was engaged in a cold war with the Soviet Union that sought to keep the expansion of communism in check, and thus very much supported both Britain's and its own continued existence as imperial world powers (Levine, 2007, 193). The U.S. was also 'uniquely successful in evading decolonization by incorporating colonies into their own territories' (Fieldhouse, 1982, 380), and, as such, it avoided the outright decolonizing efforts of its British counterpart. France had done something similar with its *anciennes colonies*. Much more openly combative in its approach, France had engaged in expensive warfare to maintain a hold of its colonial territories: a campaign which was, ultimately, unsuccessful (Abernethy, 2000, 148).² Thus, while the world witnessed the dissolution of the greatest empire in modern times, both the United States and France were steadfastly determined to retain their imperial status quo.

One potential reason for this is the shared interests both nations had in the Pacific region, which took on momentous geopolitical significance following the battles fought there during the Second World War. For the U.S., islands such as Hawaii, Wake Island, Midway Island, Tutuila, and Guam (all in the Pacific) had been variously annexed or incorporated as U.S. territories, and were, during the Pacific War, crucial outposts for the western Allies' defence against Japanese aggression. Allied success in this conflict became synonymous with

² Again, a concise summary of the complexities of either U.S. or French colonial politics cannot be expected within the parameters of this essay (if at all). For a more detailed understanding of U.S. imperial policies and history, see Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005); Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Book, 2004); Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (London: Harvard University Press, 2004); Neil Smith, *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization* (London: University of California Press, 2003); Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution* (London: Yale University Press, 1987); Walter Lafeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (London: Cornell University Press, 1975); and Sidney Lens, *The Forging of the American Empire* (London: Pluto Press, 1971). For a similar survey of French imperialism, see Barnett Singer and John Langdon, *Cultured Force: Makers and Defenders of the French Colonial Empire* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008); Robert Aldrich and John Connell, *France's Overseas Frontier: Départements et Territoires D'Outre-Mer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); J.F.V. Keiger, *France and the World since 1870* (London: Arnold, 2001); Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); Anthony Clayton, *The Wars of French Decolonization* (London: Longman, 1994); and Herbert Ingram Priestley, *France Overseas: A Study of Modern Imperialism* (Buckinghamshire: Octagon Books, 1938).

the control of older colonial dependencies in the Pacific. For the French, who possessed the islands of New Caledonia, Tahiti, and the New Hebrides (which had been overseen jointly with the British), the Second World War had had a similar impact, and the question of continued French control of these territories became a similarly fraught geopolitical issue.³ With expanding Japanese military might, both nations were concerned with the consequences of giving up these territories. However, by 1945, following the end of the War, the United States had granted independence to most of its territories, and by the mid-1960s retained only a small number of Pacific dependencies. By the same token, France offered its territories independence in 1958, which they had all achieved by the early 1960s (Fieldhouse, 347-348). For both nations, the Pacific was more than a site of strategic, military importance; it became a symbolic correlative for each country's (by then) anachronistic imperial designs, the playing field in which a 'weakened yet unremittingly colonial France' and a 'super-powerful United States, dismissive of French pretensions to imperial grandeur in the Pacific', engaged in a bitter feud (Thomas et al, 2010, 260).⁴

³ For more information on the Pacific War, see Harry A. Gailey, *The War in the Pacific: From Pearl Harbour to Tokyo Bay* (London: Random House, 2011); Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Youli Sun, *China and the Origins of the Pacific War, 1931-41* (London: Palgrave, 1996).

⁴ Aside from their mutual interests in the Pacific region, North America and France have shared a long and sometimes fraught political relationship dating back to the eighteenth-century revolutionary, the Marquis de Lafayette, who supported the American Revolutionary War against Britain, and who was a figurehead for early Franco-American relations. Dora Mae Clark has identified four broad periods of Franco-American relations that began in the eighteenth century and which came to define the complexities of this political alliance and its relationship to Britain: '...from 1775-1778 when French aid to America was secret; second, 1778-1782 or 1783, characterized by French recognition of the United States and consequent war with England; third, a decade of peace among the three countries from 1783-1793; and finally, 1793 to 1795, when France and England were at war, but America neutral'. See Clark, 'British Opinion of Franco-American Relations, 1775-1795', *The William and Mary Quarterly* 4(3), July 1947, p.306. André Siegfried has also noted that Franco-American relations have always been defined by 'something excessive': 'while the French still think politically in terms of "liberté, égalité, fraternité", the Americans practically live and act on the basis of a doctrine of discipline, authority, and race-hierarchy'. See Siegfried, 'Franco-American and Franco-British Relations', *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* 5(5), September 1926, pp. 225-226. For more information on Franco-American relations, see Thierry de Montbrial, 'Franco-American Relations: A Historical-Structural Analysis', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 17(3), October 2004, pp. 451-66; James Petras and Morris Morley, 'Contesting Hegemons: US-French Relations in the "New World Order"', *Review of International Studies* 26(1), January 2000, pp. 49-67; Yves-Henri Nouailhat, 'Franco-American Relations: French Perspectives', *Reviews in American History* 14(4), December 1986, pp. 653-68; Max I. Byam, 'William Dwight Whitney and Ernest Renan: The Role of Orientalism in Franco-American Relations', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*

It is, then, perhaps unsurprising that, by the mid-to-late twentieth century, when Britain's Empire is in its twilight, there is a dearth of specifically British Robinsonades written and produced for young readers. Since Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the Robinsonade had been considered a particularly British genre, and one which had schooled Britons in national and imperial values. However, very few British Robinsonades published during the decline of empire have managed to sustain either critical attention or popular appeal, precisely because the genre itself was undergoing significant changes which reflected Britain's fluctuating geo-political climate. Gone were the days of British high empire celebrated in the enduringly popular works of Captain Marryat, Ballantyne, Stevenson, and even Wells. Most British Robinsonades published around or after the Second World War could not rival the success of their nineteenth century counterparts, precisely because the political and cultural climate of Britain had shifted so drastically, and the Robinsonade form itself had fallen somewhat out of favour as a literary vehicle – a painful reminder, perhaps, of Britain's lost imperial legacy.⁵

What is, perhaps, equally unsurprising during this period of British post-imperialism, in which both the United States and France are clawing to maintain their own imperial grasp on the world, is that Scott O'Dell, a North American author, and Michel Tournier, a French novelist, should both find enduring critical acclaim, commercial success, and widespread approbation from educationalists for their respective Robinsonades for young readers: *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (1960) and *Vendredi ou la Vie Sauvage (Friday and Robinson: Life on*

99(2), April-June 1979, pp. 225-234; and Edouard Morot-Sir, 'Vases Communicants: Twentieth Century Franco-American Dialogue', *The French Review* 49(6), May 1976, pp. 1072-88.

⁵ There is, of course, the odd exception to be found in Enid Blyton's *The Secret Island* (1938) and Captain Johns' *Biggles in the South Seas* (1940), as well as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954). However, in the case of Blyton and Johns, at least, the enduring popularity of these works probably has more to do with their being part of a series of similar such books (The Secret Series and the *Biggles* books, respectively); while Golding's novel has come to be valued largely because it sets itself apart as a dystopian Robinsonade, an allegorical counterpoint to Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1858). Other British writers of mid-to-late twentieth century Robinsonades include Barbara Euphan Todd, who is best remembered as the author of the *Worzel Gummidge* series, and whose novel *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* (1946) recounts the story of a woman who returns to Britain after being stranded on a desert island; and Monica Hughes, whose young adult novel, *The Keeper of the Isis Light* (1980), is a science fiction Robinsonade set on another planet in the distant future.

Speranza Island, 1972). If, as I have argued elsewhere in this collection, the origins of the Robinsonade genre are to be found in British imperialism and in the initial expansion of British colonial policy, then both O'Dell's and Tournier's choice to adopt the Robinsonade form at a crucial historical juncture (when the United States and France seek to step out from the shadow of Britain's imperial legacy) is a pointedly political one – or, at the very least, reflective of both authors' regard of the Robinsonade as an effective political vehicle. Both novels deal with the heritage of colonialism in the Pacific and both re-mythologize certain real-life events that have occurred in colonial history: *Island of the Blue Dolphins* reimagines the story of the Native American woman Juana Maria, the 'Lone Woman of San Nicolas',⁶ who survived in isolation for eighteen years on one of the Channel Islands off the coast of California, after her tribe was massacred by Alaskan hunters working for the Russian-American Company; whereas *Friday and Robinson* is an adaptation of Tournier's own novel for adults, *Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique* (*Friday; or, The Other Island*, 1967), itself a re-imagining of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which was, famously, based on the marooning of Scottish sailor Alexander Selkirk on Más a Tierra island off the coast of Chile in 1704.

That both novels offer a revisionist telling of colonial mythical figures (both of whom are based in recorded fact) during a period of high tension in the United States' and France's race for imperial dominance, suggests that the authors of each are attempting, in some way, to dismantle the imperial nostalgia of their respective nations. With O'Dell and Tournier, the Robinsonade entered a new political phase. That both novels attained near-mythic cultural

⁶ See Diann L. Baecker, 'Surviving Rescue: A Feminist Reading of Scott O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphin*, *Children's Literature in Education* 38(3), 2007, p. 196: 'There are two surviving accounts of [Juana Maria's] story. It first appeared in *Scribner's Monthly* in 1880. The article, written by Emma C. Hardacre, is entitled "Eighteen Years Alone and focuses exclusively on the story of the lost woman of San Nicolas. By 1898, the woman's story had become part of the established lore surrounding San Nicolas and was included as part of John E Bennett's article, "Our Seaboard Islands in the Pacific", published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (1898) [...] the woman's story began when the inhabitants of San Nicolas experienced a devastating attack from members of another tribe (whom O'Dell specifies as Aleuts). These men had come down from the north to hunt otter under the direction of Captain Whitmore, a white man working for a Boston company. After a dispute between the tribes, the Aleuts massacred all of the men of San Nicolas. They took the women as wives and had children by them. By 1830, the population of the original tribe of San Nicolas had shrunk to less than forty inhabitants'.

status within their respective countries following their publication is somewhat ironic, given that both texts are largely anti-imperialist, but it also vindicates the position that much (though certainly not all) of O'Dell's and Tournier's popularity and literary success in the mid-twentieth century can be attributed to shifting global geopolitics and the imperial posturing of the U.S. and France. The popularity of these two novels has hardly waned since. In the case of O'Dell, *Island* is 'as widely read and respected today as it was a generation ago' (Moir, 1981, 14), and it was ranked as the sixth-best-selling children's paperback ever published (Schwebel, 2011, 45).⁷ For Tournier, *Friday and Robinson* is second only to de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* (*The Little Prince*, 1943) in the list of France's best-selling books for children (Beckett, 2006, 158). So popular was the story in the late twentieth century, in particular, that it was predicted that, by the turn of the millennium, *Friday and Robinson* would have been read by every single person in France (*Histoire*, 1993, 88).

Much of the cultural reverence for these texts can be attributed to the important role each has played (and continue to play) in childhood education. Since their publication, both texts have been essential components of elementary or early-years educational curricula in the U.S. and France, respectively. *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, for instance, has proved so fundamental to elementary lessons concerning Native Americans that, when James B. Clark's 1964 film adaptation of O'Dell's novel was released, the Committee of the National Council of Teachers of English in North America wrote a teaching guide to accompany the film, so as to further promote discussion within classrooms of the issues raised by the film (Greaney, 1967, 467). Tournier's novel, too, was very highly regarded by educationalists, probably

⁷ Indeed, so entrenched is the story within U.S. cultural memory that in 2012 the *Los Angeles Times* reported on a significant archaeological dig in the Channel Islands (where the Lone Woman of San Nicolas had survived) with the headline 'Cave of popular heroine found at last? Island of the Blue Dolphins' woman's cave believed found'. Such coverage does much to conflate within the U.S. cultural imagination O'Dell's fiction and the real history of the Lone Woman, reifying O'Dell's reimagined account of Juana Maria's survival as verifiable fact. See Steve Chawkins, 'Island of the Blue Dolphins' Woman's Cave Believed Found', *Los Angeles Times*, 29 October 2012.

because Tournier himself was openly philosophical about the processes of negotiation between the child reader and his writings. In adapting *Friday; or, the Other Island* for young readers, Tournier collaborated with several children whose responses and comments to those changes he proposed to the narrative structure helped to bring out the more explicitly moral tone of the completed *Friday and Robinson* (Tournier, 1971, 56). As a result of Tournier's discursive process and his philosophical outlook on childhood education, *Friday and Robinson* became synonymous with early learning in France.⁸

That *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and *Friday and Robinson* were so widely embraced within the educational circles of two quite disparate national cultures, and during the same historical moment, suggests that the Robinsonade form, far from its origins as a genre of outmoded didacticism, was quite vital to the national consciousness of both the United States and France at this juncture, and, certainly, to the edification of their younger generations. If, as Millicent Lenz asserts, the Robinsonade 'poses fundamentally utopian questions in the sense that it portrays the sweeping away of pre-existing society and the attempt to build a new human life from the ground up' (1986, 24), then O'Dell's and Tournier's adoption of the form may very well be an attempt on each author's part to come to terms with their respective nations' colonial histories, and with their own personal and cultural identities at a time of great political turmoil. Given the tenuous geopolitical climate in the immediate aftermath of nuclear devastation in the Pacific War (the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), it is no surprise that O'Dell and Tournier should elect to express their misgivings about imperial warfare using the Robinsonade, which Lenz asserts has 'a special attraction in this age when humanity feels the threat of nuclear extinction' (24). But, unlike their British

⁸ So much so that *Friday and Robinson* was chosen as the inaugural text by Paris's national public school for the blind to machine produce for its students using new technology. See Sandra L. Beckett, 'Michel Tournier Retells the Robinson Crusoe Myth: *Friday and Robinson: Life on Speranza Island*', in *Beyond Babar: The European Tradition in Children's Literature*, ed. S.L. Beckett and M. Nikolajeva (Oxford: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2006), p. 158.

counterparts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, who wrote Robinsonade narratives to shore up British colonial prowess and to inculcate imperial ideologies (as did Captain Marryat and R.M. Ballantyne, for instance), O'Dell and Tournier employ the Robinsonade form to undercut imperialism entirely, thus subverting the form itself at a time in which their respective nations are each vying for imperial dominance. *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and *Friday and Robinson*, then, offer young readers countercultural glimpses of a potentially post-imperial world: in the former, this is seen in Karana's wordless and tender friendship with one of the Aleut girls, whose tribes-people have murdered Karana's family; in the case of the latter, it is seen most clearly in Friday and Robinson's mutually beneficial friendship. Both O'Dell and Tournier are attempting to show the effects of imperialism, but they also proffer implicit suggestions to the reader as to how to navigate the damages of imperial ideology. This is not overt, of course. Rather, both authors rely on the reader's engagement with their texts, and, most importantly, both authors trust to the reader's capacity to interpret the moral messages of the stories. O'Dell and Tournier employ a number of strategies which Jackie L. Horne has identified as important for the child reader's engagement with a text (2011, 24; 38; 70): in both cases, the child reader is implicitly encouraged to identify with and model her/his behaviour or outlook after the protagonists, Karana and Friday; and in each text the child reader is guided in her/his rational response to events within the narratives. However, the issue of eliciting emotion from the child reader, which Horne identifies as an important part in securing the child's identification with the narrative (25), is one that is particularly significant in relation to *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, in which the heroine, Karana, is presented as virtually emotionless. This is a point to which I will return in more detail. More generally, though, in their efforts to 'de-colonise' their readers, O'Dell and Tournier adopt the seemingly anachronistic literary form of the Robinsonade and upend its conventions, putting into perspective for the reader (in a subtle and non-invasive way) the

imperial trappings of the genre. Both *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and *Friday and Robinson* were published during a period of great geopolitical upheaval, and both texts' resistance to both U.S. and French imperial metanarratives suggests that the didactic bent underpinning them is a political one. Both texts speak to their authors' countercultural leanings, and both offer young readers a philosophical point of entry to the problematic nature of colonialism. That these texts have been read so widely at school age suggests that there is, indeed, something valuable to be gained from their study.⁹

In what follows, I will examine the ways in which O'Dell and Tournier's texts deliberately problematize the colonial paradigm. Rather than bolstering the imperial policies of their respective nations (as the use of the Robinsonade form might, at first, suggest is the case), I argue that *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and *Friday and Robinson* construct visions of a potential, post-imperial world that runs counter to the national narratives of both the United States and France at the time of the books' publication. The popularity of these narratives among young readers, and the esteem in which they are held within childhood education, I contend, is not because these novels simply reinforce widespread ideology, but rather because they provide teachers, educationalists, and young readers with an alternate perspective against which dominant contemporary thought can be contrasted. Indeed, shifting perspectives and viewpoints, as well as debate and the exchange of ideas, are crucial components of both narratives, and through the continual shifting and re-alignment of perspective within each story, the reader is afforded what I argue to be a pure educational experience. While both O'Dell and Tournier approach these narratives with a specific desire to unravel the horrors and absurdities of colonialism, the child reader is not expressly guided in their interpretation of the narratives' events. Rather, both authors employ their subtle

⁹ I say this with all awareness of the prescriptive, and largely conservative, didacticism of much childhood educational practice, the goal of which has been to effectively socialize children rather than to promote reflective critical thought.

instructive strategies to great effect: both utilize what Jacqueline Rose terms a ‘realist’ aesthetic in which ‘showing is better than telling’, and in which ‘characters and events speak for themselves’ (1994, 60). The child reader is presented with narrative events which go unremarked upon by the narrative voice, and which force the reader to measure their own emotional and rational responses to the text. In both texts, it is ultimately left to the reader to decipher the moral underpinnings of the narratives, and to conceive of their own response to the ethical issues raised therein. Neither O’Dell nor Tournier force their didactic hands; for O’Dell, in particular, this aesthetic approach is reflective of his views of the child reader’s ‘ability, which in adults is eroded or entirely lost, to identify himself with the characters of the story’ (qtd. in Townsend 1971, 160). I will argue that, through the highlighting of reasoned debate, forced shifts in perspective, and a playful exposure of received social laws, both *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and *Friday and Robinson* are examples of educational literature *par excellence*, precisely because they engender within the reader the ability to critically analyse, interpret, and independently draw conclusions from the texts’ events.

The first thing a reader notices about Scott O’Dell’s *Island of the Blue Dolphins* is its introduction *in medias res* to the Ghalas-at tribe: the narrative opens with a homodiegetic flashback (‘I remember’), which, like the sudden return of memory, immediately transposes the reader’s viewpoint, aligning it with that of the speaker, the story’s heroine, Karana, who is an indigenous native of the titular island. The homodiegetic narrative not only allows the reader ‘to share Karana’s experience of coming to understand her own maturation process’ (Staneck, 1974, 24) – a technique which is not out of place in a work of literature for young readers – but it also functions to orientate the reader’s focus towards the Ghalas-at. The reader’s perspective is instantly that of Karana’s, and Karana’s recalled memory becomes essential to the reader’s point of ingress to the story. That O’Dell should commence his narrative in this fashion is not a coincidence, I would argue, as his text is, in many ways, all

about the focalizing and re-focalizing of individual perspective; the continual shift of both the characters' and the readers' viewpoints from one stance to another enables the narrative to accommodate a number of different subject positions, which, O'Dell implies, is an important aspect of his post-imperial story. Take the opening passage, for instance, which offers a transmuting image of a large sailing boat heading for the shore of the island:

I remember the day the Aleut ship came to our island. At first it seemed like a small shell afloat on the sea. Then it grew larger and was a gull with folded wings. At last in the rising sun it became what it really was – a ship with two red sails (O'Dell, 1967, 7).

Aside from the implication that there is something specifically memorable about the arrival of this ship (the portentous red sails suggest that it does not bode well for Karana), O'Dell's use of transmuting similes and metaphors to describe its approach is an early indication of the text's emphasis on shifting focalization. With each sentence, the ship is figuratively transformed from one thing to another; and with each successive analogy, the reader's perspective of the approaching ship is gently realigned. Karana's use of oceanic imagery further underlines the focalizing perspective of her indigenous island culture, implicitly reminding the reader of the connection between the Ghalas-at and the natural environment. In short, this opening passage succeeds in simply and effectively aligning the reader's viewpoint with that of Karana: that is, with the 'female perspective on frontier history' (Maher, 1992, 217). Nevertheless, O'Dell is, I think, offering the reader an indication of the multiform ways in which a single occurrence or event (in this case, the arrival of the ship) can be viewed and re-viewed from a number of perspectives; at different stages of its approach, the ship is variously described as one thing or another: it is transformed by way of Karana's viewpoint.

The importance O'Dell places on shifting focalization within the narrative is further drawn out in the exchange that takes place shortly after the opening scene between Karana and her younger brother, Ramo, who are debating how best to describe in words the ocean before them.

"The sea is smooth," Ramo said. "It is a flat stone without any scratches."

My brother liked to pretend that one thing was another.

"The sea is not a stone without scratches," I said. "It is water and no waves."

"To me it is a blue stone," he said. "And far away on the edge of it is a small cloud which sits on the stone."

"Clouds do not sit on stones. On blue ones or black ones or any kind of stones."

"This one does."

"Not on the sea," I said. "Dolphins sit there, and gulls, and cormorants, and otter, and whales too, but not clouds."

"It is a whale, maybe" (8).

Much like the approaching ship, the reader's perspective of the ocean, here, shifts in focus depending on the corresponding perspectives of Karana and Ramo; the ocean, too, becomes a transmuted image shaped through successive metaphors. What O'Dell demonstrates in this scene is the siblings' ability not only to communicate their own vision of the world to one another, but, more importantly in the context of the story that is to follow, the ability to accommodate one another's contrasting viewpoints. Together, Karana and Ramo engage in an epistemological discussion, probing one another's perspective in a manner suggestive of a mature and reasoned Socratic debate of sorts, in which Karana, as the older sibling, can be seen to push back against the younger Ramo's assumptions by interrogating his process of

thought and countering his suggestions. As with the opening paragraph of the novel, the reader's perspective is successively realigned throughout Karana and Ramo's exchange with each adjusted metaphor. Indeed, one of the reasons why *Island of the Blue Dolphins* has proved so effective as a didactic text is precisely because 'O'Dell's short, loaded sentences [...] force the reader to participate' (Milton, 1976, L2). From the outset, O'Dell invites the reader's interpretation; the reader's perception of images or events in the text is presaged, and the continual transmutation of these images suggests that the reader is being instructed from early on in the narrative never to assume or rely on the validity of any one perspectival position. This view is given some credence by Diann L. Baecker, who notes that '*Island* is both a typical female Bildungsroman and a feminist manifesto. That it can be both lies with the reader' (2007, 200). The issue of O'Dell's feminism is one that has been discussed elsewhere,¹⁰ but Baecker's broader point, here, is that, although the reader's perception has, from the novel's opening, been narratologically aligned with Karana's, it does not preclude the reader from engaging in the self-same epistemological discussions that Karana entertains with Ramo. Rather, through Karana's eyes, the reader's perception (of images, of events that occur) is also forcibly transmuted; to see through Karana's eyes is to view the world of the novel precisely as she sees it: as multivalent and ever-changing. That the reader's perspective is aligned with Karana at all (and not, hypothetically, with the invading Aleut tribe, whose arrival Karana recounts in the opening paragraph) is an integral part of O'Dell's counter-imperialist ideology, as well as the novel's subtle ethical didactics. Although the narrative is a

¹⁰ Ellen E. Seiter believes that, in *Karana*, young (female) readers find a very suitable role model, and that '*Island of the Blue Dolphins* has an explicitly feminist message about restrictions on female activity'. See Seiter, 'Survival Tale and Feminist Parable', in *Children's Novels and the Movies*, ed. D. Street (New York: F. Ungur Publication Co., 1983), p. 187. However, not everyone agrees. While J.R. Townsend has argued that O'Dell 'shows a gift for assuming a female identity' (See Townsend, *A Sense of Story* (London: Longman, 1971), p. 159), Diann L. Baecker has noted that the novel 'cannot be read as an unqualified manifesto for women's rights', and that 'O'Dell does much to mitigate such an interpretation'. See Baecker, p. 203. Equally, C. Anita Tarr has denounced O'Dell's characterization of Karana as stereotypical. See Tarr, 'An Unintentional System of Gaps: A Phenomenological Reading of Scott O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphin*', in *Children's Literature in Education* 28(2), 1992, p. 61.

homodiegetic one, in which the reader views what happens through Karana's first-person narration, the reader is not told how to interpret the series of events that occur, and nor is she/he encouraged to view Karana's perspective as the morally 'right' one. This is not to suggest, at all, that Karana's narration is unreliable, nor that O'Dell actually intends for his readers to overlook Karana's moral righteousness, only to say that Karana's dispassion, and her refusal to qualify at all her own thoughts, means that it is left to the reader to authorize or classify the events which she describes. In terms of the novel's efficacy as an educational tool, the reader's response to the narrative constitutes its meaning; or, to put it another way: because at no point does O'Dell openly advocate one moral or ethical position over another, it lies with the reader to critically interpret the story's events and to inscribe meaning to these events.

That *Island of the Blue Dolphins* became so essential to early childhood education in the U.S. suggests that the novel's capacity to inspire within its readers critical thought, as well as an ability to accommodate diverse and conflicting perspectives, is, at least partially, reflective of the shift in broader cultural attitudes towards imperial politics at the time. Sara Schwebel has noted that O'Dell's novel has been part of North American 'literary, historical, and scientific efforts to understand "the Indian", make sense of European colonialism, and justify American nation building' (2013, 474). While the latter point certainly constitutes the most problematic aspect of O'Dell's text (like Juana Maria in real life, Karana is ultimately rescued from the island by the *deus ex machina* of a passing American ship), Schwebel does concede that '[b]oth the child who is enraptured by O'Dell's tale and the child for whom it painfully rehearses the devastation and disempowerment European contact brought to indigenous nations deserve the opportunity to explore their reactions and enrich their understanding through critical analysis' (473). O'Dell's narrative certainly affords the child reader the opportunity to determine her/his own critical reaction to the politics of imperialism

through the series of exchanges that take place between Chief Chowig, the chief of the Ghalas-at and Karana's father, and Captain Orlov, the leader of the Aleut tribe from Russia who have come to the island to hunt otter. The terms of their trade agreement are these: for permission to dwell on the island and to hunt the native otter, the Aleuts will give a share of their catch to the Ghalas-at. While Orlov initially offers one third of the catch to the Ghalas-at, Chief Chowig contends that the share must be equal. Orlov counters this, asserting that '[o]ne part to you is fair since the work is ours and ours the risk' (11). When Chief Chowig retorts that '[t]he sea which surrounds the Island of the Blue Dolphins belongs to us' (12), Orlov finally seems to agree to the terms. Here, O'Dell fashions for the reader a reasonable debate, a compromise between two parties with partially competing interests. Both Chowig and Orlov negotiate and broker a seemingly fair trade, demonstrating in simple terms the capitalist politics of exchange. The epistemological discussion that the reader witnessed between Karana and Ramo at the beginning of the novel, in which one countered the other's perspective in Socratic terms, is played out on a larger cultural scale between the Ghalas-at and the Aleuts. For the child reader, this reasoned negotiation is important for understanding the simple politics of exchange which the narrative posits: like Karana and Ramo's discussion, the reader is invited to weigh up and consider each proffer made by the opposing chiefs, and to determine whether each is reasonable. Such an invitation is very much in-keeping with Jackie L. Horne's belief that the inclusion within children's literature of rational arguments, or appeals to the child's rationality, is a specific strategy designed to elicit the child's receptivity to a text's ideological messages (70). In the case of *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, it is the narrative's sequence of events, rather than the authorising voice of the adult narrator, which prompts the reader's judgement; it is the reader's own rational and emotional response to the injustices which befall the Ghalas-at that O'Dell attempts to elicit, and it is in the child's response to these events which sanction the text's moral ideology. The child reader

understands that Chief Chowig's reluctance to Orlov's proffer is due to his memory of previous Aleut hunts, in which the Ghalas-at were forced by another Aleut, Captain Mitriff, to 'hunt from one moon to the next, never ceasing' (11) – in effect, to hunt otter for the Aleuts, like slaves, without the promise of any of the spoils. What follows the agreement between Chowig and Orlov is a period of tense enmity between the Ghalas-at and the Aleuts, during which the Aleuts request for the Ghalas-at to share some of their fish with them, but the Ghalas-at refuse – precisely because Chief Chowig is distrustful of the Aleuts' intentions, imagining that Orlov will renege on their deal and make off with the otter pelts without honouring the terms of their agreement. That Captain Orlov denounces the exploitative policies of his predecessor makes his ultimate betrayal all the more insidious, and in the ensuing fray between both parties, Chief Chowig is killed and the Aleuts do indeed take all of the otter pelts. All of this is presented for the reader through Karana's dispassionate account, a dispassion she maintains despite having lost her father in the battle. Nevertheless, O'Dell presents just enough evidence for his readers to make an accurate *mora* judgement of the Aleuts' actions.

The efficacy of O'Dell's novel as an educational text can be found in his refusal to explicitly validate either the Ghalas-at people or the Aleuts. Though the story presents what might best be described as an incident of cultural genocide, during which exploitative imperialist practices are shown to beget the violent desecration of all but a small few of an indigenous population, O'Dell does not allow any potential emotions Karana might be imagined to feel (for she does not show any) to infuse the narrative; nor can it be said that the reader's response to this incident is determined by the deliberate evocation of any particular emotions. Instead, O'Dell's narrative maintains a structural distance between the implied reader and the events it describes. In so doing, *Island of the Blue Dolphins* seeks not to guide the reader's emotional response; rather, Karana's emotionless account of what happens

imbues the narrative with a certain objectivity which dispels the reader's own emotional response, and which simultaneously returns the reader's interpretation of these events to a rational sequence of cause and effect sprung from the politics of exchange between Chief Chowig and Captain Orlov. It is the child reader's comprehension of the politics of this exchange, and her/his ability to interpret the injustices of the Aleuts' actions, which transforms O'Dell's text from a simple narrative into an effective educational tool. O'Dell does not guide the reader's response, but, rather, he relies on the reader's rational interpretation of the narrative's sequence of events to shore up the problematic nature of the colonial paradigm, something which a lot of young readers are bound to recognize: that is, the unjust and unfair treatment of one party by another. As Susan Naramore Maher notes, O'Dell's decision to situate his narrative at an historical point of contention (the slaughter of a native Amerindian tribe by imperial outsiders) is part of the novel's ideological tenet, which strives to uncover for the reader the 'morally repugnant consequences of cultural dominion' and to give a 'voice to the oppressed, to those who lost their land and culture' (1992, 216). Given Karana's eventual isolation on the island, it might be tempting to view her subsequent narrative as a survivalist parable or mythic revisioning of the Native American as a sort of Crusoe figure. Indeed, Diane L. Gunstra has noted many similarities between Karana and Defoe's eponymous hero: 'Both suffer from loneliness and fear. Both must hide from human enemies although they long for human company. Both tame wild animals in an effort to fill a longing for companionship. Both learn to judge with a deeper level of understanding, Karana when she saves a wild dog who eventually becomes her faithful companion, and Crusoe when he saves Friday' (1985, 56). That O'Dell should deliberately model his heroine (in part) on the imperial Crusoe is not, as Gunstra seems to suggest, merely to situate *Island of the Blue Dolphins* within the literary tradition of the Robinsonade. Rather, the initial similarities which O'Dell tacitly fashions between Karana and Crusoe are actually designed to shore up their

differences, for his narrative is patently not a work of imperialist fiction in which the Robinsonade form is utilized to justify a myth of empire building. Karana does not imperialise the island; the island is already home to her and her people. To view the text as a Robinsonade proper is to wilfully misconstrue its ideological precepts. I am not suggesting that O'Dell is engaged in ideological trickery of the reader; rather, I am suggesting that his use of the Robinsonade form disarms the expectant reader (who is, perhaps, anticipating a traditional Robinsonade in the mould of an imperialist narrative) and allows for the more effective communication of anti-imperialist ideologies within a literary genre whose origins are firmly entrenched in imperialist discourse. While *Island of the Blue Dolphins* deliberately draws comparisons between Karana and Robinson Crusoe, it also makes it clear that, 'whereas Crusoe is a perpetrator and beneficiary [of imperialism], Karana is a victim' (Schwebel, 2011, 48). By narratologically aligning the reader with Karana's perspective, by encouraging the reader to identify with Karana's struggle and to emulate her resilience, O'Dell is ensuring that the reader, too, is encouraged to view imperialist practice from the point of view of those who are disempowered by it. O'Dell's novel, then, can be described as an anti-Robinsonade, a counter-western narrative which seeks to undermine for the reader the 'violence, subjugation, masculinity, and expansion-induced mobility' of colonization (Schwebel, 2011, 48). That it does so in the guise of a traditional Robinsonade only further underlines O'Dell's political intention: to discredit imperial practices and the U.S. myth of cultural superiority.

However, it has been argued that the subtlety of O'Dell's counter-imperial politics means that it is unlikely for students and child readers to view Karana as a victim of historical colonialism without assistance (Schwebel, 2011, 148). Schwebel argues that it is impossible for students to 'become sophisticated readers of historical novels without considering the way they function as interpretative history' (149). As such, the ubiquity of O'Dell's text within U.S. schools poses an interesting conundrum: in order to comprehend and critically respond to

O'Dell's text, child readers need a certain amount of guidance in their interpretation of the narrative's events. Given the text's anti-imperialist underpinnings, that it falls to public institutions in the U.S. to interpret the wrongs of imperialism for its students can be seen as somewhat ironic, as it requires those teachers who are charged with interpreting the novel's message to be aware of their own potential political, historical, and cultural biases concerning the Amerindian population, as well as an overarching awareness of the historical foundations of the U.S. itself. In effect, that *Island of the Blue Dolphins* has become so widespread a text in the U.S. education system is an ironic vindication of its anti-imperialist ideologies.

Much like O'Dell, Michel Tournier uses the Robinsonade form as a political vehicle to counter French national imperialism and as a way of exposing the ills of colonialism for his readers. At first, *Friday and Robinson* seems to follow the same narrative pattern as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*: the imperialist Robinson is shipwrecked on a desert island; he saves Friday from being sacrificed by his native tribesmen; and he takes Friday into his care and enslaves him. However, it is here that Tournier's narrative departs from Defoe's original, and through playful but pointed inversion of the master-slave (and teacher-pupil) dialectic, succeeds in shoring up the absurdities of colonial rule. Whereas O'Dell's novel draws deliberate (albeit implicit) comparisons between Karana and Robinson Crusoe in order to highlight their ultimate differences as victim and purveyor of colonialism, respectively, Tournier's wholesale adoption of Defoe's hypotext represents an attempt to dismantle the very myth of colonialism, itself. Indeed, much like O'Dell's appropriation of the Robinsonade form to undermine the politics of imperialism, Tournier has noted that the use of mythological texts such as the Robinson Crusoe story, which resonate throughout literary and cultural history, are effective vehicles for both reinforcing and undermining dominant ideologies, precisely because the reader's fondness for and familiarity with such texts assure their complicity in the process of myth-making. Thus, when Tournier states that '[b]y manipulating Robinson Crusoe I am

manipulating the reader' (qtd. in Blume, 1983, 7), he is being overt about his intentions to employ the Crusoe myth for something other than its foundational imperialism, as well as drawing explicit attention to the history of the Robinsonade genre as one that has been traditionally employed for conservative didactic purposes. Moreover, that the traditionally subservient Friday is given such prominence in the novel's title suggests, in Sandra L. Beckett's words, that Tournier's novel is the first attempt to craft a 'Fridayade' (as opposed to a Robinsonade) in which the disenfranchised, marginalized Friday is afforded greater prominence, thus further signalling Tournier's intention to reverse the imperial myth (2006, 170-71).

Like O'Dell, much of Tournier's anti-imperialist politics focus on the injustices of labour relations within the text. In *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, the reader comprehends the problematic nature of colonialism through the dishonourable treatment of the Ghalas-at by the Aleut hunters, who have, in the past, forced the Ghalas-at to hunt and collect the otter skins for them, without offering a fair trade of goods for their services. In *Friday and Robinson*, Tournier attacks the productive, endeavouring spirit of the conventional imperialist (traditionally embodied in the figure of Defoe's Robinson Crusoe) by showing Robinson to be an uninspiring and downright lazy individual. While Robinson acknowledges that 'his most dangerous enemies were laziness and discouragement and that his only hope was to keep as busy as possible' (Tournier, 1972, 24), he nevertheless becomes increasingly susceptible to the allure of a large mudhole on the island, into which he intermittently sinks when he feels overcome and despondent. Robinson notes that '[i]t would be so easy to lie down in [the mudhole] and let himself turn into an animal. It's hard to live like a human being without anyone to help you' (29). Here, Tournier underlines for the reader both Robinson's lack of endeavouring spirit and his fear of destitution: like Defoe's Crusoe, Robinson imagines the productive value of labour to be his saviour, but ultimately feels 'crushed under the weight of

his work and official duties' as *de facto* Governor of the island, such as tilling and growing crops and building shelter (42). It is only when Robinson rescues Friday from sacrifice at the hands of an indigenous tribe that he begins to fully appreciate the positive virtues of labour: as a management tool. Robinson notes that he was 'happy because at last he had someone to work for him; someone to whom he could teach civilization' (56). Here, Tournier further underlines for the reader an uncomfortable truth about the colonial paradigm, and one which the reader can hardly be said to miss: that Robinson's happiness and spiritual wellbeing on the island (that which diverts his attentions away from the mire and towards his civilizing instincts) is directly contingent upon the subjugation of Friday as a source of labour. It is clear to the imperial Robinson, Tournier implies, that productive individualism is important to the destitute castaway only in so far as that labour can be carried out by another, over whom Robinson has dominion. Before Friday's arrival, Robinson ponders about the value of labouring so intensely: 'Why was he working his fingers to the bone? If he hadn't been alone, if he had had a wife and children, or even a single human companion, he would have known what he was working for. But all alone like this, it seems so useless' (47-48). It is only after Friday's arrival that such labour becomes meaningful in Robinson's eyes. To the solitary Robinson, his own labour accomplishes very little; but Friday's labour becomes a meaningful and essential pursuit to Robinson precisely because it functions to prop up the fundamentally unstable imperial relationship which Robinson has instigated between he and Friday.

But, whereas the Ghalas-at's resistance to the injustices of the Aleut hunters in *Island of the Blue Dolphins* resulted in their massacre (which is the surest act of colonial suppression), Friday does not at first resist Robinson's imperial hierarchy. Instead, the reader is told that 'Friday was obedient out of gratitude. He wanted to please Robinson who had saved his life. But he didn't understand all this organization, all these rules and ceremonies' (59). Here, Friday is referring to the series of edicts Robinson has put in place to enforce order

on the island. These include such laws as ‘[t]he inhabitants of the island are required to think out loud’ and ‘[o]nly the Governor [Crusoe himself] is authorized to smoke a pipe. But only once a week, on Sunday, after lunch’ (30). While these laws are evidently introduced by Robinson to maintain a semblance of structural order, and to prevent the devolution of his customs and habits for the duration of his time spent alone, to Friday they make very little sense. Friday is told that ‘this was what people did in the civilized countries of Europe, but [he] didn’t see why they had to do the same thing on a desert island in the Pacific’ (59). For Tournier, the anti-imperialist underpinnings of his novel are to be found in the cognitive dissonance experienced by the reader in reconciling the presumed reason and logic of Robinson’s laws and the absurdity and illogicality with which they are viewed through Friday’s eyes.¹¹ Tournier’s political agenda is very much characterized by Friday’s exposure to Robinson (and the reader) of the absurdities of colonial law, which are, in the course of the narrative, made analogous to the absurd social rules which Robinson enforces. Even though the narrative is focalized through Robinson’s perspective, the reader is nevertheless encouraged to align with Friday. Friday is kind to animals; his taming of Tenn the dog and his tenderness towards the island’s other fauna signal to young readers that he is to be trusted. Moreover, the dyadic relationship between Robinson and Friday is somewhat parental in nature: ‘Robinson, with his beard and goatskins, symbolizes the adult, whereas the playful Friday, with his nudity and giggles, represents the child’ (Beckett, 2006, 182). That Tournier presents Friday to his young readers as child-like, and therefore immediately more relatable,

¹¹ O’Dell’s *Island of the Blue Dolphins* also presents the reader with a similar conflation of presumed adult logic and the illogicality of the same laws when viewed through the child’s eyes. Karana is reminded a number of times throughout the novel that the Ghalas-at women are prohibited from making weapons of any kind at any time. Before his death, Karana’s father warned her that ‘a bow in the hands of a woman would always break’ (71). Karana’s narrative does not offer the reader a logical or considered understanding of why this particular superstition has been adopted by the Ghalas-at; rather, the reader is supposed to understand that such a taboo has been in place in the tribe for a long time. However, when Karana is besieged by a pack of wild dogs, it becomes apparent (both to Karana and to the reader) that she must have a way of fending for herself. Though Karana does not wish to dishonour her father or her ancestors by defying this particular edict, Karana fashions a bow for herself – which, of course, does not break in her hands. Here, Karana’s defiance of patriarchal logic or custom is part of O’Dell’s subtle feminism, and further draws attention to the ways in which the reader is encouraged to view traditional power structures with suspicion.

ensures that his readers are already primed to invest in Friday's point of view.¹² To Friday, Robinson's laws do not make any sense; to the reader, in whose mind Friday's play is hampered by the authoritarian Robinson, Robinson's laws are merely an obstacle to narrative enjoyment, and the reader delights in Friday's deliberate flouting of these rules.

In contravention to one of Robinson's laws, Friday takes great pleasure in smoking the tobacco pipe, which Robinson has expressly forbidden. When Friday accidentally explodes Robinson's cave (by unwittingly throwing the pipe into a stockpile of gunpowder), and destroying the symbol of Robinson's ordered, adult rigidity, far from being angry, Robinson welcomes his new-found freedom from the civilizing process: 'All the work he had done on the island, his tilled fields, his crops, his provisions, all the houses he had built, were lost. Though Friday was the cause of it all, Robinson wasn't angry. To tell the truth, he had long been bored with all the civilization he had built up, but hadn't had the courage to destroy it. Now they were free' (72). The literal destruction of Robinson's cave represents the symbolic inversion of the colonial paradigm, in which both Robinson and Friday abandon their prescribed roles in an act of Bakhtinian inversion and together delight in the freedom from convention their new-found disorder affords them. As Millicent Lenz notes, Robinson 'learns from Friday to walk on his hands, to play, and to appreciate Friday's playfulness', as Robinson's "'technocrat" becomes a "child of nature"' (27). Indeed, the reader is told that, following the explosion, and following his release from the constraints of social ordering, Robinson 'cut his beard [...] and let his hair grow', the effect of which 'was to make him look much younger'. Thus, Robinson becomes more childlike himself; like friends at play, he and Friday 'played games and had contests; they swam, they raced along the beach, they performed high-jumps, they threw *bola*' (75). Moreover, Friday's encouragement of Robinson's playfulness can be said to carry a weighty political significance. Both when he

¹² This narratological alignment is similar to that employed by O'Dell in *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, in which the reader's sympathies are also subtly directed against the imperial agenda.

dresses up the cactuses in Robinson's clothing, and when he encourages Robinson to play-act scenes from their brief history together in which they swap roles (in order for Friday to 'come to terms with his past life as a slave' (84)), Friday is abrogating (or rejecting) hierarchical colonial rule by appropriating the vestiges of Robinson's imperial dominance: his clothing. Friday's simple game of dress-up marks not only a literal inversion of their roles, but, more importantly, a symbolic one, as Robinson is, for the duration of the game, placed in the position of the subjugated Friday and is forced to recognize the damaging effects of his actions: that is, as part of the systematic oppression of colonialism. Indeed, Robinson notes to himself throughout the game-play that he was 'happy to play [along] because he felt he had been a hard master to Friday and because his conscience still troubled him' (85). Not only does Tournier note the inverted power dynamic between Friday and Robinson, but this inversion is couched specifically in didactic terms, in which the previously disenfranchised Friday 'initiates and teaches, while Robinson observes and imitates his new mentor' making bows and arrows, catching food, and making caramel (Beckett, 1996, 121). The reversal of roles within the text is framed for the child reader as instructive, or as something of which the reader should make specific note. Furthermore, that Tournier was himself a failed teacher who was anxious that his work be read in schools (Beckett, 2006, 178) only reinforces the text's underlining didacticism.

While Friday's inversion of the master-slave dialectic is framed as playful, it is also the means by which Tournier entertains for the child reader larger questions concerning 'human nature, the pursuit of happiness, human perspectives on time and mortality, and cultural relativism' (Lenz, 25). In effect, Tournier's narrative outlines the failure of one social model, Robinson's hierarchical one, and its replacement by another, Friday's egalitarian one, demonstrating for the reader the positive changes that take place in Robinson's life through his embracing of Friday's way of living. Like *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, Tournier's *Friday*

and Robinson subtly advocates a particular template for living (in this case, the replacement of authoritarianism with play and subversion), and the reader bears witness to Robinson's gradual but eventual realization that the imperial politics he once held dear and steadfast are based on the unsound and immoral principles of human subjugation. That Robinson elects to stay on the island when the crew of the *Whitebird* schooner come to rescue him is further vindication of his maturation, and of his realization of the corrupt and normalizing processes of the imperial civilization from whence he comes. He notes that 'The *Whitebird* was a messenger from a civilization to which he had no desire to return. He felt young and strong, but he knew that if he returned to the civilized world he would soon turn into a stodgy, middle-aged man [...] No, he would be faithful to the new life that Friday had taught him' (111-12). However, when Friday then abandons Robinson in order to travel back to Europe with the schooner, he is, shortly after, replaced by a cabin boy from the *Whitebird*, who has run away from his captain in the hopes of a better life, and whom Robinson takes under his tutelage. In his pupil, an actual child, Robinson has a successor to whom he will pass on the benefits of his own learning and the 'better world he will create' as a result of his forced shift in perspective (Conner, 1973, 308). Here, Robinson is once again put in the position of teacher, educating and guiding the cabin boy in the ways of his own new-found society. However, unlike his previous attempts at indoctrinating Friday, Robinson's perspective on his own cultural and social origins has altered. He is no longer simply an arm of imperialism or a counterpart Crusoe; rather, Robinson is the realization of Tournier's didactic intent, the reification of counter-imperial ideology. That the figurative child Friday is replaced by an actual child is no coincidence, either, for in the boy's decision to follow Robinson Tournier unambiguously signals to the reader his own endorsement of Robinson's matured principles.

Through the shifting of narratological perspective in both *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and *Friday and Robinson*, the reader is forced to consider the effects of imperial culture from

a number of objective positions and within the comparative framework of these fictions. That neither O'Dell nor Tournier explicitly advocate the moral righteousness of their respective texts means that it ultimately falls to the reader to interpret the moral codes at the centre of each. Both O'Dell and Tournier allow for the reader to make informed judgements about the nature of imperial relations. Indeed, the notion of rational choice, the reader's capacity for reason, is of paramount concern to both authors¹³. In the case of *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, for instance, the critical reader recognizes in O'Dell's 'exploration of the themes of equality between men and women as well as [his] deep ecological ethics' (Guan, 2008, 111) a deep moral intent. However, O'Dell does not push this interpretation. The child reader's response to O'Dell's didactics lies very much in the presentation of Karana as somewhat emotionless. Karana does not act impetuously, nor does she seemingly respond to events in the narrative (including the deaths of her father and brother) with anything less than hard stoicism. As Diane L. Gunstra notes, right from the beginning of the novel Karana 'exhibits a stoicism and acceptance of life' (56).¹⁴ Rather than responding emotionally, or with anger and hatred, to the injustices that have befallen the Ghalas-at, O'Dell makes it perfectly clear that each decision Karana takes in the novel is based on the 'principles of reasoned logic' (Schlager, 1978, 140) that are befitting her need for survival. Jackie L. Horne has argued that 'emotion is the central means by which authors persuade their readers of the "ordinariness" of their youthful protagonists, and foster sympathetic identification between them and their texts' readers' (25). O'Dell's decision to omit from the narrative any insight into Karana's emotional state, then, is a strategy that runs counter to Horne's assertion. Rather than fostering

¹³ For a description of the importance of rational thought in securing the identification of the child reader within works of children's literature, see Horne, p. 70.

¹⁴ Diann L. Baecker argues that 'the lack of extreme emotion is what young readers find attractive about Karana. Karana doesn't cry – she acts'. See Baecker, p. 201. C. Anita Tarr also argues that Karana's 'unemotional (non)reaction would normally signal psychological problems, but Karana is no sociopath, nor is she in denial. She is simply barren of emotion'. Tarr also argues that O'Dell's portrayal of Karana as lacking emotion is stereotypical of Native American representations. See Tarr, pp. 64-65.

the child's identification with Karana through an appeal to emotion, the narrative seeks to secure the implied reader's engagement by way of rationality alone. As I have mentioned, by presenting Karana as emotionless, O'Dell precludes the reader's emotional responses to the text and ensures that critical interpretation of the narrative is not hampered by an emotional reaction on behalf of Karana, but, rather, is rationally directed towards an interrogation of the Aleut hunters' actions for what they are: genocide. Susan Naramore Maher notes that the devastation that is 'forced upon her island could infect [Karana's] spirit, compelling her to create enemies' (218); however, O'Dell ensures that Karana responds to the tragedies that befall her with an admirable courage and resilience. When the Aleut hunters massacre her tribe, Karana adopts the role of a parent and nurtures her younger brother, Ramo; when Ramo is murdered by a pack of wild dog on the island, she befriends and tames one of the animals, who becomes her companion, Rontu; and when, later in the narrative, the Aleuts return and Karana encounters a young girl from their tribe alone by a seaside cave, she befriends the girl (called Tutok) in spite of her fear that the girl will make her presence known to the other Aleuts. At each opportunity in which Karana might be expected to react with impunity for the death of her family and the murder of her tribe, O'Dell ensures that the reader recognizes Karana's capacity for love and forgiveness, and suggests that 'a deeper level of meaning in the story' or something 'spiritual' is to be found for the reader in Karana's ability to forgive and in her 'courage to manage in the most extreme conditions' (Hannabuss, 2000, 15).¹⁵ In so doing, O'Dell avoids narrative sentimentality and, in Lou Willett Staneck's words, 'allows Karana to understand without blaming, to lament without becoming victimized sob sister, and to grow from her experience without becoming pompous' (24).

¹⁵ As Carolyn W. Field and Jaqueline Schachter Weiss note, '[d]espite taboos against women fishing, hunting, and making weapons, Karana does these things to survive, using a dead sea elephant's teeth as spear points. She eats seed and sea food; weaves her own baskets and net; [makes] clothes of yukka fibre, sealskin, and cormorant feathers; and fashions her own canoe'. See Field and Schachter Weiss, *Values in Selected Children's Books of Fiction and Fantasy* (Connecticut: Library Professional Publication, 1987), p. 162.

In Karana's friendship with Tutok, the reader recognizes mutual understanding. Tutok is in some ways a mirroring of Karana's livelihood: both girls are subject to patriarchal dominion; both are separated from their families and are reliant on one another for friendship. Like the friendship that develops between Friday and Robinson, Karana's relationship with Tutok bridges the imperial divide between their respective tribes. It is clear from the narrative that, while their relationship is fleeting, as Baecker notes, Karana neither expects to leave the island with the Aleut and nor does she imagine that Tutok will betray her presence to the hunters (202). Their friendship is a parabolic one, one which O'Dell deliberately utilizes to deconstruct imperialist notions of difference and as a 'repudiation of the call to violence' which has underlined so much of western imperial fiction and cultural relations (Maher, 220). Rather than viewing Tutok simply as an enemy, or as a representative of those responsible for killing her tribe, Karana looks on Tutok as an equal, and as someone who, in the reader's eye, might well be thought of as another victim of the damaging practices of colonialism. Karana's friendship with Tutok, then, effects a further shift in perspective in the reader; the bond which the girls forge away from their respective tribes represent, in O'Dell's own words, an 'act of identification with [one's] enemies' (1971, 314) that is necessary to overcome not only divisive imperial politics but one's own individual prejudices. Whereas Crusoe's identification with his Man Friday, and the relaxing of his own racial and cultural prejudices towards the indigenous islander, came about as a result of his need to survive in Daniel Defoe's novel, Karana's survival is not contingent upon Tutok. Rather, by recognizing in Tutok part of her own misery (as a subjugated woman) and by embracing in friendship her apparent enemy, Karana's moral edification throughout the novel, during which she foregoes physical violence against or forced dominion over others, is reflective of O'Dell's desired moral outcome in his reader.

Sandra L. Beckett notes that, in modern society, ‘loneliness and isolation have been created by barriers that are learned in the civilizing process’ (2006, 174). Both Karana in *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and Robinson in *Friday and Robinson* succeed in overcoming personal obstacles to their own isolation. For O’Dell, Karana’s friendship with Tutok advocates the positive values of intercultural exchange, and highlights the ways in which personal trauma might be shared with another; for Tournier, Friday’s relinquishment of his need for superiority and his acknowledgement that the ‘only thing he lacked [on the island] was someone to smile at’ (39) further underlines the importance of shared experience, and the need humans feel for positive, affirming contact with one another. Both novels offer the reader an interpretive vision of post-imperial relations which seeks to deconstruct divisive colonial politics, and both novels posit the child reader’s moral comprehension as integral to this interpretive vision. It is the reader’s critical engagement, the logical (and not emotional) interpretation of imperial action within these texts, which constitutes their writerly nature. Stuart Hannabuss is right in his assertion that there is ‘no element of didacticism and moralising (in a crude way)’ within *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (14), and the same can be said for Tournier’s *Friday and Robinson*: neither text condescends to the reader, and neither O’Dell nor Tournier adopt a moralizing tone in their narration. While O’Dell, in particular, can be seen to offer the reader certain instructive scenes which show Karana engaged in building shelter, hunting food, and in other such pursuits that are necessary for her survival, these ‘how-to’ scenes are framed both in terms of their appropriateness to Karana’s narrative as well as their instructional usefulness to the reader, whose interest in such survival techniques is reflected in the childhood desire to build tree-houses and camps, and to pretend that one is fending for oneself (Stott, 1975, 443-3). However, these instructive scenes work less on the level of actual demonstration and more to convey to the reader Karana’s burgeoning independence and her ability to survive alone. Norma Schlager notes that such

scenes are effective precisely because ‘children may gain corroboration of their own beliefs in their abilities’ through observing Karana’s maturation (139). In other words, O’Dell’s subtle didactic intent operates on multiple levels: on the one hand, his demonstration of Karana’s survival techniques performs a very basic instructional function (a ‘how to’); but, on another level, O’Dell’s narrative ‘gives his reader an opportunity to fantasize about being able to cope without adult supervision’ (Staneck, 24), thereby enabling the child to learn vicariously, through Karana, about the values of self-reliance and independent thought.

That such lessons (for want of a better word) should be couched in O’Dell’s anti-imperialist politics is what ultimately makes *Island of the Blue Dolphins* a mature work of moral fiction. The reader’s moral edification is mirrored in Karana’s development in moral understanding of the issues of imperialism, and in her tempered, rational, and loving embrace of Tutok as a friend rather than an enemy. The value of O’Dell’s novel as a subtle didactic tool within U.S. high schools lies in the fact that both the character of Karana, in her actions, in her thought, and in her speech, and the novel itself, in its overriding tenor, take a stance against imperial dominance (Tarr, 1992, 70). That the novel has been incorporated into U.S. school curricula, becoming an important text in critical debates about U.S. treatment of the Native American population, only underlines the absurd ironies inherent to that country’s self-image and the nation’s foundational practices of imperial and cultural oppression. Moreover, O’Dell’s choice of a female protagonist further emphasizes his moral intentions: to bring in from the margins those who have traditionally been disenfranchised in U.S. cultural history: that is, women and people of colour, in particular. Indeed, as Ellen E. Seiter asserts, because Karana has grown up outside of traditional North American social structures, ‘her ego, identity and world view develop in an unusually individual way’, and her isolation has allowed her to ‘create her own world, concentrate on herself, and discover the power of her own self-reliance’ (1983, 187). Karana’s individualism, her separateness both within her own

tribal culture and from U.S. imperial culture, allows her (and, by extension, O'Dell himself) to critique the practices of colonial violence perpetrated against her, as a woman, and against her culture. While it is often women of colour who must bear the burden of imperial dominance at the hands of the (white, male) oppressor, the narrative also makes it clear that the capacity for mutual, cross-cultural understanding between disparate cultures is forged between women, who are similarly oppressed by the apparatuses of imperialism. The reader witnesses this in Karana and Tutok's relationship, in particular.

Similarly, in the case of Tournier's *Friday and Robinson*, it is only when Friday accidentally destroys Robinson's cave in an explosion, and with it the apparatuses of the latter's imperial dominance, that Robinson begins to view Friday as an equal, or as someone whose livelihood on the island is indistinguishable from his own. The reader's moral edification is reflected in Robinson's spiritual development from authoritarian imperialist to someone who respects Friday's cultural and social differences. In *Robinson*, Tournier crafts a vision of society for his child readers 'not as it is but as he thinks it should be' (Petit, 1991, 98). Like O'Dell, Tournier's novel strives for a post-imperial society that offers the reader what Millicent Lenz terms a 'simple form of psychodrama' (27), in which both authors present their case for a new social discourse, one that seeks to move past imperial relations towards a form of social unification. For Tournier, in particular, his fiction introduces children to complex critical discourses in a manner which helps them to 'integrate themselves into society but also to make them question some aspects of it' (Petit, 98). He acknowledges the historical bias towards imperial culture but, through the interactions of Friday and Robinson, he asks his reader to not simply assimilate the ideas he challenges but to join him in challenging them.

That both O'Dell and Tournier should choose to mount their respective critiques of U.S. and French imperialism using the Robinsonade form is indicative not only of the genre's

potential for resistance but of a more widespread cultural ambiguity concerning imperialism at large in mid-twentieth-century North America and France. Through highlighting the practice of reasoned logic and debate, and by showing their readers how to view situations of conflict from different perspectives, O'Dell and Tournier allow for the development of the readers' critical faculties. Both O'Dell and Tournier direct this criticism towards the heritage of colonial violence, and both guide their respective readers' responses to imperial politics. In this way, both *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and *Friday and Robinson* are works of didactic fiction which pose to young readers questions of historical, political, and cultural concern and, moreover, which allow for readers to develop their own critical skills in response to such concerns.

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