

# CHANGES IN THE ROBINSON PARADIGM OR THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE SUBJECT OF MODERNITY

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It is difficult to define concisely the subject of this piece of writing. Moreover, if we underlined eschatology in the title, an introduction regarding the history of ideas would also be necessary. Therefore I would like to ask the reader to forget about the second part of the title for a while and focus on the character of Robinson. Robinson is the keyword, Robinson as an archetype of the modern individual.

Every age creates, reflects and moulds its own mythology. These mythologies form the “great narratives” of Lyotard. Even if we accept Lyotard’s reserves regarding the great narratives, they lose viability and become meaningless when we encounter mythologies in everyday life and literature. It is well known that Bacon’s and Descartes’ rationalism, the role of the individual sanctioned by the theory of social contract and the economy of time as the leading force of economic life, all belong to the basic features and principles of modernity. Every concept has its corresponding “mythology”, be it the mythology of science or the slogan of “time is money” which has become commonplace. (We must not forget however that these clichés are nodes in our knowledge and philosophy of life).

In ancient times, the individual’s forms of acting and thinking were concentrated in a single literary character: Odysseus impersonated shrewdness, intellectual curiosity; he was the organiser and the adventurer. Modernity employed a specialisation, as in other cases: Faust became the mythical hero of intellectual curiosity and the thirst for power, Don Juan the

adventurer, Robinson the archetype of the organiser (impersonating the social contract).

Faust, Don Juan (Don Quixote on another pole) as well as Robinson became part of the modern history of philosophy narratives portrayed as types bearing the eschatological fate. They bear the burden of the features of eschatology first because, with the “progress” of history, they must permanently redefine their subjectivity against their object-appendage. Secondly, the form of their time is not a minor matter, and thirdly, they must ask the eschatologic question from the perspective of their interpretation of being and their morality: is there mercy for them?

The first consideration means the relation to absolute knowledge in the case of Faust, the relation to the woman in the case of Don Juan and the relation to nature in the case of Robinson. The second consideration is the temporal expression of this latter whereas the third asks whether the aims and actions of the individual are parallel with the order of his object? Because only parallelism (identification?) brings redemption and mercy. We must add that grace in religion (*gratia*) is the divine goodness whereby God loves man despite his sins and allows him to attain his lost happiness.

Although we are dealing with Robinson, we should note that we can find significant parallels between Robinson, Don Juan and Faust in European literature with respect to temporality and grace. Not to mention that in Faust and Don Juan (Ch. D. Grabbe’s work, 1829), the seductor and adventurer as well as the man thirsting for knowledge and power will have the same fate, in spite of different temporal orientations. Whether we place the eternal on the pedestal

Faust:     Wozu Mensch,  
            Wenn du nach Übermenschlichen nicht strebst?

or consider the spell and value of humanity of the individual

Don Juan: Wozu Übermenschlich  
Wenn du ein Mensch bleibst?

the result is loss of mercy.

Although in his literary “career” Don Juan arrives from the moment, the point-like temporality of the adventurer to the longing for the eternal, and Faust, on the contrary, gives up the search for the incontestable and permanent knowledge for momentary pleasure - both of them fall out of divine grace. Goethe’s faux pas, the apotheosis in the second part of Faust, does not help either. At the beginning Don Juan provokes fate with his superiority not caring about the past or the future; afterwards, becoming reflective, he consciously takes on the unavoidable: in the field where he started fighting, he can at best stare himself out. If the Other is lost, there is no mercy. Divine eternity does not like the temporary, and longing for the eternal removes the bodily existence from us, as Kierkegaard testifies. Neither way do we get mercy. Faust has basically the same experience, though his “time travel” is different. He starts from the eternal and the abstract and reaches pleasure and the momentary. His longing will also remain unsatisfied; it was his luck that Goethe had Margaret sacrificed instead of him and for him. Knowledge is even more merciless and selfish than the most insolent adventurousness.

Both Faust, Don Juan and Robinson owe their being to longing, the wish fed by absence. The modern subject “feels” its endlessness, feels that it is the only definable principle of being but also “knows” that this is not the traditional (“pre-modern”) completeness. Therefore he wants to make up for his absence-being. We consider that knowledge comes from him: therefore he wants to attain complete and unquestionable knowledge. He is odd without the woman - the indignation of feminists about man being the modern subject is understandable - therefore he wants to possess the secret represented by the woman, that is, he wants to possess the woman; were there no order, he would fall into the state of “homo homini lupus est”, therefore he makes order in being. Faust, Don Juan and Robinson all belong to the field of the

interpretation of desire originating from Plato. The object of desire is completeness that existed before (Plato) or can/should be attained in the future. There is no eschatological philosophy of history ("grand récit") without a desire rooted in absence and there is no modern individual without both of them. Or is it? Let us turn to Robinson, in the hope that he will answer our question.

I do not wish to go through the endless list of Robinson works, but I will pick out three of them - the reader must not think that this is Hegel's influence - three works which are important stages in the variations of the original Robinson-paradigm: Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, 1718; Michel Tournier, *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*, 1967 (Hungarian translation in 1981); Bernard Malamud, *God's Grace*, 1982 (Hungarian translation in 1987).

I have begun with Defoe's work because it contains the so-called Robinson paradigm. What is the essence of this?

The change of paradigm in the philosophy of society had already taken place when the genre of the novel appeared. Classical natural law was replaced by the modern one. The difference between them is fundamental. In the classical interpretation, the whole has a meaning-deferring role as opposed to the unique and the community as opposed to the individual, the good is at the basis of the useful and nature is inseparable from the human; the individual is the unquestionable starting point and point of reference in modern "social contract" theories, the concept of usefulness is the criterion (both in its material and spiritual meaning), and nature (either as original human nature or environment) appears as something that must be subdued. In the classical conception man becomes an individual in the metaphysical, ethical and judicial sense by being a member of a community. According to the theory of social contract, it is the human being with natural features who, becoming conscious of the insufficiency of his individuality and the assertion of his individuality, comes into contact with other people to go beyond his natural being. The individual considers nature as a separate entity, moreover, as the object of his activity. Further philosophies of history think in terms of this subject-object relation and

postulate that the aim of history is the defeat of nature (and the natural) as the way of attaining the freedom of man. A-priori and transcendental values become eclipsed in a context where the archetype of things is not given and everything forms and shows itself through its own actuality. If the individual builds up society from himself and the possibilities given by his contracts, then his guiding principle is not the abstract Good but the practical usefulness. This can be at least directly legitimised. After all, in a metaphysical meaning, we could say, usefulness makes up for the concept of linear, accelerating time. Useful is that which can be attained most quickly and with the least energy. The way of life is no longer defined by natural units of time but by the schedule of “useful” activities. The individual gains power over nature by dividing time, the essential form of being. Moreover, this division filters into his natural being, too, and retrospectively adjusts temporal orientation to itself by making the existential of the shortage of time one of the modes of the sense of time and the treatment of time. The time of modernity can be characterised by the categories of the economy of time and the shortage of time.

Remember Robinson! What did he do first after the shipwreck when he assessed his situation? He saved as many things from the ship as he could and as quickly as he could. He already knew that opportunities are no longer the Fortuna of the Renaissance (whose locks can only be grabbed when she is facing us, because the back of her head is bald), but are an everyday strategy of life. Fortuna could only bring a favourable change in life, whereas making the best use of time is the existential basis of being. Making use of time is determined by the shortage of time in the beginning. Robinson knew, because he knew the movement of the sea and felt, because the instincts of lonely people are keen, that he had not enough time to complete his work. This formula sums up the so-called Robinson paradigm. The activity of Robinson (the organiser) is framed by the shortage of time which is not altered but only modified by those interventions which try to handle time.

Robinson went through the steps taken by every civilisation-creating individual (or community). First he prevented

losing his sense of time: he made a cross from a mast, engraved the date of the shipwreck and marked the following days (weeks, months, years) by scores. That is, he made a calendar. Every new civilisation creates its own time, the 0-point, the beginning of which is sacred and therefore self-interpreting. The beginning does not only separate us from the antecedents but is also built in all further happenings. It is not accidental that Robinson commemorated the shipwreck every year, turning the anniversary into a feast. He prayed and fasted. He commemorated the catastrophe which meant that sacralisation was completed and the nature of catastrophe of the beginning gradually became insignificant. The self-interpretation linked to the beginning became important: the individual acting in the shortage of time.

What were the further steps taken by Robinson? He had already adopted the shortage of time as an existential frame but he tried to complement it with interior happenings, to broaden it from within. He began to write his diary. If we disregard the issue of personal development, there still remains something which is an almost compulsory experience of the modern individual. In the case of Robinson who organised and directed, there, too, is a difference between his time and the time to life. It is only within his time that he can deal with transcendental problems, while the time to life is still governed by the shortage of time. It is a paradox turn that feasts becomes part of his time.

In order to “ease” the shortage of time, Robinson invented that which has been discussed and explained in lengthy treatises by economists, sociologists, philosophers in the 19th and 20th century: he treated time as an object as compared to himself as a subject. He alienated that which used to be naturally his own and considers it an object. This has two consequences. The first (the eschatological) one is that nature must be conquered and taken into possession. The second (the pragmatic) is that that which is object-like is also quantifiable and therefore dividable. The two complete each other, because what is dividable - *nota bene*: divided among people, although this appears only at the end of the novel, as the tactics of defeating the sailors - can also be possessed. Robinson took possession of nature. He made a schedule for the sake of

optimising production (agricultural work), which still means the adoption of natural cycles but it is expanded by the principle of “production for the sake of production”, that is, by reserving. He limited his consumption, thinking of the future. Theories call this the deferred gratification pattern: it characterises individuals oriented to the future. Robinson added to this the agenda in which he specified the time and length of his activities. These manipulative processes aim at reducing “idle runnings” and time hyatuses because losing time means losing the future. He did what Tournier’s Robinson expresses on a conceptual level, quoting Benjamin Franklin: “Do not waste time because it is the fabric of life”.

Robinson took possession of social and individual time by means of the calendar and the diary and he took possession of the time of nature by the time-table and agenda. Usefulness also gains meaning, both in terms of self-ideologising and making use of time. Moreover, this usefulness appears with Friday as a value that must be followed.

When Friday becomes part of the story, Robinson stands before us as a complete subject. He had arranged the life of his one-man society and domesticated his share of nature. He made order. We could say that he triumphed over circumstances. He has no doubts, the lack of order has mostly ceased. He only longs for the Other. We must remark in paranthesis that this Other is material in its being but is in fact a biologically abstract being. Which is in fact a noteworthy development as modernity has brought back the issue of sexuality as a consequence of the special attention given to the individual. Defoe’s Robinson seems to be uninterested by sexuality. He only gets excited by racial and social characteristics, which leads to his considering the Other the ideal Other if it is a copy of his characteristics. The Other cannot mean otherness. As though we were reading Marquis De Sade. Defoe’s Robinson thinks of cannibals with horror; he rejects their way of life. Friday is an exception because he worships Robinson; he is likeable because he resembles Europeans and he was accepted because he adopted Christianity, moreover, he became a Protestant, just like an English gentleman. The top of Malamud’s

irony is his praising the chimpanzees' command of English. However, the theory of social contract prevails: Robinson defines the rules of social life and Friday accepts them.

I have said that Robinson did not have doubts. This must be specified. Robinson did not have metaphysical doubts, only practical everyday problems. This is the universe of Leibniz, in which monad-individualities do not have "windows", but they must not worry about their relations of reciprocity. Otherness in the "best of possible worlds" means an adapting otherness. Therefore Robinson gains mercy. As doubts grow, mercy is questioned.

The world must change or, more precisely, the interpretation of the world. Metaphysical questions arise only in the horizon of this interpretation. Michel Tournier's Robinson is the modern individual who became reflective; he does not decide at once and unambiguously whether to humanise the island, Speranza. Moreover, tension does not arise from the obstacles in nature that Robinson must overcome but from the way in which he can persuade himself about the need to act, and from the conversation with Speranza. Stress in the interpretation of the world has shifted: the dominance of the subject has ceased and the balance of the subject-object relation became important. The denouement with Defoe is simple and unambiguous: the mission of the subject is to take possession of the object; if he succeeds in this, he attains the state of mercy. But what can we do if the individual wavers in his mission zeal (secularisation), when it appears that the individual is part of nature (Gaia-system) or that it turns out that the otherness of his own natural features (Claude Lévi-Strauss) are not inferior, because they are functional within the given lifestyle? From despair arising from existential uncertainty and the loss of the old order, Tournier's Robinson reaches a solution through the desire to act. The difference between him and Defoe's Robinson is mainly that while Robinson I was praxis-oriented, Robinson II lifts dilemmas to a metaphysical level and considers that the solution does not come from the changing of the object but the changing of his own world interpretation, worldview and experience of the world.



Such a metaphysical re-evaluation must contain ontological concepts (being, time, space) as well as existential concepts (power, work, love, death, game). Tournier's Robinson forms his relations to all these.

Time is the most important ontologic category: Defoe also interpreted it. However, the formula has changed now. According to Franz von Baader, German mystic, time has three basic forms: 1. *Unterzeit* (below time), in which the past is dominant and keeps man captive by his void and his weight, 2. ephemeral time, in which past and future meet, and man becomes free by acquiring the past through the possibilities of his future; 3. real time, which encompasses all three dimensions: the future bases itself in the present through the past and therefore the present is equivocal with eternity.

If we accept Baader's division as the "crutch" of our train of thought, then we will discover that Defoe's Robinson was the creator and captive of the "ephemeral time". He subordinated his freedom to his future and thus the reality of the other temporal dimensions lost substance. Tournier's Robinson tried all three types of time before choosing. In the first phase of despair after shipwreck he abandoned himself to fate and lived in mire and mud, like a pig. His *Unterzeit*-ness as a non-human form of life tempted him once again, but its giving up became definitive and he no longer considered it a solution. Mud as a formless mass is a metaphor of the original chaos and Robinson knew that every being originates in the defeat of chaos. (Tournier did not know at that time the chaos theories fashionable today.) The spirit of modernity is revived in Robinson at this point, and he fixes himself the aim of subjecting the island, Speranza to human domination. This can only be attained by creating moral order: building, organising, making order.

"Ephemeral time" comes to power and the "Robinson paradigm" comes into force. Moral order draws a division between good and bad. Good is the regulation of time (making the water-clock) and its grasp (deferred gratification); bad is the loss of time (moreover, this is a sin) and approaching the mire (relapse into *Unterzeit*). Robinson drafted the charta of Speranza (its first clause

was that “every kind of legislative and executive power is in his hand” and he started writing his diary (the “log-book”). He wrote in his diary about the rise and strengthening of his doubts (regarding the first clause, among others), and it became clear for him from his notes that something was wrong with the order.

He started in three directions. He initially recognition that making order does not have an end in itself but, in its form of organising and legislation, it acts against the destroying effects arising from the absence of others. Which means that it is a fight against losing the Self. But building and organising is embodied in objectivations, that is, the Self which needs protection, becomes exterior. This is where Robinson began the breaking down of Hegel’s philosophy of history (which is one of the most influential metanarratives of modernity). In the continuation (the second direction) he tried to re-discover and define his own Self, in a way which was still a taboo with Defoe. He interpreted the island Speranza - the female name is not accidental - as the continuation of his own being, instead of regarding it as a mere object. On the other hand he destroyed Hegel’s main civilisation-interpreting concept - the category of mediation - that is, he made even the relationship which had a founding function in sexuality and erotism, indirect.

Positing directness is not only the rational resolution of the dilemma, but also the outcome of an experiment. Robinson wanted to become acquainted with Speranza and therefore he entered the cave. He descended into the depth of it and accustomed himself to silence and darkness. He cut off his senses and mind, this civilisational dead weight and tuned in to empathy. And this empathy opened him the way to the “other island” (the Speranza which was free of objectivations), and to himself as well. The “moment of innocence” when the water-clock stopped was necessary for this, of course. It occurred to him that there is a possibility of changing. However he was frightened because he had erotic ideas at the depth of the cave – the cave is a person, a woman – his semen flows away and he covers with his hand the small hole which stands for Speranza’s womb only in the last minute. He was frightened away from conception, from the

“monster child of the incestuous relation”. He became aware that our existential concepts are not originally humane-civilisational but they have a telluric nature. The earth is the object of love and death, so we renounce to the woman as a detour on this way: love is direct. After this Robinson came across the “pink valley” and literally sows it with his semen. The mandragoras growing in the valley are the fruits of this direct sexual relationship.

What is a mandragora? It has a root resembling human shape. Pythagoras called it a herb which turned human (anthropomorphe), Lucius Columella Latin agronomist called it “semi-homo” and Albertus Magnus wrote that mandragoras can be bisexual like people. The elder Pliny said that the white mandragora is the male (norion) and the black is the female (thridacias). It was also held that mandragoras grew under gallows, from the semen of the hanged.

However, the mandragora symbolises something else in the context of Robinson trying to re-interpret and experience the traditional subject-object relationship. The mandragora is neither object nor subject; it is that which is ambiguous and therefore endangered Robinson’s new Self, the identity that was searched. It keeps calling and repels at the same time. (According to the vocabulary of post-semiotic theories, it is the result of abjection). Robinson did not know this yet. He realized that the solution was apparent when Friday “sullies” the nest of his love.

One thing becomes irrevocably unambiguous for Robinson, namely, that building is nothing else than creating a retrospective civilisation – and this is the third direction of thinking about order. Living in the ephemeral time; therefore not a solution: not an answer to the search for identity of the Self. In spite of this Robinson started the water-clock again and tried to persuade himself on the level of ideologising too. He created slogans like “Whoever kills a trout, kills its offsprings as well, he kills at least a million generations”. Whoever gives away five shillings, kills a heap of pounds.” That is, he went back to the tactics of deferred gratification.

Moreover, he went so far that at the cannibal-feast when Friday accidentally flee towards him, he wanted to shoot Friday

because he disturbs him. But, due to an accident, he shot the pursuer and then he had no choice, he had to receive and accept Friday, even though Friday did not fit into the order, not even with his name which means something episode-like, transitory and accidental according to Robinson's etymology.

But this Friday was not that Friday. "That" Friday accepted the rules of "that" Robinson. "This" Friday was an autonomous individual who does not fit into the order of the ephemeral time, even though he willy-nilly does the work farmed out on him. He has another vision for time. As he did not know production because he never worked, he did not know the concept of past and future, and the morality based on ephemeral time. He committed a sacrilegious deed: he encroached upon Robinson's relation with the "pink valley". However, the striped mandragoras (the children of Friday and the pink valley) opened Robinson's eyes: the abject cannot be a solution in the search for the Self. He directed his meditations in a new way and did not try to find a way out within the existing order but he formulated the dilemma: are civilisational traditions and customs not dead weights which hinder him in his new life?

There is a qualitative change in the Robinson-paradigm at this point: it is not Robinson, the glorious individual who decides the direction of going further, but Friday. True, the turning point is accidental: Friday, frightened by Robinson's anger (he had broken the order of the sixth clause of the charta) threw the burning pipe into the cave; the gunpowder held there exploded and turned the whole civilisation built until then into a heap of ruins. However, this incident was in line with Robinson's search and Friday's nature, his character. As a result of the explosion the system became nothing immediately, in a minute, so the transition was not temporal. Plato bears witness that suddenness is not part of time and this is why it can be the form of being of the real change. At the same time the moment of the sudden defines the third mode of time in Baader's typology which is built on the moment.

From now on, Friday is the subject of the action and not Robinson. Will, that is, bending to a task which encompasses temporal dimensions and also divides them, was never part of

Friday's behaviour. The moment is his temporal form. Robinson who wants to learn Friday's life strategy since the explosion, says to himself about the phenomenon: Friday is nature. Friday does not change nature but lives in it and with it. His elementary transcending deed also creates again the rhythm of nature: he makes an Aeolian harp. The music of the Aeolian harp "does not develop in time but it is entirely in the moment", it is a momentary symphony.

Robinson's log-book records the interpretation of events. From an ontologic point of view: time has changed. Before the explosion, time was subordinated to usefulness; now at that moment, time stopped; eternity framed his life. This now had its foretokens: mainly in the time of the stopped water-clock and the moments of "innocence". The changed time has finally shown the other Speranza which is now forever in the moment of innocence. From an existential point of view: Robinson finds his new Self in turning elementary, following Friday. The elementary Self does not differ from nature as a subject but it has become part of it.

Robinson settles the dilemma – time or eternity – for the benefit of eternity. Therefore when the rescue ship comes (on the pattern of the original Robinson theme), Robinson finds the ideals of the ship's passengers so relative that he does not consider it important to leave Speranza. After his subject-ness and the relating temporality finds a solution he draws the only possible eschatological consequence: "salvation has one purpose: to find one's way back to that timeless borderland inhabited by innocent people which he has gradually reached..."

The grimace of the denouement is that Friday is dazzled by the material world of civilisation, he becomes part of the objectifications: he goes away with the ship.

Tournier's Robinson gains mercy but only if he gives up all his original features. I am tempted to call this solution a deconstructive act, because it violates the society-nature opposition but also the difference between biologic and social rhythms. It makes the marginal, the avoided the meaning-conferring principle. However, in order to avoid excessive unanimity – it becomes deconstruction to shout "apage satanas" to this – he finds a

loophole to further interpretation by acknowledging a shortcoming in his vision: the lack of irony. He considers this so important that he writes a supplication in his log-book: "Teach me irony!"

Bernard Malamud deals with irony, moreover, devastating irony.

Irony originates in the fact that the search for identity of the disunited subject, its return to nature as the original form of being as well as relying on the eternal moment lead to a pathetic state of mind, which means that we take ourselves too seriously. Exaggerated seriousness then leads to the overestimation of the trans-temporal and condescension towards the concrete being. This can only be healed with irony. Devastating irony originates in the fact that falling out of the frames of civilisation – the introductory motif of the Robinson theme – and the circumstances of civilisation creation have changed. Both Defoe's and Tournier's Robinson build their civilisation on the pattern of an existing civilisation. The slight difference is that Robinson II gives up the "retrospective" nature and choses the way of life of natural peoples, which is also existing. Malamud's Robinson - Cohn, the deep-sea diver - goes beyond civilisation. The action begins day after (in a "post-torah" age). We are after the nuclear catastrophe. There is no civilisation and no mankind, only one representative survived. The conditions of the social contract are missing therefore. However, there is Buz, the chimpanzee as a companion. Behold: nature has appeared again. Not the pre-civilisational but pre-human nature.

The "day after" is, of course, a tragedy. But, with Cohn, it is also the possibility of beginning again. The question is: on what principle? Because Robinson II has already rejected retrospectiveness. However, Cohn cannot accept his romantic love of nature. If the principle of modernity based on the economy of time as well as the one treated by the "green" ideology fail, then there remains the last, well-known transcending method which, according to Lyotard, is one of the most well-known self-interpreting strategy of modernity: stringing the happenings on the logic of "grand narratives".

Cohn's "grand narrative" consists of two components. The first is subject of the lectures given to the chimpanzees and in which he reveals the history of mankind as a lesson to the monkeys. The second is the basic Old-Testament interpretation of mercy: the story of Abraham and Isaac. It is clear with Malamud that the stories about the subject of modernity are both about the creation of order and moral and the attainment of mercy (or unattainable mercy). This proves Foucault's statement that modern society is the society of the confession, a new hermeneutics of the subjectivity. For what is confession? The individual tells his life story before the pardoning authority (the minister; God) who, interpreting the events, acknowledges their correct version. Cohn's lectures are confessions about the past of mankind before the chimpanzees but Cohn takes on the role of the minister (moreover, Jahve) as well, because he always interprets what he has said. Thus he forms the chimpanzees's imagined subjectivity and his own new individuality. Moreover: the whole story begins with Cohn's confession which is here interwoven with Jahve's calling him to account for. It is relevant that Jahve briefs Cohn, the same as the father-confessor briefs the confessor, but afterwards he does not interfere in the story. (It is not accidental that deism appears in the modern age).

But by what right did Cohn take on both the role of the confessor and of the father-confessor? This was based on the logic of the birth of stories. When Buz asks him how do stories come into being, Cohn answers: "from other stories". Originally they come from metaphors which round into stories.

"Which was the first story?"

"That God has invented itself".

"How did he do that?"

"He simply began it. He is the God of Beginning. He uttered the Word and the world began. When people tell stories, they do the same as God has done..."

Cohn comes back from the New-Testament interpretation – God is love – to the mythological Old-Testament revelation: God

is God. Jahve presented himself to Moses in the same tautologic way: "I am who I am." Love presupposes that the relation is between Me and You whereas the definition "I am who I am" allows us to "invent" ourselves. Being and the Logos are yet the same here. Cohn had the feeling that the "grand narrative" is the most certain beginning because it refers to itself and the narrator is the creator. Cohn tries to do the same as God. However, when we have the reproduction of life instead of the creation of ideology of the new society, that is, when Cohn encounters the dilemma whether to have sexual intercourse with Mary Magdalene, the chimpanzee girl and thus meddle with evolution, he asks himself: can he behave the same way as God? But he disregards this. Although taboos are for mankind, "these ancient sanctions can no longer be valid in this necessarily post-torah world". On the other hand, if God "has beaten the world with such an eschatologic trauma" then this step can be taken, even out of sheer spite.

However, Cohn took no account of the fact that the sin of hybris is a threatening reality in the post-torah age too. Perhaps not because God would take his sin of this strange creation amiss. Neither because Cohn's Old-Testament interpretation of mercy is in constant clash with Buz's cult of Jesus or with Mary Magdalene's ideal longing for love drawing on Romeo and Juliet (although the choice of values of the chimpanzees is also a hybris), but because he wants to force his own order on the chimpanzees dictatorially. We must not forget that the Robinson paradigm is working in the background: there is production on the island, there is a time-table and Cohn announces the moral codex of the island (Cohn's Admonitions). Cohn breaks the principle abstracted by him from the existence of the post-torah (postmodern?) age when the dilemma of the yes or no of reproduction arises: he breaks the principle that everything is possible. He breaks it by stating, "Every life is valuable, not like ideas."

It is ironic that it is Isaiah (the chimpanzee boy who is an enfant terrible) who reproaches Cohn with immoderateness, Isaiah, who has a wild nature in the Old-Testament and here too (as a chimpanzee), ignoring alliance (the Admonitions). This becomes more complicated because, as we know, Isaiah is the son of Isaac



and Rebecca in the Bible, the direct descendant of the participant to the story of grace, whereas with Malamud, Rebecca is the child of Cohn and Mary Magdalene. (Let us remember: Tournier's Robinson was still frightened of the possibility of the "monster child of the incestuous relation".) Time is confused: what has been and what could be, is all now. Isaiah can kidnap Rebecca and throw her to a stone, changing this way his own mythologic prehistory, more precisely, making the repetition of the story of grace impossible.

Cohn's self-conceit, thinking that on account of his spiritual superiority he can define which ideas are more valuable than others, leads to self-contradiction but also the clash of life-strategies. Cohn's confession presented as a teaching was nothing else than an attempt to legitimise the order introduced on the island by a "narrative of origin" (R. Rorty), that is, he made reference to transcending based on the consciousness of past. On the other hand, the chimpanzees (Buz and Isaiah, the rivals) supported their ideas with quite tangible "plans" (Rorty). They had confidence in the future. The two strategies could not meet, due to Cohn's hybris, therefore they clashed.

In his last despair Cohn rids Buz of his ability to speak and therefore all the other chimpanzees become dumb. Becoming silent means that all narratives become null. The repeated creation is over. The ideal lover Mary Magdalene becomes again just a female; Buz, the most clever chimpanzee, Cohn's adopted son, the most potent male. The high point of the grand narrative turning upon itself, is that Cohn is sacrificed.

The story of grace is not repeated (moreover, the son sacrifices his foster-father), unless we consider a grace that Cohn is carried by the chimpanzees to the burnt-offering as an old man. Cohn's last words are: "God allowed me to live my life".

The circle closes. The victorious subject has "lived his life". In the meantime there were individuals who momentarily found peace in their harmonious togetherness with their object, but their re-identifying experiment did not work and came to nothing together with the order created by him. The subject in Defoe's

novel gains mercy, in Tournier's case, too, but there is no mercy for him in the "post-torah age".

The initial optimistic rationalism turns into devastating irony. Nevertheless there is one thing I cannot decide. Malamud's novel ends by George the gorilla, a dumb spectator of the events singing a Kaddish for Cohn's salvation. A Kaddish is not enough for attaining mercy. But even a Kaddish to our salvation can only be said by the voyeur? Is the voyeur the new subject?