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Islands, Literature, and Cultural Translatability

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This essay provides a historical overview of the island tradition in European literature and links it specifically to the notion of cultural translatability and the idea of the floating island as a floating signifier with a focus on canonical writers from Greco-Roman antiquity to the contemporary period, and finally using the example of the Caribbean to discuss islands in a post-colonial and global perspective. Island spaces are used to explore and create bridges between the real and the imaginary as a response to cultural and social realities, frequently taking the form of utopias/dystopias, Edens, Arcadias, nations, metatexts, cultural crossroads. The virtual spaces of islands are susceptible to translatability and articulate perspectives on the shifting relationship between self and other, center and periphery, serving as sites of mediation between cultures. Within an increasingly global culture marked by inequalities and differences, islands may induce a contrapuntal approach to literary and cultural criticism.

*No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less,*

John Donne, Meditation 17

*Islands which have
never existed
have made their ways
onto maps nonetheless*

*And having done so
have held their place,
quite respectably,
sometimes for centuries*

*Voyages of undiscovery,
deep into the charted wastes,
were then required
to move them off.*

Nicholas Hasluk, 'Islands'

Introduction

Islands have always occupied a powerful place and have been a source of fascination in the literary imagination. The island, a territory separated from other lands by water, lends itself easily to fantasy and mythologizing. Folklore abounds with tales of magical islands, places where heroes go to rest and from which they may one day return, islands that draw people in and never let them leave, islands that appear and disappear. Islands are also repositories of fearful elements: accounts of voyages to the Caribbean, for example, abound in fantasies about cannibals and other destructive forces that were believed to lie hidden in island heartlands. The tale of sailors shipwrecked on a small island that turns out to be a great sea-creature and which drowns them all just as they believe they have found safety is familiar in many languages, from Greek to Anglo-Saxon. The island that serves as home to the shipwrecked sailor became a major literary theme that is still to be found in children's literature. And indeed, the idea of the island has a powerful base in children's literature. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, both important statements about contemporary society written for adults in the eighteenth century have been transformed into texts for children, a shift of emphasis that would merit further investigation but which serves to illustrate the instability of text types across time. These works, which revolve around the idea of travel to isolated island communities, have become depoliticized, though the image of the shipwrecked sailor who finds himself isolated from his

contemporaries is at the core of both. Familiar also is the idealized island, the place that sailors aspire to reach and which they spend a lifetime searching for and never find. Early Christianity established communities on islands deliberately, seeking in physical isolation a more direct channel to God. In the Arthurian legend, souls go to find their final resting place on the island of Avalon, a theme dealt with in Tennyson's "Morte d'Arthur."

Islands, therefore, are places that can be paradoxically both safe havens and sites of great upheaval. Inhabitants of an island define themselves against those who are not islanders; significantly, the Irish refer to the United Kingdom as "the mainland" or "across the water," while the English refer to Europe as "the Continent." Perhaps those who inhabit islands have a particular kind of spatial awareness, aware as they always are that sooner or later the land stops and the sea begins. Non-island cultures inhabit different spaces, where the opening or closing of frontiers acquires a meaningfulness that can never be experienced by islanders. Time and again we find the island represented as the locus of a transformation, a translation. On islands, things change or, as William Golding shows so dramatically in his *Lord of the Flies*, things rise to the surface and are made visible, often things that we wish we did not have to see. One may recall here how José Saramago imagined the Iberian Peninsula into a floating island in his novel *The Stone Raft*, and wittily put contemporary Europe and questions of cultural identity under scrutiny. As the Peninsula breaks off from the mainland, its European identity comes into question. Europe begins to make demands on the Peninsula to stop drifting:

European governments who in the past never showed any desire to have us with them are now trying to force us to do what they don't really want and, moreover, know is beyond our powers. Unquestionably a place of history and culture, Europe in these troubled times has shown itself in the end to be lacking in common sense.¹

As a general source for the conception of this essay, we gratefully acknowledge the 'Floating Island Research Network,' which contributed to the volume *Beyond the Floating Islands*, ed. Stephanos Stephanides and Susan Bassnett, COTEPRA (European Thematic Network), University of Bologna, 2002. We benefited from all the participants' work, but we would like to mention the following whose contributions provided specific sources and ideas for this essay: Juanita Celia Djelal for the Delos myths and Lucian, G.T. Jensson for Thule, Antonis Balasopoulos for More's *Utopia* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Vassiliki Markidou and Eferpi Mitsi for early modern texts on Malta and Cyprus, Spurgeon Thompson for James Boswell and Dr. Johnson, Piotr Gwiazda for Lord Byron, Stefania Mechelucci for D.H. Lawrence, Karoly Piner for Aldous Huxley, Mary Ruth Strzeszewski for Bioy Casares, Kathleen Gysels and Assimina Karavantos for the French Antilles.

¹ José Saramago, *The Stone Raft*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero, London, The Harvill Press, 1994, 131.

The *topos* of the island explores and creates bridges between the real and the imaginary as well as crossings between genres and disciplines. Islands are articulated as utopias/dystopias, *loci amoeni*, Edens, Arcadias, nations, metatexts, stepping stones, cultural crossroads, thus raising questions about the metaphoricity and translatability of culture, desire, displacement, solitude, isolation, exile, insularity, minority and hegemonic cultures illustrating the creative stimulus that the idea of islands has provided across time and across cultures. As islanders set apart from the continent, between or among continents and surrounded by ocean or sea, we seem to be always on the threshold of identities. The virtual spaces of islands are susceptible to translatability and articulate perspectives on the shifting relationship between self and other, center and periphery. Islands place here and elsewhere in dialogue and, in this way, serve as sites of mediation between cultures. Within a global culture marked by inequalities and differences, islands induce a contrapuntal approach for literary and cultural criticism.

Early Island Myths

Many of the island tropes that occupy the literary imaginary today are already present in the classical literature of the ancient Mediterranean such as the island world of the *Odyssey* and other islands including Delos, Atlantis, and Thule.

The first floating island found in literature is perhaps the island of Aeolia, home of Aeolus, god of the wind. Floating islands are like floating signifiers, bringing together topology and tropology in the motility that links the metaphoricity of floating or traveling islands with the translatability of culture. If we are seeking a theory of translation in floating islands, we may find it in Aeolia, one of the original floating islands found in the *Odyssey*, Book 10. The name Aeolia is in the etymology of *aeolotropic*, defined by Webster's dictionary as deriving from Greek *aiolos* (changeful) and *trope* (turn), and meaning in physics, having different properties in different directions; not isotropic. The island is now considered to be one of the archipelago of volcanic islands near Sicily, known as the Isole Eolie (Aeolian Islands) that were settled by ancient Greeks in the sixth century BC. In *The Odyssey* and the *Odyssey* tradition a tension unfolds between the island as home (Ithaka) and the fantastic 'Other' islands where Odysseus and his men so often land. To help Odysseus return to Ithaka, Aeolus encloses the boisterous energies of the wind in a pouch to guarantee him a safe journey home. Odysseus falls asleep when the shores of Ithaka are sighted, and his crew, curious to see what Aeolus had given their chief, open the pouch and release the winds, thus bringing another detour to the journey home. The short excerpt below is followed by a

transliteration from the original Greek, which includes the phrase floating islands (*plôtêi eni nêsôi*), *plôtêi* being the feminine dative form of *plôtos* (floating):

Our next landfall was the floating island of Aeolia, the home of Aeolus son of Hippotas, who is a favourite of the immortal gods. All around the isle there runs an unbroken wall of bronze, and below it the cliffs rise sheer from the sea.²

â! Aioliên d'es nêson aphikometh': entha d' enaien
Aiolos Hippotadês, philos athanatoisi theoisin,
Plôtêi eni nêsôi: pasan de te min peri teichos
chalkeon arrêkton, lissê d' anadedrome petrê.³

The meaning of Odysseus's digressions to fantastic other islands, as gods and destiny defer his journey to his home island Ithaka, has been explored and extended over the millennia from Homer through Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca*, to refer to a recent example. If Ithaka is both the point of departure and arrival, it may be like the source and the target in cultural translatability. It is noteworthy that in French (as in other Romance languages) the source and target cultures in translation are referred to as "la culture de départ" and "la culture d'arrivée." In the process of the journey, the boundaries between self and other continually shift, and the meaning of Ithaka grows and changes. This is a theme underlying the post-Homeric tradition of the second Odyssey. In Dante's *Inferno* (xxvi, 90-124), we see Odysseus after the sensual experience with Circe on her island of Aeaea, deciding that he no longer wishes to go home to Ithaka, but instead to proceed on a journey without destination and experience new worlds. This theme is also found in Tennyson's poem "Ulysses" (1842) where the thirst for travel and knowledge is greater than the satisfaction of arriving home: after arriving at Ithaka, Odysseus proposes bequeathing the reign of the community of his island home to his son Telemachus, so he can continue traveling. Also in this tradition is Tennyson's "The Lotos-Eaters" (1832), in which the mariners defer their desire to return to their island home after chewing the Lotos plant. The theme is taken up by the Alexandrine poet Cavafy in an unpublished poem of 1894 with the title "Second Odyssey."⁴ After the joy of reaching Ithaka, Odysseus finds his island too small.

² Homer's *Odyssey* 10.1-4. Trans. by E.V. Rieu (1946)²

³ Homer's *Odyssey*, W. Walter Merry, James Riddell, D. B. Monro, Oxford, Clarendon Press. 1886-1901.

⁴ For a discussion of the "Second Odyssey" theme, and for Stephanides' translation of Cavafy's poem of that name see Michalis Pieris, "The theme of the second Odyssey in Cavafy and Sinopoulos," *Ancient Greek Myth and Modern Greek Poets: Essays in Memory of C.A. Trypanis*, ed. Peter Mackridge, London & Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1996, pp. 97-108.

Experiencing disappointment and *ennui*, he prepares to set off on a second Odyssey beyond the Pillars of Hercules, or beyond the boundaries of the known world, and leave the rule of his home island to his son Telemachus. In the later well-known poem "Ithaka," Cavafy suggests that the real meaning of the island is to be found in the experience of the journey. This proposes a more complex dialogic than the earlier poem of what the island home might mean. Ithaka is the source, she "gave you the marvelous journey" Cavafy says, and the journey will bring a higher order of meaning, "Wise as you have become, so full of experience." In the "detour" and "retour" of *translatio*, Ithaka is the promise of fulfilment.

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you're destined for.
But don't hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so you're old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you've gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.
Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you wouldn't have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.
And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
You'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.⁵

Another contender for the first acknowledged floating island is Delos. The "Homeric Hymn to Apollon," which speaks of the transformations and names of the island.⁶ Three centuries later, we also read in a fragment from the poet Pindar's (ca. 518–ca. 438 BC) processional song 'On Delos' of the island's translation from a floating to an anchored site of worship when the island agrees to harbor Leto and become the birthplace of Apollo:

For aforesaid, that isle was tossed on the waves by all manner of whirling winds; but, when Leto, the daughter of Coeüs, in the frenzy of her imminent pangs of travail, set foot on her, then it was that four lofty pillars rose from the roots of earth, and on their capitals held up the rock with their adamantine bases. There it was that she gave birth to, and beheld, her blessed offspring."⁷

⁵ Trans. Edmund Keeley & Philip Sherrard, Online, <http://ithaca.rice.edu/kz/Misc/Ithaka.html>.

⁶ *The Homeric Hymn*, trans. Apostolos N. Athanassakis, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins UP, 1976, pp. 15-19

⁷ *The Odes of Pindar, Including the Principal Fragments*, trans. Sir John Sandys, Cambridge, MA, Harvard UP, 1978, p. 563.

The story of the island Atlantis, told by Plato around 360 BC in his dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias* has prompted discussion for over two thousand years. Atlantis is an insular other world *beyond* the frontiers of known time and space. It is beyond the Pillars of Hercules or beyond the frontiers of the known world at the time and it had existed nine thousand years before Plato tells the story. Not only does it belong to another space, but to another distant time as well. The story of Atlantis may designate the Other within Athens, and Menmosyne (or memory) is invoked to bring back knowledge of the apparently forgotten distant past to the Athenians of Plato's day. Interestingly, it is the Egyptians who remind the Athenians of their forgotten past, the Atlanteans who survive being the ancestors of the Athenians. Egyptian priests told the story of Atlantis to Solon, who passed the tale on to Dropides, the great-grandfather of Critias. Atlantis is an idealized but imperfect world in a time before the remembered beginning. Atlantis was destroyed by a deluge and thus the story constitutes an antediluvian myth. The dialogues provide a cosmogony and eschatology of the world of Atlantis, as well as the topography and ethnography of the island and its people. The land is blessed with a wealth of natural resources and the inhabitants are proud and noble. The people are of semi-divine origin, descendants of Poseidon and the mortal Cleito, but because of *hubris* and the loss of the divine element, the gods punish them, and the island nation is destroyed and swallowed up by the sea.

Also significant in the imagination and literature of the ancient Mediterranean is the island of Thule allegedly discovered at the end of the fourth century BC by Pytheas of Massilia (Marseilles), the author of a geographical treatise, disbelieved by antiquity's foremost geographers and now lost. Referring to Pytheas as his source, Strabo (ca. 64 BC—ca. AD 21), in his *Geography* (2.4.1) speaks of Thule as a place of limited stability situated at the edge of the earth where the elements were believed to fuse into a bond that held the world together. To the early cartographers it was a kind of floating *eidolon*, at times shown separately in the seas around Iceland, at times identified with it. In literature Thule became a dreamland where basic distinctions, such as that between day and night, hot and cold, life and death are confused. Thule appears in the work of many writers including Virgil, Petrarch, Cervantes, Longfellow, and in Poe where the nocturnal iciness of ultimate dim Thule becomes the objective correlative of the lonely soul in his poem "Dreamland" (1844). The theme of islands and dystopia is already found in classical satire. Syrian writer Lucian of Samosata (ca. 120 - ca. 180 AD), in his *A True History*, parodically depicts an island-world within a whale. A dialogue between the inhabitants of a fertile floating island within a whale contains a visceral discussion

on the irresolvable tension between dystopia, and the dubious nature of Edenic insularity.

Islands of the Age of Discovery

*Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,
That if I then had waked after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again; and then in dreaming,
The clouds, methought, would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked
I cried to dream again. (The Tempest, 3.2.135-142)*

During the Renaissance and with European expansion and the colonization of other lands there arise new cartographies and new perspectives on the island theme during the Renaissance with new literary uses of the edenic, arcadian and utopian. These islands include Prospero's island and Utopia, both of which had a tremendous impact on the history of literature and ideas. The island in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which Prospero inhabits as an exile but whose ownership is contested by Caliban, has become the archetypal island of the European colonial era, for here a kind of magic that would not be permissible in urban society is used to control the destinies of those who inhabit the island, both as its natives and as its conquerors. The island of Utopia in Thomas More's founding text of that name (first published in Latin in 1516), incited exploration of how the imagined geography of the island form is linked to the possibility of social change and history in its suggestion that utopia is a dream born out of the fallen state of history itself just as islands have their origins in ruptured continents.⁸ Utopia's transformation from land to island expresses the social desire for self-containment, autonomy, and unchangeable stability.

Real islands such as Malta and Cyprus also feature in the literature of the early modern period revealing how these Mediterranean islands have served the interests of (rival) colonial powers – Ottoman, Venetian, Spanish, English - and are caught between different myths and dreams between East and West. Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* is situated in early modern Malta's historical transition from

⁸ Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Robert M. Adams, New York, W.W. Norton, 1975. See also David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000).

chivalric values to market ones, which determine the play's translations of the myths related to the Maltese island. The period adds its own myths to the perception of the island: of Cyprus in Shakespeare's *Othello* and in Cervantes' *El amante liberal*. Both texts, written in the beginning of the seventeenth century were inspired by the fall of Cyprus to the Ottomans in 1571. While in *El amante*, the captive protagonist sadly contemplates the ruins of Nicosia and the destruction caused by the Ottoman occupation of Cyprus, in *Othello*, whose time of action is set before the 1522 capture of Rhodes by the Ottomans, the island represents an outpost on the border between Europe and the Orient, between civilization and barbarism. Both islands have been a site of multiple translations and a generator of new meanings concerning the relationship between East and West, past and present, myth and reality. The question of collusions and collisions between centre and periphery, between metropolis and colony runs through in different ways at different moments in time.

Islands are often represented as sites of some kind of magical transaction or exchange, places where individuals encounter different cultures and find that they can no longer relate in the same way to the places they have left. We see new variations of the island as a fantastic other world and a *locus amoenus* in two epic poems of the period: Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532) and Luis de Camões' *Os Lusíadas* (1572). Both evoke islands supposedly in the Indian Ocean with the Renaissance ideals of sensual delight in nature. Ariosto's narrative travels through the enchanted island of the witch Alcina where magical transformations take place, while Camões' epic poem *The Lusiads* sings the glories of the Portuguese, the first Europeans to reach India by sea by sailing around the Cape of Good Hope. When Vasco da Gama and his crew successfully reach the Indian Ocean, Venus rewards them with the pleasures of the isle of love (A Ilha dos Amores). This floating island is fixed by Venus to receive the sailors who enjoy the sensual delights of this *locus amoenus*.

In the genre of shipwreck stories, *The Isle of Pine* (1618), Thomas Neville's fantastic tale about a man and four women (including maids and a slave) who survive and multiply in a blissful state of nature, populating the island with their descendants, combines the idea of the island as Edenic paradise and Utopian ideal. During this period we also have the re-emergence of Atlantis in a New World context as in, for example, Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*. While this association between Atlantis and the American continent gained currency at the time, Montaigne in his essay "Des cannibales" casts doubt on the possibility that they are one and the same: "il n'y a

pas grande apparence que cette Isle soit ce monde nouveau que nous venons de decouvrir.”⁹

Islands as Social Criticism

Eighteenth-century Enlightenment discourses of travel standardized the representation of islands within an emerging rationalist and positivist framework as we see in writers not only when they visit faraway islands such as those of the South Pacific, but also in representatives of the English and Scottish Enlightenments, Dr. Johnson and Boswell encountering fringe islands of the British isles such as the Hebrides. New problems of translatability arise in this period as epistemology and writing are derivative of empirical science as it developed in this period. A question that might be raised about the rationalist ‘seeing’ European and the ‘seen’ native is whether texts actually manage to represent what they encounter, or whether they only reproduce what they expected to find when they set out. The encounter with other island worlds and peoples often upsets the epistemological system and the problem of knowledge itself becomes an anxious theme creating new parameters for the contact zone of translatability. We see this as a theme in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and epistemology becomes one subject of comic satire in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726).

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is probably the most popular book in the canonical literature that deals with the theme of castaways on desert islands. While it is frequently discussed in the context of the rise of the novel and its links to European expansion and colonization, it has most recently given rise to scholarly discussion within the context of post-colonial studies, and to post-colonial rewritings such as Derek Walcott's play *Friday*, and Coetzee's well-known novella *Foe*. In J. M. Coetzee's rewriting of Defoe's novel, Crusoe's island is transformed into what one might call a meta-island or a meta-narrative that comments on the island narrative of Defoe's novella and for what it really represents in colonial discourse. Coetzee focuses on such issues as language as symbolic order and how it is skewed in its relationship to gender, ethnicity, and culture. This raises interesting questions of cultural translatability that may be explored in his journey from his home island to the desert island where there is a translation from source to target. Crusoe repeatedly frees himself from the constraints of his own island-nation by going out to sea, but his arrival on the Other Island is due to providence or accident (the

⁹ *Montaigne. Selected Essays*, eds. Arthur Tilley & A.M. Bouse Manchester, Manchester UP, 1948 30.

shipwreck). The desire for translation marked in the departure is curtailed and becomes fear and anxiety at the uncolonized and opaque space of his arrival as he accidentally finds himself on "this horrid island." The wrecked ship becomes a signifier of the process of mediation in translation, which begins with Crusoe's landing on the island. Several pages of the text are devoted to registering the objects that Crusoe managed to save from the wreck of the ship that brought him to the island. The wrecked ship does not sink but remains anchored a short distance from the land, and he goes to great pains to carry the signifiers of his culture into his new habitat, which he proceeds to conquer with the tools of agriculture and tools with which to inscribe and write. The cultivation and enclosure of the land, the imposition of a temporal order is analogous with the writing process, which becomes the written text itself.

I found pen, ink, and paper, and I husbanded them to the utmost; and I shall show that while my ink lasted, I kept things very exact; but after that was gone, I could not, for I could not make any ink by any means that I could devise.

And this put me in mind that I wanted many things, notwithstanding all that I had amassed together; and of these, this of ink was one, as also spade, pick-axe, and shovel, to dig or remove the earth, needles, pins, and thread; as for linen, I soon learned to want that without much difficulty.

It is after he has carried all that he could from the wreck and arranged it in his living space that he begins to keep a journal of his days on the island. If the island space is opaque and resistant to translation, in the process of writing Crusoe inscribes his system of values and meanings as he does by inscribing his temporal order with notches on a wooden post:

"I came on shore here the 30th of September 1659." Upon the sides of this square post I cut every day a notch with my knife, and every seventh notch was as long again as the rest, and every first day of the month as long again as that long one; and thus I kept my calendar, or weekly, monthly, and yearly reckoning of time.

Later in the novel we find an analogous translation imperative toward the cannibals. Friday is rescued from his cannibal captors and tamed, so the translation and acculturation of Friday are marked by salvage or redemption. The translation strategy of land and people is a process of domestication where there is an effort to impose the values of the source culture.

Book III of Jonathan Swift's great eighteenth-century satirical novel, *Gulliver's Travels*, sees the protagonist, Lemuel Gulliver, reach a previously unknown island somewhere off the coast of Japan, having been attacked by pirates and forced off his ship. As he wonders how he will survive on a desolate piece of rock, he is suddenly aware of another island, flying above him. This is the island of Laputa, which serves as a means of transport between other islands, and we follow Gulliver as he meets the inhabitants and discovers more about the mysterious island that floats above the surface of the world, and meets the inhabitants who rule over the continent of Balnibari below. Swift's satirical translation of his floating island omits the real etymology of his invented island name Laputa (in Spanish, the whore):

The Word, which I interpret the Flying or Floating Island, is in the Original Laputa; whereof I could never learn the true Etymology. Lap in the old obsolete Language signifieth High, and Untuh a Governor; from which they say by Corruption was derived Laputa, from Lapuntuh. But I do not approve of this Derivation, which seems to be a little strained. I ventured to offer to the Learned among them a Conjecture of my own, that Laputa was quasi Lap outed; Lap signifying properly the dancing of the Sun Beams in the Sea; and outed a Wing, which however I shall not obtrude, but submit to the judicious Reader. (Part III - Chapter II)

Swift's purpose in creating his narrative was to instruct as well as to entertain. He creates for our amusement accounts of the intellectual deficiencies of the inhabitants of Laputa and those of the continent of Balnibarbi below, who pride themselves on their scholarship but who are presented as ludicrous. The Laputans are so engrossed in disembodied speculation that they disdain the science of geometry, which means that their houses are inadequately constructed, whereas the Balnibarbi professors' method of teaching mathematics is to write a proposition on a thin wafer and give it to students to swallow, and as for the professors of politics, they appear to Gulliver to be "wholly out of their Senses." In this crazy world knowledge is an absurdity, logic is topsy-turvy and all their great learning is so hopelessly flawed it is useless. Swift holds up a mirror to his own society through the depiction of the rulers and ruled on the floating island and the continent below. The Laputian rulers of Balnibari are so removed from worldly affairs that they worry over abstractions, and thus are unable to manage the duty of protecting the interests of their subjects.

While the rulers inhabiting Laputa possess the advantage of the elevated situation, the island is restricted by magnetic force to flying a maximum of four miles above the continent. Moreover, the 'Bottom' of the floating island is always under threat

of penetration from the phallic rocks, towers, pillars and spires of the ruled continent below, and the somatic pull of the continent attracts the Court ladies who are drawn sexually by the earthliness of the footment and frequently venture off and away from the cerebral insularity of the floating island above. There is a mutual dependency between island and continent, rulers and ruled:

And the King, when he is highest provoked, and most determined to press a City to Rubbish, orders the Island to descend with great Gentleness, out of a Pretence of Tenderness to his People, but indeed for fear of breaking the Adamantine Bottom; in which Case it is the Opinion of all their Philosophers, that the Load-stone could no longer hold it up, and the whole Mass would fall to the Ground.

The positivist scientific and rationalist discourse of the Enlightenment survived into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries especially in the discourses of anthropology, geology, botany, and zoology where islands are perceived as the sites of isolated life forms. Notably we have Darwin's scientific analysis of the evolution of life forms on islands in his "Essay of 1844," and in the work of anthropologists such as Malinowski, Margaret Mead, Clifford Geertz, and a host of others have chosen islands as the areas of their fieldwork. In contrast, the Romantic and post-Romantic aesthetics of Decadence, Symbolism and Modernism articulates different perspectives on the desire, dream or failure of an originary paradise or of an ideal society. In the course of the nineteenth century we find Byron's Romantic nostalgia in "The Isles of Greece," "Where Delos rose and Phoebus sprung! \ Eternal summer gilds them yet, \ But all, except their sun, is set," and in Baudelaire's well-known poem "Voyage to Cythera " where Aphrodite's island becomes the expression of decadent sensuality and world-weariness.

Byron also expresses nostalgia for an earthly paradise in "The Island" (1823), based on Lieutenant Bligh's account of the mutiny that occurred aboard his ship *Bounty* in the Pacific in 1789. The tale foregrounds the love between mutineer Torquil ("the blue-eyed northern child/of isles more known to man, but scarce less wild;/The fair-hair'd offspring of the Hebrides,/Where roars the Pentland with its whirling seas;") and the young native woman Neuha. Neuha saves Torquil's life by concealing him inside a submarine grotto during a chase by the British. The womblike cave becomes an island within an island, which is the true *locus* of security, happiness, and pleasure, and an expression of desire for a return to a state of insulated protection. From the discovery of the the Americas to the period of decolonization, European writers and artists translating insularity - Pierre Loti, Victor Segalen, Paul Gauguin and others - contributed to the myth of islands in the Caribbean or

the South Seas as new Cytheras, blessed islands, or exotic Edens rich with beautiful flora and fauna. The earliest indigenous writers of the Caribbean submitted to this myth and colonial portrayal until it was later challenged by post-colonial critiques in the middle of the twentieth century by such authors as Aimé Césaire.

The island theme as a modernist response to modernity is found in fiction such as D.H. Lawrence's *The Man Who Loved Islands*, Conrad's *Victory: an island tale*, and Aldous Huxley's futuristic dystopia *Brave New World*, which raise questions about the relationship between islands, social criticism, and utopian thinking. The role of the island is a negative one in Lawrence's fiction, since escape into any sheltered or isolated world prevents that crucial contact with the world of human relationships, which, although frequently painful, is of central importance for the life and growth of the individual. Similarly, in Conrad's *Victory*, the protagonist Heyst, takes refuge from the insensitivity of the modern world by choosing to live on an island but eventually finds redemption through commitment, life and love. Huxley's work is a judgement on both the deformity of the modern world and the incurable romantic utopianism of the Savage. He draws on Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (from which the title of his novel is derived) for themes and motifs, and also is a satire on Wells' *Modern Utopia*. In Wells' *World State*, there are prison-like islands for excluded and deviant individuals, whereas in Huxley, the deviants are the most talented and intelligent people. While the literary treatment and perspectives are different in the three authors, they are all exploring insularity as a response to the anxiety of modernity.

Metaphoric Islands

*But all the islands have that legendary oarsman
Slapping down dominoes on a rumshop table,
Then raking the slabs in with a gravedigger's breath,*

Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, LVII.ii

The floating island, the unstable space that moves around in between and defies known patterns of logic was taken up in the 1980s by Eugenio Barba, founder of the Odin Theatre and the International School of Theatre Anthropology. Barba uses the idea of the floating islands not in a satirical manner, but rather to talk about a community of theatre practitioners from many lands, who move around the world, sharing their work and living in what effectively are islands, loosely connected to one another but not rooted in a mainland. He uses the metaphor of the floating island to show how in an increasingly diverse world, international creativity can

move about through a network of metaphorical islands that share a common cause. His primary aim is not to lament the shortcomings of intellectuals, but rather to show how creative ways of working can interact around the globe.

We used the metaphor in a similar way in this essay, though we have extended the idea of the floating island to encompass different kinds of island communities: geographical, spatial, psychological, and mythical. In this way, we draw in the idea of the diaspora, the linked island groups spread across the world who share a history yet who engage daily with diversity. For the floating island, as opposed to the unmovable island, is an image well-suited to the multifariousness of the contemporary world. The island that travels, that does not stay in one place is far more representative of today's world than is the island fixed, as Shakespeare puts it when describing England in his *Richard II*, like a precious stone set in a silver sea. The idea of England as an island illustrates both the power and the absurdity of the idea of the island in nationalist discourse. For England is not, and never has been, an island in any strict sense of the word. It is part of a large number of islands, large and small, off the northern shores of the European mainland, termed by geographers the British Isles; yet the island as constructed in England acquired symbolic status, through a desire to perceive national identity as separate from the 'Continent.'

At the close of the twentieth century, dominant metaphors in literary studies served to draw attention to the growing significance of inter-relatedness in the world. Interestingly, many of these metaphors derive from science, both from organic and from theoretical science. Hence post-colonial discourse employs the terminology of hybridity, while translation studies uses the terminology of refraction, and everywhere there are references to webs, systems and networks. At the same time, across disciplines there is an increased interest in exploring those spaces that are not clearly delineated, hence the growing number of studies looking at liminality, in-betweenness, diasporic movement. This raises new questions of representation. The island *topos* is frequently linked to the critical *topos* of the re-presentation of reality and as such islands are a mode of mediation in the perception of culture. The idea of reality and re-presentation is raised as a major literary and philosophical theme in Bioy Casares' exploration of the island in *The Invention of Morel*, in a way that may be considered a forerunner to postmodernist aesthetics and simulacra. Post-colonial writers have further prompted us to challenge the difference between a 'native' narrative and ones written by outsiders. The relationship between native and colonizer in such major texts as *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* are addressed in their post-colonial rewritings in, for example, Michael Gilkes'

Prospero's Island, Marina Warner's *Indigo*, and J.D. Coetzee's *Foe*. The island world of the *Odyssey* has attracted a number of contemporary Caribbean writers. Most notably Derek Walcott recreates this ancient epic and the world of the Hellas archipelago in a Caribbean Creole context in his epic poem *Omeros*. Moreover, Enlightenment discourses and the native versus outsider perspective have been linked to the critical and theoretical discussions of how literary texts depict colonized islands asking and of how the project of empire may be translated in the post-colonial momentum. How do islands claim and narrate their independence against the former colonial centres and in the aftermath of their imperialistic practices? Writers and cultural theorists have examined islands and their significance in terms of ideological formations of identity and difference, such as in the nation/island identification, and how colonial and contemporary migrations and border-crossings may provide new perceptions on notions of identity. Post-colonial islands are often seen as cross-cultural or in-between spaces. In contrast to the approach of Western anthropologists who in the tradition of scientific positivism, have frequently seen islands as metonyms for an authentic, organic, and integrated culture, the Cuban anthropologist, Fernando Ortiz, uses the term counterpoint to situate his own island culture in relation to the European culture in the early twentieth century, and uses translation, and coins the term transculturation, as a way of affirming Cuban counterpoint.¹⁰ More recently, António Benítez-Rojo, another Cuban, speaks of instability, impermanence, and heterogeneity in relation to the Caribbean:

not a common archipelago, but a meta-archipelago (an exalted quality the Hellas archipelago possessed, and the great Malay archipelago as well), and as a meta-archipelago it has the virtue of having neither a boundary nor a center. Thus the Caribbean flows outward past the limits of its own sea with a vengeance."¹¹

He suggests that the *ultima Thule* for the Caribbean could be Bombay, Canton, West Africa, a New York cafe, a Bristol pub, or a Portuguese melody. In the French Antilles, a poetics of Relation is expounded by writer Edouard Glissant who conveys the strength of Caribbean writers to recreate, to speculate on questions of identity and to find a way of expressing pluralism and diversity. The very shapelessness of the clusters of island communities that comprise the Caribbean can be contrasted productively with the monolithic nature of continental masses.

¹⁰ See Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989, pp.34-46.

¹¹ António Benítez Rojo, *The Repeating Island: the Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, Durham & London, Duke UP, 1992, p. 4.

Islands are sites of translation, or rewriting and transposition, of re-creativity: Glissant argues that the Caribbean is a place in the world where Relation presents itself most visibly. He compares it to the Mediterranean, which is an inner sea surrounded by land, a sea that concentrates. In contrast, the Caribbean is a sea that explodes the scattered islands into an arc, and thus like the Pacific, the Caribbean (without necessarily inferring any advantage) is a natural illustration of the Poetics of Relation.¹²

In the twenty-first century we shall see an acceleration of this same trend, though much greater care will be taken to ensure that generalized concepts of globalization do not erase the significance of literary and cultural traditions. The horrific events of September 11, 2001 and its aftermath have shown us that no culture, anywhere, can exist in isolation for long. There are no islands whose inhabitants can seal themselves off from influences from the rest of the world, no real physical islands and no metaphoric islands either. The peoples of the world have become too closely meshed together and, most importantly, have too great a need of one another to live cut off from outside influences. It is hoped that through encounters with the ideas about islands that float, readers will be made more aware of the importance of literature which, even in an age of increasing technological prowess, remains the key to understanding the world we inhabit.

¹² Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1997. (*Poétique de la Relation*. Paris, Gallimard, 1990).