TOWARDS A METAMODERN LITERATURE

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~ To my Mother, who taught me the things that matter ~
Abstract

The aims of the thesis are to establish the concept of *metamodernism* in literature, and to consider its wider applicability within the arts and society generally. The thesis examines the features of metamodernism in light of William Blake’s model of the self, with a focus on two novels written in the second half of the twentieth century.

For Blake, the self is a constellation of faculties, among which reason, imagination, and emotions are paramount and interconnected. I propose that an increasing awareness of the importance of this interconnectedness, and a balance between reason on the one hand and imagination and emotions on the other – which Blake regarded as a transformative “awakening” of the soul – is essential to a metamodern sensibility.

Aspects of a paradigm change from postmodernism to metamodernist sensibility have been noted by the philosophers Stephen Toulmin and Luce Irigaray, whose thinking provides a theoretical framework for the thesis. In *Return to Reason*, Toulmin advocates a type of rationality that forsakes the domain of the abstract, the decontextualised, and the impersonal, and is instead informed by care for the other. Toulmin’s refocussed rationality corresponds with Irigaray’s grounded, interpersonal, feminine subjectivity, which she proposes as an alternative to the more abstract masculine subjectivity. While masculine subjectivity is generalised as logical and hierarchical, linear and object-oriented, feminine subjectivity is identified as emotion-based, non-linear, and people-oriented.

These influences provide the elements of a metamodern sensibility that integrates both the rational and the emotional. Their interaction may be observed in Michel Tournier’s *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (1967 – hereinafter *Vendredi*) and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997). Based on textual analysis of these works and others, the architecture of the metamodern self is developed in this thesis.

With respect to *Vendredi*, I suggest that Tournier rewrites the Enlightenment story of Robinson Crusoe’s trust in reason, and reason’s ability to ground science, technology, and progress. Tournier’s innovation consists in showing that these masculine-associated traits fail to establish a sense of fulfilment. Tournier’s Robinson experiences joy when he abandons the dream of progress and excessive rationality, and learns to live spontaneously and creatively with Vendredi’s guidance. Nonetheless, bracketing reason and the subsequent following of emotions do not provide lasting satisfaction, for Robinson is bitterly disillusioned after the
defection of Vendredi. Tournier’s protagonist achieves a sense of serenity only after he has grown disenchanted with the ordered world of rationality, and when he has overcome his emotions, especially his disappointment. He experiences an epiphany that indicates that neither reason nor emotions can provide solutions unless they are integrated at a superior level, deriving from experience.

A similar integration of reason and emotion is portrayed in Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things, which tells the story of the twins Rahel and Estha, “one soul in two bodies,” each an imperfect personification of the reason-emotions dichotomy. Their story – despite positive aspects such as self-transformation, coming to terms with the past, reevaluating traditions – demonstrates the tragedy that invariably accompanies the separation of self, and the disastrous effects of self-justifying reasoning. My thesis emphasises the role of the feminine – represented by Rahel – in recovering unity.

The dynamics of the self in Tournier’s and Roy’s novels signal a paradigm shift that surpasses both modernity and postmodernity: modernity was characterised by a rejection of tradition and excessive reliance on (male-dominated) reason; postmodernity challenged traditional wisdom by developing sophisticated ways of ironically distancing the reader or viewer from previous texts or works of art. This new paradigm, which I call metamodern, is an integration of reason and sensibility, in which the self transforms; the self’s journey is recorded in “tellable stories” that bridge established modern and postmodern dichotomies, where interconnections, the feminine, and innocence are valued.
Abbreviations and Short Titles


*Blake Dictionary* – *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*

“Bootstrapping” – “Bootstrapping Finnegans Wake in Search for Truth”

“Foretelling” – “Foretelling Metamodernity: Realisation of the Self in the *Rosary of Philosophers*, William Blake’s *Jerusalem* and Andrei Codrescu’s *Messiah.***”

“Interconnections” – “Interconnections in Blakean and Metamodern Space”

*Jerusalem* – *Jerusalem. The Emanation of the Giant Albion*

*Meditations* – *Meditations on the First Philosophy*

*MHH, The Marriage* – *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

*Robinson* – *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*

*The Rosary (Rosarium)* – *The Rosary of Philosophers (Rosarium Philosophorum)*

*The Songs* – *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

“What is Enlightenment?” – “An Answer to the Question ‘What is Enlightenment?’”

*Vendredi* – *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*

*Vindication* – *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

*VP* – *Vent Paraclet*
Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr Simon Ryan for our very informative and inspiring conversations, for his erudite bibliographical suggestions and pertinent comments, as well as for his support in enabling me to attend the Luce Irigaray Seminar in Bristol 2012. I am grateful to Dr Constantin Grigorut for his support, especially during the first days and months of my candidature, when I was adjusting to the rhythms of life in a different continent and hemisphere. My heartfelt gratitude goes to Professor Chris Ackerley for his unwavering support and the many hours spent reading my manuscripts, for his very relevant suggestions and his steadfast encouragement. I am forever indebted to Thelma Fisher for her infinite patience and extreme helpfulness in answering my endless EndNote and other bibliography queries, and to Michael Parkinson for his timely help when I moved to Auckland and Thelma was not available. I am grateful to Professor Luce Irigaray for her encouragement and for believing in my project. I also wish to thank Dr. Rachel Spronken-Smith for her support and for entrusting me with editing the undergraduate journal eMURJ. To Professors Tim Mehigan, Ellinor Shaffer, Robert Weinger, John Whittaker, Caroline Shaffer-Jones, Mihai Spariosu, Solomon Marcus, Amlan Das Gupta, and countless others, I am grateful for the good things they had to say about the fragments of the thesis that they saw or heard me present at conferences, or on less formal occasions. I wish I could express my gratitude to Professors Matei Calinescu and Annette Baier for the time they spent listening to me speak about metamodernism, but this will have to wait until another life. My gratitude also goes to the very special graduate advisers at Otago, Drs Paola Voci and Cecillia Noverro, who with their warmth and tact helped me and my project in so many ways, as well as to the administrative staff in the Department of Languages and Cultures at Otago, Linda Brown, Liz McMeking, Esther Wells, and Katherine Caders, for their kindness and support. I am grateful to Lynda Pitcaithly and to Professor Eamonn O’Brien for offering me a much needed study leave, to Olita Moala, and Min-Ah Lee for putting up with my absence; to Dr Philip Sharp and Dr Judy Paterson for acting as my external consciousness for a while and urging me into completing the editing of the thesis. To Dr Susan Carter I am very grateful for her altruistic help and her expert advice. Many thanks to Gary Forrester for his unrelenting encouragement and support, for allowing me to read More Deaths than One before its publication, to Philip F.Deaver and Jillian Sullivan for letting me read some of their unpublished short stories and poems, for their friendship and moral support in navigating the turbulent waters of final draft editing. I owe much of what I have ever achieved to my teachers and university lecturers, especially Mihaela Lazar and Emma Tudor, Monica Onojescu, Doina Vesa, Aurora Ilie, Nana Granescu, and Professors Virgil Stanciu, who supervised my BA and MA dissertations, Sandra Berce who read (however skeptically) one of the first versions of my research project on metamodernism back in 2001, Michaela Mudure and Stefan Oltean who supported some of my work as a graduate student and provided continuing encouragement. To my very selfless friends Keiko Garrity, Dr India Pesci, Shobha Herle, Dr Suzi Burlea, Vivien Nye, Sherley Willox, Jane Templan, and many others, I am forever indebted for being there when I needed a shoulder. And, most importantly, I owe a lot to my friends Sukriti, Sobik and Gauri Sharma, Luca Butikofer, and Anita Keane and Rhys Phillips, and of course, to my family, immediate and extended, especially Arindam and Andrei Banerjee, Dan, Doina Elena, and Adina Dumitrrescu, Irene and Karine Nagy, for their support and for believing in me when things got tough.

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# Contents

Abstract.......................................................................................................................... 5  
Abbreviations and Short Titles ....................................................................................... 7  
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................... 8  
Contents ............................................................................................................................. 11  
1 Introduction: Romantic and Metamodern Glimpses at Self-transformation .............. 11  
   Introductory Chapter Abstract ............................................................................... 11  
   1. Opening Considerations ..................................................................................... 12  
   2. Method, Thesis Structure, and Illustrative Authors ........................................... 15  
      2.1. Methodology ............................................................................................... 15  
      2.2. Thesis outline ............................................................................................. 16  
      2.3. A Manifesto of Metamodernism ................................................................ 19  
   3. Reason and Imagination. Blake, Wordsworth, and Schiller ............................... 21  
      4. Blake’s Model of the Self .............................................................................. 30  
         4.1. The Four Zoas or the Four Main Agencies of the Self ......................... 30  
         4.2. The Divided Self ..................................................................................... 32  
         4.3. Jerusalem ................................................................................................. 35  
   5. The Ethical, the Feminine, and the Other .......................................................... 41  
   6. Beyond Technology and Technocracy ............................................................... 50  
      2.1. The Enlightenment Background: Exploring the World Together .......... 50  
      2.2. Defoe’s Robinson, or The Self and Technology ......................................... 57  
      3. Solitude and Individualism. Descartes and Robinson ................................. 59  
         3.1. Descartes’ Masks ..................................................................................... 62  
         3.2. Blake on Reason in An Island in the Moon ............................................. 66  
      4. Genette and Robinson’s Hypo- and Hyper-textual Adventures.................. 72  
         4.1. Defoe’s and Tournier’s Appropriations and Re-writings ..................... 74  
      5. From Defoe’s Trust in Reason to Tournier’s Aspiration for the Absolute .. 79  
         5.1. Inventing Myths: Silence and “L’âpre Solitude” of the Contemporary Self 86  
      6. Beyond Technology and Technocracy ......................................................... 96  
      7. Literature as Redemptive Experience .......................................................... 102  
         “Nouvelles et contes” or “la littérature comme panacée” ............................. 102  
         Tales .............................................................................................................. 103  
      8. Humanising Modernity ................................................................................…... 104  
      8.1. Tournier and Toulmin’s Solutions: Spontaneity and Reasonableness ........ 105  
      9. Man Friday and the Politics of Technology and Arts ................................... 108  
   3 From Innocence to Experience and Back Again. Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small  
     Things ................................................................................................................. 112
# Bibliography

Further Research

Significance of this Study

6

# Features of Metamodernism

Chapter Abstract

Looking back and looking forward: Post- and meta-modernism

Chapter Abstract


1. The Growth of the Self in the Light of Traditions Challenged or Revisited: Roy’s and Blake’s Views on Education

1.1. Beyond Postmodern Fragmentation: Individuation and “Tellable” Stories

1.2. Initiation and Awakening vs. Spiritual Slumber

2. Ages of Man, or the Hallmarks on the Way of Becoming

2.1. Boundaries. Experience. Fall from Innocence into Fragmentation

2.2. The Accuser as an Agent of Experience

2.3. The Ages of Man in Roy, Blake, and the Vedic tradition

3. “It is Raised a Spiritual Body”

3. 1. Innocence, Experience, and Return to Innocence

3. 2. The World of Experience and the Public Good

3. 3. Strategies of Surviving Experience


4 Towards a Metamodern Literature

Chapter Abstract

1. The Metamodern Zeitgeist

2. Some Instances of the Term Metamodernism

2.1. Early Postmodernism and the Literature of Presence

2.2. Considerations of the Sublime and the Beautiful

2.3. From Furlani’s Metamodernism as Literature of Presence to Philosophia Perennis

2.4. Metamodernism and Social Theory: Anthony Elliott and the Reflexive Scanning of Imagination

2.5. Feldman: Metamodernism as a Paradigm of Integration

2.6. Metamodernism in Art: Oscillation vs Integration and Interconnections

2.7. Metamodernism in Literature and Culture

3. Is Postmodernism Dead? Long live Postmodernism!

5 Looking back and looking forward: Post- and meta-modernism

Chapter Abstract

Features of Metamodernism

6. Closing Remarks. The Significance of this Study. Directions for Further Research

Significance of this Study

Further Research

Bibliography
1

Introduction: Beyond Romanticism

Romantic and Metamodern Glimpses at Self-transformation

Introductory Chapter Abstract

This research started from an intuition that postmodernism was dated and another sensibility was on its way. At that time metamodernism seemed like an odd idea, or just another –ism, a theory that would become dated before it was even established. Now the term has gained currency, mainly in reference to the arts and architecture. In 2011, the German newspapers Die Zeit and Der Tagesspiegel \(^1\) dubbed metamodernism as the new dominant paradigm in the arts, pushing postmodernism from centre stage after its fifty-year run.\(^2\) This thesis is the only study to date to chronicle the evolution of the concept, and to explore its implications in literature.

This thesis is primarily concerned with metamodernism in literature and culture, with a special focus on self-transformation, an aspect of metamodernism that is closest to the heart of literary studies. In contrast with postmodernist studies that anticipated the death of “the subject,” metamodernism proposes that the self is well and thriving, experiencing an evolutive pattern of transformation from innocence to experience to a “higher” stage of informed innocence. The architexts of this pattern of transformation can be identified in William

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Blake’s work, while Michel Tournier’s and Arundhati Roy’s debut novels provide turn-of-the-century examples of such transformations of the self.

One aspect of this transformation is an aspiration towards a unity of the self, as well as an expansion of the self to encompass the other – without appropriating the other. The other plays an essential part in the process of self-transformation, whether as the colonial subject Vendredi (Friday) in Tournier’s *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*,\(^3\) or as the untouchable Velutha or the feminine Rahel in Roy’s *The God of Small Things*.

In its chronicling of the character Rahel’s transformations, Roy’s novel contrasts the tribulations of the other – an Indian female protagonist in this case – with male-dominated self-justifying rationality fashioned after the model of the white Western one. Rahel challenges the dominant rules and systems in an almost Blakean fashion.

Luce Irigaray’s theoretical positing of feminine subjectivity as the other in relation to the Western self proposes an alternative to white male rationality, while not rejecting rationality as such. Building on Irigaray’s frame, this thesis considers the integral role of feminine subjectivity in articulating the contemporary self. The transforming of the self and acknowledging and respecting the other lie at the core of the metamodern sensibility.

The chapter includes a presentation of the comparative methodology used and an outline of the thesis. This thesis establishes a model of the self proposed by William Blake, and shows its correlatives in the debut novels of Michel Tournier and Arundhati Roy, in the context the concept of metamodernism and its characteristics in relation to previous paradigms of thought, especially modernism and postmodernism.\(^4\)

1. Opening Considerations

Blake’s thought has been one of the most steadfast challenges to reason in its modern iteration – the rationality that arose during the uprootedness of the industrial revolution, which the self experienced in urban environments. As an alternative to the levelling of differences

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3 I am not discussing here the 1971 *ad usum* Delphini version *Vendredi ou la vie sauvage*.

4 Note on the orthography of postmodern and postmodernism in this thesis: When referring to the post-modern in contrast with the modern, I write the terms *post-modern* and *post-modernism* with a dash, whereas when referring to the period term or the cultural and literary trend, I use the term without a dash (albeit in the cases when a contrast or comparison with the modern, or modernism is implied or emphasised). When written *(post)modernity*, the reference is to both modernity and postmodernity, or to postmodernity as a continuation of or an aspect of modernity.
which city life imposed, Blake articulated an intriguing model of the self characterised by an intricate space of contradictions and an endless proliferation of agencies.

This thesis follows Blake’s model of the self in the debut novels of two writers active at the turn of the twentieth century, Michel Tournier and Arundhati Roy, and suggests configurations of the metamodern sensibility. Most critics acknowledge that Blake’s concept of the self presents the dynamic tension between innocence and experience. I propose that the self as conceived by Blake not only navigates between the “two contrary states” of innocence and experience, but also undergoes a process of transformation during which experience transforms innocence, and is in turn followed by higher innocence. I argue that this process of transformation is also mapped in the evolution of the protagonists of Tournier’s and Roy’s novels.

One aspect of the transformation of the self that I identify in Blake and the two novels is the transition from a self dominated by egotism and rationality to a self that, through openness to emotions\(^5\) like compassion and love, becomes aware and accepting of the other. This transformation corresponds to a shift observed by Stephen Toulmin in *Return to Reason*, where abstract reason is replaced by a reasonableness that is informed by context-dependent considerations. The reasonable self cares for average people and the circumstances of their lives, acknowledges, and accepts the other, including most significantly the feminine subjectivity identified by Irigaray.

This feminine subjectivity, as Irigaray observed in *Sharing the World*, is the other in relation to the Western self – which is implicitly linked to the white male rational self, predisposed towards organising, hierarchal alignments, and conquest. While masculine subjectivity tends to relate primarily to objects rather than people, and tends to include people as objects of rational consideration, Irigaray offers the feminine subjectivity, which is more relation-based, favouring interactions between equals.

In Annette Baier’s understanding, this feminine subjectivity is governed primarily by an ethics of care. In “The Need for More than Justice,” Baier sees ethics of care as innate within any individual, male or female – although it manifests itself in varying degrees from

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\(^5\) The word emotion derives from the French *émotion*, which in turn derives from Old French, *esmовoire*, which meant to excite. The origin of the word is Latina Vulgata, or Vulgar Latin (spoken, rather than written Latin), which added the prefix ex to the Latin word *movēre*, to move. But what are emotions? Emotion, according to the *American Heritage Dictionary* means:

1. A mental state that arises spontaneously rather than through conscious effort and is often accompanied by physiological changes; a feeling: the emotions of joy, sorrow, reverence, hate, and love.
2. A state of mental agitation or disturbance.
3. The part of the consciousness that involves feeling; sensibility.

When I refer to emotions in this thesis it is mostly in the third sense. See *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, (Houghton Mifflin), 21 July 2013 <http://www.ahdictionary.com/>. 

13
person to person, and occasionally is disregarded by some.\(^6\)

I read in Baier’s position the implication of a double foci personality – masculine and feminine, rational and sensitive, practical and imaginative – which is fictionalised in Tournier’s pairings of Robinson and Vendredi and Roy’s male-female twins Estha and Rahel. The united self that emerges is characteristic of the metamodern.

Although primarily a literary and theoretical study, the thesis raises broader philosophical questions. How has the age of globalisation and instantaneous electronic communication affected our relationships and our notions of self? What is the continuing role of the Christian-based ethics premised on proximity? Is the commandment “love thy neighbor as thyself” to be modified when our actions affect people thousands of miles away?

An ethics based on interaction with the same (people like ourselves, in proximity to ourselves) is both enriched and complicated by the pressures of interacting with the other. In the process, relationships, connections, and networks emerge as organising principles of societies, rather than traditional, male-dominated hierarchies. A growing awareness of interconnections and networks (in human society and in nature) gives rise to a new conception of human societies as complex adaptive systems and, on a personal level, a redefinition of the self. This redefinition amounts to a self-transformation that seeks to encourage relational aspects of the self rather than egotistic ones. This transformation, surprisingly, takes us back to the Blakean vision, while being relevant to contemporary (i.e., start of the twenty-first century) efforts at self-definition.

The novels of Tournier and Roy, as well as the other texts that are analysed, indicate that the pressure for self-transformation comes both from within the self and from outside – i.e., from the wider society and the environment. The increased complexity of the material world, and the incessant growth of science and technical rationality, raise the question of whether the concept of self has kept up with these changes. Have we evolved so that we are able to cope with the complexities of our world? A recurrent theme of this thesis is to question how personal growth is achieved not only by an increase in skills, but also by a growth in wisdom, depth of understanding, and self-realisation.

The very fundamentals of modernity are called into question by some of the quandaries that are raised by this research. Do we still require allegiance of some sort to a paradigm of rationality, of hierarchical organisation, of rules and authority? Or is there another paradigm emerging from the remains of (what Habermas called) the “unfinished project of modernity,” a project that hoped to enlighten humankind through reason,  

mathematics, and science? What is the place of rationality in the emerging paradigm? Is rationality to be worshipped, or bracketed; is it balanced by other faculties? What is the role of emotions and imagination in this paradigm? How do we integrate rationality and emotions, logic and imagination, scientific truth, and belief or faith? What entitles us to think that a new paradigm is emerging at all, and to what degree is this paradigm a meta-modern one (i.e., addressing some of the limitations of modernity and postmodernity)? In what ways is the proposed paradigm of interconnectedness and networks different from previous ones?

2. Method, Thesis Structure, and Illustrative Authors

In this thesis I outline the theoretical concept of metamodernism, and illustrate various aspects of metamodernism as evinced in two novels – Tournier’s and Roy’s – written in the second half of the twentieth century, as well as in a few texts from the twenty-first century by other authors, among which Jillian Sullivan, Gary Forrester, Billy Collins, Philip Deaver. The thesis will discuss the significance of metamodernism in relation to the self by engaging in dialogue with analysts or critics of the modern and postmodern paradigms (notably Luce Irigaray, Stephen Toulmin, Andreas Huyssen, J. -F. Lyotard, and Ihab Hassan).

2.1. Methodology

Given that the model of the self presented in Roy and Tournier can be traced back to the eighteenth century (especially to the works of Blake), and to premodernity, a comparative literature approach is utilised in the thesis. Blake’s imagery and themes are compared to and contrasted with the texts of Tournier and Roy, as the relevance of the Blake’s visionary thought to modern or contemporary concerns is considered.

Textual studies (especially Genette) and the perspectives of contemporary criticism (mainly postmodernism as conveyed by Brian McHale, J.-F. Lyotard, Linda Hutcheon, and Marjorie Perloff), cultural and postcolonial studies, and psychoanalytical approaches to the self, are considered. When dealing with such complex topics as paradigm shift and reformation of the self, philosophical perspectives (Steven Toulmin, Luce Irigaray, Charles Taylor) and reception theories (in the sense proposed by Marshall Alcorn and Mark Bracher7) provide an informative background against which novels such as Tournier’s and Roy’s can be read in depth.

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Together, Blake, Tournier, and Roy raise issues that challenge the role of literature in society and in self-realisation: Is a primary role of literature to entertain, or rather to instruct while entertaining? Is (some) literature meant to provide cathartic experiences? Is literature obliged to reveal truth, or to set the reader in quest of his/her own truth? Can/should literature cause any change in the reader (i.e., the self)? Can/should literature serve to catalyse one’s self-realisation?

While paying homage and respect to acknowledged precedents, this thesis presents a new theoretical approach, and therefore produces its own methodology. The interpretations of Tournier’s and Roy’s novels in the light of a model of the self outlined by Blake are innovative, as are many of this thesis’s interpretations of Blake. These new interpretations coalesce in the emerging metamodern paradigm.

Accordingly, in many ways the thesis is a pioneering study that aims to outline the concept of metamodernism in literature and culture, and to explore differences from previous uses of the word in philosophy, sociology, and art (one of which uses, it shall be shown, derived from my definition of metamodernism in an earlier published article).

2.2. Thesis outline

As the change from a (post)modern to a metamodern paradigm is not confined to any particular country or culture, this thesis invokes authors from a variety of backgrounds, while metamodern elements are traced to such precedents as the alchemical Rosary of Philosophers and Blake’s texts. A male and a female writer from, respectively, Western culture (Tournier) and Indian postcolonial culture (Roy), have been chosen to illustrate metamodernism in literature as a paradigm that informs an increasingly globalised world.

References will be made to contemporary writers including the New Zealand poet Jillian Sullivan, the American poet laureate Billy Collins, the Flannery O’Connor-winning short story writer Philip Deaver, and the novelist Nick Hornby, among many others whose works together signal a paradigm shift towards a metamodern sensibility. None of these writers – including Tournier and Roy – set out self-consciously to write a metamodern poem,

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8 In its initial meaning, the Greek word *kathairein* meant to purify, thus linking to Blake’s concept of *awakening*, which implied a “cleansing of the doors of perception.” Recent studies emphasise that literature produces modifications in the brain, which lead to self transformation. Gregory Berns et al. have proven that “reading a novel may cause changes in resting-state connectivity of the brain that persist.” Their study was published in the journal *Brain Connectivity*. See Jules Verne, *School for Robinsons* (GoodBook LLC, 2007). “Stories shape our lives and in some cases help define a person,” says neuroscientist Berns, lead author of the study. Jules Verne and Christian Robin, *L’oncle Robinson* (Librairie Générale Française, 2001).
story, or novel. But each was sensitive to the paradigm shifts that were already occurring in
the wake of postmodernism, and their works reflect these new sensibilities.

The thesis is divided into three main chapters, plus the present introductory chapter
and a conclusion. The Introduction outlines the background of the discussion regarding self-
transformations in Tournier’s and Roy’s novels, showing the connections with Blake’s model
of the self and Irigaray’s proposal of double subjectivity that support my argument that the
post-1945 consciousness sometimes adapts Blakean frameworks, while opening towards the
metamodern.

Chapter Two focuses on Tournier’s Blakean philosophy as shown in the saga of the
modern self, portrayed in Vendredi. Where Blake vilified industrialisation, Tournier sees
value in the role that technology plays in shaping the modern self. Tournier’s thoughts are
placed on a vector, with Cartesian meditations on the rational self segregated from (and
eventually integrating with) emotions or passions. Blake’s satire on the rational self in An
Island in the Moon is discussed, and the transformations undergone by the Robinsonade –
portrayals of Robinson Crusoe from the Defoe architext to Tournier’s hypertext – are mapped.
The determinants that led to Tournier’s modifications of the original castaway story are
considered, and the roles of story telling and the feminine perspective in catalysing self-
transformations are explored.

By “Robinsonade” I mean a genre of the outcast narrative that presents the self’s
ingenious interaction with the natural world to ensure survival, accompanied by the story of
the discoveries and transformations undergone by the self. The genre was established with
Defoe’s The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, and includes numerous variations from the
eighteenth century to our day. In this thesis, I treat the genre of the Robinsonade as indicative
of the modern self’s attempt to turn nature to one’s own uses, while also drawing wisdom
from experience. The chapter ends with an analysis of Tournier’s and Toulmin’s solutions
for humanising modern and postmodern sensibilities.¹⁰

9 A few examples of novels belonging to the Robinsonade genre are: The Swiss Family Robinson (Johann David
Wyss, 1812), The Coral Island (R.M. Ballantyne, 1857), Uncle Robinson (L’Oncle Robinson) (Jules Verne,
1870), The Mysterious Island (L’Île mystérieuse) (Jules Verne, 1874), Two Years’ Vacation (Deux ans de
vacances) (Jules Verne, 1888), Friday (Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique) (Michel Tournier, 1967) and
Friday and Robinson (Vendredi ou la Vie sauvage) (Michel Tournier, 1977), Foe (J. M. Coetzee, 1986), Life of
Pi (Yann Martel, 2001), and the films Cast Away (2000), Man Friday (1975), and the TV series Lost (2004–
2010), among many others.

10 This second chapter is an expanded and modified version of an article published in Caietele Echinox
(Equinox Notebooks) in 2010 (the article is available at http://phantasma.ro/wp/?p=1230&lang=en). I am grateful
to Professor Corin Braga, the Editor-in-chief of Caietele Echinox, for his kind permission to reproduce
paragraphs of the article in this thesis.
Chapter Three discusses Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, and the evolution of the self in relation to Blake’s and Roy’s views on education, as well as the ages of humankind as expounded in the Indian Brahminic texts, the *Vedas*. Blake’s poem “To Tirzah,” and Estha’s awakening to human communication in Roy’s novel, raise issues of spiritual transformation and obstacles to the growth of the self. The role of the self-righteous rationalist “accusers” in Blake’s poem “The Gates of Paradise,” and the resolution of conflicts in Roy’s novel, are considered. The self’s journey of initiation through experience to higher innocence is mapped in Blake’s *Book of Los* and Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. Roy’s novel is read as emphasising the possibility of trespassing (appropriately) artificial boundaries, promoting personal growth and reconciliation with the past despite personal tragedy, and evaluating and coming to terms with tradition.¹¹

The Chapter Four provides a more detailed and generalised discussion of the term *metamodernism*, and its various applications in sociology, philosophy, art and literature. After a discussion of each application, I put forward my understanding of the concept of *metamodernism* as an emerging cultural paradigm.

The concluding chapter summarises the discussion of the features of metamodernism in literature, based primarily on the novels analysed in the chapters two and three, together with the more theoretical considerations of the introductory chapter and the fourth chapter. The conclusion contains an outline of the originality of the thesis’s research, while suggesting possible future pathways of research.

Each of the texts selected illustrates one or more aspects of metamodernism. Tournier’s *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* is a story of self-transformation that lies at the core of metamodern fiction. Roy’s *The God of Small Things* raises the possibility of epiphany despite the pressures of circumstance, with the option of integrating rationality and sensibility, eventually achieving fulfilment and unity of the self. The dynamics of the self in Tournier’s and Roy’s novels are read as signalling a paradigm shift that surpasses both modernity and postmodernity, which came into being at the end of the twentieth century, characterised by a rejection of tradition and excessive reliance on male-dominated reason. These earlier

¹¹ Some of the material in this chapter was first presented at the Postcolonial Romanticisms Conference at the University of Leeds in 2005. I am grateful to Professor Ed Larrissy for suggesting the connection with Rousseau’s *Emile* and for his encouragement while I was preparing the conference paper, and to Professor David Fairer for drawing my attention to the interaction between the word and vision of William Blake. A much earlier version of this chapter, which focussed almost exclusively on Roy’s novel rather than on the parallel with Blake, was published in a collective volume, *Rites of Passage in Postcolonial Women’s Writings* (Rodopi, 2010). The chapter is both longer and more complex than the previously published version. I am indebted to the editors and the publisher for permission to include this material in the thesis. (More information about the volume is available at http://www.rodopi.nl/functions/search.asp?BookId=CC+123.)
paradigms were characterised by the fragmentation of the self, and the emerging need to challenge the supremacy of reason. This new paradigm, which I call metamodern, is a paradigm that revalues traditions and integrates reason and sensibility.

The definition of the concept of metamodernism flows from a discussion of the transformations that the self undergoes in narratives that invoke a type of logic that bridges dichotomies rather than the Cartesian dichotomic spirit. This definition values interconnections as opposed to the Enlightenment impulse to separate observation into categories. The feminine and the reasonable as different from the default mainstream rationality, assumed to be neutral, but in fact male, white, and Western are synchronised, and innocence as opposed to Deleuze’s praise of perversion, la perversion, is recognised as the foundation of metamodern sensibility.

Metamodernism is defined from a variety of perspectives as a paradigm of integration: integration of faculties (reason and emotions), of systems of thought, and of different ontological levels as exemplified in Blake’s poetry and captured in the denouement of Tournier’s novel. Also, as The God of Small Things demonstrates, the metamodern is a paradigm in which ethical considerations are dominant and in the disregarded “other” is increasingly acknowledged and valued: women, the subaltern/colonised, the innocent and the oppressed become central actants in the contemporary cultural discourse. Acknowledging the other is a necessary element of cultural and personal “becoming,” as Irigaray points out in Sharing the World. As a result of this transformation, values that have been occasionally sidelined in (post)modernity are increasingly revisited and redefined. These values include: innocence, the protection of the innocent and the disempowered, compassion, empathy, altruistic love, forgiveness of past injuries, respect for difference, creativity, and ingenuity.

2.3. A Manifesto of Metamodernism

A metamodernist manifesto would have to acknowledge that metamodernism is the search for roots in times of uprootedness. It is the self’s longing for innocence, beauty, and simplicity in times of sophistication, shifting aesthetic standards, and excessive complexity. It is the search for that vantage point from which both complexity and simplicity can make sense, coexist, and complement one another.

From the perspective of metamodernism, the respective values of cultures, paradigms, theories, and strategies, as well as their interconnectedness, may be assessed.

Metamodernism synthesises the best qualities of modernism and postmodernism: modernist interrogations of the roots and validity of traditions, challenging rationalism and useless rules or systems, the insistence on imagination and inspiration — coexist with the postmodern openness to dialogue, its multiculturalism and inclusiveness of the other (women, minority groups, indigenous people), the challenging of hierarchies and metanarratives, merging of art forms, interest in everyone’s life and the context of his/her existence.

Metamodernism is a return to fundamental questions that define our being in the world. It is the integration of experience with innocence and wisdom, of reason with sensibility, of past with present. It is a search for the meaning and beauty of the present.

Metamodernism integrates the lessons of the past to enrich the present. It transcends national boundaries and ethnic divisions to identify the determinants of the subject in the twenty-first century. It is a poetics of tolerance, appreciation, and acceptance of the other, with openness and kindness.

Metamodernism is the search for the truths that live, and have always lived, within the hearts of everyone. It acknowledges the value, playfulness, and necessity of mask-wearing, in harmony with the importance of self-knowledge in the Socratic sense.

Metamodernism is a bold assertion of the human being as a spiritual entity, rather than a forlorn person inhabiting his or her detached island of individualism. Each person is recognised as part and parcel of the whole of human society and history, an essential part of a system of networks of continuous dynamism in the animate and inanimate world.

Metamodernism is a self-perception of humans in their complexity, in their infinite combinations and permutations of emotions, reason, conditionings, and ego — yet metamodernism seeks the common denominator that makes communication possible within our humanity: respect for nature, for the self and for the other.

Metamodernism is the expression of the self’s search for home, the recognition that the mythical heroic quests of yore nowadays belong to everyone. It is the search for genuine self-fulfilment – physical, emotional, spiritual – achieved by overcoming the obstacles to growth and self-realisation that come in every life, looking for the right path home.
Metamodernism eschews fanaticism and opens communication; it is the acknowledgment of the self’s continuous evolution and growth, and of the strategies that support the self in its journey.

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While this thesis is primarily concerned with literary studies, literature is a barometer of wider cultural and social transformations. In addressing these wider concerns, this thesis of necessity incorporates psychoanalysis (Jungian individuation), philosophy (the ethical dominant of the emerging metamodern paradigm), science (complex systems), and cultural studies (for the study of contemporary trends). Tournier, Roy, and other authors revise through their works some of the fundamental values of the societies in which they live, many of which have been shaped during modernity. Modernity was a forward-looking paradigm of rationality, separation, and dichotomy that began during the Enlightenment (Toulmin). Romantic authors, however, from Goethe to Schiller, from Blake to Keats, responded to insular rationality (and the divisions it employed to map the world) by emphasising the role of imagination and the multiplicity of feelings, together with an emerging awareness of interconnectedness.

3. Reason and Imagination. Blake, Wordsworth, and Schiller

Among the Romantics who most vehemently and persistently advocated imagination over reason was William Blake. Blake proposed the benefits of imaginative vision over what he called “ratiocination” or reason. Imagination, according to Blake, places integration (“cominglings”) over separation, and awareness of unity and interconnectedness (“we are one”) over analysis or fragmentation. Blake’s reservations about analytical reasoning are expressed repeatedly in Jerusalem. While condemning a narrow rationality that triggers “the crucifying cruelties of Demonstration” (J 25:55), Blake favours positive emotions such as joy or mercy. He opposes the analytical dissection of such emotions: “Then spake Jerusalem. O
Albion! my Father Albion! / Why wilt they number every little fibre of my Soul,/ Spreading
them out before the Sun like stalks of flax to dry?” (J 23: 19-23).

For Blake, the soul is a composite of multifarious “fibres,” an organic and concrete
metaphor, rather than an abstraction. The soul’s “fibres” act as living agencies of the self, but
can be sapped of vigour by being over-analysed and rationalised. The way to a fulfilling
existence is not to rationalise or analyse (“number every little fibre of my Soul”), but to
participate in and experience emotions such as “the Infant Joy,” which “is beautiful, but its
anatomy / Horrible, ghast & deadly: nought shalt thou find in it” (J 23: 19-23). Contrary to the
plain beauty of emotions such as “Infant Joy,” the clinical analysis of such joy is repellant and
deadly.

When Blake emphasises imagination, he has in mind (in Jungian terminology) the
feminine archetype of masculine Albion (he is concomitantly England and humankind).
Imagination is not mere fancy, but redemptive creativity. It is inspiration, the agent of
epiphanies, hence its Blakean name: Jerusalem, the city of Christ’s death and resurrection:
“Imagination is surrounded by the daughters of Inspiration, who in the aggregate are calld
[sic] Jerusalem.”

The individual’s Jerusalem, a feminine emanation, initiates and redeems, while
facilitating human communication: “When in Eternity Man converses with Man they enter/
Into each others Bosom (which are Universes of delight)/ In mutual interchange and first their
Emanations meet” (J 88: 3-11 in Keynes 733). Blake often contrasts Eternity and the Fall,
which stand respectively for an ideal state of being and the usual limitations of human
awareness. The gap between them is bridged by imagination. Imagination, a feminine
emanation, informs the exchange between ontological concepts (the Fall and Eternity), as well
as between individuals (as in Blake’s lines above).

Similarly, the other and the feminine agency – in their instantiations in Tournier’s
novel as Vendredi (whose name derives from Venus, the goddess of love and beauty), and as
the postcolonial feminine subject (in Roy’s novel) – play an indispensable role in the self’s
transformation. Irigaray’s Sharing the World provides a framework for this aspect of the
thesis’s argument. The focus on feminine agency is developed in Chapters Two and Three.

Despite Blake’s emphasis on the resurrective power of imagination, this thesis
proposes that Blake’s intention was also to put forward a transformation of the self, which he

14 William Blake and Geoffrey Keynes (ed), Complete Writings with Variant Readings (Oxford University
Press, 1972) 45.
15 All italics and bolds are mine unless otherwise specified.
calls “awakening.” This Blakean *awakening* requires a balancing of rationality and imagination. In the final plates of *Jerusalem*, Blake presented an image of a personified Sun (Sol) and Moon (Luna), each carrying out their respective tasks in harmony and under the supervision of “Los, the Eternal Prophet” (who stands for a perfect embodiment of imagination and vision) (Plate 100). Sol and Luna are referred to in alchemical texts such as the *Rosary of Philosophers* (1550), as representations of reason and sensibility, action and imagination.

Blake’s illumination in Plate 100 thus suggests that a balance between rationality (the use to which the faculty of reason is put) and emotions (evoked by the feminine character holding the Moon), can be achieved through the power of imagination. The same idea is reflected in the text of the poem, when in Plate 98 the representatives of visionary poetry – Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton – and of scientific rationality – Bacon, Newton, and Locke – participate equally in what appears to be a solar apotheosis:

> The Druid Spectre was Annihilate, loud thund’ring, rejoicing terrific, vanishing, Fourfold Annihilation, & at the clangor of the Arrows of Intellect The innumerable Chariots of the Almighty appear’d in Heaven, And Bacon & Newton & Locke, & Milton & Shakspear & Chaucer. A Sun of blood red wrath surrounding heaven on all sides around, Glorious, incomprehensible by Mortal Man. (*J* 98: 6-11)

The ideal state of being for Blake is one of unity – dynamic equilibrium between reason, emotions, and imagination – which provides the basis for some of the most important agencies of the self. Imagination not only balances reason in the ideal state of being, but it also trims its asperities, annihilates its destructive potential, and calms rationality’s inclination to “The Druid Spectre.” As the development leading up to the quote above indicates, rationality together with the ego and the limiting conditionings of custom and power (“The Druid Spectre”) are “annihilated” due to the work of Jerusalem, the feminine imagination. As a result, the self has acess to joy (“rejoicing terrific”). The energised “Intellect” participates in the epiphanic presence of divinity, whereby the self perceives subtler realities (“the innumerable Chariots of the Almighty appear’d in Heaven”), while the greatest scientific and imaginative minds (“Bacon & Newton & Locke, & Milton & Shakspear & Chaucer”) witness a solar apotheosis incomprehensible to the unawakened (the “Mortal Man”).

23
The term “solar apotheosis” refers to a moment of intense and complete epiphany when the limitations of the individual ego and conditionings melt and the self shines through. The sun is a symbol of the spirit, and of imagination in *A Blake Dictionary* (Damon 285), which makes the solar apotheosis an allegory of imagination shining through, illuminating and sublimating reason represented by scientists (“Bacon & Newton & Locke”) and emotions (“Milton & Shakspear & Chaucer”). The presence of artists and scientists side by side shows that imagination is accessible to both groups. The sun stands for an almost divine presence, indicating that a connection between individual creativity and the Creator is possible for Blake, an idea that he revisited in Plate 99, where the individual soul merges with God.

A synthesis of intellect and imagination, pragmatism and care – first captured by Blake and expressed in his poems and their illuminations – is essential for the metamodern self. A metaphor for this synthesis, and for the state of equilibrium and quiet joy that it establishes, is the return home. This idea is illustrated in Plate 99 of *Jerusalem*, where the self – represented as a feminine figure – is lost in the embrace of God.16

The Blakean self in its multiple and varied aspects (reason, emotions, sensations, and instincts – which Blake personifies under the names of Urizen, Urthona, Luvah, and Tharmas) integrates and assumes its unity in the epiphanic experience of “Visions of God in Eternity.” Blake describes this state as the rising of the psychic agencies within the self:

Urizen & Luvah & Tharmas & Urthona arose into
   Albion’s Bosom: Then Albion stood before Jesus in the Clouds
   Of Heaven, Fourfold among the Visions of God in Eternity. (J 96: 41-43)

Alicia Ostriker17 reads the end of *Jerusalem* as enacting the dynamic equilibrium of the four faculties of reason, passions (emotions), instincts, and sensations (1048). The agencies of the self manifest in the “awakened” Albion who, as a result, partakes of divinity and converses with the inhabitants of heaven. These communications are orchestrated under the resurrective influence of Jerusalem, the imagination. Imagination, a crucial faculty for Blake, manifests as visionary perception. In *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, ordinary sensory perception is contrasted with an awakened or visionary one:

16 A similar metamodern sensibility is at play in the words of contemporary New Zealand poet Jillian Sullivan, where the self navigates turbulent waters to find its way home, as the poet expresses the hope of safe journey “if only those we long for pass safely through. See Jillian Sullivan, *Parallel* (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2014).
“What,” it will be Question’d, “When the Sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?”

“Oh no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty.’” (Keynes 617)

Whereas sensory perception is bound to material objects, and to memories and social conditioning, visionary perception is infused with imagination, capable of reaching towards infinity. To the imaginative “awakened” self mundane realities reveal their epiphanic potential, and the immanent offers visionary capability. A state of openness to epiphanies that can extricate the self from the shell of ego, or from the restrictions of narrow conditioning, is a characteristic of the metamodern transformation, as the novels by Roy and Tournier will show.

**Awakening** figures large in Blake’s thought, although Foster Damon fails to acknowledge its centrality in the *Blake Dictionary*.18 If realised, **awakening** connects creature and creator, as well as humans with each other. Los, the eternal prophet, emphatically entreats Albion to forsake his slumber and awake to the divine presence inside his soul and outside, in the world:

Awake! Awake! O sleeper of the land of shadows, wake! expand!
I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine:
Fibres of love from man to man thro Albions pleasant land. (*Jerusalem* 4: 6-8)

The connections are established between individual and individual, and between humans and their environment, which is perceived as a living presence.

Eventually, Albion (England-humankind) awakens to a sense of interconnectedness, and expands his self, realising the mutual interdependence of creator and creature (“I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine”). This rediscovered unity renders relationships enjoyable, inclusive of landscapes or nature. People learn to connect to their emotions, to cherish their mutual love (“Fibres of love from man to man”), and to become receptive to natural beauty (“Albion’s pleasant land”). Through “awakening” Blake bridges the gap

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between immanence (existing or remaining within) and transcendence (beyond or outside), which he sees as being simultaneously present as the “human form divine.”

Awakening is a contemporary concern as well. Melissa Panek discusses awakening in a context closer to the present day when she refers to Tournier’s novels and links the contemporary “dormancy of the individual” with the lulling garrulousness of television and the internet:

The tremendous influence exerted on life by television and the internet collectively contributes to a critical dormancy of the individual. That is to say, in the postmodern era, man’s critical faculties are repressed, favored for a more complacent attitude of consuming rather than producing. Here enters Tournier who uses myth as a medium to not only represent this existence, but to stimulate our psyche through the literary process. (Panek 1)\(^\text{19}\)

Panek details the characteristics of the self’s state of spiritual slumber, and the factors that contribute to it: television, materialism, consumerism, complacency, listening mostly to the dominant voices of reason and authority, ignoring the input of emotions and imagination. Panek’s comments, though anachronic in referencing the internet in relation to Tournier’s novel (which was published in 1969), make a valid point: Tournier deconstructs and reconstructs myths with a view to “awaken” his readership from a media-induced sleep. Literature appeals to the imagination of readers in more engaging ways than television, awakening the self that has been numbed by the proliferation of television’s ready-made images. Like Blake, who hoped to shock his readers into awareness,\(^\text{20}\) Tournier uses myths and narratives to “stimulate” the self and awaken it from its slumber, to redeem the self from its sterility or dryness (as in Medianoche amoreux),\(^\text{21}\) and extend meaning to experience.

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20 In “Antinomianism” I analyse a “Memorable Fancy” from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, especially this passage which encapsulates what I called Blake’s philosophy of “shocking his readers into awareness:” “I then asked Ezekiel why he eat dung, & lay so long on his right & left side? He answerd, ‘the desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite.’”
21 *Medianoche Amoreux* (1985, translated as *The Midnight Love Feast*, 1989) is a collection of stories by Michel Tournier, framed by the story of the couple Nadeje-Oudale, she from a rich family of ship owners, he a sailor who wins her interest and heart through sea stories. When he retires, however, and the stories become repetitive and lose their freshness, so does their amorous interest for each other. They decide to part paths and to announce this to their friends during a medianoche party. But then, as they are about to make their announcement, one of the guests starts narrating a story, then somebody else chimes in with another story, and through the telling of stories – realistic or fantastic – the couple regains their reservoir of shared stories and experiences, and implicitly their mutual affection.
In the same way, through her novel and essays such as “Come September” and “The Greater Common Good,” Roy aims to “awaken” her audience by exposing to people “what is being done to them” in a form that is comprehensive and comprehensible (“never complicate what is simple, nor simplify what is complicated”). Then they can take ownership of their own lives in spite of political propaganda that sidelines individual stories for the sake of “the greater common good.”

Metamodern sensibility takes ownership of the self and its development. It encourages the participation of ordinary people in their own individual growth, and in the decisions that shape their own lives. Such sensibility is close to the Romantic one, which recognised poets as the “unacknowledged legislators of the world,” with the difference that within a metamodern paradigm the power to inspire does not rest with the gifted and talented alone, but also with the ordinary householder, whose story and living example is apt to guide others. The film *Odette Toulemonde* is a case in point, to which I shall refer occasionally.

Tournier’s and Roy’s affinities with Romanticism do not rest upon Romantic irony; but rather with the Romantic preoccupation with the self. Although in *Vent Paraclet* Tournier professes his indebtedness to the great classical novelists such as Flaubert and Zola, while Roy in “The Greater Common Good” acknowledges her admiration for modernist and postmodernist authors, their ambitions converge in Romanticism’s interest in unexplored areas of the self.

The Romantic poet William Wordsworth, for instance, believed that the avenue to the self is through literature, which, in turn, purifies the self. Like Blake, who advocated the awakening of the self through art and literature, and proposed a resurgence of visionary imagination, in his “Preface to Lyrical Ballads” Wordsworth regarded poetry as enlightening the mind and purifying the emotions through the experience of reading: “the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified” (22). Again like Blake, who proposed a balance of rationality and imagination, Wordsworth placed literature at the crossroads of “affections” (feelings) and the intellect: good literature unifies the self through appealing to both imagination and reason, while also being an expression of a self (the writer), who aspires for ever-renewed configurations of interactions between faculties.

Poetry imparts pleasure through “a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation,” fitted to “metrical arrangement” and conveyed rationally by the poet:

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The first volume of these Poems […] was published, as an experiment, which, I hoped, might be of some use to ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a Poet may rationally endeavour to impart. (18)

According to Wordsworth, the poet’s task is to “rationally” communicate “vivid sensations” in the real language, made fit for poetry through “metrical arrangement.” Here Wordsworth proposes that a “marriage” between rationality and emotions (“vivid sensations”) is possible; they can coexist and be expressed simultaneously by the same subject. Later in the Preface, he reiterates the idea that imagination and rationality manifest concurrently in The Ballads, as in any poem of value:

All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: and though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. (21)

Romantics like Wordsworth did not value imagination exclusively, since for them strong feelings and deep thought combine in good literature. The Lyrical Ballads capture “incidents and situations from common life” that are treated imaginatively (by throwing “over them a certain colouring of imagination”), which grants them their originality (“whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect”). These incidents are enriched by the thoughts associated with them, in “the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement” (19).

Friedrich Schiller was another Romantic who extolled the virtues of imagination as a balance to excessive thinking, which he considered symptomatic of his time. The ideals of balance and integration within the self, which Blake expressed imaginatively, Schiller formulated theoretically. He discusses the concept of die Mittelkraft, a “median power or transmutative force” that pertains to the agencies of the self. Schiller’s concept of the soul,

expressed in his aesthetic writings, elucidates this concept of the Mittelkraft further. The beautiful soul ("schöne Seele") is a “product harmonising, in optimal balance, the spiritual and the animal nature in a person” (Craig 55). The animal and the spiritual do not overlap with Blake’s categories of imagination (Jerusalem) or reason (Urizen), but are part of Schiller’s attempt to outline a concept of a unified self.

Schiller’s project, however, is not entirely successful: Although in earlier works he professed an ideal mindset that combined equal degrees of speculation and passion – “Mischung von Speculation und Feuer” (in Letter to Körner, 15 April 1786), his balance later tilted towards favouring emotion (in “Phantasie an Laura,” for instance). Then, as a means of fending off the emotions of disappointment and dissatisfaction (expressed, for instance, in the 1786 poem “Resignation”), Schiller proposed that “stoical mastery of emotion” is required of the poet, an idea that he expressed in “Über Bürgers Gedichte” and Wilhelm Tell. Gradually, however, Schiller returned to the practice of reliance on “poetic imagination,” which he had professed as a youth. Feeling that his age was afflicted by an excess of thought over sensation, he insisted that “Darstellung,” the work of the poetic imagination, could cure this ailment. He concluded that “the excess of reflection in his own earlier poetry had itself been a symptom” (Hilliard 81).

Blake’s poems and the more theoretical formulations of Wordsworth and Schiller show that for some Romantics a preoccupation with achieving balance, or a middle way, between rationality and emotions is a constant. Blake’s model of the self pays special attention to Jerusalem, as the feminine imagination, the agent of cohesion within the self, as well as the energy that awakens the self from its spiritual slumber. In what follows, I shall present the aspects of the Blakean self that are most relevant to this thesis, followed by a discussion of the tension between some of these aspects, and an analysis of the role of Jerusalem.

4. Blake’s Model of the Self

4.1. The Four Zoas or the Four Main Agencies of the Self

William Blake lived between 1757 and 1827, a period that saw rising tension between dominant Enlightenment ideas and emerging Romantic impulses. He has often been invoked, at different times, as expressing contemporary concerns. In the introductory essay to the 1988 edition of Damon and Eaves’ *Blake Dictionary*, Morris Eaves notes that since 1875-1925, the period that marked Blake’s discovery (Damon and Eaves xiii), various Blakes emerged, each expressing the characteristics of an age. These different perceptions of Blake range from a mystical, philosophising, symbolist Blake to a “formidable” Blake, “a thinker whose poems could deliver simultaneously profound truths about poetry and equally profound reactions to local events” (xiv-xv). More recently, following the student upheavals of 1968, Blake became an emblematic figure for post-war consciousness.

Eaves notes Blake’s influence on Yeats’ symbolism, and on Northrop Frye’s archetypal criticism, highlighted by “the decisive alliance between Blake’s fortunes and the fortunes of modernism” (Damon and Eaves xiii). Indeed, the fragmentary nature of some of Blake’s texts, and his combinations of words and images, link to postmodernism, while his concern for banished Jerusalem crosses paths with feminism (most prominently during the era of postmodernism). Blake condemned puritan ideas of chastity and the hypocritical denunciation of bodily pleasures, and defended the rights of subjugated people to self-fulfilment. His texts attributed significance to feminine figures and to representations of innocence and experience in the *Songs*, and presented more subtle characters in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* that embody his concept of the self as transforming.

The prominence of feminine figures in Blake’s texts reflected more than the need for development of the masculine self. It pointed also to a position contrary to mainstream Western culture, which has been shaped by patriarchal Christianity and male rationality. The masculine authoritarian figure Urizen, the personification of reason, is just one of the characters that populated Blake’s world. The psyche is composite and complex, and in acknowledging this Blake placed himself within a larger tradition of alchemical or mystic authors, which ran from antiquity through to medieval times. Aspects of a model of the self that Blake proposed are validated in Roy’s and Tournier’s novels, indicating a tendency to

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transcend the modern insistence on reason, and to open towards a metamodern understanding of the self.

As briefly mentioned, the self for Blake was subtended by four main agencies: emotions, reason, instincts, and memory, of which the first two are paramount. The four main faculties of the soul were called the *Four Zoas* (Greek for “living creatures”): Urizen, Luvah, Tharmas and Urthona. They were dynamic and changing; divided in the Fall, and united in Eternity, their attributes varied according to their ontological position. As noted by Ostriker,

[the Four Zoas are] the energies of Mankind, or of any individual man. In eternity they are integrated as the members of a single divine being. In the Fall, they divide and war against Man and each other, split from their Emanations (female counterparts) and degenerate in character. They are the agents of Man’s history, and re-unite at the final apocalypse. (1048)

Of the four Zoas, two were most important for Blake: Urizen and Luvah, Reason and Passion; their “struggle for control of Man produces the Fall” (1051). Conversely, their unity presumably opens the way to Eternity. Urizen’s name derived probably from either horizon or “your reason,” thus implying the limitations of a circumscribed field of vision, presumably three dimensional, as opposed to the fourfold vision (deriving from a unity of the four Zoas). Urizen is a “Prince of Light” associated with Man’s intellect, and evocative of the Enlightenment, the “Age of Light.” In Eternity he is a living being, an impersonation of Faith and Certainty; but in the Fall he becomes “Doubt, Authoritarianism, Limitation, Abstraction,” – avatars of unenlightened or limited reason. He is equated with the “tyrant-priest-king-father” figure (Ostriker 1056). He is at odds with Luvah (love, passion), who, in the Fall manifests as “Orc (active Rebellion)” against rules, Eros, then as “Dionysian ruler of the Last Vintage” (1050). Tharmas stands for sensations, which in Eternity ensure Man’s coherence, but which in the Fall, in actual post-lapsarian human existence, is chaotic (1055). Urthona is creativity and intuition (1056).

All four Zoas are masculine, and from them emanate their feminine counterparts, with whom they are united in Eternity and separated in the Fall. Apart from the four Zoas, another agency of the self is Jerusalem, who personifies inspired visionary creativity and the redemptive feminine, inclined to save the self from the limited existence circumscribed by rationality and the senses, and to strike a balance between reason and passions. Jerusalem is the agency that unites what reason or the “Spectre” divides.
4.2. The Divided Self

In Jerusalem Blake portrayed the dynamics of the self as embodied in the giant Albion, symbol of England and humankind, and pursued the transformations of the self and its progressions from a state of “fall” to “eternity.” These transformations are directly related to the presence or absence of Jerusalem. In the absence of Jerusalem, Albion’s dominant is rationality, “the Spectre.” When Jerusalem is present, Albion stands for a balanced, compassionate being of both reason and creativity. Jerusalem is a feminine energy, softening Albion’s hard, sometimes cruel reason.

The contrast between reason and emotions (or “soft affections”) is expressed by Blake as the dissociation between a masculine figure (Albion, the Spectre) and a feminine figure (Jerusalem), as well as the distinction between the “Male” and the “Female” aspect of the self. This division dates back to Renaissance alchemical texts. The Rosarium Philosophorum (1550) presents an exchange between feminine and masculine archetypes, as necessary elements of spiritual transformation.27

Blake points to the dangers of ignoring the imperative for communication between these archetypes. When disunity pervades, and the feminine and masculine powers of the self are separated from each other and from the central archetype of the soul (figured as “Man’s” humanity), the human subject plunges into a state of confusion: “Calling the Rocks Atomic Origins of Existence; denying Eternity/ By the Atheistical Epicurean Philosophy of Albions Tree/ Such are the Feminine & Masculine when separated from Man” (Jerusalem, Plate 67: 12-14).28

This state of confusion derived from the divisions within the self is both kindled and deepened by excessive rationality, according to Blake. Atheism, together with a philosophy and science based exclusively on sense data (“Epicurean Philosophy”) rather than on “vision,” leads to a denial of “Eternity.” Denying Eternity is, for Blake, equivalent to a failure to recognise the “living humanity divine” as the fountainhead of humankind (J 96:36-43).29

27 The interrelation of the feminine and the masculine is represented as the mutual proferring of flowers in the Rosary woodcuts 2-4. The woodcut series underscores the idea of spiritual transformation, which is expressed most vividly as the resurrection of Christ in woodcut 19. A few of the woodcuts are analysed in my article “Foretelling Metamodernity.”
28 For an equivalent state described in alchemical texts, see “Le Livre du Trévisan de la philosophie naturelle des métaux” in Bibliothèque des Philosophie Chimiques (Burckhardt, 101)
29 Blake’s “fountains of living waters flowing from humanity divine” (Jerusalem, 96: 36-43) evoke the well of prima materia recurrent in the Rosarium woodcuts, from whence spiritual transformation commences. In Smith’s translation the personified first matter asserts her centrality to the art of alchemical transformation, as well as her potential noxiousness in cases of ill treatment: “We are the beginning and first nature […] Art by us makes the
Matter (the dead “Rocks”) is worshipped instead, as per Blake’s allusions to empirical science.

Rocks are a symbol of opacity, devoid of vision, relating to materialism, atheism, or institutionalised religion. Materialism brings about bloodshed (“the bloody Veil”): “They call the Rocks Parents of Men, & adore the frowning Chaos/ Dancing around in howling pain clothed in the bloody Veil” (Jerusalem 67: 15-16). This state of strife (“the frowning Chaos”) is aggravated by an absence of humane feelings of compassion and love, made worse by undue respect shown to aggressive behaviour:

Hiding Albions Sons within the Veil, closing Jerusalems Sons without; to feed with their Souls the Spectres of Albion Ashamed to give Love openly to the piteous & merciful Man. Counting him an imbecile mockery: but the Warrior They adore, & his revenge cherish with the blood of the Innocent. 

(J 67: 17- 21)

The “Spectre” is the ego consciousness, which thrives in the limited empirical perception of reality (“within the veil”). It is the aggressive, selfish aspect of the self that grows to monstrous proportions when not tempered by positive emotions, particularly love and compassion (“Mercy”). The absence of love leads to the dismissal of Jerusalem’s sons (“closing Jerusalems Sons without”), who represent the innocent and the humble (“piteous & merciful Man, […] the Innocent”).

The only way out is through annihilating the Spectre and “awakening” one’s “Humanity.” The grasp of the Spectre is persistent, controlling the self’s being:

Each Man is in his Spectre’s power Until the arrival of that hour When his Humanity awake And cast his Spectre into the Lake. (J 1: 1-4)

principal tincture. / There is no fountain nor water found like unto me. / I heal and help both rich and poor, But yet I am full of hurtful poison” (Smith 11). Another good translation of The Rosary is Adam Mclean’s; the text and his version of the woodcuts are available at http://www.alchemywebsite.com/virtual_museum/rosarium_philosophorum_room.html
The awakened self is one in which Luvah (emotions) become manifest, and the self is apt “to awake the Prisoners of Death: to bring Albion again/ With Luvah into light eternal, in his eternal day” (J 76: 25-26). The emotions awaken the soul, and bring Albion back to his “eternal” (i.e., spiritual) existence. (Blake’s concept of “awakening” is revisited in the context of analysing Jerusalem, the redemptive imagination.)

The unawakened self is divided, and governed by a wilful, egoistical ambition to “appropriate Universality.” “Universality” corresponds to abstract reasoning (“Abstract Philosophy”), the enemy of imagination:

Abstract Philosophy warring in enmity against Imagination
(Which is the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus, blessed for ever.) (J 2: 58-9)
Los said: When the Individual appropriates Universality
He divides into Male & Female: & when the Male & Female, Appropriate Individuality, they become an Eternal Death.
Hermaphroditic worshippers of a God of cruelty & law!
(J 90: 52-55)

The segregated agencies of the self assume autonomy. Unity and wholeness are lost as the price of pride, and the egotistic, fragmented (“hermaphroditic”) individual worships an image of itself, a “God of cruelty & law.” Blake’s perception of the hermaphrodite is different from the alchemical one. Although it evokes unity in alchemical woodcuts, for Blake the hermaphrodite represents failed integration: a fallen state of egoism and materialism. Individuals trapped in this state of egoism are the “Accusers” of Blake’s poetry, who forcefully impose their forbidding laws on the innocent; they are the ones who led to the crucifixion of Christ: “the Accuser standing by/ Cried out ‘Crucify! Crucify!’

Blake’s “Accusers” correspond to Tournier’s Robinson in the administered island of Vendredi, and to the characters Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, and Chacko in Roy’s novel. They control and impose their will on others, while hindering the growth of the people who are dependent on them. The demonisation of autonomy implied in the portrayal of these “Accusers” contrasts with “the bourgeois ethos of the self-made man” (Hamilton 78) that was praised by Defoe, but challenged in later retellings of Robinson’s story (particularly 30 A fin-de-siècle fictional attempt at conveying the concept of a dynamics of opposites is Theodore Roszak’s The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein (New York: Random House, 1995).
Tournier’s, in the post-explosion portion of *Vendredi*, and Jack Gold’s in the movie *Man Friday*). Wilful “appropriation” of “Universals”\(^{31}\) produces division of the self, which, in turn, is responsible for creating a confused state of death-in-life. The death-in-life that the divided self experiences is opposed by Blake’s “awakening,” facilitated by Jerusalem.

### 4.3. Jerusalem

Jerusalem, the most complex aspect of the self in Blake’s work, stands for the visionary or spiritual reality of the self. She integrates and harmonises conflicting aspects of the self through forgiveness:

In Great Eternity, every particular Form gives forth or Emanates
Its own peculiar Light, & the Form is the Divine Vision
And the Light is his Garment. This is Jerusalem in every Man
A Tent & Tabernacle of Mutual Forgiveness, Male and Female Clothings.

*(J 54: 1-4)*\(^{32}\)

Jerusalem represents a collective reality (a “Tabernacle in every Man”). In the “awakened” self, Jerusalem is the manifestation of one’s “humanity,” the inspiration of creativity or “Divine Vision,” one’s “own peculiar Light.” In the denouement of *Jerusalem*, her identity is professed as the liberation of the self – i.e., freedom from the control of the Spectre, the ego, or restrictive conditioning: “Jerusalem is called Liberty among the Children of Albion.” She is the agency that brings about visionary clarity (“the Divine Vision,” which has “the Light” as its “Garment”), which is constantly opposed by the Spectre, the antagonistic power of the ego that hinders spiritual transformation.

No sooner does the “I” of the poem assert the identity of Jerusalem than the Spectre or “the Reasoning Power in every Man” hurls her into his chaos (54: 1-7). The Spectre and Jerusalem represent the conflicting tendencies of the self toward a deeper embroilment in materialism – the opposite of aspiration for spiritual development. For Blake, the options are straightforward: the Spectre, or “ratiocination,” sets in motion strife and confusion (“chaos”);

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\(^{31}\) I see wilful “appropriation” of “Universals” as being opposed to imaginative identification with abstract concepts such as Peace or God in the form of “human form divine,” and emotions like “Mercy, Pity, and Love,” in the poem “The Divine Image.”

\(^{32}\) Qtd. in Ostriker 740.
Jerusalem offers the security (“a tent”) of confidence in the self’s abilities, and a fulfilling existence in which the “Divine Vision” flourishes.

The positive aspects of Jerusalem in undoing the complications created by the ego (Blake’s Spectre, or the faculty of ratiocination) ripple through the novels of Tournier and Roy, where the feminine plays a resurrective part, while reason, devoid of wisdom, misleads the self. Tournier’s Robinson awakens from his sub-human state, living in the marshes, following a vision of his sister Lucy; but subsequently he is led by his rationalising impulses to organise a series of autocratic institutions on his island, and to proclaim himself as absolute ruler, judge, priest, and king. His efforts become futile, however, when his work is reduced to a chaos of rocks and rubble. Vendredi plays the part of an almost feminine figure whose willing forgiveness of past injustice at his master’s hands will facilitate a relationship that is mutually enriching and satisfying.

Likewise, in Roy’s novel, the twins’ world crumbles when Estha’s forward-looking tendency to rationalise his situation opens the way to tragedy and “Terror.” He ends up in a mental and spiritual slumber, from which he awakens years later thanks to his sister Rahel, whose return home has been motivated by her love for her twin brother. Rahel’s love, in turn, facilitates Estha’s forgiveness for the perpetrators of past wrongs. Such love, forgiveness, and care for the other are emotions common to metamodern subjectivity.

Reading Tournier’s and Roy’s novels in light of Blake’s texts provides depth, and openness to archetypal considerations. Blake’s texts constitute a frame of reference for metamodernism that is essential to this thesis. His Jerusalem provides a concomitant complexity and innocence that foreshadow the metamodern consciousness. For Blake, Jerusalem embodies feminine qualities of forgiveness and love, while the Spectre personifies reason, hatred, and vengefulness. The dominance of the Spectre has to be overturned so that Jerusalem may return to Albion, and lead him to a state of epiphany.

This epiphanic state, characterised as “the Mystic Union of the Emanation in the Lord,” brings closer the fulfilment of Blake’s vision that “all the children of God” should “be prophets,” i.e., accede to an understanding of reality that transcends the domain of existence dictated by material necessity. This state of connection or “Union” corresponds to Tournier’s “knowledge of the absolute,” and to the lower-scale epiphanies of Roy’s characters.

33 Even Los, the eternal prophet, an image of the inspired artist for Blake, is tainted by the contaminating presence of the vengeful Spectre: “The Spectre stood over Los [the eternal prophet] bitterly cursing him for his friendship/ To Albion, suggesting murderous thoughts against Albion” (J 6:4, 7).
34 Ostriker 740.
Conversely, inasmuch as they neglect their Emanation or “Jerusalem,” humans are doomed not only to incompleteness, but also to a terrifying less-than-human state: “Man divided from his Emanation is a dark Spectre” (J 53: 25). Accordingly, if Jerusalem is ignored or disregarded, this corresponds to the individual’s state of spiritual slumber, “the sleep of Ulro” (or materialism), “a passage through eternal death” (J 1:1).

“Eternal death” is experienced by those who make no attempt to rise from their spiritual slumber; it is a fallen state that has been aggravated since the banishment from the state of innocence. Unless Albion acknowledges the existence and the part played by Jerusalem, both lead a death-in-life existence. Jerusalem is there for Albion, but as she cannot fulfil her task to awaken him to his potentialities as a spiritual being, as opposed to a “natural” (i.e. empirical, materialist) and rational one, she dreams her melancholy dream of resurrection (as in her illumination on Plate 53 of Jerusalem). Jerusalem/imagination is reduced to “an ever-weeping melancholy Shadow” (J 53: 26), unable to play her necessary part in the enhancement of the self. Only by counteracting the effects of the dominant “abstract reasoning” is she able to manifest her role.

Suppressing the imagination and creativity results in aborted growth and monstrous development, as the cases of Mammachi, Chacko and Baby Kochamma illustrate in Roy’s novel. Blake may have been referring to similar situations of repressed creativity – musical, reflective, or religious (in the case of Roy’s three characters) – when, in one of the Proverbs of Hell in the Marriage of Heaven and Hell, he quipped: “He who desires, but acts not breeds pestilence.” The metamodern subjectivity is one that promotes individual creativity, self-worth, and fulfilment, while also tempering the self-righteous ego that dries the imagination and desensitises the relationship with “the other.”

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35 Innocence is a state where “love was joy and adoration, and none impure was deemed” (Song of Los). Jerusalem eulogises innocence as a state in which error is forgotten and evil is not entertained, a state in which the self cherishes the joys made available by her:

the sweet regions of youth and virgin innocence,
Where we live, forgetting error, not pondering on evil,
Among my lambs & brooks of water, among my warbling birds:
Where we delight in innocence before the face of the Lamb
Going in and out before him in his love and sweet affection. (J 20: 5-10)

It is a state of “delight” and epiphany, when the self experiences soothing emotions, “love and sweet affection,” and the self assumes its part in society and nature.

The tension between reason and imagination, and the loss intrinsic in cultivating the former to the detriment of the latter, recurs in later modernity. The flaws inherent in allowing reason to take the lead in human experience have been noted by Horkheimer in *The Eclipse of Reason*, where he cautions that “the concept of rationality that underlies our contemporary industrial culture contains defects that vitiate it essentially” (v). Accordingly, as humankind’s reliance on reason expands, we depart from the ideals that have spurred our aspirations towards enlightenment. Ironically, these reduced ideals can lead to the identification of reason as a progressive force (vi). According to Horkheimer, the departure from the idealistic hopes during the Enlightenment prompted a “feeling of fear and disillusionment,” as was experienced after World War II:

The hopes of mankind seem to be farther from fulfilment today than they were in the groping epoch when they were first formulated by humanists. It seems that even as technical knowledge expands the horizon of man’s thought and activity, its autonomy as an individual, his ability to resist the growing apparatus of mass manipulation, his power of imagination, his independent judgment appear to be reduced. Advance in technical facilities for enlightenment is accompanied by a process of dehumanisation. Thus progress threatens to nullify the very goal it is supposed to realize – the idea of man. (vi)

Horkheimer posits Enlightenment ideology as the origin of tendencies towards dehumanisation, resulting from the instrumental role of reason and the technologies it created. In the wake of progress and technological advances, which were hoped to increase human idealism, the ability of humans to think independently and their “power of imagination” have dwindled and, to some extent, atrophied. Horkheimer’s position does not express a mainstream sentiment, but it is very reminiscent of Blake’s thought. Yet even within the mainstream, voices of dissent to the prevalent rationalistic outlook have arisen and asserted the power of imagination, thus opening the way to a metamodern sensibility.

At the turn of the century, for instance, Canadian philosopher and academic Charles Taylor warned against and countered the consequences of dominant reason. He proposes that recovering a preoccupation with the spirit – which the Romantics sought “through an inward turn” – could reverse the process of dehumanisation that Horkheimer decried (258).

Likewise, novelist Russell Hoban sees the limitations of “rational thinking,” and advocates imagination through the creation of stories or myths: “the myth-making capability
is an essential one, and it’s a resource that is not used enough. Rational thinking is not enough
to get us through what we have to get through.” Like Blake, who designed mythical figures to
express tendencies or aspects of the self, and epic developments as symbolic correlatives of
political, social, and personal events, Hoban proposes myth-making as a solution to political
conflicts. Imagination would allow political leaders to see unconventional solutions to
political problems, and to identify the true source of conflicts such as those that developed
during the Cold War, as opposed to finding reasons to transfer blame from one to another:

If the heads of governments, East and West, could perceive events more in a
mythic way, they would be in better shape for working things out. The way it
is now, the Russians think the West is the enemy, and the West thinks the
Russians are the enemy. But it seems to me that if you look at the natural and
possibly savage way that the mind works, what happened is that in the Second
World War, a monster was called up, and it now looms over both the East and
the West; and that monster is the enemy. We are not truly the enemy and the
Russians are not truly our enemy.37

This monster identified by Hoban, which is the common enemy of both East and
West, might be characterised as the dissolution of the self, which Frantz Fanon decried in The
Wretched of the Earth: “Europe’s most horrible crime was committed in the heart of man, and
consisted of the pathological tearing apart of his functions and the crumbling away of his
unity.”38

Taylor’s solution is introspection: as an antidote to the crumbling of the self he
suggests turning inward towards a spiritual awakening. This spirituality can heal the evils that
rationality has brought about, while imagination, “the locus of moral sources,” can act as the
cohesive force that returns the self to its unity (426). Similarly, according to Anthony Elliott,
imagination combined with rationality fosters a more thorough and coherent perception of
reality through imagination’s “reflexive scannings” (155).

Taylor’s position indicates that the Romantic concern for “awakening” (Blake) from
spiritual slumber (Wordsworth), and counteracting the effects of excessive thinking (Schiller),

37 Qtd. in Edward Myers, “An Interview with Russell Hoban,” The Literary Review (1984), August 9, 2010
have current significance, in the form of openness to the spiritual, the unity of the self, and meaningful living.39

The preoccupation with the self is considered by Taylor in *The Sources of the Self,*40 while Tournier uses fiction to outline the transmutations undergone by the modern self in revisiting and reinterpreting pressing issues that face the modern consciousness. Roy’s *The God of Small Things* celebrates the power of the feminine to restore the self to more complete human interaction, and to enhance the significance of ordinary life and the small things that survive autocratic systems and give rise to epiphanies.

Tournier’s and Roy’s novels explore the phylogenetic and ontogenetic transformations of the modern self. These transformations trace the cultural change from a paradigm of rationality, order, authority, and rules, to one in which rationality and tradition are acknowledged, but checked and balanced by what Blake called “imagination.” As discussed, Blake’s “imagination,” a feminine redemptive energy he called “Jerusalem,” is defined by qualities (among others) of compassion, caring love, and creativity. By making Jerusalem the feminine “emanation” of the giant Albion-mankind, Blake suggested that emotions, intuition, and spontaneity are associated with the feminine, not only as gendered identity, but as functions of individual psyche irrespective of biological sex. The feminine as an essential aspect of the self is characterised by a propensity towards sensibility and empathy, which aspects of the self are increasingly acknowledged at the advent of metamodernism.

While the metamodern consciousness opens towards the other through feminine-like qualities of empathy and emotions, the metamodern self does not restrict itself to emotions, seeking instead equilibrium and balance with reason. The twin siblings’ reunion after years of separation in Roy’s *The God of Small Things* can be read as establishing a unification of the self in the merging of the feminine and the masculine. The transformation is instigated and orchestrated by the feminine protagonist, for it is Rahel who returns home, grants meaning to experience, and re-establishes communication with her autistic brother Estha. Similarly, in

39 This openness to the saga of the self is illustrated in popular culture by blogs, short stories, and novels of self transformation. Examples abound: from Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist* or Veronika Decides to Die to Robin Sharma’s motivational novels such as *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari.* The connection between metamodernism and popular culture is noted by American poet, literary critic, and theorist Seth Abramson in his article “On Literary Metamodernism.” Less commercially successful and more subtle novels of transformation are Christoph Ransmayr’s *Die letzte Welt* and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things.* While Ransmayr focuses on the transformative function of stories and story-telling, Roy underscores the role played by the feminine in bringing about closure and granting meaning to experience.

40 Another book on the subject is Jerrold Seigel’s *The Idea of the Self.*
Tournier’s novel, Robinson and Vendredi experience a communion of joys and interests, facilitated by Vendredi, a creature of softness and caring. Their interactions are dynamic dialogues between opposites: strict rationality on the one hand, and hedonism nuanced by wisdom on the other.

The two novels propose that the transformation of the self, as well as the more general change in society (from an emphasis on hierarchical organisation, reason, rules and authority, to a “softer” order of interconnections), are linked to an acknowledgement of the potentialities of the feminine. This feminine is embodied as the feminine subject (Rahel) in the God of Small Things, and as the subaltern (the slave Vendredi, whose name evokes Venus, the goddess of love, the most complex of emotions) in Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique.

5. The Ethical, the Feminine, and the Other

The exploration of the transformation of the self links to a reevaluation of the role of imagination and of what Blake called “soft affections” (J 9: 25), situating them on a par with rationality, as well as to a (re)discovery of the other: women, the subaltern, children, and their roles in bringing about cultural and social changes. This link is not far removed from Irigaray’s formulation of the concept of “double subjectivity” (Hirsh and Olson 3, 8), which implies acknowledging the feminine subjectivity and the other as different from the dominant “norm” (20).

Irigaray has argued that one of the aspects missing from the construction of subjectivity in Western culture is acknowledging the feminine. Irigaray outlines a feminine subjectivity as different from the dominant male subjectivity of Western discourse. Some of the New Scientist’s recent findings in neural networks chart the differentiated wiring of the male and female brains, and implicitly support Irigaray’s intuition and the results of her empirical studies. Irigaray proposes that the feminine subjectivity is articulated in horizontal relationships with equals, whereas the male subjectivity articulates hierarchically, and in relation with objects. Irigaray’s insistence on the difference between male and female

42 Luce Irigaray establishes the existence of a double subjectivity, male and female, through a series of experiments carried out in schools in Italy and France. Hirsh explains: “in a setting where girls typically use the preposition ‘with’ in relation to another human subject, boys in the same setting will instead use it in relation to an inanimate object; girls thus construct (and construct themselves within) a subject-subject dialectic where boys construct a dialectic of subject and object. Similarly, girls typically use the first-person pronoun (‘I’ or ‘je’) in dialectical relation with another subject (‘You’ or ‘Tu’), whereas boys typically use it in relation to an object or ‘it.’ The ‘I,’ then, always conceals a relation and is not in fact one but two-sexed – a reality that Luce Irigaray proposes to capture in the double reformulation ‘I-she’ (“je-elle”) and ‘I-he’ (“je-if”)” (Hirsh and Olson 343).
subjectivity, which she sees embodied in differing genders, complements Blake’s discourse in *Jerusalem*. Blake saw a feminine emanation in every subject, which “is Jerusalem in every Man” (*J* 54.3). Taken together, Blake and Irigaray propose two types of feminine existence: the feminine within the self (*Jerusalem*, the emanation), and the feminine in its ontological and social-gendered hypostatisation (I-she/je-elle). These perspectives overlap, in that the feminine is present in the self as compassion and caring love, the propensity towards empathy, the ability to forgive, the facility to establish communication, the tendency to set up (horizontal) networks based on affection. Acknowledging this internal feminine, and placing it on a par with rationality and its tendencies to organise, to conquer, to establish hierarchical (vertical) relationships, was as important to Blake as it is to Irigaray. Irigaray sees the acknowledgement of female subjectivity as different from the traditional (male) subjectivity, which the West has been cultivating for millennia.

The recognition of the feminine and *the other* is not always straightforward. It involves renouncing the primacy of the ego (the male ego as well as the ego construed by women after the model of the male ego), and this amounts to a genuine transformation of the self, as the analysis of Blake’s *Spectre* has indicated. It is a transformation so dramatic that Tournier fictionalises it as an explosion that reduces all the achievements of Robinson’s rational self to rubble. This transformation of the self presupposes a double move – an opening towards the inside (the introspective move that Taylor advocates), and an opening towards the different, or, in other words, towards *an other* that is different from the self (Irigaray). This transformation is concomitantly an opening towards the “soft affections” inside and outside, by recognising the different subjectivities of women, children, and the colonised (whom Gayatri Spivak called “the subaltern”).

While Tournier portrays the transformations undergone by the self through its interactions with the other, the self-transformations presented by Roy are complementary: the “other” becomes the focus of the discourse in describing the exploits of Rahel, who, after escaping the pressure of systems (marriage, caste, religious constraints) is free to experiment with life. Irigaray’s proposition that the traditionally dis-empowered enrich traditional (male, white, rational) subjectivity (Irigaray 132), is demonstrated by Tournier in the characters of Robinson and Vendredi, and extended by Roy through the presentation of her Indian characters to a Western audience.
The traditionally dis-empowered enlarge the traditional subjectivity by replacing the self-centred, egoistic self with an elongated parabolic or double foci self that accommodates two subjectivities, fictionalised as the couples Robinson-Vendredi and Estha-Rahel. Valuing the feminine within the self (in its different hypostatisations as positive emotions, empathy, intuition), corresponds to valuing women and *the other* in society. In an ideal world, women are valued (by men and women alike) for their innate qualities, rather than for embodying projections of the male psyche. Rahel’s marriage to Larry falls short of this ideal when he fails to recognise, acknowledge, and value her intrinsic qualities.

The double foci self is a self articulated by the two main tendencies proposed by Blake and represented by Tournier’s and Roy’s characters – namely, the tendencies to rationalise and to respond emotionally (logical sequential thinking and spontaneous imaginative understanding). Yet this double foci self is not a bipolar personality, but a personality that integrates these tendencies in a unique whole specific to each individual. Predicated on a state of balance (seen as a dynamic, always changing equilibrium) between these major propensities or agencies of the self, this integration is a stepping stone on the way towards what Jung calls individuation.

Individuation is a state where these dual tendencies are sublimated and harmonised, appearing as a fulfilled, self-realised human being, like Tournier’s Robinson following his solar epiphany, or Rahel’s witnessing of the kathakali performance. These are human beings that have shed the vestiges of social conditioning and prejudice, of power struggles and grudges, and who focus on their own becoming as spiritual beings, fulfilling their potential as creatures of strength and love, their actions inspired by contemplation. This thesis will examine how in each novel such transformations are represented by the respective protagonists.

The philosophical background for these transformations is set out in Tournier’s meta-textual volume of essays *Vent Paraclet*, where he notes that Robinson’s transformations, experienced in Vendredi, correspond to the three cultural ages described by Joachim de Fiore: the age of the Father (rules, the effort to instate order, “stern commands of duties” as Blake put it); the age of the Son (where the emphasis is on relating to the other, “thy neighbour,” by means of “soft” emotions like love and compassion), and the age of the Holy Spirit (where the emphasis is on self-development, spiritual transformation, and the integration of the gains of
the previous ages). This last stage corresponds to Irigaray’s Age of the Breath (*Sharing the World* 146), which is a time of individuation and differentiation, as well as a time for spirituality and experiencing the divine (similar to Blake’s sense of a “human form divine,” or “divine humanity”: a humanity informed by “Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love”). This stage operates collectively as well as individually:

Perhaps the best opportunity for a spiritual path today is to consider that we are in “The Age of the Breath.” By cultivating breathing we can gain an access to our autonomy, open a way for a new becoming and for sharing with the other traditions. The breath exists before and beyond all representations, words, forms, all kinds of specific figurations or even idols, all sorts of rituals and dogmas, and thus allows a communication between cultures, sexes and generations. Breathing can create bridges between different people or cultures, respecting their diversities. (146)

Irigaray, like Blake and Roy, suggests that, due to their intrinsic qualities, women are instrumental in bringing about this transformation. However, Irigaray points out that a prerequisite for this transformation is that women learn to cultivate and assert their autonomy:

If man has privileged a vertical transcendence to secure his becoming, woman has to preserve a horizontal transcendence through a culture of breathing. She thus seems to be the privileged initiator for the third time of our tradition, the time of spirit, on the condition that it signifies a time in which humanity itself becomes divine through a cultivation and a sharing of the breath. Woman also appears as the best mediator in a multicultural era because of her capacity of sharing before and beyond any image, word, ritual or representation. But this requires that she preserves her interiority by cultivating her breath. (147)

I understand Irigaray as saying that a woman’s breathing space is outlined by setting limits, by drawing borders to her interiority and its reflection outside the self, i.e., in the spheres of social and family interactions, by setting boundaries over which the men in her life – lovers, or sons, superiors, colleagues, etc. – cannot pass without consequences. By drawing appropriate borders around the self, women assume their difference in order to fulfil their role in this time and age:
Woman has also to consider man – beginning with her lover and her son – as different from her, renouncing all kinds of natural empathy or sensitiveness which would provide her with intuitions about them. It is one of the first steps to reaching her cultural identity. Woman has to praise the grace of being born a woman without being envious of a masculine being or existence. She has to cultivate and promote her own values and to share them with men. (146)

While Irigaray’s idea of women cultivating their own values and autonomy is clear, the need of women to renounce their empathising with men in order to achieve this autonomy is more problematic. Intuition and empathy are constituent parts of the overall strength of women, an emphatic element of their difference from men. The qualities that Irigaray sees as specific to the feminine subjectivity need to be realised and embraced, but each woman needs to make a personal decision as to how far to allow her intuitions and empathy to affect her self and her relationship with men. From woman’s perspective, man is “the other.” Renouncing intuitions and empathy would be contrary to cultivating and promoting woman’s “own values” (146); assuming them would equate “reaching her cultural identity.”

Expanding on Irigaray’s encouragement of women to “cultivate and promote her own values,” Roy’s novel suggests that the setting of boundaries around the self is simultaneously a transgression of the traditional boundaries of “the smug, ordered world” against which the character Ammu “so raged against” (176).

Women, and more generally the feminine, catalyse the self’s transformation; and yet, so does the other. Learning how to live with the other becomes an imperative for our times, and women are invaluable actants in this process. They can be intercessors, inclined to establish bridges between individuals, circles, cultures. Further to Brian McHale’s thought in Postmodern Fiction, that modernism had an epistemological dominant, while postmodernism had an ontological one, metamodernism postulates that the dominant of our times is ethical. This contemporary notion of ethics is based on differentiation, which is women’s source of strength and privilege, as Irigaray suggests in Sharing the World:

The accent now is put on an ethical attitude between us as different rather than on an individual morality, supposedly common to all people(s). Consideration for alliance and ethics in fact corresponds more to feminine values, but these
can be shared by both men and women, and help them to create bridges between them, not only at the private level but also at the public level. (148)

Although supposedly closer to “feminine values,” contemporary ethical considerations can inform subjects of both genders, creating meaningful exchanges between subjects that are different, yet equal. The weaving of relationships or established networks may undermine hierarchical patriarchal structures: “This relationship [between woman and man] being the most universal, when taking care of it, we are working for the constitution of democratic societies based on an active weaving of relations between citizens rather than simply obeying laws of those in power” (Sharing the World 148).

In other words, negating the precedence of the male over the female subject, the superior over the subordinate, leads to collapsing hierarchies, and to the possibility of establishing more democratic models of interaction in society. One of these models that favour communication between subjects that are different and equal is the networking model analysed by Albert-László Barabási. The lesson of Tournier’s Robinson is that establishing connections with the other – other cultures, traditions, social systems, and systems of thought – is grounded on an understanding of the self: for efficient communication with the other, Robinson has to know himself, he has to differentiate between his self and the self of his parents, and what his traditions and conditionings have burdened him with (prejudice against other cultures, conditionings relating to the superiority of the European culture, etc.). As he comes to know himself, and to experience his spiritual limitations and capabilities, he gains the energy and confidence to see the other as different and to cherish the difference. This amounts to worshipping the immanent transcendental in the other (as Blake suggests in Jerusalem). Acknowledging and valuing the other opens the way to an ethics of respect and tolerance, which lays the basis for a fulfilling existence for all involved in the exchange.

Irigaray contends that the way to one’s self is the way to the other, as well as the way to the Other (the immanent transcendental). While seeking self-realisation, the self

44 This idea is expressed in Jerusalem: “The Worship of God, is honouring his gifts/ In other men: & loving the greatest men best, each according/ To his Genius, which is the Holy Ghost in Man; there is no other / God, than that God who is the intellectual fountain of Humanity” (J 91:6-10). It is interesting to note that the feminine is present in two aspects here: the Holy Ghost, which corresponds to the third person of the Trinity (whose other figures are the Father and the Son), as well as the fountain, which evokes the feminine materia prima of alchemical texts such as the Rosarium.
experiences the immanent transcendentental, which Roy’s characters Ammu and Velutha come to cherish in the epiphanies of “small things,” things of beauty inhabiting the minimalist universe of insects, leaves, and grass. Likewise, Tournier’s Robinson loses his ego, his sense of segregated existence, and surrenders to an understanding of the sublimity of existence in what appears to be a cosmic apotheosis (Vendredi 254). The visionary perception that Robinson experiences in the last pages of Vendredi is unlike the empirical perception that contemporary sciences presuppose, which had ruled his existence during the period of the administered island, i.e. when he governed as a rational though autocratic and cruel leader.

Tournier, like Blake, humanises modernity by reinstating visionary aesthetic perception, through an epiphany that restores a visionary dimension to reality. Tournier shows that the modern tendency to rationalism, order, certainty, and laws is beneficial, inasmuch as it saves the self from the souille, the marsh of confusion and subhuman impulses. The order, technology, and progress that reason spawns lead away from the dangers of chaos and from the shadows (of the past or of one’s self); yet when the spirit succumbs to meaningless accumulation and self-serving rationalisations and taxonomies, reason is diminished and becomes an oppressor, rather than a liberator. For Tournier, true freedom of spirit is achieved when the temptations of both instincts and ratiocination are overcome, and the self learns (from the subaltern Vendredi and from nature itself) to cherish the present in spontaneity and joy.

There is a perceptible dialectic in this initial surrender to instinctual drives followed by worshipping reason – and then surpassing both these impulses when Vendredi takes over and leads Robinson to enjoyment of aesthetic spontaneity. However, the transformation is complete only after Vendredi forsakes Robinson; aesthetic awareness is only a step on the way to visionary aesthetic perception, which Spinoza called absolute knowledge. Nonetheless, it is not abstract absolute knowledge that is sought by the protagonists of Tournier’s and Roy’s novels, but rather a practical and grounded knowledge of the self and understanding of external circumstances – the present state of the subject. Taylor suggests (258) that this search for self-knowledge is a province of average people, rather than a rare gift of an elect few. We are now ready, Irigaray proposes in Sharing the World, “to go from the most elementary of the survival to the most subtle of the spirituality” (149).
It is strange to see that the spread of machines made the men who worked them conscious, first of their own work, and then of themselves as men. Yet this is what the Industrial Revolution did. It forced men in the long run to seek their destiny, and to find their station, not in the hand of God but in their own hands.

The machines changed the organisation of society, and shifted the centre of a man’s life from his cottage home to the daily factory. In that shift, the man ceased to be a member of his family and his village, and in the long run became simply himself: a person. Because the machine in the factory changed the order in his life, it slowly changed the status of the worker who served it. It regimented and brutalized and starved him, it exploited him and (for a long time) his family, and it robbed him of everything but his skill. And yet, by these acts in the end it made him a man – a man alone.

(Jacob Bronowski, A Man Without a Mask)
The Self in the Age of Technology:

Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and Tournier’s *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*

The whole Anglo-Saxon spirit is in Crusoe: the manly independence; the unconscious cruelty; the persistence; the slow yet efficient intelligence; the sexual apathy; the practical, well-balanced religiousness; the calculating taciturnity. (James Joyce, “*Daniel Defoe*” Trieste Lecture)

Chapter Abstract

Rationality is one of the faculties most cherished during modernity, especially starting with the Enlightenment, when the association between rationality and progress was consolidated due to the rise of science and technology. This chapter discusses the modern self as an insular self, described by Descartes in *Meditations* and satirised by Blake in *An Island in The Moon*. It then analyses the hypostatisations of the modern self in Defoe’s *Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* and Tournier’s *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*, while opening towards the metamodern.

Descartes wanted to establish a conception of the self as rational and insular in the sense that its thinking would not be influenced by emotions or distractions coming from either sensory data or the company of other people. Defoe incorporates the rationalistic aspect of the self, but his concept of the self is also influenced by Locke’s philosophy, in the sense that it is
pragmatic and empirical. For Defoe, reason is as important as sense data, and they both serve the creation of a civilised environment where the self feels at home. Reason is helpful in overcoming emotions like loneliness, despair, helplessness, or despondency, and is instrumental in managing nature and yoking her to one’s own advantage through technology. The empirical pragmatic self is both expressed through and aided by technology.

Blake criticises this reason-based concept of the self – both in its Cartesian rational and its Lockean empirical sense – and proposes imagination as a central, creative, faculty. Imagination connects with the reality that underlies sensory data, and ensures a balance of reason and emotions through their sublimation.

In Vendredi, during the period of the administered island, Tournier praises the world of rational organisation and technology that Defoe presented in Robinson. This period is sandwiched between the solitary era of la souille, when instincts are given free reign, and a period of growing disenchantment with the administered island and its institutions under Vendredi’s influence. The achievements of the rational self during this period are placed under further scrutiny in Jack Gold’s film Man Friday, where Gold’s critique of the civilising ideals that spring from the ideologies of the Enlightenment exposes them as potentially corrupting for less sophisticated, more innocent communities.

Tournier’s re-writing of Defoe’s novel provokes a discussion of the relationships between hypotext, hypertext, and architext (as described by Gerard Genette in Palimpsestes45) as well as consideration of the genre of the Robinsonade. I regard the Robinsonade as paradigmatic for the Western story of self-transformation, and a founding myth of modernity. Robinsonades are opportunities for questioning and facing the self, for confronting and relating with l’autrui, the other, and, ultimately, for self-transformation.

Robinsonades also raise troubling questions: What is the direction and outcome of this self-transformation? Do Robinsonades increase our knowledge and awareness of the self? Do they leave us with a world that is a better place due to the experience of the Robinsonade? What do they tell us about the dialectics of the modern self?

While raising these questions, and discussing Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique and its relationship with modernity and postmodernity, this chapter proposes that the concept of metamodernity provides a means of addressing some of the difficulties arising in the wake of the Enlightenment, and conceptualising some of the developments that arise from a critique of modernity. A few of the aspects of metamodernism that arise from this discussion are: the

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45 The French original of Palimpsestes was published in 1982, the English translation in 1997.
openness of the self towards balancing reason with imagination and emotions, learning from
the other, the search for the absolute as a journey of the self towards its home, the resurrective
capabilities of stories.

Novel Synopsis

Robinson Crusoe is a youth from York, who leaves a safe life and career as a merchant
in his father’s business and sets out to London in search of a different type of fulfilment –
including greater riches. He shirks from using his father’s letters of introduction to his
acquaintances, and instead takes to the sea. The novel’s prologue presents young Robinson in
correspondence with van Dyke, the old captain of La Virginie, during a stormy night. As a mise
en abîme of the story that follows, Van Dyke reads Robinson’s destiny in tarot cards, all of
which reading proves to be premonitory.

La Virginie shipwrecks, and Robinson is the only survivor. He attempts to build a new
vessel, L’Evasion. But when this proves unseaworthy, he relinquishes all self-respect and
starts living in the marshes (la souille), devoid of clothes and any specifically civilized human
activity. This period of his life is brought to an end by an imaginary visitation, the image of
his sister Lucy, which causes him to realise the extent of his degradation.

From then on, he refuses to give in to despair at being unable to return to the civilised
world, and turns instead to civilising the island he inhabits, which he names Speranza
(“Hope”). He starts hunting, picking fruit, cultivating grains, and creating technology. He also
establishes institutions: he creates a State with one king and one subject – himself. He invents
a Code of Laws, and spends his Sundays reading from a Bible found on board La Virginie. He
also undertakes scientific research, and catalogues each plant and animal on the island. He
keeps a log-book, in which he records his thoughts and experiences.

His efforts seem to become more meaningful when Vendredi joins him on the island,
but the savage serves to expose much of the folly of the administered island. When
Robinson’s house and chapel, his provisions, the Bible, the Code of Laws, the log-book, and
all scientific records are destroyed due to an accidental explosion set off by Vendredi, the
hierarchies between these two inhabitants of the remote Pacific island are cancelled, and they
become equals.

Robinson learns from Vendredi to live spontaneously and to enjoy the bounty of the
island. The two become very close, which makes Vendredi’s eventual defection on board The
Whitebird extremely traumatic for Robinson. However, when he accepts his situation, he
experiences an epiphany of sorts in the form of a solar apotheosis, during which he feels at one with nature and the island. Soon afterwards he discovers that the ship that has taken his friend away has left behind a replacement: young Jaan, an orphan who used to be mistreated on board, and whom he adopts.

1. Introduction and Related Questions

Any attempt to answer questions such as “What is modernity? When did it start? What does it entail?” can only be provisional. In the *Postmodernism Reader*, philosopher Lawrence Cahoone articulates the difficulty of establishing a definitive starting point for modernity:

Did modernity begin in the West in the sixteenth century with the Protestant reformation, the rejection of the universal power of the Roman Catholic Church, and the development of a humanistic scepticism epitomised by Erasmus and Montaigne? Or was it in the seventeenth century with the scientific revolution of Galileo, Harvey, Hobbes, Descartes, Boyle, Leibniz and Newton? Or with the republican political theories and revolutions of the United States and France in the eighteenth century?

Descartes’ *Meditations*, the sixteenth century, the Italian Renaissance, or the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, when major cultural changes occurred, are each sometimes considered as the starting point of the modernist paradigm. In *Return to Reason*, Toulmin explains that towards the eighteenth century transformations occurred that led to a quest for certainty, the rise of the rationalistic and scientific spirit, as well as increased interest in order, conquering nature, and colonising the Europeans’ *other* (32-33).

The rational spirit leads to a mechanistic conception of humans and nature, while encouraging scientific approaches based on observation and universal mathematical truths. This “enlightened” scientific spirit, which Descartes’ methodical meditation helped to articulate, became a dominant feature of Western culture and contributed to the formation of the modern consciousness. This modern spirit is represented by Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, who embodies some of the major advances of the Enlightenment: reliance on the senses and

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observation in order to understand and control his environment, trust in the ability to reason and to dominate nature through rationality and technological innovation, confidence in the value of experience as a means to discover oneself and the divine.

In *Return to Reason*, however, Toulmin proposes a tradition of modernity that is an “alternative” to the rationalism of Descartes and the quest for certainty. For Toulmin, modernity starts with the uncertainties of Michel de Montaigne and his concern for exploring the complexities of human personality (30). This “alternative” modernity is expressed not so much in science and mathematics, as it is in literature and arts, which – Toulmin asserts – tend to capture the complexity of human character better than the sciences, which focus on rationally organised data. Toulmin suggests that towards the end of the twentieth century, there was a notable tendency to integrate ethical concerns for individuals and their welfare with the goals of science and technology (rather than focusing on an abstract “greater common good”), hence replacing monochord rationality with a more complex notion of reasonableness.

The Romantic Blake anticipated this integrative trend when he abhorred both rationalising in the manner of Descartes and the “Lockean notion of empirical knowledge as coming solely through senses.” The rational and empirical self was for Blake both limiting and pernicious. Quinney explains: “Blake thought that if the soul is identified with the main consciousness or ‘I,’ especially the ‘I’ as a center of rationality, it will feel solitary and insecure” (xi). Blake is a “radical psychologist” (xi), whose “essential topic is the unhappiness of the subject within its own subjectivity, or to use a more plangent idiom, the loneliness of the soul” (11). This loneliness is due to the selfhood or ego consolidation; it is the result of the soul’s (Albion in Blake’s *Jerusalem*) severing of communication with the transcendent and with other souls, by imprisoning itself within materialism.

The one human faculty that is capable of re-establishing this communication is the imagination, “the power within us that is connected to the eternal world” (Crosby 823). To achieve this, impediments to the exercise of imagination must be removed – among them “the reasoning power,” which Blake believes inhibits imagination. The “reasoning power” and the confinement of the self in the material world are criticised by Blake in *An Island in the Moon*. While Descartes willingly sought out isolation in order to carry out his meditations unperturbed, and discarded illusions and any possible figments of his imagination, Blake regarded communication with others, and imagination, as vital.

Tournier’s novel implicitly criticises some of the assumptions of modernity, such as uncritical faith in rationality and technology. His criticisms address excessive reliance on
reason, and confinement to factuality (Locke’s empiricism). Tournier proposes two ways of coping with these discontents.

In the realm of lived experience, Tournier advocates acknowledging the benefits and the limitations of both reason and emotions, and reconnecting with nature in a way that transcends the instincts. *Vendredi* culminates with a brief moment of epiphany, in the form of a sublimation of rationality and emotions through experience. This moment reveals Robinson’s ability to overcome the emotion of disappointment and to connect with nature, from which his rationality has segregated him during the epoch of the administered island.

Similarly, in Gold’s film adaptation *Man Friday*, a state of balance between natural spontaneity and rationality becomes a mode of existence for Friday. Gold’s protagonist uses technology to accomplish his aims, but never becomes its slave. On a spiritual level, Gold’s Friday accedes to a state of wisdom in the form of higher innocence, which he communicates to his tribe through stories. For Friday, reason has been a step towards achieving an integrative wisdom, drawing morals from past experience and adjusting present behaviour according to the changing circumstances.

Another way of coping with modernity is suggested by Nadège and Oudalle’s *contes à tiroir*. In *Le Médianoche amoureux*, Tournier emphasises the role of story-telling in the re-enchantment of the world – in life as well as in literature. Stories soothe and restore the soul; they transmit wisdom and are imaginative counterbalances to day-to-day existence.

In what follows, I will discuss a few of the adventures of the self in the modern world of technology, reason, and materialism, as presented in Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and Tournier’s *Vendredi* (sections 2-6), against the background of the Enlightenment. *Le Médianoche amoureux* will be discussed in the context of redemptive literature in the seventh section of this chapter.

2. Innovation, Science and Technology

2.1. The Enlightenment Background: Exploring the World Together

This section sets the background for the discussion of Defoe’s Robinson as a figure emblematic for the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment marked a shift from preoccupations with things immaterial, such as the soul or the divinity, to aspects of the material word that
could be observed through the senses, in the Lockean tradition, and improved by means of technology. Technology was promoted from the area of crafts and trades to the more “respectable” domain of scientific investigation. What was previously disdained as mere mechanical arts, and contrasted with the more prestigious liberal arts, captured the interest of polite society around the turn of the seventeenth century. With the scientific revolution, renowned scientists innovated in technology to aid their research or to improve living conditions for their fellow human beings.

In a very short time, a surprising number of scientists, stunning in comparison with previous ages, were active in Europe. Many of them were engaged in improving the technologies of the day, in creating scientific instruments, or developing new ones (Watson 671). The roles of the emergent scientific collective, and networking in motivating and sparking scientific development, cannot be overestimated.

Thinkers were encouraged through regular exchanges with like-minded people. The Royal Society was established in 1662 in London, and l’Académie Royale in 1666 in Paris. Unsurprisingly, scientists were more concerned with practical than with theoretical issues. In The Western Intellectual Tradition: From Leonardo to Hegel, Bronowski and Mazlish state that an estimated “sixty percent of the problems handled by the Royal Society in its first thirty years were prompted by practical needs of public use, and only forty per cent were problems in pure science.” Bronowski and Mazlish comment on these scientists’ buoyant creativity coupled with eagerness to obtain concrete palpable results: “they wanted the practical results of experiment to be immediate, they were full of inventions and gadgets, and if the experiment did not come right overnight, they were tempted by morning to move on to another” (220). The pragmatism of British and European scientists, and their awareness of the benefits derived from networking, were captured by Francis Bacon (1561-1626), one of the heralds of the Scientific Revolution. Bacon “proposed a society of scientists, exploring the world together by experiment and showing no special concern for theory (and none at all for traditional theory)” (Watson 665). These scientists were motivated by enthusiasm, mutual trust, and pragmatism in the pursuit of their desire to help their fellow human beings. They established “communities that shared, as Aristotle put it, the highest form of friendship or

48 Bacon’s dream has been realised by scientist working in teams, but solitary research tends to predominate in the humanities, especially in philosophy and literary studies. Nonetheless, networking becomes increasingly important in every discipline. Networks of scientists or artists supporting each other might indicate a shift from a paradigm of individualism to one of cooperation
49 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, VIII. iii, 1156a, 6-7, qtd. in Toulmin 34. See also Joe Sachs, ed., Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2002).
relationship (philia): the philia that unites people whose interest lies not in profiting from one another’s situations, but in enjoying together shared good things” (Toulmin, Return to Reason 34). Their employment of the reasoning faculty was balanced by emotions, and they were inspired in their reflections by the dialogue with friends. Reason and sensibility were not dissociated for authors such as Denis Diderot, one of the emblematic figures of the French Enlightenment and editor of the Encyclopedie:

It is for myself and my friends that I read, that I reflect, that I write, that I meditate, that I listen, that I observe, that I feel. In their absence my devotion refers everything to them. I think unceasingly of their happiness. […] I have consecrated to them the use of all my senses and all my faculties. (Spencer and Krauze 76)

Diderot was passionate about science and technology, although he was more inclined to literary pursuits. He considered that reason, as the faculty facilitating meditation, and feelings (“devotion”) are integrated within the whole of the self, rather than existing separately. He spoke of all the senses and all the faculties – a seamless whole. When balanced by emotions, and when grounded on the here and now, rationality is a source of creativity, as exemplified in Diderot’s own resourcefulness in completing the daunting task of the Encyclopedie. In the absence of emotions, or in the failure to consider the impact of the emotions on the self and others, rationality in isolation has the capacity to turn monstrous, dictatorial, and cruel, as demonstrated by Tournier’s and Gold’s versions of Robinson.

2.2. Defoe’s Robinson, or The Self and Technology

Technological innovations and inventions contribute not only to bettering the lives of whole communities, but also to enhancing respect for individuals. Daniel Defoe chose not to focus on networks of privileged middle-class people or aristocrat scientists, but on the way innovations and inventions affected the lives of individuals. Modernity sees the rise of individualism, while the metamodern represents the breaking of the shell of the ego and attempting to connect with the other.
Defoe’s 1719 novel, *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, eulogises reason, technology, and the practical spirit of the Enlightenment, and their respective parts in saving the solitary Crusoe from falling prey to despair and similar negative emotions. This familiar story is representative of the spirit of modernity and its confidence in human reason as a means of tackling disheartening emotions, and to face the difficulties and threats posed by nature. Tournier’s later Robinson takes the story to another level: while acknowledging the benefits of reason and the scientific spirit, his experiences expose the limits and even the dangers that can come from the mind that is dominated by reason. The contrasting Robinsonades present two understandings of reason, and two attitudes to nature: Defoe’s Robinson is the exponent of a type of reason that is embedded in circumstances (and which Toulmin calls “reasonableness”), while Tournier’s Robinson relies upon a more abstract reason. The former is an attempt to adapt to nature; the latter tries to dominate it.

Defoe’s castaway Robinson Crusoe acts as a man of the Enlightenment, apt to think for himself and to pull himself out of depression. Lacking the basic comforts of civilised life, he puts despondency aside, and pro-actively sets out to recreate from scratch the civilisation that he longs for. His instrument is reason, which he sees as the central faculty, able to control nature by means of technology:

> So I went to work; and here I must needs observe, that as reason is the substance and original of the mathematics, so by stating and squaring everything by reason, and by making the most rational judgment of things, every man may be in time master of every mechanick art. (Defoe 56)

Robinson’s reasoning ability makes up for his lack of skill in handling tools. With it, Robinson organises the data derived from experiment, observation, and experience, as his will and hard work enable him to carry out his projects: “I had never handled a tool in my life, and yet in time, by labour, application, and contrivance, I found at last that I wanted nothing but I could have made it, especially if I had had tools” (Defoe 56). When the appropriate tools are

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50 Blake saw no difference between such attitudes, and satirises the materialism implicit in both, as well as the science which underpins it. He sees this materialism embodied “in the person of the Idiot Questioner, ‘who publishes doubt and calls it knowledge, [and] whose Science is Despair’” (Quinney 11). For Blake “the empiricists and the philosophers” – “Bacon Newton & Locke,” “Voltaire Rousseau Gibbon Hume” (Quinney 11) – were equally mistaken in the disproportionate attention paid to the material world, and the organisation of the sense data through reason. Blake thought that both these attitudes disregard and potentially obstruct access to the visionary reality which he saw as underlyng the physical world. However, Toulmin’s reasonableness marries empiricism and care for the other. Love as care for the other is expressed by Blake in the poems “The Divine Image” and “The Little Clod of Clay,” among others.
missing, Defoe’s Robinson makes do with the utensils he could rescue from the wrecked boat, thereby showing creativity and resourcefulness, perseverance and diligence, qualities that reflect the spirit of the Enlightenment. In time, Robinson gradually conquers the island by means of reason, technological innovations, and constant application. These qualities inspired and endeared Robinson to generations of readers.

Defoe’s novel is a testimony to reason, as the faculty that inspires technological improvement and encourages persistence in seeking solutions. The novel shows that technology raises confidence in one’s own abilities to master circumstances and nature. The abundance that flows from technology brings about Robinson’s satisfaction with his own condition, to the degree that comfort and plenty, while unable to make up for the absence of society, contribute to his acceptance of solitude. Technology (in the form of a potter’s wheel, traps, defense systems, and the like) provides protection, self-defence, efficiency, and even beauty, and leaves time and energy for engaging in meditation. This leisure time for meditation, together with the incentives prompted by life-threatening situations (such as prolonged sickness with no one to nurse him), gradually allow Robinson to examine the condition of his self and his soul, with the result that receptiveness to the divine enters his mind.

3. Solitude and Individualism. Descartes and Robinson

In his search for wealth, which was the prime motivator in leaving his native York and venturing out to sea, Defoe’s Robinson finds, paradoxically, a sense of interiority, and, ultimately, of the divine:

Thus I liv’d mighty comfortably, my mind being entirely composed by resigning to the will of God, and throwing myself wholly upon the disposal of His providence. This made my life better than sociable, for when I began to regret the want of conversation, I would ask my self whether thus conversing mutually with my own thoughts, and, as I hope I may say, with even God
Himself by ejaculations, was better than the utmost enjoyment of humane society in the world. (114)

Robinson’s rationality, which prompts the argument by which he resigns to his situation, coexists with a feeling of surrender to the will of the divine, whose presence in his thoughts he enjoys as much as human interaction. Satisfied with himself as a rational pragmatic being, and especially with his ability to innovate in order to make his life more bearable and even agreeable, in one breath Robinson praises the divinity (whose conversation he appreciates as “better than the utmost enjoyment of humane society in the world”), and extolls the benefits of technology. His emotions (for instance, enthusiasm at perfecting an umbrella that allows him outdoors on both rainy and scorching days, resignation, and gratitude) coexist with his beliefs regarding the existence of God and the ability to communicate with the divine, and his rational attitudes (such as the argument regarding the usefulness of communicating with God in order to combat the feeling of loneliness).

The passage quoted above sums up the Protestant idea of the individual’s direct communication with God. This vertical connection across ontological levels is supported on the mundane level by Robinson’s ethics of frugality, restraint, and industriousness. The connection is associated with reliance on one’s abilities, and satisfaction derived from applying one’s intelligence to bettering living conditions.

51 While Defoe’s Robinson finds fulfilment in solitary existence and rises to a state in which he achieves communication with God, Tournier’s Robinson misses the mediation of fellow humans in order to preserve his humanity. In their absence, he regresses to an animal stage, like a straw held upright by the surrounding straws, and which falls as soon as the companions are removed. After he once bootstraps himself from the marshes (“la souille”), symbol of his decadence, only his fanatical devotion to rational constructive attitudes, to building, charting, mapping, and drawing laws saves him from the temptation of falling back on sub-human instincts. God is, for Tournier’s Robinson, one aspect of the kingdom he builds around himself in order to preserve his verticality and humanity. This God of authority, systems and rules is identical with the Nobodaddy of Blake’s Notebook Poems, or with the God whom Blake put on the same level with “his Priest & King” in the poem “The Chimney Sweeper.”

52 “Labour and patience carry’d me through […] many things” Defoe’s Robinson remarks upon completing a difficult task (96). However, he insists that any accomplishment has been made possible by his owning some tools, while inadequate devices and the lack of work-mate aggravated the difficulty of work: “for want of tools, want of help, and want of skill, every thing that I did took up […] many hours out of my time. For example, I was full two and forty days making a board for a long shelf, which I wanted in my cave; whereas two sawyers, with their tools and a saw-pit, would have cut six of them out of the same tree in half a day” (96). Such comments would undoubtedly trigger a reaction of self-gratifying satisfaction in those of Defoe’s readers which were involved in the trades. Such readers would come to appreciate and cherish their comparatively more privileged state, their having the use of relatively sophisticated tools and enjoying the help and company of fellow workers. The difficulties of solitary life serve to underscore the blessings of collective living. Morrow, however, sees the opposite progress from efforts to combat solitude to becoming trapped in individualism: “The paradox in all this is, of course, that those patterns of behaviour that Robinson mobilizes to combat the effects of solitude on his desert island, namely his engaging in useful activities, are the very ones which, historically, have led to the social isolation of the modern individual” (Morrow 193).
Unlike Descartes, for whom the immanent could be an illusion of an evil genie, and who saw the contingent and the transcendental, matter and mind, as dichotomous, Robinson’s conversation with the divinity does not subvert the emphasis on sensible things and mastering circumstances. For Defoe’s Robinson, divine providence or design gradually comes to be regarded as underlying individual destiny: it constitutes the reality in relation to which humans’ tribulations acquire meaning. In finding God in a life of isolation, Robinson replicates the destiny of anchorites, albeit in a rational Enlightenment setting. His rationality also allows for faith and sentiment. Tournier acknowledges the paradoxical condition of the hermit: “L’anachorete n’est pas seul; il est avec Dieu” (Tournier and Jeon-Chapman 107). Tournier’s Robinson, however, only occasionally feels moments of divine presence, as when his hourglass stops. He endeavours to fill the void around him with organisations and institutions with the result that, during the age of the administered island, God and beliefs are for him just parts of a religious institution.

Similar to Defoe’s Robinson, the communications of Tournier’s Robinson with Vendredi, and with his island Speranza, are primarily vertical and hierarchical prior to the explosion. He changes subsequently; his transformation consists in bracketing the rational faculty and allowing himself to express his emotions and communicate horizontally. This enables him to treat Vendredi with the deference reserved for equals, thus bearing testimony to a softening, even feminising, of his personality.

In saying this, I draw on a distinction Luce Irigaray makes between a masculine and a feminine type of personality. Irigaray’s studies of school children revealed that boys and men prefer hierarchical and subject-object relationships (like Robinson of the administered island, who related more to tools and objects than to Vendredi, whom he considered inferior), whereas girls and women are more relational, in the sense that they prefer subject-subject horizontal relationships (“How Can We Live Together in a Lasting Way?” 127-28). After the explosion, Vendredi and Robinson enjoy such a subject-subject horizontal relationship. While feminine types of personality rely on the company of fellow subjects, masculine personalities are able to make do with the company of objects, or with their own thoughts. Pursuing these lines of thought, I will discuss the modern self as proposed by Descartes.

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53 Irigaray’s intuition and the results of her empirical studies are confirmed by recent research in neural networks. See MacKenzie, “Mapped: Male and Female Brain Connections.”
3.1. Descartes’ Masks

René Descartes is a founding figure of modernity, and in this thesis, essential for understanding the deeper implications of the island metaphor for construing the modern self and its individualism. Defoe’s and Tournier’s castaways enact the trope of solitary meditation that Descartes established as the foundation of the modern spirit. Before we see what makes his meditation paradigmatic, it is important to note that Descartes differs from both Defoe’s and Tournier’s Robinson in two respects. First, Descartes’ isolation is voluntary, as is his distancing from the disturbances that practical concerns and worries entail. In Meditations (1641), Descartes advances the values of calculated solitary contemplation. He confesses: “I cleared my mind of all cares and arranged for myself some time free from interruption. I am alone and, at long last, I will devote myself seriously and freely to this general overturning of my beliefs” (Descartes Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings 18). Second, no emotional distress clouds Descartes’ deliberately serene frame of mind, while the two Robinsons arrive at a rational outlook with differing degrees of effort and pain under the rigours of their respective circumstances.

Descartes’ Discourse on Method (1637) is framed by concerns “with shielding” himself from inner and outer disturbances: “I was caught by the onset of winter,” Descartes confesses. “There was no conversation to distract me, and being untroubled by any cares or passions, I remained all day alone in a warm room. There I had plenty of leisure to examine my ideas.” Descartes isolated himself as if on a deserted island, where no society, no “disquieting emotions,” and no “physical discomfort” could preclude him from undertaking his philosophical meditation. Nothing of the rumour of the busy Athenian agora – no risk or peril – threatens his equanimity and quietness.

Descartes’ programmatic solitude foreshadows the loneliness of the modern self dominated by reason:

55 Yet, Descartes himself was far from being an armchair philosopher, Jean-Luc Marion believes that “contrary to a widespread legend, he was nothing like a solitary, or even autistic thinker, soliloquizing, in the manner perhaps of Spinoza.” See Marion, “The Place of the ‘Objections’ in the Development of Cartesian Metaphysics,” 10-11.
56 No page is indicated when the reference is to a webpage, as is the case with Jorn K. Bramann, Marx: Capitalism and Alienation, The Educating Rita Workbook, 2006, Available: http://faculty.frostburg.edu/phil/forum/Marx.htm, October 16 2006.
Descartes’ deliberate retreat from passionate and full-fledged involvement in life into deep solitude is more than a personal whim. Even a detail like the quiet of winter is not an accidental feature of the scene of his work: it fits the calm and unemotional way in which this philosopher wished to do his thinking. The pronounced solitude of Descartes’ ivory tower corresponds perfectly to the concept of self that he was to develop. (Bramannn)\textsuperscript{57}

He strips the mind of any layer that might interfere with its cold reasoning: previous theories, experience, memories, and attachments. His concept of the self presupposes that the reality of the reasoning mind takes precedence over that of emotions, and even of the body and its sense data. Bramannn explains Descartes’ position:

I find here that thought is an attribute that belongs to me; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am, I exist – that is certain; but for how long? As long as I think. For it may happen that, if I stopped thinking altogether, I would at the same time altogether cease being. I am now admitting nothing that would not be necessarily true. Thus I am, speaking precisely, only a thinking thing; that is to say, a mind, an understanding, or a reason, which are terms whose meaning was previously unknown to me. In other words: I am a real thing and really existent; but what thing? [...] A thing that thinks. (“Descartes: The Solitary Self”)

Notwithstanding Descartes’ no-nonsense outlook and his involvement in solving practical problems, there is a sense in which his solitary meditation (with its emphasis on the mind’s reasoning activity as opposed to passions, on interiority versus exteriority) consolidates dichotomies. Some of the most emphatic antinomies that subtend his universe are those between mind and body, “action and contemplation, movement and stillness.” Yeats suggests that Descartes’ dichotomies may have entered the stage when the “unity of being” and its “integrity” presumably left the cultural stage, to allow room for what Kermode calls “superficial contradictions.”\textsuperscript{58} Frank Kermode argues that “all passionate integrity was split

\textsuperscript{57} Idem.
\textsuperscript{58} David Hume’s \textit{A Treatise of Human Nature} (1739), which postulates the self as a “bundle of perceptions” united by nothing more than custom or habit, also contributes to an image of the self as evanescent and
and destroyed when Descartes, as Yeats put it, discovered that he could think better in his bed than out of it” (48). The concept of the self that Descartes wished to develop is one in which rational thinking could be dissociated from pragmatic and emotional involvement, where meditation in the abstract is preferable or more trusted than meditation informed by experience and feelings – a self for which meditation and action seem irreconcilable.

This solitude in which the rational self reigns supreme – fictionalised by Defoe as Robinson Crusoe’s rule on his uninhabited island – sets the stage for modern individualism. Reacting perhaps to the predetermined hierarchies, prescribed social functions, and collectivism that the Catholic Church had tried to impose during the Middle Ages, Descartes’ enterprise inscribes itself in the larger preoccupations of his time by proposing reason as a universal faculty, available to any alert and instructed mind irrespective of social background. In a world in which many beliefs were crumbling, including allegiance to the authority of the church, and during a time when uncertainty dominated, Descartes set out to find that which is certain. Like Crusoe in search of prosperity, and the stability that wealth would afford, Descartes hoped to find the security of the one thing that is beyond doubt. And he does that by retreating into his self-created island of solitude.

While the main thing that Descartes finds in his journey for certainty is the sureness of doubt, in Defoe’s novel, tribulations lead the protagonist to perceive the hand of providence in a good, merciful God; he finds certitude in his belief in divinity. For Descartes, God’s existence was the *quod demonstrandum*, the thing to be proved, not the outcome of experience as it is for Defoe’s Robinson. The only indubitable thing was the existence of the doubting mind. All the rest – the input of senses, emotions, the natural world itself – might as well be the illusion of an evil genie (Descartes *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings* 19).

Descartes was not alone in advancing such concepts. The seventeenth century abounded in literary texts that refer to the unreality of the world, from Calderon de la Barca’s *La vida es sueño* (*Life is a dream*, 1636): 60 (Barca)“que toda la vida es sueño,/ y los sueños, sueños son” (For all of life is a dream,/And dreams are nothing but dreams), to Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, where Jaques’ monologue expresses a metaphor common at the time:

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59 Not only the incipit of *individualism*, but also that of *capitalism* can be placed in the seventeenth century. This is illustrated by Descartes’ own situation: he could retreat into his solitary meditation due, among other things, to the fact that he had no material worries as he was cashing in on the dividends from the money he invested after selling his aristocratic titles and properties.

60 The first complete English translation in verse of Pedro Calderon de la Barca’s *Life is A Dream* is that of Denis Florence MacCarthy (London: Henry S. King, 1873).
All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts. (Act II, Scene VII: 139-142)

In assuming the deceptive character or unreality of the world, Descartes expresses an idea quite potent among some of his contemporaries. Life was a stage on which people put on masks and played parts; life was as transient and illusive as a dream. In a letter to a friend, Descartes confesses: “So far, I have been a spectator in this theater which is the world, but I am now about to mount the stage, and I come forward masked” (Hall and Gay 176). One of the masks he assumed in order to avoid trouble with the Inquisition was the purely internal scope of his method – his isolation on his island of solitude was a personal whim, dictated by his need for a mask.

But soon enough he revealed his subterfuge. What he presented in Part II of the Discourse as being mere autobiography, meant to clarify his thoughts and shed away error, was expanded in Part VI: “he insists on the advantages to mankind that can accrue from the development of science and technology” – engendered by his rational method (Diamond 1). His vision is not of networks of people working together, but of the solitary rationalist whose method lays the foundation and helps to accelerate the progress of science; his is the assumed loneliness of someone willing to sacrifice social interaction for the greater common good. His vision is not of networks of people working together, but of the solitary rationalist whose method lays the foundation and helps to accelerate the progress of science.

Similarly, Defoe and Tournier invoke the destiny of the anachorite when they send their protagonists to inhabit their deserted islands in order to teach a lesson to humankind. Defoe’s lesson is the benefits of rationality; Tournier’s is the necessity of enlarging the rational outlook with emotions and epiphany. The castaway is a metaphor for the self dominated by reason, a person who has banished or repressed sensibility, instincts, and imagination. This metaphor had been explored by Blake in his satiric prose An Island in the Moon, which is discussed below.

In contrast to Descartes and Defoe, whose selves assume loneliness and superimposed masks, the self at the turn of the twentieth century seeks the other, and aims to devise
networks, as in Nick Hornby’s novel About a Boy; it consciously peels away the layers of artificiality, forsakes masks, and renounces artifices, as suggested by David Foster Wallace in E Unibus Pluram (151). This self devoid of artificial encrustations is prefigured by Blake in the watercolour The Dance of Albion. This self of revived innocence, simplicity, and numinousness is discovered by Tournier’s Robinson.

3.2. Blake on Reason in An Island in the Moon

Blake proposes that his philosophers inhabit not only an island, but an island in the moon, thus doubling their remoteness. In An Island in the Moon (cca. 1784-85), Blake’s philosophers and scientists are either confined to a world of self-construed concepts, or prisoners in an empirical, material world. In contrast to them, Blake prefers sensible people who are animated by vision and imagination – which he sees as granting access to the reality of existence, subjective as well as objective. As they lack grounding in visionary reality (which he regards as the one immutable reality), and since they rely on their reason and senses (which may be misleading), philosophers and scientists are denied access to truth and are condemned to vacillation. The character Obtuse Angle hesitates: “To be, or not to be/ Of great capacity/ Like Sir Isaac Newton,/ Or Locke, or Doctor South […]/ I’d rather be Sutton” (Keynes 57). Through Obtuse Angle’s voice Blake expresses a dislike for abstract thinkers who dabble in generalisations; by contrast, he asserts his preference for practical people, like Thomas Sutton.

Defoe’s Robinson was a down-to-earth, common-sense person, whose adventures Blake had read. This is evidenced by Miss Gittipin, a character in An Island in the Moon, who rebukes bookworm Scopprell for “always talking of his books,” among which she enumerates The Sorrows of Werter and Robinson, the latter referring to Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe (Keynes 52). Sensible people are preferable, Blake suggests, to both theorists and researchers who undertake risky and questionable tests. In the “dangerous experiments” of Inflammable

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63 Sutton “had made a fortune in the coal fields of Durham” and subsequently founded the Chatham School, one of the original nine English public schools (Damon 72). Does Blake suggest that even a money-lender like Sutton is preferable to a philosopher? I wonder whether Blake saw Sutton as a visionary and charitable person, a Muhammad Yunus of his time. This is a possible interpretation, considering that, in the Blake Dictionary, Damon identifies Sutton with the spiritual force behind one of the eight cathedral cities of England, which were meant to contribute to the country’s spiritual resurrection (72).
Gas – probably a caricature of Joseph Priestley 64 – Blake “hints his fear” that science can be detrimental: it “may yet destroy us all” (Damon 200).

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno tell a similar story about the Enlightenment and its insistence on science and reason: the sense of the miraculous is driven away, and death and destruction follow (Horkheimer and Adorno 199).65 Toulmin agrees, too, in *Return to Reason*, where he deplores the disregard for the ethical and for the context of human life in the wake of the Enlightenment, and laments the priority given to detached reason. Toulmin will be discussed in more details in section eight of this chapter.

For Blake, rationality simplifies and amputates reality in order to fit it in its mental patterns, while empiricism regards any inner life as illusory and presents a view of the world devoid of spiritual depth. Blake satirises both rationalism and empiricism in the figure of Tilly Lally, a character of vacillation who has a “childishly” simplistic “materialistic reading of the world” (Rawlinson 107). Tilly Lally is the doubting philosopher who lacks insight and vision. The Island in the Moon is inhabited by three other philosophers (“Suction the Epicurean, Quid the Cynic, & Sisop the Pythagorean”67) who engage in arguments about the importance of mathematics, talk about “incorporating their souls with their bodies,” and surround themselves with scientists and instruments such as quadrants and *camera obscura* (Keynes 47).

While engaging with Cartesian arguments – regarding mathematics, technology, science, and the body-soul distinction – and further evoking Descartes through their insular existence, these inhabitants of the *Island in the Moon* also ridicule the competing position of emotionalism: “Hang Philosophy!” says Suction the Epicurean after perhaps having a glass too many, “I would not give a farthing for it! *Do all by your feelings, and never think at all about it*. I’m hang’d if I don’t get up to-morrow morning by four o’clock & work Sir Joshua”

64 Damon describes Joseph Priestley (1733-1804) as “a religious and political radical and a prominent chemist” who discovered oxygen. When an anti-revolutionary mob burned his house in Birmingham, he moved to Pennsylvania, where he continued his research (Damon 197).

65 The pessimism of Horkheimer and Adorno is rooted in the historical circumstances during which the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory was founded. *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, published initially as *Philosophische Fragmente* (Social Studies Association. New York, 1944) is sometimes disregarded and considered dated, yet Horkheimer and Adorno’s arguments are often insightfully studied. Jürgen Habermas explains: “Critical Theory was initially developed in Horkheimer’s circle to think through political disappointments at the absence of revolution in the West, the development of Stalinism in Soviet Russia, and the victory of fascism in Germany. It was supposed to explain mistaken Marxist prognoses, but without breaking Marxist intentions.” See Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987) 116.

66 The name is revealing. “Grose’s *A classical dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* shows *Shilly Shally* as a popular term for an irresolute person,” while the OED reveals that *Tilly Vally* is an expression for nonsense, while *Tilly* is an alternative for *clay* and “Lallation denotes the act of speaking childishly” (Damon 107).

67 Keynes 45.
Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) promoted the idealising Grand Style in painting, which was as far from visionary reality as humanists’ utopias. Blake satirised Reynolds within the setting of his text. *The Island in the Moon* chronicles utopias and their satires, as well as scientific discoveries in astronomy, chemistry, and physics.

Doubt, rationalism, and idealisations are masks that hide truth in *An Island in the Moon*. By way of contrast, Blake wishes to reveal truth, unconcealed by such artifices. He would “hollow and stamp, & frighten all the People [...] and show them what truth is” (Keynes 63). Exposing truth grants him the calmness of the heart, which inspired works of art (such as “Handel’s water piece”) (62), may impart. Then he could declare, like the poetic *I* in Mrs. Nannicantipot’s mother’s song: “My heart is at rest within my breast,/ And everything else is still” (Keynes 60).

The stillness that is Descartes’ starting point, a precondition for his meditation, an emptying of the mind so that reason is given room to manoeuvre, becomes for Blake a destination, a goal. For Blake, stillness is not emptiness, but an expression of fulfilment. Blake’s interior calmness is not in the form of refined solitary rational meditation, but reminiscent of the reassuring games of children. He experiences this soothing mental silence “when the tongues of children are heard on the green,/ And laughing is heard on the hill” (60). Feelings of joy and caring love connect his poetic *I* with the children, whereas Descartes isolates himself on his island of solitude, where silence couples with lack of emotions, and where reason and doubt reign. For Blake, the perceptions of truth behind the veil of epiphenomena, and the expression of this truth through visionary art, as well as the emotions employed in relating to the other, offer a way of living that is fulfilling and soothing. Similarly, the twins in Roy’s novel derive comfort from each other, from their shared thoughts and emotions, while Tournier’s Robinson finds peace of mind and satisfaction in his care for Jaan.

The location of the Island in the Moon evokes not only the isolation of the empirical rational self, but also its lack of authentic creativity. Just as the moon fails to generate light, so the rational self fails to be truly creative, organising instead the light of others. The inhabitants of the Island in the Moon represent a variety of occupations: scientists and philosophers, “historians, … artists and entertainers, a mathematician, an anatomist, a lexicographer, a priest, a musician, an astronomer, a printer, a lawmaker” (Rawlinson 99). Blake suggests that all of the institutions these people stand for are epiphenomenal. The Island in the Moon gives
rise to motivation toward poetic genius, which Blake associates with the Sun and sunlight. As the moon receives its light from the sun, so philosophy (and the institutions and disciplines based in philosophers’ meditations) is a reflection of the truth that the poetic genius perceives directly, and expresses in visionary poetry.

In *An Island in the Moon*, Blake parodied several types of literary and philosophical texts in a pastiche mode. Later on, Tournier rewrote the Cartesian isolation trope and the Robinsonade in a more pronouncedly transformative and less parodic mode, re-working Blake’s anti-rationalism and anti-emotionalism, as well as the hoped-for direct perception of truth that emerges from their dialectic. Stranded on his Pacific island, Tournier’s Robinson evidences the transformations and the angst of the modern self. As opposed to Defoe’s character, surrounded by noisy thoughts, or Blake’s garrulous philosophers, Tournier’s Robinson discovers silence in solitude as if it were a new religion (*Vendredi* 84). I shall return to Tournier’s silence.

* Systematic doubt has affected philosophers more than Descartes’ later building of confidence in the reality of the world, safeguarded by his assumption of a benevolent and merciful God. By setting the stage for thinking as lonely meditation (in which no senses and emotions, let alone fellow humans, interfere); by isolating the mind from the rest of matter – be it the body, or nature itself; and by insisting upon the rational mind as the sole sovereign of the sensible world, Descartes established individualism. This individualism was taken up by eighteenth century thinkers and writers, and helped to shape the modern consciousness.

Defoe’s character Robinson Crusoe is an incarnation of modern individualism in many of its aspects: self-assuredness, pragmatism, reliance on reason perceived as the supreme faculty. These characteristics of the modern self spring from the circumstances that had led to the articulation of the ideas of modernity. Defoe’s Robinson was born in 1632, at about the same time as Descartes was elaborating his method of systematic reasoning. Robinson took his first breath in York, where his father had moved from Bremen, presumably after fleeing the devastation of the Thirty Years War. That war was responsible for much of the insecurity people felt at that time, and motivated both Descartes’ search for universal truth and Leibniz’ quest for a universal language (*Toulmin Return to Reason* 45). These searches converged in

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68 See also Rawlinson 100.
69 Descartes’ first book *The World*, meant to defend Copernican heliocentrism, was to be published in 1633, but learning of Galileo’s difficulties with the Inquisition, he forestalled trouble by suspending its publication.
the two philosophers’ extolling of logic and mathematical reasoning in the pursuit of such aims. The formulation of universal laws (such as those of physics), made possible by abstract thinking, logic, and mathematics, would bear fruit in the technological boom of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

An unfortunate side effect of the technological boom would be the disregard of virtually anything that cannot be quantified, and rationally or logically accounted for. Emotions and imagination were obvious victims. It would take some time before the reliance on reason began to be questioned systematically, and efforts made towards giving emotions and imagination their due. The whole corsi e ricorsi of the saga of the modern self, the consequences of excessive reliance on reason and of disregarding emotions, is captured by Tournier in *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*.

When contrasting reason with emotions or imagination, the type of reason that I refer to is “hard reason,” or the faculty responsible for “rational theories and deductions” (Toulmin 32), rather than reasonableness or reasonable practices. While the former – hard reason – is associated with the theoretical order sought by exact scientists (Toulmin 32), reasonableness presupposes taking particular circumstances into account, and considering the welfare of particular people. The distinction between hard reason and reasonableness corresponds, in moral philosophy, to a distinction between justice and care in Annette Baier’s and Carol Gilligan’s understanding. Baier explains Gilligan’s position: “In a Different Voice” challenges “the emphasis in Kantian theories on rational control of emotions, rather than cultivating desirable forms of emotion” (Baier 128). Gilligan proposes care as such a desirable emotion. Baier agrees in *The Need for More than Justice*, and believes that, while justice can be cold and impersonal, the ethics of care is warmed by communitarian virtues and social ideals (123), or as Toulmin would put it, is more embedded in the context of everyday existence.

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70 The combination of reasonableness as soft reason and care is exemplified in fiction in Philip Deaver’s short story “Lowell and the Rolling Thunder,” where the protagonist’s wife Veronica exercises a deep understanding of human nature and its flaws. She combines this understanding with love and care to safeguard her marriage to Lowell. Her strategy involves the telling of stories, and invoking a shared past in a way that is reminiscent of Tournier’s *Medianoche Amoreux*: “She always did this. When she was bedeviled in some way about him, she would tear into the past for something stable, and she would engage him in using it to shore up their common foundation. It was her intuitive way of re-establishing their balance” (Deaver, “Lowell and the Rolling Thunder”).


72 Baier, “*The Need for More Than Justice*.”
Self-confidence, trust in technology and in God, coupled with pragmatism and efficiency, may be crowd-pleasing masks that Defoe lends to his character in order to gain the heart of his contemporary readership. Robinson Crusoe enjoyed instant success, its wide popularity leading to countless editions and pirated copies. In the blurb of the 1831 edition of the Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, James Beattie (1735-1803), the Scottish poet and professor of moral philosophy at Aberdeen University, remarked on the lasting impact of the novel:

Robinson Crusoe must be allowed, by the most rigid moralist, to be one of those novels which one may read, not only with pleasure, but also with profit. It breathes throughout a spirit of piety and benevolence; it sets in a very striking light the importance of the mechanistic arts, which they, who know not what it is to be without them, are apt to undervalue; and it fixes in the mind a lively idea of the horrors of solitude, and consequently, of the sweets of social life, and of the blessings we derive from conversation and mutual aid.

Beattie concentrated his comments on a few forceful lines of Defoe’s thought: the religious spirit, the benefits of technology (“the mechanistic arts”), the trope of solitude (“the horrors of solitude”), and the contrasting bliss of socialising (“the sweets of social life, and of the blessings we derive from conversation and mutual aid”). Beattie, who lost his wife and two sons, would have been familiar with “the horrors of solitude,” but loneliness was regarded more positively by philosophers like Descartes or David Hume. It was to become essential to the definition of the modern Western self.

Hume dedicated his whole life to the “new Scene of Thought” that he had envisaged. Like Descartes, Hume decided to “throw up every other Pleasure or Business to apply entirely to” this new philosophy, which sought to revise the applicability of reason and emphasise the role of passions in human agency. Just as Descartes and Hume forfeited the joys of society, Tournier’s Robinson refuses rescue by William Hunter, the captain of the Whitebird; after twenty-eight years on Speranza he decides to spend the rest of his life on his island, far from the spectacle of human degradation (Vendredi 237). Thus he comes closer to the real-life voluntary marooning of Alexander Selkirk than to Defoe’s Robinson, and also to Descartes’

73 Beattie attacked Hume’s work in Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth (1770). This refutation of David Hume’s positions and arguments gained immediate success, helped consolidate Beattie’s academic career and led to his introduction to the King, a £200 pension, and a doctoral degree in law from Oxford.
trope of deliberate seclusion, albeit enriched by the somewhat mystical dedication to a life of wisdom-seeking.

4. Genette and Robinson’s Hypo- and Hyper-textual Adventures

Defoe’s rendition of the story of the modern self (as he perceived it at the beginning of the eighteenth century) stood as the hypotext of Tournier’s debut novel. In what follows I will discuss Genette’s listing of relationships that may obtain between texts, as well as his own critical practice as a function of these relationships. These theoretical considerations will serve as a frame within which the relationship between Defoe’s and Tournier’s novels will be discussed.

Genette was a literary theoretician belonging to the structuralist school. Like the eighteenth century Linnaeus, who organised fauna and flora into categories, Genette classified genres and textual relationships with a view to systematising knowledge pertaining to the domain of poetics or poétique (Palimpsestes 7). Genette’s taxonomies represented an attempt to rid criticism of undigested prejudices, and of the habit of employing insufficiently scrutinised terms. It was an effort to promote lucid, rational approaches and analyses. His elucidation of concepts, and his exposure of preconceived ideas and unexamined usage of terms, provide a twentieth century correlative to Descartes’ shutting away of emotions, de-bunking of prejudices, and questioning of accepted ideas.

In Palimpsestes (1982), Genette defined five types of relationships between texts: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality, hypertextuality.

Intertextuality is “une relation de coprésence entre deux ou plusieurs texts” (8), a relationship of co-presence between one or more texts.75

Paratextuality (paratextualité), represents “des signaux accessoires […] qui procurent au texte un entourage […] et parfois un commentaire” (accessory signals which create an environment and sometimes a commentary to a text). These accessory signals are: “titre, sous-titre préfaces, postfaces, notes marginales, illustrations, jaquette” (title, subtitle, postfaces, marginal notes, illustrations, blurb) (Palimpsestes 9).

75 Unless otherwise specified, all translations in the text are mine.
Metatextuality (metatextualité) is “la relation […] de commentaire, qui unit un texte à un autre texte dont il parle, sans nécessairement le citer” (a relationship of commentary which connects one text with another, without necessarily quoting it) (9).

Architextuality (l’architextualité) is “une relation tout a fait muette qu’n’articule qu’un mention paratextuelle – titulaire, comme dans Poésies, Essais, le Roman de la Rose, ou, infratitulaire: l’indication Roman, Récit, Poèmes […] – de pure appartenance taxonomique: la détermination du statut générique d’un texte” (a silent relationship that articulates only a paratextual mention – expressed in the title, as in Poems, Essays, the Romance of the Rose, or in the subtitle: Novel, Novella, Poems – of pure taxonomic appurtenance: the determination of the generic status of a text) (11).

Hypertextuality (hypertextualité), covers “toute relation unissant un texte B – hypertexte – à un texte antérieur A – hypotexte – sur lequel il se greffe d’une manière qui n’est pas celle du commentaire” (all relationships connecting a text B – hypertext – to a previous texte A – hypotext – on which it is grafted in a way that is not a commentary) (11-12).

These classifications express Genette’s “desire for rationality,” which has been an important factor in his intellectual make-up. He first searched for rationality in Marxism; later he found this desire for rationality in structuralism and analytical philosophy. In Essays in Aesthetics, he confesses: “if I must go to my prehistory, I think I kept from Marxism as I understood it — or, rather, from what, no doubt wrongly, attracted me to it — at the end of the 1940s a desire for rationality, a wish to see clearly and a refusal of fine words. This desire I found answered again later on, and I hope (which is not difficult) more advisedly, in structuralism and then in analytic philosophy” (27).

Although tempted by the tendency to rationality extolled in the Enlightenment, Genette is drawn more to the agglutinating and incorporating impulses of the Renaissance than to the Enlightenment’s rationalisation, classification, and distancing from predecessors (Orr). Moreover, he shows little uneasiness with previous traditions and texts (unlike Enlightenment writers such as Voltaire, who was keen to find a voice of his own in Candide at the cost of disregarding tradition). Genette’s system builds upon the thought of his

76 The Renaissance practice of relying on previous achievements and adjusting them to fit contemporary mindframes is best captured in the centuries-old figure of the contemporaries who rest on the shoulders of their ancestors, imagined as dwarves upon the shoulders of giants, as in the Cathedral of Chartres stained-glass, to which Calinescu draws attention in Five Faces of Modernity (1987). This practice is gestured towards and acknowledged in the fact that “standing on the shoulders of giants” has been the motto of the search engine Google recently.
predecessors, but his approach is not parasitic. He examines and rethinks previously accepted truths, as Descartes did.

4.1. Defoe’s and Tournier’s Appropriations and Re-writings

Genette’s devices of appropriating and rewriting are similar to Tournier’s in his retelling of Defoe’s *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. Defoe had done something similar in his rendering of the castaway story. The successive renderings of the castaway’s tribulations present interesting patterns of alternatively distancing and drawing nearer to the original story. Defoe was unfaithful to Alexander Selkirk’s real-life tribulations. The liberties he took with the original story bespeak of his desire to make a few points rather than just tell a story, and reflect the spirit of the Enlightenment: fierce individualism, ingeniousness and creativity in finding punctual solutions, rather than relying on inherited wisdom or traditions.

To give but one example: Selkirk had been voluntarily marooned on Mas à Tierra (west of Chile, in the Pacific), where he spent four years in complete solitude; Defoe has his hero shipwreck off the mouth of Orinoco, in the Atlantic, for twenty-eight years. Only approximately two of those years were in the company of Friday (Defoe *Robinson Crusoe* 151, 55, 63). These details in Robinson’s story as Defoe tells it indicate the author’s intention to draw a character bigger than life, a figure characteristic of an age: Even if faced with adversities (the shipwreck and all his shipmates’ deaths), the Enlightenment man can make the most of it and even (re)build civilisation and sustain it for what was then almost half a lifetime.

Tournier takes over the idea of the shipwreck, but has his Robinson, joined by Vendredi77 inhabit a Pacific island, instead of an Atlantic one. Tournier’s choice raises a few questions. Does his preference for the Pacific indicate an intention to return to Selkirk’s original story? Or does the remoteness of the Pacific make it more exotic, and therefore more enticing for a Western audience? Or, is Tournier’s choice a reminder of the fact that for the

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77 Identifying the exact time of Vendredi’s arrival on Speranza presents difficulties, as the episode of the *souille* has cancelled any connection with real socialised time conventions, thus performing a second degree abandon of the protagonist: Once this stage of regression is overcome, Robinson finds himself cast away not only on a geographic island, but also on an island in time. Only with the arrival of the ship *Whitebird*, will he know exactly the length of his stay on the island.
French the Pacific has greater historical and cultural resonance from the 18th century onwards?  

In rewriting Alexander Selkirk’s adventure or that of shipwrecked surgeon Henry Pitman, Defoe turns these castaway nouvelles into contes, morphing facts into a meaningful narrative. This type of transformation is explained by Tournier in *Medianoche Amoreux*. The difference between nouvelles (realistic story) and contes (tale), as set out by Tournier, will be discussed later in this chapter.

Genette captures the complexity of the process of transformation that Robinson’s story undergoes from the eighteenth-century original to Tournier’s version:

Le *Vendredi* de Michel Tournier ressortit à la fois (entre autres) à la transformation thématique (retournement idéologique), à la transvocalisation (passage de la première à la troisième personne) et à la translation spatiale (passage de l’Atlantique au Pacifique) (*Palimpsestes* 237)

[Michel Tournier’s *Vendredi* resorts simultaneously to a thematic transformation (ideological reversal), to transvocalisation (a shift from the first to the third person), and a special translation (from the Atlantic to the Pacific).]

Genette notes the thematic reversal from a eulogy of Enlightenment ideology to a criticism of the Enlightenment; the change in perspective, from first-person to third-person narrative; and the spatial change from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Tournier turns the values of Defoe’s Robinson on their head: the Protestant hard-working master who aims to integrate Friday into his own axiological system by education ends up being educated by Vendredi.

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78 I am grateful to Dr Simon Ryan for indicating this possible explanation for Tournier’s choice of setting in *Vendredi*.
79 It is generally thought that Defoe’s model was Captain Woodes Rogers’ *A cruising voyage round the world: first to the South-Sea, thence to the East-Indies, and homewards by the Cape of Good Hope* (1712), which included an account of Selkirk’s story. However, according to Tim Severin’s *In Search of Robinson Crusoe* (2002), the model for Defoe’s Robinson was Henry Pitman, and not Alexander Selkirk as is generally considered: Pitman had been employed by the Duke of Monmouth, and played a part in the Monmouth Rebellion. Pitman wrote a book documenting his escape from a Caribbean penal colony, followed by his shipwreck and adventures on a desert island, which was published by J. Taylor of Paternoster Row, London. Taylor’s son William later published Defoe’s novel. Severin argues that Pitman appears to have lived in the lodgings above J. Taylor’s publishing house, in an area where Defoe was then a mercer. Thus, it is likely that Defoe met Pitman and probably learnt of his experiences first-hand. See Tim Severin, *In Search of Robinson Crusoe* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
Genette calls this ideological reversal *transvalorisation*, which consists in “prendre, antithéquement, le parti (des valeurs supposées) de Vendredi contre (celles de) Robinson, et de substituer en conséquence à l’éducation de Vendredi par Robinson une éducation, symétrique et inverse, de Robinson par Vendredi”\(^{80}\) (*Palimpsestes* 419).

This hypertextual transvalorisation implies a double movement of de-valorisation (of the values of the hypotext, Defoe’s novel) and contra-valorisation in the hypertext (Tournier’s *Vendredi*) of what has been disregarded in the hypotext (*Palimpsestes* 418).

Genette perceptively observes the transformations that Tournier imposes on Defoe’s text, but surprisingly fails to see the reason for Tournier’s delaying the adventure of Robinson by a century: “le naufrage est retardée d’un siècle, transféré *gratuitement* au 30 septembre 1759” (*Palimpsestes* 420), “the shipwreck is delayed by a century and gratuitously transferred to September 30, 1759”. I propose that this century-long delay has a definite thematic function, related to Tournier’s ideological inversion: in order to be able to critique the values of the Enlightenment (which Defoe’s narrative, though set in the second half of the seventeenth century – i.e., a few decades before the accepted onset of the Enlightenment – absorbed and praised), it was essential that Tournier’s narrative be set in an age in which such critique would make sense, and relate to the actual sensibilities of the readers of the era.

### 4.2. Women in the Castaway’s Life

Another change in Defoe’s Robinson that seems gratuitous to Genette has to do with the women in the castaway’s life:

le Robinson de Defoe était célibataire [like Selkirk], celui de Tournier a laissé chez lui une femme et deux enfants, mais *ce détail n’influe en rien sur la suite*: Robinson évoquera une fois sa sœur Lucy, une autre fois sa mère, jamais sa femme ni ses enfants. (*Palimpsestes* 420)

In contrast with Genette’s view, I believe that the very absence of feminine figures in Tournier’s novel is significant: it underscores Robinson’s condition. He is a solitary person even when in society, an orphan by his very nature: “*In Vendredi*, Robinson, alone on his

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\(^{80}\) I translate Genette’s definition of transvalorisation in *Vendredi* as “antithetically siding with the (supposed) values of Vendredi/ Friday against (those of) Robinson, and consequently replacing Vendredi’s/ Friday’s instruction by Robinson, a symmetrical and inverse instruction of Robinson by Vendredi/ Friday.”
island, is an orphan of humanity.” The condition of the orphan is further delineated in the case of the cabin-boy Jaan, who “as the son of a prostitute, has only the crew who ill-treat him as surrogate parents” (Mclean 323). Women are noteworthy for their unobtrusiveness in Tournier’s work, yet their role is far from inconspicuous: feminine figures underscore Robinson’s loneliness in Vendredi.

In Le Roy des aulnes Tournier explains his conception of femininity as comprising two types: The first type is “la femme-bibelot que l’on peut manier, manipuler, embrasser du regard, et qui est l’ornement d’une vie d’homme,” while the second is “la femme-paysage. Celle-là, on la visite, on risque de s’y perdre” (32). Tournier distinguishes between the woman-bibelot, decorative and pleasant, and the woman-paysage (Mclean 324). The woman-landscape is a powerful presence in Vendredi as embodied in Speranza, which represents both island and woman. The island-mother-lover Speranza (which he had previously baptised la Désolation) witnesses the complex developments of Robinson’s transformation: from his rationalistic obsession, to his maturation and period of creativity, to the build-up towards the solar ecstasy of the denouement. She is the surrogate mother and lover figure to whom Robinson returns in search of company and comfort, in whose caves he withdraws as in a primeval womb, and with whom he conceives the anthropomorphical mandrakes.

Other feminine entities are the two boats bearing feminine names la Virginie and l’Evasion, which recur insistently during the first stages of Robinson’s stay on the island, the former as a memory, the latter as a hope for civilisation. Another feminine figure, Robinson’s sister Lucy, is a ghostly image of a girl long dead, whom Robinson thinks he sees in a daydream. This occurrence reveals to him the depth of madness into which he has fallen during his souille regression, thus enabling the debut of his recovery. Feminine presences – as the island, boats, or memories – map the transformations which Tournier’s Robinson goes through: like alchemical suror mystica who assists the alchemist’s search for the philosophical stone or the elixir of life, they witness his universe fall apart and coagulate in turns, from the failed attempts at evading his fate to the despair at his failure, then to his bootstrapping himself with the help of reason, through to his explorations of sexuality and emotions, to the final epiphany.

However, despite the discrete – almost diaphanous – presence of the feminine per se in the novel, tendencies that may be associated with the feminine or the childlike (embodied in Vendredi) undermine Robinson’s male rule of organisation, hierarchy, and order. From the perspective of a culture constituted around male subjectivity and rationality, the feminine and

81 Similarly, Blake’s character Jerusalem was a woman, yet a city.
the childlike, together with the subject originating outside the sphere of Western culture, represent the category of *the other*, which challenges the male self and fosters new crystallisations. Irigaray suggests in *Sharing the World* that the traditionally dis-empowered enrich the traditional subjectivity (male, white, rational) (132). In Defoe’s case, however, the revolt against authority comes from within the Western culture, from youthful impulses rather than from the *other*. 
5. From Defoe’s Trust in Reason to Tournier’s Aspiration for the Absolute

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the story of Robinson Crusoe – in its multifarious avatars from *Swiss Family Robinson* to Coetzee’s *Foe* or Zemeckis’ film *Castaway* – still arrests our attention and imagination. Other novels written in the first decades of the eighteenth century hold only the interest of a sophisticated minority of critics and a less specialised minority of students, but Robinson’s story still carries a fascination that fails to tire. “*Robinson Crusoe* has been in the world” for almost 300 years, and “continues to show rude health” (P. Rogers 152). How is this possible? Has no significant change in sensibility occurred since 1719? Is this continued interest due to the fact that *Robinson Crusoe* was the first great English novel (Mullan)? Or was it because of the appeal of *Robinson Crusoe* that the novel became an established and popular genre?

First, I believe that Robinson’s way of dealing with difficulties as well as his personality endeared him to his audience. His ability to assume masks is partly responsible for this. I do not refer to Robinson’s hiding his exploitation of Friday behind a “mask of humanism” (Finke 9), but to the character traits endowed by Defoe. These traits were partly shaped in response to the interests of his audience, and partly derived from the author’s own personality as a man of the eighteenth century. Robinson embodies some of the ideas and ideals of the age, especially his trust in the power of ingenuity, his resourcefulness, and his faith in reason and technology to conquer nature and convert it to a Western-style home. Similarly, Tournier’s Robinson will assume successive roles, while also working hard to make his environment hospitable.

Home is a locus of safety and fulfilment; it is an ideal state towards which the self aspires, and which the modern self thinks can be achieved, while the postmodern self wanders through forking paths that preclude arrival to a destination. The journey home is a recurrent theme in art and literature at the turn of the twentieth century, and a dominant of metamodern literature. Metamodern texts encapsulate both rephrasings of the questions raised by modernity and the fulfilment of some of the promises of the Enlightenment that Defoe’s novel expresses (especially the promise of spiritual progress commensurate with that of technology, which spiritual fulfilment is often figured as the metaphor of the return home). For some the return home is an ever evasive goal, as it is for Tournier’s Robinson, when he was hoping to return to civilization, or for the protagonist of *More Deaths than One*: “we wish we could go
home, even though it’s impossible. So we make something up” (39). In Roy’s novel, the return home is an unlikely reality for Rahel, who returns to her brother, her family home, and her stories and those of her culture/traditions. The idea of home is something that, in times of uprootedness and mobility, is gradually edified as the self journeys through life. Home is a place that the self does not quite grasp, but towards which it aspires, as in these lines from Jillian Sullivan’s poem “Choices”: “How do you know which hills and sky and water/ will be your home,/ the place you long to return to?” The return home is a hope, as in this unnamed poem from the same collection *Parallel* by Sullivan:

How those of us who wait at home
would take the waves that thud and thud
against the hull,
we’d risk lightning, torrential rain,
the dark unknown ship that’s shadowing our wake
if only those we long for
pass safely through.

The return home is a promise unkept in “Russian Customs:”

All promises, wishes for a better life,
a reconciliation, time to try again, gone.
In John Weachurch’s cell a letter to his mother read:
“I know I will be home again.” His pale, plastered face
told the end of that story.

Home is the area that contains what the self holds precious. The solipsistic protagonist of *More Deaths than One* wonders, skeptically, whether the return home is possible at all: “Are there second acts in American lives? Can you go home again? I used to know the scripted one-word answer to each of those questions” (20). But even when the self seems to be denied a metaphysical home, the epiphenomenal one is imbued with imagination and meaning that offer it coordinates bigger than life: “When I leave Maranui this morning, I’ll motorcycle back to our home at the top of Te Ahumairangi Hill. Te Ahumairangi Hill is my Golgotha, the place of the skull. A small room in that home contains everything I care about,

82 Forrester, *More Deaths Than One*. 
other than a few human beings and disappearing memories” (20). The metamodern hero is a Robinson whose aim in life is not to return to a rational civilisation, but to take the experience of modernity and civilisation to a home imagined as a place where love and self-realisation become possible. The purpose of existence seems to be that of edifying a place where the self feels at home, and to which it can return, where it, ideally, finds solace and comfort, serenity and fulfilment. Texts such as those by Sullivan or Forrester confirm the endurance of aspects of the Robinsonade, as well as the metamorphoses it undergoes, in the first decades of the twentieth century.

A second reason for the vigorous life of Robinsonades is the fascination with far-off places and the exotic, which continues to this day. I link this fascination to the Enlightenment’s emphasis on rationality. Rationality cancels out much of the prejudice inherited from traditional ways of seeing the world, and together with the increasing spread of literacy and access to books, it can open a Pandora’s Box of our longing for freedom, self-invention, and exotic lands. These longings are expressed in part by a propensity to redefine the self, and an augmented thirst for stories that express and respond to our enhanced appetite for freedom and exploration. I will discuss some of these aspects below.

The assumption of masks corresponds to the discovered possibility of individual self-definition at the dawn of modernity and I believe it has played an important part in the longstanding reception Robinson Crusoe has enjoyed. In his preface to the 2003 Penguin edition, John Richetti highlights Defoe’s “capacity for disguise and impersonation, his facility for projecting himself into the personalities and ideas of other people, to ventriloquise or mimic so effectively the voices of other people” (xiii). These capacities and facilities opened the way to a process where readers have been able to identify with facets of Robinson’s personality. This identification is strengthened by his being a believable character, rather than a schematic, symbolic, or conventional one.

Robinson’s traits were borrowed in part from Defoe’s own personality: the tension between his mercantile career and a life of piety; his fascination with technology; his resourcefulness, perseverance, and stamina. Defoe was an intrepid, self-educated, and independent man who succeeded despite adversities. His can-do attitude, which led him to take up diverse lines of business,\(^\text{83}\) derived from his Protestant work ethic, which, according

\(^{83}\) Defoe’s employment changed with the times. He was a “wholesale merchant in stockings” at a time when the demand for manufactured clothing was increasing, then he was involved in brick and tile production, followed by glassware and bottles, before he took to writing for a living. He was daring, eager to take advantage of, and improve on, existing conditions and technologies. His very first book was the 1697 An Essay upon Projects in
to Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, yields “rational bourgeois capitalism” (xi).\(^{84}\)

This work ethic is mirrored in Robinson’s self-reliance, and is echoed over time in the current era’s do-it-yourself craze, which Tournier considers characteristic of our times. Rational, sensible, and practical, Defoe lends his protagonist many of his own characteristics, as well as other features which appeared desirable in his time: flexibility and versatility, adaptiveness, focusing on conquering nature, on civilising other cultures, on Christianising the “savage.”

Defoe sensed the pulse of his society, and used his observations to advantage. His journalistic work, followed by his literary career, seemed to have taken shape in response to the needs of the market and the era’s advances in technology. John Richetti emphasises that “Defoe’s [Robinson] book grows out of the early eighteenth-century English world of the new market-place for print” (Richetti and Defoe x). The increased readership created by the spread of printing presses and widespread literacy represented a resource for Defoe, and he capitalised upon it efficiently with the result that by 1703, six years after the publication of his first book, he was already a full-time writer (Richetti and Defoe xi). Accordingly, there is a close relationship between Defoe’s choice of career and the changing conditions of the eighteenth century England.

However, Defoe was far from being the profiteer or the chameleon that his political adversaries accused him of being. His penchant for irony and satire, especially in *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1703) – which, together with *Robinson Crusoe* might have inspired young Blake in writing the prose satire *An Island in the Moon* – brought him little profit, as he was arrested and spent six months in Newgate prison. He then became an informant for Robert Harley, the Speaker of the House of Commons, which prompted his habits of disguise and double speech. In the meantime, he was writing prolifically, both journal articles and book-length treatises and narratives. Richetti comments:

> It is perhaps no accident that the political journalist and secret agent, the government’s mole in the opposition press, turned in 1719 to writing fiction, since most of his life he had been playing roles and assuming identities distinct from his own. (xiii)

Defoe’s versatility reflects in Robinson’s ability to adapt and adjust his strategies for survival and self defense, as well as his technology, to the changing circumstances of his environment.

Tournier’s *Vendredi* similarly responded to the demands of his times and the current marketplace, while capturing what Tournier perceived as characteristics of the contemporary self: its solitude, its DIY crazes, the focus on interiority, and the uninhibited search for sensual gratification. Retelling Robinson’s story, Tournier sets it a century later, in 1759, when, presumably, the Enlightenment ideology was in full swing. 85

The setting for Tournier’s novel also accommodated the life and times of Georges Danton, whose role in the French revolution helped to throw a shadow over the ideals of the Enlightenment, and implicitly to cast doubt on the pre-revolution society’s uncritical trust in the benefits of reason. Danton’s involvement in the September Massacres and the Terror anticipate Robinson’s well-meaning and rationally-justified cruelty during the age of the administered island in both Tournier’s novel and Gold’s film adaptation *Man Friday*.

In Roy’s novel, a smaller-scale postcolonial, family-wide, self-righteous Terror is also an important factor in the development of the twins, which marks their transition from innocence to experience. Roy’s treatment of the subject suggests an implicit commentary on both the historical events in Revolutionary France, and turn-of-the-century India: idealism is sacrificed and the innocent punished, but some of the historical innocence and idealism make a comeback in the age of higher innocence, like the one experienced by the twins after Rahel’s return home. In politics, this corresponds to the age that, in Roy’s *War Talk*, she “hears breathing”: “Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.” 86

In what follows, I revisit the topic of Tournier’s hypertextual transformations and offer more complex answers. Why didn’t Tournier preserve Defoe’s seventeenth-century setting? What happens in the transition to the period of eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which Tournier wishes to draw our attention to? For example, the uncertainty that lingered in

85 McLynn believed that the year 1759 should “be as well known in British history as 1066” since “Britain became master of the world” then. In 1759 Britain won a number of significant battles as part of the Seven Years War and consolidated its positions in India and Canada, expanded its trade, and opened the British Museum and the Kew Gardens to the public. See Frank McLynn, “The Year 1759 Should Be as Well Known as 1066 in the History of Britain,” *The Telegraph* 15 January 2009. Incidentally, 1759 is also the year when the philosopher Adam Smith published *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in which he posits “interest in the fortune of others,” “compassion” and “sympathy” not only as the psychological motives for altruistic behaviour, but also as essential constituents of human nature, along with the selfishness which springs from the instinct for self preservation. The full text is available online. See Adam Smith,*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, (1759), December 9, 2013 <en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Theory_of_Moral_Sentiments>. 86 Arundhati Roy, *War Talk* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2003).
Defoe’s era is out, and the Enlightenment’s relative certainty is in – and with it the unqualified trust in reason and its products: science and technology. The world in the eighteenth century was no longer a dream, but a clock, a mechanism functioning according to universal laws; the unknown was chartered, the wilderness was partly tamed, the “primitive” was becoming civilised. Landscapes had become geometrical diagrams. Nature had been trimmed to fit geometrical designs as in the French gardens surrounding Versailles. The world of Tournier’s Robinson absorbed these changes, while retaining its own vulnerability to subversive criticism.

As was the case with Defoe’s original, the experiences of Tournier’s Robinson reflect those of his creator. While Defoe thrived in his changing world, taking advantage of its opportunities, Tournier’s own relationship with the mercantile world is a rather tenuous one. After failing in his attempt to become a teacher of philosophy, Tournier found himself in the position of finding “another way of earning” his living, which would allow him to entertain his love for philosophy (Worton 191). He spent seventeen years “producing radio programmes about literature, … television series about photography and photographers, and working for a commercial radio station, Europe No 1” where he “wrote publicity slogans for nappies, washing powders and … mineral water” (Worton 191). All the while he was wondering how to draw his two lives together, his love for philosophy and his lucrative activities. Literature was the obvious answer, but still the problem remained how one could accommodate “thinking of Plato, Spinoza and Hegel” with “stories about fishing and hunting, traveling, money, adventures,” which the twentieth-century audience would enjoy (Worton 191). These experiences are not mere biographical anecdotes, for they throw light on the writer’s craft, his motivations, and the perceived role of literature.

Literature in general, and Vendredi in particular, bridges the gap between the abstract reasoning of philosophical preoccupation and daily existence in the empirical world. As in Toulmin’s view of modernity, literature preserves the preoccupation for the immediacy of embedded daily existence which the abstract rationality disregards. In Tournier’s transition from teaching philosophy to creating literature, the tripartite relationship between Robinson, Friday, and the island played an important part: “Le passage de la philosophie au roman trouvait dans ce petit drame à trois (Robinson + l’île + Vendredi) une occasion privilégiée” (Tournier Le Vent Paraclet 223). Tournier’s rendering of the story of Robinson bespeaks of the author’s intention to articulate the story of everyone, of virtually every introspective modern self.
Tournier’s story of Robinson is both adventure novel and cerebral adventure. While addressing the journeys of the mind, Tournier invokes the experience of Descartes, who elaborated on his mental path, in his *Discourse on Method*, during the Thirty Years War. In *Vent Paraclet*, Tournier quotes extensively from Descartes’ account of his solitary quest:

> J’étais alors en Allemagne ou l’occasion des guerres qui n’y sont pas encore finies m’avait appelé; et comme je retournerais du couronnement de l’empereur vers l’armée, le commencement de l’hiver m’arrêta en un quartier où, ne trouvant aucune conversation qui me divertît, et n’ayant d’ailleurs par bonheur aucun soin ni passion qui me troublissent, je demeurais tout le jour enfermé seul dans un poêle où j’avais tout le loisir de m’entretenir de mes pensée…. (224)

Descartes’ position, already mentioned in Bramann’s interpretation, sets the modern self as a solipsistic rational mind, confined within its own skull and aloof from emotions or imagination, which are regarded as inferior agencies of the self. The self, however, escapes its solipsism through dialogue with other authors and their texts. The mediator is not reason, but the third element of the Christian trinity, the evanescent Holy Spirit which connects and inspires.

In *Le Vent Paraclet* (which title may be translated as *The Holy Spirit*), Tournier confesses that *Vendredi* represents the rewriting of more than one text. *Vendredi* is the hypertext not only of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, but also of Descartes’ *Discours de la méthode*; Paul Valéry’s *Monsieur Teste* (224), which reenacts the Cartesian cerebral adventure; Spinoza’s *Ethics*; and the *Bible* (VP 229). Nonetheless, what Tournier set out to achieve in *Vendredi* is more than a rewriting that implodes the architextual categories of the genres of the novel, philosophical discourse, and religious literature. His novel aims to capture the life of the world that we inhabit, and to bridge the gap between everyday life and metaphysical cogitation/existence.

The story of Robinson as told by Tournier is a deep philosophical reflection on the three approaches to the world that Spinoza had proposed: “Les trois vies de Robinson jettent ainsi un pont entre notre existence de tous les jours et la métaphysique de Spinoza. Car à chaque home, à chaque femme trois voies s’offrent dans la vie: (1) les plaisirs”– which, taken to extremes become “purement passifs et dégradants – l’alcool, la drogue, etc..” The other two
ways correspond to satisfying impulses that are more elevated than the mere sensual: “(2) le travail et l’ambition sociale” and “(3) la pure contemplation artistique ou religieuse” (*Le Vent Paraclet* 229).

Tournier has his protagonist experience all of these elements: the pleasures, the work and social ambitions, pure artistic or religious contemplation. He shapes a character who is an exemplar not only of the Enlightenment effort to extricate the self from the chaos of superstitions and impulses (point 1 in Tournier’s list above), embodying self-reliance, progress, rationality, and technology (2), but also of humankind and its evolution from a consciousness embedded in the material to an awareness of the spiritual (3) – of what Blake called “Imagination,” and Irigaray has referred to as the “sensible transcendental”.

5.1. Inventing Myths: Silence and “L’àpre Solitude” of the Contemporary Self

While Defoe’s Robinson embodied pragmatism and efficiency, reflecting the Enlightenment’s trust in reason and the ability of the individual to manage emotions as well as nature, Tournier’s Robinson stands for a more generalised character, a guide for all of humankind. Tournier’s desire to write a novel of general (as well as specific) concerns, at a time when the exponents of *le Nouveau Roman* had been doing away with traditional categories such as plot, character, and setting, is considered by Harsan to be brave and daring:

Lorsque, en 1967, Michel Tournier publiait son roman *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*, la longue et acharnée bataille entre les tenants du roman traditionnel et les partisans du “Nouveau Roman” approchait à son terme. En fait, ces derniers avaient déjà eu le dessus et imposé (temporairement) leur conception concernant le texte littéraire du type romanesque. L’époque était dominée par le couple intellectuel Roland Barthes–Alain Robbe-Grillet qui, dans les années ‘50–’60, avait mis en pièces le roman traditionnel et avait démoli, de manière complète et systématique, tous les piliers qui soutenaient (jusqu’alors) l’édifice de ce genre littéraire. Le Nouveau Roman sortait donc de “l’underground” littéraire et marquait son entrée triomphale dans le “main stream.” Sa victoire était, pour l’instant, totale (au moins, au niveau théorique

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87 As for Spinoza, for Blake genuine religiosity and the authentic aesthetic overlap; any truly religious spirit is an artist, which is why in “The Laocoon” he proposes that “Jesus & his disciples were all artists.”
et déclaratif): on avait définitivement sonné le glas du personnage, de l’intrigue, du cadre socio-historique, de l’analyse psychologique, du lieu, du temps, du message à transmettre. La révolution romanesque était accomplie. Dans ces circonstances, il nous faut apprécier d’autant plus le courage et la témérité de Tournier, qui, tout en assumant le danger de se faire prendre pour un rétrograde, offre au public un roman qui, du point de vue formel et compositionnel, était écrit sur les canons. (25)

Tournier decided to write in a traditional way, unlike the representatives of *le Nouveau Roman*. He aimed to innovate at the level of themes and ideas, rather than at a formal level. In *Vent Paraclet*, he confesses: “Mon propos n’est pas d’innover la forme, mais de faire passer, dans une forme traditionnelle, aussi préservée et rassurante que possible, une matière ne possédant aucune de ces qualités” (190). His innovation in *Vendredi* consists in taking over the traditional genre of the Robinsonade and infusing it with new meanings, which are relevant to the contemporary self. One of the themes Tournier discusses is the loneliness of the modern self, which he associates with and regards as being aggravated by developments in science, including Freud’s psychoanalysis that aimed to map the self by establishing its categories in rational, categorical, form.

Tournier’s refusal to experiment with form and engage instead with essential concerns accords with the late American novelist David Foster Wallace’s position in *E Unibus Pluram*:

The next real literary “rebels” might well emerge as some weird bunch of anti-rebels, born oglers who dare somehow to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse and instantiate single-entendre principles. Who treat of plain old untrendy human troubles and emotions with reverence and conviction. Who eschew self-consciousness and hip fatigue . . . Real rebels, as far as I can see, risk disapproval. The old postmodern insurgents risked the gasp and squeal: shock, disgust, outrage, censorship, accusations of socialism, anarchism, nihilism. Today’s risks are different. The new rebels might be artists willing to risk the yawn, the rolled eyes, the cool smile, the nudged ribs, the parody of gifted ironists, the “Oh how banal.” To risk accusations of sentimentality, melodrama. Of overcredulity. Of softness. (151)
Tournier is such a rebel who goes against his times and embraces traditional forms while treating “old untrendy human troubles and emotions with reverence and conviction.” Thirty years after Tournier, Roy inhabits a cultural climate less inclined to experiment with literary forms; her concerns are as deep as Tournier’s: who can be loved and how much, what are the causes of evil in society and how can the effects of this evil be healed at a personal and collective level. Vendredi is a novel of essential concerns. Robinson is “a mythological character” who “is of relevance to all humanity.” He “embodies” solitude, one of the major aspects of human existence (Tournier Le Vent Paraclet 192), to which young people are condemned as soon as they emerge from the maternal paradise of the early childhood.

There are several kinds of isolation that Tournier tackles in Vendredi. First, there is physical seclusion, isolation on the island, which affects the psychology of the individual in different ways – from the temptations of madness and suicide to misanthropy, from completely letting go to building an obsessively organised environment, from recognising no restrictions, limits, or authority (including God’s), to issuing codes of law, taking charge, and even assuming God-like prerogatives in relation to subordinates.88

Then there is psychological isolation, which society presses on adolescents and even younger children. Mothers acquainted with Freud’s texts may be inclined to banish their children to the isolation of “un désert physique,” out of fear of encouraging sexual impulses in their children (Le Vent Paraclet 26). The self is condemned to this solitude because of conditionings, customs, reason and science, or reasons such as Freud’s. In Vent Paraclet, Tournier exposes the limits of Freudian psycho-analysis: “Longtemps la psychanalyse freudienne n’a admis le besoin de contact physique que comme une pulsion libidinale concrétisée d’abord dans la recherche orale du sein maternel par le nourrisson, puis par les relations proprement génitales” (26). Deprived of physical contact for years at a time, young people find themselves isolated, abandoned, as if on an island, or in a desert (VP 26).

Tournier explains the importance of physical contact, and the fact that it need not be equated with sexual relationships: “Quand je parle de contacts physiques, j’entends naturellement quelque chose de plus vaste et de plus primitif que les jeux érotiques et les relations sexuelles qui n’en sont qu’un cas particulier” (Le Vent Paraclet 25). For Irigaray, touch is a sense that respects the alterity of the other, and does not necessarily entail the sexual. She suggests that we should be cultivating this more “feminine” sense of touch, which

88 More about the master-slave relationship and the overwhelming loneliness, yet paradoxical situation of the one in power, below.
does not appropriate the other, does not take into possession as the more “masculine” gaze does (“The Fecundity of the Caress”).

Tournier’s Robinson personifies such a young man deprived of affection, for whom, during most of his stay on Speranza, “l’amour est original.” Love is “garant de confiance et de sécurité” (Le Vent Paraclet 25). His desire is not for sexual gratification – or not only for such gratification – but for human, affectionate, contact. He finds this, eventually, in the person of Vendredi who, after the explosion that destroyed l’île administrée, turns from slave into brother and friend – Robinson’s twin, his more spontaneously creative half.

While Robinson’s interactions with Speranza may be regarded as an enactment of a Freudian understanding of the mother-son relationship, more complete relationships are formed with Vendredi and then with Jaan-Jeudi, in which Robinson seeks comfort, as well as a fulfilment of the self. Previously, lack of human contact had led Robinson to a resigned acceptance of solitude, which he qualifies as “l’âpre solitude,” seeing in it the fulfilment of a destiny. His account of solitude echoes Descartes’:

La solitude est un vin fort. Insupportable à l’enfant, elle enivre d’une joie âpre l’homme qui a su maîtriser, quand il s’y adonne, les battements de son cœur de lièvre. Ne serait-ce pas que Speranza couronne un destin qui s’est dessiné dès mes premières années? La solitude et moi, nous nous sommes rencontrés lors de mes longues promenades méditatives sur les bords de L’Ouse, et aussi quand je m’enfermais jalousement dans la librairie de mon père avec une provision des chandelles pour tenir la nuit, ou encore lorsque je refusai à Londres d’user des lettres de recommandation qui m’auraient introduit chez des amis de ma famille. Et je suis entré en solitude, comme on entre tout naturellement en religion après une enfance trop dévote, la nuit où la Virginie a achevé sa carrière sur les récifs de Speranza. Elle m’attendait depuis l’origine des temps sur ces rivages, la solitude, avec son compagnon obligé, le silence…(Tournier Vendredi 84)

Forced by circumstances to live by himself, Tournier’s Robinson rationalises his condition and attempts to glorify it as a philosophy. He decides, initially, that his solitude has been both pre-destined and elected; it has recur red at important ages: as a child, when he used to hide for hours in his father’s shop; as an adolescent who read by himself through the night or took long solitary walks along the river; as a youth who chose not to use the letters of
recommendation for his family’s friends. His propensity towards solitary activity may reflect a natural predisposition, as well as a desire of his ego to establish a world that belongs exclusively to himself, where the solitary self is the only master. Similarities may be traced between Robinson’s ego and the ego that was common in the Enlightenment, with its high ideals of conquering nature (human and environmental), establishing new rules and laws, setting up taxonomies, and controlling and civilising the other in order to set up a world that human beings could dominate.

Solitude connects with various types of silence, which Robinson gradually learns to decipher and to cherish:

Through references to more than one of the senses, silence becomes a state which harmonises the various aspects of the self: the instincts or the temptation of the souille (“la consistance glauque de la souille”), the aesthetic or spiritual inclinations to which Robinson would give free vent under Vendredi’s guidance (evoked by “silences aériens et parfumes”), and the hardness of reason (“d’autres encore sont durs et sonores comme l’ébène”). Silence constructs bridges between Robinson’s soul and his environment, which is no longer seen as distinct from himself, nor as an adversary. Having become part of nature via the mediation of silence, Robinson feels capable of dissolving the illusory divisions in the universe that surrounds him.

Robinson’s near-epiphanic abandonment to night evokes the episode of the souille, and foreshadows his final ecstasy when rationality is suspended and other aspects of the self take precedence: “Pourquoi faut-il qu’au coeur de la nuit je me laisse de surcroît couler si loin, si profond dans le noir? Il se pourrait bien qu’un jour, je disparaisse sans trace, comme aspiré par le néant que j’aurais fait naître autour de moi” (Tournier Vendredi 85).

Irigaray emphasises that Western culture is primarily a culture of sight and the gaze; she insists on creating art and experience that engage all of the senses. Likewise, Tournier
invokes hearing and smelling, then touch, when talking of young people’s need for closeness, or when Robinson “bathes in silence” (as if in a material substance). The senses impart to us the complexity of the self, which is not limited to the rational or to the sense of sight with which it is associated especially in the metaphor of “the light of reason”: “Touch, smell, sound and taste, even though culturally attuned, defy the absolutist tendencies of the visual” (Gray 90). Unlike the gaze, which can annihilate the other by appropriating him or her, touch brings the alterity of the other into being, while also creating the self: “The touch of the flesh is the encounter that produces, ultimately, a self” (Gray 90).

A third type of solitude that is explored in Vendredi is the solitude of the powerful, which may be considered a particular type of psychological isolation. Both Vendredi and its film adaptation reveal the paradoxical, sad, and lonely condition of Robinson, especially in his avatar of a master. Even when he ceases to be alone physically, with the appearance of Vendredi, Robinson cannot escape his psychological solitude. Despite his power, the master has no access to meaning, nor to the third type of knowledge described by Spinoza as the knowledge of the absolute, until his ego and his emotions are shattered by the explosion and by Vendredi’s eventual defection. Instead of softening the rigidity of King Robinson, Vendredi’s presence initially consolidates Robinson’s seclusion in his ego-dominated world.

Tournier’s engagement with the corruption of those forms of power that are consolidated by self-righteous rationalisation and justification is hardly surprising in the late twentieth century, when numerous dictators continued to oppress the freedom and creativity of their subjects. The solitude of the powerful constitutes the subject matter of Gabriel García Márquez’s The Autumn of the Patriarch. Commenting on this 1975 novel by the Colombian writer, Morrow portrays the contradictory situation of the master in terms that could equally describe Robinson’s autocracy during the age that preceded the explosion: “The paradox is that the master’s self-realisation requires recognition by an equal rather than a slave, but this cannot be achieved because he is incapable of mutuality with another master’’ (42). In other words, the autocrat isolates himself or herself in a situation that allows no effective communication with anyone, and affords no growth.

Like the parts of Vendredi that are concerned with Robinson’s île administrée, the Autumn of the Patriarch is “a study in the self-destructive pathology of patriarchy as the primordial form – both political and gendered – of the solitude of the absolute power”

89 Man Friday (1975), director Jack Gold, script by Adrian Mitchell. See also Adrian Mitchell. Man Friday/ Mind Your Head (Eyre Methuen, 1974) and Man Friday (Futura Publications, 1975).
90 The original title is El otoño del patriarca (1975).
Morrow combines Hegelian terminology with an inclination toward Spinoza’s aspiration to absolute truth, when he notes the master’s failure to achieve fulfilment: “As a form of the will to truth, mastery culminates in a failed self” (Morrow 42). This idea is illustrated in Alexandre Kojève’s interpretation of Hegel’s analysis of the dialectic of mutual recognition:

Mastery is an essential impasse. The Master can either make himself brutish in pleasure or die on the field of battle as Master, but he cannot live consciously with the knowledge that he is satisfied by what he is. If history must be completed, if absolute Knowledge must be possible, it is only the Slave who can do it, by attaining Satisfaction. And that is why Hegel says that the “truth” (i.e. revealed reality) of the Master is the Slave. The human ideal, born of the Master, can be realized and revealed, can become Wahrheit (truth), only in and by Slavery. (Kojève 47)

Slavery entails dependence and subordination, as well as enforced humility, as a counterpoint to the master’s power and arrogance. Although slavery obviously poses more problems than it solves, in acknowledging humility as prerequisite for access to truth and self-realisation, Hegel and Kojève anticipate Tournier – whose Robinson has to have his rationalist ego shattered before he can progress to Spinoza’s third type of knowledge.

Self-exposure and Metatextuality

Within the context of the endurance of the Robinsonade, I will now discuss strategies for self-exposure in metamodern texts, especially in Tournier’s texts *Vendredi*, *Vent Paraclet* and *Le médianoche*, in relation with Romantic self-consciousness. In rewriting Robinson’s story, Tournier relinquished the exclusively first-person narrative of Defoe’s novel in favour of an alternation between selective-omniscience and first-person narration. Robinson’s tribulations constitute a pretext for exploring the author’s own perceptions, with the closeness of diary entries. Yet the virtual universality of Robinson’s story finds a good conveyor in the quasi-omniscient voice of the narrator. Tournier’s *Vent Paraclet* underscores both the intensely personal involvement of the author as well as the more generalised scope of human concerns as expressed in the Robinsonade. The alternate uses of first person and third person enable Tournier to render the intensely personal experience of Robinson, while avoiding the limitations of solipsism that are particular to Robinson’s first person voice.

*Le Vent Paraclet* represents a metatext\(^91\) of the very prolific Robinsonade literature – within which Tournier repeatedly mentions Defoe’s novel, Steele’s notes, Rousseau’s confessions, and Tournier’s own *Vendredi* (*Le Vent Paraclet* 218). Commenting on one’s own work, as Tournier does in *Vent Paraclet*; exploring and divulging one’s sources and the ideological structure of one’s own novels; exposing the warp of one’s own texts – such textual devices were embraced in the aftermath of Romantic self-consciousness.\(^92\) These self-absorbed and self-exposing strategies become even more frequent in modern and postmodern literature. To be sure, as authors stepped back from their passionately engaging stories, dramas, or poems to reflect on the craft of writing, they were not engaging in a peculiarly (post)modern technique, nor a specifically Western one.

*Ars poetica*\(^s\) are sprinkled through world literature, though more often than not their object is to underscore the author’s aim or programme rather than to expose the articulation of their skill and craft. In the spirit of the Romantic era, of which Wordsworth’s “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* is an example, postmodern authors are often marked by acute self-consciousness, by a desire “to get ahead of professional critics,” and to explain their work.

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91 We have seen that metatextuality is defined as “la relation, on dit plus couramment de «commentaire», qui unit un texte à un autre texte dont il parle, sans nécessairement le citer (le convoquer), voire, à la limite, sans le nommer […]. C’est par excellence, la relation critique.” See Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes. La Littérature Au Second Degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982) 10.
addition to book-length collections of essays dedicated to explaining the texts of his novels, Tournier includes metatextual passages within the text of his fiction. The famed *conte-nouvelle* distinction in *Le médianoche amoureux* (1989) is such an example, announcing its architextual appurtenance in a paratextual note on the very cover of the book, immediately following the title: *Le médianoche amoureux. Contes et nouvelles.* This distinction will be discussed in section 7 of this chapter.

An intriguing example of metatextuality is Philip Deaver’s alterations to his writing so as to forestall critics’ objections by clarifying his intentions:

> When *Silent Retreats* came out, the pretty good reviews (see the New York Times Book Review, June 12, 1988) had one quibble, and that was “What’s bothering these guys, anyway?” My answer was always testosterone was bothering us. Guilt. Nonspecific angst. Shock. Becoming the villains in women’s new story of liberation.

> I decided I couldn’t handle that criticism, and that my stories thereafter would have a clear understanding of what’s at stake, the core tension. In first and second drafts, I work to understand the tension, and revise to amp it up.”

Deaver incorporates metatexual considerations of the type presented above into the very craft of writing. He spells out the tensions between his characters, elucidating the points he wishes to make. As a result, what he wants to say becomes clearer to the reader. On the other hand, apart from meditations on their craft as story-tellers, Tournier and Roy seem to write unself-consciously; they write because they “have something to say” (Tournier and Petit 173).

In metamodern literature, metatextual devices do not merely expose the weft and warp of texts, the textuality of the text (of the sort “what you are reading are just words on paper, there is

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93 Personal communication.
94 By contrast, the postmodernist artist John Cage declares in the very title of his 1990 “performance biography:” *I Have Nothing to Say and I am saying It.* This declaration expresses the position and the craft of a few artists and writers (mostly avant-garde or postmodernist) for whom the expression is paramount, and it overweighs the message or ideas to be conveyed. At the other extreme of the pendulum swing, in *Fishing from the Boat Ramp,* the message matters the most for Sullivan, who writes in a manner that forsakes the ego: the story takes primacy and is being written through her rather than by her. Not the expression matters the most, but the meaning to be conveyed. In “Gifts” the artist is a mere instrument through which the words flow and the story articulates; she is but a receptive tool, a mediator, who allows her talent and the sacredness of a language crafted since the twelfth century to combine in writing, which becomes a work of affection, an expression of her love for self and care for the other (152). In “Tributaries,” the writer is seen as the one who glean his or her inspiration from the small things of life, from average people and workaday events, like an ocean or a sea that collects its tributaries, and for which every rivulet or raindrop counts. The writer or artist gives back to the world what the world has given them (155).
not much reality to the world construed through the use of words other than that of an artefact”). Metatextual devices are employed in metamodern literature in order to elucidate. They reveal aspects of the text and contexts that the reader might not have been aware of, they clarify meanings, and aid the reader in constructing his or her own meaning. Rather than alienating the reader, metamodern metatextual strategies edify and bring meanings home.

5.2. Revisiting Traditions: Solitude and the Transforming Self

Tournier’s exploration of the Robinsonade inscribes itself within a larger tradition of revisiting and reclaiming the styles and techniques of predecessors (from, e.g., Roman and Greek antiquity, the Enlightenment, and modernity). Such respectful looks backward help authors to define their times, and to inquire into what it is to be human. While postmodern authors tend to relate to antecedent texts in an ironic, pastiched, or parodic way, authors like Tournier engage with the themes, ideas, and motives of earlier texts in a way that is more respectful, even reverential. He endeavours to glean from them the layers of meaning that may provide his own understanding and his texts with increased depth and quasi-universal meaning.

Accordingly, Tournier’s Robinson turns Descartes’ solitary meditation into a symbol of the solitude of the modern self. By crossing the boundary between the practical and the contemplative, Robinson becomes the incarnation of a more synthetic avatar, which is both a *homo faber* and a *homo contemplativus*, and which I call *homo metamodernus*, a creature of intelligence and imagination, action and compassion.

To summarise, Descartes’ philosophy has shaped the modern spirit of individualism and rationality. This spirit is expressed in Daniel Defoe’s novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, then satirised by Blake in *An Island in the Moon*, only to be transformed by Tournier in *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*. Much of the originality of Tournier’s rewriting consists in having Robinson dramatise the three types of knowledge proposed by Spinoza, which is an example of revisiting and integrating previous knowledge and traditions.

First is the knowledge by means of subjectivity and the emotions – immediate and accidental – which Robinson embodies before the shipwreck. This is the negative aspect which culminates in his descent into pre-human existence signified by the marsh. Next is

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95 See Matei Calinescu’s *Five Faces of Modernity* (1987) where he proposes the idea of a tradition of modernity.
96 Harsan’s term (25).
Robinson’s increasing knowledge of science and technology – mediated, rational, and utilitarian – which is superficial during the period that leads to the explosion. But only the third type of knowledge – open to emotions, spontaneous enjoyment, and unleashed energy of play and creativity – offers a satisfying intuition of the absolute. Tournier integrates Spinoza’s philosophical concepts and fictionalizes them, thus making them available to his readers (who might or might not be adept at philosophy) – and to virtually everyone for whom these personified concepts can yield modified patterns of behaviours.

Robinson falls to a pre-human condition under the pressure of his disappointment and despair, then pulls himself together and organises his island, then experiences solar ecstasy after Vendredi’s defection. His evolution provides an allegory for the modern spirit – a person who relies on reason to rise from the marsh of half-truths and superstitions (with Descartes), then allows reason to dominate (as illustrated by Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe), until reason is challenged with postmodernist corrections. Robinson’s three responses to life suggest that beyond modernist rationalism and postmodernist emotionalism, there is the third approach, a third set of possibilities, which I have named metamodernism.

6. Beyond Technology and Technocracy

Spinoza’s second type of knowledge, related to rational, scientific, and technological achievements, has assumed a dominant place in modernity. In 1967, as Vendredi was being published and awarded the Grand Prix du roman de l’Académie française, the Californian cultural historian Theodore Roszak was beginning his study The Making of a Counter Culture, which appeared in 1969. The modern spirit, with its emphasis on reason, was coming under intense scrutiny by the generation that had not endured directly the atrocities of World War II, but had lived through its aftermath.

The youth of the 1960s were reminiscent of boisterous irreverent Vendredis who knew nothing of la souille and had no part in the edifying l’île administrée, but had no reservations in challenging the establishment. In 1968, as students in France were rebelling
against aggressive forms of authority, Roszak was expressing alarm about the encroaching “technocratic totalitarianism” (Roszak The Making of a Counter Culture. Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition xiii). He thought it necessary to expose the negative impact of technology, and considered that its exponents were generating a denaturalisation of the imagination. In The Making of a Counter Culture, Roszak denounced the “emerging technocratic paradise” as apt to use “techniques of inner manipulation as unobtrusively fine as gossamer” in order to orchestrate the self’s transition “to an existence wholly estranged from everything that has ever made the life of man an interesting adventure” (The Making of a Counter Culture. Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition xiii).

Roszak was suspicious even of the ideology of humanism, which he regarded as a potential means of manipulation in the hands of unscrupulous technical elites. Technocracy tends to surround itself with a “thoroughly sensible, thoroughly well-intentioned, but nevertheless reductive humanism,” which is hard to question “without seeming to speak a dead and discredited language” (xiii - xiv). Technocracy and humanism can align to close ranks, with the result that they may be incapable of matching the ideals of humanism in some future that never seems to become present. In its “grand procession through history” technocracy is “pursuing to the satisfaction of many universally ratified values as The Quest for Truth, The Conquest of Nature, The Abundant Society, The Creative Leisure, The Well Adjusted Life”.

Roszak assumes a Vendredi-like stance against an all-powerful, technically-literate system of Robinsons, and urges his contemporaries to become aware of the dangers implicit in an exclusively objective, technical, and scientific “mode of consciousness.” Just two hundred years after Kant’s and Wieland’s entreaties to become independent and rational, to trust observation (“all visible objects” (Schmidt 80)) rather than pre-fabricated ideas, postmodernists have failed to be as free as they could be, threatened by some of the very values that have brought society to this stage in its evolution: rationality and the scientific spirit.

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The dream of achieving progress through technology is contemporaneous with the establishment of the Robinsonades as a genre. Robinsonades are the narratives that are perhaps most characteristic of the modern Western spirit. Born of the optimism of the Enlightenment, these narratives document humanity’s conquest of a hostile nature, and taming it by means of industry, ingenuity, organization, and planning. However, they have done little
to predict or address the disenchantment with civilisation that many were to experience during and after WWII.

Robinsonades confidently describe the odyssey of modern people. Robinson goes from nature to culture, via the intermediary stages of agriculture, domestication, and breeding animals. In Tournier’s version, culture culminates with crafts and the economy of technology and accumulation, coupled with a politics of power and dominance. Culture also opens the door to narratives of spiritual transformation, as illustrated by Defoe’s and Tournier’s novels. The transformations of the self culminate in an approximation of the ideal of a self-reliant autonomous self. But in Defoe’s rendering, Robinson links God to his pursuit of a comfortable life – the material tied to the spiritual – while Tournier’s protagonist is comforted by and finds joy and solace in the company of the other, the “savage” Vendredi or the timid Jaan.

In contrast, a more general pessimistic trend emerged in the wake of the most atrocious of last century’s two technological world wars. Calinescu remarks that “World War II, with its unprecedented savageness and destruction, with its revelation of the brutality at the core of high technological civilisation” appears “as the culmination of a demonic modernity.” (267). This “demonic modernity” sprang from Western man’s unwillingness to listen to voices other than those of reason, due to the failure to nurture living myths and subsequently succumbing to an evil that many refused even to acknowledge (Jung and Jaffé 363). Nevertheless, unlike Jung, for whom these problems are characteristic of Western psychic life, Calinescu reassuringly notes that “demonic modernity” had “finally been overcome” (267). In this he disagrees with Jung, Tournier, and Roszak, who have reservations about the “overcoming” of modernity.

Therefore, a partial answer to the question of the sustained appeal of Robinson Crusoe and the genre of the Robinsonade, from the Enlightenment to the present day, lies in the confirmation of the hope that an epiphany may become available to each of us, individually and collectively; that advances in science and technology must have some positive correlative at the level of the psyche; and that advances of this nature will lead to betterment for the self and society.

Modernity witnessed some the most dramatic transformations in history. The eighteenth century was an age of incipient upward social and economic mobility. Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe leaves home to rise above the standards of his own class, to become

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97 Whether the friendship with the two young boys has anything to do with homosexual love, or is an expression of the self’s thirst or nostalgia for innocence, or both, is a question that must remain open.
wealthier than his father, and to prove his worth not so much by conforming as by taking chances. In Robinson’s flight from home, Defoe portrayed a whole Enlightenment philosophy of self-reliance and disdain for the restrictive rules, customs, traditions, and authority of previous generations of elders. This new world was one in which wealth and status could be achieved even outside the protective constraints of family, thus breaking the accepted patterns to establish a progressive, upwardly-mobile, bourgeoisie.

Vendredi fails to be animated by the traditional ideals of order. His very presence calls into question Robinson’s dedication to reason in the forms of rigorous organisation, bureaucracy, institutionalised religion, and taxonomic scientific enterprises. Despite undermining Robinson’s seemingly down-to-earth approach, Vendredi is not particularly subversive, but is rather creative and constructive when given the chance to express himself.

After the collapse of Robinson’s kingdom of reason, Vendredi becomes the inspiring and inspired inventor of an Aeolian harp and a boar-hide kite, both symbols of ascension, air, and wind. Vendredi and the transformation he effects on Robinson have deeper meanings for Tournier, as they evoke Joachim of Fiore’s three ages: the epoch of the Holy Spirit or Holy Breath, preceded by the ages of the Father (organising, rules, and obedience, similar to Robinson’s l’île administrée), and the Son (brotherhood and forgiveness, which follow the explosion in the novel).

These are symbols very dear to Tournier, as the quasi-autobiographical character of his fiction suggests. Robinson’s transformations resemble Tournier’s own while also being metamorphoses of the self that everyone may experience in one form or another. The self experiences successive disappointments. In Tournier’s case, the despair at being “abandoned” by a loving mother as if on a deserted island in the Swiss boarding house while still very young. Then the anguish of failing l’agrégation years later, and thus being subjected to a more dramatic isolation from his peers). But the self finds within itself the resources to overcome seeming tragedy: it resorts to reason to pull itself together each time and develop new strategies of coping. This stage is followed by a time of ripe maturity when the self engages in spontaneous enjoyment of artistic pursuits. These pursuits are expressed as photography, in Tournier’s case, and gratuitous play such as dressing plants in human costumes in Robinson’s. These artistic expressions are crowned by occasional epiphanic experiences, such as the one Tournier has when he realises the explanatory power of the Robinsonade for the modern self, and when Robinson comprehends the depth of his connection with the island and nature in general during then solar apotheosis.
Tournier progressed through these experiences despite the scars his and his contemporaries’ consciousness by post-WWII’s distrust in reason. *Vendredi* shows that, in spite of the dire consequences of applying disembodied or abstract Enlightenment principles; irrespective of particular circumstances for individuals and their backgrounds; in spite of tragedy – the self transforms.

Unlike some of the post-war generation, disenchantment does not possess Tournier. He overcomes both the (post)modern disillusionment and irony, and instantiates a new paradigm that displays an awareness of both the benefits of the Enlightenment and its shortcomings. He assumes that there are lessons to be learnt, and goes with them and beyond them to forge a renewal of the self. *Vendredi* shows that when emotions fail to provide fulfilment, and knowledge acquired through the senses and organised by reason proves to be limited and superficial, the self may yet seek Spinoza’s third type of knowledge: the knowledge of the absolute, embodied as the *other island*, the island of spiritual realisation. A different type of sensibility crystallises from the self’s authentic search for self-realisation and self-expression, paralleled by and understanding the limitations of modernity. This new metamodern sensibility is expressed by the Robinson of the solar ecstasy and thereafter, and by Rahel, after her return home.98

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Note on Postmodern Irony as Alienation and Overcoming it as a Return Home

David Foster Wallace was one of the champions of postmodern irony, which he admired in authors like Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, and Donald Barthelme, with their exposing of “textual artificiality” (Verne *The Mysterious Island* 194). Forrester explains:

A writer of metafiction could intrude anytime, anywhere, to celebrate the charade, to remind the reader that what he or she is experiencing is just words on paper. He liked Pynchon’s irony, his Warhol-like propensity to create serious work from fragments of television, popular songs, movies, advertising, sport. (*More Deaths than One* 13)

The sense of power that the ironic, knowing, tongue-in-cheek persona facilitated, fascinated the postmoderns. But towards the end of his life, Wallace turned away from postmodern irony in his essays, even if his novels *Infinite Jest* and the posthumous *The Pale King* still abounded in double entendres.99 In the mid-1990s, theorists like Marjorie Perloff, were writing the epitaphs of postmodernism, while wondering whether there was an identifiable direction in which literature was going. Similarly, “Wallace was distrustful of anyone ‘who claimed to know where literary fiction will go during this generation’s working lifetime’” (qtd. in Forrester 14). In a 1987 essay, *Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young* (Wallace “Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young”), he had declared that his generation of writers had seen their “literary innocence taken from us without anything substantial to replace it;” the knowingness of irony was “mark of the fall from innocence” (Hutcheon).100 They were doomed to inhabit a gap between generations, sensibilities, and cultural trends, “an age between” (Forrester 14). Irony eschews authenticity and sincerity, leading to “emotional displacement” (Boswell 160). Hal, Wallace’s character in *Infinite Jest*, for instance “never speaks his feelings directly, but rather hides those feelings behind a wall of cynical, hip irony” (Boswell 152). The self feels alienated from any form of direct self-expression, while inhabiting a space of postmodern self-consciousness and parody (Boswell 207), a solipsism in which it never feels at home.

99 Wallace committed suicide in 2008 and part of his ashes were scattered on Mas á Tiera (alternatively know as Masafuera), the very island where the model for Robinson Crusoe, Alexander Selkirk, was marooned. See Philip F Deaver, *Silent Retreats* (University of Georgia Press, 2011).
By 1993, Wallace was rejecting irony at the declarative level, in his essays, but not in the novel. In *E Unibus Pluram: Television and US Fiction*, he contemplates a rebellion against postmodern irony, as in the quote above (193-94).

The rebels whom Wallace envisages would return to a modernist, even premodern sensibility, within which irony is balanced by sentimentality, and cynicism by naïveté (Boswell 18). For Seth Abramson conscious rejection of irony opens towards another sensibility, the metamodern, within which poets and writers “say exactly what they mean.” Abramson’s phase “contemporary poetry is nonfictional, a direct address from the bared poet within the poet”101 applies to Jillian Sullivan’s poems in *Parallel*, to Deaver’s poem “Gray,” Collins’ poem “My Hero,”102 as well as to my *Exquisite Corpse* poems, and possibly to a few poems in Forrester’s novella in short verse *The Beautiful Daughters of Men*.

On the other hand, one can be concomitantly both sincere and ironic without being bipolar, like Chris Leonard Hooker in Forrester’s debut novel *Houseboating in the Ozarks*, who could hold two contradictory ideas simultaneously in his head and believe both of them with equal conviction (8). The understanding of metamodernism in this thesis is that of a paradigm in which it is possible to see the value of, and the potentiality for dialogue between, different outlooks, theories, strategies, even when these seem contradictory.

The return to a premodern sensibility is expressed as the metaphor of the return home.

7. Literature as Redemptive Experience:

“*Nouvelles et contes*” or “*la littérature comme panacée*”

This section examines Tournier’s understanding of the role of literature in healing the wounded self, curing loneliness, and establishing connections between people. We have seen that Robinson’s solitary existence on Defoe’s island is defined by seeking a livelihood through the application of knowledge, skills, and science, as well as by configuring his place in relation to nature, culture, and the divinity. For lack of company, Defoe’s Robinson converses with his thoughts and with God, and thus recaptures some of the directness of the

relationship between God and man that inspired the Old Testament prophets. The exchanges are not distracting, but entertaining in the original sense of “keeping up, maintaining” the self; they are essential for human existence and survival. They grant meaning to life’s tribulations and point to the restoration of the self.

Defoe’s retelling of Alexander Selkirk’s story highlights individual and general meanings that were relevant to the eighteenth-century audience who were unaware of the original story. Defoe’s re-imagining reveals not only the distance between his hypotext and the text of Robinson Crusoe, but also the distinction and overlap between fact and fiction, les “écarts entre l’histoire et l’oeuvre littéraire,” to which the difference between nouvelle and conte corresponds. Tournier’s Vendredi mythologises the story of Robinson, and while retelling it he explores several myths. Some of them are restricted in time and place; others are universal. He explores the myth of progress through the application of reason, technology, and science; he examines the Fiore story of the succession of eras leading to the non-hierarchical community of the Third Age of the Holy Ghost; and he considers the myth of the other as “le bon sauvage.” In Le Médianoche Amoureux, he reviews the myth of redemptive stories, from the Arabian Nights to Boccaccio’s Decameron, stories that are regarded as capable of saving lives, of warding off the aggressiveness of rulers and the danger of plagues.


Loving Médianoche. Realistic Stories and Tales.

The experience of listening to stories, which is described as “un rayonnement d’un charme irresistible” (“a brilliance of irresistible charm”) is presented in terms similar to those Tournier used to depict Robinson’s epiphany at the end of Vendredi. Tournier’s narratives reveal the comforting or healing dimensions of literature, “la littérature comme panacée” (Le Médianoche Amoureux 42). Also, through their repetitions and rituals of narration resembling the sacraments, narratives (re)confer on life itself a spiritual or mythical dimension, which the rush for progress has pushed aside. Jung noted the contrast between the superficial gains of the Enlightenment’s narrative of progress and the thirst for meaningful stories that would restore a spiritual dimension to life. He spoke of this tension in strong terms, when asserting

103 See note 79.
104 Tournier quoted in Genette, Palimpsestes. La Littérature Au Second Degré 419.
that “One half of humanity fattens and grows strong on a doctrine fabricated by human ratiocination: the other half sickens from lack of a myth commensurate with the situation” (Jung and Jaffé 363). Stories are capable of recovering the mythical and the spiritual, which technology abandons in Jung’s account of the modern self.

Technology and stories intersect in *Le Médianoche*. Technology helps record the stories, which, by their telling, recording, re-playing, and retelling, contribute to saving *Le Médianoche’s* couple. However, technology did little to bring about the moment of grace and creativity that triggered the act of story-telling. Accordingly, Tournier seems to view technology in *Le Médianoche* not as an end in itself, but as catalyst for the couple’s transformation, initiated by the telling of stories. By allowing technology to play an important role in the life of the couple, Tournier shows how it can have a humanising effect in contributing to their growth.

8. Humanising Modernity

Technology, or what Robinson called “the practical arts,” was often ignored in the pre-WWII view of modernity (Toulmin *Cosmopolis* 14). The emphasis was on the abstract gains scored in the transition from the allegedly superstitious traditional Middle Ages to rational modernity. Modernity’s perspective on progress, to which Tournier was exposed during his formative years between the two world wars, was quite optimistic: it proposed that “a combination of sensory experience with mathematical reasoning, Newton’s science with Descartes philosophy, combined to construct a world of physical theory and technical practice” – of which the modernists were “the happy inheritors” (*Return to Reason* 15).

This view of technology is related closely to science, but different in scope and time. Science springs from a desire to “judge all doctrines by their inherent plausibility” (*Return to Reason* 15), whereas technology aims to improve humanity’s daily life or earthly lot. While

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106 The focus on the abstract rather than the practical in the pre-War account of modernity was due to the fact that it was a long time “before the theoretical light of the 17th century yielded an equal harvest of practical fruit” *Return to Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001) 15. Nonetheless, “a sound theory of nature” was bound to yield practical results sooner or later, “in the event, it took until after 1850” and even longer until these practical results were critically assessed (Toulmin 15).

107 Nevertheless, the humane aspect of technology will be lost, when technology – like science – becomes an end in itself. On the other hand, developments towards the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first have revealed that, although contributing to separating individuals, technology also undoes their separation. Technology fragments society when people, say, no longer need to farm together when a single man aided by machines can do the job, and no longer congregate on long winter nights to listen to stories when everyone owns their own entertainment devices, thus minimizing social interaction. Technology, however can be used to bridge the distances between individuals – when, for instance, social media, or online and telecommunication networking communities connect people meters or thousands of miles away.
modern science can be as abstract and disembodied as medieval theology, technology is invariably practical, embodied, and contextualised in the here and now of each age.

Yet both science and technology stem from rationality, and spring from the aspiration for a more bearable human existence. Their justifications are found in the present rather than in an after-life (which medieval Christianity promoted, and from which modernity strove to distance itself). The benefits of science, technology, and underlying reason notwithstanding, Stephen Toulmin has emphasised both the quest for certainty that inspired modern science, and the occasional inhumane side effects. Tournier’s Robinson of the administered island is a telling example in this respect. Toulmin’s philosophical solution and Tournier’s fictional one both merit consideration in determining how to go about humanising modernity.

8.1. Tournier and Toulmin’s Solutions: Spontaneity and Reasonableness

Tournier’s initial solution in Vendredi is reminiscent of the 1968 upheavals by French students, who proposed to contest and destroy in order to build anew. Through the accident that set Robinson’s headquarters ablaze – including his Bible and scientific records, the Code of Laws, and his tools – Vendredi involuntarily annihilated a dictatorship of authority, reason, rules, and inflexibility. All of Robinson’s material achievements were destroyed in the explosion – rational, organisational, scientific, technological. Their destruction corresponds to an obliteration of modernity itself, as well as of the previous ages, as the burnt Bible suggests.

The vacuum created by the explosion in Vendredi makes room for an after-the-explosion age, with its spontaneous unleashing of energies, that resembles the postmodern era. Freed from the constraints of civilisation, Robinson learns to be himself, and to explore the fluidity of his emotions and impulses in the company of Vendredi. 108 Although the certainty provided by the institutions he established during the age of the organised island is gone, Robinson does not return to the stage of instinctual existence in which he wallowed during the stage of la souille. His experience of enlightened rationality has not been in vain.

Toulmin’s solution, on the other hand, does not require a denial of modernity’s achievements that started with Descartes, or a return to the preceding era’s uncertainty and transience. On the contrary, Toulmin hopes not to demolish the past, but to reestablish it in a more humanistic frame, to find a harmony between amoral, value-less science and meaningful

human existence: “We are not compelled to choose between 16th century humanism and 17th century exact science: rather, we need to hang on to the positive achievements of them both” (Cosmopolis 180). Recouping humanism is a priority for Toulmin.

In the figure of Vendredi, Tournier recounts some of the greatest losses that the West traded off in the modern pact for reason, certainty, and order. One of these was contact with nature. Western humanity may have conquered nature by means of technology, but it lost contact with it as a living organism. Tournier emphasises the idea of nature as a living organism (or system) by portraying the island Speranza as a feminine presence – loving, fecund, or creative, supportive, and nurturing, with a sense of humour and predilection for play shown in the begetting of mandrakes of different skin colours (as if to tantalise Robinson). She is the agency that tempers Robinson’s aggressive impulses towards administration and rules.

After the explosion, Robinson relinquishes his position outside the order of nature; he becomes part of it, able to enjoy its creativity. He responds to it by manifesting his own ingenuity, which does not spring from reasons or necessity, but from an energy of play, of gratuitous enjoyment. After the explosion, tools and technology play little part in Robinson’s and Vendredi’s lives. The two live, like the birds in the evangelic parable, from what nature offers them: no exhausting work, just the pure enjoyment of living is needed for such existence.

Yet, in this age of liberation from the constraints of reason and technology, of necessity and order, Vendredi feels the need to create, thus realising the synthesis that Toulmin envisaged for science and the humanistic spirit: the Aeolian harp and the boar-hide kite are symbols of (spiritual) ascension, of an age in which the evanescent signs of the spirit as breath and wind take precedence over the previous earth signs that were symbolic of the efforts to dominate terrestrial nature. Vendredi’s inventions have little practical usefulness. They are aesthetic objects of child-like delight, of spontaneous joy and pleasure. Vendredi replaces Robinson’s rationalistic knowledge with aesthetic knowledge.

Visionary perception, as opposed to the empirical perception that the sciences presuppose, informs the last pages of Vendredi, as it does Blake’s texts. With the epiphany that restores the visionary dimension to reality, Tournier, like Blake, proposes to humanise modernity by means of visionary aesthetic perception as an alternative to knowledge derived from the senses and organised by reason.

The transformation is complete only after Vendredi forsakes Robinson, thus indicating that aesthetic awareness, which has animated the pair, is just a step on the way to visionary aesthetic perception, which Spinoza called absolute knowledge. This visionary aesthetic perception, whereby the self accedes to an enjoyment of the sensible transcendental (Irigaray), opens the self to a communication with the other that is informed by understanding, empathy, and compassion, as exemplified in Robinson’s subsequent relationship with Jaan.

Toulmin’s humanisation of modernity differs in emphasis from Tournier’s hoped-for transformation of the self in *Vendredi*, yet it is similar in its emphasis on the ethical, and in the distancing from hard reason and from institutions that seek to control rather than to promote the interests of individuals. Toulmin envisages changes primarily in three disciplines: the natural sciences, philosophy, and politics. In the natural sciences he proposes integrating ethical considerations and their applicability to particular circumstances. In philosophy he calls for “defining a new agenda” in opposition to hard reason and dry logic. In politics he advocates a relaxation of the state’s authority and limitations on the state’s power, by “moving beyond the absolute nation state” (*Cosmopolis* 181).

Toulmin offers the reassurance that, to its credit, “much of […] modern thought and practice has in fact already gone some way towards redeeming itself” (181). This redemption consists of the contemporary integration of science and philosophical meditation, which presupposes taking the context into account. This relatively recent recognition of contextualisation contrasts with previous tendencies to consider things in the abstract, to pass judgments “denuded of considerations for what these things meant for flesh-and-blood humans being and particular communities” (*Cosmopolis* 181). Toulmin recalls that “the Enlightenment was in love with universal truths and propositions,” and insists that “now it is time to care for the particular” (*Cosmopolis* 181).

For Robinson, this transition from an Enlightenment/modern frame of mind to a more grounded outlook occurs when he relinquishes stern rule-making, and stops trying to impose on Vendredi laws that did not suit his nature. Also, after the explosion Robinson stops classifying and cataloguing; he discontinues his attempts at controlling nature and at imposing order upon its variety. He no longer tries to force benefits from nature, to yoke it to his uses; rather, he attempts to fit in, to feed on what nature has to offer, and to cherish the resulting state. Robinson softens the modern yet dry creature of hard reason, order, certainty, and laws. He becomes human, spontaneous, and open to taking pleasure in change and Heracleitean flow.
Tournier’s Robinson enacts a modern story of fascination followed by disenchantment with the dream of empirical knowledge, progress, and power, ultimately yielding to the possibility of epiphanic experience. Bacon’s conviction that “knowledge is power” loses some of its appeal and persuasive power in an age in which data and information are electronically available for virtually anyone with access to the web, and even more so, for anyone belonging to a professional network or institution. The stage belongs, we like to believe, not only to the powerful, but to those, who, like Tournier, know how to tell a story: beautifully, convincingly, and meaningfully. Stories and narratives are means of resistance to the onslaught of aggressively globalising multinationals and to the impersonal reduction of individuals into consumers – absorbent sponges of mediatised national or transnational policies and vested interests (which Theodore Roszak, for good reason, feared). Stories soothe; they distinguish and outline the contours of personalities and communities; they keep the roots alive and nurture personal growth. They constitute the other islands that provide significance to daily existence. They help one live meaningfully, or simply to live. And occasionally, they lead to epiphanies.

9. Man Friday and the Politics of Technology and Arts

Although a few authors, including Habermas and Lyotard, have noted the discontent with the meta-narrative of the Enlightenment and modernity (Best and Kellner 4), the dream of technological progress still holds its grip. Its mirage fascinated us for more than three centuries and it still exercises its magical power. In the eighteenth century, technology became for the educated elites synonymous with progress, to the extent that the sciences and even the arts adopted its underlying philosophies. This was the context in which Blake began his career of dissent, with art that escaped the demands of technological reproduction. Through his integrative art, Blake tried to undo a major rupture that marked the transition from sixteenth century culture, when organic conceptions and imaginative alchemy flourished, to the eighteenth century, which worshipped reductionist and mechanistic reason as supreme (Carl G. Jung and R.F.C. Hull 123). Although Romantic authors attempted to question the dominance of reason, its charm continued virtually unabated into the postmodern era, despite the opposition from the counter (or popular) culture. I will now consider developments related to this dominant faculty’s consolidation of power, how it was perceived from the periphery of Western culture, and Jack Gold’s criticism in his 1975 movie adaptation Man Friday.
In *Romantic Image*, Frank Kermode deplores the pervading “eighteenth-century mechanistic treatment of the subject” (93), which he contrasted with the seventeenth century’s more integrative and organic view. To illustrate his point, Kermode quoted Goethe, who compared Hamlet to a tree in *Wilhelm Meister*: “it is a trunk with boughs, leaves, buds, blossoms and fruit” (94). Kermode wondered, as Goethe did, at the interdependence between parts, as opposed to Cartesian dichotomies: “Are they not all one, and thereby means of each other?” (94-95).

The organic view and the integrative holistic mindset are lost or at least subdued, however, as science and technology progress and other domains of human activity mimic their assumptions about the infallibility of reason and the universality of scientific and mathematical methods.

The 19th century poets and theorists expressed distrust and discontent with technology, as the Industrial Revolution spread through Europe. Factories did little to fulfil the dream of social progress that had been anticipated by the idealistic minds of the 18th century. In contrast to the hoped-for organised and civilised existence, workers (like Man Friday) lacked rational self-determination and autonomy, which Rousseau had advocated as the rights of any individual (Crichtley 5). The free individual whose enlightenment Kant had envisaged (59) became a mere cog in the machine.\(^{110}\) It is no surprise that socialism gained ground in the 19th century, and came to engulf many other voices from the political left, from Owenites and Fourierists to various other proponents of communism or socialism. Socialism brought to the fore the promise of reinstating the human being to dignity and centrality, of redeeming humans from their status as anonymous instruments fostering progress in which they had no share. Gold’s *Man Friday* is a Marxist critique of the ideals of the Enlightenment, especially enlightenment through reason, of civilising the “primitive” by means of education and productive activities.

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110 Adam Smith could foresee the instrumentalisation of the human being through technology, the loss incumbent in the reduction of the human to a clog in a mechanism. See *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Laurence Dickey (Cambridge: Hackett, 1993). Due to the creation of the assembly-line, which limits and mechanises workers’ actions in order to improve efficiency, Taylorism, and Fordism, further refine the instrumentalisation of humans, which the Industrial Revolution started. Workers become mere means of production, as tools are; they represent mere extensions of technological devices for the adepts of Taylorism and Fordism. See Wollen 2008 (36-37 ff) and Frederick Taylor’s *Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Harper, 1911).
From a Western or Europocentric perspective, Robinson’s learning from Vendredi is a case of the “peripheral” art fertilising the mainstream (Wollen 209). The secondary has often fertilised the mainstream, more so since the advent of modernism. The process became established in the postmodernism era, and turned more acute after postmodernism: “As the world economy becomes increasingly globalised and core and periphery are redistributed across old boundaries, this process can only accelerate and become more elaborate […]” (Wollen 209).

Wollen confirms Tornier’s intuition in Vendredi regarding the ability of non-Western art to enrich Western culture:

The old barriers between “Western” art and “Third World” art (once known, symptomatically, as “primitive art”) will dissolve even further – in both directions. Thus artists [from diverse backgrounds] can be seen not in simple terms of identity and difference but as part of a dynamic system of aesthetic circulation. Modernism is being succeeded not by a totalizing Western postmodernism but by a hybrid new aesthetic in which the new corporate forms of communication and display will be constantly confronted by new vernacular forms of invention and expression. (209)

The Robinsonade, with its learning from the other and allowing the other to enrich, alter, and enlarge – if not altogether transform – one’s perceptions, outlook, and creativity, appears as the paradigmatic state of the modern self in its various hypostatisations. Robinsonades are stories of drifting and surviving despite isolation, of nostalgia for and attempts at reproducing a reality or society viewed as ideal, or at least preferable to solitude. In Tournier’s rendering, the Robinsonade becomes a narrative of straddling the thin line between madness and sanity, between organisation and tyranny, chaos and creativity; it is a novel of gradually growing disenchanted with reason and technology.

111 However, the process, specific to modern art, is by no-means single-sided, Wollen hurries to clarify: “this discursive circulation [between core and periphery] has been the acknowledged or unacknowledged constant of modern art. It is important to stress that this circulation has always been a two-way process, and yet the two contrary flows have been treated in very different ways. On the one hand, the flow from low to high and from periphery to core has been discussed in terms of appropriation and innovation, while the opposite flow has been seen as vulgarisation and its end product has been dismissed as kitsch” (Wollen 209).


113 Wollen mentions the African-American Jean-Michel Basquiat, the photorealist artist Audrey Flack, the Italian surrealist Francisco Clemente, and Congolese Cheri Samba.
Robinsonades invite speculation about the human condition, the condition of the individual in relation to society, solitude, spirituality. They stand for palimpsests upon which succeeding generations, in their respective epochs, inscribe enactments of meditations regarding the human condition. The story of the modern self captured by Defoe in Robinson Crusoe established a genre that continues from Tournier’s Vendredi, in which a spirit more profound than the postmodern one is captured, to J.M. Coetzee’s postmodern Foe (1986), with its reversals, tongue-in-cheek rewriting of the classical text, and meditations on the craft of the writer. In the story of Robinson, everyone recognises glimpses of his or her own story, much as Homer’s Odyssey told the story of everyone, albeit with an aura of heroism.\footnote{With James Joyce’s rewriting of the myth in Ulysses (1922), this aura of heroism will subside, as the hero’s destiny descends into workaday life.}

Although localised and bound to a certain time, Robinson’s tribulations preserve their quasi-universal appeal by encapsulating the saga of the modern self in search of wealth, mastery of the environment, and meaning. In his search for meaning and the transformation that accompanies it, Tournier’s Vendredi goes beyond the postmodern spirit in a fashion that reflects the metamodern sensibility. While both postmodern and metamodern attitudes acknowledge the limits of modernity, postmodernism is trapped in lamentation and uncertainty, whereas metamodern attitudes propose solutions, exemplified by Robinson’s solar ecstasy, and his compassionate and caring attitude to Jaan.

Tournier’s Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique is modern in its focus on the individual, whose survival and welfare are ensured by technological innovations springing from rationality, but it surpasses both modernity – Vendredi challenges the supremacy of reason – and postmodernity in attempting to achieve what may be interpreted as an integration of reason and emotions. This gesture opens out towards the metamodern paradigm.
From Innocence to Experience and Back Again.

Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*

No matter how strange this position might seem, I believe that the age we live in is a romantic one. Even in this genuine physical and psychic bedlam that we see everywhere in the world, a kind of romanticism brews.\(^\text{115}\) (Caciuleanu and Kerim 125)

We have to lose our terror of the mundane. We have to use our skills and imagination and our art, to re-create the rhythms of the endless crisis of normality, and in doing so, expose the policies and processes that make ordinary things ─ food, water, shelter, and dignity ─ such a distant dream for ordinary people. (Roy *An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire* 15)

**Chapter Abstract**

Postmodern critics return to Romanticism to legitimise their practices. Similarly, a novel like Arundhati Roy’s reveals its richness and otherwise obscured levels of significance when compared with the work of the pre-Romantic William Blake.\(^\text{116}\) This chapter explores Blake’s continuing influence in relation to the contemporary postcolonial author Roy, and outlines some of the reasons why *The God of Small Things* may be considered metamodern.

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\(^{115}\) My translation. The original Romanian reads “Eu gândesc că și epoca pe care o trăim este una romantica, oricât de ciudata și s-ar părea această aseertiune. Chiar și în acest veritabil ‘balamuc’ psihic și fizic pe care-l trăim peste tot în lume, clocotește, daca pot spune așa, un anume romantism”.

\(^{116}\) Had I not been wary of categorical affirmations I would say that metamodernism looks back at Blake in order to define itself. Blake’s immense recent popularity could indicate an affinity between his outlook and contemporary mindsets. Blake was read in the sixties as an advocate for free love and other liberties, but he is in recent times read as a prophet of spiritual transformation or of visions that would be achieved through a change within the self.
Some exponents and theorists of metamodernism in art define metamodernism as an oscillation and a continual hesitation, but in this thesis I see metamodernism as a sum of indicators of a new paradigm in literature. Metamodernism in literature is mapped by a few vectors, a term which I borrow from physics and which I use occasionally in the sense of energies or tendencies. I propose metamodernism as an umbrella term for literature, and other human endeavours, characterised by a search for fulfilment, balance, and integration, as well as a quest for identity or a unity of the self. This last feature is associated in *The God of Small Things* with a revival of homespun or low scale heroism, evidenced by defiance of set rules or societal expectations.

Related features of the metamodern are a tendency to value innocence despite overwhelming metanarratives of power (for example the innocent Ammu and Rahel who challenge social systems), the drive to establish interconnections in the face of fragmentation, and the recovery of traditional stories in spite of the postmodern distrust of tradition. Further engaging with the concept of *metamodernism* as a period concept and as an endeavour to recover the primacy of the ethical over the ontological or epistemological (McHale *Constructing Postmodernism*), this chapter reads Roy’s novel as an attempt to re-enchant everyday life and instantiate the transcendent in the immanent as *the God of small things* (cf. *Book of Zechariah* 4.10).

Assuming the mask of the innocent writer, Roy defies traditional criticism and invites a perspective of innocence. Like the childlike Man Friday who challenges the civilised Robinson Crusoe, Roy puts Western assumptions to the test, while also questioning postcolonial values. The alleged superiority of the white race and its rationality are challenged, along with the aggressiveness of century-old social conditioning regarding the condition of women. Indeed, the sophisticated West has much to learn from Roy’s postcolonial perspective ─ fresh but also grounded in millennia-old traditions.

However, the evidence of her own texts overrules Roy’s pretence at “instinctive” writing (Jones 163), and proves her indebtedness to (post)modern and Romantic authors. Epiphanies mark the significant epic moments of *The God of Small Things* (1997), as they do with Romantic and modernist writers, whereas the tropes of edges, boundaries, and limits testify to the influence of Joyce and Blake. This chapter will investigate the way Roy

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117 Especially van der Akken and Vermeulen. For a detailed analysis of their definition of metamodernism, see the chapter on metamodernism, following.  
118 In *Constructing Postmodernism* (146-47) McHale identifies an epistemological line force within modernism, and defines postmodernism by an ontological dominant. My proposition is that the dominant of metamodernism is ethical.
undermines the Romantic set image of the artist condemned to isolation by his/her visions and craft (Frank Kermode 4), as Roy dedicates herself to the public good by means of both fiction and militant non-narrative texts. Roy also re-defines the status of the postcolonial author.

This chapter discusses the role of dissent and boundary transgressions in the postcolonial story of maturation. It addresses the possibility of self-realisation in the tense relationship between the postcolonial experience and the European (or “traditional”) views on education and coming of age. Self-fulfilment seems unlikely in Roy’s novel, where death and unrequited homosexual love, cross-caste love affairs, and separations usher in an age of experience, trauma, guilt, and social rejection. Yet the trajectory described by Rahel’s evolution is similar to a Blakean pattern of innocence followed by experience, and then by higher innocence. The resurrective part played by the feminine agency and the telling of stories suggests that forgiveness, and a recovery of narrative roots, can facilitate coming to terms with the past and opening to the potential of the present.

**Novel Synopsis: Breaking the Rules. A Story of Death and Survival**

_The God of Small Things_ tells a story of survival and death in the South Indian State of Kerala. This visual narrative, which features balanced proportions of representation and story-telling, focusses on Estha, his twin sister Rahel, and their divorced mother Ammu. The two children live with the consequences of defiance: their own and their mother’s. Ammu’s life is a sum of breaches of the laws of the land. Having married a man of her choice rather than allowing her family to find her a spouse, she divorces him and returns home, where she is not wanted. Eventually she falls in love with the “untouchable” Velutha, the family carpenter. Told from her children’s perspective — or from the viewpoint of adults who have preserved the children’s way with words — the novel unfolds in analeptic episodes from the 1990s to the foreboding drowning of Sophie Mol, which took place twenty-three years earlier. The consequences of this cousin’s death and the exposure of the forbidden love affair are calamitous. Estha stops speaking; Ammu is banished from her family’s home and dies soon afterwards; Rahel is expelled from schools, drifts, marries a man she does not love, and eventually leaves him to return to her family home in Ayemenem.

Skillfully playing with contrasts, Roy has two survivors of the tragedies inhabit the now decrepit Ipe household: the most innocent, Estha, and the most cunning, Baby Kochamma. Having failed in her attempt to gain the heart of Father Mulligan, her teenage
infatuation, the horrendous Baby Kochamma has made a point of destroying the loves and lives of the vulnerable ones within her reach: the unhappy Ammu, the “untouchable” Velutha, and the children they loved. Rahel’s homecoming thirty-three years later reiterates “the same dull round” of grief and guilt that the twins cannot escape.

1. The Growth of the Self in the Light of Traditions Challenged or Revisited:

**Roy’s and Blake’s Views on Education**

Youth of delight, come hither,
And see the opening morn,
Image of truth new born.
Doubt is fled, & clouds of reason,
Dark disputes & artful teasing.
Folly is an artful maze,
Tangled roots perplex her ways.
How many have fallen there!
They stumble all night over bones of the dead,
And feel they know not what but care,
And wish to lead others, when they should be led.

(Blake, “The Voice of the Ancient Bard”)

In this section I discuss aspects of Blake’s system as a means to introduce the transformations of the self in Roy’s characters. Roy’s indebtedness to Blake is reflected in the context of the role of British literature in the colonisation of India. Blake’s poem above ends the *Songs of Experience* and invites reflection on the ways in which reason clouds, spreads doubt, and entangles the soul in “an artful maze” that is not sufficiently mature or visionary. Roy’s character Estha provides an example in his precociously elaborate plan for stalling the ineluctable changeability of emotions and situations, resulting in catastrophe and death.

Judging by the novels she refers to in *The God of Small Things* and political essays, it is clear that modernist and Romantic authors occupy a central position in Roy’s literary

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119 Like her protagonists, the twins Estha and Rahel, Roy was acquainted with English literature from Shakespeare and the Romantics, to modernist authors since very young. Among the titles she mentions, alludes to or quotes in the novel are *The Tempest* and *Julius Caesar*, Walter Scott’s *Marmion* (or “Lochinvar” poem), Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. In “The Large Things of Arundhati Roy” Sonya L. Jones points to a few other influences: Marcel Proust, Toni Morrison, Virginia Woolf, Vladimir
preferences. Through her reception of such authors as James Joyce (Jones 164) and W. B. Yeats, Roy has consolidated her admiration of the Romantic William Blake, whose early texts, especially the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, she was likely to have read as a child. It is reasonable to assume that Roy met with Blake’s poetry at an early age, as even now Indian children studying in an English-based school encounter Blake’s *Songs* at some point.120

Even after Independence, English literature continued to be taught and treasured in Indian schools. Before that, English literature had been used as a substitute for religion by the British rulers (who wished to preserve a mask of ideological “neutrality”), in the effort to spread imperial values by shaping the character, aesthetic sensibilities, and ethical thinking of the youngest citizens of the Empire (Viswanathan 3). The effects of this Anglicisation can be seen in Roy’s novel in the education of the twins and the elaborate welcome organised by the family for Sophie Mol and her English mother. The twins are exposed to English films and literature, among them *The Sound of Music*, Shakespeare’s dramas, and Kipling’s stories. They are meant to converse exclusively in English both during the week leading up to Sophie’s arrival, and while on the car ride from Cochin to Ayemenem, when they are also expected to showcase their repertoire of English songs.

Among the authors chosen to represent Englishness on the Indian subcontinent, Blake was one of the favourites, as he perhaps unwittingly brought together the militant spirit usually ascribed to colonisers and their claim of spiritual preeminence. Both aspects are synthesised in the celebrated lines from his poem *Milton*, starting with “And did those feet in ancient times / Walk upon England’s mountains green/ and was the Holy Lamb of God/ On England’s pleasant pastures seen.” The poem culminates in a bellicose promise that links “mental fight” with the building of “Jerusalem,” the city of learning and arts, whose foundation is made possible by “clearing the doors of perception”: “I shall not cease from mental fight / Nor shall my sword slip in my hand / Till we have built Jerusalem / In England’s green and pleasant land.” These lines, which evoke spiritual awakening for everyone, have become an unofficial national anthem in the UK. In colonial India they

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Nabokov, James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (166). In the essay “The Greater Common Good” Roy herself mentions James Joyce’s *Ulysses* as a text the reading of which is contrasted with the immediacy of the author’s taking up the pen to raise awareness with regards to injustices perpetrated against millions of individuals in India and elsewhere.

120 Professor Ananya Kabir, University College London, private communication.
contributed to the belief that Christianity originated in England, that Jesus was born in England, and that he therefore must have been white.

Both Blake and Roy contest the associations of whiteness with spirituality and acceptance, and power with justice. Roy challenges the authority that the Ipe family has derived from its connection with Christianity and its hierarchies, as well as from their Anglophilia. She proposes that a truly meaningful existence derives from challenging imposed rules, and finding a voice of one’s own. Likewise, the lesson Blake tried to teach the Empire had little to do with kindling the white supremacy impulse to conquer and appropriate new territories, or with enhancing the dependence of those already conquered. On the contrary, he intended to underscore the possibility of equitable relationships showing that Europe can learn from the other cultures, as suggested in the engraving “Europe supported by Africa and America,” 1796.

Roy’s challenges mirror Blake’s intentions. Moreover, Blake championed the underdogs of an unjust system of so-called good and evil in his radical Marriage of Heaven and Hell, where Satan expresses “the voice of honest indignation,” while the angels are conformist followers of systems of oppression. Similarly, Roy has the heroic twins behave irreverently towards Miss Mitten, their Australian tutor, which makes them seem to be on the devil’s side, as Blake described the voice of dissent in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.

As in Blake’s Jerusalem, much of the action of The God of Small Things occurs in the minds of the characters, which act as internal battlefields of conflicting legacies and interpretations. Within these tensions, each self aims to find peace within, with others, and with the past, a quest that is ideally associated with a kind of joy that is creative and fulfilling. This peace of mind and sense of joy are hinted at in the children’s reference to “Infinite joy” [sic], and is achieved with Rahel’s homecoming in The God of Small Things. These qualities are at the core of Blake’s vision (as Plate 100 of Jerusalem illustrates). Joy is usually preceded by strife in the form of “mental fight” in Jerusalem, or by learning as in the “Little Black Boy.” In the Proverbs of Hell, part of the antinomical wisdom of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Blake places enjoyment after, and as a consequence of, learning as well as sharing, through teaching, the learning accumulated. The peremptory advice that Blake’s devil voices in the Proverbs of Hell is “in seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy.” The seasons, seed time, harvest, winter, correspond to stages of human life.
Yet something is missing: the year is divided into four seasons, and summer is absent. The time of maturation, of ripening and sedimentation, when the fate of the crop is decided, blends, for Blake’s devil, with the harvest, and pleasure is relegated to winter. A somewhat ironic enactment of this advice is carried out by the twins’ Baby Aunt in *The God of Small Things*: she disguises her romantic interest in Father Mulligan as religious scholarly curiosity. As a young girl, she masked her cruelty as charity. She teaches the twins the alienating rigours of a strict and foreign Anglicised education during her maturity, while as an old woman she indulges in frivolous delights mediated by television and consumerism.

Ammu, the twins’ mother, on the other hand, has a genuine interest in studying for as long as her father cares to sponsor her. Then, as an adult, she takes her role of teaching her children seriously and tries to prepare the twins for adversities to come. But this does not prevent her from experiencing joy in the form of entrancement with music and forbidden love. The age of teaching and that of enjoyment collapse for Ammu in a bid to make the most of life while she can, before the reign of Terror sets in – premature twilight in the form of ageing, then solitary death.

By *winter*, however, Blake does not mean the end of sensual pleasures, as there is for him no body separated from the spirit. The body is an instrument or vehicle to acquire ultimate joy, which in Roy’s novel become “Infinnate Joy” [sic]. Joy for Blake derives from the ability to stand and partake of love, especially the love of God. Likewise, love is vital for Roy; the insistence on achieving or losing love in *The God of Small Things* will be discussed presently. In Blake’s “The Little Black Boy” (1789), the mother’s voice instructs her son to see beyond appearances, to put up with present inconveniencies, and focus on a life-long aim of learning to endure the sometimes terrible love of God:

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And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love,
And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove.
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For when our souls have learnt [sic] the heat to bear

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121 Descartes’ strategies establish mask-wearing as characteristic of the modern self. The postmodernists ironically distance themselves from such strategies while themselves assuming masks, whereas in *Infinite Jest* David Foster Wallace advocates the self’s unmasked exposure. Wallace is, like Forrester, a (post)modernist who longs for a metamodern sensibility, and who comes closer to it in essays or theoretical formulations than in fiction.
The cloud will vanish; we shall hear his voice,
Saying: ‘Come out from the grove my love & care,
And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice.’
(Keynes 125)

Despite similarities with accepted Christian views, the mother in “The Little Black Boy” does not reproduce literally the Christian postponement of joy for the afterlife (Rev 21:1-4). Although they have cast their bodies or “clouds” away, the Black and the English boys of the poem still have some bodily shapes that allow the black child to stroke the “silver hair” of the boy whose acceptance and love he seeks. These bodily shapes left after escaping from the bonds of the material (as well as from those of racial prejudice) further permit the black boy to shade his white friend from the heat of God’s love “till he can bear / To lean in joy upon our father’s knee.” The suffering that results from black bodies in a racist society is implied to be spiritually strengthening, so that the Black Boy becomes the protective leader in the spiritual realm. This sublimated body reflects the idea of the alchemical corpus subtile, to which Blake probably alluded in “To Tirzah” (“It has been raised a spiritual body”), a concept with variegated implications, from the biblical to the alchemical. Roy’s narrator may be referring to a similar subtle presence when mentioning the “little man in Ammu’s chest,” who is the witness of her otherwise solitary death.

The “black body” is an obstacle to receiving a white person’s love in Blake’s poem, as in in Roy’s novel, where the precocious, self-conscious Estha associates lovability with whiteness and cleanliness. Estha wonders whether Captain von Trapp would love a black child (Roy 106). Through Estha’s rhetorical question, Roy critiques just how far the emancipatory “sound of music” resonates regarding race: most canonical Western icons are conspicuously marked with a superior and exclusive whiteness. The twins’ aspiration for joy is conditioned by what they conceive as their lovability, which in turn is determined by the degree of success of their and their mother’s submission to and fitting into the dominant

122 Quotation marks in the original.
123 The cloud is not only a metaphor for the body, but also for anything that obscures the “spirit” (as in “To Tirzah”), or “the human form divine.” In “The Voice of the Ancient Bard,” the poem immediately following “The Little Black Boy” in the initial layout of Songs of Innocence, the “clouds” associate with doubt and reason. “The Voice of the Ancient Bard” (Keynes 126) proclaims an age of epiphany not as liberation from racism and prejudice, and the subsequent revelation of love (“and be like him, and he will then love me”), as in “The Little Black Boy,” but as perception of truth as epistemological revelation. The Ancient Bard, holder of truth simultaneously ancient (as his antiquity suggests) and new born (“Image of truth new born”), which lies beyond reason and doubt, warns against complicated arguments which succeed in clouding truth and confusing the youth.
124 Subtle body (Latin).
125 Captain von Trapp is a character in The Sound of Music (1965), the film which the twins and their extended family watch during their visit to Cochin to welcome Margaret and their British cousin, Sophie Mol. He represents the father figure whose love and attention Estha seeks.
cultures that intersect in the Ipe household. The twins’ measure of their own lovability does not derive from more mature members of the family who would be expected to protect and nurture the innocent. Old age does not bring wisdom, nurturing, or serenity for the Ipe family, but strife for Ammu, and the eruption of old resentments for her parents Pappachi and Mammachi.

When he proposes that enjoyment be associated with winter, Blake alludes to both this tradition and an alchemical tradition of a spiritual body. The enjoyment that one should experience in the winter of the bodily existence is undoubtedly a spiritual *cum* bodily bliss. This spiritual joy made possible by the mediation of the body is opposed to both the after-life bliss propounded by orthodox Christianity, and Descartes’ exclusively intellectual pursuit.

Most of Roy’s characters aspire to this kind of bliss, but few of them actually achieve it. The children voice their aspiration for “Infinitive Joy” [*sic*], which constitutes a leitmotif of the novel. How can this “Joy” be achieved? Does it bear any relation to self-fulfilment? In what follows I compare Blake’s and Roy’s views on education and its relationship to self-fulfilment, as presented in the *Songs* and *The God of Small Things*.

As a Romantic, Blake is less concerned with discursive or rational education than with instruction that focusses on intuition and love. He proposes an integrated approach to education that conflates religious attitudes and moral qualities such as wisdom and tolerance. The main aspects of the psyche,¹²⁶ which Blake called “the gods” that “reside within the human breast,”¹²⁷ establish the understanding and insight that allow for the perception of “the infinite in everything” (Keynes 154). “The Little Black Boy” illumination concentrates the three archetypes,¹²⁸ a trinity made up of God the Father, God the Son, and a mother. God the Father offers sometimes demanding love (of the sort described as “The garden of love,” in the poem bearing this very title, where “Thou shalt not” is “writ over the door”); God the Son is pictured in the illumination and present in the text as lamb-like enjoyment. Mother, as the fleshy and familiar third figure of the trinity, is portrayed in the text as both instructor and

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¹²⁶ I propose that what for Blake are the main aspects of the psyche are pictured in the illumination on Plate 25 of *Jerusalem*. More on the subject in “Foretelling Metamodernity: Realization of the Self in the Rosary of Philosophers, William Blake’s Jerusalem and Andrei Codrescu’s Messiah,” Constructions of Identity, ed. Adrian Radu (Cluj: Napoca Star, 2006).

¹²⁷ The fact that the gods reside within the human breast suggests that they escape the control of reason, usually associated with the head or brain.

¹²⁸ The “The Little Black Boy” illumination may be Blake’s interpretation of woodcut 19 of the *Rosary of Philosophers* (Smith 111).
comforter. 129 These three figures are present in either the illumination or the text, reinforcing the lessons in tolerance, patience, and love that the text propounds.

Roy antinomically recreates the Christian trinity of Blake’s illumination by making the father absent, 130 while a graceful mother, whose given name is never mentioned, beyond children’s appellative “Ammu,” meaning Mother, is present in her children’s life for only seven years. The twins’ closeness creates the further effect of one soul in two bodies – together they seem one androgynous being, bringing to mind the androgyne of the Rosary of Philosophers.

Uncompromised by what later came to be labelled as “the postmodern dissolution of the I” (Christensen 453), Blake showed the existence of the self as purposeful and leading, ideally, towards its crystallisation as visionary. According to Blake, learning and teaching occupy two thirds of one’s lifespan (i.e. childhood and maturity), while enjoyment is reserved for old age. It is interesting to note that childhood was perhaps “invented” as a result of the interest in rational early education shown by Locke (Locke Some Thoughts Concerning Education), 131 Rousseau, Romantic and Enlightenment authors, and the Sunday School movement, 132 while Blake’s Songs of Innocence and Experience contributed to delineating childhood as an age apart that adults fail to gauge. This is as portrayed in the Experience version of “The Chimney Sweeper,” where the child complains that

Because I am happy and dance and sing,
They think they have done me no injury,
And are gone to praise God and his priest and king,
Who make up a heaven of our misery.

129 The mother in “The Little Black Boy” instructs and comforts her charge, similar to the Comforter announced in John 14: “I shall send you the Comforter who will teach you all things.”
130 The absent father (from Ammu’s ex-husband, to Chacko, in whom the twins invest filial affection but who cares little for them beyond mere pastime, and Velutha – part elder brother, part father figure) should be noted. I wonder to what degree the absence of a figure of authority in the twins’ life is a negative determinant responsible for Rahel’s drifting and the apparent dissolution of Estha’s self? Or is it a positive factor which allows for Rahel’s experimenting with hierarchies (such as those extant in a girls’ boarding house) and defying authorities (for instance, those of schools and of customs and traditions)?
131 See John Locke’s Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693), which responds to the development of Rousseau’s views of the human mind, as did his Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690).
132 The discovery of childhood is a very class-specific process which emerges in later 18th century in Europe, and which affects mostly the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. I am grateful to Dr. Simon Ryan for pointing this out. Blake’s part in outlining this emerging concept - through eulogising innocence and presenting the successive ages of the soul - is crucial. Other Romantics such as Wordsworth or pre-Romantics (Goethe, through establishing the genre of the Bildungsroman with Wilhelm Meister), played a significant part in legitimising childhood as a distinct age.
Neither innocence, nor simple happiness, however, are confined to immaturity. The authors discussed in this study, most notably Blake, Tournier and Roy, predicate a kind of after-experience innocence different from “innocence as inexperience” (Fairer),\(^{133}\) which could be defined as a “higher innocence” that follows the sometimes traumatic experience of struggling and learning.

Learning facilitates the transition from innocence to experience, and then to higher innocence. In “The Little Black Boy,” learning is directed at rendering the subject capable of bearing absolute knowledge (or apprehending the presence of the absolute), expressed as the beams of God’s love. Blake suggests that people continue learning past the age of youth inasmuch as they preserve innocence and flexibility or openness to imagination, as opposed to what he calls “petrification” (Quinney 64). Should they fail to relate to the ideals and the imagination cherished in childhood or youth, as both Blake and Roy show, the adult’s ego is prone to solidification as a cruel, albeit occasionally well-meaning, accuser, who acts to torture and prevent the innocent from achieving their potential or expressing their personality.

Blake’s “Accuser” will be “cast out” during the “Last judgment,” (which is enforced as “Forgiveness of Sin”), “not because he Sins, but because he torments the Just & makes them do what he condemns as Sin & what he knows is opposite to their Identity”\(^{134}\) (Keynes 616). Forgiveness is granted to the “sinning” or the victims, while the accusers’ inability to forgive renders them unforgivable.

The most significant accusers in Roy’s novels are women, like Baby Kochamma and Mammachi, who point the finger and do harm in the name of native tradition, accepted social practice, morality, and justice, while those who carry out the “sentence” are men, for example, the mob that maims Velutha, or the police who complete the job of murdering him; Chacko who send Estha away; Comrade Pillai who instigates the mob at Mammachi’s prompting. These are static characters, as neither the accusers nor the executioners evolve in the novel, while the victims undergo radical changes that can be described as initiatic. Rahel and Estha evolve, their experience leading towards an initiation that can be defined as a deeper understanding of the self and one’s circumstances. Such transformations lead the self closer to itself.

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134 In A Vision of the Last Judgment (1810) Blake describes and extemporises on a homonymous watercolor now lost (Keynes 616). A draft is kept at Petworth House, Sussex, National Trust.
The relationships between learning, initiations, and the transformations that the self undergoes are explored below in the context of paradigm shift and a transition to the metamodern. From folk tales to Herman Hesse’s novella *Siddharta*, stories of initiation and maturation — usually featuring a generic male hero — have infiltrated modern consciousness. Postmodern authors, more concerned with challenging established genres and pushing the limits of experimentation, seem less attracted to stories of coming of age, like the *Bildungsroman* with which *The God of Small Things* has some affinities, especially in its portrayal of Rahel’s evolution. Postmodern stories may take the form of “neurotic, or provocatively and subversively ironic female initiation under the rules of decadent patriarchy in the context of fin-de-siècle intertextual references” (Newman). Roy’s *The God of Small Things* provides an example of female initiation, especially Rahel’s, but also Ammu’s to some degree, in spite of the self-indulgent male domination exercised by Rahel’s grandfather, father, and uncle. However, Roy’s novel also questions the rules of patriarchal India, and emphasises the centrality of women if a society is to recover from past wrongs and move on.

Accordingly, Roy’s novel marks a transition from postmodern to metamodern fiction. *The God of Small Things* is not excessively ironic, fragmented, self-referential, open-ended, or disgruntled with meta-narratives, although it contains virulent critiques of caste and social conditionings in postcolonial India. It undermines postmodern scepticism, and indicates that stories make for meaningful existence, since living, telling, or remembering them can lead to Spinoza’s third type of knowledge or to Blake’s perception of the infinite in everything.

The journeys undertaken by Roy’s protagonists in *The God of Small Things*, specifically by Ammu, Estha, and Rahel, have obvious overtones of initiation: the family leaves and returns to Ayemenem changed or impaired, enriched or carrying death in their souls and bodies. These initiations involve not only individuals, but whole communities that are forced to grow out of their conditioning or prejudices.

History itself becomes a character; its unfolding parallels the development of individual stories. History and people’s lives follow a spiral pattern of innocence sacrificed

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135 It has to be noted that, although Indian outward society is undoubtedly patriarchal, there is a sense in which the inward society, occupying the less visible sphere of home life, often gravitates around feminine presence. Durix acknowledges the centrality of women to Roy’s fictional universe when he notes that “very strong women characters […] play major parts in the plot” (9).

136 Mammachi sees her hopes of becoming an accomplished musician crushed by a jealous and controlling Pappachi; the moth discovered by Pappachi bears somebody else’s name; Ammu’s hope of escaping is replaced by care for the twins, and her love for them by the prospect of a “forlorn death” after Estah is returned and she is banished from home. Their relationship with the Ayemenem family home registers their losses most acutely, until Rahel returns and grants meaning to the experience of loss.
for the sake of experience, followed by realising a mature form of innocence.\textsuperscript{137} The role of the mother in catalysing the initiation reflects that of circumstances and history in precipitating the coming of age, whereas attempting to regain her child-like self and the ability to forgive in spite of tragedy is an effort that Rahel needs to undertake by herself.

Roy’s novel is in many ways a novel at the crossroads, of cultures: the Empire and the post-colonial; of traditions: Christian and Hindu; of political orientations: the liberal, the Marxist, and the feminist. It also marks the transition from a fragmented outlook to a unified one, as well as from the (post)modern to the metamodern. As the novel deals with awakenings, fragmentariness, and a fall from (followed by a return to) innocence, links can be traced to Blake’s thought, as well as to contemporary debates relating to means of achieving self-realisation.

1.1. Beyond Postmodern Fragmentation: Individuation and “Tellable” Stories

\textit{The God of Small Things}, which won the Booker Prize in 1997, strikes a chord with most of its readers. It is a meaningful story of coming of age by losing the world of innocence, then achieving some sort of self-realisation by reconciling the authority of rules and customs with personal emotions, as it revisits previous traditions of storytelling. Such a narrative may indicate a transition towards a post-postmodern paradigm in storytelling, what I am calling the metamodern. As opposed to the (post) modern\textsuperscript{138} propensity towards fragmentation, and the iconoclastic or ironic distancing from traditions specific to modernism and postmodernism, metamodernism may be defined as the reflection in art or literature of a preoccupation with individuation or self-realisation. This preoccupation is often expressed as an interest in a “tellable” story,\textsuperscript{139} as well as an attempt at incorporating previous paradigms of thought.

\textsuperscript{137} The underlying understanding may be of “society as a complex adaptive system” in the tradition of Walter Buckley (490), whereby individuals and societies react to circumstances and change in order to adapt. Buckley’s influential paper was published in 1968, and republished a few times since. See Walter Buckley, “\textit{Society as a Complex Adaptive System},” \textit{Modern Systems Research for the Behavioral Scientist}, ed. Walter Buckley (Chicago: Aldine, 1968 ).

\textsuperscript{138} By (post) modern I mean both modern and postmodern. Fragmentation is characteristic of both modernism and postmodernism, as illustrated by novels such as William Faulkner’s \textit{Absalom! Absalom!} and Thomas Pynchon’s \textit{The Crying of Lot 49}.

\textsuperscript{139} Roy’s novel is readable and compelling, without ruling out experimentation. The writer has picked up the best of a few worlds, and created her own universe at the intersection of tradition and innovation. Beth Yahp of \textit{The Australian} praises Roy’s novel as “a tantalising mix of Indian exotica, mysticism and history on a domestic and national level… a remarkably assured novel, ambitious in scope, innovative in style, filled with moments of quiet beauty…” (Roy \textit{The God of Small Things} iii). Like any work of art worth its name, Roy’ novel is a synthesis of tradition and revolution mutually enriching each other, moulded as a cross between “tradition and
Carl Jung described individuation as the unification or crystallisation of the archetypes of the soul in a configuration that is unique to each individual. This process is also referred to as self-realisation. Cambray and Carter quote Jung’s definition of individuation in Two Essays on Analytical Psychology (1928): “individuation means becoming an in-dividual, and, in so far as individuality embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one’s own self. We could therefore translate individuation as coming to selfhood or self-realisation” (117). Individuation results in a sense of unity or wholeness, which Jung contrasts with the discontinuity that fascinated his contemporaries (117).

Blake anticipated this tendency towards wholeness through his concern with “clearing the doors of perception” and nurturing the imagination in order to achieve a unified vision of reality (“fourfold vision”). He also pleaded for the removal of the limitations imposed by a strictly rational outlook, and for achieving a unity of being, in which the aspects of the self portrayed as “the divine family” in Jerusalem declare that they “are one.” Enthusiasm and the search for dynamic balance, joy, and fulfilment pervade Blake’s world, as depicted in The Dance of Albion and Plate 100 of Jerusalem, or alluded to in the trope of the personal “Heaven…built in Jerusalem’s wall” (Ostriker The Complete Poems of William Blake 797). The dynamic equilibrium of what Blake calls “mental faculties” is sought through reason’s (Urizen’s) engagement in a dynamic dialogue with inspiration or imagination. Blake’s work is a plea for integration through the agencies of love and forgiveness (“Mutual forgiveness of each vice / Such are the gates of Paradise”), qualities which are highly relevant in an age of fragmentation, extremes, and fundamentalism, such as Roy’s.
1.2. Initiation and Awakening vs. Spiritual Slumber

*The God of Small Things* tells a story about fragments of individual lives put together to make up the larger story of a people struggling in the aftermath of centuries of occupation and thousands of years of social conditioning. Shattered souls search for meaning and self-fulfilment in spite of social practices that make self-realisation impracticable. However, through his comparative studies of world religions and founding texts, Mircea Eliade proposes that suffering is not always useless, for it may in fact be part of a process of initiation: “ordeals constitute an experience of initiation,” by which one abandons a previous frame of mind to acquire a deeper understanding of one’s self and society (*Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth* xii).

Accordingly, Rahel’s return brings hope, reconciliation with the past by means of stories remembered and told or represented by the *kathakali* dancers, and healing as Estha gradually regains interest in the outward world. The positive consequences of Rahel’s homecoming turn her story into an initiating, heroic one. Similarly, Blake’s “The Little Black Boy,” where the the pain of rejection enables the black boy to perceive and withstand the beams of God’s love, underscores the ideas of growth into awareness and personal evolution.

In emphasising the role of initiation, Mircea Eliade is in conflict with Rousseau, who sees no point in sacrificing “the present to an uncertain future that burdens a child with all sorts of restrictions and begins by making him miserable, in order to prepare him for some far-off happiness which he may never enjoy” (*Émile* 2-3). Rousseau warned against attitudes like those duplicated in Roy’s characters Miss Mitten and Baby Kochamma – who have been assigned the official duty of looking after children’s formal education, and who feel compelled at times to hurt them in order to prepare them for hardships to come. The approach of the children’s mother is comparable, when she tries to wake them from the childhood dream of universal love to prepare them for the indignities of adult life. Ammu’s occasional lapses into despair, at seeing them indiscreetly shower their love on people unwilling to return their affection, are similar to the attitudes fostered by educators in Rousseau’s time or Blake’s, in which educators praised pain, restraint, and austerity as leading to fortitude. But Ammu’s motivation is affection, while the educators based their theories on rationalistic considerations.

Rationalistic approaches tend to ignore enjoyment as a possible outcome of the educational process. Relinquishing innocent joys may prepare children for real life, or worse
still, for improbable after-life joys, like blowflies, educators, and priests “lay the eggs of duty on the fairest joys” in Blake’s view (Keynes 152). Blake would have certainly agreed with Rousseau’s romantic attack on educators who attempt to kill the joys of childhood, but would have disagreed with the latter’s proposition that it is solely through education that we acquire a sense of morality. Rousseau’s stress on a step-by-step rational education for building a young person’s character met with Blake’s distrust, as did the positions of another philosophe, Voltaire.

Blake, who believed that “we come to this world like a garden already planted and sown,” could not agree with the empirical and rationalist approach to education that Rousseau defended. For example, unlike Rousseau, Blake did not think that religious education should be postponed until one has achieved intellectual maturity, that is, until the rational faculty has reached maturity, thus making knowledge of the absolute the province of reason. Rousseau shares the philosophes’ trust in reason and its ability to emancipate humankind, while the emphasis on emotions in texts like Julie ou La nouvelle Héloïse brings him close to the Romantics. Blake differs from most Romantics in that he advocates imagination and vision rather than romantic love and passion. However, as a true Romantic, Blake reacts against the rationalist dimension of Rousseau’s texts. He vents his rage in one of his Notebooks poems (1800 -1806) at Rousseau’s and other rationalists’ mocking attitude to the humans’ capacity, and especially children’s, to have appropriate knowledge of God or, indeed, any integrated knowledge at all, that is knowledge that is both visionary and logical, creative and comprehensible through reason:

Mock on Mock on Voltaire Rousseau
Mock on Mock on tis all in vain
You throw the sand against the wind
And the wind blows it back again. (Keynes 418)

The Romantic bias in favour of intuition and vision notwithstanding, Blake concedes that even rational knowledge can turn visionary:

And every sand becomes a gem
Reflected in the beams divine
Blown back they blind the mocking Eye
But still in Israels paths they shine. (Keynes 418)
“The mocking eye” is a metaphor for dispassionate, rational, and ironic attitudes, while the gems shining in Israel’s paths suggest the visionary, even redemptive quality of the creative self. This movement to recapture the spiritual dimension exemplifies a development from innocence to experience (“the mocking eye”) to regained innocence (“still in Israel’s paths they shine”). This development is recurrent in Blake’s work, and is the outcome of a trial by fire, which corresponds to the explosion in Tournier’s novel, or an initiation.

Similarly, even if subjected to rationalist education, Rahel’s innocent curiosity and inquisitive spirit, looking for the deeper truth behind the veil of appearance, would not be stifled by received answers, which have been filtered through the reasoning power of others. Instead, her outlook turns deeply visionary in spite of the temptation of practical reason: “In a purely practical sense” the voice of the narrator, perhaps identifiable with Rahel’s, muses, “it would probably be correct to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem.” She experiences an epiphanic understanding that “things can change in a day. A few dozen hours can affect the outcome of whole lifetimes” (Roy The God 32 - 33).

The creator or narrator can resurrect the remains of events and examine them, account for them, and ascribe to them new meanings. Bare facts stand for the “bleached bones of a story” (33); revisited by a creative mind such as Rahel’s, they evoke and encapsulate what is accountable from a series of events:

And that when they do, those few dozen hours, like the salvaged remains of a burned house — the charred clock, the singed photograph, the scorched furniture — must be resurrected from the ruins and examined. Preserved. Accounted for. Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story. (32)

These “bleached bones,” a possible intertext from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (Keynes 148), are for Roy the “hard” matter or raw material of history, yet they fail to sum up the pain of the actants involved, their thoughts and “soft emotions,” as Blake would have called them. They may conjure up stories, but they cannot create life. They lack the creative and visionary quality that Blake associated in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell with the “red clay” that brings forth life:
Then the perilous path was planted:
And a river, and a spring
On every cliff and tomb;
And on the bleached bones
Red clay brought forth. (Keynes 148)

Nonetheless, the hard facts, together with her reflection on lived experience, prompt Rahel’s epiphanic realisation in Roy’s novel. The vision Rahel acquires, after experience, gives her an understanding of the prime mover of the world as consisting of love. She also learns of the limits of this love:

Still, to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem is only one way of looking at it.
Equally, it could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. Long before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar, before the Dutch Ascendancy, before Vasco da Gama arrived, before the Zamorin’s conquest of Calicut. Before three purple-robed Syrian bishops murdered by the Portuguese were found floating in the sea, with coiled sea serpents riding on their chests and oysters knotted in their tangled beards. It could be argued that it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag.
That it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much. (33)

In a manner entirely consistent with Blake’s thinking, Rahel refuses an outlook that regards present and past events as the final result of a series of mechanical causes. In her understanding, events in personal and political history stand for links in a chain connecting the origins of humankind with the present moment. They are links or hubs — i.e. focal points, centres of activity or interest — in a network that maps individual lives and the lives of families, states, and nations. The stories woven around such events are “safety nets” that keep people “from crashing through the world like falling stones” (231). For Roy, stories are lifelines that prevent the fall into the abyss of nothingness or intellectual disintegration, which threatens Estha, or any self segregated from human communication. Rahel, who recounts the

143 Nets, networks and networking are recurrent themes in novels written towards the end of the twentieth century. In novels such as About a Boy by Nick Hornby, or Particules Elémentaires by Michel Houellebecq, they safeguard the individual from loneliness, depression and despair.
stories as she revisits Ayemenem, has found ways of surviving with and through the stories of
the past. Her survival strategy includes defying systems and weaving her own understanding
out of the big stories imposed on her by adults, society, and education systems.

Romantic and pre-Romantic concern with education culminates in a contemporary
emphasis on instruction, which is reflected in Roy’s novel. The Enlightenment, pre-Romantic,
authors advocated didacticism, whereas Blake supported a rather non-conformist approach
to education summarised in his much quoted Proverbs of Hell: “If the fool would persist in
his folly he would become wise,” or, “the tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of
instruction” (Keynes 151-52). The frontispiece of the Songs of Innocence contrasts the two
approaches: institutionalised strictness as opposed to energetic subversion of systems. Note
the gravity of the instructing lady: a nurse or a teacher — all right angles and rigidity as if
mirroring the stiffness of the hard wood or stone chair she is sitting on — against the
exuberance of tendrils and fervent movement above. Of all these fervent activities, the three
main human characters — instructor and the two children — seem sadly ignorant. Screened by
disproportionate absorption in the letters or knowledge of the book, a whole world of sound
and movement, of unchecked growth and exuberant energies, remains unknown to the pair of
children and instructor alike. Yet the liana twisting around the solid trunk of the tree and
ending in fruits, flowers, and flame-like leaves, conveys a message of hope: a solid education
may yield or at least support energetic fruit and vibrating flowers.

This suggests that innocence, even if imposed upon and restricted by rules of strict
education, may explode in manifestations of joy. For Blake, education and art, or rather
education through art, is a means of enriching the soul and bringing about its transformation
from a self that is bound by materialism and empirical perception, to one adept at spiritual and
visionary understanding. This is illustrated by two excerpts: “I give you the end of a golden
thread/ only wind it into a ball/ It will lead you to Jerusalem’s wall,” where art guides the self
towards its redemption (Jerusalem), and the fragment from A Descriptive Catalogue where
Blake encourages his audience to make friends of his images, which will lead them then “to
see God I the air,” that is, to have a vision beyond the confines of the material. Visionary
reality is the primary reality for Blake – all the rest being mere phenomenality. The means of
acceding to reality is through art. For the twins in Roy’s novel, literature is the realm of
sublimated reality, which relinquishes the contingent and inspires beyond the limitations of
the phenomenal. It can open the twins’ eyes to a world of jealousies and power struggle (as in

144 See Dr. Johnson’s Dictionary and Rousseau’s Émile for instance.
Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*), while education is a direct avenue to a realistic way of relating to or being in the world.

The contrast between the total absorption of the two children in a seemingly rigid book, and the exuberance of life, may well have impressed little Arundhati Roy as a pupil at *Corpus Christi*, the school run by her mother Mary Roy. It probably reminded her of a teacher she had who, uneasy with Arundhati’s curiosity, would say that she could see Satan in the child’s eyes. The episode is reproduced in *The God of Small Things*, placing not only young Arundhati but also some of her characters, notably Estha and Rahel, on the devil’s side, much like Blake and his mouthpiece, the antinomian Satan. Scenes of instruction, recurrent in the *Songs*, are present in Roy’s novel, where, unsurprisingly, two children of comparable size and age (the twins) are being taught by a rigid graceless teacher, much as in Blake’s illumination.

Blake contrasts the stiffness of instruction with the dislodging energies that undermine it, and which are represented by energetic winding leaves and tendrils. When located in the Blakean tradition, Roy’s novel gives rise to such questions as: “Which of these approaches

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146 Mary Roy is a social activist well-known in Kottayam District, Kerala, for her revolutionary ideas about education and legal matters.
has become the norm nowadays and which would be desirable?” The model of Rousseau,147 which lays the stress on learning through the senses and by means of pleasurable experiences? Or the energetic and creative one, which advocates learning through the cultivation of imagination and vision?148 Is an education possible that encourages visionary imagination as opposed to sense data, states of mind149 as opposed to facts? Dissenting voices surface every now and then, lending their pathos to prophetic protests such as Blake’s.

Mary Roy expressed such an undercurrent of dissent about education when she instilled the habit of independent thinking in young Arundhati’s mind and taught her creative writing at a very young age. Similarly, Ammu encouraged her children to record experiences in the “Wisdom Exercise Notebooks” (156-158). When she allows her daughter to grow and to leave well-trodden paths, to dissent and to question, Mary Roy proves herself to be a Blakean instructor who cherishes a model of education based on the concept of sowing seeds150 rather than seeing education as superimposing bricks of knowledge. This comes down to supporting exuberant growth and the risks involved against normative development through organisation and gradual accumulation, which many contemporary educators still support in the wake of Rousseau.

To return to the previous question: What type of education does Roy’s novel support: one based on authority, accumulation, and acceptance of rules, or an education grounded on imagination, growth, and creativity enhanced by questioning? Two types of instruction, one by rote and the other by gaining insight, one springing from power, the other from dissent, are embodied in the antagonising characters of the stiff and stern Miss Mitten and Baby Kochamma on the one side, and the loving Ammu and Velutha on the other. Consistent with Blakean tradition, the narrative voice supports the latter (education that nurtures) against the former (normative and restrictive education). This is shown in the unsympathetic treatment of

147 Rousseau is in some respects an Enlightenment figure, and in others a Romantic one. He is one of the philosophes who debate the main tenets of Enlightenment and contribute to the ongoing political discussion (On the Social Contract, 1762), while also writing novels (Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse) and Confessions that announce some of the main positions of Romanticism. See Patrick Riley, The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

148 Vision here signifies the visualising function of imagination, not the empirical faculty of seeing.

149 Such education seems, instead, to belong to wishful thinking. Or so, it was for Romanian philosopher Constantin Noica in Philosophical Diary ([1944] 1990): “I dream of a school where nothing is actually being taught, but spiritual states” and where the only knowledge sought were, presumably, Socratic self-knowledge. The full statement in the Romanian is “Visez o scoala in care sa nu se predea, la drept vorbind, nimic. Sa traiesti linistit si cuviunci os, intr-o margine de cetate, iar oamenii tineri, cativa oameni tineri ai lumii, sa vina acolo spre a se elibera de tirania profesoratului. Caci totul si toti le dau lectii. Totul trebuie invatat din afara si pe dinafara, iar singurul lucru care le e ingaduit din cand in cand e sa puna intrebari. Gandul Scolii, al celei unde sa nu se predea nimic, ma obsedeaza. Stari de spirit, asta trebuie dat altora; nu continuturi, nu sfaturi, nu invataturi” (4). See Constantin Noica, Jurnal Filosofic [Philosophical Diary] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990).

150 Blake thought that “we come into this world like a garden already planted and sown.”
the characters Baby Kochamma and Miss Mitten, and the empathetic treatment of Velutha, Ammu, Estha and Rahel. Like Blake, Roy explores the transmutation of revolution into authority. Rahel’s aunt, Baby Kochamma, enacts this malefic transformation of the dissenter into an accuser.

After she rejects the Syrian Christian religious tradition of her family, Baby defiantly embraces the Roman Catholic Church in the hope of gaining proximity of an Irish Jesuit priest, Father Mulligan. Her disappointment at being unable to gain Mulligan’s affection solidifies, and becomes the hatred and resentment that would play a significant part in the tragedies that befall Ammu and her children. She is responsible not only for the death of Velutha, but also for Ammu’s, and for Estha’s lapse into intellectual slumber.

The self-righteous Miss Mitten fears unregimented inquisitiveness, and associates the two children’s curious eyes with the devil. Staunch supporter of a dogma grounded on reason and taboos, she believes that questioning the dogma means threatening it. Similarly, Baby Kochamma resents Ammu’s and Velutha’s freedom of the spirit, which allows them to defy caste boundaries and societal expectations and taboos. The plot of the novel is built on such contrasts: rule vs. energy, and reason vs. feeling. The emotions of the individuals who aspire to transgress boundaries and rules are opposed to the reason of the powerful, which is condoned and sanctified by tradition, and enforced by society. Miss Mitten and Baby Kochamma, Chacko, and Mammachi represent instances of the self-righteousness that springs from the solidification of the visionary into rule and authority. The experience of these characters has been arrested, while, in contrast, Ammu and Velutha evolve until their untimely deaths. Rahel continues their experiment in defying expectations, continues to grow, and proceeds to recapture innocence after experience.

2. Ages of Man, or the Hallmarks on the Way of Becoming

Rahel’s journey is exemplary for the modern self. This section demonstrates how a progression from innocence, sometimes definable as dangerous inexperience (Fairer), through

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151 When *tradition* is understood in its normative way, as the “normative past with its fixed criteria” (Calinescu 3), it usually carries a negative connotation, whether the fixed criteria are ethical or literary. When regarded as the repository of general-human values (such as tolerance, compassion, care for the other), tradition is seen in a more positive light in this thesis.
experience to regained innocence\textsuperscript{152} – innocence as wisdom, childlikeness as opposed to childishness – maps the becoming of the self in both Blake’s and Roy’s worlds.

2.1. Boundaries. Experience. Fall from Innocence into Fragmentation

This section will explore some aspects of innocence and experience, as well as the fall, which provides the transition between these states. Innocence is tentatively defined, then experience; some of their symptoms and effects are discussed, especially the disproportionate importance ascribed to boundaries, and the perception of the world as fragmented. Consequently, the soul, under the weight of experience, seeks solace in “small things” in the face of a world of grand narratives and their agents, the “accusers.” The two accusers discussed are Baby Kochamma and Mammachi.

How can the age of innocence be described? For example, what do children do that is radically different from adults? For Roy, the age of innocence is portrayed as the age of children’s complete trust in the adults around them, the age of unconditional love, unadulterated by “laws” that dictate who can be loved and how much. It is an age of pure existence, un-shadowed by thoughts or insecurities such as that expressed by Estha: “Would Captain von Trapp love brown children?”

This age of innocence starts to end for the twins when their cousin’s visit is announced, and rules are imposed upon their otherwise free existence: They are not to speak in Malayalam or display uncivil behaviour. As a result, the twins start becoming self-conscious and question their lovability. But these are just beacons that announce the fall from innocence. The transition to the age of experience becomes unavoidable after the Cochin cinema lobby incident, and its consequences for the twins’ lives.

Fall from Innocence

Adults play a significant part in children’s, or humbler (Blake would say “meeker”) adults’, progression towards experience and regained innocence. One can easily discern self-righteousness as a main quality of Roy’s adult world, with the notable exceptions of Ammu and Velutha. What does self-righteousness mean? A favourite phrase of Blake’s, \textit{self-righteousness} is a quality of the “elect” or the powerful who fail to see the beam in their own

\textsuperscript{152}This higher innocence often entails wisdom associated with childlikeness, which is radically different from childishness. The term \textit{higher innocence} captures the idea of progression. I am indebted to Professor Chris Ackerley for suggesting the syntagm “higher innocence” in lieu of my previous second-degree innocence or second innocence.
eyes, yet blame others for the mote in theirs. They are the few who take God’s and other laws into their hands, and persecute the mild and the humble for not living up to these rules. Perhaps it was in anticipation of such attitudes that the Godhead of Blake’s *The Gates of Paradise* shed tears of compassion after having written the Laws that were to act as boundaries of human behaviour: “Jehovah’s Finger wrote the Law; / Then wept; then rose in zeal and awe” (Keynes 761).

Boundaries are as significant for Blake’s philosophy and art as *maryadha* (limits, boundaries) are for the Bengali Hindu tradition to which Roy’s father belonged. As Blake might have known from his extensive readings of Hindu mysticism, boundaries may prevent dissipation, and result in oppression. The two quasi-mythological figures that represent the positive aspects of submitting to laws, rules of behaviour (written or not), and, conversely, of transgressing laws, are Rama and Krishna. Rama, respected throughout the Indian subcontinent as the *maryadha purushotama*, is the ideal human being who represents the model of life under laws, conspicuously absent in Roy’s novel. Krishna’s epic *Mahabharata*, on the other hand, dominates Rahel’s return to Ayemenem. Krishna’s story – a narrative of bold transgressing of caste and family boundaries – shows the possible benefits of defying laws and the establishment, thus coming close to Blakean antinomianism.153

Bearing the Blakean mark of ambivalence, Roy’s treatment of transgression of boundaries is ambiguous, too. This feature places her novel specifically in the tradition of Romantic dissent, understood as a pattern or paradigm of thought. A Blakean dissenter and militant by temperament and education, Roy reflects Jerome Christensen’s definition of Romanticism as a mode of thinking that challenges the *status quo*. In “The Romantic Movement at the End of History,” Christensen defines Romanticism as “the real (as opposed to idealised social orders or social utopias) movement of feeling that challenges the present state of things” (457). If we consider Romanticism as the impulse to upset the set order of things, defy tradition, and fight the establishment, this applies both to Blake and to many of the characters that populate his visions, and to Roy’s protagonists Estha and Rahel, as well as Ammu and Velutha.

Boundaries contain or limit, and occasionally crush even to death in the case of Velutha and Ammu. Limits or rules that are not internalised can bring emotional impairment, as for Estha and Rahel. Under the pressure of their self-righteous environment the twins’ universe falls apart, as does Ammu’s, but not without an intrinsic cause. Rahel’s world and

153 Thompson’s *Witness Against the Beast* (1993) is the best study to date to explore Blake’s antinomianism. A more modest contribution is my own essay *The Antinomianism of William Blake*. 135
that of her family becomes fragmented only when love as its agent of cohesion fades. The world of the twins and their mother falls to pieces when those in charge — conspicuously Chacko and monstrous Baby Kochamma\(^{154}\) — decide that care and love should not continue to be given to those depending on them. In this war the smallest lose the most.

Refused a place in the larger order of things, the children and the Ammu-Velutha couple resort to “small things” to draw joy and solace. Minimalism is their answer to experience and the “grand narratives” to which they do not belong. These “narratives” or ideologies are spun by and entertained by those in power, the “accusers” in Blake’s system, who weave their control and justify their actions by means of Western rationality.

Having resorted to minimalism to safeguard their existence which is threatened by religious, social, and cultural systems corresponding to Lyotard’s metanarratives, the children and the couple experience fragmentation. When events fail to make sense, the world seems to lose its connections, and networks fall apart. The universe of the two couples, Rahel-Estha and Ammu-Velutha, crumbles as well, and meaning is lost:

At that time, there would only be incoherence. As though meaning had shrunk out of things and left them fragmented. Disconnected. […] Isolated things that didn’t mean anything. As though the intelligence that decoded life’s hidden patterns, that connects reflections to images, glints to light, weaves to fabrics, needles to thread, walls to rooms, love to fear to remorse — was suddenly lost. (225-26)

Both couples are pushed forcefully from an age of innocence towards an experience of the deadly, crushing, power of grand narratives. Their world fragments and loses its meaning. The agents of this transition are the gatekeepers of systems, the “accusers.”

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\(^{154}\) Baby Kochamma is a composite sphinxlike being whose passion turns into frigidity, and defiance into conformism. Her transformation from loving teen to spiteful spinster is involuntary, and takes place under the pressure of circumstances (the impossibility of consummating her love for Father Mulligan), yet the effects of this malefic transformation manifest themselves as deliberate acts of hurting those weaker than herself. Her transformation illustrates Blake’s idea that contraries (such as love for the young priest vs. cruelty towards the trapped waifs she is washing in a show of compassion, passion vs. calculated actions meant to approach Father Mulligan) are pernicious when they represent aspects of a split personality. However, in Jerusalem Blake shows that contraries may bring about progression when they integrate at a superior level, that is, when their tension creates a new synthesis. Baby never escapes the constraints of her rigidity and hatred, but the two children will, eventually, escape their fate of wandering through the maze construed by their alleged “crimes,” and which the great aunt helped edify (326).
2.2. The Accuser as an Agent of Experience

How does the fall occur? Apart from tempters like the Orangedrink Lemondrink\textsuperscript{155} Man, who directly trigger the fall, there are a few other agents who indirectly contribute to the fall, to consolidating the fallen state, and to turning an accident into a permanent state. They are what Blake called “accusers,” and they constitute the focus of the following discussion.

In the progression from childishness to experience, the self-righteous and frustrated Baby Kochamma and Chacko play the part of the accuser; they are agents of rationalism attempting to deny to both innocence and experience their share of joy. The contrast between Baby Kochamma’s stern “command of duty” (to use a Blakean phrase) and Ammu’s softer approaches to education echo the tension between the Accuser and Jehovah whose tears (and subsequent manifestation as Christ) mitigate the rigidity of laws, as in Blake’s poem “The Gates of Paradise:”

\begin{center}
\begin{verbatim}
Mutual Forgiveness of each vice,  
Such are the Gates of Paradise,  
Against the Accuser’s chief desire,  
Who walk’d among the stones of fire.  
Jehovah’s Finger wrote the Law;  
Then wept; then rose in zeal and awe,  
And the dead corpse, from Sinai’s heat,  
Buried beneath His Mercy-seat.  
O Christians! Christians! Tell me why  
You rear it on your altars high? (Keynes 761)
\end{verbatim}
\end{center}

Placed high on Christians’ altars, “the Law” is dead, a “dead corpse” that annihilates compassion (“buried beneath His Mercy-seat”) and destroys and dries everything in its wake (“Sinai’s heat”). The “Laws of Love” in Roy’s novel are equally dry and inexorable, and as a result of their inflexibility, lives are lost and childhoods ruined.

Baby Kochamma, the manifest accuser in Roy’s novel, is the personification of self-righteousness. This becomes obvious in her attitude to the twins and their mother, her resentment derived from sharing the subaltern position of an unmarried woman living in her parents’ home with people she considers her inferiors:

\textsuperscript{155} I have shortened this to Orangedrink Man hereafter.
In the way that the unfortunate sometimes dislike the co-unfortunate, Baby Kochamma disliked the twins, for she considered them doomed, fatherless waifs. Worse still, they were Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry. She was keen for them to realise that they (like herself) lived on sufferance in the Ayemenem House, their maternal grandmother’s house, where they really had no right to be. Baby Kochamma resented Ammu, because she saw her quarreling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less woman. The sad, Father Mulligan-less Baby Kochamma. She had managed to persuade herself over the years that her unconsummated love for Father Mulligan had been entirely due to her restraint and her determination to do the right thing.

Baby Kochamma subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents’ home. As for a divorced daughter — according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma’s outrage. As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage — Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject. (The God of Small Things 128)

Baby’s hatred for Ammu and her children springs from her resentment as an unfortunate person who conforms to her society’s expectations. Her ill-will is directed at the ones who defy rules, who happily assume their existence outside of the rules of the community in a state of apparent lawlessness. Baby makes it her personal project to show Ammu that she does not belong in the Ipe household, and she derives special satisfaction from doing so: “Baby Kochamma’s conversation was designed to exclude Ammu and her children, to inform them of their place in the scheme of things” (329). She genuinely believes that Ammu’s life in her parents’ house after marriage violates the natural order of things, while Veluha’s lusting after a woman of superior caste must be avenged by capital punishment. Ironically, the two couples are condemned, and Baby Kochamma is deemed a “subaltern” according to the same “Laws of Love” that deem a manless woman and fatherless children as second-degree citizens. Baby is simultaneously an accuser, and a victim turned victimiser.
Partially counteracting the effects of Baby’s hateful acts, Rahel’s lack of resentment upon her return to Ayemenem approximates forgiveness. Her presents to her spiteful great-aunt signal an offer of truce with both Baby and her own past. Whether this truce makes joy possible even after the traumatic experience, or despite the experience, as the moments of oblivion while watching the kathakali performance indicate, is another issue. If this were the case, and joy could indeed be experienced again by the twins, it would reiterate the tract covered by Blake’s “Sexes” on their way to The Gates of Paradise.

Another “accuser” in Roy’s novel is Mammachi (Soshamma Ipe), the twins’ grandmother and Chacko’s and Ammu’s mother. Mammachi’s relationship with her children is based on double standards: the love for her son blinds her to his immorality and inefficiency in running the Paradise Pickles and Preserves factory, while traditions and prescribed codes of behaviour prevent any empathy with her daughter. Equally blinded by attachments and frustrations, Baby Kochamma and Mammachi personify the repressive aspect of tradition; they express the rather impetuous, overwhelming power of prejudice and the hatred engendered by oppressive tradition. The accusers in Roy’s novel are only opposed by the fragile minimalism of the two couples’ imagination and affection. By contrast, the accuser in Blake’s The Gates of Paradise is opposed by Jehovah, a redoubtable opponent: “Against the Accuser’s chief desire,/ Who walk’d among the stones of fire./ Jehovah’s Finger wrote the Law […]” (Keynes 761).

Granted the antinomian context of Blake’s work, one would expect the accuser to voice the indomitable power of repressive law, as opposed to the flexibility of tolerance and forgiveness. Yet the legislator is Jehovah, who weeps after he has delineated the Law as the limit or outline of human conduct. Do his tears foreshadow Christ’s compassion for the wronged innocents of the world, who are wronged exactly because they are innocent, by those who have taken God’s law into their hands and decreed themselves its safeguards? Neither Kochamma, Mammachi, nor Chacko give their tears in compassion for those they have wronged by forcing rules upon them — of imposed chastity and caste delineation — rules that they did not observe or believe in.

2.3. The Ages of Man in Roy, Blake, and the Vedic tradition

The dialectic of the self from innocence to experience to higher innocence can be related with the Vedic tradition of the “ages of man.” Although she was the daughter of a Syriac Christian mother, Roy’s status as the daughter of a Hindu father with a culture in
which she was immersed since childhood granted her access to the Hindu philosophy that is known by its practitioners as the “Perennial Faith.” This philosophy divides the human life span into four stages. The first is *brahmacharya* (celibacy), followed by *grihasthya* (householder), *vanaprasta* (seclusion), and *sanyasa* (renunciation). These have been prescribed by the Vedas and ratified by tradition.156

Blake might have known of these four stages through William Jones’s translations of Hindu texts. Yet Blake’s ages are only three: “In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy”. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the ripening stage is present (negatively) in another proverb of hell: “Prayers plow not! Praises reap not!” (Keynes 152). It is as useless to pray as it is to praise the ones in authority, meaning, presumably, that these idle activities may never bear the fruit of energetic actions and active rebellion.

Colonialism, as reflected in *The God of Small Things*, has played a part in alienating the traditional Hindu ways of life, so that the four ages of *brahmacharya, grihasthya, vanaprasta, sanyasa* — i.e. their specific functions of ordering and organising life, of giving direction and balance — were irremediably undermined under the British rule. An awareness of the upheaval brought about by British rule emerged during the Romantic age. The concept of “colonialism” then underwent a mutation, with an alleged shift from initial “conquest, plunder, and imperial appropriation to scientific exploration devoid of any explicit agenda for conquest of and for the exploitation and terrorisation of native peoples” (Obeyesekere 5).

This is hardly music to British ears, yet Obeyesekere credits the colonisers with a Romantic spirit more eager to explore new territories than to conquer and rule. The key word here is *explicit*. What Edmund Burke made explicit on 16 February 1788, in Westminster Hall, during his impeachment of the Governor of Bengal, Warren Hastings, was a concern to preserve the nativity of the Indians. Drawing on colonial guilt, Burke represented Indian society as ordered according to strict hierarchies sanctified by tradition and religious texts. Warren Hastings’s governing of India had upset these traditions and levelled them.

Later, in the 1790s, Burke reinforced the idea that Hastings’ colonialism resorted to a destruction of pre-colonial Indian society (Langford 350) and replaced it with “an inherently tyrannical (and unstable) despotism” (Kitson 15). In the eagerness to level and control, to

156 *Brahmacharia* (meaning “grazing in Brahma or God”) takes up the first part of one’s life. It is the time of celibacy spent in learning and meditation, usually with a guru as guide. This prepares one for the responsibilities of social and family life. Next comes *grihastha* or the householder stage during which one marries and engages in a professional career. This stage is followed by a gradual inclination towards spiritual concerns, followed by the last stage in which one leaves society for a secluded and meditative life.
reduce complex Indian society to a manageable entity, one institution that the British rule might have – consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly – levelled down is that of the fourfold Vedic stages of life. Unfortunately, the levelling effects of colonialism survived colonial times and were aggravated during post-colonial attempts at self-assertion, as illustrated in Roy’s novel. Although most of Roy’s main characters belong to four generations of the Ipe family, the four traditional Vedic ages are hardly present. Ironically, however, only Roy’s extreme characters, the ones who inhabit the margins of the Ayemenem world, conform to tradition: the two children of a divorcée and the priest. Their existence at the borders of life is further stressed by their progression through the first and the last of the four stages of life as set by the Vedic tradition. The twins enjoy an age of innocence until they reach the fateful age of seven, but their development does not go beyond a stage of brahmacharya (bachelor) life that extends to their thirties.

Why are the twins’ lives comparable to a bachelor’s life? On the one hand, the precocious children retain their childlike qualities even as adults. Estha never marries, and is not involved in a relationship. Rahel’s brief marriage, on the other hand, is a union in name only, due to her lack of commitment to it, her non-involvement, and her lack of participation. It is a continuation of her bachelor life, but in the company of a man who frets over her.

Father Mulligan, the Irish priest, although an outsider to the Ayemenem culture, conforms to the fourth Vedic traditional stage of sanyasa. Despite being Irish, the last stage of his “evolution,” i.e., his conversion to Buddhism, evokes the traditionally prescribed age of reflection. Other characters in the novel are suspended mid-way in marriages that are not marriages157 (Kochimma’s and Chacko’s), or celibacy, which, like Baby Kochamma’s, is not brahmancharya, replete as it is with unacted desires that do not lead to married life, grihasthya.

The adulteration of the Vedic stages of life continues with what should be the stage of vanaprastha. Ripe maturity in The God of Small Things is hardly secluded, invaded as it is by hundreds of television-mediated possible worlds. Nor does it bring wisdom for Baby Kochamma, the cook Kaku Maria, or grandmother Kochimma, who have been frustrated in their respective searches for sexual gratification, desire for power over the household, and artistic pursuit. Conforming to the Blakean proverb that those “who desire and act not, breed

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157 There is no exchange between the partners in the Mammachi-Pappachi relationship, no communication other than unilateral oppression, control and bullying. In Chacko’s case, there is no matrimony at all, just selective memories of a failed marriage, and the refusal to accept the reality of his wife’s having betrayed and abandoned him.
pestilence,” their old age brings resentment and hatred instead of peace of mind, fulfilment, and satisfaction that the Vedic texts envisaged.

Despite their part in upsetting the prescribed Vedic order of human life, the narrator of *The God of Small Things* does not blame the British for the tragedies that beset the Ipe family, for their failures, or for the lack of accomplishments that mar their relationships. Instead, she lays the blame on rule-making that inevitably yields trespassers. As the first limits to human behaviour were set at the dawn of humanity — before religions were formed, before states were organised and conquered — the predicament of the human species itself may be responsible for the terrible events that banished the twins from their age of innocence and forced their traumatic experience. In looking for the origin of the tragedies, Roy contrasts the supposed innocence of the narrative voice with the practical reasoning ability that belongs, presumably, to adults with a more comprehensive understanding of things. This understanding may be the province of the higher innocence (Roy 32) to which I have referred.

From the perspective of reason, the terrible events that blight one’s childhood may be beneficial, as they enable one to acquire a deeper understanding and a broader perspective. Experience, dreadful as it may be, allows new meanings to emerge (Roy 32-33). But the limitations of reason are shown in Estha’s lapse into an apparently less-than-human state as a result of traumatic experience. Nevertheless, thirty-year-old Rahel manages a return home to recapture truths glimpsed as a child. So, to credit the subtler understanding, or the inner voice that argues against the purely practical voice of reason as an agency of consciousness, it seems that wisdom following from experience affords both a broader or deeper perspective, as well as an awareness of truth already available but not yet fully appreciated during the age of innocence.

Wisdom is the result of experience acquired after the fall from innocence, as well as a bootstrap towards higher innocence. This progression is reminiscent of Blake, who places law-writing at the onset of man’s descent from paradise (possibly the cause and consequence of the fall). He also identifies laws as the boundaries that prevent humans from yielding to the Accuser’s chief desire, in the lines from *The Gates of Paradise* already quoted. Similarly, social and caste laws doom the Velutha-Ammu couple, and a budding awareness of the inexorable laws of love causes Estha to try to evade these laws by running away, and unwittingly causing his cousin to drown. The same laws of love bring Rachel home for a

158 The intertext is with the biblical story of the Garden of Eden, and with Blake’s concept of the *fall*, as an exile from a state of grace.
reconciliation with the past, as the laws of love tug at her heart and pull her back home to her brother, whose return to human interaction she will mediate. This process equates to an awakening of his soul, suppressed in the aftermath of the tragedies that blighted his child-world. A similar awakening is described by Blake in the poem *To Tirzah*, which tells the author’s personal story as well as a story with broader application.

3. “It is Raised a Spiritual Body”

This section explores issues of spiritual journeys in Blake and Roy. The relationship between the self and the world of material existence – physical and political – is considered, as well as strategies for coping with realities that overwhelm the self (in 3.2). Some of the stages the self goes through are discussed in 3.1, with special emphasis on the tripartite development from innocence to experience to higher innocence. Blake’s treatment of the self is used as a framework within which Roy’s characters are discussed.

The text of Blake’s life has long been evocative for lay people as well as for biographers, as it signifies beyond the mere anecdotal. The works of the Poetic Genius signify, but so too do his acts, as Plate 11 of *The Marriage* suggests. (Pirandello) Blake’s alternating periods of silence or creativity, of seclusion or public presence, are read as having a bearing on the work produced. They point to the changes in the psyche of the creator, and tell stories of transformation that more often than not describe recursive patterns of innocence to disillusionment, followed by regained confidence. The echoes of such movements of the self ripple through the works the creator produces, and sometimes escape the bonds of the created world, to attain autonomous existence. Such changes have an effect on the lives and characters of other authors.

This may be the case with the structure most central to Blake’s universe, namely the circular or spiral-like movement from innocence to experience, and then back again to a type of recovered innocence that integrates experience. This pattern maps Roy’s world in *The...*
God of Small Things, and is echoed in several of her militant articles. In what follows, I will advance the claim that Roy’s novel exhibits Blakean influence both in the recursive pattern that leads from original innocence, through experience to innocence regained at a superior level, and in the treatment of one of the protagonists, Estha, whose tribulations mirror a pattern of development in Blake’s “To Tirzah.”

Eric Hirsch maintains that, at the time of its publication about 1805, “To Tirzah” ended a period of “immense spiritual turmoil” in Blake’s life (106). This time of tension was marked by creative silence. The “publication of [this] lyric poem” was the last modification to the Songs of Innocence. This poem marked not only the author’s emergence from the age of mimetic experience in Felpham, where he was expected by his patron, William Hayley, to draw true-to-life miniature portraits, but also a return to “the Christian pieties of Innocence” (Hirsch 107). This was definitely not a mere revision of previous positions, but a synthesis of the positions held in the Songs of Innocence.

“To Tirzah” also marks a step forward consisting of understanding the world as a dynamism of contrasting forces reunited under the auspices of innocence, which is seen as an all-pervading principle. The poem builds on the dialectic tension between visionary and material reality, between closing and opening the doors of perception, between imprisoning and liberating the soul or poetic creativity.

whole expanse of the external world, the self turns to exploring its last frontier, discovering innocence as a state of consciousness, as a condition of the soul. The self will have to pass through a symbolic gate that signifies the assumption of a radically different state, but which, however, pertains to a deep level of the self: “Through the unknown, unremembered gate/ When the last of earth left to discover/ Is that which was the beginning.” These lines bring to mind the New Testament question by Nicodimus about becoming (like) a child in order to enter the Kingdom of Heavens. The Pentecostal flames of fire reinforce the idea. The state of regained innocence imagined by Eliot’s evokes Nannicantipot’s mother’s song in Blake’s An Island in the Moon, where the play of children, the music of nature and the stillness of the mind combine in an image of simplicity and fulfilment (Keynes 60): “At the source of the longest river/ The voice of the hidden waterfall/ And the children in the apple-tree/ Not known, because not looked for/ But heard, half-heard, in the stillness/ Between two waves of the sea./ Quick now, here, now, always/ —A condition of complete simplicity/ (Costing not less than everything).” This is the culmination of the soul’s journey, the epitome of the self’s growth or evolution in the world: its becoming divine (apotheosis), the moment of apocatastasis, its reaching its heavenly abode, when the individual spirit (the rose) and the Divine (as the Holy Ghost manifesting as flames during the Pentecost) merge (in a manner evocative of Blake’s Jerusalem, Plate 99): “And all shall be well and […]/ When the tongues of flame are infolded/ Into the crowned knot of fire/ And the fire and the rose are one.”

162 Adrian Mitchell, Man Friday (Futura Publications, 1975).
163 To these in 1794 he had added the Songs of Experience.
The gist of “To Tirzah” is revealed in the illumination accompanying the second half of the poem, as the sentence written on the cloak: “It is Raised a Spiritual Body.” The fact that the inscription on the stooping man’s side is present in all copies of “To Tirzah” testifies to its importance for Blake. Blake would often alter illuminations from one copy to another; examples from The Four Zoas, America, or Jerusalem abound. His alteration of successive copies is due either to his being in a different state of mind than when he finished the previous copy, or because of more profound modifications in his artistic outlook or in his projects. He might have equally abhorred the mechanical reproduction of art works, that is, the fact that the artist could leave the imprint of his creativity and genius upon the original, but not on subsequent copies. Thus in the illumination of “To Tirzah,” the preservation of the caption, inscribed upon the robe of the male figure to the right of the plate, is meant to underline its significance and the message it carries. Together with the image of the supine

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164 That is, in copy L, 1795 (Yale Center for British Art), copy R, c. 1808 (The Fitzwilliam Museum), copy Z, 1826 (Library of Congress). For a contrastive view of the copies see http://www.blakearchive.org
165 The term copy is preferred in the Blakean literature as successive illuminations which are identical in print may differ in the colours applied. Robert Viscomi’s William Blake and the Idea of the Book (1993) is perhaps the most comprehensive study of Blake’s illumination technique to date.
166 A classic example is the frontispiece of The First Book of Urizen (1794), which turns into The Book of Urizen (1818), for the sole reason that there was no Second Book of Urizen.
naked man, whom the two women try to prop up and the elderly man tries to revive, the text of the poem and the caption convey the idea that one’s retreat from a contingent existence — due to blinding one’s doors of perception or under the pressure of overwhelming material world — may lead to an intense spiritual experience.

The concept of spiritual resurrection contrasts with the image of the fallen man (or is he dead? Is he evoking a dead Christ? Is he the Christ before resurrection?). This image of a man supported by two feminine figures brings to mind Plate 25 of Jerusalem. Although both relate to ideas of spiritual revival, “To Tirzah” and this plate differ in that the figure orchestrating the spiritual resuscitation in the former is not an energetic naked female as in the latter, but a fully dressed old man. This conveys a sense of venerability and paternal care, as opposed to the energy and imagination of youth. The old man’s presence is soothing and compassionate. This kindly attitude to the fallen youth in “To Tirzah” is replicated in Plate 25 as the outstretched protective arms of the hovering female who witnesses the whole scene from above.

The themes of closing the doors of perception, of the contrast between spiritual life and mundane realities, are to be found in the withdrawal by Roy’s character Estha into apparent autism. What were the causes of this condition? Is Estha’s autism voluntary? Is it the effect of circumstances? Clearly, his condition springs from external circumstances and his own realisations regarding the attitudes of people around him, together with his reactions to these events. Among the external circumstances are the senseless deaths of his cousin Sophie, his friend the un-touchable Velutha, and then his mother. These deaths shatter the young boy’s world, beliefs, and expectations. His realization, however unfounded, that his mother’s love was conditional, and the sudden revelation of the resentments of his uncle (Chacko), his grandmother (Mammachi), and his aunt (Baby Kochamma) made him vulnerable to being overwhelmed by circumstances. All these factors precipitate the crumbling of his universe of infantile love and trust. The effect upon the seven-year-old’s soul is devastating.

Estha’s paradox springs from his being the most forward-looking, and the most rational of the twins (“it’s best to be prepared”), yet this does not necessarily lead to sound decision-making, as exemplified by the failed run from home that leads to Sophie’s death. Moreover, he inadvertently tells on Velutha, which will lead to his death. When tragedies strike, he has no strategy of coping with the pain. Is his guilt so overwhelming that it is paralysing, hence his speechlessness? As he seems to be the representative of reasonableness in the novel, does Estha’s predicament suggest that reason alone, if not coupled with intuition
or common sense, leads to disastrous consequences (three deaths: his cousin’s, mother’s and Velutha’s, and two banishments: his own and Ammu’s)?

“To Tirzah” provides a paradigmatic context for understanding Estha’s retreat from communication with the world. As supposedly was the case with Blake’s long silence after 1795 (Hirsch 108), and that of the poetic persona in “To Tirzah,” Estha’s lapse into muteness veils an insurmountable spiritual turmoil. He voluntarily “blinds” his nostrils, shuts his “ears,” and closes his “tongue.” Following the successive deaths and separations in his life, Estha has attempted to close “the doors of perception” in order to ward off sensations and feelings perceived as being too acute, too painful for him to bear.

This state of virtual autism ends with the return of his sister. After twenty-three years of separation, the twins — “one soul in two bodies” — reunite, and Estha awakens to a state in which he can listen to the noises and sensations inside his sister’s head. The channels of communication reopen due to Rahel’s having learned to forgive. Periods of silence and the way they end are deeply suggestive of the nature of the experience of the self they mediate. Blake ended his silence with “To Tirzah,” a poem that delineates how the “I” in the poem escapes from the shell of his blinded senses by means of resurrection in spirit (“it is raised a spiritual body”). Estha’s sterile refusal to communicate ends with the return of his feminine half, and in their communion, the pair recaptures the unity of being they enjoyed as children. Silence mediates a renewal of the self, a rediscovery of innocence and trust in the self and the other at a higher level.

3. 1. Innocence, Experience, and Return to Innocence

Roy’s novel explores the tension between innocence and experience, as a development from ingenuousness to experience, then from traumatic experience to regained confidence and innocence. This dialectic is particular, Roy thinks, not only to persons, but to whole worlds. In “Confronting Empire,” Roy expresses her belief in the imminence of another, possible world, a world after experience: “Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.” Blake similarly suggests that the dialectic of innocence/experience/regained innocence pertains not only to individuals, but also to whole worlds. In the Book of Los (1795), the universe, whether the mental one or not, enjoyed a time

167 The losses that affected Estha the most are the deaths of his cousin Sophie-Mol, of which he felt responsible for allowing her to join him and his sister on the river, the death of Velutha, his friend and role model, then the separation from his sister and mother (and Ammu’s death), to both of whom he was deeply attached.
“When Love and Joy were adoration / And none impure were deemed” (Chapter I: 8-9; Keynes 256). In Roy’s novel, the twins’ lives prior to the Orangedrink Man episode are woven from unconditional love for all. The communion and affection that marked the lavatory episode on the way to Cochin will persist in Rahel’s mind as a treasured memory, but will be very soon forgotten by the other characters.

The dialectic of innocence and experience in Roy’s novel reproduces a similar development in Blake’s *The Book of Los*. Blake paradoxically qualifies the time of innocence by lack of qualifications: it was a time when qualities (innocence) and states (love, joy) manifested as principles unmodified:

- Not Eyeless Covet
- Nor Thin-lip’d Envy
- Nor Bristled Wrath
- Nor Curled Wantonness. (I: 10-13, in Keynes 256)

That was a world of delight, of love untarnished by covetousness, envy, wrath, or dissipation. Nothing had yet sullied the world of innocent joy. However, as Blake shows, experience distances the self from innocence to the extent that it becomes its opposite:

- But Covet was poured full:
- Envy fed with fat of lambs:
- Wrath with lions gore:
- Wantonness lulld to sleep
- With the virgins lute,
- Or sated with her love. (*Book of Los* I: 15-19, in Keynes 256)

Debauchery preying on innocence reflects the story of temptation, which Roy will represent as the crooked Orangedrink Man invading the twins’ world, bringing secrecy and shame, tarnishing the twins’ chaste love with his lustful rape of the ingenuous Estha. The twins’ later brief incestuous relationship may be put down to the “fall” from innocence induced by the Orangedrink Man and consolidated by the “accusers” in the novel. Or is it a symbolic reunion of “contraries,” a reconstruction of the mythical androgyny?

In Blake’s *Book of Los*, relinquishing of innocence leads to a consolidation of experience. When trying to organise itself, experience becomes aggressive and destructive:
Raging furious the flames of desire
Ran thro’ heaven & earth, living flames
Intelligent, organiz’d: arm’d

Despite the apparent dynamism, consolidation in experience brings about the arresting of energy. The flow is dammed, restrained: in the midst of “intelligent, organized” experience, Los, the creative genius, is a captive. The shape of his chains and shackles reflects in the circular movement of surrounding flames:

In the midst
The Eternal Prophet bound in a chain
Compell’d to watch Urizens shadow

Rag’d with curses & sparkles of fury
Round the flames roll as Los hurls his chains
Mounting up from his fury, condens’d
Rolling round & round, mounting on high
Into vacuum: into non-entity.
Where nothing was! dash’d wide apart
His feet stamp the eternal fierce-raging
Rivers of wide flame; they roll round
And round on all sides making their way
Into darkness and shadowy obscurity. (I: 30-42)

When the creative artist organises the products of his/her creativity s/he shackles and restricts imagination, and invites destruction. Similarly, Roy’s Baby Kochamma becomes trapped in her own projects while trying to control the affections and lives of a few nearby people. First Baby schemes to win Father Mulligan’s heart, then to seek retribution for Ammu’s defiance of established rules and customs while appearing to avenge the death of Sophie Mol. Later she channels her controlling impulses towards organising her garden as part of a landscaping experiment. Eventually, armed with a remote control and presiding from her armchair, she comes to govern and control her shrinking world fully. By then her world has become an emotionless, barren, darkness illuminated only by the flickering of the television set. Baby
presents the ironic case of creativity turned into sterile autocracy, which is the very condition she sought to evade as a young woman.

In Blake’s poem, however, when the dialectic reaches a cycle, joy is recovered (“Los smild with joy”) and inspiration checks reason: imagination and creativity represented by Los win over Urizen: “he the vast Spine of Urizen siez’d” (Book of Los Chapter IV: 46-47, in Keynes 260). As a result, balance reigns, and this new-found equilibrium is represented at the cosmic level – “The Sun stood self-balanced”:

Nine ages completed their circles
When Los heated the glowing mass, casting
It down into the Deeps: the Deeps fled
Away in redounding smoke; the Sun
Stood self-balanced. And Los smild with joy.
He the vast Spine of Urizen siez’d
And bound down to the glowing illusion. (IV: 41-47, in Keynes 260)

In the age after experience, reason appears as “glowing illusion.” A question remains open, namely whether the return to joy in Blake’s text stands for a paradigmatic movement that provides a model for all cyclical transformations, or whether the cyclical nature of all movements in the universe informs the evolution of the self from innocence to higher innocence. As circles, orbs, rounds, spirals, whirls, and fiery spheres map Los’s world, the second interpretation seems most plausible: circular or cyclical changes occur at all levels in the universe, so, for Blake, the revolution from innocence through experience to innocence regained must follow this circular pattern that pervades the world.

Roy’s world, fictional and political, will be discussed in the light of this dialectic of the self, with special insistence on experience and the self’s strategies for coping with it. Focusing on small things, and on whatever joy can be gleaned from the present moment, is the Ammu-Velutha couple’s strategy for escaping the pressures of the “big things” such as caste, history, and politics.
3. 2. The World of Experience and the Public Good.

Living in the Present and Focussing on Small Things

“There is a widespread sense of loss here, if not always of God, then at least of meaning.” (Charles Taylor, A Secular Age)

Roy’s fiction reproduces Blake’s universe of dialectical tensions that develop in three main stages (innocence, experience, higher innocence), whereas her other texts, primarily militant political manifestos, engage exclusively with the middle stage, the age of experience, with its indignities and tribulations. Her attitude is Romantic, indeed Blakean, in her selfless advocacy for the voiceless. But while Blake escaped into imagination, which he saw as the solution to the indignities and the pain of living in the world, Roy leaves aside her literary preoccupations and uses her imagination to relieve the ailments of the people she encounters, or at least to point out charismatically the issues troubling them.

With reference to the vision of literary texts, Roy opposes the crude realities of a world in which the wealth of “587 billionaires exceeds the combined gross domestic product of the world’s 135 poorest countries.” In her essay “The Greater Common Good,” Roy acknowledges her appetite for reading, yet discloses her other passion for unveiling truths and voicing the concerns of the voiceless. She lends her passionate voice to a world fallen from innocence, which lies tormented between the greed of the rich and the plight of the poor. Starting with The End of Imagination, written in 1998 while The God of Small Things was coming out in print, Roy speaks and acts on behalf of her less fortunate fellow citizens to make their worries audible to an entire nation and the world. She voices her concerns not by

168 Among the Romantics two tendencies can be identified with regard to politics. The first generation of British Romantics: Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, made their voices heard on political issues. Wordsworth, for instance, confessed that he gave twelve hours of meditation on political issues to one on poetry (Dawson 48), and his whole generation was militant and politically engaged. The second generation of Romantic poets (Byron, Shelley, Keats), however, are less vocal in expressing political opinion, disillusioned as they are with the failure of the ideals of the French Revolution and appalled by the atrocities of the Terror. Nonetheless, in A Defence of Poetry Shelley declares that the “poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world” (Dawson 49). The Terror figures as a trope in Roy’s novel, a metaphor for the time subsequent to Sophie Mol’s drowning, when the big ideas and idealism of Chacko and Baby Kochamma leave room to mercilessness.


170 Roy thinks that the poor are prejudiced against not so much for reasons of race or caste, but for not having access to education and to the necessities of life, for not having the know-how or courage to fight what they regard as the inevitable. Ammu openly defies family and caste expectations, but her defiance manifests solely in her private life, while Velutha takes up political action through his involvement with the Communist Party. Their defiance is suicidal, as they both pay with their lives. Nonetheless, the results of challenging rules and the status quo are visible a generation later, when Rahel has access to college education and is able to express freedom of choice with regard to matrimony, professional choice and living arrangements. Paradoxically, the more voluntary of the twins reaches adulthood as a dependent, a shadow of his former self, of whom only the physical body survives, while his soul is almost comatose, dormant as it will turn out. Adult Rahel seems to be the only one who, in the absence of their long dead mother can spark some life into his soul, which otherwise fails to register perceptions or nurture emotions or thoughts.
means of academic postcolonial discourse, but through politically charged speeches and action. In order to take action, she sets aside her more pleasurable contemplative life:

Instinct led me to set aside Joyce and Nabokov, to postpone reading Don DeLillo’s big book and substitute it with reports on drainage and irrigation, with journals and books and documentary films about dams and why they’re built and what they do. *(The Greater Common Good)*

In a Blakean manner, Roy reveres “minute particulars,” and despises generalisations like “the big things” of repressive authorities: the law, the state, priests, and political leaders. Like Blake, she warns against the dangers of power politics and disregarding the specifics. “To generalise is to be an idiot,” Blake cautioned.

Not generalisations, but singularities validate both works of art and political discourse. Political big talk departs from the modesty of a minimalist vocabulary based on facts and small truths, and re-enters the domain of modernism’s grand narratives. The language of generalisations causes issues to become blurred, elegantly or otherwise, obscuring the vested interests behind big, shallow words. In her essay “The Greater Common Good,” Roy pleads for a return to particulars, to the specifics of each issue being discussed publicly, but she also invites meditation on the way particular matters affect the greater picture:

In India over the last ten years the fight against the Sardar Sarovar Dam has come to represent far more than the fight for one river. This has been its strength as well as its weakness. Some years ago, it became a debate that captured the popular imagination. That’s what raised the stakes and changed the complexion of the battle. From being a fight over the fate of a river valley it began to raise doubts about an entire political system. What is at issue now is the very nature of our democracy. Who owns this land? Who owns its rivers? Its forests? Its fish? These are huge questions. They are being taken hugely

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171 *The Friends of the Narmada River* project, for instance, whose website opens with Roy’s engaging and combative article “The Greater Common Good,” is an international project connecting individuals and professionals from around the world in an effort to prevent the constructions of dams on Narmada (one of India’s main rivers along with the Ganges, Saraswati, Sindhu, and Kaveri).


173 Blake’s weariness of generalisations corresponds in art to an abhorrence of blurred outlines: “The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: that the more distinct, sharp, and wiry the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art […]. The want of this determinate and bounding form evinces the idea of want in the artist’s mind […] Leave out this line, and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again” Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats, *The Works of William Blake, Poetic, Symbolic and Critical* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1893) 254..
seriously by the State. They are being answered in one voice by every institution at its command – the army, the police, the bureaucracy, the courts. And not just answered, but answered unambiguously, in bitter, brutal ways.

Imagination becomes a subversive faculty for Roy, as it was for Blake. It destabilises the scaffolding of power through uneasy questioning. Imagination cuts through verbosity and sees through elaborate lies, forcing authorities to face and, ideally, to answer people’s questions. Unfortunately, as Roy suggests in “The Greater Common Good,” the only occasions when those in power use simple language is when they resort to violence to answer legitimate inquiries:

For the people of the valley, the fact that the stakes were raised to this degree has meant that their most effective weapon — specific facts about specific issues in this specific valley — has been blunted by the debate on the big issues. The basic premise of the argument has been inflated until it has burst into bits that have, over time, bobbed away. Occasionally a disconnected piece of the puzzle floats by — an emotionally charged account of the Government’s callous treatment of displaced people; an outburst at how the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), “a handful of activists”, is holding the nation to ransom; a legal correspondent reporting on the progress of the NBA’s writ petition in the Supreme Court.

“Literature is the opposite of a nuclear bomb,” Roy declares in *Come September* (2002). However, she turned away from literature and dedicated herself exclusively to political discourse and action after winning the Booker Prize in 1997. Her actions suggest that literature is not enough to defuse bombs (yet literature can initiate political action). The fact that her novel predates most of her political texts indicates that for Roy literature precedes political involvement; literature draws on life in order to change life.

Authors, although they seem to draw their material from the world, they themselves come into being due to stories:

Writers imagine that they cull stories from the world. I’m beginning to believe that vanity makes them think so. That it’s actually the other way around. Stories cull writers from the world. Stories reveal themselves to us. The public narrative, the
Stories pervade the political and fictional discourses alike, they are ways of reflecting reality: “Fiction and nonfiction are only different techniques of storytelling.” Yet, fiction is more innocent, more spontaneous, while politically-charged discourse is accompanied by the pain similar to that felt by those on behalf of whom she speaks: “For reasons that I don’t fully understand, fiction dances out of me, and nonfiction is wrenched out by the aching, broken world I wake up to every morning.” Even in her novel there is a layer of political thought: “The theme of much of what I write, fiction as well as nonfiction, is the relationship between power and powerlessness and the endless, circular conflict they’re engaged in.” Although concerned with this main theme of the disempowered vs. the powerful, which recurs leitmotif-like in all her writings, Roy does not tell a singular story, nor do her stories speak in a singular voice or have a unique meaning. Polysemy is crucial to democracy as it is to any aspect of life or story-telling, she believes. Fittingly, the epitaph of The God of Small Things is John Berger’s pronouncement “Never again will a single story be told as though it’s the only one.” In Come September, she develops on this idea, highlighting her role of a story-teller: “There can never be a single story. There are only ways of seeing. So when I tell a story, I tell it not as an ideologue who wants to pit one absolutist ideology against another, but as a story-teller who wants to share her way of seeing. Though it might appear otherwise, my writing is not really about nations and histories; it’s about power. About the paranoia and ruthlessness of power. About the physics of power. I believe that the accumulation of vast unfettered power by a State or a country, a corporation or an institution – or even an individual, a spouse, a friend, a sibling – regardless of ideology, results in excesses […].”

Roy’s insistence on specific political or social issues has been foreshadowed by the “small things” of her novel. The twins’ mother Ammu and her illegitimate lover Velutha discover minimalism as a personal adventure. Minimalism is for them a way of retreating from, or almost cowering under the pressure of a world too aggressive and too unsympathetic to bear. Roy the essayist, on the other hand, tackles specific issues in order to remedy the plight of those sacrificed for “the greater common good,” which in actual fact serves those in power.

Ammu’s minimalism in The God of Small Things strikes a balance between Chacko’s impractical concern for the big things of the universe and his former wife Margaret’s preoccupation with holidays, shopping, or gossip. The contrast is between the starry-eyed
idealism of an Indian male who is unconcerned with questioning his own caste or sexist prejudices, and the down-to-earth pragmatism of a British woman. The lives of Margaret and Ammu are also compared: the relatively straightforward life of a middle-class woman in the West — whether single, married or divorced — and the intricate destiny of a woman in India, further aggravated by her being a divorcee. Together with the overwhelming authority of “the Big Things,” the triviality of Margaret’s concerns provide a background against which the interest in the small things, cherished by the innocent, reveal their significance.

Ammu’s and Velutha’s absorption in the miniature world of insects and plants — and the solace and wisdom they seem to derive from them — is a desperate attempt to obliterate the hugely levelling wheel of history, of power laws and millennia-old social practices. Their minimalism establishes a present in which happiness becomes possible. They do not require much, just to be left alone, and they do not dream of a future. They simply focus on what is available at the moment — small things and mutual affection.\(^{174}\)

Under the pressure of circumstances, and forced into resorting to minimalism as a strategy for survival, for resisting imminent annihilation or death, Ammu and Velutha discover the bliss of living in the present as the only time accessible to them. Out of a desire to furnish their love with whatever joy was accessible in a universe impoverished by oppressive rules, which condemned their relationship and allowed it no future, the couple clings to the present and to small things.

Whether their joy and insights stand for epiphanic realisations is open for debate. It is certain, though, that their love affair reveals something that can be described as an awareness of the almost divine nature of their own beings: Ammu dreams of Velutha as an imperfect god of small things, while Velutha experiences love as a revelation. They deliberately ignore the “important” aspects of life, the “Big Things” such as the caste system or social and family expectations, and confine their attentions to their love and to other creatures that live exclusively in the present within their minimalist universe:

\[^{174}\] Similarly, Blake edifies the now as a refuge and a shelter from the pain of living:

There is a Grain of Sand in Lambeth that Satan cannot find
Nor can his Watch Fiends find it: tis translucent & has many Angles
But he who finds it will find Oothoons palace, for within
Opening into Beulah every angle is a lovely heaven. (Jerusalem 37:15-18)

The present is the time of renovation, which refreshes the self and brings fulfilment:

There is a Moment in each Day that Satan cannot find
Nor can his Watch Fiends find it, but the Industrious find
This Moment & it multiply, & when it once is found
It renovates every Moment of the Day if rightly placed (Milton 35:42-45).
Only one thing mattered now. They knew that it was all they could ask of each other. The only thing. Ever. They both knew that. […]

Even later, on the thirteen nights that followed this one, instinctively they stuck to the Small Things. The Big Things ever lurked inside. They knew that there was nowhere for them to go. They had nothing. No future. So they stuck to the small things. (338)

Their world evokes an innocence where humans talk to plants and animals as in Blake’s *Songs* or *The Book of Thel* (1789). In “Come September,” Roy talks of *The God of Small Things* as a collaboration between her and a “little bit of magic.” The world reveals its magic to the couple through its small, defenseless, and innocent inhabitants: caterpillars, insects, or fish. Caught between the crushing big things — rules, customs, authority, power — and the transience of the moment, the couple concentrates on the “small things” in nature, from which they derive joy and reassurance:

They laughed at ant-bites […], at clumsy caterpillars sliding off the ends of leaves, at overturned beetles that couldn’t right themselves. At the pair of small fish that always sought Velutha out in the river and bit him. At a particularly devout praying mantis. At the minute spider who lived in a crack in the wall of the black verandah of the History House […] Without admitting it to each other or themselves, they linked their fates, their futures (their love, their Madness, their Hope, their Infinnate Joy) to his. […] They grew to love his eclectic taste. His shambling dignity. (338-9)

Humour and epiphanic understandings combine in the present, which present also reveals the presence of god, “The God” of the thrill of the moment that manifests as “Goose Bumps” and of spontaneity expressed as “Sudden Smiles” (330). It is a “god of small things” to be sure, but the only god that matters to the couple. They grow to perceive and enjoy the tissue of the world as love, and to link their fragile existence to the precariousness of other ephemeral beings. Like the minute spider, they also “lived in a crack in the wall of the black verandah of the History House.” Their god is not imposing and perfect; it is instead a god of small things who appears in Ammu’s dream, as an incomplete being, both divine and human.
The “cheerful one-armed man” (330) resembles Shri Ganesh, the elephant-child god with a broken tusk.\(^{175}\)

Praised as “the tiny core of everything without which larger things have no purpose,”\(^{176}\) this god of innocence, who has lost a tusk in battle with Shiva, symbol of authority and power, may have been the model for the one-armed god of small things. This incomplete god’s relatedness to epiphanies sheds a different light on Ammu’s’ and Velutha’s experience of a minimalist universe, as growth into a subtler awareness. Described as more charming than the god of love, Ganesh is the underlying principle of the living universe,\(^{177}\) able to confer joy, innocence, and wisdom.\(^{178}\)

Blake’s “The Little Black Boy” also suggested that love and wisdom are to be learnt through processes that can turn painful. Experience appeared as a rather arduous development, through which one acquires the strength to love, forgive, and enjoy in spite of pain. The wisdom that Roy’s surviving characters acquire after experience comprises understanding, forgiveness, and reconciliation, enhanced by a readiness to fight any battles that are still to be fought. Literally, the only survivor is Rahel,\(^{179}\) and her battle is to re-gain Estha, returning him to the realm of vocalised human communication, much as it had been the feminine Jerusalem’s plight to reopen the reluctant Albion to emotional and visionary exchanges in Blake’s prophetic poem Jerusalem. The cliché of the active male versus the passive female is reversed by Blake and Roy; the feminine energy realises the disjunction between herself and the male counterpart, and tries to bridge it, while the male is reluctant to relinquish his separation, and stubbornly persists in his folly.

Estha’s fall from innocence starts when the Orangedrink Man entices him behind the fateful counter. The boy who burst with joy, with songs and images derived from films or from life, gradually starts distancing himself from a state of blissful (albeit ignorant)

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175 Ganesh is also known to the Western world due to Romantic William Jones’ translations of Hindu texts and stories. Inspired perhaps by Jones’ translations, Blake had sketched two men with elephant heads, which David Weir reproduces in his book *Brahma in the West. William Blake and the Oriental Renaissance*.

176 See Maurice Bloomfield’s *Athrava Veda* as discussed by Edward. V. Arnold in the essay “The Rig Veda and Atharva Veda” (*Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Vol. 22 (1901), 309-320). Arnold’s essay wishes to emphasise the popular aspects of the Ganesh poems within the Atharva Veda. Similarly, in “Lord Ganesh and His Historical Plight,” the author identified by the initials G. P. D. highlights the popular origin of this child-god, protector of poor people and of the disfavoured (3483-84), hence the connection with the god in Ammu’s dream.

177 See also *The Hymns of the Atharva-Veda* in Max Müller’s collection *Sacred Books of the East* (1897).

178 The child-god Ganesh evokes the alchemical *filius philosophorum*, which, Jung reported, is born “when light and darkness, male and female come together” (Marlan 132), that is, when opposites converge or are sublimated. See Stanton Marlan, *The Black Sun: The Alchemy and the Art of Darkness* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2005).

179 Roy makes a case of Estha and Rahel existing as a soul in two bodies, thus making the delimitation of their individualities rather cumbersome.
innocence. He is, like Blake’s Chimney Sweeper (in David Fairer’s interpretation), abused particularly because he is innocent. His innocence makes the abominable act even more horrendous. Roy refuses to embellish or sublimate the child abuse into something significant or acceptable.\(^{180}\) After the traumatic experience with the Orangedrink Man – ironically, a crucial occurrence for revealing the dirt and baseness that can mar purity – Estha’s distancing of himself from a state of innocence describes a trajectory that opens ever larger gaps between him and the ones he loves, between him and home, and, eventually, between him and his own self.

One may wonder what in particular made the Orangedrink Man experience so abominable to Estha that he would retreat into a world of his own. Was it the fact that he perceived himself as less lovable, tainted by the encounter? Or that the corrupting experience was a secret which, unlike previous ones, he could no longer share with Rahel? Perhaps he construed the subsequent unfolding of events as having been triggered by the episode in the cinema lobby. This initial guilt pulled him away from the paradisiacal joy of living in the present that is characteristic of childhood. The deaths of Sophie Mol, Velutha, and his mother, the return to his father, and his re-return to Ayemenem, seem to derive from his having experienced impurity. Can we sense an ironic counterpoint to the biblical theme of the fall\(^{181}\) in the boy’s being coaxed into an act he knows nothing about and subsequently abhors, thus being drawn into a world of shadows with ambiguous degrees of lovability? In Blake’s *The Book of Los*, it is the Urizenic impulse, the urge to manifest the ego, which, together with lust, had brought about the fall from edenic unity and joy into divisiveness and imbalance.\(^{182}\)

### 3. 3. Strategies of Surviving Experience

After the successive deaths of Sophie Mol and Velutha, continuous mourning marks the lives of Rahel and Estha. Already silent and forlorn, with the banishment from his

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180 Six years before Roy’s novel came out, in the short story “Lizzie’s Tiger” (1991), Angela Carter, a prominent Blakean among postmodern writers, similarly contrasts Lizzie’s innocence — perceived as a vital force able to tame the beasts and return the universe to a state of harmony — with a child abuse scene. Blake is often read in terms of sexual behaviour; his venting his anger at the work exploitation of children is replaced in the work of the post-modern authors that he has influenced with anger at obnoxious sexual advances directed at children. See Angela Carter, *American Ghosts & Old World Wonders* (Random House, 2012).

181 Eve is tempted by the apple of knowledge and consequently she and Adam experience self-awareness, while Estha loses a sense of the self as a result of his fall. If self-awareness is a desirable thing, the outcomes of these two falls qualify the events that triggered them as positive in Eve’s case and negative in Estha’s. As a Thomasian Christian, Roy might have been exposed to a type of Christianity closer to the gnostic tradition, since Thomas’s teaching diverges occasionally from Pauline Christianity, as evinced by *The Gospel of Thomas*.

182 See *The Book of Los* (Chapter I: 15-32 in Keynes 256).
mother’s home and the return to his father, Estha further retreats into himself, contemplating the octopus-like grief that has occupied his mind. Similarly, Rahel’s sorrow corrodes her will to the point of intimidating her fellow students with her “waywardness and almost fierce lack of ambition” (18). Rahel’s woe occasionally surfaces in her eyes, which exasperates Larry, her American husband, who sees only her “indifference and despair” (19). Her anguish is that of a whole huge country where men are crushed for the sake of keeping up caste barriers and retaliating for crimes uncommitted (Velutha is an example in point), where individual lives are shattered for the greater common good (such as the thousands dislodged by dam construction), and people have to cling to small, almost insignificant things, because the significant ones have been confiscated or controlled by the ones in charge.

Rahel’s despair resembles that of her mother, who, despite her acts of defiance, could seldom actually choose for herself. When choice was fought for and gained, it was between the violence of a battering father and that of a drunkard husband, between solitary bitterness and separation from, and death of, loved ones. The pain Rahel has lived through, and the subsequent dejection, unavoidably wrecks her marriage, as Larry finds it hard to relate to her tormented background:

He didn’t know that in some places, like the country Rahel came from, various kinds of despair competed for primacy. And that personal despair could never be desperate enough. That something happened when personal turmoil dropped by at the wayside shrine of the vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible turmoil of a nation. That Big God howled like a hot wind, and demanded obeisance. Then Small God (cozy and contained, private and limited) came away cauterized, laughing numbly at his own temerity. Inured by the confirmation of his own inconsequence, he became resilient and truly indifferent. Nothing mattered much. Nothing much mattered. […] It was never important enough. Because Worse Things had happened. [B]etween the terror of war and the horror of peace, Worse Things kept happening. So Small God laughed a hollow laugh, and skipped away cheerfully. […] The source of his brittle elation was the relative smallness of his misfortune. He climbed into people’s eyes and became an exasperating expression. (19)

Larry fails to understand that her indifference is nothing but self-protective armour wrapped around her soul to help her survive the bereavement and suffering accumulated in her life. Apathy is her way of coping with the everlasting mourning, her refusal of superficial glee.
In a culture abounding in stories about gods breaking the divide between high and low, interfering in daily life, and, from their sometimes low-caste background, advocating detachment and the irrelevance of Big Things – such as laws, rules, or caste divisions\textsuperscript{183} – Rahel’s resort to indifference as a strategy of survival is not surprising. In fact Rahel’s eyes expressed “not despair […] but a sort of enforced optimism” (19), the effort to stay alive and keep sane despite being overwhelmed by grief. Moreover, Rahel and Estha mourn because of their separation, the severing of their joint soul: “the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other” (20).

The twins’ pain is amplified by a sense of remorse that they cannot escape. Actors in a drama they do not understand, ostensibly arrested in their growth at the age of seven, the twins misidentify themselves as perpetrators rather than victims of events. After their world is shattered by deaths and separations — enforced as a means of retaliation against their mother for having transgressed caste boundaries — Estha and Rahel drift, “with no moorings” and “no foundations” (192) through never-ending agony. What they fail to grasp is the part played by the child abuse that has victimised Estha.

A narrator’s aside, however, reflecting on the twins’ fate twenty-three years after the portentous events, draws the source of all the mishaps to the incident in the hotel lobby (191). Acknowledging their part as victims rather than aggressors — their only fault being that of suffering from “innocence as dangerous inexperience”\textsuperscript{184} — the narrator, whose voice resembles Rahel’s own, seems to see no way out of their mental torment. Their mourning feeds on itself like the two-headed snake bracelet that Ammu had made for Rahel. As a result, a state of perpetual darkness builds up “like liquid tar” (191) in the shared soul of Estha and Rahel.

Ignoring the part played by history and rule-making, the twins hold themselves responsible not only for the tragic death of their beloved Velutha, but also for the accidental death of Sophie Mol and the lonely death of Ammu. Under the accumulated weight of guilt

\textsuperscript{183} Such blurring of boundaries, which every major character in the novel attempts, from Velutha’ trespassing into touchable territory to Chacko’s marrying a commoner’s daughter, is enacted by Shri Krishna, the hero of the Mahabharata, the epic which the kathakali dancers perform in Roy’s novel. Although only peripherally evoked in the novel, Shri Krishna’s story is suggestive (Roy 127). Like Estha, Krishna was a precocious child given to pranks and wisdom, who had to fight demons while still very young, as Estha has to face the fear of not being loved, and then the traumatic death of his cousin Sophie. As Estha was sent away from his uncle Chacko, Krishna had been taken away from his parents to protect him from his evil uncle Kansa, and grew up to challenge caste boundaries and other accepted evils. Here the analogy stops as adult Estha ceases to oppose systems and adopts a passive attitude to life, an almost saintly withdrawal which resembles the fourth stage of life as prescribed by the Vedas.

\textsuperscript{184} See David Fairer, “Experience Reading Innocence: Contextualizing Blake’s ‘Holy Thursday’” in \textit{Eighteenth-Century Studies}, 35. 4 (2002): 535-62. Fairer’s phrase can be aptly applied to the first seven years of the twins’ life, during which time they indiscreetly showered their love on whoever paid them any attention.
and sorrow, Estha retreats deeper into himself, where there is no solace, but only continuous re-living and re-thinking of the past. Estha, previously the more responsible and far-sighted of the two (319), stops looking into the future. On the contrary, he takes to pondering incessantly over the past that enclosed the ones he loved. In almost Blakean imagery, with antagonising parts of the self clamouring for primacy, his shattered soul infused with guilt construes the death of his mother as equally fragmented, for he believes that a part of her being has stifled her to death: “It was his fault that the faraway man in Ammu’s chest stopped shouting. His fault that she has died alone in the lodge with no one to […] talk to her” (352).

Estha has arrived at a state of death in life, Laius-like, trying to avoid his destiny, and attempting to escape the terrible danger of living. His experience in the theatre lobby and the fear that took hold of him in its aftermath had taught him that “anything can happen to Anyone,” so “it’s best to be prepared” (194). In endeavouring to fight his fate, the instability of affections and the loss of things as he knew them, he attempted to counteract the postmodern condition of “ephemerality and evanescence.”

After the “Terror” orchestrated by the “accusers,” Baby Kochamma and Chacko, has taken hold of his life and that of his family, Estha’s existence conforms to what Zygmunt Bauman regards as the postmodern strategy for warding off death: “Daily life becomes a perpetual dress rehearsal of death. What is being rehearsed […] is ephemerality and evanescence of things humans may acquire and bonds humans may weave” (Baumann 186). Similarly the twins are left not with death, but “the end of living” (321), that is, death lived over and over again.

From this death-in-life they attempt to awaken twenty-three years later, when concern for her brother overcomes Rahel’s indifference and prompts her to start her journey home. Likewise, love for his sister slowly eases Estha’s guilt and sorrow. When he starts to hear the tumult in his sister’s head, Estha not only re-awakens to human communication, but also ceases to live exclusively in the past, thus, presumably, opening to the possibilities of the present. After experiencing the evanescence of relationships, the twins may have lived too long in the shadow of the past to be able to recover faith in the permanence of things and life in the present. Yet, with the dogged stubbornness of life clinging to life, they attempt to transcend their condition — woven out of postmodern fragmentation, instability, and personal grief — eventually to recapture whatever unity of self they can achieve, to attain whatever

185 Laius is a legendary King of Thebes and Oedipus’ father. On hearing a prophecy of the Delphi oracle that his son will murder him, he decides to kill his son. Oedipus survives and returns to Thebes as a young man, where he kills his father, thus fulfilling the prophecy. By trying to evade his destiny, Laius has taken steps towards its fulfilment.
fulfilment their circumstances might afford them. In doing so, they enter into a state of innocence beyond experience, or rather in spite of experience. The pattern of their development parallels the Blakean pattern of innocence overtaken by experience, followed by attempts to recapture innocence.


It can be said that, during the age of innocence, the destinies of Rahel and Estha had run in the same stream. Prior to the fateful abuse by the Orangedrink Man, the twins’ souls were united; one soul in two bodies, rejoicing in their oneness (much like Albion and his emanation Jerusalem). Then guilt as the cloak of ego – that is, of Estha’s pride in presuming a demiurgic dimension to his acts\(^\text{186}\) – functions as the centrifugal force that would gradually tear their lives apart, until their courses run parallel, then further apart into divergence. The fall from innocence is further aggravated by successive banishments: from their mother’s presence during the hotel stay in Cochin, followed by Estha’s separation from Rahel, then loss of home, and eventually isolation from human interaction in Estha’s case.

The twins’ separation may be read as an allegory for the fragmentation of the self. This separation is bridged by Rahel’s homecoming, by her efforts to interact with previous perpetrators of abuse, especially the most vicious of the “accusers,” Baby Kochamma. These efforts equate with exercising forgiveness of sorts. Rahel also succeeds in reestablishing communication with her brother and revisiting a few aspects of tradition exemplified by the kathakali performance of the Mahabharata.

In the diverging courses of the twins’ lives, Roy presents alternative ways of coping with tragedy. Their afflictions prove to be overwhelming, stifling both will and imagination for those who suffer tragedy and its consequences (as is the case of Estha). He decides to run away from home across the river, which leads to Sophie’s drowning, but he has no power of decision or agency over the subsequent unfolding of events, such as his and his mother’s banishment from home, Velutha’s death, and Rahel’s drifting. Estha’s penchant for appropriating or assuming tragedy contrasts with Rahel’s attitude. She commits herself to defying and questioning tragedy and, directly or indirectly, to assuming agency and

\(^{186}\) Blake’s Urizen in *The Book of Los* and Albion in *Jerusalem* assume comparable stances.
challenging both its consequences and its perpetrators. To Rahel, tragedy eventually reveals its meanings. The snake sheds its masks of evil to show its face of wisdom.\(^{187}\)

Roy’s novel is conspicuously about returns: most characters (Estha, Rahel, Mammachi, Ammu) return to a native place, one to which they find they have acquired a different perception through their suffering and learning. The return home is a return to origin, to where one’s heart and values are, and, ultimately, to one’s self. It is a return to the roots of the tree, which grant cohesion and make existence livable and meaningful. Crucial to my comparative reading of *The God of Small Things* through a Blakean Romanticist lens, the feeling of reassurance that such a novel imparts differs from the uneasiness associated with the postmodern.

The Blakean concept of a cyclic progression through innocence to experience to a higher innocence is reshaped in the works of the authors that he inspires. Roy’s redefining of the dialectic between innocence and experience benefits from her composite cultural and religious background. In *The God of Small Things* she places herself in a Blakean tradition to which belong important authors, such as C.S.Lewis (*The Great Divorce*), Kahlil Gibran (*The Prophet,), postmodern Angela Carter (“Lizzie’s Tiger”) and contemporary Konzaburo Oe (*Rouse Up, O Young Men of the New Age!*)(Oe). Gibran (1883-1931), whom modern French sculptor Auguste Rodin would deem the “William Blake of the twentieth-century,” has his prophet teach that “in the dew of small things, the heart finds it morning and freshness” (Gibran *The Prophet* 36). Roy fits within this Blakean school as a novelist who provides a guiding philosophy.

Contrary to the metanarratives that Jean-François Lyotard distrusted, grounded in self-righteous reason as they were, there may still be some other kind of large projects – like Roy’s effort to save the Narmada Valley or to expose the failures of the Indian postcolonial society – that are valid due to being rooted in emotions such as compassion and caring love. Roy insists, as Blake did, that these emotions must balance rationality. The Romantic Blake’s vision of redeemed humankind was occasionally taken up by visionary artists thereafter, and used with a similar stridency.

Among the authors who have brought Blake’s project to fertile and inspired uses, Arundhati Roy stands out as both a visionary and an active militant. Two of the ingredients of

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187 A Gnostic intertext is discernible here, in the trope of suffering that reveals knowledge. Sophia plays the part of the consort of God in Gnostic texts. She is also the one who has enticed humans into knowledge so that they gain awareness and knowledge. Roy’s Syriac Christian ancestry may account for her familiarity with, and potential openness to, gnostic texts or ideas. See Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1987).
Blake’s vision are the *topoi* of universal brotherhood grounded in love, and enlightenment as spiritual awareness. These are not far removed from what Roy pursues in her various endeavours to protect the modest, unvoiced, inhabitants of rural India, threatened with extinction by government or multinational projects.

A kind of brotherhood is also shared by the twins of *The God of Small Things* through the love they shower on those around them, irrespective of the recipients’ attitude to them. The twins are extremely perceptive for their age, able as they are to comprehend the web of life as being made of love, despite the obvious outrageous appearances of hatred and resentment. Yet, as children, the twins lack adults’ ability to see the antipathy of the people around them. The events that abruptly end their childhood will also open their eyes, leading them to a new maturity in which they cherish both innocence and experience: an age of regained innocence made possible by forgiveness.

With a kind of self-assurance untypical of postmodern writers, Arundhati Roy brushes away the barrier between actuality and the world of fiction because she aims to teach a Blakean message about the need for love and wisdom. She has a conscious and confident trust in the audience to whom she addresses her novel and her political manifestos. In this, Roy further distances herself from (post) modern writers who no longer know for whom they write (Lyotard and Thebaud 9) or who write only for intellectuals. Such authors create their readership when their work reaches the market, but Roy confidently identifies her audience before publication. She speaks on behalf of readers who have experienced loss, and gone one to make sense of it, or have the potential to be able to do so. She speaks to all of humanity, likely to need to learn how to cope and make sense of loss if they have not done so already.

In “Come September” Roy highlights her abiding preoccupation with loss and with those who experience it daily:

> what I would really love to talk to you about is Loss. Loss and losing. Grief, failure, brokenness, numbness, uncertainty, fear, the death of feeling, the death of dreaming. The absolute relentless, endless, habitual, unfairness of the world.

What does loss mean to individuals? What does it mean to whole cultures, whole people who have learned to live with it as a constant companion?

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188 These were to be achieved through addressing distinct political issues and solving specific social problems, as well as through a transformation of the self so that to comprise the values of the “human form divine:” “love, mercy, pity, peace” (Ostriker 111).
189 In the blurb appraisals to the novel, Ian Jack, of the *Independent on Sunday*, describes the book as “an affecting and intricate story…written with amazing confidence” (Roy i).
What cure is there for the ones who experienced loss, whose only god is “The God of Loss” (330)? For Ammu and Velutha there is nothing left when their dreams die. But Rahel, and later Estha, recover from the long list of conditions affecting their unified soul (“grief, failure, brokenness, numbness, uncertainty, fear, the death of feeling, the death of dreaming”). Rahel’s return is not a pretext for re-living the past, but more importantly an opportunity to come to terms with it, and to start looking to the future, as the last word of the novel suggests: “Tomorrow” (440). This word carries a promise and a hope; it shows that the demons of the past can be defeated, and that the self is purged of resentment, and ready for new experience. This wiser self is made stronger, seeing more realistically what has happened, and yet having the natural empathy of a child who, unlike grown-ups, does not hold grudges.

Establishing a pattern of return to values that place innocence at their heart, thus acknowledging its centrality in contrast to a postmodern ideology that would disregard it, Roy’s novel proposes a Romantic return to the values of innocence. This specific quality of innocence was valorised at the advent of modernity, when Montesquieu and Rousseau coined the myths of the good and innocent sauvage, and Rousseau sought ways to educate the self by a return to innocence. At the same time, Blake and Wordsworth praised childhood as an age apart, while both espoused what Wordsworth would articulate in his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, infusing reality with the redeeming energy of imagination:

The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life… and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature. (Wordsworth 19)

Innocence has not always been valued, but has instead been the butt of various authors’ irony, especially during the modern and postmodern eras. Gilles Deleuze’s postface to the 1968 edition of Tournier’s Vendredi suggests that postmodern ideology disregards innocence,190 while in La tentation de l’innocence Pascal Brucker assesses the average postmodern subject as a hopeless childish idiot who strives to enjoy all the pleasures that

190 Deleuze, “Michel Tournier Et Le Monde Sans Autrui.”
his/her senses can provide without assuming any of the responsibilities derived from the human condition. In other words, an individual who hasn’t attained his or her maturity or enlightenment through reason, to use Kant’s terms in “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” Roy’s characters, especially Rahel and Ammu, are quite different in the sense that they internalise their experience, while Chacko and Baby Kochamma are arrested in a state of maturity devoid of wisdom.

Although having to transgress borders, getting bruised in the process and experiencing fragmentation and separation, Roy’s characters convey the unity of being as the ideal of personal life. The narrative suggests that postmodern fragmentation can give way to wholeness, and be thus redeemed in stories that integrate suffering and make sense of it. In many ways a novel at the crossroads, of cultures – the Empire and the post-colonial, of traditions – Christian and Hindu, of political orientations – liberal, Marxist, and feminist, *The God of Small Things* may be read as marking the transition between two significant paradigms of thought, the post-modern and the metamodern. The significance and meaning of metamodernism will be discussed in the following chapter.
Towards a Metamodern Literature

The future belongs not so much to the pure thinkers who are content – at best – with optimistic or pessimistic slogans; it is a province, rather, for reflective practitioners who are ready to act on their ideas. Warm hearts allied with cool heads seek a middle way between the extremes of abstract theory and personal impulse. (Toulmin, *Return to Reason* 214)

Chapter Abstract

Metamodernism is mentioned in contexts as diverse as literary theory, art criticism, social theory, and political science. However, the possibilities of the concept and its implications have not been sufficiently explored. This chapter presents a few occurrences of the term *metamodernism* and some of its proposed meanings, while referring to Tournier’s and Roy’s novels as illustrative texts. The preoccupation with self-transformation and the search for a balance and unity of the self, as well as the ambition to innovate while maintaining continuity with literary traditions, recommend Tournier’s *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* and Roy’s *The God of Small Things* as instances of metamodernism in literature. Metamodernism is defined as a paradigm of engaging in a dialogue with other paradigms, past or present; a paradigm that reflects the self’s evolution towards its self-realisation, and the sublime and the beautiful; a paradigm that goes beyond both modernism and postmodernism – in the sense of transcending them while integrating some of their characteristics.
1. The Metamodern *Zeitgeist*

This study springs from a perception that the debate about postmodernism has waned, and globalisation has risen as “master signifier of our time” (Huyssen 1). In the realm of theory a new term, *metamodernism*, has slowly gained ground.\footnote{191 A term search for *metamodernism* results in over 60,000 sites, and since 2010 *Metamodernism* has its own Wikipedia page and a series of related sites, all of which are independent of this thesis or its author. This was true as of October 2013. On November 28, 2013, the *Exploring Metamodernism* WordPress blog was created. The blog contains around five pages, most of which posts by myself or the blog’s readers.} Metamodernism is related to globalisation in that both imply some sort of integration: an integration of psychic agencies is sought in metamodernism, while globalisation is predicated upon an integration of resources and activities.\footnote{192 “Globalization is a process that encompasses the causes, course, and consequences of transnational and transcultural integration of human and non-human activities” (1). See Nayef.R.F. Al-Rodhan and Gérard A. Stoudmann, *“Definitions of Globalization: A Comprehensive Overview and a Proposed Definition,” Program on the Geopolitical Implications of Globalization and Transnational Security. Geneva: Centre for Security Policy* (2006).} However the use of such different suffixes as “-ism” and “-isation” points to a distinction between a theory (an “ism”), and a process by means of which a certain situation or state of affairs comes into being (an “-isation”).

Accordingly, globalisation is the process by which the world becomes global, a global village.\footnote{193 See Herbert Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).} The postmodern city, in which the individual lives a secluded existence, organised by a bureaucratic apparatus, and sorely cut off from the rhythms of nature, contrasts with the global village, supposedly characterised not by individualism and fragmentation,\footnote{194 In *Postmodernism or the Logic of Late Capitalism* Frederick Jameson criticizes postmodernism from a Marxist stance, and talks of “the atomic fragmentation and individualism of capitalism” (379).} but by interconnections and a sense of community. As I hope to show below, metamodernism relates to aspects of globalisation in its search for the unity of the self, and for renewed connections with nature and one’s fellows.

Metamodernism may be regarded as the outcome of a gradual process of departure from, concomitant with re-crystallisations of, some of the values of modernity and postmodernity. Rationality is respected as in modernity, but dethroned from its position as the queen faculty; openness and flexibility are valued as in postmodernism, but not to the extreme that “everything goes” from the perspective of detachment and irony. A few of the uses of metamodernism are listed and discussed: Andre Furlani defined *metamodernism* as a literature of presence that arrived in the last stages of postmodernism, which is a literature of absence. Stephen Feldman explored the inadequacy of “liberalism” and “conservatism” in philosophy, proposing the term *metamodernism* as a clarifier. Anthony Elliott slights *metamodernism* as
one of many social theory labels, while I define it as a new cultural paradigm characterised by interconnections. Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker’s definition of *metamodernism* provides an interesting admixture of postmodern and metamodern elements. These uses and definitions are analysed below.

2. Some Instances of the Term *Metamodernism*

Metamodernism is an emerging paradigm characterised by an overriding search, by artists, average people, and societies, for self-realisation and for a balanced fulfilling existence. It is a paradigm for recovering and reestablishing tradition(s), and establishing an ongoing dialogue with previous paradigms of thought— as opposed to the modernist rejection of traditions and the postmodernist ironic detachment from previous texts. Metamodernist works and practices seek to reinstate people’s concerns for the ethical, as opposed to the excessive attention paid to the epistemological in the wake of the Enlightenment, and to the ontological in the postmodern era.

Metamodernism is a paradigm in which connection with fellow humans, and indeed with all sentient beings and with nature, is valued – in contrast with (post)modernism’s emphasis on individualism and isolated experience. Metamodernism is realised in the telling of stories that act as cohesive agents, and are inclined to grant meaning to experience. Metamodernism appears in several significant contexts in literature, social science, philosophy, and the arts. This section will look at five occurrences of the term metamodernism, and discuss several of the characteristic features they may share.

2.1. Early Postmodernism and the Literature of Presence

In 2002, Andre Furlani used the term *metamodernism* in his article “Postmodernism and After: Guy Davenport,” to characterise the work of painter and writer Davenport (1927-2005) and several atypical postmodern writers associated with the Black Mountain school, including Charles Olson, Denise Levertov, Gary Snyder, Robert Duncan, and Robert Creeley. Levertov, a postmodernist whom Furlani quotes, would confess: “I long for poems of inner harmony in utter contrast to the chaos in which they exist” (724). This is a surprising statement coming from a poet who continues to be labelled as postmodernist. When not
succeeding to the temptation to create for entertainment alone, the postmodernists often lament the inescapable postmodern condition of alienation and detachment, rather than instantiate art as means of coping with it or overcoming it. While postmodernism postulates the world as incomprehensible and chaotic, and our understanding of it as limited and biased, condemned to continual revisions (as the failure of modernity’s grand narratives or all-encompassing theories indicates), poets like Levertov and Davenport, independently, see art and literature as “an intelligible world inside a largely unintelligible one” (724).

Charles Altieri indicates that the early postmodernists mentioned above conceive of poetic and literary creation “more as the discovery and the disclosure of numinous relationships within nature than as the creation of containing and structuring forms” (17). Although accurate and sound, Altieri’s characterisation “no longer coincides with what is loosely understood as postmodernism, in which notions of presence, immanence, and numinousness are regarded as wholly contingent language games (Wittgenstein’s Sprachspiele) masquerading as essences” (Furlani 710). This is because “[p]ostmodernist thinking in the years since the publication of Altieri’s pioneering study (in 1979) has largely repudiated his categories. The poetics of presence is now viewed as a modernist fata morgana” (710).

I agree with Furlani that such categories as Altieri’s no longer apply to what we now commonly understand as postmodernism, but there is a sense in which the ideals of early posmodernists are not entirely outmoded. Altieri’s ideals – a poetics of presence, a restoration of harmony, promotion of ethical and psychological renewal, aspiration towards immanence, and a search of the numinous in our relationship within nature – still speak to us through texts such as Tournier’s and Roy’s. Their novels go beyond postmodern relativity and suspicion with metanarratives that reinstate confidence in meaningful existence, and enhance

195 Jameson thinks that art is redefined in postmodernism “as a source of sheer pleasure and gratification” (qtd. in Furlani 724).
196 Numinous means spiritually elevated, sublime, in this context; another of its denotations points to a sense of presence. The OED gives three meanings of numinous: “1. Of or relating to a numen; revealing or indicating the presence of a divinity; divine, spiritual. 2. Filled with or characterized by a sense of a supernatural presence: a numinous place. 3. Spiritually elevated; sublime.” Yet spiritually elevated has nothing to do here, as is often conceived, with retracting one’s senses and leading an ascetic life. Quite the contrary, the Black Mountain poets were far from being saintly in the sense of self-denial, while Tournier’s Robinson “learns to accept all of himself” (Petit 19): he reaches his potentiality and cherishes in the resulting state. A good visual representation of the soul’s experience of the numinous is Blake’s “The Dance of Albion” or “Glad Day” (1796), now in the British Museum, wherein a naked Albion – symbolising his having forsaken artificial personas – exults in his new awareness. This fact is indicated by the posture of the dancer – hands outstretched emitting energetic beams of light. Tournier describes Robinson’s experience of epiphany at the end of Vendredi in comparable terms.
the individual’s ability to perceive the numinous and communicate with one another, and across multifarious levels of existence.197

Furlani acknowledges that “inner harmony” in poetry and art as “an intelligible world” is not what we associate these days with the postmodern, thus establishing these poets as a group apart within the postmodernist paradigm. Moreover, these writers seem atypical because they fail to share in the widespread postmodern repudiation of the modernist notion of the sublime. Furlani explains:

The discontinuities and gaps of Davenport’s asyndetically arranged narratives imply sublime recesses of extralinguistic meaning. Rather than calling into question aesthetic and even linguistic access to truth, such a strategy aspires to at least limited access to it. (724)

For Davenport, truth is non-linguistic and associated with the sublime. Similarly, in The Cultural Turn Fredric Jameson equates the aspiration for the sublime with the search for truth, and he laments “the end of the Sublime, the dissolution of art’s vocation to reach the Absolute” in postmodernism (84), wherein “Beauty and the decorative” return “in the place of the older modern Sublime” (81).198 Furlani observes that, although authors like Davenport and Levertov were active during the sixties (supposedly the heyday of postmodernism), their texts fit awkwardly under the postmodern label. I shall return to Furlani’s use of the term metamodernism after a few considerations of the sublime and the beautiful in the understanding of Burke, Woolstonecraft, and Blake.

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197 These aspects echo Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy, in which the resurgence of the Dionysian reiterates the “blissful satisfaction of the primordial unity” (18), the possibility that “hearing this gospel of universal harmony, each person feels himself to be not simply united, reconciled or merged with his neighbour, but quite literally one with him” (18), and allowing nature to be reconciled “with her lost son, humankind” (18). Nevertheless, the transformations rendered in metamodern texts differ from what Nietzsche envisages as being the result of “Dionysiac drunkenness” (19). Whereas self-awareness is an important ingredient of the transformation occurring in metamodern fiction, Nietzsche’s “magic of the Dionysiac” (18) implies “self-abandon” (19), and is analogous with “intoxication” (17). Moreover, metamodern transformations spring from an integration of the opposites, whereas Nietzsche’s Übermensch deliberately cultivates the tension between the Apollonian and the Dionysiac. Furthermore, while Nietzsche’s triumphalist vision envisaged that “the millions sink into the dust, shivering in awe” of the Übermensch (18), metamodern fiction portrays a transformation undergone by everyone, as in Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt’s 2006 film Odette Toulemonde. Also, Tournier’s Robinson evokes not only a single nation (as Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe), but the whole modern (Western) humankind.

198 However, Furlani hastens to add: “Jameson’s view contrasts with that of Jean-François Lyotard, in whose formulation of the postmodern the sublime continues to operate” (724).
2.2. Considerations of the Sublime and the Beautiful

The understanding of beauty and the sublime as mutually exclusive has its roots in the thinking of Edmund Burke, who associated beauty with small things that engender love, and the sublime with admiration or awe inspired by greatness. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke based this distinction between beauty and the sublime upon linguistic arguments:

A great beautiful thing is a manner of expression scarcely ever used; but that of a great ugly thing is very common. There is a wide difference between admiration and love. The sublime, which is the cause of the former, always dwells on great objects, and terrible; the latter on small ones, and pleasing; we submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us; in one case we are forced, in the other we are flattered, into compliance. In short, the ideas of the sublime and the beautiful stand on foundations so different, that it is hard, I had almost said impossible, to think of reconciling them in the same subject, without considerably lessening the effect of the one or the other upon the passions. (182)

Small and pleasant things are said to be beautiful, while the awe-inspiring (because great or terrible) are sublime. From the use of the beautiful and sublime in language, i.e., from the objects they are usually associated with, Burke deduces characteristics of the objects they describe, rather than characteristics of the concepts of the beautiful and the sublime. Beauty is a quality of small and pleasant things, which inspire love, while the sublime is linked with great things and inspires admiration (in the sense of wonder or awe).[^199]

Woolstonecraft argued in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that Burke discussed aesthetic categories in deeply gendered terms, as he linked beauty with feminine qualities, and the sublime was seen as evoking the masculine. In their introduction to the *Vindication*, McDonald and Scherf underscore these equations: “The sublime is masculine; the beautiful, 

[^199]: For Johann Winckelmann, an influential eighteenth century art critic, “beauty was a matter of inner proportions” (see Bauman, “The Challenge of Hermeneutics,” 126). A similarly neoclassical stance is taken by Blake, who “aligned himself with the neoclassical school’s emphasis on outline and the human figure, and rejected the complex baroque movements, rococo decoration, strong coloring, and Dutch-Flemish realism” (Mellor 103).
feminine; the sublime is associated with power, and it inspires respect, admiration, and even fear; the beautiful is associated with weakness, and it inspires love” (16).

Woolstonecraft strips the sublime and the beautiful of their gender bias and equates them with truth and simplicity, respectively, and then with each other: “truth, in morals, has always appeared to me as the essence of the sublime, and, in taste, simplicity the only criterion of the beautiful” (16). Then, simplicity and the beautiful become identical for Woolstonecraft, while “simplicity in works of taste, is but a synonymous word for truth” (Macdonald and Scherf 61). Woolstonecraft undermines the hierarchy inherent in equating the sublime with the masculine and the beautiful with the feminine, and, in contrast to Burke, collapses the sublime and the beautiful into one: “This identification allows [her] to combine beauty with conventionally masculine qualities” (16), and to show that “there is a beauty in virtue, a charm in order,” as she associates the “feminine qualities” of “gentleness of manners, forbearance and long-suffering” with the sublime (143). The attribution of gendered identity to aesthetic categories is more than a curiosity, as it is relevant to the way clichés or the propensity towards challenging clichés function.

As a theorist of the postmodern who underscores the virtues of the decorative, Fredric Jameson ignores Woolstonecraft’s attempt at unifying these categories and, like Burke, believes that the sublime and beautiful are irreconcilable (84). There is indeed a sense in which the sublime and the beautiful may be linked more with a period term or a cultural trend than with another, as Jameson suggests: the sublime with modernism; beauty – or, at least its commodification as the decorative – with postmodernism.

However, not all authors of different times agree that the sublime – together with the search for the absolute, which the sublime often accompanies – and the beautiful are mutually exclusive. Blake was one such dissenter. Unlike Burke’s analytic thinking, Blake’s approach is synthetic. He does not see beauty and the sublime are irreconcilable. Nevertheless, mere decoration based on no subtler reality, and devoid of vision or enthusiasm, irritated him, for he saw it as shallow.

For example, Sir Joshua Reynolds and his impeccable technique in his exquisite true-to-life portraits would kindle almost anyone’s admiration but Blake’s. This is due to irreconcilable aesthetic views: while the beautiful rested for Reynolds on impeccable

200 One of the Romantics most often invoked after World War II, initially in popular culture, and then increasingly in the academic discourse, Blake may be considered an emblematic figure of the postwar consciousness. This is so for two reasons: first, his programmatic refusal to conform to conventions and put up with social injustice and inequality as well as puritan moral attitudes inspired many a modern and postmodern author. Second, his attempt to understand the human subject and to map soul’s search for fulfilment seem to answer to a need felt more imperatively in the wake of the upheavals of World War Two.

201 See the remarks about Blake’s attitude to analytical reasoning and “the crucifying cruelties of Demonstration” (J 25: 55) in the introductory chapter.
execution, for Blake only that which sprang from visionary or inspired understanding counted as beautiful.

For Blake, the beautiful derives its worth from an association with the sublime, and is the expression of a search for the absolute. When deprecates “mere enthusiasm,” Blake’s spurs out: “Damn the Fool!” (Keynes 931). Blake sees the decorative, which is not the result of exuberance or enthusiasm, as barren. For “Exuberance is Beauty!” he declares in Plate ten of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1791). For Blake, the sublime and the beautiful coexist in harmony, and are complemented by proportion and pathos: “The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals Beauty, the Hand & Feet Proportion” (Keynes 152). Thus, beauty and the sublime – the aesthetic feeling, and the awe-inspiring (or the search for and longing to reach and express the absolute) – are not incompatible for Blake.

Similarly, beauty and the sublime are not mutually exclusive in metamodern literature, as we shall see. Perhaps two instances which combine the beautiful and the sublime are the epiphanic denouement of Tournier’s Vendredi, and, in Roy’s novel, the moment when the Velutha-Ammu couple derive joy from the minimalist universe of insects and vegetation. Beauty and the sublime harmonise in metamodernism on the journey of the self towards transformation and fulfilment – not any transformation, but one that comes with experience, enthusiasm, and epiphany. Such transformation constitutes a step forward in rearticulating the spirit, an impulse which Charles Taylor regards as stifled in our culture (520).

In what follows, I shall continue looking at several occurrences of the term metamodernism, at what different authors mean by it, and at the ways in which their uses of

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202 First used in English around 1600, enthusiasm derives from the French entousiasme, which in turn originates from the Greek (via Latin) enthousiasmos, which means “divine inspiration.” The verb enthousiazein denotes to “be inspired or possessed by a god, be rapt, be in ecstasy,” while the adjective entheos, “divinely inspired, possessed by a god,” derives from en “in” + “theos,” god. So enthusiasm connotes a state of being with or inspired by God, which is what it probably meant for Blake as well.

203 I owe Professor Ackerley the observation that, indeed, beauty and the sublime are not incompatible either “for much of the modernist aesthetic, with its [Joycean] emphasis upon particularity, and (sometimes) what he calls ‘the aesthetics of the shabby.’”

204 I believe that it is correct to say that Romantic epiphanies are grounded in sensibility – both as sensation (the perception of nature) and as emotion related to the perception of beauty (see William Wordsworth’s “The Solitary Reaper”) –, while the modernist epiphany is grounded in the intellect; it stands for (or brings about) a sudden understanding, as in James Joyce’s definition of epiphany in relation to The Dubliners: “Joyce’s epiphany, even though it retains the quality of a spiritual revelation, expresses a realistic intention that the young artist had learnt from Flaubert and Ibsen. It is the culmination of the process of cognition and a moment of all-inclusive truth that the writer has to record objectively” (Valente, qtd. in Sabatini 18). Although bearing some similitude to these types of epiphany, in the sense that it reveals previously unrealised truth, the metamodern epiphany is grounded in the integration of reason and sensibility. This integration reveals the spirit (as the reality which underlies reason and emotions, but is not controlled by either), and stands for a revelation of the sublimity and beauty of a sunrise or a micro-universe. See William Wordsworth and Cecil Day Lewis, The Solitary Reaper (LCC Central School of Arts and Craft, 1910).
the word converge towards or diverge from the definition of metamodernism in this thesis. (Wordsworth and Lewis)

2.3. From Furlani’s Metamodernism as Literature of Presence to Philosophia Perennis

After Furlani notes that a “designation such as postmodernist can only distort the work of writers like Davenport, Olson, Levertov, Snyder, Duncan or Creeley, who are better viewed as metamodernists” (713), he proceeds to explain his concept of metamodernism in its constituent parts: the prefix “meta” and the Latin root “modo” in modernism. Furlani aptly explains the meaning of “meta”:

The English prefix meta- relevantly denotes derivation, resemblance, succession and change. The Greek preposition from which it derives has an especially pertinent range of meanings: with the accusative, μετά [meta] means “after” or “next”; with the dative, “among,” “besides,” or “over and above”; with the genitive, “by means of” or “in common with.” (713)

Furlani’s concept of metamodernism differs from mainstream post-modernism in that “μετά denotes the continuity apparent in the metamodernists’ effort to succeed the modernists,” whereas “post- suggests severance and repudiation” (713). Furlani’s analysis thus places him squarely within the postmodernist paradigm, albeit in the late stages of postmodernism when modernist values were being revisited. Furlani notes the avowed indebtedness of early postmodernist poets to modernists ones, and remarks (once again remaining within the scope of postmodernism) that “[m]etamodernism is a departure [from modernism] as well as a perpetuation” (713).

Although Furlani’s position is late postmodern, and his use of the term metamodernism is very narrow, and does not suggest a new cultural paradigm, his analysis accords with the understanding of metamodernism in this thesis as the search for the sublime and the beautiful, as well as the concept of a literature of presence and of harmony. However, the metamodernism of this thesis is proffered as a new cultural paradigm, following after postmodernism and insisting on the idea of the becoming of the self, inclusive of the related transformations in relation with the other – in the sense outlined by Luce Irigaray, whereby the self grows in its interaction with the other. Metamodernism’s ethical concerns, as well as the search for balance, wisdom, and fulfilment as an avenue for self-transformation, link with
some of the tenets of modernism as set out in Aldous Huxley’s *Perennial Philosophy*. Huxley explains the concept of *perennial philosophy* in his introduction:

Philosophia perennis – the phrase was coined by Leibniz; but the thing – the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man’s final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being – the thing is immemorial and universal. (vii)

Huxley believes that elements of a philosophy that postulates the transformation of the soul, so that it assumes its spiritual identity, can be identified in every culture. He quotes Blake in relation to the connection between cleansing one’s sensory capacities and an ability to perceive infinity, by which the self becomes aware of the spiritual unity of reality. Huxley notes that for those who experience self-transformation or transmutation “the sense of being a separate ego” tones down:

Reality is no longer perceived quoad nos [as it is revealed to us through the senses and organized by the intellect], but as it is in itself [i.e. quoad se]. In Blake’s words, “If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would be seen as it is, infinite.” By those who are pure in heart and poor in spirit, appearance and reality, time and eternity are experienced as one and the same. (189)

By “poor in spirit” Huxley means those people whose ego or “I” consciousness is open to a perception of the continuity and unity of the immanent and the transcendent. For both Huxley and Blake, a perception of the infinite seems possible, inasmuch as it is mediated by visionary experience. It is facilitated by de-emphasising rationality (which is itself “poor in spirit”), and

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205 Nonetheless Huxley is not a typically modernist writer, less so in his later years when he became more “mystical.” I owe this nuancing of my assertions regarding Huxley’s modernism to Professor Ackerley. This illustrates the difficulty of ascribing period terms to authors, and even to particular texts, as will be shown shortly.

206 I am grateful to Dr. Simon Ryan for drawing attention to this similarity of intent between my understanding of metamodernism and some of the tenets of the perennial philosophy. However, it has to be noted that Huxley is not a typically modernist writer, less so in his later years when he became more “mystical.” I owe this nuancing of my assertions regarding

207 Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) explains the *quaod nos/quaod se* difference in *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 1: Prolegomena* (30-31).
by paying attention to the things of the heart. It is worth noting, though, that whereas Huxley’s text and the authors he quotes propose core principles of the “perennial philosophy,” metamodern literature makes the transition from theorising to enacting or actualising such principles. For example, Tournier’s Robinson experiences an epiphanic sense of being one with his island, while Roy’s Estha and Rahel eventually undergo a unification of the self similar to that envisaged by the *philosophia perennis* (Huxley 189). Ammu and Velutha learn to live in the present experienced as suspended portions of eternity, and derive a feeling of the sublime from their emotions and the small things of nature.

Furlani’s use of the term metamodernism coincides temporally (i.e., the 1960s) with early postmodernism, and is invoked only in relation with the writers mentioned above (Davenport, Olson, Levertov, Snyder, Duncan, and Creeley). Furlani stops short of universalising the concept. By contrast, the understanding of metamodernism in this thesis captures a broader attempt to overcome the limitations of both modernism (e.g., the grand narratives that fail to recognise diverse perspectives) and postmodernism (e.g., the fragmentation, detachment, and sarcasm that are associated with the postmodernists). This thesis assumes a position from which an integrative perspective is possible.

Polyphony was appropriately and radically encouraged during postmodernism (Bakhtin), but there was the risk in postmodernism that the scores of previously muted voices, clamoring for attention, might result in cacophony and discord. In metamodernism, this risk is averted since the modernist and postmodernist “theories” complement each other. Modernism and postmodernism are notoriously slippery concepts, but are they as different as some critics want to think?

In *Five Faces of Modernity*, Calinescu sees both modernism and postmodernism as mere facets of the overriding phenomenon of modernity. Indeed, it is often difficult to ascribe to any given author or text a certain label, period, or trend. James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are regarded as modernist works, but they are also presciently postmodern

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208 This integrative perspective is a stance from which cultural or literary trends such as Romanticism, modernism, postmodernism etc. appear as steps in an evolutionary process. This evolutive process involves the individual or personal as well as the collective or societal. Accordingly, Jung insists that individuation is everyone’s province, while Hassan proposes that postmodernism is a step on the “road to the spiritual unification of humankind” (McHale 4).

209 The concept of polyphony is inspired from Mikhail Bakhtin’s work, and is often used in relation with postmodernism, though he himself was more of a modernist than a postmodernist. Some of the voices which became more vocal during postmodernism are – among others – those of the feminists, the ethnically and sexually different, and other groups marginalized by social practice and prejudice. Interestingly, the recognition of these previously ignored voices follows after the multiple voices in one’s consciousness have been acknowledged and allowed expression in texts by modernist authors such as Virginia Woolf or William Faulkner (see Yoshimura 2006), or by critics like Bakhtin (especially in his discussion of Dostoevsky’s polyphony). See Ikuko Yoshimura, “Rosa’s Voice in Absalom, Absalom!,” *The Faulkner Journal of Japan* 8 (2006), September 7, 2009. <http://www.isc.senshu-u.ac.jp/~thb0559/No8/Yoshimura2006.htm >.

210 cf. “Interconnections.”
in their use of parody and pastiche. The heavy reliance of *Finnegans Wake* on connections and integrative world views is a forerunner of the synthesis captured by metamodernism.211

Ideas and periods overlap more than might be supposed: metamodernism may be esecoming tablished in the early twenty-first century, but is postmodernism extinct? Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that metamodernism, postmodernism, and modernism coexist, and that metamodernism’s core analytic value is to welcome the synthesis that draws the best features from its predecessors. For instance, Tournier’s *Vendredi* is postmodern in the sense of revaluing the tradition of the novel and that of the Robinsonade, but it also addresses the issues of solitude and solitary meditation, in opening towards metamodernism with its stories of transformation.

In *The Dismembering of Orpheus*, Ihab Hassan offers a contrasting table of the characteristics that he attributes to modernism versus postmodernism, which somehow suggests that these are stable categories (267-68). Nonetheless, Hassan adds a hurried disclaimer to the effect that “the dichotomies [the] table represents remain insecure, equivocal. For differences shift, defer, even collapse; concepts in any one vertical column are not all equivalent; and inversions and exceptions, in both modernism and postmodernism, abound” (269). Metamodernism itself is diverse and varied; it emphasises somewhat different attributes with respect to different texts, without being a shifting, slippery concept. For example, the longing for unity is constant, yet it can assume countless forms.

Metamodernism is in many ways an attempt to interrogate the modernist/postmodernist inheritance – and to go beyond it. One consequence concerns the costs of investing too heavily in rationality – i.e., the limitations of rationalist judgements devoid of emotional or spiritual content. Scott Lash suggests that determinate judgement and logical meaning have taken over our world. But “there are meanings more important and less determinate than logical and market place calculations” (Lash 235). Matters of the heart – to paraphrase the 1988 documentary on Jung213 – cannot be contained by reason. For instance, “we cannot understand the death of those close to us, births, long striven for life goals, falling in love, our children’s joys and crises through the determinate meaning of logical statements” (Lash 235). Lash believes that “transcendental or existential meaning” cannot be achieved by means of logic or reason. On the contrary, Lash proposes in a manner reminiscent of Roy and Blake, that “aesthetic or reflective judgement presupposes [...] that

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211 More about connections in *Finnegans Wake* in my article “Bootstrapping Finnegans Wake.”
212 By determinate judgment Lash means “judging and organizing with fixed rules” (2, qtd in Berry 20).
the path to [transcendental and existential] meanings is through the particular, through the eminently trivial, through everyday cultural artifacts and habitual forms of life” (Lash 235). These aesthetic judgements of the sublime or the beautiful could counterbalance the dominant “determinate judgement” and “bridge the sphere of ‘nature’ or necessity – including sensation, the imagination and the understanding – on the one hand, with the sphere of freedom on the other” (234). Aesthetic judgements do not necessarily separate – they can also bridge.

Nonetheless, as Lash notes in a tone that resembles Roy’s, this world of small things, of “the particular,” “the eminently trivial,” “everyday cultural artifacts and habitual forms of life” (235) sometimes appears to have been hijacked by “determinate judgements.” Technology and the instrumentalisation of nature have played an important role in the taking over of reality by determinate judgements: “The trouble in our age of ‘technology’ […] is that the world of objects and death itself comes increasingly under the sway of determinate judgement and logical meaning. […] Worse, we come increasingly to encounter the particular, the cultural artifacts of sensation and experience themselves as already instrumentalised, as already under the spell of determinate judgement” (Lash 235). Aesthetic judgements, on the other hand, are the means by which the infinite (or the awe-inspiring) can be experienced and existential meaning arrived at, not directly, but through the mediation of imagination or sensation: “When such experience [of the infinite] is mediated by forms, by the imagination, by the imaginary, we are talking about judgements of the beautiful; when they are mediated by sensation outside of forms, these are judgements of the sublime” (Lash 236).

To paraphrase Lash, metamodernism, with its insistence on imagination as a means of experiencing “the infinite” and gaining “access to existential or transcendental meaning” (236), captures artists’ attempts to overcome the cul-de-sacs of instrumental reason.

2.3.1. Theories as -isms

214 Emily Dickinson expressed a similar position in her poem “Tell all the truth but tell it slant.” Dickinson insists that the poet, artist, or reader, should only tell the truth, and should tell all of the truth (“Tell all the truth”), not half-truths. But truth should be told indirectly, gradually (“but tell it slant”); one should come at truth from an angle, from a perspective that the reader/interlocutor could understand and relate to. “Success” in presenting the truth only comes when the truth is approached from a multitude of perspectives, in a circuitous way (“Success in Circuit lies”). Bare truth can shock or blind; people would either not understand it or be overwhelmed by it, as it is “Too bright for our infirm Delight.” But truth that is told with kindness, with the reader in mind, (“As lightning to the children eased/ With explanation kind”) can enlighten; it will “dazzle gradually” to reveal eventually “The truth’s superb surprise.” For Dickinson, like for artists writing from a metamodern sensibility, there is a truth or truths to be presented or at least searched for.
Furlani’s use of the word metamodernism fails to take into account the important suffix -ism, which designates a doctrine or a system attached to a cultural or literary trend, or reality.²¹⁵ More than labels attached to living phenomena, nouns ending in -ism are the expression of an inclination to classify, outline, and delimit, which has been inherited from the Enlightenment and which unavoidably shapes one’s approach to the world. Such labels may be useful didactic tools for instance, but occasionally they transform from servants into masters. They spring from a general-human longing for certainties, from a hope to organise the world, to make sense of it by means of reason.²¹⁶ Reason has helped conquer nature and the world through colonisation and the elaboration of ideologies and theories (“-isms”), and has made the unknown familiar by charting it – but sometimes it turns its advocates into slaves, and leads to results contrary to its goals.

2.3.2. Rationalising as Alienation

Reason as a human faculty is not the enemy in this thesis, but rationality (the use to which reason is put, its functionality) taken to extremes is. By this I mean rationality that is out of balance, not counterpoised by positive emotions, among which is the care for the other in its multifarious forms. In Return to Reason, Toulmin distinguishes between the value-free, “positivist” rationality of science based on formal argument, and the value-laden reasonableness of narratives, which are grounded on substantive argumentation (5, 15, 16). Rationality produces de-contextualised abstractions, whereas reasonableness is employed to make sense of particular situations (16-17).

After the cinema-lobby episode, Roy’s character Estha rationalises his condition and persuades himself that he has fallen from the heaven of unconditional motherly love to a world of love by regimented degrees – a love that is rationalised (or conditioned by reasons) and apportioned. As a result he distances himself from his sister Rahel, shirking the unity of self, that they experienced together until then: “Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and limits have appeared like a team of trolls on their separate horizons.” He fears the world as a place that he no longer comprehends, and he mindlessly tries to prevent his universe from...
crumbling by running away along the river. His reasons are wrong, and so is his reasoning. He thinks he is no longer loved completely, and he deems himself less lovable after he suffers from sexual abuse. His rational foresight (‘it’s better to be prepared’) is not informed by wisdom, nor by an understanding of the effects his actions might have on other people. Instead of restoring order, his reasoned efforts catalyse the dissolution of his universe: the escape by boat does nothing to solve his alienation, but will further aggravate it after Sophie’s drowning and his extended family’s retaliation. Reason devoid of wisdom and care proves catastrophic for the self and for others.

Similarly, Tournier’s Robinson, fearing the unpredictable, dreads madness and strives towards safety by building institutions, by organising the natural world and his existing knowledge. He tries to grasp reality rationally: he subdues what he deems inferior or different, as well as the other, Vendredi, who personifies the softness that a hardwired brain cannot comprehend. While expanding outwardly, towards conquering, charting or possessing the island, Robinson ignores the emotions which would embellish his rationalist efforts and render them meaningful. However, the feminine island Speranza inspires the love of her master, and temporarily saves him from the excessive dryness of his extreme rationality. Nonetheless, Robinson’s love for the island does not provide the hoped-for fulfilment. Prior to the explosion, Robinson is the unhappy master of a world he only partially comprehends. But emotions exchanged with his fellow human Vendredi will eventually prove to be a more valid, even if impermanent, source of joy and beauty. The fragility of fulfilment through emotions alone is established by Vendredi’s defection.

Following Vendredi’s defection on the Whitebird, another psychic agency that could be called the “spirit” manifests itself in Robinson’s feelings of the sublime and his awareness of presence. Both Roy’s Estha and Tournier’s Robinson, in their attempts to alter their universes, are motivated by fear coupled with a need for certainties, a hope to restore the world to manageable and predictable categories and/or institutions. Their attempts echo Descartes’ search for certainty by outlining a method of apprehending the universe rationally. But Estha’s and Robinson’s searches for certainty bring about suffering: in Estha’s case, that of his own and his family’s, and in Robinson’s case, that of Vendredi. Eventually, the pain

217 Any reference to the spirit in this paragraph is to something quite different from the I-consciousness, the ego, the intellect or the rational mind. The spirit refers, instead, to one of the subtle elements, which together with body and psyche make up a trilogy. Huxley talks of the existence of a “permanent soul” (38), and deplores the departure of the European thought, “from before Aristotle to the present day” from an outlook which would recognize the existence of an “immanent and transcendent Spirit” as the ground of existence (38, 51, 187). Similarly, Robinson’s spiritual experience at the end of Vendredi connects to a pre-modern tradition, which is occasionally revived in some alchemical and mystical texts. Some of these texts are discussed in my essay, “Foretelling Metamodernity: Realisation of the Self in the Rosary of Philosophers, William Blake’s Jerusalem and Andrei Codrescu’s Messiah.”
that rationality devoid of wisdom causes is assuaged through the mediation of emotions, by opening the self towards interaction with the other. The other is represented as Vendredi and then Jaan in Robinson’s case, and by Rahel and “the Audience, the Big Man,” in Estha’s case. These “others” are granted admission within the self. Emotions exchanged with a fellow human eventually prove, as in Vendredi’s teachings, to be a more valid, though not permanent, source of joy and beauty. Rationality in isolation alienates the self from itself, from its world, and from the other – but emotions provide a possible return route, as the spirit provides a more permanent solution.

2.4. Metamodernism and Social Theory:

Anthony Elliott and the Reflexive Scanning of Imagination

One year after Furlani’s study, Anthony Elliott used the term “metamodern” in relation to social theory in Critical Visions: New Directions in Social Theory, to lament the inability of twentieth-century concepts to comprehend contemporary social process (2). This incapacity is due to the complexity of the twenty-first century: “ours is the era of globalisation, reflexive metamodernism, and postmodernisation” (152). Elliott qualifies the term metamodernism with the adjective “reflexive,” and refers to a self-contemplating attitude on the part of (post)modernism – i.e., modernism reflecting on itself.

The meaning of the prefix meta- in Elliott’s analysis is self-referential. He explores concepts of the self and citizenship in relation to a discussion of “the Enlightenment’s privileging rationality and individuality,” as well as providing concurrent critiques of modernity and modernism from a postmodernist perspective. The model Elliott proposes is a composite one, in which modernity and postmodernisation coexist: “postmodernisation does not spell the end of the project of modernity” (152). But clearly, Elliott remains squarely within the postmodernist tradition.

For Elliott, “postmodernity is rather modernity without illusions – as social practice is increasingly geared to reflect back upon itself, to examine its guiding assumptions and aspirations” (152). Identity formation or transformation is at the core of both modernity and postmodernity, Elliot believes:
Much talk is these days about identity: identity and its problems, the transformation of identity, and, perhaps more fashionably, the end or death of the subject. Nowadays notions of identity seem inevitably to capsize into either modern or postmodern forms of theorizing. In modern theorizing the catchword is that of “project,” in postmodern theorizing, it’s that of “fragmentation.” (153)

For Elliott, modernity and postmodernity seem more like modes of being in the world than period terms. They are “life strategies” (152) that present different ways of coping with or making sense of the world. Modernity is preoccupied with a project of edifying the self, where free choice supplants the role of traditions, while postmodernity presents the self as fragmented:

The “project” of modernity is that of identity building. By identity building [is meant] the building of conceptions of oneself, of one’s personal and social location, of one’s position in an order of things. It is such restless self-activity that replaces the ascriptions of tradition and custom. Freed from the rigidities of inherited identities human beings are set afloat in the troubled waters of modernity – in its unpredictability and flux, its global transformations, cultural migrations, and communication flows. (153)

The modern self is expected to be feverishly at work, edifying itself, organising its world, colonising the future. Individuals are supposed “to get on with the task and achieve,” contributing thus to the “order-building, state-constructing, nation-enframing ambitions of modernity.” According to Anthony Giddens, two of the defining features of modernity are “life-planning” and “colonising the future” (cited in Elliott at 153).

The problem with this model of self-construction, as Elliott comments, is that the “modern craving of identity maintenance or identity preservation results in a dramatic limiting of life stories, the denigration of meaning in the present and its projection into the future.” The modern adventure, Elliott believes (with Freud), is a drive for order, doomed to a repetition of the same (154), for the self that cannot find fulfilment in the present is marked by lack and discontent, and aspires to an identity that it can never reach. The identity that modernity tries to edify is an ego identity, as Elliott observes: the aspiration for “ego strength
and autonomy.” By contrast, the postmodern self is a minimalist self, drained of “ego strength and autonomy” (154). Unlike the modern self, that lives life as a project, the postmodern self “focuses on the experience of living one day at a time.” As opposed “to the ideal identity (complete, finished, self identical)” sought by modernity, the postmodern celebrates “cultural heterogeneity, difference,” and openness (154). Postmodern reality is comprehended as “a succession of minor emergencies.” This perception of reality exposes a major flaw of the postmodern model: whereas modernity edified a future-orientated ego identity in which there was not much room for sensibility, the postmodern exacerbated negative emotions such as anxiety or concern:

Daily life, in the postmodern, becomes a matter of shifting anxieties and drifting concerns, always changing, always episodic. It is as if we live in a constant state of information overload. Crisis […] has become the norm. Living in a world of constant crisis means, necessarily, adjusting one’s emotional response levels. (155)

The information overload accentuates the emotional overload, and to cope, many choose to switch off their emotional barometer. Better float dry through the ever-changing flow of the postmodern world than drown under the overwhelming torrent of situations that require an emotional response. Elliott agrees: “There is [no one] who can attempt to monitor all that is going on, and any attempt to do so can only lead to psychic burn-out. So, players in the postmodern game of life develop an air of indifference and aloofness” (155).

There are not many illusions regarding the future, Elliott believes, as the only certainty of the disengaged postmodern self is the certitude that “all new improvements, social or technological, will only create further problems down the track” (155). The postmodern subject is “decentered,” perhaps because “postmodern life is episodic, a fractured and fracturing world, with little in the way for continuity or the making of meaningful connections” (155). However, not all is doom and gloom, as recent technology has allowed the imagination to flourish:

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218 The difference between postmodern heterogeneity and metamodern coexistence of competing theories is that while the postmodern self and the world it inhabits are fragmented, the metamodern self is cohesive, despite an acknowledgement of the diverse agencies of the self. Emotions, analytical thinking, contemplation, instincts are seen as manifestations of an underlying spirit in continuous dynamism and evolution (what Irigaray calls “becoming”).
we now have technology that ushers in the possibility of different kinds of pleasure, different thoughts and feelings, different imaginings. In psychical terms, the trademark of postmodernity is a radical “decentering” of the human subject: the limiting of omnipotence, not in Lacan’s sense of a separation of subject and Other, but rather in terms of a reflexive scanning of imagination. (Elliott 155)

Elliott regards imagination, as did Blake, as potentially redemptive for the self, as “heightened self-understanding of imagination and desire” aid “the fabrication of meaning in daily life.” The main advantage of the imagination unbound by tradition is its openness, its presumed “toleration of ambivalence and contingency.” However, Elliott cautions that there may be risks involved in proceeding “in cultural and personal life without absolute guidelines,” for he wonders whether the self-aware imagination is a solid enough ground for sustaining interpersonal relationships (155).

From Elliott’s postmodernist perspective, Estha’s attitude to tragedies is postmodern: he withdraws and becomes seemingly indifferent to what happens to him, while Rahel, with her experiments in “breasts and how much they hurt,” presents an interesting mix of imagination and thought experiment, a self-aware creativity akin to Elliott’s self-reflexive imagination. Elliott proposes the phrase, “the reflexive scanning of imagination,” to draw “attention to the complexity of fantasy itself, as a medium of self-construction and other-directedness.” Elliot’s phrases are more meaningful than simply pointing to the complexity of imagination, for they reconcile the modernist self-construction of identity and the postmodernist imagination and diversity.

Although he mentions “metamodernism” only in passing, and even then in the sense of self-reflexive modernism, Elliot’s position, his understanding of contemporary culture as a coexistence of paradigms, and especially his concept of “the reflexive scanning of imagination,” are relevant to the definition of metamodernism prevalent in this study. Elliott opens a discussion that relates to the aspect of metamodernism that acknowledges the limitations of both modernism’s reason-based approach and postmodernism’s unleashing of individualised emotions and imagination. That being said, Elliot’s analysis is far short of announcing a new cultural paradigm that reconciles modern and postmodern sensibilities. Elliot is squarely in the postmodern camp.

2.4.1. The Dissociation of Sensibility
In the next two sections I engage with two approaches to the issue of the polarised self: T.S. Eliot’s dissociation of sensibility (thought-emotions) in “The Metaphysical Poets,” and Nietzsche’s Apollonian and the Dionysian “reason-passions” in The Birth of Tragedy. Eliot believed that the gap between reason and emotions originated in the seventeenth century, while attempts to integrate sensibility and reason commence in the works of Romantic authors. In “The Metaphysical Poets,” he proposed that a dissociation of sensibility took place in the seventeenth century England between the intellectual and the emotive selves:

something [...] had happened to the mind of England between the time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson and Browning; it is the difference between the intellectual poet and the reflective poet. Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet’s mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man’s experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.

Poets establish connections, identify patterns, and see design in disparate phenomena or occurrences. Their perception may be unified, for their minds and hearts, reasoning faculties and emotions, talk to and modify one another (“A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility”). They do not pursue the prompts of the intellect to the disadvantage of sensibility.

Similarly, in Cosmopolis, Stephen Toulmin saw a radical cultural change in the transition between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, the former tolerant of ambiguities and uncertainty (evidenced by Montaigne or Shakespeare), the latter relentless in its search for certainty and clarity (32). Eliot also sees a chasm between poets who possessed an integrative “mechanism of sensibility” that would sublimate all experience, and poets for whom “ratiocination” and feeling appeared as opposing faculties:
We may express the difference by the following theory: The poets of the seventeenth century, the successors of the dramatists of the sixteenth, possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience. They are simple, artificial, difficult, or fantastic, as their predecessors were; no less, nor more than Dante, Guido Cavalcanti, Guinicelli, or Cino. In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered; and this dissociation, as is natural, was aggravated by the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and Dryden. Each of these men performed certain poetic functions so magnificently well that the magnitude of the effect concealed the absence of others. The language went on and in some respects improved; the best verse of Collins, Gray, Johnson, and even Goldsmith satisfies some of our fastidious demands better than that of Donne or Marvell or King. But while the language became more refined, the feeling became more crude. The feeling, the sensibility, expressed in the Country Churchyard (to say nothing of Tennyson and Browning) is cruder than that in the *Coy Mistress*.

Romantic sensibility, with its revolt against ratiocination, deepens the chasm, with only few timid attempts at bridging the gaps:

The second effect of the influence of Milton and Dryden followed from the first, and was therefore slow in manifestation. The sentimental age began early in the eighteenth century, and continued. The poets revolted against the ratiocinative, the descriptive; they thought and felt by fits, unbalanced; they reflected. In one or two passages of Shelley’s *Triumph of Life*, in the second *Hyperion* there are traces of a struggle toward unification of sensibility. But Keats and Shelley died, and Tennyson and Browning ruminated. (qtd. in Clay 134-35)

Thus, early seventeenth century poets possessed a type of sensibility that integrated experience and thought. But “between the time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson and Browning,” a mutation took place, which marks late seventeenth century poets as poets of dissociated sensibility; their sensibility and thought, feeling and

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219 I have added the bolding. 187
experience no longer integrate. Romantic poets revolt against the preeminence of thought in art, literature, and especially in poetry, but they are not very successful. Although somewhat tentative, Romantics’ attempts at unifying thought and sensibility point to a dissatisfaction with the hegemony of analyticity, or a prevalence of the Apollonian in Western culture.
2.4.2. The Apollonian and the Dionysian

Another attempt to acknowledge sensibility within a mainstream of reason belongs to Nietzsche, who, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, distinguishes between the Apollonian energy of order and reason and the Dionysian energies of passion. He believed that the society he lived in was governed by the Apollonian, and advocated a resurgence of the Dionysian. The Dionysian is desirable because (unlike the Apollonian, which limits and fragments the self, severing it from the other and from nature) it reiterates the “blissful satisfaction of the primordial unity” (18), the possibility that “hearing this gospel of universal harmony, each person feels himself to be not simply united, reconciled or merged with his neighbour, but quite literally one with him” (18), while allowing nature to be reconciled “with her lost son, humankind” (18).

A transformation should occur, Nietzsche proposes, allowing vital energies to manifest and encompass the soul in what he calls “Dionysiac drunkenness” (19). Nietzsche’s “magic of the Dionysiac” (18) implies “self-abandon” (19), analogous to “intoxication” (17), and stirs up a triumphalist vision in which “the millions sink into the dust, shivering in awe” of the *Übermensch* (18), who derives some of his strength from a cultivation of the tension between the Apollonian and the Dionysiac.

Although Dionysian forces of passion and play are vital, as they associate with joy in existence and creativity, as Nietzsche suggests in *The Birth of Tragedy*, they are potentially dangerous if overridden or overrated. Dionysian forces are creative and healthy if balanced with Apollonian energy, as Blake proposes in *Jerusalem*. Plate 100, where the two figures supporting the sun and the moon engage with equally significant, yet complementary

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220 In identifying the contrasting energies of order and of play, Nietzsche arguably continues a tradition of alchemical texts (such as *Rosary of Philosophers* and *Tabula Smaragdina*) which is also captured in Blake’s *Jerusalem*. However, Nietzsche fails to acknowledge the power of the union of opposites, which is implied in these texts.

221 Blake sees four major energies (Zoas) at play in culture, but his main oppositions are between imagination (Urthona/ Los) and reason (Urizen), which roughly correspond to the Dionysiac – Apollonian. All these energies are to be active and balanced in an “awakened” humankind:

> Then Albion stretch’d his hand into Infinitude,
> And took his Bow. Fourfold the Vision, for bright beaming Urizen
> Lay’d his hand on the South & took a breathing Bow of carved Gold,
> Luvah his hand stretch’d to the East & bore a Silver Bow bright shining,
> Tharmas Westward a Bow of Brass pure flaming richly wrought./
> Urthona Northward in thick storms a Bow of Iron terrible thundering./
> And the Bow is a Male & Female, & the Quiver of the Arrows of Love
> Are the Children of his Bow; a Bow of Mercy & Loving-kindness, laying
> Open the hidden Heart in Wars of mutual Benevolence, Wars of Love:
> And the Hand of Man grasps firm between the Male & Female Loves. (*J* 97: 6-15)
activities provide an evocative reminder. Conversely, the energies of logical order and stiff sobriety may be stifling and drying to the imagination, but in their absence the self is thrown into irrationality, instinct, and impulses, which can be equally destructive – as Robinson’s wallowing in the mud suggests in Tournier’s novel.

On the other hand, Estha’s life after his return in Roy’s novel indicates that the absence of emotions is equally unfruitful, and even damaging to the self. By excessively eulogising the Dionysian, critics like Jung and Huskinson believe, Nietzsche fails to acknowledge its dangers, nor does he emphasise the equal importance of both Dionysian and Apollonian energies, and the necessary balance or dynamic tension between the two, if a fulfilling and joyful life is sought. Tournier and Roy suggest that a unification of the self is possible and desirable to fixation in one agency or the other. Jung maintains that although Nietzsche “is actually at grips with the problem of the union of opposites” (120) in Thus Spake Zarathustra, and “understands that the Self is a reconciliation of opposites” and thus a solution to the problem (433), he (Nietzsche) ultimately fails in its actualisation (117), since “the Übermensch fails to unite the opposites” (Huskinson 108).

Closer to Blake’s and Jung’s perceptions than to Nietzsche’s, the metamodern element of integration differs from Romantic attempts at integration (especially Keats and Shelley’s, as T.S. Eliot suggests above) in that it provides a story of transformation, linking self-realisation with a realisation of the grounding of existence in an agency that is neither reason, nor emotion, but a unification, or rather a sublimation of the two into a third agency (which Huxley called the “spirit”) (38). This third agency surpasses dualism, and thus makes balance and unity possible as a state of dynamic equilibrium rather than a petrified stillness.

In proposing that the reflexive faculty and imagination could harmonise as “reflexive scannings of imagination,” Anthony Elliott proposes that the dissociation of sensibility perceived by T.S. Eliot, and the tension between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, can be bridged by the self-reflexive individual. Anthony Elliott underscores the centrality of imagination and creativity to social theory, and sees a renewal of critical social theory in

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222 I am grateful to Dr Ryan for noting that “in The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche does in fact acknowledge the need to avoid a total imbalance between the Apollonian and Dionysian. In Greek tragedy a measure of the Apollonian is still present and indeed necessary. He recognises that without the semblance of clarity and structure provided by the Apollonian mode, the embrace of Dionysian passion becomes destructive - nihilistic” (private communication). Julian Young, Friedrich Nietzsche : A Philosophical Biography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

223 This third agency of the soul is figured as either a young woman or a dove with its wings outspread in woodcut nineteenth of the Rosary of Philosophers (111) or as a hovering feminine figure in Plate twenty-five of Blake’s Jerusalem.
theoretical pluralism, which accommodates theories as diverse as post-structuralism and postmodernism, psychoanalysis and deconstruction. His position suggests that dissimilar theories not only coexist, but are necessary if a more comprehensive picture of reality is to be found.

Extrapolating from Anthony Elliott’s stance, paradigms as diverse as metamodernism and postmodernism need not cancel each other or be mutually exclusive. They may talk to one another other, inspire and challenge each other. Not surprisingly, central to metamodernism, as I define it, is the principle that contrasting theories can be simultaneously valid and enlightening in relation to an issue considered.224 Next I shall discuss Stephen Feldman’s use of the concept of metamodernism in relation with the idea of the coexistence of theories.

2.5. Feldman: Metamodernism as a Paradigm of Integration

In 2005, three years after the publication of Anthony Elliott’s study, the word “metamodernism” appears in the title of an article by Canadian scholar Stephen Feldman: “The Problem of Critique: Triangulating Habermas, Derrida, and Gadamer within Metamodernism.”225 Feldman endeavours to show that “Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, Habermas’s communication theory, and Derrida’s deconstruction all fit together within one philosophical paradigm: metamodernism” (296). In doing so, Feldman captures an important feature of metamodernism: integration. Like Elliott, he starts from reflection on and uneasiness with twentieth-century concepts, most of which have been handed down by tradition, and therefore need to be reconsidered, since “traditional (modernist) political categories of liberalism and conservatism do not suitably reflect” contemporary tendencies:

Gadamer, Habermas, and Derrida are far more concerned with explaining the possibility and techniques of interpretive and social critique, while remaining true to the metamodernist paradigm, rather than fitting themselves into the traditional liberal or conservative political camps. (Feldman 296)

Feldman’s use of metamodernism pertains to “a world-view, a set of presupposed beliefs that pervasively shapes one’s perceptions of and orientation toward the world” (297). The disagreements between the three philosophers – Gadamer, Habermas, and Derrida – arise from their having “different aims” and asking “different questions” (297), but these do not make their systems incompatible, nor do they preclude their sharing “certain fundamental presuppositions about our being-in-the-world” (297). Such dissimilarities “are those that might arise within a shared paradigm” (297).

While Feldman’s re-evaluation of liberalism and conservatism is timely, his attempt to prove that the three philosophers mentioned are “concerned with remaining true to the metamodernist paradigm” (296) is both limited and strained. Feldman is suggesting a new word, neither “liberal” nor “conservative,” inviting the question as to whether it is possible for anyone to remain true to a new concept if they are not even aware that it exists. This stylistic – or, rather, cognitive – lapse aside, Feldman’s article is a worthy attempt at associating the word “metamodernism” with a philosophical paradigm that accommodates philosophical hermeneutics, communication theory, and deconstruction (276).

Feldman’s essay is significant in that it makes two valid claims in relation to his use of the word “metamodernism”: an explicit one and an implicit one. The explicit one is that metamodernism is a paradigm of philosophical thought; the implicit one is that integration stands at its very core. Although the term has sporadically been used in the preceding century, and texts such as Feldman’s evincing random features of metamodernism have been previously published, the twenty-first century carries the promise and actualisation of a new cultural paradigm of metamodernism. As the twentieth century was the century of modernism and postmodernism, the twenty-first century is receptive to metamodernism. In what follows I discuss the concept of metamodernism in relation to contemporary developments in art.

2.6. Metamodernism in Art: Oscillation vs Integration and Interconnections

Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker’s development of metamodernism in Europe post-dates my own development of the concept as a new cultural paradigm. To a limited extent, they have acknowledge the creative role of their predecessors. Vermeulen and van den Akker’s definition of metamodernism is in some respects similar to the

226 In the article on metamodernism quoted above Feldman refutes Ernst Behler’s argument with regard to “the incommensurability and incompatibility” of deconstruction and philosophical hermeneutics (144). See Ernst Behler and Steven Taubeneck, Confrontations: Derrida, Heidegger, Nietzsche, trans. Steven Taubeneck (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).
“metamodernism” as used in this thesis and in my previous work, but in other respects it is markedly distinct. In short, they present an admixture of postmodern and metamodern elements. On their website, Notes on Metamodernism, these art critics distinguish between the term and the concept of metamodernism:

Metamodernism as a term – but not as a concept – is or has been associated with altermodernism, reflective modernism, reflexive modernism, and a counterstrategy within modernism. And it has been applied to developments and disciplines as diverse as economics, politics, architecture, data analysis, and the arts.227

Vermeulen and van den Akker list the fields where metamodernism as a term has been discussed since the demise of postmodernism as a dominant paradigm (“economics, politics, architecture, data analysis, and the arts”), but they fail to engage in a dialogue with respect to these previous uses, either on their website or in their article published in The Journal of Aesthetics and Culture.228 Given that several earlier articles (including my own) go beyond simple lists, and are dedicated to full-fledged development of metamodernism as a concept rather than only a term or a method, Vermeulen and van den Akker cannot ignore those precedents. They briefly acknowledge two discussions of metamodernism in literary studies in their second footnote:

Although we appear to be the first to use the term metamodernism to describe the current structure of feeling, we are not the first to use the term per se. It has been used with some frequency in literature studies in order to describe a postmodern alternative to postmodernism as presented in the works of authors as far apart as, amongst others, Blake and Guy Davenport. However, we would like to stress that our conception of metamodernism is by no means aligned to theirs, nor is it derived from them. It is in so far related to these notions that it too negotiates between the modern and the postmodern; but the function, structure, and nature of the negotiation we perceive are entirely our own and, as far as we can see, wholly unrelated to the previous perception.

This disclaimer by Vermeulen and van den Akker indicates that when they wrote their article, they were aware of both Furlani’s article (on Guy Davenport) and my “Interconnections in Blakean and Metamodern Space.” However, although they distance themselves from previous articulations of metamodernism, they do little to elucidate how their definition might differ from the one advanced in this thesis. While they say their definition is different, they do not trouble themselves to explain the nature or scope of the difference. Nor do they specifically acknowledge the previous scholars who employed the term and developed the concept.

This lapse is only partly remedied in the wiki page they dedicate to “Metamodernism,” where Furlani’s name and mine are mentioned in passing (under the heading “Previous uses of the term”). They fail, however, to refer to other uses of the term, such as Feldman’s discussion of metamodernism in philosophy. More importantly, although they describe metamodernism as a paradigm of dialogue, Vermeulen and van den Akker reject any discussion with those writers who have made “previous uses of the term,” and disregard their thinking with a wave of the hand. Hence, they assert themselves as the first proponents of the concept of metamodernism “to describe the current structure of feeling.”

Vermeulen and van den Akker approach the definition of metamodernism in a manner that copies Furlani’s, that is, by starting with the prefix meta-:

The prefix ‘meta-’ allows us to situate metamodernism historically beyond; epistemologically with; and ontologically between the modern and the postmodern. It indicates a dynamic or movement between as well as a movement beyond. More generally, however, it points towards a changing cultural sensibility – or cultural metamorphosis, if you will – within western societies.

Here their definition of metamodernism matches my prior definition in “Interconnections”: indeed, the “changing cultural sensibility – or cultural metamorphosis – within western societies” may be described as metamodern. In “Interconnections” I proposed that a

229 However, three years previously metamodernism is discussed as an emergent tendency in theory and arts in my article on “Interconnections.”
A metamodern paradigm of interconnections grasps the complexity of “contemporary cultural phenomena”:

Positing metamodernism as a period term and a cultural phenomenon, partly concurring with (post)modernism, partly emerging from it and as a reaction to it (especially to its fragmentarism, individualism, excessive analyticity, and extreme specialisation), metamodernism [is] a budding cultural paradigm. Allowing for diverging theories, metamodernism champions the idea that only in their interconnection and continuous revision lie the possibility of grasping the nature of contemporary cultural and literary phenomena. (Dumitrescu)

Similar to my precedent, Vermeulen and van den Akker position metamodernism both beyond and within postmodernism:

Thus, although meta has come to be associated with a particular reflective stance, a repeated rumination about what we are doing, why we are doing it and how we are doing it, it once intimated the movement with and between what we are doing and what we might be doing and what we might have been doing. When we use the prefix meta- we do NOT refer to the former meaning. Meta- for us, does NOT refer solely to reflectivity, although, inevitably, it does (and, since it passes through and surpasses the postmodern, cannot but) invoke it.

The quotation from Vermeulen and van den Akker echoes the tone of the first four lines of my own previous remarks. What I referred to in “Interconnections” as the coexistence of theories within metamodernism is presented by Vermeulen and van den Akker as a continuous oscillation:

Meta, for us, signifies an oscillation, a swinging or swaying with and between future, present and past, here and there and somewhere; with and between ideals, mindsets, and positions. It is influenced by estimations of the past, imbued by experiences of the present, yet also inspired by expectations of the future. It takes into account and affect [sic!] the here, but also the there, and what might or might not happen elsewhere. It is convinced it believes in one
system or structure or sensibility, but also cannot persuade itself not to believe in its opposite.

Nothing in the meanings of the prefix meta-, as expounded by Furlani, supports this description of “in-betweenness” or oscillation in metamodernism. However, the preposition μεταξύ has the meaning of between, amid, betwixt, twixt. The wavering invoked by this preposition refers to a movement in the same plane, without transcending it or the alternating extremes. By contrast, my earlier definition of metamodernism involves transcending extremes, sublimating them into a new stage, a progression rather than vacillation. Moreover, nothing can develop or grow on grounds that are continuously moving, as “oscillation” implies in Vermeulen and van den Akker’s essay:

Indeed, if anything, meta intimates a constant repositioning. It repositions itself with and between neoliberalism and, well, keynesianism, the “right” and the “left”, idealism and “pragmatism”, the discursive and the material, the visible and the sayable. It repositions itself among and in the deconstructed isms and desolate ruins that rest from the postmodern and the modern, and reconstructs them in spite of their un-reconstructableness in order to create another modernity: then one, then the other, one again, and yet another. […] Meta- does not refer to one particular system of thought or specific structure of feeling. It infers a plurality of them, and repositions itself with and between them. It is many, but also one. Encompassing, yet fragmented. Now, yet then. Here, but also there.

I agree with Vermeulen and Akker that strict adherence to one system is not the metamodern way – by metamodernism is open to (indeed, based upon) the synthesis of the sensibilities of both modernism and postmodernism. A rigid structure of sensibility is doomed to failure. For example, Irigaray proposes that each of us has to discover his or her own sensibility, but this must be done with respect: for oneself and for the other (Irigaray Key Writings 146). While vacillation between aesthetic theories and systems is important for Vermeulen and Akker, a central tenet of metamodernism is the ethical, as I have previously
stated. This aspect of metamodernism is considered by Vermeulen and van den Akker in “Notes on Metamodernism” in conjunction with the aesthetic: ⁵³⁰

new generations of artists increasingly abandon the aesthetic precepts of deconstruction, parataxis, and pastiche in favor of aesth-ethical notions of reconstruction, myth, and metaxis.

Although the ethical aspect is one instance where my definition of metamodernism and that of Vermeulen and van den Akker converge, most aspects of the definition of metamodernism on Vermeulen’s and Akker’s website incorporate the developments of late postmodernism, rather than postulate a new sensibility. Vacillation, acknowledgement of longings that cannot ever be fulfilled (Elliott 153-54), a reluctance to take a position, the oscillation between possible options, and hesitations between truths and fear of commitment – describe a postmodern sensibility. Consequently, Vermeulen’s and van den Akker’s metamodernism provides an umbrella term for developments in art that typify the late postmodern tormented consciousness, for their version of “metamodernism” lacks a unifying or organising principle. It is, instead, just another bric-a-brac, another layer in the multi-layered cake of postmodernism in its latter stages.

The in-betweenness that Vermeulen and van den Akker claim as metamodern is valid, but hardly new. Andrei Codrescu and other postmodernists have long inhabited the gaps between cultures and cultural paradigms. ⁵³¹ Yet to give credit where it is due, the position expressed on Vermeulen and van den Akker’s website “Notes on Metamodernism” has the merit of providing a platform where dialogue regarding contemporary trends in art and culture is possible, through readers’ reactions to the ideas presented. For example, in his reply to the

230 The ethical as a pragmatic life choice with regard to the built environment, as an attitude of respect for the natural setting, and pointing to a sensibility different to the modern tendency to dominate nature, is expounded in note 37 of “Notes on Metamodernism.”

Of course, there is widespread agreement that contemporary architecture is no longer postmodern. The end of the postmodern is most clearly signaled here by the return to commitment. The growing awareness of the need for sustainable design has led to an ethical turn in the attitude toward the built environment. Roof gardens and solar panels are heavily subsidized, carbon neutral buildings and ecologically friendly neighborhoods are widely commissioned, and, yes, even entirely green cities are being designed from scratch. Necessitated by a competitive market, urged by demanding politicians, and inspired by the changing Zeitgeist, architects increasingly envision schemes for a sustainable urban future. But it is also, as we intend to show, increasingly paired to a new form.

Metamodernism appears here as a resurgence of responsibility for nature and for the future, probably in the vein of Prince Charles’ architectural projects, characterised by “the [esthetical] consideration not just of buildings themselves but also the [ethical consideration of] communities and places” (Jamieson).

article *What meta means and does not mean*, one of the respondents, G. Croes, touches upon a different understanding of metamodernism, similar in some respects to my own definition. Metamodernism, for Croes, rescues what is valuable in the past and integrates those elements into the present:

Looking, searching for where we are (in the West) in the history of evolution I try to fathom what metamodernism can mean. What kind of bric [sic!] we can use for building the next layer of culture. We cannot build on substance that has not dried out completely. And this last is the case. In my view the development of many things went so fast that most people lived too superficially and therefore are unstable.

When he deplores superficial living, Croes also implies nostalgia for what is stable, for the roots (of the metamodern, of Western culture, of existence itself), as well as a longing for a paradigm in which depth trumps accumulation, and quality is more important than speed, as in an Italian proverb, “Chi va piano va sano e va lontano.”  

The idea of going too fast, and thus undermining stability, is the mechanical metaphor for Charles Jencks’ concept of complexity that goes past its optimal point. Jencks suggests that complexity increases until it renders itself redundant:

In effect, systems such as large, fast aeroplanes get more complex as they evolve in size and speed, until like the Concord, they become too complicated. The route from simple to complicated is made by adding more elements along the way, rising up a hill until an optimum “effective complexity” is reached, after which adding more elements makes the system less complex. From this perspective, complication is a type of simplicity, but at the far end of the scale, increasing entropy and chaos. (Jencks 152)

I agree with Jencks that there is an optimal point at which complexity of analysis reaches its limits. After this point, complexity leads to redundancy, oppression, and misunderstanding. Its very sophistication can be an impediment to effective functioning.

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232 “He who proceeds slowly, goes healthy and for a long time” (my translation).
Croes’ solution implies the articulation of a new kind of humanism in which the ethical and personal stories figure large:

What we need is rehumanizing, tell each other our personal stories and thus become human again in our togetherness, our society. And yes, pick up pieces from the past, here and there, choosing the most positive but also most reliable ones and solidate (sic!) them in our memory. Then a new philosophy and culture can go forward to the unknown with faith. Is that what metamodernism can mean? (Vermeulen and Akker)

Croes’s final question suggests his disagreement with Vermeulen and van den Akker’s position of vacillation and indeterminacy, rather than with the uncertainty of their version of metamodernism. Whether Croes is right to believe that postmodernism has not entirely died or dried out is debatable.233 In “Interconnections” I proposed that elements of postmodernism are synthesised into metamodernism. However, Croes is certainly correct in saying that rehumanising, the telling of personal stories, and recapturing the past, are imperatives for our times.

This review of the uses of the term metamodernism in cultural studies and political studies, in art and literature, establishes a genealogy for the concept, showing that it is not an aedificare in aere; rather, it has been used before in meaningful, helpful, and challenging ways in scholarly studies. From these previous uses I retain those aspects that overlap with my development of the concept of metamodernism, and which confirm my vision of the metamodern as a paradigm of integration (as Feldman suggested in the context of philosophy) where the reflexive scanning of imagination (i.e., imagination tempered by rationality), is emphasised (as it is by Elliott), as a literature of presence which expresses a search for the sublime and the beautiful (akin to Furlani’s atypical postmoderns). I do not, however, embrace the idea of metamodernism as an oscillation between diverging positions as defined by Vermeulen and van den Akker, unless it is in the form of an ever-adjusting equilibrium.

This metaphor emphasises the median point of balance, however short, rather than the swinging of the pendulum. In what follows I will present my understanding of

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233 It is true that discussions of postmodernism in the Western academia are less fashionable than a few years ago, if not altogether dated; but a few scholars, mostly from the periphery or from outside the Western academic networks, still find the concept of postmodernism useful, while the media still loves to label as postmodern such things as contemporary abstract art which escapes discursive commentary, or does not make much sense to them.
metamodernism as evinced in articles prior to 2010, when Vermeulen and van den Akker launched their understanding of the concept. Then I will explore some of the features of the metamodern paradigm as proposed in this thesis and derived from readings of Roy’s and Tournier’s debut novels.

2.7. Metamodernism in Literature and Culture

This section summarises three articles where I used the concept of metamodernism in relation to cultural theory and literature. The first two have been published, and are accessible on the *Hypermedia Joyce* and *Double Dialogues* journal sites, while the third is a book chapter.

In “Bootstrapping Finnegans Wake,” I proposed that “the concept of metamodernism may be employed to describe a paradigm of thought subsequent to the postmodern one.” However, the metamodern and the postmodern, I suggested, may be seen not “as mutually exclusive, but as completing and defining each other,” while “their explanatory relevance emerge from their interrelation.” The article also discusses un-hierarchical outlooks, networks, and “unashamed tears” (i.e. un-self-conscious expression of emotions), which were to be incorporated in later definitions of metamodernism.

In “Interconnections in Blakean and Metamodern Space” I revisited the position taken in “Bootstrapping” and posit metamodernism “as a period term and a cultural phenomenon, partly concurring with (post)modernism, partly emerging from it and as a reaction to it, especially to its fragmentarism, individualism, excessive analyticity, and extreme specialisation.” I further propose that “allowing for diverging theories, metamodernism champions the idea that only in their interconnection and continuous revision lie the possibility of grasping the nature of contemporary cultural and literary phenomena.” A metaphor for metamodernism may be that of a “set of maps under continuous revision,” or a “boat being built or repaired while it sails.” The provisional aspect of these metaphors was subsequently modified by Vermeulen and Akker’s definition of metamodernism as a continuous oscillation.


In “Foretelling Metamodernity.” I go beyond expressing the intuition of a paradigm shift and define “metamodernism as an emerging cultural paradigm” characterised by a search for “self realisation.” The authors invoked are Blake, Jung, and Codrescu, who agree that “energies of a feminine nature play a major part in the process of self realisation (or re-formation of the self)” (151).

Metamodernism is further outlined in relation to, or in contrast with postmodernism: “While postmodernism has been equated with the cult of artificiality (Calinescu 248) and the ‘loss of innocence’ (Eco 19-20), metamodernism represents the search for the innate or the natural, the innocent and simple” which becomes necessary and topical in the wake of extreme complexity. In other words, “whereas modernism and postmodernism believed in determining nature to deviate from its norms (Calinescu 173), metamodernism stands for an attempt to investigate (and appropriate) the laws of – inner and outward – nature, to understand them and to act in agreement with their” requisites or coordinates, in spite of imposed rules, hierarchies or restrictive social practices (Jencks).

Rejecting the aberrant – such as the caste system in Roy’s novel, or Robinson’s judicial system for organising a kingdom inhabited by one subject, – metamodernism seeks the beauty of the unsophisticated, of “the small things,” and repels the kitsch satisfactions provided by means of mechanical reproduction (Calinescu 7, McHale 185). Postmodern “mediated lives” (McHale 115) – by TV as used by Baby Kochamma’s, or by computers or cyberspace as used by Felicity in Andrei Codrescu’s Messiah – are inadequate when compared to a search for unmediated experience of the self (Robinson) and of nature (Ammu-Velutha). A metaphor for this understanding of metamodernism is the search for roots, which can be equated with identifying the meaning and origins of situations (The God of Small Things 33), as well as the elements of constancy within modern complexity. But in order to have access to roots, and to perceive the simplicity beyond complexity, a series of transformations of the self are required.

As a constellation of transformations, metamodernism involves a revision of deeply ingrained perceptions and concepts. The concepts of time and progress are reexamined in metamodernist writings. Time, for instance, was seen in modernity “as a line stretching from

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238 See also Bondanella 467.

a beginning towards the future (and pictured as ‘the arrow of time’), bound to reach some final stage, and following a progressive course of development” (“Foretelling Metamodernity” 156). But, I was saying in this earlier article, “the end of history” (Fukuyama), a postulate of postmodernism, may be contrasted with the postulation of an open world” (Prigogine 214). In other words, the modern concept of progress modeled the perception of time as linear and teleological, while during postmodernism “the end of history” and of human evolution became conceivable. Prigogine partially challenged this position when he proposed the idea of an “open world,” which I read as suggestive of infinite potentialities, of possibilities more diverse than the ones envisaged by a linear, strictly rationalist, perspective.

Accordingly, in texts like Tournier’s and Roy’s, the suggestion is of non-linear time, a spiral that integrates past experiences and sublimates them. The experience of la souille, when Robinson renounces rationality and abandons himself to his instincts, for instance, is reenacted at a superior level and sublimated in the post-explosion era, when Vendredi teaches his master how to go beyond reason and follow higher, creative impulses. Similarly, Rahel’s return home at 31, “a viable, dieable age”, re-enacts Ammu’s returns, with the difference that while Ammu died a victim of family and societal coercion, Rahel lives to defy and overcome oppressions. She grows able to forgive the previous inflictors of misery and terror, notably Baby Kochamma and Comrade Pillai, sufficiently to conduct polite conversations with them, while her present focus on her brother leaves little room for old grudges. Despite pain and tragedy, which could have crushed Robinson’s and the twins’ souls and brought about the end of their respective universes, the endings of both Vendredi and The God of Small Things postulate an open world of forgiveness for the ones who defected, inflicted suffering or death. This is a world of living in the present of epiphany, while nurturing a hope for “Naaley. Tomorrow” (Roy 340), as expressed in the last line of the novel.

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I have endeavoured to point out the overlap and the distinctions between my concept of metamodernism as a new cultural paradigm and the uses of the term by Feldman, Furlani, and Elliot. I have wished to credit each of them with employing the term and considering possible meanings for it. However, they use the term metamodernism narrowly, without bringing the depth of vision that would support the development the metamodern paradigm. Feldman, for example, uses the word to find an alternative to the categories of liberal and conservative; Furlani uses the word very narrowly, in regard to the later postmodernist work
of Davenport and the Black Mountain school of poets. Elliott comes closest to my vision in the context of three philosophers, but his use of the term metamodern is very narrow.

Vermeulen and van den Akker have seen the potential of the concept, and have acknowledged having read my articles in *Hypermedia Joyce* (2006), *Double Dialogues* (2007) or *Equinox Notebook* (2009), and the *Rites of Passage* book chapter (2010). They have proceeded to develop the concept of metamodernism further in what seems to me, despite a few significant overlaps with my development of the concept, to be a belated avatar\(^{240}\) of postmodernism. To their credit, I believe that their intuition regarding the demise of postmodernism, which has become gradually more pronounced following the turn of the twentieth century, would have also triggered their research, and I applaud them for generating discussion on this groundbreaking concept.

Nonetheless, I believe that my earlier and broader vision of this concept, which springs from solitary meditation on literary texts and cultural phenomena (as opposed to the impact of a group of artists such as those surrounding Vermeulen and van den Akker), conveys a depth that is not reflected by later appropriations of the term. I freely acknowledge the inspiration for the label of metamodernism came from the book *Meta Modern Era* by Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi, of which I was aware as early as 2000, but which I read in its entirety a few years after I wrote the first drafts of a research project on metamodernism. Nirmala Devi’s depth of vision, the common sense and straightforwardness with which she tackled the malaise of modernity and the linearity and limitations of rationality, as well as her suggesting an evolution quantum leap towards a meta-modern sensibility, were influences on my thinking.

In what follows I explore some of the features of the metamodern paradigm as proposed in this thesis and derived from readings of Roy’s and Tournier’s novels, following a brief note on postmodernism.

3. Is Postmodernism Dead? Long live Postmodernism!

The most important thing is always the contemporary element, because it is most purely reflected in ourselves, as we are in it. (Goethe)
A note on postmodernism is required to explain the use of the concept in this thesis. Less controversial than it used to be in the eighties and nineties, postmodernism is not completely ignored or forgotten in the twenty-first century. Huysen acknowledges that the debate about postmodernism has waned (2), yet I consider that the few studies on postmodernism published at the turn of the twenty-first century, among them Bran Nicol’s very comprehensive Postmodernism Reader, indicate a somewhat sustained concern with the explanatory and descriptive possibilities of postmodernism. Even so, these studies might indicate a fairly defunct period term, as opposed to a living process that heated debates in the eighties. However, on the periphery of the Western world, in Asia and the Eastern Bloc, people still write with gusto about postmodernism. Though the postmodernist wave has subsided, the concept has not completely fallen into disuse. There are critics who – gaily and, perhaps, with some relief – greet the latter-day “consensus about what the term refers to.” They believe that:

“postmodernism” has become more or less established in critical discourse as a term that refers to a shift in what it means to be a subject in late twentieth-century society and to designate a related attitude of self-reflexivity or ironic knowingness that permeates our culture as a result. (Nicol 2)

Nicol aptly captures a few defining aspects of postmodernism as an attitude or a mode characterised by a distancing from the modernist tradition – although critics like Calinescu still view the former as a continuation or an aspect of the latter –, and a centring on the subject, which is treated with a knowing tongue-in-cheek detachment. Perhaps not entirely a figment of critics’ imagination (Nicol 8), postmodernism refers to (in the sense of points to, or reflects) a stage in the collective consciousness after WWII, which has been affected by a multiplicity of factors. In the aftermath of the industrial revolution and Enlightenment ideas, the Second World War, and subsequent developments, caused us to query the very roots of

242 In Five Faces of Modernity Calinescu explains how the names of period terms such as romanticism, baroque, classicism etc, initially come from common language and express a shared taste (87). If period terms such as postmodernism are merely indicative of a shared taste, their survival is directly dependent on the main stream taste. However, in Poetica Postmodernismului (The Poetics of Postmodernism), Liviu Petrescu proposes that postmodernism be an episteme (145), a way of conceiving of reality. The concept of episteme is similar to Khun’s concept of paradigm, and it has been used by Foucault in The Order of Things and Power/Knowledge (197) to mean a configuration of knowledge, assumptions, and beliefs. See Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (New York, NY: Psychology Press, 2002).
243 When written (post)modernism, or (post)modernity, the reference is to both postmodernism and modernism as in attitudes such as Calinescu’s, who sees postmodernism as a continuation of modernism, with which it shares a few characteristics. For Calinescu, both modernism and postmodernism are faces or aspects of modernity.
Western civilisation. The shape of countries changed within very short intervals, as did political regimes, allegiances, ideas, lifestyles, values.

A necessary revaluation of tradition was required in order to, on the one hand, identify and challenge the institutions, ideas, and habits of thought that led to the aberrations and atrocities of WWII, and on the other, to adjust to the increasingly fluid patterns of living, communication, and ways of structuring the the human subject and society. This break with tradition led to passionate experimentation with forms and ideas, and continued the modernist notion of challenging the accepted, the acceptable, and the norm. Simultaneously, great flexibility of mind was necessary to absorb and make sense of later developments. This was conducive to the concept that everything in culture is fluid and that the search for truth should be replaced by acknowledging pluralities of truths, an attitude that Bauman holds responsible for much of the contemporary relativism (Intimations of Postmodernity 206).

This relativism is reflected in the fate of postmodernism: quite unstable and hard to pin down, postmodernism (much like modernism) means different things when applied to different texts or authors, or when used by different critics. Nevertheless, I believe that although postmodernism does not exist “out there” in the world, 244 the concept of postmodernism, like all categories or concepts invoked to make sense of cultural phenomena, has a paideic or didactic value. It captures the dynamism of an epoch on the move, seen in its very diverse, sometimes diverging, aspects. Depending on the perspective adopted, postmodernism has been associated by theorists with the “literature of replenishment” (Barth), or of “inflationary economy” (Charles Newman, with the “general condition of knowledge in the contemporary informational regime,” or Ihab Hassan’s “stage on the road to the spiritual unification of humankind” (cited in McHale 4).

Perhaps the most beautiful definition of postmodernism is Ihab Hassan’s: just a stage on the way to spiritual unification – postmodernism is not the final destination. This leaves us with some optimism: relativism, scepticism, and pastiche do not represent the dead-end of human civilisation. They are just brief stages on an open road; they do not appear as frightening as if these by-products of civilisation and sophistication were in fact

244 McHale insists that, although it tries to capture real phenomena, postmodernity (as the referent of postmodernism) does not exist out there in the world:

Whatever we think of the term, however much or little we may be satisfied with it, one thing is certain: the referent of “postmodernism,” the thing to which the term claims to refer, does not exist…precisely in the way that “the Renaissance” or “romanticism” do not exist. There is no postmodernism “out there” in the world any more than there ever was a Renaissance or a romanticism out there. (Nicol 8)
inescapable. There are indeed ways of escaping the funhouse of postmodernism, \(^{245}\) and entering a new area of consciousness and sensibility which I have named metamodern.

Looking back and looking forward: Post- and meta-modernism

Chapter Abstract

This chapter wraps up the discussion of metamodernism by revisiting some of its features, especially the coexistence of paradigms and the network model, self-realisation of ordinary people, and the ethical dominant. Other characteristics of metamodernism include: an integration of rationality with imagination, emotions, and impulses, regard for innocence, acknowledging the role of art and literature in catalysing the transformation of the self, and consideration for traditions while engaging in dialogue with concurrent theories.\(^{246}\)

Further references are made to philosophers and critical theorists, notably Taylor, Bauman, McHale, and Nicol. Some of the metaphors discussed previously are revisited,

\(^{245}\) The inescapability of the postmodern condition is expressed as the metaphor of the funhouse in Barth’s short story *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968). See John Barth and A. Tulloh, *Lost in the Funhouse* (Bantam books, 1969).

\(^{246}\) In “Interconnections in Blakean and Metamodern Space” I develop the idea of the opening of metamodernism towards both traditions and other “theories” (*Double Dialogues*, 2006).
especially the metaphor of traditions as roots, as well as the imagination–reason dichotomy that was formulated most pronouncedly by Descartes. For Taylor, traditions are invigorating and capable of breathing new life into the Western spirit, while literature is for Blake, Roy, and Tournier not mere experiment with form, but the expression of meaning, of having “something to say” (Tournier and Petit 173) – literature is expected to induce a self-transformation in the reader.

**Features of Metamodernism**

The heyday of postmodernism has come and gone and we are now in a position to see its “virtues” as well as its drawbacks. And, certainly, although praiseworthy aspects of postmodernism (the rise of feminism, multiculturalism, diversity, aesthetic relativity) survive and flourish, the works of many writers nowadays cannot be labelled as postmodern. The questions they pose, their themes, styles and preoccupations gesture towards or configure another paradigm of thought, which integrates some aspects of the modern and postmodern but differs from these. Another paradigm as “a world-view, a set of presupposed beliefs that pervasively shapes one’s perceptions of and orientation toward the world” (Feldman 10) has arrived. A few features of this paradigm are outlined below.

Central to this new paradigm is a predilection for connecting with the other, and for the self-realisation of ordinary people, “an affirmation of ordinary life” (Taylor 258), within which both reason and emotions are acknowledged as being integral:

> For the believer in reason whose life is in order, the householder who senses the richness and fullness of his life, the value of ordinary life is woven through the emotions and concerns of his everyday existence. It is what gives them their richness and their depth. (Taylor *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* 44)

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247 In politics, Best and Kellner similarly advocate a paradigm of “alliance and solidarity” which transgress the boundaries between modern and postmodern politics and are suited for tackling the challenges of the new millennium: “Developing a new politics involves overcoming the limitations of certain versions of modern politics and postmodern identity politics in order to develop a politics of alliance and solidarity equal to the challenges of the coming millennium” (*The Postmodern Turn* 1).

248 Ordinary people’s access to epiphany and self-realisation is treated, for example, in the French-Belgian romantic comedy film *Odette Toulemonde* directed by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt (2006).
Ordinary people, including “householders,” are aware that everyday existence is enriched and made meaningful when order and reason are combined with positive emotions. The emphasis is not only on daily life, but on what makes it meaningful. Metamodern texts reinstate a primary interest in the ethical, as opposed to the excessive attention paid to the epistemological in modernist fiction, and to the ontological in postmodern fiction (McHale Constructing Postmodernism 206). Connecting with fellow humans, unlike (post)modern’s bias in favour of individualism, has become vital for social and individual existence: “this aspiration to connection is a fundamental drive, with an immense potential impact in our lives “ (Taylor Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity 45).

The aspiration is to connect with the other – other people, other cultures, nature, and other times – in order to make sense of and to enrich the present and the self. Both “high fiction” (Christoph Ransmayr’s novels, for instance) and popular series (such as Rick Riordan’s Heroes of Olympus), evince a preoccupation with revisiting and recovering tradition(s). Theories and worldviews are based on and emerging from each other, an idea that springs from the postmodern opening to a plurality of interpretations. Bauman registers such a position in hermeneutics: “the plurality of interpretations (coexistence of rival knowledges) ceases to be seen as a regrettable yet temporary and in principle rectifiable inconvenience, becoming instead the constitutive feature of being as such” (Intimations of Postmodernity 132). For Khun, paradigms follow one after another; nowadays there is an awareness that paradigms may concur: “views coexist with those which have arisen later in reaction to them” (Taylor Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity 497). No system of thought or theory is regarded as exclusive of others, but communication or dialogue is sought between different world views (Irigaray and Still 27).

1. Recovering traditions: The Tree and the Roots

249 McHale believes that in modernist fiction, the question being asked is epistemological, seeking an increase in knowledge, “whodunit?” as in Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom!, while postmodernist fiction elicits ontological questions: “which world is this?” as in Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49. I think that these distinctions (between modernism and postmodernism, epistemological and ontological dominants in literature) are useful for understanding a few features of literary texts, but they are not to be regarded as absolute or mutual exclusive categories. For instance, Henry James’ short story The Turn of the Screw is articulated around two dominants: epistemological and ontological. Similarly, although I propose that the dominant in Vendredi and The God of Small Things is ethical, epistemological elements are discernible in Robinson’s attempt to “understand to the bone” the nature on his island Speranza, and Rahel’s understanding of events as “the bare bones of a story.” Ontological components are perceptible in Robinson’s attempt to communicate with his island, and then during the solar apotheosis, in Roy’s novel in Rahel’s communicating with an angel during Sophie Mol’s funeral; and in the Ammu-Velutha couple linking their destiny with those of ephemeral insects.
Taylor believes that despite the complexity of the contemporary theoretical landscape, or probably because of it, traditions and previous views can help to make sense of present complexities and the predicaments of our time (521). For Jonathan Rée, “our traditions are our roots” (13). The tree metaphor dates back to Descartes, especially the opposition and interrelationship between the roots and the branches. Likewise, the insistence on the visible to the detriment of what can be conceived by imagination and intuition, originates, in Western thought, with him. For Descartes, the acknowledgement of the roots is concurrent with the attribution of more importance to the branches. Descartes, one of the key figures in the onset of modernity as an age characterized by emphasis on methodical doubt and analytical thinking, uses the tree metaphor in the preface to the French edition of *Principles of Philosophy*. Descartes underscores the importance of roots in his description of the interdependence of the various sciences:

Thus the whole of philosophy is like a tree, the roots of which are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches which emerge from the trunk are all the other sciences, which are reducible to three principal sciences, viz. medicine, mechanics and morals. (xl)

In a letter to Elizabeth, Princess of Bohemia, dated June 28, 1643, Descartes wrote that the principles of metaphysics are the root of knowledge, since they “provide us with knowledge of God and our soul” (Descartes Medications and Other Metaphysical Writings 154). Descartes advocated self-referential questioning, or Socratic introspection. The repeated, insistent questions in *Meditations* establish the priority of self-knowledge in Descartes’ thinking: “What am I?,” and “Who this ‘I’ is who now necessarily exists?” (26). Nevertheless, in the same letter, Descartes warns against abstract thinking or excessive meditation on metaphysics, which could become so compelling that imagination and sense data would be ignored:

I think that it would be very harmful to occupy one’s understanding frequently in thinking about them [the principles of metaphysics] because the

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250 1647. The original Latin edition was published in 1644.
251 Implied here is a view of philosophy as comprising all knowledge available at the time.
252 Principles, AT IX, Part 2, 14 qtd. in Desmond M.Clarke’s “Introduction” to the 2003 edition of René Descartes Medications and Other Metaphysical Writings, xl.
understanding would find it difficult to leave itself free for using the imagination and the senses. (154)

Since “the soul is conceivable only by pure understanding” (152) or reason, and God and one’s soul engage one’s mind fully, little room remains for the exercise of imagination and the processing of sense data, faculties which Descartes also considers beneficial. Accordingly, Descartes does not support exclusive reliance on reason to the detriment of other faculties: the senses are important and necessary, and he encourages focus on the tree’s visible aspects or its exterior (the trunk and branches, i.e., physics and the other sciences), rather than its less visible, more subtle roots (interiority). The faculties of the soul are seen as complementing one another: memory, imagination, and the sense data harmonise with the more abstract knowledge derived from reasoning on the “principles of metaphysics:”

It is best to be satisfied with retaining in one’s memory and one’s belief the conclusions that have once been drawn from the principles of metaphysics, and to devote one’s remaining study time to those thoughts in which the understanding acts together with the imagination and the senses. (Descartes Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings 154)

Although he is remembered today mostly for his contribution to mathematical and scientific thinking, Descartes emphasised the role of imagination some two centuries before Romanticism. “Understanding assisted by imagination” is more efficient in conceiving objects and their qualities than rationality by itself: “the body, that is, extension, shapes and movements, may also be conceived by pure understanding on its own [i.e. rationality], but it can be conceived much better by the understanding assisted by the imagination” (152).

Hence, the Cartesian distinction between soul and body, spirit and matter, comes down to a distinction in the objects of our faculties: the soul can be perceived by the intellect alone, whereas the body (matter) and its qualities require intellect aided by imagination, while the unity of the soul and body is “known very clearly to the senses” (152). The things united are equally important for Descartes. Cartesian partitions, therefore, although perceived as a separation between mind and body, God and creature, the spiritual realm and the visible one,

253 Descartes equates the soul with the mind, the intellect or reason in his “Second Meditation.” Noting that he can be certain only of his own existence, and, as thinking cannot be detached from self consciousness, he concludes: “I am, therefore, precisely only one thing, that is mind, soul, intellect or reason […]” (Descartes and Clarke 25).
seem to have been originally focussed on unity – analysed in its component parts for the sake of analytical clarity – rather than on partition. In such instances, Descartes’ emphasis on reason gives the impression of a celebration of *reason assisted by imagination*. Nevertheless, analytical reason and systematic doubt have been emphasised in our remembrance of Descartes’ thought, as a model on which to mould, or against which to measure, modern thinking.

Descartes is a founding father of modern patterns of thinking, and his partition between the roots and the tree is almost as dramatic as the other dichotomies mentioned above. Visited once and then relinquished for good, metaphysics, when considered as the roots of knowledge, is to be forsaken for the sake of meditation on science (the branches). This was understandable in his age, in which, looking for certainties, science struggled to free itself from religious dogma that claimed ownership of the roots. Later on, however, the very existence of the roots was ignored, overlooked, or denied in favour of a soulless science or analytical speculation.

Descartes’ separation between metaphysical considerations and positive science has influenced modern thinking to the extent that science – initially pursued for the sake of the progress of humanity, for its happiness and liberation from ignorance – developed in the absence of metaphysical reflection as an enterprise devoid of moral thought. To further develop the tree metaphor, contemporary (Western or otherwise) civilisation in many ways resembles an extremely complex tree whose scientific and technological branches have outgrown their own strength and sustainability, at the expense of the roots. But a tree cannot survive without roots, as Nirmala Devi has rightly pointed out.²⁵⁴ Conversely,²⁵⁵ the roots, metaphysical or otherwise, have no meaning unless they nourish the tree, which – as indicated by the manifest failures of humanity – seems seriously threatened. Intuitions such as this have nourished much of the pessimism of the postmodern condition (Sassatelli 82-4).

It has remained to literature and other arts to remind us of these roots, of the grounding of our being in the spirit. As has been stated earlier, another form in which this preoccupation with the roots survived is as *philosophia perennis*, or meditation on what constitutes human existence. Identifying the roots and nurturing them is vital, according to Taylor. Conversely,

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²⁵⁵ Professor Chris Ackerley drew my attention to another use of the tree metaphor, when Yeats talks of Swift’s sense of himself as a tree dying from the top to the roots.
the failure to do so (or ignoring the roots) results in a stifling of the human spirit, and carries the risk of annihilation of the human species:

The intuition […] is that we tend in our culture to stifle the spirit. We do this partly out of prudence, particularly after the terrible experiences of the millenarist destruction of our century; partly because of the bent of modern naturalism, one of our dominant creeds; partly because partisan narrowness all around. We have read so many goods out of our official story, we have buried their power so deep beneath layers of philosophical rationale, that they are in danger of stifling. Or rather, since they are our goods, human goods, we are stifling. (520)

Taylor hopes to revive interest in the spirit, that is, in what defines us as humans beyond dogmas, ideologies, or theories, beyond rationality that invites us to a type of prudence that encourages only contemplation of what is visible, measurable, quantifiable, and therefore regarded as safe. Taylor hopes to achieve this revival of the spirit, through a discussion of traditions, of what past modes of being in the world still have to offer. For Taylor, revisiting traditions and previous paradigms is empowering and invigorating. His intention in writing *Sources of the Self* is “one of retrieval, an attempt to uncover buried goods through rearticulation – and thereby to make these sources again empower, to bring air back again into the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit” (520). He encourages a Blakean type of enthusiasm, as well as a vision of the self that is more than rationality, when he notes that “[rational foresight or] prudence constantly advises us to scale down our hopes and circumscribe our vision. But we deceive ourselves if we pretend that nothing is denied thereby of our humanity” (520).

Descartes’ separation between metaphysical considerations and positive science has influenced modern thinking to the extent that science developed as largely devoid of moral considerations, imposing its dry and precise methods on most other domains of human experience. This situation could be rectified, Taylor believes, through the recovery of a humanity that is rich with intuition, vision, and imagination, and combining awareness of the details of daily existence with spiritual interests or an aspiration to the sublime, which is probably what Blake extolled as “the human form divine.” A (re)discovery of the spiritual roots of humankind is, for Taylor, the antidote to the tree’s overgrowth, to its meaningless sophistication. A change in the self so that s/he becomes more receptive to spiritual roots associates with a change in the social environment. In what follows, I hope to show how aesthetic, philosophical, and social elements combine in the texts by Tournier and Roy as
discussed in this thesis, and how these considerations relate to the emerging metamodern paradigm.
2. Transformative Literature: Literature as an “aesthetic pattern, a philosophical issue, and an exploration of social problems”

I’m interested in the transforming power of literature. I am! But I suspect I might stray down a few self-centred alleyways occasionally. Stop me if I do. (Anne Kennedy, The Last Days of the National Costume)

Unsurprisingly, many artists and cultural theorists have acknowledged their weariness with the linguistic games of postmodernism, with its satire and its manipulations – as Baudrilliard put it, with the “vestiges of what has been destroyed.” The ruins or vestiges could be construed as consequences of ignoring the roots. What has been destroyed are traditions, their values, and the classical texts against which the modernists posed their experiments with forms, and the postmodernists their parodies. These traditions, values, and texts are revisisted by authors like Tournier and Roy, who ascribe to them new meanings.

Unlike (post)modern authors, Tournier writes not because he wishes to experiment with form, but because he has “something to say” (Tournier and Petit 173). Yet despite his declared shirking of experimentation, Tournier, like Roy, is a “reformer.” Their texts aim “at reconceiving some aspect of the world and at changing people’s attitudes and acts” (172). Under the seemingly realistic surface, Roy and Tournier propose an “aesthetic pattern, a philosophical issue, and an exploration of social problems” (172); but their fiction is far from dogmatic, and their novels are not romans à thèse. Their texts are open, allowing a multitude of interpretations, letting readers contribute their own meanings. Tournier innovates at the level of themes and symbols by drawing from the Biblical tradition, and from the philosophical traditions of modernity. He hopes to encourage general shifts in people’s attitudes, while Roy is a more radical reformist who militantly seeks to induce changes of attitudes and solve particular issues through her novel and her political texts:

We have to lose our terror of the mundane. We have to use our skills and imagination and our art, to re-create the rhythms of the endless crisis of normality, and in doing so, expose the policies and processes that make ordinary things – food, water, shelter, and dignity – such a distant dream for ordinary people. (An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire 15)

256 Cited in Furlani 712.
Roy’s declared aims as novelist and political activist are “to try to help people understand what is being done to them,” and “try to prevent” injustice. Her writing is meant “to never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple” and “to be able to communicate to simple people what is happening in the world” (Roy and Barsamian 120). The urgency of her self-imposed task to help people understand and oppose the encroachment of vested interests or aggressive systems upon their lives is probably the reason why she never returned to fiction after her debut novel. She chose to focus instead on politically-charged articles and essays designed to bring about real and immediate transformations or solutions.

From the perspective of literature, this is of course regrettable, for her novel holds the promise of extraordinary freshness in her handling of tradition and stylistic innovation. Roy’s novel is innovative at the linguistic level when she expresses children’s thoughts in childspoke that bears a Joycean resonance, and at the thematic level by finding original psychological and imaginative solutions to the old problems of aggressiveness and oppression. Her innovations engage in a dialogue with a wealth of traditions: questioning Christian and Hindu assumptions, she continues the modernist tradition in the vein of Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. She experiments with word formation as Joyce did in *Finnegans Wake* (Jones 125), while connecting with the Romantic tradition of Blake in her portrayal of innocent rebellion against authority as devilish (“I can see the devil in your eyes,” declares the twins’ tutor). Her political texts, almost all initially presented as talks, seek a transformation of her audience that evokes Blake’s “awakening.” Similarly, her protagonists Rahel and Estha gradually come to terms with life and tragedy, which process may be described in terms of coming of age and even of transformation.

For Blake, art and the literary text were vehicles of self-transformation, as in this fragment from “Vision of the Last Judgement” in *A Descriptive Catalogue*:

> If the Spectator could Enter into these Images in his Imagination approaching them on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought, if he could Enter into Noahs Rainbow or into his bosom or could make a Friend & Companion of one of these Images of wonder which always intreats him to leave mortal things as he must know then would he arise from his Grave then would he meet the Lord in the Air & then he would be happy.”

Art and literature can cause in the receptive subject a cathartic purification of preconceived ideas (“arise from the Grave”) and the obliteration of the entrenchment in material existence
(“leave mortal things”), which otherwise thwarts growth. Arts can open the gates of imagination and provide access to spiritual realities, which are symbolised by the “rainbow”:
“The rainbow, as a form of water sublimated and transfigured, is the perfect symbol for the spiritual body” (Damon 301). Blake, Tournier, and Roy endeavour to facilitate a transfiguration of the self through the mediation of imagination, through the knowledge of the absolute, or through understanding the roots (or origins) of contemporary ailments. For Roy, the task and the hope of the writer consist in expressing one’s sensibility, especially love, accompanied by an effort to seek beauty and make sense of experience:

   To love. To be loved. To never forget your own insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away. And never, never, to forget. (“Come September” 76)

The artist’s work requires humility and courage, for she feels compelled to challenge violence and vulgarity, while also seeking joy and aesthetic values. Roy articulates an ideal for both writers and readers: sensibility coupled with understanding, which is tantamount to achieving one’s dignity and fulfilment as a human being. Such a fulfilled individual discriminates between strength and power, and has the confidence to face reality. S/he sees things for what they are, and learns from experience.

   Ethical transmutations such as the one implied in Roy’s manifesto are increasingly characteristic of contemporary literature. Self-transformation as an ethical achievement, a “self-overcoming” (Taylor 453), provides pleasure to the metamodern reader. As noted, Furlani discusses early postmodernist authors (Olson, Levertov, Snyder, Duncan and Creeley) in terms of ethical and psychological renewal:

   these early postmodern poets epitomize a poetics of presence, whereby the moment of perception restores harmony and promotes ethical and psychological renewal. […] Theirs is an “immanentist” vision of the role of poetry. (710)
According to Furlani, the role of the writer is to inflict a change in the here and now, to modify the self, rather than to express a longing for a *nescio quid*, for an unattainable transcendence ever-retreating, ever-absent.

Literature reflects a transformation of the self, and may induce a change of the subject. Alcorn, Bracher, and Holland\(^{257}\) believe that “literature edifies – in the root sense of the term. It builds us. Literature might alter not only cognition but, more significantly, the internal structures of the self ” (Holland 818). Similarly, Tournier holds that “stories fill up the emptiness” (Petit 193): they provide solace and inspire. The writer’s “power is great, for he or she can renew old myths and thus reshape society” (Petit 86). Literature transforms the self and society, for the writer “is working for change by means of his [or her] art, by giving people a new vision of life” (Petit 83).

A working definition of metamodernism is set out below and further features of this emergent paradigm are discussed.

### 3. Edifying Metamodernism

A definition of metamodernism that emerges in this thesis is the reflection in literature (and the other arts) of a tendency to seek the roots of what constitutes our humanity, to integrate contrasting psychic agencies, such as emotion and reason,\(^{258}\) within the self, to express an aspiration for the spiritual or the sublime, and to achieve a self-realisation that grants meaning to experience.\(^{259}\) Different from the postmodern poetics of absence, metamodern poetics allows for a poetics of presence, for the sublime and for epiphany, which translate as renewed interest in a “tellable” story in narratives, as opposed to the postmodernism’s propensity towards fragmentation, or experimentation for its own sake.\(^{260}\)

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\(^{257}\) Holland, however, disagrees with the way in which Alcorn and Bracher illustrate their claims as well as with their allegedly using insufficient data to back them (Holland 818).

\(^{258}\) This does not mean that emotions and reason are postulated as the only significant psychic agencies. Jung identifies more than two psychic archetypes, and so does Blake. Nietzsche, however, speaks just of the dominant Apollonian and Dionysian in terms which I take as designating complexes of tendencies. Nevertheless, what most authors agree on is that the tendency to reason and the leaning towards emotions are complementary; the over-emphasis on rationality since Enlightenment, and the effects of such an outlook on humankind, accounts for the attention paid to what counterbalances it, namely, emotions (which were identified as apt to check rationality as early as Romanticism, as T.S. Eliot suggests in “The Metaphysical Poets” quoted above).

\(^{259}\) Jung contends that realisation of the self pertains mostly to one’s maturity, but other authors seem to suggest that it is a process encompassing one’s whole lifespan, and which, indeed, becomes more pressing as one steers towards the middle age. Dante seems to express a general human truth, when half-way through his life (“[n]el mezzo del camin de nostra vita”) he started his symbolic journey towards his self. As in Dante’s poem, it is the feeling that something is missing, which becomes more urgent during one’s middle age, that accelerates or catalyzes the process of self realisation (cf. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* 135). See Alighieri Dante and H. F. Cary, *The Divine Comedy* (Grolier, 1973).

\(^{260}\) The term “tellable” is used in Herman et al. (3).
This is not to say that experimentation ceases, but that it is counterbalanced, enriched, made more meaningful by the work’s underlying message, and by the traditions and values involved in the dialogue.

3.1. “Something to Say:” Meaning and Experimentation

Meaning or significance (German: Bedeutung) is an important concept for metamodernism, as, under Goethe’s influence, it has been for Walter Benjamin. Accordingly, in distancing himself from (post)modernism and especially from Nouveau Roman, Tournier criticises its lack of content and the inflation of form. On the contrary, Tournier’s project is to “combine traditional form with innovative content” (Davis 4). In Vent Paraclet, Tournier confesses: “Mon propos n’est pas d’innover dans la forme, mais de faire passer au contraire dans une forme aussi traditionnelle, préservée et rassurante que possible une matière ne possédant aucune de ces qualités” (190).

Tournier’s preference for traditional forms locates his texts in the modernist tradition as defined by Lyotard in The Postmodern Condition. Yet Vendredi is metamodern in allowing its protagonist to experience and enjoy presence, without apology or irony. Lyotard defines the difference between modernism and postmodernism as the reassurance one derives from “recognisable” modern forms versus the strong sense of the unattainable one finds in the postmodern:

Here, then, lies the difference: modern aesthetics is an aesthetic of the sublime, though a nostalgic one. It allows the unpresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents; but the form, because of its recognizable consistency, continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter of solace and pleasure. Yet these sentiments do not constitute the real sublime sentiment, which is an

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261 In the “Introduction” to the 1968 collection of Benjamin’s essays, Hannah Arendt talks about Goethe’s as “the only world view that had a decisive influence on Benjamin.” She notes “Goethe’s conviction in the factual existence of an Ürphaenomen, an archetypal phenomenon, a concrete thing to be discovered in the world of appearances in which ‘significance’ and appearance, word and thing, idea and experience, would coincide” (12). She also notes that “Bedeutung, the most Goethean of words, keeps recurring in Benjamin’s writings” (Benjamin and Arendt 12).


263 “My aim is not innovate with form, but to convey in a form as traditional, conventional, reassuring as possible, subject matters which have none of these qualities” (my translation from the French).

264 Thus, according to Lyotard’s definition, later Joyce is anything but modern. Although Dubliners (1914) still presents the recognizable form of the short story, Joyce’s Ulysses (1922) and Finnegans Wake (1939) cannot be considered reassuring.
intrinsic combination of pleasure and pain: the pleasure that reason should exceed all presentation, the pain that imagination or sensibility should not equal the concept. (81)

Lyotard describes the sublime, as does Burke, in terms of pleasure and pain deriving from the tension between reason and sensibility. The quote above unmistakably proclaims the dominance of reason in modernism, and its almost unlimited capacities. Such a concept of the sublime is different from the metamodern one, where the sublime is configured in the constellation mapped by a desire to reach the absolute, and the joy experienced when coming nearer to the object of one’s aspiration. Robinson has such an experience of the presence of the sublime in the last pages of Vendredi. 265

Unlike the modern, which pines for the unpresentable, but still retains a “recognisable consistency” of forms, the postmodern “denies itself the solace of good forms” (Lyotard 81). Consequently, nostalgia and an unsettling feeling of absence dominate postmodern art and fiction:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in the presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia of the unattainable; that which searches for new forms not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. (81)

In contrast, the metamodern would seek appropriate forms to express the joy of looking for the absolute or the spiritual, which become accessible by way of epiphany or other means. The ability of metamodern sensibility to be shared collectively derives not from a consensus of taste, but from its partaking in humanity. 266

As Robinson’s epiphanic experience includes

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265 The turtle in the poem “My Hero” by Billy Collins might be said to experience a similar presence of the sublime when it ignores the race and is “distracted/ by a bee humming in the heart of a wildflower.” See Billy Collins, Horoscopes for the Dead (Random House Digital, 2012).

266 Blake expresses the idea of a shared humanity as the “human form divine” in the poem “The Divine Image” from the Songs of Innocence.
Jaan; the fourth Magi’s in *Gaspard, Melchior et Balthazar*\(^{267}\) includes all children, or Rahel’s quiet joy at homecoming and reestablishing communication with Estha overflows to include the Kathakali dancers and the story they portray. If “postmodernism denies itself the solace of good forms,” Tournier’s and Roy’s return to “good forms” stands for a step beyond postmodernism, into a new territory that I call *metamodern*. This new domain is characterised, among others, by a revival of concerns for the ethical; it incorporates care for the other, tolerance, acceptance, the need to resist power and unnecessarily autocratic systems, and the re-defining of self as we aspire to greater realisation.

### 3.2. Epiphanies

Martin Bidney lists “intensity, mystery, and expansiveness as the three most significant and encompassing criteria for epiphany in modern writing” (Martyn 379). Modernist epiphany comes as *claritas*,\(^{268}\) as sudden understanding, a glimpse of meaning hidden in experience, while metamodern epiphany is closer to Bidney’s definition as an experience felt as “vivid but rationally unaccountable” (2), with the reservation that the modernist epiphany is a sublimation of reason rather than a suspension of reason (in other words, a sublimation using reason as an element, rather than suspending reason.). Metamodern epiphany is a transformation that affects more than the rational mind or understanding alone; it encompasses both a transformation and the effects of a transformation. After transcending the psychic opposites, this transformation reaches the spirit (in Huxley’s sense), allowing it to manifest clearly in the self. The metamodern epiphany illuminates and reveals the roots of the tree, the grounding of existence in the Huxleyan spirit.\(^{269}\)

Estha’s sudden understanding that love is not necessarily unconditional is an example of a modernist epiphany; instead of bringing about a peace of mind and a sense of fulfilment of a metamodern epiphany, Estha’s rational understanding mingles with the unfolding of

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267 *Gaspard, Melchior et Balthazar* is truly metamodern (through the search for the sublime in the form of the newly born Jesus, through the fact that the quest and related misfortunes are made meaningful by their narration), though possibly allowing for a postmodern reading (with reference to a poetics of absence).

268 The term *claritas* is derived from St Augustine and used by Joyce in *Stephen Daedalus*. I am grateful to Dr Ryan for reminding me of this filiation.

269 Professor Ackerley has drawn my attention to the “Modernist contention to the effect that it is mystical but without God, or spirit.” I agree: the Joycean epiphany reveals meaning within trite realities, but the self is not radically transformed by the experience, nor does the modernist epiphany open towards the more transcendental, as the metamodern epiphany does. An interesting case (possibly a counterexample) is T.S.Eliot’s poem “Little Gidding,” where the self achieves a perspective from where memories and sense data “become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern,” and accedes to a realization of innocence as the prime mover of the world (see the “Little Gidding” notes above).
events that lead to tragedies. Rahel also experiences an epiphany, in the Joycean sense of a sudden understanding, when she realises the deep implications and consequences of a few events that occurred in almost legendary times (Roy 33). Robinson experiences an initial postmodernist epiphany of suspended rationality first, then, a fuller, more comprehensive metamodern one. The suspended time Robinson cherishes when his glass clock stops is a postmodernist epiphany, whereby his sense of duty is suspended (“il etait en vacance”/ “he was on holiday”), while his experience at the end of Vendredi (253) is an all-encompassing, metamodern one. The former is a suspension of time-measuring, and therefore the deferment of an aspect of rationality, while the latter involves the protagonist’s whole being and extends to encompass his whole universe: “Une glaive de feu entrait en lui et transverbérait tout son être” (Tournier 254).

Robinson’s understanding and perception expand to engulf the island of Speranza herself in its purifying, innocence-conveying, and restoring, healing breath: “Speranza se dégageait des voiles de la brume, vierge et intacte.” It then includes Jaan Neljaapäev, the Whitebird’s cabin-boy: “Enfin l’astre-dieu déploya tout entière sa couronne de cheveux rouges dans des explosions de cymbales et des stridences de trompettes. Des reflets métalliques s’allumèrent sur la tête de l’enfant” (Tournier 254). The time of epiphany is the time of restoration, when the self again assumes a state of innate plenitude and joy, when everything falls into place and painful experiences reveal themselves for what they are: either nightmares in contrast to the luminosity of the epiphanic moment, or stages on the way of becoming, or both. Does Tournier suggest that it is because of the asperity of the agonising experience that the self opens to epiphanies? He would not have supported the idea that to inflict pain on another is excusable because it leads them to eventually experience some kind of revelation. No Machiavellian adage such as “the goal justifies the means” survives in metamodernism.

Concluding his argument in the essay “What is postmodernism?” Lyotard emphasises that “it is our [the writers’] business not to supply reality, but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented” (81). Metamodern fiction, however, departs from the postmodern literature of absence defined by Lyotard. Presence is felt as actual and real; it is manifest and attainable through epiphany. The metamodern writer’s overriding concern is not to express the “unpresentable in presentation itself” (81), but to formulate and/or rediscover the rules and coordinates of what constitutes our humaness. Robinson and Rahel learn to forgive and are richer and kinder for it; they rediscover the innocence that can follow experience and they delight in the company of the other.
Writers like Tournier and Roy (re)invent the rules for how to grow in our humanity. Such a focus forestalls excesses in the long run. For Robinson, the use of discriminating and analytical abilities for the sake of organising, classifying and analysing the island, cataloguing its fauna and flora, are eventually complemented by symmetrical inward-looking skills of self-scrutinising and introspection. Similarly, Rahel, who, as a child, tirelessly undertakes explorations into fellow humans’ subjectivity (or the other perceived as other), into “breasts and how they hurt,” traverses a stage of passivity as a young woman, then awakens to subjective interaction when she returns to her brother, whom she perceives to be as the same as she is – one soul in two bodies. This gradual process of self-exploration, the impulse to chart the external world (or the other as other in Rahel’s case), and the desire to explore one’s interiority (or the other as same) ultimately lead Robinson and Rahel to a state of dynamic equilibrium rather than tension. The metamodern story is a narrative about growing in one’s humanity, about understanding the obstacles to one’s growth and overcoming them. In what follows, I examine the narrative aspect of the metamodern story and the search for wisdom it records.

4. The Narrative Turn and the Search for Wisdom

At the middle of the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin noted the receding presence of the storyteller in public life: “familiar though his name may be to us, the storyteller in his living efficacy is by no means a force today. He has become something remote from us and is moving ever further away” (143). Benjamin deplores the disappearance of the art of storytelling: “the art of storytelling is nearing its end because the epic side of truth – wisdom – is dying out” (Benjamin 146). He probably wishes thereby to entice authors into reviving the tradition of meaningful narrative. However, in “One Culture and the New Sensibility” (1965), Susan Sontag comments, somewhat gleefully, on the fading of narratives, as well as on the decreasing relevance of the literary to the new sensibility: “the primary feature of the new sensibility is that its model product is not the literary work, above all, the novel.” The novel, which was a preferred form for the modernists, ceased to take centre-stage during postmodernism; it was pushed aside by the advent of moving images. Narratives were out, images were in. Nonetheless, the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century have witnessed a return of narrative, in its various forms, from soap-operas to novels.

Although Benjamin thought he was witnessing the last stages of the narrative as it was removed “from the realm of living speech,” as a “concomitant of the secular productive forces of history” (146), narratives are making a comeback. They return not only in prose, but also in poetry, and become a way of accounting for experience.

In 1985 Marjorie Perloff wrote an essay on “The Return of Story in Postmodern Poetry,” in which she quotes Victor Turner’s notes on the meaning of “narrate.” Derived from the Latin narrare (to tell), narrare is “also akin to the Latin gnārus (‘knowing,’ ‘acquainted with,’ ‘expert in’).” Both narrare and gnārus are derivatives of:

the Indo-European root gnâ (“to know”), whence the vast family of words deriving from the Latin cognoscere, including “cognition” itself, and “noun” and “pronoun,” the Greek gignōskein, whence gnōsis…. Narrative is, it would seem, rather an appropriate term for a reflective activity which seeks to “know” (even in its ritual aspect, to have gnōsis about) antecedent events and the meaning of those events. (Turner 167)

In this sense, Perloff notes, high-brow modernist poetry “does incorporate autobiographical narrative” (Perloff 157). Although she writes about poetry, Perloff’s remarks point to the presence of the narrative. Refering to Yeats’s “The Tower,” Robert Lowell’s Life Studies and Adrienne Rich’s “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law,” Perloff draws attention to “retrospective accounts in which the solitary ‘I’ remembers or even relives a particular situation or set of events in the past so as to come to terms with, understand, have gnōsis about the present” (157). Nevertheless, “the dominant poetic mode of early modernism remains the lyric – what Goethe called ‘die Ichzerzählung’ – in which the isolated speaker (whether or not the poet himself), located in a specific landscape, meditates or ruminates on some aspect of his or her relationship to the external world, coming finally to some sort of epiphany, a moment of insight or vision with which the poem closes” (156-57). High-brow modernist poetry comprises an element of introspective narration aimed at deriving meaning from experience, meaning that becomes manifest through epiphany.

Perloff holds that to tell a story is “to find a way – sometimes the only way – of knowing one’s world,” (161). Scarcely present in modernist poetry, the narrative becomes more visible in postmodern verse. Referring to postmodern literature, Perloff notes that

271 Quoted in Perloff 157.
“since, in the view of many postmodern poets and fiction writers, the world just doesn’t – indeed shouldn’t – make sense, the gnosis which is narration remains fragmentary,”
“frustrating our desire for closure,” foregrounding the “narrative codes themselves” and calling them into question (161). The postmodern narrative is “no longer the full-fledged mythos of Aristotle,” the “specific syntactic shape” Robert Scholes speaks of, but a point of reference, a way of alluding, a source of parody” (Perloff 161).

However, recent criticism and literary practice identify a move away from experiments with possible worlds, from the fragmentary, the parodic, or allusive, to a return of the narrative in literature. Writing of Graham Swift’s novels and their distancing from postmodernists modes of writing, Catherine Pesso-Miquel observes that “le roman retournerait aux histories” (135). This corresponds to a more general tendency:

Swift seems recently to have preferred modernist forms, or even a straightforward fictitious narrative eschewing metafiction, intertextuality and historiography, as if he agreed with recent critics who have been begging for a “return to stories” in the British novel. (Pesso-Miquel 135)

Similarly, Tournier places himself in the tradition of Zola and Flaubert, and writes not only because he has something to say, but also because he loves stories (contes, more than nouvelles). Stories bring together (whereas nouvelles “tend to separate”); they can be “insurpassably, irresistibly beautiful,” in their unfolding charm, and soothe the anguished soul. They can have an impact and transform. They fill up the emptiness (Petit 193). Tournier’s narratives provide the solace of recognisable forms, the succor of meaningful experience, while seeking to enclose new concerns. Narratives re-establish the balance of the self, and, as with the couple in Le Médianoche amoreux, and Rahel and Estha in Roy’s novel, rekindle emotions, especially mutual affection, and redeem their relationships, and themselves.

Storytelling is an integral part of Philip Deaver’s poems. The poem “Gray” is an illustrative example. It tells of a pet, and through its story, a parallel story of a family’s life,

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272 For Aristotle, “a story is an imitation of an action (mimesis praxeos); the resultant plot is a particular arrangement or structuring of the incidents (ton pragmaton systasis)” (Perloff 157).
273 “A story is a narrative with a specific syntactic shape (beginning-middle-end or situation- transformation-situation) […]. When we speak of narrative, we are usually speaking of story, though story is clearly a higher (because more rule-governed) category” (Scholes 210).
with its habits and moments of togetherness and homely joy. For Deaver, love and empathy are paramount, and they circulate between both humans and animal; the relationships among the humans are merely alluded to, so that the reader can make what s/he wants of them and of the subsequent disintegration of the family. The need for closure, for the closeness and proximity of family members, all but disintegrate when the family breaks, as the pet’s death reflects the death of binding emotions in the hearts of human beings. The emotion is sincere and at the surface, the feeling of loss and mourning unfeigned, universal, and timeless. The words used by the poet are as simple as that of prosaic tales. Deaver’s poem “Gray” has transcended postmodernism; there is no irony or self-consciousness: it is pure metamodern.

Deaver’s poem “Gray,” like most of his short stories, offers no answers or conclusions except what might come to mind for the reader. They invite the reader to contribute his/her experience in the act of reading, with the result of opening towards a unity between the text and the reader, which could potentially enhance the self of the reader.

Deaver’s short stories carry the promise of psychological depth, without falling into (the traps and over-rationalisations of) analysis. His prose is carefully chiselled and economical, without being minimalist. Deaver’s short story “An Angel Visits,” for instance, is impressive in its calculated simplicity, its depth of feeling, and not least, its unregimented spirituality. Deaver acknowledges the limitations of institutionalised religion(s) – Catholic guilt – and moves beyond, to a sense of the spiritual in everyday experience. Of course there may be a modernist flavour to the idea of immanent transcendence, or whatever we call the everyday spiritual, but the story narrates an experience, actual or imagined, in a way that is unselfconscious, and which presupposes a communication with a reader that is very different from (post)modern angst.

Both Deaver and Forrester seem to prefer short stories, and excel at story-telling; even their novels, such as Forty Martyrs and The Connoisseur of Love, respectively, are novels-in-stories, though their concerns are radically different. In Deaver’s case, the overriding question is how can the self live in a world that is shared with other flawed people, whose stories can never be completely known? Forrester’s queries are more explicit, articulated as they are by the first-person protagonist of More Deaths than One, rather than implied by the narrative

275 Forrester comments that: “‘Gray’ is plain, simple, free of irony, free of detachment, expressive of values, timeless, longing, loving, unpretentious. It is pure and new, liberated from postmodernism. It is unafraid. It is willing to be mocked. It synthesises, it doesn’t divide. It seeks bonds across time and across broken families and across the border at the end of life. And it works.” Personal communication (November 22, 2013).
voice used in many of Deaver’s short stories. Forrester’s queries have an urgency and poignancy about them that demands immediate answers or eternal suspension in the questioning mode: “Are there second acts in American lives? Can you go home again?” (20), or “Why does everyone I know go away in the end?” (32). They engage with the phenomenal world in a way that invokes the noumenal one; they can be simple yet fundamental questions that go beyond the everyday to that which grants meaning to experience.

Deaver designed *Forty Martyrs Suite* as a set of interconnected stories in which no character is the main character, though there is a strong feminine presence in a few of the stories, a compelling woman, a paragon of wisdom, diplomacy, and grace. Deaver explains his strategy:

I’ve found I can avoid a need for back story and constant explanations by employing the power of varying points of view and by making the stories complementary instead of purely sequential. Like petals on a tulip—which one’s first? But of course every novel-in-stories needs a good psychologist trying to get by in a rough, rough world. And a priest. And a compelling woman. And an attempted murder and a fire and a secret back-staircase. And a compelling woman.278

There is no priority, no hierarchy, just interconnections, a convergence towards a centre, as in a short story equivalent of *The Alexandria Quartet* by Lawrence Durrell, where each perspective is almost equally compelling. One of the blessings of what I/we call metamodern sensibility is that we have learned, from the postmoderns and other people, to be tolerant, to accept the other, and to see virtues in outlooks completely foreign to our own. A metaphor that comes to mind is that of the international potluck dinner: Everybody comes to the dinner table dressed however s/he pleases, bringing a plate of their choice, yet everybody enjoys both the food and each other’s company. I refer to this as the principle of theory overlapping (PTO), first mentioned in my “Interconnections” article. Different (even divergent) theories or outlooks coexist and a common denominator/middle ground which could ensure dialogue is sought. How to find a common denominator between diverging theories is another matter—not unsolvable, however, when the divergence is only superficial.

278 Zafris, “A Conversation with Philip Deaver.”
The poems of former American poet laureate Billy Collins also tell stories about the simple things of life: everyday stories, everyone’s experiences articulated in simple, clear expressions. They ride the line between the postmodern indecisiveness, derived from a tendency to let the reader chose between possible interpretations, as in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* by John Fowles, and a metamodern invitation to the reader to contribute his/her experience, and to gain insight and understanding, through the act of reading. The metaphor of the journey is presented in Collins’ poem “The Hero” from *Horoscopes for the Dead*, in a way that portrays arrival to destination as less relevant than the journey itself: every moment of beauty in the journey, every moment that the self finds rewarding, is an arrival as significant as the destination:

> Just as the hare is zipping across the finish line,  
> the tortoise has stopped once again  
> by to roadside,  
> this time to stick out his neck  
> and nibble a bit of sweet grass,  
> unlike the previous time  
> when he was distracted  
> by a bee humming in the heart of a wildflower.

This poem by Collins reverses the category of the hero as the winner; the hero is instead the self capable of enjoying the journey, rather than a task-oriented person of exclusively rational impulse, planning and organising. Collins’ hero is someone who taps into their emotions to make the journey enjoyable and fulfilling, without necessarily disregarding the ultimate destination.

5. Emotions and the New Paradigm

Metamodernist texts do not simply defy and undermine “the project of reason-based Enlightenment” (Taylor 243), nor do they embrace the opposite extreme of heightened emotions. On the contrary, texts like *Vendredi* and *The God of Small Things* integrate the

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279 It is important to recognise that both reasoning and emotions are “sometimes useful but sometimes destructive” (Oatley 26). Therefore, self-knowledge is essential. Oatley emphasises this point: “From the ancient
reason-based inclination of the Enlightenment and place it in dialogue with alternative outlooks. The tendency to analyse and reason are not only counterbalanced by intuition and emotion, but they are sublimated at a superior level. Therefore, emotional intelligence, the faculty that integrates rationality and emotions, is a central metamodern faculty. In what follows, I will discuss a few instances when emotions are recognised as instrumental in establishing meaningful communication, and in articulating the contemporary self.

In “What Emotions are About,” Baier notes the different designations for emotions across time. The function of sensibility has been variously defined as “what Descartes, Hobbes and Hume called our passions, […] what Darwin and recent philosophers call our emotions, [and] what Spinoza, Kant and psychologists from Freud onwards call ‘affect’ or ‘affects’ (1). Among the emotions, Baier lists “mild amusement, nostalgia, hope, regret, curiosity, interest,” revulsion, reverence (7), happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise (8), love, envy, jealousy, resentment, joy, rage, anger, surprise, shame (9), and exhilaration (17). Together with motivation (the cognitive) and beliefs (the cognitive), emotions are essential functions of our brain, vital for our social existence, as well as for our own lives as subjects. In the social sphere, they inform other people of our states of mind and intentions, while in private they “animate the mind, keeping it from that apathy or absence of all passion which Hobbes called ‘dullnesse,’ a running down of the living mechanism, a diminishing of ‘endeavour,’ signalling the approach of death” (“What Emotions Are About” 1).

Emotions differ from moods in that they are about something, that is, they have an object. Baier argues, for example, that sadness is about a loss or absence, while depression is not necessarily about anything; it is a mood rather than an emotion. In her essay “Getting in Touch with our own feelings,” Baier defines emotions as states of mind that are expressed spontaneously, to which we have unmediated access, and which are related to our deep psychology. They

have deep “objects,” in the sense that they are shaped by primeval experiences and by our own experiences since very early childhood or pre-natal stages of development: [their] depth is dependent on our history as a species and our individual histories as intelligent mammals. (127)
Baier explains the depth aspect of emotions: “Emotions can have historically layered and so deep intentional objects.” This feature is illustrated by Darwin:

when for example he analyses the expression of disgust as an incomplete repetition of a spitting out movement, or a nod of affirmation as a lowering forward of the head as if to receive offered food. This would make food the deep object of acceptance, false food the deep object of disgust. Emotions can have historically layered and so deep intentional objects, whereas other states of mind may be closer to being about no more than what they seem at the time to be about. (4)

Emotions, which are usually expressed in our body language (126), are essential for human interaction. They help us communicate with our fellows, for they have a reduced capacity to deceive, unlike “epiglottal language,” which is commonly more deceitful (124). Emotions establish connections between living members of the species, as well as connections with our past – personal and collective:

Thoughts trail implications, leading us as it were from one node on a tree or vine to its other branches, but emotions can lead us to their own perhaps multiple and interlocking roots, in personal history or in our species’ history. (Baier, “What Emotions are About” 4)

Baier adds that “depth is depth of significance, not just depth back in time” (14). Emotions are essential for social and individual existence, but the priority for Descartes is not to identify and decode them but rather to control them: “In Passions of the Soul Descartes makes the secret of felicity lie in the human will’s control of human passions, in use of its ability to make or ‘feign’ appropriate ones, according to what circumstances require” (Baier 12). Harnessing one’s emotions and controlling them through rationality was the norm in modernity, while the postmodern encouraged the expression of one’s emotions freely. Sylvia Plath, for instance, praised Robert Lowell’s Life Studies for their boldness in voicing his very personal emotions, which she regarded as a breakthrough: “I’ve been very excited by what I feel is the new breakthrough that came with, say, Robert Lowell’s Life Studies, this intense

breakthrough into very serious, very personal, emotional experience which I feel has been partly taboo” (Orr).

The emphasis after postmodernism gradually shifts towards identifying emotions and interpreting them so as to adjust one’s reactions to the social environment. In *Emotions: A Brief History*, Keith Oatley notes the significance of emotions in conversation and social interaction: “emotions are the roots of relationships.” Emotions are more valuable than solitary meditation: “To allow emotions importance as compared with reason as Folly recommended in Erasmus’ book [*In Praise of Folly*], is to consider that relationships are important rather than, in a solitary way, merely thinking what to believe and what to do” (151). Theodore Zeldin agrees, and suggests that we are now entering a new paradigm comparable in importance with “the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, modernity and postmodernity” (Eco 7). This new paradigm “will carry more awareness of its roots in affectionate relationships” (Oatley 151):

Humans have already changed the world several times by changing the way they have had conversations. There have been conversational revolutions which have been as important as wars, riots and famine. When problems appeared insoluble, when life seemed to be meaningless, when governments have been powerless, people have sometimes found a way out by changing the subject of their conversation, or the way they talked, or the persons they talked to. In the past that has given us the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, modernity and postmodernity. Now it’s time for the New Conversation. (Zeldin 7)

The new modes of speaking and the new subjects are primarily relational, as they tend to include the other. They are, in Taylor’s words, a celebration of ordinary life. Oatley explains that “if emotions are primarily social commitments, to concentrate on them is to concentrate on our relationships” (151). Opening towards the full recognition of emotions is enhanced by the mediation of art and literature:

We are unable properly to understand our emotions in ordinary life because we are made blind by a thick crust of egoism. Because literary emotions could be less imbued with egoism, they allow the reader to see more clearly into their true nature and implications. (Oatley 153)
Literature can take us away from our egoism and sensitise us to emotions. Conversely, Oatley thinks that lack of empathy for the other is likely to endanger our society and our species: “For the future of our human species, […] we have to fear the human capacity for contempt: for treating others as outside any human relationship, without concern for their capacity for the emotional life that they share with us” (155). Emotions are not always positive: disdain (for the different, the outsider, the underdog, or the misfit) is an example of a negative emotion. Oatley agrees with Mihai Spariosu that in our awareness of others’ positive emotions, enhanced through the mediation of literature and art, lays the possibility of an irenic (peaceful) future for mankind (Spariosu 13).

The main adversary of an empathetic outlook is the competitiveness that was stimulated by the capitalist mode of production and consumption (Spariosu 6, 13), which in turn engendered the postmodern paradigm (Best and Kellner 278). In contrast, metamodernism emerges from questioning both capitalism and anti-capitalist impulses. Stephen Best and Douglas Kellner acknowledge that “capitalism generates needs and desires, which it ultimately cannot satisfy”, and contrast the aspirations “for freedom, justice, self-realisation, and a good life” with “the current mode of social organisation” (278). Of these aspirations that still shape the contemporary psyche, most specific to metamodernism is the yearning for self-realisation, for which other aspirations (freedom, justice etc.) are prerequisites. Blake named it awakening, and thought that it results from “cleansing the doors of perception,” which he equated with expressing one’s imagination, and striving for a unity of the self which is, however, not homogeneity (Makdisi 248).

5.1. From Fragmentation to Unity. Transformation as Initiation

A renewed unity of the self is desirable due to the condition of the postmodern self, which is dangerously fragmented and unstable. In A Poetics of Postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon remarks on the postmodern fragmentation and the instability of the subject that: “Postmodern works tend to fragment or at least to render unstable the traditional unified identity or subjectivity of character” (90). When he recovers his rational self, after the instincual stage, Robinson starts to buckle under the pressure of his organising impulses, and self-imposed regulations, and eventually doubts the legitimacy and rightfulness of his own rule. His self threatens to fragment. Having lost the connection with grounding traditions and

281 The full phrase from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell reads: “If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite./ For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things through narrow chinks of his cavern” (Keynes 154).
values, with the roots that previously established his identity, the personality of the (postmodern) subject tends to become brittle. After the shipwreck, Robinson feels cut off from the society of humans, their values, and the pressure to respect them, and is reduced to an almost animal-like state produced by “la rupture de quelque petit ressort de son âme” (Tournier 38). Similarly, Roy’s characters snap when love is refused – Ammu and Velutha break leads to death, and Estha and Rahel suffer emotional impairment.

However, the “brittling” of Robinson’s identity is not irredeemable, nor is that of the twins, who start to recover when their care for each other finds a way of expressing itself, at the “viable, die-able age” of thirty-one, the age of their mother when she died, and the age when they awaken to new life. Under the self-disciplinarian pressure of reason and order, Robinson regained his humanity and transformed the uninhabited island into what appeared to be an ideally organised world under the name of Speranza, only to later realise the artificiality and futility of his reason-imposed order. Tournier acknowledges the value of reason (as the instrument Robinson uses to pull himself out of the mire), but tempers it with an intuition about its limited ability to offer fulfilment, joy, or meaningful existence. At Vendredi’s prompting, and as a result of the symbolic explosion that destroys all that he has so laboriously constructed, Robinson’s transformation reaches a stage in which intuition and reason coexist and complement one another. This integration of contrasting psychic energies is represented as an alchemical image as the Ouroboros, “le symbole du serpent qui se mord la queue” (Tournier 229).

Similarly, in Roy’s novel, the personalities of the twins crumble under the pressure of tragedies, which are aggravated by social bigotry, caste prejudice, and lack of love or compassion on the part of their extended family. Estha’s silence and Rahel’s indifference are reactions to the series of deaths and separations they experience. With Rahel’s homecoming, however, feelings start to animate their inner lives, and the unity of their respective and conjoined selves (symbolised by the two-headed snake bracelet that Rahel wears) is restored.

Narratives can provide support for the self’s journey. During his metamorphosis, Robinson confesses in his log book, “je tâte à la recherche de moi-même dans une forêt d’allégories” (“I grope in search of my self in a forest of allegories,” tr.m.) (Tournier 232). He invokes myths to make sense of events around and within, in the same way that Rahel looks

282 Britting is a term coined in an attempt to underscore the fragile nature of Robinson’s personality, its proneness to breakage and reconfigurations, until he reaches his self-realisation, and his personality becomes characterised by fluid immutability.

283 Speranza’s name (Hope) indicates the future orientation and the hope for progress that motivated mankind since the Enlightenment.
back in history to find the origins of the mishaps that have affected her family, or Estha refers to the *Sound of Music* storyline to assess his own lovability and that of his sister.

Tournier locates his Robinson within the tension between modernism, which he decries for “too much form and too little content” (Davis 4), postmodernism, and a new way of writing that brings epistemology, ontology, ethics and metaphysics together into literary texts. Despite the seemingly simple style of his novels, or perhaps because of it, Tournier succeeds in enlarging literature to encompass areas of culture that are usually considered independent. The separation between philosophy, science, and literature is “of fairly recent date, at least since the Enlightenment, and perhaps only since the era of the contemporary university” (Serres and Latour 29). Michel Serres believes that a sense of connectedness between disciplines, alive as far back as Plato’s, Aristotle’s, or Pindar’s times, has been lost in much post-Enlightenment literature. However, authors like Balzac, La Fontaine, H.G. Welles, or Jules Verne endeavoured to bridge the gap between science and literature (28). Similarly, contemporary interest in philosophical fiction, or what de Kalbermatten dubs the “fiction of reality” (xi), may be interpreted as renewed interest in interconnectedness, in focussing on links and connections between literature and philosophy, rather than on separation and discrimination. Accordingly, Tournier revives the ancient practice of connecting different areas of culture through the protagonist’s exploits on the island: Robinson resorts to technology, agriculture, economics, religion, and myths for physical, intellectual, and spiritual survival. In philosophy, he restores the centrality of the Delphic entreaty to “know thyself” through his self-explorations.

Tournier’s protagonist lives through both postmodern fragmentation and metamodern longing for presence, for meaning, and unifying experience. The postmodern poetics of absence – figured as the emptiness of society, the absence of a non-metaphorical feminine presence, and the vacuum left by Vendredi’s defection – precedes metamodern epiphany. The

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284 Postmodernism in its *nouveau roman* avatar is, presumably, criticised by Tournier as “une certaine école moderne” which “s’efforce de faire éclater les limites de la littérature” (*Vent Paraclet* 175).

285 Tournier’s way of writing, especially the colonising of literature by philosophy in his texts, is justified by autobiographical anecdotes: Banished from philosophy after his failed *agrégation*, Tournier decides to write novels: “Donc faire œuvre littéraire. Mais ne pas oublier que je venais d’ailleurs, et rester dans le monde des lettres un homme d’ailleurs. Il ne fallait pas renoncer aux armes admirables que mes maîtres métaphysiciens avaient mises entre mes mains. Je prétendais bien sûr devenir un vrai romancier, écrire des *histories qui auraient l’odeur du feu de bois, des champignons d’automne ou du poil mouillé des bêtes, mais ces histoires devraient être secrètement mues par les resorts de l’ontologie.*” (*Vent Paraclet* 174-5). Tournier’s hopes to write in a manner that would integrate sensibility with experience, and thought with feeling, as before the dissociation of sensibility – which, T.S. Eliot noticed in the essay on “The Metaphysical Poets” - became more radical in the wake of the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment.

materialism of the administered island leaves the stage, replaced by a sense and experience of the sublime.

Although lured by (post) modern-like impulses to dominate, control, and exacerbate the importance of reason, when confronted by the other in the form of Vendredi, Robinson’s experience demonstrates that postmodern instability and fragmentation, which the ego (Blake’s “Spectre”) brings about, can be overcome. Subsequently, genuine transformation and integration are possible. Self-transformation is far from easy or enjoyable, and the way to it is fraught with challenges, even dangers.

Transformation is the result of initiation, which is central to any authentic human life, as Mircea Eliade proposes in Rites and Symbols of Initiation: “initiation lies at the core of any genuine human life” (135). This is so for two reasons: “The first is that any genuine human life implies profound crises, ordeals, suffering, loss and reconquests of self,” “death and resurrection.” The second is that, irrespective of the fulfilment experienced till then, there may be moments in one’s life when “something seems to be missing, and life is seen as a failure.” In such moments of crisis, there is a longing for “new, regenerated life, fully realised and significant.” This is not the vague feeling that a change is needed, or “the obscure desire of every human soul to renew itself periodically.” Rather, it is the hope “to obtain a definitive and total renovation, a renewal capable of transmuting life” (Eliade 135). The exploits of Robinson and Rahel-Estha provoke such a pattern of renovation; their transmutations affect the deepest recesses of their selves. In the following section, I discuss the renovation of the self and its obstacles.

5.2. Beyond the Ego and Rationality

In traditional literature, the hero can only achieve self-transformation after overcoming a few obstacles (Eliade 135). For Robinson, most of the impediments to self-transformation pertain to his own psyche, while external circumstances also provide an impetus towards, or a pretext for, self-renovation. Rahel and Estha, on the other hand, have to face adverse external circumstances which initially almost break them, but eventually bring about internal revolutions in the twins’ shared soul. Among their adverse external circumstances are the relentless pressures of a society paralysed by its conditionings; the exigencies of their extended family; and the aggressiveness of the resentment voiced by the family’s “accusers,” Baby Kochamma and Chacko. All these factors bring about fears, guilt, and grief for the twins, and cause their self-confidence and lifeworld to become brittle. These obstacles to the soul’s wholeness are overcome through Rahel’s symbolic return home.
Robinson’s initial transformation involves overcoming illusions (that he could build a seaworthy boat by himself, for example), and the temptation to evade into the past. He grows out of this situation and learns to cherish what circumstances provide and to derive wisdom from experience. Initially he cannot enjoy the beauty of the island, which he sees as adverse as long as he focusses on pre-conceived ideas of what the good life is (the company of fellowmen, material comforts); nor can he learn from Speranza, or from his own solitary experience. He falls into the *souille* state, from which he initially recovers by bootstrapping himself through his use of reason. He clings to the rational faculty in order to prevent future lapses. The rational stage occupies most of the novel, and it overshadows both the *souille* stage, and the stage of emotional spontaneity in Vendredi’s company.

When his actions and thoughts are based on rationality, Robinson’s life is highly organised and planned; he aims to organise everything around from nature to society and religion, similar to the Enlightenment *philosophes* and the scientists who followed in their wake. Robinson records in his log-book his ideal, his demand, for a quantified, accounted-for world:

> Je veux, j’exige que tout autour de moi soit dorénavant mesuré, prouvé, certifié, mathématique, rationnel. Il faudra procéder à l’arpentage de l’île, établir l’image réduite de la projection horizontale de toutes ses terres, consigner ces données dans un cadastre. Je voudrais que chaque plante fût étiquetée, chaque oiseau bagué, chaque mammifère marqué au feu. Je n’aurai de cesse que cette île opaque, impénétrable, pleine de sourdes fermentations et des remous maléfiques, ne soit métamorphosée en une construction abstraite, transparente, intelligible jusqu’à l’os. (67)

Robinson wishes that everything around him were measured, rational, quantified. Speranza needs to be mapped, and its resources recorded in a register. Each plant should be labelled, each bird ringed, each mammal marked with fire. The island, which previously appeared as full of mysterious forces, should become an abstract construction, “intelligible to the bone.” While Robinson hopes to understand “to the bone” every aspect of his island, and chart it until it is transformed into an abstract, transparent, and rationally intelligible construct, Roy wishes to flesh the “bleached bones of history” (33) with the emotions, stories, and thoughts of the characters involved. In Robinson’s case, map-making and charting the land are expressions
of his desire to appropriate, to possess, much as the encyclopedic impulse to gather all data, all knowledge of nature, motivated Diderot and the *encyclopédistes*.

Robinson’s intention of marking with fire every mammal symbolises the disregard of the European colonisers for the pain incurred through their efforts to civilise and organise indigenous peoples. There is little or no room for emotion. Even Robinson’s prayers express little religious fervour; instead, they seem to be the summoning, or the worshipping, of his own ego projection (like Blake’s Nobodaddy), rather than an attempt to communicate with a higher agency or his deeper self. Epiphany occurs only later, when reason-imposed order is transcended. The unknown, and all that cannot be comprehended by what Kant called “the natural light of reason” (in “What is Enlightenment?”), is abhorred by the rational mind. This is the reason why Speranza is described as “cette île opaque, impénétrable, pleine de sourdes fermentations et des remous maléfiques” (Tournier 67).

The exacerbated ego-consciousness that has made Robinson sole sovereign of the virgin island bursts in manifestations of irritation and cruelty against the subaltern, the seemingly inferior Vendredi. But Robinson does not see his battering of Vendredi as aggressive, or his own outbursts of anger as inappropriate. On the contrary, he justifies his cruel behaviour. In his log-book he writes that it is all for Vendredi’s own good: “Certes, je le bats, mais comment ne comprendrait-il pas que c’est pour son bien?” (Tournier 154) (“Of course, I give him a hiding, but how come he doesn’t understand that’s for his own good?”). Robinson’s attitude indicates that reason can justify anything whatsoever; even cruelty or atrocities can be rationally substantiated if there is no recourse to humane feelings. The inflated ego is self-sufficient: posited in a shell-like personality, Robinson cuts himself off from any possible external communication. Resorting to an almost exclusive reliance on the rational faculty and to hyperactivity have been strategies for survival and for warding off madness; however, these have become second nature to Robinson. Susan Petit rightfully notes Robinson re-creates the civilisation he has left behind because he can give himself a reason for existing only by hyperactivity – he is not, as in Defoe’s book, restoring a necessary and superior order of existence, that of European civilisation, but merely doing things that keep him from feeling useless, purposeless, meaningless. This extreme reaction is the result of the dialectic; to escape the wallow, he must do the exact opposite of living slothfully. (4)
Hyperactivity is not as meaningful for Tournier’s Robinson as it had been for Defoe’s protagonist, whose activity and planning recreated the European civilisation. The exploits of Tournier’s Robinson expose the risks incumbent in a civilisation that relies entirely on reason. His hyperactivity stands for a swing in the direction opposite to slothfulness, but there is no balance in his actions. While Defoe’s Robinson created a forerunner of modernity on his island, Tournier’s protagonist shows the risks of postmodernity, as a paradigm continuing on from modernity and carrying some of its characteristics to extreme. The postmodern self can only be balanced in relation to the other.

Posited in the gap between God, which he sees as his (only) superior, and Vendredi, whom he perceives as sauvage, Robinson as priest, king, and administrator manages to connect with neither. He does not see the need to establish genuine connections, which would require humility and acceptance, as opposed to his self-created world of arrogance and judgment. In what he construes as the epitome of reason-based organisation, one can see a manifestation of abject behaviour, bowing before superior forces – God in this case – and belittling the ones considered inferior, i.e., the other. Inasmuch as Robinson relies entirely on rationality, he condemns himself to loneliness and barrenness: he cannot actually connect with God, nor does he allow Vendredi’s exuberance to enrich his world.

Limited to a rational construct with little grounding in reality, Robinson’s project of acquiring happiness by organising Speranza is doomed to failure, much as Estha’s attempt to forestall future developments results in tragedy. The destinies of Estha, and of Robinson of the administered island, illustrate the fate of any monochord theory that purports to be a paradigm, for reluctance or refusal to engage in dialogue with other outlooks has disastrous outcomes. These effects are symbolised by the deaths of Sophie-Mol, Ammu, and Velutha in The God of Small Things, and in Tournier’s novel with the explosion that destroys all of Robinson’s organisational achievements. But while Sophie-Moll’s death signals the end of the children’s age of innocence, and the beginning of an arduous process of maturation, for Robinson, the annihilation of his world signals a more immediate awakening to the futility of rationalism and materialism: “The gunpowder explosion at the end of Chapter 7 of Vendredi erupts from the ‘chaos’ or jumble of rocks, at the centre of the island and marks a kind of rebirth, a completely new beginning in Robinson’s life” (Gascoigne 147).

Destruction paves the way to rebirth: the obliteration of characters’ worlds gives way to transmutations akin to alchemical ones. While Tournier signifies the destruction that

287 The effects of refusing dialogue with other theories or worldviews are illustrated by Blake in “The Little Boy Lost.” I discuss this aspect in “Interconnections in Blakean and Metamodern Space.”
precedes re-birth by the obliteration of objects, Roy’s transformations are led by the deaths of people. In both cases, however, a new personality emerges once the obstacles of ego or excessive rationality on the one hand, and guilt and fear, on the other, are overcome. The self opens to the other, makes sense of experience, and even accedes to an experience of joy.

5.3. Towards Innocence

Si j’avais cinquante-trois minutes à dépenser, je marcherais tout doucement vers une fontaine. (If I had fifty-three minutes to spare, I would walk slowly towards a well.) (Exupère, Le Petit Prince)

The trajectory described by Robinson’s evolution includes several mental and spiritual milestones, among them a return to innocence followed by rediscovery of spontaneous and joyful creativity (with Vendredi’s example). The civilised Robinson becomes open to teaching from the araucan, and he consequently develops a new faith in himself, in the island, and in Vendredi. Learning to communicate and later to forgive, and ultimately reaching a state of integration, mark important sequential steps in his transmutation. The concluding epiphany, as the moment in which the phases of his transformation integrate and acquire their significance, is anticipated by previous instances of joy, suspended time, or bracketed rationality. For instance, when the flow of sand stops in the sand clock, Robinson experiences a state of joy in the arrested time that ensues. He describes this joy as “un moment d’innocence” (Vendredi 94). He rejoices at his momentary release, the holiday granted by the seemingly interrupted passage of time, “le temps était suspendu. Robinson était en vacance” (Vendredi 93). But this moment of innocence is still contaminated by his desire to control and rule, to pose himself at the centre of the world. Captive in an organiser’s, coloniser’s, or conqueror’s mind-frame, he cherishes the realisation that his powers extend to a mastery of time: “la toute-puissance de Robinson sur l’île – fille de son absolue solitude – allait jusqu’à une maîtrise du temps!” (Vendredi 93).

The innocence that he now has a glimpse of – as a brief break from the “rigueur de métronome” dictated by the “rythme obsédant des gouttes s’écrasant une à une dans le bac”

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288 Robinson’s gradual transformation evokes the series of alchemical transmutations represented as a seven-tiers tree of philosophy. The number seven figures in numerous alchemical tracts. A suggestive example is the “Seven virgins being transformed,” an illustration to the Songe de Poliphile (reproduced in Jung, Psychology and Alchemy 41). This image of the seven virgins links alchemical transmutation with the feminine, in its hypostatisation of suror mistica, who acts as an agent or catalyst of transformation. As mentioned earlier, the feminine plays major parts in the self transformations underwent by the characters of both Tournier’s and Roy’s novels.
(Vendredi 93) – is to be realised more fully after the full collapse of his reason-based organised administration of Speranza. His return to innocence is associated with a rediscovery of qualities such as creativity, the ability to play (e.g., dressing of cacti and other plants), and submission to learning from another. He opens to Vendredi, who becomes his mentor, personifying spontaneity and child-like innocence, and whose function is to stimulate “mental and spiritual outreach” (Gascoigne 176). Vendredi also opens the possibility of existence at a different level, higher than the telluric, more spiritual than the mundane, which is symbolised by his creation of the Aeolian harp. With Vendredi’s help, Robinson is uprooted from his terrestrial and limited existence, and accedes to a stage of aerial, more spiritual, existence: he is “arraché à son trou par le génie éolien.” As a result, he transforms from an earth-bound larva, “l’homme de la terre,” into a glittering butterfly, “un être de soleil” (Gascoigne 176).

During this process of transformation, Robinson discovers affection instead of domination, and opens up to communication as opposed to control; he has meaningful exchanges with Vendredi, seen now as an equal, or even a superior, and with the island. In doing so he assumes a more humble outlook. Humility favours epiphany, and makes possible the access to a knowledge of the essences, sometimes symbolised in literature as the roots (Descartes, Réé). In an interview with Petit, Tournier describes the tripartite transformation that Robinson experiences in order to achieve “a direct intuition of essence” (Petit 180), phrasing this transformation in terms of Spinozan epistemology:

Robinson goes through three stages which resemble Spinoza’s three kinds of knowledge. First there’s the pig wallow, then the administered island, and the solar life, which somewhat resemble Spinoza’s three kinds of knowledge, which are passion, scientific knowledge, and direct intuition of essence. (Petit 180)

Petit emphasises the three main stages in Robinson’s development as three ways of knowledge, from the instinctual, to the rational, to the spiritual. Accordingly, Robinson’s story is a story of self-realisation: he becomes aware of his self as being not merely a set of instincts, nor only rationality or ego, nor emotions alone, but a spiritual sublimation of these, integration at a superior level. The spiritual identity he discovers eventually is symbolised by the presence of the rising sun (a symbol of the spirit and divinity in Christian iconography) in the final epiphany. The transformation that leads to the solar apotheosis (“apothéose solaire”)
begins as soon as Robinson’s rigid reason relents, and he experiences a sense of *ravissement*, ecstasy, and delight at the new dimension found:

L’éblouissement heureux qui l’enveloppa le fit chanceler et l’obligea à s’appuyer de l’épaule au chambranle. Plus tard, réfléchissant sur cette sorte d’extase qui l’avait saisi et cherchant à lui donner un nom, il l’appela *un moment d’innocence*. Découverte merveilleuse: il était donc possible d’échapper à l’implacable discipline de l’emploi du temps et des cérémonies sans pour autant retomber dans la souille! (Tournier 93-4)

Tournier explores, from multiple angles, human positioning towards reason, especially the attraction to the extremes of reason: lack of reason invites madness; too much reason and order dry the soul of emotion. Between these parameters lies the “moment of innocence,” when the soul is free from instincts and liberated from the constraints of organised existence, when the self is free to be and to become. The resulting state is one of “éblouissement heureux,” which is the outcome of a wonderful discovery: he could escape the relentless discipline of organised time and ceremonies without necessarily reverting to slothfulness. The mature Robinson’s solution is metamodern, in that he transcends reason, and integrates it with emotion, while forestalling the risks of falling into the excesses of either. In doing so, he redisCOVERs innocence.

Becoming (*werden*) figures large in both Robinson’s and the twins’ stories. The heroes experience a series of transmutations (Gascoigne 169), at the end of which, the initiated character becomes a different person, no longer subjected to the common destiny of the mortal condition (“l’initié est devenu un autre home, qui ne sera plus soumis au destin commun, celui de la condition mortelle”) (Vierne 120). The self undergoes a transformation from ignorance or limited knowledge (awareness limited to sense data in Robinson’s case; children’s partial understanding in Estha’s and Rahel’s situation) to self-knowledge, and to understanding the meaning of experience.

The dominant in these narratives is ethical: the protagonists become, they transform in relation to the self, and open towards the *other* – in Robinson’s case first affectionately, with Vendredi, then out of care, in his relationship with Jaan. In *The God of Small Things*, Rahel manages to communicate with Baby Kochamma and Comrade Pillai due to a sense of forgiveness, and Estha opens to their mutual love.

289 See also Gascoigne 169.
Narratives of transformation may be associated with a re-emergence of myths, and with awareness of their ability to both reflect and influence everyday life. The myth of the self-made, self-sufficient “man of modernity” is revisited by Tournier, while Roy questions the indictment of millennia-old traditions. Yet the narrative aspect of myths, retold for a contemporary audience, may abet the recovery of some of the deeper levels of the self, as evinced in the kathakali performance, which brings Roy’s two siblings together, and in the reference to “la jeudi des innocents” in the final paragraph of Vendredi.

Unlike the postmodern disappearance of the author, the death of the subject, and the propensity for fragmentation or oscillation between systems, the metamodern novel brings to the fore humans’ connection to and interdependence with fellow humans, the natural environment, and ontological perception. Connections and networks are important in such narratives that stress relationships, rather than individuals who are segregated and forlorn, or trapped in inescapable labyrinths. Tournier’s Vendredi is a good case in point. Although castaway, Robinson relates to his lost world by invoking and then re-creating a copy of the Western culture on Speranza; then, when Vendredi joins him, the dialogue between cultures contributes to the edification of a new Robinson. Similarly, in The God of Small Things, the Indian and British cultures provide a dialogue that shapes the personalities of the twins, their uncle Chacko and great-aunt Baby Kochamma, while Ammu and Velutha relate their relationship to the transience of a minimalist biological universe. However, the experience of other ontological levels is quite different in the two novels: while Robinson experiences an epiphanic sense of presence in the solar apotheosis, Ammu and Velutha worship their incomplete god of small things.

The metamodern story brings into play the possibility of epiphany despite, or as a natural consequence of, personal tragedy (such as the shattering of all Robinson’s wealth and his cultural constructs, or the many deaths and separations that beset the twins in Roy’s novel), the necessity of evaluating and coming to terms with a plurality of traditions (Robinson’s Western modernity and Vendredi’s less rational culture, and the Hindu and Christian, postcolonial and imperial in Roy’s novel), as well as the integration of reason and sensibility within one’s self to achieve a transmutation. Robinson’s and the twins’ stories are narratives about acquiring innocence after experience. Roy and Tournier propose that the only transformation worth undertaking is the one that leads towards higher innocence.

As a result of self-transformation, the postmodern self is able to experience innocent joy: the formerly fragmented and segregated individual cherishes an awareness of psychic unity, as well as a connection with nature. Robinson experiences a sense of delight as the
sun’s rays envelop his body from head to toe: “une jubilation douce m’enveloppe et me transporte des pieds à la tête, aussi longtemps que le soleil-dieu me baigne de ses rayons” (Tournier 230). Robinson’s transformation is reminiscent of an alchemical trajectory from the heavy elements of water and earth to the lightness of wind and light. His metamorphosis is a spiritual coming of age, in which the feminine, such as the island bearing the female name Speranza, or the image of his sister Lucy, have played a significant role. Vendredi, too, whose name evokes Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, has been crucial in catalysing this evolution from reason-dominated self, to a self open to creativity, imagination, spontaneity, and joy.

Similarly, Rahel guides the “farsighted” Estha (319), who retreats to his island of silence and solitude when his plans for proofing the future are shattered. She leads him out of his isolation and into a state of communication with her, and with others, through his participation in the collective enjoyment of the kathakali performance.

6. The Self and the Other

The self’s ability to relate to the other is an important characteristic of the self’s becoming. The distinction between the self and the other is an aspect of modern self-awareness that stems from the Enlightenment philosophy, instantiating a Cartesian partition between mind and body, the self and the divine, nature and culture. This partition culminates in analyticity, which promises true and objective knowledge. However, contemporary scientific theories advocate a philosophy not of categorical distinctions and analysis but of connections, of linking various levels of existence, and of accommodating contraries (as in Barabasi’s Linked or my own “Interconnections”). Novels like Vendredi and The God of Small Things illustrate this understanding in fiction.

6.1. Interconnections: Crossing Artificial Borderlines

Tournier emphasises the contrast between the self and the other by pairing Robinson and Vendredi and having them inhabit a lonely Pacific island. The tensions, between instinct and rationality, spontaneous expression of affection and deliberate organisation, nature and culture, technology and emotion, underscore Robinson’s experience on his island. The rational civilised Robinson is the exact antithesis of the spontaneous Vendredi, their
contrasting natures demonstrating “l’antagonisme entre l’Anglais méthodique, avare et mélancolique, et le natif primesautier, profligie et rieur” (Vent Paraclet 188). For the most part, Tournier’s Robinsonade, much like Gold and Mitchell’s film adaptation,290 illustrates how Robinson, the embodiment of order, reason, and objectivity, attempts to impose his will and control291 on Vendredi, who represents the other element of modern dichotomies (i.e., spontaneity, imagination, subjectivity).

Nevertheless, in time, connections are established between the two cultures and religions that are represented by Robinson and Vendredi. This dialogue between these cultures explodes the traditional hierarchy – and the subsequent intolerance and intransigence – that posits Western culture and Christianity as superior, and rationality as the most respected human faculty, while looking down on other modes of thought. This raises for examination the issues of organised religion (and, extrapolating, any hyper-organised system or over-institutionalised religion) and the rational appropriation of nature. Tournier invites his readers, especially those brought up within Western culture, to re-think and re-evaluate their conditionings and assumptions. The tension of opposites becomes a fusion of antonymic terms: Robinson’s “stern command of duties”292 is counterbalanced by Vendredi’s enthusiasm, while Ammu – the woman who had a lot to offer – befriends and mates with Velutha, who appears in her dreams as the incomplete “God of Loss” (God of Small Things 290). Interconnections between seemingly impossible worlds are established through Ammu’s dreams, and the reveries of the Ammu-Velutha couple. The precariousness of their relationship is likened to the ephemeral things of nature.

The reconciliation of opposites puzzles the rational mind, and through reason’s positioning in the tension between contradictory terms, the self experiences new inner configurations, and new understandings of reality. Tournier’s and Roy’s engagement with contraries indicates an understanding of reality that goes beyond the rational, and relies on other faculties, such as intuition, the emotions, and imagination. Tournier and Roy fuse opposites and cross boundaries, while establishing interconnections between apparently irreconcilable realities.293 They upset and reverse hierarchies, and take pleasure in crossing

291 This attitude is quite understandable in Robinson as the exponent of a civilisation which had to conquer its environment in order to survive and accommodate its institutions, and which therefore learned to favour assertiveness.
292 This quotation from Blake, The Four Zoas, “Night the Seventh:” 23, spoken by Urizen, applies equally to Robinson of the administered island, who imposes strict rules and discipline to himself and to his subject.
293 A metaphor for the blurring of boundaries is the explosion of vegetation which encroaches upon the man-made world: upon her return home during the monsoon season, Rahel notes how “boundaries blur as tapioca
the border-lines between the demonic and the mundane, the scatological and the theological, the scientific and the poetic, the dissident and the conformist. Both Roy and Tournier exhibit within their prose the openness they hope for more generally in society.294

Roy’s feminine characters, especially Ammu and Rahel, defy artificial borders and conventions, such as caste, religion, societal expectations, and rules. This defiance is symbolised as the level crossing on the way to Cochin, where contradictory aspects of Indian culture converge, and the establishment (middle-class, Anglophile, conservative) is met with defiance on the part of the pro-communist procession of untouchables and hand workers. It is characteristic of Roy’s novel, as it is of Tournier’s writings, to “blur the boundaries, to burst out and transcend crude categorisation and binary structures.”295 By pairing opposites (which Roy describes as “things unbearable in their polarity, in their irreconcilable far-apartness”), by fusing them, they intensify the contrasts. Tournier believes, with Blake,296 that “the overlap, interplay and interchange between opposites are seldom polar and antithetical, but on the contrary natural companions” (Maclean 15). “Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and limits” mark the twins’ inner landscape after the fall from innocence. These borders stop limiting the self, and are crossed only after experience gives way to higher innocence. The mature Rahel and Estha’s simultaneous presence in the Ayemenem family home suggests that the “Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and limits” that separated them have been crossed, and the twins have recaptured some of the spiritual unity they had experienced as children.

6.2. The Other

Collapsing opposites can be linked with an awareness of the self as the root. If I know myself, I can understand and accommodate tendencies as dissimilar as my emotions, my reactions, and the dominating and controlling impulses of my ego. I can keep them in check as I comprehend both my difference and my sameness with the other. Self-awareness alters and evolves in time. In Psychology and Alchemy, Jung defines the self as the central archetype of the psyche, and he qualifies it in antinimical terms, both as unchangeable and as subject to transformation.

fences take root and bloom. Brick walls turn moss green. Pepper vines shake up electric poles. Wild creepers burst through laterite banks and spill across flooded roads.”
294 For a detailed discussion of the main trends and tendencies in Tournier’s novels, Worton’s study is probably one of the best to date.
296 Blake thought that contraries are necessary for human existence: “Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, /Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence” (Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, in Keynes 149).
Tournier’s and Roy’s novels weave into their pages issues of concern, among them the relationship between the self and the other, the effects of colonialism, the oppression of excessive rationality and rule-making, the succumbing to instincts, or the giving in to passions. They capture a contemporary preoccupation with ways of relating to the world (dominating nature, becoming subservient to it, striking a balance between the two), as well as the authors’ own philosophical quandaries, thus creating a complex universe, in which

the relationship of the human and the world is far from being straightforward and simple. In particular, the lack of the Other, l’autrui, put Robinson’s world in Tournier’s novel into jeopardy. Because there is no other [to start with], Robinson’s schemes of understanding and action break down. (Haapala viii)

The other supports the self, and in the absence of the other, the self collapses. The self grows and develops in relation to the other. The other stands for the challenge that forces the self out of its shell shaped by ego and conditionings; it is due to the other that the self expands and learns to relate to fellow beings and the world in fruitful ways. Tournier acknowledges the importance of the other, and names his novel not after the protagonist Robinson, but after the other, the australan who challenges and transforms Robinson’s outlook and mind-frame, and who brings about his self-transformation. Similarly, Roy’s novel takes the name of the incomplete god who defies organised systems of religion and power, metanarratives, accepted practices, and mainstream expectations, through his very incompleteness.

Towards the end of Tournier’s novel, the distinctions between Robinson and the island, and then between his self and the other, start to fade. This is partly because he is now more influenced by the forces operating on the island – the earth, the sun, and the sky – than by the cultural codes he brought with him to the island. Cultural and natural alterity have been bridged: the self has become like the other, and the differences between nature and culture have been smoothed.

Despite challenging one’s assumptions, to be human (to have a human and humane world) one needs the other. The other offers the chance to grow, which relatively static characters like Chacko or Baby Kochamma fail to take. Their folly, selfishness, and cruelty are exposed in comparison with Velutha’s generosity, Margaret’s pragmatism, and Ammu’s common sense. Unlike Rahel, who learns from the other, and from experience, and who adjusts her expectations, Chacko and Baby Kochamma fail to develop as characters. The self
needs *the other* in order to become oneself (Haapala viii), but it is a matter of choice whether *the other* is allowed to enrich the self.
6.3. Perversion vs. Innocence, or the Only Robinsonade Worth Undertaking

_Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique_ can be read in terms of a theory of the other, while some see this novel as a story of perversion: “C’est ce que suggère Tournier dans ce roman extraordinaire: il faut imaginer Robinson pervers; la seule robinsonade est la perversion même” (Deleuze 281). Yet, perversion, like beauty, is in the eye of the reader, a matter of interpretation. What I have proposed here is a different reading of _Vendredi_, a reading that focuses not only on the other, but on a self that is shaped or constructs its awareness in relation with the other. For Roy, an example of the other is centuries and millennia of oppressive colonising of the self by authoritative systems. Some of these systems have been functional to a stage (the four ages of humans, for instance, is an interesting proposition, still worth considering), while many are obsolete and redundant, such as the caste system, or harsh restrictions against widows and female divorcees.

This is a reading centred not on perversion, but on innocence. In this thesis, I have been looking for reasons to read _Vendredi_ and _The God of Small Things_ innocently, as enacting self-fulfilment, as opposed to perversion. I have argued that Robinson, like Rahel, acquires a higher innocence. This is not the untested innocence of the child (though it bears some similarities with it), but a kind of innocence that comes after experience, and despite whatever perversion may have accompanied that experience. Perhaps because of the part played by experience, this higher innocence may be mistaken by some for perversion. Nonetheless, I propose that the only Robinsonade worth undertaking is the one that leads to regained innocence. And this Robinsonade stands for a re-discovered process of initiation and transformation.

Emotions play an important part in this transformation; they trigger introspection and catalyse the transmutation. “Les limbes” (from the title of Tournier’s novel) suggest the limbic area of the brain, which is responsible for emotions, whereas Vendredi’s name links to Venus.

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297 The self, as used in this analysis, is not the ego, which Blake calls “the selfhood.” “The self or selfhood is the innate selfishness,” which “is opposed to Humanity.” It “develops” into the Spectre (Jerusalem 33: 17), which stands for “one’s Satan” (Damon 363); “the Great Selfhood Satan, Worship’d as God by the Mighty Ones of the Earth” (J 33: 17). As seen previously, the confusion between the ego and divinity is also characteristic of Robinson of the administered island in _Vendredi_. The Selfhood sets up rules to control humankind, and its effects are deadly: This agency is a “Devouring Power” (J 33: 17), a “Polypus of Death,” a “Spectre over Europe and Asia, withering the Human form by Laws of Sacrifice of Sin! By laws of Chastity& Abhorence to murder the Divine Humanity” (J 49: 24). Setting laws and assuming “universal Attributes,” the Selfhood is the ultimate enemy to awakening, which needs to be purged away in the “furnaces of affliction” (J: 96-98), which stands for Blake’s equivalent to initiation or transformative experience.
By using “Vendredi” instead of Robinson in the title, Tournier reinforces the stress he lays on emotions rather than on reason. An epiphanic peace of mind, also evoked by “Pacifique” in the title, the merging of the protagonist’s soul with the forces of a spiritualised nature, is achieved at the end of the novel. These merging differences stem not from reason or analytical mental activity – which has proved its limitations in the futility of Robinson’s project to map and organise the island, to label and classify its fauna and flora, – but from a state in which sensibility complements and counterbalances reason. For Tournier, sensibility serves as a means of transcending and eventually illuminating reason.

Emotions and reason reveal each other with their advantages and limitations, in a contrapuntal dialectic of light and shadow making each other more obvious by contrast. Accordingly, metamodern authors aim to reveal the world for what it is, beyond the appearances that are commonly taken for unchallengeable reality. Such authors make the transition from fictional worlds to the absolute reality of everyday life, and vice-versa (McHale 71). This two-way traffic between fictional worlds and everyday life creates a type of “fiction of reality” (Kalbermatten xi) that reveals the meaning of lived experience.

As in Roy’s and Tournier’s realistic novels, metamodern renditions of reality are not simply representations. Nor do metamodern writers make it their primary business “to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented,” as postmodern authors do according to Lyotard (81). The sense of the sublime and the feeling of presence are realities in metamodern fiction. Like the postmodern writer, the metamodern writer questions and challenges the reality s/he represents, but his or her attitude and intention is not ironic or parodic, as is the postmoderns’.

Moreover, metamodern authors do not despair of the inescapable condition in which they feel trapped. Quite the contrary, they adopt a somewhat candid approach in their search for the causes of individual and collective ailments, of present social malfunctions and by assessing their roots they try to put forward solutions. They do not accept inhumanity as does in Particles élémentaires, but rather redefine, re-imagine, and rediscover humanity. Their humanity is not made of stone, durable and eternal, as is the humankind imagined by Christoph Ransmayr in Die letzte Welt; rather, it is a humanity of small things, of wisdom and understanding, magnified by compassion and delight, as envisioned by Blake in the Songs of Innocence and the Prophetic Books.298 Trying to achieve such humanity through posing the

298 This state of innocence and wisdom is presented in the Book of Thel, where the heroine talks to plants, or in the Ode of the Ancient Bard, where wisdom as a state of visionary perception of reality is sought.
subject in perpetual introspection, and by questioning their own selves, metamodernists establish a significant step away from postmodernism’s more negative impulses and towards more enlightenment. Metamodernists’ humanity is respectful of reason, but also more loving, empathetic, and innocent than postmodernist inclinations. Inevitably, the first steps in establishing metamodernism are being taken by writers and artists, while the rest of us may follow their example.

The metamodern self emerges from the dialectic of the modern and the postmodern. These two period terms are opposites that complement each other. Metamodernism is the expression of the hope to find the means of escaping this pendulum-like oscillation between the two, and to accede to an eagle’s-eye view to see them in their dialectic.

Metamodernism stands for an attempt to “go beyond” the tradition of rationality at the core of modern thought. Nevertheless, metamodernism acknowledges the virtues of modern thought, its unavoidability, its usefulness, its having been a necessary step in the collective evolution of human consciousness. Tournier expresses this idea as Robinson accedes to a state where epiphany is possible. The epiphany does not follow from his succumbing to a less than human state, while living “in the pig wallow,” in “sloth and bestiality” (Petit 5), but comes only after he has resorted to rationality – in order to organise his life and his universe – as an antidote to the threat of animal degradation. His epiphany does not occur because of this order of rationality that he adopted. With the primacy of reason challenged by Vendredi and negated by the explosion, Robinson discovers joy in beauty, play, creativity, and human relationship; he opens to the world’s spontaneous order. His journey has been anything but straightforward. Robinson achieves “a mystical union” (Petit 8) between his spirit and the world only after going through psychological rebirth by communicating with “the other” island, a mother-like, spiritual and sublime presence which he perceives through epiphanies; after having resorted to reason and then seeing its limits; after recovering a higher innocence that allows him “to enjoy his entire body through play” (Petit 5, 7); after embracing a new

299 The instrument of introspection cannot be reason alone, for, Robinson of the administered island in Tournier’s Vendredi, and the Manhattan Project, in real life, have shown where solitary reason leads if unchecked by emotions such as care and empathy. Both a sense of compassion, and respect for the humanity of groups and individuals seem necessary to counterbalance reason and the ego or arrogance which reason can foster unawares. The flaws inherent in allowing reason to take the lead of human existence have been noted by Horkheimer in The Eclipse of Reason (v, vi). The humanism, which Horkheimer thinks was lost on the train of progress governed by triumphant – yet unavoidably devoid of sensibility – reason, is retrieved and given a new dimension in metamodernism. Metamodern humanism connects with the Renaissance dream of homo universalis in that human faculties are not seen in their separateness but in their unity, with the difference that it values epiphany and interconnections of theories, ontological levels, and other systems (biological, ecological, etc). No longer the centre of the universe, as Renaissance humanists would have liked, humans nevertheless assume a status which is both dignified and humbling as hubs in the vast network of nature; they occupy a place at the apex of a long process of evolution, but are still aware of being part and parcel of a greater whole.
sensibility and then seeing its aptness to disappoint. Only then are his body and soul no longer perceived as distinct; only then can they “unite” (Petit 48).

While contemplating the Whitebird as it fades on the horizon, Robinson’s epiphany translates as “fulfilment” or “a millennial happiness” (Petit 8, 100). His epiphany instantiates presence as sublime experience associated with the hard-to-grasp Holy Spirit, suggested both by the ship’s name (evoking St. John’s vision of a white dove), and by the cabin boy, perhaps a male “avatar of the Holy Spirit” (Petit 100). Although “the most satisfying reading of the novel is one in which Robinson is conceived as the discoverer of a new way to live with oneself and the world” (Petit 21), Tournier’s novel opens to multiple interpretations rather than closing in a roman à thèse. His vision of the world seems to look simultaneously backwards and forwards; he envisages a path away from a Sartrean existentialist deadlock, leading to a state interpretable either as “the unconsciousness of primitive tribes or, perhaps, as a goal to which the modern world should aspire, a state in which people can accept themselves and almost achieve happiness” (Petit 20). Petit notes the radical difference that distinguishes Tournier’s novel from other texts belonging to the genre of Robinsonade (robinsonnade, in French):

Whether he returns symbolically to a distant past or creates a future society, each of the kinds of challenges he makes shows that the book is an antirobinsonnade, for Robinson does not re-create the England he left but establishes a new kind of existence. (Petit 20)

Starting from the tradition of the Robinsonade, Tournier innovates; he integrates what he finds fertile and significant in the Western tradition in order to sublimate it in a potentially challenging, even ground-breaking, view. One of the traditions he assimilates is that of the mysticism of Joachim de Fiore, as shown previously. The twelfth-century Cistercian monk envisaged a time when institutionalised religion would be unnecessary and infidels would unite with Christians, as it eventually happens with Robinson and Vendredi on the utopic (proto-chronic or forward looking?) Speranza. Outlining the possibility of a world beyond institutionalised Christianity (Petit 11), Tournier’s outlook integrates Christianity while aspiring to go beyond it.

Similarly, although forward-looking, metamodernism is the expression of a tendency to instantiate the grounding of culture and society, not only in reason or in art, but also in the spirit, in a vein similar to Huxley’s philosophia perennis. Indeed, many features of the
perennial philosophy, “as a system of thought or rather a collection of insights defying institutionalisation, and characterised by integration and syncretism, in the light of which humility, love, and empathy are cardinal virtues, while arrogance is seen as dangerous,” have their correlatives in metamodernism. This grounding in the spirit is bound to affect and give new meanings to a grounding of reason and art. Not surprisingly, a key metamodern metaphor is not the Enlightenment grid, nor the arrow of progress, but the spiral of evolution, which Blake represented in “Jacob’s Dream.”

Tournier and Roy do nothing less than imagine metaphysical and ethical breakthroughs. The mutations they envisage turn away from both modern individualism (demonstrated by Tournier as solitary rational existence on a distant island) and postmodern fragmentation of the self (as symbolised by the twins’ separation). The metamodern turn is also a turn towards the story, but not merely to the story as entertainment. Postmodern literature, especially low postmodernism, abounds with entertainment. But metamodernism provides meaningful narrative that involves the audience, and answers some of its quandaries, aiming either to coax or to shock the reader into regaining a humanity of concern, care, and compassion. It is a turn that restores to story its meaning, which implicitly expresses the hope of restoring meaning to one’s life.

Moreover, metamodernism is a turn towards the story that bridges gaps between levels of existence, between high and low, the human and the natural (vegetal, animal or mineral, as in the different stages of Robinson’s transformation), the material and the spiritual. The gaps are also bridged horizontally, for the metamodern narrative is not so much a story of an epistemological endeavor, as it is a story of establishing links between humans. For these reasons, a visual representation of the self-transformation that metamodern authors propose is the above-mentioned figure of Jacob’s ladder, which poses the self as a space of dialogue. Figured as a space in which angels climb and descend, their dynamism is suggestive of establishing connections and interceding between high and low, between created and uncreated, between reality and fiction, between factual and imaginative existence.
Closing Remarks. The Significance of this Study. Directions for Further Research

Modernism, with its elitism, its fascination with the new, as in Ezra Pound’s imperative to “make it new!”, and the experimentalism that derives from these, may be a culminating point of the reason-centred heritage of Enlightenment. To this inheritance, the postmodernists reacted through their distrust of grand projects or metanarratives, such as the Enlightenment, or Socialism, and by paying more attention to the individual and his/her sensibility than to big groups of people, expressed by Roy as “the greater common good,” which oftentimes camouflages the vested interests of an oligarchy. Postmodernism empowered peripheral groups to the degree that these groups sometimes assumed control over the majority or artists and cultural theorists. While modernism may be regarded as centering on reason, postmodernism tends to emphasise emotion, often of the negative variety.

Although postmodernism as a mode or period term is still mentioned at the periphery of Western culture, the term has lost its power. The works of few writers at present could be labelled as postmodern. A new sensibility has emerged which is characterised by a concentration on integrating reason and emotions, recuperating traditions, as opposed to the modern rejection of tradition and the postmodern ironic detachment. Metamodernism reinstates humans’ preoccupation with the ethical dimension, as opposed to the epistemological dominant in modernism, and the ontological in postmodernism, and establishes connections with fellow humans. This inclination contrasts with (post)modern individualism and paves the way for establishing a dialogue with other paradigms of thought. No world outlook or theory is regarded by metamodernists as superior to another, but communication between different perspectives is essential. Because it goes beyond modernism and postmodernism and succeeds them in time, the naming of this new paradigm and sensibility as “metamodern” is appropriate.

I have tried to show that the possible origins of a perception of the self as an integration of agencies dates from Romanticism, and even precedes modernity, in alchemical texts such as the late Renaissance work The Rosary of Philosophers. The self is seen as a
balance of rationality and emotions, and the “awakened” self is one in which imagination is alive and active. The thesis has discussed the transformation of the self enacted in Tournier’s *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*, and in Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. Tournier’s novel presents the transformation from an age of instincts (the sub-human existence “dans la souille”), followed by “enlightened” rationalism (“l’île organisée”), to one of emotional spontaneity, under Vendredi’s guidance, to eventually reach a state of spiritual realisation in the denouement of the novel. Roy’s novel follows the developments in the inner life of the twins Rahel and Estha from an age of innocence through traumatic experience to a higher innocence that ensues from the spirit’s ability to forgive, to come to terms with the past and to live in the present while relating to traditions in a critical yet fruitful way.

The epiphanic experience is the culmination of Robinson’s existence on the island, the last act of an existence that enacts Joachim of Fiore’s three ages of mankind: those of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit (Reeves and Hirsch-Reisch 247). The age of patriarchal power, of the stern authority and scientific rigour on the administered island, is followed by the post-explosion fraternity of Robinson and Vendredi. Forgetting previous hierarchy, forgiving the mutual harm – of Robinson’s cruelty and Vendredi’s negligence, which resulted in destroying all his “master’s” work and wealth – , the two become brothers and friends, learning from and loving each other. A humbled Robinson learns from the previously disregarded *araucan*.

The third age, of apotheotic fulfilment, marks an integration of previous experiences, similar to Joachim of Fiore’s third era, in which “history reaches its apotheosis” (Reeves and Hirsch-Reisch 248). The pathway followed by the self to reach this stage is telling in terms of the nature of its transformations. Following Vendredi’s defection, the disappointed and grieving Robinson, who, at the *araucan*’s prompting had learned to abandon every plan and ambition for the sake of enjoying the fleeting moment as it comes, now suspends all hope and emotions. He feels betrayed, yet Speranza and the rising sun inspire him with the power to forgive, and to abandon himself once again to the present moment. The present is now invested for Robinson with deeper meanings as an aesthetic visionary experience. Immediately following this state of surrender, Robinson experiences a resurgence of intense emotions, a spiritual rebirth that asserts his connection with nature, and which may be described as an epiphany, a glimpse of the *other* island, the island of meaning and spiritual existence (Tournier 254).
Significance of this Study

The originality of this thesis is twofold: theoretical and interpretive. I will refer briefly to the interpretive aspect, then the theoretical.

The thesis has provided original interpretations of Blake’s model of the self as a synthesis of reason, imagination, and sensibility, based on arguments drawn from the poems and illuminations. An evolving pattern of transformation has also been identified at the level of the self, a progression from innocence, through experience, to higher innocence. Links between Blake’s Jerusalem and The Rosary of Philosophers have been identified and explored, and novel analyses of a few plates of Jerusalem (especially Plates 25 and 53) were undertaken. Blake’s insistence on the redemptive qualities of the feminine imagination, Jerusalem, has been linked to Irigaray’s philosophy of double subjectivity, which seeks to delineate a subjectivity in the feminine, radically different from male Western subjectivity.

The textual analyses have served to buttress the theoretical contributions. Tournier’s and Roy’s novels have been read in the light of Blake’s model of the self, and original interpretations of key aspects of the novels have been proposed, outlining features of an emerging cultural and literary paradigm. This emergent paradigm was posited in a dialogue with modernity, following Toulmin and Calinescu, and postmodernity, especially Lyotard, Irigaray, McHale, and Nicol. A few features of metamodernism as an emerging paradigm in literature and culture have been identified and analysed. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study dedicated to outlining metamodernism in literature, and reviewing the uses of the term metamodernism.

Further Research

Possibilities for further research along the lines set in this thesis, include extension of the discussion to other authors whose work indicates a metamodern sensibility, notably Andrei Codrescu, V.S. Naipaul, and Amos Oz, among others, as well as New Zealand authors such as Fiona Kidman, Michael Harlow, and Mary McCallum. There are opportunities to research the significance of values, networks and complex systems for culture, the interrelations and cross-fertilisation between theories, as well as the modern and pre-modern ancestry of metamodernism – especially Joyce’s Finnegans Wake. Other projects might include Jung’s relevance for literary and cultural studies, and deeper studies of alchemical texts such as The Rosary of Philosophers and Tabula Smaragdina.
A study of the history of rationality in the West could be another, possibly collective, project, based on a chapter I removed from this thesis due to limitations of space. Blake’s relevance to the understanding of the articulation of the contemporary self could be further explored, especially his proposition of a dynamic self in continuous transformation, which entertains philosophies or theories that evolve with time and experience.
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256


259


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267


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270


