Concrete and Desert Islands: Proto-Posthuman Crusoes in Daniel Defoe and J. G. Ballard

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Abstract

This article will argue that J. G. Ballard's *Concrete Island* can be productively read as a narrative that engages some of the central ideas of posthumanism and that from this reading one can then re-read its source text, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, as a proto-posthumanist text. Ballard's rewriting of this highly influential tale of a castaway trapped on a desert island emphasises the inhuman quality of contemporary Western society by having the protagonist, Robert Maitland, discover a more meaningful and more vital existence during his exile in a concrete wasteland. Paradoxically, this life is more human precisely because it involves an acknowledgement of the human as animal and of the similarly problematic distinction between the human and the technological. Maitland's becoming-posthuman is thus both a moving beyond and moving towards the human. From this perspective, it becomes possible to re-read *Robinson Crusoe* as a proto-posthumanist text, as Crusoe's constant anxiety about the distinction between the human and the non-human anticipates the posthumanist turn in the twentieth century. *Robinson Crusoe* reveals that the human is always already posthuman insofar as the text highlights Crusoe's failure to police the boundaries separating the human from the non-human. Similarly, I suggest here, the text also allows us to see how posthumanism is always already a *proto*-posthumanism, insofar as it is always already implied in that which it seeks to critique.

Keywords: posthumanism, J.G. Ballard, Daniel Defoe, adaptation

> The fact is that every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies
> our conception of the past, as it will modify the future.
> – Jorges Luis Borges, 'Kafka and His Precursors'

> Humans can live on an island only by forgetting what an island represents. Islands are
> either from before or for after humankind.
> – Gilles Deleuze, 'Desert Islands'

> All the Remedy that offer'd to my Thoughts at that Time, was, to get up into a thick
> busy Tree […] and where I resolv'd to sit all Night.
> – Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*

> The vegetation was wild and lush, as if the island was moving back in time to an
> earlier and more violent period.
> – J. G. Ballard, *Concrete Island*

J. G. Ballard's Posthumanist Crusoe

On one level, J. G. Ballard's *Concrete Island* (1974) is a rewriting of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), with the former text's protagonist Robert Maitland being a

kind of postmodern Crusoe, marooned not on a desert island in the middle of the ocean but on a patch of concrete below several motorway overpasses. Indeed, Ballard writes in the preface to *Concrete Island* that *Robinson Crusoe* is 'one of the first books we read as children'.[1] It is the 'fantasy that endures', he goes on to say – the fantasy not only of surviving alone on an island but of 'returning to our more primitive natures, stripped of the self-respect and the mental support systems with which civilisation has equipped us' (3). Echoing Crusoe's colonialist attitude, Ballard also suggests that at a 'deeper level' of this fantasy lies 'the need to dominate the island, and transform its anonymous terrain into an extension of our minds' (3). However, whereas Crusoe largely depicts his island adventure as an unfortunate and unhappy accident, Ballard suggests that in the twentieth century it may be that 'secretly, we [hope] to be marooned, to escape our families, lovers and responsibilities' (4). For Ballard, then, becoming marooned is a chance to escape from what he calls the 'elaborately signalled landscape' of modern technological society, and an opportunity to 'tyrannise ourselves, test our strengths and weaknesses, perhaps come to terms with aspects of our characters to which we have always closed our eyes' (4).

Ballard was fascinated with the topos of the island, and, indeed, what Simon Sellars refers to as 'the Crusoe metaphor […] is a motif [Ballard] would return to repeatedly' in his career.[2] Many of Ballard's short stories take up this theme, including 'My Dream of Flying to Wake Island' (1974) and 'The Enormous Space' (1989). The protagonists of these stories not only stand as emblems of a desire to break away from conventional society but also to embody the qualities of island space. As one character puts it in 'The Terminal Beach' (1964), '"[t]his island is a state of mind"', and indeed this overlap between inner and outer space is a hallmark of Ballard's fiction.[3] Ballard began using the phrase 'inner space' in the early 1960s to refer to this 'meeting ground between the inner world of the mind and the outer world of reality'.[4] His interest in *Robinson Crusoe* sits largely within this context, for what most fascinates him is the state of mind that an isolated man would develop and the strange overlapping of internal and external landscapes. However, Ballard often inverts the image of Crusoe in such a way as to suggest that we secretly wish to escape civilization. In 'The Enormous Space', the protagonist refers to himself as 'a reductive Crusoe paring away exactly those elements of bourgeois life which the original Robinson so dutifully reconstituted', whilst in *The Drowned World* (1962), the narrator describes Kerans' existence as an 'inverted Crusoeism – the deliberate marooning of himself without the assistance of a

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[1] J. G. Ballard, *Concrete Island* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), 3. (All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.) Ballard also makes clear his love of *Robinson Crusoe* in a memoir: 'I read children's versions of *Gulliver's Travels* and *Robinson Crusoe*, which I loved, especially *Crusoe*, and I can still hear the sound of waves on his beach'. J. G. Ballard, *Miracles of Life* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), 20.

[2] Simon Sellars, '"Zones of Transition": Micronationalism in the Work of J. G. Ballard', in *J. G. Ballard: Visions and Revisions*, ed. Jeannette Baxter and Rowland Wymer (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), 232.

[3] J. G. Ballard, 'The Terminal Beach', in *The Complete Short Stories*, vol. 2 (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), 30.

[4] '1968: Jannick Storm. An Interview with J.G. Ballard', in *Extreme Metaphors: Selected Interviews with J.G. Ballard, 1967-2008*, ed. Simon Sellars and Dan O'Hara (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), 16. For more on Ballard's concept of 'inner space', see his essays 'Which Way to Inner Space?' and 'Time, Memory and Inner Space', both of which are collected in *A User's Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews* (London: Flamingo, 1996). According to *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, there is some dispute about whether or not Ballard was the first to coin the term. 'Inner Space'; available at http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/inner_space. [accessed 30 June 2016].

gear-laden carrack wrecked on a convenient reef'.[5] Picking up on this latter phrase, Michel Delville argues that Maitland is also an 'inverted Robinson' who 'does not try to recreate a civilized society on a miniature scale but, instead, goes through a process of initiation that draws him away from civilization into the deepest and most primitive reaches of his unconscious self'.[6] Throughout many of Ballard's narratives, there is thus a concern with what happens when civilization breaks down: what alternative forms of life might human beings create for themselves once stripped of the veneer of civilized life? And what might a breakdown of civilization say about what it means to be human?

What I want to show in the first half of this essay is that Maitland's isolated existence on the island can be read as an exploration of issues central to the discourse of posthumanism, a reading that has escaped the attention of critics thus far. The text's affinity with posthumanism appears most prominently in its blurring of the line separating the human from the non-human: the descriptions of Maitland's bodily and mental life all put pressure on the notion of a unique human essence by foregrounding both his inseparability from technology and his regression to a more "primitive" or "animalistic" state during his exile. The landscape itself plays an important role in this, for it is the island that stimulates Maitland to develop a new kind of existence, which I will argue can be meaningfully described as posthuman. Simultaneously, Maitland's existence on the island is in a sense more human than his previous life. It is paradoxically only in leaving behind his humanity that Maitland is able to rediscover a more authentic version of it; being isolated from human civilization allows him to discover what has been repressed: that to be human is always already to be posthuman.

An Environment Built for Man's Absence

Like many of Ballard's narratives, the plot of *Concrete Island* is relatively simple. A middle-aged architect, Robert Maitland, is driving home along a motorway overpass when a tyre bursts, sending his car off the road and onto a concrete wasteland. His attempts to escape fail and cause further injuries, thereby seemingly trapping him. Eventually, Maitland discovers two other people inhabiting the island, a prostitute named Jane and an ex-circus acrobat and simpleton called Proctor. After an initial period in which Maitland believes that he is being held captive by the pair, he gradually comes to realise that nothing is preventing him from leaving. As a result, he takes pleasure in controlling and dominating Jane and Proctor, experimenting with the violent strains that were previously buried in his psyche. Eventually Jane becomes disgusted with Maitland's behaviour and leaves the island. Proctor is not so lucky and is killed in a freak accident, leaving Maitland alone on the island. The narrative ends with Maitland deciding to remain in a bid to come to terms with himself and the island.

Maitland's life on the island is represented as a more active and authentic existence, whilst by both implication and through occasional remarks it is clear that his previous life had had a stifling effect on him. From the opening scenes, it is immediately apparent that the world in which Maitland ordinarily lives is an inhuman environment, one in which 'the human inhabitants of this technological landscape no longer provided its sharpest pointers', to borrow a line from Ballard's earlier novel

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[5] J. G. Ballard, 'The Enormous Space', in *The Complete Short Stories*, vol. 2 (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), 701; J. G. Ballard, *The Drowned World* (London: Harper Perennial, 2012), 48.
[6] Michel Delville, *J. G. Ballard* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998), 42.

Crash (1973).[7] The environment surrounding the island is constructed out of concrete, metal, and paint, along with the burning rubber and glass windows of the endless stream of cars. On the horizon lie 'the dark façades of the high-rise apartment blocks', which look to Maitland like 'rectangular planets' (23). Much later, Jane alludes to the '"speculative building that's going up these days"', foregrounding the way that late-capitalism treats human habitats primarily as financial investments rather than dwelling places (163). Similarly, Sebastian Groes argues that *Crash*, *Concrete Island* and *High-Rise* (1975) are all about 'cars, motorways, and apartment blocks' and

> are primarily interested in allegorizing the spatial impact of these phenomena upon modes of living, revealing late capitalism's brutal reshaping of the social and cognitive processes that determine everyday lives. These novels capture the texture of modernity.[8]

As Ballard puts it in *High-Rise*, 'this was an environment built, not for man, but for man's absence'.[9] We can describe this environment as post-human in the sense that it is a world that no longer needs humankind and in which traditional forms of human life are replaced with abstract spaces and structures. On one level, the qualification of the island as 'concrete' draws a contrast with the 'abstract' world in which Maitland has been living: a world of massive urban planning, modernist architecture, and a world without affect.[10] By contrast, it is paradoxically the concrete wasteland that offers Maitland a space to reconnect with both his and others' humanity. As Sellars puts it, the island 'becomes a space where social relations can begin again, where the social order is decommissioned, recombined, reconstructed and reshaped in ways that subvert dominant systems of thought'.[11] One dominant system of thought that is subverted is humanism, for as Maitland reconnects with both his own body and with those of others, there occurs a blurring of the boundaries between the human, the animal and the technological. Paradoxically, if this then functions as a rediscovery of what it means to be human, it appears to reveal that being human is always already to be posthuman. What made Maitland's previous life inhuman is that it denied this.

Of Men, Machines and Prostheses

One way in which Maitland's new existence on the island can be read in posthumanist terms concerns his relationship with technology, which, as I will show, problematizes the notion that the human is something distinct from technology, with the latter being a mere addition or prosthesis to a historically prior and self-contained human being. This reading resonates with scholarly work on the relationship between the human and technology, a body of work that often draws on Jacques Derrida's concept of 'supplementarity', and which utilizes the concept of 'originary technicity'.[12] Prominent

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[7] J. G. Ballard, *Crash* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), 36.

[8] Sebastian Groes, 'The Texture of Modernity in J. G. Ballard's *Crash*, *Concrete Island* and *High-Rise*', in *J. G. Ballard: Visions and Revisions*, ed. Jeanette Baxter and Rowland Wymer (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), 124.

[9] J. G. Ballard, *High-Rise* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), 25.

[10] Ballard often referred to 'the death of affect' as one of, if not the, biggest casualties of the 20th century.

[11] Simon Sellars, '"Extreme Possibilities": Mapping "the sea of time and space" in J.G. Ballard's Pacific fictions', *Colloquy* 17 (2009): 53.

[12] See, for example, Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*.

critics in this field include Arthur Bradley, Bernard Stiegler and David Wills.[13] Whilst I do not wish to engage directly with this ever-growing and complex body of work here, I do want to suggest that what Cary Wolfe refers to as the 'prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools' is an image that helps us to grasp Maitland's relationship to technology during his exile, for *Concrete Island* suggests in a number of ways that technology is not merely an external accessory to the human, but an integral part of it.[14]

To begin with, it is noteworthy that Maitland's very exile is precipitated by a non-human machine: the mechanical explosion of a burst tyre. However, complicating this opposition between the human and the technological is the fact that the explosion seems 'to detonate inside [his] skull', the first of many instances in which the text not only blurs the line between the human and the technological, but also the internal and the external (7). Like an epiphany that reveals a new path, the exploding tyre sends both Maitland and his car through the crash barrier, forcing it to leave the straight white lines of the road behind in an act of highway perversion – 'perversion' taken in the sense of its Latin root, *perversus*, meaning 'turned about'.[15] Soon after his car has come to a stop on the island, Maitland gazes into his rear-view mirror only to find a divided self: 'The eyes staring back at him from the mirror were blank and unresponsive, as if he were looking at a psychotic twin brother' (9). Maitland's human(ist) self is put further into question by his self-doubt: 'Why had he driven so fast?' The narrator describes how once inside the car, it was as if 'some rogue gene, a strain of rashness, overran the rest of his usually cautious and clear-minded character' (9). The narrator also suggests on more than one occasion that Maitland 'had almost wilfully devised the crash' (9). The rational, self-knowing humanist subject appears here under threat not from an external technological prosthesis; rather, the combination of man and machine reveals a psychopathology lurking beneath the surface of consciousness. Groes provides an additional layer to this reading by noting that the term 'automobile' contains a paradox: '"auto", etymologically derived from "self", suggests that it is the subject who is in control of his or her mobility, but the opposite is happening. The autonomous subject is subjected to a process, a collective experience in which (s)he is a figure whose unconscious yields control'.[16] From a posthumanist perspective, this event appears to reveal an unsettling connection between technology, genetics and the unconscious, perhaps suggesting that the human subject is not as autonomous as advocates of humanism would like to believe, but has evolved with and alongside the development of technology. As Maitland's relationship to his automobile suggests, the autonomous subject appears bound up with technology, the prefix 'auto' ambiguously referring to both self and machine.[17]

A number of other elements in the text also foreground the mutual embeddedness of the human and the technological. Firstly, Ballard draws on the comparison of the human with the marionette that appears in the work of writers such as Heinrich von

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[13] See Arthur Bradley, *Originary Technicity: The Theory of Technology from Marx to Derrida* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Bernard Stiegler's multi-volume work *Technics and Time*; and David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

[14] Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xv.

[15] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'Perversion'; available at http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/perverse. [accessed 30 June 2016].

[16] Groes, 'The Texture of Modernity', 128.

[17] Whilst etymologically, the prefix 'auto' derives from the term 'self', in common parlance motorcars are often referred to as autos.

Kleist and E.T.A. Hoffmann when, during the car crash, Maitland's fingers are 'jerked […] like a puppet's' (7).[18] Observing a group of tourists aboard a coach, Maitland perceives them as 'a party of mannequins', a metaphor that may also indicate the influence of Surrealism upon Ballard's fiction (12).[19] Similarly, Maitland is described on a number of occasions as looking like 'an animated scarecrow' (54). More unsettling still is the description of Maitland's 'sharp hunger pangs' as '[reaching] up from his abdomen into his throat like a steel hand', an image of a prosthetic limb invading the human body from within (43). Proctor is also described as machine-like at several points: his exercise routine is 'an elaborate ritual of puffing and panting like the start-up of an old gas engine' (93), whilst his 'powerful arms' are said to move 'like pistons' (170). From a humanist perspective all of these metaphors might be read as acts of dehumanization; however, looked at through the lens of posthumanism they appear rather as examples of a text that problematizes the supposedly clear-cut distinction between man and machine.

The image of the 'steel hand' invading Maitland's body from within is complimented by another example of the logic of prosthesis, this time concerning one of his supposedly 'natural' limbs. Upon injuring one of his legs, it is described as becoming detached from the rest of his body and indeed from his sense of self: the leg is likened to, variously, 'a dead animal' (26), 'a joint of meat' (30), 'a dying companion' (48), and 'a tattered pole' (137). At one point, Maitland even 'wish[es] that he could disconnect his right leg and throw it away' (127). In all of these images, an important part of Maitland's identity is perceived as 'other', and in various forms: human, animal and artificial. Maitland's solution is to create a technological prosthesis: spotting a loose 'exhaust pipe' hanging from an abandoned car, he 'wrenche[s] it from the bracket', '[bends] one end into a crude handle' and then proceeds to use it as a 'makeshift crutch' (32). It is at this point that, after proving to himself his rationality and resourcefulness, Maitland turns to inspect the island, saying to himself '"Maitland, poor man, you're marooned here like Crusoe"' (32). Also like Crusoe, Maitland finds and tames a 'savage', in the form of Proctor (whose name means 'steward'), whom he occasionally rides like a beast, using his crutch as a tool to 'steer' Proctor 'around the island' by tapping him (143). As for Maitland's injured leg, it lies motionless and 'as useless as the scabbard of a broken lance' (144). In this way, the text suggests that natural and artificial limbs are interchangeable, further problematizing the distinction between man and machine.

Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Grass

Concrete Island also plays with the distinction between the human and the animal in a number of important ways. Firstly, there are the repeated representations of Proctor in animalistic terms: he is variously described as or like a 'panting, bull-like figure' (76), a

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[18] See, for example, Heinrich von Kleist's 'On the Marionette Theatre' (1810) and E.T.A. Hoffmann's 'The Sandman' (1816).

[19] The Surrealists were fascinated with the mannequin, as can be seen from the international exhibition in 1938 at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts, Paris, in which a number of artists presented a series of mock-Parisian streets populated with mannequins. Hans Bellmer also produced a number of works involving dismembered dolls. The influence of Surrealism upon Ballard's work has been well noted and Ballard himself is explicit about this in many of his interviews. The human-like but uncanny figure of the mannequin also appears in Ballard's short-story 'The Terminal Beach'.

'bird' (127), and a 'nervous dog' (158). Furthermore, the shelter that he uses as his habitat is said to be like a 'deep burrow' or 'a large kennel' (121). Even in death, Proctor is portrayed as an animal, for after being accidentally strung up by a series of ropes and decapitated, he is described as '[t]russed like a carcass in an abattoir' (172). One aspect of Proctor's animal-like behaviour that is frequently remarked upon is his close relationship to the grass that covers most of the island: he is said to move through it 'like a large mole' (126) and often 'vanish[es] [into it] like a startled animal' when threatened (94). Whilst it might be tempting to interpret this characterization as dehumanizing, the text also allows for a posthumanist reading. The best example is Proctor's heightened sensitivity towards the grass: 'the deep grass was his vital medium. His scarred hands felt the flexing stems, reading their currents as they seethed around him' (128). Proctor's affective relationship to the grass represents not a regression to a less-than-human state but a productive engagement with both the natural world and his own corporeality, one which also avows his animality. This has a profound impact upon Maitland too, despite his initial judgement of Proctor as an imbecile. For example, although Maitland becomes frustrated when his attempts to teach Proctor to read and write fail, he eventually realizes that Proctor is skilful in other kinds of sign-reading: '[Proctor] was not going blind, Maitland was convinced, but simply preferred to rely on his scarred fingers and his sense of touch within the secure realm of the island's undergrowth' (150). Looked at in the context of Maitland's reassessment of his way of life, Proctor's animal-like qualities, and in particular his heightened sense of affect, are a source of inspiration because they provide an alternative to the alienated existence of everyday life in modern society.

In order to strengthen this posthumanist reading, it is instructive to turn to the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Deleuze and Guattari develop their concept of the 'rhizome', which is a principle of non-hierarchal, acentric and horizontal organisation that involves symbiotic relationships and the preservation of difference.[20] Whilst the rhizome 'assumes very diverse forms', one of their central examples is grass: 'potato and couchgrass, or the weed'.[21] They contrast the rhizome with the tree or arborescent structure, which has a centre, a root, a predetermined structure, and grows vertically, hierarchically and linearly. Deleuze and Guattari also relate the rhizome to their concept of 'becoming-animal', in which disparate beings form an alliance, each changing in relationship to the other and creating what they call a 'line of flight'. One of their most oft-cited examples of 'becoming' is that of the wasp and the orchid, two radically different beings that form an alliance, each 'deterritorializing' and 'reterritorializing' onto one another, but never becoming totally assimilated by the other or imitating the other.[22] Although they do not use the term *posthumanist* to describe either the rhizome or becoming-animal, both concepts can productively be read in this light. Just as posthumanism is concerned with problematizing distinctions between the human and the non-human, celebrating

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[20] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 10.

[21] Delezue and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 7.

[22] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 10. For more on the concept of 'becoming-animal', see the chapter '1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible…'

hybridity and border-crossings, so too rhizomatic structures and processes of becoming break down the distinctions so crucial for humanism.[23]

On the basis of this brief outline, a number of productive links can be discerned between these concepts and the representations of Proctor and the grass in *Concrete Island*. Firstly, in their discussion of grass as a rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari quote approvingly from Henry Miller: 'Grass is the only way out… The weed exists only to fill the waste spaces left by cultivated areas'.[24] This image of grass as an escape route and as a life form that appropriates those spaces left behind by the march of civilization chimes with a number of details in *Concrete Island*. Not only does the vitality of the grass belie the descriptions of the space as a concrete wasteland, it also symbolizes an alternative mode of existence for both Proctor and Maitland: 'the blades of crushed grass sprang through the open door, reaching into the car against [Maitland's] leg. The resilience of this coarse grass was a model of behaviour and survival' (58). This uncultivated grass is in marked contrast to the tidy lawns of suburbia where borders and boundaries must be maintained at all times, the suburbs being another prominent motif in Ballard's work. Furthermore, the frequent descriptions of the 'pathways around the Island' as 'labyrinthine', as Chris Beckett observes, strengthens the image of the island as a rhizomatic space, for Deleuze and Guattari also see the labyrinth as a rhizome, illustrated for them by the underground labyrinth in Franz Kafka's 'The Burrow'.[25] Lastly, Proctor's animal-like qualities can also be read as an example of 'becoming-animal', a productive relationship of difference between Proctor and the grass that produces a 'circulation of intensities' as his body becomes more sensitive to the grass.[26]

Inspired by Proctor's example, Maitland too embraces this existence, thereby affirming his animality. Early on, he notices the way in which the grass is vividly animate, even displaying a kind of agency or autonomy as it '[springs] through the open door' of his car (58). Indeed, the island itself is represented in a similar way: for example, Maitland's car-crash scores a series of 'deep ruts, like the incisions of a giant scalpel' into the surface of the earth, which thus figures the island as a body undergoing a surgical procedure (10). It is also interesting to note that Maitland's car is a Jaguar, the cliché of the automobile as wild animal coming to life in this strange place where '[t]he vegetation was wild and lush, as if the island was moving back in time to an earlier and more violent period' (102).[27] Whilst exploring this surreal space, Maitland notices how the grass 'seethe[s] around him […] speaking its agreement', and as he enters the grass it 'rustle[s] excitedly, parting in circular waves, beckoning him into its spirals' (68). He is fascinated by its 'swirling motions, reading in these patterns the reassuring voice of this immense green creature eager to protect and guide him' (68). The grass also appears to have a transformative effect on him, as can be seen in the frequent

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[23] There is a well-established body of work that reads Deleuze in terms of posthumanism, including critics such as Claire Colebrook and Rosi Braidotti. For one discussion of posthumanism and Deleuze, see Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus, 'What's Wrong with Posthumanism?' *Rhizomes* 7 (2003); available at http://www.rhizomes.net/issue7/callus.htm#_ftn21. [accessed 30 June 2016].

[24] Henry Miller, qtd. in Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 19.

[25] Chris Beckett, 'J. G. Ballard's "Elaborately Signalled Landscape": The Drafting of *Concrete Island*', *Electronic British Library Journal* (2015), 14.

[26] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 10.

[27] This pun on the word Jaguar works in the same way as the Ford Galaxy in Jean-Luc Godard's science-fiction film *Alphaville* (1965), and indeed Ballard may well have been inspired by Godard's joke given that he was impressed with the film. See Ballard's *A User's Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews* (London: Flamingo, 1996).

overlapping between the island and Maitland's mind. On one occasion, Maitland notes how the 'spiral curves [of the grass] swerved through the inflamed air' like 'the visual signature of epilepsy', which then provokes him to a consideration of '[h]is own brain' and the potential 'damage to his cerebral cortex' caused by the car accident (68). From this thought, Maitland then has the idea of finding a ladder to aid his escape from the island. However, seemingly in response to this, the grass then 'lash[es] at his feet, as if angry that Maitland […] wished to leave its green embrace' (68). Only a few paragraphs later, the narrator adds that 'the island was becoming an exact model of his head' (69). This association between Maitland's mind/brain and the island/grass might be productively read alongside Deleuze and Guattari's suggestion that 'the brain itself is much more a grass than a tree'.[28] As if in response to the model of life symbolized by the grass, Maitland's mind begins to change as he reassesses his way of life.

One of the most surreal images of Maitland's transformation occurs much later in the narrative when he experiences his skeletal structure shifting inside him, as if his body were in the process of evolving backwards like the island: 'Maitland could feel the bones of his thighs and pelvis emerging through his musculature – his skeleton come to greet him […] The bones were re-assembling themselves into a small, sharp face from which a pair of tired but fierce eyes stared out' (145). Like Kerans in *The Drowned World*, Maitland's body appears to be reassembling itself according to another, earlier evolutionary configuration.[29] From this point of view, the comparison of Maitland's movement across the ground with that of 'a wounded snake' (25) and the description of his hand as 'claw-like' (161) both suggest a strange process of becoming-animal, as if his life on the island were a rejection of human(ist) civilization in favour of an existence that acknowledges the human as animal. By the end of the narrative, Maitland feels 'a sense of gathering strength, as if the unseen powers of his body had begun to discharge their long-stored energies' (175). He is able to leave behind his crutch and instead crawl 'through the grass, feeling his way with his outstretched hands, sensing the stronger vibrations of the tall grass growing from the churchyard' (175).

By seemingly returning Maitland to an earlier state of evolutionary history, the island environment creates a posthumanist future in which the boundaries between human, animal and technology are put into question. *Concrete Island* thus illustrates the paradoxical temporality of posthumanism by suggesting that Maitland's regression to a form of animal life is actually a rediscovery of the fact that the human has always been an animal, a fact that humanism disavows. This rewriting of *Robinson Crusoe* foregrounds human civilization as a social construction and reveals the illusory nature of humanist discourse. Maitland's time on the island is an experiment in discovering a new form of life that is more affecting and vital, and appears as simultaneously proto- and post- human.

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[28] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 15.

[29] In his description of *The Drowned World* in an interview in 1968, Ballard drew attention to the evolutionary body: 'In *The Drowned World* I describe the return of the entire planet to the era of the great Triassic forests, which covered the earth some 200 million years ago. I tell how human beings likewise regress into the past. In a certain sense, *they climb down their own spinal column*.' *Extreme Metaphors*, 11 (emphasis added).

Defoe's Proto-Posthumanist Crusoe

After examining how *Concrete Island* can be productively read as a posthumanist text, I want to now turn to its source text, *Robinson Crusoe*, to see how from this new perspective the earlier text can be read as proto-posthumanist. Ballard often drew on the Freudian distinction between manifest and latent content, and what I want to suggest here is that we might think of *Concrete Island* as bringing out the latent content of *Robinson Crusoe*. My analysis of the latter text focuses on a few different aspects of the narrative that all turn on an anxiety about the distinction between the human and the non-human. The text stages a tension between Crusoe's desire to police the boundaries separating the human from the non-human and his desire to cross them. It is this tension, I argue, that gives us reason to think of the text as proto-posthumanist; Crusoe's anxiety about the definition of the human opens the door to a posthumanist perspective in which distinctions between human and animal, and human and machine, are problematized.

The character of Crusoe has most often been read as a figurehead of mankind, the universal man or everyman. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for example, once wrote that Crusoe was 'merely a representative of humanity in general'. The experience of reading Crusoe's account, he added, 'makes me forget my *specific* class, character, and circumstances, [and] raises me into the universal man. […] You become a man while you read'.[30] Crusoe is not only presented here as the universal man, he also appears to be able to bestow this status onto his readers. Of course, Coleridge is probably using the term 'man' in the sense of masculinity or manhood. But, allowing for a certain slippage here, one may read in this a reference to humankind as a whole. What I want to suggest is that one might think of *Robinson Crusoe* as bestowing humanity on its readers through its anxious defence of humanism and its attempts to reassure the reader of the distinctiveness of the human.[31] Simultaneously, though, as I argue further below, in the text this anxiety and defensiveness also works to draw attention to the instability of the human and the boundaries that have come to define it.

Preserving and Crossing Spatial Boundaries

As with Maitland's concrete island, Crusoe's desert island is potentially a space of difference, providing him with a chance to reimagine his life and experiment with new forms of existence. Far from his own society, Crusoe is free to challenge dominant or conventional modes of thought and custom. However, unlike Maitland, Crusoe largely ignores this potential and instead attempts to turn his island into a replica of England. Early on, he takes a 'Survey of the Island', detailing the uncultivated land ripe for his labour and enterprise (72). Like a good colonialist, Crusoe appropriates this seemingly empty land and figures himself as its owner and ruler: he claims that he was 'King and

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[30] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Crusoe as a Representative of Humanity', in *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor, reprinted in Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Michael Shinagle (London: Norton, 1994), 268 (emphasis in original).
[31] This might be compared with Harold Bloom's argument in *The Invention of Shakespeare*. However, whereas Bloom is concerned with humanity as inwardness and consciousness, my concern is with the definition of the human and its differences from what is not human.

Lord of all this Country indefeasibly, and had a Right of Possession; and if [he] could convey it, [he] might have it in Inheritance, as completely as any Lord of a Mannor in *England*' (73).[32] By placing his protagonist in a so-called 'primitive' environment, Defoe could have questioned contemporary European society, as Ballard does his own society with *Concrete Island*. However, as Watt suggests, 'Defoe sets back the economic clock, and takes his hero to a primitive environment' only in order to make labour appear 'varied and inspiring'.[33] Thus, where *Concrete Island* reads as a critique of modern, Western society, *Robinson Crusoe* appears more as a manifesto for its humanistic values. Whilst Maitland is transformed by the conditions of existence provided him by his island, Crusoe instead 'subdue[s] nature to his own material purposes, and eventually [...] triumph[s] over his physical environment', thereby maintaining rather than challenging boundary lines.[34]

However, alongside this policing of spatial boundaries sits Crusoe's 'wandring Inclination', which suggests a desire to cross rather than preserve them. Indeed, it is this desire that is responsible for Crusoe disobeying his father's command that he cultivate a typically middle-class life and instead seeking adventure at sea. Crusoe's desire to cross boundaries can also be seen in his occasional representation of his island as 'a Prison', an indication that his 'wandring Inclination' is frustrated (71). However, despite his ardent desire to wander, Crusoe is often frightened of the unknown, suggesting that there are limits to his boundary-crossing. On an early sea voyage, Crusoe describes the horror he and the other sailors experience when a violent tornado 'took us quite out of our Knowledge' (32), a rather telling phrase that is repeated much later when Crusoe attempts to sail around his island in a small boat: 'I was so apprehensive of being hurry'd out of my Knowledge again by the Currents, or Winds, or any other Accident' (111). Indeed, this fear of the unknown appears to haunt much of Crusoe's life on the island, for he spends vast amounts of time building a number of fortifications as protection from invasion, thereby blurring the line between the island as prison and as a place of freedom, as well as Crusoe's competing desires. Finally, whilst *Concrete Island* ends somewhat inconclusively, with Maitland choosing to remain on the island in order to come to terms with himself, Crusoe not only takes the first opportunity to escape from his confinement but also turns his island into his own 'Collony', thereby appropriating it as part of a traditional bourgeois lifestyle and transforming the unfamiliar into the familiar (219). In all of these ways, the text reveals the importance of sharp boundaries for maintaining a belief in the distinctiveness of the human and presenting Crusoe as an exemplar of this humanity. It is to Crusoe's remarks about this particular distinctiveness that I now turn.

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[32] Crusoe frequently betrays his fondness for numbers, systems and accounts. For example, he produces a table in which he divides his life into two columns, labelled 'Good' and 'Evil', in order to use his 'Reason [...] to master [his] Despondency'. He explains that his account is 'stated [...] very impartially, like Debtor and Creditor', making clear his need for objectivity and order (49).

[33] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1987), 72.

[34] Ian Watt, *Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 151.

Of Men, Beasts and Savages

Isolated on his desert island, Crusoe says that he is 'divided from Mankind, a Solitaire, one banish'd from humane society' (49), later observing that 'no humane Shape had ever set Foot upon that Place' (72). Despite the seemingly emptiness of the island, Crusoe spends considerable time worrying about being 'devour'd by savage Beasts, or more merciless Savages of humane kind' (19). Whilst he often presents beasts and savages as equivalents, on a number of other occasions, Crusoe locates savages as 'far worse than the Lions and Tigers of *Africa*' because they are 'Cannibals, or Men-eaters' (80). Crusoe's recurrent anxiety about falling into the hands of cannibals is also accompanied by perhaps a darker fear: that of becoming a savage himself. At one point, he worries that had he not been able to plunder all manner of goods from the conveniently placed shipwreck, he would have had to live 'like a meer Savage', 'gnaw[ing]' at meat 'with my Teeth, and pull[ing] it with my Claws like a Beast' (95). In passages such as these, Crusoe registers an anxiety about maintaining his humanity, acknowledging that it may be dependent upon external circumstances. Indeed, there is a rather telling slippage between the categories on display here: 'Beasts' are 'savage', 'Savages' are 'of humane kind', and Crusoe may have had to live like either. Additionally, Crusoe's humanity is threatened by the possibility of insanity, for upon first finding himself shipwrecked, he confesses that during the daytime he '[ran] about like a Mad-man'. At nightfall, he seems to regain his sanity but is struck by a fear of being devoured by 'ravenous Beasts'. His solution is to 'get up into a thick bushy Tree' and 'sit [there] all Night' (36). Given the characterisation of the island as a primitive environment and, indeed, of Ballard's figuring of the island as a place from an earlier period in evolutionary history, Crusoe's flight into the tree can be read as a kind of evolutionary regression to that precursor of mankind: the ape. By alluding to man's former life in the trees, the text appears to remind the reader that the human remains an animal – a fact that puts further pressure on Crusoe's humanist beliefs about the sanctity of mankind. Crusoe's humanity here appears threatened on a multitude of fronts.

Reasonable Creatures

In the face of these threats, Crusoe relies on a number of things to shore up his sense of humanity. One of the most important traits which he sees as an integral part of being human is the ability to use reason, a faculty that he believes is lacking in both animals and savages. Crusoe's love of reason places him firmly within the humanistic discourses of the Enlightenment, which championed reason as the means of individual fulfilment, universal truth and correct moral behaviour.[35] One measure of the importance of reason for Crusoe is that he places it as the foundation of his long survival on the island: 'as Reason is the Substance and Original of the Mathematicks, so by stating and squaring every thing by Reason, and by making the most rational Judgment of things, every Man may be in time Master of every mechanic Art' (51). Despite never having 'handled a Tool in [his] Life', through rational thought and application Crusoe discovers that he is

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[35] See William Bristow, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 'Enlightenment'; available at http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/enlightenment/. [accessed 30 June 2016].

able to provide for his every need (51). As well as being the lynchpin of practical mastery over the world, Crusoe also sees reason as playing a significant role in the revelation of religious truth. During his attempts to teach Friday of the Christian God, for example, Crusoe explains that 'the meer Notions of Nature […] will guide reasonable Creatures to the Knowledge of a God' (158). Initially, Crusoe fails to convince Friday of God's existence, and so becomes despondent, lamenting 'this poor Savage' and 'ignorant Creature' (158). However, when Friday eventually adopts a suitably penitent attitude towards Christianity, Crusoe praises him and even admits that Friday's 'serious Enquiries, and Questionings' make the teacher 'a much better Scholar in the Scripture Knowledge' (159). Crusoe's phrase 'reasonable Creatures' is an interesting one because it appears to undermine his belief in reason as an exclusively human faculty and thus threatens to blur the boundary separating the human from the non-human. Indeed, Crusoe's successes in teaching Friday to speak his master's tongue and other forms of 'civilized' behaviour suggest that being human is a social construction. Hence, while Crusoe at first dehumanises Friday by referring to him as 'my Savage' (147) and a 'Creature' (154), once Friday is able to pass as a civilized human being, Crusoe instead begins to refer to him as 'my Man' (158).[36] Further complicating Crusoe's humanist ideology is the fact that he also manages to teach a parrot to speak. Early on in the narrative, Crusoe confesses that he had begun to miss the opportunity for conversation after being alone for several years. His initial solution is to capture a parrot by '[knocking] it down with a Stick' and then spend '[y]ears' teaching it to speak, including the ability to 'call me by my Name' (80). It is noteworthy that Crusoe expends enormous effort in training this bird to say his name, for it is as if his own sense of humanity depended, ironically, on the recognition from an animal. As Angela Carter put it in her 'Poem for Robinson Crusoe', 'he / taught / the lacquered flocks of parrots […] / to remind him of his identity ("Robin Crusoe!")'.[37] In both of these cases, then, Crusoe's belief in the distinctiveness of the human is problematized by these 'reasonable Creatures'.

Crusoe's reliance upon reason also comes under threat from an internal source: despite giving the impression that his every decision is guided by reason, Crusoe occasionally confesses to being guided by a more instinctual, or perhaps animal, force at certain key points. When his father first asks him for 'Reasons' for going to sea, Crusoe is unable to give any, instead citing only his 'wandring Inclination' (4). More troubling is his confession later on that he only embarked on the voyage that lead to his becoming marooned because he 'obey'd blindly the Dictates of [his] Fancy rather than [his] Reason' (31). Like Maitland, Crusoe's island existence is the result of his leaving the straight-and-narrow path of conventional life and being led astray by his unreasonable and perverse desire. Lastly, it is worth returning briefly to Crusoe's claim that he temporarily lost his sanity. It is extraordinary from a psychological perspective that Crusoe not only triumphs during his stay of nearly thirty years alone on an island but also manages to avoid permanent, or at least long-term, insanity. As Watt observes, 'Defoe's sources for *Robinson Crusoe*' suggest that real castaways 'sank more and more to the level of animals, lost the use of speech, went mad, or died of inanition'.[38] What these real-life examples of castaways reveal is that humanity is a social

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[36] Compare the animalistic representations of Proctor in *Concrete Island*.
[37] Angela Carter, 'Poem for Robinson Crusoe', in *Unicorn: The Poetry of Angela Carter* (London: Profile Books, 2015), 39.
[38] Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 88.

construction and not some biologically innate quality, for their regression and madness are the result of (human) deprivation. The representation of Crusoe as successful and sane therefore functions as an attempt to deny this reality. Hence, *Robinson Crusoe* is a mythological tale rather than a psychologically realistic account of a life of extreme isolation, for Crusoe miraculously preserves his sanity and, indeed, his humanity.

Preserving Humanity

In addition to reason, Crusoe identifies a number of other things that supposedly act as guarantors of his humanity, the first of these being work. 'I was not idle' Crusoe claims, eager to persuade the reader of his correct moral attitude (111). Indeed he is not, for he recounts at length how he employed himself in a multitude of ways: hunting, fishing, planting, and 'the strange multitude of little Things necessary in the Providing, Producing, Curing, Dressing, Making and Finishing [a single loaf of] Bread' (86). Crusoe also builds multiple shelters, cultivates large portions of the land, and fashions a number of items with which to supplement his home. The importance of work for his sense of humanity is made clear not just in the contrast between Crusoe's incessant activity and the seemingly passive character of the island's flora and fauna, but also in contrast with the savages he encounters. Another part of Crusoe's 'civilizing' of Friday involves instilling in him the correct attitude towards work and so he endeavours to 'teach him every Thing, that was proper to make him useful, handy, and helpful' (152). As Watt observes, 'the advent of new manpower […] is a signal, not for relaxation, but for expanded production'.[39] By the end of his narrative, Crusoe has transformed his island from a barren wasteland into a profitable colony, in effect civilizing and humanising the land through intense labour.

There is, however, a curious tension in *Robinson Crusoe*'s representation of labour which stands as another example of where the text both polices and problematizes boundaries. So desperate is Crusoe to emphasise both the human value of work and his own efforts, that he makes the extraordinary claim that by being shipwrecked he has been 'reduced to a mere State of Nature' (86). As many have observed, Crusoe appears to ignore or forget the enormous stockpile of resources that he plunders from the shipwreck. His claim that he has been reduced to a state of nature is in effect an attempt to persuade the reader that he has been deprived of all social constructs – that his survival under these circumstances is due to his innate humanity and that even after being stripped of all social constructs he remains implacably human. From this perspective, the difference between mankind and non-human animals or savages would be an essential or qualitative one. However, because he also includes in his account his plundering of this well-stocked ship, the text reveals Crusoe's belief in his essential humanity to be an illusion. He is not, in fact, reduced to a state of nature and therefore his survival is at least in part a consequence of various social constructs in the form of goods and tools. In this way, the text once again dramatizes a tension between policing and problematizing boundaries and shows Crusoe's belief in an innate human essence to be an illusion.

This tension also appears with respect to two other examples of Crusoe's identity: his clothing and his skin colour. Despite the island's extreme heat, Crusoe claims that

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[39] Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 73.

he 'could not go quite naked' for the simple reason that he could not tolerate the sun's rays on his flesh (98). However, there are hints that his reason for wearing clothes may also be connected to his sense of being human, since he is conscious of the fact that the savages he encounters go naked. It is significant, for example, that Crusoe forces Friday to wear clothes, though acknowledges that he 'went awkwardly in these Things at first' (150). Even if Crusoe fails to understand or admit the logic here, this scenario reveals the fact that clothes help construct a sense of what it means to be human. In fact, he comes close to realizing this when, after escaping from the island, he admits that it is 'unpleasant, awkward, and uneasy […] to wear […] Cloaths' once again (198). With this perception, Crusoe appears to acknowledge the unnaturalness of clothing and thus the ways in which clothes help construct the identity of the 'civilized' human being. In addition to clothing, Crusoe is concerned about his racial identity as manifested in his skin colour. On one occasion, he is anxious to assure the reader that he is still white: 'As for my Face, the Colour of it was really not so *Moletta like as one might expect from a Man not at all careful of it, and living within nine or ten Degrees of Equinox*' (109, emphasis in original). Given that many discourses during the Enlightenment positioned non-white peoples as less than human, Crusoe's concern about skin colour registers also as a concern about being human. In Crusoe's telling phrase – 'a Man not at all careful of it' – whiteness as humanness must be preserved. Yet, again, Crusoe draws attention, perhaps unwittingly, to the way in which human identity is constructed, since in order to pass as a 'civilized' human being Crusoe believes that he must avoid any natural tanning of his skin. The naturalness of the human is thus put into question once again, despite Crusoe's desire to preserve a sharp boundary between the human and the non-human.

Human Traces

Whilst Crusoe works hard to maintain the veneer of humanity through his clothing, skin colour and attitude towards work, his sense of being human is threatened by the signs left behind by savages, signs which disturb him because they appear human. Despite Crusoe's earlier claim that no human had ever set foot on his island, after many years in complete isolation he is shocked to one day discover a single footprint in the sand. Crusoe is 'exceedingly surpriz'd with the Print of a Man's naked Foot on the Shore, which was very plain to be seen in the Sand: I stood like one Thunderstruck, or as if I had seen an Apparition' (112). This trace of the human clearly unsettles Crusoe, so much so that he too takes on a spectral quality, becoming 'like a Man perfectly confus'd and out of [his] self' (112). The footprint also troubles Crusoe's vision, for as he hurries back to the safety of his fortification, he anxiously gazes behind him 'every two or three Steps, mistaking every Bush and Tree, and fancying every Stump at a Distance to be a Man' (112). The boundary lines separating the human from the non-human are here blurred. Crusoe's sorrow at being 'cut off from Mankind' has now transformed into a different emotional state: 'I should now tremble at the very Apprehensions of seeing a Man' (114).

This anxiety about the human provoked by a single footprint resonates with a similar image painted by Michel Foucault. In the conclusion to *The Order of Things*, Foucault argues that 'man' is a relatively recent construction within the history of Western regimes of knowledge (he locates the birth of the concept in the sixteenth

century). Foucault then speculates that if the ground of modern human sciences were to collapse for some as yet unknown reason, the concept of 'man' may come to an end. In this case, Foucault suggests, 'man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea'.[40] The resonance between these two images centres on the precariousness of the concept of the human: like Foucault's suggestion that he is a temporary construct organising our modern epistemological discourses, so in a similar way Crusoe's anxiety turns on his (in)ability to maintain his own humanity and police the boundary separating the human from non-human others. On a prosaic level the footprint signals a physical threat in the form of marauding savages and is a literal crossing of boundaries, threatening Crusoe's absolute rule. However, this ephemeral sign also upsets his assumptions and takes him 'out of his knowledge' by problematizing the difference between the human and the savage. It is also worth noting here that a footprint is as much about absence as it is about presence. Unlike a material remain, such as a piece of clothing, the footprint only suggests a human foot – the foot itself is absent. No wonder that Crusoe's language turns to the spectral, that uncanny language of presence and absence. Crusoe's attachment to a distinctive notion of the human is a paradoxical one: whilst he claims to be dismayed at being cut off from the rest of mankind, he also appears to love his solitude and unchallenged dominion over the island, and when the presence of other human beings – or human-like beings – becomes apparent he loses his mind, hides and then fortifies the boundary lines of his shelter. Thus, although Crusoe tries to assert his humanity and police the boundary separating the human from the non-human, the text shows that such boundaries are problematic and constantly on the verge of being upset. From his decision to spend the night in a tree like an ape to the hallucinatory experience of seeing every bush and tree as a human figure, Crusoe's time on the island involves a profound questioning of what it means to be human.

The Posthuman in the Human

As can be seen, therefore, *Robinson Crusoe* is a text with a tension running through it: Crusoe repeatedly works hard to assert his humanity, police the boundary between the human and the non-human, and convince the reader that his humanity is an innate quality that remains present even when a man is seemingly stripped of all the marks of civilization. Simultaneously, the text repeatedly draws attention to how problematic this is by showing that the boundary lines are not so clear and that Crusoe still relies on certain marks of civilization to maintain his sense of humanity, including language, clothing and the supply of goods from the shipwreck. Defoe's text thus simultaneously affirms and undermines its humanistic vision: it makes clear that the human is always in a relationship with otherness, yet features a protagonist who is keen to maintain a sharp boundary between the two. As my reading of *Concrete Island* demonstrated, Maitland's engagement with both technology and his own animality was not a sign that the posthuman comes after or negates the human; rather, it revealed that such otherness is always implicit within the human. Putting it paradoxically, Maitland's posthumanist existence on the island is more authentically human because it acknowledges the inseparability of the human from both the animal and the technological. One key difference between *Concrete Island* and *Robinson Crusoe*, then, is that whilst Maitland

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[40] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2001), 421-2.

embraces this state of affairs, Crusoe cannot accept that this otherness is implicit in the human, needing to believe in a fundamental distinction between the human and the non-human. Hence the different conclusions to each narrative: whilst Maitland embraces a radically different life to the one his society provides for him, Crusoe escapes from the island, returns to Europe to collect any money owed him, and then transforms his island into a profitable colony.

This article has taken a contemporary text in order to read an earlier one, and has done so in order to show that the posthuman is always already implicit in the human. It thus illustrates the logic of posthumanism outlined by Wolfe:

> posthumanism can be thought of as analogous to Jean-Francois Lyotard's paradoxical rendering of the postmodern: it comes both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world […] [and] after in the sense that posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore.[41]

Following this schematic, *Concrete Island* can be thought of as illustrating a form of posthumanism that comes after and critiques humanism, in part because Maitland clearly exists in a world where the human is starting to look increasingly threatened by sophisticated technology, but also because he affirms his own animal nature along with technological prostheses to live a kind of hybrid existence. By contrast, *Robinson Crusoe* is more indicative of the way in which posthumanism pre-empts and is pre-empted in humanism itself: despite Crusoe's humanistic beliefs, the text reveals his embeddedness in both a biological and a technological world, and problematizes the idea of a distinctive and essential humanness. In this sense, both texts reveal that the posthuman is always already implicit in the human, and, moreover, that posthumanism is always already implicit in humanism. To a certain extent therefore, posthumanism itself can be said to be always already a 'proto-posthumanism' that questions the notions of temporality, evolution, history and genealogy, and draws attention to the temporally ambiguous figure of a posthuman that, as Ballard's and Defoe's texts show, comes both before and after the human.

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[41] Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, xv.

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Insule concrete şi pustii. Faţete proto-postumane ale lui Crusoe în opera lui Daniel Defoe şi a lui J. G. Ballard

Rezumat

Acest articol argumentează că opera lui J. G. Ballard *Concrete Island* poate fi citită ca o naraţiune care aduce în prim-plan câteva dintre ideile centrale ale postumanismului. Din această perspectivă, sursa textului, romanul *Robinson Crusoe* al lui Daniel Defoe, poate fi de asemenea privit ca text postumanist. Rescrierea lui Ballard a unei poveşti atât de influente precum cea a naufragitului pe o insula pustie subliniază trăsătura inumană a societăţii vestice contemporane prin protagonistul Robert Maitland care descoperă o existenţă vitală şi mai plină de înţelesuri în timpul exilului său pe un pământ părăsit. În mod paradoxal, această viaţă se apropie mai mult de uman tocmai pentru că implică confirmarea umanului ca animal şi face o distincţie problematică în mod similar între uman şi tehnologic. Devenirea postumană la Maitland este astfel o deplasare dincolo de şi către uman. Din această perspectivă, *Robinson Crusoe* se poate citi ca un text proto-postumanist, deoarece anxietatea constantă pe care Crusoe o invocă este distincţia dintre uman şi non-uman, ceea ce de fapt anticipează turnura postumană din secolul XX. *Robinson Crusoe* revelă faptul că umanul este întotdeauna postuman în aşa fel încât textul subliniază eşecul lui Crusoe de a veghea la graniţele care separă umanul de non-uman. În mod similar, articolul sugeareză că textul ne permite să vedem cum postumanismul este întotdeauna deja *proto*-postumanism, în măsura în care este mereu implicat în ceea ce încearcă să critice.