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DESSERT ISLAND ONOMASTICS

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I

The youthful discipline of Literary Onomastics has so far concentrated its attention and efforts almost exclusively on the investigation of names of characters or localities created or utilized by authors of literary artifacts. The author as namer, and the significance and meaning of his or her onomastic products in the context of specific works of literature, have, quite naturally and justifiably, commanded central interest in most enquiries into the function of names in both poetry and prose, and the results of such examinations have, in a variety of ways, produced valuable new insights for both the literary scholar and the student of names. Names have, in fact, in the last decade or two, become major clues in the sophisticated analysis of literary works.

There are, however, other aspects of names in literature which have in the past received little or no attention but which, perhaps
more than any other, allow us to gauge an author's perception of the nature of names and of the importance of naming as a process designed to structure our environment for us; in other words, to turn natural space into cultural space. These are the roles played by fictitious characters as namers, the characteristics of the names they create, and the reasons they adduce for creating them. To a degree, the fictitious character becomes the author's representative or mouthpiece on matters onomastic, while at the same time vicariously acting out the author's principles of naming.

In no other situation does an author have the opportunity to present a fictitious character as namer in a richer measure than in the distressing and challenging circumstances of life on a desert island, following a disaster at sea and unexpected escape from an otherwise life-destroying shipwreck. Not only does such a sequence of events place the character or characters in question in a limited and controlled environment, it also forces them to cope, in conjunction with many other challenges, with a landscape totally lacking in names, completely unstructured onomastically, and therefore still to be mastered by the human spirit; an experience not unlike that undergone by early settlers in colonial situations, whose onomastic reaction to them can be documented in areas and times as far apart as ninth-century Scotland\(^1\) and seventeenth-century New England\(^2\).
Like their historical counterparts, our fictitious island castaways can also be expected to have come from cultural landscapes—Britain and Switzerland, to be exact—which, because of their long heritage of human settlement, were saturated with names; like them, they are therefore likely to have been inexperienced namers, and it is doubtful whether they had ever been called upon before to make a contribution to the place nomenclature of their countries of origin.

II

The obvious first candidate, both chronologically and in terms of literary importance, in this respect, is the hero of Daniel Defoe's first novel. Published in 1719, when Defoe (1659-1731) was sixty, the account of "The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner," has been called an adventure story, a moral tale, a commercial accounting, a puritan fable, a travel book, a myth, a panegyric of work, a Christian allegory, a conversion story, a typical English novel, and other things besides. It is, however, undoubtedly more than anything else an "epic of solitude." That loneliness provides neither the incentive nor the opportunity for communication, including the use of names, does not have to be stressed, but it would nevertheless be too facile and superficial to attribute the fact that Crusoe only names twice during the whole of his twenty-eight years on the island solely, or
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even mainly, to this condition of solitariness. First of all, it is important to note when and what he names. His first act of naming, as recorded retrospectively in the first few pages of his Journal, occurs at the very beginning of his sojourn when he decides to call, what he otherwise terms "this dismal, unfortunate island," the Island of Despair. This turns out to be a nonce name, strictly confined to his diary, for it is never used or mentioned again, not even in the other three versions of his early days on the island, or in the many silent soliloquies and passages of reflection which flow through the narrative like a strong undertow that surfaces from time to time. A possible explanation may at least partly lie in a change of attitude toward his insular home, allowing him "to find advantages, mundane as well as spiritual, in his island life," so that, when in dire danger of being carried out into the ocean by a treacherous current, Crusoe "looked back upon [his] desolate solitary island as the most pleasant place in the world," which on account of this frightening experience 'takes on the qualities of a "Happy desart."

This first, apparently abortive, act of naming in reference to, and motivated by the initial distressing encounter with, the totality of the new and threatening habitat, is followed many years later by the naming of the person putting an end to the outward solitude of the castaway. Whereas it would be unreasonable to expect Crusoe to
have known in advance the name of the small island on which he was to be shipwrecked, such information would not have been unavailable to him with regard to the man rescued from the cannibalistic intentions of some boatloads of intruding savages; but Crusoe makes no attempt at ascertaining the poor wretch's own name, straightaway imposing his own choice: "...first; I made him know his name should be Friday, which was the day I saved his life; ... I likewise taught him to say Master, and then let him know, that was to be my name; ..." Rightly, much has been made of what must be considered to be the ultimate onomastic expression of Robinson's "inordinate egocentricity" and "absolute individualism", of his "authoritative tendency" and "patriarchal power." Instead of one, there are now two solitary persons isolated side by side, each without his own name, on a nameless island, and "my Man Friday" is simply a logical addition to that long proprietary list comprising "my habitation, my own house, my bower, my dwelling, my cave, my barns, my boat, my flock, my country seat, etc., etc." In ironic mockery of true communication, it is "my parrot," though, which is taught to pronounce its own name, Poll, and has the imitating ability and permission to address its owner as "Poor Robinson Crusoe", in echoing externalization of the name-bearer's sorry self-pity.

More important and revealing, however, than these two isolated acts of naming are the many instances of Crusoe's non-onomastic,
lexical interactions with his new and strange environment. Striving "to construct in his tropical island a standard of living . . . equivalent to life in his native England," he is continually coerced into extending the connotative functions of many times in his English vocabulary:

"I made myself a thing like a hodd, which labourers carry mortar in when they serve the bricklayers."  

"I worked to make this room or cave spacious enough to accommodate me as a warehouse or magazin, a kitchen, a dining-room, and a cellar."  

"Now I . . . began to furnish my house, and set up some pieces of boards, like a dresser."  

". . . a three cornered ugly thing, like what we call in England a shoulder of mutton sail; . . ."  

"I began my fence, or wall; . . ."  

". . . the country . . . looked like a planted garden."  

"I built me a little kind of a bower."  

"I fancy'd now I had my country-house, and my sea-coast house."  

In fact, in his exotic, un-English habitat, Crusoe frequently finds himself in a state of genuine puzzlement and confusion about potential lexical connotations:

"I killed a large bird that was good to eat, but I know not
what to call it." 

"... my habitation ... [was] surrounded with a strong pale and cables, but I might now rather call it a wall, ..." 

"... the few rags I had, which I called cloaths. ..." 

"... a plain open piece of meadow-land, or savanna (as our people call it in the western colonies), ..." 

"my castle, for so I think I called it ever after this. ..." 

"... the hole in the rock which I called a door..." 

"my country seat, which I called my bower." and particularly:

"my flock or herd, call it which you lease," and:

"... stockings and shoes I had none but had made a pair of somethings, I scarce know what to call them, like buskins, to flap over my legs and lace on either side like spatter-dashes." 

As these examples show, and there are others, Crusoe's lexical troubles are considerable, and his desire to extend the semantic range of certain words, on the one hand, and his unwillingness to do the same for others, result in a shilly-shallying hesitation concerning their connotative potentials, which is bound to lead to inhibiting uncertainty when it comes to the creation and application of denotative names, in the speech act of identifying reference. Crusoe is demonstrably not a smart onomastic artisan. It is worth
noting, however, that while initially experiencing similar difficulties in the creation of handmade material artifacts ("I had never handled a tool in my life," he confesses sheepishly),
demanding a corresponding kind of extended "connotation" in nonverbal undertakings, he later proves to be more adaptive and successful in this respect than in his verbal endeavors and, when attempting to produce certain earthen ware, for instance makes "things round and shapable, which before were filthy things to look on..." In a certain sense, he avails himself of his inherited vocabulary as ineffectively as of the many serviceable goods salvaged from the wreck in several perilous trips. Of both it can be said with justification that he had a "far greater store of materials than he had ever used.".

Despite his onomastic shortcomings, Crusoe is by no means unaware of the existence of names or of their usefulness. He proudly reports, for example, how quickly "Friday began to understand the names of almost every thing I had occasion to call for, and of every place I had to send him to..." and also asks "him the name of the several nations of his sort of people; but could get no other name than Caribs; ..." His real ineptitude, or perhaps his inability, his shyness caused by his inexperience, to impose even a minimal place-nomenclature, appropriately derived
from that of his native England, on his island home of more than a quarter of a century, is probably due to his failure to observe that the natural scene on his island composes a landscape.33 Where there is no landscape, but only a geography "conceived in moral terms,"34 there is no need for the otherwise essential toponymic structuring; therefore Crusoe's tentative, indecisive, fumbling descriptive essays at connotative clarification on the lexical level, and his two proprietary acts of naming are probably all that is needed to give him the necessary basic mastery over his capriciously acquired natural environment and companion.

Such a finding is, on the face of it, somewhat at odds with Eric Berne's dictum that Crusoe's adventures constitute "one of the most detailed accounts in any literature of the psychological process of organizing space into a structure."35 Berne, however, never considered names among his criteria, but defined Crusoe's conquest of insular space in terms of fears and anxieties. Nevertheless, he, too, as a result of his psychoanalytical interpretation, comes to the conclusion that "Crusoe. . . never did explore the whole extent of his island effectively."36 While creating for himself an ordered interior within the wall which he builds almost immediately after his arrival, the surrounding
wilderness remains largely unknown to him, and therefore onomastically anonymous.

III

Of the well over two hundred Robinsonaden which, in imitation of the original, had made their appearance in many European countries by the end of the nineteenth century, the two Wyss's Der schweizerische Robinson has probably had the most lasting impact in the English-speaking world. Published in Zurich in 1812 and 1813 and, unlike Defoe's novel, from the outset intended for the children, it deposits a whole family of six - a Swiss preacher, his wife, and four sons, Fritz (16), Ernst (14), Jack (12) and Franz (9) - on a desolate island for more than ten years, as sole survivors of a shipwreck; this removes any real chance of Crusoe's 'egocentric isolation' being repeated and makes their years of solitude not so readily interpretable as a 'metaphor of selfishness.' From an onomastic point of view, too, the contrast between the two narratives could, despite the obviously derivative use of the name Robinson in the title of the latter, hardly be much greater. One may argue that this extraordinary difference regarding the awareness of the function of names and of the ontological necessity for naming is entirely due to the very much greater heed for unambiguous identifying references, when six
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Robinsons are communicating with each other than when one is left in solitary confinement, but this remarkable divergence in attitude cannot be explained in this fashion alone and must have other reasons. In fact, the claim can be made without much fear of contradiction that whereas Defoe's Robinson Crusoe is at best patently negligent in matters of naming, the Swiss Family Robinson, under the father's instructional leadership, promises to be a model of onomastic behavior, both in its application and documentation. It is consequently a much more productive source of information for the name scholar whose interest lies in the elucidation of naming practices by settlers, colonists, or castaways, in response to the challenges of a nameless landscape.

The basic toponymic framework for their island of exile is imposed one Sunday soon after their arrival, in a kind of family committee meeting convened by the father. The record of this session deserves to be quoted in full, since it is fundamental to an understanding of the principles and practices employed by the Swiss disaster victims. For this purpose it is essential to go back to the German original, because during the checkered history of the many translations and adaptations, this particular scene, like so many others, has undergone such drastic changes that it would be
impossible to get a sense of the authors' intentions from modern English copies published this century. Here is my own translation of the 1962 reprint of the Originalausgabe: 12

"During the meal it occurred to me to make a suggestion to the boys which would, I knew, be very much to their taste.

'How would it be,' I said, 'if we were finally to give proper names to our home and the different areas of this country with which we have so far become acquainted? The coast we shall leave alone in this, however, for who knows whether it has not long been mapped, and christened after the name of some navigator or saint, by our scholarly compatriots, the geographically knowledgeable Europeans? But we want to name the different individual locations at which we usually stay or which appear noteworthy to us so that it will be possible for us to refer to them more quickly and more easily, and so that we shall have the pleasant illusion of living in the middle of well populated country, surrounded by villages and towns which we have known for a while.'

'Oh, that's marvelous, that's great!' they all shouted with joy, but Jack immediately made another suggestion. 'Now we also want,' he said, 'to invent such intricate and Turkish names as are to be found on maps; people will then have to rack their brains trying to learn the geography of this island. I have also sweated enough over
their Monomotapa and Zanguebar and Coromandel.'

'Well, my boy,' I remarked with a smile, 'if only people ever hear of our country and of the names we are about to give! In any case, we would be punishing ourselves most in the end, if we were to get our tongues twisted by exotic names.'

'But how are we going to go about it?' asked Jack.

'We'll do it the way in which all people have done it,' I replied; 'we'll call the various places in our own mother tongue after some noteworthy characteristic, or after features similar to other things, or after events and occurrences, or after human beings, which here means ourselves primarily.'

'All right, it will be better like that,' he said; 'but where are we going to start?'

'I think, at the bay,' I replied, 'in which we first landed. What shall we call it?'

'Out of gratitude for our happy rescue, I should like to call it Deliverance Bay (Rettungsbucht) in future,' said mother.

This name met with general approval and was therefore accepted immediately. Then we also gave names to other locations which had so far seemed noteworthy to us, names which reminded us of some important circumstance. Thus our first place of habitation was called Tenthomo (Zeltheim) because our shelter had been a tent;
the islet which lies at the entrance to Deliverance Bay received the name Shark Island (Haiinsel) because Fritz thought he had seen a shark there; and another island was called, in contrast to it, Whale Island (Walfischinsel). We named the swamp where we had cut our arrow reeds, Flamingo Marsh (Flamantumpf) after the bird shot there; our tree castle received the poetic name Falconhurst (Falkenhorst); 'for', I said to the boys, 'you are all such a young brood of pillagers, hopefully of a noble kind, willing to learn, obedient, swift, and courageous as falcons.' On my suggestion; the high promontory from which Fritz and I had looked in vain for our shipmates, was named Cape Disappointment (Vorgebirge der betrügten Hoffnung); and the hill on which we stood was simply called the Look-Out (die Warte). Finally we christened the stream, across which the jackals had penetrated into our former habitation, Jackal Creek (Schakalbach).

Thus we whiled away the time very pleasantly, while we ate, and laid the foundations for the geography of our new fatherland."

For the Swiss Robinsons, then, the naming of places is a deliberate, democratic, principled act, essential to felicitous communication and precise denotative reference. For them it is also not an empty act without practical application, for only a few hours later, in a discussion trying to determine a suitable place to which to take an evening stroll, Jack, as if anxious to
get his tongue round one of the new names as soon as possible
suggests Tenthorne and his mother agrees: 'I also vote for Tenthorne,'
and from then on applied onomastics really works. As part of
their explorations and adventures, as well as in the daily routine
of living, during the long remainder of the family's stay on the
island, this initial set of place names is used frequently, both
by the first person narrator (the father) and in the many passages
of direct and indirect speech reported by him. Nor is this central
act of naming considered sufficient for a toponymic structuring of
the landscape, and other names are added whenever a denser or wider
toponymic network becomes necessary, or at least appropriate:
Monkeywood (Affenwäldchen) after a tragi-comic incident involving
Fritz and monkeys; Boarford (Eberfurt) in memory of driving some
piglets to the other side of a stream; Greendale (Grüntal) in
description of an especially verdant valley; Arab Look-Out (Warte
der Araber) in jocular reference to a height from which some
ostriches on the move had been mistaken for Arabs on horseback;
Pearl Bay (Perlbai) indicating a rich find of pearls. Several
names referring to the flora and fauna of the island, such as Gourd
Wood (Kürbiswäldchen), Oak Wood (Eichenwald), Coconut Wood
(Kokoswäldchen), Acorn Wood (Süseichelwald), Goose Marsh (Gänseumpf),
Duck Marsh (Entensumpf), Duck Point (Entenspitze), Swan Lake
(Schwanensee), Bear Cave (Bärenhöhle), and others. If use of the definite article is anything to go by, most names in this last category hover ambiguously on the border line between noun and name. A typically Swiss touch is provided by such imports as Waldegg for a new dairy-farm, Klus, or Klause, for a narrow passage of gap, and the sonorous Hohentwiel. This is the only name transferred as a whole, and at least partly without lexical meaning, whereas every other name coined by the Swiss Robinsons means both onomastically and lexically, i.e. has name and word meaning. It is a place nomenclature that is both private and public insofar as it is subjective in its selections and associations, but objective in its integrating function as an onomastic field and its individualizing potential. It is the toponymic dialect of six people on a desert island.

As a structured nomenclature it is not only not finite, as we have already seen, but also not static, for we are treated to a significant name change. After some considerable improvement in their habitation, and since lexical meaning is still perceived as important, the family expresses the desire to replace Tenthome with a more grandiose name and after some discussion decides on Rockhome (Felsenheim), somewhat against the wishes of the father who would have liked to have preserved the old name because of
its, to him, close associations with the first few days of their remarkable escape. The father's reluctance to agree to this proposed change is not surprising in view of the fact that he clearly regards a given, circumscribed place nomenclature as cumulative, without a need of an opportunity for replacements, because it was he, after all, who in the initial naming session advised against looking for a name for the coast since that may already have been named by other people. Despite its open-endedness, the island nomenclature is rounded off in a sense just before the end of the narrative account, i.e., just before the island sojourn comes to an end for some of the family members.

In a symmetrical act of naming, a rocky promontory overlooking Deliverance Bay is called Cape Farewell (Kap Lebewohl), and in true colonists' fashion the whole island is given the proud name New Switzerland (Neu-Schweizerland), linking past, present, and future in a grand onomastic gesture of patriotism, and in defiance, by the way, of any cartographer who may already have named the island differently. Flag waving is more important than principles.

Formally, all the names created by the Swiss Family Robinson are as is compatible with the morphological principles of comparatively recent naming processes, compound names, except two - die Warte and Klus. In both these instances, the particular language
in which the narrator couches the naming of these two places, indicates his awareness of, perhaps even his uncomfortableness with, these exceptions. The generics employed are few in number and therefore repetitive, and constitute some of the most general lexical items in the topographic sector of the vocabulary - home, island, marsh, creek, bay, cape, field, wood, lake, dale, cave, point, castle - with very little discriminatory power. Only with reference to watercourses does river (Fluss) occur once (Ostfluss) in addition to two creeks (Bach) - Schmalbach and Klusbach - permitting a contrast according to size, an opposition which is expressed in the case of forest names through the use of the diminutive - Eichenwald and Süssseichelwald, but Affenwäldchen, Kurbiswäldchen, Kokoswäldchen, and Pinienwäldchen. Only the grandiose hurst (Horst) in Falkenhorst and the curious top in Zuckertop stand outside this basic set of generics, as do, significantly, the two words used in uncompounded names - Warte and Klus.

The specifics are primarily descriptive with reference to flora (gourd, oak, coconut, acorn, sugar [cane]), fauna (shark, whale, flamingo, jackal, monkey, boar, goose, duck, swan, bear, pearl), setting (tent, gap, rock, wood, east), color (green), or shape (blunt); some, however, imply associations with events and responses to events (deliverance, disappointment, Arabs; farewell,
and even, as we have seen, shark, whale, monkey, boar, and bear). This last category, the incident name, although not unknown in colonial territory, is, as happens so often, exaggerated by the literary creators of the Swiss castaways, insofar as it is in real life a prominent feature of name re-interpretation rather than of name creation, frequently in a kind of mythological view of names on the folk-cultural level, giving new meaning, sometimes in narrative form, to the meaningless.  

It is almost as if the namers of New Switzerland re-interpret before they name, or as if they are doing both at the same time. Indeed, the wish to commemorate and to be able to attach a story in retrospect is, it seems, in many instances the primary stimulus to identify a locality rather than the perceived need to make the environment accessible through naming. Certainly the structure of their "onomastic field" is almost totally identical with the structures formed by the generics and specifics, respectively, for even in their satisfactory denotative function almost all the names in question have transparent lexical meaning, and seem to demand it.

At this point, a brief excursion is in order to remind ourselves that the naming processes employed by the Swiss Robinsons served as direct models for the five men stranded on a Pacific island after their daring escape from the besieged Richmond, Virginia, in 1865, as depicted by Jules Verne (1828-1905) in The Mysterious Island
Nicolaisen 20 (1874). Not only do they hold a mountain-top naming conference (Part I, Chapter 11) at which the first dozen or so major names are coined, but direct reference is also made to some of the Robinsons' names, 'like "Providence Bay, Whale Point, and Cape Disappointment."' Verne's castaways — or colonists, as they prefer to call themselves — on a number of occasions compare themselves with the Robinsons with regard to the tools available to them or the fortunate results of their own ingenuity. Their only notable departure from the name categories utilized by the Robinsons is their introduction of patriotic names, including references to national heroes, a name type familiar to them from their native America, so that they create Lincoln Island, Mount Franklin, Lake Grant, Washington Bay, and Union Bay, in addition to the more usual Safety Island, Prospect Heights, Serpentine Peninsula, Claw Cape, etc., and the curious river Mercy. Other names given at later stages of their stay and explorations primarily refer to events, like the pursuit of a bird (Jacamar Wood), the capture of certain birds (Tadorn’s Pens), the discovery of a valuable chest on the beach (Flotsam Point), the recovery of parts of their damaged vehicle (Port Balloon), the dynamiting of a new water channel (Creek Glycerine), or the death of Captain Nemo (Dakkar Grotto). As direct descendants of the Robinsons, Captain Cyrus Harding, Gideon Spilett, Pencroft, Herbert, and Neb are just as anxious to use place names as
localizing devices of *commemoration* as their Swiss prede-
cessors, and although these serve perfectly well as names
afterwards and are used with a kind of onomastic panache, the
curious fact remains that the strongly derivative onomastic
dialect of Lincoln Island, like that of New Switzerland,
remains gappy and ineffective if a link cannot be made with
some incident, discovery, or encounter involving all or some
of the balloon-wrecked fivesome. It may be at least worth a
footnote that this dialect is transplanted to Iowa by the
rescued castaways after the geographical features to which it
originally applied have been destroyed and covered by the
waters of the Pacific. 46a

IV

The Swiss Robinsons (whose real surname; incidentally, we
never learn, presumably because Father Wyss was the first-person
narrator in the original bedtime story setting) have their English
counterparts, or rather replacements, in the Seagrave family — the
father who is a surveyor, the mother, and children William (approx.
10), Caroline (7), Master Tommy (6), and Little Albert (the baby) —
who were created in direct response to the adventures of their
Swiss originals. As Captain Marryat (1792 - 1848) recounts it in
the Preface to his *Mastman Ready*, first published in 1841 - 42:
"I promised my children to write a book for them... On my questioning to know what kind of book they would prefer, they said they wished me to continue a work called the Swiss Family Robinson, which had never been completed, and which appeared peculiarly to interest them. I sent for the work and read it... but I found difficulties which were to me insurmountable, and which decided me not to continue that work, but to write another in the same style; and I mention this more with a view to prevent any accusation of plagiarism, than with any intent to depreciate the work referred to. I have said that it is very amusing; but the fault which I find in it is, that it does not adhere to the probable, or even the possible, ... ."\(^{47}\)

Marryat, an experienced seafaring man himself, is especially critical of the lack of expertise in matters of seamanship, and of the carelessness in describing "the vegetable and animal productions of the island."\(^{48}\) From the outset, his narrative has therefore to be read with this dissatisfaction and silent protest in mind, and although written in defense against the unreliability of the Swiss story, it must nevertheless be regarded as a further example of a Robinsonade, but at least twice removed from the prototype. It is also worth noting that, in comparison with the Swiss Robinsons, and certainly in contrast to Robinson Crusoe, the burden of loneliness and the hardships of a prolonged sojourn on a desert island
are considerably lessened by the additional presence of an elderly man, with great common sense and practical experience, the old salt Masterman Ready, and a black servant girl, Juno, always available and willing to relieve Selina Seagrave and others of the more unpleasant chores. It is a band of eight, therefore, that has to cope with the new and isolated habitat into which a sudden storm and shipwreck has unexpectedly placed them while on their way to Australia, and one would have thought that the much more extensive demands for communication among these eight people would also have created a much greater need for toponymic identification. The first surprising observation in this respect, however, is that the Seagraves and their two companions do not seem to have engaged in any naming at all, for there is not a single example of a denotative name spelt with a capital initial, and there is certainly no report of any conscious, deliberate act of naming. Is the implication of this that the good Captain, in addition to his objections to the Robinsons' mediocre seamanship and their careless mixing of improbable flora and fauna, also found fault with the naming practices of the Swiss castaways? Is the lack of appropriately marked toponyms another protest on behalf of his superior island dwellers? Or is the absence of proper names on the island simply on oversight on the part of the author?
At first glance, it does look indeed as if the Seagraves have to be content with such circumlocutions as "the spot which had first received them after their danger" or "the place which was to be their future residence," but a closer reading reveals that, because of the simplicity of life on a small island and the uniqueness of each geographical feature labeled, unambiguous reference can be made to such features without an overt act of naming. The Seagraves' temporary habitat is just "the island" ("on the south of the island," "the family on the island," "their departure from the island," ) and since everything is seen through the eyes of the castaways and from the perspective of their location, it is sufficient to divide the insular world into "this side of the island" and "the other side of the island." Sentences and phrases like the following abound: "Their journey back again to the cove," "we may venture to walk through the wood;" "home to the house," "the fish-pond reminds me of it," "which are in the store house," "go to the hen-house," "They're in the yam patch," "we can commence the stockade," "the large black rock is on a line with the garden point," "they gained the house in the bay," etc., etc. Thus we find that nouns, usually uncompounded and always preceded by the definite article, are all that is required for the process of proper identification, and topographic reference is therefore made through such, almost
deictic, lexical items as the island, the cove, the tent, the coconut grove, the reef(s), the beach, the rocks, the brushwood, the point of land, the wood, the huts, the coast, the spring, the house, the garden, the pond, the ravine, the cottage, the pasture land, the harbour, and so on.

Consequently, the landscape is structured, and its unique features are isolated and integrated, by a superimposed network of lexical items drawn from the topographic sector of the English vocabulary and acting as a kind of, not very sophisticated, lexical field consisting of perhaps two or three dozen words with rather general and imprecise meanings and only imperceptibly extended or altered connotations, in comparison with the English homeland. As there appears to be — in any given context of island life, anyhow — only one representative of each geographical feature connoted, the mention of such features becomes automatically denotative in function, and there is no need to turn lexical items into toponymic generics. It is probably fair, under these special circumstances, to think of such items as "the cove" or "the spring" as denotative words, or, if you will, as names with small initials.

In terms of exploration and mastery of their environment, the Seagraves have, as a result, to be content with some rather basic concepts and perceptual patterns. It also becomes fairly clear
from their confident use of a small number of familiar topographic terms that their island habitat does not provide a real threat to them or prove problematic in its exotic otherness. One gets the impression that Marryat, in adopting this mode of reference for the Seagraves and for his third-person narrative, acts instinctively rather than with deliberate design. What he would have done if there had been two coves, or two springs, or two ponds, is difficult to say. If "storehouse" and "henhouse," in juxtaposition to the simple "house," are anything to go by, his first step would presumably have been the introduction of compound nouns, as also in "coconut grove" or "fishpond." It is, on the other hand, almost inconceivable that the Seagraves might ever have coined and used proper names for which no lexical meaning was accessible.

V

Like The Swiss Family Robinson and Masterman Ready, the fourth and last work to be reviewed in this brief survey of "Desert Island Onomastics," R. M. Ballantyne’s The Coral Island was written for the younger generation. With a readership especially of boys in mind, Ballantyne (1825-1894) makes three boys the victims of a shipwreck, leaves them on an island with very little material support and certainly without the advice of an older person. As it turns out, the eldest of the three boys, Jack
Martin, is for his age of eighteen an exceptionally mature, and well-read person and therefore a natural leader whose example is gladly followed by the fifteen-year old Ralph Rover, who is also the narrator, and the ever-cheerful Peterkin Gay, a thirteen-year old. At no point in the narrative is there, either directly or indirectly, any reference to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* or the other two works, but its publication date (1857) makes it most unlikely that the other three accounts were not known to Ballantyne. In addition, we know that his uncle John Ballantyne (1774-1821), one of the publishers of the works of Sir Walter Scott, was a keen admirer of Defoe's novel, of which he claimed that "perhaps there exists no work, either of instruction or entertainment, in the English language, which has been more generally read, and more universally admired," and in a highly literary family like the Edinburgh Ballantynes such a strongly favorable, publically announced opinion would not go unnoticed or be without considerable influence. The story of the three boys shipwrecked on a coral island is therefore undoubtedly yet another *Robinsonade*.

It is not difficult to establish that our three young Robinsons are also namers, albeit very restrained in their onomastic actions. The mere half dozen names, which they are reported to have given,
are obviously not sufficient to add up to a satisfying nomenclature, but all six of them are coined to highlight some important experience in their lives and, referring to locations visited on frequent or significant occasions, are well used by the young islanders. Moreover, the reader is always well prepared in advance for each name and therefore quite ready to accept it when it is given in a deliberate act of naming expressly recorded in the narrative.

The first name created naturally reflects the disastrous event which placed the three boys in their predicament, and is given, in the narrator's words, to "our own valley, which we afterwards named the Valley of the Wreck."53 Indulging, as boys will even under the most distressing conditions, in the pleasure of swimming and diving "amongst the flower-beds of" a "submarine garden"54 in a lagoon but driven from this place by unexpected danger, Jack, Ralph, and Peterkin transfer their pleasant pastime to a less dangerous spot "inside of this basin, which we called our Walter Garden" where "the coral formations were much more wonderful, and the sea-weed far more lovely and vividly coloured."55 Having accidentally discovered an underwater cave of which "the walls, as well as the roof, sparkled in the light of our torch, and threw back gleams and flashes, as if they were covered with precious stones,"56 the young castaways on a number of occasions return to this "Diamond Cave, as we named it."57
Early in the story we learn that the coral reef which had been the major cause of their shipwreck, "completely encircled the island," and nothing is therefore more natural than that the name of that island should after a while indeed emerge as "Coral Island." One of the boys' most exciting adventures happens after, on one of their excursions in exploration of the island, they noticed that "there appeared a white column above the rocks, as of steam or spray. It rose upwards to a height of several feet, and then disappeared." Going closer, poor Peterkin Gay had the misfortune of unsuspectingly placing himself above one of the guisers so that "a fierce spout of water burst up between Peterkin's legs, and blew him off his feet." This place is christened "Spouting Cliff" by the boys. Finally, they also give a name to a neighboring island which they visit because of its intriguing inhabitants whom Peterkin had first mistaken to be a regiment sent out to massacre the natives in cold blood, but who turned out to be penguins. "Penguin Island" is not strictly speaking part of their own immediate environment, but the name is nevertheless the result of a deliberate act of naming on the part of the boys who can also, in non-onomastic fashion, still occasionally talk about it as "the island of the penguins."

A mere six names, and yet they encompass all that mattered in
the lives of the boys on their island - at least in the narrator's memory. What do we have? A Valley of the Wreck, a Winter Garden, a Diamond Cave, a Coral Island, a Spouting Cliff, and a Penguin Island - toponymic references to the extraordinary, the strange, the phantastic in their involuntary adventure. One almost doubts that there ever were any other names, for adolescents do not name the ordinary and the familiar, are not interested in structuring through naming the whole texture of their lives. The peaks of experience are enough. What appears as unimaginative simplicity to the old, is exciting sophistication to the young; it is certainly sufficiency. Why name places that have played no part in one's personal experience? Jack, Ralph, and Peterkin are mapping out their lives, not anybody else's. They are, in this respect, not unlike the Yurok in Northern California whose "whole environment," according to Eriksön, "exists only insofar as human history has named certain locations."

The three youngsters do more than that, though. When finally in contact with a friendly native, they put Crusoe to shame by not imposing a name of their choosing on him but by attempting clumsily but successfully, to discover his. No proprietary "my-man-any-day-of-the-week" for them:

"Jack pointed to his breast and said 'Jack' very distinctly;
then he pointed to Peterkin and me, repeating our names at the same time. Then he pointed to himself again, and said 'Jack,' and laying his finger on the breast of the chief, looked inquiringly into his face. The chief instantly understood him, and said 'Tararo' twice, distinctly. Jack repeated it after him, and the chief, nodding his head approvingly, said 'Chuck'.

VI

Four authors, four desert islands, four different sets of characters created to face the challenges and conquer the strange, potentially hostile habitat of insular exile. From an onomastic point of view, the Swiss Robinsons, with the Lincoln Island balloonists in tow, clearly stand out as the most deliberate and efficient namers, conscious of the necessity of naming for their intellectual survival as a group, seeing it as a key to the knowability of their temporary habitation. Berne assesses their toponymic efforts to be the "finest development" of what he terms "the 'Lover's Leap' method of nomenclature," but to us it seems to be efficiently one-sided (especially in their limited choice of generics) rather than methodologically excellent. That as sophisticated and "scientific" writer as Jules Verne chose to emulate them, by refining and modernizing this particular model, is an instructive indication of how the creative act of naming tends to be perceived by authors
as a process by which the personal past is commemorated and the historical or legendary event is encapsulated toponymically. In this sense, R. M. Ballantyne's three boys are next best as namers, for the names which they give are not so much intended to provide structure for their total insular environment as to give durable location to the most curious aspects of their adolescent exile. In accomplishing this, they use the 'Lover's Leap' method even more exclusively. Quantitatively, Robinson Crusoe would be third, with his two isolated, proprietary stabs at naming, but his spectacular failure to come to grips onomastically with the island space as a whole has its roots both in his inadequate handling of the connotative function of his lexicon and in his lack of exploratory zest. Last there are the Seagraves, apparently not interested in naming and yet making the speech act of identifying reference possible through the deictic, lexical denotation of unique geographical features, practically all of them single sites and not larger tracts, and through the use of a basic onomastic field where ambiguity through duplication or multiplication is ruled out.

As has been amply demonstrated, all authors, through their characters, insist on lexically meaningful names, favoring appropriate description and commemoration of events as the most important extra-
linguistic associations, and adopting therefore a stance typical of folk-cultural naming and, even more so, re-interpretation. The nameless landscapes confront the castaways as demandingly as the uncharted days of their desert island lives. Their chances for survival are not only enhanced by their newly acquired skills to handle tools and to provide food and shelter; they also, in a more profound way, depend on their ability to name satisfactorily. Since, apart from Masterman Ready, all characters survive, their creators at least must have considered them to have been successful on all counts.

The student of names cannot come to quite the same optimistic conclusion, insofar as the naming processes, whether consciously employed or not, are mistakenly limited to a very small set of basic principles, in which description and incidence are accorded a prominence far beyond their usual importance in naming situations. Even when the namers' general inexperience is taken into account, their failure to look beyond these two major associations and beyond the lexically meaningful prevents the products of their activities from blending into an integrated, richly diversified nomenclature. In the last analysis, all their toponymic efforts, from the Swiss Robinsons to the English Seagraves, do little to lift their so-called "names" much above the level of "words," and what
should have been a space-structuring *onomasticon remains*, to a greater or lesser extent, a superimposed, selective lexicon, disguised by its capital initials. Linguistically speaking their *onomastic fields* and their *lexical fields* remain practically identical, and our verdict has to be that the fictitious names of fictitious names are, on the whole and despite some intriguing touches, not on a par with their real counterparts, the colonists, the settlers in virgin territory, the conquerors and explorers of sparsely inhabited areas.
FOOTNOTES

1 See W. F. H. Nicolaisen, "Early Scandinavian Naming in the Western and Northern Isles," *Northern Scotland*, forthcoming.


5 Defoe, 87.


7 Defoe, 149.

8 Ibid., 209.

9 Watt, 86.

10 Ibid., 92.

12 Angus Ross, in Defoe, 17.

13 Defoe, 90.

14 Ibid., 91.

15 Ibid., 229.

16 Ibid., 92.

17 Ibid., 113.

18 Ibid., 115.

19 Ibid., 89.

20 Ibid., 84.

21 Ibid., 144-145.

22 Ibid., 155.

23 Ibid., 162.

24 Ibid., 173.

25 Ibid., 170.

26 Ibid., 158.

27 This would be the name scholar's answer to Harry F. Robins,

28 Defoe, 85.

29 Ibid., 153.

30 Robins, 782.

31 Defoe, 209.

32 Ibid., 217.

33 See Watt, 70.

34 Edwin B. Benjamin, "Symbolic Elements in *Robinson Crusoe*," *Philological Quarterly* XXX (1951) 209.


36 Ibid., 564.


1924, p. 79), the term Robinsonade appears to have been first used by the fictitious editor "Gisander" of Johann Gottfried Schanbel's *Insel Felsenburg* which was published in 1731 under a lengthy title beginning *Wunderliche Fata einiger See-Fahrer, absonderlich Alberti Julii, eines gebohrnen Sachsens,...*

In this work, the enforced island exile of a shipwrecked couple results in the founding of a prosperous, utopian colony which finds onomastic expression almost exclusively in place names indicating proprietorship or personal responsibility - Alberts-Raum, Stephans-Raum, Christians-Raum, etc., also Albertsburg.

39 It is generally assumed that Johann David Wyss (1743-1818) first told this story to his four boys, and that his son Johann Rudolf Wyss (1782-1830), later University Librarian and Professor of Philosophy in Berne, edited it for publication.

40 Brown, 566.

41 Ibid., 565.

42 Johann David Wyss, *Der schwizerische Robinson*. Zurich, Orell Fussli, 1962, 82-83. Most English versions are not translations but adaptions, often influenced by the French edition. The version available in bookstores in this country seems to go back to the retelling by William H.G. Kingston of 1879; this both expands and

43 Wyss, 84.

44 Ibid., 207. The name Felsenheim, apart from reflecting the more solid nature of the family's new habitation, may well have been modeled on Johann Gottfried Schnabel's *Insel Felsenburg* (1731) which was very popular in the eighteenth century, and a version of which was edited by Ludwig Tieck, under that title, in 1828. See also note 38.

45 This is also true of the naming of animals which are called after their color (an old donkey called Grizzle; two dogs called Brown and Fawn; a milchcow called Blanche), speed (Hunter, a young domesticated jackal; Lightfoot, an onager; Storm, a buffalo; Swift, a donkey; Arrow and Fast, two other donkeys; Hurricane, an ostrich), or the noise they make (Hum and Hummer, two calves; Stentor, a steer). The only exception is a young dog who receives the name Koko because the sound of it would echo beautifully in the woods and cliffs.

Under somewhat different circumstances, and humanly speaking on a much larger scale, this is also the fate of the prosperous colony resulting from Mark Woolston's shipwreck in the South Pacific, as depicted in James Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Crater* (1847); and just as Verne's man-servant ape may well have its forebears in the domesticated monkeys of Schnabel's *Insel Felsenburg*, the dominating, threatening, and later destructive volcano is likely to be a derivative counterpart of Cooper's *Vulcan's Peak*. Verne's river *Mercy*, too, has a hydronymic precursor in Cooper's *Hope*, the name of a channel of water. If the Cooper novel, by the way, Robinson (Crusoe) is occasionally and quaintly used as a verb, as in Bob Betts' comments to Mark, when it becomes obvious that they have to abandon their ship: "Nor would I be at all surprised, should there turn out to be a bit of land to leeward, if you and I was to Robinson Crusoe it for the rest of our days."


48 *Loc. cit.*


R. M. Ballantyne, 60.

Ibid., 53.

Ibid., 72.

Ibid., 126.

Ibid., 128.

Ibid., 60.

Ibid., 130.

Ibid., 87.

Ibid., 88.

Ibid., 149.

Ibid., 102.

Ibid., 149.

is not drawn attention to capriciously, for "The Yurok not only lived largely in or at the mouth of a narrow, mountainous, densely-forested valley, but in addition limited themselves within arbitrary borders." In this their insularity on the northern Californian mainland, they certainly resemble several of our castaways, and Crusoe's walled "island" within the island comes especially to mind. Furthermore, also according to Erikson, "The Yurok goes very far in denying any prominence to a place which has not become a named 'locus' by being given a historical foundation" ("Observations on the Yurok: Childhood and World Image," Univ. of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology XXXV [1934 - 1943, publ. 1943] 273.

66 R. M. Ballantyne, 179-180. Other names which they learn in this way are Avatea and Mahine, the former a girl, the latter a chief.

67 Berne, 563.