

Ceci est la version préliminaire de l'article publié dans Hubert Zapf, dir., *Handbooks of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2016, p. 385-412.

Eco- and Geo- Approaches in French and Francophone Literary Studies:  
*Écocritique, éco-poétique, géocritique, géo-poétique*

Rachel Bouvet (UQAM) and Stephanie Posthumus (McGill)

## Introduction

A wide variety of approaches to space, place, landscape, and nature have been developing in French and Francophone literary studies over the last decade or so, many of them strongly influenced by the “spatial turn.” For example, literary geography draws on landscape studies to examine the representation of a place in a novel or collection of poems (Collot 2014). Geocriticism, on the other hand, focuses on the ways in which space becomes place with respect to specific geographical referents (Westphal 2007). As for geopoetics, it aims to redefine the role of personal experience of the real world (White 2014) and outline a methodology for analyzing the relationship between humans and places in literary texts (Bouvet 2011). Following an “ecological turn” more than the “spatial turn,” French and Francophone forms of ecocriticism and eco-poetics align themselves with the critical concept of place and home (eco-). Some of these approaches work with a more traditional notion of the natural world (Schoentjes 2015) and environmental literature (Suberchicot 2012), while others are developing a broader interest in post-apocalyptic literature and urban and industrial environments (Posthumus 2014).

To clear up the misconception that French and Francophone literary studies remain rooted in traditional analysis of nature as setting or background, we will carefully compare and contrast four of these literary approaches – geocriticism, geopoetics, ecocriticism and eco-poetics.<sup>1</sup> Each co-author will present the field in which she specializes alongside a second field that fits best with her area of specialization – geopoetics and geocriticism in the case of Rachel Bouvet, ecocriticism and eco-poetics in the case of Stephanie Posthumus. This organization will allow us to discuss the differences between geo- (earth) and eco- (home) approaches. But this alignment does not preclude other possibilities. For example, we could have emphasized the similarities between geopoetics and eco-poetics that both pay close attention to the role of language and literary techniques, in contrast to geocriticism and ecocriticism that pay more attention to socio-historical and cultural contexts. Or we could have aligned geopoetics and ecocriticism in terms of their call for a less harmful, more mindful way of dwelling in the world, in contrast to

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<sup>1</sup> We will not include Michel Collot’s literary geography in this overview because his work is more deeply rooted in landscape studies and has only more recently shifted to questions of place and space. Moreover, Collot

geocriticism's outright rejection of ecological politics and ecopoetics' implied ecological principles.

These alternative arrangements of geocriticism, ecocriticism, geopoetics and ecopoetics illustrate the importance of looking more closely at their similarities and differences. In addition, each co-author will use her respective literary approach – geopoetics in Bouvet's case and ecocriticism in Posthumus' case – to analyze the novel *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (1967) by French author Michel Tournier. These readings will offer another look at the understanding of space, place, nature and environment at the heart of geo- and eco- approaches. Finally, we will draw some practical conclusions about the ways in which French and Francophone literary studies can contribute more fully to ecocriticism's current projects as well as to its “emerging trends” (Buell 2014).

### ***Écocritique: A culturally diverse, comparative approach***

For a variety of political, philosophical, and cultural reasons, ecocriticism remains less well known in French and Francophone Literary Studies than in American and Anglo-Saxon circles. The early publication of a special issue on “Écologie, écocritique et littérature” in *Mots pluriels* (1999) went almost entirely unnoticed, despite the fact that it included contributions by important French and Francophone thinkers and writers. One reason may be the particular climate of literary studies in France where approaches grounded in identity politics such as queer studies, gender studies and animal studies have often been dismissed as less relevant or irrelevant.<sup>2</sup> Even with approaches that place the literary text in the context of the real world, such as renewed interest in reader reception theory (Macé 2013), there has been tension around the fact that this reader is stripped of class, gender, and race markings (Moi 2013). Given this climate, it is not surprising that ecocriticism has been developing in small, often marginalized pockets taken up by literary scholars working on French and Francophone literature outside of France.

Published in 1999, the special issue of *Mots pluriels* set the stakes for doing ecocritical studies in French and Francophone literary studies. In her introduction to “Écologie, écocritique et littérature,” Hélène Jaccomard states that ecocriticism must have “an eco-ethic” otherwise it is simply another analysis of representations of landscape, nature and setting in literary texts. The articles in this collection illustrate the ways in which nature has been transformed into environment, a political cause around which scientists, philosophers, and literary scholars rally in search of a less destructive way of living on planet earth. And yet these articles also reveal that “eco-ethics” exist in the plural rather than in the singular. For example, French geographer Augustin Berque carefully distances himself from a strong anti-anthropocentric view and develops instead an “ontology of human *milieux*.” Moreover, the contributions from African

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<sup>2</sup> See Scott Gunther (2005) for the reception of queer studies in France and Anne Simon (2015) for Animal Studies.

literary scholars, sociologists and thinkers create a portrait of an *écocritique* rooted in a very different landscape than that of the French and North American contributors. While asserting a necessary ecological ethics, this special issue on *écocritique* reflects the diversity that is at the heart of *francophonie* more generally as a political, cultural and linguistic entity.

In the recently edited collection *Aspects écocritiques de l'imaginaire africain* (2013), Étienne-Marie Lassi underlines the role that post-colonial studies have to play in *écocritique*, responding in part to the absence of such a critical lens in Jacomard's earlier collection. In his introduction, Lassi critiques the representation of African tribes as less environmental and raises the issue of colonial tendencies of "green" initiatives in Africa. In many respects, this Francophone *écocritique* can be seen as a challenge to calls for a global environmentalism (Buell 1995) or a shared set of terms for talking about environmental issues (Adamson 2015). In the 1999 special issue of *Mots pluriels*, the tension is already present between an *écocritique* emerging from a full-stomach environmentalism and an *écocritique* associated with a hungry-belly environmentalism, to borrow two expressions from Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez-Alier's *Varieties of Environmentalism* (1997). This means that *écocritique* will always carry the traces of multiple environmentalisms and so may not come together in the same way as ecocriticism has. But at the same time, it will resonate deeply with scholars who work on Anglophone post-colonial literatures (see for example Mita Banerjee's contribution in this collection).

In addition to its cultural diversity, *écocritique* is strongly influenced by a comparative perspective. In her introduction to a special issue on "Éco-littérature" in *L'Esprit Créateur* (2006), Lucile Desblache points out the importance of contrasting the ways in which ecological concerns are represented in Anglophone and Francophone literatures (2). The articles in the collection focus, however, on one or the other of the two literatures and do not outline the type of comparative cultural approach described by Desblache.<sup>3</sup> One French scholar who has been working towards such an approach is Alain Suberchicot. In his first book, *Littérature américaine et écologie* (2003), Suberchicot focuses on nature writing and presents ecocriticism as an American phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> However, in his second book, *Littérature et environnement. Pour une écocritique comparée* (2012), Suberchicot works across three national literatures - American, Chinese, and French - analyzing literary texts in which nature and ecology come to the foreground. Suberchicot defines environmental literature not necessarily as politically motivated,

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<sup>3</sup> In her introduction to the special issue, she asserts that analyzing the relationship between humans and the environment in the literary text can often reveal the "cultural profile of a country or a period" (2006, 2; authors' translation).

<sup>4</sup> This is quite typical of how ecocriticism has been received in France. Introducing ecocriticism to a French readership, Tom Pughe and Michel Granger underline the fact that nature writing and the environmental imagination arise from "preoccupations that are rooted in American cultural history" (2005; authors' translation).

but as driven by the question of the natural world.<sup>5</sup> For example, in his discussion of Julien Gracq's novels, Suberchicot explains that the geography of place plays the dominant role, leaving human characters to fade into the background. Using the lens of *littérature environnementale*, Suberchicot develops a comparative approach that underlines similarities across different national literatures, leaving less room for the specificities of the cultural contexts under consideration.

Working from within a French literary and intellectual tradition, co-author Stephanie Posthumus argues for an *écocritique* that is interdisciplinary and politically engaged, yet specific to the French cultural context. Placing literary texts in dialogue with French political ecology and environmental philosophy, she outlines the ecocritical potential of contemporary texts that are not about environmental issues or texts that may even be highly critical of such issues. She reads these texts in light of the thinking of Bruno Latour, Michel Serres, and Isabelle Stengers who are all working to rearticulate the relationship between humans and the environment through the concepts of the nature-culture (Latour 1999), the natural contract (Serres 1990) and cosmopolitics (Stengers 1997). This leads to new interpretations of the ways in which literary texts represent complex human/non-human relationships in a wide variety of natural, urban, industrial, apocalyptic environments and on different regional, national, transnational and global levels. Without reducing the literary text to a single concept or theory, this ecocritical approach aims to place literature in dialogue with other social discourses about nature and the environment. This interdisciplinary approach is complemented by a comparative angle that focuses on the specificity of the literary text, but also on the cultural specificity of the political and philosophical texts. A French *écocritique* carefully considers the role of linguistic, historical, political, and socio-cultural differences, not in order to reconstruct national boundaries, but so as to better understand the plurality of perspectives that will be needed to address a global environmental crisis.

Given the diversity of approaches discussed here, speaking of an *écocritique* in the singular may very well be a *leurre*, that is an illusion. But it is a *leurre* that also announces *l'heure de l'écocritique*, or the fact that the time has come for ecocritical studies to more fully emerge in French and Francophone studies. Rather than representing a lag, the recent developments in *écocritique* reveal its future potential. Avoiding some of the issues that have cropped up in Anglo-Saxon ecocriticism such as a focus on one particular literary genre or one type of natural environment or one set of environmentalist politics, *écocritique* will be home to diverse Francophone perspectives, literatures and intellectual traditions - Québécois, French, African, Belgian, to name a few. Moreover, its connections to comparative studies means that *écocritique*

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<sup>5</sup> In this sense, Suberchicot's understanding of *littérature environnementale* is different from Buell's "environmental text" that has a definite environmentalist stance as part of its "ethical orientation" (1995, 7-8). Suberchicot does take into account this type of text when he considers *littérature à vocation environnementale* as a branch of *littérature environnementale* along with *littérature à motif environnemental non-spécialisée*.

will work from the fundamental premise of cultural difference to frame the understanding of a planetary ecological crisis.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Écopoétique: place, aesthetics and poetics***

While *écocritique* spans various French and Francophone literary traditions, *écopoétique* is more limited in its geographical scope. It has emerged in France and Belgium, gaining momentum over the last few years to define itself as something other than a French translation of Anglo-Saxon ecopoetics. Offering a short overview of the development of *écopoétique*, we will again emphasize the fact that this is an emerging area that has not benefitted from the momentum of a group of like minded poets (Hume 2012) or a set of theoretical works by a seminal literary scholar (Bate 1991; 2000).

In his essay “Réinventer la nature: vers une éco-poétique” (2005), Thomas Pughe begins to build the foundations of a literary theory of aesthetics that draws on the ideas of British literary scholar Jonathan Bate, but also distinguishes itself through its emphasis on the act of writing as production.<sup>7</sup> Pughe carefully outlines that he does not wish to close the gap between word and world (Buell 1995), but instead to better understand the literary and stylistic techniques used to write about nature. He is thus particularly interested in developing an “éco-logie esthétique” or an aesthetics that works from a “generalized ecology” in which humans and nature are intimately connected (Pughe 2005, 78-79). Distancing himself from ecocriticism’s emphasis on environmentally oriented literature, Pughe calls for an *écopoétique* that focuses on the ways in which new literary forms give rise to an aesthetic theory of nature (2005, 80).<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, Pughe’s *écopoétique* acts as a corrective to a lack of engagement with a text’s form, structure and genre in some ecocritical work. On the other, it remains unclear as to the role of the literary critic and writer when it comes to engaging directly with environmental concerns. Pughe avoids the issue, ending his article with a general call for reading that tries to “save a world in danger.”

Many of these same issues crop up in a more recent article, written by Nathalie Blanc, Denis Chartier and Tom Pughe, as an introduction to a special 2008 issue of *Écologie & Politique* on “Littérature et écologie.” The authors first summarize the history of Anglophone ecocriticism, in particular Jonathan Bate’s work, and then propose the term *écopoétique* as a way of shifting the emphasis from an ecological politics to an ecological aesthetics. They use the term *environnement* not to refer to a political movement, but to speak of the context and conditions of the production and reception of art more generally. What is different about their understanding of

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<sup>6</sup> Ursula Heise (2013) discusses in depth the important role that comparative studies can play in making ecocriticism a more transcultural, less monolingual approach.

<sup>7</sup> In their article, Granger and Pughe (2005) makes this clear by translating “nature writing” not as “écriture de la nature” but as “écrire la nature.”

<sup>8</sup> Citing thinkers like Jaus and Adorno, Pughe anticipates the work of an ecocritic like Timothy Morton (2007) who is also highly critical of ecomimesis and works to define a new environmental aesthetics.

an *écopoétique* is that it outlines an environmental aesthetics that goes beyond the literary text. Cultural geographers and not literary scholars, co-authors Blanc and Chartier bring to the notion of *écopoétique* a wider perspective rooted in the many ways in which humans construct place and interact with the world. For example, they look at land art and poetic performance in terms of the ways in which they inscribe the human in a physical world of sound and sight (2008, 10). Even if the articles in this special issue focus on literary texts, there is a productive tension in the way Blanc, Chartier and Pughe think through *écopoétique* from an interdisciplinary perspective.

A Belgian literary scholar, Pierre Schoentjes uses the term *écopoétique* to describe his work on representations of the natural environment in contemporary texts largely from the French tradition. In his book *Ce qui a lieu, Essai d'écopoétique* (2015), Schoentjes explains that his approach is different from that of ecocriticism because it combines a thematic analysis with careful readings of literary form, style and tone. He recognizes the important political work that North American ecocriticism has done, but insists on the need for a less cultural studies driven approach within French literary studies. Calling for a cosmopolitan perspective that does not get caught up in the divisions of national literatures, he nevertheless takes up the notion of *lieu* or place as the best way to articulate thinking about nature and environment in literary texts. Moreover, his focus is on the natural environment, rather than industrial, urban or post-apocalyptic environments, and so follows the patterns of earlier versions of North American ecocriticism. The influence of ecocritical work on Schoentjes' work is clear in an earlier article, "Littérature et environnement: écrire la nature" (2013). The first part of the title recalls Cheryl Glotfelty's definition of ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, while the second part of the title echoes Pughe and Granger's insistence on writing as production. Offering an overview of many nature-related themes and motifs in different types of literary texts, Schoentjes challenges the idea that French contemporary literature is void of issues relating to nature and environment in this article. He also reiterates the fact that rereading these texts using an ecopoetics lens means paying close attention to formal and stylistic differences between the texts.

Also a specialist of literature of the First World War, Schoentjes (2009) traces the marks left on the French cultural imaginary of this devastating, military campaign. Without outlining his literary project in ecopoetic terms, Schoentjes illustrates one of the major traits of the French environmental imagination: the effects of the Great War on the landscape.<sup>9</sup> Environmental history has been examining the ways in which the world wars of the first half of the twentieth century marked the physical landscape as well as attitudes towards the natural world.<sup>10</sup> But literary studies also has much to contribute. Schoentjes' work in this area can serve as a starting point for a more in-depth analysis of the ways in which WWI and WWII played a much more

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<sup>9</sup> See also Claire Keith (2012).

<sup>10</sup> See for example the recent workshop on "The Global Environmental History of World War I in Perspective" held at Georgetown University and organized by John McNeill, Martin Schmid and Richard Tucker (2014).

important role shaping the European environmental imagination than the North American environmental imagination.<sup>11</sup>

To conclude this overview of *écocritique* and *écopoétique*, it is useful to briefly compare the two in terms of their status within French and Francophone literary studies. Neither of these approaches has seen the success that ecocriticism has in Anglo-Saxon literature departments and they have emerged in the margins compared to more traditional approaches such as literary history, reader reception theory, and genetic criticism. This said, *écopoétique* has had an uptake in the last year or so with the call for a special issue of the scholarly journal *Fixxion* and the publication of Schoentjes' book. As for *écocritique*, it has received more attention with the publication of Suberchicot's monograph and the organization of different panels and *journées d'étude* in this area. While both of these approaches echo ecocriticism's call for reading literature in light of today's contemporary environmental crisis, they also outline a more culturally specific approach within the context of French and Francophone literary, cultural and intellectual traditions.

### ***Géopoétique and géocritique: a comparison***

Geopoetics and geocriticism have emerged and developed independently of each other with few connections between them until now. In order to better understand these two geo-approaches, we will look first at their foundations, then at their fields of specialisation, and finally at their methodologies.

#### ***Foundations***

The founder of geopoetics, Kenneth White, is a bilingual writer, traveler and philosopher, Scottish by birth, but living in France for many years now. After formulating the concept of geopoetics in his nonfiction essays, White created the International Institute of Geopoetics in 1989. Six years later, he proposed that the Institute be transformed into an archipelago of several research and artistic creation groups. Since that time, different working groups and centers have been created in Belgium, Chile, France, Italy, Scotland, Sweden and Quebec. In collaboration with other colleagues, co-author Rachel Bouvet established the Quebecois branch of geopoetics called *La Traversée*, and led the group for eight years. The group has since become affiliated with *Figura*, a research centre for the study of literary texts and imagination at the University of Quebec in Montreal. The Quebecois geopoetics branch is the only one to have an academic home. Each of the geopoetics centres or workshops has their own particular characteristics and together they form a network that is called the Geopoetics Archipelago. Growing outside of an

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<sup>11</sup> For an overview of some of the differences between European and North American ecocriticism, see Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby (2011).

academic setting, geopoetics brings together writers, artists, professors, students, and professionals. To fully understand geopoetics, it is necessary to read White's texts (*Le plateau de l'albatros*) and the *Cahiers de géopoétique*, published between 1990 and 2008, as well as the diverse publications of working groups like the *Atelier du Héron* and the *Traversée's Carnets de navigation*. But it is just as important to go outside and explore both the external world and the world of ideas in order to develop an individual and personal relationship to the earth rooted in mind and body.

Given geopoetics' emphasis on developing a body and mind relationship to the earth, it is not surprising that White has also expressed concern about ecological issues. This concern has, however, given rise to some misunderstandings, as can be seen in Bertrand Westphal's article "Pour une approche géocritique" in which he presents geopoetics as principally an environmental movement (2000, 16). In reality, the artist or writer's role of raising ecological awareness is only one aspect of this area of research and artistic creation. Advocating for the outdoors, radical critique and movement, geopoeticians choose to work in the margins: adopting a certain distance with respect to familiar positions and dominant ways of thinking allows for a new corporeal experience of the world to be lived, and new avenues of creation and research to be explored.

A more recent development, geocriticism emerged in an academic setting in 2000 at a literature conference entitled "Geocriticism: a working model," held at the University of Limoges. Organized by Bertrand Westphal, this conference resulted in a published collection of essays by scholars such as Daniel-Henri Pageaux, Juliette Vion-Dury, Jean-Marie Grassin, etc. According to Grassin, geocritics is "not only a science of the imagination of space, but also the art of interpreting imaginative spaces" (2000, xiii).<sup>12</sup> Compared to previous studies of place in literary texts, geocriticism attributes a greater importance to the referent, drawing on imagology to study the traveler's construction of space. While these studies tend to focus on issues of exoticism and Otherness, geocriticism calls for "a *geocentric* approach that centers its debates on place" (2000, 185).<sup>13</sup> Westphal has been the most active in developing this geocentric approach that he describes as "a poetics whose object of study is not the representation of space in literature, but the interactions between humans and literature that are one of the major contributing factors to the creation and undoing of cultural identities" (2000, 17). In his book, *La géocritique. Réel, fiction, espace* (2007), Westphal examines in depth the question of the referent and the relationship between space as real and imagined by studying literary representations of different European and American cities.

### *Fields*

Because White is a poet, the movement has been too quickly associated with "poetics" as a

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<sup>12</sup> Authors' translation.

<sup>13</sup> Italics in original, authors' translation.



way of writing, as a form of literary creation. Translating *geo* as earth and *poetics* as poetry, scholars have described geopoetics as a “poetry of the earth.” Even if this is partly true, geopoetics cannot be reduced to this one element. It is important to clear up this misconception. The suffix *poetics* does not refer to poetry – even if this literary genre plays a key role in geopoetics – nor does it refer to White’s particular way of writing - even if he has inspired others to follow his example. The term *poetics* needs to be understood in the broadest sense of the word, similar to what Aristotle meant when he spoke of “poetic intelligence” (*noûs poiêtikos*). It refers to “the fundamental dynamics of thought”<sup>14</sup> that maximizes a human being’s physical and mental resources, including sensorial perception, emotional sensitivity, and critical thinking. This is a poetics that “synthesizes all the forces of body and spirit.”<sup>15</sup> This means perceiving the world’s beauty, understanding the minute changes in the natural and urban environment, but also creating and composing using ideas, words, images, and many other kinds of material: “Composing (organizing, giving form to) is another one of the strengths of the human spirit at its best, when it penetrates, with all the faculties of perception and understanding, into a larger space-time.”<sup>16</sup> The deeper the encounter with the world, the greater the possibilities, and the more vivid the “composition.” Geopoetics does not exclude *a priori* any form of expression or creation; the dynamic nature of thought can be expressed through many different mediums such as writing, drawing, sculpture, painting, photography, on site installations, paths, gardens, musical compositions. Each individual has a unique way of understanding and expressing their relationship to the world, their foundational landscapes, their on-going research, their readings and most memorable encounters, etc. It is from the alliance between “geo” and “poetics” that a livable world is born: “A world [...] emerges from a contact between Mind and Earth. When the contact is sensitive, intelligent, subtle, you have a world in the full sense of the word. When the contact is stupid and brutal, you have nothing like a world, nothing like a culture, only, and more and more so, an accumulation of refuse, including a lot of ‘cultural products.’”<sup>17</sup>

To the spatial metaphors of world, space, and field, that are all rooted in language, we can add the word “territory.” Geopoetics aims to construct a new territory (Bouvet & White),<sup>18</sup> a space where each individual can breath fully, grow and establish harmonious relationships with others on the basis of a shared community and project. Geopoetics is a vast field of research and artistic creation that brings together the sciences, the arts, and literature, in other words, a transdisciplinary field. Research and artistic creation are inseparable, equally necessary for moving towards a deeper understanding of the world in which we live.

<sup>14</sup> White, <http://www.kennethwhite.org/geopoetique/>

<sup>15</sup> White, “Que faut-il entendre par poétique ?” Authors’ translation.

[www.geopoetique.net/archipel\\_fr/institut/introgeopoetique/textes\\_fond\\_geopoetiques2.html](http://www.geopoetique.net/archipel_fr/institut/introgeopoetique/textes_fond_geopoetiques2.html)

<sup>16</sup> White (1994); Authors’ translation.

<sup>17</sup> White, <http://www.institut-geopoetique.org/en/founding-texts/133-the-great-field-of-geopoetics>

<sup>18</sup> See for example the collection of essays edited by Rachel Bouvet and Kenneth White (2008).

Transdisciplinary does not mean simply bringing together different disciplinary perspectives from geography, science, literature, philosophy and the arts; it means creating a place of encounter situated beyond these disciplines. As Basarab Nicolescu explains, transdisciplinarity is “as the prefix *trans* indicates, *between* disciplines, *across* different disciplines, and *beyond* any one discipline” (1996, 66).<sup>19</sup> Geopoetics envisions transdisciplinarity as a movement towards a “field of potential convergence arising from science, philosophy and poetry” (White 1994, 27).<sup>20</sup> White has invited as many scientists to work with him as he has philosophers, artists, and literary scholars. Moreover, articles published in *Cahiers de géopoétique* are often more tied to “earth sciences (exploration of the earth, geography, ethnography)” (Duclos 2006, 196) than to literature.

Understood as a “densification of geography,” geopoetics attributes a more central place to work being done by geographers on the relationship between humans and environment than other literary approaches to space and place. In addition to knowledge about real places, critical concepts from humanistic geography provide important tools for analyzing literary texts. This work is framed by what White calls “textonics,” that is, textual analysis that aims to open up to the larger world: “Textonics is the opposite of textualism. This latter term is ultra-literary and marks an intellectual absolutism that wants to reduce everything to text including the world. Textonics, on the contrary, opens the ‘text’ up to the Earth/World” (2014, 108).<sup>21</sup>

Geocriticism, on the other hand, is first and foremost a literary approach, a critical perspective for reading literary texts. Even if geocriticism draws on cultural geography at times, very few theoretical concepts are borrowed from other disciplines. Intertextual elements in the text require looking at historical archives for example, or cinema studies or architecture, but these disciplines are already close to literary studies. Moreover, there is little to no connection made between research and artistic creation, with the exception of Christiane Lahaye’s experiment in geocriticism (2009). Lahaye first invited a group of writers to describe a specific place, and she then studied their texts using a typology of important spatial figures. But Lahaye’s approach is less aligned with geocriticism as outlined by its founder, Westphal, because it does not use the same tools and methods such as multifocalization, that we will discuss in the next section.

### ***Methods***

Geopoetics and geocriticism are very different in terms of the literary genres and places they consider. Geocriticism was first interested in the study of those human spaces that have been the subject of numerous cultural representations: cities. Westphal does however recognize that

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<sup>19</sup> Italics in original, authors’ translation.

<sup>20</sup> Authors’ translation.

<sup>21</sup> Authors’ translation.

“geocriticism is relevant when a geocentric and multifocalized approach is needed. This means that certain thematic places without a named referent can still be the focus of a geocritical study: a desert, an archipelago, etc. These studies will necessarily be more abstract and take a more general turn.” (2007, 194)<sup>22</sup> In terms of literary genres, geocriticism has been most interested in the novel.<sup>23</sup>

As Westphal explains, geocriticism has a clear methodology built around four key concepts: multifocalization, polysensoriality, stratigraphy and intertextuality. Multifocalization consists of comparing different cultural representations of a specific place. While imagology looks at the exogenous perspective, that of the writer-traveler, for example, geocriticism juxtaposes the endogenous perspective, that of the native city dweller, with an allogenuous perspective, the in-between perspective of the migrant writer for example. Geocriticism does not look at a single literary text nor at the work of a single author: “Rather than study an author’s perspective or even that of a series of authors with the same sense of identity, geocriticism will study multiple, heterogeneous points of view that converge on a single, given place, the *primum mobile* of the analysis” (2007, 198-99). The second critical concept, polysensoriality, requires looking at the different sense perceptions described in the text, going beyond the visual aspect that is often the only focus of attention. The third critical concept, stratigraphy, means the unearthing of different historical and archaeological strata of the representations of place. This part of geocriticism requires studying the simultaneous or successive temporalities constructed by different cultural communities. The final critical concept, intertextuality, raises the question of stereotypes. Avoiding a set of superficial images frozen in time, a geocritical analysis looks closely at different forms of mimetic art, such as film, photography, painting, etc.

Geopoetics initially favoured spaces like margins and natural places. Shores, forests and mountains played a central role in White’s way of thinking and writing about the world. But urban spaces have also become an object of reflection, notably in the work of Jean-Paul Loubes, professor of architecture in Bordeaux, and in the work of Bertrand Lévy, professor of geography in Geneva. Cities are seen as places for wandering *flâneurs* even if urban geopoetics continue to raise some questions.<sup>24</sup> The most important literary genres have been poetry, travel writing, short fragments and non-fiction writing. White often refers to nature writer poets such as Thoreau, Whitman, and Muir even though he does not use the expression nature writing. The novel, on the other hand, and fiction more generally, have not been the object of as much attention.

The fact that geopoetics constitutes a field of research and artistic creation rather than a critical approach does not mean it does not have a set of methods. Geopoetics as defined by

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<sup>22</sup> Authors’ translation.

<sup>23</sup> One notable exception is the work of Christiane Lahaye who uses a geocritical perspective to analyze short stories (2009). Travel writing has also been the subject of geocritical analysis, which is not surprising given the earlier connections to imagology.

<sup>24</sup> A conference was held in Paris in June 2014, on the subject of urban geopoetics. A collection of essays entitled *Ville et géopoétique* and edited by Georges Amar, Rachel Bouvet and Jean-Paul Loubes, is forthcoming.

White also includes critical analysis of maps, landscapes, land art, etc. But because of its transdisciplinary dimension that opens up to the world, geopoetics cannot be reduced to the study of the relationship between space and artistic creation nor to the critical analysis of literature. Central to geopoetics is the personal, individual approach of the literary critic who willingly follows the text where it leads him or her, into biology, geography, geology, philosophy... even to other cultures, regions, places if need be. The literary analysis of the text is rigorous, but does not erase the reader's subjectivity. Preferences for certain landscapes, different personal experiences, cultural and aesthetic filters, and geographical location all play an important role in interpretation. It is not enough to identify the spatial figures and configuration of places in the narrative; it is also necessary to examine the emotional and symbolic elements that are unique to the subject reader and shape his or her particular relationship to the world.

### ***Geopoetics as literary analysis***

Co-author Rachel Bouvet has developed a specific methodology for the geopoetic study of place and space in fiction, adopting concepts from mathematics to identify the text's spatial dimensions (Bouvet 2011).<sup>25</sup> Using the geometrical categories of point, line, surface and volume, this analysis opens up the literary space one dimension at a time.

A geopoetic approach starts by identifying **the anchoring point of a specific landscape**. As the smallest spatial dimension, the point represents the centre around which the literary landscape takes form. While the frame, horizon line and depth are also important, these all change when the anchoring point moves. Experienced through sensory perception – visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile and even gustative – the literary landscape varies with the anchoring point and engages different readers' schemas. Even if the landscape is a written text, it is absolutely necessary to consider sensorial and emotional experiences, in short the phenomenological dimension. The written landscape depends in part on the interactions between a subject and an environment, on what Charles Avocat calls the “act of landscape” (1984). But these interactions are subject to a set of cultural and aesthetic filters that are just as important as the forms and colours of the landscape's physical elements. Moreover, future readings give rise to other acts of creating landscape as in the case of young readers who discover new ways of “seeing” the text.

A geopoetic approach then looks at a second dimension, **the line traced by the characters' routes**. The main character is generally the only one who transgresses boundaries, as Iuri Lotman explains in *La sémiotique*. According to Lotman, the main character has more room for manoeuvre than the other characters, whose routes are limited to movement within certain confines (1999). The boundary in this case both separates and unites different semiospheres, that

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<sup>25</sup> For a geopoetic analysis of travel writing, see Rachel Bouvet and Myriam Marcil-Bergeron (2013).

is, semiotic spaces, spatio-temporal structures necessary to the functioning of different languages.<sup>26</sup> Studying a character's routes entails identifying the lines that cross and re-cross over each other in the narrative, either when different participants meet or when boundaries are traversed. The geopoetician focuses on shores, paths, and lines of flight, since these create the meaning of place and space in the text.

The third dimension that a geopoetic approach considers is **the surface of the map**. The reader creates his or her own mental map that becomes more complex as the text evolves by identifying the tension between places that are easily imagined and those that are impossible to construct, by extrapolating from descriptions of natural places such as rivers, seas, mountains, forests, islands, etc., and by piecing together the itineraries of the characters whose paths converge and diverge. If we can ask what history a map tells, as Peter Turchi does in *Maps of Imagination* (2004), we can also ask what map the text traces when we read it. A map implies a global understanding of space, a scale that could be that of a country, a continent, oceans, the planet, or even the galaxy; but it also implies a distancing movement. This is because the simple fact of situating a place in terms of its geographical coordinates brings into play the map of the world we have stored in our memories, more or less consciously, more or less correctly, in other words, subjectively. The imagining of places that happens as we read sets in motion a process of mental cartography during which an implicit map of the text begins to emerge, or more precisely a map constructed by the act of interpretation.

The fourth dimension that a geopoetic approach looks at is that of **volume defined in terms of dwelling**. To understand this final spatial dimension, it is necessary to draw on Heidegger's work on poetic dwelling, work that has inspired numerous geographers to rethink places, practices and modes of dwelling. In his article "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," Heidegger examines a crisis that is caused, he explains, by the fact that humans no longer know how to live in the world. He holds that poetry is a kind of building ("making habitable") in the sense that the poet's words send the reader back to earth, providing a way of inhabiting the world harmoniously. If dwelling is the "fundamental trait of being" (Heidegger 1958, 192),<sup>27</sup> we can ask whether literary genres other than poetry can be included. Connecting literature, geography and architecture, we can ask if the narrative can also be considered from the angle of building or making habitable: "Dwelling is the manner in which mortals are on the earth" (Heidegger 1958, 175). Literary texts offer a diversity of ways of dwelling, and so represent a rich source of reflection for thinking about our relationship to the world. We can then come back to the etymology of the word ecology, the *oikos* that is the place or dwelling specific to humans, and examine more closely the necessity of taking care of this place, our environment.

To conclude, it is important to remember that the geometrical terms of point, line, surface and volume are not to be used as a grid for literary analysis. On the contrary, a geopoetic

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<sup>26</sup> In terms of boundaries, see Pierre Jourde's, *Géographies imaginaires* (1991).

<sup>27</sup> Authors' translation.

approach remains rooted in the pleasure of reading a text that amplifies the call to go outside, that awakens the ties that link us to the world and that intensifies our perception of reality.

### **Geopoetic Analysis – Michel Tournier’s *Friday, or the Other Island* (1967)<sup>28</sup>**

Analyzing Michel Tournier’s *Friday or the Other Island* from a geopoetic perspective means first noting that the four dimensions outlined in the previous section are not all equally present or important in the novel. If we consider the main character’s transformation in the novel that successively highlights different spaces, the most interesting avenues of inquiry are the map, the landscape, and dwelling. But even this observation must take into account the fact that each reader will have different insights so that the analysis depends on each reader’s capacity to recreate the spatial dimensions in the text. It is quite clear that space is not traversed in the same way at the beginning, the middle and the end of the novel. Instead, it is measured, explored and discovered in light of Robinson and Friday’s experiences that evolve over the course of the novel. This progression reveals different ways of coming into contact with the world and different kinds of landscapes: the seascape, the marsh/backwater, the cave, the prairie, the forest, and the sky. Drawing on a geopoetic perspective, we will analyze the most important landscapes and ways of dwelling in the order they are presented in the novel.

But first, it is important to map the novel in terms of geographical names and referents. Recounting the initial storm at sea, the novel’s prologue (in italics) is full of names of places – York, Lima, the Tropic of Capricorn, the Venturados islands, the Fernandez Archipelago, Mas a Tierra island. All of these names serve to anchor the novel’s fictional space in a map of the world. The ship’s captain knows very well where they are and even Robinson has no trouble situating himself on an island off the coast of Chile after the shipwreck. What has changed, however, since Robinson’s fictional shipwreck is that Mas a Tierra island has been renamed Robinson island, inscribing fiction on the real world, at least as far as geographical names go. In the novel, Robinson is constantly naming places on the island - Bay of Salvation, the Western cliff, the Eastern cliff – and so producing what Christian Morissonneau calls “choronymiques acts” (1977, 1978). The first name reflects Robinson’s hope that a ship will come to save him, and the two others the island’s positioning, an east/west orientation common to many cultures. When Robinson begins to explore the island more methodically, he immediately begins to draw up a map. He notes that the island has the shape of a female body without a head (Tournier 1969, 47), a shape that prefigures the island’s feminine nature later in the novel. Later, in his logbook,

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<sup>28</sup> A geocritical analysis of Tournier’s novel is not possible because geocriticism looks at multiple cultural representations of a single place (multifocalization) and not at one single literary text. It would have been necessary to find other cultural or textual representations of the geographical space represented in the novel (l’Archipel des îles Fernandez, île Mas a Tierra) to develop a geocritical analysis. Moreover, geocriticism is interested in the interactions between humans and particular places whereas the island in Tournier’s novel is uninhabited before the arrival of Robinson.

Robinson describes the island as seen by other human observers at different viewpoints: “The island was thus charted by a network of interpolations and extrapolations which lent it different aspects and rendered it meaningful” (Tournier 1969, 55). Since Robinson is the only person measuring the surface of the island, he uses his imagination to make up for the lack of other humans. The need to master space can be seen through the act of cartography that creates an order for the elements that make up this territory and that multiplies the possible number of survey points. Mastery represents one of the major structuring principles in this first part of the novel. When Robinson finds a footprint on a rock, he takes it as the ultimate sign of possession: “There could be no doubt about it, no fantasy or mystification: it was not Adam’s footprint when he had taken possession of the Garden, or that of Venus rising from the sea; it was his personal signature and his alone, impressed in the living rock, indelible and eternal [...] Speranza bore the seal of her lord and master” (Tournier 1969, 57-58).

Named, mapped, and marked, Speranza becomes man’s creation. From the mark (footprint) to the symbol (map, names), the signs of the relationship between man and the world give rise to a geography in the literal sense of the word of writing (-graphie) on the world (geo-).<sup>29</sup> Creating a land registry, Robinson goes even further in his desire to rationalize, master and classify the space around him: “I shall not be content until this opaque and impenetrable place, filled with secret ferments and malignant stirrings, has been transformed into a rational structure, visible and intelligible to its very depths!” (Tournier 1969, 66). At the root of this need to control and manage everything is a fear of the unformed and the unknown. Keeping “a meticulous chart of his seedings” (Tournier 1969, 158), “the Governor of the Island of Speranza, situated in the Pacific Ocean between the Islands of Juan Fernàndez and the coast of Chile” (Tournier 1969, 69) officially announces the birth of his “mandrake-daughters.” Naming, mapping, registering, inseminating – it is as if Robinson is giving birth to the island itself.

After analyzing the importance of mapping in the novel, a geopoetic approach will examine the different landscapes and ways of dwelling that appear progressively in the novel. At the beginning of the novel, Robinson is resolutely turned towards the sea, the only place from which escape may possibly come. It is no surprise then that the seascape dominates this part of the novel. The first thing Robinson does upon finding himself shipwrecked on the island’s shore is to look around: “North and east the skyline was open sea, but to the west it was broken by a rocky promontory which seemed to continue under water in a series of reefs” (Tournier 1969, 17). Next, he tries to find a higher point from which to situate himself: “Reaching the summit, he found that indeed he could see the whole circle of the horizon – and the sea was everywhere” (Tournier 1969, 19-20). This panoramic view confirms the predominance of the marine element. During this first part of the novel, Robinson continuously directs his view seaward: “With his back turned obstinately to the land, he kept his eyes fixed on the rolling, metallic surface of the

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<sup>29</sup> Marc Brosseau develops the idea of novels as geographers in his book *Des romans-géographes* (1996).

sea, from which, surely, hope would soon come” (Tournier 1969, 23). Surface without depth, expanse without limits, whose curves evoke the coldness and sharpness of metal, this marine immensity appears as a figure of emptiness, an emptiness that must urgently be filled if Robinson is not to be swallowed up by it. It is the lack of ships on the horizon or from time to time the appearance of a ship on the horizon that gives meaning to this seascape. Quite the opposite is true of the next landscape that Robinson experiences: the swamp or backwater that is characterized by its materiality, its viscosity, its repulsive elements. Attracted like a magnet, Robinson tries to lose himself, to dissolve himself in the landscape’s indistinguishable earth, water, and vegetal matter.

Driven by despair to the swamps, Robinson submerges himself in the mud like the peccaries around him, losing little by little his human attributes. This period of dehumanization reawakens childhood memories, in particular olfactory memories that Robinson associates with his father, such as the smell of suint in the wool factory: “I have always preferred the feel of things to their look. The sense of touch and smell are to me more moving and instructive than those of sight and hearing” (Tournier 1969, 78). Robinson experiences the swamp bogs first and foremost by touch and smell, entering into contact with the island by way of his skin and his nose, by way of the senses that are considered to be the closest to animality.<sup>30</sup> But as he does with the seascape, Robinson abandons the swamp. From this landscape associated with a form of autodestruction and the abject, he moves on to something more familiar, landscapes of houses with doors and windows.

In the third part of the novel, acts of creation and construction abound and the question of dwelling comes to dominate. The first house that Robinson builds looks surprisingly like a tropical isba (Tournier 1969, 64). This first dwelling has a purely symbolic role and is not meant to be lived in. It serves instead as a “museum of civilized living” (Tournier 1969, 65), dedicated to the memory of Western civilization. Robinson only enters it when he is dressed in his finest clothes “as though he were paying a formal call on all that was best in himself” (Tournier 1969, 65). Why exclude domestic functions from this dwelling? Normally, a house serves as a shelter from the outside elements, a place for routines related to the body (eating, sleeping, washing, getting dressed). Quite the opposite is true of Robinson’s first home. Purely symbolic and decorative, it acts as a precursor for the fortified village to come: “In front of the official Residence, the Pavilion of Weights and Measures, the Palace of Justice, and the Meeting Hall, there was now a crenelated wall made out of the earth excavated from a dry moat twelve feet deep and ten feet wide, running in an ample semicircle from one side of the cave to the other” (Tournier 1969, 75-76). Dedicated to justice, religion and economy, these buildings fill no practical purpose. They do not however fill Robinson’s need to dwell because they are modeled on forms imported from far away, from England. Although Robinson ingeniously uses the

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<sup>30</sup> Sight and sound are considered the most valued senses in Western cultures because they appeal to cognitive abilities and are seen as the most intellectual of the senses (Corbin 1986; 2001; Le Breton 2006).



materials around him to construct these buildings, he does not fully appreciate the value of his new surroundings. Coming back to Heidegger's distinction, we can say that building does not always allow man to dwell on earth. Robinson himself begins to see the gap between his civilizing project and the island's resistance to this project; he begins to take note of "other" possible ways of dwelling on the island.

The first "temporary solution" that Robinson undertakes in his search for another way of dwelling on the island is the cave. Burrowing as deep as possible into the cave, Robinson begins his "telluric or foetal period." Whereas the swamp was experienced largely through touch and smell, the landscape in the cave is experienced through silences and sounds. It is then a soundscape: "With my whole being intent like a single ear, I note the particular quality of the silence at a given moment. There are airy, scented silences like a June night in England, others with the glaucous thickness of the mire, and yet others that are hard and sonorous as ebony. I find myself plumbing the tomblike depths of night silence in the cave with a vague, queasy pleasure that somewhat perturbs me" (Tournier 1969, 81-82). Listening to this absolute silence, Robinson perceives the island landscape, imagines it from the "heart of the island" that closely resembles a mother's womb. This *foyer* of perception confers on him a great power: that of seeing the invisible and feeling what is in reality far away. "Around him absolute quiet prevailed" (Tournier 1969, 99): this complete silence allows Robinson to see in the darkness elements elsewhere on the island (waves, palm trees blowing in the wind, a hummingbird, a hermit crab, a seagull) and to feel the fresh air on the shore. An entire landscape unfolds by way of Robinson's memories and his mystical union with the rock, the belly of the island. But like the seascape, the marsh and the construction of buildings, this "telluric period" does not last.

The next temporary solution that Robinson undertakes is that of inseminating the combes. Walking through these valleys or hollows – an area of the island he had not seen before – Robinson succumbs to the charm of the landscape: "He was standing in a gently rolling meadow broken by folds and slopes dressed in a covering of round-stemmed, pink-tinted grass, like a coat of hair. 'It's a combe,' he murmured to himself. 'A pink combe'" (Tournier 1969, 120). For Robinson, the shape of the valley evokes a woman's loins. Tournier's use of the word "combes" (valleys) that rhymes with "lombes" (loins) is an example of the kinds of metaphors that associate the body with geographical features.<sup>31</sup> But this is not the only erotic element of the landscape: the colour (pink), the texture (soft), and the scattered vegetation (cylindrical plants shaped like hair) also evoke female sexual organs. Robinson inseminates the earth, and small plants are born from this union between the human and the vegetal, mandrakes that he calls his "daughters." Robinson has become "the man who had married the earth" (Tournier 1969, 120)

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<sup>31</sup> Geographers have studied the close connections between body and earth that are at the root of many organicist metaphors. In *Terra erotica* (2009), Luc Bureau examines numerous commonly used expressions that associate a part of the body with a spatial element: for example, words that describe a landscape's contours and forms (a mountain "gorge" (throat in French), a hillside's knoll ("mamelon" in French), words that are used to describe a city (arteries), and words that evoke the body and sex (tuft, seed).

and the landscape is transformed because of this union: “The meadowland drifted away into shadow like a silken cloak fluttering here and there in the faint breeze. [...] A breath of perfume told him that he was approaching the pink combe, whose soft ridges the moonlight threw into sharp relief. The mandrakes were now so numerous that the whole aspect of the place had changed” (Tournier 1969, 157).

The relationship between Robinson and the island progresses from “cultivated-island” to “mother-island” to “wife-island” (Tournier 1969, 173). Yet even this stage during which Robinson develops a more corporeal and complicit connection to the earth is still governed by a sense of possession. He keeps track of his “seedings” in the land registry and becomes violently jealous when he notices another colour of mandrake, a “bastard” child supposedly born from Friday’s “union” with the island. Suddenly, the intimate connection Robinson had with the island is broken, leaving him feeling betrayed. It is shortly after this moment in the novel that the relationship between Robinson and Friday are inverted and Robinson enters into a new relationship with the “other island.”

Examining the landscapes in the rest of the novel goes beyond the scope of the present geopoetic analysis. Instead, we will conclude this section by underlining the diversity of relationships between Robinson and the many landscapes in the novel. This diversity leads the reader to question his or her own relationship to the world and examine the ways in which he or she forges connections with the mineral, aquatic, vegetal, animal and human worlds. Robinson must learn not only to live without other humans, but also to “live with” his surroundings, without possessing, mastering, and subjugating, all attempts that prove unfruitful and destructive in the end.

### **Ecocritical Analysis - Michel Tournier’s *Friday, or the Other Island* (1967)**

As Tournier notes in his autobiography *Le Vent Paraquet* (1977), he decided to rewrite Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* in light of the ideas with which he had come into contact while a student of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in 1949-1950. One of Tournier’s objectives in writing the novel was to reveal the fallacy of the idea of Western civilization as superior to that of so-called “primitive” societies. In the novel, Tournier reverses the relationship between Friday, the Araucanian Indian, and Robinson, so that Friday becomes Robinson’s teacher after an explosion puts an end to Robinson’s socio-economic order. Whereas Defoe’s story thoroughly reinforced the colonialist project, Tournier’s novel reveals the questions being raised about Western imperialism at a time when formerly colonized African countries were gaining independence.

Given Tournier’s desire to rewrite the role of the colonized Other, his novel offers interesting possibilities for a Francophone ecocritical reading. Friday’s relationship with the non-human world is clearly demarcated from that of Robinson’s. The reader is struck by Friday’s spontaneous interactions with Robinson’s dog, Tenn, his upside down replanting of small

bushes, his dressing up of cacti with Robinson's clothes. These playful, intimate encounters between Friday and the non-human world nevertheless avoid the "myth of the ecological Indian" as necessarily more caring of the environment (Krech 1999). Friday does not hesitate to place a live turtle on a burning fire so that he can peel off the shell to use as a shield. What the novel illustrates is that Friday's interactions with nature and animals follow their own logic, one that Robinson has great difficulty understanding until he stops trying to impose his colonialist order on the island and discovers the existence of "another island."

From a postcolonial perspective, the novel does pose some problems because of the fact that Robinson dominates the narrative voice. The reader is given glimpses into Friday's way of seeing the world, but always through the lens of the omniscient narrator.<sup>32</sup> Tournier recognizes, however, that he would have had to write a very different book if his aim had been to tell the full story of two civilizations coming together: "It was not the marriage of two civilizations at a given stage in their development that interested me, but rather the destruction of all traces of civilization in a man subjected to the abrasive effects of inhuman solitude, the stripping of all foundations of being and life, and on this clean slate the creation of a new world by way of tests, probes, discoveries, revelations and raptures" (1977, 229).<sup>33</sup> In other words, Tournier's literary project remains firmly rooted in the philosophical question of how the white Western individual constructs a sense of identity and a relationship to the real world when the usual social props have been stripped away.<sup>34</sup>

Another way of reading the novel from a French ecocritical perspective is to look more closely at Tournier's own ecological leanings. As Mairi Maclean explains, "there is with Tournier an exogamic compulsion, an age-defying receptivity to the outside world" (2003, 7). In collections of essays such as *Célébrations* (1999), *Journal extime* (2002), *Le Miroir des idées* (1996), and *Petites proses* (1986), Tournier includes many examples that illustrate his respect and astonishment at the richness of the natural world. While he fully appreciates the beauty of a well-tended garden, he describes in detail the anxiety caused by the overabundance of vegetation in an Amazon jungle (1999). In this sense, Tournier's appreciation of nature reflects a French or European sensibility that prefers cultivated landscapes to *nature sauvage*. The novel follows a similar line of thinking with Robinson's initial reaction to non-human nature on the island being one of fear and disgust. The description of his experience in the mud/mire as a regression to a former "animal" like state also illustrates this notion of the dangers of uncivilized nature. It is not until Robinson begins to work the island, mapping it out geographically, developing forms of agriculture and raising animals, that he calls the island *Speranza* (or hope). Even if Robinson discovers the follies of this path towards civilization, the novel never embraces a notion of

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<sup>32</sup> This omniscient narrator is however the product of an author who was deeply affected by the Lévi-Strauss' critiques of the notion of "primitive" cultures and the so-called "good savage."

<sup>33</sup> Authors' translation.

<sup>34</sup> Tournier initially did his studies in philosophy, largely German Continental, and so his literary texts are often steeped in ontological questions about the nature of reality (1977).

untamed or savage nature. As we will explain later, it remains committed to the notion of a mediated experience of the non-human world.

Another side of Tournier's ecological leanings is his critique of the lifestyles of modern man in the West today. He compares our destructive relationship with the planet to that of a parasite who kills its host: "Apparently, the beetle is the only creature as stupid as man currently destroying the planet on which he lives as a parasite and to which he owes his subsistence" (1995, 19).<sup>35</sup> The image of humans overrunning the planet reappears in another of his essays: "We now know that nature is under threat of death because of the proliferation of human vermin" (1996, 48).<sup>36</sup> But very rarely does Tournier integrate an explicitly ecological message in his fiction. One of the few exceptions is his short story "La fugue du Petit Poucet" (1978), that describes a hippy, marijuana smoking eco-commune as a preferable alternative to living in a high-rise, hermetically sealed apartment. Very critical of the *roman à thèse*, that is, novels in which the author tries to convey a clearly political message (1977), Tournier instead aims to write stories that allow his readers to smell "the smell of a campfire, autumn mushrooms and an animal's wet fur" (1977, 179),<sup>37</sup> in other words, to write novels that bring readers closer to an embodied experience of the world. This is clear in *Friday* in which the body and the senses play a key role. Such rich experiences of the natural environment can be seen as one possible path away from a parasitic to a more symbiotic relationship with the earth.<sup>38</sup>

Examining a text in light of the author's ecological leanings is one way an ecocritical approach contextualizes the text. Another way is to look more closely at the socio-historical events of the time that led to changing attitudes towards nature and the environment. Although slightly after the publication of Tournier's novel in 1967, the Larzac conflict (1971-81) represents such a tidal shift, bringing together ecologists and farmers driven by strong anti-capitalist sentiment. In response to the French government's decision to extend the military base in Larzac, mass rallies and Paris marches set the tone for resistance. Landowners rose up to protect the heathland in the Larzac, drawing attention to the value of the natural landscape. They eventually won their cause and the Larzac has come to represent a victory of small communities banding together to protect the land.

Tournier's novel anticipates the critique of capitalism and globalization at the heart of the Larzac conflict. The novel troubles the narrative of Western progress and civilization by ultimately rejecting the georgic tradition of working the land, the protestant work ethic of saving

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<sup>35</sup> Authors' translation.

<sup>36</sup> Authors' translation. Both of these citations are taken from texts that Tournier published in the 1990s, after Michel Serres published his well-known text, *Le Parasite* (1980) in which he fully develops the metaphor of man as parasite.

<sup>37</sup> Authors' translation.

<sup>38</sup> See for example David Abram's argument in *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996) for a richer, more intimate experience of the natural world.

and storing, and the integration of Friday as working labourer.<sup>39</sup> After the explosion, Robinson sees the folly of his attempt to recreate the Judeo-Christian tradition of stewardship and domination on the island.<sup>40</sup> To develop a new relationship with the island, he tries to follow Friday's lead, but Robinson is not capable of the same spontaneous interactions with the non-human world. Instead, he adopts a new *grille d'interprétation* as the "homme-chevalier," renewing his strength every morning with the rise of the sun on the eastern side of the island. This closed system that has reached its equilibrium and in which the human being lives in harmony with nature is reminiscent of ecological theories in the 1960s that embraced models of steady-state equilibrium and holistic communities.<sup>41</sup> All the elements remain in the same dynamic relationship once the system has reached its climax or stable state.

But when a ship arrives on the island, this equilibrium is destroyed. The sailors "pillage" the fruits on the island, taking more than they need to restock the ship. The captain's description of events in the real world remind Robinson that historical time marches forward in contrast to the circular, eternal time on the island. He is relieved when the ship leaves, eager to re-establish his sun routine with Friday and the island. But Friday has left with the ship. One of the crucial components of the island's equilibrium has been removed, leaving Robinson once again in a binary relationship with nature. He considers suicide until he finds the ship's young galley boy, Jaan, hidden in the rocks of a cave. With the discovery of this young boy, equilibrium is restored. But Jaan's light skin and red hair means he resembles Robinson much more closely than Friday the Auracanian Indian did. This raises the troubling question of sameness begetting sameness, creating a closed system that is even less dynamic than the one of which Friday was a part. The novel ends with the image of Robinson as once again the "homme-chevalier" basking in the rays of the rising sun.

From an ecocritical perspective, Tournier's novel ends problematically. The utopian dream of living on a deserted island far from the rest of human civilization does not present a viable socio-ecological model. But this reading does not do justice to the novel's engagement with problems related to the *polis* and the non-human world. As Gilles Deleuze explains, the novel reveals the effects of the Other even if there are no human others on the island for the first half of the novel. This is because the Other does not represent a specific subject or object; it is instead a set of structuring processes: "But the other is neither an object in the field of my perception nor a subject that perceives me: it is first and foremost a structure of the perceptive field, without which this field would not function as it does" (Deleuze 1967, 264).<sup>42</sup> Even if he is alone, Robinson continues to perceive the world as if there were others around him. Moreover, he interacts with the non-human world in this same way, organizing "the Elements into Earth, the

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<sup>39</sup> See Anthony Purdy's analysis of this aspect of the novel (1996).

<sup>40</sup> See Lynn White's thorough analysis of the ecological effects of the Judeo-Christian tradition (1995).

<sup>41</sup> These models are still largely present in Jean-Paul Deléage's *Une histoire de l'écologie* (1991).

<sup>42</sup> Authors' translation.

earth into a body and bodies into objects” (Deleuze 1967, 280).<sup>43</sup>

Tournier’s novel reminds the reader that there is no return to nature in some unmediated form even if an individual is living on a deserted island (or in the woods alone *à la Thoreau*). Before the explosion, Robinson interacts with the non-human world first as dominating settler, then as a child nostalgic for an innocent past, and finally as a jealous lover. These different frames serve as supporting structures for Robinson’s experiences but also for the narrative development. After the explosion, Robinson no longer attempts to dominate and tame the island, but his experiences are filtered through the lens of Greek mythology and astrology. He describes the cosmic harmony that he experiences every morning as the sun rises and refers to the figures of Jupiter, Venus, Lena and the twins to explain the meaning of past and present events on the island. Moreover, these figures are drawn from the initial scene in the novel when the ship’s captain is predicting Robinson’s future using a set of tarot cards during the storm. Narrative structure begets plot structure and vice versa. In the end, the novel underlines the structuralist thinking at the heart of Tournier’s literary project: myth and story are what allow us to experience and make sense of the world.

While such a conclusion hardly seems ecocritical in the sense of closing the gap between word and world, it can be read in light of a call made by French philosopher Michel Serres.<sup>44</sup> In his seminal 1990 text *Le Contrat naturel*, Serres asks how we can begin to account for the fact that humanity as a global phenomenon has now affected the earth in its entirety: “At stake is the Earth in its totality, and humanity, collectively. Global history enters nature; global nature enters history: this is something utterly new in philosophy” (1995, 4). Serres goes on to examine the ways in which human history and nature have become more and more bound together with the emergence of global ecological issues. He notes, however, that philosophy may not be the right venue for coming to terms with this new humanitarian and planetary condition. Literature can go even deeper than philosophy, he asserts (1994, 111). This should give the ecocritic much hope. Even if Tournier’s novel does not offer a narrative about global humanity and Planet Earth (it predates Serres’ text by almost twenty-five years), it does relate a similar message about the primordial role of story and myth. What we now need are new stories, images, and metaphors that will help us imagine the future of the human species on planet earth, the only home we have ever known.

## Conclusion

Our overview of geo- and eco- approaches in French and Francophone literary contexts has emphasized the potential of their diversity. Each of the approaches is creating its own critical

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<sup>43</sup> Authors’ translation.

<sup>44</sup> Another way in which *écocritique* contextualizes the literary text is to consider concepts from contemporary French political ecology and environmental philosophy.

concepts, methods and areas of specialization: landscape, travel, dwelling, and the relationship between humans and the earth in the case of *géopoétique*; polysensoriality, multifocalization, stratigraphy, and the relationship between humans and urban spaces in the case of *géocritique*; nature, art, performance, eco-logy and place in the case of *écopoétique*; and decentring the human, environmental issues, and cultural differences in the case of *écocritique*. Problems can of course arise when niches and vocabularies become too specialized. This is why we have tried in the present article to find a shared ground from which to outline our areas of expertise, geopoetics and ecocriticism. While our individual analysis of Tournier's novel illustrate some of the important differences in the way we read and interpret literary texts, the explanation of each approach illustrates a common call for paying more attention to the real world outside the text. While it is too early to speak of a paradigm shift within French and Francophone literary studies, it is clear that room is being made for less traditional approaches to reading and interpreting cultural texts.

To conclude, it is important to ask how Francophone and Anglophone communities can better converse on the subject of reading texts ecologically or geographically. It is true that cross-cultural dialogue has been taking place: Kenneth White writes poetry in English and essays in French, Bertrand Westphal's work has been quickly picked up and translated by bilingual ecocritical scholars (Prieto 2012; Tally 2011), and comparative scholars such as Suberchicot are promoting a culturally diverse *écocritique*. But monolingualism still dominates much of ecocritical work. It is appropriate then to make a call once again for more bilingualism and multilingualism within ecocriticism. Even though the present article is in English, it is the product of collaboration between a Francophone and a bilingual literary scholar. Much discussion and negotiation was needed to arrive at agreements about translated sections. It is for this reason that we caution against the idea of a global vision of environment and environmentalism. While we agree that we need more analysis of "planetary-scale tendencies" (Buell, Heise and Thornber 2011, 434), global has too often meant Anglophone. We need to be more aware of differences at the local, regional, and national levels when we discuss environmental issues, whether this be something as widespread (and uneven) as the effects of climate change or something as delimited as the development of eco- and geo- approaches in specific literary studies' contexts.

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