
*Robinson Crusoe's nalatenschap
/ Legacies of Robinson Crusoe*

JLIC – Issue 5.2 (2020)



Journal for Literary &
Intermedial Crossings

Special issue edited by:
Elisabeth Bekers, Andrea Penso, Hannah Van Hove
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

JLIC is the journal of the Centre for Literary and Intermedial Crossings (CLIC)
Vrije Universiteit Brussel



Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings

ISSN: 2506-8709

Journal homepage: <https://clic.research.vub.be/journal>

 Submit your article to JLIC

Narrative Coherence and Postcolonialism in *Tomorrowland* (2009) and *Tender Girl* (2015) by Lisa Samuels

Anthony Manu – Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Issue: 5.2

Published: Autumn 2020

To link this article: <https://clic.research.vub.be/volume-5-issue-2-2020-robinson-crusoes-nalatenschap-legacies-of-robinson-crusoe>

To cite this article: Manu, Anthony. "Narrative Coherence and Postcolonialism in *Tomorrowland* (2009) and *Tender Girl* (2015) by Lisa Samuels." *Robinson Crusoe's nalatenschap / Legacies of Robinson Crusoe*, special issue of *Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings*, vol., 5 no. 2, 2020, pp. h1-18.



BY-NC 4.0 DEED: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

This content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International license.

Narrative Coherence and Postcolonialism in *Tomorrowland* (2009) and *Tender Girl* (2015) by Lisa Samuels

Anthony MANU

Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Lisa Samuels is a transnational poet and poetics scholar born in Boston. She works at the university of Auckland (New Zealand) and has lived in Sweden, on land claimed by both Israel and Palestine, in Yemen, Malaysia, Spain and the U.S. Many of her experimental works, including the long poem *Tomorrowland* (2009) and the experimental novel *Tender Girl* (2015), explore multicultural dynamics. While both works do so through their stories, by presenting characters experiencing transculturality within their story world, these stories seem only vaguely coherent. This article argues that the absence of a clear novelistic story structure in favour of the presence of a less obvious, hybrid poetic-narrative structure furthers the goal of exploring multiculturalism. Coining and describing two lingual mechanisms that allow for such a hybrid structure, it explores the textual strategies at work in Samuels's texts, illustrating how they structure texts combining principles of narrative coherence with principles of poetic structuring.

Incoherent Stories?

Tomorrowland is an experimental book-long poem. The text is highly hermetic but recurrent imagery involving arrival by ships, riches and countries suggests the theme of colonisation. Moreover, the concept of coloniality is made explicit in the canto "Treasure island" after an island setting and an idea of uncertainty and darkness are introduced: "I see nothing that I see.

Slenderizing baby talk progressions/ Staking out some ways and oh coloniality thine art has made/ Me brute with recollection” (Samuels, *Tomorrowland* 27). Three phases in a colonial history are evoked. Firstly, mentions of ships, sailing, the sea, beaches, maps and treasure suggest the arrival of explorers. Secondly, images of a city being built and the founding of a nation-state (41, 52) suggest the founding of the colony. Thirdly, urban imagery and mentions of activism and (cultural) pluralism (15) evoke contemporary, diverse, postcolonial cities.

Furthermore, the story’s four named entities,¹ Eula, Manda, Fasti and Jack are related to attitudes on multiculturalism in a colonial or postcolonial context. Eula is associated with “pliable monoculturalism”,² “activists”, metropolitanism and pluralism (Samuels, *Tomorrowland* 13,15) and is said to contend with (other?) intercity aliens (20), which implies an appreciation for cultural diversity from a privileged standpoint. Manda is associated with monogamy, civilisation and teaching (55, 92). She evokes the imposition of cultural norms by colonizers. Fasti is called “founding fasti” (52), which relates him to the attitude of a colonizer. According to the blurb, “Jack plays death.” The first mention of Jack - “Thus coastal disproportionate form is hanging Jack” (26) -associates him with death by hanging and disproportion. The fourth mention - “so it’s better really when you think of culture as inherited/ good so less taxing so Jack waiting in any fearful way/ the great man parroting the

1 In an interview with Hannah Van Hove, Samuels refers to these as “named principles” or “charactericity principles”. See “Transplace Poetics: A Conversation and Reading with Lisa Samuels” in this issue of the *Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings* (Samuels and Van Hove 13, 17). Both terms indicate that they are not traditional “characters” that can be thought of as singular humanoid persons with each their own stable existence in the fictional world described by the text. This article in no way claims to do full justice to the interesting difference between characters and principles in Samuels’s vision on language and narrative. Practically speaking, it treats the named characters/principles as character-like, separate entities in the story world in the sense that each one has its own set of characteristics and its own set of events in the world of *Tomorrowland*.

2 In this article, the “multiculturalism” serves as a broad term for the reality of different cultures co-existing in a space or within the identity of people. Similarly, “interculturality” denotes the reality of (people from) different cultures coming into contact with each other and “transculturality” denotes the reality of people belonging to more than one cultural group throughout their life. Samuels’s works explore these realities through various social, cultural and historical perspectives. Some of these perspectives are “multiculturalist”. They imply the context of “multiculturalism” (as the phenomenon of societies embracing multiculturalism and cultural diversity) or they echo a “multiculturalist” ideology which claims that societies should strive for that. Other perspectives present in these works however are colonialist, pluralist or post-humanist.

revolution he can hold/ now gently in the form of recent books.)” (31-32) - associates him with the inheritance of goods, taxation and revolution. Naturally, “taxing” can also be interpreted as meaning “demanding” and “good” can just mean “positive”. The economic reading is however strengthened by the evocation of an expression of interest document (“our mate for life expressions of interest”) and of business equations (“and have your office all set-up for optimal equations”), respectively nine and two verses earlier (31). The “optimal equations” can be linked to “vertical obsessions” (mentioned in the preceding verse) in the sense that (colonial) capitalism is tied to sociocultural hierarchy. Considering both passages, Jack can symbolize death and conflict resulting from inequalities (disproportion) and revolutionary reactions against those inequalities. Conservative and pseudo-revolutionary discourses (“parroted the revolution”) present cultural dominance as simply inherited, not as being reinforced by systemic inequality (“disproportion”) and colonialist economic structures (e.g. taxes that enrich Western societies and encourage economic exploitation). In doing so, these discourses deny Jack’s presence. They deny the violence and death which can result from colonial injustices which Jack’s presence symbolizes. In short, most recurring images and characters are related to a broad theme of coloniality. How all these elements form one consistent story about coloniality is however unclear on a first reading.

In *Tender Girl*, the main focalizer Girl is half human, half shark and does not think in the traditional narrative way. When she narrates her conception for example, it is hard to figure out which events occurred and even to whom they occurred (she narrates her parents’ experiences in first person): “*The ship was dark and sunken, the dream sunken, the calling out with impassioned invocation triumphant, my body enamored of a sieve and split by fever pitch, the clothes ditched and falling off in the turning water, the seminal moment hard by laws amidst the trashed water [...]*” (Samuels, *Tender Girl* 49). What is described as being narrated in the summary at the bottom of the page which arguably presents Girl’s thoughts, is

a sequence of sensorial experiences, observations and thoughts connected by a loose chronology (the seminal moment follows the ditching of clothes) and associations (the literal sunken ship is associated with the metaphorical sinking of a dream). Similarly, the connections between the events that form the overarching story of the novel are not clearly established. Girl explores different locations, learns to live like a human, learns language, discovers sexuality, has several relationships, has multiple jobs, is raped, kills her rapist, becomes an artist, gives birth and baptizes her daughter. It is not clear how these important but seemingly disparate life events form a coherent story. Nevertheless, for both works, I will argue below that the events related to intercultural experiences and identity can be connected to form coherent albeit experimental stories. The question remains however: how does the apparent incoherence of the story affect the meaning of the work when it comes to the exploration of multiculturalism?

Narrative Coherence and the Colonialist Perspective

The apparent incoherence could be a strategy through which the text avoids a narrative structure that expresses a colonialist perspective. Brett McInelly (2003) explains how the formal and thematic characteristics of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) are shaped by (an imagined) colonialism and express a mindset once needed for British colonists to maintain their confidence and assert dominance faced with the anxiety of having to control a vastly expanding empire. To summarize McInelly's points concerning the narrative structure of *Robinson Crusoe* and, more generally, the colonial novel, a novelistic story generally has one protagonist who, by attaining self-mastery and mastery over his day-to-day reality, learns to (or fails to learn to) assert himself over the circumstances that keep them from reaching their central goal. When the central goal concerns a reconceptualization of their cultural identity after a foreign context has destabilized their cultural views, this structure implies that the

protagonist, instead of being humbled by an expanding worldview, learns to control their non-civilized environment through strategies from their “normal”, civilized life, reasserting their Eurocentric self-image as a civilized westerner. This is the case in *Robinson Crusoe*, where the titular character transforms an island into his personal western-style kingdom. As a result of this structure, the stereotypical novelistic story exploring colonialism and identity echoes a colonialist perspective.³

Tomorrowland intertextually evokes *Robinson Crusoe* through images of an island, a shore, salvages and even mentions the novel by name in a “further reading” list. This may indicate that it acknowledges Defoe’s work as a precursor text narratively exploring the discovery of a world outside of one’s own civilisation. If so, it makes sense for Samuels’s works to avoid the traditional novelistic story structure that tied said exploration to the colonialist perspective.

Metatextual clues

Tender Girl and *Tomorrowland* do not *simply* avoid generic novelistic story structures. Metafictional passages in both texts suggest a meaningful thought process behind the story structure. Michael Peverett (2017) notices how verses like “This sort of narrative city is what it's all about” or “All the buildings are made of voices” (Samuels, *Tomorrowland* 37) are prevalent throughout the canto and thematise a connection between narrative and construction

³ McInelly furthermore suggests that the novelistic genre as a whole was defined by colonialism as the attention to the individual protagonist echoes colonialism. Does this mean that any novel spotlighting an individual protagonist is colonial? While this seems true for many early novels (e.g. adventure novels) with a classical structure, the centrality of a protagonist in many modern novels can serve reasons which I would not connect to a colonial attitude or even see as reactions against the norm of a heroic protagonist who changes their narrative world through actions (e.g. novels exploring the experiences of a minority character surrounded by people from majority groups or psychological novels exploring how a character experiences an individual trauma). This implies that the classical novelistic structure, despite its colonial origins, can be used in a relatively non-colonial manner. In the case of a novel exploring colonialism however, to present an individual protagonist mastering their surroundings is to present the colonial context as something over which an individual learns to assert themselves.

(Peeverett 2017: sect. 9). In *Tender Girl*, the aforementioned moment in which Girl “narrates” her conception but presents a sensorial, stream-of-consciousness-like description removed from traditional narrative can be a comment on narrative structure. Moreover, the passage is part of a set of metafictional subchapters in which Girl contemplates storytelling, having watched a movie and not understanding what she was witnessing because it was not news or (actual) information but fiction. Interpreting these passages can be a step towards interpreting the story structure in Samuels’s works.

“All the buildings are made of voices” in *Tomorrowland* relates images of urban architecture with the theme of fictional narrativity (Peeverett 2017: sect. 9). Architectural construction can symbolize narrative construction. The stanza introducing architecture imagery furthermore includes the verses:

I dip my tongue in water just to speak
Collected stories joined inside her body
At night she sweated language on her sheets
[...]

I asked them everything free indirect, [...]

[...]

One answer is that we cannot though text as text can.
Language is a reproduction forest where our bodies move
in the dark, having stayed up past our bedtime to prove
the bush is a complex device used to hearken self-consuming
interiors [...] (Samuels, *Tomorrowland* 72-73)

In these verses, language and stories are presented as intuitive (“in the dark”, “at night she sweated language”), bodily and serving as a device to hear/understand (“hearken”) the mind or “interior”. The reference to free indirect discourse, a stylistic device that blurs the line between different entities’ consciousness, may symbolize how embodied language as opposed to “text as text” is always tied to one language user’s consciousness and perspective.

In the second stanza of *Tomorrowland*'s first canto, the materiality of language is expressed using a different combination of images: "We land to divination with our tongues in the water/ Indeed the material world literally swims". Again, language (symbolized by the tongue) is presented as something bodily and intuitive (divination), submerged in the material world.

An image of the mouth related to a body of water also occurs immediately after Girl's narration of her conception: "As though that wave could carry forward all the way into your mouth" (Samuels, *Tender Girl* 49). There, it evokes the first sub-chapter of the prelude: "Really love, you construe with optimal tongue motion the words you have said inside your mind and now re-formulate as though love were a thought et al" (11). Combined, the sentences picture language as something constructed in a bodily manner that can mirror love and memories from inside the mind but cannot contain them fully since they are not "thoughts".

These ideas of language evoke Samuels's theoretical essay "Introduction to Poetry and the Problem of Beauty" (1997). In summary, the article claims that, while language is generally thought of in terms of the communication of concepts, poetic language also communicates through its aesthetic value, which is based on its sensorial nature and the effect its material properties have on the reader. This sensorial, non-conceptual communicativity of fictional language appears to play a large role in both metafictional passages. Yet why would a passage that thematizes narrative construction and a set of subchapters that explore fictional storytelling focus on typical, non-narrative characteristics of poetic language? To understand this, I will consider the relation between narrativity and poetic beauty.

Narrativity versus Poetic Beauty

In “Linguistics and Poetics” (1960), Roman Jakobson discusses the different functions of language. He defines six factors that have to be present in every use of verbal language that each “determine” a function of language. This article focusses on the poetic function, which pertains to the message and the referential function, which, in turn, corresponds to the context. The functions do not exclude one another but are hierarchized so that each function has a degree of relative dominance in an enunciation. Epic poems (generally long poems), for example, have a relatively strong referential function.

The poetic function is dominant in poems while it only plays an accessory role in other uses of language. It highlights how the (encoded) message consists of palpable signs. Samuels’s description of poetic beauty can be used to more precisely describe *how* her works fulfil the poetic function. They fulfil it in the sense that they are beautiful to a reader as the result of the latter’s “subjective sympathy” for the way in which the text follows the principles (“rules”) it has laid out, this fulfilment of internal principles being something which the reader cares to (learn to) notice the more their sympathy is aroused (Samuels, “Introduction” 2). These “principles” can be rhyme schemes or regular metre, though in Samuels’s works a striking poetic characteristic is the rich sensorial and hermetic imagery. By interpreting the images, the reader notices and appreciates how the text succeeds in realizing its hermetic/sensorial style, thereby focussing on the encoded message. Zoë Skoulding, moreover, describes Samuels’s style as expressing a “post-language poetics” which insists “on the instability of meaning and representation” (64). Trying to resolve the ambiguities and the unusual grammar, the reader also notices the encoded message.

In its referential function, which is central to narrativity, language focusses on the context of the enunciation, the referential reality about which information is communicated. In the case of a fictional narrative, the context is the story world. Jakobson does not address

the nature of the referential context in general, let alone in the case of fiction. Some basic insights about the story world as a context, necessary to understand the interplay between poeticity and narrativity in Samuels's works can be borrowed from fictional worlds theory. Somewhat simplified, fictional worlds theory, a contemporary narratology that sees the narrative world as the fundamental characteristic of narrative, models the world of the story as a construct consisting of fictional information stored in a cognitive encyclopaedia. This world is not merely the background against which the events of the story take place. The story is rather defined by the elements and narrative modalities (value systems of good versus bad, known versus unknown, possible versus impossible). The elements and modalities characterize the narrative world as knowledge about them is stored in its encyclopaedia (Doležel 31, 113, 177).

Therefore, textual strategies that establish a story generally fulfil the referential function. The logical coherence between events that defines the novelistic story structure of *Robinson Crusoe* and the colonial novel, in which self-mastery leads to mastery over one's circumstances in an intercultural context, for example can be understood as a structural principle that benefits the communication of "interesting" fictional information.

In the introduction to *Fictional Truth* (1990), Michael Riffaterre asks why fictional texts interest the reader. Non-fictional (I will add "informative") texts have to possess a certain value of truth to be interesting. Fictional texts must then possess some characteristic that makes the reader experience them in a way similar to texts presenting actual truth. This "fictional truth" is an effect experienced by the reader when the text presents a fact that is already predetermined by the preceding elements of the story. The reader realizes that an event in the story is indeed how things would play out in the fictional world, so it rings true to them. This makes the world feel real and gets the reader invested. That would not happen if important events felt random or were inconsistent with the rest of the story (e.g. in the case of

a deus ex machina, the text introduces a solution that does not feel predetermined by the story so far. This can damage the reader's investment in the story).

I will add that a non-fictional informative text should not just be true for it to be interesting. It also has to communicate new, non-obvious information that is "valuable". This "value" implies an axiological aspect. The information has to present a good/bad situation (e.g. bad news) or suggest the possibility of such a situation (e.g. instructions that imply a good result). Similarly, fictional narratives appear pointless if they only present obvious events without tension between "good" and "bad". These principles largely define the novelistic story structure of the colonial novel and *Robinson Crusoe*.

The structure can be described as an organisation that allows the text to fulfil the criteria needed to be experienced as interesting in an efficient, noticeable way. The story initially sets up the situation of a civilized protagonist faced with a non-civilized context. This situation implies a threat as the protagonist loses the mastery over their fate that has always been guaranteed by their cultural identity (e.g. Crusoe was a comfortable citizen but finds himself in danger of becoming a prisoner of war cannibalized by colonial Others). As a threat, the situation implies different axiologically charged outcomes, the bad outcomes being most obvious. The fictional informative text can therefore be interesting by building towards a good, non-obvious outcome. In order to make the events which it presents seem true, it should do so by introducing events that appear predetermined by what has been established about the world previously. That means that the protagonist's actions near the beginning of the novel have to feel predetermined by their initial characterization. This helps to explain why the typical colonial novelistic story structure has the civilized protagonist gradually figure out the skills necessary to take control over their fate by completing day-to-day activities by which they make their condition less uncivilized. If the protagonist could immediately tame the uncivilized/natural environment and/or return to civilisation, the narrative would feel

incoherent since their ability to do so would come out of nowhere. If they first learn to make their new every-day circumstances in the natural environment resemble their civilized life however, this seems narratively predetermined and “makes sense” as they have been characterized as only feeling comfortable in civilized circumstances.

In that sense, the characteristics that make the novels problematic, i.e. the idea of (seemingly) non-civilized societies and circumstances as a threat to be addressed and that of the civilized man transforming his circumstances based on what he knows, are also the traits that make it work as a simple, coherent narrative. One strategy to avoid the colonialist perspective in a narrative exploration of the transcultural experience would then be to reject story-level coherence, for example by only presenting ambiguously or non-related sensorial or hermetic images. Samuels’s texts do not take this approach, nor do their metafictional reflections suggest this option. Several chapters after her first narration of her conception, *Girl* reconsiders the event in a less sensorial, more conceptual and coherent way, still comforting herself with the thought: “there isn’t a grand narrative, so relax” (*Tender Girl* 115). It is only then that she can contemplate the moral complexity of the interspecies dynamic (evoking interculturality) defining her identity. In *Tomorrowland*, the stanza portraying language as a forest ends with: “If the architecture of the new/ room means anything the answer lies less”. Architecture symbolizes narrative structuring. The following stanza contains the verses “it would be wrong to see untheorized buildings yawning to her [Eula, see below]/ it would be wrong to covet bender glass race point class age”, connecting the narrative construction to socio-cultural identity factors (73). In both cases, the connection between narrativity and the socio-cultural factors connected to the intercultural dynamics explored in the respective work (i.e. anthropocentrism evoking patriarchal culture in *Tender Girl* and gender, class and race as factors based on which patriarchal coloniality, like the coloniality explored in *Tomorrowland*,

hierarchises society) suggests that narrative exploration is still a valid way to explore intercultural identity.

Nevertheless, considering the full metafictional reflections, the passages present a completely referential focus when using language, for example: a focus that would lead to a novelistic narrative structure, as being incomplete (e.g. the idea that love is not just a wordable thought (see above)). They demonstrate how the referential functionality can be considered in a broader context including its relation to language's poetic aspects. Referential language produces sensorial expressions of sensory-emotional experiences of a fictional or real material context that exist in the consciousness or "mind" or "interior" of the language user. Concepts and thoughts, the information stored in a cognitive encyclopaedia should therefore not be thought of as that which a language user wants to present or contemplate lingually (e.g. "love") when they aim to express or contemplate an experience (e.g. "love") but rather as the abstracted, non-sensorial interpretation of such an experience (e.g. the thought of love) which they can use as a rationally constructable basis for their sensorial expression (e.g. a sensual/poetic pleasing expression of love). To do so, they have to cast it in a sensorial encoded message hoping that this will do the original experience some justice (e.g. that the expression of love matches the intensity, intimacy, etc. of the emotion).

In other words, when it comes to the expression and exploration of experiences involving abstract ideas such as morality and socio-cultural identity, Samuels's metafictional passages argue for a hybrid referential-poetic practice which constructs stories to explore the moral and psychological dimensions of the multicultural experience without losing sight of the aesthetic, sensorial aspect of the experience, the aspect that is non-conceptual and allows experiences to expose our culturally defined conceptual framework's limitations. That loss would be the normal result of narrative's strong referential function, especially if the narrative were clearly structured in a generic, novelistic manner. I will argue that Samuels's texts

achieve this objective using two linguistic phenomena which I will call “envisioning” and “formulation”. Both allow for textual strategies which simultaneously structure texts story-wise and poetically.

The technical cause of these phenomena allowing for hybridity is the interconnectedness between the system of linguistic-stylistic knowledge and that of encyclopaedic knowledge. The former connects concepts to formal expressions and vice versa. The latter connects concepts to phenomena, presumed “things” that can be directly or indirectly observed in a world. There is a mechanism that allows for new concepts from the system of encyclopaedic knowledge to enter the system of linguistic-stylistic knowledge. If one encounters a new phenomenon, be it an actual phenomenon existing in the actual world or a fictional phenomenon existing in a story world, they can create matching signs or combinations of signs. The process of turning a concept into a new sign or structure in the system of linguistic-stylistic knowledge can be called “formulation”. There is also a mechanism that allows for a concept from the linguistic-stylistic system to enter the encyclopaedic system. If one decodes a new combination of linguistic features carrying meaning, i.e. if one decodes a new sign or combination of signs, the semantic information deduced from the message using linguistic-stylistic knowledge can allow the receiver to conceptualize the referent and to imagine an actual, fictional, subjective, hypothetical,... observation of the concept, thus recognising or introducing a new phenomenon in their encyclopaedia. This process can be called “envisioning”. To conclude this article, I will demonstrate how *Tender Girl* and *Tomorrowland* can be interpreted as telling clearly coherent stories structured around a strategy of envisioning and formulation respectively.

***Tender Girl* (2015): Story Through Envisioning**

To use the process of “envisioning” to create a hybrid narrative-poetic practice, one employs linguistic and stylistic principles to introduce one or more new ideas which enter the fictional world and change it, so as to make an axiologically marked, non-obvious event ultimately feel predetermined by the text, thus fictionally true. When sufficiently striking, the tactical usage of linguistic and stylistic principles may evoke a sense of poetic beauty.

Tender Girl can be interpreted as a text that aims to make it seem possible for a non-fully human person to find a place in the human world where non-humans are objectified and only rationality is truly valued (This evokes posthuman and feminist critiques of patriarchal society). This objective is achieved by making Girl the focalizer so that the style mirrors how she would experience the world. This “beautiful” associative style, with sensorial metaphors that do not clearly distinguish between targets and sources, also influences how the reader and the implied author imagine the world through envisioning as, based on the text, no one can distinguish between what is “fact” and what is imagery. As a result, Girl’s vision expressed through the text can ultimately determine what is true and possible in the story-world. If she suggests that it may be possible for her to become a land creature (Samuels, *Tender Girl* 177), this becomes a possible event in her world. The story ends when she baptizes her daughter with a human name, Mira (188), which symbolizes her mastery over human identity through language. Based on this interpretation of the overarching structure, the analyst can describe the relation between the novel’s main events.

Tender Girl begins with a fragment from *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1869) by Isidore Ducasse as Girl will be born from the union between the protagonist Maldoror and a shark, as described in Ducasse’s novel. In the prelude which follows, Girl is born in the sea but discovers the land, “the land of the father” (12) and decides to live there. The subsequent story coincides with the process of Girl becoming familiar with her new surroundings and

finding a place in human society while she contemplates her double identity as a human-shark hybrid but also as a part of both the marine and the human world. From the moment of her arrival, random men approach Girl because they are attracted to her physically and/or desire to have sexual relations with her, even before she has learned to talk or understands human intimacy. The men do not simply use Girl to fulfil their sexual and relational needs, as she also enjoys the physical and even romantic intimacy, but their society as a whole does consistently cast her as a potential romantic partner for men, purely because she is an attractive woman, without questioning which are her romantic and sexual desires. The human world of Girl's father is thereby immediately characterized as being rather sexist in its objectification of women and patriarchal in its disregard for women's romantic and sexual expectations. This characterisation is strengthened by the fact that Girl is later raped (106).

The idea of partial humanity and the characterisation of human society as patriarchal suggests the novel is enacting a posthumanist critique of western culture. Posthumanism is a present-day school of thought that argues for a redefinition of the concept of the human. One facet of posthumanism criticizes anthropocentrism and how anthropocentric culture legitimizes patriarchal biases by portraying minorities as less human. Girl's struggle to find a place in human society can therefore be related to that of members of cultural minorities trying to find a place in western society. That is why *Tender Girl* can be read as a narrative exploration of the real-world experience of having to find a place in a new cultural context as a result of intercultural migration, although the sea from which Girl originates does not technically have a culture in the traditional sense, thus making her migration in the story not intercultural in a strict sense. Of course, following the same reasoning, Girl's struggle could be seen as that of a woman attempting to find a place in a male-dominated society. The feminist reading and the multicultural reading would complement each other. This article however focusses on the latter.

While Girl does succeed in building a human life for herself through day-to-day activities, she ultimately does not reshape her foreign surroundings to the degree of a colonial protagonist like Crusoe. What ultimately changes to bring about the good, non-obvious outcome is not the in-world likeliness of Girl mastering her circumstances but rather her ability to envision the happy ending within the narrative world which the reader knows through her consciousness. By the end of the novel, Girl has gained an understanding of human language, which allows her to take control over the future discourse surrounding her daughter's identity by classifying the daughter as human by according her a proper name. The act of giving her child a human name, "Mira" confirms that Girl has made human society into a facet of her identity. It also symbolically shows her mastery of human language and culture. The naming evokes the Lacanian idea of the *Nom-du-père* (Lacan 230): a child is introduced to the world of language by the father and loses its unity with the mother, whom it will from then on desire. In *Tender Girl*, by finding a place in her father's human world and by learning his language Girl becomes able to play the role of the symbolic father, introducing her daughter in that world by giving her a name, a linguistic sign by which one can refer to her. By doing so, she ultimately takes control over her and her daughter's double identities while, before that point, she seemed unsure about the possibility of ever being at home on land. Note that the baptism of Mira happens at the end of the novel's penultimate chapter, "Sprung", the ultimate chapter being a postlude. The final sentence of "Sprung" states: "That's the opening, that's her name: *Mira*" (188). This sentence is preceded by a long description ending in: "the daughter in the crevice sea by the tender rocks, [...], amphibious traduced." "Amphibious" can refer to the double identity of the daughter as a being of the sea *and* of the land. "Traduced" reaffirms the importance of language in the obtainment of the human identity. Its negative connotation also implies that it is ultimately unjust for language users to define the child's identity for her. They classify her using human concepts ("land creature" versus "sea

creature”) that do not fully fit her, thus identifying her as something complex (amphibious). Girl’s mastery over language however allows her to reconceptualize her own identity as well as that of her daughter’s from their own perspective. If she chooses to, she can identify Mira as primarily being a full member of human society, carrying a “normal” human name. In short, the story of *Tender Girl* concerns, among other things, the central character’s “mastery” of the new cultural systems that surround her through which she gains control over her idea of self, by finding harmony with her human side, as well as over “others”, as she becomes a master of culture able to play the role of the archetypal father.

***Tomorrowland* (2009): Story through Formulation**

To use the process of “formulation” to create a hybrid practice, one uses principles by which phenomena are introduced in a narrative world in order to introduce new concepts that can be worded in a specific, challenging style, thereby foregrounding how the text is following rules. The subjective sympathy which the reader feels when they notice how the text is following these rules creates a sense of poetic beauty. The “principles” in question are mainly the criteria for fictional truth.

Tomorrowland can be interpreted as a text aimed at creating “mobilizing narratives” concerning coloniality. Eula, one of the named entities, is described as mobilizing narratives in the first canto (13). “Mobilizing” can be read in the political, culture-critical sense. Ideally, the mobilizing exploration of coloniality should criticize the dominant, monocultural discourses that describe the multicultural experience and authentically expose the complex, unresolved intercultural tensions. This, however, is difficult as it would require the exploration to present diverse perspectives authentically. Even though language as a system allows for stylistic-rhetoric devices that would allow a text to express multiple cultural perspectives on the same narrative level (e.g. free indirect discourse, see above), used

language is embodied and therefore intertwined with the consciousness of its sender. As a result, it would be inauthentic to blur the lines between the culturally-determined perspective of the implied author and that of other relevant voices. This problem is implied metafictionally when Eula's metropolitan activism is initially associated with the parochial (13), which suggests monoperspectivity.

As a solution, the text separates the implied author's perspective into named entities who represent different historical viewpoints (that of the founding father, the civilizer-educator, the witness of colonial tragedies and the postcolonial thinker) that have defined the postcolonial perspective of the dominant cultural group. In this way, *Tomorrowland* can authentically express the complexity of the experience of coloniality without falsely claiming to express more than one consciousness.

On a technical level, this is a case of a hybrid practice by "formulation". An ambiguous dynamic exists between the identities in the fictional world; they both do and do not exist simultaneously as they sometimes interact although their other actions and characterisation imply different phases in the history of a colony. This dynamic is textually conveyed through ambiguous temporal and spatial deixis and ambiguous systems of consciousness representation. E.g.: the canto "Bulwarks" starts: "A tactic takes an order by surprise/ A certain precondition (Manda finds within the new terrain)" (Samuels, *Tomorrowland* 44). The reference to Manda is between parentheses and invites the question whether the previous words are her thoughts, referred to as her findings? If so, where is she? Does "the new terrain" correspond with a previously mentioned location where there could be other characters? Through these textual ambiguities, the text fulfils its rhetorical goal of presenting a heterophonic account of colonial experiences without dissimulating how it entirely expresses one perspective, that of the implied author.

On the narrative level, the objective which defines the story structure then is not to build towards a “good”, non-obvious ending, as was the case with the colonial novel. The colonial experience is not narratively explored in terms of a fear of being cut off from civilisation that is ultimately overcome. The objective of the story structure *is* to build towards an interaction between the entities, despite their desires and characterisations being defined by perspectives that imply different historical contexts, so as to make the inclusion of their different perspectives in one textual exploration rhetorically meaningful. The text has to build towards said interaction starting from the initial characterisation of the named entities by introducing events that seem fictionally true (see above). The interaction is realized in the penultimate canto “The body’s charge” where all the named entities make their final appearance, completing their storylines. Manda, the civilizer-educator who had previously asked: “[H]ow will we teach them [?]”, referring to children seeking a “Safety Zone” and missing the land of their mother, now successfully “spreads ideas” (25, 92-93). Eula, during her final appearance, seems to plea or to be a witness against an accused in a court case. “Plea, please, plaint, plait the beautiful hair of her land”; “I swear my oath, Eula tries”; “An opening statement everyone can hear” (88). This could symbolize how those living in postcolonial environments have to think critically about their colonial past and how it is reflected in their contemporary society. The courtroom scene can be regarded as a conclusion of Eula’s storyline in the sense that, where she initially mobilized narratives in cafés (9), she now “mobilizes” a witness statement in an environment where this can make a large concrete difference. Moreover, the fact that a witness statement seems to play a decisive role highlights how Eula, who has mostly been associated with second-hand sources such as books and museums, has learned to appreciate first-hand experience. (“With more than passing interest in/ A room without any book?” (87)) This character development could symbolise that a

multiculturalist view based on historical knowledge and academic insights can be enriched with personal intercultural experiences and first-hand accounts.

Jack (death) unspheres Fasti. The latter's forthcoming death is already suggested in a previous canto, "All the buildings made of voices": "But Fasti would be young only so long/ [...] And he would/ [...] never perish thought/ in the stones, whistled in the planned trees" (77-78). In other words, Fasti will only live for ever in a symbolical sense, through other people's memories. In the next stanza of the canto "All the buildings made of voices", Eula apparently struggles to make a point. This stanza begins with the verse "For history is biography, a pair of lips once thought". Since the preceding stanza can be read to suggest that Fasti will live on through his historical importance, the verse can be interpreted as a comment on how the history of a society should not be conceptualized as a series of events caused by impersonal factors but rather as a history of societal dynamics between groups characterized by shared personal and interpersonal views. A history of coloniality for example should not be studied and judged only by reading books that detail the objective facts.

Immediately after the courtroom fragment involving Eula, a character referred to by male pronouns, but whose identity is otherwise not made explicit, is said to get upset "not far from the finished temple" (89). His reason for being upset could be the outcome of the court case. Later, a male entity who has hanged himself is buried in the ground beneath books. "The will said place him under books/ A thousand of them used to press/ Him fast under the ground" (93). Peverett (2017) theorizes that the person in question is Jack since he is often associated with the word "hanging". It could however also be Fasti since Jack is characterized more as death itself than as someone who dies. Jack "unsphering" Fasti could then be interpreted as Jack taking Fasti away from the mortal realm after the latter has hanged himself. In any case, the burial scene and the following verses, "I [the heterodiegetic narrator] made the curtains of his hair/ I made the windows of his eyes/ I made a crown from all his

teeth”, suggest that memories of the deceased live on through culture (books) and political authority (crown). It seems to be the narrator who keeps his memory alive. The idea that someone, presumably the patriarch Fasti, dies, and that their death and the memory of them leads to cultural and political developments evokes the Freudian idea of a primordial patriarch who is killed by his descendants. The descendants feel guilty about the murder and start worshipping the dead father as a symbolic father whose law they follow. This way, human culture originates as defined by a symbolic order and a law. This idea connects the role of the father to symbolic systems, culture and laws and lies at the basis of Lacan’s name-of-the-father principle. Applying it to the named entities of *Tomorrowland*, Fasti can be seen as the dead patriarch-colonialist whose death marks the passage from a more natural, seemingly “pre-cultural” to a “cultural”, civilized state in which Manda can civilize and educate the colonial others. After Fasti’s death, others including the narrator can live in a civilized, educated and lawful way in a culture still shaped by a mythicised memory as expressed in its patriarchal and colonial power structures. By consequence, even in its postcolonial, multicultural stage, the resulting society still has colonial, patriarchal aspects which can only be fully understood by someone who fathoms its (mythical) history. In summary, in the penultimate canto, the story has built up to an interaction between the entities that fits their characterisations and desires by making the influence of the previous generation on the intercultural positioning of a group into an important theme of each storyline. As a result, the text has been able to express the experience of the multicultural stage as an ambiguous vision of society defined inconsistently through different (colonial, patriarchal, Eurocentric, activist, intellectual, postcolonial, etc.) discourses, even within a single individual’s consciousness.

Skoulding offers a different reading of *Tomorrowland* that pays more attention to the theme of cosmopolitanism and less (though still some) to that of coloniality. Furthermore, it does not focus on the story structure. Nevertheless, Skoulding (67) also states that the reader

is made to doubt how the poem as a lingual construct can present knowledge about a social reality which involves multiple distinct perspectives. In fact, she claims that the named entities correspond to different moments in the development of a community and mainly serve to communicate a sense of plurality in the poem. (67, 72)

Contrary to my reading however, Skoulding (69-71) sees the underlying perspective, of which the characters present fragments, as that of a collective of strangers trying to function as one cosmopolitan, multicultural community by confronting their otherness on the level of representation and communication. Their attempt does not logically lead to a coherent concept of their cosmopolis but to an ongoing performative critique of it. My reading pictures a relatively singular underlying perspective: that of a postcolonial thinker who, through a lingual performance, attempts to explore coloniality in an authentic way and ultimately succeeds. This is in accordance to my central claim that both texts still have a story structure with conflict and resolution, albeit an alternative one.

Works cited

- Doležel, Lubomír. *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*. The Johns Hopkins UP, 1998.
- Hébert, Louis. “The Functions of Language.” *Signo*.
www.signosemio.com/jakobson/functions-of-language.asp. Accessed 30 May 2020.
- Jakobson, Roman. “Linguistics and poetics.” *Style in language*, edited by Robert Brown et al., MIT P, 1960, pp. 350-77.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits*. Translated by Bruce Finks, W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.
- Riffaterre, Michael. *Fictional Truth*. The Johns Hopkins UP, 1993.
- Peverett, Michael. “The story of Lisa Samuels’ *Tomorrowland*.” *Intercapillary Space*, 2017.
www.intercapillaryspace.blogspot.com/2017/01/the-story-of-lisa-samuels-tomorrowland.html. Accessed 30 May 2020.
- Samuels, Lisa. “Introduction to Poetry and the Problem of Beauty.” *Modern Language Studies*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1997, pp. 1-7.
- . *Tender Girl*. DUSIE, 2015
- . *Tomorrowland*. Shearsman Books, 2009.
- Samuels, Lisa, and Hannah Van Hove. “Transplace Poetics: A Conversation and Reading with Lisa Samuels.” *Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings (JLIC)*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2020, pp. 1-18.
- Skoulding, Zoë. “Lisa Samuels: Unknown Cities.” *Placing Poetry*, Brill Rodopi, 2013, pp. 93-112.