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Sabrina A. Hansen  
*Boston College*

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## **Barbados, Bugs, and Blurred Borders: Reimagining the Myth of European Colonization**

Sabina A. Hansen, Boston College

Popular narratives of early European transatlantic travel, like Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* published in 1719, have created what critic Ian Watt has called a myth of European colonization. In his essay "*Robinson Crusoe* as Myth," Watt states, "the ultimate message of Defoe's story" is that "The most desolate island cannot retain its natural order; wherever the white man brings his rational technology there can only be manmade order, and the jungle itself must succumb to the irresistible teleology of capitalism" (292). Other critics have made similar observations; James Joyce famously wrote, "The true symbol of the British conquest is Robinson Crusoe....He is the true prototype of the British colonist....The whole Anglo-Saxon spirit is in Crusoe" (323). While Defoe's narrative was fictitious, the story has stuck in our cultural imagination, as we can see through frequent reproductions and reinterpretations of the tale. In analyzing the legacy Crusoe left behind, scholar Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace finds that one important species is missing on Crusoe's island: the insects! In her essay, "'The True State of Our Condition,' Or, Where are Robinson Crusoe's Insect Companions?" Wallace argues that in leaving out the bugs in his story, Defoe simultaneously allows Crusoe to attain a mythic stature while also ignoring all of the "invisible work" that insects do to make "it possible for Crusoe to be the hero he claims to be" (3). However, Richard Ligon's historical travel narrative published in 1657 and titled, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, offers a very different picture of what European colonists' experience of first contact with new peoples, animals, plants, and insects looked like in the Caribbean.

In 1647, about seventy years before the publication of *Robinson Crusoe*, an exiled Royalist arrived on the island of the newly formed British colony of Barbados to work as a

plantation overseer. Trained as an artist, Ligon recorded his three years on the island in a travel log, taking care to provide detailed descriptions and drawings of his experience working on a slave plantation, the intricate procedure of processing sugar, and his exotic encounters with the native people, plants, and animals. During this time period, the sugar economy was in its infancy, and “Ligon’s assessment of planter society on Barbados came at a pivotal moment in the evolution of commercial systems in the English Atlantic” (Smith 569). In these early years of British colonialism, “settlements were often internally in utter disarray” (Donegan 157), and this internal chaos was only heightened by the instability that the English Civil War created. Additionally, historian Hilary Beckles argues that in the 17th century, Barbados became “the quintessential black slave society,” in that it became the first successful colony where enslaved Africans were made the social majority, and the economic success and sustainability of the island was “existentially dependent on slavery” (1-2). Looking at Barbados through this lens of social and economic experimentation and instability, Ligon’s text records an important time period shortly after the settlement of Barbados by the British in the 1630s and the enactment by Parliament of the 1661 Slave Code which “define[d] the boundaries between black and white bondage and reaffirmed its commitment to African enslavement as the development institution for the future” (39). Therefore, while Crusoe metaphorically became the prototype of a British colonist, Barbados quite literally became the prototype of a successful slave society.

Unlike Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Ligon’s text does not forget to include the insects of the island, which demonstrate a resistance to European takeover and offer various insights into underlying colonial social anxieties. While the “godlike” (Novak 311) figure of Crusoe successively gains “mastery” over “the self, the environment, animals, natives, and [then] Europeans” (Richetti 372), Ligon’s inclusion of the bugs on Barbados showcases the Europeans’

failure to gain mastery over the environment and firmly establish the self that Defoe's narrative so strongly suggests. Instead, through encoded emblems like insects, the narrative reveals an uncertainty of success and underlying awareness of the fragile position of Barbados as an English colony. Additionally, through the ants, Ligon creates an allegory promoting a stable and harmonious commonwealth that advocates for all parts of society to play their role—including the African slaves. In this essay, I demonstrate how a post-humanist reading of the insects in Ligon's *History of the Island of Barbados* can dramatically change the way we understand the relationship between human and the environment, not only in the colonial contact zone itself, but also in the literary representations of that colonial contact zone. Not only do the bugs in Ligon's text blur the borders between manmade spaces, but they also break down manmade identity distinctions that separate white from black and brown, human from animal, and civilized man from the natural world. I argue that insects like the caterpillars, ants, and chegoes in Ligon's *History* can help us reimagine the myth of European colonization in the early Atlantic world by illustrating how the English did not hold firm mastery on Barbados, but instead had to adjust to the environment around them, utilize indigenous knowledge, and rethink established notions of hierarchy and the individual self.

In the mythical world of *Robinson Crusoe*, insects do not exist; yet, as Wallace states, insects would have required "his constant attention and unceasing vigilance—in effect, they would threaten perpetual war" (9). The first way insects disrupt the colonists' lives is by damaging their crops. Ligon describes how the abundant caterpillars "do very great harm; for, they light upon the leaves of our Potatoes, which we call Slips, and eat them all away, and come so low, as to eat the Root too" (116), thereby pillaging their food supply for both their horses and themselves. While the planters can remedy the caterpillar problem to an extent by driving

Turkeys into the fields to “devour” the caterpillars (116), this picture in no way suggests that “wherever the white man brings his rational technology there can only be manmade order” (Watt 292). Instead, the men, not the jungle, are at the mercy of the insects, animals, and environment around them. These caterpillars can be seen as naturally resisting the English by attacking their land and crops, reminding us that even though Barbados was no longer inhabited by indigenous Amerindians when the English settled there, their invasion still disrupted the lives of the native animals, insects, and plants.

In this anecdote, Ligon describes the problems the caterpillars cause for the planters, but, as Wallace states, the insects in our ecosystem help make possible the growth of crops (12-13), play a “necessary role as food source for higher life forms” (7-8), and—critically—help decompose human and animal waste and “decaying flesh” (13). Wallace argues that if insects’ helpful and harmful presence were recognized in *Robinson Crusoe*, it would destroy the “illusion of his singular accomplishment” (13) and “threaten to undermine the text’s assertion that Crusoe holds absolute dominion over nature” (10). In contrast to *Crusoe*, Ligon’s narrative acknowledges the insects of the island. While Ligon primarily represents the insects as troublemakers for the humans, he also takes time to express their beauty and usefulness. For example, Ligon appreciates the “curious” (119) webs of the spiders, the “ash-color and purple” (116) complexion of the flies, and the “delightful” chirping of the crickets (119). He laments that there are no bees present on the island because their absence means they must fetch their candle wax from Africa (77). When admiring a banana tree, Ligon states, “God never made anything useless or in vain” (144), and it is through this lens that he describes most things on the island, including insects. Critic Rebekah Mitsein attributes this to Ligon’s belief in “a larger system at work” on the island (112), where everything has its place and part to play, including the natives and African slaves.

Ligon's inclusion of insects' vices and virtues helps de-center the human by deconstructing the colonial myth of human mastery over the environment. This display of both the destruction and irritation the insects cause along with their intelligent and mesmerizing qualities can also be seen in Ligon's description of the ants on the island.

Like the caterpillars, the ants pose a consistent threat to the Europeans' food supply, although the ants' attacks are not as easily solved. While Crusoe is often portrayed as a godly figure (Novak 311, Richetti 372), Ligon reserves ascribing godlike qualities such as omnipresence to the ants. When illustrating their invasion of the planters' homes: "If I should say, they are here or there, I should do them wrong; for they are everywhere" (116). He lists the many places they inhabit both in the natural world, such as "under ground, where any hollow or loose earth is, amongst the roots of trees," and also in the private, inside space the colonists have carved out for themselves, such as "in all places without the houses and within, upon the sides, walls, windows, and roofs without; and on the floors, sidewalls, ceilings, and windows within" (117). Ligon calls the ants "Ubiquitaries" (117), or, as cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "A person or thing that is, can be, or seems to be, everywhere at once" ("ubiquitary, n. and adj. "). The Europeans' failure to keep these bugs out showcases their inability to gain complete mastery over their environment. When it comes to the omnipresent ants, the English fail to delineate the borders between outside and inside, or as Ligon would say, "without" and "within" (117). Here, we also see how Ligon can only think of space as public and private, by first describing the ants in nature, then on the outside of the houses, then on the inside. Ligon's description of space reminds us of how the British justify colonization by writing English space over non-English space, but the ants do not recognize or respect these arbitrary borders. Instead, the ants blur these boundaries that Ligon and the colonizers create by occupying the 'private' space of the home.

Therefore, the colonization of Barbados by the British is not met without resistance; the ants create inhospitable living and working conditions by invading their homes and plundering their food stores (118).

The power of omniscience also accompanies the ants' omnipresence. This becomes most apparent in one anecdote where Ligon is amazed that the ants can immediately smell and find any sugar in the house. The planters then use this knowledge to try to gather and kill the ants by placing a sugar cube on a table, waiting for the ants to condense, and then clapping "a large book (or anything fit for that purpose) upon them, so hard as to kill all that are under it" (118). The planters are astonished, however, when they come back into the room "but a quarter of an hour" later and "find all those bodies carried away" (118). In this experiment, Ligon and the planters watch in awe as the ants are able to quickly smell the sugar, make the "long journey" up the table, and return "again the same way, without taking any for his pains, and informs all his friends of this booty; who come in thousands, and ten thousands, and in an instant, fetch it all away" (118). The idea that there are still so many ants as to be able to come and carry away their dead signifies the futility of the Europeans' trying to exterminate the bugs. Additionally, this moment recalls Ligon's first months on the island of Barbados, in which he states how, "At the time of our arrival, and a month or two after, the sickness reigned so extremely, as the living could hardly bury the dead" (71). The ants' ability to carry away their dead contrasts heavily with this picture of the Europeans' dwindling numbers and illustrates a more desirable society that has such an overwhelming surplus of healthy bodies that they appear omnipresent and omnipotent at all times. Finally, as Wallace states in examining the absence of insects in *Robinson Crusoe*, "To reckon with insect numbers and their myriad activities is to be forced to reconsider the size and scope of human life. Precisely because their numbers are

unfathomable...insects can threaten the fantasy of a unique and unitary human being” (8). By describing the ants with sublime and godlike qualities, Ligon simultaneously highlights the inadequacies of European colonization and their precariously vulnerable position on the island.

In addition to godlike qualities, the ants are also granted humanlike qualities such as ingenuity and wisdom. In their futile attempts to stop the ant invasion, the Europeans have tried surrounding their food with moats of water, placing the legs of their tables in buckets of water, tarring the legs of tables, hanging their food from the ceiling, and tarring the ropes this food hangs from, but still the ants find a way to infiltrate their food storage, whether by dropping from the ceiling or building bridges and ladders with their bodies (117-118). In his depiction, Ligon also uses anthropomorphic language to characterize the ants, such as when he grants them titles like “Officers” (117) or relationships like friendship (118). Ligon’s descriptions of the various failures to outsmart the ants reveals the ants’ highly capable intelligence. After the sugar trap scene, Ligon ascribes the ants “Ingenuity” (118), a term that the *OED* defines as “High or distinguished intellectual capacity; genius, talent, quickness of wit” (“ingenuity, n.”). This use of the term shows Ligon’s respect for the ants’ abilities and bridges the gap between the human and nonhuman divide, demonstrating a more fluid understanding of human ontology and suspending assumptions of human difference.

The personification of insects enhances the exotic and excessive aspects of Ligon’s *History* and grants the ants a power and agency that allows the reader to revel and marvel in the ants’ intelligence with Ligon. Critic Karen Ordahl Kupperman reads Ligon’s descriptions of the planters trying to outsmart the ants as an amusing example of how bored the planters were on the island (27). While the planters very well might have played with the ants to satisfy their boredom, this scene also shows the planters’ intense curiosity and fascination with the ants’ acute

senses, apparent intelligence, and highly organized society. In his article, “Useful Knowledge, Improvement, and the Logic of Capital in Richard Ligon’s *True and Exact History of Barbados*,” David Chan Smith argues that “throughout the text Ligon also represented himself discovering useful knowledge by means of experimentation and inductive reasoning” and the “experiments on ants” were ways “to explore their behavior” (559). The ant scenes thus showcase Ligon engaging with Baconian empiricism by performing experiments, drawing conclusions from these observations, and providing ample details in order for his readers to replicate the scenes. Additionally, the ants can be seen as not only objects of scientific inquiry, but also as teachers of it. In her article “Richard Ligon and the Atlantic Science of Commonwealths,” Susan Scott Parrish states, “The ant had a distinguished past, appearing in the garden frescoes of Erasmus’s *Goldy Feast*, in Horace’s *Satyrs*, and in Solomon’s Proverbs, usually representing wise Providence” (230). For example, Proverbs 6:6-8 states, “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise” (Carroll 728). With one foot in the world of Baconian empiricism and one foot in the world of religious exegesis, the ant as a teacher of wisdom would have appealed to Ligon. In recognizing the ants’ humanlike qualities, such as ingenuity and wisdom, and showcasing how humans can learn from the native insects of the island, Ligon challenges the myth of “radical independence” (Watt 290) that the *Crusoe* narrative purports by consistently championing connectivity and interdependence. By analyzing Ligon’s respect for the ants’ harmonious and efficient society, we can also connect the way Ligon describes the ants to his post-English Civil War political landscape.

During these experiments, Ligon presents the ants’ productivity as a result of their unity, stating they “are but of a small size, but great in industry; and that which gives them means to attain to their ends, is, they have all one soul” (116). This statement suggests that the ants are

particularly successful because they work as one body. In one scene, this idea is emphasized when Ligon illustrates how some of the ants will sacrifice themselves for the good of the whole, stating that in order to cross barriers of water they “make a bridge of their own bodies, for their friends to pass on; neglecting their lives for the good of the public; for before they make an end, they will make way for the rest, and become Masters of the Prize” (118). Ligon describes this scene of self-sacrifice with admiration, and his word choice recalls one of his contemporaries, philosopher Thomas Hobbes. In *Leviathan*, published in 1651, Hobbes states that in the ideal “body politic” (11), “the *sovereignty* is an artificial *soul*, as giving life and motion to the whole body...every joint and member is moved to perform his duty” in order for the body to function properly (10). Ligon more directly references and supports Hobbes’ *Leviathan* earlier in the *History* when first setting eyes upon Barbados, stating:

Vegetatives may teach both the sensible and reasonable creatures, what it is that makes up wealth, beauty, and all harmony in that Leviathan, a well governed Common-wealth, where the Mighty men and Rulers of the earth by their prudent and careful protection, secure them from harms, whilst they retribute their pains, and faithful obedience, to serve them in all just Commands. And both these, interchangeably and mutually in love, which is the Cord that bind up all in perfect Harmony. And where these are wanting, the roots dry, and leaves fall away, and a general decay, and devastation ensues. Witness the woeful experience of these sad times we live in. (65)

Hobbes, like Ligon, was a Royalist exile, and in this passage Ligon implicitly references the English Civil War and identifies himself as a Royalist by clearly supporting the “Mighty men and Rulers” (65) that afford protection and create harmony in all things. In comparing the vegetatives to a harmonious Leviathan, he proposes that the English can learn from the plant

kingdom and asks us to suspend established stratifications once again by acknowledging the plants as an organized society. Here, we can see how the insects are not the only creatures challenging preconceived notions, but as Kupperman states, some of the islands' plants' ability to react and "close up when touched....raised the question of whether even the boundary between the animal and vegetable kingdoms might be blurred in this exotic world" (9).

Additionally, the reference to Hobbes reminds us that, as Maximillian E. Novak notes, Robinson Crusoe embodies the antithesis of Hobbes' *Leviathan* (319) in that he goes against the idea that without the body politic, the life of man is "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes 10). Ultimately, Ligon's admiration for the ants' organization aligns with Hobbes' body politic and conflicts with the Crusoe mythology of independent mastery, actually suggesting that the ants are the "Masters" (118).

Finally, Ligon's ant anecdotes can be read as an allegory. When Ligon describes first setting eyes on Barbados, he states the British colonizers' "eyes became full Masters of the object" (64). Just as the ants become "Masters" (118) of an island of sugar, the British become masters of the sugar producing island of Barbados. Parrish reads Ligon's *History* as calling upon a larger humanist tradition that used emblems to illustrate lessons reflecting social conditions (217). Parrish argues that the strange and persistent imagery Ligon uses throughout his *History* was actually encoded language (218) whose goal was to show the "many natural indicators of potential harmony" on an island under "extreme social disorder" (223). Reading this scene with this species-as-emblem tradition in mind, the ants metaphorically become the European colonists and sacrifice becomes "a necessary act of a brave few for the success of the many; individual death is sublimated in public achievement" (Parrish 231). Yet, this metaphor quickly becomes problematized when African slaves are factored into the equation and calls into question the

validity of a body politic built upon “the presumption of consent” (Parrish 214) that Hobbes proposes.

Substituting the self-sacrificing ants as African slaves makes other parts of Ligon’s text read more sinister. The brave individuals working together and risking their bodies to build a bridge for the good of the collective whole distorts into a forced sacrifice of non-consenting African slaves brutally exploited for the good of the few. The drowning ants recall the horrors of the Atlantic Slave Trade and those that Olaudah Equiano named the “inhabitants of the deep” (58)—the slaves who were tossed overboard or purposely drowned themselves in the Atlantic before arriving in the New World. The scene where Ligon admires the ants’ overwhelming surplus of healthy bodies seen in the carrying away of their dead now becomes a fantasy of a disposable labor force. Although there are moments where Ligon displays the slaves’ humanity by showcasing their artistic talent, ability to learn, and even arguing for their right to convert to Christianity, Ligon never disapproves of the use of African slave labor on the island. Reading the ants as emblem, therefore, allows us to contemplate whether Ligon is actively partaking in a newly emerging ethical and political discourse surrounding the ethics of African chattel slavery or if underlying colonial social anxieties have seeped in the text. Finally, the allegory can help us reimagine Crusoe’s highly praised “virtues of manual labor” (Watt 292) and narrative of independent “triumph of human achievement and enterprise” (298). By recognizing how the capital success of Barbados correlated with its increasing dependence on chattel slavery (Newman 219), we can correct the romanticized version of European colonialism that often whitewashes and erases slave labor.

Robinson Crusoe constantly fears that cannibal natives will eat his body, but Ligon presents a larger and more realistic threat to the European body: insects. In the text, Ligon warns

that if any men come to Barbados for the pleasures they have heard of, they will be met with “the innumerable Army of Pismires, and Ants, to sting him with such a reproof, as he shall wish himself anywhere rather than amongst them” (182). He describes the insects as “tormentors” (116) and complains of the pesky mosquitoes, merrywings, and cockroaches, which “bite your skin, till he fetch blood” (115). The most invasive insect, however, is the chegoe, or chigger, which goes one step further by burrowing into the skin and literally occupying human bodies by laying their eggs there (119). Ligon states that the bugs commonly find a home under the skin in the feet, “and there make a habitation to lay his offspring, as big as a small Tare, or the bag of a Bee, which will cause you to go very lame, and put you to much smarting pain” (119). Ironically, by making a habitation, laying their offspring, and causing the men to go lame, the chegoes mimic the same actions of the European colonizers on the island of Barbados. While the ants are omnipresent without and within the public and private space, the chegoes go one step further by infiltrating the skin, effectively crossing the borders of the human body and breaking down the barriers that demarcate the human subject. In Lynn Festa’s article “Crusoe’s Island of Misfit Things,” Festa claims Crusoe’s carefully crafted borders begin to break down when Crusoe wears his goatskin clothing: “In Defoe’s novel, the material properties of skins hamper efforts to delineate Crusoe’s figure” (446), raising “a set of questions about the integrity of the human form and the porousness of the borders that set the subject off from the world” (455). Similarly, the chegoe shows how even the human body has crossed over into an unfixed, malleable, and fluid entity that shares its borders with insects like the chegoes. The parasitic bugs in Ligon’s *History* help demonstrate how the European colonizers were not separate from the material world they infiltrated, but they actually fit into Barbados’ intricate ecosystem, even acting as hosts for other species.

The chegoes offer us a chance to reimagine the power dynamics on the island, as we learn that it is “The *Indian* women” who “have the best skill to take them out” (119). Ligon states, “I have had ten taken out of my feet in a morning, by the most unfortunate Yarico, an *Indian* woman” (119). Here, Ligon singles out the Indian woman Yarico’s skills, a woman who gained fame in Europe for a different anecdote in Ligon’s narrative. Earlier in the text, Ligon describes how Yarico became a slave on the island, relating how she was meanly sold into slavery by an Englishman that she saved from being captured and killed by her own people (107). Ligon’s story highlights the injustices committed by the Englishman, stating, “But the youth, when he came ashore in *Barbados*, forgot the kindness of the poor maid, that had ventured her life for his safety, and sold her for a slave, who was as free born as he: And so poor *Yarico* for her love, lost her liberty” (107). This short anecdote became wildly famous in the eighteenth century, and, as Lawrence Marsden Price states, “no similar legend of the time, for legend it came to be, vied with this one in popularity” (2). Yarico’s story quickly began to be retold and circulated throughout England and Germany, and new renditions quickly created a name for the Englishman (Inkle) and granted Yarico new characteristics such as high birth, nice clothes, a child by Inkle, and sometimes even a new skin color (Price 2). Price finds that of the two, Yarico “was the more interesting because her further fate was left to the imagination” (9); however, Yarico is mentioned one more time after this anecdote when Ligon enlists Yarico to de-chегоe his feet. In this later moment, Yarico is not the heartbroken and helpless Indian that many subsequent retellings of her enslavement made her out to be. Instead, we are given a very different image of Yarico as a woman sought out for her skills and granted agency by this act of healing. Through Ligon’s description of the chegoes and defining of who had the power to control them, we are asked to question how the native people and insects of the New World were

perceived, and to rework the dominant ideology about who exactly held mastery over the land, the environment, and the self.

This moment is extremely important because it demonstrates the dependent relationship the Europeans built with the native population. In her book “Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation,” scholar Mary Louise Pratt insists on the importance of asserting a counterhistory to “the legacy of Euroimperialism, androcentrism, and white supremacy in education and official culture” (xi) by undergoing “a large-scale effort to decolonize knowledge” (2). In Defoe’s narrative, Crusoe’s characteristics of “radical individualism emerges with Crusoe’s solitude on the island” (Hulme 188). Even when Friday is introduced in the novel, Peter Hulme notes that Defoe produces the ignorance of the Amerindians by centering “Friday’s education on precisely the two aspects of Carib technology, the barbecue and the canoe, that Europe learned from the Caribbean, both ‘barbecue’ and ‘canoe’ being Carib (or strictly speaking Island Arawak) words” (210-211). This helps promote a “denial of those very aspects of Carib culture from which Europe had learned” (211). In contrast, Ligon’s text showcases the dependent relationship the Europeans formed with the natives, such as their assistance in navigating the land (69), expertise in properly cooking the native plants (76), and the Amerindian women’s acts of healing (119). Mitsein argues, “Ligon’s interest in and dependence on native Caribbean technology...casts the settlement of Barbados as a necessarily hybridizing process and shapes Ligon’s representational world into one where non-European ingenuity is integral to the success of the commonwealth” (107-108). Perhaps the most evident example of Ligon’s admiration of native ingenuity can be found in his fascination with their skill in tempering clay pots (68).

The final obstacle the bugs of the island pose to the English is their attack on the structure of their houses. Ligon states that bricks would allow them to “keep our wainscot from rotting”

(92) because “Hangings we dare not use, for being spoiled by Ants, and eaten by the Cockroaches, and Rats” (92). Yet, Ligon writes, “though we made often trails” they could not replicate the tempering of clay that the natives had mastered (91). He describes the Indian clay pots with admiration, claiming they are “made of clay, so finely tempered, and turned with such art, as I have not seen any like them, for fineness of mettle, and curiosity of turning, in *England*” (68). Ligon then proposes enlisting the natives’ help:

...[the natives], having the skill to bring their Clay to so fine a temper, as to burn and not break, may show us the way, to temper ours of the *Barbados* so, as we may make Bricks to burn, without chopping or cracking....And it is no hard matter, to procure an *Indian* or two, to come from that Island, and give us direction, which would be of infinite use and advantage, to our buildings in *Barbados*. (69)

This description not only conveys the superiority of their clay pots, but also articulates Ligon’s wish for the natives to “give us direction” (69) and teach the English their expert methods.

Ligon’s pots contrast heavily with Crusoe’s famous tempering of earthenware pots, which, like many things on his island, comes about as a happy accident (Defoe 88) as opposed to the skilled, traditional artform Ligon describes. Wallace argues that “The celebration of Crusoe’s ingenuity, his technological triumph over clay, straw, and wood, erases the expertise of generations of indigenous artisans before him. Once again, Crusoe emerges as an extraordinary individual at the expense of a previous collective whose agency is made to disappear” (16). In her essay “Robinson Crusoe’s Earthenware Pot,” Lydia Liu similarly contends that by mastering “the technologies of other civilizations,” Europeans removed cultural meaning and “produced the very ground on which the primitiveness and backwardness of those civilizations would be mythologized” (739). Ligon’s insistence that they must learn from the natives, however, shows

how the production of knowledge is not a solo endeavor, but a social, symbiotic one. Mitsein reads Ligon's praise of the native's clay firing technique as "an opportunity to consider the extent that the non-European and creole technologies of the New World provoked European settlers to confront their own epistemological limitations and their inability to dominate the natural world of the island through European technological knowledge alone" (113). This moment reinforces how European colonialism featured an exchange of ideas, and Barbados provided "a space where knowledge and civility arise from hybridity and reciprocity rather than wholesale European domination" (Mitsein 113). Ultimately, the problems the chegoes, ants, and cockroaches pose to the English homes in Ligon's text present an opportunity of agency to the Amerindian people by showcasing their superior understanding of the island and its natural pests and resources. Here, the powers of native peoples and insects both emerge and illustrate a European society highly dependent on indigenous expertise and hardly resistant to insect forces.

One year after publishing *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe would publish another novel, *The Life, Adventures and Piracies of the Famous Captain Singleton* (1720). Singleton shares similarities with Crusoe, but when he and his crew are stranded on the island of Madagascar and journey through the African continent, he relies heavily on the native people of Africa to help them survive. Through Singleton, Defoe slightly corrects the myth of independent European mastery that Crusoe portrayed, but Singleton does not live in our cultural imagination in the same way Crusoe has. Ian Watt claims, "It is not an author but a society that metamorphoses a story into a myth, by retaining only what its unconscious needs dictate and forgetting everything else" (290). Society chooses to remember Robinson Crusoe as a realistic, mythic hero, despite "the traces of science fiction in the novel" (Liu 738) and horrors of English colonialism.

Subsequent retellings of *Robinson Crusoe*, like Michel Tournier's *Friday* (1967) and J.M.

Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), work to combat this legacy of Euroimperialism by creating a new image of Defoe's mythic character, and the insects featured in both stories help assist in this reimagination. Coetzee's *Foe* references the impact of the ants and chegoes immediately when in the first few pages the narrator finds "There were ants scurrying everywhere...and another pest, too, living in the dunes: a tiny insect that hid between your toes and ate its way into the flesh" (7). In Tournier's *Friday*, bees pollinate the island (112), painful spider bites appear on Crusoe's body (116), and termites eat away at the boat Crusoe builds to escape the island (137). When Crusoe struggles "to dispose of his kitchen waste so as not to attract the notice of the vultures and rats....Friday's method was to make use of a colony of red ants" to eliminate the waste (143). Through these examples, Tournier shows how insects would be both helpful and harmful to Crusoe on his island. By having Friday, not Crusoe, discover a way to solve their waste problem by utilizing the ants, Tournier displays indigenous ingenuity and helps work towards decolonizing knowledge. Finally, both Coetzee and Tournier's retellings help place Crusoe in a larger ecosystem, erasing his singular accomplishments. Like Ligon's *History*, these texts highlight the invisible work of insects, introduce a hybrid production of knowledge, and decenter the human. By holding up texts like those of Tournier, Coetzee, and Ligon, we can make an intentional effort to reshape the mythic heroes of our collective consciousness and reimagine European colonization.

The hostility of the bugs in Ligon's narrative, such as the caterpillar towards the crops, the ants towards the home, and the chegoes towards the body, suggests the limitations of European colonization and also demonstrates a resistance to this takeover. The caterpillars remind us that it was the Europeans who were forced to adapt, not the environment. Through the ants, Ligon shows how bugs seriously challenged the European's sense of stability by plundering

their food stores, colonizing their homes, and blurring the borders between humans and animals. Additionally, the ants act as an allegory for an ideal and stable commonwealth, something Barbados and England were both struggling to establish at the time. Finally, the chegoes literally colonize the European body, breaking the final barrier between the outside world and the individual self that Crusoe so proudly maintains. Ligon's inclusion of the indigenous women that help the English remove the chegoes from the body also gives credit to the expertise of the Native Americans that Europeans were so highly dependent on and demonstrates that the production of knowledge in the Atlantic world was not one-sided, but rather an equal exchange. Through the analysis of these various bugs, this essay shows how recognizing insects can help us decenter the human, decolonize knowledge, and reimagine the myth of European colonization in the early Atlantic world. Counter to the Crusoe myth, Ligon's *History of Barbados* shows a more accurate narrative of early European colonization—one where there was no mastery, boundaries, or clear understanding of the self, but there were definitely bugs.

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