



## Environmental education through literature: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*

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### Abstract

Environmental education is a process which allows each individual to explore environmental issues, engage in problem solving, and take action to improve the environment. As a result, individuals develop a deeper understanding of environmental issues and have the skills to make informed and responsible decisions. The components of environmental education are: Awareness and sensitivity to the environment and environmental challenges; Knowledge and understanding of the environment and environmental challenge; Attitudes of concern for the environment and motivation to improve or maintain environmental quality; Skills to identify and help resolve environmental challenges; Participation in activities that lead to the resolution of environmental challenges. Environmental education teaches individuals how to weigh various sides of an issue through critical thinking and it enhances their own problem-solving and decision-making skills.

Literature and environment studies - commonly called "ecocriticism" or "environmental criticism" that aims to explore the environmental dimensions of literature. This research paper seeks to illustrate the importance of art and literature for developing environmental literacy and awareness. Classics such as Robinson Crusoe provides an opportunity to give lively accounts of the existence and cultural activity of the environmental values. In Robinson Crusoe, David Copperfield nurtures and cultivates his own individual identity and his environment education through his literary imagination.

**Keywords:** environmental education, ecocriticism, environmental criticism

### Introduction

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Humans are part of nature. They should live and work in harmony with nature. Crusoe is a man at peace with nature. He loves the sea and the island. Therefore, when he marooned on the island, he finds himself alone with nature as his companion and he adapts easily. He is quick to use things from nature to help him survive. He uses the trees, plants to build house and canoe for himself, breeds animals to feed him. Daniel Defoe was a man of many shades. His personal traits are reflected in his literary contribution. Some of his important masterpieces like "Essay on Projects", "The True Born English Man", "The Hymn to Pillory", "Consolidator", "Apparition of Mrs. Veal", "History of the Union", "Reasons Against Succession of the House of Hanover", "A General History of Trade", "Robinson Crusoe", "Captain Singleton", "Moll Flanders" and "Rexona or the Fortunate Mistress" will remain glorious throughout the ages.

Man has control over everything except nature. But in *Robinson Crusoe* Defoe's hero Robinson Crusoe has total control over the environment. He is hard-core traveller. He loves to explore new and unknown places. Due to his bad luck, and also a storm, his ship has been destroyed and he comes to an unknown island. The island is not only unknown to Robinson but it is too lonely. Robinson does not able to find a single human being. He is totally confused. He feels confusion due to uncertainty of his destiny. He finds nothing on the island to survive. He has no shelter, food, fresh drinking water, no proper clothing and the very basic elements to live a life. He stands all alone and he has to face the Nature single-handedly.

Robinson cries bitterly but there is no one who can give assurance. There is no one who can provide the best comfort and warmth. But he has to survive as he comes in a desolated island. Slowly and gradually he understands Nature. It can be interpreted that Nature plays a major role in bringing the required maturity in Robinson. Nature grooms Robinson to be responsible man. Environmental education displays its effect and recreates a person who can live and lead a life alone almost for 28 years. Robinson is a traveller, he runs from his much protected shelter, ignoring his parent's warning but he never takes life as seriously.

The environment nurtures him and he matures himself. Robinson has been cast into an alien island and now he really understands the life how tough it is. But in the novel Nature has been portrayed as very polite character. Nature gives her ever thing to Robinson. Robinson learns to make adjustment with adverse situation. He wins over the hostile location. Nature makes him much more experienced, courageous, and skilful. Robinson should be thankful to Nature. She gives him every essential goods to survive decently on such a strange place.

Robinson goes back to the damaged ship to bring the goods. He finds biscuits, rice, bread, cheese, goat's flesh, corn, wine, carpenter's tool, ammunition, arms, barrels, clothes, money and hundreds of other essential merchandise. He needs a roof to protect him and also to preserve the most wanted goods. He finds a suitable place where he can stock his goods. He even gets plenty of fresh water near his shelter. He starts using and exploiting the Nature from now on wards.

Nature teaches him to do many kinds of chores. He learns farming, baking, fencing, ploughing, reaping and many other farm duties. He exploits Nature for his own purpose and Nature too helps him whole-heartedly. Robinson uses everything that he has brought from the ship but he cannot use money. As in such a deserted island he cannot able to buy or sell anything. Thus money or the wealth is just a useless thing to Robinson. With the help of Nature he makes his personal life much more pleasurable and comfortable. He has everything. He prepares required furniture for his comfort, he reads the Bible, he learns that there are two farming seasons, he learns to make earthen utensils and also knows how to make them durable. He has goats, parrots with which he spends his leisure time. He remains busy all day with many kinds of works. But still he feels seclusion. Lonesomeness is the major problem for Robinson. He remains flourishing in utilizing the Nature. He makes all arrangement for his survival. He has full control over Nature. He remains victorious in the silent battle with the Nature. Thus in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* the protagonist has full power and control over Nature that Nature which can destroy anything within a fraction of second and that Nature which can be calm and serene at the same time.

Crusoe's success in mastering his situation, overcoming his obstacles, and controlling his environment shows the condition of mastery in a positive light, at least at the beginning of the novel. Crusoe lands in an inhospitable environment and he makes it as his home. His taming and domestication of wild goats and parrots. Moreover, Crusoe's mastery over nature makes him a master of his fate and of himself. Early in the novel, he frequently blames himself for

disobeying his father's advice or blames the destiny that drove

him to sea. But in the later part of the novel, Crusoe stops viewing himself as a passive victim and strikes a new note of self-determination. In building a home for himself on the island, he finds that he is master of his life though he suffers a hard fate he finds prosperity. In short, while Crusoe seems praiseworthy in mastering his fate, the praiseworthiness of his mastery over his fellow humans is more doubtful. Defoe explores the link between the two in his depiction of the colonial mind.

### Acceptance and Adaptation in Life

Crusoe's experiences constitute not simply an adventure story in which thrilling things happen, but also a moral tale illustrating the right and wrong ways to live one's life. This moral and religious dimension of the tale is that Crusoe's story is being published to instruct others in God's wisdom, and one vital part of this wisdom is the importance of repenting one's sins. He believes that it is important to be grateful for God's miracles. Crusoe believes that his major sin is his rebellious behaviour toward his father, which he refers to as his "original sin," akin to Adam and Eve's first disobedience of God. This biblical reference also suggests that Crusoe's exile from civilization represents Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden.

For Crusoe, repentance consists of acknowledging his wretchedness and his absolute dependence on the Lord. This admission marks a turning point in Crusoe's spiritual consciousness, and is almost a born-again experience for him. After repentance, he complains much less about his sad fate and views the island more positively. Later, when Crusoe is rescued and his fortune restored, he compares himself to Job, who also regained divine favour. Crusoe may never have learned to repent if he had never sinfully disobeyed his father in the first place. Thus, as powerful as the theme of repentance is in the novel Nature plays a part of a teacher and an instructor and brings out scintillating transformation in Robinson.

### Self-awareness

Crusoe's arrival on the island does not make him revert to a brute existence controlled by animal instincts nevertheless, he remains conscious of himself at all times. Indeed, his island existence actually deepens his self-awareness as he withdraws from the external social world and turns inward. It is significant that Crusoe's makeshift calendar does not simply mark the passing of days, but instead more egocentrically marks the days he has spent on the island: it is about him, a sort of self-conscious or autobiographical calendar. Similarly, Crusoe obsessively keeps a journal to record his daily activities, even when they amount to nothing more than finding a few pieces of wood on the beach or waiting inside while it rains. One can also sense Crusoe's impulse toward self-awareness while he teaches his parrot to say the words, "Poor Robin Crusoe. Where have you been?" This sort of self-examining thought is natural for anyone alone on a desert island. But it is given a strange intensity when we recall that Crusoe has spent months teaching the bird to say it back to him. Crusoe teaches nature itself to voice his own self-awareness.

### Crusoe's Integration with the Island

One of Crusoe's first concerns after his shipwreck is his food supply. Even while he is still wet from the sea in Chapter V, he frets about not having "anything to eat or drink to comfort me." He soon provides himself with food, and indeed each new edible item marks a new stage in his mastery of the island, so that his food supply becomes a symbol of his survival. His securing of goat meat staves off immediate starvation, and his discovery of grain is viewed as a miracle, like manna from heaven. His cultivation of raisins, almost a luxury food for Crusoe, marks a new comfortable period in his island existence. In a way, these images of eating convey Crusoe's ability to integrate the island into his life, just as food is integrated into the body to let the organism grow and prosper. But no sooner does Crusoe master the art of eating than he begins to fear being eaten himself. The cannibals transform Crusoe from the consumer into a potential object to be consumed. Life for Crusoe always illustrates this *eat or be eaten* philosophy.

### Encounter with Water

Crusoe's encounters with water in the novel are often associated not simply with hardship, but with a kind of symbolic ordeal, or test of character. First, the storm off the coast of Yarmouth frightens Crusoe's friend away from a life at sea, but does not deter Crusoe. Then, in his first trading voyage, he proves himself a capable merchant, and in his second one, he shows he is able to survive enslavement. His escape from his Moorish master and his successful encounter with the Africans both occur at sea. Most significantly, Crusoe survives his shipwreck after a lengthy immersion in water. But the sea remains a source of danger and fear even later, when the cannibals arrive in canoes. The Spanish shipwreck reminds Crusoe of the destructive power of water and of his own good fortune in surviving it. All the life-testing water imagery in the novel has subtle associations with the rite of baptism, by which Christians prove their faith and enter a new life saved by Christ. But the cross is also a symbol of his own new existence on the island, just as the Christian cross is a symbol of the Christian's new life in Christ after baptism, an immersion in water like Crusoe's shipwreck experience.

Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe as a narrative that the novel can be read as a quintessential fable of humans' cultivation of nature and the creation of individuality which provides its readers with strategies for describing processes such as education. Both the novel Robinson Crusoe and the characters, metaphors, and scenarios it provides have functioned in the "auto-communication" of culture as an enduring equipment for living. Like proverbs "come rain, come shine", Burke states that literature names typical recurrent situations. Narratives deal with certain common characteristics of life, such as love and death. However, they do not only describe situations, but also provide "strategies for dealing with situations". Stories provide human beings with "lessons," which inform ways of living.

Defoe's descriptions of the island become a sign of his utilitarian spirit. After a first act of exploration, Robinson can begin to settle in a shelter; by creating a refuge, Crusoe is in effect transforming his island into landscape. The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to

who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future - these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decide in narrative. Robinson's descriptions also counter symbolic instability, because he feels that the land stands in opposition to the necessary establishment of his true self and cultivation concerns more than the domination of land; it is part and parcel of British and Western identity formation. As it deals with Western culture so explicitly, it is no surprise that *Robinson Crusoe* was popular reading material for environmental education. Robinson is not a naturally educated man, as his methods for cultivating nature are determined by the upbringing he received before he came to the island. Robinson had received a competent share of learning. Robinson's prior education determines his behaviour on the island, and the question as to whether Defoe's novel is the best treatise on a natural education is up for debate.

In *Robinson Crusoe*, the meaning of "cultivation" began to encompass more than the purely agricultural, the metaphor of "gardening" has had explanatory power in the sociologies. Savage cultures reproduce themselves from generation to generation without conscious design, supervision, surveillance or special nutrition. The "garden" variety of culture is most usually sustained by literacy and by specialized personnel, and would perish if deprived of their distinctive nourishment in the form of specialized institutions of learning. In the sociological theory "gardening" is elaborated on "to explain the role of education in preparing young people for 'planting out' as dutiful workers, keen consumers, and patriotic citizens. The gardener becomes an instrumental and utilitarian manager of order. The teacher begins to resemble Robinson.

Robinson was able to recreate European civilization on the island with the tools at his disposal. Colonial critiques of *Robinson Crusoe* have focused on Robinson's re-education of Friday by means of the Bible is a process that will make him European. Similar to how Robinson turns the wilderness into a liveable, meaningful place and he transforms the nameless savage into the "human being" Friday. Friday is seen as an empty vessel, like the landscape. Robinson suppresses the language and culture of the other. Friday as a savage is considered to have no culture and is treated as an unwritten page. In *Robinson Crusoe*, there are instances of reciprocal learning between Robinson and Friday. Most often, Robinson holds a "pedagogical monologue," but he also reports a certain give-and-take in teaching Friday.

Robinson gets control on nature. He transforms the wild (unwritten) nature into an ordered (written) space. He initially does forget to mention the books and other writing material he gets from the ship: "among the many things which I brought out of the ship. Which I omitted setting down before; as, in particular, pens, ink, and paper" (53). It is with these writing tools that Robinson "began to consider seriously my condition, and the circumstance I was reduced to, and I drew up the state of my affairs in writing... as to deliver my thoughts from daily poring upon them, and afflicting my mind; and as my reason began now to master my despondency" (54). He starts a diary, in which he not only describes his experiences and wrestles with certain problems, but also reflects and creates a composition of the self or, in other words, cultivates himself. From a moral perspective,

Robinson uses his diary to draw up a balance sheet of good and evil on the island (54-55). The written list emphasizes that Robinson is introducing order (civilization) into the chaos.

*Robinson Crusoe* does not observe the island with the eye of a lover of nature, but wherever he looks he sees acres that cry out for improvement. Thus, the novel can be read as a fable of controlling physical space, of organizing time, of making, crafting, fabricating, of fearing and mastering. These cultural actions are supported by the traditional tools of culture, such as writing and calculation. An analysis of *Robinson Crusoe* through the lens of the relationship between normativity and cultivation (of nature) demonstrates that the book provides one of the foundational myths that determine the relationship between man, his culture, and his biophysical surroundings.

### Summing up

*Robinson Crusoe* proves itself as an authentic example of environmental education as it comprises all the components such as Crusoe has an awareness and sensitivity to the environment and environmental challenges he faced in the uninhabited island. He acquires knowledge and understanding of the environment. He has shown attitudes of concern for the island and the cannibal Friday and motivation to improve or maintain environmental quality and he reforms Friday as a good human being. He possesses skills to identify and help resolve environmental challenges. Crusoe involves and participates himself in various activities that lead to the resolution of environmental challenges. It is evident through *Robinson Crusoe* that Environmental education teaches individuals how to weigh various sides of an issue through critical thinking and it enhances their own problem-solving and decision-making skills.

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