EXPANDING EMPIRES, EXPANDING SELVES: COLONIALISM, THE NOVEL, AND *ROBINSON CRUSOE*

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Featuring a British trader as its hero and set on a distant Caribbean island, *Robinson Crusoe* cries out for study in its colonial contexts. Indeed, British colonialism informs nearly every feature of Daniel Defoe's first novel. Spatially, *Robinson Crusoe* illustrates that the vastness of the globe can bring a corresponding enlargement, rather than shrinking, of the venturing self and can produce close self-reflection of a kind not easy to achieve in "civilized" society. Religiously, the novel demonstrates that a spiritual awakening can take place in isolation from society and can be crystallized when an Englishman subordinates and converts a non-European Other. Economically, Defoe's novel functions as an argument for the expansion of trade. And psychologically, *Robinson Crusoe* shows that relations with an alien Other can hone an ego that can master both its own selfhood and the destiny of others. In short, *Robinson Crusoe* owes many of its most characteristic traits to the colonial context.

Not surprisingly, contemporary readers commonly regard Defoe's novel as *the* prototypical colonial novel[1] of the eighteenth century, if not in all of English literature. Yet, the colonial elements of *Robinson Crusoe* have not been as thoroughly treated as we might expect in either eighteenth-century studies or postcolonial theory and criticism. Curiously, some of the more provocative postcolonial analyses of Defoe's novel appear not in criticism but in postcolonial literature such as Derek Wolcott's *Pantomime* and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, works that "write back" to Defoe's "master" narrative of empire. Even more numerous are the frequent allusions to *Robinson Crusoe*, particularly the Crusoe-Friday relationship, in postcolonial theoretical discourse. The mere mention of Defoe's novel, or his protagonist's relationship to Friday, seems to encapsulate the colonial myth and the dynamics of

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colonial relationships in general. Edward Said, for example, alludes to *Robinson Crusoe* as "a work whose protagonist is the founder of a new world, which he rules and reclaims for Christianity and England" (70). References like Said's are common, yet there seems to be an odd attempt to avoid engaging the colonial elements of the text in a sustained way. The novel's status as *the* prototypical colonial novel, I suspect, helps to account for this neglect, seemingly making such analyses unnecessary. Of those studies that engage colonial themes and issues directly and at length, many, if not the majority, tend to focus on the Crusoe-Friday relationship or related matters, such as cannibalism–Peter Hulme's *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* being a case in point. Martin Green's reading of the novel as a modern adventure tale illustrates another tendency in Defoe scholarship to reduce the essence of *Robinson Crusoe* to an expression of a colonial myth or fantasy. The issue of colonial trade has likewise been explored, most notably by Maximillian E. Novak.[2]

In this essay, I attempt to demonstrate the extent to which colonialism shapes Defoe's novel both formally and thematically, and I suggest that *Robinson Crusoe* indicates ways in which British colonial history made the genre of the novel possible. Specifically, I trace the influence of empire on the novel to the most elemental of novelistic conventions, namely, its attention to individual character, the starting point of Ian Watt's landmark study, *The Rise of the Novel*. Watt distills the essence of the novel to its "formal realism"–the "narrative method" by which novelists represent a "circumstantial view" of an individual life (32)–and he identifies *Robinson Crusoe* as *the* first novel precisely because of the detailed attention Defoe gives an "ordinary" individual.[3] Watt, however, fails to consider just how contingent Crusoe's self-image is on the colonial setting of the novel. Though his journey toward selfhood begins on precarious grounds–he is nearly swallowed by a storm, enslaved by Moors, and shipwrecked on an uninhabited island frequented by cannibals and located in the middle of the Spanish Empire–Crusoe gradually learns how to assert himself over land and people. In short, the colonial setting facilitates Crusoe's individualism as he comes to recognize the unique place he occupies as a British Protestant in a world in which he is surrounded by religious and cultural Others.

In assessing the influence of colonialism on Crusoe's individualism, we should acknowledge that we are dealing with an imagined colonialism. Terms such as "colonial context" and "influence of empire" sound as if I will ground my discussion in the actual practices of colonialism, but this implication is only partly true. Just as some readers of *Robinson Crusoe* protested that its author had wholly invented an individual's sacred experience, and Defoe responded that the narrative still was true in an allegorical sense, we must factor into any discussion of the novel's engagement in colonialism the

fact that the engagement is wholly fictional. *Robinson Crusoe* stands as an allegory or figure of colonialism, not an exhibit of it. Defoe had no direct experience with plantations, South American coastal peoples, oceanic voyages, the slave trade, or a colonial economy. What he "knew" came through the play of his imagination on information from travel narratives, trade, geographies, etc. The actualism of his novel functions as an effective mode of deception, serving to engage the reader in a mental journey that merely resembles the experience of colonialism.

Defoe, himself, likely acknowledged the distance between the reality of Britain's colonial endeavors and his representation. Prose fiction provided him a medium of depicting reality that, as Novak argues, "could be turned to useful ends." Novak, who traces the influence of Dutch realist painting on Defoe's fiction, suggests that Defoe's "interest [in painting] was not so much in getting at 'the thing itself,' something any writer and artist has to know to be impossible, but in the methods of deceiving the eye and the mind into accepting the presence of the representation as something that might have existed" ("Picturing" 2). Novak concludes that Defoe eventually learned that "he was working in a medium that was even more powerful–more vivid–than painting" (15). In *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe transforms colonialism through the power of fictional representation into the adventures of a single man who masters an island, his native companion, and himself. His formal realism works to enfold the myths of psychological and economic self-sufficiency in a texture of convincing detail. The highly imaginative nature of Defoe's colonialism is acutely illustrated in a passage from *The Complete English Gentleman*. There, Defoe essentially claims that the English Gentleman can take possession of the world through reading:

> [The English gentleman can] make the tour of the world in books, he may make himself master of the geography of the Universe in the maps, attlasses and measurements of our mathematicians . . . He may go round the globe with Dampier and Rogers . . . He may make all distant places near to him in his reviewing the voiages of those that saw them . . . with this difference, too, in his knowledge, and infinitely to his advantage, viz. That those travellers, voiagers, surveyors . . . etc., kno' but every man his share . . . But he recievs the idea of the whole at one view. (225-26)

The point of view of the English gentleman while "making the tour of the world in books" is not unlike Crusoe's as he overlooks his island home, master of all he surveys. Authority in both instances is primarily imagined, preceding, in Crusoe's case, his actual control over the island and shaping colonial attitudes and assumptions of the English gentleman.

We must also recognize that any distinction between real and imagined colonialisms, imperialisms, and other practices quickly surrenders to the view that such institutions are themselves, to a large extent, imaginary constructs, which in turn influence the concrete practices and policies that help govern and regulate political, social, and economic relations with other peoples. Defoe's debt to the colonial context takes place at the level of representing anticipations and premonitions of colonialism. Any influence he had on the colonial mentality is much more precisely that–a mentality–than a practice conducted by actual agents in history. And the contribution of the colonial context to the history of the novel takes place in a similar vein. By imagining a solitary escapee on a far island, Defoe creates the conditions that will be crucial to the development of the novel: fully realized characters who internalize experience within a setting that resembles real life.

I

Crusoe's individualism represents one of the more peculiar features of *Robinson Crusoe*. Despite his insignificant origins–"mine was the middle State, or what might be called the upper Station of *Low Life*" (4)–Crusoe, by the end of his adventures, is filled with a sense of his own self-importance. At least part of the significance of Defoe's hero, particularly as that significance relates to the origins and development of the novel, is the appearance of a character who sees himself and his experiences as being of immense consequence; in *Robinson Crusoe* we get, perhaps for the first time in English prose fiction, a work that asserts the primacy of the individual human subject.

Watt, of course, attributes such individualism to the rise of capitalism and the spread of Protestantism. While Watt's thesis remains convincing, Said and other postcolonial critics have shown the profound influence of imperialism on Western culture and its artifacts, and Watt's argument merits reassessment in light of the overarching implications of Britain's colonial history. Implicit in Watt's argument is the idea that the kind of individualism we see in *Robinson Crusoe* could have only arisen in eighteenth-century England, a stronghold of Protestantism and material capitalism. Watt mentions the debt *Robinson Crusoe* owes seventeenth- and eighteenth-century travel literature, and he suggests that colonialism helped to "assist" the "development of capitalism" (67), but his study goes no further in examining the influences of colonialism on the early novel. Studies of the novel since Watt, while otherwise thorough in tracing the social and cultural influences that gave rise to the novel, have similarly paid little attention to colonialism as a shaping force.

The movement of Defoe's narrative from the colonial center to the periphery facilitates Crusoe's development as a character. The sheer expanse of the globe through which Crusoe wanders has a paradoxical effect on him: rather than being overwhelmed by the vastness of his environment and

dwindling under feelings of insignificance, Crusoe's self-image enlarges the farther he travels from England. This double movement–what I refer to in my title as expanding empires, expanding selves–serves to position Crusoe at the center of both the world he inhabits and Defoe's novel. Crusoe takes on significance as a character because he stands as a seemingly stable and coherent subject in the wake of, what is for him, an expanding empire. This is precisely the type of mindset that colonialism would require, and Crusoe certainly is not the first fictional character to show British self-assurance among a people or in a landscape that could easily overpower him (e.g., Shakespeare's Prospero). Voyage accounts by Raleigh, Dampier, and others provide further evidence that such self-assurance was already firmly embedded in the British outlook, but Crusoe is the most notable because of his long solitude and growing control of his imagination.

The enlarging self that typifies Crusoe's response to his experiences compensates in many ways for the actual precariousness of his situation. Particularly while on the island, Crusoe constantly faces physical peril, both real and imagined. He finds himself stranded in the middle of the Spanish Empire on an island beset by cannibals. While Crusoe's situation should (and at times does) impress upon him a sense of his own smallness in the world, Crusoe responds by finding confirmation of his self-importance. Surveying his circumstances on the island, Crusoe imagines himself "Lord of the whole Mannor; or if I pleas'd, I might call my self King, or Emperor over the whole Country which I had possession of" (128). The seeming unflinching confidence with which Crusoe asserts himself over the island derives largely from the nature of his predicament: the only inhabitant on the island, he might just as well shrink in terror. Instead, he imagines himself in grandiose terms (i.e., as a "King, or Emperor").

As Defoe transforms colonialism through representation, Crusoe refashions himself and the island, in part, through the imagination and language. As Novak argues in "Friday: or, the Power of Naming," Crusoe "transforms his island world through the agency of language, and particularly . . . through a creative process of naming" (110). In making laws and giving names to places and things on the island, including himself, Crusoe both creates and assumes control over his island home. "By renaming [Friday]," Novak states, "Crusoe assumes possession of him in the same way that Columbus assumed possession of the land by his namings" (117). Like Defoe's novel, Crusoe's tendency to imagine and create through language his own reality reveals something of the nature of colonialism in general, namely, that it involves an assembly of images and cultural constructs, as well as material practices and circumstances.

Crusoe's tendency to imagine himself in grandiose terms replicates something of what was occurring in the culture at large in the early eighteenth century: "From 1688 on," Green explains, "England had been expanding,

and the pride of Englishness had been swelling, particularly with reference to the country's overseas possessions" (4). Imperialism began to influence English national identity as early as the mid-seventeenth century, and the English continued to associate their national prominence with their colonial activities, whether trade or the acquisition of foreign territories, throughout the eighteenth century. Nonetheless, Great Britain experienced its share of anxieties on the road to imperial greatness, both in its dealings with other European powers and its native subjects, and the British people's proclivity to view themselves and their international achievements with intense pride helped to neutralize those anxieties in much the same way Crusoe's imagined responses to potential dangers ease his fears. The English further alleviated their concerns regarding their international status by becoming an increasingly self-referential society, seeing more of themselves in spite of their increasing contact with a diverse range of cultures; or, we might more accurately say, seeing more of themselves *through* their contact with colonized peoples. Crusoe's character illustrates the point perfectly, in that no experience, except perhaps that with his God, validates his self-image and culture more than his relationship with Friday (a point I address in detail later in this essay).

Given the reach of Britain's trading and territorial empire during the eighteenth century and the resulting effects on British subjectivity, it is not surprising that *Robinson Crusoe*, with its bold assertion of colonial authority by means of a single individual, emerged in England when it did. At a time when the British were struggling to establish a trading empire and competing with other European powers for territory and market's abroad, *Robinson Crusoe* effectively defused insecurities relating to Britain's colonial endeavors by affirming, through Crusoe's character, the exceptional nature of the English subject.

By placing Crusoe outside of human society for nearly two decades, Defoe grants his protagonist the opportunity never afforded in actual experience. Crusoe has the luxury of working out the political ramifications of colonialism before the economic. While it may seem odd to speak of political implications of an individual dwelling in solitude, Crusoe's mental work for nearly twenty years is essentially political. Crusoe's mastery of himself and his creation of an imaginary kingdom prepare him for his reencounter with human beings of an alien (to him) culture and eventually for the recovery of his property and revenues and his renewed trading ventures. The trajectory of Crusoe's colonial experience, then, is clear: master yourself and you master your destiny; master your destiny and you master others; master these and you master the economic contingencies of life.

II

In *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837,* Linda Colley suggests that the British developed a sense of national identity as a result of anxieties relating to their international status. Although marked by a myriad of local and regional differences, Colley contends that the Welsh, Scots, and English defined themselves as Britons because they came to see themselves as a people apart and distinct from other nations and peoples: "Britishness was superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other, and above all in response to conflict with the Other" (6). Specifically, Colley refers to the French and other Catholic nations of Europe, from whom the British, because of their common commitment to Protestantism and their market economy, distinguished themselves. Protestantism, in particular, served as a unifying agent during the eighteenth-century conflicts with these other nations (18), which often involved colonial possessions and trade routes throughout the non-European world.[4]

Naturally, Colley acknowledges the rivalries among competing Protestant denominations, but she contends that "the gulf between Protestant and Catholic" was "still the most striking feature in the religious landscape" of the eighteenth century (19). The constant threat of a Catholic monarchy being restored by force (which could only have come about with the aid of France or Spain) and the persecution of Protestants throughout Europe heightened the English, Welsh, and Scots' sense of separateness from other European nations. Due to the military victories against such adversaries, Protestant Britons came to see themselves as God's chosen people and in his divine care. This is not to suggest that the British were necessarily an extremely pious people. The Protestant worldview, however, was such an elemental aspect of their culture that it informed their thinking and identity, even if regular church attendance was not a priority (31).

While the sincerity of Crusoe's conversion and his religious commitment have been debated by critics since Defoe's novel was first published, Defoe does fashion in Crusoe a Protestant viewpoint that is close to his own and crucial to the colonial possibilities as he envisioned them in the novel. He creates a Protestant who is tolerant, committed to essential practices rather than doctrinal controversy, keenly evaluative of his own behavior in relation to his religion, intensely personal in his encounter with God, and committed through acts of interpretation to seeing God's hand in everything from the grand outlines to the daily details of his life.

Crusoe's religious views are especially crucial if we see him as a British Protestant competing for territory with Catholic French and Spanish colonials. As Jack P. Greene observes, "The English overseas Empire, from the beginning, defined itself in opposition to the Catholic empire of Spain" (213). Boyd Stanley Schlenther similarly claims that Protestantism served

"as a handmaid to Empire in the context of renewed rivalry with Roman Catholic France and Spain" (131). The British saw themselves as saving native peoples from Catholicism as well as from their own "savage" ways, a historical fact that helps elucidate the geopolitical implications of the Crusoe-Friday relationship. In addition, the British tended to view their empire as a trading empire during the first half of the eighteenth century,[5] significantly different from the Spanish Empire, which, from the point of view of the British, was raised through conquest and territorial rule (a distinction I discuss in more detail later in this essay).

By isolating his protagonist on a deserted island, Defoe effectively establishes Crusoe as a character apart and distinct from other human beings. Most important, Crusoe comes to view his isolation as the result of a divine will; that is, God is both aware of and responsible for his isolation. Reflecting on his deliverance and the fate of his comrades, Crusoe wonders "that there should not be one Soul sav'd but my self" (46). He later asks himself, "Why were you singled out?" (63). Eventually believing that "nothing happens without [God's] knowledge," Crusoe assuredly claims that God "knows that I am here"; and Crusoe declares he "was brought to this miserable Circumstance by [God's] Direction" as a form of punishment for a "dreadful misspent Life" (92). Crusoe's isolation thus serves to both magnify and render significant his existence in the world; he, unlike the rest of the crew, was "singled out" by God. The Spanish shipwreck Crusoe discovers off the coast of the island reinforces this interpretation of his experience: "of two Ships Companies who were now cast away upon this part of the World, not one Life should be spar'd but mine" (187). Notably, the second of the shipwrecked crews is Spanish; Crusoe's own ship is en route from Brazil, a Portuguese colony, to Africa, when it founders on the rocky coastline that surrounds the island. As far as we know, then, Crusoe is the only English Protestant among either crew.

Crusoe's Protestantism, which develops and is refined through his island experience, and the fate of the other crew members might seem a minor point were it not for a number of anti-Catholic references scattered throughout the novel. Referring to the "*Priestcraft*" Friday describes among his people, Crusoe observes that "the Policy of making a secret Religion, in order to preserve the Veneration of the People to the Clergy, is not only to be found in the *Roman*, but perhaps among all Religions in the World, even among the most brutish and barbarous Savages" (217). While Crusoe associates "*Priestcraft*" with "all Religions in the World," he is generally more conscientious in distinguishing his faith from Catholicism: in explaining his apprehensions toward rescuing the Spanish crew on the mainland, Crusoe suggests "that they should afterwards make me their Prisoner in *New Spain*, where an *English* Man was certain to be made a Sacrifice . . . I had rather be deliver'd up to the *Savages*, and be devour'd alive, than fall into the merciless

Claws of the Priests, and be carry'd into the *Inquisition*" (244). The claim that an "*English* Man" would be made a martyr in New Spain indicates the interrelated nature of religion and national identity for Defoe and many eighteenth-century Britons.

Further, the reference to the Inquisition would have had particular resonance for Defoe's audience, since the Inquisition persisted throughout the eighteenth century. The Inquisition, of course, helped to solidify anti-Catholic sentiment and reinforced the idea that British Protestants were a chosen people. Crusoe, who before his conversion on the island has no reservations about living among Catholics in Brazil, explains:

> I had entertain'd some Doubts about the *Roman* Religion, even while I was abroad, especially in my State of Solitude; so I knew there was no going to the *Brasils* for me, much less going to settle there, unless I resolv'd to embrace the *Roman* Catholic Religion, without Reserve; unless on the other hand, I resolv'd to be a Sacrifice to my Principles, be a Martyr for Religion, and die in the Inquisition; so I resolv'd to stay at Home, and if I could find the Means for it, to dispose of my Plantation. (303)

Crusoe's island experience establishes in his mind religious, and hence, national boundaries; once he has been literally singled out and separated from the European world by God, Crusoe, on reentering that world, is assured of his place in it. Crusoe comes to see the unique place he occupies in the world as an English Protestant.

This is not to say that Crusoe becomes a religious bigot. As a Dissenter who experienced religious prejudice himself, Defoe was an advocate for religious freedom, and much of his antagonism toward Catholicism naturally derived, as it did for many of his contemporaries, from the perceived intolerance on the part of Catholics toward non-Catholics, hence Defoe's references to the Inquisition. During the short reign of James II, Defoe openly distrusted Catholic offers of toleration, a distrust that remained with Defoe throughout his life. Defoe's animosity was not, of course, directed exclusively toward the Catholic Church, and Defoe likewise openly criticized the Anglican Church's efforts to deny religious freedom to non-Anglicans: "I DISSENT," he writes, "believing every Christian to be obliged to worship God in that manner of form he finds most agreeable to the will of God declared in the Scriptures, and to join in Communion with those that he thinks do so–and upon these reasons I SEPARATE" (qtd. in West 151). Although clearly unhappy with the religious persecution prevalent in his own culture, Defoe and many eighteenth-century Britons believed that the Inquisition embodied an extreme form of religious intolerance that allowed them to see, by comparison, Great Britain as a nation founded on constitutional and

religious liberties, in spite of widespread prejudice among Protestants and government legislation designed to deny non-Anglicans fundamental rights (e.g., the Test Act). Defoe's sense of being a Protestant Dissenter among a Protestant majority may, in fact, have suggested Crusoe's isolation on his island.

Defoe's commitment to the cause of religious freedom informs the nature of the colony Crusoe creates on his island, and the image of Crusoe surrounded by his island subjects is a pointed illustration of what was, for Defoe, an ideal nation and colony: "It was remarkable too, we had but three Subjects, and they were of three different Religions. My Man *Friday* was a Protestant, his Father was a *Pagan* and a *Cannibal*, and the *Spaniard* was a Papist: However, I allow'd Liberty of Conscience throughout my Dominions" (241). Crusoe's colony, then, is implicitly contrasted with Brazil, since "Liberty of Conscience"–expressly associated with Crusoe's island colony–seems outside the ideological bounds of a predominantly Catholic colony.

Though critical of Catholic intolerance toward non-Catholics, Defoe is simultaneously gracious in his portrayal of his Catholic characters, particularly the Spanish Captain, who, along with the British mutineers, succeeds Crusoe on the island. Interestingly, the British mutineers initially prove to be the most degenerate of Crusoe's island subjects, and the Spanish castaways are the better colonists (although this statement must be qualified, since the Spanish Captain is essentially schooled by Crusoe in the art of running a productive colony in much the same way Friday is schooled in Western culture and Christianity). Defoe's characterization of Crusoe's successors on the island consequently seems to blur the national distinctions that I have argued are fundamental to the formation of Crusoe's character. Defoe was not so simple in his thinking as to discriminate merely on the basis of one's national origins or religious affiliations, and although he is outwardly critical of Catholicism in general, he likewise acknowledges individual humanity (and inhumanity) on a case-by-case basis. Defoe's portrayal of the Catholic Priest who accompanies Crusoe on his return visit to the island–recounted in *The Farther Adventures*–illustrates this point. Crusoe admires the Priest for his relatively liberal religious views, and he even leaves him on the island to convert his pagan subjects to "the Faith of Christ" (27). The Priest, in seemingly atypical fashion, espouses a generalized Christianity over adherence to a particular denomination, which accounts for Crusoe's admiration and qualifies him to act as a spiritual advisor on the island. Shaking hands with the Priest, Crusoe proclaims, "I wish all the Clergy of the *Roman* Church were blest with such Moderation, . . . but I must tell you, that if you should preach such Doctrine in *Spain* or *Italy*, they would put you into the *Inquisition*" (42). While together on the island, the two men share religious authority, and they concur that there should be no "Differences or

Disputes . . . about Religion" among Crusoe's English and Spanish subjects (61).

Certainly, Crusoe's attitude toward Catholics is tempered as a result of his contact with the Spanish Captain and the Priest; yet Crusoe's attitude toward Catholicism in general remains intact and integral to both the formation of his identity as a British Protestant and the kind of colony he establishes on the island. While Defoe surely intended to criticize the intolerance he perceived in his own culture through his representation of Crusoe's island, the distance between Protestant and Catholic still remains the dominant feature throughout the novel, despite Defoe's relatively favorable portrayal of the Catholic characters with whom Crusoe comes in contact. Further, the island–a place where mutual respect and tolerance between Protestant and Catholic flourish–is ultimately Crusoe's creation and represents a distinctly English colony, deliberately contrasted with those of Crusoe's "more typical" Catholic competitors. Just before leaving his island for the last time, Crusoe, in a distinctly Protestant-like gesture, leaves a Bible with his island subjects, thereby recalling the instrumental role the Bible plays in Crusoe's own conversion and intimating the role the Bible will play in the spiritual lives of his island subjects.

The religious overtones of Defoe's text thus provide a blueprint for a religiously "sound" colonial policy. Since colonialism brings colonizing peoples into contact with individuals of competing Christian creeds as well as non-Christians, colonialism must, as does Crusoe, establish a strong, liberal, and principled policy on religion. Sectarian disputes are to be abandoned in favor of central truths and essential points of ethical behavior. Native populations are to be gently encouraged, not compelled, to accept Christianity.

III

As Colley contends, British national identity was further solidified by the economic prosperity the country experienced during the eighteenth century. A chapter on "Trade" in the 1718 issue of *The Present State of Great Britain* begins: "Next to the purity of our religion we are the most considerable of any nation in the world for the vastness and extensiveness of our trade" (qtd. in Colley 59). Defoe himself associated global trade with national prominence, writing in 1726, "We are not only a trading country, but the greatest trading country in the world" (*English Tradesman* 212). Defoe saw the colonies as integral to the nation's commercial success, and the importance of colonial markets to the local economy was evident throughout the century: "Of all the branches of our Commerce," George Lyttelton wrote in 1739, "that to our colonies is the most valuable . . . it is by *that* alone we are enbled to carry out the rest" (qtd. in Wilson 154). Thus, Crusoe's

successes as a trader and colonizer make a powerful political statement. Crusoe, the quintessential colonizer, is an *English* colonizer, and Defoe distinguishes between Crusoe's particular brand of colonialism and that of his European competitors. His brand involves free trade and the "improvement" and upkeep of his colonial possessions, in addition to freedom of conscience.

Defoe, who envied Spain's control of Central and South America, portrays Spain's involvement in the Americas as nothing more than a ruthless conquest for riches. "It could not be just for me to fall upon them," Crusoe explains as he considers attacking a group of cannibals, "This would justify the Conduct of the *Spaniards* in all their Barbarities practis'd in *America*" (171). In conversing with Friday, Crusoe learns that the "Cruelties" of the Spanish in America have "spread over the whole Countries, and [were] remembr'd by all the Nations from Father to Son" (215). The Spanish shipwreck that Crusoe discovers indicates the motive for Spain's "barbarities": "I had room to suppose, the Ship had a great deal of Wealth on board; and if I may guess by the Course she steer'd, she must have been bound from the *Buenos Ayres*, or the *Rio de la Plata*, . . . to *Havana*, in the Gulph of *Mexico*, and so perhaps to *Spain*: She had no doubt a great Treasure in her" (192).

Hulme, who suggests that Defoe's novel attempts to reconfigure the colonial experience by denying the harsh reality of colonial relationships and the similarities between "civilized" and "savage" cultures, contends that Defoe's portrayal of the Spanish allows Defoe to distance his English hero from the native cannibals and their supposedly savage practices. "The Spaniards," Hulme explains, "are allowed to be like Crusoe–only not as efficient; and they are chosen to bear the brunt of the undeniable similarities between European and Carib" (200). When Crusoe entertains thoughts that the Spanish castaways may have resorted to cannibalism in order to survive, Hulme argues that the supposed gulf between civilized and savage societies remains intact, since the castaways are Spanish, not English. Moreover, Crusoe's self-sufficiency contrasts strikingly with the dependence of his Spanish counterparts on the native Caribs, thus validating the preeminence of Western civilization on a distinctly English model (200).

Though perceptive, Hulme's reading presents at least two problems: first, *Robinson Crusoe* and Defoe's other writings, particularly *The Further Adventures*, indicate that Defoe accepted cannibalism as a necessary human behavior in severe situations, even for an Englishman; second and more germane to my argument, Hulme does not address the fact that Defoe affirms through Crusoe's character proper colonial policies, in addition to the superiority of European civilization. Just as the natives are depicted as cultural savages, the Spanish are portrayed as ruthless colonizers. Contrary to Spain's acts of aggression against the natives, Crusoe's attacks on the

cannibals are justified on "higher" moral grounds, namely, "Self-preservation" and to save the life of a "poor *Christian*" (199, 233); and Crusoe's efforts to "improve" the island and bring it into the world of commerce and trade stand as an indictment of Spain's conquistador approach to the Americas. As Novak states, "Defoe was thoroughly familiar with the black legend of Spanish cruelty toward the Indians, . . . but the story he wants to tell is not that of conquest but that of colonialism, of the advantages of exploiting foreign lands and of a good relationship between colonizer and indigenous population" ("Friday" 114). Indeed, Defoe viewed colonial populations, including natives, as potential consumers of English goods. Crusoe's rescue and subsequent return to his island colony fulfill Defoe's colonial vision by connecting the island to England and the commercial world through trade.

Like the majority of his contemporaries, Defoe believed that Britain's colonial activities were carried on relatively peacefully. Seven years after the publication of his first novel, Defoe, writing in *The Complete English Tradesman*, claimed:

> We have not increased our power . . . by subduing the nations which possessed those countries, and incorporating them into our own, but have entirely planted our colonies, and peopled the countries with our own subjects, natives of this island; and, excepting the negroes, which we have transported from Africa to America, as slaves to work in the sugar and tobacco plantations, all our colonies . . . are entirely peopled from Great Britain and Ireland . . . the natives having either removed farther up into the country, or by their own folly and treachery raising war against us, been destroyed and cut off. (219-20)

Of course, the casual dismissal of the African slaves and the native inhabitants of the Americas in Defoe's claim for a peaceful colonialism seriously compromises the validity of his assertion. Nonetheless, Defoe's comments reflect the attitudes of many Britons who associated British prosperity with a relatively peaceful empire based on free trade, or what T. H. Breen has termed an "empire of goods" (468), not territorial conquest and domination, which they associated with Spain and its empire. That Crusoe's island is uninhabited and later peopled by Europeans–the British mutineers and the Spanish Castaways–and a handful of "converted" natives is thus a convenient way for Defoe to present Crusoe's activities as a relatively nonviolent enterprise. Initially a blank space awaiting Crusoe's arrival, the island represents the quintessential pure English colony Defoe articulates in *The Complete English Tradesman*.

Playing off of Novak's observation that Crusoe does not grow wealthy as a result of his incessant desire to travel the globe (see *Economics* 32-48), Alan Downie points out, quite accurately I think, that Crusoe gains wealth by

his plantation in Brazil and the dutifulness of his benefactors, the widow and the Portuguese Captain (20). In other words, Crusoe's island experience does not translate into material prosperity. While on the island, however, Crusoe solves the personal challenges of foreign residence and survival, and his development, in turn, prepares him to face and resolve properly the political constituents of colonialism: authority over peoples of different beliefs and customs, with some customs being intolerable to a Christian, and authority in competition with other foreign nationals whose methods descend to the level of barbarity shown by the savages over whom they exert control. When these problems have been solved–and they are the core problems of colonialism and can be solved this way only in fiction–the subject is ready to tackle the less problematic realm of economics and commerce. Trade and commerce, Defoe seems to be saying, are the primary means of gaining wealth and increasing the power of the nation, but even though they are among the driving incentives for venturing abroad, individual mental states and political attitudes must lay a proper foundation for them.

IV

Another advantage of the island setting is that it provides the ideal conditions for Crusoe to make himself the object of his own reflections, a process that teaches Crusoe how to master himself and prepares him to master his native companion, Friday. The farther Crusoe wanders into the world, the more he comes to see of himself; he becomes a narcissistic, inward-gazing character. The longest section of the novel–nearly 180 pages–takes place on the island while Crusoe is alone. His self-meditations (and his authority) go virtually unchecked and are almost without interruption. During his time on the island, Crusoe meticulously keeps a journal–at least until his ink runs dry–in which he makes his daily reflections and activities the focus of his own attention. Crusoe's isolation, then, heightens his self-consciousness and fixes him as not only the exclusive focus of Defoe's novel, but also the sole focus of his own musings; and he acquires, through sustained self-reflection, the psychological equipment needed to convert an imagined authority into a reality. While alone on the island, Crusoe himself realizes that his authority is the result of his isolation: "I had no Competitor, none to dispute Sovereignty or Command with me" (128). Once internalized, however, Crusoe eventually transforms that authority into a means of gaining sociopolitical power, first, over Friday, and then, over the British mutineers. Crusoe's self-involvement revises itself into grandiose possession and legitimate authority.

Michael McKeon makes a similar claim when he suggests that Crusoe's social mobility depends on his ability to first internalize his authority. Unlike Watt, McKeon sees the "religious element" as "crucial and complementary" to the economic (326); and he contends that before Crusoe can improve his standing in society, he must first develop the capacity to "spiritualize" his

experience on the island, that is, to acknowledge a divine presence operating in his life. Once Crusoe detects god's directing influence, he is then able to "spiritualize" his advancement in society as being the will of God. Moreover, the relationship between God and Crusoe–i.e., savior and saved–is eventually "literalized" in the Crusoe-Friday relationship. At the moment of Friday's deliverance from cannibals, Crusoe's authority on the island is no longer merely "figurative," since, as McKeon puts it, "the necessarily metaphorical relationship of creator to creature [is] quickly literalized into one of sociopolitical subordination" (332). Eventually, Crusoe develops the mental capacities needed to assert himself in English society and to advance beyond his original social class (334).

While McKeon implies that religion provides a legitimating narrative context for Crusoe's colonial activities, he does not pursue the colonial thread that he introduces into his reading of *Robinson Crusoe*, choosing instead to focus on Crusoe's island experience as a proving ground for his seemingly more consequential reentry into English society. Nonetheless, *Robinson Crusoe* is clearly concerned with expansionist politics, and Crusoe's island home is much more than a benign environment in which Crusoe learns how to be economically and spiritually successful in English society. Not insignificantly, the justification of authority within the colonial context disguises both the ugliness and possible malignity of grandiose possession. Once Crusoe learns to interpret his life as a divinely sanctioned event, his authority on the island is naturalized. As Crusoe comes to believe that God is intimately aware of him and his circumstances, he readily accepts the notion that Friday, like the island, is delivered into his hands, and questioning the legitimacy of his authority would require a questioning of God himself.

Though the model of colonial rule Defoe articulates in *Robinson Crusoe* may appear egocentric to the modern reader, it is largely informed by Defoe's political thought. Manuel Shonhorn, who reads Defoe's novel as "a political fable that emanated from an imagination that had been actively engaged in the most intense political debates in modern English history" (141), argues that Crusoe's island experience reveals Defoe's faith in a monarchical system of government, in which divinely appointed kings rule submissive subjects according to God's will. Fearing that growing parliamentary control actually impinged on the liberties of the people, Defoe believed that royal absolutism represented the surest means of ensuring political stability. At odds with Whig philosophy that suggested that "God's power passed to the king through the medium of popular choice or popular covenant," Defoe, Shonhorn states, looks "back to an earlier mode, in which covenants are initiated between the deity and his chosen kings," thereby allowing them "to perform a godly service with godly assistance" (151). In taking possession of the island and Friday, Crusoe merely takes what God gives him. While

Schonhorn is relatively uninterested in British expansionism, his efforts to recuperate Defoe's political philosophy suggest how a monarchical system of government fully legitimizes Crusoe's authority on the island and, by extension, Britain's involvement in the colonial world. Again, what better way to validate the ugliness of grandiose possession than to construe it as being authorized by God?

Coupled with God's blessing, the colonial world Defoe creates affords a context wherein a common Englishman can become, in a limited capacity, a master, a king, and an emperor. Even more so than the national context, in which it was also occurring, the colonial sphere offers the "private man" a setting in which he can become extraordinary and powerful; and Friday, a cultural inferior,[6] is the perfect companion to advance the self-image of a character who, in English society, would have been a nobody. As Albert Memmi contends, "Even the poorest colonizer thought himself to be . . . superior to the colonized" (xii).

Crusoe, in venturing out into the world, discovers perhaps the most essential element of his self-image, namely, a mirror, someone to reflect a self-validating image of himself. Shortly after rescuing Friday, Crusoe explains: "I made him know his Name should be *Friday*, which was the Day I sav'd his Life . . . I likewise taught him to say *Master*, and then let him know, that was to be my Name." As cited earlier in this essay, Novak sees the act of naming as a means of taking possession of Friday. Hulme similarly observes Crusoe's shrewd use of language: "By naming him Friday . . . Crusoe underlines to him that his previous life has been forfeited, providing a weekly mnemonic to remind him who was responsible for giving him that second life" (206). I would add that nullifying Friday's identity and history through the imposition of the name Friday also begins a process of transforming Crusoe's native companion into an image of Crusoe himself. Friday's transformation is achieved in large part through education, which includes instruction "in the true Knowledge of Religion," "*Europe*, and particularly *England*," and "how [they] traded in Ships to all Parts of the World" (220-22). Friday becomes, in many ways, a carbon copy of his white savior: "and thus he was cloath'd for the present, tollerably well; and was mighty well pleas'd to see himself almost as well cloath'd as his Master" (208).

Ironically, Crusoe's desire for a companion/servant is simultaneously another manifestation of his narcissism. In (re)creating Friday, Crusoe actually prolongs his isolation on the island: Friday speaks Crusoe's words and imitates his actions; he is a mere extension of Crusoe himself. In this regard, Friday is not unlike Crusoe's pet parrot, who learns to repeat Crusoe's words and even parrots back his own thoughts: "*Poor* Robin Crusoe, *Where are you? Where have you been? How come you here?*" (143). Of course, no matter how Anglicized he becomes, Friday is always Other, and Crusoe

maintains the master-slave paradigm that underlies their relationship. Friday is thus the perfect companion for Crusoe: he provides a mirror image of Crusoe's character while simultaneously reinforcing his authority.

In this respect, the Crusoe-Friday relationship[7] exemplifies what Homi Bhabha means by colonial mimicry and ambivalence. "Colonial mimicry," Bhabha explains, "is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (86). A "double articulation" is built into the discursive field that produces Crusoe's authority, a doubling that "fixes" the colonized subject as a "partial presence." Again, no matter how well Friday imitates his master, he is always Other. In this regard, Bhabha postulates that colonial mimicry helps to establish and regulate the power structures that underlie colonial relationships. But Bhabha also sees mimicry as a potentially disruptive force, capable of resisting and undermining colonial authority: "The *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (88). Essentially, the "partial presence" of the colonized subject produces a fragmentary vision of the colonist's own identity, thereby undercutting notions of a homogeneous and stable subjectivity; that is, colonial mimicry does not reproduce a faithful image of the colonizer, but instead distorts the colonizer's self-image by casting back an unfamiliar and, at times, unidentifiable image.

The extent to which Crusoe's identity depends on his relationship to Friday illustrates the "menace" of colonial mimicry by exposing the delicate and precarious nature of Crusoe's self-image. Friday, for example, is introduced into the novel after Crusoe's encounter with the footprint, which completely unsettles Crusoe's self-perception: "I stood like one Thunderstruck, or as if I had seen an Apparition" (153). After eleven years of solitude, during which time Crusoe plays the part of "Prince and Lord of the whole Island" (148), the footprint represents the first challenge to his personal safety and authority. Moreover, Crusoe's narcissism is colored by a neurotic paranoia as a result of his encounter with the footprint. Crusoe experiences recurrent nightmares; anxiety continually afflicts his mind; and every unusual sound startles the shipwrecked hero. Crusoe explains: "I *say*, that I should now tremble at the very Apprehensions of seeing a Man, and was ready to sink into the Ground at but the Shadow or silent Appearance of a Man's having set his Foot in the island" (156). Crusoe's authority–indeed, his internalized image of himself–is threatened by the mere prospects of an encounter with the Other.

Crusoe's reaction to the footprint thus reveals how the ambivalence of colonial discourse, by fixing the colonized subject as a partial presence, can be inherently subversive. The footprint represents, quite literally, both a

presence and an absence. For the first time since arriving on the island, Crusoe faces the possibility of encountering someone other than himself, the prospect of which unsettles Crusoe's solipsistic state. Prior to this event, Crusoe has virtually no reason to reflect at length on anyone but himself, and the footprint forces him, for the first time, to contend with an image other and different from his own.

What, then, serves to solidify Crusoe's character after his encounter with the footprint? Hulme states that the encounter blurs for Crusoe the boundaries between self and Other–Crusoe imagines for a moment that the print is his own–and he suggests that the remains of the cannibal feast enable him to recompose himself: "that paradigmatic manifestation of cannibalism finally allows Crusoe to clearly distinguish himself from others" (198). While Crusoe's firsthand experience among the cannibal remains redraws for Crusoe the boundaries between self and Other, the remains, I suggest, actually further discompose Crusoe's character. The fear of an encounter with the Other, cultivated by the footprint, intensifies when that Other is identified as a cannibal. Crusoe's self-composition, accordingly, hinges on more than a distinction between a "civilized" self and a "savage" Other; mastering the self requires mastering the Other. It is not until Friday is introduced into the narrative and his subsequent relationship with Crusoe that Crusoe is able to compose himself as "master," in control of himself as well as the native Other.

In Crusoe's relationship with Friday, Defoe circumvents the menace of mimicry by imagining a native subject who mimics his master but is not inclined to assert his difference or independence in a way an actual colonial subject might. Friday willingly submits to his white savior–he makes "all the Signs . . . of Subjection, Servitude, and Submission" (206)–and he changes himself into a copy of his master. His almost flawless mimicry of Crusoe reinforces Crusoe's belief in the superiority of his religion, culture, and social and political values. Moreover, Friday reflects back to Crusoe the image of a benevolent colonizer, thus firmly establishing Crusoe's authority on the island. When his authority is later challenged by potential rivals–specifically the British mutineers–Crusoe, without flinching, assumes the title of governor and is even mistaken for God on one occasion (254). At the end of his sojourn on the island, Crusoe goes from a man saved by God to one who is a savior appointed by God: "And where, Sir," Crusoe asks the Captain of the English ship, "is your Belief of my being preserv'd here on purpose to save your Life?" (260). Crusoe's proclamation suggests how self-composed he has become as a result of his experience on the island.

V

Ultimately, Crusoe's images of himself and his culture are, as I have shown, essentially projections onto a complex and threatening reality. In

mastering his own selfhood, Crusoe simultaneously masters his environment and (re)creates a world to his liking–a decisively colonial act. Crusoe reenters British society having acquired a radically heightened sense of self, and the detailing of an otherwise ordinary man's life is validated by the highly politicized context in which the action of the novel occurs, from Defoe's criticism of Spain's colonial practices to the Anglicization of Friday.

The entire process of isolating the personal, religious, political, and even economic facets of a fictional subject's life within an imagined colonial setting contributed directly to the features we now associate with the early novel: attention to individual character and the particulars of day-to-day experience, and an intense exploration of the dynamics of selfhood. As J. Paul Hunter observes, "The subjectivity of the novel involves not just a raised status for the individual self but an intensified consciousness, individual by individual, of what selfhood means" (24). While later novels–such as *Pamela* and *Tom Jones*–are not directly associated with the colonies, their protagonists can be the focus of a literary work because an individual (British) subject, as *Robinson Crusoe* so keenly illustrates, occupies a unique place in a widening world. I do not want to suggest that imperialism gave rise to the novel; rather, imperialism contributed significantly to the construction of the focal point of the novel's attention, namely, the individual (British) subject. Eventually, the colonial backdrop against which the British defined themselves became so naturalized that it is merely assumed in later novels. With relatively few exceptions, colonial space and the colonized Other are relegated to the periphery of most British novels until the end of the nineteenth century. This does not suggest, however, that the colonized world did not have a profound impact on British consciousness and later novels. The absence of that world and its inhabitants from the novel suggests how self-referential British society became in the wake of an expanding empire. Clearly, for a country on its way to controlling over a quarter of the globe, such an enlarged sense of self was crucial to obtaining and maintaining the Empire. In this sense, the novel and imperialism have a reciprocal relationship, the rise of each paralleling and reinforcing the other.

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NOTES

[1] Martin Green touts *Robinson Crusoe* as "the prototype of literary imperialism" (5).

[2] See Novak's chapters on *Robinson Crusoe* in *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe*.

[3] While critics like Michael McKeon have shown "Watt's vulnerability in delimiting the formal characteristics of the novel" (3) and have challenged his claim for *Crusoe* as *the* first

novel, most regard the preoccupation with individual character as among the novel's defining characteristics (see Hunter 24).

[4] Following the War of Spanish Succession in 1713, the British acquired Minorca, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and St. Kitts as a result of the Treaty of Utrecht. More important to Britain's economy, they likewise acquired the slave *Asiento* for Spanish America as a result of the treaty. The War of Jenkins' Ear (1739) and the Seven Years War (1754) further illustrate the extent to which Britain's intra-European conflicts involved colonial issues and possessions during the eighteenth century.

[5] It was not until the end of the Seven Years' War when the British seized control of France's North American, West Indian, and East Indian colonial possessions that the British began to view their empire as a territorial empire.

[6] As critics frequently observe, Friday is presented as an exceptional Other, and contrasted with his English master, Friday possesses, in many respects, superior physical and moral attributes. Moreover, Crusoe, in a paradoxical reversal, is "improved" as a result of his contact with Friday. Crusoe, for example, comes to recognize their common humanity and becomes a better Christian through their relationship. Novak suggests that the set physical descriptions of Crusoe and Friday–Defoe "makes his colonizer grotesque and his savage handsome, generous and affectionate"–is Defoe's way of "making a statement about the imperial spirit" ("Picturing" 13-14). While Crusoe is, of course, not without his faults and Friday exceptional in his way, there is, in my opinion, no question in the novel as to the intended superiority of Crusoe's culture and, consequently, the legitimacy of Crusoe's efforts to Anglicize Friday. Notably, Friday is admirable precisely because he embodies traits–generosity, gratefulness, fidelity, and a desire to do good–which should, according to Defoe, be characteristic of his own culture; that is, Friday is admirable because he is, in many ways, as the British should be.

[7] Parallels can be drawn here between the Crusoe-Friday relationship and the British-Spanish dichotomy discussed earlier in this article. The articulation of difference in regard to divergent colonial and religious practices authorizes Crusoe's colonizing activities in much the same way that a partially reformed Friday legitimizes the supremacy of Western culture. What ultimately counts in *Robinson Crusoe* is not the similarities between Crusoe and his Spanish counterparts or Friday, but the subtle and persistent differences that distinguish the former from the later.

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