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The Creation of an Ordered World in *Robinson Crusoe*

A favourite scene of the illustrators of *Robinson Crusoe* is Crusoe's discovery of the footprint on the sand. Crusoe can be seen peering downwards in surprise and shock at an oversize and remarkably distinct single footprint, which, when we check the story, oddly enough is still visible several days later. The image remains in the mind, a crystallization of what the book has come to mean to us, the hero in his shaggy goatskins, his isolation, his ever-present danger from unknown cannibals. The footprint scene comes well on in the novel,¹ and its effect belongs as much to what popularity, posterity and Disneyland have done to Crusoe, as to the text itself. For the reader, an image as strong appears earlier: that of Crusoe driven by the earthquake from his refuge in the rock, sitting alone in the storm, outside his palisade (80-81). He is, he tells us, "greatly cast down and disconsolate", "very much terrify'd and dejected", and remains in his solitary, defenceless position for upwards of two hours. His wits quite leave him at first, he has no notion of what to do, and it is not until he all of a sudden decides that the wind and the rain which follow the earthquake are the consequence of the earthquake, and it would be safe for him to retreat once more into his cave, that he can make any motion at all. Defoe does not tell us so, but we imagine Crusoe as sitting and shivering, clasping his knees, his head bowed in despair.

Between them the two scenes might serve to epitomize two views of the novel: if the first is our dominant image, we see Robinson Crusoe as the resilient hero of adventure, the man who survived, the man alone, triumphant over not only nature but all outside danger. Giving the second image precedence in our imagination leaves us with a different Crusoe, a solitary, pathetic figure, an outcast, rejected by man and deserted by God. Chronologically, of course, these images need not be

contradictory, and we can read the novel as the history of the outcast's triumph, his finding of God, and with God, strength. With this in mind, our memory of Crusoe as an orphan of the storm fades, and the scene of his isolation becomes but a prelude to his inevitable victory. Yet such a reconciliation seems unsatisfactory; the image of isolation is too strong to be forgotten.

The criticism of recent years has forced us to look at *Robinson Crusoe* with more respect, and has gone a long way to explain the novel's extraordinary force and strength. We know that the book is full of faults, that it is repetitious and often boring, that it is sloppily written by a forgetful author. We are aware that the time scheme is improbable and the end of the novel is tacked on. We are told that Crusoe's life is unrealistic, that he does not seem to suffer from the lack of company, or women, or an adequate diet. We know too that all these things matter very little, since the book has a mythic simplicity, an appeal that owes little to realism and nothing to chronology.

Yet what is the central myth of *Robinson Crusoe*, what is the one theme that gives the novel its organizing structure and its rationale? Ian Watt, in his familiar thesis of Crusoe as *Homo economicus*,² argued for the novel as a myth of man alone, independent and free, while E.M.W. Tillyard placed the book in the tradition of epic.³ More recently, J. Paul Hunter has substantially reminded us of the background or religious allegory in the story,⁴ with Crusoe as a type of Adam, his sufferings and trials patterned upon the wanderings of the children of Israel. These views are well known, and each is necessary to an understanding of the novel: Crusoe is economic man, the hero of epic, and a reluctant pilgrim; he is all of these and more. Yet in thinking of him as a type we neglect his humanity, we forget how close he stands to ourselves. An article by Eric Berne on the psychology of the novel suggests a way of adjusting our perspective, in drawing attention to the man himself.⁵ Berne argues that Crusoe's behaviour on the island is motivated by his need to explore and secure the space around him, and in this Crusoe is at least partially successful. What is important about Berne's argument is not its conclusion — as a Freudian he sees Crusoe as something of a neurotic, the victim of an oral fixation — but his realization that the hero's conquest of the outer space of the island parallels the exploration of the inner space of the self.

I propose to look at this dual exploration from an archetypal viewpoint. Crusoe's quest is to find himself: a quest, both extraordinary

and commonplace, heroic and human. He is the exceptional man, yet one of us; no neurotic, but a man undergoing the archetypal crises of life. Our response to him is one of sympathy, understanding and immediate recognition of his situation. *Robinson Crusoe*, I will argue, is a novel about order, both physical and psychic, and the establishment of this order is its dominant myth.

The island is Crusoe's microcosm; it contains the extreme conditions he must learn to cope with, the dangers and the delights, both around him and within his own self. On the island he learns to progress from spiritual ignorance to psychic integration. In the middle of the storm after the earthquake, we see him at perhaps his lowest point. He has survived his shipwreck, he has overcome his first fears of savages and wild animals, and he has laboriously salvaged innumerable articles from the hulk on the rocks. He has begun his system of fortification, erecting a semi-circular palisade of stakes around the face of a wall of rock, and he has tunnelled out his cave from this rock. Just before this point in the story, he seems to be well on his way to establishing himself in safety and some measure of repose, since he has seen his first miracle, the first sign of God's hand, in the discovery of the stalks of barley. Then comes the earthquake, which finds him inside his cave. His first action is to escape into the open, and he does this instinctively, being afterwards "like one dead or stupify'd" (80). His first fear is of being buried himself, his next, that his tent and all his goods will be buried even if he is not. When the storm is over and he has had time to consider, he finds himself subject to two equal fears: one, of being swallowed up alive, the other, of being in the open, of "lying abroad without any fence" (82).

Seeing the novel as a record of the hero's establishment of some kind of psychic order within his personality, this scene takes on a powerful meaning. We remember that Crusoe has been buried before: when he is shipwrecked we are told that the wave swallowed him up, and "buried me at once 20 or 30 Foot deep in its own Body" (45). Now, he again lives in fear of "being swallow'd up alive" (82). His battle with Nature is cosmic; she seems a most terrifying and powerful force, ready to devour her unfortunate child. We remember that Crusoe is a Jonah (15), and that Leviathan lurks in the waves, even that he is a type of Christ, and must needs descend into the dark jaws of Hell before he can be reborn. With these mythic and allegorical parallels in our minds, we can see this earthquake scene as a second beginning, a thrusting out

from the womb-like cave into the open world. Until Crusoe has become aware of his defencelessness he cannot (like Jonah) begin the ordering of his life.

One of the peculiarities of the beginning of the novel is the nature of Crusoe's sin. He tells us repeatedly that he is a sinner, and that his sin is filial disobedience. He is guilty not only for his refusal to obey his father, but also because he has resisted the will of God, who gives him clear signs that he should never go to sea. Yet in spite of these explanations, we sense that Crusoe's actual sin is only important as a rationalization, and that he is a victim of an unrelenting fate. His father's constant advice is that he should seek the "middle state", for the golden mean brings man's only chance of earthly happiness. This is "the just Standard of true Felicity" (4), and it can only be Crusoe's "meer Fate or Fault" (5) that stirs him to wander, for he is by no means content with this middle state, either in England or later on his plantation in Brazil, but must explore the extreme. This indeed is the eternal fate of the hero. Crusoe has been singled out, chosen for testing by Providence, and we can have no reluctance to accepting his claim to be the Wanderer; being someone very special, he becomes a surrogate for ourselves. As a story of crime and punishment, *Robinson Crusoe* is incomprehensible; as a record of an individual's struggle to accept the responsibilities of the heroic role, to go to the limit of self and return sane, the novel is in the mythic tradition. Crusoe cannot reach an equilibrium until he has both discovered and come to an accommodation with the world of extremes. This world is both around him and within him, both in his conscious and his unconscious self.

What emerges from the first part of the story is the inevitability of Crusoe's role as wanderer, a man driven by Providence towards some critical moment. That this moment is not just retribution, nor yet another adventure, but a meeting with God and Self, is central to any thematic reading of the novel. Crusoe's God is of course an external power, controlling the elemental forces, showing Himself to Crusoe through the sea, the storm, the earthquake and nature, but He is at the same time within Crusoe, manifesting Himself in his thoughts and his dreams, directing his soul through secret stirrings. It does no historical injustice to the novel to see in this communication with God Crusoe's exploration of his psyche, and in particular, to recognize, in the gradual freeing of Crusoe's soul, his acceptance of his unconscious.

It is when he becomes sick with an ague that Crusoe has his first real experience of God and makes his first prayer. In the middle of his sickness he has a dream, in which "I thought, that I was sitting on the Ground on the Outside of my Wall, where I sat when the Storm blew after the Earthquake" when he sees a man descend from "a great black Cloud, in a bright Flame of Fire" (87). This apparition seems unspeakable to Crusoe as it moves forward towards him with a "long Spear or Weapon" in its hand to kill him, and he is terrified when the figure speaks:

I heard a Voice so terrible, that it is impossible to express the Terror of it; all that I can say, I understood, was this, Seeing all these Things have not brought thee to Repent, now thou shalt die: At which Words, I thought he lifted up the Spear that was in his Hand, to kill me (87).

Crusoe wakes filled with the horrors of this terrible vision.

This is clearly intended to be a symbolic conversation, the moment when Crusoe's Saul becomes Paul. The image of Crusoe's absolute isolation after the earthquake is repeated at the beginning of the dream: the two events in a sense are but one episode, when Crusoe is forced to reach down into his inner depths and find accommodation with his worst fears. In his half-conscious reflections upon his moral depravity immediately after his dream he casts his eye over his whole sinful life and comes to a true realization of his utter helplessness:

...now I have Difficulties to struggle with, too great even for Nature itself to support, and no Assistance, no Help, no Comfort, no Advice; then I cry'd out, *Lord be my Help, for I am in great Distress* (91).

From this point on his spiritual cure is hardly in doubt. Looking for tobacco as medicine for his sickness, he finds a Bible; looking in the Bible he finds guidance from the word of God. He is led to reconsider his past life, and given hope for the future. He comes to understand that from being confined upon a barren island, he has been delivered from a sinful career, from being imprisoned, he is now free.

On recovering from his sickness — which is of course spiritual as well as physical — he is able for the first time to set out upon a journey of exploration. He has a "great Desire to make a more perfect Discovery of the Island, and to see what other Productions I might find, which I yet knew nothing of" (98). He crosses over into the other half of the island, finding that it is fruitful — his own part is barren — having meadows, a great deal of tobacco (the herb that had cured his illness),

sugar canes, melons, and grapes. Going further, Crusoe finds a spring, and everything in "a constant Verdure.... that it looked like a planted Garden" (99). He immediately imagines himself as the lord of this fair country.

It is clear that the effect of this scene is symbolic.⁶ Crusoe could not have found the fruitful part of the island until he had made peace with God; once he has realized he is no longer a prisoner the bars are open, and he is ready to be led into green pastures. On the psychological level, with his visionary dream Crusoe reaches into his unconscious, and is afterwards guided through his sickness by intuition and instinct. Until this point he has been resisting the forces within himself; after this dream he becomes resigned to his condition. On his recovery from his ague he is able to proceed further and explore the wonders of a new and delightful country, which in a sense may be said to stand for the unconscious itself. He builds a "bower" in this lotus land, and eventually sets up a little farm there, but significantly enough he never abandons his first home on the barren side of the island, telling himself that his rescue must come from that direction. The fruitful side has an almost seductive charm; there is something dangerous about it: it is from this side that the savages come when they do. Crusoe never thoroughly makes it his own, never quite surrenders himself, tempted though he is, to the "Pleasantness of the Place".

He is now able, however, to set up a reasonable and almost complete order in his new world after this first exploration of the island. He finds no want of food, and delights in all its variety. He tames first a parrot, then a young goat; added to his dog and cats they form his society. He professes himself increasingly comfortable, and his own house becomes a "perfect Settlement" to him (111). He still has his wanderings and doubts, but essentially he is at peace with himself:

I began to conclude in my Mind, That it was possible for me to be more happy in this forsaken Solitary Condition, than it was probable I should ever have been in any other Particular State in the World; and with this Thought I was going to give Thanks to God for bringing me to this Place (113).

It is at this point that we can see how completely Crusoe's inner order is reflected by his outer order.⁷ His actions at this stage of the novel are methodical and precise; working with hope in his breast he becomes increasingly constructive. He is an experimenter, hindered only by the inadequacies of his tools; he is a creator, limited only by his diminishing ignorance. We notice that Defoe's treatment of work is symbolic when we compare what Crusoe did before his dream and

after. His first attempt to organize his solitary life was energetic rather than directed; with beaver-like industry he worked to create a world about him, making himself a home, fixing himself furniture, exploring a part of his neighbourhood. Immediately before his sickness he had worked frantically on a second salvage of the wreck, but all to very little purpose: he was frustrated by the tide and the sand; he could only hack pieces off the roll of lead, and the figurehead itself, freed by the wind, proved too heavy for him to move. He did manage to bring a mass of timber, planks and iron-work ashore, enough to build a boat "if I had known how" (86). What characterizes this labour is its pointlessness. This is made quite plain by the contrast of the work done after his recovery from his sickness: now his labour is as tedious, but it is purposeful.⁸ He makes himself a board, and though it takes him five days before he can even begin to flatten the sides, he does succeed in his design, for he is patient. What does he need with boards, we might ask, remembering that he had salvaged enough planks from the ship to build a boat? The answer — unless we are willing to accept the explanation of the forgetful author — is that the labour is symbolic of his spiritual and physical cure; now Crusoe is a creator, who is building his own order. He does not want nor need the abundance of the wreck, which in a sense is tainted by his previous sin, but he must make do with natural material. He must make his own things, and he must make things work. So he proceeds by trial and error, often laboriously, but with a new sense of design. He discovers how to grow his corn, and in his many difficulties he is "content to work it out with Patience, and bear with the badness of the Performance" (118).

In settling the small world about him, he adjusts to the cosmos itself, observing and taking note of the seasons (106). He organizes his agriculture according to these observations, sowing and harvesting at the proper times. He sets his daily routine in strict and sensible parts; no time is unaccounted for, no time is wasted:

I was very seldom idle; but having regularly divided my Time, according to the several daily Employments that were before me, such as, *First*, My Duty to God, and the Reading the Scriptures, which I constantly set a part some Time for thrice every Day. *Secondly*, The going Abroad with my Gun for Food, which generally took me three Hours in every Morning, when it did not Rain. *Thirdly*, The ordering, curing, preserving, and cooking what I had kill'd or catch'd for my Supply; these took up great Part of the Day.... (114)

He becomes an inventor, and after a fashion, a craftsman, discovering rough and ready ways to make his tools and pots. He sets himself up as the judge and executioner of his society, first over the animals (as with the birds that rob his field) and later over the savages and the mutineers.⁹ He still on occasion “wastes” his labour, spending long and fruitless hours on such a hopeless project as the first dug-out canoe, but this is a lapse, a backsliding from his real knowledge of God. In the main he is at peace with his inner self. He has long dialogues with his soul, questioning his fate and the workings of Providence, reassuring himself:

Thus I liv'd mighty comfortably, my Mind being entirely composed by resigning to the Will of God, and throwing my self wholly upon the Disposal of his Providence. This made my life better sociable....(135)

He still has occasional meetings with the world of the unconscious which unnerve him, and show him the limits of his psychic order. On launching his second canoe, he is carried away by the current; on reaching firm land with much difficulty he regains his bower, and drops into a sleep of exhaustion.¹⁰ He is awakened by a voice calling his name, “where are you Robin Crusoe? Where are you? Where have you been?” This excursion into unknown waters is a frightening experience, and it is only after an extended self-explanation that he really accepts his questioner as “honest Poll”, the “sociable Creature” (142-43).

It is in the middle of a long and circumstantial account of Crusoe's ordered world – his plantations, his fortifications, his stores, his goats – that we are suddenly surprised, as he is himself, by the appearance of “the Print of a Man's naked Foot on the Shore” (153). Crusoe of course is more than surprised, he is “Thunder-struck”, and all his carefully constructed tranquility seems at once overturned. He hurries home to his fort, imagining intruders behind every bush, and immediately shuts himself up in great “Terror of Mind”. His fears are far from rational: he finds it impossible “to describe how many various Shapes affrighted Imagination represented Things to me in, how many wild Ideas were found every Moment in my Fancy, and what strange unaccountable Whimsies came into my Thoughts by the Way” (154). He supposes at times that the footprint belongs to the devil, for there is something supernatural about its appearance, something terrifying in it being a *single* mark. His musings at length take a more balanced note, and he turns once again to God, finding in His revealed work comfort and direction.

The footprint is a disruption of Crusoe's little kingdom; it is a sign that there have been trespassers about on the island. Its dramatic effect is all the more powerful for the detailed description we have just had of an island apparently tamed; now civilization is shown to be a facade, the inviolate society broken into almost by malevolent magic. Crusoe's immediate action is to re-organize his world, to set up more and yet more lines of defence about his fortifications, to crawl once more back into his island womb, to regret even the door on his cave. It is two years before he sees any further sign of the savages, and his mind, at first obsessed by thoughts of his own defence, then significantly enough turns to thoughts of revenge. "It would take up a larger Volume than this whole Work is intended to be, to set down all the Contrivances I hatch'd, or rather brooded upon in my Thought, for the destroying these Creatures" (168). The savages are the intruders from another world; they must be met and destroyed before order can be restored.

It is as much Crusoe's inner peace that has been threatened as his outer order. Musing upon his now unsettled condition, he resolves to take direction from his unconscious:

How when we are in (a *Quandary*, as we call it) a Doubt or Hesitation, whether to go this Way, or that Way, a Secret Hint shall direct us this Way, when we intended to go that Way... (175)

He makes it a rule of conduct from this time forth to obey these "secret Hints, or pressings of my Mind". To the Puritan this was a familiar way of receiving God's own instructions; Crusoe's speculations go a little further than usual, since he goes on to suppose that these "Intimations of Providence... are Proof of the Converse of Spirits, and the secret Communication between those embody'd, and those unembody'd..." (176). It is just after these thoughts that he has another nasty fright in a second encounter with the devil, when, exploring a cave, he sees "two broad shining Eyes of some Creature", which terrifies him with a pair of loud, deep sighs (177). The devil turns out to be a goat. Crusoe once again in crawling into this enclosed and dark world — which reveals itself to be in its innermost depths the most "glorious Sight seen in the Island" (178) — learns that the fear is of the unknown within and that indeed there is nothing so fearful as fear itself. Taking possession of this inner and most splendid cave, Crusoe fancies himself "like one of the ancient Giants", and for the first time feels quite safe from even "five hundred Savages" (179).

Up to this point we have been shown a series of archetypal images in the life-voyage of this Wanderer: his disengagement from the sea, more helpless and no wiser than Jonah himself; his isolation; his peril, first from (imaginary) wild animals, and later, from wild men; his burrowing back into the elemental earth: his expulsion from this womb to face the divine. As we have seen, this crisis, this meeting with the unconscious, is followed by the meticulous re-ordering of both the inner and the outer realities. The island, though still surrounded by the dangerous currents of the elemental waters, turns from prison into a kingdom, while the images of the wilderness give way to those of the enclosed garden. Now Crusoe, faced with the threat from the outside world, significantly seeks the solution within himself, enters the mouth of hell, confronts the devil, and finds in that cave of the unconscious a secure and hidden retreat.

He is by no means settled and easy after this experience in the cave, but still finds himself prey to innumerable doubts and fears. It is not until he meets his danger in the form of Friday that he becomes his old self once more: by taming, teaching and forming Friday after his own image he sets his world back to rights. Once the unknown becomes familiar, once he is able to make it his own and impose his own order upon it, it no longer offers a real threat to him. With Friday at his side, Crusoe spends "the pleasantest Year of all the Life I led in this Place" (213).

Crusoe has now regained his confidence, and during the rest of the novel he is in command of his growing society. With the addition of Friday's father and the Spaniard "my Island was now peopled" (241), and he is no longer just king in fancy. His resoluteness in guiding the attack on the savages, and later, in directing the defeat of the mutineers, makes us accept his title of "Governour" as real rather than ironic just as later, safe in Spain, his companions call him their "Captain". The order that he has imposed so carefully upon his own life is extended to those who come near him: he plans the rescue of the fourteen shipwrecked Spaniards, and he restores to his ship the captain and his companions, imposing resolute yet merciful justice upon the mutinous crew. The final imposition of order upon his by now expanded world is the settlement of his commercial affairs, whose notable success — and it is none of Crusoe's doing — is a reward for his finding of God and self.

He is now quite in touch with God and is content to be guided by the promptings of his inner self. His unconscious speaks to him in moments of crisis, and he listens: "I had some secret Doubts hung about me, I cannot tell from whence they came...." and they bid him to be on his guard, and so he is cautious. He speculates on the nature of such warnings, speaking of "certain Discoveries of an invisible World, and a Converse of Spirits" (250). "Let no Man despise the secret Hints and Notices of Danger" he says, and later, on his way home to England, when he finds he has a "strange Aversion" to going to sea, he repeats the lesson: "let no Man slight the strong Impulses of his own Thoughts in Cases of such Moment" (288).

Seen in this light, Crusoe's life becomes the experiencing and the ordering of the unknown. The peculiar scene of the wolves in the pass of the Pyrenees is felt as one last attack upon his psyche; by now he is so strong that even when "above three hundred Devils come roaring and open mouth'd" to devour him (302), and he tells us that he gives himself over for lost, we have little sense of crisis, and no fear for his safety.

This scene may be unrealistic, but realism, for all the detail of *homo economicus*, is not always Defoe's point. Crusoe's island is a world of creation and experience, and his twenty-eight years on the island should be read in somewhat of the same light as Jehovah's six days of creation. All is drawn into the myth of order: Crusoe becomes more than *homo economicus* and more than the Wanderer: he becomes, finally, every man who has ever tried to cope with a chaotic and hostile world.

Footnotes

1. Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York Mariner*, ed. J. Donald Crowley (London, 1972), p.153. Subsequent references to this edition will be given in the text.
2. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley, 1959) p.p.60-92.
3. E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Epic Strain in the English Novel* (New Jersey, 1957) p.p.31-50.
4. J. Paul Hunter, *The Reluctant Hero* (Baltimore, 1966).
5. Eric Berne, "The Psychological Structure of Space with some remarks on *Robinson Crusoe*," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, XXV (1956), p.p.549-57.
6. This point has, of course, been made before: see Edwin B. Benjamin, "Symbolic Elements in *Robinson Crusoe*," *PQ*, XXX (October, 1951), 206-11.
7. See Benjamin. Tillyard (*op. cit.*) denies that such precise and detailed symbolism could exist without the author's conscious intention. Reality for Crusoe is governed by his psyche, by his fears and ignorance. Defoe is certainly aware of this: the symbolism in a sense follows, as a reflection of Crusoe's psychic state. Benjamin argues that the richness of the far side of the island is largely illusory, giving as evidence the fact that Crusoe is afraid to eat the grapes for fear of a flux, and those that he gathers and leaves in a pile are trampled by some wild animals. Yet Crusoe's economy comes to depend on the very real richness of the

meadows and woods around his bower; it is here he grows his grain, gathers his grapes for raisins, hunts, and makes his enclosures for his goats. His "Country Seat" has a most "tollerable Plantation" attached (152).

8. Crusoe further notes that should the reader object to the apparently short time allowed for labour, then he should remember the laboriousness of the work.
9. "It would have made a Stoick smile to have seen, me and my little Family sit down to Dinner; there was my Majesty the Prince and Lord of the whole Island; I had the Lives of all my Subjects at my absolute Command. I could hang, draw, give Liberty, and take it away, and no Rebels among all my Subjects" (148). Crusoe's well regulated "kingdom" is an emblem of his inner security.
10. Again, what is dangerous to Crusoe is ignorance: once he has studied the currents he sees he has little to fear from them (151).