

**Crusoe as a Bourgeois Picaro
and a Colony Builder**

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Daniel Defoe was not a passive observer, but an active participant in the changing society. He lived in a transitional age marked by the interplay between mercantilism and *lassiez-faire* that had already witnessed the decay of the feudal system and replaced the landlord with the tradesman. It should be noted that economic activities, particularly trade, flourished with the blessings of religion. The intensity of the search for the kingdom of God commenced gradually to pass over into sober economic virtue, the religious roots died out slowly, giving way to utilitarian worldliness. Defoe himself writes in the *Review* journal (III : 65-66) :

Since then our voices are by Necessity, thus made Virtues in our trade, ... it is manifest that he who would go about to reform affectually, the common vices and luxury of the Nation, at the same time begins the ruin of our Trade, and by that time he has brought us to be a Nation of Saints, will be sure to make us a Nation of Beggars. (Anderson, 26)

In his discussion of the South-Sea trade, Defoe expresses his concern over England's debt. He would like to see England paying off for its great debt by colonizing the South Seas. This is his attitude toward the new world :

This is what we are to understand by a Trade to the South Seas, that we shall, under the protection, in the Name, and by the Power of Her Majesty, *Seize, Take, and Possess*, Country, or Dominion, *Call it what you please, as we see fit in America, and Keep it for our own*. Keeping it implies Planting, Setting, Inhabiting, Speaking, and all that is usual in such Cases.⁽¹⁾

Moreover, Defoe recommends the trustworthiness of government securities and the need for prompt payment to support the credit of the nation. He notes that the war has made the government borrow and enabled many people to make fortunes.⁽²⁾

Critics have interpreted Robinson Crusoe in different perspectives. Critics who followed Coleridge's description of Crusoe as Everyman embraces the idea that the novel is designed to show us man in solitude with no complex social environment which makes men appear so detached from each other (Hunter, 1966). Watt (1972) approaches the novel as a symbol of the processes associated with the rise of economic individualism (70). In another work, Watt (1951) speaks of Crusoe as *homo economics* and discusses the theme of alienation in the novel.⁽³⁾ Novak (1962) also points to Defoe's mercantilistic theories and his fiction as a colonial propaganda.⁽⁴⁾ Other critics have considered the novel from a religious point of view. Hunter believes that the novel is structured on the basis of a Christian pattern of "disobedience – punishment – repentance – deliverance."⁽⁵⁾ However, traditional criticism has not examined clearly the energy of Crusoe in manipulating men and material circumstances to his advantage. This study intends to prove that Crusoe is primarily an intelligent bourgeois picaro who manipulates people, circumstances, and religion, and progresses to a colony builder.

Robinson Crusoe is a story of economic quest set in episodic form. Although the island episode occupies the major part of the novel, Defoe establishes all the characteristics of Crusoe way in the course of the novel. The novel opens with a short account of Crusoe's family and class descent. Crusoe leaves his parents and cultural expectation to be an explorer of "barbarian fringes." (Cummins, 1994).⁽⁶⁾ He is seen as completely an outsider and a rebel. The spiritual significance of Crusoe's "rebelliousness is subsidiary to the dramatic constitution of Crusoe as a character who must be separated from society." (Cotton, 274). No names are given and there is only a flimsy mention, void of brotherly feeling, of his two brothers who left home to make their own way in the world. Crusoe's economic ambitions are revealed when he speaks about his "design" or "mere wondering inclination" for going to sea. Crusoe's father rationalizes "It was for men of desperate. fortunes on one hand, or of aspiring superior fortunes on the other, who went

aboard upon adventures to rise by enterprise."⁽⁷⁾ Crusoe clearly falls into the second category since his "middle state ... the upper station of low life" excludes him from the first. If this is not sufficient proof to identify Crusoe's strong desire for going to sea for pecuniary ends, his own confession that it is "raising my fortune" (p. 15) is clear enough to disregard whatever terms he uses to describe this itch — "wild and indigest nation," "evil influence," "filial disobedience," "Obstinancy" (p. 15), or "breach of my duty to God and my father" (p. 9).

Robinson Crusoe is, undoubtedly, an economic quester whose "calling" is neither the law as his father intended, nor to become a sailor, but simply a merchant. In a revealing comment, Crusoe confesses :

In all these adventures I did not ship myself as a sailor, whereby I might indeed have worked a little harder than ordinary ... learned the duty and office of a foremost man and in time might have qualified myself for a mate or lieutenant, if not for a master ... (but) having money in my pocket, and good cloaths upon my back, I would always go on board in the habit of a gentleman; and so I neither had my business in the ship, or learned to do any (p. 15).

In *Mercator or Commerce Retrieved* essay (1713-1714), Defoe stresses the profitability of trade with France against the British merchant's mercantilist opposition and he argues for the Tory policy of the trade. Crusoe's first voyage to Guinea is profitable. It makes him "both a sailor and a merchant" (p. 16) — mainly a merchant because his monetary gain (almost 300m pounds) fills him with "aspiring thoughts" and makes him "set up for a Guinea trader" (p. 16). The second voyage to Guinea is a failure as his lot turns "from a merchant to miserable slave" (p. 17). When he settles in Brazil and sees "how well the planters lived, and how they grew rich suddenly, I resolved ... I would turn planter" (p. 29). But Crusoe realizes that the plantation business is "an employment quite remote to my genius, and contrary to life I delighted in" (p. 30). In other words this plantation business is not his "calling" since it does not yield quick and plenty of profit. As a result of his trading activity he buys manpower : "a negro slave, and a European servant also" (p. 32). In sum, he rises in economic status "infinitely beyond my poor neighbour" (p. 32). To satisfy his economic itch and

use his genius of trade, Crusoe embarks on an illegal voyage to buy slaves, which results in his shipwreck on the island. There he reflects on the virtues of satisfaction and patience which he lacks.

... for had that providence ... blessed me with confined desire, and I could have been contented to have gone on gradually ... I might have been worth an hundred mayors (p. 152).

Throughout his economic quest, Crusoe shows his desire and strong feeling for money.⁽⁸⁾ Even after twenty-three years on the island, his attitude towards money does not change. He searches the pocket of the "corps of a drowned boy, takes two pieces of eight" although he admits they are of no value to him (p. 147). It should be noted that during his adventures to follow his economic "calling", Crusoe always manipulates others. A picaro with the economic drive for quick and easy gain, Crusoe bases his social relationships on self-interest and a mere utilitarian purpose governs all of them. In his boyhood, the only friend mentioned is the son of a ship's captain. When he gets to London, he "first fell acquainted with the master of a ship who had been on the coast of Guinea", one who "had very good success there" (p. 16). Naturally, the last voyage he makes as a trader to East Indies in which he visits his "new colony" is "passage free" since he goes in his nephew's ship.

Again, when Crusoe reaches Brazil, he reveals his social attitude, a colonial feeling and inhuman treatment toward others during his four-year stay there.

I had not only learned the language, but had contracted acquaintances and friendship among my fellow planters, as well as among the merchants of St. Salvadore which was our port and that in my discourses among them, I had frequently given them an account of my voyages to the coast of Guinea, the manner of trading with the negroes there ... but negroes for the service of the Brazils, in great numbers (p. 33).

Crusoe, in fact, influences these promising friends with his wit and glib tongue, and illustrates to them how easy it is to fool the Guinea natives with trifles for valuable commodities, including human beings.

Moreover, he is shrewd enough to clothe the inhuman practice with the cloak of nationalism, saying that the negroes will be "for the service of Brazils." His success is beyond measure when the merchants and planters expressed their willingness to carry out the scheme. As expected, Crusoe has all the cards on his side : getting his "equal share of the negroes without providing any part of the stock" (p. 33). There is a glorification of the colonizing spirit of Crusoe and celebration of this trader as a colonizing hero. It is a belief of these colonists that lands are made for colonization by commerce and trade. Certainly, people drop in and out of Crusoe's life with hardly any emotional tremor.

An example of his social attitude is his relationship to the English Captain's widow. The widow has always been a trusty person keeping Crusoe's money and sending gifts of him and to people who rescue him.

It was some months, however, before I resolved upon this; and therefore, as I had rewarded the old captain fully, and to his satisfaction, who had been my former benefactor, so I began to think of my poor widow, whose husband had been my first benefactor, and she, whilst it was in her power, my faithful steward and instructor (p. 223).

Crusoe also remarks that she might be in debt; therefore, he is not going to leave his effects with her. For this reason, he decides to leave Lisbon for England and not for Brazil.

Crusoe's relationship to Xury is worthy of notice. He throws Ismael into the water, keeps Xury and promises to make him "a good man" — not to set him free. Xury proves himself to be faithful but Crusoe sells him to the Portuguese captain.

... he offered me 60 pieces of eight more for my boy Xury, which I was loath to take, not that I was not willing to let the captain have him, but I was very loath to sell the poor boy's liberty, who had assisted me so faithfully in procuring my own ... he would give the boy an obligation to set him free in ten years (p. 38).

Later Crusoe feels regret : "I had done wrong in parting with my Xury" (p. 29) and this experience teaches him not to sell his man, Friday.

With Friday, the same kind of treatment may be noticed just as Crusoe named the parrot "Polly" (p. 94), he quickly names the "savage" he has rescued "Friday." Crusoe seems to convey no real need for others. He finds other people, in particular Friday, a means to an end. Crusoe's arrival to the island may cause anguish and risks to others. (Schlenger, 1992).⁽⁹⁾ In fact Crusoe does not inquire about Friday's real name, but attaches this label to him. It is strange that the only real names of characters mentioned in the whole novel are Ismael, the Moor, Xury, the Morisco. These characters occupy only few pages in the book; yet, Crusoe is careful enough to name different tools, countries, ships, boats, and above all money coins of different nations. Speaking of Crusoe's bourgeois world on the island, Caudell (1976) says :

Even the exploited proletariat in there is a person of the ignorant, good-natured man Friday, and as the bourgeois always dream, there is no overt domination in their relationship. Friday is exploited quite in the best paternal manner. (58)

Friday is a servant, a laborer, and in order to function well and produce more, Crusoe provides him with the requirements of his existence. Throughout his adventures in Barbary, Brazil, and England, or on the island, Crusoe exhibits the middle class prejudices, the reasons which are related to economy. Yet, as a bourgeois picaro, Crusoe makes compromises to achieve his ends. One of these prejudices is language. Xury speaks broken English picked up from the English slaves at Sallee, whereas Crusoe does not mention that he learned Arabic during his two years in Morocco. Likewise, he teaches Friday English, but he is not interested in learning his language. On the other hand, he is careful enough to mention that he has learned Portuguese and a little Spanish since they are the languages of the trading nations and the language most pirates and savages.

Crusoe himself has undergone slavery at Sallee, Morocco. While he stays there, he is kept and treated tolerantly.

... our ship being disabled, and three of our men killed, and eight wounded, we were obliged to yield, and were carried all prisoners into Sallee, a port belonging to the Moors.

The usage I had there was not so dreadful as at first I apprehended, nor was carried up the country to the emperor's court, as the rest of our men were, but I was kept by the captain as his proper prizes, and made his slave, being young and nimble and fit for his business (p. 17).

The kind of tolerant treatment Crusoe gets at Sallee suggests that he must have professed his reasoning about Islam. This is not to maintain that Crusoe has to become a Moslem. It is more pretentious. Crusoe follows this means for utilitarian ends — not to be sent to the Emperor's court, to secure good treatment and to get a better change for escape. This lack of religious scruples is analogous to his passing for a “papist” in Brazil.

It should be remarked that in Crusoe's first two voyages to Guinea, the slave trading issue was not introduced. However, Crusoe's scheme for tempting the Brazilian merchants to undertake an illicit voyage for slaves shows him quite knowledgeable about the slave trade in Guinea. Defoe himself disapproved of slavery in his *Reformation of Manners* (1702), although he became an ardent advocate for it later on. Yet, by acting an initiator of an illicit voyage to buy slaves for trifles, Crusoe not only acts against the morality of the Brazilian public who resent even the “legal” slave trade but also against the law of Brazil in that his plan is to smuggle the negroes into Brazil. Crusoe, then, has no moral scruples and he shows little concern for the fate of others. He does not blame himself for the death of his shipmates but mentions simply and matter-of-factly, the material things left of them:

I walked about on the shore, ... making a thousand gestures and motions which I cannot describe, reflecting upon all my comrades that were drowned, and that there should not be one soul but myself; as for them, I never saw them afterwards, or any sign of them, except three of their *hats, one cap, and two shoes that were not fellows* (p. 39, my italics).

Only later does Crusoe wish his mates were alive — primarily so that he won't be left without comfort and company. In almost every circumstance, Crusoe thinks only of himself. Again, when he sees a ship in distress, he does not pity the plight of the sailors but quickly

rationalizes : he thinks that although he would not help them, it is possible that they might help him (p. 45).

Crusoe's lack of moral scruples, his references to the natives as savages and beasts, his bias against Sapaniards, and the slavery issue were all connected with colonization. This island episode illustrates Crusoe's progress from a bourgeois picaro to a colony builder.⁽¹⁰⁾ In fact, Crusoe creates a little England and a table (p. 55). Crusoe justifies slavery, subjection of the natives, and colonization in the name of humanitarianism and civilization. His long residence and diligence may exploit these resources in addition to manpower.

As a colonizer, Crusoe introduces limited education. In spite of Crusoe's constant references to Friday's loyalty and his praise of him for being a quick learner and a good laborer (p. 66), a better fighter (pp. 182, 197); a better Christian than himself (p. 172); he never teaches him to read and write ... a task easily surmountable by smart Crusoe. This is symbolic, at a higher level, of the relationship between the colonizing nations and the colonized.

According to Cummins (1994), Crusoe "violates the capitalist model of Adam Smith because his situation is not one of free market competition guided by the 'invisible hand'" to optional use and distribution of economic resources (138). In fact, Crusoe tolerates Friday, another person, but as a servant not a competitor. Because he is very afraid about his profits, Crusoe is made the prisoner of his ruled island. After securing a place for him to be used as a house, Crusoe begins his activities against any potential intrusion of another person. Although this intrusion is marked by the coming of Friday, Friday is now tamed, subjugated, and Christianized. There is threat, says Bellah (1985), to those who leave their home and give themselves a second birth in a new environment; these people seem to be shut up in the solitude of their own heart (37). The illusion of freedom and threat of solitude is celebrated and addressed in Crusoe who was an explorer overcoming solitude and civilizing an untamed island.

Friday himself does not evolve in character after acquiring the limited education Crusoe provides him for utilitarian ends. Near the end of the novel, Friday plays the clown to amuse the European gentlemen. His attitude throughout is that of the subjected colonized people to their English colonizers. Both Xury and Friday offer to sacrifice their lives

for their "master". Xury says: "If wild mans come, they eat me, you go way" (p. 230). "Me die, when you bid die, master" (p. 180), Friday says. This is prophetic of England's continental wars.

In his colony, Crusoe considers himself absolute monarch. For him, this is possible since his domination is a colony outside the English soil. Crusoe surveys the island with pleasure.

... with a secretkind of pleasure ... to think that this was all my own, that I was king and lord of all this country indefeasibly and had a right of possession; and if I could convey it, I might have it in inheritance, as completely as any lord of manor in England (p. 80).

All subjects pay him tribute and even Poll and the other two parrots call his name, "Robinson Crusoe", repeatedly. Whenever Crusoe speaks of himself with an authoritative title, he always has in mind the idea of property. His reference to the island as his "little Kingdom" and his "Reign" (p. 108).

There was my majesty Prince and Lord of the whole island, I had the lives of all my subjects. Then to see how like a king I din'd too all alone, attended my servant, Pool ... my dog ... and two cats (p. 117).

Again, when he rescues Friday's father and the Spanish captain, he turns them into his two rescued prisoners and his two new subjects. Crusoe feels very happy and glad that his kingdom is peopled.

My island was now peopled, and I thought myself very rich in subjects, and it was a merry reflection which I frequently made, how like a king I looked. First of all, the whole country was my own meer property, so that I had an undoubted right of dominions. But this is by the way (p. 188).

In *A True Account of the Design and Advantages of the South Seas* (1711), Defoe recommends the South Sea Company as the instrument by which to remove the French from the West Indies and settle English colony there. Being unable to enjoy freedom on the island, he is obsessed by the need to create an orderly system which will bring him profits. At the end of the narrative, Crusoe overtly refers to the island as "my new colony" (p. 236).

In order to form a complete English colony, Crusoe parodies the English convict sailors to plead to stay on the island to escape death. They do so, and he gives them direction and provides them with supplies and ammunition. After seven years, Crusoe visits his colony with supplies and a carpenter and a smith. He 'shaves the island into parts with them' reserves to himself 'the property of the whole, but gave them such parts respectively as they agreed on' (p. 237). Crusoe is careful to have the properties of the English convicts, 'set apart for them,' and he sends them women as well. Thus the island becomes an ideal English colony inhabited by people of different nationalities, religions, and colors. The right of property is respected, and inter-racial marriage exists within certain races. Even the suppression and extermination of the male natives takes place when colonists kill almost '300 canibeas' who have invaded the island.

In all affairs concerning the management and security of his state, Crusoe is a representative of his class but also a picaro who can handle things to fit his needs, who can surmount desperate and critical situations after considering the advantages and disadvantages. Even in the journey from Lisbon, he takes command and proves his prudence. The only thing he is rash about is that he cannot control his feelings at the sight of gold, or at the idea of gain. His prime God is maximum profit through maximum manipulation of people, circumstances, and nature. Crusoe uses his wit and succeeds in handling situations and persuading people to achieve his ends. At the same time, he acts without moral or religious scruples. Crusoe is a bourgeois picaro who never wastes his time and energy in unprofitable deeds. Crusoe is a hero who ventures on an economic quest using his wit of a picaro. He represents the practical knight for the middle class who overcomes difficulties to attain his goal-profit.

Notes

1. *An Essay on the South Trade* (1711), p. 39. See also Morrissey (1994), pp. 209-215.
2. *An Essay upon Loans* (1710). For more on Defoe and trade, see the Appendix Note in Mcveagh (1970) : 141-147.
3. For a useful bibliography on Defoe, see Stoler (1984).
4. For more details on Crusoe's economic motive, see Novak (1962).
5. See also Starr, who looks upon the novel as a spiritual autobiography (1965).
6. According to Cummins (1994), Benjamin Franklin and Robinson Crusoe set out a perilous journey and "plung into unknowns that they seek to shape according to their wills" attempting to devise projects to control their environments. Both of them are ideal technologists who tried to master their circumstances (pp. 137-147).
7. Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* ed., Shinagel (1974), pp. 5-6. All subsequent quotations from this edition will appear in parentheses.
8. Sill (1994) provides a semiotic approach in his treatment of desire in *Robinson Crusoe*. See pp. 215-232.
9. Schlesinger (1992) acknowledges the anguish that resulted from the coming of Europeans to the New World but emphasizes culture pluralism, religious tolerance, and artistic freedom and liberating ideas of individual dignity and equality before the law.
10. Frye (1964) points that Robinson Crusoe provides "a kind of detached vision of the British Empire, imposing its pattern wherever it goes, catching its man Friday and trying to turn him into an eighteenth century Nonconformist, never dreaming of 'going native'" (p. 123).

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