

INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE

DIPLOMA PROGRAMME

English B Extended Essay

“How is Robinson Crusoe’s character development expressed through the language of reflectiveness, isolation and fear in the novel?”

Word Count: 3996 words

Category: 3-Literature

Table of Contents

A. Introduction	3
A.1. Methodology	4
A.2. Context and Background	4
B. Initial Characterization of Crusoe	5
B. 1. Youth and Rebel	6
C. Isolation That Transforms Crusoe	7
C. 1. From Breakdown to Survival	8
C. 2. Finding God and Being Awakened	9
C. 3. The Civilizing Force of Labor	10
C. 4. Change of Values and Identity	10
C. 5. Friday and the Exam of Conversion	11
D. Final Character of Crusoe	12
D. 1. Past vs. Present of Robinson Crusoe	12
D. 2. Moral and Spiritual Maturity	13
E. Conclusion	13
F. Resources.....	15

A. Introduction

Robinson Crusoe, written by Daniel Defoe was first published on 25 April 1719. It is an adventure novel and was written in a confessional and didactic tone. The main storyline, which is about a young adventurous man who gets out of his father's word and sails his way out of Britain with his friend's ship. Many people think that the book was Daniel Defoe's own travelogue because Daniel and Robinson who is the fictional character have many common ways. Cultural assimilation, character development, longing for home and the bad effects of the loneliness are the main subjects that are processed in the novel. Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe is seen as one of the earliest and most influential books/novels in the English literature. Briefly, it goes through the tales of a castaway, trying to live on an undiscovered island. However, beneath that adventurous text, there also lies a religious scripture related text with a purpose of making the readers learn. Its plot is also a discovery of human and human's nature, spiritual awakening and personal transformation. Robinson Crusoe, the protagonist of the novel has a very complex character arc, which as a narrator, tells how he evolves from a self-centered and restless man to an awakened (spiritually) and independent man. In the book, Crusoe's psychological and moral development can be observed through Crusoe's own pair of eyes.

This essay explores the character development of Robinson Crusoe during the storyline of the book. Many traits are used to shape Crusoe's identity, isolation, labor, religion and monologues by Defoe. The research question, *"How is the Robinson Crusoe's character development expressed through the language of reflectiveness, isolation and fear in the novel?"* will be answered throughout the essay.

A. 1. Methodology

The investigation will be conducted through the novel by examining the parts where Crusoe talks about himself with methods like close reading, narrative voice, narrative perspective and linguistic features. Throughout the first few chapters, he is not reflective, and he has no fear of God in him. By reflective, it is meant that he is not able to express his emotions and his inner character but only his greed and shallowness. During the storyline, Crusoe's character gains depth, and the steps that are effective on this achievement will be assessed as pieces of clues to what Daniel Defoe meant with his language. With references which are direct evidences to the change in Crusoe's thoughts, the investigation will be supported. By examining the various phases, Crusoe undergoes including his youth where he is rebellious to his father, adaptation to life on island, awakening to follow the Providence and his changing worldview.

A. 2. Context and Background

To understand Robinson Crusoe's development fully, it is mandatory to examine the background and the writer of the novel separately. Daniel Defoe's ideas were heavily influenced as a result of the ideas of the 18th century. Daniel Defoe (1660-1731), whose father was a middle-class merchant was the third child of his family. Robinson Crusoe contains many reflections about the materialism of Defoe as Robinson also takes good care of his money, in contrast with Defoe. He was born and died in London, cause of death is a stroke¹.

Stylistically, Defoe became a significant innovator, because he stopped using the fancy and elegant language, which elite class used, and switched to using the direct, simple and fact-based language of middle class. This kind of usage of language became standard after him. In

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Daniel-Defoe>

the book, Robinson Crusoe, the language is used to express the metamorphosis that the protagonist goes through with a pale language compared to the languages used in the other literary texts written during the same years. Defoe also became the pioneer of the alienation and isolation centered modern art. His book mirrors the colonialism of England; discovery of an unknown island, establishing control over every part of the island and conquering the land by destroying whatever is in beyond, relatable with the imperial mission of England.

The consequences of the reflectiveness of Crusoe can be identified from the moment he was stranded in the island. Crusoe being isolated from the society and compelled to rely entirely on his own skills and discernment, embodies the enlightenment ideal of the self-made man. His discipline and logical thinking are seen as the reasons for his stubbornness, problem solving skills and ultimately success. However, Defoe blurs the image of Crusoe in the eyes of the readers by combining lack of reflectiveness and fear (from God). Crusoe's spiritual development shows that moral awareness and submission to divine will, are just as significant as freedom, which is a concept Crusoe desires from the beginning of the book.

B. Initial Characterization of Crusoe

In the beginning of the novel, Robinson Crusoe, the protagonist and the most important character of the novel is introduced: a restless and self-centered young man. Robinson has an ambition for adventures; his passion is to be a seaman, discovering the seas. He is not described to be a hero like the common sense. He is rather presented in the book as a disturbed and flawed person whose choices are the reflections of his selfishness and a desperation of need to enter the capitalist society. His character is described to be ready for a transition later in the storyline. This is shortly done by stating that he is young and inexperienced. Considering the fact that Crusoe is the most rebellious while he is young compared to the rest of the book it can be

interfered that this phase is important for the storyline of the novel and character development of Crusoe.

B. 1. Youth and Rebel

From the early chapters, Robinson Crusoe's main characteristic is his rebellious structure towards his parents which is the major authority at the time. He rejects his father's will, as well as a stable and serene life coming with it. Because of his young age, Crusoe wanted the adventurous side of the life and makes this wish real by participating in the sail of the fellow captain. "He said that he would not cease to pray for me, yet if I did take this foolish step, God would not bless me." (Defoe, 2002, pg. 7) he says, mentioning he would not be able to get his father's blessing if he were to go to seas. This is the first milestone of Crusoe, saying that he will be making reckless choices.

Daniel Defoe frames this act of Crusoe as an ethical consideration. Crusoe looks back to his disobedience with regret as he thinks that everything bad that has been happening to him is a consequence of his acts in his early life. "My wicked leaving my father's house, and abandoning my duty; all the good counsel of my parents, came now fresh into my mind." (Defoe, 2002, pg. 9). At the beginning of the book, Crusoe did not have the reflectiveness of his acts, as his fear and regret were related to his physical acts. His character traits such as ignoring important things and lack of prediction have become the main reasons of a repeating flaw for his character.

Crusoe only learns from his own mistakes when he has no other choice left. But even then, his learning is temporary, about the things that have been a challenge for him. His learning can only be permanent if he is the one in the danger of death, which makes a deeper change. For example, during a large storm that Crusoe swears to go back to home: "it would please God to spare my life this one voyage, if ever I got my foot upon dry land again, I would go directly

home.” (Defoe, 2002, pg. 9). However, after the weather calms down, he abandons that promise. This shows that temporary things, such as external things or simple things such as weather conditions are more important than the internal principles Crusoe should have had.

Despite all the imperfections Robinson has, Defoe makes the readers understand that Robinson can change if he really wants to. This can be interfered by his instincts, his brilliance, and his strength: “I drowned all my repentance, all my reflections upon my past conduct, and all my resolutions for my future.” (Defoe, 2002, pg. 10). His incomplete character is the reason he is able to change. The character development is more realistic and again, more relatable this way. Making the readers see Crusoe this much imperfect, creating the first impression of a protagonist this wrong but this easy to relate, Defoe begins a path of ethical and psychological journey that has been effective on both the protagonist and the readers. The imperfections that define Robinson; his youth, foresight deficiency, rebellious structure and the most important, greed at the beginning makes him a good subject of a paper related to character development.

C. Isolation That Transforms Crusoe

Being isolated completely from the society, Crusoe spends many years by himself in the island. The core of Crusoe lies in the change he has faced during those years. This change is based on the fact that every character trait from his past life, which means the life he had before the day he boarded that ship which brought him to the deserted island, were limiting him to become more adapted to the island. There is no such thing as “not changing his character” in the island, because his materialism does not have a material to be obsessed or his pride does not have anyone to scold while in the island: “carpenters’ chest which was indeed a very useful prize to me and much more valuable than a ship loading of gold.” (Defoe, 2002, pg. 42). As his values become meaningless, Crusoe decides to adopt new character traits slowly such as

discipline, reflectiveness, and consciousness. Surviving the island is not only a physical challenge but also an emotional one. Resistance against the hardship of the life, as being on his own, Crusoe is forced to live in a world full of difficulties. The effort he shows and the self-inspection he makes are also very important as the other reasons of the change Crusoe goes through.

C. 1. From Breakdown to Survival

The first emotions he felt when he first found out that he was on a stranded island were fear, desperation, and anguish. Being surrounded with absolutely no one, Crusoe becomes anxious about everything he sees on the island. Without hope, he tries to overcome his fears as he also tries to create a livable facility on his own. "I yet knew not, whether on the continent or an island, whether inhabited or not, whether in danger of wild beasts or not." (Defoe, 2002, pg. 43). This shows that Crusoe had an emotional demolition, which is caused by his addiction to have people around. As much as he has a character that is only suitable for the society, his survival instincts kick in, making him scavenge the supplies from the shipwreck.

Crusoe's survival instincts overcome everything he has on his mind, making him plan an organized life which is suitable to live in the deserted island. Things he does when he puts his mind together are incredible such as a shelter which he calls "the fortress", plantation of grains and some kinds of vegetables, another little house by the little river, domestication of goats which he calls "cattle", a large canoe for him to transport his supplies and many more things. These efforts are caused by something more than just practical needs. These became Robinson's acceptance of the island as his kingdom and all of them are the results of Robinson's creativity, rationalism, patience and discipline. This change of phase also brings a large impact on his character, because he is now valuing the labor and determination, not materialistic things as he was in the beginning.

C. 2. Finding God and Being Awakened

Another trait Crusoe's character has gone through the change of him is his awakening by means of spiritual and religious subjects. In the beginning of the novel, Crusoe regards everything related to religion. He avoids praying in little risks he takes. Since the first life-threatening situation he goes through, he prays to the God continuously. Him being alone in the island is also a major factor of him being spiritually more active, because there is absolutely no one he can speak to, during his daily life and this brings a deep thinking to Crusoe, about how everything in the universe was created. During the time he becomes ill very bad, with high fever, he starts to hallucinate. A silhouette he saw in one of those hallucinations makes him turn to God, by advising Crusoe to read the First Amendment. When he wakes up, he immediately starts reading the Bible due to the stress that he might see that man in his sleep again. The first thing he encounters in the Bible is the verse "Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver, and thou shalt glorify me" (Psalm 50:15) (Defoe, 2002, pg. 75) some genuine feeling inside him awakens.

After the awakening feelings in him, Crusoe starts see his survival as a gift from God, attributing what he achieves in his daily life to divine powers instead of himself. As the Bible says, "The God always has a plan", Crusoe starts to believe that his isolation is not a punishment but a part of God's bigger plan. "I never had once the word *Thank God*, so much as on my mind, or in my mouth; nor in the great distress, had I so much as a thought to pray to him, or so much to say, *Lord have mercy upon me*." (Defoe, 2002, pg. 105) He notes to his diary making the readers see a change in his worldview. He now has started to accept his fate with gratitude, respecting God and his plans. The life he has on the island adopts religious activities on a daily basis. Bible readings, prayers and deep thoughts become indispensable for his routines. His loneliness makes Crusoe independent and disciplined so it appears that may be solitude and is not as bad as Crusoe thought initially.

C. 3. The Civilizing Force of Labor

Crusoe's character development is also bonded to the labor he performs on the island in order to civilize. Him building furniture, doing agriculture and husbandry, are now daily jobs in order to make the place look like a home for him. Daniel Defoe sees and presents labor as a civilizing force in the book. This is because of the fact that labor is a perfect way of someone bringing order and peace to his surroundings and his inner self: "Now I changed both my sorrows and my joys; my very desires altered, my affections changed their gusts, and my delights were perfectly new, from what they were at my first coming, or indeed for the two years past." (Defoe, 2002, pg. 90). As mentioned before, discipline is imposed to Crusoe as he makes the same kind of jobs every day with a same kind of order. Along with the discipline, long-term thinking skills instead of deciding with instincts was imposed to Crusoe in his journey of loneliness.

Another aspect of his character development is him being controlled by not only his ambitions but with his values and simplicity. Through labor he performs on the island, he improves his goals in life. Things he become proud of change as the time on the island gets longer. For example, in the beginning of his time on the island, he was building things only to survive but more he stays on the island he builds things to pleasure his passions. These passions he has about the labor he performs symbolize the work ethic of Protestants. According to this work ethic, hard work and divine approval are connected, as labor is not only for survival but also is a training of spirit.

C. 4. Change of Values and Identity

Over the time, values and identity of Crusoe change significantly. Initially, he was in the grief of the loss of his fortune, however after he salvaged a large amount of money in the shipwreck, the money became useless and valueless for him due to the fact that there is

absolutely nowhere to spend the money. This can be proved by Crusoe leaving the money behind and taking gunpowder instead of it from the shipwreck. As the time passes more, he starts to see the beauty inside the solitude, as he says, “From this moment I began to conclude in my mind, that it was possible for me to be happy in this forsaken solitary condition, than it was probable I should ever have been in any particular state in the world.” (Defoe, 2002, pg. 91). As mentioned before, the longer Crusoe stays on the island, more opposite he gets to the man he was, who had done many things questionable by means of morals like slave trading or chasing fortune no matter the situation.

Language is another thing as Crusoe’s time on the island changes in him. His entries to his journal at the beginning of the book show how much external conditions effect Crusoe’s daily life. But after Crusoe gets used to the external conditions, he starts to talk less about them on his diary and uses less of that language in the entries.

Crusoe’s feeling of identity also shifts. Initially, he was talking about himself with his possessions and status in the society, for example a plantation owner or a trader. However, after him being imprisoned on the deserted island, which means there is no one to represent the society, he starts see himself and talk about himself with his lifestyle. Despite all the changes Crusoe gets through, Daniel Defoe never changes Crusoe’s arrogance, as he still mentions himself as the king of the island: “I might call myself king, or emperor over the whole country which I had possession of. There were no rivals. I had no competitor, none to dispute sovereignty or command with me.” (Defoe, 2002, pg. 103).

C. 5. Friday and the Exam of Conversion

The arrival of Friday provides an exam for Crusoe’ development. When Friday first arrives, Crusoe talks about him as “my servant” (Defoe, 2002, pg. 160), thinking him only as a work force and not like a man. However, as the time passes, Crusoe slowly teaches Friday

some English and Christianity. Friday also treats him with respect and loyalty: “I dare say, he would have sacrificed his life for saving mine, upon an occasion.” (Defoe, 2002, pg. 165), so he eventually becomes the first human member of Crusoe’s kingdom. These behavior of Crusoe shows that he partially returns to the colonial mindset if possible. Also, him trying to civilize Friday is not a long-term behavior, as their relationship evolves to companionship.

D. Final Character of Crusoe

After the twenty-eight years of isolation on the island, when Crusoe is finally rescued and returned to England, the returning of him to the society plays the final state of his character. Daniel Defoe makes the readers see how Crusoe’s character is affected deeply by this isolation, however, Defoe also makes the readers see that some ways of Crusoe’s character still continue to be the same. Robinson Crusoe’s re-integration to the modern world is seen as a metaphor to the afterlife, carrying the same function, moral test. This metaphor can be interfered by similarities like Crusoe seeing the consequences of the habits he adopted on the island in the modern world, just like someone seeing the consequences of his actions in the afterlife. “Will Crusoe return to his materialistic habits, or will he stay in the direction of the wisdom he gained through solitude, as he was on the island?” is the question that may be asked by readers and the fictional characters who saw Crusoe again in the society.

D. 1. Past vs. Present of Robinson Crusoe

After returning to the society, Robinson starts to search for his old life, the life he had before everything related to the adventures, but he finds out that everything has vanished and his parents are dead. He feels like a foreigner in his own town: “I was perfect a stranger to all the world, as if I had never been known there.” (Defoe, 2002, pg. 219). This emotional disconnection consolidates the fact that he is not the same man who went on the adventures in

the first place. He transformed from a man who regards his father, only cares about fortune and is a short-term thinker to a man who thinks long and deep, careful to the things other than fortune and spiritually connected to the God and moral values.

The transformation Crusoe had gone through can be observed in many fields like fortune management, which he gained from his plantation in Brazil, and the lack of passion for increasing his money. Without greed and vanity, he accepts his fortune and sees the handling of his wealth not as a passion but a responsibility: “But after making several reflections upon the circumstances of my life, how little way this would go towards settling me in the world, I resolved to go to Lisbon.” (Defoe, 2002, pg. 219)

D. 2. Moral and Spiritual Maturity

Crusoe’s continuing spiritual awakening is still continuing no matter the situation or place Crusoe is in. He is still a humbling and moral man after he entered the society. As he adopts the moral lessons he learnt the hard way on the island, he remembers to be thankful towards God. He becomes a clear opposite to the man who he was once; his life is now filled with responsibility and discipline.

E. Conclusion

The path of Robinson Crusoe is the perfect story to understand a character development. The novel’s main story line explaining the depths of a transformation of a character that evolves from a man who lacks in reflectiveness, to a spiritually and morally awakened and patient man. The isolation which started as a prison but continued as a teacher and an exam at the same time taught Crusoe many things. While on the island, he is forced to confront his weaknesses and make him go under a slow but precise transformation. Although he is changed in a large number of perspectives, some traits of his character stay the same because of the way of his up-rising,

the culture and social norms around him. Comparing the two 'Robinson Crusoe' at the end and beginning of the book makes readers realize how humble and introverted he got during the storyline. The situations he encounters during his stay at the island made deep changes in his character, which can be seen by his attitude difference and the fear from God he achieved.

In conclusion the novel, Robinson Crusoe, not only explains a man who gets the control of the nature but also the man who gets the control of himself. The time of Crusoe on the island makes him confront the basic properties of human being: identity, connectivity, faith and purpose. His evolution reflects the universal process of going from ignorance to wisdom, selfishness to sacrificial personality. In the novel, Robinson Crusoe, the language of reflectiveness, isolation and fear expresses the character development by offering a comparison between the two very different protagonists in the end and beginning of the book.

F. Resources

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