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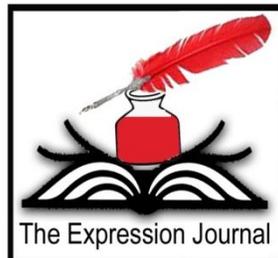
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AN ANALYSIS OF EMPATHY RELATIONSHIPS IN *ROBINSON CRUSOE*

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Abstract

Robinson Crusoe happens to be one of the earliest novels written in English. The novel noted as a realistic model of fiction has been subjected to multiple analysis that mirror the evolution of novel studies, with each step invoking some form of socio-political ethos ranging across the liberal humanistic approaches, historical approach, travel literature and Marxist paradigms. This essay attempts to compliment a reading of the novel by Ian Wyatt who argues that Crusoe emerges as an archetypal capitalist motivated by economic individualism. The essay will rely on outlining Crusoe as invested with a disproportionate degree of self-empathy as compared to other characters. This high degree of self-empathy can be traced by an application of empathy rules outlined by a Japanese linguist, 'SusumoKuno' in an essay titled "Functional Syntax: Anaphora, Discourse, and Empathy". The essay combines these rules with arguments drawn from an essay by 'Arthur Palacas' titled "Parentheticals and Personal Voice". This essay examines selected portions from Robinson Crusoe and to provide further proof of Watt's assertion that Robinson Crusoe is not an ideologically neutral text, but is marked by a self-empathic individualism.

Key-Words

Novel, Capitalism, Empathy, Realism, Adventure, Style.

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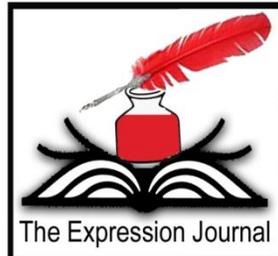
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The novel Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe has enjoyed unparalleled popularity as an inspiring story of human survival and enterprise. The story of a shipwrecked man surviving against adversity has resonated with generations of readers. The novel has lent itself to a host of multiple interpretations ranging from “an exotic adventure story; a study of solitary consciousness; a parable of sin, atonement, and redemption; a myth of economic individualism; a displaced or encoded autobiography; an allegory of political defeat; a prophecy of imperial expansion.” (Keymer 2007 vii). Yet, as Keymer points out in painstaking detail, none of these explanations have exhausted the interpretative scope of the novel, as the novel continues to be analyzed and interpreted in myriad ways. This essay takes as its base, a reading of the novel by Ian Wyatt. In his book, ‘The Rise of the Novel’ Wyatt concludes a novel’s drawing point is its commendation of individualism that gels well with a capitalist trajectory. He defines individualism not as an individual trait but rather a shared social belief in the autonomous man and a corresponding way of life. He argues:

It posits a whole society mainly governed by the idea of every individual's intrinsic independence both from other individuals and from that multifarious allegiance to past modes of thought and action denoted by the word 'tradition' – a force that is always social, not individual. The existence of such a society, in turn, obviously depends on a special type of economic and political organisation and on an appropriate ideology; more specifically, on an economic and political organisation

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which allows its members a very wide range of choices in their actions, and on an ideology primarily based, not on the tradition of the past, but on the autonomy of the individual, irrespective of his particular social status or personal capacity. It is generally agreed that modern society is uniquely individualist in these respects, and that of the many historical causes for its emergence two are of supreme importance—the rise of modern industrial capitalism and the spread of Protestantism, especially in its Calvinist or Puritan forms.” (Watt 1957 61).

Watt argues that Crusoe emerges as a self-centered individual who in the true Cartesian sense approaches the world around him, from the vantage point of being the center of determination and meanings. Such self-centeredness Watt argues follows from an economic utilitarianism that colours every interaction of Crusoe. Friendship, for example, is a function of economic interest as Crusoe makes sparse allowances for any activity characterized under the rubric of leisure. Watt finds Crusoe the archetypal capitalist who displays a marked tendency towards economic individualism. Abandoned on the island, Crusoe provides long and winding descriptions of his endeavours that comfortably exceed the requirement of survival. Watt examines the glorification of manual labour as a harmonious intersection between Calvinism and capitalist inclinations. Calvinism refused to concede to the notion that physical labour was a post-lapsarian punishment for Adam’s disobedience, rather reversed the notion and linked the “untiring stewardship of the material gifts of God as a paramount religious and ethical obligation” (Watt 1957 73). This fit well within the capitalist idea of productivity as a marker of diligence and so Crusoe perfectly embodies this harmonization. The island, a virgin territory, unoccupied and devoid of occupation is converted by Crusoe into a personal fiefdom with the aid of tools looted from shipwreck and the combined labour of Man Friday. The island offers Crusoe the ideal conditions for a lassies faire attitude as he creates property by fencing, marking and cultivation. As Watt argues, “The conclusion is obvious. Follow the call of the wide open places, discover an island that is desert only because it is barren of owners or competitors, and there build your personal Empire with the help of a Man Friday who needs no wages and makes it much easier to support the white man's burden.” (Watt 1957 87). As such, the novel will show Crusoe engaged inwards, always as a self-centered individual engaged in the task of fulfilling an imperialist ambition.

This essay will attempt to provide further proof of this tendency not by examination of symbolic meanings, but by an examination of sentence structures. Such a study comes under the domain of Pragmatics. Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that “deals with language in use and the contexts in which it is used, including such matters as deixis, the taking of turns in conversation, text organization, presupposition, and implicature.” Such an analysis provides valuable insight into the construction of characters as a structural

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analysis not only validates the symbolic meanings, but also highlights the intertwining of form and content that distinguishes literariness from mere communication. More specifically, the essay will rely on outlining Crusoe as invested with a disproportionate degree of self-empathy as compared to other characters. This high degree of self-empathy can be traced by an application of empathy rules outlined by a Japanese linguist, 'SusumoKuno' in an essay titled "Functional Syntax: Anaphora, Discourse, and Empathy". The essay combines these rules with arguments drawn from an essay by 'Arthur Palacas' titled "Parentheticals and Personal Voice". This essay examines selected portions from Robinson Crusoe and to provide further proof of Watt's assertion that Robinson Crusoe is not an ideologically neutral text, but is marked by capitalist ideology.

Jean Graham quotes SusumoKuno in his book: Functional Syntax: Anaphora, Discourse and Empathy, points out that attitudinal shifts are enshrined within the syntax of a given linguistic utterance. She notes that he points out that the attitudinal shifts can be studied in terms of the degree of empathy i.e. "the speaker's identification, which may vary in degree, with a person/thing that participates in the event or state that he [/she] describes in a sentence," or as "a camera angle on x rather than y". Further Kuno posits that the sentence is egocentric in its basic form – that is in the case of the above sentence, the narrator will identify more with himself rather than the parents of Susomo. However in case the speaker desires to condition and limit the degree of self-empathy (s)he will take recourse to such mechanisms that limit or disguise self-empathy e.g. the technique of passivization: "Conversations were reported" rather than "I reported the conversations."

The first chapter of the novel entitled "I go to Sea" starts thus: I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, and so my companions always called me". Let us take a look at the sentence construction. The first sentence has as its subject the first person pronoun and the voice is active. The empathic focus clearly lies on the subject 'I' – a cataphora for Robinson Crusoe, and thereby the clause is ego-centric which is consistent with the notion of an autobiographical terrain of the novel. However the sentence proceeds further in parenthetical structures: in the city of.....always called me. The third clause that begins with my father is interesting to note because it indicates ostensibly an empathic shift that collaborates with the introduction of a second human agency besides himself in the novel. But a closer look at the sentence dismantles the notion, since the father not only remains unnamed and unknown that is in complete contrast to Crusoe, but also he is structured in a relational possessive structure: my father. Going by Kuno's rule of descriptor empathy hierarchy that states: a descriptor who is constructed in a dependent relationship with another descriptor in the sentence, receives less empathy than the independent descriptor. A similar relationship is at work in the second paragraph that details the fraternal relationships of Crusoe. It starts with: I had two elder brothers.....me." It is easy to observe that the focus of empathy here is again Crusoe since as the subject of the sentence

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he appropriates the most syntactic prominence as the agent of the description. The sentence structure closely mirrors that of the earlier paragraph with the introduction of the brothers within parenthetical structures. The description of the first brother is as follows: one of which was lieutenant-colonel to an English regiment of foot in Flanders, formerly.....Spaniards.

The sentence is interesting for the way it involves no emotional indicator, unlike the first paragraph that employs the positive adjective 'good' three times and a pejorative adjective 'corrupt' once. This indicates that there is increased self-reflectiveness in the personal descriptions, while the same is conspicuously absent in the second paragraph that is factual in its tone. This reading is consistent with the observance of empathy focus in the paragraph. While the main clause: I had two elder brothers has the speaker empathizing the most with himself, it is no different in the parentheticals either. The description of the first brother must be located in a predicative structure as Crusoe places himself in the subjective position. Going by the surface structure empathy rule that postulates it is easier for a speaker to identify with the referent of a subject than with that of any other noun phrase in the sentence, the degree of syntactic empathy is greater in the subject Crusoe than in the predicative noun phrases i.e. his brothers. Since Crusoe establishes himself as the primary receptor of empathy from the speaker, who is again Crusoe himself, he can't allow for any shifts of empathy, as that would violate the rule of ban on conflicting empathy foci that states a single sentence doesn't permit a conflict in empathy relationships. The second brother receives even lesser empathy as he is not only structured as dependent descriptor – my second brother, but also he is located in a predicative relation structured closely with the subject of the main clause i.e. Crusoe: what became of him, *I never knew*. The relationships of empathy even when weakened all serve to strengthen the original or the majoritarian receptor – Crusoe.

Chapter 5: I go on board in an evil hour, starts again with an active voice: but that I was born...The first sentence again places Crusoe in the subject position and thus all empathy is due to him. Moreover the empathic level is reinforced as the predicative structures are all structured in relation to the original subject: my own destroyer, I could restrain, my first rambling designs, lost upon me. This implies in the very first sentence there are four references to the self, thereby it can be observed that the level of authorial empathy is solely with the subject Crusoe than with any other phenomenon. Similarly the second sentence contains seven instances of the usage of first person pronouns: I told them, I would go, all my heart, my plantation in my absence, I should direct. The only agency attributable to the others is conditioned by the verb 'direct' attributable to Crusoe, which entails in itself that their agency is that of a subordinate one – the passive obedience as compared to the active direction. It must be noted that the sentence is a conditional and

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the semantic (the condition determines the permissibility of the action noted in the subordinate clause), and syntactically (the subordinate clause depends upon the condition laying main clause to complete its meaning). The third sentence of the paragraph continues this power structure with the demonstrative 'this' preceding the agency of his compatriots who must engage and enter into agreements then. The rest of the sentence in parenthesis contains no less than six references to self, and each reference being located in an agentive position: 1) Formulating a will 2) Disposing a property 3) establishing the unchallenged ownership of the disposed property 4) appointing a heir 5) establishing the heir as a reciprocal gesture for saving his life earlier, and thereby demarcating the high value resident in an propertied individual 6) restricting the agency of the heir by clearly marking out instructions regarding the produce – one serving to strengthen the substitute by allowing him to keep one half of produce to himself, and one serving to strengthen the production of his original land – shipping half of produce to England thereby ensuring the transference of wealth. The third paragraph does attempt to reduce this parity by asserting that "I was hurried on", but still ends up appropriating all the agency, as the hurrying up is not attributed to anyone in particular, and is immediately conditioned by the act of obedience of dictates of "my fancy rather than my reason". The hurrying, presumably by the partners led to fruition only after self-sanction that relies on satisfaction of the premise of agreement by his partners on the terms laid by him. The event only serves to frame another act of self-assertion when Crusoe sets out "in order to act the rebel to their authority". It could be noted that Crusoe is simply not content with defining an act – rebel against authority, but must necessarily frame it within an unambiguous assertion of individuality by utilizing the verb 'act', and thus appropriating the transformation of subjectivity completely as by taking of the identity – rebel.

Chapter seven starts with a description of Crusoe's thoughts on residence: "My thoughts were now wholly employed about securing myself against either savages, if any should appear, or wild beasts, if any were in the island....." (Dofoe). The beginning of the chapter shows no difference from the previous two samples. The empathy lies with Crusoe since the subject: thoughts, are directly linked to him through a possessive relationship. Moreover, this empathic relationship is strengthened as the verb (securing) and indirect object of the primary clause (myself) are directly and solely linked to Crusoe. The direct object in the main clause has reference to savages, and in the parenthesis to wild beasts. It must be noted that the indirect object is always a reference to the human agency in a sentence and the direct object always refers to a non-human object. The savages and wild animals, used as plural to indicate a generality, are completely bracketed off from the civilized individual marked by his specificity. The second paragraph continues in this vein as the individual agency is highlight through a reiteration of the verbs like finding or discerning the unsuitability of the place for residential purposes, and causes attributable to

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it. The paragraph comprising of one winding sentences contains four references to the self, each occurring in an agentive role as explained above.

Jeane Graham quotes Arthur Palacas argument in his essay "Parentheticals and Personal Voice" that paragrammatic structures (which include but are not limited to parentheticals indicate the writer's more "private" thoughts, "second-order thoughts about, or evaluations of, other presented meanings" (509). Take a sentence: The film stands out for its brilliant acting, I think, though for me the plot is predictable, just a little too predictable

Jean notes that such structures are separated from the basic sentence by commas (in the first and third instances); by intonation if read aloud (for example, a lowered intonation for "I think" and a raised in "for me"); by a "distinctively loose structural connection in the sentence, verging on the absence of any structural connection" and by a similarly loose connection semantically: the first two comments express conscious subjectivity, while the third hedges, limiting the meaning of the basic sentence. She notes his conclusion that each of the three paragrammaticals represents "a recognizably self-editing function, wherein the author has self-consciously paused to evaluate what he has just expressed and offers a personal comment on it - an edit", which may sometimes be "perceived as an afterthought". Alternatively, the author has used this syntactic strategy to deliberately project the appearance of self-editing, of reflecting on the basic sentence (515). In either case, Palacas asserts, "[b]y its nature, the reflective mentality is the more self-conscious and is the key to voice" (Graham)

Drawing on this assertion, it is easy to observe that the parentheticals constitute an additional voice of reflectiveness in the text under consideration. However rather than creating a discontinuity, these reflections are entirely self-reflexive in tone and only serve to emphasize the narratorial empathy with himself. The function served by this reflective mode is the creation of an illusion of spontaneity and thereby blur the gap between the author and the speaker. The blurring of the gap is further reduced.

Of course, this is not to argue that such a limited reading is symptomatic of the whole novel. For such a claim to be made, the whole novel and the various textual interactions involved will need to be studied. However this sample piecemeal reading serves to conjure a hypothesis that could be validated or refuted by a more comprehensive analysis. Prima-facie it appears that the narrator is a typical capitalist subject who embodies the tendency to be severed from social contact and thereby places minimal value in the social contract, preferring instead to be rooted in the belief of self-totality. The closure here is arbitrary and doesn't claim any interpretative finality.

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