



The Role of God in *Robinson Crusoe* and *Day*

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ABSTRACT

Faith in God has always been an extensively explored issue in English literary works, and this is particularly evident in Robinson Crusoe and Day. Many scholars hold the view that Robinson Crusoe is a deeply orthodox, unambiguous account of the hero's spiritual journey toward faith and trust in God. However, few scholars focus on the analysis of religious exclusiveness in Robinson Crusoe, which is a rejection of other nations or cultures. Although the rejection was mentioned by some scholars such as McNelly (2003) from the aspect of colonialism, it was seldom analyzed from a religious point of view. In the eyes of Robinson Crusoe, a Christian, God is the supreme representative of justice and civilization, so he persuades Friday to give up his original belief and adopt correct notions of Christian doctrine. In his opinion, people who believe in Christ are civilized and educated, while others are ignorant and backward, thus cannibals who do not submit should be killed. A similar misfortune befell the "inferior barbaric" Jews, whose sorrows are shown in Elie Wiesel's Day, a book that describes the life of Jewish people who survived the Holocaust. As John T. Pawlikowski stated that traditional preaching and teaching in the churches constituted an indispensable seedbed for the success of the Nazi effort (Pawlikowski, 1988), the role religious elements played in the massacre should be figured out. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the role of God in Robinson Crusoe and Day from three aspects, faith in God, the exclusiveness of belief, and doubt of God.

KEYWORDS: *Robinson Crusoe; Day; faith in God; exclusiveness; holocaust; question of God*

INTRODUCTION

Most scholars have the common assumption that Robinson Crusoe is a deeply orthodox, unambiguous, even "allegorical" account of the hero's spiritual journey towards faith and trust in God. For example, George A. Starr has translated Crusoe's difficulty as simply part of the traditional conception of the initiate spiritual guide (Starr, 1965). J. Paul Hunter has claimed that according to 17th-century, accounts of missionaries, Indian converts frequently questioned the Christian teachings on the devil: Defoe has been historically accurate (Hunter, 1963). Timothy C. Blackburn interpreted the episode as a dramatization of the failure of reason to discover the mysteries of the revelation (Blackburn, 1985). However, few scholars focus on the analysis of religious exclusiveness in *Robinson Crusoe*. In the eyes of Robinson Crusoe, a Christian, God is the supreme representative of justice and civilization, so he persuades Friday to give up his original belief and adopt correct notions of Christian doctrine. In his opinion, the people who believe in Christ are civilized and educated, while others are ignorant and backward. Therefore, cannibals who do not submit should be killed. In other words, it is a rejection of other cultures, portraying other nations as inferior barbaric "pagans", and further strengthening the Eurocentric values based on Christianity. Although this idea was mentioned by some scholars such as McNelly (2003),

it was analyzed from the aspect of colonialism. Scholars seldom dissect it from a religious point of view. Actually, this principle is further exemplified in Elie Wiesel's *Day*, a book that describes the holocaust of "inferior barbaric" Jews. In *Day*, Eliezer shows his sorrowful and meaningless life after the Holocaust, the mass murder of Jews. As John T. Pawlikowski stated that traditional preaching and teaching in the churches constituted an indispensable seedbed for the success of the Nazi effort (Pawlikowski, 1988), the question of God is one strand in Wiesel's response to the Holocaust. So, this paper intends to explore the role of God in the two books, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Day*.

ROBINSON CRUSOE -- HYMN OF GOD

Robinson Crusoe is a hymn of God who converts to Christianity after his experience on the island. "The protagonist's experience seems to be a metaphor for human degradation in the Bible: being tempted to commit original sin, confessing, and being saved by God" (Zhang, 2009). Paul Hunter explains the influence of the Puritan tradition embodied in Crusoe on the text from the perspective of religious heritage. He believes that the novel is no different from the traditional Puritan works in terms of moral commandments and interpretation of the divine oracle. It is not only a spiritual autobiography, but also a book of spiritual confession (Hunter, 1994). Hunter stated that all spiritual autobiographies have a model:



Rebellion - punishment - repentance - salvation. This model originates from the Old Testament.

The first two pages of the novel contain a long panegyric of the middle-class station in life. Robinson Crusoe's father draws his son's attention to the fact that "the calamities of life were shared among the upper and lower part of mankind; but that the middle station had the fewest disasters, and was not exposed to so many vicissitudes as the higher or lower part of mankind" (Hunter, 1963). If Crusoe abides by the principle and does not eat the forbidden fruit, he can enjoy a happy life in the garden of Eden. However, like Adam, Robinson ate the forbidden fruit and was exiled to the "Island of despair". When he was terminally ill, he dreamed that God said to him: "If all this can't make you repent, you can only go to hell at once" (Defoe, 2008, p.78). Bearing the original sin, Robinson began to reflect on his relationship with God: "I don't remember that I once respected God and didn't reflect on my behavior... I didn't fear God in danger and wasn't grateful to God when I was rescued" (Defoe, 2008, p.78). Realizing his sin, Crusoe began to repent from the bottom of his heart. He used the technology brought from the civilized world to transform the desert island and survive tenaciously. He marks diligently on the island the passing of days so as to mark the linear, progressive advance, consciously trying to measure himself against the temporal dimension (Defoe, 2008, p.88). Crusoe is grateful that God left him on an island where at least he "found no ravenous beast, no furious wolves or tigers to threaten [his] life ... no savages to murder and devour [him]" (Defoe, 2008, p.149). Finally, under the guidance of God, Crusoe realized redemption and returned to the civilized world. Therefore, Crusoe is an advocate of Christianity, and the story of Crusoe is regarded as a hymn of God.

In addition, Christianity plays a crucial role not only in the guidance of Crusoe's growth, but also in maintaining his sense of a stable identity in Crusoe's ambivalent attitude towards natives, whose difference poses a temporary threat to Crusoe's sense of self (Fleck, 1998).

EXCLUSIVENESS—“FAITH” IN GOD

When Friday tells Crusoe of his god, a benevolent deity named Benamuckee who lives on top of a mountain. Crusoe tells Friday that Benamuckee is a "Cheat" and that if his priests talked to anyone on top of the mountain, "it must be with an evil Spirit" (Defoe, 2008, p.217). Crusoe does not allow Friday to believe other "gods". Australian critic Helen Tiffin believes that Crusoe is "a dangerous authoritarian and an incurable barbaric colonialist." "He plundered land, slaughtered pagans, and used force to make those who changed their beliefs his tools" (Moore, 2014). He represents the "enlightened" European whilst Friday is the "savage" who can only be redeemed from his barbarous way of life through assimilation into Crusoe's Christian belief and culture. "Friday's imperfect conversion to Christianity allows Crusoe to reassert his sense of a superior self, possessed of Christian knowledge and enlightenment while subjugating

Friday as the other who can approach but never attain the European standard of Christianity" (Jehlen, 1993).

The cannibalism of Native Americans also violated Christianity in Robinson's mind, so cannibals deserve to be slaughtered because they are followers of pagan demons. The image of God actually is the sanctification of Crusoe's own value system, giving him spiritual guidance and eliminating the sense of guilt in his heart. This was particularly evident when he hesitated to decide whether to shoot savages or not: "why do I need to kill and attack these people?... I decided not to interfere with them unless I was inspired by God" (Defoe, 2008, 196). Said believes that Europeans are traditionally accustomed to the idea of binary opposition, which distinguishes civilized Europe from the barbaric other. In the eyes of Europeans, regions outside Europe are full of barbarians. These people worship paganism, which is a threat to European civilization, so they need European rule (Quinn, 2017). This rationalizes their massacre of "pagans".

Nevertheless, Crusoe wants more than faith in God. He also wants faith in himself. "The cannibals are a particular target for his hostility because they challenge Crusoe in that part of himself where he is most deeply threatened" (Pearlman, 1976). He transforms himself into the deity of the island. Another remarkable evidence of it is the reaction of the beached English captain when he sees Crusoe: "The poor man, with tears running down his face, and trembling, looking like one astonished, returned, 'Am I talking to God, or man!'" (Defoe, 2008, p.246) God became man, but not in the theological New Testament sense of the Incarnation of the word. On the contrary, God becomes a man of power.

The problem captured by Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* that nonetheless manages to keep equilibrium through ages eventually breaks out in the second world war, particularly, in the holocaust, in the relationship between Nazi and Jewish people. As Tal describes this political God concept in Nazi's consciousness: "In the new conception, God becomes a man in a political sense as a member of the Aryan race whose highest representative on earth is the Führer" (Tal, 1973). The new conception was used by the Nazis to run the anti-Semitism movement. Jewish people were regarded as part of so-called "pagans", as Elie Wiesel shows in *Day*.

DAY—DOUBT OF GOD

Day is a continuation of *Dawn* and it is the third and final book in a trilogy-- *Night, Dawn, Day* -- that describes Wiesel's experiences and thoughts during and after the Holocaust. Night represents Death. Dawn represents that fine line in between, and Day represents life. *Day* is a day after the deepest and darkest tragedy, the Holocaust. But it is not a day with warm light. It is a day that is so bright that it hurts people's eyes. The protagonist, Eliezer, sees the world clearly and he is no longer shielded by the darkness.

As a Jewish, Eliezer experienced the Holocaust. But why, why should he experience the sorrow? As John T. Pawlikowski

stated, traditional preaching and teaching in the churches constituted an indispensable seedbed for the success of the Nazi effort (Pawlikowski, 1988). Wiesel has explained in his interview, "In Night it is the 'I' who speaks. In the other two, it is the 'I' who listens and questions" (Franciosi, 1987). Wiesel raises in his stories the question of divine justice or the morality of God. As Friday raises the question "why God no kill the Devil, so make no more do wicked?" (Defoe, 2008,p.218),Wiesel also raises the question the heart of medieval Jewish mysticism, whether God truly defeated Satan in the primeval struggle -- a question inescapable for one contemplating Job in the light of Auschwitz.

"I'm crying because I just saw 'God.' Strange dream. I had gone to heaven. God, sitting on his throne.....Now I can ask Him the question that haunts all the wise men of Israel: What is the meaning of suffering? But, awed, I couldn't utter a sound. In the meantime, other questions kept moving through my head: When will the hour of deliverance come? When will Good conquer Evil, thus allowing chaos to be forever dispelled?" (Wiesel, 1962, p.164)

In *Day*, the protagonist, Eliezer, is ashamed of having survived the dead. He could not find the meaning of his life and always questions the morality and authority of God. Wiesel said in the interview:

My universe is a universe of survivors. Writing is a duty for me as a survivor. I entered literature through silence; I seek the role of witness, and I am duty-bound to justify each moment of my life as a survivor. Not to transmit my experience is to betray that experience. Words can never express the inexpressible; language is finally inadequate, but we do know of the beauty of literature. We must give truth a name, force man to look. The fear that man will forget, that I will forget, that is my obsession (Walker, 2019).

For Wiesel, life is meaningless. He can only record the sorrows and suffering to speak for the victims of the Holocaust. The Jewish survivors "have been amputated; they haven't lost their legs or eye but their will and their taste for life..... And then the world will be frightened and won't dare look the spiritual cripples in the eye" (Wiesel, 1962,p.68). The experience of the Holocaust has profoundly altered the very basis of morality and ethics(Pawlikowski, 1988, p.1). God is no longer the representative of justice. God was dead as an effective force in governing the universe (Pawlikowski, 1988, p.3). The doubt of God is infiltrated in *Day*.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Christian faith in God in *Robinson Crusoe* is not only guidance of Crusoe's growth, but also a principle to maintain his sense of a stable identity in Crusoe's ambivalent attitude towards natives.He represents God's benevolence in terms of enlightening Friday and the cannibals. In the eyes of Robinson Crusoe, a Christian, God is the supreme representative of justice and civilization, and only when a

nation is abandoned, it will "stay in a state of ignorance and barbarism" (Said 10).However, there is only one God admitted by Crusoe. God in other religions, such as Benamuckee in Friday's belief, is a "Cheat", and if his priests talked to anyone on top of the mountain, "it must be with an evil Spirit" (Defoe, 2008, p.217).

Nevertheless,Crusoe wants more than faith in God.The image of God actually is the sanctification of Crusoe's own value system, giving him spiritual guidance and eliminating the sense of guilt in his heart.This was particularly evident when he hesitated to decide whether to shoot savages or not: "why do I need to kill and attack these people?... I decided not to interfere with them unless I was inspired by God" (Defoe, 2008, 196). He transforms him into the deity of the island. The exclusiveness of Christianity gradually evolves into dissatisfaction with heretics and then changes into racial discrimination. It is a rejection of other cultures, which is furtherly taken advantage of by the Nazis, and resulted in the Great Auschwitz Tragedies.

As John T. Pawlikowski stated, traditional preaching and teaching in the churches constituted an indispensable seedbed for the success of the Nazi effort (Pawlikowski, 1988).As Friday raises the question "why God no kill the Devil, so make no more do wicked?" (Defoe, 2008, p.218), Wiesel also raises the question the heart of medieval Jewish mysticism, whether God truly defeated Satan in the primeval struggle -- a question inescapable for one contemplating Job in the light of Auschwitz.For Wiesel, God is no longer a belief. Only his pen, which is used by him to speak for the dead, is his belief. "The act of writing," he says, "is for me often nothing more than the secret or conscious desire to carve words on a tombstone: to the memory of a town forever vanished, to the memory of a childhood in exile, to the memory of all those I loved and who, before I could tell them I loved, went away" (Walker, 2009).

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