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Beyond Survival: Anthropocentrism and Environmental Justice in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*

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Abstract

This study analyzes *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) through an ecocritical lens, focusing on its depiction of Crusoe's anthropocentric mindset that thrives due to his disregard for environmental justice. Drawing on Lawrence Buell's "environmental imagination" and John Locke's theory of property, the study examines how Crusoe's survival tactics exploit the environment, prioritizing his own needs while neglecting the ecological principles of environmental sustainability and biodiversity. By reinterpreting the novel in light of these contemporary ecological principles, this study offers a fresh perspective on Crusoe's actions, encouraging readers to critically reassess the long-term consequences of his behavior on the natural world. It also prompts reflection on the ethical implications of human intervention in ecosystems. In doing so, this study contributes to ecocriticism by showing how *Robinson Crusoe* serves as a cautionary tale about the risks of unchecked anthropocentrism and the neglect of serious ecological concerns in today's environmental landscape.

Keywords: Environmental justice, anthropocentrism, ecocriticism, sustainability, biodiversity.

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة دور رواية روبنسن كروسو (1719) في إدكاء الوعي البيئي، وذلك من خلال تحليل تجاهله لمفهوم العدالة البيئية والذي بدوره عزز أعماله القائمة على فكرة مركزية الانسان. من خلال مناقشة نظرية الخيال البيئي التي طرحها لورنس بيول و نظرية التملك التي طرحها جون لوك فان الدراسة تحتاج بأن الإستراتيجيات التي إتبعها كروسو للبقاء على قيد الحياة هي سلوكيات تمثل المركزية البشرية التي لا تمت للإستدامة البيئية ولا للتنوع الحيوي بصلة. وبإعادة إستقراء بعض أحداث الرواية في ضوء هذه المبادئ البيئية المعاصرة، تقدم هذه الدراسة منظوراً جديداً لأفعال كروسو لعرض علاقة أكثر إستدامة وإنصافاً بين الإنسان والطبيعة. يشجع هذا الإستقراء على التأمل في الآثار المدمرة للتدخل البشري في النظم البيئية. وبذلك تسهم هذه الدراسة في تقديم الرواية كعمل تحذيري حول مخاطر المركزية البشرية خاصة حينما تترافق مع إهمال المفاهيم البيئية الحديثة

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The environmental crises we face today, including pollution, deforestation, and climate change, are direct consequences of human activities that often view the natural world as a resource to be controlled and exploited. As these issues threaten ecosystems, species, and human well-being, it becomes clear that our relationship with nature needs urgent reevaluation (Sala et al., 2000). Ecocriticism, a framework that analyzes the relationship between literature and the environment, has emerged as a valuable tool for exploring how human narratives shape and reflect our understanding of environmental issues. Rooted in ecological insights, ecocriticism highlights the interconnectedness of ecosystems and the complex relationships between humans and the natural world (Rueckert, 1978).

Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) is an intriguing figure to explore in an ecocentric context due to his deep engagement with nature and the environment, particularly in his novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). As a key figure in 18th century English literature, Defoe contributed significantly to the development of the novel form during a period of dramatic social, political, and economic upheaval in England (Johnson, 2008). His era was characterized by major shifts that can be seen in the rise of capitalism, the expansion of the British Empire, and the early stirrings of the industrial revolution, all of which reshaped the relationship between humans and the natural world (Macfarlane, 2019). Defoe's novel reflects these shifts offering a rich site for analysing the dynamic between humanity and nature (Johnson, 2008).

This dynamic is clearly illustrated in Crusoe's struggle for survival on a desert island, which acts as a microcosm for exploring colonial expansion and environmental exploitation. As Defoe's protagonist transforms the island from a wild, untamed space into a productive site for economic gain and territorial expansion, the novel reflects on humanity's ability to reshape and dominate nature (Ferguson, 2004). And so, the novel serves as a commentary on the relationship between humans and the natural world, colonialism, and the consequences of human actions on the environment. The protagonist's evolution from a stranded castaway to a self-sufficient island ruler exemplifies the 18th century colonial human-centered worldview, where nature is primarily seen as a resource to be controlled for human use (White, 1967). For Crusoe, the island becomes valuable only when he successfully cultivates it according to European systems of labor, governance, and property (White, 1967). His actions, claiming the land and modifying the environment to meet his needs, echo the justifications for colonial expansion outlined in John Locke's theory of property.

Locke argues that land becomes an individual's rightful possession when it is worked and cultivated (1980). He contends that European colonizers have a moral obligation to civilize lands they view as uncultivated, even when native populations are already present. This perspective is deeply anthropocentric, as colonizers justified their presence by labeling indigenous peoples as too few, uncivilized, or incapable of properly using the land (Locke, 1980; Edwards, 1970). Similarly, Crusoe, despite being aware of the island's indigenous inhabitants, claims it as his own. He believes that through his efforts, he is integrating the wild island into European civilization, reflecting an anthropocentric view that aligns with Locke's belief in property rights. (Moore, 1994).

1.2 Robinson Crusoe as a timeless literary piece

In light of today's global environmental crises, like soil erosion, habitat loss, and declining biodiversity, *Robinson Crusoe* emerges as a timeless story about the risks of unchecked human intervention in the natural world (Leopold, 1949). While the novel reflects the attitudes of its time, it continues to resonate in current discussions about environmental sustainability, biodiversity, and the ethical dimensions of human-nature relationships. Modern ecocritics, such as Lawrence Buell (1995), challenge the novel's human-centered viewpoint and criticize its portrayal of nature as something for humans to control and exploit (Tsing, 2015). Reexamining the text through the lens of contemporary environmental issues highlights the urgent need for a more sustainable, just, and ecologically responsible approach to our interactions with the planet (Plumwood, 1993).

This study examines how Crusoe's interactions with the island and its resources reflect the 18th century anthropocentric colonial attitudes and the lack of modern concerns about environmental justice, especially in terms of sustainability and biodiversity. Drawing on Locke's theory of property and Buell's concept of environmental imagination, the analysis shows how Crusoe's human-centered perspective is enabled by the lack of environmental justice ethics. These ethics are highly supported by ecocritics such as Buell. By exploring alternative scenarios in which Crusoe could treat the environment more justly, the study positions the novel as a cautionary tale, encouraging contemporary readers to adopt a more ecocentric and responsible approach to their relationship with nature.

2. Methodology and Key Concepts

2.1 Theoretical framework

The study is based on a contrasting analysis of Buell's theory of environmental imagination and Locke's theory of property. In *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), Buell contends that literature is vital in shaping our perceptions and interactions with the natural world. He argues that literature influences our ecological awareness by engaging with the environment in meaningful ways (Buell, 1995). He critiques dominant anthropocentric viewpoints, advocating for a more ecologically conscious approach to literature, which stands in contrast to Locke's theory of property.

The concept of environmental justice is incorporated to explain Crusoe's continuous anthropocentric attitudes, particularly in relation to marginalized communities and nonhuman entities. Environmental justice, in this context, is seen as a moral and ethical obligation to promote sustainability and biodiversity assuring a just life for all species. Such a perspective aligns with Buell's belief in literature as a tool for fostering ecological awareness and emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life (Loreau et al., 2001).

Buell's theory, while not directly focused on environmental justice in the policy-driven sense, advocates for a literary examination of environmental issues and environmental sustainability. This provides valuable tools for understanding the cultural dimensions of environmental justice, which is not only about addressing the tangible impacts of environmental harm but also about examining how narratives, values, and cultural representations influence societal responses to environmental crises.

2.2 Key concepts

Anthropocentrism refers to “attitudes, values, or practices that prioritize human interests at the expense of other species or the environment” (Hayward, 1997, p.50). From this perspective, nature is primarily seen as a resource for human benefit, and environmental issues are evaluated in terms of their impact on human well-being. The term comes from the Greek words “*anthropos*” (meaning humans) and “*kéntron*” (meaning center), reflecting the belief that humans are the central or most important entity in the universe (Zimmerman, 2010). This perspective is closely linked to Locke’s theory that property is a right earned through labour (Locke, 1680).

Environmental justice challenges this concept by broadening the focus on human well-being to include marginalized or oppressed human communities as well as nonhuman entities. While still prioritizing human welfare, it critiques traditional anthropocentrism, which often neglects or exploits vulnerable groups and species. It advocates for sustainability, biodiversity, and equal treatment for all, not just the privileged (Schlosberg, 2007). This concept is closely aligned with ecocriticism, particularly Buell’s theory of environmental imagination, as both emphasize the role of literature in shifting our perspective to recognize nature as an interconnected community (Buell, 1995).

The connection between anthropocentric attitudes and the lack of environmental justice ethics explains why Crusoe fails to recognize the harm his actions cause to the environment. Such a human-centered perspective has historically led to practices that exploit both nonhuman ecosystems and marginalized communities. This link clarifies my argument that Crusoe’s overuse of natural resources for short-term human gain stems from a disregard for environmental justice concerns. Environmental justice is the key to minimize or prevent anthropocentric acts since it calls for a reevaluation of this extractive mindset, advocating for environmental sustainability and the protection of the environment as integral principles of justice.

2.3 Analytical framework

This study will apply thematic content analysis to *Robinson Crusoe*, focusing specifically on Crusoe’s human-centered actions and their broader implications. The analysis will be conducted in several key stages. First, it will explore the influence of anthropocentrism and early colonial ideas found in Locke’s theory, emphasizing how Crusoe’s human-centered approach fosters a disregard for environmental sustainability. Second, the relationship between Crusoe and Friday will be examined, with particular attention to how their interactions, shaped by Crusoe’s colonial mindset, hinder the creation of a healthy, biodiverse environment on the island. This section will also consider how the island’s ecosystem might have been better understood if Friday had been able to share his ecological knowledge with Crusoe. Third, the study will analyze specific scenes from the text that highlight the consequences of Crusoe’s anthropocentric actions, illustrating the link between his attitudes and the lack of environmental justice. Finally, the research will reimagine parts of the narrative, proposing alternative scenarios in which biodiversity and sustainability could have been fostered.

This study contributes to the field of ecocriticism by exploring the intersection of two important theories: Buell’s concept of environmental imagination, which resonates with the

principles of environmental justice, and Locke's anthropocentric theory of property. By connecting these ideas, the study creates an ecocritical framework that examines the tension between environmental justice principles and property rights. This tension challenges prevailing narratives of ownership and exploitation, advocating for a more inclusive and ecocentric worldview. Through this lens, the novel not only reflects the cultural norms of its era but also critiques them, underlining the ongoing significance of these issues today. In doing so, the study demonstrates how literature can raise ecological awareness and promote environmental justice, calling for a more just and sustainable relationship between humans and the natural world (Garrard, 2011; Glotfelty, 1996).

3. Main Aim and Research Questions

This environmentally-focused study aims to explore how Crouse's human-centered behaviors are tied to his colonial mindset, which disregards environmental justice principles and enables these attitudes to continue. The study argues that raising awareness about environmental sustainability and biodiversity is crucial for achieving environmental justice. The following questions are addressed: How does *Robinson Crusoe* illustrate the ecological consequences of anthropocentric attitudes through its portrayal of human-nature interactions? What role does the absence of indigenous knowledge play in Crusoe's survival and his relationship with the environment? Does *Robinson Crusoe* offer insights into environmental justice principles in terms of natural resource use and the sustainability of human intervention in ecosystems? What are the long-term consequences of unchecked anthropocentric behavior?

Scholarly attention to *Robinson Crusoe* has largely concentrated on its colonial, economic, and imperial themes. The novel has often been analyzed through postcolonial theory, examining issues of colonialism, race, and the European notions of superiority. Economic interpretations have focused on Crusoe's evolution into a self-sufficient, capitalist figure, highlighting themes of labor, capitalism, and materialism. It is important to state that the novel has not been extensively examined from an ecocritical perspective. This study explores *Robinson Crusoe*'s engagement with nature, environmental relationships, and sustainability, linking Crusoe's actions to broader issues of environmental injustice. By incorporating an ecocritical lens, this analysis broadens the traditional colonial and economic readings of the novel, offering new perspectives on how *Robinson Crusoe* can be seen as an early exploration of ecological interconnections. In doing so, it contributes to the academic conversation surrounding Defoe's work and provides meaningful reflections on humanity's ongoing relationship with the natural world.

4. Literary Review

This thematic review offers a summary of significant scholarly works on *Robinson Crusoe*, focusing on the novel's examination of themes like colonialism, capitalism, ecological imperialism, isolation, and individualism. It explores these topics through different historical and academic lenses, including environmental criticism and psychoanalysis. Common to these discussions is Crusoe's survival and his interaction with nature. The review provides readers with a comprehensive view of how the novel connects individualism, economic self-sufficiency, and colonial expansion to the protagonist's need for survival and the exploitation of both land and labor.

4.1 Ecological imperialism and the colonial ideology

In his (2023) article, “John Locke, Ecological Imperialism, and the Narration of the Land in *Robinson Crusoe*—A Tale of the Anthropocene”, Timothy Bowers situates Defoe’s narrative within the broader context of ecological imperialism, exploring how the protagonist’s relationship with nature reflects and reinforces the ideological foundations of colonial exploitation and land ownership. His analysis positions the novel as a precursor to the anthropocene. The article argues that *Robinson Crusoe* serves as a framework for understanding the relationship between land, labor, and power in the context of early modern capitalism. The article analyzes Crusoe’s survival narrative through the lens of Locke’s property theory, illustrating how his efforts to cultivate the land and raise animals reflect Locke’s idea that ownership is rightful through hard work. It also delves into how Crusoe’s control over the island represents ecological imperialism, with the land being shaped according to European ideals of improvement. Crusoe’s dominion over the island is framed as both a natural right and a moral obligation. The character of Friday is contrasted with Crusoe’s rational, industrious labor, emphasizing a Eurocentric perspective that justifies the domination of both land and indigenous peoples.

In contrast, R. Ghesquière’s ecocritical analysis in “Rereading *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe) and *Friday* (Tournier) – An Ecocritical Approach” (2017) critiques the previous vision, especially through comparing it to Michel Tournier’s *Friday*. While Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* reflects the Enlightenment-era view of nature as a resource to be exploited for human gain, Tournier’s *Friday* challenges this utilitarian and imperialistic mindset. Tournier reconfigures the protagonist’s connection with the environment, positioning it as one of respect and harmony rather than domination. This shift directly critiques Crusoe’s colonial attitudes and the destructive tendencies of colonialism. The comparative analysis underscores how the two novels represent contrasting ecological attitudes: Crusoe’s relationship with nature is one of isolation, control, and utility, whereas Friday’s relationship is more integrated and respectful. Through this contrast, Tournier’s novel becomes a broader commentary on ecology, inviting reflection on alternative, more harmonious ways of interacting with the natural world.

Naomi Pepperell’s (2023) article, “To Dream of a Wildness Distant from Ourselves”: Capitalism, Colonialism, and the Robinsonade, critically examines the Robinsonade genre, particularly its relationship to capitalism and colonialism. In her analysis of *Robinson Crusoe* and its literary successors, Pepperell explores how the Robinsonade genre reflects and reinforces colonial and capitalist ideologies, particularly in its treatment of nature, labor, and social order. She examines the tension between wilderness and civilization, arguing that the wilderness in these narratives functions both as a space for personal transformation and as a resource for colonial exploitation. While survival in the wilderness is framed as a form of self-actualization, it is always intertwined with broader imperial and capitalist goals. Pepperell critiques the portrayal of colonial dynamics, especially through the relationship between Crusoe and Friday, which exemplifies the colonial logic of domination. The article also discusses how the genre mirrors the rise of capitalism, with the protagonist evolving from isolated survival to mastery over nature, reflecting capitalist values of self-sufficiency and accumulation.

4.2 Neoclassical economics and capitalism

These critiques of colonialism and capitalism are also echoed in feminist and economic readings of the text. In her (2010) article, “Robinson Crusoe: The Quintessential Economic Man?” Ulla Grapard offers a feminist economic critique of *Robinson Crusoe*, challenging the traditional

view of the protagonist as the model of individualism and rational economic behavior. Grapard argues that Crusoe, often seen as the archetype of the economic man in classical economic theory, is instead a gendered figure whose actions reflect colonial and patriarchal values. She critiques the myth of Crusoe's self-sufficiency, showing that his economic success on the island is built on the exploitation of non-European labor, particularly the enslaved Friday. By examining Crusoe's labor division and his reliance on enslaved labor, Grapard highlights how his wealth is tied to the appropriation of resources and the subjugation of indigenous peoples, mirroring broader colonial and capitalist exploitation. Ultimately, Grapard reframes Crusoe's supposed autonomy as an illusion that overlooks the social interdependence of labor, particularly the reproductive labor performed by women, positioning Crusoe as a metaphor for colonial capitalism.

Moreover, Mark Watson's article "Competing Models of Socially Constructed Economic Man: Differentiating Defoe's Crusoe from the Robinson of Neoclassical Economics" (2011) challenges the economic interpretation of Crusoe as a self-sufficient, rational actor. Watson examines the tension between the portrayal of Crusoe and the concept of the economic man in modern neoclassical economics. He argues that Crusoe's character does not fit the idealized, self-interested, utility-maximizing agent central to the neoclassical economic model. While Crusoe engages in economic activities such as resource management and survival, Watson suggests his actions are motivated by a broader range of existential, moral, and spiritual concerns, such as his relationship with God and his ethical struggles with slavery, that go beyond simple profit maximization. Watson critiques the neoclassical perspective for reducing Crusoe's complex behavior to mere economic rationality, overlooking the social, historical, and cultural contexts that shaped his economic actions. He emphasizes that Crusoe's activities on the island are part of a larger narrative of survival challenging the notion that economic behavior is a universal, timeless construct. Ultimately, Watson advocates for a more nuanced understanding of economic behavior, one that takes into account the social, historical, and moral dimensions of human life.

4.3 Abandonment and isolation

In "Daniel Defoe and Abandoned Life" (2017), David Hollingshead examines the theme of abandonment in Defoe's works, especially *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*. He argues that abandonment is central to Defoe's exploration of social, cultural, and philosophical concerns in early 18th century England. Rather than just a narrative device, abandonment reflects the tension between individualism and the need for community. Through characters who face physical, social, or emotional abandonment, Defoe explores broader issues of survival, identity, and morality during a time of colonialism, economic instability, and rising self-reliance. Hollingshead focuses on Crusoe's isolation on the desert island, viewing it as both literal and metaphorical abandonment. Crusoe's solitude forces him to redefine his identity outside social norms, but this process is fraught with anxiety, highlighting his desire for control. This commentary on the era's growing individualism and desire for control suggests that Crusoe's eventual reintegration into society emphasizes the impossibility of true isolation in a world shaped by capitalist, social, and religious forces.

4.4 Psychological dimensions

Peter Kelleher's psychoanalytic and animal studies approach, "A Table in the Wilderness: Desire, Subjectivity, and Animal Husbandry in *Robinson Crusoe*" (2019), further discusses the

narrative of Crusoe's survival. Moving away from the typical focus on colonialism, Kelleher emphasizes the role of animal husbandry in shaping Crusoe's psychological development. He argues that Crusoe's relationships with domesticated animals, such as goats, dogs, and his parrot, serve as metaphors for the formation of his subjectivity and individualism. Kelleher suggests that Crusoe's attempts to tame and control these animals mirror his broader struggle to assert control over his identity. The domestication process is key not only to his physical survival but also to his psychological self-formation. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, particularly Freud and Lacan, Kelleher explores how the animals, especially the parrot, represent otherness, challenging Crusoe's sense of mastery and prompting him to confront his limitations. These interactions facilitate Crusoe's self-discovery, where his efforts to control the animals also become a means of negotiating his sense of self.

4.5 Gaps in the literature: Reassessing Robinson Crusoe's thematic dimensions

While the existing literature on *Robinson Crusoe* offers significant insights into its colonial, capitalist, ecological, and psychological themes, several gaps remain that warrant further exploration. The current body of work tends to focus on Crusoe's individualism and survival as either a critique or a celebration of colonial and capitalist ideologies. Still, there has been less attention paid to the roles of gender, race, and class in shaping the narrative and its underlying power structures. Ulla Grapard's feminist critique highlights the patriarchal basis of Crusoe's sense of autonomy, but a deeper analysis of gendered power dynamics, both in Crusoe's self-perception and in his relationships with other characters, would provide a richer understanding of how race, labor, and colonialism are interconnected.

Another underexplored area is the ecocritical dimension of the text, particularly in relation to decolonial environmentalism. Bowers' article examines land ownership and exploitation, but further research is needed to explore how these issues intersect with indigenous ecological knowledge and to identify ways to challenge and change these harmful attitudes. While Ghesquière's comparison with Tournier's *Friday* offers a critical counterpoint to Crusoe's colonial attitudes, there is a need for more nuanced studies that integrate indigenous environmental perspectives and challenge the Eurocentric framing of the natural world. This could involve investigating how the landscape itself functions as an agent in the novel, not merely as a resource to be shaped, but as a site of resistance or transformation.

Furthermore, the psychological aspect of isolation in *Robinson Crusoe*, specifically the psychological toll of colonialism, remains underdeveloped. Scholars like Hollingshead and Kelleher have explored themes of abandonment and psychological development, yet the trauma of colonial violence, especially as it pertains to Crusoe's view of Friday, could be further analyzed. How does Crusoe's isolation lead to a fragmentation of his identity, and how might this trauma inform his later relationships with other human figures in the novel? This would involve extending psychoanalytic theories to examine not only Crusoe's self-formation in isolation but also the psychological dynamics of colonial encounters. These dynamics include the effects of Crusoe's imposition of authority on Friday, who represents both a mirror and a foil to his character.

Additionally, the role of capitalist accumulation and the evolution of Crusoe's economic practices can be explored in relation to contemporary debates in global capitalism. While several authors, including Watson and Pepperell, discuss the relationship between Crusoe's survival and

his economic behavior, the wider implications of Crusoe's economic actions—such as his establishment of private property and the division of labor—could be contextualized within modern postcolonial and neoliberal critiques of labor and wealth. Further exploration of how these economic principles resonate with today's global inequalities would help underscore the novel's continued relevance to discussions of contemporary capitalism.

Despite the richness of current scholarly work on *Robinson Crusoe*, these gaps highlight the need for interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches to the text. By integrating gender, race, and class into the analysis and further unpacking the psychological and economic effects of isolation, scholars can continue to deepen our understanding of how Defoe's work reflects, critiques, and challenges colonial ideologies and capitalist values. This would not only enrich our interpretation of the novel but also demonstrate its enduring significance in ongoing discussions of colonialism, capitalism, and survival. My study offers a fresh perspective that addresses an ecological gap by proposing environmental justice principles as a means to reduce Crusoe's anthropocentric actions. It enhances critiques of anthropocentrism by analyzing Crusoe's relationship with nature and highlighting the absence of fundamental ecological principles on the island.

5. Discussion

5.1 *The legacy of anthropocentrism and the examination of early colonial thought*

Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is not just an adventurous account of Crusoe's 28 years on a deserted island; it also delves into how he came to portray himself as a superior man, convinced of his high standing in the social hierarchy. He declares, "I thought myself very rich in subjects; ... how like a king I looked. First of all, the whole country was my own mere property. Secondly, my people were perfectly subjected. I was absolute lord and lawgiver, they all owed their lives to me" (Defoe, 1925, p.256). His human-centered perspective highlights his belief that everything around him belongs to him. Most notably, he views the island as his personal domain to control and exploit. His actions to establish dominion over the environment include cutting down trees, hunting animals, and cultivating the land to meet his needs. In Crusoe's vision, the island's land, creatures, and resources exist solely to serve him, reflecting a worldview in which he sees himself as the rightful master of all he surveys.

As a result, Crusoe views the island as a lesser entity that needs to be harnessed. He approaches the land focusing on transforming it to suit his needs, as seen in his systematic cultivation of crops, domestication of animals, and construction of shelter. At no point does he appear to acknowledge the island's ecosystem as a whole, interconnected entity, nor does he express any concern for its preservation beyond his own immediate needs. The land, according to Crusoe, is his own property simply because he modified it into becoming his farm or "plantation" (Defoe, 1925, p. 298).

His role as the self-sufficient master of the island mirrors Locke's perspective on land and property. Locke argues that "the labor of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his" (Locke, 1680, p. 27). According to Locke, by cultivating or extracting resources from the land, a person transforms it into private property; a notion of property rights reflected in Crusoe's actions on the island. Crusoe famously declares, "I had a right of possession; and if I could convey it, I might have it in inheritance as completely as any lord of a manor in England" (Defoe, 1925, p.122). This statement underscores Crusoe's human-centered view of nature,

applying Locke's principles to legitimize his ownership of the island. The natural world, in this view, is seen as raw material that can be molded and profited from through human effort.

Before altering the island, Crusoe views it as a barren, "uninhabited wilderness" that needs his intervention to be improved (Defoe, 1925, p.142). When he surveys the land, he fails to see its natural beauty, referring to it instead as the "Unfortunate Island" or the "Island of Despair," focusing solely on how it can serve his needs (Defoe, 1925, p. 89). This attitude reflects his lack of appreciation for the island's biodiversity disconnecting him from his environment. He does not acknowledge the resources nature provides him. Living on the island, he learns practical skills like farming, baking, building fences, and harvesting, all of which improve his living conditions. He constructs furniture, tracks the seasons for farming, and makes durable tools from local materials. He also tames goats for food and clothing, claiming ownership over them. His actions, shaped by a colonial anthropocentric worldview, reflect his belief in his entitlement to control and own the land, without any sense of responsibility towards the natural environment. Had he recognized his obligations to the island, such as reducing wood usage to minimize air pollution, he might have developed a more sustainable and respectful connection with nature (Leopold, 1949).

Instead, Crusoe further asserts his control over nature by using modern tools to exploit both animals and the environment. When he returns to the shipwreck, he equips himself with ammunition, two pistols, powder-horns, and a small bag of shots. He stockpiles ammunition in order to eliminate what he perceives as a natural threat reflecting his dependence "on his own culture's tools... Only through such tools does Robinson get control over nature" (Vandermeersche & Soetaert, 2018, p.8). His over-reliance on technological advancements to dominate nature is enabled by a complete disregard for environmental justice (see Appendix), underscoring his detachment from the natural world in pursuit of extreme dominance. This contradicts the ecological concept of interconnectedness, which emphasizes that humans must see themselves as part of, rather than apart from, nature (Buell, 1995). Crusoe's reliance on modern tools highlights a profound separation from nature, a tendency to dominate instead of coexist.

5.2 Reclaiming the other: Indigenous ecologies

In *Robinson Crusoe*, marginalized groups, particularly indigenous communities, are notably excluded from the mainstream environmental discussions, a dynamic that is powerfully embodied in the character of Friday. He represents the "other"—an oppressed and silenced figure whose voice and agency are systematically undermined by Crusoe's Eurocentric, colonial worldview which creates an imbalance in the Crusoe/Friday relationship (McCarthy, 2003, p.56). This imbalance is seen in how the natural world and indigenous people alike are perceived primarily in terms of their utility to European colonizers (Locke, 1980). Crusoe's anthropocentric ideology, which positions him as the dominant force both over nature and over Friday, mirrors colonial ideologies that sought to reshape native people according to European norms.

The imbalance in the Crusoe/Friday relationship is evident in how Crusoe initially views Friday, much like the island, as something to be subdued and controlled. Crusoe's desire to "get a savage into [his] possession" reflects the imperialist mindset of the time, where indigenous people were seen not as fully autonomous individuals but as subjects to be civilized and reshaped (Defoe, 1925, p.213). As Friday adopts Christianity, learns English, and embraces European customs, Crusoe's authority over him becomes complete echoing Locke's belief that indigenous peoples

existed within a hierarchical, ethnocentric system that portrayed them as inferior and in need of European intervention. This framework was used to justify European colonization, under the premise that colonization would improve indigenous societies. Even in Friday's transformation, his worth is determined by his usefulness to Crusoe, reinforcing the notion that indigenous people are only valued in relation to their colonial masters (Locke, 1980).

In this way, Friday embodies the silencing role of marginalized people, particularly in environmental discourse. His silence and lack of agency throughout the narrative reflect the broader erasure of indigenous knowledge, reinforcing Crusoe's anthropocentric actions. The term "Master," which Friday uses to address Crusoe, marks the culmination of Crusoe's project of domination, underscoring Friday's complete lack of voice or agency (Defoe, 1925, p.220). This reflects Friday's total submission to Crusoe's oppressive ideology and his internalization of colonial power dynamics.

This narrative lacks a focus on environmental justice and does not advocate for more inclusive, equitable relationships that recognize the interconnectedness of all beings. (Buell, 1995; Nixon, 2011). If Friday were given a voice, the narrative could shift from a purely anthropocentric lens to one that acknowledges the deep, reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment. Friday, as a native with massive knowledge of the island's ecology, could offer a counter-narrative that challenges Crusoe's reduction of nature to a resource for human exploitation. If we imagine a scenario where Friday educates Crusoe about the concept of mother trees for example, it would be an enriching and transformative moment in their relationship.

Mother trees, as an ecological concept, refer to older, dominant trees that play a pivotal role in sustaining and nurturing the forest environment. These trees often have deep root systems that spread out wide, allowing them to access and store nutrients. Through their roots, they help to circulate nutrients to other trees and plants in the surrounding area, supporting biodiversity (Barton & Hewitt, 2014). Friday could guide Crusoe to understand the importance of these trees and how they must be respected and preserved, not exploited. Through Friday, the story could reveal a more rounded understanding of the natural world, one that emphasizes balance, interdependence, and respect for all life forms (Buell, 1995).

This reimagining of Friday's role aligns with environmental criticism, particularly as explored by Buell who advocates for a more inclusive depiction of nature in literature—one that goes beyond physical landscapes to include the cultural and historical forces that shape human-environment interactions. Buell argues that nature and its inhabitants should not be seen as static, isolated entities but as dynamic and interconnected. He stresses the need for "better ways of imagining nature and humanity's relationships," and calls for the recognition of "multiple centers" in environmental discussions (Buell, 1995, p. 238). If Friday's voice were given more prominence in *Robinson Crusoe*, the novel could serve as a powerful example of centering indigenous perspectives and emphasizing ecological balance. This new narrative would emphasize the importance of biodiversity and mutual respect (Buell, 1995; Nixon, 2011).

5.3 The consequences of Crusoe's anthropocentrism

Crusoe's high anthropocentrism is evident in his problematic attitude toward the unnecessary killing of animals. Unlike when he kills goats for survival, he kills any animal he comes across without considering its life or need. He does not always consume the animals he kills, but instead

experiments with their meat, as seen when he states, “neither when I killed them could I tell what was fit for food, and what not” about a group of birds he hunted (Defoe, 1925, p. 66). After killing another animal, Crusoe remarks, “its flesh was carrion, and fit for nothing,” highlighting that his hunting is not driven by necessity but by a desire to sample different types of meat (Defoe, 1925, p. 67). This pattern of behavior repeats itself as he kills more animals than he requires, leaving their bodies to decay. He does so thinking that the dogs will eat the rotten meat, since, in his view, they have no problem with it.

The random killing of animals is morally unacceptable because it disregards their inherent value and flourishing, as argued by philosophers who clarify that ethical obligations to animals arise from their intrinsic role in ecological systems and their interconnectedness with all life forms (Callicott, 1989). Additionally, environmental justice frameworks condemn this random killing of animals emphasizing the moral imperative to respect biodiversity (Shiva, 2016).

Anthropocentrism neglects the interests of nonhuman entities by asserting that only humans can determine what is legitimate and important (Kopnina, 2018). Crusoe exemplifies this by displaying both affection and aggression toward nonhuman creatures. His affection for animals like his parrot and goats does not reflect a harmonious relationship between humans and nature; rather, it highlights his reliance on nature for his personal survival. He responds with hostility when he undermines the island and its creatures referring to them as “uninhabited except by wild beasts” (Defoe, 1925, p. 33). Clearly, he overlooks the fact that he encountered both the goats and his parrot on the island

A similar approach is evident in his treatment of plants. His repeated acts of deforestation, which involve clearing or thinning forests for human benefit, reflect the broader ecological issue of “wilderness destruction” (Kopnina, 2018, p.115). Deforestation, where large numbers of trees are removed, leads to the destruction of the forest’s air, plants, and animal life all together (Kopnina, 2018). Crusoe engages in this practice multiple times to create items like a chair, basket, and bed. While his actions are driven by the necessity of survival, he still exploits the trees in a wasteful manner. As he notes, “I could not tell what tree to call it that these stakes were cut from,” indicating his haphazard approach to cutting trees and branches to achieve his objectives (Defoe, 1925, p.130).

Additionally, he cuts down any tree that he perceives as a threat to his home before it has a chance to grow large believing that its presence would endanger his safety. In doing so, he fails to recognize that it is his own actions that pose a threat to the natural growth of the trees. Not only does he jeopardize their survival, but he also wastes them, feeling entitled to manipulate his environment as he pleases. This is evident when he says, “I went and cut boughs of trees, and branches of such shrubs as I could find, and threw it over” (Defoe, 1925, p.141). He fails to consider the importance of the trees’ existence or the ecological imbalance he is creating. This mindset leads him to believe that “only humans are worthy of ethical considerations,” viewing all other beings merely as tools (Callicott, 2006, p.119).

This analysis of Crusoe’s survival strategy reveals a notable conflict between his anthropocentric approach to resource use for personal survival and the broader principles of environmental justice. From an ecologically aware perspective, Crusoe could have adopted methods that respected the island’s natural balance, ensuring his survival did not harm the

environment's well-being (Buell, 1995). For example, the deforestation that Crusoe carries out is an unsustainable activity, as it results in the loss of biodiversity. Instead of clearing vast areas of forest, Crusoe could have employed selective harvesting, removing only mature trees and allowing younger ones to thrive. This more sustainable approach would enable the forest to regenerate, ensuring the island's ecosystems remain viable over time. Additionally, replanting trees after harvesting would further promote forest recovery, aligning Crusoe's survival strategy with sustainable practices (Lundgren & Clark, 2015).

The idea of seeking alternatives to timber for shelter and tools also highlights a more sustainable approach. Rather than depleting the island's tree population, Crusoe could explore other materials such as bamboo, reeds, or vines, which are often more abundant and renewable. Bamboo, for example, grows rapidly and can be harvested without damaging the ecosystem. Unlike trees, which may take years to regrow (Hughes, 2009). This makes it an ideal candidate for construction and tool-making, providing a resilient and environmentally friendly material that can be used for a variety of applications—from building shelter to crafting tools and utensils. This shift in materials would not only reduce pressure on the forest but also allow for a more diversified, less exploitative use of the natural environment (Hughes, 2009).

When it comes to animal life, Crusoe's tendency to hunt animals for food, particularly land-based animals, also exemplifies a survival strategy based on resource extraction without ethical consideration. From a contemporary environmental perspective, Crusoe could have minimized the need for animal killing by prioritizing plant-based food sources. The island likely offered a variety of edible plants, which could have been harvested sustainably without harming the island's animal populations. If hunting were necessary for survival, it could have been limited to specific times and done in a way that did not endanger local species (Keller et al., 2003). Crusoe could also explore more sustainable fishing practices, such as using traps or lines instead of overhunting.

This reimagining of Crusoe's survival strategy is not only about maintaining the island's ecological health but also about fostering a deeper sense of responsibility and respect for the environment. By integrating principles of environmental justice, Crusoe could have created a more ethical and balanced relationship with his surroundings, one in which the environment is seen as a partner in ensuring long-term survival. By doing so, Crusoe would connect his personal survival with the larger goal of ecological harmony that calls for sustainable interactions between humans and nature (Shiva, 2016).

Indeed, a shift from Crusoe's human-centered mindset to one rooted in environmental sustainability and biodiversity would require a fundamental rethinking of humanity's relationship with the environment. Such a shift would entail not merely technical adjustments, such as careful resource management, but also a philosophical transformation: a move from seeing nature as a backdrop for human action to seeing it as an active participant in the web of life. Scholars like Schlosberg (2007) and Carter (2017) agree with this arguing that true environmental sustainability is not just about ecological preservation but also about social equity, considering the needs and rights of all life forms.

Crusoe's failure to recognize his duties to the island is a reflection of his entrenched anthropocentrism. His persistent view of the island as a prison and his isolation as a form of punishment reveal a deep disconnect from the natural world. He believes that nature "divided [him]"

from mankind—a solitaire; one banished from human society” (Defoe, 1925, p.43). Rather than seeing nature as a partner or an entity to be respected, he views it as an obstacle to overcome. In this way, he embodies a destructive, extractive ethos that exemplifies the dangers of unchecked anthropocentrism, which has long been a driving force behind ecological degradation. If Crusoe had been more attuned to the ethical dimensions of his actions, he might have avoided contributing to the ecological harm he inadvertently causes.

6. Conclusion

This ecocritical analysis of *Robinson Crusoe* explores the novel's implicit critique of anthropocentrism examining how the prioritization of human interests over environmental concerns leads to ecological harm. Through the lens of Locke's theory of property and Buell's concept of environmental imagination, the analysis highlights how Crusoe's human-centered worldview is enabled by the lack of environmental justice principles. This perspective urges readers to broaden their understanding of nature to include indigenous cultures and all life forms, challenging the traditional notion of nature as a passive resource to be exploited.

This analysis provides a fresh and much-needed perspective on the novel by linking Crusoe's anthropocentric, colonial mindset with his disregard for sustainability and biodiversity. It critiques the conventional interpretation of Crusoe's actions, presenting a strong argument for how environmental justice can enhance our understanding of Defoe's text in ways that align with modern debates on environmentalism. The analysis calls for a reevaluation of human-centered values and supports a more sustainable, equitable, and environmentally conscious viewpoint. It advocates for an environmental management approach rooted in justice and inclusivity, where human well-being is in harmony with the health of the planet. By reimagining Crusoe's interactions with the island, the narrative emphasizes our moral responsibility to protect all forms of life.

This study suggests the need for additional ecological research on the novel. For example, introducing Friday as an ecologically knowledgeable guide, who could offer Crusoe an alternative, ecocentric perspective on resource management. Such adaptation could emphasize principles like permaculture and agroforestry, creating models of responsible interaction with nature. Educators and scholars could use these adaptations as tools to challenge students to critically examine Crusoe's anthropocentric worldview, questioning the colonial ideologies embedded in his actions. Also, collaborating with activists, who focus on the inhabitants of far islands, to carry out scientific researches on the unique species and ecosystems of *Robinson Crusoe's* island could yield valuable ecological insights. Such research could reveal how the island's ecosystems operate, the interactions between species, and the potential threats they face. This information would be crucial for identifying new conservation priorities and developing strategies for species recovery.

Additionally, curriculum developers could create lesson plans and discussion guides to encourage students to engage critically with the novel's environmental themes and reflect on how colonial ideologies continue to influence modern environmental issues. Furthermore, educators could design lessons or discussion prompts that encourage students to analyze Crusoe's interactions with trees, particularly his errors in cutting a lot down. By examining instances such as the felling of sacred or young trees, students could reflect on how Crusoe's actions might have differed if he had understood the value of these trees. The curriculum could also introduce concepts like sustainable planting, aiming to promote a healthier environment for all species.

Glossary

Anthropocentrism is the belief that human beings are the most important or central entities in the universe. It places human interests, values, and needs at the forefront, often at the expense of considering the intrinsic value of other living organisms or the environment. In an anthropocentric view, the natural world and non-human species are typically regarded as resources to be used for human benefit.

Biodiversity refers to the variety and variability of life forms on Earth, encompassing all living organisms—plants, animals, fungi, microorganisms—and the ecosystems they inhabit. Biodiversity is crucial for maintaining the necessary environmental justice for establishing ecosystem health, resilience, and the provision of resources that humans depend on.

Ecocentrism is an environmental philosophy that assigns intrinsic value to all living organisms and ecosystems, rather than prioritizing human needs. It emphasizes that non-human entities, such as animals, plants, and ecosystems, have inherent moral worth and deserve ethical consideration, regardless of their usefulness to humans.

Environmental degradation refers to the deterioration or destruction of the natural environment, which is caused by human activity, natural processes, or a combination of both. This degradation can manifest in various ways, such as: pollution, deforestation, climate change, and the loss of biodiversity.

Environmental justice refers to the movement and field of study that seeks to ensure that all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, income, or social status, and all natural entities have equal protection from environmental hazards and equal access to environmental benefits. Its main principles include: environmental sustainability, intergenerational equity, global solidarity, biodiversity, and prevention of environmental harm.

Environmental sustainability refers to the responsible management of natural resources and ecosystems to ensure they continue to meet the needs of current and future generations. It involves practices and strategies that maintain the health of ecosystems while supporting human development and well-being.

Indigenous knowledge refers to the deep understanding, skills, practices, and wisdom that Indigenous peoples have developed over generations through their close relationship with their environment, cultures, and communities. This knowledge is often passed down orally, through stories, rituals, and hands-on experience, and is deeply embedded in the context of specific landscapes, ecosystems, and social structures.

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Appendix

Modern Technology and Ecocriticism

Ecocritics generally argue that technology plays a key role in either the preservation or destruction of nature, depending on the level of anthropocentrism humans exhibit. Modern technologies used for activities like logging, construction, and hunting can harm the environment if not handled responsibly. To address this, environmental communication through visual rhetoric is crucial to educate people on how to use technology sustainably. Additionally, the media should collaborate with ecological thinkers to protect the environment from various forms of pollution. Ultimately, fostering ecological literacy and implementing effective environmental policies, with the media's support, are essential for raising collective awareness about the impact of modern technology and achieving environmental justice.