Level: 1st Year (All groups)

Module: Literary Studies

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Course 4: DANIEL DEFOE’S ROBINSON CRUSOE (1719)

1. About Daniel Defoe (1660-1731)

Daniel Defoe was born in 1660 in London. A son of a butcher and candle-maker .It seems that the young Daniel was disappointed that he was not born into a rich family. This may be the reason why he added the De to his surname. As a young man, Daniel toyed with the idea of becoming a minister but instead went into commerce. Defoe’s import-export business was not successful, nor was his marriage. He worked as a journalist.Late in life he turned to fiction and wrote an enormous number of works, mostly adventure stories, many of them published anonymously. Some see Defoe as the Ernest Hemingway of his day. Although his books were a popular success, he was never wealthy and in fact died at the age of 70, a poor man.

2.Synopsis of Robinson Crusoe (1719)

Inspired from the story of the Scottish Alexander Silkirk, Robinson Crusoe is a story of a young man whose parents want him to stay in his home town of York but he has other ideas. He wants to become a sailor and travel the world. He leaves home and sails to Brazil where he makes his fortune. On his way from Brazil to Africa, he is shipwrecked on an uninhabited island and discovered that he was the only survivor.

He soon started to make plans for food and shelter to protect himself. He became a skilled craftsman and was able to furnish himself with diverse comforts. After spending almost fifteen years on the island, Crusoe came across a footprint, and later saw cannibalistic savages eating prisoners. They don't live on the island; they used to come in canoes from a mainland not too far away. Crusoe was filled with outrage, and thought to save the prisoners the next time these savages appear, and indeed, some years later, they came back. With his guns, Crusoe scared them and could save a young balck man whom he named Friday. This latter was extremely grateful and became Crusoe’s devoted servant. Crusoe in turn taught him English and introduced him to Christianity. For a good period of time, the two lived happily. Some time later, another ship of savages arrived carrying three prisoners. Crusoe and Friday managed to save two of them. One of them was a Spaniard and the other was Friday’s father. Their reunion was extremely joyous. Both prisoners came from the mainland that was close by. After few months, they left to bring back the rest of the Spaniard's men. Crusoe was happy that his island was being peopled. Before the Spaniard and Friday's father could return, a boat of European men reached the shore. There were three prisoners. While most of the men were exploring the island, Crusoe knew from one that he was the captain of a ship whose crew mutinied. Crusoe promised to help them if they take him and Friday back to England for free and indeed, agreement was made. Together this little army managed to capture the rest of the crew and retake the captain's ship. Friday and Robinson were taken to England. Despite the fact that Crusoe had been away for many years, he found that his plantations had done and brought wealth to him. He finally returned to the English countryside and settled there; he also got married and had three children. When his wife died, he once again went to the sea with promises of new adventures.

Sample excerpt from the Novel

From Chapter 3: Wrecked On a Desert Island

 After we had rowed, or rather driven about a league and a half, as we reckoned it, a raging wave, mountain-like, came rolling astern of us, and plainly bade us expect the coup de grace. It took us with such a fury, that it overset the boat at once; and separating us as well from the boat as from one another, gave us no time to say, "O God!" for we were all swallowed up in a moment.

 Nothing can describe the confusion of thought which I felt when I sank into the water; for though I swam very well, yet I could not deliver myself from the waves so as to draw breath, till that wave having driven me, or rather carried me, a vast way on towards the shore, and having spent itself, went back, and left me upon the land almost dry, but half dead with the water I took in. I had so much presence of mind, as well as breath left, that seeing myself nearer the mainland than I expected, I got upon my feet, and endeavoured to make on towards the land as fast as I could before another wave should return and take me up again; but I soon found it was impossible to avoid it; for I saw the sea come after me as high as a great hill, and as furious as an enemy, which I had no means or strength to contend with: my business was to hold my breath, and raise myself upon the water if I could; and so, by swimming, to preserve my breathing, and pilot myself towards the shore, if possible, my greatest concern now being that the sea, as it would carry me a great way towards the shore when it came on, might not carry me back again with it when it gave back towards the sea.

 The wave that came upon me again buried me at once twenty or thirty feet deep in its own body, and I could feel myself carried with a mighty force and swiftness towards the shore - a very great way; but I held my breath, and assisted myself to swim still forward with all my might. I was ready to burst with holding my breath, when, as I felt myself rising up, so, to my immediate relief, I found my head and hands shoot out above the surface of the water; and though it was not two seconds of time that I could keep myself so, yet it relieved me greatly, gave me breath, and new courage. I was covered again with water a good while, but not so long but I held it out; and finding the water had spent itself, and began to return, I struck forward against the return of the waves, and felt ground again with my feet. I stood still a few moments to recover breath, and till the waters went from me, and then took to my heels and ran with what strength I had further towards the shore. But neither would this deliver me from the fury of the sea, which came pouring in after me again; and twice more I was lifted up by the waves and carried forward as before, the shore being very flat.

 The last time of these two had well-nigh been fatal to me, for the sea having hurried me along as before, landed me, or rather dashed me, against a piece of rock, and that with such force, that it left me senseless, and indeed helpless, as to my own deliverance; for the blow taking my side and breast, beat the breath as it were quite out of my body; and had it returned again immediately, I must have been strangled in the water; but I recovered a little before the return of the waves, and seeing I should be covered again with the water, I resolved to hold fast by a piece of the rock, and so to hold my breath, if possible, till the wave went back. Now, as the waves were not so high as at first, being nearer land, I held my hold till the wave abated, and then fetched another run, which brought me so near the shore that the next wave, though it went over me, yet did not so swallow me up as to carry me away; and the next run I took, I got to the mainland, where, to my great comfort, I clambered up the cliffs of the shore and sat me down upon the grass, free from danger and quite out of the reach of the water I was now landed and safe on shore, and began to look up and thank God that my life was saved, in a case wherein there was some minutes before scarce any room to hope. I believe it is impossible to express, to the life, what the ecstasies and transports of the soul are, when it is so saved, as I may say, out of the very grave: and I do not wonder now at the custom, when a malefactor, who has the halter about his neck, is tied up, and just going to be turned off, and has a reprieve brought to him - I say, I do not wonder that they bring a surgeon with it, to let him blood that very moment they tell him of it, that the surprise may not drive the animal spirits from the heart and overwhelm him.

"For sudden joys, like griefs, confound at first."

I walked about on the shore lifting up my hands, and my whole being, as I may say, wrapped up in a contemplation of my deliverance; making a thousand gestures and motions, which I cannot describe; reflecting upon all my comrades that were drowned, and that there should not be one soul saved but myself; for, as for them, I never saw them afterwards, or any sign of them, except three of their hats, one cap, and two shoes that were not fellows………

After I had solaced my mind with the comfortable part of my condition, I began to look round me, to see what kind of place I was in, and what was next to be done; and I soon found my comforts abate, and that, in a word, I had a dreadful deliverance; for I was wet, had no clothes to shift me, nor anything either to eat or drink to comfort me; neither did I see any prospect before me but that of perishing with hunger or being devoured by wild beasts; and that which was particularly afflicting to me was, that I had no weapon, either to hunt and kill any creature for my sustenance, or to defend myself against any other creature that might desire to kill me for theirs. In a word, I had nothing about me but a knife, a tobacco-pipe, and a little tobacco in a box. This was all my provisions; and this threw me into such terrible agonies of mind, that for a while I ran about like a madman. Night coming upon me, I began with a heavy heart to consider what would be my lot if there were any ravenous beasts in that country, as at night they always come abroad for their prey.

 All the remedy that offered to my thoughts at that time was to get up into a thick bushy tree like a fir, but thorny, which grew near me, and where I resolved to sit all night, and consider the next day what death I should die, for as yet I saw no prospect of life. I walked about a furlong from the shore, to see if I could find any fresh water to drink, which I did, to my great joy; and having drank, and put a little tobacco into my mouth to prevent hunger, I went to the tree, and getting up into it, endeavoured to place myself so that if I should sleep I might not fall. And having cut me a short stick, like a truncheon, for my defence, I took up my lodging; and having been excessively fatigued, I fell fast asleep, and slept as comfortably as, I believe, few could have done in my condition, and found myself more refreshed with it than, I think, I ever was on such an occasion.

 QUESTIONS OF ANALYSIS

 Identify the passage

 Identify characters

 Identify the setting

 Identify the point of view

 Extract the theme(in the passage)

 Pick out from the passage two figures of speech and explain them.

3. SAMPLE ANALYSIS

The excerpt is taken from Defoe’s novel Robinson Crusoe (1917).This is a story of a young adventurous young man whose parents want him to stay in his home town of York but he has other ideas. He wants to become a sailor and travel the world. He leaves home and sails to Brazil where he makes his fortune. On his way from Brazil to Africa, he is shipwrecked on an uninhabited island and he spends twenty-seven years alone there before he finally manages to return to England. The present passage tells about the critical moments when Crusoe was shipwrecked in the sea. It narrates with details the huge hardships he encountered when striving to survive.

The events in the present excerpt take place first in the sea when Crusoe was wrestling the huge tides and later in an uninhabited island that truly represents wildlife. Robinson Crusoe, being described as the major character, shows exceptional courage in coping with the shipwreck and even later was he reached the island. Here again, Crusoe demonstrates his bravery for the sake of survival. His sense of self reliance and perseverance are quite clear in the passage.

The events of the story are narrated from the first point of view as they are told by the central character (Crusoe).The reader therefore is invited to share Crusoe’s emotions and thoughts in such critical moments of the shipwreck and the strive for survival.

The passage clearly exemplifies the instinct of survival as well as the individualism of Crusoe in facing hardships. The conflict in this passage is Man Vs wild nature. It is Crusoe’s distinguished sense of perseverance and persistence that allowed him to overcome dangers.

The author uses some figures of speech to make his story attractive and vivid. Example of these include: simile “mountain like” as he compares the huge tides to mountains.

Personification “The wave that came upon me again buried me” as he gives the waves a human quality.

Hyperbole (exaggeration) “making a thousand gestures and motions, which I cannot describe” as he exaggerates in describing Crusoe’s gestures and motions.

 At last, one can easily notice Defoe’s talent in the art of writing. Indeed, his writing is influential and exhorts the reader to follow the flow of the events due to the suspense created within the story as a whole. Besides, Dofoe’s journalistic style is reflected in the present excerpt as he is attentive to provide the subtleties and details of the critical moments of the shipwreck. On this basis, one can come up to the conclusion that the author was to a larger extent successful in conveying his message.

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