THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE IN ROBINSON CRUSOE

THE ISLAND AND THE WORD:

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Abstract

Robinson Crusoe bears signs of an uneasy reconciliation of two contradictory notions of language. The first of these is the idea, current in Defoe's day, that language has retained something of the divinely-granted power it had for Adam in the Garden of Eden and that, between names and things, there is a relationship guaranteed by God. The second notion is to be found in John Locke's An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. There, Locke argues that the relationship between words and things is arbitrary and purely a matter of convention.

This thesis seeks to demonstrate how in Robinson Crusoe Defoe attempts to reclaim for language the sacred power it had possessed for Adam by subsuming the desacralized conception of language we find in Locke within a larger, essentially Adamic system. In the first chapter, it is argued that, to date, the criticism of Robinson Crusoe has failed to acknowledge fully the depth of anxiety the novel displays towards language. The possible sources of this tension are traced in the second chapter and, in the third, I examine how the Adamic and Lockean theories manifest themselves in the novel.

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Introduction

The question of "conscious artistry" is one which has long dominated criticism of the novels of Daniel Defoe. Although this criticism has produced a variety of insights, the question to which these insights are a response has, nonetheless, the potential to blind critics to other, no less important, matters. Arguments for the conscious artistry of a novel such as Robinson Crusoe often involve, for example, a demonstration of how certain ideas current in Defoe's time are represented in some aspect of his work. Such influences are usually presented as flowing in a straightforward manner from their source to their assimilation in the pages of the novel. And yet, in Robinson Crusoe, there is evidence that the assimilation of some ideas was not always a happy one, but arose instead from anxiety. This is particularly evident in the manner in which language is represented in the novel for it is in fact often apparent that the ideas on which Defoe is drawing are contradictory. The novel thus shows the strain of its attempt, consciously or otherwise, to reconcile these ideas.

What was Defoe's attitude towards language? As at

least one critic has noted, the novelist displays a certain "casual" (Watt 99) disposition towards all aspects of his fictional work and language is clearly implicated in this charge. It is possible, however, that the evidence of casualness some critics find in the style of Robinson Crusoe is a product of the novelist's attempt, possibly even at an unconscious level, to reconcile the conflicting linguistic ideas present in the thought of his day.

Defoe's time was one of considerable linguistic debate and speculation, the ultimate result of which was the recognition that language was man's creation, not God's. Philosophers and theologians had long thought about language in terms of the exemplary tongue of Adam described in Genesis. Divinely created, the language of Adam, it was thought, had the capacity to express the essence of things in their names. And, as was often argued, a certain residual connection between words and things remained in language even after the Flood and the confusion at Babel. Thus it was believed that, at some level, there was a divine guarantee that the words people used essentially corresponded to those things they spoke or wrote about and that, through the appropriate etymological labour, it was possible to discover something of the nature of things through words alone.

It was in response to such thought that John Locke wrote "Of Words", the revolutionary third book of An Essay

Concerning Human Understanding. Locke argued that, although God granted the first people the ability to form meaningful, articulate sounds, language itself was not created by God with Adam. Rather, it was the product of convention and, as such, the relationship between names and things is completely arbitrary. With this assertion, Locke severed whatever roots it had once been imagined that words had in those things which they represented. Suddenly, words and their meanings were not sanctioned and guaranteed at any level by God. Language was wholly human.

It is difficult to imagine that such ideas could find their way into the works of writers of the time, particularly those writers with strong religious convictions such as Defoe, without any sign of resistence or anxiety. Thus, in Robinson Crusoe we find an uneasy attempt to reconcile the Adamic concept of language with that of John Locke. While the novel concedes there is a certain validity to Locke's ideas, it nonetheless attempts to place these ideas within a larger, Adamic framework. The arbitrariness of language is thus shown as more apparent than real, and this appearance is a product not of anything inherent in words themselves, but is the result of the failure of man's fallen understanding to recognize the relationship between words and things. Because of his corrupt comprehension of God's will, man simply cannot perceive the true relation between words and things, although he has all the

tools he needs to work out this relationship.

Robinson Crusoe is a novel in which fallen man is returned to a state similar to that of Adam in the Garden of Eden. There, certain truths become apparent, one of which is that a divinely-created coherency between words and things does exist, the proof of which is to be discovered by the proper squaring of human words and the world of things with God's Word, as set down in the Bible. That this coherency could only be demonstrated in a lengthy, fictional narrative suggests something of the anxieties which may have given rise to the novel. Robinson Crusoe is in part an attempt to resacralize language. To accomplish this, however, the author must transform the narrator's world into a complex language or system of signs all of which point to and find their source in another text: the Bible. It is an interesting possibility that the narrator's occasional failure to interpret these signs is, in some way, a tacit admission by Defoe of his own inability to see the cohesiveness in language which, nonetheless, he represents in his novel. In a similar way, any signs of casualness critics may perceive in the style of Robinson Crusoe could as easily be seen as indications of Defoe's own anxiety concerning language, uncertainties and doubts which were perhaps more readily manifested in the text of a fictitious narrative persona than in Defoe's own non-fictional works.

Chapter One

Critical Survey

No one question has dogged the criticism of Robinson Crusoe more persistently than that of the author's conscious artistry. Ever since Charles Gidon published his stinging invective The Life and Strange Adventures of Mr. D----- DeF----- of London, Hosier in 1719, critics have enthusiastically aligned themselves with one side or the other of the issue . Although many may concede to Defoe a certain native genius, for some this is overshadowed by textual evidence which suggests that any indication of complete literary control in the novel is more apparent than real. Others argue vigourously that Defoe was a writer who was all but complete master of his art. Indeed, Defoe's literary reputation has risen and fallen in accordance with the critical response to the question of conscious artistry. The publication in 1957 of Ian Watt's influential The Rise of the Novel, marks one significant low point in Defoe's fluctuating status. Clearly, as befits the "rising" scheme of Watt's thesis, Richardson and Fielding fare better as writers conscious of their artistry than does Defoe in Watt's

assessment; Defoe's perceived lack of authorial care and control outweighs whatever evidence of genius the critic finds in his novels and tips the scales of judgement inexorably to the side of "accident". It was, no doubt, an unfair verdict, which more than thirty years of criticism has sought to repeal, usually by arguing, with increasing subtlety and complexity, the case for Defoe's genius and conscious artistry. The arguments usually focus on the structure and deployment of language in Defoe's novels, two of the very areas in which Watt perceived the authorial laxity on which he based much of his judgement of the author. Although more recent critics have done much to raise Defoe from the modest position he occupies in Watt's early history of the novel, what has remained and is perhaps more entrenched in the criticism today than when Watt wrote, is the question of conscious artistry, a question which, however answered, inevitably blinds one to other, perhaps more subtle, aspects of the text.

Watt's conclusion that Defoe had a "very casual attitude to his writing" (99) is predicated for the most part on "inconsistencies in matters of detail" (99) which the critic finds in the novels. Nonetheless, the charge of literary casualness spreads implicitly beyond any problems Defoe might have had in keeping track of his narrators' ink supplies, gold watches, and parrots and suggests there is a questionable quality to all aspects of his fictional work. Consequently,

Watt's Defoe is something less than a serious literary artist. Rather, he is a talented but somewhat unpolished and mercenary hack with "very little of the author's usual fastidious attitude to his work, or even of the author's sensitiveness to adverse criticism" (100). Furthermore, he is a writer whose fictional works were shaped by market rather than artistic concerns. a fact, Watt contends, which is reflected in the author's style. Watt writes that Defoe's prose:

> was easy, copious, unpremeditated -- the very qualities that were most consonant both with the narrative manner of his novels and with the maximum economic reward for his labours with the pen. (57)

Despite Watt's praise for the "readability" (104) and "the simple and positive quality" (102) of Defoe's prose, such comments are always tempered by the primary accusation of authorial carelessness, a charge which allows Watt to praise Defoe and yet relegate him to the status of a primitive novelist.

The work of more recent critics such as James T. Boulton, G.A. Starr, E. Anthony James, and Janet E. Aikens, has demonstrated that to dismiss Defoe so quickly is to do him a great disservice for, although it is indisputable that his novels are marked by glaring factual contradictions which suggest a certain neglect, the same, it seems, cannot be said about the author's attitudes to writing and to language itself.

In his introduction to an anthology of Defoe's non-fictional writings published in 1965, James T. Boulton points out that morality and language were inextricably bound together for Defoe: "He was in no doubt that a man's language and his morality were closely related" (3). Indeed, as Janet E. Aikens comments in a more recent article, for Defoe, "speech possesses the status of moral action" (538). To imagine he would write with any less conviction than this quotation suggests is to dismiss Defoe, as does Watt, without giving him the full consideration he is due.

It is no accident, then, that discussions of Defoe's prose style and rhetoric have figured prominently among the works of those critics attempting to demonstrate that there is more conscious artistry in Defoe's work than Watt allows. Since Watt threw down the gauntlet in The Rise of the Novel, the case for Defoe's genius has been put forward in arguments which increasingly suggest that his use of language is far more complex and subtle than critics had ever imagined.

Few critics, of course, would disagree with Watt's description of Defoe's prose; he notes it is rife with "repetition and parentheses" and marked by "long and involved sequences of co-ordinate clauses" (101). Nor would they challenge his assertion that Defoe's rhythms are often "stumbling" (101). They would challenge his contention, however, that those rhythms are "unpremeditated" (101) and

further, that the style as a whole demonstrates "a complete disregard for normal stylistic considerations" (101). More recent critics have also found much more to say about these stylistic features than Watt's conclusion that they merely "tend to heighten the effect" of "spontaneous authenticity" (101).

Later critics have been more attentive than Watt to the subtler effects of Defoe's language and have shown a greater willingness to attribute these to Defoe's artistic "genius". For example, in Boulton's preface, we are offered a Defoe much more consciously manipulating his language to fulfill specific didactic purposes than Watt will acknowledge. Arguing that a plain style was appropriate to Defoe's fascination with the real world of "things" as well as "a warranty of honest purpose" (5), Boulton challenges Watt, insisting "too much can be made of Defoe's stylistic deficiencies; the consequence is to underrate his literary sensibility" (12).

In the 1970's the defence of Defoe's use of language was pursued more rigorously by critics, paticularly E. Anthony James and G.A. Starr. In Daniel Defoe's Many Voices -- A Rhetorical Study of Prose Style and Literary Method, James explicitly places himself on the side of those "friendlier commentators" who argue Defoe was "a writer of great talent and versatility, wholly capable of adopting varying styles and techniques to varying needs" (1). Furthermore, James argues,

this capacity was the result of a literary method "not haphazardly, but consciously, consistently and for the most part succesfully applied" (2 emphasis added). Stylistic features which Watt would regard as evidence of carelessness and haste are, for James, rhetorical devices which Defoe consciously employs in order to make "the narrative events credible to the reader" by providing "direct and indirect insights into the moods, mentality, temperament and personality of the protagonist" (167). Thus, for example, the strangeness of the circumstances into which Crusoe is cast and the "uncertainties of his attempts to define his surroundings and adapt to them" (169) renders him a "habitual semantic quibbler" (167) whose descriptions are frequently characterized by "fuzzy pairings of synonyms, near synonyms, or otherwise related words" (168), an "eccentricity of style", which James contends, "neatly suggests the extent of his bewilderment" (168). Furthermore, the "varying epithets which Defoe has him assign to the unchanging conditions and phenomena of everyday existence" (169) dramatize Crusoe's dynamic psychological response to his dilemma. "Defoe", James concludes, "was far more often a conscious craftsman than not" (256).

A related but more influential study is G.A. Starr's article "Defoe's Prose Style: The Language of Interpretation". Starr argues that Defoe's fictional writings are far less "objective" than previous commentators have suggested and in

fact, mark a movement "toward rather than away from subjective consciousness and personal interpretation" (283). The perception of this movement, already suggested but not fully realized by James, is significant in the rise of Defoe's literary reputation. In emphasizing the subjectivity of Crusoe's perceptions and thus the subjective nature of Crusoe's rendering of his world in narrative, Starr assigns a new importance to the narrator's language for, he argues, "it is on this level that the ordering of experience most fundamentally takes place" (292). Starr writes:

> By animating, humanizing, and Anglicizing the alien things he encounters, Crusoe as narrator achieves verbally exactly what Crusoe as hero achieves physically, spiritually, and psychically. (292)

In making the distinction between Crusoe as hero and Crusoe as narrator, Starr introduces a temporal element into the discussion of the language of Robinson Crusoe which James and other critics had not recognized. For James, peculiarities in the prose of the novel represent only the protagonist's response to events at the time he experiences them. Starr, in seeing Crusoe's subjective narration of his story as an experience removed in time from the events he describes, places a new emphasis on Crusoe's, rather than Defoe's, language and, in so doing, attributes to the novel a new potential for structural irony not fully considered by earlier commentators.

With Starr's article, the telling of the tale of Robinson Crusoe assumes an importance at least equal to that of the "story" itself and the recognition of the ironic distance between the two has proven a boon for those more recent critics wishing to strengthen the case for Defoe's artistic control and, indeed, "genius".

We shall consider two articles: Mary E. Butler's "The Effect of the Narrator's Rhetorical Uncertainty on the Fiction of Robinson Crusoe", published in 1983, and Robert James Merrett's "Narrative Contraries as Signs in Defoe's Fiction", which appeared in 1989. Language, of course, figures prominently in both discussions, as does an emphasis on Crusoe as writer and the role of the reader in interpreting the irony in the rhetorical patterns Defoe has inscribed in the text. Needless to say, in both articles, Defoe is represented as an author in all but complete control of his art.

Butler's position is clear from her opening sentence. She writes, "the text of Robinson Crusoe is a representation of itself in the process of being created" (77). Like James, she argues the narrator's numerous "self-corrections" (77), apparently "fussy interruptions" (77), and "rhetorical uncertainties" (78) reflect aspects of his psychology, specifically "the uncertainty and imprecision of the narrator's own experience" and his "'self-critical' habit of mind" (86). Following Starr's example, however, she contends that the text

reflects these mental states not at the time of the experience being described but at the time of writing. In foregrounding the narrative process, Crusoe's problem becomes, more specifically than what we find described in James, one with language itself and its relation to experience. Butler writes that Defoe's prose reveals that Crusoe's "attention seems seriously divided between what he is trying to narrate and his difficulty with the process of narrative" (81) and adds:

> Thus we see that Crusoe appears to be attending more carefully to documenting the process of his writing than to leaving us with a definitive statement of facts. Defoe's interest in portraying the process of Crusoe's narrative muffles the narrative itself. (84)

This apparent difficulty, however, Butler says, adds an important immediacy and verisimilitude to the narrative, providing a sense of a text in the process of being created.

Butler groups the "rhetorical idiosyncrasies" (78) which result, into two categories:

> those which reveal his [Crusoe's] concern about the inherent clarity of his writing, and those which reveal his concern about his reader's ability to understand the writing. (78)

These in turn, suggest "two types of admission of the difficulty of writing":

> one of which places responsibility on the shortcomings of language, and one of which places responsibility on the writer for any narrative weaknesses. (80)

These uncertainties, however, Butler strictly maintains are not Defoe's. Instead, they are devices he employs ironically to "push his fiction into the realm of real creation" (78) and "to draw our attention as much to the convincing perplexity of his narrator as to the objects of his narrator's description" (79). She clearly views this as a product of Defoe's conscious artistry since, "Crusoe's characteristic attempts at exactness serve Defoe's ulterior motive for the fiction" (79 emphasis added) which is to "get our attention and perhaps our credulity" (80).

In no way does Butler ever suggest these self-corrections are signs of anything but Defoe's mastery; she does not consider the possibility that, if we were to remove the emphasis on irony implicit in her article, they could be indications of Defoe's own perplexity about his medium -- questions, conflicts, and anxieties that he shares with and projects onto the text of his fictional narrator. Instead, Butler argues that the imperfections of the text are evidence of its very perfection, and that "with a few exceptions, what appear to be stylistic interruptions are the bases of artistic triumph" (88). This conclusion, as I hope to demonstrate, is a clever way of resolving the complex linguistic tensions --

tensions which perhaps Defoe could not hope to control -- by attributing signs of conflict to an author who intentionally places them with great skill and control in his text in order to illuminate certain aspects of his narrator and the narrative process. The implication of this is that, in order to have such knowledge and the virtuosity necessary to communicate it, Defoe himself must have been an undeniable master of narrative art.

Robert James Merrett sets Butler's "rhetorical uncertainties" in the larger context of the dialectical method which, he says, "informs Defoe's relation of words to things and his depiction of identity" (Merrett 172n). For Merrett, contraries are ubiquitous in Defoe's fiction, manifesting themselves in setting, place, geography, plot, characterization but, perhaps above all, in language. For example, like James, Merrett notes the "contrary views" (174) which Crusoe takes of his island; like Starr he says these show "that Defoe is less simple-mindedly interested in depicting setting as a place than in making it a sign of his character's moral and spiritual condition" (174). Next, however, Merrett seizes on the irony only implicit in Starr's article and concludes his consideration of this rhetorical trick with the statement:

> By showing that Crusoe's sense of the island is as fanciful as it is factful, Defoe makes action and character ironic and intriguingly problematic. (174)

The problem, however, is the reader's, not Defoe's for Merrett contends that Defoe's novels are essentially self-reflexive and heuristic. The many contraries embedded in the text constitute, for Merrett, an ironic "second" sign system which contrasts and, indeed, conflicts with the narrative itself. These contraries Defoe expects his readers to learn to interpret in order to "complete", "improve" and "read beyond the written text" (177-8). Ultimately, argues Merrett, the relation between the many contraries in Defoe's novels "is more substantial than the details themselves" (185).

Merrett's argument is itself posited as a sign of Defoe's conscious -- indeed highly self-conscious -- artistry. In their dialectical structures, Defoe's novels reveal their author's "wish to go beyond verisimilitude" (180), to reflect on the narrative process, to demonstrate "that experience and writing are dialectical" (185) and to teach his readers how "to enjoy his fictional texts as flawed systems of competing signs" (185). All of this is evidence enough for Merrett to conclude that "ultimately, his conscious use of narrative for the benefit of his readers is the sign that Defoe profoundly cares about writerly and fictional authenticity" (185).

To be sure, the discussion of Defoe's rhetoric and prose has come a long way in the three decades since Ian Watt published <u>The Rise of the Novel</u>. Most important, I think, is the increasing awareness in the later criticism of the degree

to which Robinson Crusoe is concerned with language, narrative and the making of fiction. And yet, for all the insights this criticism has yielded into the effects of Defoe's prose style, none of these readings has sought to consider the question of the novel's language apart from the argument over the question of Defoe's conscious artistry. What earlier critics had called rhetorical peculiarities and tics have thus simply become rhetorical tricks employed by a writer so much the master of his art that he could represent the prose of a narrator who was not.

To move the debate out of the confines of this restricting question, it is necessary to pose a number of new questions. To what extent does this recent criticism muffle conflicts central to the text, conflicts which Defoe perhaps could not help but inscribe in Robinson Crusoe? Are Crusoe's narrative difficulties those of Defoe himself? Is Crusoe's narrative then, in fact, a record of Defoe's own questions and problems with language and fiction? Is it possible that any such conflicts, problems or anxieties could manifest themselves in a heightened way in the text of Defoe's fictional narrator? And, to what extent did the novel, as a form, allow these problems to come to light or, conversely, to what degree are they responsible for the "rise" of the novel as such.

As we have seen, the arguments for Defoe's conscious rhetorical artistry in Robinson Crusoe must ultimately be based

on the sort of highly ironic readings of the text which we find in the articles by Butler and Merrett. For such critics an ironic reading of the novel, it seems, provides a convenient means of resolving conflicts and tensions in the text which otherwise seem to be signs of literary carelessness and evidence for those who would contend that Defoe's work is the product of something less than conscious artistry. And yet, an emphasis on irony in the exclusive service of proving Defoe's conscious artistry comes at the cost of suppressing the possible implications and significance of those conflicts and tensions which are evident in the novel, tensions, I shall argue, which are, in part, generated by the divergence in linguistic and semantic thought in Defoe's day. It would seem then, the first step in shedding the restrictive halter of the question of "conscious artistry" which has served as a matrix for much of the criticism of Defoe's use of language, would be to regard Robinson Crusoe as a site of linguistic conflict and tensions which Defoe, following what one critic has called the "imaginative logic of his invented fiction" (Damrosch 9), could not help but inscribe in his text. The novel itself may, in part, be a product of the author's response to these tensions.

The presence of tensions in the novel is usually more clearly and explicitly acknowledged by those critics who do not emphasize the ironical aspects of Robinson Crusoe. In allowing

for structural irony and, indeed, in depending on its presence for their arguments, Butler and Merrett are able to reconcile conflicts in the text as "subliminal effects" (Butler 77) or secondary systems of signification -- "invisible signs" curiously like those which Crusoe purports he learns to read during his "silent life" on the island -- consciously employed by the author in order to guarantee certain responses in his audience. The provision for conscious irony by these critics thus allows Defoe a mastery of the apparent "contraries", conflicts, and idiosyncrasies in his novel which critics who do not acknowledge irony use as evidence of his lack of conscious artistry. Instead, even the least generous of Defoe's critics usually regard such conflicts and discrepancies as an indication that there were forces at work in the creation of the first novels which were beyond their author's conscious control. Watt, for example, notes a generalized "conflict between spiritual and material values" (83) in the eighteenth century, a "confusion", he writes, "more obvious because so many people thought, apparently in good faith, that it did not really exist" (83). Among those reluctant "to consider the extent to which spiritual and material values may be opposed" (83), he writes, is Defoe, whose narrative structures:

> embodied the struggle between Puritanism and the tendency to secularisation which was rooted in material progress. At the same time it is also

> apparent that the secular and economic viewpoint is the dominant partner". (83)

Those critics concentrating more specifically on Defoe's use of language and ignoring any potential ironies in it, tend to ascribe indications of Defoe's lack of authorial control to an inability by the author to hold in check not "external" -- i.e. cultural, philosophic, or social, forces around him -- but instead internal, vaguely psychological forces. Thus, writing of Defoe's prolixity, Boulton, for example, comments:

> What he cannot restrain is that fascination -- which communicates itself to his audience -- with observed facts of human behaviour and environment . . . he does not write with premeditation; relying on a native sensitivity to word and cadence, he writes at the behest of feeling and common sense. (7)

A similar characterization of Defoe's style as a product of certain internal forces which the author could not contain is to be found in a much earlier study, Gustaf Lannert's <u>An Investigation Into the Language of Robinson Crusoe as Compared with That of Other 18th Century Works</u>, published in 1910. Commenting on the "often long digressions" he finds in <u>Robinson Crusoe</u>, Lannert writes:

> Without the author himself being conscious of the fact, his lively imagination, and the fluency of his language often seem to have carried him away from his

> proper subject. (9)

Like Watt, Lannert sees Defoe's style, for the most part, as a product of purely practical, financial considerations. He contends Defoe wrote feverishly to generate the maximum amount of copy, always written in the language necessary to guarantee the largest possible audience. And yet, in its simplicity, the thought in the quotation above has a strange resemblance to a general observation of a more recent critic who also argues Defoe's novel strays into unintended, "improper" areas but this is so, he contends, not because of any personal creative zeal which Defoe could not restrain but because of certain external factors, beyond the author's conscious control which manifest themselves in the very process of creating narrative fiction. The critic is Leopold Damrosch, Jr. and, in his book God's Plot and Man's Stories, he notes that Robinson Crusoe is a:

> remarkable instance of a work that gets away from its author, and gives expression to attitudes that seem to lie far from his conscious intention. (187)

What Damrosch is willing to consider which other critics of Defoe were and are not, is that artistic "control", tied up as it is with the notion of an author's conscious intentions and how successfully he or she embodies them in a work, is not necessarily a reliable gauge of literary merit. In fact, Damrosch argues intentionality, as a measure of

artistic success or failure, is based on the notion that an author is able to embody in his or her art the coherence of a given set of doctrines. "Culturally", however, Damrosch writes, "no body of ideas or attitudes is sufficiently coherent to serve as the unified 'background'" (8), on which a scholar may base his or her conclusions regarding how succesfully those ideas are incorporated in a work. "The energy that motivates a great literary work," Damrosch writes, is in fact:

> seldom a desire to corroborate some comfortable and secure body of ideas. On the contrary, it is precisely the rifting and disturbance in belief that give rise to great literature. (8)

This disjunction, in turn, results in what Stuart Hampshire has called "imaginative inconsistencies" which often contradict the apparent conscious intentions of a particular work (Damrosch 9). Damrosch, I think, explains this well when he states, "the great writer follows out the imaginative logic of his invented fiction, which includes the suspended dilemmas that it exposes and tries to mediate" (9). In other words, in the attempt to unify that which is fractured the great literary works acknowledge and repeat the very tensions which they attempt to reconcile. Thus, regardless of what the author may deem as his or her "proper" subject, it is the nature of great literature -- indeed, Damrosch suggests it is the nature of the imagination itself -- to give voice in the process to the

"improper", that "other" which has created the very disunity the work is attempting to repair. As a result, inconsistencies in the proper subject matter of the text -- instances where Lannert, for example, would say, the author seems to have been carried away "from his proper subject" (9) -- reveal a tension and anxiety which itself may be regarded as a sort of second, spectral text within the text "proper". Anxiety masked is also the revelation of anxiety.

It would seem inevitable then that in such a time of extreme philosophical, religious, and social upheaval as the age in which Defoe lived, such a phenomena would manifest itself in literary works. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Damrosch writes, "philosophers and ordinary people alike were growing deeply suspicious of claims for coherence" (12), claims, as it were, based primarily on the Christian mythology on which Western culture had, in turn, based its conception of the structure of reality. This was partly a result, Damrosch argues, of the paradoxical nature of many of the central doctrines of Christianity, such as the incarnation. Where Christian theologians had once "resolved" these paradoxes by insisting "on the element of mystery and strangeness in their faith" (6), such explanations were losing their efficacy in an increasingly secular world. The process was exacerbated by Reformers, such as Calvin, who attempted to give these paradoxes "a logical structure" (6), an effort which, Damrosch

writes, served only to generate more anxiety and skepticism (6).

Thus with the central myth on which the unity of Western culture had been based "breaking up in every domain -- scientific, philosophical and political" (6), we find the anxiety such disintegration engenders manifested in the works of those writers who sought to restore order. Damrosch claims these tensions:

> are particularly visible in narratives that purport to reflect the coherence of reality. Theologians and preachers could continue simply to assert the old doctrines, but it is never enough for a narrative to assert; it must dramatize convincingly. And this means that the inner logic of a fiction often goes beyond, or even contradicts, what its author intended to "say". (8)

With this as his theoretical foundation, it is Damrosch's main point that the first novels are essentially novels of ideas which covertly repeat, test, and play out tensions latent "in the central doctrines and narrative modes of Christianity" (2). He contends:

> the eighteenth-century novel can be seen as a disguised battlefield, a scene of deep if dimly understood movements, a reconceiving of essential questions about man and his fate. These movements were both generated and controlled by the suddenly urgent struggle of a religious myth that was losing its ontological certainty. (15)

Damrosch considers a variety of tensions which he finds in the earliest novels, and his discussion of such areas will serve as a model for the method here, but one area which, it seems to me, he does not give the full consideration it is due, is that of languge. What he does have to say on this topic is restricted to a discussion of Puritan notions of language, an area to be sure which has a place in this discussion and which will be considered in its place, but when taken in isolation from other developments in linguistic thought in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, does not fully represent the crisis in meaning taking place during this time. Furthermore, the subject of this crisis plays no role in Damrosch's chapter on Robinson Crusoe.

If the novel is a testing ground or a battlefield of ideas as Damrosch states, it would seem there is nothing that would be so rigorously examined and tried than language itself. In 1719, when Robinson Crusoe was published, language was undergoing a violent process of desacralization, with theologically catastrophic implications for ideas concerning the relationship between words and things or reality. The God-given guarantee of linguistic meaning was embattled and, thus, this crisis in language and meaning was nothing less than a crisis in faith itself, a crisis which is played out and indeed occupies a central position in the book often regarded as "the first novel", Robinson Crusoe.

Chapter Two

Historical Background

Critics have little trouble identifying influences which produced Defoe's prose style. Although they may not always agree as to which source had the greatest effect on the author, or whether influence was direct or indirect, it is generally agreed that his prose embodies the "plain style" advocated by both Puritan preachers and by the Royal Society whose linguistic policy, first adumbrated in the works of Francis Bacon, was formalized by Thomas Sprat, in his History of the Royal Society (1667). Differences between critics often occur not, however, in identifying influences, but as a result of oversimplifying either Defoe's style or Sprat's programme in order to make author and the source of influence fit snugly together. Watt, for example, writes "Defoe's prose fully exemplifies the celebrated pogramme of Bishop Sprat" (Watt 101). In this he is referring to the often quoted lines from the History in which Sprat advocates:

> a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness; bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness as they can; and preferring the language of

> artisans, countrymen and merchants before that of wits and scholars". (quoted in Starr 284)

To Watt's conclusion, James responds that, in fact:

> Many of Defoe's tendencies -- his repetitiousness, his love of digression, of verbose, often prolix amplification and qualification -- run counter to the naked conciseness held desirable by the Society. But those tendencies do not run counter to the kind of plainness advocated by the Puritans, and are in fact present in much Puritan writing. (19n)

More penetrating still is Starr's response to Watt in which he observes that little of the scientific prose produced by members of the Royal Society actually fulfills the agenda which it seems Sprat sets out. For example, Starr concludes, it was not Sprat's aim to eradicate metaphor totally, as is sometimes taken to be the case, but merely to discourage its use for ornamental purposes. Indeed, Starr shows, Sprat left an honoured role for metaphor in his programme: it was to be used where it was most instructive to the reader to represent "the unfamiliar metaphorically in terms of the familiar" (205). (We find Locke, in Book Three of An Essay Concerning Human Understanding making a similar concession). Starr thus concludes that Defoe does adhere to Sprat's programme, although it is a programme quite different from that which Watt presents. Starr comments:

> In seeking "plainness", both Sprat and Defoe reject metaphorical ornament, but in seeking "naturalness" they eschew the appearance, not always the fact, of metaphorical artifice. (286n)

Despite their differences, these critics inevitably regard the transmission of the plain style from whatever source they identify to Defoe as a smooth one. In this they disregard the basic anxieties concerning language which engendered the plain style in the first place. With the rise of science in the seventeenth century, language fell under suspicion as something corrupt and inadequate in its present form for the purpose of communicating true knowledge of things and ideas. In this assault on the word, none was more influential than Francis Bacon. In the Novum Organum (1620), he identified the "bad and unapt formation of words" as one of the main sources of error obstructing the human mind in its quest for truth (Flew 162). Bacon proclaimed:

> In short, language does not impart to the mind a true or accurate picture of material reality, but fills it with more or less fantastic ideas of nature. (quoted in Large 11)

Such distortions, it was believed, occur through what James Knowlson in his book Universal Language Schemes in England and France 1600-1800 calls a "misalliance of words and things" (36). Bacon, in an observation to be built upon later by John Locke, noted that "words react on the understanding" (quoted in

Knowlson 36) and thus words, if representing things which have no existence in reality or if applied to things in an arbitrary or confused manner, can negatively influence thought. Implicit in this is the idea that if language is to provide the clear, objective window on reality of which Bacon obviously believed it was capable, that window must be wiped clean so that words stand "in a constant, unequivocal relation" (37) to objects.

It is clear then, the plain style is, in part, a product of epistemological concerns: if words affect one's knowledge of things then the improper use of language will provide a distorted picture of the world. Less explicit, however, are the metaphysical, indeed in some ways esoteric and hermetic, assumptions which attend Bacon's criticism of language and, indeed, which served as a foundation for notions promulgated by Bacon and a host of other theorists in his tradition as to how a perfect language might operate.

As linguistic historian Hans Aarsleff has convincingly argued in his book From Locke to Saussure, it was these ideas of a perfect language which John Locke attempted to uproot in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Maximillian E. Novak has noted Defoe read the Essay "at least as early as 1705 when discussions of Locke's ideas appeared in The Consolidator and Review" (Novak 662). Defoe then, we may be sure, read the following words in the Essay's Third Book, "Of Words":

> Words . . . come to be made use of by Men as the Signs of their Ideas; not by any natural connexion, that there is between particular articulate Sounds and certain Ideas, for then there would be but one Language amongst all Men; but by a voluntary Imposition, whereby such a Word is made arbitrarily the Mark of such an Idea. The use then of Words, is to be sensible Marks of Ideas; and the Ideas they stand for, are their proper and immediate Signification. (405)

In retrospect, this statement does not appear particularly radical. Locke is saying that language is a convention, a man-made tool, the parts of which -- words -- are assigned arbitrarily by man not to things but to his ideas of things. And yet, as Aarsleff notes "the Essay was literally epoch-making, and such works never fail to efface their own past" (Aarsleff 43).

With "Of Words", and indeed in the entire Essay itself, Locke was formulating an antidote to what Aarsleff calls "the most widely held seventeenth-century view of the nature of language, a doctrine that can be called by the umbrella term the Adamic language" (25). Locke's critique of the Adamic doctrine, writes Aarsleff, "laid the foundation of the modern study of language" (24).

According to the Adamic doctrine, the language spoken by Adam in the Garden of Eden was a paradigm of linguistic perfection. In his article "The Language of Adam in Seventeenth-Century England", David Katz notes Genesis makes it clear that "God created the world by speaking the original

language" (132) and it was this language which he imparted to (or, for some theorists, co-created with) Adam. The words with which the first man named the animals were thus as naked, pure, and free from corruption as Adam himself. They were the linguistic embodiment of his perfect knowledge and expressed perfectly the nature of those things which they named for, as Aarsleff notes, "in the Adamic doctrine the relation between signifier and signified is not arbitrary" (25). Rather, it is guaranteed by the presence of God from whom the language originally emanated.

The depth of this belief in seventeenth-century thought is not to be underestimated. For example, in a sermon published in 1663, the English churchman Robert South, a former school-mate of Locke's, said of Adam:

> He came into the world a philosopher which sufficiently appeared by his writing the Nature of things upon their names; he could view essences in themselves and read Forms without the comment of their respective properties. (quoted in Katz 133)

Far from being an inconsequential Biblical curiosity, the Adamic doctrine offered seventeenth-century thinkers a stable, if distant, theoretical centre around which they could organize their own notions about language. Problems in linguistic meaning which writers like Francis Bacon were revealing could therefore be explained by the fact that contemporary languages

were corruptions of the original, perfect tongue. Bacon, in fact, acknowledged and praised "that pure and uncorrupted natural knowledge whereby Adam gave names to the creatures according to their propriety" (quoted in Katz 133).

Clearly, the Adamic Doctrine provided a measure of the magnitude of man's fall. It also, however, offered an exemplar of how a perfect language would operate. The language of Adam served as a model for the various "philosophical language" schemes which appeared in the latter half of the seventeenth century, the most well-known of which was John Wilkins' An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language, published in 1668. It was also used as evidence for the presence of a "language of nature", such as that which we find in John Webster's Academiarum Examen, published in 1654. There, discussing Adam's naming of the animals, Webster states:

> I cannot but conceive that Adam did understand both their internal and external signatures, and that the imposition of their names was adaequately agreeing with their natures: otherwise it could not univocally and truely be said to be their names, whereby he distinguished them. (quoted in Aarsleff 61)

There was, however, an important corollary to the Adamic doctrine which proved far more intriguing and, no doubt, reassuring, to some seventeenth-century minds, particularly those of a hermetic bent such as Webster's, than could a mere model of linguistic perfection. This was the

belief that traces of the language of Adam remained embedded in all -- or at least some -- contemporary languages. This view was derived from Biblical evidence which suggested that the language of Adam had not been entirely lost at Babel but had remained either more-or-less intact in a language still spoken somewhere on earth (Hebrew was the obvious and favoured choice although absurd cases were also made for Chinese, Flemish, Swedish and others) or in traces in all languages which succeeded that of Adam (Aarsleff 282). No doubt, it is to this that John Donne alludes when in one of his Essays on Divinity, he writes, "Names are to instruct us, and express natures and essences" (quoted in Katz 133).

The Adamic doctrine thus offered the unstable world of the seventeenth century the assurance that words had once been firmly grounded in those things they represented and that, at some etymological level, a correspondence between word and thing was still present. This link was itself a sign of God's guarantee of unarbitrary meaning in language. Regardless of how corrupt language may have become since the Fall, the Adamic doctrine offered the assurance, Aarsleff writes, that men were still "little Adams and spoke much greater truth than they knew" (Aarsleff 26).

This possibility was grounded, however, in what ultimately was an illusory and nostalgic vision of the past for, if anything, the Adamic doctrine was little more than an

imaginary linguistic and epistemological pastoral into which theologians, philosophers, and literary men, confronted with the apparent arbitrariness of language could retreat, disguising the retrograde belief in which they took refuge as a progressive model for recovering, through such means as the development of a philosophical language, a lost paradise of linguistic and epistemological certainty. As we find often during the seventeenth century, the thinkers look bravely to the future through the security offered by the past.

One thinker who would not was John Locke. In fact, Aarsleff argues, the target of Locke's Essay was not exclusively the concept of "innate notions" found in the philosophy of René Descartes, nor was it the common habit by which speakers "often suppose the words [they use] to stand also for the reality of things" (Locke 407), "as if the name carried with it the knowledge of the species or the essence of it" (quoted in Aarsleff 24). Rather, the discussion of language in Book Three was a rejection of the formalization of this "word-thing" habit in the Adamic doctrine. Essentialist and innatist, the Adamic doctrine was the antithesis of Locke's central idea that all knowledge is the product of experience and is acquired mainly though the senses. Rather than the empirical method of investigation advocated by Locke and his contemporaries in the Royal Society such as Boyle and Newton, the Adamic doctrine encouraged esoteric and hermetic pursuits

such as those of Jacob Boehme, in which languages were regarded as "a better avenue to the true knowledge of nature than the mere self-help of man's deceiving senses and imperfect reason" (Aarsleff 24). For example, if there had been any validity in the Adamic doctrine, Aarsleff notes:

> the word for gold, for instance, might by suitable means be made to reveal the nature and essence of gold, whereas for Locke it was impossible to know more than what he defiantly called the "nominal essence". (24)

For Locke then, language is conventional, not divine. It is a product of "ignorant and illiterate people, who sorted and denominated things by those sensible qualities they found in them" (quoted in Aarsleff 27) and then assigned sounds to those ideas "by a perfectly arbitrary imposition" (Locke 408). Thus, because words signify only ideas of things, not things themselves, there is no inherent connection between words and things. Furthermore, because a man's ideas "are all within his own breast, invisible and hidden from others, nor can of themselves be made to appear" (Locke 405), there is, in Aarsleff's words, an "inpenetrable subjectivity to which words are tied" (28). This, in turn, means that "each individual has a radically private language that virtually precludes all hope of perfect communication" (28).

Such contentions by Locke would, at the least, have

challenged the beliefs of the late-seventeenth or early-eighteenth century thinker who placed any credence in the Adamic doctrine and its various manifestations. For, with his argument, Locke desacralizes language, emptying it of even the trace remnants of divinely-guaranteed meaning each word possessed in the Adamic doctrine. Even the capacity for language in Locke's thought is not something specifically granted to man by God. Man, rather, found the "articulate sounds" of his voice the tool best suited for the purpose of communicating his private ideas. Locke contends:

> The Comfort, and Advantage of Society, not being to be had without Communication of Thoughts, it was necessary, that Man should find out some external sensible Signs, whereby those invisible Ideas, which his thoughts are made up of, might be made Known to others. For this purpose, nothing was so fit, either for Plenty or Quickness, as those articulate Sounds, which with so much Ease and Variety, he found himself able to make. (405)

In this respect, Locke's ideas on language may be seen as initiating a revolution in linguistic theory comparable to that which Copernicus began for astronomy and scientific thought in general with <u>De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium</u> almost 150 years earlier. Copernicus displaced man from the centre of the physical universe; Locke displaced man's language from its powerful position in the creation. After Locke's <u>Essay</u>, any notion that words bore a divinely-sanctioned

correspondence to things was highly doubtful. With the bond between signifier and signified severed, words lost that God-given power they had possessed which allowed Adam to name and thus to control his world. For as Aarsleff explains:

> Adam's naming of the animals was a creative act; it was both a striking manifestation of man's place in creation, of the harmony of the macrocosm and the microcosm, and at the same time a sign of man's control, for in the names he "knew" the creatures. (59)

To imagine that such ideas would be absorbed without conflict or anxiety into the works of an intellectual community which had historically placed a certain faith in the Adamic doctrine, is to forget the violent opposition with which Copernicus' theory was met as well as the attempt by one such as Tycho Brahe who sought to reconcile Copernicus' findings with a system that left the earth at the centre of the universe. The awkward Tychonic System is analogous to the sort of uneasy compromise between Locke and the Adamic doctrine which we find played out in Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. Before we turn to the novel, however, it is best perhaps to search Defoe's non-fictional writings for clues about his own linguistic ideas. These, in turn, may provide an indication why Defoe turned to fiction.

Although Defoe writes occasionally of his reasons for writing in a plain style, he says little explicitly about

language itself. The areas of interest to seventeenth and eighteenth- century minds regarding language such as the relation between words and things and the various epistemological, metaphysical and religious assumptions and implications surrounding that question are conscpicuous in their absence from Defoe's writings. There are, however, a number of statements he makes which have a tangential bearing on such matters. These are marked by a strange ambivalence as if Defoe is willing to adhere to the Lockean conception of language to a point and yet is unable to abandon the notion that languge, in some way, yet retains an aspect of the divine. Always careful never to contradict Locke overtly , Defoe nonetheless attempts to find, in the crevices Locke leaves, so to speak, some shard of the sacred remaining in language. For example, in the Introduction to A System of Magick (1728), Defoe treads a line which, while acknowledging Locke's empirical conception of the manner in which we acquire knowledge, nonetheless attributes to Adam and Eve an innate and divinely-granted, fully-formed language. Defoe writes:

> But to go back a little to originals, and to fetch up knowledge from the fountain: man, born ignorant, arrives to very little knowledge but what comes by one of these two channels.
>
> First, Long experience, study and application.
>
> Secondly, Teaching and instruction from those that went before.
>
> I shall insist only upon the last, and that

> particularly for the sake of what was antediluvian. The most early knowledge which mankind obtained in those days, is supposed to be by teaching immediately from heaven; for example: Adam and Eve's mouths were opened at the same time with their eyes, and they could speak, and knew what language to speak, as soon as they were made. But it is most certain also, that all the speaking world since Adam and Eve learnt it successively from them, by mere imitation of sounds, teaching of parents and nurses, and the like. (6)

Such a language, created by God, could hardly be arbitrary. Therefore, while Defoe adheres, in one sense, to Locke's rejection of innate knowledge -- either in men's minds or as embodied in their language -- he nonetheless hedges his commitment by suggesting that Adam and Eve learned their language from God and this language they subsequently passed on to future generations. Strangely, Defoe makes no comment as to whether or not this language was destroyed at Babel. Certainly, he makes a point of arguing that with the Flood was lost the great knowledge of the antediluvian Patriarchs, much of which, he wrote, they had learned by "a secret inspiration from heaven, filling them with, or at least directing them to, the knowledge of things in a more than ordinary manner" (7). And yet, he implies that, despite Babel, the divine language of Adam and Eve has been relayed with a certain continuity from generation to generation.

As a statement of Defoe's view of language, this passage is, of course, far from conclusive. It does provide, however, an indication of the author's concern with the subject

and of his unwillingness to completely relinquish the notion, abandoned by Locke, that language was created by God with Adam and thus, at one time, there had been a divine bond between words and things.

Although Defoe may remain evasive as to whether or not contemporary speech retains a divine element, he does, however, state unequivocally that writing was given to man by God. Defoe's account of this event suggests a typological relation between Adam and the man to whom writing was first revealed, Moses, to whom the author attributes a knowledge of things comparable to that of the antideluvian Patriarchs and, indeed, Adam himself. In A System of Magick, Defoe argues:

> The first knowledge of letters to write by, and to read upon, was dictated to Moses from Mount Sinai, by the immediate revelation of Heaven. I say it could not be otherwise. For how should they write before they had letters, and knew how to form the sound of words upon the tables, where they were impressed?
>
> As Moses had the first knowledge of letters, so he had the first knowledge of things too, and was therefore the best qualified to be a collector of antiquities; nor was it so difficult a matter for Moses to write a history of the creation, and of all the material events of things that had happened before his time as some may imagine: since by the calculations of time, Moses might easily have an account of those things by a successive supply of oral tradition from Noah himself, as you may gather from the times wherein he lived, and the persons with whom he had conversed; of which take the following short sketch, as a leading thread or chain of things directly confirming my argument.
>
> If Moses, then, had the most early knowledge of things by a short succession of the person relating them, and that even from Adam and Noah in a right

> line; and if Moses had the first Knowledge of letters, even immediately from a superior hand, then at least you must allow me, that Moses was certainly the best qualified to form a history of the first things transacted in he world; and was the first man, or at least the man best able to write that history down. For who could form a history of things they did not Know? and who could write before they had letters to form the words he was to write by? and who could read what was written unless those letters had been Known, and made public to the world. (183-4)

In this passage, Defoe seems to be attempting to recover for writing something of the sanctity of which Locke had purged the spoken word. It is, of course, little compensation for nowhere does Defoe venture to suggest that writing is any better suited to conveying the nature of things than the spoken word, although it is interesting to note that, in an earlier work devoted more fully to the origin of writing, An Essay Upon Literature: Or An Enquiry into the Antiquity and Original of Letters, Defoe lists writing, but not speech, among the "Three Things in Nature" that seem to him "to Claim an immediate Inspiration from Heaven" (37). (The other two are music and numbers). Furthermore, in this work he refers to the words written on the tablets which Moses received from God as a record of "his meer Voice" (67). This suggests that, for Defoe, writing somehow possesses something of the authority of that first language with which God created the world and which he subsequently bestowed upon Adam. Defoe, of course, makes no such claims explicitly in his text and, yet, it seems his

attempt to ensure that language, in at least one of its aspects, retains its sacred quality is in some way a strategy to counteract the secular linguistic theories of Locke. If nothing else, Defoe's words mark a certain anxiety and consternation in the face of a language which, like so much else in his world, had been desacralized.

This confusion is more apparent if we look at his contradictory statements concerning hieroglyphics. In An Essay Upon Literature, Defoe's thesis is, as we have noted, that the first writing in the world was that of Moses. To prove this, he must somehow account for the presence of Egyptian hieroglyphics which, it would seem, predate the tablets brought down from Mt. Sinai. Defoe settles this matter by limiting his definition of writing to the phonetic alphabet. In this way, he argues that hieroglyphics are not really writing at all but an inferior type of notation which he characterizes as "lame, unintelligible" and "enigmatic" (29) and as "meer Independent Marks, design'd to direct the Mind as any particular Mark might mean" (34). His attitude to hieroglyphics he sums up in these words:

> It cannot be deny'd but that they carried this Art of speaking a great length, and abundance of Ingenious things were done that way; but all was Circumlocution, going round the bush, and round the Bush, and indeed to very little Effect, for the World was not able to form any Method fully to Express themselves to one another at a Distance. (7)

These remarks contrast with those made earlier by Defoe in his Review. There, he longingly refers to hieroglyphics as a better, more precise, means of describing things than words. Defoe writes:

> By the Doctrine of Idea's, it is allow'd, That to Describe a Thing, Ugly, Horrid and Deform'd, is the best way to get Abhorrence in the Minds of the People--and this was the Method of the great Men in the East, in the Ages of Hieroglyphicks, when Things were more accurately Describ'd by Emblems and Figures than Words; and even our Saviour himself took this method of Introducing the Knowledge of himself into the World, (viz.) By Parables and Similitudes. (quoted in Novak 661)

It is interesting to note that the differing comments about hieroglyphics embrace the years in which Defoe turned to writing fiction. His positive comments in the Review were written before he wrote his novels, the negative remarks after. It would seem, and indeed as Maximillian E. Novak has suggested in his article "Defoe's Theory of Fiction", that the hieroglyph offered Defoe, as it did many others in the century which preceded his, a model of linguistic perfection which could compensate for the shortcomings of words. Defoe's assumptions here seem similar to those of Francis Bacon who based his own conception of a philosophical and universal language on reports -- erroneous as time would reveal -- sent by Jesuit missionaries from the Orient. Their dispatches claimed that the Chinese ideogram referred not to words, which in turn

represented things and ideas, but illustrated directly the logical status of those things to which they referred. Bacon claimed:

> It is the use of China and the Kingdoms of the high Levant to write in Characters Real, which express neither letters nor words in gross, but things or Notions; insomuch as countries and provinces, which understand not one another's language can nevertheless read one another's writings because the characters are accepted more generally than the languages do extend. (quoted in Large 11)

In such a language, in which notation represents phenomena, not words, Bacon maintained that the essence of a thing or idea could be efficiently communicated without the loss or distortion of information. As William Lytton Payne has pointed out in his book Mr. Review: Daniel Defoe as Author of The Review, Defoe worked painstakingly to achieve the greatest clarity in his journal in order to save his writing from the sort of malicious mis-reading which was common in the age of "party-sponsored journalism" (21). As the hieroglyph offered itself to the seventeenth century as a remedy for the "cheat of words", the parable seems to have been regarded by Defoe as the best means of achieving the greatest clarity of meaning. In this, it would seem his novels offered an opportunity to experiment on a wider canvas and this was an experiment which could, in turn, dismiss any doubts that it was within the power of contemporary language, regardless of how corrupt it may have

become with time, to represent the world of things as it had for Adam. For Bacon's misunderstanding of the nature of Chinese characters is a result of his seeing in them a model of language equivalent to that of Adam's where the signifier and signified bear an unarbitrary relationship with one another. Defoe's turning to fiction seems, consciously or not, an attempt to test language's sacred capacity to communicate the knowledge of things. That he should later write so disparagingly of the hieroglyphics which serve, in part, as a model for his method is, perhaps, a testimony to his view of the results of this experiment.

Chapter Three

Language in Robinson Crusoe

From Defoe's comments, quoted at the end of the last chapter, it would seem that parable offered the author a method of overcoming the Lockean "cheat of words". Indeed, the form of Robinson Crusoe, which today we identify as "novelistic", is described as a "fable" by the narrator Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (ix). Although in the narrator's comments "fable" (from the Latin fabula) refers explicitly to the "plot" or "story" of a narrative, the word is nonetheless an apt description of the strategy the author employs in Volume I of Robinson Crusoe. A fable, like a parable or an allegory, is an extended metaphor for a specific moral lesson. As such, the fable is, essentially, a lexical picture, or emblem, of the moral, which is usually stated non-figuratively in a concluding epigram. Such a specific and explicitly stated moral is conspicuously absent from Robinson Crusoe. Indeed, in "Robinson Crusoe's Preface" to the third volume of his works, the narrator apologizes for the fact that Volume I is an "emblem" which is not "explained" (x). Regardless of the intriguing difficulties this admission may pose, what remains is the fact that Defoe

regards Robinson Crusoe as an emblem, or an "emblematic history" (x) comparable to The History of Don Quixote.

As we have noted, Defoe associates parable with the "Emblems and Figures" which it was believed in his day constituted the semantically transparent hieroglyphics of the Egyptians. As with Bacon and the projectors of philosophical languages, such a belief privileges the written or inscribed character over the spoken word as a means better suited to the conveyance of the "nature of things". In a fallen world the hieroglyph is for them the closest approximation possible to the perfect language of Adam. Thus, the presentation in written form of emblematic images becomes, as Defoe wrote in The Review, a superior means by which things may be, "more accurately Describ'd" (quoted in Novak 661). In this sense the parabolic and emblematic form of Robinson Crusoe may be regarded as an effort to reclaim for language something of the semantic force it once possessed for Adam.

The linguistic anxiety, of which the form of Robinson Crusoe is a tacit acknowledgement, also manifests itself explicitly in the manner in which language is characterized in the novel. Lockean questions concerning the use and abuse of language at the day-to-day level of social interaction, figure prominently in Crusoe's narrative; indeed, the narrator himself is a victim of language, in a very Lockean sense, and the narrative of his twenty-eight years of "silent life" on the

island is, in some respects, a Bildungsroman charting his linguistic development, complete with the spiritual crisis which usually forms an important component of novels of this sort.

The representation of Lockean notions of language in Robinson Crusoe, and their importance in the plight and subsequent spiritual development of the novel's protagonist is, however, at odds with the novel's attempt to demonstrate the essentially Adamic notion that language -- despite its apparent corruption -- is backed by a divine guarantee of meaning. This, of course, is the very idea which Aarsleff argues Locke tried to purge from linguistic thought. The text, however, attempts to surmount the paradox, by suggesting that words, like everything else in God's world, are controlled by a Providential force. Language is thus granted the power to achieve a semantic perfection comparable to that of the language of Adam. For, the novel suggests, it is not words themselves which are corrupt, but man's ability to understand words in their true, spiritual significance.

After the Fall a great gulf opened -- or at least, appeared to open -- between man and his creator. This was not a spatial breach, for God is omnipresent, but a perceptual and epistemological one. As we learn in Genesis, Eve and Adam ate from the tree of Knowledge "And the eyes of them both were opened" (Genesis 3:7), blinding them and all their progeny to

the perfect knowledge of God and their world which they had possessed and which was embodied in the language they used in their prelapsarian state. In Robinson Crusoe, the open eye paradoxically becomes a metaphor for spiritual blindness. Early in the novel, for example, following his first shipwreck, Crusoe remarks on the:

> secret over-ruling Decree that hurries us on to be the Instruments of our own Destruction, even tho' it be before us, and that we rush upon it with our Eyes open. (14)

For the Puritans this blindness was not strictly visual but an indication of the corruption of all human faculties. In The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century Perry Miller explains, in what is a fitting description of the spiritual condition of Crusoe when he is first cast ashore the island, that:

> Sinful man tries all his life to see things as they are, to apprehend truth and to act by it, but at every endeavour his senses blur, his imagination deceives, his reason fails, his will revels, his passions run riot. (284)

Man's inability to comprehend the actual spiritual significance of the things in his world is conflated, in Robinson Crusoe, with his inability to understand the true, spiritual significance of words. Words and things, in the novel, share

an identical status and that is a semiotic one: both are presented as signs of a Providential will, the significance of which is obscured for man by his corrupt understanding. And yet, there is hope of gaining a proper knowledge of the world, and strangely, this is possible through a text: the "sure Guide to Heaven" (221) to be found in the Word of God as set down in the Bible.

One's life and the things in it are presented in the novel as a series of "emblems" only properly understood when read through the divine template of the Biblical Word. Similarly, one's words may, if properly squared with the words in the Bible, reveal that one indeed speaks more truth than one may realize. Crusoe's linguistic world is thus ultimately similar to Adam's, with one difference. Adam could represent the essence of things directly because of his divinely-granted ability to name. For Crusoe words, as they are used by man, and things are signs whose true significance must be located in the Bible. It is there that the relationship between words and things is realized and guaranteed for both are ultimately, the novel suggests, signifiers whose signified is the Biblical Word of God. The Bible thus is the token that the names for things are not a product of an arbitrary and conventional imposition by men. It is only man's corrupt understanding which blinds him to the significance of both words and things.

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The Lockean influence on Robinson Crusoe is nowhere more apparent than in the narrator's prose. Although he may be a literary novice, Crusoe's style nonetheless betrays, in its ubiquitous qualifications, its frequent pairings of synonomous or near-synonomous words, and the numerous admissions by the narrator of his inability to express certain extreme states of mind, a deep anxiety and, indeed, a distrust of language. While such rhetorical devices may be perceived as evidence of the novelist's "casualness", even Watt has conceded that Defoe's style may, in part, be a product of the author's desire to create believable autobiographies for what are in fact fictional characters. In his book Defoe's Art of Fiction, David Blewett picks up this thread which Watt drops, describing Defoe as an author with a chameleon-like capacity to "imagine himself in the position of the protagonist" (3) of his novel. This would seem to be the case. Certainly Robinson Crusoe is no more poorly written than one would expect from a seventeenth-century mariner with "a competent Share of Learning, as far as House-Education, and a Country Free-School generally goes" (Robinson Crusoe 3). But, moreover, Crusoe seems to lack the linguistic confidence Defoe displays in his nonfictional writings and even in the fictional autobiography, Roxana. Crusoe's prose is marked by a cautiousness which

suggests the narrator is uncomfortable with the medium with which he is working, as if he is aware that it is more slippery and unwieldly, and perhaps more dangerous, than the natural materials with which he built his island home. His pen moves across the page with a distinctly Lockean wariness of the arbitrary nature of language and thus of its ability to convey inaccurate ideas. This caution, however, is charged with the anxiety of a knowledge of what Janet Aikens, in her essay "Roxana: The Unfortunate Mistress of Conversation", calls the "terrible potency" of words (Aikens 529). As Aikens suggests, Defoe himself came to realize this power of words after his imprisonment for writing The Shortest Way With the Dissenters. Crusoe, it seems, has come to a similar realization and, like Defoe, this awareness was brought about through the experience of imprisonment, not in Newgate but behind "the Eternal Bars and Bolts of the Ocean, in an uninhabited Wilderness without Redeption" (113). In short, far from being in any way casual, the hesitant, cautious style of Robinson Crusoe is a product of the experiences the narrator recounts in his book.

Crusoe's preoccupation with the imperfections of language is apparent in the first paragraph of the novel. There he refers to the englishing of his surname from the German "Kreutznaer" as the result of "the usual Corruption of Words in England" (3). The specific source of this corruption is unclear; Crusoe writes, with the uncertainty characteristic

of his style, "we are now called, nay we call our selves and write our Name Crusoe, and so my Companions always call'd me" (3). Whether his parents were first called "Crusoe" by others or by themselves is unclear. What is apparent, however, is that the alteration of the name has somehow come about through the family's interaction with their society. The possibility that such a change could occur at all would seem to suggest that, in the process of naming there is something intrinsically conventional and arbitrary.

If words are the arbitrary products of social convention, it follows that it is quite impossible to know truth through language alone; any link between word and thing, it would seem, is purely a matter of custom. Language may, in fact, obscure a true knowledge of things. Such ideas bear a strong resemblance to those we find in Locke's Essay. Words, Locke asserts:

> interpose themselves so much between our Understandings, and the Truth, which it would contemplate and apprehend, that like the medium through which visible objects pass, their Obscurity and Disorder does not seldom cast a mist before our Eyes, and impose upon our Understandings. If we consider, in the Fallacies, Men put upon themselves, as well as others, and the Mistakes in Men's Disputes and Notions, how great a part is owing to Words, and their uncertain or mistaken Signification, we shall have reason to think this no small obstacle in the way to Knowledge. (488-9)

In many ways, Crusoe's fate is a product of such a failure of

understanding. The novel demonstrates what Locke proclaims: an important way to limit the potential obscurity of language is through the use of reason and one's ability to question statements and to think for one's self. Crusoe comes ultimately to recognize this as well. For example, when attempting to determine the morality of slaughtering the cannibals during his stay on the island, the narrator tells us, "I debated this very often with myself" (171) and "I argued with my self" (172). This ability to reason is hardly a characteristic we find in the rash, young Crusoe. In the early scenes in the novel, he is presented as one incapable of such rational self-debate, let alone of arguing with anyone else. He is unresponsive and "obstinately deaf" (7) to his father's warning not to go to sea. Similarly, following the upbraiding he receives from the Master of the first ship on which he sailed, Crusoe remarks, "I made him little answer" (15). Instead, Crusoe, at this point in his life, answers only to his passions and, as such, soon finds himself in the company of men whose "conversation" seems to agree with and legitimize his own passionate nature: the sailors. It is only after he has been cast out of the world of conversation and into the "silent Life" of the island, that he becomes capable of the sort of rational discourse which allows him to disagree and debate first with himself, and then with others. In coming to this realization Crusoe must first recognize the corrupt nature of the sailors' "conversation" and

how, in agreeing with his own uncontrolled passions, it has blinded him to reason. He laments:

> I had been well instructed by Father and Mother; neither had they been wanting to me, in their early Endeavours, to infuse a religious Awe of God into my Mind, a Sense of my Duty, and of what the nature and End of my Being, requir'd of me. But alas! falling early into the Seafaring Life, which of all the Lives is the most destitute of the Fear of God, though his Terrors are always before them; I say, falling early into the Seafaring Life, and into Seafaring Company, all that little Sense of Religion which I had entertain'd, was laugh'd out of me by me Mess-Mates, by a harden'd despising of Dangers; and the Views of Death, which grew habitual to me; by my long Absence from all Manner of Opportunities to converse with any thing but what was like my self, or to hear any thing that was good, or tended towards it. (131)

For Locke, habit, or "custom", is "a greater power than nature" (Locke 82) in defacing particular ideas such as those with which Crusoe's parents originally inculcated in their son. Language plays a central role in such corruption for, as John Dunn explains in his book on Locke, the philosopher believed:

> one of the main ways in which human understanding undergoes this corruption is through the words in which men express their thoughts . . . Since most men most of the time think in words . . . confusion or unnecessary vagueness in the use of words can do immense harm. (73-4)

At several points in Robinson Crusoe the narrator suggests not only "the wicked and prophane" (88) nature of the sailors but also how this corruption is manifested in their imprecise use

of language. For example, Crusoe notes how the sailors do not refer to Africa by its correct name but instead "vulgarly call it" Guinea (16) (a name he nonetheless adopts when writing of the continent). Such vagueness is a natural outgrowth of a social milieu in which passion, not reason, prevails. For Locke, it is possible to come to a true understanding of the world only through one's own experiences, not through the words of others. When one's judgements are based on what one hears from others rather than on one's own experience and reason, Locke notes, one's opinions are "but the effects of Chance and Hazard, of a Mind floating at all Adventures, without choice, and without direction" (663). It thus seems fitting that Defoe should have selected the sailors' life as one suited to the irrational young Crusoe.

Crusoe, however, is by no means the lone victim in the novel of the false impressions the words of others may create. Friday's God, Crusoe instructs him, is a linguistic fabrication perpetrated by the priesthood of the savage's society. With his newly-gained ability to dispute such ideas, Crusoe tells us:

> I endeavour'd to clear up this Fraud, to my Man Friday and told him, that the Pretence of their old Men going up the Mountains, to say O to their God Benamuckee, was a Cheat, and their bringing Word from thence what he said was much more so . (217)

Given Crusoe's earlier susceptibility to being governed by his passions and to be guided, not by his own experience and reason, but by the opinions of others, the salvation for which he seems marked necessitates his removal from the world of "conversation" and banishment to "a scene of silent Life, such perhaps as was never heard of in the world before" (63). As Crusoe's listing of the "Evil" and "Good" he finds in his fate makes clear, the main thing he lacks on the island is human company. And this lack of companionship is most sharply felt as an absence of conversation: "I have no Soul to speak to, or relieve me" (66), he laments. The silence of the island is, however, a fitting corrective for one previously deaf to reason, the absence of conversation an appropriate fate for one for whom conversation became a substitute for reason.

During his "silent Life", Crusoe becomes aware not only of the error of basing one's opinions on the words of others but also of the sort of abuses to which language, and thus understanding, are subject. Here, Crusoe's recognition of these problems again seems similar to what we find in Locke's Essay. In the chapter entitled "Of the Abuse of Words", Locke states, "the first and most palpable abuse is, the using of Words without clear and distinct Ideas; or which is worse, signs without any thing signified" (490). Words, then, are best understood if one comes to know their meanings through experience and not by way of conversation with others. There

are several dramatic examples in Robinson Crusoe of words being not properly understood by the narrator until he actually experiences that which they signify. One instance occurs during Crusoe's first voyage when, in the midst of a terrible storm, he hears the sailors crying among themselves that the ship was sure to "founder". Crusoe notes, "It was my Advantage in one respect, that I did not Know what they meant by Founder, till I enquir'd" (12). The meaning his enquiry produces, however, is subsequently revealed as inadequate for, upon observing the actual foundering of the ship, Crusoe writes, "and then I understood for the first time what was meant by a Ship foundering in the Sea" (13). Similarly, after being cast ashore the island, the narrator experiences another such "definition". Crusoe is able to identify the shaKing of the ground as an earthquaKe but finds his Knowledge of the word itself has hardly prepared him for the "Thing it self" which it signifies: "I was so amaz'd with the Thing it self, having never felt the like, or discours'd with any one that had, that I was like one dead and stupify'd" (80).

Such experiences render Crusoe able to recognize one of the central problems with language which Locke described in his Essay:

> because Words are many of them learn'd before the Ideas are Known for which they stand: Therefore some, not only Children, but men, speaK several Words, no

> otherwise than Parrots do, only because they have learn'd them, and have been accustomed to those Sounds. (408)

This is certainly Crusoe's state of linguistic awareness before his spiritual awakening and consequent recognition of language's dangerous power to create the illusion that one knows the meanings of the words one uses when, in fact, one may not. It seems then no accident that Crusoe's only companion on the island with whom he may "converse" before the arrival of Friday is Poll, the parrot he catches and teaches to speak. Like Crusoe, before his recognition of the force of language, Poll obviously uses words without the full knowledge of what those words signify. Nonetheless, the parrot serves as a first step in Crusoe's return to the world of conversation and to society. For example, Crusoe refers to the bird as "the sociable creature" (143), a phrase which echoes the famous lines with which Locke began the third book of his Essay:

> God having designed Man for a sociable Creature, made him not only with an inclination, and under a necessity to have fellowship with those of his own Kind; but furnished him also with Language, which was to be the great Instrument, and common Tye of Society. Man therefore had by Nature his Organs so fashioned, as to be fit to frame articulate Sounds, which we call Words. But this was not enough to produce Langauge; for Parrots, and several other Birds, will be taught to make articulate Sounds distinct enough, which yet, by no means, are capable of Language. (402)

It would seem these revelations of the apparent arbitrariness of language and its role in his dreadful fate would lead Crusoe to a Lockean conclusion about the purely conventional nature of language. Such is not the case. For, as Crusoe's increasing sensitivity to language leads him to consider what is, for him, the more serious inadequacy of his understanding of words of a spiritual nature, he discovers an exception to the Lockean rule that words are best defined by experiencing that which they represent. Following the description of his terrifying first dream, Crusoe proclaims:

> This was the first time that I could say, in the true Sense of the Words, that I pray'd in all my Life; for now I pray'd with a Sense of my Condition, and with a true Scripture View of Hope founded on the Encouragement of the Word of God; and from this Time, I may say, I began to have Hope that God would hear me. (96)

Unlike such words as "earthquake" and "founder", terms with an explicitly spiritual significance such as "pray" are "defined", not by experience alone but through the textual experience of reading the "Word of God". The Bible is thus singled out as the one exemplum of language rendered clearly and accurately enough to teach, through words alone, what otherwise must be learned through the correlation of language and experience. For example, meditating on what he has learned in teaching Friday the Word of God, Crusoe comments on the lack in the

Bible of that obscurity which mars human speech:

> How infinite and inexpressible a Blessing it is, that the Knowledge of God, and of the Doctrine of Salvation by Christ Jesus, is so plainly laid down in the word of God; so easy to be receiv'd and understood. (221)

It is the discovery of this exemplary language embodied in the Word of God which ultimately undermines the full realization of Locke's notion of a desacralized language in Robinson Crusoe. The possibility that there is one case in which language is not "corrupt", indeed where language assumes the ontological status of experience itself, suggests that the corruption of language is not inherent but a product of man's own fallen senses and diminished understanding of God's world and, indeed, of his Providential "plot".

In Robinson Crusoe the Word of God assumes such force that, rather than providing a mere gloss on the protagonist's life, the Bible becomes the very ground of which his life is a figure or metaphoric emblem. Thus no longer do words simply represent things; things, that is Crusoe's experience and the events and objects in it, represent and point to the words of the Bible. By this strange reversal, God's Biblical Word takes on a literalness, a substantiality, and immediacy to truth which subsumes non-linguistic experience itself. The implications for language of this reversal are quite unlike

anything John Locke proposed and are, in fact, closer to the notions in the Adamic doctrine of language.

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Corrupt and corrupting as language may appear in its manifestation in public use, Defoe reserves for it a certain divine power to provide a true, "scriptural", idea of reality. Throughout the novel we find a mysteriously unarbitrary correspondence between the language Crusoe employs and the spiritual significance of the experiences he describes. One is left with a sense that Crusoe's language, like his life, is guided and indeed guaranteed by a Providential force of which he is often only vaguely aware. Clearly such a correspondence is Adamic rather than Lockean in nature.

The Adamic correspondence between words and things consists, in a sense, of encasing the meaning of a word within the word itself. Therefore, there is no distinction between public and private language such as we find in Locke. There is only language and the world and the two are essentially in agreement. In Lockean linguistic thought, however, we may well say that between a public word and the private image or sign which it represents there is, as between Abraham and Dives, "a great Gulph fix'd" (Robinson Crusoe 128). Although Crusoe may use this Biblical passage as a metaphor for his own remoteness

from the world of society, it is interesting to note he comes later to revise this notion, recognizing that God and his Word, as represented in the Bible, is an omnipresent force which renders such gaps and distances inconsequential. Commenting on his reading of the Bible with Friday, Crusoe notes, "We had here the Word of God to read and no further from the Spirit to instruct, than if we had been in England" (221). The "great gulph" between extremes thus ceases to exist once God enters the picture and, indeed, this is the case with the Lockean gap between idea or image and word as well as between public and private languages. For Locke words are representations of ideas which, in turn, are private images. In Robinson Crusoe, however, the distinction between image and word is collapsed, removing the "great gulph" at the heart of Lockean linguistics and presenting something much closer to the Adamic idea of language. Throughout the novel, the line between public and private language, between image and word, and, indeed, between figurative and literal language, is crossed and recrossed in such a way that that line, that "gulph", begins to blur and, ultimately, to all but vanish.

This fusion and transposition of linguistic opposites is apparent in two general ways. The first of these is the manner in which names applied figuratively by the narrator in the solitude of his island world to things in that world, as well as to himself, assume with time the status of proper,

literal names. Second, and conversely, is the manner in which apparently non-metaphoric, literal descriptions in the novel often take on the status of emblematic representations of spiritual truths of which Crusoe himself is not always aware. Frequently, the images created in the text say much more about Crusoe than he himself is capable of saying explicitly in his narrative.

This constant, criss-crossing exchange between figures and their literal values or grounds is most immediately intelligible in the two dreams which Crusoe describes in the novel. A dream is like an extended metaphor since its ground or tenor is something other than the apparent "literal" meaning of the images experienced by the dreamer. These images constitute something similar to Francis Quarles' definition of an emblem: they form "a silent parable" (OED, s.v. "emblem") which pictorially allegorizes certain aspects of the dreamer's existence. This is certainly the case with Crusoe's terrifying first dream, which he experiences during his sickness. All of the elements in the dream we have previously met with in the text. Crusoe has already encountered and described numerous storms, an Earthquake, and "a bright Flame of Fire" (87) like the lightning which he earlier feared could ignite his supply of powder. Even the "long Spear or Weapon" (87), which the formidable dream figure carries, harkens back to the weapons brandished by the natives Crusoe saw in Africa. It is,

however, the bringing together of these natural, non-figurative elements into a single, "terrible Vision" (88), which emblematizes for Crusoe his own spiritual depravity to which he had until this point been blind. Thus, in this dream, we have a good example of a recombination of the story's literal elements which construct a figurative emblem which is, in turn, a comment on a certain "invisible" or unremarked quality of the protagonist's character or plight.

There is, however, a second dream in the novel, in which precisely the opposite sort of transposition occurs. In the first dream the literal experiences of the narrator are transformed into figures which emblematize a "deeper" truth; in the second, the dream images take on, with time, a literal truth. In a sense, the second dream does not only appear to be prophetic but, as Crusoe acts upon its "parable", is actually constitutive of the reality which follows it.

These dreams are themselves emblematic of the manner in which language operates in Crusoe's world: there, the word has the power to construct images which present a more precise representation of reality than "literal" language or experience, as well as an apparently prophetic capacity to shape reality. Both of these possiblities suggest that language, like the world, is guided, and thus guaranteed, by Providence.

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The second dream suggests that Crusoe's world is one in which the metaphoric may be transformed, with time, into the literal. The most obvious example, of course, is the prophetic complaint Crusoe makes while living what he then regards as the all-but-solitary existence of a Planter in "the Brasils": "I used to say, I liv'd just like a Man cast away upon some desolate Island, that had no body there but himself" (35). There are, however, more subtle examples of a similar "Exchange" (35) in which Crusoe's figurative expressions become literally realized. In each of these transpositions the hand of Providence is no less evident than it is in this prophetic passage.

Most noteworthy of these is the manner in which the essentially figurative names which Crusoe privately assigns to things on his island as well as to himself are transformed in the course of the novel into literal and public nomenclatures. To understand this strange movement, we must first recognize that, typologically, Robinson Crusoe is an image of fallen man cast back into the Garden of Eden. During one of his expeditions, and travelling West, the direction opposite from that which the first man and woman were cast out of Eden, Crusoe discovers in the centre of the island an idyllic scene comparable (although Crusoe does not draw the obvious parallel)

to that of Eden itself:

> At the End of this March I came to an Opening, where the Country seem'd to descend to the West, and a little Spring of fresh Water which issued out of the Side of the Hill by me, run the other Way, that is due East; and the Country appear'd so fresh, so green, so flourishing, every thing being in a constant Verdure, or Flourish of Spring, that it looked like a planted Garden. (99)

Crusoe, however, is not Adam. Language was not created with him upon his arrival on the island; he imports it with him, just as he does the many materials he draws from the wrecked ship. And, like these things, his language is inadequate in its existing form to answer his needs. Unlike Adam, he "Knew not the names of" (110) many of the different species of birds he finds on the island nor does he know what to call certain plants, such as the trees he uses to make the stakes with which he surrounds his "bower": "I could not tell what Tree to call it, that these Stakes were cut from" (105). Even things which he has made with his own hands defy his ability to name. For example, of the abominations his first efforts as a potter produce he says, "I could not make above two large earthern ugly things, I cannot call them Jarrs" (120). His attempts to make clothing for himself produce a similar linguistic consternation. Of his footware, he notes, "Stockings and Shoes I had none, but had made me a Pair of some-things, I scarce know what to call them" (149).

As with the sails and boards he salvages from the ship, Crusoe's language must be adapted to suit his new environment. This process involves the naming, through metaphor, of those things with which he is unfamiliar or which, for some reason, do not suit the proper names he might wish to assign to them. Thus, his "Pair of some-things", he describes as "like Buskins to flap over my Legs, and lace on either Side like Spatter-dashes" (149). The same metaphorical process takes place when he attempts to name natural phenomena. For example, he can only name by analogy the "Creatures like Hares" (53) on his island. Indeed, much of Crusoe's naming on the island is metaphoric. Because of the "barbarous shape" (149) of many of his creations, he is only able to name them by analogy to those items which he has sought to imitate with his own crude means of production. Doubtless too, this process serves to naturalize his alien environment.

In writing his narrative Crusoe is careful to provide his readers, where he can, with the metaphoric names he employed for things while on the island, along with the name which, for his reader, is a more proper description of their function. Thus, describing the chair he makes for himself in his bower, Crusoe writes "I made me a squab or a couch" (152). Certainly, the first word is probably a more accurate name for the crude sort of cushion one might imagine Crusoe making. The second term, however, represents the way in which he probably

viewed his creation and hence what he called it privately. The roughhewn nature of Crusoe's implements is even reflected in the verbs he must use to describe his work with those tools. Thus, the hollowed-out piece of wood and the "Pestle or Beater" (122) he has fashioned, allow him to "grind" his grain in only a figurative sense. Retrospectively, Crusoe supplies a literal description of the action involved in the task, explaining that he would "grind, or rather pound my Corn into Meal to make my Bread" (122). We find the same metaphoricity at work in the adjectives Crusoe uses while on the island. Although he may once have regarded the tiles with which he paves his Hearth as "square", he writes, "when I wanted to bake, I made a great Fire upon my Hearth, which I had pav'd with some square Tiles of my own making, and burning also; but I should not call them square" (123).

Certainly, Crusoe's creature comforts while on the island are as much a product of his linguistic as his mechanical ingenuity. By drawing metaphorically on the "public" language he recalls from England, he creates a private language which helps him make his alien environment more hospitable. Thus, when searching for a site for his habitation, he selects "a little Plain on the Side of a rising Hill; whose Front towards this little Plain, was steep as a House-side" (58). In this "Rock", there is a "hollow Place worn a little way in like the Entrance or Door of a Cave" (58)

before which, Crusoe writes, the plain stretches "an Hundred Yards broad, and about twice as long, and lay like a Green before my Door" (59). Similarly, within this crude dwelling, he hollows out a cave which he tells us "serv'd me like a Cellar to my House" (60), sets up "some Pieces of Boards, like a Dresser, to order my Victuals upon" (75), and cuts "a Hole thro' my new Fortification like a Sink to let the Water go out" (81). In keeping with the pastoral image he creates for himself through language, he writes of his desire to breed goats so "I might have them about my House like a Flock of Sheep" (146).

Several times in his narrative, Crusoe acknowledges his habit of naming the things in his world through metaphor. He notes, for example that, eventually, those hare-like animals he previously confessed he was unable to name, "I call'd Hares" (115) and tells us that, after a long trek about the island "without settled Place of Abode", he finally reached "my own House, as I call'd it to my self" (111). Similarly, he tells his readers that, in his "Fancy" he called his cave, "my Kitchen" (61) and his hut in the centre of the island, "my Country-House" (107).

He is, of course, only able to flatter his creations with such metaphoric names because of his solitude:

> I was Lord of the whole Mannor; or if I

> pleas'd, I might call my self King, or Emperor over the whole Country which I had Possession of. There were no Rivals. I had no competitor, none to dispute Sovereignty or Command with me. (128 emphasis added)

When this sovereignty is threatened, however, Crusoe does not abandon the metaphoric liberties he has taken privately with language. Instead, after seeing the print of a human foot in the sand on his island, his personal rhetoric remains defiantly in place and is, in fact, heightened to match the defensive posture he adopts physically. Thus, describing his reaction upon first seeing the footprint, he writes that he fled to his "Castle", "for so I think I call'd it ever after this" (154). Preparing to defend himself, he explains, "I loaded all my Cannon, as I call'd them; that is to say my Muskets, which were mounted upon my new Fortification" (182). Similarly, upon hearing from Friday that there are white men a mere forty miles away in his companion's former home, Crusoe, as if anticipating his rescue may bring with it a challenge to his control of what is potentially his colony, proclaims, "This put new Thoughts into my Head; for I presently imagin'd, that these might be the Men belonging to the Ship, that was cast away in Sight of my Island, as I now called it" (223 emphasis added).

It is one of the most remarkable things about Robinson Crusoe, however, that, with the coming of others to his island, a number of the private conceits which he has adopted become public and proper names. Upon escorting the English ship's

Captain to his dwelling, Crusoe does not hesitate to present it by the name which he has adopted in the "Fancy" his solitude allowed:

> I told him, this was my Castle, and my Residence; but that I had a Seat in the Country, as most Princes have, whither I could retreat upon Occasion. (258)

Alone on his island, Crusoe might well have called himself "King or Emperor" (128). But, strangely, the arrival of others does not infringe on this possibility. In fact, we see such figurative names creep slowly out of the realm of "Fancy" and into that of reality. Thus, while with Friday, Friday's father and the Spaniard gathered about him, Crusoe might ponder "How like a King I look'd" (241), this sovereignty is explicitly acknowledged by the English mutineers as well as by their Captain and those members of the crew loyal to them. This practice begins, it would seem, as a fiction designed to render the mutineers prisoners. Thus, describing the process whereby the Captain disarms and captures Will Atkins, Crusoe comments, "the Captain told him he must lay down his Arms at Discretion, and trust to the Governour's Mercy, by which he meant me; for they all called me Governour" (268). Although this name depends, initially, on the disguise of darkness (itself a symbol of the sailor's spiritual blindness) so that the prisoners "might not see what Kind of a Governour they had"

(269), with a change of clothes and the victory won, Crusoe tells us, "I came thither dress'd in my new Habit and now I was call'd Governour again" (275). He dispenses punishments accordingly. Furthermore, Crusoe's authority over the island, originally a private fiction dependant on metaphorical names, becomes by the end of the novel quite literally true. There is not a trace of irony in his comments that, on a subsequent voyage "I visited my new Collony in the Island" (305). Thus, what began as a personal "Fancy" or fiction has become, with the course of events, a "public" reality.

Such metamorphoses of figurative expressions into literal "proper" names suggests not only a radical metaphoricity in all language but also that that which we take to be reality is itself a sort of fiction, constructed out of words. While this possibility may have occured to Defoe as he constructed his novelistic world of words, it is one from which his Puritan sensibility would, no doubt, have recoiled. For, along with the idea that all language is totally arbitrary, the notion that language is constitutive of reality suggests the possibility that all human ideas, including God, are the result of such tropological transfigurations. Defoe thus asserts in another way that language is harnessed and guided by Providence and that the true "literal" meaning of words is to be found in only one place: the Bible.

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Just as metaphors have a tendency in Defoe's text to take on a literal significance, so too are the things in the world described in the novel continually refigured as metaphoric representations of something other than themselves, invariably spiritual, Biblical truths. We have noted that this gesture is emblematized in Crusoe's dream of the flaming figure descending from the sky. There are, however, other images in the text which operate in a similar manner. In such images, those things which appear to be products of necessity are revealed as emblems of Crusoe's spiritual condition, signifiers which ultimately find their signifieds in the Bible. The most striking example of this is perhaps the protagonist's description of his clothing. Lightheartedly, he offers the reader a "Scetch" of his "Figure", revealing that he is dressed from head to toe in goatskin. There seems, initially, nothing unusual in this: there are many goats on Crusoe's island and their hides offer him the best material available for his clothes. A scene later in the book, however, reveals the terrible, emblematic significance of this garb. The scene is that in which Crusoe discovers a cave, in the mouth of which are the glowing eyes of a dying goat. Unaware of the nature of the beast staring back at him, Crusoe tells us he saw:

> two broad shining Eyes of some Creature, whether Devil or man I knew not, which twinkl'd like two Stars, the dim Light from the Cave's Mouth shining directly in and making the Reflection. (177)

The connection between Crusoe's clothing and his spiritual condition, only hinted at naively here by the narrator, is revealed explicitly in the Bible. In the Old Testament, the goat is related directly to sin: it is the animal offered to God by people to atone for their wrong-doings. Thus, in Leviticus, the Lord instructs Aaron to:

> lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hands of a fit man into the wilderness. (Leviticus 16:21)

Thus the protagonist's clothing is an emblem of his own sinfullness which is itself a sign of the Devil's work. Defoe here also draws on associations which, no doubt, sprang from the basic Biblical relation between the goat and sin. Thus the qualities of evil and passion typically associated with the goat, along with the connection commonly made between the goat and Satan, suggest that Crusoe's vision in the cave is in fact nothing less than a metaphoric reflection of his own irrational and corrupt nature which is externalized symbolically in his goatskin clothing. This is ironically confirmed when the narrator tells us that at the moment when he was about to

plunge into the cave and face the unknown creature he thought, "that I durst to believe there was nothing in this Cave that was more frightful than my self" (177). It is also significant that there is a linguistic dimension to this scene. Crusoe describes the goat as making "a broken Noise, as if of Words half express'd" (177). This echoes Crusoe's description of the "broken and imperfect Prayer" (94) he had made which was itself a sign of his corrupt use of language before he learns to pray "in the true Sense of the Words" (96) with "a true Scripture View of Hope founded on the Encouragement of the Word of God" (96).

What should ultimately be noted in this scene is that in the interplay of Crusoe's words and the image he describes, much more truth is divulged than he is actually aware. What prevents him from recognizing the ironic appropriateness of his utterances is his attribution of "literalness" to a thing which is, in effect, a visible "token" or emblem of something else. Things, in Crusoe's world, are often figures for certain spiritual truths, laid down in the Bible. With the fallen understanding of things he shares with all men, however, Crusoe "reads" the emblems in the book of the World in a literal way only. As this scene demonstrates, however, the apparent self-identity things may possess is, in fact, metaphorically charged: things here serve as figural representations of spiritual truths which, in turn, may be understood through the

Bible.

With this gesture, a strange reversal has taken place in the relationship between words and things. Whereas we commonly take words to be signs representing things, things, in this scene and others in the book, direct us to God's word. Thus, instead of words standing for things, things have come to stand for words, although these words are of the divine variety to be found in the Bible. The Biblical word suddenly takes on the concreteness and self-identity we typically attribute only to things.

When brought together, the two orders of signs, words and emblems, play ironically off one another so as to reveal the spiritual truth men may, unwittingly, speak. This possibility augurs for words a potency comparable to that of the Adamic language. Although words may appear to have lost the power they once had to represent in themselves the essence of things, they actually retain a force by which, when squared with the Word of God found in the Bible, they may be used to interpret the metaphoric significance of things. Crusoe's text is an embodiment of this principle. In it, words are used to create hieroglyphic images, yet within those images are ironic spoken or written comments which, like the motto of an emblem, point to the true significance of such scenes which is to be found in the well-spring and anchor of language -- the Bible. Man is thus party to the divine will through the Biblical

word. It is the one text through which people may decipher the emblematic world of things, which words only appear to name literally.

Furthermore, although people may use words to refer to things, this process is only a detour, so to speak, in which the sacred nature of man's language is lost or, at least, obscured. We have noticed that things in this novel are themselves signs of the Word of God as inscribed in the Bible. Man's words therefore are signs of things which are in fact signs or representations of the perfect Word of God. The world is thus an illustration or emblem of the divine Word, and man's own words, because of his corrupt understanding of both the sacred nature of his language and of the emblematic or semiotic status of things, appear to him to stop dead at that which his words seem to name. In appearing to name things which are themselves figures, however , man's language is thus, in its usage although not in its essence, highly metaphorical. Man's words appear to represent literally what are in fact only figures of the divine Author. Words, as we use them, are then figures of figures.

On the island Crusoe becomes aware of the metaphoric nature of language. Returned as he is to Eden, and "reduced to a meer State of Nature" (118), this awareness manifests itself, in part, in his recognition of the literal foundation of such epithets as "wooden":

> First, I had no Plow to turn up the Earth, no Spade or Shovel to dig it. Well, this I conquer'd, by making a wooden Spade, as I observ'd before; but this did my Work in but a wooden manner. (118)

Crusoe, however, also sees that the literal roots of such common figurative expressions as "daily bread" are not only to be discovered by a return to the simplest of lives, but are also present in the Bible. Thus, discussing the great amount of labour required in the production of bread, he notes:

> It might be truly said, that now I work'd for my Bread; 'tis a little wonderful, and what I believe few People have thought much upon, (viz.) the strange multitude of Things necessary in the Providing, Producing, Curing, Dressing, Making and Finishing this one Article of Bread. (118)

Besides recognizing the literal basis of what has become a figurative expression, Crusoe's experience itself is rendered as a metaphor of a literal Biblical statement. Hence, in his comment, he echoes the punishment God pronounces on Adam before expelling him from the Garden: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground" (Genesis 3:19). Thus, while the words "work for one's bread" may have taken on a figurative aspect in time, this is only because, with his imperfect understanding, man has forgotten that labour itself is a emblematic reminder -- a "memento", to use Crusoe's words -- of man's original sin. It is thus not the words themselves which are corrupt so much as it is man's

understanding of them, and thus his forgetfullness of the symbolic significance of the experience to which they refer. Man has forgotten the symbolic implications of labour and thus uses the term "worK'd for my Bread" in a corrupt way. In recognizing the literal truth of the expression, Crusoe moves a step closer to the dim realization that his entire experience is pre-figured in the words of the Bible.

While for LocKe words are best defined through experience, Defoe suggests that even this can be misleading because man has an imperfect understanding of his experience. Even the consensus required by LocKe for a word to be truly meaningful cannot provide what this novel suggests is the true, "scriptural", significance of words. All men are fallen; thus any attempt to agree on the meaning of a word, without reference to God's Word, is to remain within the blinding darKness of man's corrupt and imperfect Knowledge and thus to use what is essentially a sacred language in a prophane manner. In this sense the Bible is the best dictionary available, for the language there is a perfect and direct embodiment of God's will which for man is only mysteriously manifested in the configurations of things in the world that his words attempt to name. Thus, although Crusoe may believe in seeing the ship "founder" that he understands the meaning of the word, he does not, for the foundering of the ship is itself a movement in God's plot, emblematizing the sinful nature of the sailors and

the spiritual danger which threatens the young Crusoe, caught as he is in "the Current" of his "Desires" (8).

Although Crusoe may not understand the spiritual significance of the word "founder", two important words which he does come to realize the true, spiritual meaning of are "deliverance" and "remission". Initially reading these words in the Bible, Crusoe takes them to apply only to his physical circumstances. For example, while recovering from his sickness, he reads the words from Psalms 50:15: "Call on me in the Day of Trouble, and I will deliver, and thou shalt glorify me" (94) and remarks:

> The Words were very apt to my Case, and made some Impression upon my Thoughts at the time of reading them, tho' not so much as they did afterwards; for as for being deliver'd the Word had no Sound, as I may say, to me; the Thing was so remote, so impossible in my Apprehension of Things, that I began to say as the Children of Israel did, when they were promis'd Flesh to eat, Can God spread a Table in the Wilderness? (94)

Although Crusoe regards the words with skepticism, he does, however, shortly recognize that he "had been deliver'd, and wonderfully too" (95), not from the island, as he had initially interpreted the words, but "from Sickness" (95). And so, the word seems literally applicable to his circumstances. But here again he is mistaken. The true significance of "deliverance" is not revealed to him until several days later when the word

is itself illuminated, not by experience, but by another word which he finds in the Bible. He explains:

> it happen'd providentially the very Day that reading the Scripture, I came to these Words, "He is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give Repentance, and to give Remission". (96)

In "Remission" Crusoe has "providentially" stumbled upon a word which embraces all aspects of his experience on the island, including his misinterpretation of "Deliverance", and crystalizes them in their spiritual significance. Not only does the word denote the waning of his sickness, it also suggests, in the usage in which it signifies a shortening of a prison term, that "the Island was certainly a Prison to me, and that in the worst Sense in the World" (96-7) as well as the notion that true Deliverance means, like remission, forgiveness from sin. In this moment, Crusoe recognizes the emblematic nature of his experiences and the spiritual meaning which they represent. The moment is, indeed, a startling one:

> Now I look'd back upon my past Life with such Horrour, and my Sins appear'd so dreadful, that my Soul sought nothing of God, but Deliverance from the Load of Guilt that bore down all my Comfort: As for my solitary Life it was nothing; I did not so much as pray to be deliver'd from it, or think of it; It was all of no Consideration in Comparison to this: And I add this Part here, to hint to whoever shall read it, that whenever they come to a true Sense of things, they will find Deliverance from Sin a much greater Blessing, than Deliverance from Affliction. (97)

Certainly Crusoe here recognizes that his physical and his spiritual life are bound together, one the emblem of the other. Also evident here, however, is that the Bible reveals that the link between the two is a linguistic one and that his fate hangs in the balance of his ability to determine the true, spiritual significance of words. Needless to say, this revelation is followed by Crusoe's first true prayer, undertaken as it is "with a true Scripture View of Hope founded on the Encouragement of the Word of God" (96). Furthermore, realizing the sacred essence of language which man's corrupt understanding obscures, Crusoe asserts, "from this Time, I may say, I began to have Hope that God would hear me" (96).

Throughout his narrative, Crusoe demonstrates an awareness of the emblematic nature of reality and the relation of these emblems to the Bible, which he does not initially recognize while on the island. For example, commenting on his disastrous first voyage, and his decision not to return home after it, he writes:

> Had I now had the Sense to have gone back to Hull, and have gone home, I had been happy, and my Father, an Emblem of our Blessed Saviour's Parable, had even Kill'd the fatted calf for me. (14)

Crusoe, of course, does not return and thus himself becomes the emblem of an Adam-like figure, or as he calls it:

> a Memento to those who are touch'd with the general Plague of Mankind, whence for ought I know, one half of their Miseries flow; I mean, that of not being satisfy'd with the Station wherein God and Nature has plac'd them; for not to look back upon my primitive Condition, and the excellent Advice of my Father, the Opposition to which, was, as I may call it, my ORIGINAL SIN; my subsequent Mistakes of the same Kind had been the Means of my coming into this miserable Condition. (194)

There are other "mementoes" in the book, all of which are representations of God's presence in the world. For example, the skulls and limbs Crusoe finds strewn on the beach of his island he calls "a token that God has left them [the cannibals] to such stupidity" (232). And the peaceful tableau of Crusoe dining in the midst of his animal subjects is itself, he realizes, an emblem of a Biblical passage which he, like the Israelites, had initially doubted the possibility of:

> How mercifully can our great Creator treat his Creatures, even in those Conditions in which they seem'd to be overwhelm'd in Destruction. How can he sweeten the bitterest Providences, and give us Cause to praise him for Dungeons and Prisons. What a a Table was here spread for me in a Wilderness, where I saw nothing at first but to perish for Hunger. (148)

Indeed, Crusoe himself learns to adopt the emblem as a powerful mnemonic device. For example, after his mad efforts to transport the first boat he builds to the water are frustrated, he decides "to let it lye where it was, as a Memorandum to teach me to be wiser next Time" (136). Similarly, he names his

new companion "Friday" after the day on which he saved him, "for the Memory of the Time" (206).

This last example is particularly interesting because the "Memento" is not a thing, but a name. And yet, those few names we are given for the characters in Robinson Crusoe possess the power to indicate the spiritual status of the person named. The names of those whom it seems are among the elect of God, are marked with either a sign of the cross or something which suggests a religious significance. Thus "Xury", the name of the boy whom Crusoe sells into service aboard a Portugese vessel and from which he will be set "free in ten Years, if he turn'd Christian" (34), is inscribed with the Cross, a sign of his "deliverance". Similarly, the English "Corruption" of the narrator's name retains a trace of "cross" (Blewett 158,n53) present in the first syllable of the German "Kreutznaer". Therefore, like Xury, Crusoe is quite literally marked with the cross and is thus, it would seem, marked by God as one elected for salvation. His first name complicates the question somewhat, which in part explains his inability to determine whether the reflection he sees in the cave is "Devil or Man" (177). Eighteenth-century readers may have recognized in the goat-skin clad form of Robinson Crusoe another figure from English folklore: Robin Goodfellow, a Pan-like hobgoblin who, according to Allison Packer in her book Fairies in Legends and the Arts, was depicted on the cover of a 1639 chapbook

entitled Robin Goodfellow, His Mad Prankes and Merry Jests, as "a lustful satyr with a goat's horns, legs and hooves" (111). As Robert Graves notes in The White Goddess, the figure dates back even further than this, however, to a time when Robin Goodfellow, or as he was then known, Robin son of Art, was an image of the devil and a god of witches (396). This duality which Crusoe inherited in the names of his mother and father respectively, does indeed adumbrate the Manichean nature of Crusoe's struggle. The name which is perhaps the least easy to reconcile with the pattern we find here, is that of Friday. One possible solution comes from the fact that Crusoe tells us that he "had lost a Day or two in my Reckoning" (104) of time while on the island. If the latter is the case, Friday's salavation seems assured because he is in fact, named after the Sabbath. Like Robinson Crusoe and Xury, his name suggests that words themselves, regardless of man's corrupt understanding of them, do possess an Adamic capacity to communicate the essence -- which in this novel figures as a spiritual essence -- of that which they name.

Conclusion

In John Locke's desacralized conception of language, words are signs of ideas and ideas are signs of things and the link between the two is "arbitrary, voluntary, individual and private" (Harris and Taylor 114). In order to resacralize language and to demonstrate that there remains in words something of the divinely-granted power to name essences enjoyed by Adam in the Garden, Defoe in Robinson Crusoe, adds an additional level of signification to Locke's formula. Things themselves, the novel suggests, are also signs of God's will and their significance may be known through the perfect language of the Biblical text. Defoe thus ensures meaning in language by turning everything into signs whose referents are to be found in a single, divinely-inspired text. That man himself is party to the language of this divine text which is the ground of which all things are a figure is in itself a guarantee that man's language is not of his own invention. That people may not recognize the sacred significance of the words they use is merely itself a sign of man's fallen status. In a sense then, Defoe has created in Robinson Crusoe a closed circle of signification in which meaning is guaranteed in both

things and words by the Divine Word of God as set down in the Bible. Biblical allusions and quotations in the text thus serve to close this circle.

For Adam there was no gap between signs and that which they signified: his language constituted a system whereby the meanings of words were enclosed within words themselves. In Robinson Crusoe we are offered a comparable system in which words and the ultimately spiritual essence of the things to which they correspond are enclosed within a semiotic circle where both words and things are signs of God's Will as stated in the Bible. It is only man's corrupt understanding of Providence which blinds him to this divine link between words and things. When brought together narratively, however, as these elements are in Robinson Crusoe, man's words, God's Word, and things prove themselves to be in a cohesive relationship in which each invariably corresponds, through the crucial Biblical link, with each.

The anxiety which John Locke's assertions concerning the desacralized nature of language inevitably produced thus proved an impetus which gave rise at least to Robinson Crusoe, if not other early novels. The resacralization of languge required the demonstration of an unarbitrary link between words and things. In Robinson Crusoe, this bond is revealed (or created) by suggesting that, not only do things have a semiotic significance similar to that of words but also that words

possess the apparently self-certifying status of things. Thus, in the novel, both words and things derive that which they lack from that which links them -- the Bible. As human language is, despite the corrupt human understanding of it, a repetition or descendant of the foundational, self-present, Biblical Logos, it thus possesses something of the self-identity which we typically attribute to things. Similarly, because things in the novel are signs of God's Will, they share in the semiotic status of language. Thus, the essence of both things and words overlaps and the area of their intersection is that of the Bible.

That this demonstration of the unarbitrary nature of language could best and, perhaps, only be demonstrated in the parabolic form of the novel is evidence that the novel itself was a response to the linguistic theories of Locke. That the word could only be resacralized by constructing an apparently self-certifying linguistic creation, is evidence that this novel, if not others, was a response to the frightening implications of the arbitrary and conventional language described in John Locke's Essay.

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