

The Pursuit of Happiness in *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Scarlet Letter*

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Abstract: This paper aims at finding the obvious reason behind suffering of the two classical protagonists Robinson Crusoe and Hester Prynne in their life either in the sea or on a deserted island as in the case of Robinson or in a hometown as in the case of Hester. It emphasizes the assertion of individuality and its aim to find out the possible alternatives of the present life. An investigation of the particular background will shed light on our understanding of the two stories. Hester moves from the Old World of Europe to the New World of America, and settles down near Boston. After committing the adultery with Dimmesdale, Hester, all by herself, becomes a lonely woman in a totally alien land.

Keywords: *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Scarlet Letter*, transgression, humiliation, happiness

An Overview of *Robinson Crusoe*: Daniel Defoe the life and strange surprising adventures of *Robinson Crusoe* was published as a fictional story in 1917. It is based on the true story of a real-life castaway. His name was Alexander Selkirk, and was a Scottish sailor who got stranded on his own desert island off the coast of Chile for four years. Historians said that after the sailors' vessel had become unseaworthy, Selkirk asked to be put ashore on one of the inhabited Juan Fernandez islands (now called Robinson Crusoe Island) about 400 miles of the west coast of Chile, south America. Selkirk was eventually rescued in 1709 and his story appeared in print and periodicals in England. Daniel Defoe made use of that real story of Selkirk whose name changed to be Robinson in Robinson Crusoe. In the novel, Robinson Crusoe is a mariner who takes to the sea despite parental warnings. Crusoe's father wants him to be a good, middle-class man. However, Crusoe wants nothing more than to travel around in a ship. He struggles against the authority of both his father and God and decides to use his own instinct which is to go advertising on the sea instead. He suffers a number of misfortunes at the hands of Barbary Pirates and faces a number of sea hardships. He eventually escapes and is helped to Brazil where he becomes a successful plantation owner. He embarks on a slave gathering expedition to West Africa but is shipwrecked off the Coast of Venezuela in a terrible storm.

An Overview of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* : *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne depicts the story of a heroine called Hester Prynne. She is beautiful and young and has been married to Chillingworth, and elderly 17th-C English scholar; Chillingworth sends her to puritan New England. The story takes place in the puritan village of Boston. The narrator informs the readers that several years before the novel begins, Hester Prynne came to the New World to await the arrival of her husband in New England and did not arrive in Boston as Hester

expected. Her husband was captured by Indians and did not come back home. Soon after, she fell in love with her minister, Dimmesdale. Believing her husband dead, Hester had an illegal relationship and committed adultery with the young Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale and she became pregnant. The village magistrates imprisoned her for this sin and she is publically disgraced and sentenced to wear a visible sign of her adultery "A" on the bodice of her dress for the rest of her life. It is her doom to wear The Scarlet Letter, the "A" which worked as a symbol of sin on her dress, and on her stands on the public scaffold, to be seen by all people. She made no excuse. She would wear her doom and acknowledge it justice. As she stood on the public scaffold to be seen by all men there, her husband, Roger Chillingworth came by chance into the town and they saw each other. No one else in Boston knew that they were man and wife. Hester refused to tell him who had been her fellow sinner. Swearing revenge, Chillingworth disguised himself as a doctor in order to better to hunt down the unnamed father. On the other hand, Hester Prynne became a highly skilled in needlework in prison. She beautifully embroidered the scarlet letter with gold thread. During the first few years of Hester's punishment, the letter "A" was a daily reminder of shame. Hawthorne writes in chapter five:

Hester Prynne had always this dreadful agony in feeling a human eye upon the token; the spot never grew callous; it seemed, on the contrary, to grow more sensitive with daily torture. (*The Scarlet Letter*: 90)

However, as the story continued, this letter came to mean other things to Hester and the people. It eventually became a symbol to some people meaning "able". Hawthorne writes: They said it meant "Able"; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength. (TSL: 169) Although the letter was meant to be a kind of punishment for Hester, it had not punished Hester. Therefore, the letter did not perform its duty and Hester went back to Europe. In other words, If Hester had learned anything from the letter, she would have known better than to run away with a man who wasn't her husband. In fact, the burden of The Scarlet Letter had preyed heavily on Hester's spirit but not, perhaps, in the way that had been intended. In her solitude, Hester had been freed from the limitations imposed by strict adherence to the puritan creed. She could wear her punishment without fear. She had realized her sin and the curse of *The Scarlet Letter*, and therefore, she was shunned from society. On the contrary, Reverend Dimmesdale lacked the strength of Hester's character. He shared Hester's crime but did not have the courage to suffer the humiliation of discovery and The Scarlet Letter. Hester was able to view human frailty with compassion. She realizes that her sin was not unique nor was it as a vile as that of Chillingworth. In other words, the committed sin paved the way to Hester to pursue her happiness. She had realized that such sin would allow her to run away from the limitations of that puritan society.

What is happiness? And how do Hawthorne and Defoe search for it? "That pit of blackness that lies beneath us, everywhere...the firmest substance of human happiness is that a thin crust spread over it with just reality enough to bear up illusive stage-scenery amid which we tread. It needs no earthquake to open the chain." (Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*: 1)

It is clear that happiness depends partly upon external factors and mostly upon oneself. We, as human beings, are too much concerned with ourselves to satisfy the creep of happiness. Many people believe that happiness is impossible without a creed or any religious dimension. Other things such as food, shelter, health, love, successful work and the respect of one's own herd are also indispensable to the happiness of most men but they are very simple compared to the creed of religion. When these things are lacking, only exceptional people can achieve happiness. If people don't get these things they become unhappy. A man should never be pessimistic in life, even if pessimism has become a part of his day, he should never give up and he should dig more and more to achieve the cure of his happiness. This is clearly explained in detail in some classical literary works such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Scarlet Letter*. The two heroes, Robinson and Hester are always fighting to live happily and when they can't find it inside their worlds, they try to bring it from outside and overgeneralise it in their society. Through much of the 15th century, the kingdom and the search for happiness rose by the struggle against the firm and strict family laws of the 15th and 14th centuries. The social conflict started there by the obstinate flags of youth. Robinson Crusoe desired to search around for his happiness away from the dictatorial webs of his family. Daniel Defoe successfully reflects this search as he makes Robinson dig in solid grounds. Robinson Crusoe is given a deeper theme by Defoe than the adventure-story offshoots that have become very popular particularly among the new generation of young people, even of the modern world. Through Robinson Crusoe, Defoe reflects this conflict clearly, as he makes his hero fight even with nature itself. Our hero begins as a child who grows up through his experience of achieving his ambitious greed of establishing and maintaining his special world of happiness. Crusoe's strong character beliefs resemble those of many youths. He never succumbs, as many of his friends, to the desire of the old generation. Against his father's advice, he wants to go to sea and this is considered to be a very dangerous decision if we think it from a historical point of view. In other words, the British naval history shows that Britain during the time of Defoe had many enemies especially at sea. However, Crusoe does not care about that. Therefore, he runs off to the great wide ocean. Defoe suggests overtones of happiness but not imperialism or colonization as many critics believe. Robinson Crusoe, the representative of the typical young man who is full of the spirit of enthusiasm, is perpetuated by his egocentric sense of race, culture and religion. Because of this sense of superiority, Crusoe constructs his self as the exclusive center that looks for the world of happiness. His self-indulgence in finding happiness rises moments of hopes and fair insight by himself. These moments of insight stem largely from moments when Crusoe is able to question the family dominion. He believes not only he can rebel against such dominion but also that he is sure of finding the world of happiness. Therefore, it is a journey of framing-happiness of the individual into the world, the dangers and obstacles the individual encounters there, and the individual's efforts to reintegrate them into the social fabric of establishing the kingdom of happiness. It is the interaction between the individual and the danger,

but who will win? Robinson does not think about the winner but what matters for him is to set up his new journey in searching for happiness and he is also sure that he will face a lot of difficulties.

From the very beginning of Robinson Crusoe, our hero emphasizes his central place in his journey of happiness. His use of "I" as "I was born in the year" states out his strong ambition in this supposed journey. Robinson then shifted his narration to his parents:

I was born...of a good family, tho'not of that country, my father being a foreigner of Berman, who settled first at Hull. He got a good estate by merchandise and leaving off his trade lived ageward at York, from whence he had married my mother, whose relations were....a very good family in that country. (Robinson Crusoe: 3)

The opening pages continue to locate Crusoe within a strong family structure which reflects the strong desire of Crusoe in pursuing his happiness. This also shows that happiness is not related at all to money or job; otherwise, Crusoe would accept his father's advice. In fact, Crusoe shares with his readers the strength of his own name: "Robinson" is his mother's family name, and "Crusoe" a corruption of his father's. Indeed, there can be no doubt that Defoe purposefully positions the narrator of Robinson Crusoe as a child of the middle classes or that the text illuminates the impact of emerging bourgeois values and the transition from puritan social stability to more aggressive forms of capitalism. As a result, Crusoe succeeds materially; he becomes a plantation owner after leaving his family behind; while he is stranded on the island, his investments make him a wealthy man; debris from the shipwreck give him all of the metal and tools he needs to domesticate land, dominate people and animals, and live safely and comfortably—even occasionally luxuriously. Therefore, Crusoe's rebellion, as other writers said, is not a family or socio-economic rebellion; instead, it is profoundly personal. Defoe constitutes Crusoe's revolt against the young laziness as the response to an internal demand for happiness. Even his father's most articulate warnings cannot dissuade Crusoe. Crusoe tells us that after a particular effort by his father, he "resolved not to think of going abroad anymore, but to settle at home according to his father's desire. But alas! a few days were it all of".(RC: 3) Crusoe cannot easily forget his strong desire to search for happiness, no matter how he resolves to when he fails to persuade his father, he negotiates the matter with his mother, promising that:

if she would speak to (his)father to let (him) go but on one voyage abroad, if (he) came home again and did not like it, (he) would go no more, and (he) would promise by a double diligence to recover that time (he) had lost. (RC: 3)

However, his mother rejects Crusoe, and Crusoe continues to struggle to achieve happiness for more than a year until he leaves. Crusoe wishes that his parents agree so that he can gain happiness. He knows very well that his journey of persuading happiness will be difficult. Therefore, he never gives up looking for his parents' blessings. Robinson could have given up in the first storm but it seemed that he was well convinced that the pleasure of happiness never comes out of nothing. He swears never to

come back again. However, as soon as he is saved, he comes back again. During the storm Robinson thinks that it is not easy to reach what he wants. His dream seems to be true. If there are not such horrible and terrifying storms, Robinson may come back and stop dreaming. Nevertheless, he never gives up and continues his passage of searching. As readers, we feel envious of the strong determination of our hero. He feels afraid and goes to the cabinet as if he is blaming himself of all these things happening in the sea. After being saved, Robinson's friend thinks that the voyage is the most disgusting and horrible experience to Robinson. He is extremely sure that Robinson would never even think of coming back again to the sea. However, Robinson through the first voyage to the sea learnt an important lesson which is happiness can never be easily gained. Destiny for Robinson meant the happiness he had been looking for and thinking of all that time. Later, Robinson Crusoe has become a symbol of happiness of great potency and wide application. Robinson hates the presence of western civilization in that place and he wants to assume it on the island. As a result, he deserves a place within the history of ideas. It is in this regard that Ian Watt observes that:

Robinson Crusoe falls naturally into a place, not with other novels, but with the great myths of Western Civilization, with Faust, Don Joan and Don Quixote. All these have as their basic plots; their enduring images, a single-minded pursuit by the protagonist of one of the characteristic desires of Western man. (Watt: 15)

Robinson Crusoe has become Defoe's important hero who does not only present the western civilization but also the world humanity; it is the motto of happiness. Robinson reflects some of the ideologies which have been read into Defoe's novel to determine to what extent they fall with the spirit of the text and Defoe's own ideological inclination, and finally to see how a writer such as Defoe reflects the eighteenth century quest for happiness. Robinson Crusoe proves to us as readers that man has always sought to define himself, his environment and the dominant aspects of his culture through happiness which gives meaning to life. Robinson's presence on the island universalizes the human desire for independence, and the inevitable contrary with authority that this desire engenders, introduces into the novel a sense that happiness in life progresses naturally. Robinson knows that such deserted place will be horrid. However, he prefers to be there rather than to be nothing:

something always returned swift upon me to check these thoughts, and to reprove me; and particularly one day, walking with my gun in my hand by the seaside, I was very pensive upon the subject of my present condition, when reason, as it were, expostulated with me the other way, thus: "Well, you are in a desolate condition, it is true; but, pray remember, where are the rest of you? Did not you come, eleven of you in the boat? Where are the ten? Why were they not saved, and you lost? Why were you singled out? Is it better to be here or there?" And then I pointed to the sea. (RC: 16)

But otherwise Crusoe responds to his anxiety self-desire of approaching happiness, concluding here that it is better to be alive and lonely than dead. He considers his early life as meaningless or dead. He tries to

convince himself of the risk of his journey. He, therefore, speaks to himself as a man who wants to migrate his previous life; a life without happiness. He becomes, as it were, both teacher and student in a quasi-dialogic instruction. He compares his life "here" and "there". He extends this specific chance for him to gain the happiness he has been searching for. He considers this opportunity as God's blessing and therefore he takes fully consideration in observing it: All Evils are to be considered with the God that is in them, and with what worse attends them.(RC:29) He believes that such circumstances of being alone can be usefully react as a positive route of pursuing happiness in terms of a greater evil. He constructs his first catalogue based on this view of the bad things in life as not bad in and of themselves but as a continuum that relies on opposites to make sense:

<i>Evil</i> <i>am cast upon a horrible desolate Island,</i> <i>avoid of all hope of recovery.</i> <i>I am singl'd out and separated,</i> <i>as it were, from the entire</i> <i>world to be miserable</i> (RC: 31)	<i>Good</i> <i>But I am alive, and not drown'd</i> <i>as all my ship's company was</i> <i>But I am singl'd out to from all</i> <i>the ship's crew to be spar'd from Death;</i> <i>and he that miraculously sav'd me</i> <i>from death can deliver me from</i> <i>this condition"</i>
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This catalogue proves that Robinson starts his first ladder of the journey into that island which proves that he is a man of change. He understands his situation as fortunate not in and of itself, but fortunate in terms of happiness. It is this lesson and the logic in which the text returns after Crusoe attempts to explore his island with a makeshift boat. Robinson feels that he will not set upon the place again. He considers that desolate place as the best place and the best route to find and establish happiness. Therefore, he deploras it. His life on the island is compared to his life in London and he finds that living on that Island is for better than that in London, and when he considers living on that island is also the best choice now. Similarly, Hyster Byrne in *The Scarlet Letter* has become the martyr of the community who has been pursuing happiness, and therefore, she has become an angel, everyone around is envied of her behaviour. According to Maxwell Geismar, *The Scarlet Letter* includes "the brooding note of a pity with which Hawthorne viewed those heroic women who were scarified, whether by sacred edict or social convenience, on the altar of masculine institutions". (Geismar: 6) *The Scarlet Letter* presents a unique sinner in the community who acquires an important place in the community as a result of many reasons. Ultimately, she is not to be pitied. In fact, Hyster Brynne is looking for her happiness from the beginning of the novel. Her solitude begins when the novel begins; however, the reader learns slowly of what events occurred before her condemnation. Everyone around Hyster is suffering a lot except her. She is revealed as the angel of mercy which everybody waters his soul from. Hyster looks around her at the world and discovers that this is the universe of hypocrisy. People try to act as if they are

without sins. They try to hide their sins by putting the focus and attention on other people's sins. This is why Hyster decides to pursue a shelter for her to dig for happiness. Happiness means for Hyster a world free from liars and hypocrites. Hyster is not ashamed of what she has done. However, she is ashamed of her punishment but makes a courageous gesture to change a negative situation into a positive experience in a journey described as tough searching for happiness. After having worn the letter for a while, she decides to decorate it. She tries to make the best of her situation and by becoming a craftswoman who survives through her own talents, Hester demonstrates the heroic qualities of self-sufficiency and regeneration. The crowd around Hester is impressed by her needlepoint skills. They are outraged as she has fallen their expectation of her. They consider Hester's decoration of the letter "A" as something insulting of the universe blessings. They feel that Hester is mocking and dismissing the power of authority and as they converse amongst themselves, they say:

She hath good skill at her needle, that's certain," remarked one of her female spectators; "but did ever a woman, before this brazen hussy, contrive such a way of showing it? Why, gossips, what is it but to laugh in the faces of our godly magistrates, and make a pride out of what they, worthy gentlemen, meant for a punishment? (TSL: 58)

In fact, Hester is using *The Scarlet Letter* "A" as a symbol which stands for her desperate man and woman in that society. Hawthorne uses Hester to bring attention to hypocrisy and replacing it by happiness, especially to the extremely critical and judgmental people in her society, and by doing so slowly she earns cautious acceptance from the townspeople as well. Hester shows the letter "A" at work to prove that she has gained not only happiness but also respect. Like *Robinson Crusoe*, Hester is condemned by her society to be isolated. In fact, Robinson and Hester have nothing in common in their lives or personalities, several interconnections and endeavours between them serve to illuminate their distinctive search for happiness: the happiness that other characters urge their souls to seek. For instance, in *The Scarlet Letter*, Chillingworth explains to Hester Brynne:

I had lived in vain. The world had been so cheerless! My heart was a habitation large enough for many guests, but lonely and chill, and without a household fire. I longed to kindle one! It seemed not so wild a dream--old as I was, and sombre as I was, and misshapen as I was--that the simple bliss, which is scattered far and wide, for all mankind to gather up, might yet be mine. And so, Hester, I drew thee into my heart, into its innermost chamber, and sought to warm thee by the warmth which thy presence made there! (TSL: 79)

The characters around Hester express regret and a sense of initial guilt or responsibility for later outcomes by taking younger, beautiful women for brides. It is clearly enough that Hester is more peacefully rested than Chillingworth. This is the peace of mind and the happiness of the soul that either Robinson or Hester has taught their readers to look for. Robinson and Hester Brynne live with the objective of being happy; their lives are all different and yet the same. Indeed, they are all on a common quest- the pursuit of happiness. They try to establish their own world

away from the restrictions of their society. Both, Daniel Defoe and Nathaniel Hawthorne, in these two particular texts, are drawn to be ashamed of their ancestry. Their reflections of their nation are an attempt to confront the legacy of the past and the moral contradictions in their heritage. Their serious attempt reflected the restrictions of their society, which led their characters to see a new world where they would be able to seek for their happiness. Hawthorne provides Hester with the reasons to fled away from a world to such a degree that one of the characters in *The Scarlet Letter* is described as so completely descentised by his environment that he cannot even respond emotionally to the tragic loss of his children and wives. He ironically portrays another character in the Custom House as a "man of business"; when he encounters someone confused by a business transaction, "With an easy condescension and kind for aberrance towards our stupidity--which to his order of mind, must have seemed little short of crime,--would be forth-with, by the merest touch of his finger, make the incomprehensible as clear as daylight" (TSL: 29) The man of business thrives within the confines of the Custom House, but he appears to have neither a personal history nor any connections to his community. Hawthorne portrays him as a purely anonymous being. Generally, most of the characters, except Hester, appeared frivolous and enervated. Therefore, they deserve to be there. However, Hester is described as an energetic being to dig a place for here happiness. Both, Daniel Defoe and Nathaniel Hawthorne saved their characters from being weak and languorous. In the final chapter of *The Scarlet Letter*, the narrator reports that Pearl has got considerable fortune, inherited from her father. This inheritance gives Pearl both paternal legitimacy and wealth. She and Hester then leave Boston for Europe suggesting the writer scholarship as a present for them. Hawthorne suggests that Pearl eventually marries into an aristocratic family and has children of her own. Yet shortly after Pearl's marriage, Hester returns to Boston. She reoccupies her isolated cottage and voluntarily replaces the embroidered letter "A" on her breast. It is the motive of happiness that Hester has made for her. It is the motive of happiness and the new world that Hester has successfully got:

But there was more real life for Hester Prynne, here, in New England, that in that unknown region where Pearl had found a home. Here had been her sin; here, her sorrow; and here was yet to be her penitence... The Scarlet Letter ceased to be a stigma which attracted the world's scorn and bitterness, and became a type of something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence, too.... people... besought her counsel. (TSL: 277)

In fact, Hester suffered a lot during her whole life. It is worth mentioning that we have to consider the effect of seven long years of ostracism on Hester. During those years Hester remains nearly invisible within the community, never drawing attention to herself and devoting herself to the care of the sick and poor. She appears to have accepted her penance with such grace that many in the community change their view of her. She no longer seems the epitome of sinfulness and erotic transgression but, rather, a humble servant of the community. They no longer see the "A" on her breast as a symbol of adultery but as signifying "Able". Even

Hester's physical appearance has changed. Hester has successfully proved the shortcoming of the world and its law around her. She looks indifferent and looks at the world around her as a place devoid of the happiness she is looking for. Thus, she attaches herself to her daughter and even tries to take her daughter with her to that unknown world. Hawthorne says:

The world's law was no law for her mind. It was an age in which the human intellect, newly emancipated, had taken a more active and wider range than for many centuries before. Men of the word had overthrown nobles and kings. Men bolder than these had overthrown and rearranged -not actually but within the sphere of theory, which was their most real abode-the whole system of ancient prejudice; wherewith was linked much of the ancient principle. (TSL: 172)

Hawthorne continues his description of Hester as if she is a spirit of hope, as he says:

Hester Prynne imbibed this spirit. She assumed a freedom of speculation, then common enough on the other side of the Atlantic, but which our forefathers, had they known it, would have held to be a deadlier crime than that stigmatized by *The Scarlet Letter*. (TSL: 172)

At the end both Hester and Robinson are wealthy and the happy end is ensured. Their happy ending is a reward for their being patient. Both have suffered a lot to reach this degree of happiness. They have endured retribution, agony, torture; Hester is rewarded with Pearl while Robinson with the whole island. Like Robinson, Hester has to suffer before she can appropriate the life bound in pearl, before she can realize the promise that her child will bring her the happiness she has been looking for. The Native Americans who come to watch the Election Day pageant think it marks her as a person of importance and status.

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