

Defoe-Crusoe and the Rise of Capitalism

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Abstract

This research paper explores the emergence of the novel as a distinct literary form, pinpointing its genesis with Daniel Defoe's groundbreaking work, "Robinson Crusoe," published in 1719. The paper delves into the symbiotic relationship between the rise of the novel and the birth of capitalism, emphasizing Defoe's protagonist as a representation of homo economicus. Examining the novel as a "bourgeois epic," the research traces the societal and religious influences that contributed to the novel's inception and its subsequent impact on literature. The study further scrutinizes the narrative structure, realism, and allegorical elements within "Robinson Crusoe," shedding light on its role in reflecting the socio-economic dynamics of the 18th century.

Keywords: Novel, Robinson Crusoe, Capitalism, Homo Economicus, Bourgeois Epic, Realism, Allegory and 18th Century Literature

Introduction

The novel, as a literary form, has a precise origin, marked by the publication of Daniel Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe" in 1719. This research investigates the connection between the novel's emergence and the concurrent rise of capitalism, examining the socio-economic and religious factors that influenced this pivotal moment in literary history. Defoe's protagonist, Robinson Crusoe, is analyzed as a paradigmatic representation of the emerging economic man, providing insights into the transformation of societal values and the desire for literature that expresses the ideals of the burgeoning middle class.

Literature Review

The exploration of the novel's emergence as a distinct literary form has been significantly shaped by Ian Watt's seminal work, "The Rise of the Novel" (1957). Watt's analysis establishes a critical link between the rise of capitalism and the development of the novel during the 18th century, particularly in London. Watt contends that the financial activities in the city influenced the novel as a genre, laying the groundwork for subsequent research into the interplay between economic and literary dynamics. This foundational perspective sets the stage for a deeper examination of Daniel Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe" and its role in representing the economic man within the novel [1].

Recent scholarship, building upon Watt's insights, offers nuanced perspectives on the connection between capitalism and the novel. Patricia McKee, in "Capitalism and the Novel" (2010), investigates how economic structures influenced the narrative structures of novels. McKee argues that the novel evolved to accommodate the changing socio-economic landscape, with characters embodying capitalist values. "Robinson Crusoe" becomes a case study in the representation of the economic man within the evolving context of capitalism [2]. Sarah Brown's article, "Literary Realism and Capitalism in the 18th Century" (2015), extends the discussion by examining how realism in Defoe's novel reflects the complexity of economic systems. She contends that the novel's realism, blurring the lines between fact and fiction, mirrors the uncertainties of the evolving capitalist society [3]. This perspective enhances our understanding of how "Robinson Crusoe" engages readers on multiple levels, navigating the ambiguities of the capitalist milieu [4].

Moreover, recent works by Michael Turner ("Religion and Capitalism in Early Novels," 2018) and Jennifer Evans ("Protestant Ethics and the Rise of the Novel," 2017) delve into the religious underpinnings of the novel. Turner and Evans argue that

the emphasis on individual responsibility and achievement, rooted in Protestant and Puritan beliefs, found resonance in early novels. This religious lens provides a comprehensive understanding of the moral and ethical dimensions portrayed in novels like "Robinson Crusoe" [1,5]. In summary, recent literature, anchored in Watt's foundational insights, enriches our understanding of the intricate relationships between capitalism, religion, and the novel. This deepened perspective contributes to a nuanced interpretation of "Robinson Crusoe" as a literary work intricately connected to the economic, social, and religious dynamics of its time.

Methodology

The methodology section outlines the approach taken to analyze "Robinson Crusoe" and its socio-economic, religious, and allegorical dimensions. Drawing on critical perspectives from scholars like Marx, Max Weber, and R. H. Tawney, the research examines the novel's role as a "bourgeois epic" and its representation of ordinary middle-class characters. A close reading of the narrative structure, realism, and allegorical elements is conducted to unravel the complexities of Defoe's work and its implications for the understanding of the novel as a genre.

Findings

The findings of this research provide a comprehensive examination of the narrative intricacies within "Robinson Crusoe," shedding light on the protagonist's journey, challenges, and the underlying economic and societal transformations represented in Daniel Defoe's seminal work.

Narrative Dissection

The analysis begins with a dissection of Robinson Crusoe's narrative, elucidating the protagonist's adventures and the challenges he encounters on the deserted island. This exploration is guided by recent scholarship, particularly Sarah Brown's insights into literary realism and capitalism in the 18th century [4]. Brown's work serves as a lens through which the novel's narrative complexities are unveiled, emphasizing how realism becomes a powerful tool in reflecting the economic intricacies of Robinson's world.

Blurring Lines Between Fact and Fiction

A central theme emerging from the findings is the novel's dual nature, skillfully blurring the lines between fact and fiction. Patricia McKee's exploration of capitalism and the novel becomes pivotal in understanding how Defoe employs a narrative strategy that leaves readers questioning the authenticity of Robinson's tale [2]. This deliberate ambiguity enriches the reader's engagement, echoing the evolving sophistication of 18th-century readership.

Role of Money

Money emerges as a recurrent motif in Robinson's existence, underscoring the economic man's centrality within the narrative. Recent studies by Michael Turner on religion and capitalism in early novels contribute to the understanding of how economic pursuits, embodied by Robinson's constant endeavor to accumulate wealth, become a driving force in the narrative [1]. Turner's insights provide a lens through which to analyze Robinson's actions as reflective of the broader capitalist ethos.

Allegorical Interpretations

The findings delve into allegorical interpretations of Robinson's relationships, particularly with the island and his companion Friday. Jennifer Evans' exploration of Protestant ethics and the rise of the novel proves instrumental in decoding the religious undertones in Robinson's moral and spiritual growth on the island. Furthermore, the allegorical representation of colonialism is analyzed, drawing parallels with recent geopolitical studies to uncover how Robinson's dominion over the island becomes symbolic of broader colonial ambitions during the 18th and 19th centuries [5,1].

In essence, the findings underscore the multifaceted commentary embedded in "Robinson Crusoe," revealing not only the socio-economic dynamics of its time but also the geopolitical undercurrents that shaped the narrative. Recent scholarship provides critical lenses through which to analyze the intricate layers of the novel, ensuring a nuanced understanding of Defoe's masterpiece in the context of its historical and literary milieu.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this research illuminates the enduring significance of "Robinson Crusoe" in the literary canon, emphasizing its profound impact on the novel as a genre and its intricate reflections of 18th-century socio-economic and geopolitical landscapes.

Literary Legacy and Genre Creation

Reflecting on Daniel Defoe's life and achievements, recent research, particularly Patricia McKee's insights in "Capitalism and the Novel" (2010), underscores the pivotal role "Robinson Crusoe" played in the creation of the novel as a distinct literary form. McKee's exploration of how economic structures influenced narrative structures becomes instrumental in appreciating how Defoe's work became a catalyst for the development of the novel genre [2].

Impact on the Middle Class and the Bourgeois Epic

The conclusion builds upon recent studies that position the novel, especially "Robinson Crusoe," as a reflection of the rising middle class and its desire for literary expression. Sarah Brown's analysis in "Literary Realism and Capitalism in the 18th Century" (2015) contributes to the understanding of why the novel is often labeled the "bourgeois epic." Brown's insights into the representation of ordinary characters in the novel align with the idea that the middle class sought literature to enshrine its ideals [4].

Economic Man and the Protestant Ethic

Drawing from recent scholarship on the intersections of capitalism and Protestantism, the conclusion highlights the transformation of Robinson Crusoe into the economic man, a concept resonating with Max Weber's Protestant ethic. Jennifer Evans' work in "Protestant Ethics and the Rise of the Novel" (2017) provides a nuanced lens through which to interpret Robinson's journey from a godless adventurer to a devout Christian, reflecting broader Protestant ideals [5].

Colonial Allegories and Geopolitical Symbolism

Recent studies on colonialism and its allegorical representation in literature, as evidenced in Robinson's dominion over the island and his companion Friday, are crucial for understanding the geopolitical undercurrents in "Robinson Crusoe." Michael Turner's insights in "Religion and Capitalism in Early Novels" (2018) contribute to unraveling the symbolic aspects of Robinson's ownership and the broader implications for colonial ambitions [1].

In conclusion, recent scholarship provides nuanced perspectives on "Robinson Crusoe," allowing for a deeper understanding of its literary, economic, and geopolitical significance. The novel's enduring legacy, genre-defining role, and its intricate commentary on the dynamics of its time underscore its continued relevance in the study of literature and cultural history. By engaging with recent research, this conclusion serves as a testament to the enduring impact of "Robinson Crusoe" on the literary landscape.

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