

Course Name: The Novel and Change

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Lecture 6

So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course titled The Novel and Change. Today we will have the concluding session of Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. So we discussed some of the main themes which are germane to the purpose of this particular course which is looking at how this novel may be seen as a meta text for the birth of imperialism, for the birth of the territorial linguistic cultural expansion that accompanied imperialism. Now in the concluding section we will look at the relationship that Crusoe establishes with a quote unquote savage, a cannibal that he rescues, a person that he decides to name Friday because it happens to be a Friday. Now we talked about the politics of othering in the last class, how this connects very interestingly and very complexly with contemporary sentiments of xenophobia, the fear of the immigrant, the fear of the outsider, whereas very ironically erasing the fact that the person fearing may have been an outsider at one point in time. So, in this case, Robinson Crusoe's story, we have the same kind of a sentimental structure where Crusoe comes in an island, takes over the island, essentially territorializes it, and yet he lives in this constant and permanent peril of being attacked by the outsider. Man Friday in this novel happens to be someone as I mentioned he rescues and someone who gives a name and an identity as if he didn't have one identity before and someone who turns into his own religion, someone who begins to speak his own language albeit in a broken way. So again, we can see how the relationship that Crusoe has with Friday It may be seen as a metamodel of the relationship that the colonizer wanted to establish with the complicit colonizer, complicit subject in the colony. So in terms of how that particular subject will facilitate imperialism, will facilitate territorialization, etc. So the chapter Man Friday, which is chapter 14 in this particular version we are reading, it should be on your screens.

It was one of the nights in the rainy season in March, the four and twentieth year of my first setting foot in this island of solitariness. I was lying in my bed or hammock, awake, very well inhaled, had no pain, no distemper, no uneasiness of body, no, no any uneasiness of mind, more than ordinary, but could by no means close my eyes, that is, so as to sleep. No, not a wink all night long, otherwise then as follows. And he goes on how to describe how he almost has a premonition of what is going to happen. And as he mentions in the paragraph after the one we were skipping, My head was full for some time, taken up in considering the nature of these very wretched creatures, I mean the savages, and how it came to pass in a world that the wise governor of all things should give up any of his creatures to such inhumanity, nay, to something so much below even brutality itself, as to devour its own kind. But as this ended in some, at that time, fruitless speculations, it occurred to me to inquire what part of the world these wretches lived in, how far off the coast was from whence they came, what they ventured over so far from home for, what kind of boats they had, and why I might not have ordered myself and my business so that I might be able to go over the hill as they were able to come to me. Now, we talked about how very interestingly you know we also see how these people that Crusoe very conveniently calls savages are able to build boards, are able to pedal boards, are able to make a cannon, are able to make a fire and yet the homo faber version of their identity is very carefully you know put in the background and what gets foregrounded again and again is the violence, the brutality, the quote unquote uncivilized quality of these people, the subjects. Now we will move to the section where Crusoe essentially rescues Friday and how that whole thing comes into being. When this had agitated my thoughts for two hours or more with such violence that it set my very blood into a ferment and my pulse beat as high as if I had been in a fever, merely with the extraordinary fervor of my mind about it. Nature, as if I had been fatigued and exhausted with the very thought of it, threw me out, threw me into a sound sleep.

One would have thought I should have dreamed of it, but I did not, nor of anything relating to it. But I dreamed that I was going out in the morning as usual from my castle. I saw upon the shore two cannons and eleven savages coming to land, and that I brought with them another savage. So again, look at the very homogeneous description. Everyone is a savage.

Everyone doesn't look like him or speak like him or behave like him, are very conveniently relegated or classified as savages and monsters. whom they are going to kill in order to eat him. So, he seems to know everything what's going on in their minds. So, the moment he sees this quote-unquote savages bringing another person, he automatically assumes and ensures that they're going to kill and eat him. when on a sudden the savage that they were going to kill jumped away and ran for his life. And I thought in my sleep that he came running into my little thick grove before my fortification to hide himself, and that I, seeing him alone and not perceiving that the others sought him that way, showed myself to him, and smiling upon him, encouraged him, then kneeled down to me, seeming to pray me to assist him." So, this is a classic God gaze. that we talked about earlier as well because with the binoculars, with the perspective glasses and the ladder that he mounted himself with, he has got a vision and a perspective to survey, you know they have this massive and almost complete surveillance. of the whole of the whole island right and you know he continues in that direction in this description as well. So he appears to this person as a god ready to redeem him, ready to protect him and you know obviously protect him from the other savages that are chasing him down presumably in crucial assumption to kill him. upon which I showed my ladder, made him go up, and carried him into my cave, and he became my servant, and that as soon as I had gotten this man, I said to myself, Now I may certainly venture to the mainland, for this fellow will serve me as a pilot, will tell me what to do and whether to go for provisions and whether or not to go for fear of being devoured. So, he is capturing, he is rescuing and he is protecting this person obviously with the motive to use the person to get more surveillance on the other side of the island so that he can access more provisions, he can access more resources over there. What place is to venture into and what to escape? I awaked with this thought and was under the inexpressible impressions of joy at the prospect of my escape in my dream.

There are disappointments which I felt upon coming to myself and finding it was no more than a dream. were equally extravagant the other way and threw me into a very dejection of spirit. So interestingly how the reverie first appears before the action, right. So, he has this reverie, this dream as it were where he is rescuing one savage from other savages and is obviously using the person that is rescued to get more access and more direction in terms

of what is happening on the other side of the island. Upon this however I made this conclusion. My only way to go about an attempt for an escape was, if possible, to get a savage into my possession. Now this is an interesting word over here, possession. We talked about how the sense of ownership is very interesting and very important in Robinson Crusoe. He owns the island, he owns the animals, he owns the flocks and the birds and everything else. All the natural resources are owned by him and his island. And now he is about to own another human subject. So, you know, the word possession over here is not accidental, it is very much in keeping with the sentiment of the novel where almost everything can be turned to a commodity. Now, we talked about how the subject is male and white over here and what is not the subject is either the object which can be made into a commodity or the abject which is the other savage, the other human subject which is the abject compared to the, you know, the white male subject that Crusoe embodies, right. So, to get a savage into my possession and if possible, it should be one of their prisoners. So, look at the strategic thinking of Crusoe. If I manage to capture or manage to protect one of these those savages prisoner, I will get the loyalty for life and with that loyalty I can venture to other parts of the island and perhaps escape the island as well. Right, if possible, it should be one of the prisoners, whom they had condemned to be eaten, and should bring hither to kill. But these thoughts still were attended with its difficulty, that it was impossible to effect this without attacking a whole caravan of them and killing them all. And it was not only a very desperate attempt and might miscarry, but on the other hand, I had greatly scrupled the lawfulness of it to me, and my heart trembled at the thoughts of shedding so much blood, though it was for my deliverance. I need not repeat the arguments which occurred to me against this, but they being the same mentioned before. But though I had other reasons to offer now, viz. those men were enemies to my life, and would devour me if they could, that it was self-preservation in the highest degree, to deliver myself from this death or of a life, and was acting in my own defence as much as if they were actually assaulting me and the like.

So you can see how is building up an argument to justify the violence is about to wreck him you know he is about to perpetrate sorry. So he is having this dilemma initially that you know is it justified to shed so much blood but he has managed to make a case in his

own mind where he is saying that well I am doing this to protect myself so it is essentially an act of self-defense. So, it is a very clever in a way to sort of make this argument, build a case to justify and legitimize violence. So, saying that if I don't do this violence, if I don't commit this act of violence, my own life is in danger. Well, in reality, there is no immediate physical threat that Crusoe has, but he is making this anticipatory imagination, this anticipatory justification in order to carry out a raid. Right. So, then he goes about how he makes an action plan. With these resolutions in my thoughts, I set myself upon the scout as often as possible, and indeed so often till I was hurtily tired of it, for it was above a year and a half that I waited, and for a great part of the time went out to the west end and to the south-west corner of the island, almost every day, to seek for canners, but none appeared. This was very discouraging, and began to trouble me much, though I cannot say that it did in this case, as it had done some time before, that which whereof the edges of my desire to the thing. But the longer it seemed to be delayed, the more eager I was for it. In a word, I was not at first so careful to shun the sight of these savages and avoid being seen by them, as I was not eager to be upon them. So, he's making it more and more clear that he's very keen to attack them, to take over their possession and possess what they have. In other words, have a human slave. Besides, I fancied myself able to manage one, nay two or three savages, if I had them, so as to make them entirely slaves to me. So again, this word is not accidental at all. He's looking for human slaves. He's looking for slaves who can run errands for him. essentially carry on or perpetrate this sense of possession, the sense of property over here. So, as you can see Robinson Crusoe is also an interesting example of how you know intercultural property purchase takes place.

So, Crusoe being a white male subject goes to a non-white place and essentially makes almost everything around him into his property and now he's extending that sense of property to other human subjects as well which are defined first as abjects you know he subject abjet and then the abjet will be turned back into a commodity to serve Crusoe's utility. Right. was a great while that I pleased myself with this affair but nothing still presented all my fancies and schemes came to nothing for no savages came near me for a great while. So, you know he's and this entire time lag is important because he's getting more and more inclined to attack more and more inclined to carry out this violence and the

moral dilemma seems to have almost disappeared. Now we come to the section where he takes over the savage and he essentially attacks them with his gun. And this should be on your screen. I was surprised one morning early with seeing no less than five canoes all on shore together on my side the island and the people who belonged to them all landed and out of my sight. The number of them broke all my measures. For seeing so many, and knowing that there always came four or six or sometimes more in a boat, I could not tell what to think of it, and how to take my measures to attack twenty or thirty men single-handed. So I lay still in my castle. Again, look at the word castle over here. So he's essentially the monarch, and he's using this metaphors of monarchy to highlight or corroborate his sense of possession, his sense of property over here.

So I lay still in my castle, perplexed and discomfited. However, I put myself into all the postures for an attack if anything had presented. Having waited a good while, listening to hear if they made any noise, at length being very impatient, I set my guns at the foot of my ladder. and clambered up to the top of the hill by my two stages as usual, standing so, however, that my head did not appear above the hill, so that they could not perceive me by any means. Here I observed, by the help of my perspective glass, that there were no less than thirty in number. So, the perspective glass over here pretty much serves like a security footage, some kind of a CCTV camera that Crusoe has, you know, an access, a visual access, surveillance. that they had a fire kindled they had the meat dressed how they had cooked it I knew not or what it was but they were all dancing in I know not how many barbarous gestures and figures that one way round the fire so the dance of these men are barbaric by default the dance of these men are you know uncivilized by default and that sense of the projection of otherness over here is something which we have constantly throughout this novel so uh So this is the point where Crusoe basically jumps and intervenes and then begins to rescue one person that he names Friday subsequently. So there was between them, and this should be on the screen, there was between them and my castle, the Creek, which I mentioned often at the very first part of my story, where I had landed my cargoes out of the ship. And this I saw plainly he must necessarily swim over, or the poor wretch would be taken there. But when the savage escaping came thither, he made nothing of it, though the tide was enough.

But plunging in, swam through in about thirty strokes, or thereabouts landed, and ran on with exceeding strength and swiftness. So the sense of excess is important over here, because the other is described through the vocabulary of excess. So the one person running away from the other person is coming towards Crusoe, coming towards the creek. between him and the other quote unquote savages. When the three persons came to the creek I found the two of them could swim but the third could not and that standing on the other side he looked at the other but went no further and soon after went softly back which as it happened was very well for him in the main.

I observed that the two who swam were yet more than twice as long swimming over the creek as the fellow that had fled from them. It came now very warmly upon my thoughts and did irresistibly that now was my time to get me a servant again. So, he's looking at it as an opportunity for him, as a strategy for him. This is my time, this is my moment to get a free servant, to get a slave for life and perhaps a companion or assistant. So, the word servant comes first and then companion and then assistant and that's not an accident at all. And that I was called plainly by providence to save this poor creature's life. Now I had mentioned several times before how the biblical rhetoric, how the Christian vocabulary is used seamlessly in order to instrumentalize the sense of possession, the sense of expansion, the sense of territorialization and in this sense, the sense of slavery. It is actually used in a Christian vocabulary to say this is a moment that God is showing me to get a slave, to get a servant, to get a free manservant for life. So, what does it do? I immediately ran down the ladders with all possible expedition, fetched my two guns, for they were both but at the foot of the ladders, as observed before, and getting up again with the same haste with the top of the hill across towards the sea, and having a very short cut and all downhill, clapped myself in a way between the pursuers and the pursued, hallowing aloud to them, to him that fled, who looking back was at first perhaps as much frightened at me as at them. But I beckoned with my hand to him to come back.

And in the meantime, I slowly advanced towards the two that followed. Then rushing at once upon the foremost, I knocked him down with the stock of my piece. I was lost to fire

because I would not have the rest here. Though at that distance it would not have been easily heard, and being out of sight of the smirk too, they would not have easily known what to make of it. Having knocked this fellow down, and the other who pursued with him stopped, as if he had been frightened, and advanced apace towards him. But as I came nearer, I perceived presently he had a bow and an arrow and was fitting it to shoot at me. So, I was then necessitated to shoot at him first, which I did and killed him at the first shot. So, he essentially kills the other person and knocks down the first person. So, two people chasing the human subject who becomes Friday later are essentially knocked off. The poor savager fled, but had stopped, though he saw both the enemies fallen and killed as he thought, yet was so frightened with the fire and the noise of my peace that he stood stock still, and neither came forward nor went backward, though he seemed rather inclined to fly still than to come on. I hallowed again to him and made signs to come forward, which he easily understood. and to come a little way and then stopped again and then a little further and stopped again and I could then perceive that he stood trembling as if he had been taken prisoner and had just been killed as his two enemies were. I beckoned him again to come to me and gave him all the signs of encouragement that I could think of and he came nearer and nearer, kneeling down every ten or twelve steps, in token of acknowledgement for my saving his life.

I smiled at him and looked pleasantly and beckoned to him to come still nearer. So again, Crusoe is playing God over here. So, he's smiling benevolently towards him, asking him to come nearer to him. This is becoming very much like a heavenly vocabulary, a very divine vocabulary and Crusoe is obviously projecting himself very narcissistically as a you know someone who enacted divine deliverance for this you know unfortunate human subject. This seemed was in token of swearing to be my slave forever. So, he set my foot upon his head. So, at length he came closer to me and then he kneeled down again and I would like to sort of highlight this section a little bit because it's a very symbolic motor movement happening over here, muscle movement happening over here. He comes, kneels down again, kissed the ground and laid his head upon the ground and taking my foot, set my foot upon his head. So, this is the ultimate fantasy of the white subject over here, the white male subject over here. So, he rescues a non-white subject and the non-white subject

comes and kisses the ground on his feet and takes the foot of the white man and places it on top of his head. So, we can see how this very narcissistic fantasy is projected in this particular episode and he gets a slave for life. And this, it seems, was in token of swearing to be my slave forever. So, this Crusoe interprets very conveniently, I should add, that this must mean that he is wanting, he is desiring to be my slave forever. I took him up, and made much of him, and encouraged him all I could. But there was more work to do yet, for I perceived a savage whom I knocked, Dan was not killed, but stunned with the blow, and began to come to himself. So, I pointed to him, and showing him the savage, that he was not dead. Upon this he spoke some words to me, and though I could not understand them, yet I thought they were pleasant to hear, for they were the first sound of a man's voice that I had heard, mine only excepted for about twenty-five years.

But there is no time for such reflections now. The savage who has knocked Dan recovered himself so far, to sit upon the ground, and I perceived that my savage began to be afraid. But when I saw that, I presented my other piece, other man, as if I would shoot him. Upon this my savage, for so I call him now, my savage. So again, look at the transfer of epithets over here, transfer of the language, the switch, the possessive over here, my savage. So, you know, sense of ownership, the sense of property is clearly established. Upon this my savage for so i call him now made a motion to me to lend him my sword which hung naked in a belt by my side so i did he no sooner had it but he runs to his enemy and one blow cut off his head as cleverly no executioner in Germany could have done it sooner or better which i thought very strange for one who had reasons to believe never saw a sword in his life except perhaps except their own wooden swords. So, again he is, Crusoe is very surprised to see that Friday the person he is rescuing over here can use a sword and kill someone with one blow and is comparing him with the clinicality of the German executioner. So, again this is from a British position. This means something very culturally significant as you can imagine. And he's also assuming that this is a man, the human subject over here, has never seen a sword before, a metal sword before, except for a wooden sword. So, he's very impressed with his motor skill and motor movement. Right. So, however, it seems as I learned afterwards, they make the wooden sword so sharp, so heavy, and the wood is so hard that they will cut off heads even with them. Hey, and arms, and that at one

blow too. When he had done this, he comes laughing to me in sign of triumph and brought me the sword again and with abundance of gestures, which I did not understand, laid it down with the head of the savage that he just killed just before me. So, he, you know, cut off the head of the savage and presented the head to Crusoe while also laying down his sword. But that which astonished him most was to know how I'd killed the other Indian so far off. So pointing to him, he made signs to me to let him go to him. So obeyed him go, as well as he could.

When he came to him, he stood like one amazed. So again, he's looking at the effect of the gunshot, so to speak. Looking at him, turned him first on one side, then on the other, looked at the wound of the bullet he had made, which it seems was just in his breast, where it had made a hole, and no great quantity of blood had followed it. but had bled inwardly, for he was quite dead. He took upon his bow and arrow and came back. So, I turned to go away and beckoned him to follow me, making signs to him that more might come after them. So, you know, this is a point in the story where Crusoe establishes his mastery, his senses, his identity as a master, because he has a slave over here. Now, what's interesting for us to know is how the master-slave relationship or the binary over here is one which is interdependent. I mean Crusoe is a master because he is a slave and Friday is a slave because Crusoe is a master. So, it works in that interdependent way and again this may be seen as some kind of a better model of how imperialism and colonialism took place. Okay, so we will come the end now and the description of Friday over here is interesting. He was a comely, handsome fellow, perfectly well made, with straight, strong limbs, not too large, tall, well-shaped and as I reckon about 26 years of age. So again, this is entirely something that Crusoe was interpreting and obviously whatever he is interpreting or inferring he is presenting in such a way as if it's information. So, interpretation which is quite subjective in quality is masquerading as information. Again, this is very very common in terms of the colonial-process of knowledge production where the colonizer's subject position is essentially legitimized to the extent that that becomes the objective position.

So, the subjectivity of the position is carefully concealed shall we say and whatever comes from that position is by default seen as the objective empirical position. So, this also has

how a lot to do with how the politics of knowledge production and knowledge consumption takes place during colonialism. He had a very good countenance, not a fierce and surly aspect, but he seemed to have something very manly in his face. And yet he had all the sweetness and softness of a European in his countenance too, especially when he smiled. So, the sweetness and softness obviously are conferred to the Europeans. So, there is something sweet and soft and pleasant about them which is comparable to the Europeans.

The European here becomes a benchmark of civilized sweetness, civilized softness. His hair was long and black, not curled like wool. His forehead was very high and large, and a great vivacity and sparkling sharpness in his eyes. The colour of his skin was not quite black, but very tawny, as the Brazilians and Virginians and other natives of America are, but of a bright kind of a dun olive colour. and they had in it something very agreeable, though not very easy to describe. His face was round and plump, his nose small, not flat like the Negro's, a very good mouth, thin lips, and his fine teeth well set, and white as ivory. We can see how the description of this person is also quite objectifying, it is also quite commodifying and obviously Crusoe uses the word which is offensive today but then we have to situate this text in the particular context of his times where this was an acceptable word and was not received as offensive because it was obviously a way to address the other. the nose, the lips, the countenance, the anatomical features are all amplified and we talked about amplification in the previous class as well. How the white man's gaze over here, the white man's perspective over here is essentially an amplifying gaze. So we'll stop here and we'll wind up but what I will do as a you know in a way of winding up this text, winding up the story Robinson Crusoe is basically give you you know sense of what this novel is doing and how it is important for us in the context of this particular course. Because as you can understand, you can see in the course of the story he is called Friday because he is given the name Friday because Crusoe had essentially rescued him on a Friday. So, the randomness of naming here is also part of the empirical enterprise of knowledge production and knowledge classification. That is entirely coming from the subject position of the colonizer, the imperial man. But it is also important for us to understand how Friday's identity essentially becomes erased and then reproduced because we do not quite know what he was in terms of his religion before Crusoe came to the island.

He is just given Christianity, he is given Christian faith, he is given the Christian vocabulary and value system and the whole thing becomes some kind of an imposition, some kind of a name giving. And this name giving thing is very, very important because the entire knowledge production and consolidation and projection takes place from the perspective of the white man. So, the white human subject here becomes the consolidating, galvanizing position of knowledge. And what we see throughout the novel is how almost everything is commodified, almost everything has a price tag, almost everything has a value to it. And that valuation, the whole politics of pricing something, the whole politics of commodifying something is done from the position of the colonized, from the position of the white male subject. And I use the word white male very carefully because a female is conspicuously absent in Robinson Crusoe. In fact, those of you who read the whole novel would know that Crusoe very briefly mentions his wife towards the end of the novel. So as to speak that his wife appears in the novel, produces more sons for him and disappears by dying conveniently. you know by dying quickly. So, the whole purpose of the woman here is to produce more men who will carry on the legacy of Crusoe. And again, we need to situate this in the structure of imperialism around that time where the white man goes, creates a legacy through expansionist, territorializing policies of military policies, taking over islands, giving it a new name, giving it a new epistemic structure, a new knowledge structure in the form of language and religion and classification and naming and so on and so forth. And entire thing is done very interestingly in this particular novel with a constant reference to Christianity, a constant reference to the religion. And in many, in many occasions you find the religion over here is also a means to justify violence, also means to justify certain kind of acts which would otherwise be seen as you know very inhuman, almost brutal in quality. So it is a very complex cultural condition and that is exactly what we are looking at here and how this is also a novel which is reflective of social changes, how the merchant class is rising in terms of its acquiring of wealth, in terms of its expansionist enterprise and there is a sense of a democratization about it the common man can become a sailor and go on and make a lot of money and wealth and make a name for himself but at the same time it's also a time of new cartographic expansion map making and with the map making the whole idea of trade territory and property comes into being

right, how everything becomes a property including human subjects and the production of property over here operates in all kinds of ways through symbols, through language, through religion, through human subjects, obviously through animals and other kinds of non-living entities as well, right.

So this is the context of Robinson Crusoe. This is the way in which this novel should be studied particularly in a course like this in terms of how it is reflective of social changes, profound and complex social changes. And we'll look at, in the subsequent classes, we'll look at how we can situate this novel, this piece of fiction that Daniel Defoe does. It's a really interesting novel because it appeals to human imagination even today. And as I mentioned that there are many instances, many themes in Robinson Crusoe, including xenophobia, including the fear of the outsider, including the fear of the immigrant coming and taking over your land, your territory, your culture, that are very, very pertinent even today in the current geopolitical climate that we internalize and inhabit. So we stop at this point. This is officially the end of the novel in terms of how you are reading it. Of course it is a much bigger novel. It does many other things. But for the purpose of this course we are culling out certain sections and looking at how those sections may be studied in some close details in order to see how the novel is reflective of the social and cultural changes that are happening around that time.

But in the subsequent classes we look at the secondary scholarship on Robinson Crusoe to see how that notion of change, social change are happening in terms of trade, in terms of commerce, in terms of territorialization and how this novel may be seen in 2024. as interestingly reflective of those dichronic changes or social structural changes. So these are things which will continue in the subsequent classes. Thank you for your attention.