

The Romantic Perception of the Presence of God in *Robinson Crusoe* and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”: A Comparative Reading

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Abstract: *Robinson Crusoe* is written by Daniel Defoe, a writer often described as the father of English novel. This novel was first published in 1719, which means that it is the product of the age of reason and the neoclassical age. On the other hand, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of the pioneers of the Romantic Movement in English poetry. “The Rime” was first published in 1798 in the collection, “Lyrical Ballads,” in collaboration with his friend and pioneer of romantic poetry, William Wordsworth.

Though *Robinson Crusoe* and “The Rime” belong to two different literary genres, namely novel and poetry, both are narratives that concern two protagonists who go on journeys that lead them to acquire new experiences that affect their future lives. Robinson and the mariner come to have journeys in the sea that finally land them into the full perception of God among all features of nature, which, according to romantics, is one of the principal agents that lead to man’s regaining of his innocence and purity.

The journeys that the two protagonists go through enforce isolation on them, which leads them to undergo an individual experience of suffering that ends the moment both come to perceive the presence of God, a perception that enables them to regain their peace and their faith.

This study is to undertake a comparative reading of the two works to highlight the experience of the two protagonists, which ends up with their full perception of the presence of God in the embrace of nature.

Keywords: comparative reading, nature, presence of God, romantic perception

1. Introduction

This paper aspires to undertake a comparative reading of *Robinson Crusoe* and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” to underscore the experiences of the protagonists of the two works, which end up with their perception of the presence of God whether they are aware of Him or not.

As far as I know, only two studies deal with *Robinson Crusoe* and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” in a comparative way. There are indeed many articles that undertake studies on the two works, but they deal with them on an individual basis without comparing them. The two studies are an article entitled “Mixed Messages: Isolation, Salvation, and Slavery in *Robinson Crusoe* and *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*” by Rami Blair and a book entitled *Coleridge’s Submerged Politics: The Ancient Mariner and Robinson Crusoe* by Patrick J. Keane (1994).

Concerning Blair’s study, there are no publishing data; it is published on Academia with no information about the publisher and the year of publication¹. Anyway, it could have been published before 2010. As is apparent from the title of Blair’s article, the main focus of the study is on isolation, salvation and slavery in both works. Also, it is concerned “about providence and the nature of God” (1). Blair’s article is interested in dealing with slavery in general and “ideological slavery” (2, 3) in particular in *Robinson* and “metaphoric slavery” in “The Rime” (5), a point that I am not concerned

about treating in this paper. As for his reference to Robinson’s “sin” and his argument about Robinson’s need for “salvation” (3, 4), whether physical or spiritual, he is accurate. He also deals with the mariner’s crime and the punishment he suffers (5), which he sees that it is “inappropriate for the crime” (6).

Regarding the punishment imposed on the other mariners, for Blair, it “seems unusually severe” (6). Still, the vital question is: do they deserve punishment or not? For me, at least, the clear and direct answer is that they deserve punishment since their crime cannot be justified. Finally, for Blair, the island and the sea are places where Robinson and the mariner suffer punishment. However, for me, besides, they are places that represent nature where they become able to perceive the presence of God.

Keane’s book, *Coleridge’s Submerged Politics: The Ancient Mariner and Robinson Crusoe*, mainly focuses on Coleridge’s politics as the main title shows. The subtitle is a little bit misleading since it gives the wrong impression that it is going to undertake a comparative study of “The Rime” and *Robinson*. Raimonda Modiano argues that in this book Keane “proposes a political reading of *The Ancient Mariner*” (1996 450). That is why, in his book, Keane traces Coleridge’s political views that he has embraced in the years preceding the writing of “The Rime.” He presents all these political views, especially those concerning slavery and the slave trade, in the book’s introduction. He imposes a “political reading” on the poem, to the extent that he unawarely forgets that the poem is a “work of “pure imagination” (Modiano 450). What leads Keane to deal with *Robinson* is that Coleridge in his “marginalia to *Robinson Crusoe*” (1830) in which he annotates *Robinson* and describes “its hero as a “Universal Man” with whom every reader could identify” (Modiano 450; See also Simon Frost’s study that partly deals with Coleridge’s views regarding Robinson and the novel 2013 85–110). It enraged Keane that though Coleridge was an “abolitionist” and was against “slave trade” he neither criticized nor made any “mention of Crusoe’s slave trading activities or his objectionable treatment of Friday” (Modiano 450; See also David P. Haney’s review of Keane’s book in which he pronounces similar views of this book 1995 498–501). After that Keane, though heavily relying on historical and biographical facts, offers a “political reading of *The Ancient Mariner* that does not jeopardize its status as a work of “pure imagination” (Modiano 452).

Other reviewers of Keane’s book sound, though with some variation, similar views on it. Daniel P. Watkins claims that Keane’s study is “an important contribution to the ongoing historicist assessment of Romanticism.” Still, he accurately maintains that “while the subtitle suggests that Defoe’s novel is central to the thesis, Keane’s real interest is in Coleridge’s work and thought at two different periods of his life” (1995 259) – the period after the French Revolution and the period in which he annotated a copy of *Robinson Crusoe*. Another reviewer, Anya Taylor, argues that Keane’s book “presents a comprehensive account of both the history of the slave trade and of twentieth-century political criticism about Coleridge” (1995 194). She also highlights the fact that the book is mainly a political reading of “The Rime” and refers to Keane’s criticism of Coleridge concerning his silence about the slave trade in *Robinson*. Another reviewer of the book, Irving N. Rothman, states that Keane finds that both “The Rime” and *Robinson* “covertly treat the effect of slavery and the slave trade on the nation’s sensibility” (1996 260), and argues that Keane’s book “is a study of the political implications of the two major works, it is not an analysis of the aesthetics of literary production” (1996 261). Rothman, opposed to Keane’s viewpoint, concludes that, by studying Defoe’s novel and his essays on the slave trade, “we realize that Crusoe’s greatest achievement in the book would be his conversion of Friday – saving souls, even his own; this is the crucial issue, not the slave trade *per se*” (1996 262).

In this way, one observes that these two studies engage each other in issues that this present study is not interested in handling in detail. Both studies focus on slavery and the slave trade. Blair’s article attempts a comparative study of the two works. However, Keane’s book is not a real comparative study of “The Rime” and *Robinson*; most reviewers conclude that it is a political reading of “The Rime” concerned about the issues of slavery and the slave trade. What leads Keane to deal with Robinson is that Coleridge ignored mentioning and criticizing Robinson’s activities that relate to slavery and the slave trade. Here emerges the importance of the present study since it is going to deal

with the two works as works of pure imagination and since it is an attempt to attract attention to the fact that they are comparable on this basis.

This study is to fall into six sections: the first one is an introduction; the second deals with the guilt committed by the two protagonists; the third treats the punishment that befalls the two protagonists and which leads them to suspicion and later on to repentance; the fourth with the protagonists' perception of God and their reconciliation to themselves and God; the fifth with tolerance; and finally the sixth is a conclusion that sums up what has been done in the paper.

Robinson Crusoe (1719) by Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) are two of the masterpieces of world literature that cannot be ignored by anyone who comes to study English literature. Both *Robinson* and "The Rime" have achieved great popularity among readers and critics alike from the moment they were first published. Though they belong to two different literary genres and two different literary ages – *Robinson* is a novel that was written in the age of reason and in fact ushered in the English novel, and "The Rime" is a narrative poem, a ballad, that was created in the Romantic age and one of the poems that announced the advent of the Romantic Movement – they have a lot in common.

Both *Robinson* and "The Rime" are narratives of two protagonists who go through various experiences, mainly in the sea, that come to determine their future lives; each focuses on the individual experiences of its protagonist. Robinson and the mariner come to have journeys into the sea that finally land them into the full perception of God among all elements of nature, which, according to the romantics, is one of the principal agents that lead to man's regaining his innocence and purity.

Each of the two journeys begins with committing a sin, in the case of Robinson, and a crime, in the case of the mariner. Due to the sin/crime, they commit, they come to suffer punishment, and isolation and solitude are enforced on them. Then, they go through a process of atonement and penance for the sin/crime they committed. Both survive their suffering and are finally relieved of their sin/crime once they perceive that God was, and is always, there watching on them. This perception, which takes place in the embrace of nature, saves them physically and spiritually, enabling them to regain their peace and their faith.

This paper aims to undertake a comparative reading of *Robinson* and "The Rime" to highlight the individual experiences of the protagonists of the two works, to underline the sin/crime committed by each of them, to underscore the punishment they suffer and the curse imposed on them, which leads them to suspect that God is not there watching on them, and finally to emphasize the fact they come to perceive that God is always there watching over them, which brings about their salvation and deliverance. Furthermore, the paper is to highlight the feeling of tolerance that prevails by the end of the two works. *Robinson* and "The Rime" are two of the important literary works that have come to occupy a very significant stance in world literature because of the tolerance, especially the "toleration of religious differences" (Cooney 2007 198), as well as the acceptance of the other that is embraced in the texts of the two works and that mainly prevails by their end, as will be shown.

2. The Guilt: Sin or Crime

According to *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, guilt is "the fact of having committed a specified or implied offence or crime" (1999 817). If you have a feeling that you are responsible for doing something bad or wrong, it means that you are guilty of committing a sin or a crime. Sins are done against God, while crimes are done against creatures created by God. In *Robinson*, Robinson commits an offence against his parents by disobeying them, which amounts to an offence against God, i.e. a sin. On the other hand, in "The Rime," the ancient mariner commits a crime when he kills the Albatross, an innocent seabird, which disrupts the order of nature and its tranquillity, and that is why some critics consider the mariner's crime a sin; Bowra deems "The Rime" "a tale of crime and punishment" and "a myth of guilt and redemption" about "a guilty soul" (1950 68, 71); Weng sees it "as a narrative of sin and redemption" "centred on the individual soul and moral action" (2013 141),

and Hamdan likens the mariner’s crime to Adam’s sin of eating from “the forbidden apple” which leads to the loss of paradise (2017 27).

Robinson Crusoe opens with Robinson introducing himself to the reader and paving the way for the sin he is to commit with his eyes wide open. He is obsessed with the idea of “going to sea”, which is contrary to “the will” and “the commands” of his father (1). This difference in wish and opinion creates a “conflict” between Robinson and his father on the “question” of his “future profession and social status” as Novak accurately observes (1961 19). His father, who belongs to the middle class and who is a representative of “the power of the father in puritan homes” (Novak 1961 20), a “deputy of God according to religion” (Nuruzzaman & Yeasmin 2016 26) and of God on earth according to the norms of the age of reason, counsels him against his desire of travelling and encourages him to stay in his “father’s house and [his] native country” and be a prosperous individual by belonging to the middle class, and in this way avoid the fate of the people who belong to the lower class or the upper class who face a lot of hardships and changes in their lives (2). Further, he warns him against having a miserable future if he disobeys him and though he will never stop praying for him he will never bless his choice of the course of his life: “though ... he would not cease to pray for me, ... if I did take this foolish step, God would not bless me, and I would have leisure hereafter to reflect upon having neglected his counsel when there might be none to assist in my recovery” (3; Ellipsis mine). Though his father’s expostulation affects him greatly, he, later, comes to take the wrong decision by running away from his father and from his country to follow his desire of “seeing the world” “without asking God’s blessing, or my father’s” (4, 5). Nuruzzaman and Yeasmin rightly maintain, “Crusoe’s defiance of his father’s advice is equal to the original sin of Adam and Eve” (2016 25). At the beginning of his fleeing away, he has another warning in the form of a strong storm, which leads him to make a vow to return to his parents and his home “like a true repenting prodigal” son (6), but once the weather changes he forgets about his vows. A few days later, he has another warning in the form of another violent storm, which ends by foundering the ship, which leaves him “entirely without excuse”: he has been counselled by his father against going to sea, and is now warned twice by “Providence” against following his desire of seeing the world utilizing the sea (7). In short, Robinson is responsible for the sin he commits and consequently for the misery he suffers later and for his fate. The third warning comes to him through the words of his friend’s father who tells him “never to go to sea anymore” and “to take” what has happened as a “visible token” that he is “not to be a seafaring man” (11). His friend’s father adds that since he has made this trip as a trial, he should be warned that what he is to expect is nothing more than he has seen. Moreover, he compares him to Prophet Jonah, who disobeys God by not following his instructions and is punished for his disobedience. He ends by advising him “to go back to [his] father and not tempt Providence to [his] ruin.” He also warns him, “young man, ... depend upon it, if you do not go back, wherever you go, you will meet with nothing but disasters and disappointments, till your father’s words are fulfilled upon you” (12; Ellipsis mine), which echoes his father’s earlier warning to him.

However, instead of following the advice of his friend’s father and going back to his parents, Robinson continues his disobedience by travelling to Africa aboard another ship, “a sin which he regards as the direct cause of all his sufferings” (Novak 1961 19). Here, he comments on his foolish action and similar deeds done by youth as follows, “they are not ashamed to sin, and yet are ashamed to repent; not ashamed of the action for which they ought justly to be esteemed fools” (12). He is aware of his sin against his parents and in turn against God. As if it were devilish enticement, this voyage is a success, which encourages him to make another trip, which turns out to be a total failure and a disaster and leads to his being taken as a slave by the pirates (15). This condition lasts for two years, which gives him time to think about how prophetic his father’s words have been. By the end of the two years of slavery, he escapes (18), and is later “delivered” by a Portuguese ship, which takes him to Brazil where he settles for four years and sets up a plantation to be naturalized (28, 29). In Brazil, he leads a successful life similar to that of the middle class in England, which makes him repent

that he has disobeyed his father by ignoring “all his good advice,” a “regret” that makes him feel miserable, “desolate” and “solitary” (30).

Still, though leading a prosperous life in Brazil, and being obsessed with this feeling of discontent, he comes to think again of travelling and “wandering abroad,” which makes him, as he accurately comments on his deeds, “the willful agent of all my miseries” (32). Again and again, he is responsible for all his suffering and for all that befalls him. When he is made an offer to travel to Guinea to bring a cargo of Negroes to trade in them, he acquiesces, “But I that was born to be my destroyer could no more resist the offer than I could restrain my first rambling designs, when my father’s good counsel was lost upon me” (34). Thus, they prepare a ship and travel heading for Guinea to fetch the Negroes, but they never reach the coast of Africa because a violent storm breaks out and later drowns the ship with all its cargo and its men except Robinson (35–40). His being the only one delivered, the only survivor, is a boon, a bliss in itself, but in the case of Robinson, it was “a dreadful deliverance”: he has nothing about him, whether for food or protection which throws him “into terrible agonies of mind” (41). Here, where he is cast away on a desolate island his father’s prophetic words, which “have the operative power of a curse” (Novak 1961 23), come true and he is to have many years to meditate on his “original sin” (174) of neglecting his father’s advice and not caring to be blessed by his father and in turn by God. In this way, he is like our great grandfather Adam and Prophet Jonah in that when they sin against God by not following His instructions, they are punished: Adam is dismissed from Paradise, and Jonah after being swallowed by a whale is cast away on an island. In all cases, the sin of disobedience leads to being punished by God.

On the other hand, similarly, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” which falls into seven parts, opens with the narrator introducing the mariner and the context in which the mariner starts telling his story to a young man he selects from three invited to a wedding feast, “It is an ancient Mariner, / And he stoppeth one of three” (466). The young man, who is a kin of the bridegroom, asks about the reason why for stopping him in particular, a question that the Mariner does not answer until he discloses his entire story to him. Instead of answering the wedding guest, who is in a hurry because “The guests are met, the feast is set” (467), the mariner immediately begins his narration. Though the young man is irritated by the mariner’s hold of his hand, he stands captivated by the look in “his glittering eye” and does nothing except listen to the Mariner’s tale “like a three years’ child” (467). He tells of a ship that departs the harbour and is cheered by all; an atmosphere of happiness prevails, which is reflected in the description of the ship’s departure and the gradual movement of the ship away from the port, the church, the hill and the lighthouse in addition to the movement of the sun in the sky and the sea as well (467). The ship sails southward and the weather is fair without violent winds until they reach the Equator. Then a strong storm breaks out and drives the ship toward the South Pole. Once they are at the South Pole, the weather completely changes; ice is everywhere and fearful sounds are heard though they see neither humans nor beasts,

“Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken –
 The ice was all between.
 “The ice was here, the ice was there,
 The ice was all around;
 It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
 Like noises in a swound!” (468)

After a while of fear, chaos and confusion, an Albatross, a seabird, comes through “the fog” and they receive it as if it were “a Christian soul” with happiness and hospitality “in God’s name.” They offer the bird their hospitality and the bird accepts it, which forms a bond between them. Immediately after the coming of the bird, the weather changes and they can sail again, “The ice did split with a thunder-fit; / The helmsman steered us through!” A mild south wind breaks and drives the ship northward, which indicates that the Albatross is a bird of good omen, at least to them, and the bird follows them and daily comes to them “for food or play” whenever the sailors holler to it. This state

of friendship and hospitality lasts for nine days, while the ship runs smoothly and the moon glimmers white in the sky. However, this state of peacefulness and tranquillity comes to an end when the ancient mariner, without any revealed reason, shoots the Albatross with his “crossbow” (468), a crime for which he has no reason except “his sole sense of pride” as Hamdan observes (2017 22), which is a deadly sin, and which violates the peaceful relationship between man and beast and violates principles of hospitality; consequently, he is to be punished for destroying the innocence and peace of nature.

In this way, the mariner comes to defile the norms of hospitality, humanity and nature; he shoots the Albatross, a representative of nature, and kills a guest who puts absolute trust in the mariners. Here one is reminded of Macbeth when he murders King Duncan, his guest, but the difference between Macbeth and the mariner is that Macbeth was aware of the reason why for killing Duncan. As for the mariner, he does not reveal to the reader any cause for murdering an innocent bird, which makes his crime more brutal and evil. The second part of “The Rime” discloses to the reader what happens in the aftermath of shooting the Albatross. Similar to the complications that occur in *Robinson* after Robinson disobeys his father and goes to sea, a lot of complications and hardships take place in “The Rime.” Changes in the weather do confuse them and so does the movement of the sun (468–469). “The good south wind still blew behind,” but there was “no sweet bird” to follow them “for food or play”; this state leads the other mariners to accuse him of having “done a hellish thing” that will cause them a lot of trouble and grief. They also accuse him of slaying the bird “That made the breeze blow.” However, when the weather changes and becomes better and the sun rises in the sky removing all fog and mist, the mariners change their minds and declare that he has “killed the bird / That brought the fog and mist.” Moreover, they tell him that it was “right . . . such birds to slay / That bring the fog and mist” (469; Ellipsis mine). Once the other mariners voice such views and judgments, they become accomplices and partners in the crime of slaying the bird. The fact is that when they declare such views, they have been deceived by appearances since everything, later, changes including the weather and the movement of the sun,

“Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down;
 ’Twas sad as sad could be;
 And we did speak only to break
 The silence of the sea!
 “All in a hot and copper sky,
 The bloody Sun, at noon,
 Right up above the mast did stand,
 No bigger than the Moon.
 “Day after day, day after day,
 We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
 As idle as a painted ship
 Upon a painted ocean.” (470)

This is the beginning of the punishment that the mariners become aware of once they observe the stillness of the sea and the sun in addition to the ugliness that prevails in the sea. Water is everywhere, but there is no water to drink. Because of the stillness of the sea, everything rots and all sea creatures and the sea itself become slimy (470–471). This hellish atmosphere leads the mariners to have dreams, and to hallucinate, about a spirit that disturbs them, a spirit that has followed them “from the land of mist and snow,” i.e. from where the mariner shot the Albatross. Now, the mariners, who have welcomed the brutal slaying of the bird once they have observed the good change in the weather and the smooth movement of the ship, with “withered” tongues because of “utter drought” are unable to speak, but can alter their opinions to put the whole blame on the mariner,

“Ah! Well-a-day!—what evil looks
 Had I from old and young!
 Instead of the cross, the Albatross
 About my neck was hung.” (471)

When the other mariners do this symbolic action of hanging the Albatross about his neck instead of the cross, they do it with an absolute belief that they can get rid of their sense of guilt and responsibility for killing the bird forgetting that they have become partners in the crime once they praised the mariner for shooting the bird “that brought the fog and mist” (470). In short, all of them are guilty; consequently, they deserve to be punished, which is displayed in the next parts of “The Rime.”

3. Punishment, Suspicion and Repentance

In *Robinson* and “The Rime,” punishment occurs in the form of submitting the protagonist to isolation and alienation from everything around him. This state of isolation and desolation lasts as long as he is not reconciled to the things around him, to himself and to God. During this period, the protagonist comes to suspect that God is not there watching over him and protecting him. Once reconciliation, whether to the things around him, to himself or to God, happens, everything changes, and the protagonist commences a process that makes him perceive things around him in a new way, which leads him to perceive the presence of God.

Robinson is “cast upon a horrible desolate island, void of all hope of recovery” and is “divided from mankind, a solitaire, one banished from human society,” as he accurately describes his condition to the reader after he was stranded on the island, which is “enviored every way with the sea” (58, 46). It is true that he is able to survive what he experiences on the island, but his stay in it, which lasts for twenty eight years, imposes isolation and loneliness on him, which is “Crusoe’s punishment for his willfulness” as Gómez correctly observes (2010 10). Four years later, he admits to the reader that he is “removed from all the wickedness of the world here” and from all the sins of the world, i.e. he is totally isolated (115). Still, he succeeds in setting up a tent and a cave for his habitation, in providing himself with food and fresh water and in protecting himself throughout the years he lives on the island. In short, he succeeds in establishing his own colony, his own kingdom, of which he comes to think that he is its sole owner (89, 115). Yet, all this success and his survival do not abolish the fact that he has lived on the island quite alone until he rescues Friday from the savages, and is thus provided with human company. Also, from the first days of his stay on the island, he never stops thinking of it as a “desolate place” or “the island of Despair,” as he calls it, and never ceases waiting for the moment of his “deliverance” (54, 61, 51). However, similar to the age of reason he belongs to, Robinson is a man of “reason,” which enables him to find the means that make his survival possible on the island, which leads him to be inventive and creative and “be in time master of every mechanic art.” Also, it enables him “to master [his] despondency” brought about by the desolation of the island. Besides, being a man of reason enables him to distinguish between what is good and what is evil about his being on this “horrid island” and “dismal place” (59, 60, 57, 56, 158).

However, though a man of reason, Robinson never gives much thought to religion or the works of Providence; he spends about seven months setting up his tent and cave and making other necessary things not aware that God is there watching over him until he sees a few stalks of barley and rice growing of their own accord, as he believes at the beginning (68). As long as he does not remember that he is the one who has thrown the grains of barley and rice, this incident astonishes him and confuses his thoughts. Up to this moment, he has never acted upon “religious foundations at all,” has “had very few notions of religion” and has “entertained” the idea that all that has “befallen” him is nothing but a “chance.” It never occurs to him that it might be “the end of Providence in these things or His order in governing events in the world.” In short, this event of the barley growing leads him to think “that God had miraculously caused this grain to grow without any help of seed sown and that it was so directed purely for my sustenance on that wild miserable place.” Yet, once he remembers that he is the one who has thrown these seeds, everything changes since the sense of “wonder” ceases; therefore, his “religious thankfulness to God’s Providence” abates (69). In short, his reasoning leads him to suspect God’s Providence and become unable to see its aims, and hence oscillates between belief and disbelief.

The hardships, like that of illness, he suffers and the natural disasters, like that of the earthquake, he confronts on the island make him persevere in his suspicion that God is not there to save him. When he is ill with fever, he prays “to God for the first time” on the island, but he scarcely knows what he says and the reason why for saying it due to his “confused” “thoughts” and his being “lightheaded” and “so ignorant” of what he should say, and ends up by crying, “Lord, look upon me! Lord, pity me! Lord, have mercy upon me!” (77). Later, when he sleeps, he has a “terrible dream” in which he sees “a man descend from a great black cloud, in a bright flame of fire, and light upon the ground,” and then moves “forward towards” him “with a long spear or weapon in his hand to kill him” (77-78). Next, this man approaches him and addresses him in “a voice so terrible” that terrifies Robinson. What the man says, though in a dream, – “Seeing all these things have not brought thee to repentance, now thou shalt die” (78) – is a real warning to him, which will later awaken his soul and make him realize that he needs to show his regret and to express his repentance for the sin he has committed against God by disobeying his parents. However, up to this moment, Robinson has had “no divine knowledge,” which makes him similar to other sailors “hardened, unthinking, wicked creature” who does not have “the least sense either of the fear of God in danger or of thankfulness to God in deliverances.” For this reason, he never has a thought that what happens to him is “a just punishment for my sin: my rebellious behaviour against my father, or my present sins, which were great; or so much as a punishment for the general course of my wicked life” (78). This is why the dream he has while being sick frightens him and consequently awakens his soul, his “conscience” (80), to the need to repent and to atone for his sin. Thus, for the first time in many years, he prays to God and asks for his help. Later, when he is a little better, he, amid all elements of nature, starts meditating on the maker of earth, sea and “all the other creatures, wild and tame, human and brutal,” which leads him to perceive the existence of God and realize his Providence (81, 81-82).

While looking for a roll of tobacco to use as a cure for his fever, Robinson accidentally finds three Bibles he brought from the shipwreck and takes one of them. At this moment, he has a feeling that he is “directed by Heaven no doubt” for at the same time he finds “a cure both for soul and body”: tobacco cures his body; the Bible his soul (83). When he opens the Bible, he, by chance, reads, “Call on Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver, and thou shalt glorify Me.” Here he finds God’s promise to deliver, but due to his lack of faith he doubts the promise when he asks himself, “Can God Himself deliver me from this place?” (83) Owing to the desolation he suffers he does not perceive that he has been delivered by God’s Providence. Still, he muses on the words he reads in the Bible, and later prays to God, as if to test Him to see if He is to deliver him, “but before I lay down, I did what I never had done in all my life; I kneeled and prayed to God to fulfil the promise to me, that if I called upon Him in the day of trouble, He would deliver” (84). His prayer indicates how he still suspects God’s ability to save him physically and spiritually. However, when he is recovered from his illness, he realizes how unthankful he has been to God, and starts glorifying Him by giving thanks to Him to deserve “greater deliverance,” i.e. “deliverance from sin” which is “a much greater blessing than deliverance from affliction” (85, 86). The words of the man in the dream in addition to God’s words in the Bible lead him to pray to God to give him repentance. By the time of the first anniversary of his landing on the island, he is aware of how sinful he has been, and that is why he confesses his “sins to God” and acknowledges “His righteous judgments upon” him and prays “to Him to have mercy on” him (92). This recognition, later, enables him to accept God’s Providence, reconcile himself to the will of God and be thankful to Him, which reflects the spiritual change that Robinson undergoes (96-97, 100, 116-119). However, his disposition of being thankful to God does not omit the fact that he, now and then, complains of being “forsaken of God and man” and even accuses himself of being “a hypocrite” when he thinks of giving “thanks to God for bringing me to this place” (101).

Years later, after having various experiences on the island and the sea around it and after “resigning” himself to God’s “Providence,” though he leads a practically happy and successful life there, he never forgets that he is cut off from “society” (129, 133-134) which underlines his desire to have

society back. Nonetheless, when he sees a footprint of a man for the first time on the island, he becomes terrified and comes to entertain frightful ideas about the probability that it could be of the devil or the savages. The fear he enjoys at the time banishes his “religious hope” and his “former confidence in God,” which affects his spiritual tranquillity and his reconciliation with himself and with God (140, 138–143). The fear he entertains leads him to suspect and complain that God is not there to protect and deliver him,

Thus fear of danger is ten thousand times more terrifying than danger itself, when apparent to the eyes; . . . and *which was worse than all this, I had not that relief in this trouble from the resignation I used to practice*, that I hoped to have. *I looked, I thought, like Saul, who complained not only that the Philistines were upon him but that God had forsaken him*; for I did not now take due ways to compose my mind by crying to God in my distress, and resting upon His providence, as I had done before, for my defense and deliverance. (143; Ellipsis mine; Italics mine)

Fear as well as Robinson’s lack of confident belief in God leads him to suspect God’s Providence once he is in trouble or distress, which underscores his need for repentance for all his sins, something that he does when he abates and gets rid of his fear and frightful ideas.

Similarly, in the third part of “The Rime”, the process of punishment and atonement for killing the Albatross continues. In the previous part, the punishment occurs in the form of the stillness of the sea and the sun in addition to the lack of drinking water though they are surrounded by water everywhere. Besides, because of the stillness, ugliness prevails, which they abhor. In an attempt to escape their sense of guilt and to put the whole blame on the mariner, the sailors hang the slain Albatross around his neck (470–471). Suffering from drought and thirst continues, which affects the sailors greatly. When he sees a ship approaching them, none of them can make a voice, and the mariner, to free himself from thirst, bites his arm to suck his blood to be able to cry at the ship,

“With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
We could nor laugh nor wail;
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!
I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,
And cried, ‘A sail! A sail!’ (471)

Deceived by appearances, they feel joy for the ship’s coming that may save them. As if the ship responding to their call, it stops, but it does this by standing between them and the sun, which creates a terrifying atmosphere; the ship is nothing but a skeleton,

“Are those *her* ribs through which the Sun
Did peer, as through a grate?
And is that Woman all her crew?
Is that a Death? and are there two?
Is Death that Woman’s mate?”
“Her lips were red, her looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold;
Her skin was white as leprosy;
The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she,
Who thicks man’s blood with cold. (472)

This frightening description of the woman, who stands for Life-in-Death, unveils the reality of the ship and demolishes any hope of deliverance at the hands of its crew. Instead, they infuse fear that thickens blood in all the mariners. Besides, contrary to what the mariners have expected, they find out that the Woman and Death are playing a game on their lives and souls. The Woman wins the ancient mariner, and thus he is destined for Life-in-Death. As for the other mariners, they are won by Death, and thus they are fated to die (472). After that everything changes in a terrible way and fear pervades, “Fear at my heart, as at a cup, / My lifeblood seemed to sip!” (472). What follows after

that is more terrifying; the other mariners die “One after one” without a “groan or sigh,” but instead each one of them turns his face to him “with a ghastly pang” and curses him “with his eye” (473). In this way, a crew of two hundred sailors dies one by one cursing him,

“The souls did from their bodies fly—
They fled to bliss or woe!
And every soul, it passed me by,
Like the whizz of my crossbow!” (473)

It is a terrible incident in which the death of each sailor reminds the mariner of his brutal crime, an offence for which he has to show repentance and atone for it.

As for the ancient mariner, contrary to what the wedding guest fears, he never dies. Similar to Robinson, he is left alone to suffer loneliness and isolation and to have a destiny similar to that of the woman, Life-in-Death. Also, similar to Robinson, he comes to suspect that God is not there to watch over him and help him,

“Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony. (473)

It agonizes him to see the men lying dead aboard the ship, to find himself similar to thousands of “slimy things” living and to feel abhorrence about the slimy things and “the rotting sea” (473). The suspicion he feels and the feeling of repugnance make him unable to pray, and instead of “a prayer” there comes “a wicked whisper” that makes his “heart as dry as dust” (474). This “pathetic state of alienation and desperation” (Weng 2013 143) lasts for “seven days and seven nights” (474) during which the curse, “the mirror of his guilt” (Vlasopolos 1979 368), directed towards him from the eyes of the dead men never changes; as for him, he neither sleeps nor dies. Later, the smooth movement of the moon in the sky and the heavenly light shed on “the water snakes” moving “in tracks” in the sea reflecting the white light of the moon touches the mariner’s heart and brings about an unexpected change in him,

“O happy living things! No tongue
Their beauty might declare;
A spring of love gushed from my heart;
And I blessed them unaware!
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware. (474–475)

Suddenly, the mariner becomes aware of the hidden beauty of the sea creatures and can perceive how happy they live without complaining. This change enables him to bless them instead of loathing them and even to feel love towards them. This transformation in his disposition, which Vlasopolos “attributes” “to the perceiving mind, not to natural phenomena” (1979 365), enables him to perceive that God is there to have “pity on” him, which enables him to be reconciled to himself and the other creatures and even bless them. Besides, he becomes able to pray, which rids him of the bird hanging about his neck,

“The selfsame moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.” (475)

Hamdan correctly remarks, “the mariner survives alone and feels lonely till he realizes repentance and discovers the value of every living thing; he attains forgiveness and salvation” (2017 22). Thus, similar to Robinson, the moment he feels repentance, he starts regaining himself and becomes able to pray, which is an important step towards his reconciliation with God.

4. The Perception of the Presence of God and Reconciliation

One observes that once Robinson and the mariner stop suspecting that God is not there to protect and deliver them and once they cease complaining because of this suspicion, they come to perceive the presence of God, which usually happens to them while they are “unaware,” i.e. while they are not conscious of the feelings that infuse them at this moment (Rime, 475). This perception leads them to be in harmony with nature, with the creatures created by God and with themselves, which makes their reconciliation with God possible. Yet, this perception needs to be checked and that is why they go through a process of atonement.

Earlier in *Robinson*, Robinson comes to perceive the presence of God when he meditates about everything created by God, about himself and about what occurs to him,

What is this earth and sea, of which I have seen so much? Whence is it produced? And what am I and all the other creatures, wild and tame, human and brutal, whence are we?

Sure we are all made by some secret Power who formed the earth and the sea, the air and sky; and who is that?

Then it followed most naturally, It is God that has made it all. (81–82)

However, as I mentioned earlier, his lack of confident faith leads him to question the will of God forgetting that he is the one who has sinned and consequently deserved punishment (82). Later when he sees the unknown footprint of a man, fear leads him to complain that God has forsaken him though he is quite aware that God has saved him from death and danger throughout his prior years on the island. He acts like King Saul who was chosen by God to be the first king of Israel, but later disobeys Him and persists in his sin, and consequently is abandoned by God (143; See also *My Book of Bible Stories*, story 56 “Saul – Israel’s First King”). Robinson’s behaviour highlights the fact that his perception of God is not enough; he needs to have constant faith in God, to perform due repentance to Him and to atone for all his sins, and in this way be shriven of his guilt. Meditating he concludes that fear banishes faith and that “a temper of peace, thankfulness, love, and affection is much more the proper frame for prayer” since “praying to God being properly an act of the mind, not of the body” (147). Later, when he discovers that savages come to the other side of the island to feast on their human victims, he thanks God for landing him where he was shipwrecked and regrets his earlier complaints about being stranded on this side of the island. In short, he becomes thankful to God and reconciles himself to God’s providence to him throughout the years of his stay on the island (148–149). His discovery of the savages makes him realize how “merciful” is God; God always delivers us though we have no idea that He is there directing and helping us while we doubt in his Providence and complain because of our ignorance (157). In the beginning, he feels hatred and repugnance of the savages and their customs, but he comes to tolerate them and their brutal habits, a point to be discussed later.

Similar to what happens in *Robinson*, in “The Rime” when the mariner perceives the hidden beauty of the water snakes, he feels “a spring of love” gushing from his heart, which leads him to bless “them unaware” and be able to “pray.” This same feeling makes him perceive that God is there watching over him and has “pity on” him, which frees him of the burden of the Albatross hung about his neck (474–475), a step toward his being freed from his guilt. Yet, this perception needs to be checked and that is why he goes through a process of atonement.

In part five, once the mariner blesses the water snakes and becomes able to pray, he sleeps, and it rains as well, which is quite symbolic of the forgiveness he is granted. After a long period of drought, he drinks, whether in his dreams or his wake. When he comes to, he hears the sounds of “a roaring wind” but it does not come near the ship. Yet, this wind “with its sound” shakes the sails. Moreover, he sees strange sights, whether in the air, the sky or the sea, and again it rains heavily (475). What is more extraordinary is that, though the wind never reaches the ship, it starts moving it (476). Still, what is odder is that the dead men rise and start working at their usual posts on the ship, but they neither speak nor move their eyes, “They raised their limbs like lifeless tools— / We were a ghastly

crew.” However, it is not the dead crew that has moved the ship, “But a troop of spirits blest” (476). When it is dawn, the souls leave their bodies, and they go back to their places aboard the ship, but still, the ship keeps sailing “slowly and smoothly.” However, at noon the ship stands still, and the sun fixes the ship to the ocean. Suddenly the ship moves in an unstable way that leads to his fainting. When he comes to, he overhears two voices arguing about his brutal crime of shooting the innocent Albatross with his bow. He finds out that the Polar Spirit loved the bird that he killed, and that he wants revenge on the mariner who murdered it (477). One of the voices sees that the mariner deserves further punishment, and the other sees he has done enough repentance, “The man hath penance done / And penance more will do.” In part six, the two voices continue arguing about how the ship moves towards the north. Yet, they depart before the mariner awakens from his “trance” to find the ship still “sailing” and the weather “gentle.” When it is night, the dead men rise again and do their usual jobs, but this time they fix “their stony eyes” on him (478), which reminds him of his crime,

The pang, the curse, with which they died,
Had never passed away;
I could not draw my eyes from theirs,
Nor turn them up to pray. (478–479)

Due to his inability to forgive himself for what happened to the mariners, once he sees the curse in their eyes he loses the ability to pray, which is quite similar to what happens to Robinson when he is obsessed with fear. Later, when the curse is broken, he comes to see things differently and to feel the unseen wind airing his face, and thought, “It mingled strangely with my fears, / yet it felt like a welcoming” (479). Immediately after that, the ship sails and takes him back to his country seeing on his way the lighthouse, the hill and the church. Seeing his country leads him to pray while sobbing, “O let me be awake, my God! / or let me sleep away” (479). What happens later to the bodies of the dead crew indicates that they are forgiven, and so is he. After that he is rescued by the Pilot, the Pilot’s boy and the Hermit, whom the mariner believes will free his soul from guilt, “He’ll shrive my soul, he’ll wash away / The Albatross blood” (480). Since he is not yet fully reconciled to himself, he cannot believe that he has done enough penance and that the only one who can purge him of his guilt is the Hermit. In part seven, the Hermit who spends most of his time worshipping God (480) prays for him and later asks the mariner to tell his story, something that the mariner does immediately, which frees him and rids him of his sense of guilt (482). However, this sense of guilt returns to him now and then, which leads him to choose someone, as he has done with the wedding guest, to retell his tale and in this way free himself,

“Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns;
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns.
“I pass, like light, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me—
To him my tale I teach. (482–483)

It is as if every time he tells his story he makes a confession, and in this way rids himself of his sense of guilt, as if the process of atonement never comes to an end.

5. Tolerance: An Implied Message

The experiences through which both Robinson and the mariner go and the severe agonies they are submitted to teach them to tolerate others since they are not perfect; like all human beings they are sinners. In short, they acquire a sense of tolerance, which enables them to accept others as they are and to tolerate their “religious differences” (Cooney 2007 198) with them.

In *Robinson*, when Robinson sees the remains of human bodies on the island for the first time, he is overwhelmed and terrified by the horribleness of the scene that reflects the “brutality” inherent in “human nature,” and feels “abhorrence of the savage wretches” and their “inhuman custom of” “eating one another” (148, 149). His repugnance leads him to entertain various thoughts and plans about destroying these savages when they come back to the island to feast on their defeated enemies and save the victims from them. However, later when he abates and debates this issue with himself, he concludes that he has no right to meddle with their rituals and customs since they neither attacked him nor harmed him in any way. Also, he thinks that it might be the will of God that they do this punishment on one another to achieve His justice for them without being aware that they are committing a crime against one another. In this way, if he interferes with their custom, he will be sinning “of willful murder” similar to that of those Christians who kill their prisoners of war or that “of the Spaniards in all their barbarities practiced in America.” Besides, when he considers this issue from a religious perspective, he becomes convinced that it is not his duty to meddle with their practices and that it is up to God to judge and punish them to execute His justice on them as it “pleases Him” (151-155). Later on, after saving Friday and after civilizing him, when the savages re-appear on the island, he entertains similar thoughts and concludes that he can neither “be a judge of their actions” nor “an executioner of His Justice.” Brian C. Cooney rightly observes that “Defoe twice stands Crusoe behind the brush looking down upon the rituals of cannibals for the character to debate in his mind the limits within an ostensibly neutral, liberal society of religious tolerance” (2007 198). By deciding “not to meddle with them” (209) unless they attack him and to endure their rituals and beliefs though he does not approve of them, Robinson displays his ability to tolerate them as well as their religious customs which are contrary to all his Christian beliefs. In short, as Novak remarks, he “regards the cannibals with a certain degree of tolerance” (1963 50). Moreover, later after saving Friday’s father and a Spaniard from the savages, he, Friday and the other two come to live peacefully together though they uphold different religious beliefs. Like Robinson, Friday is “a Protestant” while Friday’s father is “a Pagan and a cannibal” and the Spaniard is “a Papist.” Still, Robinson’s experiences and meditations lead him to allow “liberty of conscience” in his kingdom (217). In other words, his experiences have taught him tolerance, which enables him to tolerate others and their religious difference and to allow religious freedom on his island.

Similar to Robinson, the experiences and the agonies that the mariner suffered in his journey has taught him tolerance, which enables him to accept others as they are and to cope with their religious difference. Now, contrary to the past, he is certain that God is always there to help him and save his soul from cosmic loneliness. His utter pleasure is,

To walk together to the kirk,
 And all together pray,
 While each to his great Father bends,
 Old men, and babes, and loving friends,
 And youths, and maidens gay! (483)

Going to church in the company of others to pray does not necessitate that all of them pray to the same God or that they uphold the same beliefs; each is to pray to “his great Father” without forcing others to believe in what he believes in. In short, tolerating others’ beliefs is a must. Only those who love well can pray well; “He prayeth well who loveth well / Both man and bird and beast” (483). It is love in its greater sense when it includes all creatures created by God. The more you love God’s creatures without distinction between them the more you pray well and the more perfect you are,

He prayeth best who loveth best
 All things both great and small;
 For the dear God who loveth us,
 He made and loveth all. (483)

Tolerance leads us to tolerate others and their beliefs, and consequently to accept them as they are, which enables us to love them unconditionally, which in turn enables us to pray well and be closer to God and to perfection.

6. Conclusion

This study has aimed to undertake a comparative reading of *Robinson Crusoe* and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” to underscore the individual experiences of the protagonists of the two works. Utilizing a close reading and meticulous analysis of the two works, they are comparable as displayed. The comparison has revealed that the protagonist in each has committed a guilt that affects his present and future life. Both are responsible for their choice, which leads to suffering and punishment. Their punishment occurs in the form of isolation and alienation imposed on them in desolate places: island and sea. The isolation enforced on them leads them to find out how guilty they have been when they committed their sin/crime, which makes them aware that they deserve to be punished. Still, while they are suffering punishment, they suspect that God is not there watching over them and guarding them, which leads them to unjustly complain. However, once they perceive the gravity of the committed sin, they start repenting and atoning for what they have done, which leads to their reconciliation with themselves and with God. Once they stop suspecting, they perceive that God is always there watching and protecting them though they are unaware and are sinners, which brings about their salvation and deliverance. The severe experiences they undergo teach them tolerance and enable them to tolerate religious differences with others and accept them as they are. This tolerance teaches them to love others and be better believers in God who can be closer to Him and hope for perfection once armed with their true perception of God.

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Notes

¹ It deserves mentioning here that, in the beginning, I avoided mentioning or referring to Blair’s study since I do not have any valid documentation except that of being published on Academia. However, after a discussion with my colleague Professor Areeg Ibrahim, I came to embrace her viewpoint that since I do not have an alternative it is better to refer to it and use it.

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