

Miscellaneous**Representations of the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ in Travel Narratives:
Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe and A.W. Kinglake’s Eothen****Orkun Kocabiyik¹**

Abstract: As travel and travel accounts are as old as history of mankind. With the beginnings of first examples of literary writings, it is hard to separate travelling and writing within each other. Looking at the 18th century travel literature and its tendencies, this paper explores the argument that the narrative of travel allows the writer to imagine and disseminate images of the self. Defoe and Kinglake, through the discourse of the travel narrative, portray idealised images of the “self” in the construction of the central character and that this is based on social ideals of the time. This paper also shows briefly the idea in both works that is important to the representation of “self” is the representation of the home culture. The main question for this essay could be, to what extent that the narrative of travel allows the writer to imagine and disseminate images of the Self?

Keywords: travel; selfhood; culture; narrative; eighteenth century

Charles L. Batten comments about the changing nature of travel narratives as follows: “Although Englishmen had been describing their voyages and journeys for many years, the eighteenth century...witnessed a new era in which non-fiction travel literature achieved an unparalleled popularity.” (Batten, 1978, p. 1)

The travel literature of the eighteenth century was grounded on the act of journeying and the narrative format of the everyday Englishman stranded in a foreign land. It was felt that a man’s surroundings were what shaped his character. At the time trade was being expanded and more territory was being opened up abroad, influencing the travel narrative in terms of the themes it dealt with. It is nearly impossible to discuss the eighteenth century fiction and nonfiction without speaking of travel. Its protagonists’ journeys so often give impetus and form to their stories. The travels of Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders, Joseph Andrews and

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Tom Jones, Tristram Shandy and Yorick come to mind when we speak about the eighteenth century English Literature.

By the eighteenth century, the entanglement between self and world was one of the concerns of travel writers. In the age of Enlightenment many famous names started to hear by the English people such as John Locke, Newton and Descartes and this way, a new shift happened in the travel writing. James Buzzard draws attention to the influence of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) on the eighteenth century intellectual life. Buzzard states that Locke's essay "became a sort of Bible for those who espoused a 'blank slate' conception of human consciousness and held that all knowledge is produced from the "impressions" drawn in through our five senses" (Buzzard, 2002, p. 47). As knowledge comes from the direct experience of five senses, travel becomes a means of learning and scientific pursuits. People were not satisfied with the bookish information instead. They preferred a firsthand involvement in their subject of study. John Locke thought that the spirit of inquiry was in fact an inquiry into the nature of understanding. Locke wanted to see how far human understanding could reach for self-discovery. In his above mentioned essay, he dealt with how man, through senses and reflection, created all his beliefs about the world. To Locke, the human mind has a complete freedom to create associations, impressions and ideas. He says: "I cannot avoid ideas produced in my mind" (Buzzard, 2002, p. 49). Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) argued that the importance of power in external world were crucial to the development of one's intellectual powers.

Perhaps the spirit of the eighteenth century could best be seen in travel literature. English people began to travel throughout Europe for self-discovery and they also journeyed outside Europe to observe and bring the unique values of the countries they visited home. Travel accounts and letters sold by thousands. Fabricant writes that travel accounts in the eighteenth century were among the most popular genres, outselling novels many times over (Fabricant 708). However, there was a difference between eighteenth century travel writers and their predecessors in that the enlightenment scepticism, the critical spirit of inquiry and the exploration re-framed the content and perspective of the eighteenth century writers. Fabricant believes that Don Quixote's reply "To all corners of the globe" to Sancho Panza's question "Where then, my dear country man are you going?" best reflects the spirit of eighteenth century travel writing. (Fabricant, 2005, p. 707)

By the end of the eighteenth century, as the Enlightenment balanced between science and sentiment to give way to the subjectivity of the romantic period, travel writing turned its face toward the selfhood. By the last decade of the eighteenth century, travel writing was shifted from descriptions of people and places to the accounts of the influence of people and places upon the narrator. By the early nineteenth century, travel writing became a matter of self-discovery as well as a record of the others like in Alexander Kinglake's (1809-1891) travels to Turkey and its beyond in his sensational work *Eothen*.

In this essay two pieces of travel literature will be analyzed: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *Eothen* by A.W. Kinglake. My aim is to prove that these writers, through the discourse of the travel narrative, portray idealised images of the 'self' in the construction of the central character, and this is based on social ideals of the time. One other point, the idea that also important to the representation of 'self' is the representation of the home culture and will also be analysed as far as the topic is concerned.

I feel it is important at this stage to outline the meaning of the terms "self" and "other", and what it means to 'disseminate', before proceed to discuss these terms within the context of the books I am commenting on. To "disseminate" is to spread information and ideas, and in this case, they are social ideals spread through a travel narrative. The concept of "self" and "other" is called binary opposition. The "self" is the persona of the narrative, and the "other" is something or someone that is then used as a contrast, to further exaggerate the positive qualities of the "self". An example of this is found in *Eothen*, where Kinglake uses the representation of the female in the text as an opposite to that of the male. The females act as the "other" and through the narrative Kinglake uses derogatory comments about women. This is evident in Chapter 17- The Desert, where he describes the Bedouin women as "Unhappy beings...so plain and clumsy, that they seemed to me to be fit for nothing but another and a better world." (Kinglake, 1992, p. 95)

He comments that the haggardness in the males faces gave them character, but in the females it was "sheer ugliness". This is a reflection of the social ideals and sexism of the Victorian period being disseminated through the discourse; men felt they were superior to women. The only time women are complimented is when they live up to the social ideal of the time, meaning they serve the male and are passive. This occurs in Chapter 3- *Constantinople*, where he comes across an

Ottoman lady. His first description of her as "...one of those coffin-shaped bundles of white linen which implies an Ottoman lady" suggests oppression and takes away her identity. The use of the word 'coffin' implies death, and the white linen is like a shroud. He describes her movement as "painfully struggling" (Kinglelake, 1992, p. 95). However, it is noticeable that his depiction of her begins to become more positive because when he describes her painted fingers he uses a simile to liken them to rose-buds, and roses are generally seen as romantic and beautiful flowers. Once she knows no 'Musselmans' are watching, the lady finally reveals herself to him by removing her 'yashmak'. It only then, after she has submitted to him, that he admires her by saying: "she shines upon your heart and soul with all the pomp and might of her beauty" (Kinglelake, 1992, p. 95). The fact that she is shown to be oppressed by the Musselman is used as a binary opposition to suggest that relationships in Britain are more equal; therefore idealising the home culture and showing foreign culture as negative.

Originally published in 1844, *Eothen* is now regarded as a classic example of travel writing. It is an example of the Victorian male travelogue which is written in an epistolary style; an amused letter to his friend Eliot Warburton about his travels to the East. It is also self-reflexive as it is commenting on the act of travelling. Kinglelake had wanted to be a soldier from an early age and it is almost as if he achieves this through the persona he creates in the book (the soldier figure was a key role model for Victorian masculinity). This element of male fantasy is a distinctive element to travel literature, and is also found in *Robinson Crusoe* where Crusoe runs away to sea in search of an adventure he had always dreamed of. Like *Robinson Crusoe*, it is written in the first person narrative form, and subjectivity is emphasised and deliberate. This is seen from the very first chapter where he fictionalises a conversation he has with a Pasha.

Although Kinglelake fictionalises within the narrative, he claims in the preface of his *Eothen* it to be the truth: "my excuse for the book is its truth." He claims that his feelings are more important than what he should have felt and create a truer portrait of the East. Kinglelake often refers to "You", which although he is addressing Warburton, also makes it seem like he is addressing us as the reader. This is very evident in Chapter 16- Terra Santa, where it says: "*You know what a sad and sombre decorum it is that outwardly reigns through the lands oppressed by Moslem sway.*" He uses the address to assume that the reader and writer are of the same class and nationality, and will therefore have the same outlook and opinions in the matter.

Kinglake became a celebrity after the release of the book, and became known by the persona he creates in the narrative- "Eothen Kinglake". I feel that this is evidence of how successful Kinglake had been in creating a truly believable character for the reader to identify with. The persona that Kinglake creates is very socially constructed, meaning that the character represents the ideals at a time of colonial power, about what the imperial male should be. Typical characteristics are: phlegmatic, physical, unemotional, independent, patriotic, and able to be kingly and superior whilst abroad (very much the same characterisation that is used by Defoe). It was felt that through the bravery and hardships of travelling (Kinglake exaggerates the tough nature of the journey); the male could develop the qualities expected by his nation. The following quote supports this notion:

The geography of adventure...accommodates and conditions constructions of identity...Men are made, albeit loosely, in the image of their settings. While they appear to be set free in the geography of adventure, they are also confined to the limited range of masculine identities that are possible there- broadly speaking; they are confined to hegemonic masculinity. (Phillips, 1997, p. 66)

Kinglake also reiterates this idea in *Eothen* where he says: If you are wise, you will not look upon the long period of time thus occupied in actual movement as the mere gulf dividing you from the end of your journey, but rather as one of those rare and plastic seasons of your life from which, perhaps, in after times you may love to date the moulding of your character - that is, your very identity. (Kinglake, 1992, p. 14)

Kinglake doesn't only project the ideal image of self through the discourse but also the ideal image of the nation (namely England). He depicts England as a place of modernity, rationality, knowledge, and as a place governed honestly. The way he successfully constructs these ideas is through his complimenting of the nation and the use of negative decoding about other cultures, to further the compliment. In Chapter 3- Constantinople, he compares the way the Turkish and English trade: In England, or in any other great mercantile country, the bulk of the things bought and sold goes through the hands of a wholesale dealer, and it is he who higgles and bargains with an entire nation of purchasers by entering into treaty with retail sellers. (Kinglake, 1992, p. 24)

He uses the adjective 'great' to compliment England, which comes out of the binary he creates as being a place of order and rationality, and the suggestion is that any other way of doing things is wrong. The following quotes summarise this idea:

The English further alleviated their concerns regarding their international status by becoming an increasingly self-referential society, seeing more of themselves in spite of their increasing contact with a diverse range of cultures; or, we might more accurately say, seeing more of themselves through their contact with colonized peoples. (Mcnelly, 2003, pp. 14-15)

And: "...travellers understood what they saw and experienced in terms of preconceived notions of national identity and difference; in turn, they used their journalistic representations of that experience to reinforce those notions." (Ulin, 2002, p. 123)

When we focus on *Robinson Crusoe*, it is clear that Daniel Defoe is famous for the fiction he produced in the latter part of his career, one of the most popular being *Robinson Crusoe*. Published in 1719 and based on the true story of a shipwrecked sailor called Alexander Selkirk. The book is considered to be a "seminal novel" meaning it helped to shape the whole genre of 'the novel' as it is known today. Seeing the popularity that the book had at the time, many other authors also began writing books of a similar nature i.e. The narrative of the English 'hero' stranded abroad, which subsequently created a sub-genre called 'Robinsonades'. Examples of such are *Swiss Family Robinson* (1812) and the later *Foe* (1986). The book tells of an Englishman called Robinson Crusoe who runs away from his home town of York, in search of adventure at sea. We follow his journey and the many different experiences he has such as shipwreck and an attack from pirates. During a voyage to Guinea to set up a plantation Crusoe's ship hits a storm.

Only he survives and is washed ashore on a deserted island off the coast of Trinidad. It is there that the real story begins as Crusoe has to find his way and develop many new skills in order to survive. After he has been on the island alone for some time, he realises that there are other inhabitants through his discovery of a footprint. He comes across a man who is about to be eaten by cannibals, and rescues him. The man, in his gratitude at being saved, offers total submission to Crusoe. Crusoe names the man "Friday" and takes him as his servant. The two have many adventures together such as building boats to travel to the land of the cannibals, and overcoming mutineers. Crusoe settles back in England with the fortune he has made from his plantations and marries. However after his wife's death, he sets off for the West Indies and makes a visit to his island to see that it has become a prosperous colony governed by the Spaniards.

The style that Defoe uses in *Robinson Crusoe* is very important and is a key element in successful travel writing. He narrates the story in the first person, which is made clear by the repeated use of the pronoun 'I' throughout. An example of this is the way the story begins: "I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York" (Defoe, 2004, p. 1). This, and the facts used, assists the story in its intentions to tell a seemingly 'true' story; Defoe's work often blurred the distinction between journalism and fiction.

His writing was extremely popular with the general, working-class people who formed his readership, and this is thought to be due to his tendency towards the use of colloquial writing which resembles the everyday speech of the reader, and also his preference for fact-based writing rather than the pretentious style used by the upper-classes -he felt that it was more important that the focus was on content rather than style. Also noticeable within the text is Defoe's inclination towards overwhelming detail to create a very clear portrait of the environments and scenes that his characters witness. This is important because the readers of the time would not have seen many of the sights that Crusoe does on his journeys. To allow them to become involved in the story, Defoe describes in enough detail to allow them to create a vivid image in their minds about that they are reading, without making it too complex.

It is crucial to examine how the 'self' is disseminated through the narrative of *Robinson Crusoe*. I feel that there is a sense of changeable identity created in the depiction of Crusoe's character, as he becomes a merchant, plantation owner, slave, and even a kingly figure (like in *Eothen*). I feel that a major point in the narrative is when Crusoe discovers the footprint in the sand. The distinction between 'self' and 'other' becomes distorted because Crusoe imagines the print to be his own. It is only when he sees the remains of the cannibal feast that he is able to distinguish himself as civilised, against the native and savage 'other' that are the cannibals. The introduction of Friday into the narrative, further allows Crusoe to establish self, as he becomes Friday's master, and has therefore managed to gain control over the 'other'. He does this through the act of naming him; "I made him know his name should be Friday ... I likewise taught him to say master, and let him know that was to be my name" (Defoe, 2004, p. 158). The language Defoe uses here, such as the words 'made' and 'should' is very forceful and highlights the dominance that Crusoe now has over the man he has rescued and who has submitted to him. Crusoe also dresses Friday; "I gave him a pair of linen drawers ... which I found in the wreck." (Defoe, 2004, p. 159). He dresses Friday in a

typical Englishman's attire and teaches him to speak English. By doing this he is effectively creating an image of himself in the "other" by which he can validate himself. He is also symbolically and literally colonising both Friday (a native) and the island, as the following quote also implies: "*In mastering his own selfhood, Crusoe simultaneously masters his environment and (re)creates a world to his liking-a decisively colonial act.*" (McInnelly, 2003, pp. 1-21)

Travel literature was one of the most popular literary genres in the eighteenth century. As it is mentioned before, arguably, this period was a time of increased scientific and economic exploration, and numerous scientific expeditions were motivated by the ambition to "boldly go where no man has gone before". At the same time, travel in the form of tourism became more widespread, especially for the middle classes. Once I understood that travel accounts are vehicles whose main purpose is to introduce us to the other, and that typically they dramatized an engagement between self and world, it was a matter of focusing on the various ways the observing self and the foreign world echo within each work.

This tendency could be observed intensely in many eighteenth century literary works. The persistence of this kind of writing is undoubtedly related to human curiosity and to a travel writer's desire to mediate between things foreign and things familiar, to help us understand that world which is other to us. I find this pattern in both literary works, namely,

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and A.W. Kinglake's *Eothen*, the narrative power, both literal and symbolic, takes reader to see the self and other clearly. So Journey pattern is one of the most persistent forms of all narratives – both fiction and nonfiction.

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