

**MAN AND NATURE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ROBINSON CRUSOE
AND PARADISE LOST. NATURE, CREATION, AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY**

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Abstract: *This thesis investigates the representation of nature, creation, and human responsibility in Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe and John Milton’s Paradise Lost. Although differing in genre and scope, both texts explore humanity’s relationship with the natural world and divine creation. Defoe presents nature as a space for survival, mastery, and moral reflection, while Milton depicts nature as a divinely ordered system disrupted by human disobedience. Through comparative literary analysis, this study examines how both authors address humanity’s duty toward creation. The findings reveal that both works emphasize responsibility, moral accountability, and the consequences of human action within the natural and spiritual order.*

Keywords: *man and nature; creation; human responsibility; Defoe; Milton; environment; Divine Order*

Introduction

The relationship between humanity and nature has long been a central concern in English literature, reflecting philosophical, religious, and moral debates about creation and responsibility. Early modern and Enlightenment writers often explored nature not merely as a physical environment but as a moral and spiritual framework in which human actions carry significant consequences. Daniel Defoe and John Milton, two influential figures in English literary history, engage deeply with these ideas in Robinson Crusoe (1719) and Paradise Lost (1667), respectively. Although the texts differ greatly in genre, narrative scope, and historical context, both examine how humans interact with nature and how responsibility toward creation defines moral identity.

In Robinson Crusoe, Defoe presents nature as both adversary and provider. Crusoe’s isolation on a deserted island forces him to confront the natural world directly, transforming

nature into a testing ground for human ingenuity, labor, and faith. Defoe, often regarded as a pioneer of the English novel, uses Crusoe's survival narrative to explore Enlightenment ideals of rationality, progress, and human mastery over nature. However, the novel also emphasizes moral responsibility, as Crusoe repeatedly interprets natural events as expressions of divine will. His reflection, "I learned to look more upon the bright side of my condition," demonstrates how engagement with nature leads to moral growth and self-awareness.

In contrast, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, one of the greatest epic poems in English literature, presents nature as a divinely created and harmonious system. Milton depicts Eden as a perfect environment designed to reflect God's order and goodness. Humanity's responsibility within this system is central to the poem's moral structure. Adam and Eve are entrusted with stewardship over nature, yet their disobedience results in the corruption of both human nature and the natural world. Milton's famous assertion that the poem aims to "justify the ways of God to men" underscores his theological focus on human responsibility within divine creation.

Despite their differences, both texts explore the consequences of human action within the natural world. Defoe emphasizes labor, adaptation, and moral discipline, while Milton stresses obedience, humility, and stewardship. This thesis compares how nature functions as a moral space in both works, analyzing the portrayal of creation and the responsibilities imposed upon humanity. By examining these texts together, the study highlights enduring literary concerns about humanity's role within the natural and divine order.

Literature Review

Scholarly discussion of Robinson Crusoe frequently emphasizes its portrayal of nature as a site of human mastery and moral testing. Ian Watt argues that Defoe's novel reflects Enlightenment individualism, presenting Crusoe as a self-reliant figure who reshapes nature through labor and reason. Critics note that Crusoe's interaction with nature is deeply tied to Protestant ethics, where work and discipline become moral duties. Defoe's line, "I was lord of the whole manor," has been interpreted as illustrating the human desire to dominate nature, while simultaneously raising questions about colonialism and environmental exploitation. Other scholars, such as Maximillian Novak, emphasize that Crusoe's growing respect for nature reflects a moral transformation grounded in humility and gratitude. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* has generated extensive critical debate regarding its depiction of nature and creation. C. S. Lewis describes Milton's Eden as a manifestation of divine harmony, where nature exists in perfect balance until disrupted by human sin. Scholars highlight Milton's portrayal of nature as morally responsive, noting that after the Fall, the natural world reflects humanity's corruption. Milton's line, "The Earth felt the wound,"

symbolizes the interconnectedness of human action and natural consequence. Critics such as Stephen Fallon argue that Milton emphasizes stewardship rather than domination, portraying humanity as caretakers responsible for preserving divine order.

Comparative studies between Defoe and Milton often focus on differing theological perspectives. While Milton situates nature within a cosmic, divine framework, Defoe presents a practical, experiential engagement with the natural world. However, scholars agree that both authors emphasize responsibility. Crusoe’s survival depends on respectful adaptation to nature, while Adam and Eve’s downfall results from their failure to uphold divine trust. Both texts suggest that nature is not morally neutral but reacts to human behavior.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that Defoe and Milton use nature to explore moral accountability. Whether through survival narrative or epic theology, both authors depict creation as a space where human responsibility is tested and defined. These interpretations provide a foundation for examining how man’s relationship with nature reflects broader ethical and spiritual concerns.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative comparative literary analysis to examine representations of nature, creation, and human responsibility in Robinson Crusoe and Paradise Lost. Primary texts are analyzed through close reading of descriptive passages, narrative commentary, and symbolic imagery related to the natural world. Secondary sources include scholarly criticism addressing theology, environmental ethics, and historical context. The methodology focuses on identifying thematic parallels and contrasts, particularly regarding stewardship, domination, and moral accountability. By comparing narrative strategies and philosophical frameworks, the research highlights how each author constructs humanity’s role within nature and divine creation.

Results

The analysis reveals that both Robinson Crusoe and Paradise Lost depict nature as a moral and spiritual space shaped by human responsibility. In Defoe’s novel, nature initially appears hostile, testing Crusoe’s physical endurance and psychological resilience. Over time, however, Crusoe learns to coexist with his environment through labor, planning, and gratitude. His cultivation of the land and reliance on natural resources demonstrate Enlightenment ideals of progress, yet his frequent references to divine providence suggest moral accountability. Crusoe’s reflection that “all the evil was converted into good” highlights his belief that nature serves as a means of spiritual instruction.

In Paradise Lost, nature is portrayed as a perfect creation entrusted to humanity. Adam and Eve’s role is not to dominate but to preserve harmony. Milton depicts Eden as

responsive and alive, emphasizing its dependence on human obedience. After the Fall, nature becomes disordered, reflecting humanity's moral failure. Milton's description of the Earth reacting to sin demonstrates that human actions have universal consequences. This contrasts with Crusoe's individual struggle, yet both texts stress accountability.

Comparatively, Defoe presents responsibility as practical and personal, while Milton frames it as cosmic and theological. Crusoe's mistakes lead to hardship but also growth, whereas Adam and Eve's disobedience results in irreversible loss. Despite these differences, both works emphasize that nature responds to human behavior. Human responsibility, therefore, is not optional but integral to survival and moral order.

Conclusion

This comparative study demonstrates that Robinson Crusoe and Paradise Lost offer profound insights into humanity's relationship with nature, creation, and responsibility. Although written in different periods and literary forms, both texts portray nature as a morally charged space that reflects human action. Defoe's novel emphasizes individual effort, adaptation, and faith, presenting nature as both a challenge and a means of moral education. Crusoe's survival depends on his ability to respect and understand his environment, suggesting that responsibility toward nature is essential for human progress.

Milton's epic presents a more expansive vision in which nature is inseparable from divine order. Adam and Eve's responsibility is rooted in obedience and stewardship rather than control. Their failure results in the corruption of both humanity and the natural world, emphasizing the gravity of moral choice. Milton's portrayal of Eden reinforces the idea that creation is a trust rather than a possession, and that misuse leads to universal consequences.

Comparatively, both authors reject the notion of human superiority without accountability. Defoe critiques reckless domination through Crusoe's initial arrogance, while Milton condemns disobedience through the Fall. Both texts highlight the interconnectedness of humanity and nature, suggesting that ethical behavior sustains harmony, while moral failure leads to disorder. Ultimately, these works remain relevant in contemporary discussions of environmental ethics. They remind readers that nature is not merely a resource but a system intertwined with moral responsibility. Through survival narrative and epic theology, Defoe and Milton offer enduring lessons about stewardship, humility, and accountability. Their texts affirm that humanity's destiny is deeply connected to how it treats the natural world, reinforcing the timeless significance of ethical responsibility within creation.

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