

2017

The Adventure of a Lifetime: Examining Life Lessons in Eighteenth Century Literature

Griffin Ferre

Claremont McKenna College

Recommended Citation

Ferre, Griffin, "The Adventure of a Lifetime: Examining Life Lessons in Eighteenth Century Literature" (2017). *CMC Senior Theses*. 1678.

http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc_theses/1678

This Open Access Senior Thesis is brought to you by Scholarship@Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in this collection by an authorized administrator. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

Claremont McKenna College

The Adventure of a Lifetime:

Examining Life Lessons in Eighteenth-Century Literature

Submitted to
Professor Christine Crockett

By
Griffin Ferre

for
Senior Thesis
Spring 2017
April 24th 2017

Introduction: The Journey Begins Here

From the beaches of a tropical deserted island to the bustling streets of France to the bowels of slave ships cruising across the ocean to the desolate icy tundra, the characters in eighteenth-century¹ English novels inhabit a wide range of settings. Often, these characters must reconcile their inner desires with societal norms and expectations. Since literature allows us to travel to different worlds we can analyze how various characters respond to such disparate situations. Often, the characters have little control over their circumstances and so need to learn how to make the best of them, to varying degrees of success. The wide range of trials that each character faces highlights the universal skills and attitudes that can help readers make the most of difficult circumstances.

In Daniel Defoe's 1719 adventure novel *Robinson Crusoe*, he chronicles the peculiar circumstances of the titular character. Crusoe begins his journey by only thinking about his own wishes, neglecting the concerns that his parents express about the nautical travels that Crusoe yearns to embark upon. Dismissing his parents concerns, Crusoe does head out to sea only to become marooned on a seemingly deserted island where he is left with nothing but his own thoughts. After much reflection, Crusoe comes to appreciate the companionship and support of others. He realizes that he should not consider those around him as simply pawns that can be manipulated for his own advantage, but rather as individuals with just as much life and agency as himself. When

¹ Technically, the novels that this thesis examines span throughout what might more accurately be referred to as the "long eighteenth century," which, as Oxford Scholarship Online explains, is the time period "beginning with the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and ending with the battle of Waterloo in 1815."

he overcomes his initial distrust of others and decides to enter into more symbiotic relationships, he finds that his life becomes more fulfilling.

Another character who must navigate unfamiliar surroundings is Yorick, the protagonist in the 1768 novel *A Sentimental Journey* by Laurence Sterne. Yorick's experiences are much different than those of Crusoe in that he journeys from his native England to the unfamiliar bustling culture of France. Here, he struggles to properly modulate his significant internal emotions and integrate himself into the more tradition-bound culture in which he finds himself. After a series of encounters with a variety of individuals, mostly ending with frustration, Yorick finds the greatest satisfaction when he no longer struggles to find his niche in the French culture that is so at odds with his natural inclinations, and instead strives to make connections on the individual level. Although Sterne concludes his novel on quite the cliffhanger, he does leave the reader with the hint that Yorick will be able to break free of the social constraints he had been saddled with, and use his robust sentimentality to craft a more fulfilling life.

Crusoe and Yorick both struggle to reconcile the values of their home society with their newfound social environments, and it is through the process of learning to balance the values of their internal and external worlds that they arrive at a method for fashioning more fulfilling lives for themselves. After undergoing their respective ordeals, both of these characters learn the valuable lesson that it is important to respect others as individuals and not try to impose societal expectations upon them. Crusoe learns this lesson through his experiences with Xury and Friday, who are both slaves that end up under Crusoe's control at various points in the novel. He comes to regret his initial treatment of Xury and applies the lessons he learns to his relationship with Friday. Yorick

starts to allow more sentimentality to permeate his interactions with others, departing from the traditional norms of French culture, and perhaps sets up the possibility for more fulfilling personal interactions.

While both Crusoe and Yorick explore unfamiliar surroundings, the characters in Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*, are in very comfortable environs. However, as the novel develops, Elizabeth Bennet starts to resist the societal norms she has come to know. In this novel, Austen thoroughly explores the role of women in British society, and the options, or lack thereof, that they are presented with. As men, Crusoe and Yorick enjoy a good deal of agency, and when that is taken away, it forces them to adjust their outlooks. Elizabeth though, must resist the very society in which she was raised. As a woman, she is expected simply to choose a husband and serve as his faithful companion, and perhaps even servant. The main expectation Jane faces is to elevate her social status through marriage, which means that finding a husband becomes a logistical, rather than emotional, matter. Elizabeth resists this expectation though, and her gradually evolving relationship with Edward Darcy forms the central storyline of the novel. In the end, she learns the benefit of pursuing marriage with someone she truly loves and cares for, instead of just viewing the institution as a way to advance her social status.

Finally, the two autobiographies *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* by Olaudah Equiano and the novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, depict the lives of two protagonists in entirely different circumstances than the previously mentioned protagonists. Equiano is forced to endure the life of a frequently traded slave and spends a good deal of his early life in captivity. Despite his terrible ordeal, Equiano maintains his composure and demonstrates how to make the most of a terrible situation.

The same can not be said of Frankenstein's monster, who endures a similarly grueling plight, but allows the cruelty of those he encounters to drive him into hatred and despair. The juxtaposition of these characters reveals the importance of focusing only on what you can control. There will always be circumstances that make life more difficult, but the one thing you can always control is your attitude and how you respond to external circumstances. Both Equiano and Frankenstein's monster had plenty of reason to despair, but only Equiano realized that there was no point in bemoaning his situation since no one would respond to that. Instead, he continuously strives to maintain his strong moral character to earn his freedom. Frankenstein's monster gives in to his frustration and soon learns that reverting to a life of evil only serves to plunge him further into despair. The discrepancy between the conduct of Equiano and the monster highlights just how important it is to the temptation to let difficult circumstances corrupt one's mindset.

By comparing various works of literature from a wide range of authors, it is possible to discern underlying truths that readers can apply to their own lives as well. Most of the events depicted in these novels are unlikely to occur in real life, but it is often when individuals are faced with adversity that their true character reveals itself. That is why novels and autobiographies, in addition to being entertaining to read, can be quite insightful as well. Forming connections with other people has the potential to be one of the most fulfilling acts in one's life, so examining how a wide variety of characters interact with those around them is a rich source of life lessons. Two lessons in particular emerge from this selection of eighteenth century literature. First, it is important to care about the merits and morals of other individuals rather than their social status. Second, it

is important to focus on what one can control rather than ruminating on the elements in one's life that are out of one's control.

Chapter 1: A Tale of Two Travelers

In his classic adventure novel *Robinson Crusoe*, Daniel Defoe explores how the titular character's abrupt transition from adventurous seafaring captain to deserted island-dweller affects him as a person. Defoe traces both the physical as well as the emotional journey of Crusoe as he learns about himself and what kind of man he wants to be. As Crusoe endures his ordeals, he gradually adjusts his mindset to become increasingly self-aware. By doing so, he develops a more full sense of what he truly values in life. After beginning his journey as a self-absorbed thrill-seeker, Crusoe gradually evolves over the course of the novel into someone who considers others as well, which is his way of developing a more fulfilling life. At first Crusoe thinks that he can accomplish all of his goals by himself, but by the end of the novel Crusoe learns that working for and with other people provides a much more fulfilling experience.

The very first conflict that Crusoe encounters is the discrepancy between his own inclination toward adventure and his father's desire for him to pursue the less perilous career of law. Here, Crusoe and his parents each hold very different views about what profession will lead to a higher quality of life for Crusoe. His parents value safety and security, while Crusoe places a higher value on thrill and adventure. This disparity sets the scene for the first conflict in the plot. Crusoe relates that his father "press'd me most earnestly, and in the most affectionate manner, not to play the young Man" (Defoe 6) and that "I observed the Tears run down his Face most plentifully" (Defoe 7). Crusoe's parents possess a very traditional mindset, while Crusoe seeks a more unconventional path.

Crusoe also relates how his father earnestly and sincerely implored him not to embark on his nautical escapades. He also shares that his father “would do very kind things for me if I would stay and settle at home” (Defoe 7). The problem for Crusoe’s parents is that their son is very inwardly focused. His main consideration is what he desires rather than how his decision will affect those around him. Crusoe’s father’s next attempts at persuasion are an appeal to Crusoe’s older brother’s death as a warning. His father explains that, “his (older brother’s) young Desire prompt(ed) him to run into the Army where he was kill’d” (Defoe 7). Despite multiple counterarguments in various forms Crusoe still decides to embark on a nautical journey. The key here is that Crusoe’s parents thought that their son could achieve the highest quality of life by occupying a respected position in society, but Crusoe thought that it was important to follow his internal compass.

Defoe spends several pages documenting how much his parents oppose Crusoe’s plan and how it is because they care about their son. However, Crusoe does not reveal much sympathy for the fact that his father cares about him and would be distressed if harm were to come to him. Crusoe does say that, “I was sincerely affected affected with this Discourse” (Defoe 7) so he was not completely cold, but that sentiment never translates into action. It seems as if Crusoe’s main internal conflict is between the excitement of a seafaring adventure and the stability of a more sedentary lifestyle, rather than a concern for his parents’ feelings. It does not seem as if Crusoe seriously considers his parents’ discourse. He never tries to reason with them or reassure them. This stubborn demeanor is the first impression we get of Crusoe and will later provide a benchmark for

how much change Crusoe will undergo. Crusoe's impulsive ways will later come back to haunt him.

Defoe also establishes the early theme that Crusoe must reconcile his internal yearnings with societal inclinations. He reflects to himself, "But I that was born to be my own 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...I was hurried on, and obey'd blindly the Dictates of my fancy rather than my own Reason" (Defoe 34). The language Crusoe uses here is intriguing because he insinuates that he has no choice in the matter, and is instead at the mercy of his impulses. This feeling that he is being pushed along by his "Fancy" likely contributes to his eagerness to venture out and is why he has so much difficulty adhering to his parents' wishes. Crusoe recognizes that his father's counsel is sound, but still gave in to his yearnings for adventure. He thinks he can find fulfillment with a state of constant motion, without attaching himself too closely to anyone. Since Crusoe has yet to learn the importance of thinking from the perspective of others, his main compass is his internal sentiments. However, later, once he is left alone with nothing but those inner thoughts, he realizes that there is more that he is missing out on.

At times it almost seems as if nature itself is also trying to compel Crusoe to remain on land. Crusoe soon realizes that the adventurous lifestyle he had envisioned is harder to achieve than he initially thought. After he goes against the wishes of his parents and sets out to sea, he endures several shipwrecks never actually encounters success on his ventures. Yet, these episodes do not seem to dampen Crusoe's spirit of adventure. Crusoe thought a swashbuckling life of adventure would bring him fulfillment, but as evidenced by his tumultuous experiences on the high seas, the happiness and excitement

he gains from these adventures are fleeting at most. Originally Crusoe sought this sense of adventure above all else, but now he is becoming more open to other sources of fulfillment.

After Crusoe leaves his parents behind, he eventually finds himself pressed into slavery, which, while unpleasant, does not stifle his desire to possess slaves of his own later on. Defoe includes this episode to establish another baseline that we can compare an evolved Crusoe to later on. In the beginning, Crusoe exhibits cutthroat tendencies, likely because he finds himself enslaved early on in his journey. To escape his predicament, he lures his fishing boat out into the open water. There, he “tost (his captor) over-board into the sea” (Defoe 20). That took care of his captor, but there was also another slave named Xury present in the boat. Crusoe says, “I could ha’ been content to ha’ taken this Moor with me, and ha’ drown’d the Boy, but there was no venturing to trust him” (Defoe 21). This represents our first glimpse into Crusoe’s inclination to distrust those he first meets and only consider their value in terms of their use to him. Crusoe even threatens Xury, telling him, “if you will be faithful to me I’ll make you a great Man, but if you will not stroak your face to be true to me, that is, swear by Mahomet and his Father’s beard, I must throw you into the Sea too” (Defoe 21). At this point in the story, Crusoe is not seeking to make any personal connections, and instead is only doing what serves him best in the moment. After benefiting from Xury’s presence for a bit, Crusoe unceremoniously sells Xury when he no longer sees a use for him, once again viewing Xury more as a tool than as a companion. Crusoe relays that, “I was very loath to sell the poor Boy’s liberty, who had assisted me so faithfully in securing my own” (Defoe 29) so we do get one glimmer of Crusoe’s future empathy and when Crusoe bargains for Xury’s future

freedom and the captain assures Crusoe that, “he would give the Boy an Obligation to set him free in ten years, if he turn’d Christian”(Defoe 29). Crusoe comes to regret the transaction, but at first it is merely because he realizes the extra hand would have been useful. As Crusoe sets to work on his plantation, he realizes that, “we both wanted Help, and now I found more than before, I had done wrong in parting with my boy Xury” (Defoe 30). Crusoe likely recalls this experience later on when he has another opportunity to take on a servant, and takes care to treat Friday better. Crusoe realizes that he had not appreciated Xury as much as he should have. This lays the foundation for when Crusoe eventually learns the value of working with others to achieve his goals instead of trying to fly solo. This whole scene shows how much room Crusoe still has to grow as a person, but he can draw on some of these experiences later on when he has to decide what kind of person he wants to be.

After Crusoe embarks on yet another adventure, he is eventually marooned on an abandoned island where he is forced to adopt a lifestyle more in line with what his father envisioned for him, albeit under much different circumstances than either could have imagined. Initially, Crusoe proved himself to be quite restless. Initially, Crusoe accepts his fate without much consternation, and dedicates himself to creating an infrastructure that can sustain his new life. Defoe spends many pages detailing how Crusoe gradually expands his empire. This island setting provides a stark contrast to the bustling activity of England, but Crusoe tries to bridge that gap by structuring his island world to more closely resemble civilized society. Here, Crusoe must learn to manufacture happiness for himself, independent of any other human connection. At first, it seems as if he does this by fully immersing himself in his work since almost all of his energy is simply devoted

toward survival. He sets about with admirable clarity and purpose to transform his surroundings into something more hospitable, thus maintaining his original self-absorbed mindset. His first attempt at bringing other living creatures into his domain does not go as planned. "I kill'd a She-Goat which had a little Kid by her when she gave Suck to, which griev'd me heartily; but when the Old one fell, the Kid stood stock still by her till I came and took her up, and not only so, but when I carry'd the Old one with me upon my shoulders, the Kid follow'd me quite to my Enclosure, upon which I laid down the Dam, and took the Kid in my Arms, and carry'd it over my Pale, in hopes to have bred it up tame, but it would not eat, so I was forc'd to kill it and eat it myself" (Defoe 50). This is another example of Defoe revealing how much more Crusoe still has to grow. As Crusoe's time on the island prolongs itself, he starts to appreciate the companionship of others more and more. At first, the island wildlife is his only source of companionship, and he tries to domesticate a goat in order to secure some. This is perhaps the first occasion we see in which Crusoe does not view others as simply disposable. He tries to care for the well being of another living creature, but since he does not have much experience he does not enjoy much success. However, this is the beginning of Crusoe's development. Crusoe's struggle to adapt his mindset serves as a key development in the novel and sets him on the path to becoming a more considerate person.

As Crusoe gradually grows to become more considerate of others, he must fight against the imperialistic urges that have become so ingrained in him. Growing up, Crusoe likely witnessed his native England using its military might to impose its will upon inferior nations. On the island, Crusoe occupies the superior position largely due to his superior weaponry and the practical knowledge he gleaned from his pre-island life and

acts the part as well. He reflects that, “I descended a little on the Side of that delicious Vale, surveying it with a Kind of Pleasure...to think that this was all my own, that I was King and Lord of all this Country indefeasibly” (Defoe 80). He has a place to give him a sense of security and comfort and to feel as though he has mastered his surroundings. In addition, Crusoe has amassed quite a collection of pets, including cats, dogs, goats, and his parrot. As well as providing a bit of companionship, these allow Crusoe to feel as though he has control over something. However, Crusoe also has no problem ruthlessly disposing of any animal that no longer meets his needs, drowning his cats’ kittens without much of a second thought. At this juncture Crusoe is still seeking to subjugate other living beings to his will. He does seem to start to appreciate them for more than just their practical use though, so perhaps he is showing a bit of growth.

A crucial development in Crusoe’s evolution as a person occurs when, for perhaps the first time in his life, he adopts the inferior position in a relationship. This occurs when, after Crusoe gradually descends into a state of despair, he turns to God and Christianity for a source of support. Crusoe’s newfound religious tendencies spur him to become more receptive to non-domineering relationships, which is a significant step forward for him. Interestingly, what sparks his faith is that, “after I saw Barley grow there, in a Climate which I know was not proper for Corn, and especially that I knew not how it came there, it startl’d me strangely, and I began to suggest, that God had miraculously caus’d this Grain to grow” (Defoe 63). In perhaps Crusoe’s darkest moment, religion emerges as a source of comfort for him and he begins to seriously pray for the first time in his life. This is also the first time that we witness Crusoe deferring to someone else’s authority. Perhaps this signals that Crusoe’s self-centric mindset was

unfulfilling, and he is gradually starting to admit that he needs to let others into his life.

Here, Crusoe admits that he is inferior to God and ascribes to him the power to influence his life. This helps Crusoe accept his situation, which marks a departure from his earlier attempts to exert control over his life. He admits, “Then I cry’d out, Lord be my Help, for I am in great distress. This was my first Prayer, if I may call it so, that I had made for many Years” (Defoe 73). This moment marks one of the key developments in Crusoe’s internal evolution because it signals a shift in perspective for him. Now, Crusoe is living for more than just himself. He is astounded by what he believes to be God’s creations and wants God to aid him in his own life as well. So he starts to live a life while considering about whether God would approve of his actions. Therefore, for the first time he is considering how his life will impact someone else besides himself. Earlier, Crusoe’s main shortcoming was that he mainly thought about himself, which is why this moment is so crucial.

Crusoe’s new surroundings also force him to take a new perspective on life. He was brought up in a more developed English culture in which there were many different stations in life and one’s reputation amongst others was of vital importance. This background contrasts greatly with the island life where there is no such social structure to speak of and Crusoe has the opportunity to craft his own lifestyle without the need to consider his reputation. However, when Crusoe first encounters the cannibals on the island he is thoroughly repulsed and in fact he “entertained such an Abhorrence of the Savage Wretches, that I have been speaking of, and of the wretched inhuman Custom of their devouring and eating one another up, that I continued pensive, and sad, and kept close within my own Circle for almost two Years after this” (Defoe 130). Crusoe’s

trepidation is partly due to the fact that he has been isolated for so long that any kind of human contact seems strange to him now, but it also reveals how Crusoe tends to react to others by closing himself off. After a bit more pondering, he realizes that he was viewing the savages' behavior through the lens of a completely different culture from their own. He realizes that he was imposing his view of what a society should look like upon them, writing, "in the next place it occur'd to me, that albeit the Usage they thus gave one another, was thus brutish and inhumane; yet it was really nothing to me: These People had done me no Injury" (Defoe 134). Here Defoe illustrates that Crusoe can perhaps think from the perspective of others. We can see Crusoe gradually developing in this regard across the novel, with several incidents combining together to transform Crusoe in the long run.

The next evolution for Crusoe is that he starts to look back on his pre-island life and realizes that he used to take what he had for granted. What is ironic is that now Crusoe thinks that he has more than he even needs even though he has less than he has ever had. This is because the island has completely shifted his perspective. When Crusoe is stripped of everything it forces him to focus on what is really important. He realizes, "I was remov'd from all the Wickedness of the World here...I had nothing to covet; for I had all that I was now capable of enjoying...There were no Rivals. I had no competitor, none to dispute Sovereignty or Command with me...I learn'd to look more upon the bright Side of my Condition, and less upon the dark Side...All our Discontents about what we want, appear'd to me, to spring from the Want of Thankfulness for what we have" (Defoe 101). This fresh mentality lays the foundation for his realization that the relationships he has in his life are worth more than the materials surrounding him. He

does occasionally yearn for companionship, which is why he is so intrigued by hearing his parrot Poll say his name. The one thing that Crusoe does not have in his new life is companionship, but that will soon change.

Then, after thinking that he wanted another sign of human life for so long, he finally gets another opportunity to become a master when he rescues Friday. He initially wants to acquire a slave as a means to help him escape from the island, which, although it is still a self-serving desire, it is one of the first times we see Crusoe admit that he might need help from another living person. He seems to take pride in being quite independent, but he still views a potential slave as merely a tool to help him achieve his goals. However, after he rescues Friday he actually begins to care for him and realizes that having him around made it the most enjoyable year of his life on the island. At first, Crusoe is inclined to distrust Friday as well, as he constructed his home to make the place where he sleeps inaccessible to Friday. He soon warms to Friday though and comes to really appreciate him. Friday is quite useful, knowing what kind of wood is best to use for the canoe and eventually facilitating his escape from the island, but it does seem like Crusoe cares for him. He makes clothes for Friday, and even expands his crops to be able to feed him as well, a move that seems to contrast with Crusoe's earlier defensive measures.

Crusoe still displays some regressive tendencies though in that he initially sees Friday as a repository for his own life philosophies, including his newfound Christianity. His feelings toward Friday are more akin to those of a proud owner than to those of a member of an equal partnership. Crusoe shares that, "I seriously pray'd to God that he would enable me to instruct savingly this poor Savage" (Defoe 171). In Crusoe's eyes,

Friday needs his help and he believes that his newfound faith is the best way to help Friday. This moment is an interesting blend of Crusoe caring for Friday and wanting to help him, but also viewing him as a chance to advance his own Christian sentiments.

Despite Crusoe's limited ability to think from Friday's perspective, he does reveal some genuine feelings toward Friday. He writes, "I had more Affection in my Enquiry after Things upon this Occasion, than ever I felt before; so that whether this poor wild Wretch was the better for me, or no, I had great Reason to be thankful that ever he came to me" (Defoe 171-172). In fact, Crusoe and Friday's partnership gradually evolves over the course of the relationship as the two become closer. As Crusoe and Friday affect their escape from this island, Crusoe witnesses the close bond Friday shares with his father. Crusoe writes. "It is not easy for me to express how it mov'd me to see what Extasy and filial Affection had work'd in this poor Savage, at the Sight of his Father" (Defoe 185). Although, Crusoe never fully comes to view Friday as a complete equal, saying, "my man Friday accompanying me very honestly in all these Ramblings, and proving a most faithful Servant upon all Occasions" (Defoe 217). Now, Crusoe can hardly deny that he has come to care for Friday as a person.

Interestingly, Crusoe's return to civilization does not come with the joyful feelings that the reader might expect but instead with more muted emotions. Crusoe finds that his plantation in Brazil was actually quite profitable, but this does not bring him as much joy as it might have earlier. Defoe speeds up the narration pace and glosses over several of Crusoe's post-island escapades after going into excruciating detail to describe Crusoe's time on the island. During his return to civilization, Crusoe tries to make amends because he now realizes that the lives of other people do matter and he wants to

apply the lessons he learned on the island. In fact, “the first thing (Crusoe) did, was to recompense my original Benefactor, my good old captain” (Crusoe 221). Although Crusoe is certainly not perfect, this act of gratitude serves as a clear indication that Crusoe wants to become a more considerate person.

In his article Brett C. Mcinelly argues that Crusoe had to learn how to conceive of his position as the center of his own universe. Crusoe’s journey to the island provides him a very unique perspective and a sudden increase in status amongst his surroundings. As Mcinelly notes, “Despite his insignificant origins...Crusoe, by the end of his adventures, is filled with a sense of his own importance” (McInnelly 3). At first, Crusoe must focus his sole attention on surviving on this island, but then he soon finds himself the dominant figure in a growing island economy. Crusoe becomes quite pleased, since this mirrors the colonial trajectory of his home nation. “The movement of Defoe’s narrative from the colonial center to the periphery facilitates Crusoe’s development as a character. The sheer expanse of the globe through which Crusoe wanders has a paradoxical effect on him: rather than being overwhelmed by the vastness of his environment and dwindling under feelings of insignificance, Crusoe’s self-image enlarges the farther he travels from England (McInnelly 5). Crusoe certainly suddenly becomes the center of his own universe, but he realizes how much he needs to welcome others into his universe as well. At first, Crusoe tried to build his empire of island dwellings with him as the centerpiece, His universe is his to customize as he sees fit, but there is still something missing- a human connection

In the end, Crusoe evolves across his journey by learning to shift his perspective. The key is how he adjusts to his new position on the island. After a whirlwind start to his

young adult life, he is forced into a situation where all he can do is reflect. Defoe almost certainly meant to compare Crusoe's increasing dominion over the island to his native England's colonization efforts, but it is not actually Crusoe's power that gives him happiness, but rather his newfound consideration for other people. Crusoe originally thought that having control over Friday was what he sought, but he soon learns that it was the fact they began to care about each other that was the true source of happiness. Crusoe discovers that deep personal connections in which one cares about others as individuals rather than merely as tools has guided him on the path to happiness. Now, the next question is how to go about interacting with others, which is a matter that Laurence Sterne will delve into in more detail in his own novel.

In *A Sentimental Journey*, Sterne chronicles the travels of his protagonist Yorick, who has already learned at the beginning of the novel what it takes Crusoe a series of escapades to discover; that is nearly impossible to navigate through life entirely on your own. As opposed to Crusoe, who spends much of his adventure in isolation, Yorick encounters a wide swath of characters as he operates in a bustling metropolis setting. Yorick cares deeply about those around him, and yearns to adapt to his new society by integrating himself amongst his peers. Like Crusoe, Yorick finds himself in an entirely unfamiliar surrounding, but in a quite different sense. Crusoe learns what life is like with all other humans subtracted from it, which allows him to appreciate the role that people play in the world. Yorick must learn how to maximize his interactions with others by interacting with people which whom he has limited knowledge about. Throughout his travels Yorick is exposed to many new experiences and gets to see how life plays out in different parts of the world. He means well but must grow accustomed to the customs of

different cultures. As a self-described sentimental man, Yorick empathizes with those around him and wants to establish an emotional connection, while also not appearing to be overly concerned with maintaining the customs of the land. He is relatively uninhibited and often shows off his inexperience in these foreign situations. However, there are several scenes throughout the novel in which Yorick discovers what truly brings him happiness. He comes to find the most fulfillment on the occasions in which he has more personal interactions and thinks of others as individuals rather than as actors in a large social drama

Literary critic Joseph Chadwick begins his analysis of the novel by highlighting the diverse interpretations this novel engenders, from the idea that Yorick is reveling in a beneficent world to the idea that he has found the world to be solipsistic in nature. While a significant portion of *Robinson Crusoe* depicts Crusoe alone with his thoughts and his world building, Yorick is fully immersed in a bustling world of his own. Sterne crafts Yorick as a character to be quite different from the standard male of the time in order to provide a fresh perspective. As Chadwick notes, “Sterne undermines conventions of the novel and travel narrative respectively, thus eliminating the usual means by which the reader can evaluate a character’s or narrator’s words and deeds” (Chadwick 3). Here, Chadwick hits on what makes *A Sentimental Journey* so unique; Yorick is upending the typical archetype of a protagonist in a travel narrative. This allows the reader to keep a keen eye out for what variations to normal societal interactions Yorick creates. Since the progression of the plot takes place as much inside Yorick’s mind as it does in the exterior world, Sterne’s journeys into Yorick’s psyche also serve as revealing scenes. “(Yorick) serves as the reader’s epistemological link to the world within the novel; as

narrator/protagonist, he is able to isolate the reader within the psychological and moral world of his own personality...the reader is isolated within Yorick as a center of consciousness” (Chadwick 4,5). What this means is that since Yorick contrasts so sharply with the rest of the characters he encounters, he isolates himself from the society he inhabits. In this way, Yorick stands alone as a main character since no truly three-dimensional secondary characters emerge. Le Fleur is perhaps the character who appears the most besides Yorick, but his main role is merely to serve as Yorick’s sidekick. Therefore, since Sterne uses Yorick’s perspective to guide his readers through the novel, it helps the reader identify more closely with Yorick.

One of the main distinguishing features of Yorick’s perspective on the world is that he strives to imbue his surroundings with positivity. Chadwick describes it as “Yorick’s vision of travel as a self-fulfilling process” (Chadwick 5). Yorick is certainly seeking more than a material reward, and is not scouring the people and experiences he encounters for additional sources of internal wealth. Ostensibly, Yorick’s positive and unskeptical attitude seem like promising mechanisms for achieving what he is looking for. Yorick “is able to endow even his most repetitive experiences, such as his series of sentimental/seductive encounters, with emotional tones and intellectual meanings that differentiate themselves from one another” (Chadwick 6). Yorick’s tendency to look for deeper meaning, particularly more meaningful connections with others, serves to drive the action forward throughout the novel. It seems as though other people who Yorick encounters in France are more bound by societal norms than Yorick is. Since Yorick comes from a different culture, he brings a fresh perspective in which he is much less

restrained in his sentimentality than the French. Throughout the novel, Sterne analyzes how Yorick's attitude clashes with many of the individuals he encounters.

The first instance of this phenomenon occurs as Yorick first ponders the nature of France culture. He expresses bewilderment at the French citizens' uninhibited sentimentality, relaying to his female companion, "they have certainly got the credit of understanding more of love, and making it better than any other nation upon earth: but for my own part I think them errant bunglers, and in truth the worst set of marksmen that ever tried Cupid's patience. To think of making love by *sentiments!*" (Sterne 26). Sterne depicts Yorick's conception of France's culture with tinges of revulsion but also awe. This way of life is so foreign to Yorick he cannot fully comprehend it, yet he is also strangely fascinated. Later on, Yorick shares some interesting musings, saying, "that if I ever do a mean action, it must be in some interval betwixt one passion and another: whilst this interregnum lasts, I always perceive my heart locked up- I can scarce find in it, to give Misery a sixpence; and therefore I always get out of it as fast as I can, and the moment I am re-kindled, I am all generosity and good will gain; and would do any thing in the world either for, or with any one, if they will but satisfy me there is no sin in it...but in saying this- surely I am commending the passion-not myself" (Sterne 34). This quote reveals the depths of Yorick's thoughts on the role sentimentality should play in one's life. He struggles to extricate himself from his emotions and realizes, rightly so, that they will come to play a driving force in his adventures. He realizes that it is hard to act without his emotions playing a role and although he struggles with it here, he soon comes to embrace his sentimentality. Yorick learns that he can use his sentimentality to connect with people in ways that he could not if he tried to suppress his feelings.

One example in which Yorick demonstrates his ability to think about others is when he attends a concert and realizes that one patron is unable to view the show from his position. Yorick says, "I feel some principles within me, which incline me to be merciful towards this poor blighted part of my species, who have neither size nor strength to get on in this world" (Sterne 60). This is a welcome contrast to Crusoe's more self-absorbed meditations. Yorick certainly thinks about his place in society much more than Crusoe did, and even is able to put himself in the position of the dwarf and empathize with him. While this opens him up to the possibility of making more connections, it also allows Yorick to feel the pain of others as well. When the dwarf finds himself trapped in a disadvantageous position behind a tall German gentleman and unable to glimpse the show down below, Yorick becomes invested in his cause and feels a certain amount of anguish on his behalf. Yorick mentions that, "I cannot bear to see one of them tread (sic) upon" (Sterne 60) and that "I could have leaped out of the box to redress it" (Sterne 61). Except, Yorick did no such thing. Instead it was a French officer who came to the dwarf's aid. It was as if there was another play going on up in the box seats as well as down below on the stage since Yorick never actually intervened. This is an interesting scene because Yorick's keen sense of others did not end up serving him well. Instead it merely distracted him from the performance and did no direct good to the person actually in need of assistance.

While most of Yorick's escapades flow smoothly from one to the next without much consternation, one significant snag arises when Yorick realizes he does not have the required passport to continue his journey. However, Yorick is reluctant to show any signs of consternation or weakness, thinking, "I could not find in my heart to torture La

Fleur's with a serious look upon the subject of my embarrassment, which was the reason I treated it so cavalierly: and to show him how light it lay upon my mind" (Sterne 69). This attitude is more in line with what might be more traditionally expected of males at the time. Yorick is not keen to show any weakness, even to his trusted companion Le Fleur. Yorick's mental state is viscerally manifested in his encounter with the trapped bird a few pages later. He once again immediately empathizes with the bird's plight and endeavors to facilitate its escape. "I fear, poor creature! Said I, I cannot set thee at liberty- 'no,' said the starling- 'I can't get out'" (Sterne 71). Sterne not so subtly uses the bird trapped in the cage to represent Yorick's true sentiments, which he just recently sequestered away. "I vow, I never had my affections more tenderly awakened; nor do I remember an incident in my life, where the dissipated spirits, to which my reason had been a bubble, were so suddenly call'd home" (Sterne 71-72). Yorick is struggling to free not just the bird, but his own emotions as well. He is not at all comfortable with valuing societal expectations over his internal feelings.

Yorick does continue to strive to attain social success and he does soon actually ascend to the heights of popularity. Likely, Yorick would originally have pinpointed such a social status as a sign of success. At first, Yorick revels in his newfound popularity, relaying that, "for three weeks together, I was of every man's opinion I met" (Sterne 112). However, Yorick's excitement is short-lived. He explains that, "I could have eaten and drank and been merry all the days of my life at Paris; but 'twas a dishonest reckoning- I grew ashamed of it- it was the gain of a slave-every sentiment of honour revolted against it- the higher I got, the more I was forced upon my beggarly system" (Sterne 112). This key moment provides a revealing insight into what kind of sentiments

Sterne envisions for Yorick. It is not when Yorick is enjoying the benefits of fame that he is most happy, but rather when he is eschewing the typical social functions of society. His most meaningful interactions come when he is having more personal conversations, such as with the first chambermaid, Maria, and we are left to assume, the chambermaid at the end.

One of Yorick's more intriguing encounters was when he discovered the forlorn Maria. After revealing that, "nature melted within me" (Sterne 115) he takes a keen interest in her and "Maria put her arm within mine, and lengthening the string, to let the dog follow- in that order we entered Moulines" (Sterne 116). Sterne is ambiguous as to what exactly becomes of Yorick and Maria, but the feeling that he leaves with the reader is that their relationship will go deeper than merely the surface level. Yorick is clearly quite distraught by the encounter because he can feel intensely for her, so he has not quite figured out how to marshal his emotions in a positive direction, but he is able to provide a nice moment for a lady who was probable overlooked by most of the others who traveled past her. This is a great example of Yorick using his sentimentality to care about an individual regardless of the personal benefit to himself.

Yorick does find some satisfaction through his interactions with the two chambermaids. Earlier on in the novel, when Yorick is in a Parisian book shop, he notices a young girl come into the store and, after paying a great deal of attention to her movements, they walk out of the store together. Yorick then reports how "as both our roads lay the same way, we made no scruple of walking along the Quai de Conti together" because "when a virtuous convention is made betwixt man and woman, it sanctifies their most private walks" (Sterne 65). Here Yorick reveals a bit of his own

morals, because even though he marveled at the seemingly excessive sentimentality of France, there are still rules regarding propriety that Yorick will soon come to encounter. He seems to feel a personal connection with this chambermaid though and is able to dismiss the constraining French customs to experience an enjoyable moment.

This scene most directly connects with the final scene in the whole novel. In that peculiar scene, two ladies are unceremoniously checked into Yorick's bed-chamber, which causes quite the consternation amongst the trio of participants in this unorthodox venture. Since this is such a deviation from standard practice, the lady forces Yorick to agree to a set of terms for their cohabitation, including a ban on his ability to speak. Yorick of course, being the sentimental man he is, is game to adhere to the code but soon finds that he cannot suppress all the emotion he has accrued across his journey and he cannot help but burst out "when Nature and patience both wearing out- O my God! Said I" (Sterne 124). If his violation of the treaty wasn't enough, the book ends on a very abrupt note with a moment in which "when I stretch'd out my hand, I caught hold of the File de Chambre's" (Sterne 125). This marks a stark contrast to when Yorick so freely walked with the last chambermaid he met in the bookstore. Here, Sterne is intentionally ending the novel on a cliffhanger in order to get the reader's mind racing. We don't know why the chambermaid was within reach of Yorick's hand but it may be that Sterne saying that the chambermaid did not buy into her lady's games and machinations and also yearned to establish a personal connection with Yorick.

The ambiguous ending allows the reader to ponder what might be next in store for Yorick and the chambermaid. Yorick strove to forge personal connections with those he encountered, even if they did not always return those affections. Yorick is literally

bursting with emotion, but he does always know how best to direct that emotion. His exclamation violates the social contract he had established. However, he does receive a glimmer of hope when the chambermaid demonstrates a willingness to depart from the more rigid norms her master espoused. Since she is subjected to an inferior social position, she is likely much more open to actions that seem to disregard that tradition. One of Yorick's strengths is that his worldview is not colored by the established, and often suppressive, social norms. Perhaps the chambermaid could sense that, and was offering a show of support to the chastised Yorick.

In the end, Yorick journeys in the opposite direction of Crusoe. Crusoe begins his stay on the island by slowly building an empire around himself. He enjoys feeling the power of control and thinks that this domination will bring him happiness. However, once he decides to submit to God's will and forfeit some of this power, he gains access to a new, more fulfilling, perspective. He learns to view those around him, such as Friday, not as mere tools to help him construct his own empire, but as individuals with their own life projects as well. Yorick on the other hand, is eager to fully immerse himself in the lives of others. He has to learn to control his feelings to integrate himself into a new culture. He is intensely aware of others' feelings, yet seems unable to put this conscientiousness into practice. He never has any truly meaningful or profound connections, but Sterne does leave us with the possibility that some sort of connection is in Yorick's immediate future.

Both Crusoe and Yorick learn that thinking about the wellbeing of others is a crucial first step toward happiness. Both grew up in cultures in which personal connections were devalued in favor of hierarchical social relationships. Crusoe's

imperialistic England valued colonialism and subjecting others to its will, while Yorick's adopted France operated under strict social guidelines. In France, most servants are not treated as equals, but Yorick is not attuned to French culture, so he does not see as much of a divide between him and the chambermaid. This opens up a new world of potential relationships to him. Yorick is really good at empathizing with others, and he feels intense emotions, but he does not know how to marshal those emotions toward something productive. Maybe this is not a suitable environment because this is an entirely new way of thinking. However, the ending scene does give a glimpse of hope that others will start to appreciate Yorick's brand of social interaction more.

Crusoe also discovers an unlikely new relationship when he no longer views Friday as simply a tool, and instead begins to view him as a friend. Crusoe is able to shed his imperialistic mindset after his stint on the deserted island when he realizes that conquering his landscape does not bring him as much fulfillment as he had hoped. Crusoe adopted a very self-centric mindset throughout a large portion of his adventures, always looking to increase his own status. Then, a significant shift occurs when he begins to view Friday more as an equal rather than as a conquest. When he witnessed Friday lovingly embrace his father during their reunion, Crusoe sees what he has been missing out on by eschewing closer personal relationships. Yorick similarly attains a greater sense of happiness by viewing others as individuals rather than just as pieces of a larger social structure. His personal touches with both Maria and the first chambermaid are examples of how keeping in mind the perspective of others and operating with a selfless mindset can help one achieve a greater sense of happiness.

Chapter 2: A Revolution from the Inside

After coming over from England, Yorick must get his bearings in an entirely new culture, which makes it difficult to objectively evaluate the French way of life. This experience contrasts with that of Elizabeth Bennet, the protagonist in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, who grows to find that she is not entirely comfortable in the very society that she grew up in. In Elizabeth's Georgian England, the status quo for young women was to honor their families by behaving properly and not rocking the boat. In this way they could hope for a man to ask their hand in marriage and thus secure their happiness. It is in this world that author Jane Austen plies her trade, and she is successfully able to use her literary platform to highlight what she viewed as some inefficiencies in the society around her. In her novel she explores the life of a young woman who dares to resist these class structures. Austen depicts the class dynamics of her current society while also demonstrating how one can pursue a different idea of happiness. The main conflict that arises in the novel is between Elizabeth and Darcy's growing affection for each other and their difference in social class, which seemingly would preclude such affection. The custom at the time was for young women to marry the man who would most benefit their family's social status, with actual compatibility given very little consideration.

One way that Austen integrates the theme of happiness is by keeping the novel as a whole rather light. No characters descend into the depths of despair and there is no significant loss or catastrophe that befalls the characters. As Claudia Johnson notes, "Pride and Prejudice is a categorically happy novel, and its felicity is not merely incidental, something that happens at the end of the novel, but is rather at once its premise and its prize" (Johnson 73). Austen doesn't explore how characters can cope

when things go wrong, but instead explores how her female characters can pursue their own ends by not being afraid to resist the dominant social norms at the time. The society that Austen depicts revolves around family, and Austen's characters certainly reinforce that since a main pursuit of almost all the characters is that they seek to form their own families. Elizabeth, however, pursues this goal more indirectly. She does not simply pursue a husband who will provide her security, but instead yearns for a deeper emotional connection. This desire drives the plot forward as Elizabeth must decipher how to pursue the companionate marriage she seeks while operating within her more traditional social sphere.

An interesting dynamic at play in *Pride and Prejudice* is that Austen appears to resist typical social norms and structures while not completely discarding them. As indicated by the title, the major trend that Austen hopes to subvert is the feeling that one's class plays into one's worth. In the very beginning of the novel, Austen establishes the prominent role that wealth and social status will play in the novel, starting with the phrase, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" (Austen 1). Indeed, the arrival of Charles Bingley onto the scene is the opening salvo of the novel and begins the action. Austen also introduces readers to Mrs. Bennet, Elizabeth's mother, who serves as a contrast to Elizabeth. Mrs. Bennet explains to her husband that, "you must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them (her daughters)...think what an establishment it would be for one of them" (Austen 2-3). Mrs. Bingley represents the very traditional social view that Austen will comment on through the character of Elizabeth, so Mrs. Bingley also serves as more of a caricature of a character who highlights the ridiculousness of her point of view.

Austen also introduces her readers to Edward Darcy, who does not begin the novel as a very appealing character. Darcy's friend Mr. Bingley implores him, "I must have you dance. I hate to see you standing about by yourself in this stupid manner" (Austen 12). However, Darcy is not swayed by his friend and responds, "I certainly shall not. You know how I detest it, unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner. At such an assembly as this it would be insupportable, your sisters are engaged, and there is not another woman in the room whom it would not be punishable to me to stand up with" (Austen 12). Darcy turns up the heat on his burn even more by making it personal when he says in reference to Elizabeth, "she is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt *me*; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men" (Austen 13). Based solely on these quotes, it would be hard to believe that Elizabeth could grow to love such a man, but Austen is able to reveal over the course of the novel how much society's expectations have corrupted Darcy's demeanor. At this point, it seems as though Elizabeth and Darcy have as much of a chance of getting together as Elizabeth does of being named the next Queen of England. However, Austen uses this rocky beginning to their relationship to show how much it evolves over the course of the novel.

In fact, the next time Darcy and Elizabeth meet, Darcy looks a good deal more favorably upon Elizabeth, but she does not return those affections. After Darcy appears "not unwilling to receive" Elizabeth's hand to dance, Elizabeth exclaims, "Indeed, sir, I have not the least intention of dancing" (Austen 32). Elizabeth's refusal actually shows a remarkable amount of rebelliousness because if she had totally bought into the marriage

culture of the time, she would have leapt at the chance to marry a man of such high social status. Instead, Elizabeth is already placing a higher emphasis on personal connection. Despite his higher social status, Darcy is not immune from his share of awkwardness either. He clearly develops feelings for Elizabeth, but since she is not the kind of wife that he would be expected to marry, he does not pursue her as publicly as he might otherwise have. Since Elizabeth “attracted him more than he liked...he wisely resolved to be particularly careful that no sign of admiration should *now* escape him, nothing that could elevate her with the hope of influencing his felicity” (Austen 79). This is another example of how both Darcy and Elizabeth seem to be involved in a sort of game in which neither is able to truly express how they feel. Austen is demonstrating how constricting this game of social advancement is for these two protagonists.

Elizabeth also demonstrates her willingness to resist social norms when she is confronted by a marriage proposal from the buffoonish Mr. Collins. After Mrs. Bennet enthusiastically ushers Elizabeth and Mr. Collins together, Mr. Collins says, “you can hardly doubt the purport of my discourse, however your natural delicacy may lead you to dissemble; my attentions have been too marked to be mistaken. Almost as soon as I entered the house, I singled you out as the companion of my future life” (Austen 142). Here, Mr. Collins acts as though this proposal is a foregone conclusion and that this is perfectly natural, despite the obvious lack of a personal connection between the two individuals. Mr. Collins proceeds to launch into a long speech explaining why he chose to propose to Elizabeth, and Elizabeth, after barely being able to get a word in, tells him that, “I am very sensible of the honour of your proposals, but it is impossible for me to do otherwise than decline them” (Austen 145). Mr. Collins, unfazed, refuses to accept this

rejection, declaring, “it is usual with young ladies to reject the address of the man whom they secretly mean to accept...I am therefore by no means discouraged by what you have just said” (Austen 145). In the ensuing back-and-forth Elizabeth tries to convince Mr. Collins that she is indeed rejecting him for good. This conversation reveals how hard it is for Mr. Collins to believe that Elizabeth is going against social norms. It is almost too difficult for him to comprehend. In one line, Elizabeth says, “ I would rather be paid the compliment of being believed sincere,” (Austen 147) which is telling because it reveals her frustration at not being taken seriously. She does not wish to be viewed as merely a means for social advancement. Instead, she wants to be viewed as someone can have her own opinions and who can control her own destiny. This conversation highlights the discrepancy between the views of Mr. Collins and Elizabeth.

Mr. Collins does not waste any time in pursuing other options, proposing to Elizabeth’s friend Charlotte Lucas not long after. In doing so, he further reveals how much he views marriage merely as a social convention rather than as a personal connection. Charlotte also contrasts Elizabeth because she, “who accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment, cared not how soon the establishment were gained” (Austen 165). Even though she does not think that Mr. Collins will bring her the most personal happiness, Charlotte buys into the customs of her society that dictate that she needs to pursue the marriage that is most socially advantageous. Although Austen does not dwell on their marriage in too much depth, the union of Charlotte and Mr. Collins serves a baseline to which readers can compare the later match between Elizabeth and Darcy.

One turning point in Darcy and Elizabeth's gradually thawing romance occurs when Darcy intercepts Elizabeth during her walk to deliver a letter explaining some of his actions. He does not entirely succeed since "his style was not penitent, but haughty. It was all pride and insolence" (Austen 273). So, even though Darcy is not able to entirely extricate himself from the traditional cultural norms that he has ingrained in him, he does show flashes of promise. Elizabeth had grown to dislike Darcy after their unpleasant first encounter, but this forces her to view him in a new light. After Darcy explains his history with Wickham and how Darcy had tried to do what he thought was best, Elizabeth is forced to question her feelings about him. Elizabeth "grew absolutely ashamed of herself. Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd" (Austen 278). She realizes that there might be more to the people that she interacts with than what appears on the surface, and suddenly she is more open to getting to know Darcy. Another revelation from this scene is that Elizabeth sees a side of Darcy in which he is not the cold and distant figure she experienced at the first dance. Darcy is not entirely buying into the transactional mindset either, and is instead striving to do what he can to help his family.

The next episode that drives Elizabeth and Darcy together is the news that Wickham and Lydia may not actually get married, which would embroil the Bennet family in an unsavory social scandal. Both Elizabeth and Darcy are both quite distraught about the negative possibilities, and this experience brings them together. They both express regret about what they could have done to stop it, with Darcy saying, "Oh! Had I known what I ought, what I dared to do! But I knew not-I was afraid of doing too much. Wretched, wretched mistake!" (Austen 370). Although this situation is neither Darcy nor

Elizabeth's fault, each focuses on how they could have been better and they each take personal responsibility. In fact, "never had she (Elizabeth) so honestly felt that she could have loved him, as now, when all love must be in vain" (Austen 370). This scene, in which Darcy acts almost completely opposite of how he acted at the first dance, reveals what character traits Elizabeth values in others. She admires Darcy's ability to care about her family and friends, regardless of their social status.

The moment when Elizabeth realizes that she truly does have feelings for Darcy is when she receives a letter from Mrs. Gardiner that explains the lengths that Darcy went to remedy the situation with Charlotte and Wickham. Mrs. Gardiner relays how Mr. Darcy provided Wickham the money he needed in order to follow through with his marriage with Charlotte. Although, according to Mrs. Gardiner, Darcy "called it, therefore, his duty to step forward, and endeavor to remedy an evil which had been brought on by himself," (Austen 430) Elizabeth understands that Darcy was motivated more by his feelings for her. She thinks to herself, "he had done all this for a girl whom he could neither regard nor esteem. Her heart did whisper that he had done it for her" (Austen 436). Elizabeth appreciates Darcy's efforts because he, like her, is not purely motivated by social advancement. Even though he takes responsibility for this predicament, he is not really the one at fault, yet still does his best to lend his support. It seems as though his main motivation is that he cares about Elizabeth. This is the kind of personal relationship that Elizabeth is looking for, and what she finds is lacking in many of the other characters she interacts with.

Lady Catherine in particular is quite resistant to the idea of Elizabeth and Darcy getting married. She cites traditional reasons for her objection such as, "honour, decorum,

prudence- nay, interest, forbid it” (Austen 477). Austen uses Lady Catherine as almost a physical manifestation of the social norms that Elizabeth must struggle against. Lady Catherine keeps pressing Elizabeth to promise not to marry Darcy, and Elizabeth responds by trying to explain to Lady Catherine that her views on what is socially appropriate should not have as much bearing on the situation as the feelings of the two people actually involved in the union. Elizabeth asks, “would *my* refusing to accept his hand make him wish to bestow it on his cousin?” (Austen 479). Here, Elizabeth tries to emphasize for Lady Catherine that she cannot control how people feel and that her attempted machinations are doomed to fail. One of the most telling lines that Elizabeth delivers in this conversation is when she says, “I am resolved to act in that manner which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to you, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me” (Austen 480). Here Elizabeth delivers one of the main themes of the novel. She declares that it is more important to pursue one’s personal idea of happiness, regardless of how that fits into the traditional social structure. Elizabeth realizes that often people pursue strategic marriages simply because they think they need to in order to improve their lives, and do not put much extra thought into it. Elizabeth, after putting a great deal of thought into the matter, realizes that if she places more value on the merits of the individual rather than on their place in society she can fashion a higher quality life for herself.

In the end, Austen succeeds in representing a new outlook on life that she thinks can improve her current society. For the modern reader though, it is apparent that Austen does not break entirely free from the system. The main goal of her characters is still marriage, which plays into the traditions of the time. Most likely, it would have been

quite difficult to revolutionize the entire social structure of the time during which Austen lived because that was the world that she knew and was relatable to her readers. Claudia Johnson delivers some insightful analysis when she mentions that, “Austen’s allegiance to conservative social values is proven by the inevitability of marriage in her novels”... while other novelists dismiss love, Austen puts a premium on it” (Johnson 89-90). Johnson contends that this means that “If *Pride and Prejudice* legitimizes a progressive yearning for pleasure, it also gratifies a conservative yearning for a strong, attentive, loving, and paradoxically perhaps, at times even submissive authority” (Johnson 73). However, marriage as an institution is still integral to society today. Perhaps Austen does not need to disparage marriage in order to be progressive for her time. The fact that she hopes to revolutionize it is sufficient.

Chapter 3: When you Have Nothing to Lose

If Yorick and Crusoe think that their lives have been tough, it is probably because they have not heard of the tale of Oloudah Equiano, the African slave who endured a series of stints as a slave throughout his life. While both Yorick and Crusoe navigated unfamiliar social environments, they each at least had the freedom to chart their own course and apply the lessons they learned from their mistakes. However, the same cannot be said for either Equiano or the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. These characters' main focus is on simply surviving rather than on how to operate in society. While Equiano's autobiography is not the most scintillating tale, its main purpose is not to provide readers with an exciting adventure but to illuminate the daily struggles of life as a slave. Equiano shares how he was able to maintain his composure in the face of numerous injustices and eventually earn his freedom on the merits of his strong character and work ethic, rather than by resorting to force. Throughout his journey, Equiano learns the valuable lesson that it is important to focus on what one can control. Instead of constantly bemoaning his unfair treatment, he continually strives to better himself and make the most of his situation. It is certainly a long and difficult journey, but in the end Equiano does find freedom.

In the beginning, as Equiano describes his village and its customs, he casually mentions how avoiding potential kidnappers was simply an ingrained part of everyday village life. He writes, "generally when the grown people in the neighborhood were assembled together some of us used to get up a tree to look out for any assailant or kidnapper that might come upon us, for they sometimes took these opportunities of our parents' absence to attack and carry off as many as they could seize" (Equiano 15).

Equiano relays this information as if it is a normal fact of life. However, in this early encounter Equiano also reveals that he believes in predestination and perhaps these two thoughts help him cope with the turbulence of his life. He realized that most of his life was entirely out of his control, and that cursing his fate would only bring him anguish instead of salvation. There is a lot in Equiano's life that he cannot control; in fact most of his life would probably fall into that category. However, Equiano is smart enough to realize that there is no point to worrying about what is outside of his control. He has been dealt a terrible life, but he realizes that cursing his luck will not change anything and so will be unproductive. Instead, Equiano focuses on how he can make the best of his dire situation. This admirable mentality is how Equiano is able to pursue happiness amidst his dire situation, and is worth tracking throughout his journey.

First, Equiano is remarkably kind-natured toward others, despite his harsh treatment. It would have been easy for him to resolve to treat others the way he had been treated, a la Crusoe adopting a slave soon after serving as a slave himself, but the fact that Equiano always served his masters well turns out to reward him in the end. When he asks his current master for a discharge, the master hesitates initially, but then "I gave him so many reasons for it that at last he consented to my going" (Equiano 148). After a life of near-constant hardship, it is Equiano's resolve that helps him survive the ordeal. While Equiano likely never achieves true happiness since his life lacks so much of what people seek, his ability to find the best in the situation and his ability to not compare his life to those of the more fortunate, he can make the best of an unfortunate situation.

Equiano's incredible display of fortitude and character during his arduous ordeal becomes all the more impressive when compared to the reactions of both Victor

Frankenstein and his monstrous creation in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*. In her novel, Shelley explores the series of calamitous events both central characters endure in their lives, and their responses to them. Both characters eventually allow their initial tendency to demonstrate goodwill to dissolve into hate. Unlike Equiano, both Frankenstein and the monster ultimately decide upon revenge as the route that they will pursue. However, in the end, they both realize that seeking revenge did not actually help them achieve any greater happiness. In fact, it only brought more pain into their lives. Therefore, both could have benefited from following Equiano's lead and thinking about how to work respectfully with others.

Throughout the novel, Shelley depicts the monster's struggle to find some sort of personal connection in his life. As the monster wanders alone through life, he ruminates that, "no father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses; or if they had, all my past life was now a blot, a blind vacancy in which I distinguished nothing...I had never yet seen a being resembling me" (Shelley 81). It is certainly fair to say that the monster was as alone as he could possibly be, with little to no chance of engineering a better life for himself. In fact, even Frankenstein himself is immediately repulsed by his creation. Frankenstein relates that when he "perceived in the gloom a figure which stole from behind a clump of trees near me" he immediately assumes that, "*He* was the murderer! I could not doubt it. The mere presence of the idea was irresistible proof of the fact" (Shelley 48). Even though Frankenstein had created the creature himself and had no reason to believe that he had imbued the creature with any malice, he still allows the creature's appearance to influence his judgment. In fact, both Equiano and the monster are frequently judged prematurely based on superficial

categories out of their control, which makes their situations all the more frustrating. Frankenstein also reveals that “I suddenly beheld the figure of a man, at some distance, advancing toward me with superhuman speed...I trembled with rage and horror, resolving to wait his approach, and then close with him in mortal combat” (Shelley 65). This hostile reception from the one person from whom the monster might have expected compassion from serves to further enhance the monster’s hopeless mindset.

The monster does, however, hatch a clever plan to integrate himself into society. After observing a seemingly pleasant cottage-dwelling family for an extended period he realizes that if he can ingratiate himself with De Lacy, the patriarch figure, perhaps the elder man could advocate on the monster’s behalf. Since the monster’s appearance thwarts his every attempt at establishing a relationship with someone, he needs to somehow take his appearance out the equation. Speaking with the blind man would allow him to only be judged based on what he can control instead of the frightening countenance that he is saddled with. Demonstrating remarkable social skills for a creature who was brought into the world not too long ago, the monster at first makes some progress in his efforts to convince De Lacy of his good intentions. De Lacy replies, “I may perhaps be of use in undeceiving them. I am blind, and cannot judge your countenance but there is something in your words which persuades me that you are sincere” (Shelley 91). This is exactly what the monster had hoped to hear, but soon his plans are foiled when the rest of the family enters the cottage and, just as the monster had feared, become blinded with disgust and terror at the sight of the monster’s appearance. As the monster relays it, “Felix darted forward and with supernatural force tore me from his father... and struck me violently with a stick” (Shelley 91). This was a particularly

devastating blow for the monster because this plan had been months in the making and the blind elderly man had been his best and perhaps only hope at forging an ally. In fact, it appeared as though the monster was on track to successfully forge an alliance with De Lacy before the arrival of the rest of the family foiled his plan. In the face of such a hopeless future, the monster begins his downward spiral into hate.

An interesting note is that Shelley chose to characterize the monster as extremely eloquent and polite up to this point. It does seem odd that the monster so ably and quickly develops such a refined personality after coming into existence only a short time ago in a rather rudimentary way, but likely the reason is that Shelley wanted to highlight the contrast between the monster's demeanor before and after the cottage incident. She wanted to demonstrate that the monster has the potential to operate as an ordinary member of society, but it is only his appearance hindering his efforts.

After the long buildup to the monster's violently disastrous contact with the family, Shelley incorporates two additional incidents into the story that help propel the monster into the detestable state that he inhabits throughout the latter half of the novel. First, the monster observes a young girl slip into a river so he shares that he, "rushed from hiding place, and, with extreme labor from the force of the current, saved her and dragged her to shore" (Shelley 95). However, even after the monster has demonstrated his good will, he is still unable to prove himself in the eyes of others. When the girl's father appears, "on seeing me, he darted towards me, and, tearing the girl from my arms, hastened toward the deeper parts of the wood" (Shelley 95). Next, the monster hopes that a young boy will be able to see past his hideousness, but the child is just as repulsed as the rest of society. So the monster "grasped his throat to silence him, and in a moment he

lay dead at my feet” (Shelley 97). This is the first in a series of heinous crimes that the monster commits. These two incidents further Shelley’s goal of demonstrating how every member of society, even children who have not yet been influenced by society, are immediately repulsed by the monster. She is able to indicate that there is nothing that the monster himself is doing that is causing the problem. Instead, the monster is suffering from society’s inability to allow some who looks so different to integrate into society.

Up to this point, the monster had done all he could to prove to society that he was not actually as monstrous as his appearance might indicate. However, from this point on, he decides to become exactly the monster that the rest of society feared he was. The monster asks Frankenstein, “can you wonder that such thoughts transported me with rage?” (Shelley 97). The monster had previously been a very sympathetic character because he had responded to every hostility with an earnest effort to use goodwill to prove himself. But now, he truly becomes a villain. The monster gives up hope that society will accept him and ceases his attempts to prove himself. This marks a pivotal moment in the play in which the monster is no longer the innocent victim.

Therefore, he tries a new tactic. He tells Frankenstein, “you must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being” (Shelley 98). It is easy to understand why the monster desires a companion but now that he has shown a degree of maliciousness, he has lost the credibility he needs for Frankenstein to be able grant his request without guilt. Frankenstein wrestles with the decision, asking himself, “Had I a right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?” (Shelley 118). Here, Frankenstein clearly sees the potential

disaster in further populating the world with monsters, but appears to be considering acquiescing mainly for his own benefit.

In the end, Frankenstein decides to not create a second monster, but makes the questionable decision to further antagonize the first monster by, “trembling with passion, tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged” (Shelley 115). This enrages the monster and he subsequently makes it his mission to make Frankenstein’s life as miserable as possible and the lives of both central characters spiral downward from this moment on. First, the monster murders Frankenstein’s close friend Clerval, and later he does the same to Frankenstein's wife as well. Frankenstein feels that he is “doomed to live (and) as awakening from a dream, in a prison, stretched on a wretched bed, surrounded by gaolers, turnkeys, bolts, and all the miserable apparatus of a dungeon” (Shelley 123). This imagery reveals how tortured Frankenstein feels as a result of the monster’s actions. The monster thought that, since he now has no hope of ever achieving a sense of companionship, he can at least force his creator to suffer the same fate. He thought that seeking revenge against his creator would make up for his dismal life, but the reality is just the opposite. Both the monster, and Frankenstein, who goes on a revenge rampage of his own, both realize that seeking revenge does not bring them any further happiness. The plights of Equiano and the monster demonstrate how important it is to only focus on what you can control. Equiano did just that and his noble character eventually enables him to garner his freedom. Frankenstein’s monster does not learn the same lesson his despair drives him into a downward spiral from which he can not recover.

Conclusion: The Journey Ends Here

At first glance, the experiences of all these characters from across eighteenth-century literature may seem to have little in common, but the lessons that they learn transcend their individual circumstances. Adversity is often the arena that allows one's true character to shine, and the various protagonists across the eighteenth-century literature landscape react in very different ways. When one endures difficult or unfamiliar circumstances, and one can no longer rely on experience or habit, it pushes one's true character to the forefront. As these eighteenth-century authors subject their characters to various tasks and challenges, they fully explore how the characters react to these adverse circumstances, and from these reactions we can tease out some underlying themes.

Adversity takes a much different form for each of the various characters, and it would do no good to try to erase all adversity from one's life, but there are distinct methods of coping with this adversity. Dwelling on what has gone wrong in one's life only serves to accentuate problematic inclinations, such as Crusoe feeling the need to barricade himself inside his shelter away from potential allies, Yorick feeling trapped like a bird in a cage by having to suppress his feelings, Elizabeth not feeling able to pursue her love, Equiano suffering from unfair treatment, and Frankenstein's monster being rejected by society. With the exception of the monster, each character starts to focus only on what they can control in order to escape their predicaments.

Other extremely telling moments in each of the novels occur when the protagonists interact with new acquaintances. The protagonists' expectations of each other are greatly colored by the society in which they inhabit. Crusoe sees many of the

other characters as simply pawns to be dominated, Yorick is baffled by the strange customs he encounters in France because it is different from the culture from which he comes from, Elizabeth has to learn to dissociate Darcy from the goal of advancing her status through marriage, and Equiano and Frankenstein's monster struggle with the way that the rest of society does not respond to their attempts at good will.

The key for all of these characters is to consider other people as individuals though instead of as representations of their aspect of society. When Crusoe starts to actually care about Friday, when Yorick no longer struggles to fit into France's restricting customs, when Elizabeth allows herself to consider how she truly feels about Darcy, and when Equiano logically reasons his way to freedom, each of these characters prove it is possible to use strength of character to connect with others. Often, it can be tempting to prioritize adhering to society's obligations so as to avoid being labeled as odd or an outcast, but connecting with others on an individual level, and not allowing outside circumstances to interfere is a great way to increase the sense of satisfaction and fulfillment in one's life.

Works Cited

- Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources Criticism*. Ed. Michael Shinagel. New York: W.W. Norton, 1975. Print.
- McInelly, Brett C. "EXPANDING EMPIRES, EXPANDING SELVES: COLONIALISM, THE NOVEL, AND "ROBINSON CRUSOE"." *Studies in the Novel* 35.1 (2003): Web.
- Sterne, Laurence. *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*. Ed. Ian Jack. London: Oxford UP, 1968. Print.
- Chadwick, Joseph. "Infinite Jest: Interpretation in Sterne's A Sentimental Journey." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 12.2 (1979): Web.
- Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. New York: Franklin Watts, 2006. Print.
- Johnson, Claudia L. *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*. Chicago, Ill.: U of Chicago Pr., 1988. Print.
- Equiano, Olaudah. *Equiano's Travels*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967. Print.
- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. Ed. J. Paul. Hunter. New York: Norton, 1996. Print.