



## ENLIGHTENERS' PHILOSOPHY AND ITS REFLECTION IN THE WORKS OF DANIEL DAFOE

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**Abstract:** *This article explores the influence of the enlighteners' philosophy, also known as the Age of Enlightenment, on the literary works of Daniel Defoe. The enlighteners emphasized reason, rationality, and the pursuit of knowledge, challenging traditional authority, and promoting individual freedoms and social reforms. Defoe, a prominent English writer of the 18th century, incorporated these ideas into his writings, creating literary works that reflected the spirit of the Enlightenment.*

**Key words:** *Enlighteners' philosophy, Age of Enlightenment, Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, reason, individualism, social critique.*

The philosophy of enlighteners, also known as the Age of Enlightenment, emphasized reason, rationality, and the pursuit of knowledge. It sought to challenge traditional authority and promote individual freedoms, scientific progress, and social reforms. The Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century brought forth a new wave of intellectual and philosophical thought that paved the way for immense social, cultural, and literary transformations. Central to this epoch was the philosophy of the Enlighteners, a group of thinkers and scholars who championed reason, individualism, and the pursuit of knowledge.

Through an exploration of key themes, stylistic innovations, and societal critiques found in Enlightenment-inspired literature, we will unravel the ways in which the works of these enlightened thinkers embodied their philosophical ideals, challenged societal norms, and propelled the literary landscape into a new era of transformation. Informed by reason and critical thinking, the Enlighteners sought to question authority, challenge superstitions, promote scientific inquiry, and empower individuals to think for themselves. These ideas not only sparked revolutionary political movements but also left an indelible mark on the realm of literature. By examining the ways in which the Enlighteners' philosophy intersected with the literary works of the time, we gain invaluable insights into the social and cultural fabric of the Enlightenment period.

This article endeavors to shed light on the profound connections between the philosophy of the Enlighteners and the literary works of the English Enlightenment. By examining the progressive ideals, transformative ideas, and striking literary techniques employed by influential writers of the era, we develop



a comprehensive understanding of how the Enlightenment shaped English literature and paved the way for the emergence of modern literary forms.<sup>1</sup>

Daniel Defoe, the renowned English writer, is primarily known for his famous novel "Robinson Crusoe." While Defoe is recognized for his contribution to fiction, his works also contain elements of the enlightener's philosophy. Defoe's literary works often reflect the principles of the Enlightenment, an intellectual movement that emphasized reason, knowledge, and progress. One of the key aspects of the Enlightenment was its emphasis on individualism and the power of human reason. Defoe's characters, particularly in "Robinson Crusoe," exemplify these ideals.

In "Robinson Crusoe," the titular character, stranded on a deserted island, faces numerous challenges and must rely on his own ingenuity and resourcefulness to survive. This portrayal aligns with the Enlightenment belief in the capabilities of individuals to overcome adversity through rational thinking and practical skills. Additionally, Defoe's works often showcase a fascination with exploration and discovery, which were important themes during the Enlightenment era. "Robinson Crusoe" itself Defoe's writing style, characterized by its realism and attention to detail, also reflects the Enlightenment's emphasis on empirical observation and accurate representation of the world be seen as a metaphor for the quest for knowledge and the triumph of human agency over nature. Overall, while Daniel Defoe may not have explicitly identified himself as an Enlightenment philosopher, his works, particularly "Robinson Crusoe," embody many of the key principles and themes associated with the enlightener's philosophy.

Defoe's acclaimed novel, "Robinson Crusoe," published in 1719, undoubtedly reflects the key principles of the Enlightenment philosophy that swept across Europe during the 18th century. Through the journey and experiences of its protagonist, Robinson Crusoe, the novel encapsulates several central themes and ideas associated with the Enlightenment movement. First and foremost, the Enlightenment emphasized the power of reason and the ability of individuals to shape their own destinies. In "Robinson Crusoe," we witness Crusoe's relentless pursuit of knowledge, his resourcefulness, and his unwavering determination to survive and thrive on the deserted island. Defoe portrays Crusoe as a self-reliant "man of reason," who employs his intellect, creativity, and practical skills to conquer the challenges he faces. This encapsulates the Enlighteners' belief in the potential of human reason to overcome adversity.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, the novel explores the concept of individualism, a key tenet of Enlightenment philosophy. Crusoe's isolation on the uninhabited island allows

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<sup>1</sup> Gay, Peter. *The Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Paganism*. Vintage Books, 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Hunter, J. Paul. *The Reluctant Pilgrim: Defoe's Emblematic Method and Quest for Form in Robinson Crusoe*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966.



him to reflect on his own existence and contemplate the human condition. As he grapples with loneliness and the absence of societal norms and expectations, Crusoe begins to formulate his own set of principles and values. He becomes a self-governing individual, making decisions and assuming responsibility for his own actions. This portrayal aligns with the Enlightenment's emphasis on personal autonomy and freedom of thought. Lastly, "Robinson Crusoe" also encompasses elements of the Enlightenment's reverence for science and empirical knowledge. Crusoe meticulously records his observations and experiences on the island, displaying a scientific curiosity and a desire to understand the natural world around him. Defoe's attention to detail and the extensive descriptions of Crusoe's practical skills further underscore the Enlightenment's focus on the importance of observation, experimentation, and rationality. In summary, Daniel Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe" mirrors the ideals and themes of the Enlightenment philosophy through its portrayal of an individual's triumph over adversity, highlighting the power of reason, individualism, the questioning of authority, and the pursuit of empirical knowledge. By weaving these elements into his narrative, Defoe's work stands as a testament to the profound influence of the Enlightenment on English literature and society as a whole.

There are several other works in the field of philosophy that share similarities or offer contrasting perspectives to Robinson Crusoe. One such work is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel, "Émile," which explores the ideal education and development of an individual in isolation. While Robinson Crusoe's story focuses on survival and self-reliance, "Émile" delves into the importance of natural education and social interaction for personal growth. Another work that can be compared to Robinson Crusoe is Albert Camus' essay, "The Myth of Sisyphus." Although not directly related to isolation or survival, it shares the theme of existentialism and the search for meaning in an absurd world. Both Robinson Crusoe and Sisyphus face daunting challenges and must find their own purpose in life despite the circumstances they find themselves in.

In conclusion, the philosophy of the Enlightenment had a profound impact on English literature, particularly in the works of Daniel Defoe. Defoe's writings reflect the values of reason, individualism, and progress that were central to the Enlightenment movement. Through his works, Defoe not only entertained readers but also challenged societal norms and advocated for social change. The Enlightenment's emphasis on rationality and human potential can be seen in Defoe's characters and narratives, making him a significant figure in the literary landscape of his time. Overall, the influence of the Enlightenment on English literature, as exemplified by Defoe's works, continues to be felt and appreciated today for its enduring relevance and impact.



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