

A Comparative Analysis of Colonialism in Robinson Crusoe and Heart of Darkness

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Abstract

Taking "colonialism" as the starting point, this paper analyzes the colonial color contained in Robinson Crusoe and the heart of darkness. Robinson Crusoe is an adventure novel written by Daniel Defoe, an English writer in the 18th century. It is the first time for the emerging bourgeoisie to express the image of the bourgeoisie through literary works after they stepped onto the historical stage. The colonialist thought in the novel is a praise to the bourgeoisie with advanced significance at that time. Joseph Conrad's heart of darkness takes the profound contradiction between British colonists and African aborigines as the main line, describes the conflict between Western civilization and African society, widely reveals the exploitative nature of imperialism in the fields of economy, politics and culture, and makes readers understand that the European colonists at that time wore the "coat of civilization", To Africa and other third world countries, plunder and plunder cruelly in their colonies, and then satirize and expose the darkness behind western civilization. The authors of the two books have very different ways of expression of colonialism. This paper analyzes the reasons for this difference by comparing the differences between the two books.

Keywords

Robinson Crusoe; Heart of Darkness; Colonialism.

1. Interpretation of Robinson Crusoe

Robinson Crusoe is a masterpiece of English realist period enlightenment fiction, and its protagonist is a well-known name. Born into a middle-class family, Robinson was not content with a life of mediocrity and boredom and had a natural love of adventure. In his journey, he was sent adrift on an uninhabited deserted island due to a shipwreck, where he began a life of isolation. With a strong will and perseverance, he kept livestock, rescued and tamed Friday, and survived on the deserted island, where he eventually returned home after 28 years, two months and 19 days. As a typical example of the emerging bourgeoisie, Robinson was brave, resourceful, optimistic and strong, possessing not only an adventurer's desire for pursuit and exploration, but also a practical man's spirit of diligent work and hardship. Through this character, Defoe expressed his strong colonialist tendencies.

With Robinson as the first point of view, the author brought himself into the identity of the colonizer and thus implemented all the processes which he called it as "civilization". On the deserted island, Robinson was himself as a colonizer, greedily making the island his private property, whether it is the grass, trees, mountains or rivers on the island. At the same time, after rescuing Friday from the cannibals, Robinson's subsequent actions are no different from theirs. Not only did he restrict Friday's personal freedom, but he also subconsciously transformed him in many ways, including his ideology and cultural life, to the point where Friday eventually forgot his own identity and national culture. This perspective allows the reader to participate in colonial rule and mobilize support for the colonial ideology, which is Defoe's intention.

Robinson dominated the course of civilization on the desert island, from land colonization to economic colonization to cultural colonization, imposing what he saw as noble qualities on Friday and expressing a sense of racial superiority throughout, which was followed by the exploitation and oppression of other civilizations by British colonialism. Like Robinson, Defoe was born into a middle-class family at a time of the rise of the British Empire and the establishment of maritime supremacy, while foreign trade and colonial expansion contributed greatly to the accumulation of wealth and the economic development of Britain. The latter, although with obvious bloodshed, was the most prevalent way of the period, which influenced Defoe deeply. It is therefore easy to find that, while affirming that hard work and self-reliance can make a difference, he actively supported expansion through colonization.

2. Interpretation of Heart of Darkness

Considered as the first modernist novel in English literature, *Heart of Darkness* is the magnum opus of Joseph Conrad. This book tells the story of Captain Marlow's experiences in Africa, where he got acquainted with a white colonist, Kurtz.

Marlow was employed by a trading company and sailed to Africa. While he was traveling between the company's stations, he heard about Kurtz, who was highly competent, highly respected in the area, and had won a lot of ivory for the company. At first, according to his colleagues, Kurtz was optimistic about what they were going to do in Africa. He regarded the stations of the company as the lamps to light up the roads, and through trading he would bring civilization and progress to this mysterious and backward land. Later, when he finally met Kurtz for the first time, Kurtz was terminally ill, and he didn't think well of the latter: he portrayed him as a ghost, a god of death, ironically, whose statue was carved out of ivory, struggling at his last gasp, eccentric and greedy. At last, Marlow was present when Kurtz was about to die and listened to his last words, through which Marlow could find that Kurtz struggling, succumbing to his desires and sinking into darkness. In other words, Kurtz had long since gone from being an idealist to a voracious predator.

Kurtz set out to bring light to Africa, but ended up pursuing a personality cult, ravenous for ivory from indigenous peoples. The author arranges for Kurtz, the colonist, the ending is not happy: he dies of illness; his career and achievements belong to others. No one misses him except his fiancée and Marlow, and the latter, however, does so out of a noble sympathy for his fellow human beings rather than out of approval of what he has done. From the changes and actions of Kurtz, it can be seen that the author is skeptical of these colonialists who claim to be civilized and noble and what they have done. In addition to Kurtz, the colonialists mentioned in the book include the scheming, unsympathetic colleagues of Kurtz whose images were negative and motives and actions were laughable and disgraceful. Besides, the author's attitude towards colonialism can also be seen in his descriptions of the Indigenous Africans employed by the colonists. For example, when Marlow arrived at the first station of the company, what caught his eye were thin, glassy-eyed, scantily clad black porters. Meanwhile there was a black man who was "reclaimed", overseeing this group of black workers. This scene is absurd and ironic, reflecting the author's reflection on such consequence brought by colonialism: after the division of hierarchy, people are bound and distorted by the identity acquired from it. Besides, Marlow saw sick black men left to die under a tree, just like useless tools; and the panicked, self-defensive attack of the natives upon the sound of the steamer. To compare, the absurdity of colonialism was clear: indigenous people didn't need the so-called civilization and progress, which they saw as an incomprehensible invasion. However, what would really benefit them, such as advanced medical technology, was never gotten by them from the colonists, which showed that the latter were indifferent and selfish. The colonists never saw the indigenous

people as equal trading partners, but only wanted to get more benefits from them. They were insatiable, bullying conquerors.

In *Heart of Darkness*, at first, it was the unnamed "ME" who listened to Marlow's story on the ship; and then, in his story, the narrator became Marlow. Both of the narrators are spectators. Marlow heard of Kurtz, the colonist, watched his death, and speculated on his struggles and fall. He was not directly involved in the exploitation of the black people. Instead, he saw the despair and helplessness of the indigenous people. This shows that he was not taken in by the colonists' self-deception. Besides, according to the unknown "me", Marlow sat "with his legs folded before him, he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower". The description of Marlow's appearance reflects the author's attribute to him as a saint, and his later sympathy for Kurtz also reflects this point. He sometimes sided with Kurtz, not out of sympathy with his actions but out of revulsion at his ill-disposed colleagues.

3. Reasons for Different Attitudes

Robinson Crusoe is an adventure novel written by Daniel Defoe, a famous British writer in the 18th century. It is the first time that the image of the bourgeoisie is presented through literary works after the emerging bourgeoisie stepped onto the historical stage. On the surface of the novel, the protagonist Robinson's strong, persistent, brave and pioneering enterprising spirit has been loved by readers. His taking the bull by the wind to stray and establishing their own homes, is the result of his efforts and bear hardships. From the perspective of social development, *Robinson Crusoe* has profound colonialist thoughts, and he shows an image of typical colonialists.

With description of colonialism, *Heart of Darkness* depicts the bloody and brutal pillaging of the African continent caused by western colonial countries led by Britain at the end of the 19th century. It criticizes the colonial history of the empire and expresses deep concern and mourning for the hundreds of millions of African people who died. It is an in-depth analysis of the evil African colonial movement of the West.

It is necessary to discuss the reasons for the different manifestations of colonialism in *Robinson Crusoe* and *Heart of Darkness* and the different attitudes of the authors towards it. These are mainly influenced by the different political and economic backgrounds and foreign policies of the two periods.

The Glorious Revolution in 1688 overthrew the Restoration dynasty, and the Bill of Rights issued in 1689 was conducive to establish the constitutional monarchy. These cleared the way for the development of capitalism and establishing the regime led by the bourgeoisie and the new aristocracy. From then on, Britain entered a relatively stable development period. This calmed the internal troubles of the country and laid the political foundation for colonial expansion.

Since the end of the 17th century, Britain had actively engaged in many colonial hegemony wars in Europe and even around the world, which was also known as the "Second Hundred Years' War". British colonies and semi-colonies spread all over the world, plundering a great deal of wealth. And these colonies provided great overseas markets for British industrial production. Britain defeated the Spanish Armada and accomplished its supremacy at sea in 1588. In addition, Britain was the main operator of triangle trade. They invested the money earned from slaves in industry and commerce, which promoted the development of capitalist economy. The Industrial Revolution created huge productivity for Britain, enabling its capitalist economy developed and its national strength to become strong.

In the 18th century, under the influence of the British bourgeois revolution, the Enlightenment Movement took place in the European continent. People usually turned the characters in the works into spokespersons of the authors or even "simple mouthpieces of the spirit of The

Times". Robinson was obviously the "mouthpiece" of the colonialists at that time. Under the background of this era, the tide of British nautical novels began. This imperial passion for maritime dominance was naturally and invariably repeated, forming one of the most dynamic parts of the fabric of linguistic and cultural events in 18th-century England. Defoe's Robinson Crusoe was born in such a cultural atmosphere. At this time, significant damage and exploitation to the traditional way of life and laborers caused by the rapid development of capitalist industrialization did not turn out. Therefore, readers at that time were more concerned with the wealth and benefits brought by colonialism.

By contrast, in February 1868, to compensate for the loss of industrial hegemony, Disraeli's government stepped up colonial expansion. Gladstone still pursued a policy of foreign aggression. In 1886, the Conservative Party advocated the establishment of a strong government, the implementation of protective tariffs and the acceleration of colonial expansion. These foreign policies were the premise for colonial expansion. After the 1970s, Britain's economic development slowed down and its industrial monopoly lost, but it stepped into the stage of imperialism. The formation and development of Monopoly capital in Britain was closely related to the pillaging of colonies. In order to make up for the decline in industrial profits caused by it, the United Kingdom frantically plundered colonies to obtain excess profits in the late 19th century. The highlight of the European powers' carving up of Africa happened in the 1890s. British colonies spreading across five continents acquired the title of "empire on which the sun never sets". Lenin called imperialism as "colonial imperialism" on the ground that colonies were of decisive significance to the development of British capitalism and had become the lifeblood of Britain, the backbone of its political economy, the source of raw materials and the dumping market for goods. Due to the progress of technology, hot and humid climate and special infectious disease shrouding in black Africa inland finally lost the final protection. Even Belgium, such a small country, could occupied a 40 times native land larger than their owns, and could begin to plunder and enslaved African peoples with unprecedented cruelty in all corner of the continent.

Through his work, the author makes readers understand that European colonialists at that time, dressed in the "cloak of civilization", went to Africa and other third world countries to collect and plunder their colonies ruthlessly, and then satirized and exposed the darkness behind western civilization.

4. Conclusion

Reading Robinson Crusoe from the perspective of colonialism can make readers directly feel the positive and enterprising side of Robinson's character. Through Robinson's self narration, the novel focuses on his desert island adventure experience, and reflects the characteristics of the early development of capitalism and later colonization abroad. Patriarchal consciousness and imperial dream are the driving force of Robinson's all adventure activities and pioneering spirit. Money is the purpose of Robinson's exploration of the desert island. The spread of Christian thought and the practice of the idea of suzerain ruling the country all contributed to the success of the desert island colonization and the formation of his colonial identity. In fact, the work artistically reproduces the construction process of imperial colonies, comprehensively shows the characteristics of colonial aggression and cultural hegemony in the early stage of capitalism, and reflects the overseas expansion and colonial practice of European colonialism. The heart of darkness is a specific product of the Victorian period. At that time, fanatical colonial ideas were everywhere in Britain, colonial activities were in full swing, and the colonial expansion of the "sun never sets Empire" was in its heyday. The purpose of Conrad's heart of darkness is very clear: subvert the hegemonism of imperialist expansion and

skillfully attack colonial atrocities, which reflects the author's reflection on the problems in the process of colonial expansion for hundreds of years.

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