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Building the Wall: Crusoe and the Other

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Building the Wall: Crusoe and the Other

SCOTT NOWKA

CRUSOE devotes an inordinate amount of attention in *Robinson Crusoe* to the construction of a semicircular wall in defense of his cave home. In all, Crusoe discusses the creation of, or addition to, his wall eleven times in the thirty pages between his arrival on the island and the wall's completion. Though Defoe's novel holds a preeminent place in the history of realistic fiction, such repeated description goes beyond mere verisimilitude. On the contrary, the meticulous narration of his labors reveals the wall to be not just a physical structure, but a mental one: a dividing line between himself and a host of others that he finds threatening both to his physical well-being and his own self-definition. In other words, unlike the majority of the physical objects that adorn Defoe's fiction, Crusoe's wall is as symbolic as it is practical. It is not, however, the only symbolic architectural structure that Defoe includes in the Crusoe trilogy. In the *Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, homes made of porcelain and basket-work are physical structures similarly invested with qualities that reveal Crusoe's psychology and his often complex relationship with the Other. These symbolic architectures serve as physical manifestations of his anxieties concerning both the difference of the Other and his own need to define himself against that difference. These are formal representations of a more sophisticated psychology than has often been acknowledged in Defoe's novels, and they embody complex movements of disavowal and transference.¹

The symbolic architectures of Crusoe's adventures also take us beyond his anxiety to empathy, revealing an instance of a positive relationship with the Other that has hitherto gone unrecognized. In the case of the basket-work homes of Defoe's island described in the *Farther Adventures*, Defoe envisions a new, more utopian

society and a relationship in which colonizers and colonized are literally woven together. In examining this moment, as well as attending to other symbolic structures, readers discover that Defoe's narratives themselves are complex negotiations of maintaining one's identity in the face of a difference that is perceived to threaten it.

The psychological theory of the philosopher Richard Kearney proves useful in interpreting the significance of symbolic structures in the Crusoe narratives. In *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness*, Kearney contends that too often our experience of Otherness is shaped by our sense of our limitations and fears rather than an objective consideration of those we consider foreign. At the beginning of this work, Kearney offers us a choice: "(a) to try to understand and accommodate our experiences of strangeness, or (b) to repudiate it by projecting it exclusively onto outsiders" (4). As he notes, "All too often, humans have chosen the latter option, allowing paranoid illusions to serve the purposes of making sense of our confused emotions by externalizing them into black-and-white scenarios -- a strategy found again and again from ancient tales of knights and demons to contemporary war rhetorics of Good versus Evil" (4). The latter option describes well the way Defoe portrays Crusoe's relationship to the Other. Crusoe's anxieties and desires -- troubling to his sense of himself in that they highlight his own lack of a stable center of being -- are projected outward, and he is able to know himself by claiming he is not what he disavows: he is not a cannibal, he is not Chinese. Such disavowal is oblique, rather than straightforward thinking, and represents more complex psychology than Defoe's work is often given credit for.

The role of psychology in understanding Crusoe's relationship to the Other, particularly the Chinese Other, has been the subject of recent debate in criticism of *Robinson Crusoe* and its sequels. Both Hans Turley and Robert Markley have persuasively employed an attention to Crusoe's psychological concerns in developing coherent readings that unite the three novels, often seen previously as quite disparate, and which question the findings of critics who focus on *Robinson Crusoe* in isolation. Hans Turley's chapter on the trilogy in *Rum, Sodomy and the Lash: Piracy, Sexuality and Masculine Identity* reads Crusoe's hostility to the Chinese trading empire and Chinese idolatry as indicative of a retreat from the foreign into a militaristic evangelism (129–30). Robert Markley, who has engaged this question in a series of related works, has argued that Crusoe's animosity to the Chinese is part of a larger English anxiety about the limited role England played in global trade (*Far East* 20, 189–201).² My own reading of the symbolic architectures of the novels, while differing on several important points from both of these critics, similarly sees the Crusoes of *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Farther Adventures*, and the *Serious Reflections* as united by a sense of self defined by difference from Otherness.

In a recent essay, however, G. A. Starr has questioned the accuracy of readings that rely on "psychological speculation" (435) concerning Crusoe's attitude toward the Chinese, citing in particular Markley's work. Starr insists in "Defoe and China" that

“Defoe’s long-held convictions about religion, government, and trade explain why China was anathema to him” (436). Starr’s primary contention is that Markley is wrong to assert that Defoe’s treatment of China is colored by his “compensating for covert fears and phobias” (436) regarding the place of England in world trade and culture. However, Starr’s collapsing of the distinction between the author and his creation at times overlooks the complicated relationship that Crusoe the fictional character forms between himself and all others in his narratives. To understand Crusoe and the novels, it is important to acknowledge that Crusoe’s response to “savages” and the Chinese may be shaped as much by his psychological needs and desires as it is by objective, rational consideration, and that Crusoe’s attitudes toward the Other may not be the same as those of his creator.

In this essay, I draw on Kearney’s description of how psychological projection shapes encounters with Otherness to illustrate the importance of three symbolic architectures in Defoe’s novels for understanding Crusoe’s own experience. Kearney’s philosophical work is, among other things, meant to serve as an intervention in the reduction of others to ourselves, imagining ways that we might prevent such violence by creating narratives that bridge the gap between the familiar and the foreign. And while recent criticism of *Robinson Crusoe* and its sequels is right to see Defoe’s protagonist as at times intolerant or even xenophobic, Kearney’s work helps explain the origins and operations of this intolerance within the logic of the novels. Using these ideas, we can understand the incessant building and improvement of Crusoe’s wall and his encounter with, and reaction to, the porcelain home. In the logic of Defoe’s tales, Crusoe needs such others to define himself, for there is nothing more concrete to build his sense of self upon.

CRUSOE’S WALL

Once Crusoe finds himself on his island, he tells us that his “thoughts were now wholly employ’d about securing my self against either savages, if any should appear, or wild beasts” (47). To this end, Crusoe begins building a wall at the entrance of a cave, the narration of which is remarkable in the novel for its detail and the number of times he returns to the subject. We are told that the wall is ten yards from the cave entrance, that it is composed of two rows of stakes, some measuring as much as five-and-a-half feet in height, and that the stakes are no more than six inches apart and sharpened at the top.

But acknowledging this amount of detail still does not capture the amount of attention that this fortification is given. Turning to the entry for January third in Crusoe’s journal, we see that an intersection of genres helps emphasize this focus. The entry itself is like many others concerning the wall, stating that Crusoe, “being still jealous of . . . being attacked by some body . . . resolved to make [it] very thick and

strong" (92). This entry is then cut short by an interjection from the narrator, the purpose of which, it would seem, is to avoid repetition of the description of the wall: "N.B. This wall being described before, I purposely omit what was said in the Journal." This interjection, however, is longer and contains more description of the wall than many of the previous passages, stating its final length, "24 yards"; its shape, "a half circle from one place in the rock to another place"; and the position of the cave's entrance within this wall. But even here the description does not end -- the next two paragraphs of reflection are devoted to the "inexpressible labour" of the wall's construction and the erection of a "turf wall" (93) on its outside.

Judging from the attention that Crusoe devotes both to its construction and description, the wall is not merely a physical barrier for his safety. Functionally, the wall is redundant; the expanse of ocean around his island, which isolates him, is a far more effective barrier than anything that he could construct. We as readers know that he will not encounter another person for ten more years, and Crusoe himself later admits that "there was no need of all this caution from the enemies that I apprehended danger from" (77). And yet the wall is a central concern for him.

Alone on the island, Crusoe's obsession with his wall is indicative of an effort to create and maintain a stability of subjectivity -- a sense of self defined against the Otherness he fears. In building the wall, Crusoe is not merely constructing a barrier to keep others physically away; he is attempting to create a locus of selfhood in which the threat or influence of the Other is negated.³ But such an attempt at generating a total sense of self, a secure sense of self, is doomed to failure; such a thing is as fabricated as Crusoe's wall of cable and palings.

The narrative itself suggests the impossibility of Crusoe's endeavor, for the completion of the wall is followed almost immediately by Crusoe's being forced to flee it. "The very next day after this wall was finished," Crusoe states, "I had almost had all my labour overthrown at once, and my self killed" (96). He becomes terrified when the earth of his cave's ceiling begins crumbling down upon him and the posts he had added for support begin to crack. Not considering "what was really the cause" (96) -- Crusoe stresses that he had never experienced an earthquake or spoken to anyone who had -- he rushes from his cave and over his wall. It is not until he is safely outside his carefully constructed sanctuary that he perceives what has occurred: "I was no sooner stepped down upon the firm ground but I plainly saw it was a terrible earthquake." This incident is then followed by a "most dreadful hurricane" (97) that Crusoe weathers while seated "upon the ground very much terrify'd and dejected."

The earthquake episode, it could be argued, is not unlike any of a number of adventures that occur to Crusoe which seem to have no effect on his person; like his first storm at sea or his captivity under the Turks, the event seems to disappear into the past without significance. In fact two months go by in the narrative without any reference to it, long enough for Crusoe to have forgotten that he had planned to begin building another wall in a safer location. The dream that Crusoe experiences in the

throes of a fever, however, makes it clear that not only is the earthquake significant, but that it is crucial to our understanding of the meaning of the wall for Crusoe.

Months later, the dream begins precisely where the earthquake episode had ended.⁴ Crusoe finds himself without the protection of his wall, as if once again driven from the security of his fortification: "I thought that I was sitting on the ground on the outside of my wall, where I sat when the storm blew after the earthquake" (102). The dream is thus far a re-enactment of the earlier episode. We are placed back at the very moment when Crusoe, "greatly cast down and disconsolate" (97), must first come to terms with the fact that his wall, extensive though it may be, is not sufficient to preserve him against all threats.

Our sense of *déjà vu*, however, would seem to be shattered by the appearance of the supernatural -- the figure of divine retribution stressed in the allegorical readings of this passage, such as J. Paul Hunter's in *The Reluctant Pilgrim* (156-58). While sitting on the ground, Crusoe sees a "man descend from a great black cloud" (*Robinson Crusoe* 102). This figure is one of terror for Crusoe, rendering our narrator unable to convey the type of description that he has heretofore led us to expect from his narrative. "He was all over as bright as a flame," states Crusoe, "so that I could just bear to look towards him; his countenance was most inexpressibly dreadful, impossible for words to describe." Similarly, Crusoe will find that it is "impossible to express the terror" he feels upon hearing the voice of this indescribable man. Even after the arrival of this man from the cloud, however, the moment of the earthquake and Crusoe's flight over the wall are still evoked. In fact, the sequence of events in the dream effectively telescopes our attention back to the very moment he is forced to flee his wall -- generating something radically new in the process: the clear sense that with the threat of destruction to his wall and himself, he is faced with those others that the wall was meant to shield him from.

The dream parallels the events of the earthquake episode in reverse. As noted before, the dream begins with Crusoe seated on the ground where he had been "when the storm blew after the earthquake" (102). It is at this moment that Crusoe first sees the indescribable man. The narrator then makes explicit reference to the earthquake itself. He states that when the man from the black cloud "*stepped* upon the ground with his feet, [he] thought the earth trembled, just as it had done before in the earthquake" (102-3, my italics). Furthermore, this correlation between the dream figure's placing his feet upon the earth and the earthquake's instigation is a direct parallel to Crusoe's own first perceiving the earthquake once he has fled his wall: "I was no sooner *stepped* down upon the firm ground but I plainly saw it was a terrible earthquake" (96, my italics). In describing the events of the previous passage in reverse order, the narrative of the dream effectively brings Crusoe, and us, back to the instant that he was forced to flee from behind his wall -- the moment of crisis, or trauma.

The parallels between the earthquake and the dream directly relate the earthquake with the judgment passed on Crusoe by the figure from the cloud at the

end of the dream. As Crusoe describes it, “he was no sooner landed upon the earth, but he moved forward towards me, with a long spear or weapon in his hand, to kill me” (103). Crusoe then hears the words: “Seeing all these things have not brought thee to repentance, now thou shalt die”; the man then lifts his spear to kill him. This moment is, however, far from the end of Crusoe; it is in fact where Crusoe most comes alive on the page, and this event will spark the contemplation and conversion which follow. Through the paralleling of the sequences described above, the happenstance event of the earthquake takes on significance. The event of Crusoe’s fleeing from behind his wall becomes -- through his interpretation of the event *via* the dream -- his moment of judgment.

That Crusoe perceives this event as a threat to his identity, and not just his life, is evidenced in both the dream itself and its presentation. Once forced from the “compleat enclosure” (96) of his wall, which had served as a locus for an unthreatened and complete sense of self “fortify’d . . . from all the world” (77), Crusoe is exposed to the others he has attempted to keep at bay. This is the realization Crusoe has been working against from the beginning through the construction of his wall, and, if we keep it in mind, the manner in which this scene is narrated takes on a complicated significance. Furthermore, the dream figure himself, in being equated with the traumatic forces that drive Crusoe from his enclosure, is shown to be a multiple, rather than singular figure: a creation of Crusoe’s mind through a condensation of all that his wall was meant to keep outside.

The fragmentation of Crusoe’s psyche that the dream is to reveal is intimated within the narrator’s very presentation of the dream. Rather than a single, complete Crusoe, our narrator describes three: “*I thought* that *I was* sitting on the ground on the outside of my wall, where *I sat* when the storm blew after the earthquake, and that I saw a man descend from a great black cloud” (102, italics mine). While any attempt to describe a dream must be necessarily more psychologically complex than a simple first-person narrative, the number of Crusoes mentioned here -- the dreaming Crusoe (“*I thought*”), the dreamed Crusoe (“*I was sitting*”), and the remembered Crusoe (“*where I sat when the storm blew*”) -- emphasizes the fragmentation of his sense of self in the wake of the earthquake. The distinction between each of the Crusoes is evident enough that one could substitute a different proper name in the place of each “*I*” without violating the grammar of the sentence.

The figure threatening Crusoe is equally complex, and the man from the cloud is both a figure for the displaced trauma of fleeing the wall as well as a heavily condensed figure of the others that Crusoe had defined himself against. The man from the cloud then is not just “a symbol” of divine justice; rather he is a complex amalgam of three senses of the Other which Crusoe has attempted to keep outside of himself.

The first of these others is the most readily apparent, for it associates the figure of the man from the cloud with Christianity. The fact that the man descends from the

clouds “in a bright flame of fire” (102) is suggestive of Biblical imagery, though there were newspaper reports of such visions during Crusoe’s day. The form and content of the man’s statement, “Seeing all these things have not brought thee to repentance, now thou shalt die” (103), are characteristic of the King James Bible. The diction retains the pronouns “thee” and “thou” of this translation, and the message itself is one of Christian repentance, and in this way represents the Other of religious discourse with which Crusoe struggles before the dream leads to his explicit conversion.

The dream figure, however, also represents a more terrestrial other: the “savages.” Without name or nation, the “savages” Crusoe has yet to encounter are of course his most frequently stated concern when considering threats to himself, and their possible presence is a stated reason for the erection of his wall. Within the dream, the entirety of the non-Western, the “savage,” is figured in the instrument with which the man threatens him, the “long spear or weapon in his hands.”

The third and final other condensed into the figure of the man from the cloud is Crusoe himself. That his own sense of fragmentation would be illustrated in the dream was intimated by the complex sense of “I” which began the narration of this episode, and his sense of himself as other is suggested in the dream figure’s description and his actions. If we remember that this dream is occurring while Crusoe is in the throes of his illness, the flames covering the man from the cloud are suggestive of the fever burning in Crusoe which has put him through “cold fit and hot, with faint sweats” (102), and left him feeling desiccated before the dream begins. In the paragraph immediately previous to the dream he mentions thirst or a lack of water in his home four times. Acknowledging this, the man from the cloud, “all over as bright as a flame,” becomes a figuration of Crusoe’s feverish, abject self.

All three of these others are indicative of the fragmentation of self that has been realized in Crusoe’s psyche once the self-sufficiency of life behind the wall has been shown to be an illusion. His attempt to define himself against all others within his wall is found to be impossible. This realization is of course not simply contained in the multiplicity of others condensed in the description of the man from the cloud. For all of the complexity of their associations, these others are simply threatening aspects of identity that Crusoe must now renegotiate. This “return of the repressed” is not another or others passing judgment on Crusoe, but the traumatic loss of the security of his wall and the resulting sense of threat to his identity. Crusoe’s reinterpretation of the event of the earthquake in terms of his identity results in the emergence of the Other with a vengeance, but, in Kearney’s terms, always the Other as defined in relation to the self.

The wall we have been so painstakingly examining, then, serves as the most explicit representation in *Robinson Crusoe* of Defoe’s treatment of the Other. The Other is a threat to the self; difference questions the stability of the ego. Crusoe’s great achievement in the novel, and where he is perhaps the most compelling as a

character, is when he dares to reach out of himself selflessly toward the Other that is God. But such moments of uncompromised faith are fleeting. In the rest of the narrative, the Other, even the divine Other, remains a projection of his needs and desires as well as his anxieties.

Of course the best example of this is Friday, Crusoe's only companion for all those years. Crusoe sees what he wants to see in this "savage" and fashions him into an instrument of his desires. Like Behn's Oroonoko, Friday is praised for his European appearance, making him much more like Crusoe than the African slaves he intended to ship to Brazil (162). When he first meets Friday, after saving him from his captors with the gun Friday finds so terrifying, Crusoe's interpretation of Friday's gestures tells us much more about Crusoe's desires than Friday's intentions. Crusoe relates that Friday "kneel'd down again, kiss'd the ground, and laid his head upon the ground, and taking me by the foot, set my foot upon his head; this, it seems, was in token of swearing to be my slave for ever" (161). While clearly a gesture of submission, Crusoe's interpretation of it as Friday's specific desire for a life of slavery illustrates Crusoe's inclination to understand others only in relation to himself and his desires.

Reading Crusoe's relationship to Friday, as well as most everyone he encounters in *Robinson Crusoe*, in terms of utility is in keeping with the majority of readings of the novel, though these tend to emphasize Crusoe's self-interestedness rather than his self-definition.⁵ Ian Watt standardized such an interpretation in *The Rise of the Novel* when he noted that Crusoe devalues non-economic factors in all his personal relationships, instead treating them "in terms of their commodity value" (69). He adds, "Emotional ties, then, and personal relationships generally, play a very minor part in *Robinson Crusoe*, except when they are focused on economic matters." This interpretation correctly captures the exploitive nature of Crusoe's relationships, as well as the interested nature of many of his most generous moments. Crusoe is only able to understand others, even someone as close to himself as Friday, in terms of himself. That he does so in order to define himself against the Other can best be demonstrated by his similar construction of self and other in his relation to the Chinese in the *Farther Adventures* and *Serious Reflections*.

"CHINA" IN A PORCELAIN HOUSE

If the bogeyman of *Robinson Crusoe* is the cannibal, in the *Farther Adventures* and *Serious Reflections* the subject that Crusoe returns to again and again is the Chinese. Leaving behind his island, Crusoe travels to the Far East for the sake of exploration and, to a lesser extent, trade. Doing so, he enters foreign lands rather than building a wall to prevent the Other from approaching him, and as a result his strategies for

dealing with the Other are quite different. Rather than hiding himself from the threat, he engages in a campaign of revelation, aiming to debunk familiar Jesuit accounts of Chinese accomplishments by exposing what he claims are the realities of life in China.⁶ What remains constant from *Robinson Crusoe* through its sequels, however, is the manner in which these descriptions reveal the psychology of Defoe's character. And as with the wall in the original novel, it is another symbolic architectural structure, a house made of porcelain, that is the most revealing.

In all of Crusoe's descriptions of his travels in China, his observations -- of the size of their cities, the orderliness of their urban planning, the extent of their trade, and the grandeur of their civilization -- are tempered with claims of the barbarity of the people. Crusoe feels compelled to delineate the reality of China in the face of the illusion that many Westerners have of the empire's greatness. He includes positive descriptions, such as this one of his visit to the city of Nankin [Nanjing], which he describes as "a city well worth seeing, indeed; they say it has a million of people in it: it is regularly built, the streets all exactly straight, and cross one another in direct lines, which gives the figure of it great advantage" (*Farther Adventures* 358). However, this favorable comment is immediately retracted in the next sentence when he states, "But when I come to compare the miserable people of these countries with ours, their fabrics, the manner of living, their government, their wealth, and their glory, as some call it, I must confess that I scarcely think it worth my while to mention them here." But mention them he does, repeatedly and at great length. As his aim in the face of a people so different is to expose failings which he fears have gone unobserved in other accounts, it is unsurprising that he employs the trope of "quixotism" to describe the Chinese. Telling us of a Chinese "country gentleman" he traveled with on his way to Peking, Crusoe sums him up as a "mixture of pomp and poverty" -- which calls to mind Don Quixote's chivalric aspirations atop the broken-winded Rocinante -- and he suggests that this is indicative of the "beggarly pride" of the Chinese (361).

Such descriptions of the failings of China go on for pages, but perhaps more important than the details he includes is the fact that the descriptions are there at all. Crusoe tells us such details are "scarcely . . . worth my while to mention" (358), but he seems unable to stop mentioning them. He admits that his description of China "is the only excursion of the kind which I have made in all the accounts I have given of my travels" (359), giving it a singular emphasis. For this reason, he sees this condemnation of China as out of place in his work, and vows, "I shall make no more such." However, just as with his compulsive description of the creation of his wall, he simply cannot forbear attacking the Chinese for their pomposity, lack of Christianity, and supposed inability to measure up to Europeans in the pages that follow.

Crusoe's encounter with the porcelain house is a case in point of this psychological strategy, demonstrating the tension in Crusoe's character and the importance of distinguishing himself from the Chinese.⁷ The passage begins with Crusoe's Portuguese pilot offering to show Crusoe and the rest of the travelers "the

greatest rarity in all the country,” though from the first this statement is treated as sarcastic as the pilot is “sneering” as he utters these words (365); Crusoe’s Western bias seems characteristic of the entire party. Nevertheless, Crusoe’s curiosity is piqued. When he is told that this rarity is a house of “china ware” he is confused, first thinking the pilot means a house made of Chinese wares and then, after some explanation, that it is a porcelain replica of a house. It is important to note that Crusoe’s immediate reaction is to purchase the object as an exotic curiosity to be exported: “How big is it?” he asks. “Can we carry it in a box upon a camel? If we can we will buy it.” China was at this time the only source of true porcelain, not yet replicable in the West, and as a commodity this is something that Crusoe clearly values, if he values nothing else in the country. The pilot surprises him, however, by informing him that it is an actual home, housing some thirty people.

Crusoe’s response to the house is characteristic of his reaction to China as a whole: he sees why others are impressed at a distance, yet he eagerly looks into the details to dismiss the achievement as another instance of quixotism. What makes this unique porcelain house a symbolic architectural structure, however, is both the way in which an entire empire comes to be represented in this single figure *and* the way that it forces Crusoe to reveal genuine admiration for the Chinese despite himself.

His initial treatment of the house is like that of China as a nation: it fails to live up to its reputation. “[I]t was nothing but this,” he begins, “it was a timber house, or a house built, as they call it in England, with lath and plaster; but all this plastering was really china ware, that is to say, it was plastered with the earth that makes china ware.” Nevertheless, despite announcing “it was nothing but this,” as if exposing something hidden, the description Crusoe provides of the house is among the most detailed in all the *Farther Adventures* -- and the admiration is palpable. Yet he follows this with a disclaimer, emphasizing his first point: “As this is one of the singularities of China, so they may be allowed to excel in it; but I am sure they excel in their accounts of it; for they told me such incredible things of their performance in crockery-ware, for such it is, that I care not to relate, as knowing it could not be true” (365–66).

Though Crusoe bookends the description of the porcelain house with statements such as these, which are meant to diminish it, the descriptions nevertheless are lavish and run away with him:

The outside, which the sun shone hot upon, was glazed, and looked very well, perfectly white, and painted with blue figures, as the large china ware in England is painted, and hard as if it had been burned. As to the inside, all the walls instead of wainscot, were lined with hardened and painted tiles, like the little square tiles we call galley-tiles in England, all made of the finest china, and their figures exceeding fine, indeed, with extraordinary variety of colours, mixed with gold, many tiles making but one figure, but joined so artificially, the mortar being made of the same earth, that it was very hard to see where the tiles met . . . This was a china ware house, indeed,

truly and literally to be called so, and had I not been upon a journey, I could have stayed some days to see and examine the particulars of it. (365)

Despite himself, Crusoe is impressed. He examines the quality of the glazing, the addition of gold to the colors, and the manner in which the tiles are seamlessly joined with mortar, and he suggests that he would have stayed days longer to provide an even more thorough description of the “particulars” if he had not been in the midst of traveling.

Ultimately, though, he cannot acknowledge his admiration. Crusoe defines himself against the Chinese, and in so doing true admiration is precluded. He must treat this as the singular gift of the Chinese, an accident of geology whereby the Chinese just happen to live where the right sort of clay is available. And, as Lydia Liu contends, by referring to creations like the porcelain house as “earthen-ware” or “crockery-ware” -- not that more rarified product, porcelain -- Crusoe is perhaps even implying that he, forger of a well-known “earthenware pot” on his island, could have done the same had he been shipwrecked in China. In this way, the porcelain house is more than a roadside attraction, a moment of narrative interest to liven the description of his travels. The porcelain house is an expression of both Crusoe’s explicit belief that Chinese greatness is more glister than gold as well as a more implicit example of how important such a belief is for Crusoe’s sense of self during his travels.

WILL ATKINS’S BASKET-WORK HOUSE

The examples thus far, of the wall around Crusoe’s cave home and the porcelain house, would seem to suggest that symbolic architectures in Defoe’s trilogy are consistently negative, and that every relationship with the Other is one of radical separation or dismissal. At the same time, the fact that Crusoe can occasionally be surprisingly open-minded and memorably caring for Friday and others, in his particular way, cannot be denied. There is a hopeful, even utopian element in some of these interactions with others. And while they do not tilt the balance away from the negatively-defined Crusoe I describe above, they open the possibility that narrative can in fact heal the wounds that separate us from the Other, describing new ways of being, just as Kearney suggests in *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters*.

Crusoe returns to his island in the *Farther Adventures*, and when he does so he discovers that things have been far from peaceful in his absence. Those he left behind have faced a number of challenges, and a great deal of the strife has been caused by Will Atkins, one of the mutineers left behind at the end of *Robinson Crusoe*. However, by the time of Crusoe’s return, all has changed. The inhabitants, that is, seventeen Spanish men, three English men and their three native wives, and a few enslaved male

“savages,” have created a community forged in response to the greatest threat that Crusoe’s island had ever faced -- an onslaught of some two-hundred-and-fifty “savages” arriving on twenty-eight canoes. By the end of this bloody confrontation one of the English residents of the island is dead, but the surviving members of the invading tribe -- never allowed to escape after suffering defeat -- have been reduced to a tractable population of 37 that inhabit their own portion of the island. The outside threat had been neutralized; Crusoe calls them “the most subjected innocent creatures that ever were heard of” (270). Moreover, the divisions between the English and the Spanish inhabitants of the island, which resulted in numerous threats and actual acts of violence in the past, seem resolved by their having been forced to unite against a common foe. Most dramatically, Will Atkins, described at the beginning of this conflict as “a dreadful fellow for wickedness” (264) has become a “very industrious, useful, and sober fellow” (271). In many ways, the issues facing the island’s residents are resolved. This utopian moment, and its blending of different communities, comes to be represented in this section of the novel in the form of a symbolic work of architecture, the unique home of Will Atkins, which is made of “basket-work” (271).

To treat this passage and the final events on Crusoe’s island as utopian, however, is to read against the grain of recent criticism. Nicole E. Didicher claims that “this picture of island life is an exaggerated idyll . . . All is not as perfect on Crusoe’s island Eden as he would have us believe” (79), and Markley passes over these hopeful passages to note that despite Crusoe’s efforts, after his departure the island community falls apart (“I have now done” 31–2). Crusoe tells us

the last letters I had from any of them was by my partner’s means; who afterwards sent another sloop to the place, and who sent me word, tho’ I had not the letter till five years after it was written, that they went on but poorly, were discontent with their long stay there; that Will. Atkins was dead; that five of the Spanish were come away, and that tho’ they had not been much molested by the savages, yet they had had some skirmishes with them; and that they begg’d of him to write me, to think of the promise I had made to fetch them away, that they might see their own country again before they dy’d. (318–19)

Markley asserts that in this description “Defoe is explicit: as an experiment in or as a model of colonialism, Crusoe’s island is a failure. Neither ideals of toleration nor the internalized discourses of self-control can prevent the island from succumbing to the well-known problems of early eighteenth-century colonies—diminishing resources, political conflicts, and external threats” (“I have now done” 31–2).

Markley here is absolutely right to note that reading the *Farther Adventures* radically changes how we understand the significance of Crusoe’s island. Reading *Robinson Crusoe* in isolation from the rest of the trilogy has allowed critics to write narratives of the “history of modern identity, the rise of the novel, and the rise of financial capitalism in mutually constitutive and mutually reinforcing terms” (25). But

in the later novels Crusoe leaves the island behind, and in doing so the first novel no longer appears to be a clear example of economic self-sufficiency and modern subjectivity.

However, Markley's dismissal of the "ideals of toleration" and Didicher's suspicion of Crusoe's description of the island overlook the curious passages devoted to basket-work architecture, as well as what they suggest about the island community. This piece of symbolic architecture is a new model of social interaction in the Crusoe story, emphasizing hybrid structures and cooperation, both of which fly in the face of most treatments of self and other in the novels.

As with his account of the wall and the porcelain house, Crusoe describes in great detail the unique home of the reformed Will Atkins, mutineer turned moral center of Crusoe's island community. His home and the others on the island like it were constructed of "basket-work" or "wicker-work" (270), which Crusoe calls an "extraordinary piece of ingenuity" (271). What distinguishes this architecture from Crusoe's wall is that it is a joint creation, an architecture that emphasizes hybridity rather than division. According to Crusoe, the English colonists first taught the conquered "savages" to weave basket-work, but "they soon outdid their masters" (270) making "abundance of most ingenious things in wicker-work" (271) including cupboards, chairs, beds, and houses. The English then asked them to make homes for them in such a fashion as well. On first seeing these homes, Crusoe observes that these unique structures make it appear as if "they all lived like bees in a hive." A hive community becomes the metaphor for a new way of existing and interacting with one another. In the place of a nearly Hobbesian war of all against all, Defoe presents us with a community that lives for the community.

The construction of these hybrid structures emphasizes a complex interweaving of selves rather than a division between self and other; the distinctions so important elsewhere in the work fade to the background. The very existence of the building demonstrates trade or cooperation between the English and the "savages." Two groups, recently at war, are working together. These basket-work homes house hybrid marriages, as Crusoe, before leaving, convinces Will Atkins and the others that have taken up with native women to partake of the sacrament of marriage. Beyond this, Will Atkins's house, "one hundred and twenty paces round on the outside" (271), contains hybrid family structures, for "in this bee-hive lived the three families, that is to say Will Atkins and his companion; the third [Englishman] was killed, but his wife remained, with three children . . . and the other two were not at all backward to give the widow her full share of everything" (272). Here, at least, a widow can be given "her full share of everything," not because she has been particularly loyal to Crusoe over the years (like the widow in *Robinson Crusoe*), but because she is a widow with children, and deserves it.

In fact, the hive structure of this unique home presents an approach to the Other that was unthinkable in *Robinson Crusoe*. In the one passage where wicker-work

is discussed in that novel, Crusoe dismisses its efficacy: “When we had thus hous’d and secur’d our magazine of corn, we fell to work to make more wicker work, (*viz.*) great baskets in which we kept it; and the *Spaniard* was very handy and dexterous at this part, and often blam’d me that I did not make some things for defence, of this kind of work; but I saw no need of it” (195, italics in original). In the first volume, walls are for keeping others out. In this particular instance in the *Farther Adventures*, however, Defoe allows us, if but for a moment, the chance to imagine differently. What I want to draw attention to is that in the example of Will Atkins’s basket-work house, we see Defoe weaving together a new narrative, working through the relationship between colonizer and colonized in that most perfect laboratory for social experiments, his island.

Of Atkins’s house, Crusoe says, “Such a piece of basket-work, I believe, was never seen in the world, nor a house or tent so neatly contrived, much less so built” (272). This gives credit to both the ingenuity of the “savages” for their basketwork and that of Atkins for his organization of the structure, but more importantly it emphasizes that such a building was never seen in the world, it is a non-place, a utopia, and this bee-hive of hybridized cultures thereby becomes the symbolic architecture of what Crusoe’s island could (but never completely will) be. And it is here that I think that Kearney’s hope, in *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters*, that we can move beyond defining the Other in terms of ourselves by writing new narratives that no longer place the Other beyond the pale has its most promising expression in the tales of Crusoe.

As I hope I have made clear, what I have been calling the symbolic architectures of Defoe’s novels are the most complex, formal representations of Crusoe’s attempt to establish a relationship with otherness that he can come to terms with. In the case of his wall and the porcelain house, Crusoe presents us with structures that distinguish himself from what he fears, whereas in the example of Atkins’s house we witness an attempt to imagine the Other differently. Crusoe may often be frankly unreflective about his relationships with the Other in terms of his statements as narrator, but the narrative itself contains such ideas embodied in these buildings. In this way, Defoe is able to represent both the best and the worst ways that Kearney suggests we may face the Other, either by projecting our fears upon others or by writing a new narrative that imagines ways in which we might live together.

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NOTES

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- ¹ The touchstone arguments regarding the lack of psychological complexity in Defoe's fiction are Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (108–9) and Maximillian Novak's *Defoe and the Nature of Man* (129–33).
- ² Aspects of this argument also appear in Markley's "I have now done" and "Teaching the *Crusoe* Trilogy."
- ³ In focusing on Crusoe's lack of a stable subjectivity, I am revisiting readings of Crusoe's character by Homer Brown and Thomas Kavanagh with the intention of shifting the focus from Crusoe's "displaced self" (Brown 562) and "troubled representation . . . of the self as unified" (Kavanagh 416) to what this lack says about his relationship with the other.
- ⁴ Geoffrey Sill considers this dream at length in the chapter "Crusoe in the Cave: Family Passions in *Robinson Crusoe*" in his *Cure of the Passions and the Origins of the English Novel*. He argues that the dream is a significant event in the story, but disputes earlier critics' description of the dream as a "turning point" in Crusoe's narrative, as it occurs during his first of twenty-eight years on the island (96–7). Instead, he contends, "To a degree not generally appreciated, the second and third quarters of the history depict a carefully structured progression through which Robinson first investigates and then rationalizes the passions revealed by his dream" (97). For Sill, this dream initiates, rather than ends, a long psychological process that will only be concluded with Crusoe's discovery of the cave with the dying goat inside, which he sees as the mirror image of the events of the dream (104). Without disputing the role of the passions in Defoe's fiction, which seems undeniable, I would disagree with Sill's conclusions about the significance of these passages. Rather than confirming Sill's argument that by the time of Crusoe's discovery of the second cave he has developed in his relationship with his passions, the description of the cave seems to suggest that his anxieties about the other have simply changed addresses from his "castle" to the cave, within which his sense of self swells until he seems "like one of the ancient giants, which were said to live in caves" (142) and feels utterly safe, even if he were beset upon by "five hundred savages."
- ⁵ Hans Turley's treatment of the *Crusoe* trilogy is a notable exception to the critical consensus that sees Crusoe's relationship to Friday as one of ownership and utility. Turley suggests that the "uncomplicated master/slave dichotomy that critics tend to observe" (144) ignores the "desire exhibited by Crusoe toward Friday." Emphasizing Crusoe's treatment of Friday on the island, his "jealousy" when Friday (it seems) is prepared to leave Crusoe for his homeland, and Crusoe's violent reaction to Friday's death, Turley sees Crusoe as learning over the course of the trilogy that "nothing or nobody -- except Friday -- is important in the 'real' world" (136). My objection to Turley's reading is that, though insightful, it is never able to escape the rhetoric of possession: Crusoe desires Friday, does not want him to leave, and is outraged when he is taken from him. Against Turley's interpretation, I would contend that Friday remains an instrument of Crusoe's, a tool for enacting his desires upon the world, rather than an independent individual.

⁶ For discussions of Defoe's sources for his descriptions of China and his use of them, see Markley, *Far East* 189–201 and Starr.

⁷ Lydia Liu offers a reading of this passage similar to my own in "Robinson Crusoe's Earthenware Pot," suggesting that "Crusoe's act of unmasking [in the porcelain house passage] turns china into a synecdoche of China (a pun made easy by early modern typography), [and] the violence is directed at both" (50). My own treatment of this as a symbolic architectural structure acknowledges this move, but further emphasizes Crusoe's unacknowledged admiration of the porcelain house. This other component in the description helps develop the tension in Crusoe's new definition of himself against Chinese products, culture, and unbelief.

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