

The Theme of Alienation and Isolation: A Study of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*

A. Praveen Samuel

Research Scholar,

Department of English,

Scott Christian College (Autonomous),

Nagercoil

Affiliated to Manomaniam Sundaranar University,

Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli-627012, Tamil Nadu, India.

Abstract

Literature is a written work of art that goes beyond the realm of nations and gets united by themes, motifs and so on. This paper is a study of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Jonathan Swift is an Irish novelist who depicts the types of human qualities a human encounters in a foreign land in *The Gulliver's Travel*. The same goes with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* where the concept of enduring struggles is dealt with. The concept of alienation is also discussed in detail. Alienation is the state of being alienated. Though the novels mainly deal with traveling and exploring, both protagonists are traveling alone for their sake. Somehow they are alienated. Alienation happens not only when someone willingly chooses to be isolated from society but also when several situations push them to be isolated without any go. But here the protagonists willingly chose to be isolated in their travel. This study aims to explore the thematic similarities and differences, narrative styles, and underlying philosophical perspectives of the two novels. This research paper presents the characteristics, and perspectives, and clearly portrays the findings from both novels.

Keywords: Survival, Exploration, Travel, Alienation, Children's Literature.

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature refers to written or spoken works that have artistic and intellectual value. It encompasses a wide range of creative expressions, including novels, poems, plays, essays, and more. Through the use of language, literature explores human experiences, emotions, and ideas, often offering insights into various cultures, historical periods, and philosophical concepts. It serves as a means of storytelling, self-expression, and reflection, inviting readers to engage with diverse narratives that can evoke empathy, provoke thought, and leave lasting impressions. Especially some literary pieces are meant and concentrated on young readers and children. English literature includes a wide variety of genres, styles, and historical periods, including modern novels, plays, poems, and essays, as well as literature from the middle Ages. English-speaking and English-written authors from many different places of the world have worked in English literature. Its reflection of various historical, cultural, and social situations makes it a rich and varied topic of study. English literature has made significant contributions to children's literature through timeless classics like Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* which is considered to be one of the earliest novels in English literature and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* which is very famous for its style.

Children's literature specifically concentrates on children and young readers. The context is basically easy to understand as it is written very simple. The writers often introduce young readers to a fantasy world in their works, which makes it very interesting for young readers.

Daniel Defoe, best known for *Robinson Crusoe*, made a notable contribution to children's literature with his work *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. Although originally written for adults, its themes of survival, exploration, and resourcefulness have made it popular among younger readers as well. Defoe's storytelling style and the adventurous spirit of the protagonist have had a lasting impact on children's literature. He is also well known for his writing style, which was marked by clarity, simplicity, and directness. His use of plain language made his works accessible to a wide range of readers and his influence can be seen in the development of English prose and children's literature. On the other hand, Jonathan Swift, known for his satirical works, made a notable contribution to children's literature with his book *Gulliver's Travels*. This was also intended for adult readers but the novel's imaginative and fantastical elements have captured the interest of younger audiences as well. Through the adventures of Lemuel Gulliver in different lands, Swift explored themes of alienation, human nature, survival, and cultural differences, offering valuable insights to young readers.

Robinson Crusoe is a novel written by Daniel Defoe and published in 1719. The story is about a man named Robinson Crusoe who becomes stranded on a deserted island for 28 years after a shipwreck. The axiom of alienation and its theoretical percepts ascend with respect to the isolation he encounters on the island. He initially struggles to survive but eventually learns to adapt to his surroundings, building shelter, finding food, and taming animals. Over time, he becomes self-sufficient and even considers the island his own kingdom. He encounters various challenges, including a cannibalistic tribe he rescues a captive from, whom he names Friday. Crusoe and Friday form a strong bond and work together to defend against threats. Eventually, they are rescued and Crusoe returns to England, having gained a deeper understanding of himself and the world. The novel explores themes of survival, isolation, self-reliance and alienation. In this novel, the characters are realistic unlike *Gulliver's Travels*

Gulliver's Travels is a satirical novel written by Jonathan Swift, first published in 1726. The story follows Lemuel Gulliver, a ship's surgeon who finds himself in various bizarre and fantastical lands after being shipwrecked. Gulliver encounters four different societies: Lilliput, where he's a giant among tiny people; from this, we can understand that he is alienated based on his true identity. Brobdingnag, where he's miniature among giants; Laputa, a floating island inhabited by impractical intellectuals; and the land of the Houyhnhnms, rational horses ruling over irrational humanoid creatures called Yahoos. Through these encounters, Swift critiques various aspects of human nature, politics, and society, using satire and allegory to highlight the absurdities and flaws of the world of his time. Here the characters are all fictitious entities, unlike Robinson *Crusoe*.

Though there are many similarities between these two novels, the theme of alienation is very prominent. In literature, the concept of alienation refers to the sense of isolation, estrangement, or disconnection experienced by characters from their surroundings, society, or even themselves. This theme often explores the emotional and psychological effects of individuals feeling disconnected or out of place, leading to a sense of loneliness, disillusionment, and a lack of belonging. Writers use alienation to reflect on broader social, cultural, and existential issues, highlighting the challenges of human existence and the search for identity and meaning. Alienation is unavoidable because not every time we mingle with people. Sometimes, we don't like it too. This happens due to existential factors. There are some positives in alienation which are that, one can bring out their unique talents, skills, etc without the support of others. In existentialism, the theme of alienation plays a major role. This also deals with freedom, struggle, survival, etc. Alienation and isolation are closely related concepts that are often explored in the literature. Alienation refers to isolation or a feeling of being removed from something, either from society, from oneself, or from a particular group. Isolation, on the other hand,

is a state of being physically or emotionally alone or separated from others. Although they share similarities, they differ in scope and focus. Alienation delves into the emotional and psychological aspects of disconnection, emphasizing feelings of not belonging or being out of place. This can happen as a result of social norms, personal changes or internal conflicts. Literature often uses alienation to explore the internal struggles of characters and the wider social consequences of disability. Isolation, on the other hand, focuses on the physical or emotional state of being alone. This may be voluntary or involuntary and may be due to circumstances such as geographical distance, social exclusion or personal choices. Literature often explores the effects of isolation on the mental states of characters, emphasizing the effects of loneliness on their thoughts, behavior, and overall well-being. Both concepts are rich sources of thematic research in literature, allowing writers to delve into the complexities of human emotions, relationships, and social dynamics. Whether the characters experience alienation from their environment or choose isolation for reflection, these themes offer valuable insights into the human experience

To start with, both protagonists of these novels, even though they have everything, they travel alone. From the very beginning, they are unconsciously alienated. In *Gulliver's Travels*, Lemuel Gulliver, the protagonist, experiences alienation and isolation through his encounters with various societies. In Lilliput, he is physically larger than the inhabitants, leading to his isolation and inability to fully integrate into their society. In Brobdingnag, the exact opposite happens, Gulliver becomes a small individual among giants, heightening his sense of alienation. In Laputa, the floating island, the impractical intellectuals isolate themselves from the world, reflecting a different form of isolation driven by intellectual disconnection. Finally, in the land of the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver is isolated by his own revulsion towards humanity's flaws, leading to his distancing from both the Yahoos and the rational horses. Jonathan Swift clarifies the concept of alienation that rises with respect to fraternal and familial isolation; "My wife received me with great surprise and joy because they concluded me certainly dead" (Swift 250).

Robinson Crusoe portrays also portrays the theme of alienation and isolation through its protagonist's solitary existence on a deserted island. Crusoe's isolation results from his shipwreck and his subsequent survival efforts. He grapples with loneliness, fear, and a lack of human interaction. Crusoe's attempts to create a life for himself, including building shelter, growing food, and taming animals but also deepen his sense of separation from society. His encounter with Friday, a native he rescues, offers temporary relief from isolation, as they form a bond, but Crusoe still carries the psychological burden of being the only European on the island. His eventual rescue and return to England showcase the emotional toll of long-term isolation and his struggle to reintegrate into human society". "I am cast upon a horrible desolate island, void of all hope of recovery" (Defoe 66). Zygmunt Bauman

in his work *Modernity and Ambivalence* attempts to give a definition for alienation; “Alienation is the experience of being cut off from the world, of being unable to connect with others or with the natural world. It is the experience of being a stranger in a strange land” (21).

II. CONCLUSION

Universally and globally there is a misconception that an individual when alienation, subjects himself to grief, sorrow, and despondency. At times an individual is forcefully pushed towards an alienated temperament, and at times alienation is the individual’s choice. This misconception of alienation acclaiming a sense of recurring sorrow and grief can in itself be alienated through the notion that alienation inspires and ensures emotional intelligence and strength to overcome the psychological bondages of the human mind. The protagonists Robinson Crusoe and Lemuel Gulliver justify the latter. These characters alienate the myth of misconception behind the literary theory of alienation. Similarly, these protagonists break the ambiguity behind the psychological choice of alienation. Alienation is not totally isolation, it also inspires exaltation, liberation, and emancipation.

III. REFERENCES

1. Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.
2. Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe*, Oxford University Press Inc, 2007.
3. Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.
4. Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver’s Travels*, Oxford University Press Inc, 2005.