

‘Superstes Sum ‘in Medio Nullius,’ Ergo Sum’: The Echo of ‘The Crusoe Myth’ (1719) Three Centuries Forwards in Katie Hale’s *My Name Is Monster* (2019)

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Submission: 05/12/2024 Acceptance: 12/12/2024 Pulication: 15/12/2024

Abstract: This research paper explores the connections between Katie Hale’s *My Name Is Monster* (2019) and Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) at diverse literary facets. The purpose of this effort, hence, is to consider the extent to which the former has echoed the castaway’s conundrum initiated in the latter while reconfiguring the account to align it with both the post-apocalyptic temporal and spatial matrix as well as conform it to third millennium readership expectations. Taking my bearings from Mikhail Bakhtin’s theoretical insights, I argue that Hale has stylized a wide array of aspects from Defoe’s narrative. This contemporary stylization has been carved and enacted in the sphere of the castaway’s incessant fight against ‘wilderness,’ for survival, the island plight, with its complex challenges, and the Crusoe/Friday duality replicating not only these two characters’ essence but also their power based relationship. Defoe’s text has,

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accordingly, been deployed to recreate the island versus the lone survivor trope in a post-apocalyptic world.

Key words: Hale's *My Name Is Monster*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*; rewriting, stylization; survival

1-Introduction :

Robinson Crusoe is without doubt a book to be reread line by line, and we will continually make new discoveries. (Calvino, 1999, p. 68)

If 'thinking' is that vital, as an activity, which would pertain, though at a quite philosophical dimension, to being one of the highest proofs of a human being's existence, to René Descartes, with his early enlightenment Latin maxim "Cogito, ergo sum" (Descartes as cited in Matthews, 1992, p. 11); then the first part of this article's title, "Superstes sum 'in medio nullius,' ergo sum," that purports in English, "I survive 'in the middle of nowhere,' therefore I am," would perhaps be one of the most, if not the most, accurate statements with respect to an Augustan literary mythical protagonist, Crusoe, showcasing the consequentiality of subsistence, equated with existence, in Defoe's realm away from Descartes'. Crusoe does not contemplate or think, in any romanticised fashion, about subsistence; he just does whatever it takes, in the most practical and pragmatic ways, to survive. The hero's relentless struggle, against all odds, for survival and, as a matter of fact, ultimate existence, despite being an integral part of any castaway's mundane world/reality, would not have reached fruition without his, much needed, Sisyphean daily basis, almost obsessive compulsive, drive to explore, but above all, make the best use, through trial and error, of the entire unfamiliarity of the encapsulating scenery. These are a few unequivocal aspects, to avoid being exhaustive, which is an almost impossible endeavour, that straightforwardly strike a chord into the essence of any human being;

thereby, rendering *Robinson Crusoe*, potentially one of the most timeless canonical texts, to say the least, in Western and even world literature with such engaging and tempting themes, storylines and characters, although there are not many –which all contributed to the worldwide fame it has, so far, enjoyed. The fact that it still continues, at quite different proportions, to trigger both readers’ and authors’ imagination together with critics’ ambivalent responses, three centuries later (1719-2019), is not something outlandish in anyway whatsoever. The words in the above epigraph, which are Italo Calvino’s, are thence, of high relevance, and justification enough, when it comes to the almost impossible to-be-numbered adaptations, revisions and appropriations Defoe’s first novel has been subjected to. Katie Hale’s *My Name Is Monster*, this article’s subject matter, falls in line with Crusoe’s perennial, ongoing and compelling heritage, though its title does not, at first glance, reveal any of it, with its surgically precise and well synchronised timing of publication (2019) which, out of no coincidence, concurs with the three hundredth year of the source’s onset exposure to the wide public (1719).

The ultimate finality in mind, from the idea’s inception, behind which this endeavour is undertaken, comprises a resolute bid to probe into one facet of the affinities, if any, binding Defoe’s and Hale’s first novels. The fact that the latter have, consciously or unconsciously, been placed, within the castaway’s narrative tradition, at quite distinct and even extreme ends of the continuum, early eighteenth and early twenty-first centuries, might uncover the intricate dimensionality of the effort before hand; however, out of fear of falling into either a shallow attempt, devoid of any analytical and critical depth, or an exhaustive venture, out of which there would be no end, I deem it crucial to restrict my design, at this stage, into a few, but well

targeted aspects. This research paper, with what has been pinpointed in focus, takes its bearings and premises, as well, from Mikhail Bakhtin's notion, he has dubbed, 'stylization'; it will draw, by virtue of logic, upon his theoretical insights, understanding and vision he has both formulated and refined in his seminal works *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984). The chosen concept to circumscribe my scope, in the theorist's worldview, is a segment of the shielding larger division he has grounded, to deploy his words, as the "double-voiced and double-langued phenomena" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 337) within any discursive exercise whatsoever. The Russian thinker has put much emphasis on the fact that a stylization "is an artistic representation of another's linguistic style" which is often intended to "create[...] a free image of another's language [...] by carrying into it its own interests," that is the stylizer's ones (Ibid., pp. 362-363). He expounds on the boundaries of stylization claiming that at the precise moment when the stylizer's perception has "penetrated someone else's discourse [the stylized/source text] and made its home in it, does not collide with the other's thought, but rather follows after it in the same direction" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 193). It has to be elucidated, for the sake of circumventing any possible pending ambiguities, that such a notion is bound to encompass the presence, at least not in a physical fashion, rather at the stylistic layer, of the two authors', that is the stylized's/source's and stylizer's/ subsequent's, tasks, aims, consciousnesses and visions merging, and above all, navigating the intricate spatial and temporal disjunctions towards a more symbiotic pattern of cohabitation coexisting, thereafter, in a literary matrix devoid of any polemic or parodic intentions. One is compelled, at this point, to highlight a fundamental aspect which is the fact that, to the fullest extent of my knowledge, there are no available academic

documents and papers, of any kind, on the current research topic. The central claim I foster and meticulously support with textual evidence, throughout the ensuing discussion, is that Hale's *My Name Is Monster* has stylized and reproduced certain stylistic and thematic features from its source text, *Robinson Crusoe* which, at the interpretative scale, might place it, though perhaps at relative proportions, within Bakhtin's realm of stylization.

2-Monster's Survival: A Debt to Crusoe:

The entire existence of the human species, from the dawn of history to the current third millennium, has all been, and would perhaps continue to be, in centuries to come, about that, both innate and acquired, capacity to survive even in the most improbable conditions; the thrill of survival, therefore, with all the dangers, tribulations and discoveries it often involves, is one of the most attractive features, either on a daily basis reality or at a metaphorical and literary stratum, with which any human being, wherever and whenever he/she might be, would conspicuously identify and feel ecstatic about. The immortality and endurance of literary accounts such as *Robinson Crusoe*, which has materialised this precise aspect among many other gripping ones, is thereby neither unwarranted nor undeserved. The stories framed on behalf of Defoe's, though with a wide range of sometimes strange variants, are incorporated within the same literary tradition. Such texts recurrently make reference to a protagonist, who is not a god or a semi-god, but rather a common human being, with all his flaws and qualities, dragged by internal and/or external incentives to face the brutal experience of being wrenched from his comfort zone, with all its cosiness, towards insufferable loneliness on a remote island where survival would remain a daily priority. Katie Hale's *My Name Is Monster*, despite being a post-apocalyptic novel, has stylized a wide array of these elements from its source

with myriad alterations to fit the events in a context where humanity has met its doom; yet in the whole desolate scenery, wreaked all over Hale's narrative, the readers meet Monster, the main and Crusoe-like character, who has managed to survive and would carry her struggle for subsistence till the end.

The reader of Hale's novel, in a far from being uncalculated, accidental or fortuitous manoeuvre, is ushered into the story with the epigraph that reads as follows, "I am cast upon a horrible, desolate Island, void of all hope of Recovery. But I am alive; and not drown'd as all my Ship's Company were" (Defoe as cited in Hale, 2019, p. 06). This passage, with all its tremendous significance, is taken from *Robinson Crusoe*; it amply depicts the hero's internal fierce struggle at the key moment when he began, with an enlightenment thinker's spirit, to weigh down the pros and cons of his island dilemma. By explicitly evoking Defoe's masterpiece, for the first and by the way last time, Hale has rooted her stylization, through the opening epigraph, in a canonical eighteenth century text paving the way, thereby, to readers and critics to establish a direct line with one of the outstanding figures of desert island survival, Crusoe and his account. The tales, whose lineage is anchored and rooted in Defoe's first novel, Hale's text might not, under whatever circumstances, be exempt, have a specific pattern which, though to a certain extent predictable, has a high resonance and magnitude; they "often begin[...] with a shipwreck and arrival on a desert island; [and] the protagonist must then improvise the means of survival from the limited resources at hand" (O'Sullivan, 2010, p. 214). This is exactly, almost in a verbatim manner, what both protagonists, Crusoe and Monster, have experienced despite their belonging to two utterly different temporal and even literary dimensions with the former being an early eighteenth century mariner while the latter a twenty-first century scientist.

Though *My Name Is Monster* depicts the aftermath of a large-scale war and an unprecedented pandemic which have reduced Earth into cinder and ashes, placing it, as a result, within the post-apocalyptic literary genre, that might connote a dystopian and even nihilistic undertone, it has to be argued that survival is vital and no less important, by any measures, than it is in the robinsonade. The words of one critic, from this perspective, when she claims that “[t]he post-apocalyptic genre is entirely contingent on the conceit of survival; the possibility of survival—of survivors—is its bedrock” (Hicks, 2016, p. 171) are not, by any standards, mere fallacies or devoid of truth. What both characters, Crusoe and Monster, found solace in, despite the unbearable predicament they have had to face, is the fact that their lives have been spared making them the only survivors in their intricate respective realms. The epigraph from Defoe’s novel, Hale has deployed, from the onset of her text, brings into the surface survival as a paramount aspect despite Monster’s being possibly the last remnant of the entire human species. Trapped in a world, where destruction is a common currency, she has realised, under the massive influence of the engulfing famine, fear and altogether havoc, all around her, that “there is nothing to create, and nobody to create it for. There is only survival” (Hale, 2019, p. 32) to pursue to the point of obsession. After an almost self-imposed quarantine period of time, the heroine has had no option, with food and water supplies massively dwindling and on the verge of getting drained, but come out of the Svalbard Seed Vault, a scientific station, which is under Norwegian jurisdiction, where she used to be a worker/scientist during the antebellum era. Once everybody is dead, and humanity extinct, the whole world, to Monster, is an island; danger, despair and loneliness, just like with Crusoe’s plight, in the original, were looming, all over, the horizon after the horrifying recollection of being

a lone survivor. The narrator of Hale's tale, following this thread of argument, utters the following statement, "survival has a cost [...] and the cost is being alone" (Hale, 2019, p. 10); such words have a strong resonance with Defoe's hero who has been the first literary figure to pay this hard price and 'taste' what is it like to have the matrix one has grown in crumble. Hale's readers, additionally, often encounter situations where Monster has been compelled to do quite improbable things, like eating expired food or drinking rotten water, for survival. There is one scene, where being thirsty, as a biological urge, has overcome the heroine and since she has had the last drop of water, a few days ago, there was nothing to do but drink the putrid water, in a house, where she has detected a small stagnant quantity in a sink; the narrator maintains, "[t]he water is brown and thick-looking [...] I take a deep breath, then lift the bottle to my lips, trying not to smell the rancid rot I am drinking. I force my constricted throat open, drink in trickles, ignore the sour taste filling the raw cavern of my mouth" (Ibid., p. 28). This instance, among many others, might demonstrate the extent to which survival, as finality in itself and for itself, is at the heart of Hale's account the same way it has been in Defoe's eighteenth century narrative.

3- The Shipwreck, Island and the Wreck of the Ship: Stylized Motifs:

"The shipwreck and island motifs are indeed atemporal and universal" (Le Juez and Springer, 2015, p. 02); though quite straightforward, these concise words, the critics deployed, have managed to shed light on two substantial features which indubitably render shipwrecks and island life both mesmerising and gratifying whenever and wherever one might be. Such motifs have, hence, an inconceivable capacity, no matter what the context is, to be trans-historical, on the one hand, the particularity which enables them

to transcend temporal restrictions and trans-cultural, on the other, the quality which grants them the much needed versatility to circumvent cultural confines. These hallmarks, shipwreck and survival accounts often entail, have been the key motifs, though they are not the only ones, which elevated literary works in the likes of *Robinson Crusoe*, as time is proof enough, to the status of a canonical text with one of the most timeless and global narratives of which the interest of generations of readers and writers seems never to wean. The shipwreck as the door to a radically different universe, from what the hero has enjoyed within the comfortable boundaries of civilisation, operates as a trigger which immediately plunges the castaway in and unleashes upon him/her the entire day-to-day island tribulations, adventures and all in all experience. This has allowed Crusoe to explore his potential, though at times not aware of it at an earlier phase of his life, at various scales, thereafter, exceeding as one of the “larger-than-life heroes” (Hoppenstand, 2018, p. 03), both his mental and physical limits. James V. Morrison’s claim, likewise, when he fostered that Defoe’s first novel “provides good evidence for the literary connection between shipwrecks [, island life] and personal transformation” (Morrison, 2014, p. 113), is not, at whatever proportions, a fallacy. These are exactly the motifs of interest, despite the presence of many others, which Hale has stylized through *My Name Is Monster* to suit the eighteenth century masterpiece within the utterly different, even outlandish to Defoe’s Augustan contemporaries, moulds of the twenty-first century.

Hale’s post-apocalyptic narrative, after a few opening notes related to the hostile matrix that would host the events, has not dallied over anything, despite picturing the end of the world, since it immersed the reader in the intricate and dynamic plot of the castaway’s life with the heroine taking, at

full sway, the aftermath of a shipwreck which brought her to a region, until then, unknown to her. The narrator depicts this key occurrence with these words, “[t]he beach tastes of skin and salt [...] Slowly, I lift my head. I sit up and cough. It starts in my throat, in the sand and spume still rattling in my oesophagus [...] This is where the sea spat me out” (Hale, 2019, p. 07). This whole scene, the least one might say, is reminiscent of Crusoe’s good days of old with a solitary figure emerging, as the only survivor of a shipwreck, from what might be regarded as a mighty tempest which left the vessel torn into shreds. The landscape the heroine has described points at the setting with these terms, “[t]o the right, a broad belt of sand stretches for miles, into the mist and sea spray of the horizon. In front, following the line of the beach, a low cliff is dotted with trees and seagulls” (Ibid). This is the kind of language which conjures, within the minds of third millennium readers, that is Hale’s contemporaries, Crusoe’s afflictions mingled with those reality shows, they are often dished with on screen, or the wilderness documentaries imbued with Crusoe’s spirit, exploring wildlife, on an island. A few paragraphs later, the narrator/heroine evokes the exact location where she has landed following the shipwreck making a clear reference to a “beach in Scotland” (Hale, 2019, p. 07). The fact that she has arrived on the British Isles, in the aftermath of an unidentified global war and disaster, makes the totality of planet earth an island, at a macrocosmic level, with the human species annihilated and no human company to be sighted in the horizons. It could be argued, in this sense, that it is by virtue of the same logic, which has empowered the main character to declare himself king and made, as such, the island Crusoe’s possession, that all earth, on a larger view, has become Monster’s since there is no human living soul with whom the possibility to partake anything whatsoever would emerge.

The pressing questions with so many thorny facets, any shipwreck survivor on a foreign territory, Crusoe and Monster are not exempt, is doomed to reckon with, right after his/her life being spared, are expected to be intertwined with future subsistence. Has one made it and survived only to rot on the island out of hunger and thirst? If no, then how and where a person is supposed to find food and water? What about clothes? Where to spend one's nights? Where ultimately to live in the vast encompassing 'wilderness'? How can a human being be safe without weapons in an increasingly hostile area? This is the abundant spectrum of inquiries, though not in an exhaustive fashion, that would probably wrestle within the mind of any shipwrecked lone survivor, like Crusoe and Monster, and such is the dilemma he/she would grapple with to the point of madness. The answer to many of these spiky questions, perhaps to the surprise of any reader of Defoe's text, is not delayed for so long and as if by magic, it came few hours later. Crusoe has been shipwrecked on the 30th of September, 1659 and only one short paragraph afterwards, he made on the next morning, October the 1st, the stunning discovery of "the ship [that] floated with the high tide, and was driven on shore again much nearer the island" (Defoe, 2005, p. 65). All that remained, of the world Crusoe has once known, is the wreck of the ship which appears to be in a good shape. There was no time to waste and in the heat of the moment, Crusoe did not only contemplate the idea of salvaging anything that might be of any use, but also seized the opportunity by putting the scheme into execution for nearly twenty four days during which he retrieved almost all kinds of daily necessities that would make his account of survival, for close to three decades, a believable and feasible undertaking. In addition to food, clothes and a plethora of tools, which would be deployed at various stages of his island sojourn, the hero has managed to bring on shore

firearms and above all a considerable amount of gunpowder solving, thereby, a great portion of his problems. The argument of one critic, at this stage, is more than appropriate as he fostered that the wreck of the ship stands for “Crusoe’s umbilical cord” (Donoghue as cited in Craft-Fairchild, 2005, p. 08) which supplied him with what is needed to amend his island daily reality. The wreck of the ship has, as a result, acted like a thread or a bridge which interlaced the ‘destitute’ ‘wilderness’ of the protagonist’s present predicament with his, near past, state of abundance and plenitude back home.

Hale’s stylized version, of the Crusoe story, has replicated, although not in the manner of a carbon copy, a few, but significant aspects, of these elements. The solutions to the castaway’s initial plight, here again, has not been delayed and, in the fashion of Defoe’s story, the reader of *My Name Is Monster* encounters, after only a few lines, the coming passage that reads as follows, “I turn to the sea and there it is: the boat, my boat, beached and broken on the rocks a short way out” (Hale, 2019, p. 07). The way the wreck is positioned, as if it begs to be seen, on a rock, in Defoe’s and Hale’s texts, and the distance where it anchored, true still within the sea, but a few metres only from land, that is, made within reach, on purpose, by both authors, highlights the extent to which Hale has stylized *Robinson Crusoe*. The sight of the wreck, with all the despair and hope concomitant with it, has invoked within the heroine, the same way it did with Crusoe, quite confused expectations. There is reason enough, on the one hand, to think of it as a crushed bundle of dead wood after the torrid journey it has gone through; on the other, there is the possibility of it being not entirely damaged which might mean ready to be used resources, tools and all in all provisions and amenities that would contribute to the castaway’s subsistence. The

narrator/heroine has voiced such mingled flow of emotions when she fostered, “I expect the boat to be nothing but timbers and a few sodden relics, but for the first time in weeks, lightness fills my lungs like bellows. The cabin is still intact” (Hale, 2019, pp.07-08). The castaways, in both works under scrutiny, have discovered, much to their benefit and comfort, that the ship, they boarded, is not annihilated since parts remained undamaged, the realisation which not only overjoyed, but also opened new bright perspectives, in store, for them. The next step in both narratives, a quite predictable one though, is to organise scavenging expeditions to salvage all that could be of any immediate or future utility, which Monster did to the fullest the same way her predecessor did, four hundred years ago. The list, though a short one, of what she has retrieved, from the wreck, include “a backpack full of clothes, food, a sleeping bag, two rolls of Elastoplast, a Swiss army knife, rope, a lighter” (Ibid., p. 08), which cover almost all aspects of a human being’s life. These salvaged goods, even spoils in her critical situation, if I might term them such, could be deployed, upon meticulous analysis, to sustain Monster’s solitary existence and perform a wide range of tasks vital to maintain her alive during the coming afflictions. The ship’s wreck, it could fostered, in Hale’s novel, performed a similar function to that in Defoe’s source, making its presence, as a motif, in both texts, a deliberate choice to which the authors have resorted to lend a helping hand to their shipwrecked protagonists.

4- Crusoe and Friday in the Third Millennium: A Female Crusoe and a Female Friday:

The presence of a female castaway, in the robinsonade’s “profoundly masculinist” (Green as cited in O’Malley in Reimer, 2008, p. 85) realm, though it would have been quite unusual, back then, to Defoe and his

contemporaries, is not, by any standards, at the level of a third millennium account such as *My Name Is Monster*, a disconcerting phenomenon, for nowadays' readers and critics alike. Despite the fact that Hale's text makes only one direct reference to Defoe's novel in the opening epigraph, without any explicit allusions, at whatever moment, to its hero, there is textual evidence enough of Crusoe's aura which might be detected in the heroine, Monster, who might be perceived, in a wide variety of ways, as a female Crusoe-like figure. I foster that she is, likewise, a stylized version of Defoe's protagonist who has been, through several strategies, remoulded to fit in another socio-political and economic reality and transposed to the second and third decades of the twenty-first century where women, no longer the fleeting shadows they used to be in the source, are given agency and empowered to be active agents in history. The post-apocalyptic matrix, in which Monster is immersed, though it seems utterly different from the eighteenth century, to a high extent optimistic, desert island environment, is not only challenging, but also demanding to any lone survivor both physically and mentally. It is, perhaps, the kind of context which might put any castaway, Monster not exempt, to test since its requirements are, far from any exaggerated claims, hard to meet unless one possesses the Crusoe spirit, with all its qualities, or a Crusoe-like mindset with its various attributes.

Monster is, from this perspective, a twenty-first century Crusoe-like figure who is conscious of its being a survivor, and whose lineage could be traced back to Defoe's protagonist as she is endowed with Crusoe-like aptitudes which allowed her to scavenge for food and other kinds of goods, learn through trial and error, develop resourcefulness and problem solving skills, settle in strategic locations, struggle with 'wilderness,' contrive a

calendar and perform, above all, the civilising mission. These primordial features of the narrator of *My Name Is Monster*, which might seem axiomatic in desert island survival accounts, have their roots, any familiar reader of *Robinson Crusoe* might pinpoint, in Defoe's first novel and its hero, which have had an enduring impact on Hale's whole text and its heroine. The pressing predicament, though it must be admitted not the only one, castaways such as Crusoe and Monster often encounter is connected with finding food and tools. Scavenging, despite the fact it entails bringing the castaway to an animalistic state, and leading a scavenger's life, at one moment or another, is not, thereby, an option, but rather a forced choice to both castaways for survival. Monster has had no choice initially, just like Crusoe, but to scavenge for food in the remnants of the ship where she has managed to find a small quantity of what might sustain her life for a few days. Later, she has discovered, after walking for days, a farm where she, to her great satisfaction, stumbled upon the following "treasures [she] can salvage: a bag of rice, two tins of kidney beans, half a box of Cup-a-Soup, stock cubes, vinegar and a bottle of red wine" (Hale, 2019, p. 30). These provisions, together with those Crusoe scavenged from the wreck of the ship in the source text, could not be equated with any monetary value on uninhabited settings like a post-apocalyptic world or a desert island, as they stand for the only valid currency with which survival ought to be traded. She has had, once on her own, to walk for long distances, at times on an empty stomach, to find what to eat with the only thought comforting her, "there is food [...] [she] tell[s] [her]self there must be food," (Ibid., p. 26) to be found somewhere and somehow. Monster is clever enough, in Crusoe's fashion, to understand that her solitary sojourn might be prolonged with the parameters in control of the surrounding matrix beyond her reach; as a result, she has

had to make the best use of the available resources by scavenging, through systematic expeditions, all over the adjacent city for anything, no matter in what state it could be, that might satiate her hunger. The coming passage, where the narrator has stated, “I put in four tins of dog food and a bag of dog biscuits. The biscuits are over a year out of date, but they will do in case I can find nothing else to eat tonight,” (Hale, 2019, p. 36) has neither shocked nor surprised me as the castaway is wrestling to outmanoeuvre one of the potent biological processes, hunger. Resorting, therefore, in a world where resources are scarce, to dog food and expired biscuits as a means, even though Monster would have never ever done it in a ‘normal’ situation, is justified on the grounds where the end is one’s subsistence.

There is also Monster’s ability, whenever needed, to be ingenuous and resourceful when it comes to solving the wide array of problems she has often encountered which represents another long-standing debt to Crusoe. The backbone of Defoe’s narrative, which oftentimes sticks to memory making it hard to forget, is located in that portion which “celebrates Crusoe’s ingenuity in solving the problem of how to live [...] on the island,” (Adler, 1978, p. 23) away from civilisation’s facilities, which with all its multifaceted intricacies, has aroused admiration in readers worldwide for more than three hundred years. Monster, Hale’s stylized Crusoe, has been face to face with ‘wilderness’ where she has had, if she wanted to see the light of another day, to improvise; this is Crusoe’s quandary, in the twenty-first century, which showcased, in a post-apocalyptic environment, the heroine’s creativity whenever problem solving abilities are required. She has, hence, encountered, “Crusoean situations,” which are “circumstances where [people] must rely on their own ingenuity, skills, and imagination to solve a problem or find their way out of a predicament” (Cohen, 2016, p. 42). The

unfamiliarity of the setting, with all the risks it entails, combined with the fact that she is, perhaps, the only human being on the entire earth, might be confusing and daunting enough that a ‘simple’ task such as finding water, which might have been a non-event in another context, would represent a nightmare. Her skills, with so many life saving hacks, have been displayed when she revealed the utterly resourceful strategies she has deployed, depending on the available means, to supply herself with water; she has stated, in this respect, that she has utilised the “tannin-dark streams chattering downhill, a rain barrel, the clear top half of a silted animal trough,” (Hale, 2019, p. 26) which yielded, from time to time, the needed quantities for survival. What might be astounding, to Hale’s readers, is Monster’s following claim, “[o]nce, when my reserves [of water] are low, I manage to squeeze a few precious drops from the moss clinging to an old wall” (Ibid); this trick highlights the extent to which her horizons have been widened in terms of exploiting her acumen to solve daily problems.

Crusoe’s compelling legacy in *My Name Is Monster* could, moreover, be spotted in the heroine’s ability to settle in a convenient place, wrestle with ‘wilderness,’ and keep track of time through a calendar. First of all, castaways like Crusoe and Monster, despite standing at different ends of the continuum, with bleak horizons at sight, have had the capacity, after the initial despair they have experienced, to accept their present plight. There is one passage in the source text in which the hero points at his “own circle,” (Defoe, 2005, p. 158) the expression he has deployed to signify his major areas of settlement on the island that encompassed “three plantations - viz. [his] castle, [his] country seat [...] and [his] enclosure in the woods” (Ibid). These three places, with their strategic locations, have had the function of bases from which Crusoe has orchestrated his exploratory expeditions,

organised his fortifications, and exercised, to cut it short, his all-control over the whole territory of the island. Despite the immensity of the world, peopled by a single individual, Monster has managed, in the same fashion as Crusoe, to discover a site, a farmhouse, that would suit her survival designs. She has selected, thereby, this slightly secluded space, away from the dangers of the crumbling adjacent and unnamed city, as the basis for her daily activities ranging from cultivating land, raising chickens, planting trees, collecting snails to going into planned errands to the city for the purpose of scavenging. The narrator has been delighted with the cosiness she has to enjoy in her new settlement and made it conspicuous that settling in that place is, perhaps, one of the best, if not the best, decisions she has taken in a while; after having some food and water, she could not refrain herself from asserting the following, “[t]he farmhouse curls around me, still and protective, like a reward for choosing safety over the city” (Hale, 2019, p. 31). The much needed safety and reassurance, the castaways have at the onset lost, are concomitant, both in Monster’s and Crusoe’s tribulations, with settling down, which in turn consolidates not only their survival, but also their subsequent presence all over the island with so many prosperous activities.

There is, in the second position, the main character’s constant struggle with ‘wilderness’ which is a stylized feature Hale has transplanted into her text from Defoe’s story. The latter has had this motif, in addition to many gripping others, as one of the key elements that has sparked, across centuries, the imagination of children and adults alike and ignited, likewise, readers’ interest in, curiosity about and even wildest fantasies related to the literary genre known as the robinsonade. The reader of Hale’s narrative, if familiar with *Robinson Crusoe*, might pinpoint a Crusoe-like tendency to do

whatever it requires to fight against ‘wilderness’ with the dual purpose, in mind, of either taming it, vanquishing hence over it, or surviving against its harsh background by braving the dangers it often entails. The scene which portrays this fierce struggle, for one’s life, occurs at one point, when, in the middle of nowhere, Monster has been attacked by a pack of wolf-like-dogs. Once the pack in an attacking formation, she has done her best to dodge and scare the hungry creatures, but in vain and all she felt is the “pain in [her] left calf like a nail gun [as one of the animal’s] teeth stuck through [her] trousers” (Hale, 2019, p. 24); she has had, in the course of this unbalanced ‘combat,’ to wage one of the fiercest battles, on her own and without arms, against the starving animals with the sole idea of staying alive as the only valid option. The moment Monster settles in the farmhouse, another battle begins with the desire to tame her surrounding environment. Reference, in this respect, has to be made to the coming passage, imbued with the heritage of Defoe’s tale, where the reader of Hale’s story might, at the stylistic dimension, detect the same kind of choppy, but quite practical sentences which render the castaway’s daily chores and struggle against nature an easy undertaking. The narrator stated, with booming optimism, the coming,

I can build more of a home at the farmhouse. I fix up the outside toilet so it is easy for me to clean out. I cobble together a new table, and pull the least mildewed of the armchairs into the kitchen so I can sit by the fire. I dig up more of the field behind the house, to prepare it for planting. I construct a log store [...] My hens begin to lay. (Hale, 2019, p. 38)

The above sentences portray, with surgical precision, the kind of life, full of what might seem an incessant fight against ‘wilderness,’ the heroine has had to lead in order to tame nature and make her survival a reachable target. The executed tasks, in these quoted words, are not only necessary, but also pivotal in two-folds: they provide the heroine, on the one hand, with or prepare for her the needed grounds for subsistence which in itself is satisfactory; on the other hand, similar to Crusoe’s hectic schedule, they maintain her in a balanced mental state which, in a post-apocalyptic world, is vital for her sanity.

The third aspect, at this level, which could be traced back to Defoe’s account, is the reliance of the castaway on a calendar, at various stages of her solitary sojourn, to both monitor and develop a consciousness of time. The reader of *My Name Is Monster* might recall, from time to time, the square wooden post Crusoe has used to “cut every day a notch with [his] knife [...] and thus [he] kept [his] calendar” (Defoe, 2005, p. 59) which is an effective method, though somewhat a primitive one. Back into the days, when she was in a self-imposed confinement in Svalbard, the heroine asserted, “[t]he days are tallied on the concrete wall of the vault, thirty-eight of them scratched with a bent iron nail in five-bar gates” (Hale, 2019, p. 50); she has explained, through these words, the exact method, she has deployed, to count the amount of time it precisely took for the human race to be extinct once the catastrophe started. The least one might say is that the similarity of Monster’s way of staying synchronised with time, if juxtaposed to that Crusoe has used, is striking. The calendar, despite its seeming vanity, in both Crusoe’s and Monster’s dilemmas, who have had all time for themselves, has the symbolic function of connecting the castaways to a past lost realm which is the civilised world where time is/was a treasured currency.

Above all, to the reader familiar with Crusoe's errands, and who is well equipped in literary criticism, there is in mind, in advance, the probability that Monster is not the only survivor, the aspect which would relentlessly summon into imagination Defoe's Friday. It has to be spotlighted, in this regards, that the latter is not only necessary to Crusoe's ordeal but also vital to his final accomplishment as a 'comprehensive' and independent human being, by himself and for himself, due to the fact that he "is able to reinforce [his] sense of himself when he 'acquires' Friday and determines that [he] is the [...]Other to him" (Nayar, 2015, p. 07). This might render, to any critic, Friday's presence, or another stylized figure like him, for that matter, an eminent or even an obvious occurrence since he is expected, to make his entrance into Hale's novel, at any moment. This is, in accordance with my expectations, what has occurred when, as the first part was drawing to its end, a new female character is discovered by the heroine in the ruins of the nearby city. This Friday-like figure is, in fact, a child and though the native in Defoe's novel is an adult, there is ground enough upon which an association of the two, that is to say, the female child and Friday, would rest. Crusoe has voiced his patronising and paternalist vision towards the 'other,' on a regular basis, by not fortuitously asserting that Friday's "very affections were tied to [him], like those of a child to a father" (Defoe, 2005, p. 196); in Crusoe's psyche, with his colonialist-imbued-worldview, the native is nothing, but a child who needs his 'benevolence,' 'care' and 'watchful eye' to 'guide' him, whenever the time is ripe, in order to render him a 'better' human being carved after the coloniser's model. These are the pillars, though not the only ones, upon which the possible connexion, to be drawn, between Hale's young female character and Defoe's Friday would stand.

The initial encounter between the two female entities, in Hale's text, though at a cursory glance has nothing to do with Defoe's eighteenth century masterpiece, is reminiscent, upon meticulous analysis, of the instant when Crusoe and Friday came, for the first time, into contact. Thenceforth, the narrator's 'superior' stance and paternalist worldview, the same way it has happened with Crusoe, in the source, has come to the forefront with the heroine wielding language and whatever, thought of, necessary with the sole resolution of bestowing the 'benefits' of the 'civilising mission' on the 'inferior' other. The background of this newcomer to the tale, similar to the original, has neither been of a great significance to the heroine, nor has it constituted, to her, a problematic starting point to reckon with; her words, the little girl "is lost and alone [...] I can help her. I can teach her language, and I can teach her survival. I can fix her" (Hale, 2019, p. 44) are egotistical, self-congratulatory and, to a high degree, revelatory of her intentions at imparting her 'dominant' standards upon the other. Now, the urgent inquiries, one might grapple and be overpowered with are bound to the young female figure's life prior to having her path intersected with the heroine's. Has not she already survived long enough, without anybody's help, in a world where human beings are nowhere to be sighted? Does not this constitute a tangible proof that she has had, even before the protagonist's arrival into her life, ample skills, knowledge and acumen when it comes to subsistence? Then why is the narrator referring to 'teaching,' 'helping' and 'fixing' someone who has, hitherto, proven her worth? This condescending vision, akin to arrogance, Hale's heroine, has evinced, the same mentality Crusoe has exhibited, springs from a self-centred colonialist mindset that has positioned her, beforehand, as the 'enlightened' self whose 'kernel' 'intent' in life is to 'enlighten' 'the other'.

The opening move, as in the source text, through which the heroine has set the civilising process in action, is the appeal to language in order to fashion, shape and even control the castaways' perception of truth, falsehood, right, wrong, good, bad and, all in all, monitor that entire world through a wide range spectrum of dualities. In the customary approach of high time colonialists, Crusoe not exempt, she has deployed, to this end, the strategy of 'naming'; the narrator has, accordingly, called herself "mother" (Hale, 2019, p. 44) and taught the young girl that her name is "monster" (Ibid., p. 46). The remodelling of the world, herein, is striking with the heroine carving a name, which used to be hers, as a clad for the girl's identity without bothering oneself, in Crusoe's way of doing things, to at least try to fathom whether she ever possessed a name of her own before their encounter. The narrator has given herself the right to name the 'other' claiming "I have decided to call her Monster" (Ibid), the same manner Crusoe took the decision to call the native "Friday" as a reference to "the day [he] saved his life" (Defoe, 2005, p. 194). Hale's Crusoe-like figure, armed with language, at her disposition, and without anybody to contest her worldview, has endorsed her civilising mission making it her duty to mentor young Monster in the needed linguistic skills. Crusoe's 'benevolence,' paternalism and tight supervision, when instructing Friday, have been stylized and could, thereby, be observed with the narrator's approach towards instructing the little girl in vocabulary; with these declarations, first of all, "[s]o I help her fill in all the spaces of this limited world, give her words for everything within it. I need to teach her until I cannot tell where I end and where Monster begins" (Hale, 2019, p. 48) and "I help her to understand the small sphere of her existence, and she grows quick and wiry under my care," (Ibid., p. 51) in the second position, Hale's heroine has been

some sort of a Crusoe, at the end of the world, who strives to control the foreigner's scope of seeing things and carve, likewise, an extension of herself rendering the 'other' a mere shadow devoid of essence. The above words, the narrator appealed to, are of egregious violence with the condescending treatment, haughty attitude and colonialist purport they have brandished in relation to the 'Friday-like' 'other'. It is noteworthy, that the approach, Hale's protagonist has endorsed, to instructing the latter in terms of language follows a similar pattern to that Crusoe has relied upon with the native treated like a child on whom an adequate pedagogy ought to be implemented. The following assertion, "I cannot find any vestiges of language in her [...]. So we start with everyday objects: chair, pan, water, chicken, bed, hammer, nails, saw, wood, spade" (Hale, 2019, p. 48), are not, by any means, surprising if looked upon from Crusoe's colonialist scope.

Like Crusoe's endeavour, the heroine's 'benevolence,' in a stark stylization of Defoe's masterpiece, extends beyond linguistic grounds, in an attempt to remodel the 'other,' towards making the little girl 'useful' and 'imparting,' as such, upon her 'Western' values. Defoe's protagonist has, for the sake of exactitude, instructed Friday with a jargon and introduced him to skills via which he would, at the end, be productive and helpful to the coloniser; such a claim, the hero has fostered, that he "made it [his] business to teach him [Friday] everything that was proper to make him useful, handy, and helpful," (Defoe, 2005, p. 197) is, therefore, the fruit of this colonialist approach which is imbued with a practical sense, to be instilled, whenever dealing with the native is required. The reader might detect this very same undertone, at the level of *My Name Is Monster*, with Hale's narrator stating, "I teach her how to fetch water from the stream and how to plant vegetables in the field, and her vocabulary expands to verbs: pour, boil, dig, sow, work.

She learns quickly” (Hale, 2019, p. 48); the imperative mood connoted in these verbs, employed without full sentences, is both conspicuous and even harassing to a twenty-first century reader since they entail kneading the ‘other’ into servitude. The same conclusion might be drawn with another instance as the heroine confirms, “I teach her [young Monster] how to stoke the fire, how to use book pages to make the embers catch and avoid wasting precious matches” (Ibid., p. 51); these mundane tasks, which represent a daily reality to the castaway, have to be performed, if someone like Crusoe wants to be the master, by another entity, the ‘other,’ held to be ‘inferior’.

The narrator has, moreover, lectured the Friday-like girl, in terms of western cultural standards, which are elevated to being the reference, on various topics ranging from ownership, and body hygiene, to eating mannerism and politeness. After all the measures taken, at different scales, to teach the ‘other,’ and enact the civilising process, the heroine has judged, out of her own whims, that those efforts are not sufficient; which is why, she has claimed, “I decide that Monster needs to become more civilised” (Hale, 2019, p. 53). She is the ‘dominant’ entity, whose ‘superiority’ is conferred upon her by her status as the holder of ‘civilisation’; hence, taking such a decision, with the risk that it might backfire, is not only her prerogative but also a ‘moral’ duty to be fulfilled against all odds. She taught, first of all, young “Monster about possession” (Ibid., p. 51) as one of the most effective tactics of altering her identity while simultaneously delineating her sense of ‘self’ within new boundaries not to be transgressed. She has, then, made it her duty, with the zeal of high time colonial agents, to instruct the girl in relation to taking care of her hygiene; afterwards, she introduced her into the cutlery to be used while having one’s food. Because she is engaged in the promulgation of civilisation, the heroine has appealed to a more authoritative method to

restore discipline; likewise, she is not ashamed, if compelled, to resort to violence, like any coloniser, whenever the cultural norms are not met. She has affirmed, in this direction, that in case the ‘other’ “objects to my washing her hair, I slap her leg and upend the jug of water over her,” and if “she tries to dig straight into her meal with her hands, I take away the food until she complies” (Hale, 2019, p. 53). Hale’s Friday-like figure, whose identity is being reshaped, to a high degree, all along the story, to fit into the overarching power’s codes of conduct and norms, has even acquired politeness from her Crusoe-like mentor who ‘infused’ her with the ‘civilised’ speech patterns.

Once the only survivor on the island, Crusoe’s top-of-the-list obsession, to be back to the source text, is the apprehension of sinking, out of the potential scarcity of food, into savagery becoming, therefore, one of those ‘barbarians,’ he so much dreaded. The prospect of getting constrained, out of necessity, to ‘devour’ one’s food uncooked, using his nails to tear parcels of raw meat, seems quite real and even eminent that he has been petrified by the idea of forsaking his ‘civilised’ values and conventions. The protagonist has contemplated, with revulsion, the scene of him being a survivor deprived of tools asserting, that he “should have lived [...] like a mere savage; that if [he] had killed a goat or a fowl [...] [he] had no way to flay or open it, or part the flesh from the skin and the bowels, or to cut it up; but must gnaw it with [his] teeth, and pull it with [his] claws, like a beast” (Defoe, 2005, p. 123). The coming of Friday on the island has served as a background upon which the hero has projected this horrifying outlook the reason for which he has taken the burden of subduing, in him, any signs of savage cravings. Hale’s heroine, though at a different matrix, has reckoned with a similar predicament the moment she endorsed the civilising mission towards the

little girl; she has, equally, inclined towards suppressing whatever sediments of barbarous proclivities, in her, for a full enforcement of civilisation's standards. There is a prominent example of the two female figures who, while roaming in the ruins of the city, have found wolves and wild dogs lacerating an animal's carcass; young Monster has meddled with these beasts and wrenched from them a parcel of meat and "lifts it to her mouth" (Hale, 2019, p. 47). The narrator, outraged by the savagery of the act, has screamed, "Stop it!"; then, she "snatch[ed] it away [rebuking her] 'You can't eat that — it hasn't been cooked'" (Ibid). The reader might see that, on a later occasion, the heroine has adopted teaching by example, as a method, when she cooked, once in the farm, parcels of meat so that the 'civilised' Monster would never ever have the urge to 'devour' raw morsels.

The failure of the civilising process, fostered towards their respective 'Fridays,' in which both Crusoe and the heroine got immersed, would have had disastrous effects wasting their efforts in vain, on the one hand, and would have been a clear indication, on the other, of their civilisation's lack of its alleged 'superiority' when faced by the 'other'. The civilising mission in both Defoe's and Hale's texts is, thereby, a success marking, in this way, the victory of the coloniser's 'civilised' world over the barbarians. In the original, Crusoe has not encountered any difficulty, at whatever proportions, in the course of trying to metamorphose the native's habits; his 'superiority' over Friday, in Defoe's literary realm, is apparent since the latter has aligned, on multiple junctures, with his master's worldview. Young Monster, in Hale's text, has also been shaped by the heroine who has altered not only her behavioural patterns but also her entire mindset. The narrator has, in one episode, confirmed that the young girl "starts to learn, till she [rejects the savage modes of conduct], as if she's forgotten a time before they were ever a

part of her life. Over the months, I see the animal in her drop away” (Hale, 2019, p. 53). The last sentence, I have italicised on purpose, for the sake of emphasis, is a perspicuous indication of the victory of the civilising mission the heroine undertook. She has succeeded, likewise, in the process of taming the ‘other,’ the same way Crusoe triumphed, three centuries earlier, with his designs, of carving out of Friday a carbon copy, accomplished. There is another passage, which might be read as the heroine’s proclamation of victory, where she affirmed, “I have teased out and discarded all the feral parts of her — how even when they surface [...] I can turn her away from them” (Ibid., p. 61). Beyond the self-congratulatory purport, these words entail, there is the narrator’s marked ‘superiority’ in action, giving her, this way, the ability to materialise, via the little girl’s acquiescence, the ascendance of her civilisation’s norms. Thus, no matter how strong nature’s urges are, the ‘civilised’ heroine, in Crusoe’s fashion, would ‘tame’ them spreading, accordingly, ‘higher’ standards of life.

5-Conclusion

The release of *My Name Is Monster*, a post-apocalyptic contemporary remoulding of its three centuries old source text (1719-2019), with the Corona-virus-pandemic raging, is substantiation enough of the timelessness of *Robinson Crusoe* which upheld Defoe’s lasting legacy, perhaps, longer than what the English novelist would have ever envisioned. Hale has been inspired, at the incipient stage, by the eighteenth century masterpiece, the aspect that has allowed her to stylize the Crusoe story, at myriad layers, sustaining the eternal struggle of the human being versus nature, the tale’s kernel, while inflecting it towards a post-apocalyptic setting. The centrality of the castaways’ daily struggle for survival in both novels, despite navigating the intricacies of different contexts and standing at two extreme ends of the

pole, is not something to be understated. Hale's heroine has been, on a constant basis, pressured to fight for subsistence in an environment, to put it no less stronger, the hostility of which is unequivocal. The narrator has taken the reader in a journey during which the only things that mattered, like food, water and shelter, are not at her disposal everywhere with abundance; she has, as a result, to persist in giving her utmost, the way Crusoe did, to have access to these resources. The shipwreck, the island and the wreck of the ship, in the penultimate position, are significant, if not vital motifs, which have been stylized, from the source, to resonate with third millennium readers. The three motifs, common to both novels, are not fortuitous in the castaways' accounts since they have the purpose of driving, at various stages, the story forwards. There is, finally, in *My Name Is Monster*, the stylization of Crusoe and Friday whom the contemporary author has recast as the heroine and the young girl. Hale's two female figures have a wide range of similarities which could trace their genealogy to Defoe's white man and his native servant.

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