

Robinson Crusoe, 'The Other' and the Poetics of Surprise¹

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Textual Surprise: Some Basic Observations

I would like to present a few interesting and surprising episodes of encounter between Robinson Crusoe and 'the other' in Defoe's story. While discussing these episodes, I will also suggest some principles and possibilities characterizing the poetics of surprise in literature in general and in narrative fiction in particular. The element of surprise in Defoe's novel should of course not astonish us, because the very title promises surprising elements: *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner etc.*² Some of these promised surprises occur, as can be expected of a story of adventures, on the level of the action, the plot. Others, however, may occur on a deeper, conceptual and ideological level. Note that these two types are not mutually exclusive—the latter may be due to an outer event, but the surprising effect goes far beyond questions typical of 'surprising adventures.'

Before analyzing these episodes, a few clarifications of the notion of surprise are in order. It is useful, first, to place surprise in the multifaceted and dynamic spectrum of textual effects stemming from the temporal nature of the literary text. In his systematic discussion of different strategies for unfolding narrative information, Sternberg proposes some useful distinctions: *Curiosity* is evoked wherever a relevant piece of information of the story's chronological past (or 'exposition') is felt to be missing by the reader (e.g. the 'Whodunit' of a classical detective story); *suspense* occurs when the reader desires to know a piece of information belonging to the story's chronological future (e.g. will Polyphemos devour Odysseus; will King Kong de-

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your the young woman?). Both of these effects rely on the perceptibility of the missing and desired information at a specific point in the reading process; the reader senses that in order to construe a coherent story, an information *gap* is to be filled in, and this missing piece is either part of the past or the future of the reconstructed chronological sequence of events, i.e. of the story's *fabula* (vs. its *sujet*).³ But there are cases where the gap is not felt to be missing by the reader and he/she realizes that it was there only *in retrospect*; in such cases the reader experiences a *surprise* (e.g. we are surprised when the narrator tells us that a Martian opened the door, because we were not told earlier that the fictive world is inhabited with extra-terrestrial creatures). Note that the information of such 'retrospective gaps' belongs to the story's past. Thus, by using two criteria—(1) does the missing relevant information belong to the past or to the future of the story line, and (2) is the missing information felt to be missing by the reader—Sternberg is able to distinguish elegantly between three major textual effects—curiosity, suspense and surprise:

[the difference] between curiosity and suspense relates to the chronological direction of the missing and desired information (narrative past versus future); while that between curiosity and surprise relates to the perceptibility of the process of gapping and gap-filling. With "curiosity gaps," the reader is at once alerted to the deformation of antecedents; with "surprise gaps," in contrast, his awareness of the gap's very existence and/or relevance and/or true significance is retrospective, being delayed to the point of closure rather than heightened at the point of opening.⁴

Let us now elaborate a bit on the nature of the 'retrospective' surprising effect. First, it is important to note that it is a relational concept, i.e., someone is surprised only with reference to a specific set of expectations. Given one set of expectations, a textual unit (an event or a semantic unit or a word or even a sound) may be integrated in the text continuum as a 'natural,' 'expected' consequence, but in another context will be labeled 'a surprise.' Note also that in order to be perceived as a surprise, it is not sufficient for this textual unit simply not to follow from the set of established expectations. It should stand in contrast to what are regarded as the essential characteristics of the

previously established frame. If we know a character in a novel to be a villain, it is expected of him to perform evil acts. If the novelist decides to describe this villain in a domestic situation, it does not necessarily mean that we will be surprised, because this does not contradict the essential traits of the character. If, however, this villain suddenly performs an act of charity, it will be a surprise, because charitable acts are not compatible with being 'a villain.'

The more strongly an organizing principle has been established in a text, and the stronger the clash between what we perceive to be its essential elements and the ensuing textual unit, the stronger will be the effect of surprise. Thus, the concept of textual surprise is, first, a relational one: no element or pattern in and of itself is 'surprising.' We may be surprised if at the beginning of what seems to be a realistic novel, an animal starts to talk—because at that point we assume that the fictive world is organized according to realistic, life-like principles. But if another animal responds to the first talking animal, our sense of surprise will lessen, we will start looking for a generic framework that can accommodate such events (e.g. a fairy tale or a fantastic story), and our set of expectations will consequently change. To take this argument a step further, in some cases of fantastic tales—rare perhaps but still significant—the occurrence of 'normal,' 'life-like' events may be perceived as surprising.⁵

In a complementary manner, there is no specific element or pattern that necessarily blocks the surprising effect. Repetition may be considered a serious candidate for serving as an "anti-surprise" pattern. And indeed repetitions usually increase our sense of the known, the familiar and hence decrease the possibility of surprise. Still, even repetitions are not guarantors against the surprising effect, especially when they occur in places where sheer continuity is expected, where sheer continuity is expected, where sheer continuity is expected

In addition to its relational nature, the surprising effect is of course gradated. One can speak of degrees of surprise: moving from a 'zero degree' (the occurrence of an expected element, entailed by the previous text), to a moderate surprise and ending up with an utter surprise or 'a shock.'

From its relational and gradated nature, it is clear that textual surprise can be manifested in innumerable ways, depending on the chosen genre: an adventure story full of dramatic turns in the plot (e.g. *Robinson Crusoe*), a detective story that surprises us in the disclosure of the specific identity of the murderer (e.g. Agatha Christie's classical stories), a lyrical novella ending with an unexpected psychological epiphany experienced by the major character (e.g. Joyce's "The Dead"), avant-garde literature attempting to *épater la bourgeoisie* by deviating from established aesthetic norms (e.g. Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*).

The surprising effect may occur in different layers of the literary text: sound patterns, semantics, character, plot, implied ideology. In short lyrical poems, surprises may occur on the sound level as a clash between the prosodic pattern that has been established up to that point in the text continuum, and a specific sound. If in the first quatrain of a sonnet we detect a rhyming scheme of a-b-b-a, we will expect the next quatrain to have another a-b-b-a. If, however, we encounter c-d-d-c, this may not conform to our initial expectation, but will not be a great surprise—because it still conforms, on a higher level of abstraction, to the rhyming scheme of an Italian sonnet. But if we find in the second quatrain a scheme of c-d-c-d, we will be a bit taken aback—because this rhyming scheme is associated with the Shakespearean sonnet. Or, to take a stronger example, if throughout the first eleven lines of a poem we have a recurring rhyming scheme of a-b-a-b etc., we would be surprised if the twelfth line did not conclude with b rhyme.⁶ The reader may also be surprised on the level of meter (e.g. iambic pentameter suddenly changing into a dactylic line) or on that of the expressive import of sounds (e.g. expressive 'soft' sounds replaced by 'hard' ones).⁷ Figurative language in poetry may also be a rich source of surprises: e.g. the unexpected juxtaposition of two incongruent semantic fields, 'yoked by violence together' in the conceits of the metaphysical poets and in a great part of modernist poetry.⁸

There is, however, one significant difference between texts that construct a fictive world with life-like characters and events, and texts that do not, like many short lyrical poems, vis-à-vis the surprising effect. Whereas in lyrical poems surprises, as a rule, occur only on the level of the reader's response (in his/her attempt to integrate prosodic and semantic units), in a work of fiction the surprising effect may occur on two levels, that of the reader's response, and also that of the fictive world: it is not only the reader who may be surprised, but very often a character is caught by surprise. The ubiquity of surprise in the world of the novel has been lucidly described by Sternberg, using *Pride and Prejudice* as an example:

Surprise, a related symptom of lack of information or mistaken conception, is [...] one of the key-phenomena in the novel, just as the word "surprise" (with its synonyms) is one of its key-words. Characters are surprised on almost every page, sometimes owing to their peculiar deficiencies and sometimes in the company of others (not excluding the reader), sometimes more and sometimes less justifiably, sometimes by trivial and sometimes by momentous discoveries, the latter simultaneously evoking deeper feelings as well, such as joy, alarm, or regret.⁹

It is important to note that the two levels of surprise—reader's and character's responses—do not necessarily overlap. There are cases where a character is surprised while the reader is not, because he/she already possesses the relevant information that the character lacks. When My Man Friday witnesses for the first time in his life the use of a gun by Crusoe, during the scene of his rescue, he is shocked: "that which astonish'd him most, was to know how I had kill'd the other Indian so far off, so pointing to him, he made Signs to me to let him go to him, so I bad him go, as well as I could; when he came to him, he stood like one amaz'd" (148). The reader, who of course knows how a gun works, is, unlike Friday, neither astonished nor amazed.

There are cases where both character and reader are surprised. Perhaps the most dramatic such moment in *Robinson Crusoe* occurs when Crusoe discovers a footprint on his uninhabited island:

It happen'd one Day about Noon going towards my Boat, I was exceedingly surpriz'd with the Print of a Man's naked Foot on the Shore, which was very plain to be seen in the Sand: I stood like one Thunder-struck, or as if I had seen an Apparition. (112)

The reader may not share the depth of Crusoe's shock, but he/she, like the character, is certainly utterly surprised and shares the need for finding a plausible explanation for the mysterious phenomenon. For Crusoe the effect of surprise quickly turns into deep anxiety. He tells us that it is difficult to describe "how many various Shapes affrighted Imagination represented Things to me in, how many wild Ideas were found every Moment in my Fancy, and what strange unaccountable Whimsies came into my Thoughts by the Way" (112). At one point his turbulent mind fancies it

must be the Devil; and Reason joyn'd in with me upon this Supposition: For how should any other Thing in human Shape come into the Place? Where was the Vessel that brought them? What Marks was there of any other Foot-steps! And how was it possible a Man should come there? (112)

When Crusoe ruminates about the possibility that the Devil is responsible for the footprint, the reader—adhering to realistic principles of explanation and less emotionally involved in the situation—distances him/her self from Crusoe. Still, despite the frenzy that overcomes Crusoe's mind at that point, it is interesting to note how he still follows the rational logic of hypothesis formation in "gap filling," debating various pros and cons for corroborating a feasible explanation of the strange phenomenon. This logic may point to an interesting dynamics characterizing the effect of surprise. In encountering an unexpected element, we—both reader and character—try to form an ad-hoc explanation that will turn the unexpected into the expected; we attempt to eliminate the element of surprise, by constructing, "retrospectively," a coherent (preferably causal) chain of events—into which the surprising element can be integrated. When we succeed in this construction activity, the surprising element ceases (in retrospect) to be surprising. The moment we understand that the footprint was formed by a savage during a visit to the island, its existence is no

longer a mystery. Here one can see the close link between the effects of surprise and curiosity: the surprising effect immediately activates our sense of curiosity, directing our attention to missing relevant information from the narrative past that may account for the present unexplained phenomenon. In that respect, one may describe surprise as a 'retroactive curiosity.'

In the footprint episode both reader and character are surprised (and consequently their curiosity is aroused), and this is not a rare case in the novel. When Crusoe (the character) is surprised, chances are that the reader shares his surprise. It is useful in this context to be reminded of the distinction between Crusoe-the-character and Crusoe-the-narrator. Whereas the former can be surprised, the latter cannot; as a narrator he is privileged, by definition, in possessing all the relevant information of his story from the very first page and hence cannot be surprised by anything he relates. Defoe made Crusoe-the-narrator decide, however, in the greatest part of the book to limit the information he unfolds to the scope of information possessed by Crusoe-the-character.¹⁰ This narratorial decision is the major source for creating surprising effects for the reader. Had Crusoe-the-narrator chosen to give us the relevant information he already possesses, events would no longer be experienced as surprising (e.g. the footprint episode).

We have seen a case where the character's surprise coincides with the reader's surprise, and where the character's surprise is not shared by the reader. What about a case where something happens that surprises the reader, but not the character? Such cases are harder to find in *Robinson Crusoe*, and those that can be found are less dramatic and more subtle than those discussed so far. Still, there are situations where Crusoe does something that surprises the reader to some degree, with no indication that he himself experienced any such effect. When Crusoe and Xury are rescued, the generous Portuguese captain of the rescuing ship offers to buy from Crusoe his boat, and in addition, "he offer'd me also 60 Pieces of Eight more for my Boy *Xury*" (26). Crusoe's immediate reaction is to reject the captain's offer: "I was

very loath to sell the poor Boy's Liberty, who had assisted me so faithfully in procuring my own" (26). Hearing Crusoe's objection, the captain offers a "Medium" (i.e. a compromise): "he would give the Boy an Obligation to set him free in ten Years, if he turn'd Christian" (26). At this point, all of Crusoe's noble thoughts of upholding Xury's liberty evaporate and he takes the offer. I would like to argue that at this point, the reader may be a little surprised at witnessing Crusoe's quick change of mind, but Crusoe himself does not experience any such surprise. There is no indication that Crusoe sensed any discrepancy between his initial reaction and his final decision. Later on, when Crusoe settles in Brazil, he expresses a regret for selling Xury: "and now I found more than before, I had done wrong in parting with my Boy *Xury*" (27), but the reasons for his regrets are by no means moral, but rather practical and economical; Crusoe, together with his neighbor and partner "planted some Tobacco, and made each of us a large Piece of Ground ready for planting Canes in the Year to come; but we both wanted Help" (27). Note that this is not the only time when Crusoe has a sudden change of mind after expressing some high thoughts. The most famous case occurs when, after his rhetoric on the uselessness of the money he found on the shipwreck, calling it "Drug," he adds: "However, upon Second Thoughts, I took it away" (43). In this case it is possible to imagine that Crusoe himself experiences a small surprise (he is surprised by his own change of mind), indicated in the use of "However." But it seems that the reader's surprise is much greater. And Defoe stands behind Crusoe's back, with an ironic smile, inviting us to ponder on his character's true motivations.

The fact that there is no automatic or necessary correspondence between reader's and character's surprise is a rich source of aesthetic and rhetorical effects.¹¹ When a character is surprised, but not the reader (e.g. we know more than Friday does about guns), it is a typical case of what is usually referred to as dramatic irony.¹² When the narrator limits his/her scope of knowledge to that of a character, so that both reader and character are surprised, it goes with the establishment

of close reader-character relations, often enhancing the reader's identification with the character, although it may also be a source of subtle irony towards that character. In fact, such a mixture of identification and subtle irony can often be found in *Robinson Crusoe*.¹³ And, as we saw in the case where Crusoe decides to sell Xury, a narrator could create a momentarily puzzling effect that may lead to an ironic critique of his character.¹⁴

Two Surprising Encounters with 'The Other'

So far, I have outlined some general principles concerning the notion of surprise. Before discussing some further interesting possibilities of the surprising effect, let us turn to two episodes in *Robinson Crusoe* involving the presence of 'the other.' The encounter with "my Man Friday" of course plays a central and important role in the book. But this famous encounter is not the first one where Crusoe meets and cooperates with 'the other.' Throughout the novel, the inhabitants of non-European lands represent for Crusoe a personal existential threat as well as a symbolic threat to Western civilization. Not only does he fear the encounter with savages, but also that he himself would become in his solitude "a meer Savage" (95). The extreme threat is epitomized in the image of the cannibal. This fearsome figure has deep literary roots: the story of Polyphemos in Homer's *Odyssey* establishes a close link between cannibalism and inhospitable, uncivilized attitudes towards foreign visitors.

My first episode is taken from the early stages of the book, before Crusoe lands on 'his' famous uninhabited island. A brief reminder: The voyage that brought Crusoe to the island where he spent twenty-eight years was not his first one. In fact, Crusoe is a serial traveler, and in all these travels he follows a distinct pattern. It begins with an adventurous impulse to leave the middle class English environment, to set sail and look for fortune and adventure. Then he faces some kind of catastrophe (created by nature or man) that forces him to

repent his Devil-propelled impulse. His remorse, however, has a very short life span. The moment he recuperates from the catastrophe, he starts planning the next round.

In one of his first voyages out of England, Crusoe is captured by pirates and sold as a slave to the Moors. After two years in captivity, he succeeds in escaping on a small boat and sails near the African shoreline, accompanied by Xury, a Moorish boy (a short prelude to his relationship with Friday). They have to go on shore for water and food, but they are constantly fearful of a twofold danger: wild beasts and savages. First, they see “vast great Creatures [...] of many sorts [...] and they made such hideous Howlings and Yellings, that I never indeed heard the like” (20). The idea of going on shore at night is dismissed because they are afraid of becoming the food of such creatures. The alternative—going on shore in daylight—seems as menacing, “for to have fallen into the Hands of any of the Savages, had been as bad as to have fallen into the Hands of Lyons and Tygers” (20). When they discuss the possibility of going on shore to fetch water, Xury suggests, as a faithful servant, that he, and not Crusoe, would go. Crusoe asks why he would do that and Xury’s answer is— “*If wild Mans come, they eat me, you go wey*” (20).

Finally, after they have exhausted their supplies, the moment of truth of an actual encounter with the savages approaches. But just before this meeting takes place, Crusoe describes a frightening encounter with a lion. In one of their landings on shore to get some water, they perceive “a dreadful Monster” (22). It is a sleeping lion, and they decide to kill him. Crusoe takes aim, shoots at the lion, but does not kill him immediately. The injured beast “gave the most hideous Roar that ever I heard.” Only after a second and a third shot does the lion die. When they first perceive the lion, Crusoe suggests that Xury kill him and the latter’s first reaction is “*Me kill! he eat me at one Mouth*” (22). This encounter with the lion undoubtedly evokes afresh the characters’, and our, apprehensions about the coming encounter with the savages.

When they perceive the land to be inhabited, the first thing Crusoe notes is that the men on the shore "were quite Black and Stark-naked" (23). The stage is set for the realization of their worst nightmares. At this point, both Crusoe and Xury share similar fears. So they keep at a distance and start to communicate with the savages by signs. And here, lo and behold, the savages seem to respond with good will and even bring "Pieces of dry Flesh and some Corn" (23) to the beach. Now Crusoe and Xury are caught between their deeply entrenched fears and their urgent need to fetch the provisions. And another surprise: Crusoe and Xury are not the only frightened people around: "I was not for venturing on Shore to them, and they were as much afraid of us" (23). And there comes yet another surprise. The way-out of the standoff is offered by the savages: "they took a safe way for us all, for they brought it to the Shore and laid it down, and went and stood a great way off till we fetch'd it on Board, and then came close to us again" (23).

Crusoe's greatest fears are exposed in a subtly ironic light: instead of devouring them, these black, stark-naked savages give them food; instead of eating them alive, they provide them with aliments. And, while doing so, the savages even show tact and inventiveness by finding the way to supply the goods without making direct contact. Both the characters and the reader are surprised by the savages' benevolent and virtuous conduct. Does this make Crusoe re-consider his prejudices concerning savage people? Well, not necessarily. It does, however, make *us* aware of such prejudices permeating Western culture. Note that the surprising effect that the two characters (Crusoe and Xury) and the reader experience occurs on the outer level of the plot but evokes unexpected questions (about racial and cultural prejudices) on a deeper, ideological level.

The other episode I would like to focus on takes place on Crusoe's uninhabited island, with 'his' man Friday. Crusoe's attitude towards Friday is fundamentally instrumental. During the dramatic scene of Friday's rescue from the hands (and mouths!) of his enemies, Crusoe is torn between fear and hope. The argument that seems to tip the

scale is his need for a servant: “It came now very warmly upon my Thoughts, and indeed irresistibly [sic], that now was my Time to get me a Servant, and perhaps a Companion, or Assistant” (146). Note how the word “companion” is hidden between the other two nouns—servant and assistant—and is qualified by the hesitant “perhaps.”

After Crusoe has been teaching Friday a basic English vocabulary, necessary for communicating to him the Master’s needs so that Friday may duly perform his duties, he moves to a different layer of instruction. Crusoe decides to play the role of a missionary and to instruct Friday in “the Knowledge of the true God” (156). First, he explains to him the notion of an almighty God, and Friday seems to be able to grasp this notion, perhaps because there are some striking similarities between Christian practices and beliefs and those of the savages. The unexpected analogy created between the savages’ ‘ridiculous’ and ‘primitive’ beliefs and practices and those of ‘elevated’ and ‘true’ Christianity, notably the Catholic Church, has clear satirical implications. In both religious systems, for example, there is a cast of priests who are in charge of relations with divinity and use unintelligible prayers to promote their social hegemony.

While Friday is capable of grasping the concept of God, he experiences some difficulties in understanding the concept of the Devil: “I found it was not so easie to imprint right Notions in his Mind about the Devil, as it was about the Being of a God” (157). When describing to Friday the enmity between God and the Devil, and how the latter uses his skill “to defeat the good Designs of Providence, and to ruine the Kingdom of Christ in the World,” Crusoe is interrupted by a question from Friday, and the following dialogue ensues:

but you say, God is so strong, so great, is he not much strong, much might as the Devil? Yes, yes, says I, *Friday*, God is stronger than the Devil, God is above the Devil, and therefore we pray to God to tread him down under our Feet, and enable us to resist his Temptations and quench his fiery Darts. (157-58)

So far, Crusoe seems to be perfectly capable of responding to Friday’s query by using his received ideas. But Friday is not satisfied

with these common beliefs and asks: "*if God much strong, much might as the Devil, why God no kill the Devil, so make him no more do wicked?*" (158).

This simple but troubling question seems to take Crusoe off balance, and he comments that he "was strangely surpriz'd" (158) by it. Note how Crusoe echoes here the phrase from the book's title "Strange [and] Surprising Adventures." At this point, Crusoe's behavior takes some comical turns. First, he tries to find excuses for his inability to come up with a convincing answer: "and after all, tho' I was now an old Man, yet I was but a young Doctor, and ill enough quallified for a Casuist, or a Solver of Difficulties" (158). Then he retreats to the oldest trick in the world for gaining time:¹⁵ "And at first I could not tell what to say, so I pretended not to hear him, and ask'd him what he said?" (158). Crusoe's trick however does not work. Friday "was too earnest for an Answer to forget his Question; so that he repeated it in the very same broken Words, as above" (158).

Friday's funny broken language does not conceal the seriousness of his deep theological doubt. Every religion that postulates the existence of an almighty and benevolent God *and* of a Devil has to struggle with Friday's question (as the book of Job has already shown¹⁶). And, to the best of my knowledge, there is still no simple and satisfying answer to that question.

After elaborating a few more important aspects of Christian doctrine—Judgment Day, Repentance and Pardon—Crusoe despairs of conveying to Friday the true faith. Instead of pursuing the dialogue, he simply withdraws, using the excuse of having important errands to do: "I therefore diverted the present Discourse between me and my Man, rising up hastily, as upon some sudden Occasion of going out; then sending him for something a good way off" (158). The amateurish Christian "Doctor" facing some difficult and bewildering questions has opted for the easy way out. And this embarrassment is caused by Friday, a savage, an ex-cannibal who does not even speak English correctly.

Note that Defoe himself may hold the specific Christian beliefs that Crusoe propounds to Friday. But at the same time, he makes us aware

that these beliefs are not necessarily based on nature or reason. And, what is even more striking, Crusoe's enormous surprise as he faces Friday's questions shows him, and the reader, that the light of reason can be found in the heart of darkness; that to be born black and raised in a cannibal society does not make one a beast-like creature. In some ways, such a savage, equipped with reason and an innocent eye, can call into question some of the deepest beliefs of Western civilization.

Defoe, unlike Rousseau for instance, does not reject Western civilization as fundamentally corrupt.¹⁷ As we may recall, Robinson Crusoe's story is, among other things, a eulogy of civilization, especially its technical aspects. At the same time Defoe foreshadows some aspects of post-colonial critique of Euro-centric prejudices and perceptions of the world.

Further Observations on the Poetics of Surprise

Before concluding, and in light of the episodes discussed above, I would like to propose another important distinction in the poetics of surprise. In addition to the two general characteristics outlined at the beginning of this article—its relational and graduated nature—the surprising effect may be part of two overall different rhetorical and cognitive schemes. On the one hand, it may be a part of a general structure that reaffirms stability, creating a temporary de-stabilizing effect that ultimately serves a harmonizing structure. The footprint episode may illustrate this possibility: the utter surprise evoked by the unexplained phenomenon is later replaced by a satisfactory explanation. This type is also evident in many endings of the older school of detective stories: the specific answer to the question of "Whodunit" may at first startle us; the writer has planted many false clues throughout the story, diverting our attention from the real suspect, so that when the unexpected solution is proposed by the detective (in the classic collective scene of potential suspects) it creates a momentarily surprising effect. But after the initial surprise, and when we follow the

detective's perceptive reasoning, we re-construct the chain of events, sifting the true clues, and achieve a sense of a consistent and coherent chain of events. The first destabilizing, surprising effect is substituted by a sense of stable satisfaction. In that respect, a typical detective or mystery story may be viewed as an elaborated version of the "simple form" of the riddle.¹⁸

There are, however, other cases—both in real life situations and in literary texts—where a surprising effect is not necessarily 'smoothed out' in a larger coherent structure. A surprising metaphor or simile that juxtaposes totally different semantic fields may be an example of a 'continuing' surprising effect. Encountering such novel metaphors, we are, first, surprised; then we start looking for 'explanations' to mitigate the destabilizing effect, but even after we have found some such explanations the sense of puzzlement does not disappear. It keeps on tantalizing us, making us rethink and reshuffle the stable semantic categories we usually work with.¹⁹

Further, sometimes a literary work may be structured as a detective story, unfolding its plot towards the solving of a mystery, and still, the answer to the question "Whodunit" does not leave us sitting comfortably in our armchair. In fact, this may be the case with 'the first detective story'—Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. The dénouement serves only as a temporary point of stability, opening up further tantalizing questions. Some relate to the plot-level (e.g. how could someone as smart as Oedipus not suspect the answer before), and others are of a more general nature (e.g. does this story tell us something profound about "The Family Romance"—as Freud thought). In fact, what makes *Oedipus* such a masterpiece is its ability to build a tight structure of a mystery story, of a riddle-solving story, but at the same time, to open questions that stay with us long after the outer plot mystery has been solved.²⁰

A similar case can be presented for Defoe's classic. What makes *Robinson Crusoe* such a fascinating and thought-provoking work, a true literary masterpiece, is its ability to create plot-based effects of curiosity, suspense and, above all, surprise. But, at the same time, some of

the plot-based surprises do not serve an overall stabilizing effect. Rather, they evoke serious moral, ideological and theological issues—what is the difference between nature and culture or between civilized and uncivilized societies, what are Providence's ways with man—that keep resonating in our mind long after we have finished reading the book.

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NOTES

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²All quotations are taken from: Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Michael Shingel, A Norton Critical Edition, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1994). After each quotation I give the page number in this edition.

³See Meir Sternberg, "Retardatory Structure, Narrative Interest and the Detective Story," *Hasifrut/Literature* 18-19 (1974): 164-80 [in Hebrew]; "Temporal Ordering, Modes of Expository Distribution, and Three Models of Rhetorical Control in the Narrative Text," *PTL* 1 (1976): 295-316; and his book length study, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978).

⁴Sternberg, *Expositional Modes* 244. For more discussions of the relations between the 'natural' order of events and the order of presentation in the text continuum, see Menakhem Perry, "Literary Dynamics: How the Order of the Text Creates its Meanings (with an analysis of Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily')," *Poetics Today* 1 (1979): 35-64, 311-61; Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (1983; London: Methuen, 1989) 119-29.

⁵In her paper given at the 8th *Connotations* Symposium, "Unsurprises in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* Books," Angelika Zirker has nicely demonstrated how Alice has got so used to surprising events that it is the encounter of a 'normal' event that becomes surprising. See below, 19-37.

⁶Some subtle examples of poetic surprises on the level of the rhyming scheme were presented by Frank Kearful in his paper "Form as Surprise in Poetry" given at the 8th *Connotations* Symposium. For astute observations on how poetic structures create different effects of integration or disintegration, see the classic study by Barbara Herrnstein-Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1968).

⁷For the term 'expressive sounds' in poetry—as part of the large spectrum of possible relations between sound and meaning, see Benjamin Harshav, "Do Sounds Have Meanings: On the Problem of Expressive Sound Patterns in Poetry," *Poetics Today* 22 (2001): 253-59.

⁸It was of course Samuel Johnson who rebuked the metaphysical poets for their bold usage of imagery, claiming that in their poetry "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together." See "Abraham Cowley," *The Great Critics*, ed. J. H. Smith and E. W. Parks (New York: Norton, 1967) 461. For further discussion of bold similes and metaphors, and the different ways poets mitigate the surprising effect, see my "Poetic and Non-Poetic Simile: Structure, Semantics and Rhetoric," *Poetics Today* 14 (1993): 1-23, especially 14-21; and my book *Like a Rainfall: Studies and Essays in Poetic Simile* (Jerusalem: The Magnes P, 1996) [in Hebrew], especially 26-38.

⁹Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* 142.

¹⁰In Defoe's novel the narrator is also the main character in the story. But from a functional point of view, namely creating the effect of surprise, it is not important whether the narrator is a character in the story or not (a *homodiegetic* or a *heterodiegetic* narrator in Genette's terms). In order to achieve surprise (on the reader's part), the narrator (*homodiegetic* and *heterodiegetic* alike) has to limit to a certain extent the scope of unfolded information or to keep at least some of his/her 'cards' close to chest. For Genette's typology of narrators, see his *Narrative Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980) 185-210; see also Rimmon-Kenan 94-103.

¹¹All these observations can be applied, *mutatis mutandis* to drama—where instead of a reader we have an audience.

¹²See, for example, the definition of the term "Dramatic irony" as part of the entry "Irony" in M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981) 91-92; see also the definition of "Dramatic Irony" as part of the entry "Irony" in T. V. F. Brogan, ed., *The New Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994) 148.

¹³For creating a delicate and dynamic balance between identification and subtle irony vis-à-vis a character in Jane Austen's novels, see Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction*, especially 156-58.

¹⁴Theoretically, situations where the reader is surprised but not the character, may serve a different rhetorical effect (e.g. make us realize the limits of our own knowledge and/or values vis-à-vis a character), but I think an ironic critique of the moral and/or epistemological makeup of the character is a more "standard" effect in such cases.

¹⁵A trick I suspect each of us has used at least once when facing a difficult question from an intelligent student.

¹⁶Crusoe does not refer here to the book of Job, but it is definitely part of the religious background of the work, and indeed towards the end, there is an explicit reference to it: "I might well say, now indeed, That the latter End of Job was better than the Beginning" (205).

¹⁷Rousseau, we may remember, proposes in his *Emile* that the first book a young person should read for his natural education is not Aristotle, Pliny or Buffon, but rather *Robinson Crusoe* (quoted in the Norton Critical edition of *Robinson Crusoe* 262).

¹⁸See André Jolles's discussion of the "Devinette" in his *Formes Simples* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972) 103-19 (the original German *Einfache Formen* was published in 1930).

¹⁹The two different types of surprises—the one that integrates into a 'closed,' coherent, non-surprising conclusion and the other that maintains an 'open,' unstable, ongoing process—may be related to two kinds of cognitive processes and, as Reuven Tsur has suggested, to two "styles" of implied criticism: one that looks for an overall integrating interpretation, and one that is "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts"—Keats's description of "negative capacity," quoted by Tsur in *Towards a Theory of Cognitive Poetics* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1992) 471.

²⁰My attention to the possibility that solving the outer-mystery may still evoke deeper issues was sharpened during the discussion of Teresa Gibert's paper given at the 8th *Connotations* Symposium, "Kate Chopin's Fiction: The Surprise Ending of 'Desirée's Baby'" —where an initial sense of solving the mystery of the characters' racial background is replaced by deeper questions about their psychology and motivations. See below, 38-67.