

# NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'UN ARTHUR DIMMESDALE KARAKTERİ İLE DANIEL DEFOE'NIUN ROBINSON CRUSOE KARAKTERİNİN EMERSON'UN "SELF-RELIANCE (ÖZ GÜVEN) MAKALESİNE GÖRE İNCELENMESİ

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## ÖZ

Ralph Waldo Emerson'un ünlü makalesi "Self Reliance- Öz Güven" temelde tam bir birey olmak için izlenmesi gereken temel adımlardan bahsetmektedir: Öz-güven duygusu kazanmak, kendinize güvenmekten ve bireyin kendisine dürüst olmasından geçmektedir. Bir insanın nasıl olması gerektiğini, hangi özelliklere sahip olduğunu ve kendine bağımlı olmanın önemini tanımlar. Emerson'ın kişinin kendine ait özgü güvenini nasıl oluşturabileceği ve kendine güven ifadesinin nasıl tanımladığı farklı kurgusal eserlerde görülebilir. Emerson'ın bu yaklaşımı onun perspektifinden iki önemli kurgusal karakteri analiz etmek için gerekli yaklaşımı sağlar: Bu karakterlerden biri, Nathaniel Hawthorne'nin Scarlet Letter'ından Arthur Dimmesdale ve diğeri Daniel Defoe'nun Robinson Crusoe karakteridir. Hawthorne'un Arthur Dimmesdale'inin tasviri, bir bireyin kendine güven duygusuna sahip olamamasının ve bunun sonuçlarının bir örneğidir. Roman boyunca, Hawthorne, kendisini kendine güvenen bir birey olmaktan uzak tutan Dimmesdale'in zayıflığı ve korkularına odaklanır. Öte yandan Defoe'nun Robinson Crusoe'su zor zamanlara rağmen kendine güveni elde etmeyi başarıyor. Robinson'un adadaki varlığı, kendisinden çok uzakta olan dış toplumdaki çekilmesinden ve sonuç olarak içeriye dönmesinden kaynaklı kendi özgüvenini derinleştirmektedir. Bir ıssız adada yalnız kalmak, hayatta kalmak için gerekli olan kendine güven duygusunu tetikler ve ortaya çıkmasına sebep olur. Tüm bunların sonucunda da Crusoe, kendi yeteneklerine, mantığına ve kişisel içgüdülerine bağlı olarak kendine güvenen bir adam olarak hayatta kalmayı başarır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** kendine güven, yalnızlaşma, kendini tanıma, korku, bağlantı kurmak

## EMERSONIAN INTERPRETATION OF TWO SIGNIFICANT CHARACTERS: NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S ARTHUR DIMMESDALE AND DANIEL DEFOE'S ROBINSON CRUSOE

### ABSTRACT

Ralph Waldo Emerson's well-known essay "Self-Reliance" mainly discusses the basic steps that should be followed to become a complete individual: briefly, he says: achieving self-reliance comes from trusting yourself and being honest with that self. He describes how a person should be, what characteristics to have, and the importance of becoming self-reliant. Emersonian fulfillment of self-reliance can be seen in different fictional works, his ideas and definition of self-reliance provides insight to analyze two significant fictional characters from an Emersonian perspective: one is Arthur Dimmesdale by Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, and the other one is Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe. Hawthorne's depiction of Arthur Dimmesdale is an example of how an individual fails to possess the feeling of self-reliance. Throughout the novel, Hawthorne focuses on the weakness and fears of Dimmesdale which retains him from being a self-reliant individual. On the other hand Defoe's Robinson Crusoe manages to achieve self-reliance despite having difficult times. Robinson's existence

on the island actually deepens his self-reliance since he withdraws from the external society that is far from him and as a result he turns inward. Being alone on a desert island provokes the feeling of self-reliance, which is necessary to survive. He manages to survive as a self-reliant man by depending on his capabilities, logic, and personal instincts.

**Key words:** self-reliance, isolation, self-awareness, fear, connection

## INTRODUCTION

Ralph Waldo Emerson's well-known essay "Self-Reliance" in 1841 mainly deals with the issue of being an individual: briefly, it says: being an individual comes from trusting yourself and being honest with that self. He starts his essay with these sentences; "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men - that is genius." (Emerson 145). He describes how a person should be, what characteristics to have, and the importance of becoming a self-reliant individual. First of all, an individual should trust in himself or herself: the first point that makes an individual self-reliant is the feeling of trust. Everyone is born possessing the adequate qualifications to become an individual: people just need to learn how utilize these things they have, and this happens as long as people trust in themselves and accept the person that they truly have inside. Emerson expresses his idea on the importance of trust:

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. (Emerson 146)

Emerson suggests that individuals trust themselves, their intuition, and their nature. Only individuals possessing these qualities are able to create harmony within themselves. Consistency is another point that is discussed through the essay. Everyone expects people to be really consistent. There should not be any dilemma or conflict between their acts and ideas. Their actions and thoughts are supposed to be predictable; however, according to Emerson, being different and unpredictable will bring you greatness. Emerson names consistency as a kind of terror and says: "The other terror that scares us from self-trust is our inconsistency" (Emerson 151). Individuals should not be afraid of expressing their own ideas and supporting them, or should not be afraid of being misunderstood: "Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood" (Emerson 152). In addition, he supports the idea that believe in yourself and do not hesitate to express personal thoughts: "In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts" (Emerson 145). Secondly, an individual is expected to be a non-conformist. This is the core of self-reliant feelings. Emerson explains the importance of conformity by saying: "The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs" (Emerson 148). Nobody has to tell people what is wrong what is right to do. If an individual want to find the truth, the things that are true, he/she must follow their own beliefs and values. As long as individuals consider that their acting or decisions are true, they do not have to care about what the rest of the world say. Once a person heads for his inner self, it is impossible not to find out the truth: according to Emerson, people's own nature has top priority over everything: "No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong what is against it" (Emerson 148). The actions or the decisions that individuals take should only be concerned with them, not the other people around them. There is always a conflict between the individuals and the society as a whole, there will always be people who think they know what is best for others, or always eager to show what is true or wrong. In such a case, the difficult task is to be a single and different individual among the people of the society rather than following the latest trends of the world and the other members of the community: "What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think" (Emerson 150). People must be

responsible for what they have done or are doing, not for what others tell them to do or blame them for doing.

George Kateb in his book, *Emerson and Self-Reliance*, gives the best definition of self-reliance: “it is the steady effort of thinking one’s thoughts and thinking them through. It is intellectual independence, reactive and responsive self-possession” (Kateb 31). Individuals should not be afraid of criticism: people have a tendency to criticize or ridicule, but this will not be permanent. The thing that will stay with individuals is what they think. Individuals cannot shape their own decisions according to other people, or should not let them affect the way they choose. Finally, Emerson also points out the advancements of society. According to Emerson, society does not show true progress:

Society never advances. It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other. It undergoes continual changes; it is barbarous, it is civilized, it is Christianised, it is rich, it is scientific; but this change is not amelioration. For every thing that is given something is taken. (Emerson 166)

While making advances, society does not go further, because everything, any kind of development is based on give and take relationships. While doing one side better, the other side becomes distorted, that means that total advancement will never be possible for society. Emerson gives a really meaningful example to exemplify these give and take relationships in society: “The civilized man has built a coach, but has lost the use of his feet. He is supported on crutches, but lacks so much support of muscle. He has a Geneva watch, but fails of the skill to tell the hour by the sun” (Emerson 167). While showing progress on the one side, modern man is falling behind on the other side. Thus, according to Emerson, society never progresses or advances.

## **WHY HAWTHORNE’S ARTHUR DIMMESDALE CANNOT BE A SELF-RELIANT INDIVIDUAL**

Emersonian fulfilment of self-reliance can be seen in many different fictional works, in this essay I will analyze two significant characters from an Emersonian perspective of becoming a self: one is Arthur Dimmesdale, from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, and the other one is Robinson Crusoe from Daniel Defoe’s novel.

Hawthorne’s depiction of Arthur Dimmesdale is an example of how one self cannot be a self-reliant individual, or in other words how an individual fails to possess the feeling of self-reliance. Throughout the novel, Hawthorne focuses on the weakness and fears of Dimmesdale. According to the portrayal of Dimmesdale by Hawthorne, he is incapable of making life-altering decisions and changes; instead he places the burdens upon the shoulders of others. That is why Hawthorne’s depiction of Arthur Dimmesdale is seen as the failure of Emersonian self-reliance. Roger Lundin comments on this issue and says, “In *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne set out to realize this Emersonian romantic ideal and failed at his task” (Lundin 156). As Emerson describes how a self-reliant person should be, the first thing is to trust yourself. In the very beginning of the novel, Dimmesdale fails doing this, because he does not have trust and courage to accept his guilt; he is not able to accept the fact that he committed adultery with Hester Prynne, but he puts this burden on Hester’s shoulders and she bears all the humiliation and accusations alone without Dimmesdale. He does not trust himself to reveal his adultery in front of Puritan society, but he turns to Hester whether she will reveal his name or not: “If thou feelest it to be for thy soul’s peace, and that thy earthly punishment will thereby be more effectual to salvation, I charge thee to speak out the name of thy fellow-sinner and fellow-sufferer!” (Hawthorne 93). Instead of making his sin public, he does not trust himself and does not share that sin with Hester Prynne, as a result, Hester is known as the symbol of adultery, the sin they share, but Dimmesdale lacks the courage to reveal it to the Puritans because of his holy and highly respected position in Puritan society. Another failure of self-trust occurs during another scaffold scene. Pearl, their daughter, asks Dimmesdale to stand on the scaffold with them. At first, the Minister agrees, and stands on it when the place is empty, and there is nobody around. However, when Pearl asks him to stand on the scaffold with them again, he says; “Not so, my child. I shall, indeed, stand with thy

mother and thee one other day, but not to-mor-row!” (Hawthorne 172-73). Again he has a chance to acknowledge his sin and share this with both Hester and Pearl, but the thing he does is to leave them alone as he does not trust himself enough to reveal and make this public to others. He also does not trust the decisions he is supposed to take; instead he asks Hester to do this in his place, because he does not believe that he is strong enough to make true decision. In brook scene in the novel, when Hester and Dimmesdale meet and are walking the forest, Hester reveals the identity of Roger Chillingworth, who is her former husband, and asks him to stay away from him. Dimmesdale cannot make a decision on his own as he is not a self-dependent individual and instead asks Hester to do it for him: “Think for me, Hester! Thou art strong. Resolve for me!” (Hawthorne 213), and Hester agrees to help him and gives him advice: “Thou must dwell no longer with this man, said Hester slowly and firmly. Thy heart must be no longer under his evil eye!” (Hawthorne 213). Dimmesdale repeatedly fails in making decisions and trusting himself and thus he reveals his lack of self-reliance. Rather than being a self-dependent person, he is an independent one. He is in search of someone else who can share his burden and stay much stronger than him. In this novel, if anyone is self-reliant, this person must be Hester Prynne. She is the stronger, she trusts herself and she stands behind whatever she does. Despite knowing that adultery is a sinful act, she listens to her inner voice and acts according to her own values and morals.

Another quality to achieve self-reliance is to maintain a single identity regardless of social context. Most of the time, people really care about what others think about themselves or how they feel that they have to follow the norms and values that have been decided before by the society. However, each person is a single identity, therefore it is really important to preserve this identity from distortion. However, in the very beginning of the novel, Dimmesdale fails to create this single identity. He is Arthur Dimmesdale only when he is with Hester Prynne; however, he has responsibilities and duties that are determined by the community. He is known as the Minister Arthur Dimmesdale by the members of Puritan community. This title or identity always prevents his revealing the truth and confessing his sin. Emerson discusses this issue and says; “It is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude” (Emerson 150). As Emerson states it is more important to live on your own, not focusing on what the rest of the world says. Dimmesdale has not been able to achieve this until very close to the end of the novel. It is just a short time before his death when Dimmesdale decides to reveal himself to the Puritan people. He begins his sermon with:

“People of New England!” cried he, with a voice that rose over them, high, solemn, and majestic, - yet had always a tremor through it, and sometimes a shriek, struggling up out of a fathomless depth of remorse and woe, - “ye, that have loved me! - ye, that have deemed me holy ! - behold me here, the one sinner of the world ! At last ! - at last! - I stand upon the spot where, seven years since, I should have stood; here, with this woman, whose arm, more than the little strength wherewith I have crept hitherward, sustains me, at this dreadful moment, from grovelling down upon my face! (Hawthorne 267)

Finally, these are the sentences of a man who reveals his secret sin that he shares with Hester Prynne; this is only one of the few moments when he achieves self-reliance throughout the novel. He is enlightened by the weight of his burden that he has been carrying for a long time and makes everything known to the Puritan people and then passes away.

Although Dimmesdale is rarely depicted as a self-reliant individual in the novel, Hawthorne portrays him mostly as a personally and socially constrained individual. He does not trust himself, does not make his real identity clear to other people, and deeply cares what others think about him and his life. Dimmesdale mostly stays under the effect of Puritan society and cannot leave behind all the responsibilities and duties he has as he is a respected member in Puritan society. Thus, he is never able to obtain real freedom and trust that are really integral parts of being a self-reliant individual.

## HOW DEFOE'S ROBINSON CRUOSE SUCCEEDED IN BEING A SELF-RELIANT INDIVIDUAL

While Hawthorne's depiction of Dimmesdale shows how an individual fails to achieve self-reliance, on the other hand Defoe's Robinson Crusoe after experiencing difficult times manages to achieve self-reliance. Throughout most of the novel, Defoe deals with the importance of self-awareness. Robinson's existence on the island actually deepens his self-reliance since he withdraws from the external society that is far from him and he turns inward. Being alone on a desert island makes him become self-reliant, which is necessary to survive. Having no connection with the outer world, Robinson becomes aware of his abilities and capabilities. He learns to trust and utilize his abilities to survive on this island rather than to give up and die. He builds a shelter for himself, grows food, and tames animals; he finds a pet parrot, takes a goat as a pet, and keeps a record of his daily activities. He develops a sort of calendar for himself, and this shows that he does not want his days just to pass, but he keeps records of his days so that he can be aware of the time he has been spending on this island:

Upon the sides of this square post I cut every day a notch with my knife, and every seventh notch was as long again as the rest, and every first day of the month as long again as that long one; and thus I kept my calendar, or weekly, monthly, and yearly reckoning of time. (Defoe 50)

Being a self-reliant person occurs for Robinson after spending time on a desolate island; he has to question himself and find answers by depending on himself. Russel A. Barkley describes self-reliance with these words;

[...] it can be thought of as comprising the sorts of activities measured by those dimensions of adaptive behavior interviews and rating scales that pertain to the degree of responsibility individuals assume for fulfilling their own immediate and near-term (often-daily) needs and wants. This includes assuming responsibility for sleeping, clothing and dressing, bathing and general hygiene, food or nourishment, personal safety and self-defense from the elements, from other species, and from other humans, shelter and other self-care routines considered to be a necessary component of general self-reliance, survival and basic social independence. (Barkley 109)

At first, there was no community on the island, it was only a remoted place, where Robinson was alone and had to deal with solitude, but some time later he rescued Friday and some other people, and now his island is peopled, it is not a big society, but at least there are enough people for Robinson to save his island from being desolate: "My island was now peopled, and I thought myself very rich in subjects." (Defoe 153). At the same time, Robinson accepts that he managed to create a society on this island: "Having now society enough, and our number being sufficient to put us out of fear of the savages, if they had come, unless their number had been very great, we went freely all over the island ..." (Defoe 156). The island now has people and even Robinson feels courage to walk around the island freely and even to fight against cannibals. Robinson, Friday and the others that were saved all have some responsibilities on the island. Some cuts trees, some deals with the animals, etc. They do not have strong bonds to each other, each person becomes a free individual on the island. Friday was captured and he was a slave, but now he is free and deals with his own responsibility. Robinson was alone at first, but now he is surrounded by some people; however, this does not mean that these people interfere with each other private space. Throughout the novel, Defoe portrays Robinson as an individual who manages to attain self-reliance by completing the missions that Barkley mentions. Living on a desolate island does not push him to give up; instead he becomes more aware of himself, his talents, and inner self. Therefore, he succeeds in creating his own living space on an island, he meets his basic needs of self-reliance: food, shelter, safety, self-defense, etc. He develops his own way of protecting himself from the strangers who come around his island since he has no other choice but to be self-reliant. After realizing that he is alone on the island, Robinson becomes aware of the fact that the only one who can help and protect him is actually himself, and after embarking on the island, he says,

I consulted several things in my situation, which I found would be proper for me: first, health and fresh water I just now mentioned; secondly, shelter from the heat of the sun; thirdly, security from ravenous creatures, whether man or beast; fourthly, a view to the sea, that if God sent any ship in sight, I might not lose any advantage for my deliverance, of which I was not willing to banish all my expectation yet. (Defoe 47)

Defoe's portrayal of Robinson is so strong and powerful that it is not surprising for readers to see that Robinson attains self-reliance. Another critical point that Emerson insists to achieve self-reliance is relying on our own values and truths. If someone believes that what he does is true, he should pursue this truth; people are generally afraid of expressing themselves frankly or have the fear of not being accepted by other people. Most of the time, people feel urged to hide their own feelings and thoughts to themselves, and try to act according to the norms and values of the society in which they live. Robinson rejects this idea by leaving everybody and everything behind while going to sea. In the very beginning of the novel, Robinson expresses his own opinion, how passionate he feels to go to sea, and says,

[...] but I would be satisfied with nothing but going to sea; and my inclination to this led me so strongly against the will, nay, the commands, of my father, and against all the entreaties and persuasions of my mother and other friends that there seemed to be something fatal in that propension of nature tending directly to the life of misery which was to befall me. (Defoe 14)

His family strongly rejects Robinson's idea of leaving his home land and going to sea, but he insists on his idea and makes it come true for himself. He understands the worries of the people they love, but he adheres to his own values and thoughts, which shows that he is transformed into a self-reliant man. After his family does not want him to leave the house, he hesitates for a while and even is about to stop thinking of going abroad. However, then he chooses to follow his own way no matter how wrong it is:

I was sincerely affected with this discourse, as indeed who could be otherwise? and I resolved not to think of going abroad any more, but to settle at home according to my father's desire. But alas! A few days wore it all off; and in short, to prevent any of my father's further importunities, in a few weeks after, I resolved to run quite away from him. (Defoe 15)

He is quite passionate to go to the sea, but Robinson believes that this is a way of achieving self-reliance, he could stand on his own by doing so. However, he flees from society, and according to Emerson's concept of self-reliance; self-reliance is behaving in society as you have your own world in private. Robinson could not find privacy and happiness in the society he lives, he chooses to leave it behind. Robinson prefers relying on himself rather than staying at home and following father business to earn his life. Despite experiencing many hard times at sea and facing many challenges, these hardships do not stop him from doing what he really wants to do or achieve in life. However, while trying to achieve self-reliance, Robinson upsets his family as he left them. In most of the scenes, we see that Robinson is a self-reliant man, but by going against his family wishes, he thinks that he becomes self-reliant, but actually he fails. Self-reliance requires to believe in your own thoughts and not to care about others, but this does not mean that this should be achieved by going against people or making people upset.

## CONCLUSION

Emersonian concept of self-reliance can mainly be achieved through trusting yourself, avoiding inconsistency, and following his or her instincts and ideas. In addition, Emerson presents self-reliance as an ideal, even a virtue. Hawthorne's Arthur Dimmesdale is not able to attain self-reliance until his death, because he does not possess the Emersonian qualifications of a self-reliant man. However Defoe's Robinson mostly achieves self-reliance, and he manages to survive as a self-reliant man by depending on his capabilities, logic, and personal instincts and ideas.

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