An instant success in its own time, Daniel Defoe’s *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* has for three centuries drawn readers to its archetypal hero, the man surviving alone on an island. This Companion begins by studying the eighteenth-century literary, historical and cultural contexts of Defoe’s novel, exploring the reasons for its immense popularity in Britain and in its colonies in America and in the wider European world. Chapters from leading scholars discuss the social, economic and political dimensions of Crusoe’s island story before examining the ‘after life’ of Robinson Crusoe from the book’s multitudinous translations to its cultural migrations and transformations into other media such as film and television. By considering Defoe’s seminal work from a variety of critical perspectives this book provides a full understanding of the perennial fascination with, and the enduring legacy of, both the book and its iconic hero.


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G. A. Starr has taught since 1962 in the University of California, Berkeley, English Department. While working on the Serious Reflections … of Robinson Crusoe, he came across Christianity Not as Old as the Creation (1731), which he edited with the subtitle, The Last of Defoe's Performances (2012). His current research calls in question some postcolonial readings of Defoe on slavery, piracy, and other adjuncts or threats to trade.


Dennis Todd is Professor of English at Georgetown University. He has authored Imagining Monsters: Miscreations of the Self in Eighteenth-Century England (1995) and Defoe's America (2010) and has co-edited, with Cynthia Wall, Eighteenth-Century Genre and Culture: Serious Reflections on Occasional Forms. Essays in Honor of J. Paul Hunter (2001). He has also written essays on Swift, Pope, Arbuthnot, and Hogarth.
PREFACE

Daniel Defoe’s *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an uninhabited Island of the Coast of AMERICA, near the Mouth of the Great River of OROONOQUE; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver’d by PYRATES. Written by Himself* (1719), to give the full title of the original edition, occupies a crucial place in literary history’s account of the emergence of the modern English novel and for that matter of the beginning of the modern European novel. A standard text in college and university courses on the “rise” of those long prose fictions that we now call the novel, *Robinson Crusoe* is a perennially interesting narrative fiction that has provoked scholarly and critical debate about its cultural and moral implications and its literary significance. Is it, the argument goes, a spiritual autobiography about a man who in his dramatic isolation on an uninhabited island seeks to understand the puzzling relationship between sinful man and an elusive Providence who has arranged this strange fate for him? Or is it essentially an adventure story, an exemplification in Crusoe himself of the European imperialistic drive from the sixteenth century onward to conquer and exploit the non-European world? Is the island a punishment and trial sent by God? Or is it an opportunity for colonization and conquest and a stage for Crusoe’s triumphant survival and prosperity? There is, in my view, a great deal of truth in both of these explanations, and that ambiguity is a sign of the novel’s richness and enduring fascination for readers over the centuries.

Whatever the answer one chooses, *Robinson Crusoe* was from its original publication immensely popular in Britain and in its colonies in North America and in the wider European world, with Defoe producing a sequel, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, that same year, 1719, and in 1720 a third volume, *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, followed by seven reprints of the first two
parts in the next seven years. The book (the first part) has been continually in print ever since. It is worth noting that like all his other works of fiction and many of his non-fictional works, the *Robinson Crusoe* books were published anonymously. The book’s strong claim is, of course, that it is a true autobiography of an actual person. His other fictional narratives make the same claim, but a few scholars have recently cast doubt on Defoe’s authorship of some of the novels attributed to him, even two of his most popular, *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724). But in the case of *Robinson Crusoe*, we know from one contemporary attack on the book the same year it was published that Defoe was indeed the author. Shortly after *Robinson Crusoe* appeared, a rival and jealous author, Charles Gildon, published a satirical pamphlet entitled *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Mr. D— De F—*, of London and addressed contemptuously to Daniel Defoe “hosier.” (Defoe was for a time a wholesale dealer in hosiery!) In an amusing scene the pamphlet narrates how Defoe’s characters appear to him in a dream and take him to task for making them look ridiculous. They take their revenge by making him eat a copy of the book (both volumes!) and then tossing him in a blanket. Gildon then ridicules the novel as implausible and attacks it as dangerously impious.

But Gildon was in the minority, as he himself complained when he had his Defoe respond to the angry character he has created, *Robinson Crusoe*, that “there is not an Old Woman that can go the price of it, but buys thy Life and Adventures.” From 1719 onwards, *Robinson Crusoe* was immensely popular. Over three centuries *Robinson Crusoe* has had near-universal, world-wide appeal; it is much more than simply an academic text and node of literary-historical and critical controversy. Of Defoe’s many works, fictional and non-fictional, the story of Crusoe’s lonely survival on his island continues to be the only one familiar to large numbers of general readers, many of whom know only the title of the book and nothing about its author. As Ian Watt put it in his 1996 study, *Myths of Modern Individualism*, the Crusoe story is a “myth of modern individualism,” and Crusoe himself is comparable to Faust, Don Quixote, and Don Juan as a human and modern or at least European/Western archetype. In its hero’s confusion and terror when he finds himself alone on the island as well as in his transition to resourceful management of his environment for survival and ultimate mastery of himself, as well as of hostile visitors like cannibals and mutineers, *Robinson Crusoe* may be said to stage the tension in the early European eighteenth century between an emerging modern secular and activist individualism embodied and enacted in Crusoe, and what were in Defoe’s day older and still powerfully persuasive religious modes of understanding personal...
identity and pondering one’s destiny and fate in relation to the mysteries of providential ordering.

Moreover, like Cervantes’ Don Quixote, Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe may be in world literature a deeply familiar figure, indeed instantly recognizable, a truly iconic character (on his island, in his goat-skin clothing, carrying his umbrella and his musket, and accompanied by his faithful dog). Defoe’s 1719 novel was within a year translated into French, German, and Dutch, and it has in those nearly three hundred years since its initial publication been translated into over a hundred languages, including Inuit and Coptic. Defoe’s story has also since it appeared provoked scores of imitations, so called Robinsonades, and from the eighteenth to the twentieth century inspired a minor narrative sub-genre of island and adventure stories. More recently, novels have appeared imagining alternative versions of Defoe’s story such as Michel Tournier’s Friday or the Other Island (1977) and J. M. Coetzee’s Foe (1986). There have also been children’s versions, notably Johann David Wyss’ German Der Schweizerische Robinson (1812), published in an English translation by the philosopher William Godwin as The Swiss Family Robinson in 1816. (As a child, I first encountered the Crusoe story in this book, the source later of a Disney movie.) Robinson Crusoe has also inspired a good number of film versions, including a fine one in 1954 by the great Spanish director Luis Buñuel, in both English and Spanish versions (Las Aventuras de Robinson Crusoe) as well as perhaps the laughably worst film version ever perpetrated starring the improbably handsome actor Pierce Brosnan in 1997, in which Crusoe is a Scotsman who kills his rival for the affections of a girl in a duel and has to escape by going to sea, eventually returning to marry Mary, the girl he left behind. There have also been various dramatizations for children, sometimes in cartoon form, and other often enough ludicrous modern adaptations (for one example, a Disney version in 1966 with Dick Van Dyke as Lieutenant Robinson Crusoe, a pilot who is stranded on an island), as well as television shows such as the immensely popular Lost, which rehearsed with many contemporary variations the archetypal plot of survival on a deserted island. More convincing as well as popular was the movie Cast Away (2000), in which Tom Hanks is a FedEx manager who, when his plane crashes, is the lone survivor stranded on a desert island, and the recent film, The Martian (2015), which is yet another iteration of the Crusoe story in which Matt Damon plays an astronaut, a scientist stranded on Mars who survives through Crusoe-like ingenuity and perseverance.

The chapters in this Cambridge Companion to “Robinson Crusoe” range from discussions of the book’s literary, political, and cultural meanings...
in its own day (in England, in America, and in Europe) to its continuing resonances into our own times in popular as well as literary culture, including its migrations and transformations into other media over the last three centuries. The opening sections of our book are devoted to literary-historical and cultural explorations of Robinson Crusoe as one of the founding texts of the modern novel in England and indeed in Europe. Several chapters consider Robinson Crusoe in the context of Defoe’s multifarious career as a political and moral writer and polemicist. Other chapters include in-depth discussions of Crusoe’s story in its social, psychological, and political dimensions. One chapter traces the history of Defoe’s novel as he expanded it to include two sequels; another considers selected eighteenth-century translations and imitations (Robinsonades), with attention paid to the eighteenth-century influences of Defoe’s story on psychology and philosophy. For example in his novel of education, Émile, or On Education (1762), Jean-Jacques Rousseau stipulates that his young hero will read at first only one book – Robinson Crusoe. Several chapters consider the past and the future of Defoe’s book: one looks back to precursors and sources for Defoe’s island story, and another traces the fascinating numerous versions of the Crusoe story as adapted and transformed for children in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A key chapter surveys illustrations and images of what quickly became the iconic Crusoe from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. Two chapters remind readers of Robinson Crusoe’s popularity in colonial America, mostly in severely abridged versions, and of the book’s influence in helping to form and to reinforce the ideology of European colonialism. And various chapters in Part III deal with latter-day revisions or extensions of the story in nineteenth-century desert island novels aimed at young audiences by Frederick Marryat, R. M. Ballyntyne, and Robert Louis Stevenson. And, finally, several chapters in the last section deal with the many popular revisions and contemporary literary adaptations, some serious and provocatively transformative, some to the point of travesty, of the Crusoe story in literature, in film, and on television.

We dedicate this book to the memory of our late colleague, David Blewett, who near the very end of his life wrote the chapter in this volume on the illustrations of Robinson Crusoe. Frater, ave atque vale.
## CHRONOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1660 or 1661</td>
<td>Daniel Foe born in London (exact date unknown), son of James and Alice Foe. Restoration of the Stuart monarchy as Charles II returns to England.</td>
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<td>1662</td>
<td>Act of Uniformity passed, mandating conformity in religious services to the Church of England Book of Common Prayer and requiring office holders to be members of the state church. The Foes followed the lead of their minister, Samuel Annesley, and left the Church of England to become dissenters.</td>
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<td>1663</td>
<td>Drury Lane Theatre in London reopens.</td>
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<td>1664</td>
<td>The Conventicle Act outlaws Nonconformist worship in gatherings of more than five people. Second Anglo-Dutch War (to 1667). Dutch ships sail up the Thames and destroy much of the English fleet.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1665–6</td>
<td>The Great Plague (kills over 70,000 people in London) and the Great Fire of London (consumes most of the old wooden city).</td>
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<td>1675</td>
<td>Greenwich Observatory established by Charles II.</td>
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<td>1678</td>
<td>“Exclusion Crisis” as the Earl of Shaftesbury leads a movement to exclude James, Charles II’s Roman Catholic brother, from the succession to the throne.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c.1683</td>
<td>Established as a wholesale hosiery merchant, living in Cornhill, near the Royal Exchange.</td>
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<td>1684</td>
<td>Marries Mary Tuffley and receives a dowry of £3,700.</td>
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<td>1685</td>
<td>Death of Charles II – succeeded by his brother, the Catholic James II. Louis XIV revokes the Edict of Nantes, ending religious toleration in France.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>Participates in the unsuccessful rebellion against James II led by the Duke of Monmouth, one of Charles II’s illegitimate sons.</td>
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CHRONOLOGY

1685–92

Becomes a prosperous businessman dealing in hosiery, tobacco, wine, and other goods. Seems to have travelled extensively on business in England and in Europe.

1688

“Glorious Revolution” (James II forced to vacate the throne) and Prince William of Orange in the Netherlands invited to reign as William III of England, with James’ daughter, Mary, as his queen.

1690

William III defeats James II at the Battle of the Boyne in Ireland.

1692

Declares bankruptcy for £17,000 and imprisoned for debt.

1694


1695

Establishes a brick and tile factory at Tilbury, in Essex.

1697


1697–1701

Defoe acts as an agent for William III in England and Scotland.

1701

Act of Settlement establishes Hanoverian succession.

1702

Death of Queen Mary.

1703

Defoe arrested for writing The Shortest Way with the Dissenters, charged with sedition, committed to Newgate Prison and sentenced to stand in the pillory for three days. He published the poem A Hymn to the Pillory and an authorized collection of his writings, A True Collection of the Writings of the Author of The True-born Englishman (a second volume in 1705). Released through the influence of the powerful politician and Speaker of the House, Robert Harley, but his brick and tile factory fails while he is in prison. Bankrupt again.

1704

English capture Gibraltar; Duke of Marlborough defeats the French at Blenheim on the Danube in southern Germany.

1704–13

Defoe begins The Review, a pro-government newsheet appearing as often as three times a week (through 1713).

1705

Defoe acts as secret agent and political journalist for Harley and other ministers, traveling widely in England and Scotland promoting the union of the two countries.
Chronology

1707  Union of England and Scotland
1710  Tories gain control of Parliament under leadership of Robert Harley (later Earl of Oxford) and Henry St. John (later Viscount Bolingbroke)
      Statute of Queen Anne passed by Parliament, limiting copyright to twenty-eight years and recognizing authors’ rights
1711  Founding of the South Sea Company
1713  Treaty of Utrecht, ending War of the Spanish Succession
1713–14  Defoe arrested several times for debt and for his political writings but released through government influence
1714  Death of Queen Anne
      Accession of George I, the Elector of Hanover
      Fall of the Tory government
1715  The Family Instructor, the first of Defoe’s conduct books
      Jacobite Rebellion in support of James II’s son, “James III,” the “Old Pretender”
      Death of Louis XIV of France
      Robert Harley (Earl of Oxford) and Henry St. John (Viscount Bolingbroke) are impeached for high treason. Bolingbroke flees to France
1719  Robinson Crusoe, The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe
1720  Captain Singleton, Serious Reflections of … Robinson Crusoe
      War with Spain declared
      South Sea Company fails (“South Sea Bubble”)
1721  Robert Walpole appointed First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer
1722  A Journal of the Plague Year, Moll Flanders, and Colonel Jack
1724  Roxana, A General History of the Pyrates, A Tour Thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain (3 volumes, 1724–6)
1725  The Complete English Tradesman (volume 1)
1726  The Political History of the Devil
      Death of George I
1728  Augusta Triumphans, A Plan of the English Commerce
1729  The Compleat English Gentleman (not published until 1890)
1731  Defoe dies April 24 in Ropemaker’s Alley, London, in debt, hiding from creditors