

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-04349-7 — The Cambridge Companion to 'Robinson Crusoe'
Edited by John Richetti
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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
"ROBINSON CRUSOE"

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.

John Richetti is A. M. Rosenthal Professor (Emeritus) at the University of Pennsylvania. His published books include: *Popular Fiction Before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700–1739* (1969); *Defoe's Narratives: Situations and Structures* (1975); *The Life of Daniel Defoe: A Critical Biography* (2005); and *A History of British Eighteenth-Century Literature* (2017). He has also edited two *Cambridge Companions*, *The Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Cambridge, 1996) and *Daniel Defoe* (Cambridge, 2009), as well as *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780* (Cambridge, 2005).

A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book.

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CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	page vii
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	x
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
<i>Chronology</i>	xvii

PART I ROBINSON CRUSOE AND DANIEL DEFOE:
THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

1	Genre, Nature, <i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	3
	J. PAUL HUNTER	
2	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i> and the Form of the New Novel	16
	RIVKA SWENSON	
3	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i> and Defoe’s Career as a Writer	32
	MAXIMILLIAN E. NOVAK	
4	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i> : Good Housekeeping, Gentility, and Property	49
	PAT ROGERS	
5	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i> and Its Sequels: <i>The Farther Adventures</i> and <i>Serious Reflections</i>	67
	G. A. STARR	
6	Politics, History, and the <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> Story	84
	REBECCA BULLARD	

CONTENTS

PART II *ROBINSON CRUSOE* IN THE WIDER WORLD

7	Innovation and Imitation in the Eighteenth-Century Robinsonade	99
	CARL FISHER	
8	The Crusoe Story: Philosophical and Psychological Implications	112
	HELEN THOMPSON	
9	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i> and Travel Writing: The Transatlantic World	128
	EVE TAVOR BANNET	
10	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i> and Colonialism	142
	DENNIS TODD	

PART III *ROBINSON CRUSOE* OVER THREE HUNDRED YEARS

11	The Iconic Crusoe: Illustrations and Images of <i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	159
	DAVID BLEWETT	
12	Robinsonades for Young People	191
	JILL CAMPBELL	
13	Anti-Crusoes, Alternative Crusoes: Revisions of the Island Story in the Twentieth Century	207
	ANN MARIE FALLON	
14	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i> in the Screen Age	221
	ROBERT MAYER	
	<i>Further Reading</i>	234
	<i>Index</i>	237

ILLUSTRATIONS

2.1	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i> (front). Colored ceramic Toby Jug, combining the head and shoulders of the protagonist with other elements of the novel. Height: 7.5 in. Made in London (1959) by Doulton & Co. Limited. Object and image are author’s own.	page 28
2.2	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i> (back). Colored ceramic Toby Jug, combining the head and shoulders of the protagonist with other elements of the novel. Height: 7.5 in. Made in London (1959) by Doulton & Co. Limited. Object and image are author’s own.	29
11.1	Unknown Artist (1719). Frontispiece. Etching by Clark and John Pine. <i>The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe Vol. 1</i> (London: W. Taylor, 1719). © British Library Board, shelfmark C.30.f.6.	160
11.2	Bernard Picart (1720). Frontispiece. <i>La vie et les aventures surprenantes de Robinson Crusoe Vol. 1</i> (Amsterdam: L’Honoré & Chatelain, 1720). Etching. © British Library Board, shelfmark 12611.df.6.	162
11.3	Clément Pierre Marillier (1786). Il prend un de mes pieds et le pose sur sa tête, pour me faire comprendre sans doute qu’il me juroit fidélité. Engraving by Remi Henri Joseph Delvaux. <i>Voyages imaginaires, songes, visions, et romans cabalistique</i> (Amsterdam: Charles Garnier, 1787), facing p. 376. Edition and image is author’s own.	164
11.4	Antoine-Pierre Mongin (1799). <i>Footprint</i> . Engraving by Simon-Charles Miger.	165
11.5	Mather Brown (1785). Rescue of Friday. Engraving by Robert Pollard. <i>The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Vol. 1</i> (London: John Walter, 1790), facing p. 323. © British Library Board, shelfmark 88.d1,2.	167

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- 11.6 Richard Stothard (1790). Robinson Crusoe first sees and rescues his man Friday. Engraving by Thomas Medland. *The Life And Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Vol. 1* (London: John Stockdale, 1790), facing p. 256. Edition and image is author's own. 168
- 11.7 Charles Ansell (1790). Robinson Crusoe Rescuing & Protecting Friday. Engraving by Inigo Barlow. *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Vol. 1* (London: William Lane, 1790), facing p. 194. Edition and image is author's own. 169
- 11.8 George Cruickshank (1831). Crusoe in his cave. Engraving by John Jackson. *The Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe... illustrated with numerous engravings from drawings by George Cruikshank Vol. 1* (London: John Major, 1831), 210. Edition and image is author's own. 171
- 11.9 Alexander Fraser (1835). *Robinson Crusoe Reading the Bible to his Man Friday*. Engraving by Charles G. Lewis (1836) (London: Henry Graves, 1836). Edition and image is author's own. 172
- 11.10 Grandville (Jean-Ignace-Isidore Gérard) and François-Louis Français (1840). Frontispiece. Engraving by Louis Henri Brévière. *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (Paris: H. Fournier Ainé; London: William Strange, and Robert Tyas, 1840). Edition and image is author's own. 173
- 11.11 Ernest Griset (1869). Crusoe in a forest. *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Vol. 1* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1869), 61. Steel engraving. © British Library Board, shelfmark 12613.gg.9. 175
- 11.12 Jules Fesquet (1877). Frontispiece, steel engraving by Gabriel Hubert Alexandre Légenisel. *Etranges aventures de Robinson Crusoe* (Paris: Jules Bonnassies, 1877), facing p. xx. © British Library Board, shelfmark 12612.ff.1. 176
- 11.13 Stanley Berkeley (1890). Crusoe's first attack on the Cannibals when he saves Friday. *The life and surprising adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, mariner, Vol. 1* (London and Sydney: Griffith, Farran, Okeden & Welsh, 1890), 171. Photogravure. © British Library Board, shelfmark 012611.g.11. 178
- 11.14 Walter Paget (1891). This Was Game Indeed. Frontispiece. *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York Mariner as related by himself* (London, Paris, and Melbourne: Cassell & Company, Ltd., 1891). Wood engraving. Edition and image is author's own. 179

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

II.15	Charles Edmund Brock (1898). This Friday admired very much. <i>The life and adventures of Robinson Crusoe</i> , Vol 1 (London: Service and Paton, 1898), facing p. 168. Edition and image is author's own.	180
II.16	J. Ayton Symington (1905). I was King and Lord of all this country. <i>The Life Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner</i> , Vol. 1 (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1905), facing p. 72. Watercolour reproduced in colour. © British Library Board, shelfmark 012612.ee.9.	182
II.17	Elenore Plaisted Abbott (1913). She would have no hand in my destruction. <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> (Philadelphia: G. W. Jacob and Co., 1913), facing p. 18. Reproduction in colour. © British Library Board, shelfmark 12800.aa.20.	183
II.18	Newell Connors Wyeth (1920). All this while I sat upon the ground, very much terrified and dejected. <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> (New York, NY: Cosmopolitan Book Corporation; London: Harrods Ltd., 1920), facing p. 106. Watercolour reproduced in colour. © British Library Board, shelfmark 012802.d.2.	185

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Life of Daniel Defoe: A Critical Biography (2005). His latest book is *A History of Eighteenth-Century British Literature* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), the eighteenth-century volume of the Blackwell History of English Literature.

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PREFACE

Daniel Defoe's *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un-inhabited Island of the Coast of AMERICA, near the Mouth of the Great River of OROONOUQUE; 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

PREFACE

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 Surprising 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, Defoe's novel 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

PREFACE

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

PREFACE

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

1660 or 1661	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
1662	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
1663	Drury Lane Theatre in London reopens
1664	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
1665–6	The Great Plague (kills over 70,000 people in London) and the Great Fire of London (consumes most of the old wooden city)
c.1671–9	Attends school of the Rev. James Fisher at Dorking, Surrey, and then the Dissenting Academy of Rev. Charles Morton, Newington Green, north of London
1675	Greenwich Observatory established by Charles II
1678	“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
c.1683	Established as a wholesale hosiery merchant, living in Cornhill, near the Royal Exchange
1684	Marries Mary Tuffley and receives a dowry of £3,700
1685	Death of Charles II – succeeded by his brother, the Catholic James II Louis XIV revokes the Edict of Nantes, ending religious toleration in France
1685	Participates in the unsuccessful rebellion against James II led by the Duke of Monmouth, one of Charles II’s illegitimate sons

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	Founding of the Bank of England Establishes a brick and tile factory at Tilbury, in Essex
1695	Daniel Foe begins to call himself Defoe
1697	Defoe’s first published book, <i>An Essay on Projects</i> , a series of proposals for radical social and economic change Death of Queen Mary
1697–1701	Defoe acts as an agent for William III in England and Scotland
1701	James II dies in exile Act of Settlement establishes Hanoverian succession <i>The True-Born Englishman</i> , a poetic satire of English xenophobia and a defense of William III, who was Dutch by birth
1702	Death of William III, accession of Queen Anne, James II’s daughter England declares war against France and Spain: War of the Spanish Succession John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, named Captain-General of the English army <i>The Shortest Way with the Dissenters</i> , a satiric attack on High Church extremists
1703	Defoe arrested for writing <i>The Shortest Way with the Dissenters</i> , charged with sedition, committed to Newgate Prison and sentenced to stand in the pillory for three days. He published the poem <i>A Hymn to the Pillory</i> and an authorized collection of his writings, <i>A True Collection of the Writings of the Author of The True-born Englishman</i> (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 Defoe begins <i>The Review</i> , a pro-government newssheet appearing as often as three times a week (through 1713)
1704–13	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	<i>The Family Instructor</i> , 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	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i> , <i>The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe</i>
1720	<i>Captain Singleton</i> , <i>Serious Reflections of ... Robinson Crusoe</i> 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	<i>A Journal of the Plague Year</i> , <i>Moll Flanders</i> , and <i>Colonel Jack</i>
1724	<i>Roxana</i> , <i>A General History of the Pyrates</i> , <i>A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain</i> (3 volumes, 1724–6)
1725	<i>The Complete English Tradesman</i> (volume I)
1726	<i>The Political History of the Devil</i>
1727	<i>Conjugal Lewdness</i> , <i>An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions</i> , <i>A New Family Instructor</i> , <i>The Complete English Tradesman</i> (volume II) Death of George I
1728	<i>Augusta Triumphans</i> , <i>A Plan of the English Commerce</i>
1729	<i>The Compleat English Gentleman</i> (not published until 1890)
1731	Defoe dies April 24 in Ropemaker's Alley, London, in debt, hiding from creditors

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Frontmatter

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