American Dialectic, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2011 (90-111)

The Unexpurgated *Robinson Crusoe*

Eva Brann

I imagine that many people think they have read Daniel Defoe's adventure novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, when they were children. They didn't really, or better, they read a heavily expurgated version. But, it was the most curious clean-up imaginable. Usually it is sex that is censored. There is no sex whatsoever in the original book (though, no one will think that the fact that Robinson was, for twenty-five of his twenty-eight years there, alone on his island and, as he says (102),[1] removed from the lusts of the flesh is a sufficient explanation of the total absence of any thoughts of that sort). No, what children's versions subvert is Robinson Crusoe's frequent and prolonged struggles with sin and faith. What child not cowed by impositions of adult piety would put up with the dark nights of the soul, or, in contemporary terms, the existential crises, that Robinson Crusoe records? He tells us at the very beginning that his last name, Crusoe, was a corruption of his German father's name *Kreutznaer* or Cross-ner, "Man of the Cross."

What children love in the book (and in its many knockoffs) is surely the other side of the intensely introspective Crusoe; it is Robinson's inventiveness, his survival skills, his endless practical ingenuity. This Robinson is the original do-it-yourselfer, the adult prolongation of the two-year-old's clamor: "*I* do it, I do it myself, I can do it." That's just what Robinson says: "…I found at last that I wanted nothing but I could have made it, especially if I had had tools…" (55). To him the world is a place of projects.

---

[1] All page references are to *Robinsom Crusoe* are from the Penguin Classics edition: Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc, 2001).

Copyright © 2011 by American Dialectic.

No wonder then that *Robinson Crusoe*, published in 1719, is not only the first of the novelistic genre, but also the oldest and longest lasting of all literary children's books. It was propagated as such by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his huge educational romance *Émile* of 1762. Rousseau gives it to his pupil Émile as his first book, to teach him practical ingeniousness and self-sufficiency. I cannot help saying here, going off-topic, that *Émile* is as perverse pedagogically as can be; Jean-Jacques' charge is to be practically self-sufficient, but he is trained to be psychically dependent on his mentor for life.

Be that as it may, the project-magic worked on me. My European parents, obedient to Rousseauean tradition, gave me the children's book as the first I was to read to myself by myself. I was allowed to take it to the couch on which I, a wide-awake seven-year-old, endured an enforced afternoon nap-time. I employed myself by digging a hole in the plaster of the outside wall against which the napping-couch stood, and "if I had had tools" better than my poking index finger, I would in time have made my escape into the garden. As it was, I got as far out as my top-joint when my parents gave up the nap-regime.

Besides the project-mindedness, what makes the book so inviting to children is the scarily exhilarating absence of supervision. Robinson is all by himself, as what child does not—for a limited time—long to be. One of the well-known bowdlerizations, *The Swiss Family Robinson*, spoils it all by bringing along the whole cozy clan.[2]

Robinson, however, is indeed all alone. I think his first name, Robinson, is also deliberately chosen; it signifies Everyman, an English Everyman. (One of the mutineers in the ship that finally

[2] The castaway children of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, on the other hand, are too long without grown-ups. The lord of their island is in fact a decaying aviator's corpse—and the consequences are terrible.

takes Robinson off his island is named Robinson as if to say, that's what ordinary people are called, 210.) Now our Robinson is, on the face of it, as unlike every one else, as uncommon as can be, both in his strange fate and his extraordinary capabilities. Yet, I want to claim, Defoe presents him as an archetype, as a model of a new man, soon to be a predominant breed—a *modern* man. So it is his modernity that I will try to delineate—our modernity.

Robinson Crusoe is regarded not only as among the earliest of novels, but also as the first "realistic" novel. I would amend that: It is not really very realistic. In fact, it is perhaps quite implausible that anyone should live on a tropical island alone for a quarter of a century without succumbing to bugs or insanity. It is rather relentlessly factual, or full of facts, where by a fact I mean a processed piece of nature, an item of the world that has been entered into an accounting-scheme. This view of things comes over as thick, vivid detail, pleasing and edifying at once. No one who has a taste for things made and their handiness can resist Robinson's telling of his tale.

So *Robinson Crusoe* is perhaps the first fully realized specimen of this new and most copious literary genre, the novel. Everything about "the novel" betokens newness, not least the name itself. It refers to the *news*paper-like reportage, a newsy fiction, full of novelties, not least of which are the themes. Think, in contrast, of ancient tragedy, which was almost always a version of a well-known story that had the standing of myth and its renowned hero. Robinson, the new protagonist, is given by his author, who was himself a journalist, the talent of a reporter and the occupation of a literal journalist, a journal-keeper (while the ink lasts). He, an obscure and private nonhero, is the on-site, first-person account-giver, the personal observer of factual situations and his subjective take on them. In fact, Defoe veils the fictional character of this

factual novel in every which way. Between him and Robinson he inserts a nameless editor who assures us that this story of a "private man's adventures in the world" is worth making public and that it is, as I have described it, a "history of fact" (3). These tricks seem to work; I for one am persuaded that Robinson is candid, honest, and sincere, all words we have handy when we keep to the *intention* of the teller not to deceive so as to avoid reference to his *ability* to tell the truth. At any rate, this is an "I" book; one I is the teller, but to whom? I think first to himself. For that purpose he keeps that journal, just as memory notes to himself. But this island account is later inserted into the middle of a, to some extent duplicating, narrative, evidently written after his rescue, and this story is written for the public. Crusoe becomes increasingly aware of the fact that he and his fate are interesting. The way I imagine it is that on the island as ink gives out and his experiences deepen he talks more and more to himself, silently, for his voice grows disused. But once off the island he tells his tale—we never hear how and when—to the paper or the editor or perhaps, who knows, to a now literate Friday. He knows himself to be interesting because he has two very disparate stories, and that is because he has two very different, but also complementary natures.

One side of him is, as I have intimated, absorbed in the world of facts, in putting nature to use, in fabricating contrivances, in quickly passing beyond mere survival to civilized comfort, beyond necessities to conveniences. Thus he begins by building himself a secure fort and ends by designing a country house.

Is he really alone? Over the years he surrounds himself with possessions, the most remarkable of which to me is a folding umbrella (107) that he takes to England when he is finally rescued (218). He eventually presides over a dinner table with his "little family": an old dog, some cats, and his parrot, "the only person

permitted to talk to me," as he says (118). This speaking bird too comes back to England. He frankly lords it over his domain; if he dines alone, it is "like a King" (118), though his reign is also his captivity (109).

Moreover, he remains enmeshed in the real chronology of the Christian world; he enters the melancholy "scene of silent life" on September, 30, 1659 (52). As I said, he soon keeps a dated journal, and for much of his stay he hopes for earthly "redemption," that is, rescue from the island at a date expected though uncertain; in fact it will occur on December 19, 1686 (219). He preserves the mores of society with respect to going naked; he says that he "could not abide the thought of it, tho' I was all alone" (107), which is to say he continues to feel shame as does a social man.[3] Or, perhaps, more gravely, he is, even in his solitary semiparadise, an Adam after the Fall, who has grown forever ashamed of his nakedness.[4] He carries the inhibitions of his second nature right into nature, where clothes can serve neither sex nor status.

In fact, his being by himself gives scope to his most characteristic mode, which is his amateurishness. In the old days he never learned a trade; indeed, though the editor's title denominates him "Mariner," he prefers to take passage on his sea voyages so as not to have to work as a sailor (15). But he is curious, observant, and a quick study, to whom to have seen something done is to be able to do it: There is lodged in his memory some recollection of how to go about practically any process. Moreover, he has a great gift for figuring things out. As he puts it:

---

[3] Crusoe's aversion to going naked even in the solitude of his island contrasts revealingly with the way of the sailor who seems to have been his model, Alexander Selkirk. He spent four-and-a-half years marooned on a small island in the Pacific. (Crusoe's is in the Atlantic, off Brazil's Orinoco River.) Selkirk reverted to the state of nature when his clothes wore out and went about in the nude.

[4] *Genesis* 3: 10.

> [A]s reason is the substance and original of the mathematicks, so by stating and squaring everything by reason, and making the most rational judgment of things, every man may be in time master of every mechanic art (55).

This is the very definition of rationalized practicality; it shows Robinson as the opposite of the medieval journeyman who ends up master of one so-called "mystery;" he is every man in one and nothing is a mystery to him. All his productions are very imperfect, as he honestly records, but they do just fine. He develops out of his experience his own "best practices" for every need—the aboriginal empirical rationalist.

Alone on the island he is altogether a man of projects, a "projector" and "adventurer," as entrepreneurs used to be called. He is a busy man, a man of business, labors, and accounts. Even on a deserted island he early on sets up a double-entry balance sheet of his evils and goods "like a debtor and creditor" (54). He establishes timetables and schedules (58) and runs his island like a going concern of one. He is the ultimate individualist, who does everything by himself and for himself and sets a world humming, a world that has only a single human inhabitant, who is, however, all over it. He is indeed the true individualist, alone singled out by his God and yet representing a paradoxical archetype: the *unique Everyman*. This society of one shows Robinson in a humanly novel aspect: He gives meaning to the term "private enterprise."[5] He is a culture of one.

---

[5] The ship's company that mutinied in 1789 against the tyrannical officer (and terrific navigator) Captain Bligh sailed to the safety of self-exile under the leadership of the chief mutineer, Lieutenant Christian Fletcher. They took possession of the then desert Pitcaírn's Island. The third of Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Halls's *Bounty Trilogy*, *Pitcaírn's Island* (1934), tells of their attempt to found a civil society, which only succeeded after the first, the mutineer generation, had practically exterminated itself. This story, which, to be sure, took place long after Robinson's landing on his island, makes plausible the hard-won

Although he is “by himself,” that is, his own companion, indeed an internal chatterbox, there is in fact one other, pseudohuman, voice on the island, a voice that does not disrupt the anxious safety of his solitariness. It is the precursor of our virtual connectedness. It belongs to that parrot of his, and an uncanny episode involving his Poll brings us to Robinson’s other aspect, his Crusoe-nature.

After having put out to sea on a boat he has made and very nearly being drowned in an eddy, Crusoe falls into an exhausted sleep in his country house. He is frightened out of his oblivion by a human voice moaning at him: “Robin Crusoe, Robin Crusoe… *Poor* Robin Crusoe, Where are you? Where have you been? How come you here?” (113-114) It is his Poll who has found him and is parroting his own questions, an eerie externalization of his existential ruminations, his nonhuman echo.

For Robinson, as I said, always talks to himself and, as time goes by, more and more to God—at first only in ejaculations such as, “Lord ha’ mercy upon me,” cries that cease when the particular disaster, be it earthquake, or danger of drowning, is past (65-70). Then his inner speech becomes mundane, deplorably so, as he thinks in bad moments. Usually, Robinson, even alone, is a temperate, receptive man with a wry sense of humor and some engaged kindness for the animal life that he observes around him (50). But there are times of deep depression following on sickness or on fright, when his isolation is borne in on him, and he is “wracked by terrible thoughts.” His worst imaginations are those of being found by the cannibals, who, he discovers early in the second decade of his stay, visit the island for their horrid feasts (115, 122).

---

precarious contentment of his life. He fears the hostility of fellow humans more than his own solitude—with good reason (129-30).

What is only at first a passing, merely occasional turn to God becomes more significant when Robinson is beset by those bouts of loneliness. Then he takes refuge in a recognition that, as time goes on, becomes the focus of his inner life: a sense of having been singled out, saved time after time, as when, of three ships' companies whose loss he has witnessed, he alone survived (54, 178); he had in fact been shipwrecked once long before he was cast up on his island. Indeed, the chief events of his first eight adult years double, as if by a preparatory Providence, his castaway epoch: besides shipwreck and sole survivorship, there occurs captivity, loneliness, coping by amateur's wits, and the loyal friendship of a young heathen. Crusoe's retrospective sense of being watched over induces a progressive turn to, and incessant preoccupation with, God's Providence, but above all a consciousness of his unworthiness, his sinfulness, of a life so far spent "like a meer brute from principles of Nature, and by the dictates of common sense only, and indeed hardly that" (71).

This Providence appears, at least to this coolly distant reader, as the inner reflection of Crusoe's hedging about of his physical life with prudent arrangements of safety and comfort. Resourceful human prudence finds in him its counterpart in merciful divine Providence. Crusoe more than merely bears the cross of his marked solitariness; he turns it to his own profit. Indeed, he finds increasing comfort in these reflections and even comes to wonder "whether thus conversing mutually with my own thoughts, and, as I hope I may say, with even God himself by ejaculations, was not better than the utmost enjoyment of society in the world" (108).

Of course, the answer is ultimately "no," especially since his outcries go one way, and he is ever beset by loneliness. So when a ship is wrecked off his coast, he cries out,

> by every possible energy of words... O that there had been... but one soul sav'd out of this ship... that I might have but one companion, one fellow-creature to have spoken to me... (148).

And yet, it is simultaneously true that the "I" of Crusoe's tale is almost *too* omnipotent for company. As this individual of individuals makes a secular, physical world of contrivances *around* himself, so he calls up a God of comfort *within* himself. He is the objective and subjective master of his world; for all his expressions of subjection to his God, it is a deity *he* invokes when not occupied with fixing his island. In fact, he is and remains a man of dual motives: he refuses to go naked from shame *and* because he cannot bear the sun's heat (107); he longs both for a companion *and* a servant; he gives up his plan to exterminate the cannibals from "religion *joyn'd*" with prudence (137).

I want briefly to call attention here to a wonderfully revealing forerunner of *Robinson Crusoe*. It is the theological fantasy, *Hayy Ibn Yagzān*, written by the Muslim philosopher Ibn Tufayl in the twelfth century.[6] In this story Hayy is brought to an uninhabited island as a baby, is suckled by a doe, and grows up animal- and self-taught. But his interest in his external comforts and even in the sciences that he discovers diminishes to nothing as he becomes engrossed in evolving out of himself the complete theology of Sufism. That is another story, except to observe that, just like Crusoe, he is essentially self-sufficient in nature and self-constituted in soul, with this telling difference: the opposition of "objective" and "subjective," so crucially important to our modern life, is absent; it has no application to Hayy's divinity. But this very opposition is surely of the greatest significance for Robinson Crusoe, the Christian

[6] Ibn Tufayl's tale, translated by Simon Oakley, was published in England in 1710, nine years before *Robinson Crusoe*. Defoe *might* have known it. See *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yagzān: A Philosophical Tale*, translated by Lenn Evan Goodman, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

Everyman, the prototype modern, who needs *both* to tame (89) and modify the world and to record and rectify his soul.

Here is a revealing mistake Crusoe makes about himself. He is but shortly back home in England, both safe and rich. He accomplishes the transition, which we might imagine to be fraught with the anxiety of dislocation, in a few dry sentences: after having been thirty-five years absent he finds himself a perfect stranger, but his investments secure. The first five pages of his return give a detailed account of his finances (219-225). His true home, we see, is the world of "business," first in the literal sense of the industry, the incessant busyness of his outward island life, and second in the usual sense of financial affairs.

It is after giving the bottom line of the wealth that has accrued in his absence that he likens himself to Job. He had found Bibles in a chest saved from the wreck of his ship—Bibles together with tobacco, heavenly and earthly comfort together—and had been reading assiduously. It is his sole book, though he has it in multiple copies meant for the conversion of the heathen slaves his ship, a slaver, was meant to take; he has it, as it were, in stock. It is *the* Book, sufficient to the island. So he should know his avatar.

The point of comparison is "that the latter end of *Job* was better than the beginning" (224). But beyond that, Crusoe and Job are each other's antithesis in the two points that really count. Above all, and as a consequence of Job's unhumble recalcitrance, God is compelled to speak to him audibly, to answer him out of that whirlwind.[7] It is not merciful, but upbraiding speech: "Who is this…" and "Where wert thou" he begins; it is the very question of Crusoe's *parrot*. But, the point *God* makes and Job takes is: I exist, I am potent, I am imponderably beyond you. That is Job's real

[7] *Book of Job*, 38: 2 and 4.

reward, God's objective being-there, and that is what Crusoe's subjective God never evinces: independent existence.

Here is the second great difference. Why does Job win out, totally and completely? Because he will never capitulate to his false friends' demands that he should admit to sin. Job knows himself to be without great sin, and he, in turn, demands not God's mercy but his justice, or if not justice, some objective response, which he gets, as Crusoe never does.

The reason is that Crusoe is deeply and, I think, satisfyingly absorbed in his rather vague sinfulness, which fascinates his subjectivity, his self-devoted inner-life. It is not the sins of the flesh that haunt him. As I have mentioned, the book has simply no sex. Sometime after he returns to England, we are told that he married "not either to my disadvantage," and (one may figure out) that just before the age of sixty-two he fathered three children and that his wife died to leave him to pursue his former sinful ways (240)—all this in one short paragraph. What these are I will say in a moment, but comment here that he lives out what we call guilt-feelings. Guilt-feelings are when you bemoan a fault you have no real intention of amending.

Let me interject here a note on the remarkable sexual purity, so to speak, of this book. It was followed three years later, in 1722, by a thick novel called *Moll Flanders*, an exuberant account of the life of a lady who, and I quote portions of the subtitle:

> Was Twelve Year a *Whore*, five times a *Wife* (whereof once to her own Brother) Twelve Year a Thief…at last grew *Rich*, liv'd *Honest*, and died a *Penitent*.[8]

---

[8] Whoring Moll might appear to be blameless Crusoe's antithesis, but they have two deep characteristics in common. Both of them have an abiding interest in the bottom-line and the business that produces it, and both lead lives of stupefying variety, which are the expression of their constitutional restlessness. Both declare themselves the agents of their own miseries without much intention of amendment. Both are lucky, though as they are in effect asking for their own

So one could hardly claim that Defoe ignorant of, or adverse to, that side of life. It is absent from *Robinson Crusoe* by the necessity of the hero's nature. I will venture an explanation: Between invention and introspection he is simply too busy for desire; he labors too hard. It is a recognizable feature of modern man: purity by preoccupation.

What then *is* the sin, which he calls, in capitals, his ORIGINAL SIN? (154). It is dissatisfaction with the station wherein God and Nature have placed him, with that middling life which his father earnestly wishes for him (6). What is in Satan prideful rebellion against the Heavenly Father comes out in Crusoe as restless escape from his earthly father. Crusoe repents, but never for good; he even attributes his fault to Providence, which has not blessed him with "confin'd desires." Consider as well that "original" sin is also enabling sin, deeply ensconced. It is the first transgression that smoothes the path for subsequent ones, and as his gratitude to God's Providence abates as soon as a danger or difficulty is surmounted (64), so no sooner has a phase of life been concluded, when Crusoe must crucify himself on new projects. In general, the more ardently he reads Scripture and thanks God for his safe solitude and repents of his "wicked, cursed, abominable" previous life, the more the reader is at a loss for its actual sins: he has never killed a man until he clubs a cannibal in clear self-defense. The more he blames himself for the hypocrisy of this thankfulness (90-

---

disasters, so they also maneuver their own fortunes. Both are outlaws, Moll achieving the status of gentlewoman by prostitution and thievery, Crusoe becoming the proprietor of a colony by being simply beyond the law, a law unto himself. Both are great record-keepers, though Moll mostly of her successful vices, Robinson of his effective virtues (which is why *Robinson Crusoe* could be transmogrified into a children's book, but never *Moll Flanders*). Both are interesting, though perhaps Moll, an accomplished crook and a beauty, is more scintillating. In a summer seminar on the two books, I asked the members which of the two characters they would rather have tea with. The vote was altogether for Moll, but the women made it clear that they'd invite her to a tea shop rather than to their home.

91), the more this religiosity seems bound to mood-swings, humanly profound, but theologically shallow, deeply and familiarly egocentric. Sin seems a sort of luxury of solitude, the fascinated preoccupation of an expansive selfhood.

Then in the fifteenth year of his solitude, there is that sighting of the footprint, the presage of a new kind of life, and before long all the inner conversation turns into outer proselytizing.

This singular footprint is, again, eerie. It is, in its singularity, a very literal refutation of his comforting conviction "that no human shape had ever *set foot* upon that place" (my italics, 79). Robinson first fears that it might be the Devil's imprint, who has one human foot, and whom he takes quite seriously. (For him, remarkably, the Devil exists, visible without as evil incarnate,[9] while God is wholly interior.) Then he argues himself out of that (123). In any case, his solitary paradise has been invaded and soon he discovers to his horror that cannibals come here often from the continental side of the island to feast on their prisoners. There ensue some years of debilitating anxiety, which even reduces his inventive gusto, except that he focuses it on the destruction of these monsters.

Then come some remarkable pages (133-37) in which he tells how he came to decide against murdering them all, remarkable because they delineate that most encompassing of modern virtues, tolerance. Briefly told, he decides that if God's Providence let them be, why shouldn't he, and that they really were not murderers in the strict sense; moreover, that they are not his business and that he would probably destroy himself in attempting to eradicate them. In short, "neither in principle or in policy" (137) should he concern himself, as long as he could keep safe. Here is our familiar mode of tolerance underwritten by the gospel of "none of my business." One

[9] As it was for Defoe himself, which is clear from his *Political History of the Devil* (1726).

might even call him an early cultural relativist.[10] He says of the cannibals that they were no more to be condemned as murderers than were those many Christians who kill captives of war (136).

Thus, as so often the case with tolerance, it works only until things become up close and personal, as they do one day. The cannibals reappear. A young captive gets away from them and runs toward Robinson, who, though at first very frightened, finds himself "plainly called by Providence to save this poor creature" (160). To be sure, as I said, he hopes for a servant, but also for a companion. The rescue succeeds after a good deal of slaughter of the savages, and suddenly a quarter century of life alone is over: he has a human friend. And here the issues begin; although I've read very little of the secondary literature on the novel, I know that some contemporary critics would deny that to Robinson this primitive is either fully human—a man, or that he remains sexually unexploited—a friend. I want to show that both aspersions cast on Robinson's relations to Friday, slavery and sex, are false.

After feeding "his savage" (161), he describes him: a comely handsome fellow of twenty-six, of great vivacity and with sparkling eyes, whose features are more European than Negroid, to be sure, but certainly not white. After delineating him, that is, taking full note of him, he, Adamically, names him "Friday," because Friday is the day of his rescue according to Robinson's calendar (which we know by now is several days off, 76 days to be exact—he has after all, been on his island for over 9000 days). But who can help thinking of Good Friday, the euphemistically named day of Crucifixion, Crusoe's day? Frankly, I do not understand what Defoe is signaling, but there is no getting around the central place of the Crucifixion in Christianity and the crucial place of Christianity for Crusoe. The day of the Cross is the day of his deliverance.

---

[10] Though not the first; that was surely Herodotus: see *Persian Wars III 38*.

First "he falls to work for my man Friday," making him clothes (164)—not much like a slave-master. Then he teaches Friday, who is even quicker of comprehension than is Crusoe himself (and certainly better looking in his young nakedness than his aging goat-skin-clad savior—is he attired as a scapegoat?), his own name for Friday's use, namely, "Master" (163).

Does this denominate Friday as his slave? Friday makes gestures of submission, Crusoe answers with marks of care. "Master" is used here more as an indication of earned rank. I know a pertinent case from the Naval Academy, my school's neighbor across the street in Annapolis. There I met a Colonel Hagee (I think it was) of the Marines, later on Commandant of the Marine Corps. He won my admiration for his disciplined openness and his junior officer's respect for his exemplary leadership. One of these told me that when they were all in the canteen exchanging nicknames, a cheeky youngster asked Hagee what *his* was. Without batting an eyelid he shot back "Colonel." These free young Americans found this naming by title totally in order; it was earned.

Robinson generally refers to Friday as "my man Friday" (171 for example) much as a latter-day Englishman would refer to his batman or butler. Crusoe's intention is not, I think, to patronize him (as it might sound to the currently correct ear); on the contrary, it is an explicit acknowledgement of Friday's *manhood*. For Robinson admires him, not only for his physical deftness, but for his intellectual quickness.

Robinson has cured Friday of his cannibalism by cooking him a savory goat stew, but Crusoe also wants to convert him to Christianity by administering true theology. There is a wonderful occasion when Friday simply floors Crusoe on these very theological grounds, no less. Friday has learned English very fast, and as soon as possible, Crusoe begins to convert him to his Protestant,

anticlerical ways (171), using such doctrinal arguments as he knows. He has an easy time with the omnipotence of the Christian God and a devilishly hard one with the potency of the Devil. Friday wants to know "*if God much strong, much might as the devil, why God no kill the Devil, so make him no more do wicked?*"

Crusoe is stumped, as aren't we all. "I therefore diverted the present discourse between me and my man;" he pretends to have some urgent business for gaining time to think of an answer, which turns out to be, by his own admission, more extensive than illuminating (173).

The three years they live together before their rescue is a time of perfect and complete happiness for Robinson "*if any such thing as compleat happiness can be form'd in a sublunary state*" (174). Are they lovers? Of course not. Part of the evidence is that "The savage was now a good Christian, a much better than I." Some literary critics, who never have enough to do, surmise that Achilles and Patroclus were lovers even though each of them goes to bed every night with his own captive woman and both have affectionate relations with them.[11] I mention this case, nearly three millenia earlier, to show that devoted friendships are always subject to this suspicion. But, this is a book without sex, and so it remains to the end. Friday and Robinson are friends, the most loving friends, the latter says (168, 179), for Friday has a spontaneously loving nature (187). It is in evidence not only with Crusoe, but when they rescue Friday's father (187) and there is no hint at all of anything more or, perhaps one should say, less. To be sure, Crusoe has a severe bout of jealousy when he suspects Friday of wanting to go home (217), but it is more the feeling of an adoptive father afraid of losing a son to his natural father, and he gets over it. This relation is part of what one might call, be it with smirk or smile, the purity of the book, which

[11] *Iliad* IX, 663.

has turned it into *the* great children's book.

What makes this life possible for Friday, we are not asked to ponder, but what makes it plausible for Crusoe is implied in his nature. His maximum expenditure of inventive energy in the external world of objects together with his intense concentration on his inner being as subject is what, as I have suggested, leaves no room for sex. Two centuries later this conversion of energy will get a name: "sublimation." I am not saying that I am convinced by Freud's hydraulic theory of the psyche, that there is really a steady flow of libidinous energy that can be converted, diverted, or dammed.[12] But, I think that Defoe might have had some such notion of Crusoe's intimate life, or might have found it congenial if told of it. Crusoe is, after all, though an imagined being, yet endowed by his human creator with a character shaped by his maker's sense of the possible.

Defoe gives us plenty of evidence for this nonarticulate aspect of Crusoe's inner life. As in the early years he suffers from bouts of deep existential depression during which he wrestles with sin and faith, later on he discovers a seer's sensibility in himself. Recall that his father had a turn for prophecy, foretelling Robinson's forlornness (7). He is given to "intuitions," as we would say, but which he calls "secret hints, or pressings of my mind," and to the "converse of spirits" (139, 197), which he learns to ignore at his peril. He is also visited by accurately prophetic dreams, the strangest of which is so precise a precursor-scenario of the cannibals' arrival and his rescue of Friday that when the event occurs, a year and half later, he actually plans his actions by making deliberate emendations to his dream (157, 162). I interpret these intuitions and dreams as the

[12] Sigmund Freud, *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1915-17), translated by Joan Riviere (Chicago: William Benton, 1988), Lecture 22; see also *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929), translated by Joan Riviere (Chicago: William Benton, 1988), Section II.

psychic work of his human prudence, the image of God's Foresight, His Providence.

Before long, after another bout with visiting cannibals, the island is well and variously peopled, by Crusoe's account: Friday, a Protestant; his father, a pagan; one rescued Spaniard, a Papist. But, as he says in the most suggestive and funny comment of the book:

> However, I allow'd liberty of conscience throughout my dominions. But this is by the way (190).

This is double-minded Robinson Crusoe, our forbear, at his most characteristic. Who could fail to recognize the simultaneous assertion of caretaking dominion and liberal intention, of management and tolerance?

To conclude, Robinson and Friday get off the island by helping the English captain of a mutinous crew recapture his ship; Robinson has got him to promise—hilariously—to carry him to England "passage-free" (201). The rest is somewhat forcedly farcical, a superfluous romp through Europe, the aftermath-doings of a man whose great tale has ended, but whose restlessness has in no wise abated; he cannot stop adventuring and he cannot stop telling. The book ends with a promise of more surprising incidents and farther accounts.

Only one weighty thing happens back in Europe, and that is that account-giving I've mentioned, tale-telling at its most business-like: Robinson Crusoe reports to us in exact numbers all the income accrued to him in his absence and all the goods dispatched to him from the plantation in Brazil he had coowned. Indeed his receipt of both letters of account and actual goods nearly make him die on the spot with joy (223-26, see also 38).

No sooner has he made very generous disposition of this now considerable wealth than he is off again from Lisbon overland to

London, then back to Lisbon, more accounting and disposing, and finally, in 1694 at sixty-two, back to his island to oversee affairs there. For it is now his "collony," as he calls it, and he has long thought of himself as its Proprietor (80, 240). Friday is always with him, but of God we hear less.

What has it all come to? No sooner off the island than he reverts to restlessness, his original sin. He is the most adaptable man, not much amenable to the "culture shock" Americans are expected by anthropologists to undergo when transiting to new environments, and like many flexible characters he is, at bottom, fixedly himself, incorrigible. Furthermore, as he expends himself in worldly affairs, his subjective life wanes, diffused into unanchored darting about. His subjectivity, always governed by tides of mood, becomes shallow.

So was his faith ever deep? Well, it has a certain characteristics probably quite familiar to you. They may not betoken spiritual depth, but they are surely abidingly serviceable. This religiosity that I will briefly lay out is the coping stone of an arch of character whose one upright is inventive business, a conquering ingenuity, rebelliously rivaling within the world God's creative power beyond the world, while the other is a gnawing, conscientious inwardness, ever seeking and ever losing the repose of settled obedience.

Here are five features of Crusoe's religiosity, as they appear to me; they seem to make him the modern of moderns, in essence our contemporary.

First, there is that intense subjectivity I have been dwelling on, whose God is made in the individual's image, to be called up or relegated to oblivion as need and mood wax and wane. Crusoe is altogether a yes-and-no man, a man of two minds: utility and morality, cheer and melancholy, but above all, energetic enterprise

and enervating sinfulness. As for that last, our expression for the correlative kind of conscience is, as I have noted, "guilt feelings," a talkative insistence on sins committed, accompanied by an unarticulated intention to remain as we were. Robinson's one expressively confessed sin is his unappeasable hunger for adventure, and, indeed, no sooner is he off the island than he's back at it, his outer drivenness being fully the match for his inner anxiety.

Second, there is that embarrassment of evil, the sense that its reality, for Crusoe personified in the Devil, cannot be squared with God's omnipotence, and that in the face of this dilemma it is safest to find some sudden business to do and later to engage in long, not entirely intelligible, bible-based discourses—as Crusoe indeed does.[13]

Third, there is Robinson's candor, or as we say, his sincerity. He is terminally honest and open in the account of his life. Whether he ever gets beyond sincerity to truth, beyond the frankness of his telling to searching into the way things are, is another question. He is, perhaps, too self-involved, too much an "I," to use his intellect for the discovery of truth rather than the allaying of anxiety—a familiarly modern subversion of thought.

Fourth, there is his inveterate busyness and his unselfconsciously proud success in business. He thinks of his enterprise, I have intimated, as the secular image of God's Providence: he is, in our favorite word "creative," arrogating God's

[13] The rigorously intellectual (Catholic) treatment of evil as absence of good, as nonbeing, is not available to Protestant Crusoe. Crusoe had professed himself a Papist from convenience in his preisland time in Brazil, but he develops scruples about settling there and adopting that religion after his island stay, since it might not be "the best religion to die with." But that, it turns out, was not his main concern, which was who would take charge of his English fortune (226).

Crusoe may have been made, in part, in the image of his creator, Defoe, who was a Dissenter, an inveterate protester, and so the protestant of Protestants: one who adheres to the spiritual life of the individual over the institutional rites of a church and its clergy.

prerogative. That busyness and business might be our life's center and "time off" a burden, or, at best, a relaxation of our proper efforts, is an eminently modern feeling. For previous ages, the human center lay in time free for noble pursuits.[14]

Fifth, there is Crusoe's most recognizably contemporary feature, one very agreeable to most of us, I would think, but also insidiously deleterious to his faith: his tolerance, what might fairly be called his cultural relativism. Cannibalism is a great issue in modern anthropology: Is our repulsion at the eating of our own species to be tempered when it is done in another culture's established setting, especially when scholars can find survival values for it (such as supplying protein otherwise lacking), motivations of which the culture in question may not even be conscious? Must what we judge abhorrent in ourselves be condoned in others? This is a problem Crusoe had faced and come to the tolerant conclusion that what God has allowed he must leave alone (135-37). But it returns to him again and again, especially after Friday's arrival, and in a last long meditation it leads close to doubting the chief attribute of his God, his Providence. Crusoe understands it as God's all-knowing, wisely-planning governance of *this* world. This is God as "the governour of nations" (74, 137), very much like the God of our Declaration of Independence. Similarly, Crusoe dubs himself "commander and captain, generalismo and governour" of his island (193, 210, 210). Crusoe says that from his misgivings,

---

[14] Robinson might be said to be *diverting* himself with restless busyness. "Diversion" is Pascal's term for the dispersion of the soul in worldly activity. See *Pensées*, translated by A.J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), pp. 66-71. Sec, VIII "Diversion."

The ancients regarded leisure as the true center of life and its best activity as learning; hence our word for school, which derives from *schole*, Greek for "leisure." A parallel case is the Latin word for business, which is negative, *negotium*, from *nec otium*, "non-leisure." See Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (New York: Mentor Book, 1952), p. 21. The modern mode turns this view of leisure around: Work is what we do; free time is carved out of the busy day.

> I sometimes was led too far to invade the sovereignty of *Providence*, and, as it were arraign the justice of so arbitrary a disposition of things, that should hid that light from some, and reveal it to others, and yet expect a like duty from both: But I shut it up, and checked my thoughts with this conclusion… (165- 166).

The thought-blocking conclusion is that the savages must have sinned according to their own lights.[15] Anyhow, who are we to question the way God made us? What could be more contemporary than a taste for universal tolerance coming into conflict with the demands of a specific morality, and a resolution of this quandary by, as Crusoe says, shutting it up, that is, leaving it unresolved and turning to practical business?

So I might go so far as to say that this first of novels presents a first and near-complete portrait of a modern man, a new man in the new world inhabiting a new genre, a man engaged in hot pursuit of happiness rather than in quiet preparation for contentment, opting for a life of frights and highs (indeed whose fears *are* its euphorias), but, for all his edgy living, also the close record-keeper of concrete assets. In short, adventurer and accountant in the world, and within himself a man of developed subjectivity and opportunistic faith.

So it would not be surprising if many of us would find him in ourselves (is not America the most inventive *and* the most freely religious country on earth?), except that we have sustained one lamentable loss: Defoe's vividly concrete, succinctly expressive, simply delicious eighteenth-century prose.

[15] Crusoe may be on the right track here for some cases. It appears from stories connected with the exile of the Aztec's god of civilization, Quetzalcoatl, the "Plumed Serpent," that he was driven out of Tula for refusing to accept the practice of human sacrifice and, presumably, the eating of the victim. See Miguel Léon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980), pp. 169-170.