Shipwrecked
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We now turn to Daniel Defoe’s novel *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner* (1719), which centers on a man who lives on an uninhabited island for over twenty-four years. It established what we might call the canonical sequence:

Departure from homeland, travel, disaster, stranding of a single survivor.
Acquisition of shelter, clothing, agriculture, and defense.
Then encountering others, establishing communication and a social hierarchy.
And finally rescue and reentry into the “old” world.

There are two areas of great interest. First, because he is alone, Crusoe must reestablish human civilization on the deserted island. Crusoe attempts to re-create the old world he was familiar with by “reinventing” human technological and cultural advances. A second remarkable feature is Crusoe’s spiritual rebirth, a transformation recounted in Crusoe’s own voice as the central character explores cause, responsibility, and divine influence with regard to the events of his life. In addition, we find explicit adoption of new roles—monarch, herdsman, shipwright, and many more. All this is recorded in his journal, for Crusoe becomes recorder, chronicler, and storyteller, like Odysseus.

As was true for *The Tempest*, this work is set against the historical context of European colonization of the New World. In addition, contemporary
ideas regarding man living “in a state of nature,” wholly isolated from society, form the intellectual backdrop. For the writing of this novel, we again find an immediate trigger: the story of Alexander Selkirk, stranded on an island for four years, was brought to light just a few years before Defoe’s writing of *Robinson Crusoe*.

### Five Pivotal Events

There are three main sections to the novel. The first begins in England, as we learn of Robinson Crusoe, born in Yorkshire (1632), whose “thoughts were so entirely bent upon seeing the world” (7). At eighteen years of age, he runs off to the sea “without asking God’s blessing, or my father’s” (19). Crusoe ultimately sails to Africa, for “I had a mind to see the world” (15; cf. 7, 14). He is enslaved by a Moorish captain, but he escapes after two years, is rescued by a Portuguese captain, and is brought to “the Americas.” He works as a successful planter for four years in Brazil but is persuaded to join a slave-buying expedition to Africa.

This sets the stage for the all-important second section: Crusoe encounters two storms that drive him back to the north coast of South America. He is the only one to survive a shipwreck and ends up spending twenty-eight years on an island near Trinidad, off the coast of what is now Venezuela. Naturally, this second section will claim our main attention here.

Crusoe’s journey to buy slaves begins with good sailing, but a great storm then blows for twelve days; next, a second storm “drove us . . . out of the very way of all human commerce” (35). Crusoe’s ship is now far from frequented trade routes. The crew is beset by despair and ignorance, for they do not know where they are or how long the ship will hold out.

In a word, we sat looking one upon another, and expecting death every moment, and every man acting accordingly, as preparing for another world. (36)

As land is sighted, the ship strikes sand, and the crew gets into the ship’s boat. A great wave immediately overturns it, separating everyone. Crusoe

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1. I follow the text of Defoe (2001) edited by Richetti. Seidel (1991) ix notes that a youth named Timothy Cruso (no e) was a classmate in Defoe’s school and a later acquaintance in London.
struggles to make it to land, fighting the undertow and waves. Dashed against rocks and left senseless, he speaks of himself as “half-dead.” Upon reaching land, Crusoe gives thanks to God but finds it difficult to describe what has happened.

I believe it is impossible to express to the life what the ecstasies and transports of the soul are, when it is so sav’d, as I may say, out of the very grave. (38)²

Crusoe then walks on shore, lifting his hands in unusual gestures and “reflecting upon all my comrades that were drowned, and that there should not be one soul sav’d but my self” (38–39).

The next three-quarters of the novel tell of Crusoe’s experiences on the island. He realizes he has no food, drink, or clothes. His apparent prospects are either to perish from hunger or be devoured by wild beasts. Since he has no weapons, he gets up into the safety of a tree for his first night. The next morning, Crusoe sees that the ship has moved closer to land, so that he can reach it at low tide and bring back a wide array of supplies and provisions. Over the next two weeks, he conveys to shore food, rum, tools, clothes, ammunition, powder, and arms. He recognizes that a carpenter’s chest of saws and hammers is “much more valuable than a ship loading of gold would have been at that time” (41).

We find many similarities between Crusoe’s disaster and the Homeric shipwreck. Like Odysseus, Crusoe is also driven off course by winds, holds fast to a piece of rock, and seeks protection from animals in a wooded area.³ Rebirth imagery appears in both stories (in the descriptions “half-dead” and “out of the very grave” in Defoe’s). Crusoe’s situation, however, is quite distinct. Odysseus was fortunate to have the Phaeacians or Calypso provide him with food, water, and clothing, but Crusoe’s island is uninhabited, so he will have to fend for himself. While Crusoe must start over to attain food, shelter, and protection, the materials he brings from the ship are a means of transposing his old life onto this new solitary existence: these physical objects establish continuity with the past.

Crusoe climbs a hill to determine whether he is on the mainland or an island.

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² See also, “nothing can describe the confusion of thought which I felt when I sunk into the water” (37; cf. 71, 104).
I saw my fate to my great affliction, (viz.) that I was in an island environ’d every way with the sea, no land to be seen, except some rocks which lay a great way off, and two small islands less than this, which lay about three leagues to the west. (43)

Crusoe’s next task is to secure himself against savages and beasts and to obtain basic necessities such as fresh water and shelter (47–48). Ultimately, by the third year, he settles into a routine: each day, he prays to God; hunts; cures, preserves, and cooks food; and engages in various labors.

Obviously, the shipwreck that brings Crusoe to this island sets the stage for his challenges over the next twenty-eight years on the island. But there are five momentous events in the story, including the shipwreck itself. The second event comes after eighteen years alone and begins what Crusoe calls “a new scene of my life.”

It happen’d one day about noon going towards my boat, I was exceedingly surpris’d with the print of a man’s naked foot on the shore, which was very plain to be seen in the sand: I stood like one thunder-struck, or as if I had seen an apparition. (122)

His island has not been entirely deserted (127). Crusoe is terrified and runs back to his fort, “mistaking every bush and tree . . . to be a man” (122). At first, his terrors result “purely from apprehension on the account of the print of a man’s foot which I had seen” (129), but he soon discovers the remains of a cannibal feast on the far side of the island: human skulls, hands, feet, bones, and the fire pit in which people were cooked (130–31). He marvels that he saw no evidence of other humans for eighteen years, explaining that now it became “my only business to keep my self entirely concealed where I was” (131).

The third momentous event occurs in the twenty-fourth year, when Crusoe rescues the man he comes to call “Friday.” As Crusoe watches a group of cannibals prepare to eat their prisoners, one prisoner flees and is pursued by three men. Crusoe helps him escape, and the cannibals leave. Crusoe

4. Robert Louis Stevenson called the moment when Crusoe sees a footprint on the sand “one of the supreme moments in imaginative literature,” the others being Achilles shouting against the Trojans (Iliad), Odysseus drawing his bow on the suitors (Odyssey), and Christian running with his fingers in his ears in Pilgrim’s Progress; see J. R. Moore quoted in R. West (1998) ix. Seidel (1991) 68 finds Crusoe’s reaction to be “recidivistic”: “He wants to hide what he has made, to let nature take back its own forms.”
Fig. 5. “Robinson Crusoe discovers the Print of a Man’s Foot.” Illustration by Thomas Stothard; engraving by Thomas Medland found in Defoe (1790, vol. 1, facing p. 194). (By permission of the British Library Board.)
declares that the twenty-fourth to twenty-fifth year, during which he builds
a relationship with the former prisoner he calls “Friday,” the pleasantest year
of his entire time spent on the island (167). Friday ultimately communicates
that he lived among the “savages” on the mainland and that he traveled
to the northwest side of the island from the mouth of the Orinoco River
(170).5 The fourth major event takes place in the twenty-seventh year of
Crusoe’s “captivity,” with another cannibalistic expedition to the island, this
time comprising twenty-one “savages” in three canoes with three prisoners.
Seeing that one of the prisoners is a bearded, clothed European (a Spanish
prisoner, it turns out), Crusoe and Friday drive off or kill the warriors in a
fierce engagement and rescue the Spaniard and another prisoner about to be
eaten, who happens to be Friday’s father (183–88).

The fifth significant event comes in the twenty-eighth year, the time of
Crusoe’s “deliverance.” An English ship taken by mutineers puts in near
Crusoe’s island. In short order, Crusoe overpowers the mutineers and recapt-
tures the ship. The captain then tells Crusoe, “There’s your ship, for she is
all yours, and so are we and all that belong to her.” Unable to speak, Crusoe
describes his surprise:

Such was the flood of joy in my breast, that it put all my spirits into
confusion; at last it broke out into tears, and in a little while after, I
recovered my speech. (215)

Crusoe finally leaves his island on 19 December 1686, after twenty-eight
years, two months, and nineteen days.

The third and final section of the novel concerns Crusoe’s “reentry” into
the old world from which he had vanished. In London, he learns that his
parents have died in his absence. He also journeys to Portugal for a reunion
with the Portuguese captain who rescued him off the African coast many
years earlier. Crusoe must reestablish who he is, for the trustees of his estate
believed “you were lost,” with “all the world believing so also” (221).6 Crusoe
discovers that his wealth from the plantation in Brazil has made him a rich
man: “the joy almost killed me” (224). We may again compare Crusoe’s situ-

5. Five months after Crusoe witnesses cannibalism on the far side of the island, he finds the
wreck of a second ship with no one left alive; this leads to a second scavenging expedition that
brings liquor, powder, a shovel and pot, kettles, and chests with shirts, handkerchiefs, shoes, and
eleven hundred pieces of eight (151–53).

6. Since Crusoe had been missing so long without proof of his death, he was declared to have
been under “civil death” (221).
oration with that of Odysseus, gone for almost twenty years and thought dead even by his family in Ithaca.

Starting a new life in England, Crusoe marries and has three children. When his wife dies, he returns to his estate in Brazil (226) and even visits his old island, where he finds the Spaniards from the mainland—shipmates of the man he saved from cannibals—now living with women and twenty children. Defoe left open the possibility of a sequel, which he did write: a second volume concerns the around-the-world adventures of Robinson Crusoe.7

In *The Tempest*, everything transpires within a single day and in one place, whereas Defoe’s novel presents the life of a man, starting with birth and childhood and including early travels, an extended look at over two dozen years on an island, and even the aftermath. The presentation generally follows Crusoe’s experiences chronologically—his life as he lived it. I now turn to the most important and influential features of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*: the recapitulation of human cultural development and Crusoe’s transformation, both in terms of his activities and through a spiritual rebirth.

The Recapitulation of Human Cultural Development

A single person seeking to survive on a lonely island has to meet basic needs such as food, water, and shelter; then, if possible, more advanced technology, defense, and communication may be established.8 This is precisely what we find on the desert island of Crusoe. He begins with necessities.

I consulted several things in my situation which I found would be proper for me, 1st. health, and fresh water . . . 2dly. shelter from the heat of the sun, 3dly. security from ravenous creatures, whether men or beasts, 4thly. 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. (48)

Crusoe engages in a wide array of activities developed over human history: hunting, toolmaking, agriculture, domesticating animals, and other endeavors. He has significant success with hunting each day. His skill in

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toolmaking may at times be rather crude, but he persists: at one point he makes a shovel, “though never was a shovel . . . made after that fashion, or so long a making” (60). Agriculture results from the absentminded shaking out of some husks of grain from a poultry feed bag. Crusoe is startled when he sees stalks of green barley come up “the same as English barley” (63). He goes on to sow barley and rice, learning that there are two seedtimes and two harvests per year in his island climate (83–84).

It might be truly said, that now I work’d for my bread; ’tis a little wonderful, and what I believe few people have thought much upon, (viz.) the strange multitude of little things necessary in the providing, producing, curing, dressing, making, and finishing this one article of bread. (94)

Even in early civilizations, a division of labor allowed for the expertise of professionals; the circumstances here demand that everything must be done by Crusoe alone.

The domestication of animals arises after Crusoe “lames” a goat.

This was the first time that I entertain’d a thought of breeding up some tame creatures, that I might have food when my powder and shot was all spent. (61)

Crusoe is most successful in increasing their ranks: after two years, he has forty-three goats, along with a thriving dairy operation that produces a gallon or two of milk per day plus butter and cheese (117).

I consider’d the keeping up a breed of tame creatures thus at my hand, would be a living magazine of flesh, milk, butter and cheese, for me as long as I liv’d in the place, if it were to be forty years. (121)

Hunting, catching turtles, cultivating crops, raising animals, and drying of grapes provide Crusoe with a reliable daily menu (83).

Next come shelter and clothing. For his initial shelter, Crusoe goes under a tent made from the ship’s sail (45); next, he drives stakes around it in a semicircle to make a fence; finally, he fashions a larger tent with a hammock and obtains a cellar and other rooms by digging out a cave (48–49).9 For clothing, Crusoe uses animal skins and is soon wearing a goatskin cap,

9. Later he adds a roof, rafters, and “thatching” with tree boughs (55).
waistcoat, and breeches and carrying a goatskin umbrella against both heat and rain (107–8).\(^{10}\) Other skills he develops include medicine and the use of fire for baking bread and rudimentary ceramics; he also routinely keeps a calendar and reads the Bible.\(^{11}\) A great deal of time, energy, and description is devoted to Crusoe’s defensive fortifications, which include a palisade, a double wall, and ladders (55).\(^{12}\) Crusoe reflects on his capacity for invention,

> Every man may be in time master of every mechanick art. I had never handled a tool in my life, and yet in time by labour, application and contrivance, I found at last that I wanted nothing but I could have made it, especially if I had had tools; however I made abundance of things, even without tools, and some with no more tools than an adze and a hatchet, which perhaps were never made that way before, and that with infinite labour. (55)

He concludes, “[T]ime and necessity made me a compleat natural mechanick” (58).

In view of all this, it needs to be repeated that Crusoe does not start from scratch—he was fortunate that the wrecked ship was within reach and that he could convey from it tools, materials, guns, and ammunition. He himself recognizes this, in a counterfactual statement.

> I must have perish’d first. That I should have liv’d, if I had not perish’d, like a meer savage. That if I had kill’d a goat, or a fowl, by any contrivance, I had no way to flea [flay] or open them, or part the flesh from the skin and the bowels, or to cut it up; but must gnaw it with my teeth, and pull it with my claws like a beast. (104)

The danger is obvious: without supplies from the ship, Crusoe would have lived “like a beast.” Instead, he is able to reclaim a measure of “modern” civilization by recapitulating human technological development, building on

\(^{10}\) Due to the unrelenting sun, Crusoe considers his umbrella “the most necessary thing I had about me, next to my gun” (119).

\(^{11}\) Fire was “absolutely necessary” (51). Regarding ceramics, the accident of finding a broken piece in the fire teaches an important lesson (96; cf. 114). For the reckoning of time, he cuts a notch into a post every day, “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” (52; cf. the solar calendar in *Cast Away*).

\(^{12}\) Seidel (1991) 9 comments that “Crusoe loves enclosures within enclosures” and that when “he stakes out a half circle on the plain around an indentation in the hillside and insulates himself again—Crusoe and his property are again islanded” (59).
practices from England.\textsuperscript{13} It is notable that Crusoe never goes about naked, as doing so would suggest a more savage state. Indeed, part of his “domestication” of Friday consists of dressing him in a European outfit. But the significant point is that Crusoe must impose his will on this “wilderness” to reestablish something close to the life he grew up with.

Crusoe faces many obstacles and is often slowed by ignorance or failure. At first, he does not know what to eat (44). Once he obtains grain, he is not sure how to grind it, to make meal, or to bake bread (94). He is without a plough, harrow, mill, yeast, salt, oven, and various utensils (94–95). Regarding his herd, he notes,

\begin{quote}
I that had never milk'd a cow, much less a goat, or seen butter or cheese made, very readily and handily, tho' after a great many essays and miscarriages, made me both butter and cheese at last, and never wanted it afterwards. (117)
\end{quote}

In the case of cheese and butter—or pottery—Crusoe’s lack of experience leads to many mistakes and “miscarriages.” He is never able to make a cask to hold water, and he long lacks a tobacco pipe (62, 85–86). In a sense, he must start from scratch, employing ideas from European culture in order to learn how to be a baker, carpenter, tailor, and so on.

Another aspect of human civilization concerns interaction with others. Although, for a long time, Crusoe is alone and lacks “society” or fellow human beings (118), he does have companionship of a sort. He mentions his dog—a “trusty servant to me many years” (53)—and two cats, and he teaches his parrot, named “Poll,” to speak to him (87).

\begin{quote}
I quickly learn'd him to know his own name, and at least to speak it out pretty loud “POLL,” which was the first word I ever heard spoken in the island by any mouth but my own. (95; cf. 142)
\end{quote}

Cut off from all human interaction, Crusoe finds a substitute “companion” in his parrot. A young goat that follows Crusoe “like a dog” becomes “so loving, so gentle, and so fond, that it became from that time one of my domes-

tics also; and would never leave me afterwards” (90). In the end, Crusoe did not have the heart to kill the goat, so it dies of old age (115).

All told, this menagerie comes to be seen by Crusoe as his “little family.” Indeed, he finds humor in the gatherings at mealtime.

It would have made a Stoick smile to have seen me and my little family sit down to dinner; there was my majesty the prince and lord of the whole island; I had the lives of all my subjects at my absolute command. I could hang, draw, give liberty, and take it away, and no rebels among all my subjects.

Then to see how like a King I din’d all alone, attended by my servants, Poll, as if he had been my favourite, was the only person permitted to talk to me. (118)

Even for a single survivor on an uninhabited island, something else inevitably takes the place of human companions. For twenty-three years, Poll, the dog, cats, and kids “were part of my family” (143; cf. my discussion of the movie *Cast Away* in chapter 7).

Contrasting views of the island are proposed. In one sense, the island is idyllic, recalling the biblical garden of Adam and Eve. This is suggested when Crusoe fires his gun while hunting: “I believe it was the first gun that had been fir’d there since the creation of the world” (44). After ten months on the island, he asserts, “I firmly believed that, no human shape had ever set foot upon that place” (79). Also, just as Adam names the animals of the earth, so Crusoe recognizes certain things as new (or at least unknown to him); when he kills a large, tasty bird, he comments, “I knew not what to call it” (59).  

Yet the island is also likened to the “civilized” world. Crusoe repeatedly compares features on the island to what he was familiar with in England or Europe.  

He refers to his habitation as “my own house” (89). When he hollows out the cave behind his defensive walls, he refers to his “kitchen,” “dining room,” and “cellar” (60). He sets up boards “like a dresser” (61). Upon seeing the footprint in the sand, he returns “to my castle, for so I think I call’d it ever after this . . . [entering through] the hole in the rock which I called a door” (122).

14. On the idea of Crusoe’s island as an Eden, see Damrosch (1985) 193; cf. “Crusoe retreats from history into an Eden innocent of sexuality and of guilt” (197).

It is natural that Crusoe looks back to the world he knows so well. With regard to his implements, he continually remembers what things had been like in his home country. His shovel—though crude—was “shaped like ours in England” (59–60). The baskets he makes follow a recollected pattern.

When I was a boy, I used to take great delight in standing at a basket-makers in the town where my father liv’d, to see them make their wicker-ware; and being, as boys usually are, very officious to help, and a great observer of the manner how they work’d those things, and sometimes lending a hand, I had by this means full knowledge of the methods of it, that I wanted nothing but the materials. (86)

Crusoe also constructs a boat, anchor, and sail (100–102, 109, 138, 180). He is not always successful in his constructions. One time, he tries to set up a wheel for grinding tools, but he

had never seen any such thing in England, or at least not to take notice how it was done, tho’ since I have observ’d it is very common there. (67)

The models from his old world extend as well to reading matter, for Crusoe had a Bible to read on his island “as in England” (174).¹⁶

But still—for all the imitation of England, both actual and analogous—Crusoe is well aware that he is in a very new situation. Money is useless on his island, perhaps evoking an earlier premonetary period in civilization.

For as to the money, I had no manner of occasion for it: as ’twas to me as dirt under my feet, and I would have given it all for three or four pair of English shoes and stocking. (152–53)

In describing his outfit and appearance, he recognizes how outlandish he would appear to a fellow Englishman.

But had any one in England been to meet such a man as I was, it must either have frighted them, or rais’d a great deal of laughter; and as I frequently stood still to look at myself, I could not but smile at the

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¹⁶. Richetti (2005) 193 comments, “He seeks to appropriate the island, to possess it by turning a wilderness into a domesticated space rather like England.”
Crusoe then proceeds to “take a sketch” of his appearance with his goatskin cap, jacket, and breeches. He wore no shoes or stockings but “had made me a pair of some-things, I scarce know what to call them, like buskins, to flap over my legs” (118–19). Often, when going out, he had a saw, hatchet, basket, and gun and his “great clumsy ugly goat-skin umbrella” (119). His beard grew almost a foot, and his whiskers “were of a length and shape monstrous enough, and such as in England would have pass’d for frightful” (119). Crusoe realizes the astonishment his appearance would provoke back home. Though always looking back to English precedent, there is a sense in which Crusoe only becomes an Englishman again when, after twenty-eight years on the island, the English captain supplies him with shirts, neckclothes, gloves, shoes, a hat, stockings, and a suit (215–16). About to return home, Crusoe notes that the money “which had lain by me so long useless” is now once again valuable (218–19).

**Crusoe’s Transformations and Spiritual Rebirth**

Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* provides good evidence for the literary connection between shipwrecks and personal transformation, for Robinson Crusoe’s arrival on an uninhabited island forces him to “play” a great variety of new roles. Even before his shipwreck, we see Crusoe as a son, a passenger, a merchant, a sailor, a slave, and a planter. Once on the island, he takes on many different tasks: craftsman, tailor, and shipwright, just to name a few.\(^{17}\) Crusoe acts as a hero in rescuing Friday from death (as he does later for the Spaniard, Friday’s father, and the English captain). Crusoe’s identity may be thought of in terms of his roles toward others (son, slave, hero) or his activities (farmer, tailor, shipwright, chronicler). In addition, Crusoe performs a religious function in converting Friday to Christianity (166–74). As a saver of souls, he contrasts this role with his previous existence.

\[I\] was now to be made an instrument under Providence to save the life, and for ought I knew, the soul of a poor savage, and bring him to

\(^{17}\) For example, “I was now grown a tolerable good taylor” (164); “though I was but a bungling shipwright, yet as I knew the usefulness, and even necessity of [a rudder]” (180).
the true knowledge of religion, and of the Christian doctrine, that he
might know Christ Jesus, to know whom is life eternal. (174)

As a scholar attempting to explain the meaning of biblical passages to his
new pupil, Crusoe notes an interesting effect of these “lessons” with Friday.\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{I really inform'd and instructed myself in many things}, that either I did
not know, or had not fully consider’d before; but which occurr’d natu-
really to my mind, upon my searching into them, for the information
of this poor savage; and \textit{I had more affection in my enquiry after things
upon this occasion}, than ever I felt before; so that whether this poor
wild wretch was the better for me, or no, I had great reason to be
thankful that ever he came to me. (173–74, my italics)

Thus Crusoe undergoes a further transformation by gaining a profound
appreciation of religious matters. At a minimum, he experiences an altera-
tion of sentiment and rejoices that he “was brought to this place” (174). The
shipwreck has become a kind of blessing.\textsuperscript{19}

Further, in terms of social status, Crusoe comes to see himself as “lord of
the whole manor,” a “king, or emperor over the whole country which I had
possession of” (102–3).\textsuperscript{20}

This was all my own . . . I was king and lord of all this country
indefeasibly, and had a right of possession; and if I could convey it, I
might have it in inheritance, as completely as any lord of a manor in
England. (80)

Once his island is “peopled” by Friday, Friday’s father, and the Spaniard,
Crusoe comes to see himself as a kind of benevolent monarch.

How like a king I look’d. First of all, the whole country was my own
meer property; so that I had undoubted right of dominion. Secondly,
my people were perfectly subjected: I was absolute lord and law-giver;

\textsuperscript{18} Friday “made me . . . a much better scholar in the Scripture knowledge, than I should
ever have been by my own private mere reading” (174).

\textsuperscript{19} Engelibert (1996) 269 comments that shipwrecks such as this have “two major advan-
tages. Firstly, it makes the hero the sole owner of an unspoiled domain and allows him to explore
it. Secondly, it conceals this stroke of good fortune under a semblance of tragedy and thus allows
the adventure to take on the dimensions of a myth.”

\textsuperscript{20} Later, Crusoe seeks to view the circumference of “my little kingdom” (109).
they all ow’d their lives to me, and were ready to lay down their lives, if there had been occasion of it, for me. (190)

Crusoe then goes on to state that he allows “liberty of conscience,” for his subjects were of different religions (Protestant, pagan, and “Papist”). It is fair to say that had Crusoe remained a planter in Brazil—or even remained in England pursuant to his father’s wishes—he would never have been forced to play so many new roles. It is the shipwreck that changes him most of all, for he becomes—in a sense, is forced to become in order to survive—a craftsman, scholar, hero, and lord and king. As Joyce puts it,

The true symbol of the British conquest is Robinson Crusoe, who, cast away on a desert island, in his pocket a knife and a pipe, becomes an architect, a carpenter, a knife grinder, an astronomer, a baker, a
shipwright, a potter, a saddler, a farmer, a tailor, an umbrella-maker, and a clergyman.\textsuperscript{21}

In exploring Crusoe’s new roles, we may also consider how he is viewed by others. According to Friday, the cannibals would see Crusoe as more than human, for they

would tell their people they were all kill’d by thunder and lightning, not by the hand of man, and that the two which appear’d, (\textit{viz}) Friday and me, were two heavenly spirits or furies, come down to destroy them and not men with weapons . . . [and] that whoever went to that enchanted island would be destroyed with fire from the gods. (191)

The English captain is also perplexed in trying to ascertain Crusoe’s status.

The poor man, with tears running down his face, and trembling, looking like one astonish’d, return’d, “Am I talking to God, or man! Is it a real man, or an angel!” (200)

We know well that islanders frequently mistake someone’s identity upon sudden arrival—this is familiar from the \textit{Odyssey} and \textit{The Tempest}. To the cannibals, Crusoe has supernatural powers; his role in saving the English captain conjures up an angel or divinity.\textsuperscript{22}

Back in England, Crusoe faces trials of another sort. He must, in some sense, reclaim his previous identity. In Portugal, Crusoe is asked to

enter my name in a publick register, with [the Portuguese captain’s] affidavit, affirming upon oath that I was alive, and that I was the same person who took up the land for the planting the said plantation at first. (222–23)

An important question arises: to what extent is Crusoe “the same person” when he returns to Europe after over thirty years? Is there an enduring and

\textsuperscript{21} Joyce (1964) 24. Richetti (2005) 200 emphasizes “the possibilities for Crusoe of self-creation or self-realization.” H. O. Brown (1971) 564 remarks that “the self becomes somebody else in conversion” and that “part of the impulse behind Defoe’s fiction is the desire to explore human possibilities in the face of a necessity so harsh as to suspend normal laws” (566 note 6).

\textsuperscript{22} See Seidel (1991) 98.
stable self? This might be asked of all protagonists in shipwreck tales. Has Odysseus been changed by his twenty years of adventures—has he become even more circumspect toward those he encounters? To what extent has Shakespeare’s Prospero changed after his arrival on the island? Before, in Milan, he was caught up in his books, magic, and quest for knowledge and was susceptible to his brother’s plotting: he had his power usurped and was driven into exile. After arriving on the island, Prospero still employs magic, yet he has become a more aware figure than he was as Duke of Milan. He now uses his powers to control Ariel, Caliban, and the survivors of the “shipwreck.”

Robinson Crusoe seems to fall into a different category. I would not suggest for any of these figures that nothing of the “old” person remains, but Defoe presents Crusoe—both physically and psychologically—as having adopted a new sort of existence. This solitary man now participates in new activities, creates a different sort of “family,” and has altered his appearance. These more “objective” changes may be perceived from the outside. If there is any consistency to the inner propensities of Crusoe, it appears to be his desire to see the world: “I was inured to a wandering life” (239). It may be more difficult to demonstrate that someone has been changed on the inside, but it is to this spiritual transformation that I now turn.

The greatest change Crusoe undergoes after the shipwreck is arguably his religious conversion, a “spiritual rebirth.” He himself emphasizes what his “religion” consisted of beforehand, the period of enlightenment, and his “new life.” To begin with, there is the big question: why has he been cast away on a desert island? From the start, Crusoe blames himself. On his first sea voyage to London, he feels that he has been punished for his “breach of

23. Richetti (2005) 196 points to the significance of the novel as a literary form: “And of course the idea that identity is developed in experience rather than chosen by an act of moral will or somehow imposed by social status and destiny is a revolutionary idea, an Enlightenment notion that the novel as a genre helps to promulgate as a fundamental assumption about human nature.” Damrosch (1985) 197 remarks, “Crusoe achieves . . . a condition of self-creation.”

24. Brown (1971) 570 comments on Crusoe’s “restlessness of spirit:” “He must create a self out of the formless sea of pure possibility, out of the surrounding, anonymous wilderness. The world is for him to make something of—his own.” Richetti (2005) 204–5 points to a second aspect of Crusoe’s personality, for he “is defined by that effort at self-knowledge, but the effort by definition is continuous and unresolved”; cf. Damrosch (1985) 210.

25. Richetti (2005) 188 argues that “Crusoe’s story is of physical survival and secular prosperity accompanied by a psycho-religious transformation.” Seidel (1991) 57 interprets the idea of transformation quite broadly: “Conversion is at the heart of the narrative . . . Crusoe makes over his island, turns his religious sensibility, shifts his politics, transforms his life.” Damrosch (1985) 187 finds that “Crusoe’s religious conversion is presented as the central event.”
my duty to God and my father” (9). Though he prays to God in bad weather that, if saved, “I would go directly home to my father, and never set it [my foot] into a ship again while I lived” (9), he breaks this vow almost immediately. Crusoe fully recognizes his role in disobedience: “Providence . . . resolv’d to leave me entirely without excuse” (10). Regarding the pivotal shipwreck stranding him on his island, Crusoe accepts full responsibility. “I was still to be the willful agent of all my own miseries” (32; cf. 34). Crusoe even goes so far as to call his decision to wander—in opposition to “the excellent advice” of his father—his “original sin” (154). Although he speaks of an “evil influence” and “my ill fate” (15, 13), he mostly blames himself.26

In looking back, Crusoe admits his own ignorance about divine knowledge, referring to “a stupidity of soul, without desire of good, or conscience of evil” (71). He acknowledges that no matter what happened,

I never had so much as one thought of it being the hand of God, or that it was a just punishment for my sin; my rebellious behavior against my father, or my present sins which were great; or so much as a punishment for the general course of my wicked life . . . But I was meerly thoughtless of a God, or a Providence, acted like a meer brute from the principles of Nature. (71)

For years, Crusoe acts without any awareness of divine power. While he survived the shipwreck, he was “without the least reflection upon the distinguishing goodness of the hand which had preserved me” (72).

Crusoe’s religious conversion takes place some eight and a half months after the shipwreck itself (30 September 1659). He is sick for a two-week period (18 June–4 July 1660); with shivering, headache, and weakness, he slowly regains strength (4–14 July 1660). Early in his illness, a shining figure armed with a spear appears in a dream and speaks: “Seeing all these things have not brought thee to repentance, now thou shalt die” (71). The figure then appears to lift the spear to kill Crusoe, who awakens in terror. Soon, though his spirits are very low, “conscience that had slept so long, began to awake” (73). Crusoe’s reflection leads him to conclude that “God’s justice has overtaken me . . . [for] I rejected the voice of Providence” (73). The next day, Crusoe picks up a Bible and begins to read. Opening the book at random,

26. Cf. “If I was not very easy and happy in the world, it must be my mere fate or fault that must hinder” (7; cf. 13–14, 30). As Starr (1988) 65 notes, “In the early part of the book Crusoe virtually orphans himself through disobedience, humbling himself toward his other Father, and assuming the dutifulness of a son”; see also Seidel (1991) 88.
he first sees the words “Call on me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver, and thou shalt glorify me” (75).27 Aware that this passage seems “very apt to my case,” Crusoe then asks God to deliver him (76). He finally recognizes the saving power of God and calls on Jesus to “give me repentance.” Crusoe realizes this to be a momentous event.

This was the first time that I could say, in the true sense of the words, that I pray’d in all my life; for now I pray’d with a sense of my condition, and with a true Scripture view of hope founded on the encouragement of the word of God; and from this time, I may say, I began to have hope that God would hear me. (77–78)

Crusoe not only begins to appreciate the power of God but also contemplates the possibility that God might respond to his pleas. He ponders two senses of the idea of “captivity.” The first is the metaphorical captivity he endures on his island: “the island was certainly a prison to me, and that in the worst sense in the world” (78). Yet Crusoe comes to realize a second, spiritual sense of the word captivity.

But now I learn’d to take it [the word captivity] in another sense: Now I look’d back upon my past life with such horror, and my sins appear’d so dreadful, that my soul sought nothing of God, but deliverance from the load of guilt that bore down all my comfort. . . to whoever shall read it, that whenever they come to a true sense of things, they will find deliverance from sin a much greater blessing than deliverance from affliction. (78, my italics)

For the first time, Crusoe begins to make sense of his past. Regarding his “dreadful mis-spent life,” Crusoe comes to a realization that “God has appointed all this to befal me” (74–75). His health now improves with the reading of scripture and self-administered medicine (the smoke of tobacco steeped in rum). Ultimately, he “gave God thanks aloud for my recovery from my sickness” (77).28

As already mentioned, Crusoe’s conversion takes place during his first year on the island. By the end of his second year, Crusoe has a decidedly

27. The Bible passage is from Psalm 50.
28. Starr (1988) 54 says that it was “traditional . . . to regard actual sickness as a particularly opportune occasion for setting repentance in motion.”
different view of his life: his solitary condition may be preferred to living with others.

I gave humble and hearty thanks that God had been pleased to discover to me, even that it was possible I might be more happy in this solitary condition, than I should have been in a liberty of society, and in all the pleasures of the world. That he could fully make up to me, the deficiencies of my solitary state, and the want of human society by his presence, and the communications of his grace to my soul, supporting, comforting, and encouraging me to depend upon his Providence here, and hope for his eternal presence hereafter. (90)

This is extraordinary. Crusoe’s lonely life—“the deficiencies of my solitary state”—can now be mitigated by the comfort and support of God. A profound change in Crusoe’s mental state is clear.

It was now that I began sensibly to feel how much more happy this life I now led was with all its miserable circumstances, than the wicked, cursed, abominable life I led all the past part of my days; and now I changed both my sorrows and my joys, my very desires altered, my affections changed their gusts, and my delights were perfectly new, from what they were at my first coming, or indeed for the two years past. (90, my italics)

Just as Crusoe’s outer appearance has been changed and as his life comes to consist of new projects (hunting, farming, etc.), so what makes him happy or sad—his very desires—have been so profoundly altered that Crusoe’s delights are “perfectly new.” Crusoe has reinvented himself both physically and spiritually.

29. Richetti (2005) 188 speaks of the “familiar Christian pattern of disobedience—punishment—repentance—deliverance.” Starr (1988) 55–56 expands on this: “First there was the provocation to repentance—the event or impression which set the whole process in motion; next there was reflection or consideration, a ‘coming to oneself’; this was following by ‘conviction’ or ‘godly sorrow,’ a phase of remorseful self-accusation; then there came the stage, to which most writers reserved the term ‘conversion,’ when God actually relieved and reclaimed the sufferer.” Damrosch (1985) 209 comments, “Reborn from the sea after the shipwreck—many critics have noticed the birth imagery as he struggles ashore—Crusoe enters an ambiguous Eden that expresses, but cannot reconcile, both the guilt that landed him there and the innocence that fantasy seeks to recreate.”
Sensible of God’s providence, Crusoe now attributes everything to a divine plan: “God was necessarily and infinitely holy and just” (165–66). Crusoe remarks on how exceptionally beneficent Providence is.30

I frequently sat down to my meat with thankfulness, and admir’d the hand of God’s Providence, which has thus spread my table in the wilderness. I learn’d to look more upon the bright side of my condition, and less upon the dark side; and to consider what I enjoy’d, rather than what I wanted. (103–4)

There are countless passages in which Crusoe praises God’s powers, wisdom, and mercy.31

In addition to his thankfulness, Crusoe now has come to see himself as chosen by God to perform certain tasks. Regarding Friday, he concludes, “I was call’d by Providence to save this poor creature’s life” (160).32 Likewise, the English captain was a man sent from heaven to deliver Crusoe. In telling the captain the story of his life, Crusoe remarks that

the whole transaction seemed to be a chain of wonders; that such things as these were the testimonies we had of a secret hand of Providence governing the world, and an evidence, that the eyes of an infinite power could search into the remotest corner of the world, and send help to the miserable whenever he pleas’d. (215)

The shipwreck may be viewed as a punishment for Crusoe’s wicked ways and a sinful life, yet he has been saved: all this is part of God’s plan.33 (This combination of physical survival and spiritual salvation was also found in Saint Paul’s shipwreck recounted in the New Testament book of Acts.) In the end, with Crusoe’s repentance and acceptance of God’s power and goodness,

30. Simply discovering a cave on the island is seen as the result of divine guidance, whereas (Crusoe remarks) he would have thought it an accident before (140).
31. Even before his conversion, Crusoe remarks, “He that miraculously saved me can deliver me” (54; cf. 63).
32. See Starr (1988) 63. As Damrosch (1985) puts it, for Puritans “human life [was] a narrative invented by God, but interpreted by human beings” (4); now “nothing in life is random or pointless” (11).
33. See Starr (1988) 50 on the “intimate association between the doctrine of Providence and the incidents of seafaring,” widely depicted in religious and other types of literature during Defoe’s lifetime.
Crusoe finds his solitary condition to be paradoxically a positive experience. Speaking aloud, he takes himself to task.

How canst thou be such a hypocrite, (said I, even audibly) to pretend to be thankful for a condition, which however thou may’st endeavour to be contented with, thou would’st rather pray heartily to be deliver’d from; so I stopp’d there: But tho’ I could not say, I thank’d God for being there. (91)

Crusoe’s optimistic view is not quite that of Candide’s tutor Pangloss (aka Leibniz) that “this is the best of all possible worlds,” but it comes close: “There I acquiesced in the dispositions of Providence, which I began now to own, and to believe, order’d every thing for the best” (87).

Crusoe’s Journal

I would like to give brief consideration here to two aspects of Defoe’s novel that I will examine more fully in later chapters: Crusoe’s journal and his relationship with Friday. Defoe presents a fascinating exploration of the mental condition of a solitary man, left on an island for an extended period. All the ideas and observations are presented in Crusoe’s own voice in his journal.

After finding shelter, he begins his account by giving an example, for two paragraphs, of a journal full of “many dull things” (56; cf. 101).

He then explains that once his ink began to fail,

I contented myself to use it more sparingly, and to write down only the most remarkable events of my life, without continuing a daily memorandum of other things. (83)

34. Damrosch (1985) 198–99 notes that when seeing things positively, “Crusoe learns to identify Providence with his own desires.”

35. Novak (1963) 7 notes, “Throughout his economic writing [Defoe maintained] that the earth was the best of all possible worlds in relation to commerce.” Seidel (1991) 103 finds Defoe to be “as utopian as English writers get”; cf. 94–95, 138.


37. Seidel (1991) 81 finds an increasingly narrow set of entries: “At first the record is sequential, soon it is remarkable, and, finally, it becomes a selective series of memoranda,” emphasizing the uniqueness of these events: for example, his “melancholy relation of a scene of silent life, such perhaps as was never heard of in the world before” (52).
It is a mark of Defoe’s ingenuity to explain the absence of (tedious) everyday detail by the verisimilar excuse of a shortage of ink.

Crusoe even comments on the therapeutic value of recording his thoughts.

I drew up the state of my affairs in writing, not so much to leave them to any that were to come after me, for I was like to have but few heirs, as to deliver my thoughts from daily poring upon them, and afflicting my mind; and as my reason began now to master my despondence, I began to comfort myself as well as I could, and to set the good against the evil, that I might have something to distinguish my case from worse. (53–54)

Later, Crusoe will tell his history to Friday, the Spaniard, the English captain, those back in Europe, and his reading audience. Just as Eumaeus and Odysseus discuss the value of retelling difficult times from the past (Odyssey 15.398–401), Crusoe also “began to comfort myself” by setting down what happened, by reflecting, retelling, and reliving. We may go further. Crusoe’s writing of a chronicle suggests a common desire to offer an account, an urge he shares with the storyteller Odysseus and the “playwright” Prospero.38 In chapter 8, I will return to discussion of this fervent desire, especially characteristic of shipwreck survivors, to control the narrative of one’s life.

Ultimately, Crusoe remarks on how lucky he is.

I could hardly have named a place in the unhabitable part of the world where I could have been cast more to my advantage. A place, where as I had no society, which was my affliction on one hand, so I found no ravenous beasts, no furious wolves or tigers to threaten my life, no venomous creatures or poisonous, which I might feed on to my hurt, no savages to murther and devour me. (105–6)

He observes that it is very rare

that the Providence of God casts us into any condition of life so low, or any misery so great, but we may see something or other to be

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38. As H. O. Brown (1971) 585 interprets, “Writing also means to Robinson a deliverance from the agonizing and confusing impact from momentary impressions about his condition”; cf. “Providence not only underwrites Robinson’s narrative, it is also discovered by means of the writing of the journal” (587).
thankful for; and may see others in worse circumstances than our own. (148)\(^{39}\)

Many of these ruminations function as soliloquies, yet Crusoe debates with himself at times.\(^{40}\) This offers variety—and dramatic force—to Defoe’s presentation, yet it also shows something of the human psychological need for a sounding board—for someone or something else with which to converse. Crusoe uses language that suggests a dialogue or debate.

I call’d a council, that is to say, in my thoughts. (44)

I debated this very often with my self thus.” (135)

I argued with myself. (136)

When Crusoe inclines in one direction, “reason as it were expostulated with me t’other way” (51). There are often two sides to a question, and there is benefit in considering both.

This made my life better than sociable; for when I began to regret the want of conversation, I would ask myself, 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 human society in the world. (108, my italics)

Several times, Crusoe addresses the reader in something that sounds like a sermon.\(^{41}\) One of his favorite topics is people who cannot be happy with what they have. He desires to put

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\(^{39}\) Crusoe reflects “that all the good things of this world, are no farther good to us, than they are for our use . . . we enjoy just as much as we can use, and no more” (103). This passage may echo John Locke in his *Second Treatise of Government*: “God has given us all things richly . . . But how far has he given it us? To enjoy. As much as any one can make use of to any advantage of life before it spoils; so much he may by his labour fix a Property in. Whatever is beyond this, is more than his share, and belongs to others. Nothing was made by God for Man to spoil or destroy” (chapter 5, paragraph 31, in *Locke* (1965) 290); cf. *Robinson Crusoe* 103: “I had all that I was now capable of enjoying.”

\(^{40}\) Seidel (1991) 67 speaks of “the conversational form of the novel.” Richetti (2005) 204 describes “a long dialogue of one that stretches for twenty-five years or so on the island.”

\(^{41}\) On spiritual autobiography, Starr (1988) 48 notes that preachers are often “stressing the idea that every calamity contains a Providential lesson for those affected by it.” Crusoe often
those discontented people in mind of it, who cannot enjoy what God has given them; because they see, and covet something that he has not given them: All our discontents about what we want [i.e., lack], appeared to me, to spring from the want of thankfulness for what we have. (104)

This voice of a preacher echoes sentiments of an actual marooned sailor, Alexander Selkirk (see below).

**Crusoe and Friday**

A solitary existence for twenty-four years leads Robinson Crusoe to act. When South American natives appear, he seizes his chance for human companionship once Friday escapes and swims across a creek with two pursuers. Crusoe comments, “Now was my time to get me a servant, and perhaps a companion or assistant” (160). Crusoe knocks down one of the pursuers and shoots the second. He then turns toward the man he will soon call “Friday,” now on the ground trembling in fear.

Friday is finally safe, and Crusoe wants him to come near, yet there arises the problem of communication between two people without a common language. Crusoe employs various gestures: “I beckoned with my hand to him, to come back . . . and gave him all the signs of encouragement that I could think of” (160–61). Friday does approach and then—without language—himself conveys a great deal with gestures.

Kneeling down every ten or twelve steps, in token of acknowledgment for my saving his life: I smil’d at him, and look’d pleasantly,
and beckon’d to him to come still nearer; at length he came close to me, and then he kneel’d down again, kiss’d the ground, and laid his head upon the ground, and taking me by the foot, set my foot upon his head; this, it seems, was in token of swearing to be my slave for ever; I took him up, and made much of him, and encourag’d him all I could. (161)

There may be a lack of precision in interpreting such an exchange. Certain motions and expressions may be easier to interpret (smiling, a gesture to follow), while putting Crusoe’s foot on Friday’s head may not necessarily mean that Friday is “swearing to be my slave for ever.” Nevertheless, this exchange is important in terms of establishing a hierarchy: Crusoe is the rescuer, Friday is the saved.44

Crusoe and Friday now live together, with Crusoe in the role of master and mentor. Their communication comes to include spoken language, as Crusoe teaches English to Friday, who is a quick learner. Crusoe begins with names for them, “Friday” and “Master,” then teaches Friday to say “Yes” and “No” (163). Friday soon comes to understand names and speaks quite well. Friday is also taught to sail a boat and shoot: Crusoe remarks, “I had made [him] an excellent marksman” (199). Overall, Crusoe is “greatly delighted” with his new companion. After teaching him everything that was proper to make him useful, handy, and helpful; but especially to make him speak, and understand me when I spake, and he was the aptest scholar that ever was . . . it was very pleasant to me to talk to him; and now my life began to be so easy, that I began to say to my self, that could I but have been safe from more savages, I cared not if I was never to remove from the place while I liv’d. (166)

Friday is judged by European standards. Indeed, perhaps the most significant thing Friday learns is to become a Christian and to “unlearn” can-

44. Locke discusses why men quit the state of nature and enter society: “To avoid this State of War . . . is one great reason of Mens putting themselves into Society, and quitting the State of Nature” (chapter 3, paragraph 21, in Locke (1965) 283). He even mentions two men in a similar situation to that of Crusoe and Friday: “The Promises and Bargains for Truck [barter], etc. between the two Men in the Desert Island . . . or between a Swiss and an Indian, in the Woods of America, are binding to them, though they are perfectly in a State of Nature, in reference to one another” (chapter 2, paragraph 14, in Locke (1965) 277).

45. Watt (1994) 302 notes that “Crusoe does not ask Friday his name, he gives him one.”
Fig. 7. “He took one of my feet and put it on his head, to make me understand without doubt that he swore fidelity to me.” Illustration of Friday’s gesture of servitude to Robinson Crusoe by Clement-Pierre Marillier; engraving by Remi-Henri-Joseph Delvaux found in Garnier (1787, vol. 1, facing p. 376). (By permission of the British Library Board.)
nibalism (163). Friday is eager to eat the flesh of the two men who chased him, but Crusoe demonstrates his disgust to Friday. Crusoe teaches Friday to taste “other flesh” (165). The transformation of Friday, Crusoe’s pupil, finally reaches the stage when “the savage was now a good Christian” (174). Interestingly, Crusoe compares Friday with other Europeans.

He was a comely, handsome fellow, perfectly well made, with straight strong limbs, not too large . . . about twenty six years of age . . . he had all the sweetness and softness of an European in his countenance too, especially when he smiled. (162)

Friday had gone about stark naked, and when Crusoe outfitted him with drawers, jerkin, and a cap, he “went awkwardly in these things at first” (163–64). Ultimately, Crusoe’s Friday is transformed into the model of an English servant, loyal to his master.

I mentioned the debates that Crusoe had with himself while he was alone. He now conducts a variety of discussions with Friday, asking such questions as who made Friday? and “[W]ho made the sea, the ground we walk’d on, and the hills and woods?” (170). Friday’s answer is Benamuckee, the Brazilians’ god “that liv’d beyond all.” Crusoe comes to instruct Friday “in the knowledge of the true God . . . He listened with great attention, and received with pleasure the notion of Jesus Christ being sent to redeem us” (171).

Crusoe’s relationship with Friday is described in various ways. He refers to Friday as “my savage” (161) or “my man Friday . . . a most faithful servant” (220). At one point, Crusoe suspects Friday of a lack of devotion (164–5) and even worries that Friday will “forget all his religion, [and] all his obligations to me” if they travel to the mainland (176). But Friday reassures Crusoe on this point.

No, no, Friday tell [his fellow natives] to live good, tell them to pray God, tell them to eat corn bread, cattle flesh, milk, no eat man again . . . me make they no eat you, me make they much love you. (177)

Friday’s relationship with Crusoe overrides any ties to his country—or even to his father: he remains “true” to his newly adopted European ways and religion. Crusoe concludes,

Never man had a more faithful, loving, sincere servant than Friday
was to me . . . his very affections were ty’d to me, like those of a child to a father, and I dare say, he would have sacrificed his life for the saving mine, upon any occasion whatever. (165)

Indeed, Crusoe comes to have true affection for Friday: “I began really to love the creature; and on his side, I believe he lov’d me more than it was possible for him ever to love any thing before” (168).

We might be skeptical about Crusoe’s ability to read Friday’s inner thoughts—Crusoe’s interpretation may perhaps seem self-serving.46 Yet when Crusoe later suggests that he alone return to England and “send Friday away,” Friday asks to be killed rather than be separated from the man who saved his life.

He look’d confus’d again at that word, and running to one of the hatchets which he used to wear, he takes it up hastily, comes and gives it me, What must I do with this? says I to him. You take, kill Friday; (says he.) What must I kill you for? said I again. He returns very quick, What you send Friday away for? Take, kill Friday, no send Friday away. This he spoke so earnestly, that I saw tears stand in his eyes; In a word, I so plainly discover’d the utmost affection in him to me, and a firm resolution in him, that I told him then, and often after, that I would never send him away from me, if he was willing to stay with me. (178–79)

Like Crusoe, Friday also appears to have adopted a new sort of life.47 This is marked in part by his new name, Friday, conferred in recognition of the day on which he was rescued. Indeed, we might say that the name Friday—given by Crusoe—comes to symbolize his new existence. Although Friday is not shipwrecked, he plays new roles as interpreter and marksman (190, 199); he learns a new language and becomes a Christian.

46. B. Jones (1996) 225–26 remarks that Friday’s “reactions are recounted: translated—how reliable we can never discover—by his Master, he remains an object of narrator. Crusoe never questions his own status as sole source of authority.”

47. Novak (1963) 37–38 argues, “Friday is easily converted to Christianity . . . [H]e abandons the state of nature for the advantages of civilization. From the moment he accepts Crusoe as his master, he surrenders every uncivilized characteristic, even his distaste for salt. Instead of reverting to the life of a savage, Crusoe remakes the paradigm of the noble savage into a civilized man” (37–38); Novak later comments, “Friday’s greatest virtue is his unquestioning acceptance of the values of [Western] civilization” (47).
The final element in the shipwreck sequence in Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* is departure from the island. The English captain and his loyal crew are rescued by Robinson Crusoe and his “army,” which is made up of Friday, the Spaniard, and Friday’s father (191). Though Crusoe promises to rescue the captain, he insists on two stipulations.

My conditions are but two. 1. That while you stay on this island with me, you will not pretend to any authority here; and if I put arms into your hands, you will upon all occasions give them up to me, and do no prejudice to me or mine, upon this island, and in the mean time be govern’d by my orders.

2. That if the ship is, or may be recover’d, you will carry me and my man to England passage-free. (201)

The captain readily agrees, as Crusoe continues to assert his authority over the island. In the end, Crusoe is told, “There’s your ship” (214). Unlike Odysseus on Calypso’s island or Tom Hanks’ character in the film *Cast Away*, who must build their own vessels with sail, oars, and rudder, Crusoe may journey off on an intact ship—much like the ship awaiting everyone in *The Tempest*.

Prior to this, Crusoe has contemplated multiple means of escape. Early on, he thinks he may be rescued and does not stray to the interior of the island, “hoping in time to see some ship at sea, and therefore resolv’d to place myself as near the coast as I could” (43). Later, he thinks he might reach the mainland with a newly constructed boat or canoe, but when a large canoe is built, it is too far from the water and too heavy to move (100–102). Crusoe also constructs a small canoe, in which he tours the island (109). Despite the threat of savages, his desire to venture over to the mainland increases (99–100). Finally, after years with no outside help and the inability to build an oceangoing vessel, Crusoe made this conclusion, that my only way to go about an attempt for an escape, was, if possible, to get a savage into my possession; and, if possible, it should be one of their prisoners, who they had condemn’d to be eaten, and should bring thither to kill. (157)

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48. Crusoe’s first settlement has a view to the sea in case “God sent any ship in sight for my deliverance” (48).
Crusoe does “acquire” Friday and learns that there are seventeen white men who lived in Friday’s “nation” (176).\textsuperscript{49} This leads to his plan to build a big periagua (canoe) near the water (179–80). The plan is to wait until the end of the rainy season to cross over “and see if I could possibly join with the bearded men” and then discover “some method to escape from thence” (177–78). Before this occurs, the mutineers bring their ship to the island, and Crusoe and the captain take command of the ship and sail back to England. But the various alternative means of escape have already been thoroughly “researched” by Crusoe—there is more than one way to get off an island.

Defoe’s Life and Times

Daniel Defoe’s life and times (1660–1731) are naturally relevant to understanding the story of Robinson Crusoe. Defoe himself led an extremely eventful and varied life in business and politics, spying and publishing.\textsuperscript{50} Defoe went on the run from creditors more than once and spent time in prison and the pillory. West argues that the events of Defoe’s own life—in particular, the troubles he experienced—were transmuted in his fiction.\textsuperscript{51} A prolific writer, Defoe wrote his first novel, Robinson Crusoe, at the age of fifty-nine.\textsuperscript{52}

Defoe was a Presbyterian (such non-Anglican protestants were called “Dissenters” or “Puritans” at the time). While Defoe wrote passionately about religious liberty in his pamphlets—note Crusoe’s proud proclamation of “liberty of conscience” (190)—his religious convictions may also have influenced the detailed self-examination of the solitary Crusoe.\textsuperscript{53} Damrosch

\textsuperscript{49} Crusoe also learns that his own island is forty miles from the shore near the mouth of the Orinoco River.
\textsuperscript{51} R. West (1998) 21 comments, “It is in his fiction that Defoe sometimes describes the very hard events that he himself experienced” (cf. 324–25).
\textsuperscript{52} R. West (1998) suggests several reasons (money troubles, politics) that Defoe may have turned to writing novels: “[I]t would not be too far-fetched to suggest that Defoe’s bankruptcy led him to become a novelist. His failure as a merchant meant that henceforth he had to earn a living from his brickworks, his Secret Service employment, but above all by writing pamphlets, articles, and finally books” (55); “[P]artly because he had lost his influence as a journalist, pamphleteer and secret adviser to statesmen, Defoe turned to writing books in order to express the thoughts and fantasies that teemed in his ever-active brain” (217).
finds in Defoe’s novel a Puritan impulse for “radical analysis of the self,” according to which “the Puritan was liberated from the structured role-playing that society ordinarily demands, and could define himself as a self rather than as a tradesman, a father, an Anglican” (21). Throughout the novel, we have seen how Crusoe continually examines himself in his actions, his ideas, and his place in the world.

In terms of politics, Defoe advised monarchs on foreign policy; he also advocated the British colonization of South America, including the Orinoco River area—near Crusoe’s island. Indeed, the novel promotes a successful vision of colonization of the Americas—with the figure of Friday suggesting a compliant native population. In addition, while Defoe was not a philosopher, scholars have pointed to the possible influence of Locke’s ideas about psychology, property, and religious liberty upon Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe. At one point Crusoe describes himself as “acting like a mere brute from the principles of Nature” (71), which may echo Locke’s idea of “man in a state of nature,” from his Second Treatise of Government.

Alexander Selkirk Marooned

Much as news of the Sea Venture’s wreck off Bermuda led to the idea for Shakespeare’s The Tempest, Alexander Selkirk’s story certainly played some

54. Damrosch (1985) 196. Damrosch believes that the novels “do not show the individual to be defined and directed by social position. On the contrary, these novels are about breaking out of one’s position, achieving a radical self-definition against it” (12); he also remarks that Defoe “was moved to test Puritan faith through fiction” (204).

55. As Seidel (1991) xi, 40–46 points out, Defoe advised King William on this colonization project in the 1690s, again in 1711 with the South Sea Trade Company, and in 1719 when Robinson Crusoe appeared. For Defoe’s imperial aspirations for Britain, see R. West (1998) 123, 170–71.

56. See Seidel (1991) 33 on Locke and the generation of ideas. R. West (1998) 10 notes that while in school, Defoe would have read Locke’s Essay concerning Human Understanding, “which was banned at Oxford.”

57. Richetti (2005) 193 describes how Crusoe “seeks to appropriate the island, to possess it by turning a wilderness into a domesticated space rather like England. In the fashion described by John Locke whereby a man possesses land by working it, he becomes the owner of the island by his laboring on it and exploring it, claiming it by virtue of his European exceptionalism.” Locke asserts, “The Labor of his Body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his Labor with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property” (chapter 5, paragraph 27, in Locke (1965) 287–88).

role in triggering the impulse for Defoe’s novel. Selkirk was marooned on one of the Juan Fernández Islands off the coast of Chile for over four years (1704–9). He was brought back to England (1711), and subsequent accounts describing his experience were written by Cooke (1712); Woodes Rogers, the captain who picked him up (1712); and the essayist Steele (1713). 59

I acknowledge the differences between Selkirk’s actual stay on his island (now called Robinson Crusoe Island) and Defoe’s fictional story of Robinson Crusoe. First, Selkirk was not shipwrecked. He had a difference of opinion with his ship’s captain about the seaworthiness of the vessel they were sailing and requested to be left on the island. Second, despite the uniqueness that Steele emphasizes, there are accounts of other men stranded on this very island for up to five years. 60

I am not suggesting that Defoe has written a historically based novel, but let us explore the details of Selkirk’s stay that were adopted and, without question, transformed by Defoe. First, there is one man alone on an uninhabited island for an extended period (Selkirk’s four years and four months against Crusoe’s twenty-eight years). Selkirk’s island has a good climate, high hills, and pleasant valleys, with no venomous creatures or “savages” (and no cannibals live nearby—the South American coast is almost four hundred miles away). Selkirk tames both goats and cats (to help fight off the rats) and eats sea turtles and crayfish. The similarities are obvious in terms of natural habitat and animal taming, though Selkirk’s island is in the southeast Pacific, not off the coast of “Brazil” in the southeast Caribbean.

Selkirk takes various supplies with him when he lands: clothes, flint, powder, bullets, a hatchet, a knife, a kettle, and a Bible. Crusoe scavenged from the wrecked ship. Neither man is cast away without resources. Regarding shelter and clothes, Selkirk must construct his own hut (covered with grass) and ends up wearing a goatskin jacket, breeches, and cap (Selkirk’s father was a tanner of hides). Crusoe’s clothes obviously follow this model. Once, while chasing a

59. A new edition of Woodes Rogers’ account was published in 1718, the year before Robinson Crusoe appeared. Note the greeting a Moskito Indian named Robin gives another on the island: he “threw himself flat on his face at his feet” (Dampier’s account in Shinagel (1994) 227–29). It is possible that Defoe adapted this gesture in his description of Friday’s submission. Regarding Defoe’s borrowing from Selkirk’s story, see Seidel (1991) 40. Against Selkirk as a model, see R. West (1998) 237–38; West argues that the geography is different and that there was no shipwreck—only a man alone with goat skins. Severin (2002) 323 calls Selkirk the “inspiration” but not the “model,” who he believes is Henry Pitman; Frank (2012) emphasizes the influence of Robert Knox and his captivity. For excerpts of Selkirk’s tale found in the works of Dampier, Cooke, Woodes Rogers, and Steele, see Shinagel (1994) 227–38.

60. Steele is “doubtful whether the like has happenid to any other,” a familiar sentiment found in Robinson Crusoe (Shinagel (1994) 235–36).
goat, Selkirk falls off a precipice and lies unconscious for twenty-four hours. Later, he crawls back to his hut, where he slowly gathers his strength over the next ten days.\textsuperscript{61} Crusoe was stricken with a fever, not a fall. But in both cases, there was no one to nurse the solitary man back to health.

Perhaps the most fascinating parallels derive from Selkirk’s psychological development on the island.\textsuperscript{62} At first, Selkirk is struck with terror at the noises inland and from “the monsters of the deep.”\textsuperscript{63} Although melancholic and nearly suicidal, Selkirk comes to adopt a routine that includes reading from the Bible, singing psalms, and making prayers “at stated hours and places for exercises of devotion.” In fact, Selkirk says that he was a better Christian while in solitude than ever before. With “reason and reading Scripture [Selkirk] conquers all the inconveniences of solitude, and [began] to be very easy.”\textsuperscript{64} In this new state of mind, Selkirk now sings and dances with his cats (which come to number in the hundreds). Crusoe is also desperate and frightened upon first reaching his island, and he, too, turns to the Bible and undergoes a religious conversion, after which he “becomes content upon the island.”

Also of interest is Selkirk’s “reentry into society.” Rogers comments that when his ship picks him up, Selkirk had “somewhat forgotten language and spoke words by halves.” More profound was Selkirk’s “disregard of ordinary things.”

When the Ship which brought him off the Island came in, he received them with the great Indifference, with relation to the Prospect of going off with them, but with great Satisfaction in an Opportunity to refresh and help them. The Man frequently bewailed his Return to the World, which could not, he said, with all its Enjoyments, restore him to the Tranquility of his Solitude.\textsuperscript{65}

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\textsuperscript{61} Accounts differ as to whether Selkirk lay in the same spot for one day or three days after his fall, whether he pursued the ship as it was leaving and called for it to come back, and whether he lost some of his ability to speak. See Blanchard (1955) 423.

\textsuperscript{62} In terms of physical transformation, Selkirk wears out his clothes and shoes, but his feet toughen up so much that he runs barefoot around the island. Indeed, Rogers comments on Selkirk’s swiftness in hunting goats, after tiring his other men and their dogs (Shinagel (1994) 233).

\textsuperscript{63} Steele in Shinagel (1994) 237. Selkirk also fears two Spanish ships that pass (Selkirk had sailed on an English privateer); we may here compare Crusoe, who says, “I had rather be delivered up to the savages, and be devoured alive, than fall into the merciless claws of the priests, and be carried into the Inquisition” (192).

\textsuperscript{64} Steele in Shinagel (1994) 237; cf. Crusoe’s comment that “my reason began now to master my despondence” (53–54).

\textsuperscript{65} Steele in Shinagel (1994) 238.
Steele interviewed Selkirk several times after his return to London and wrote an essay about Selkirk six years before Defoe’s novel appeared (1713). Steele is especially fascinated by “the different revolutions in [Selkirk’s] mind in that long Solitude.” One account states that at the moment Selkirk was first dropped off, he had a change of heart and ran after the ship, calling for them to take him with them. Although Selkirk came close to ending his own life, he later accepted his new sort of existence.

He grew dejected, languid, and melancholy, scarce able to refrain from doing himself Violence, till by Degrees, by the Force of Reason, and frequent reading of the Scriptures, and turning his Thoughts upon the Study of Navigation, after the Space of eighteen Months, he grew thoroughly reconciled to his Condition.66

Woodes Rogers draws a lesson from Selkirk’s experience: that solitary existence and retirement from the world are not unendurable—in fact, Selkirk was right to leave his ship, for it was lost at sea not long after. Like Robinson Crusoe, Selkirk comes, in some sense, to prefer the solitary life.

When he had made this Conquest, the Vigour of his Health, Disengagement from the World, a constant, cheerful, serene Sky, and a temperate Air, made his Life one continual Feast, and his Being much more joyful than it had before been irksome. He now taking Delight in every thing, made the Hutt in which he lay, by Ornaments which he cut down from a spacious Wood, on the side of which it was situated, the most delicious Bower, fanned with continual Breezes, and gentle Aspirations of Wind, that made his Repose after the Chase equal to the most sensual Pleasures.67

Steele is led to conclude,

He is happiest who confines his Wants to natural Necessities; and he that goes further in his Desires, increases his Wants in Proportion to his Acquisitions; or to use his [Selkirk’s] own Expression, “I am now worth 800 Pounds, but shall never be so happy, as when I was not worth a Farthing.”68

In Defoe’s novel, Crusoe insists on these same lessons: we only need what is necessary; those who covet more are destined to be unhappy.

As we have seen, many shipwreck narratives explore the possibility of transformation, but each has a distinct emphasis. Shipwrecks not only are obstacles for Odysseus’ return home but also hinder his attempts to reassert his identity. In *The Tempest*, survivors and islanders seek to establish a new hierarchy. In *Robinson Crusoe*, the uninhabited island forces the lone survivor to rediscover human cultural advances. The constant in all situations is the potential adoption of new roles. Certainly, anyone who is shipwrecked must adapt in order to survive. While this is true for those in the *Odyssey* and *The Tempest*, we must say that *Robinson Crusoe* presents an incredibly wide range of new roles for the solitary shipwrecked arrival. Not only is persistence required, but the survivor must have a readiness to try unfamiliar agricultural and artistic skills. We might also mention the necessity of good luck—or, as in Crusoe’s mind, Providence and the favor of a god.

Crusoe experiences many shifts in fortune: from prosperity to slavery, from misery to success as a planter, from sinner to repentant. In chapter 6 of the *Poetics*, Aristotle discusses “reversal” (peripeteia) as one of “tragedy’s greatest means of emotional power [psychagogia].” In chapter 11, he defines “reversal” as “a complete swing in the direction of the action”; we might call these reversals “shifts in fortune.” Aristotle considers different sorts of reversals affecting different sorts of characters and concludes that the best type of plot for tragedy would be as follows:

We are left, then, with the figure who falls between these types. Such a man is one who is not preeminent in virtue and justice, and one who falls into affliction not because of evil and wickedness, but because of a certain fallibility [harmartia]. (*Poetics* 13)

While tragedy is the focus, much of what Aristotle says applies to literature more broadly. I interpret Aristotle to be saying that the best story line (dramatic or otherwise) concerns a character who is not an utter villain or a saint but someone in between—someone like us—”who falls into affliction.”

Whether or not Defoe had the *Poetics* in mind, Aristotle has rightly hit on a sort of universal pattern that describes what we call “dramatic situations” in literature (and in life), situations that affect readers and specta-
tors in a powerful way. Perhaps the most effective stories concern those people—like Crusoe—who fall from prosperity into affliction (cast away upon a lonely island), though also wondrous are those who pass from affliction into prosperity (Crusoe’s rescue by the sea captain). These sudden, dramatic shifts—reversals that occur in every shipwreck narrative—are self-consciously remarked on several times in the course of Defoe’s novel.

Like Crusoe, Odysseus is a single shipwrecked survivor. Odysseus also desperately struggles to reach shore and hides from wild animals under bushes his first night. Like Crusoe, Odysseus is driven far out of the way of human traffic (Calypso’s island is at the ends of the earth). Except for Crusoe, it is hard to think of someone other than Odysseus who suffers a greater set of reversals and yet bounces back (though I will consider Philoctetes in chapter 7). I have already noted that both Odysseus and Crusoe were thought dead and must prove, upon “reentry” into their old lives, that they are who they say they are.70

Like Shakespeare, Defoe is working against the backdrop of the European “discovery” of America. There is contact with “natives” (Friday, Ariel, and Caliban), there are divine epiphanies, and a ship miraculously appears at the end. In both scenarios, the social hierarchy privileges European over native islander.

Each of these three works—the Odyssey, The Tempest, and Robinson Crusoe—emphasizes particular aspects of the shipwreck predicament, yet all three share a “family resemblance” of features. While some of these parallels are striking, I certainly agree with Seidel’s argument that while we may “identify a shared allegiance” among various island stories, this is “not to identify a specific source for the narrative.”71 Defoe is certainly well read, but the aforementioned parallels do not necessarily argue for direct literary reference. As Seidel says,

No one can read the scenes of Crusoe’s arrival or departure on his island without thinking of the most famous of shipwrecked mariners, Odysseus; and no one can read the complicated machinery of Cru-

70. Although Joyce calls Crusoe “the English Ulysses,” Watt (in Shinagel (1994) 303) notes that Crusoe has no sexual adventures (or interest?): this is an “interesting break from the traditional expectations aroused by desert islands, from the Odyssey to the New Yorker.” Seidel (1991) 37–38 notes allusions to the Odyssey and The Tempest, with emphasis on the planting of oars by Odysseus, “mark[ing] the end of Odysseus’ need to wander,” and Crusoe’s oar planting when he reaches his island (109).

soe’s complicated rescue finale without thinking of the romance of Shakespeare’s island fiction, *The Tempest*. . . any island story, whether Homer’s, Shakespeare’s, or Defoe’s, builds on a narrative pattern of separation, displacement, and resubstantiation so important to Western literature. The appeal of island stories has always to do with the reserves of individual resourcefulness under the most difficult of circumstances.\textsuperscript{72}

I turn now to precursors and successors to the story of Robinson Crusoe where, once again, “individual resourcefulness” will be tested under desperate circumstances, on islands and in outer space.

\textsuperscript{72} Seidel (1991) 37.