

# **Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Chatto & Windus 1957; rep. Univ. of California Press 1957).**

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## **Chapter III: 'Robinson Crusoe', Individualism and the Novel**

THE novel's serious concern with the daily lives of ordinary people seems to depend upon two important general conditions: the society must value every individual highly enough to consider him the proper subject of its serious literature; and there must be enough variety of belief and action among ordinary people for a detailed account of them to be of interest to other ordinary people, the readers of novels. It is probable that neither of these conditions for the existence of the novel obtained very widely until fairly recently, because they both depend on the rise of a society characterised by that vast complex of interdependent factors denoted by the term 'individualism'.

Even the word is recent, dating only from the middle of the nineteenth century. In all ages, no doubt, and in all societies, some people have been 'individualists' in the sense that they were egocentric, unique or conspicuously independent of current opinions and habits; but the concept of individualism involves much more than this. It posits a whole society mainly governed by the idea of every individual's intrinsic independence both from other individuals and from that multifarious allegiance to past modes of thought and action denoted by the word 'tradition'—a force that is always social, not individual. The existence of such a society, in turn, obviously depends on a special type of economic and political organisation and on an appropriate ideology; more specifically, on an economic and political organisation which allows its members a very wide range of choices in their actions, and on an ideology primarily based, not on the tradition of the past, but on the autonomy of the individual, irrespective of his particular social status or personal capacity. It is generally agreed that modern society is uniquely individualist in these respects, and that of the many historical causes for its emergence two are of supreme importance—the rise of modern industrial capitalism and the spread of Protestantism, especially in its Calvinist or Puritan forms.

### **I**

Capitalism brought a great increase of economic specialisation; and this, combined with a less rigid and homogeneous social structure, and a less absolutist and more democratic political system, enormously increased the individual's freedom of choice. For those fully exposed to the new economic order, the effective entity on which social arrangements were now based was no longer the family, nor the church, nor the guild, nor the township, nor any other collective unit, but the individual: he alone was primarily responsible for determining his own economic, social, political and religious roles.

It is very difficult to say when this change of orientation began to affect society as a whole—probably not until the nineteenth century. But the movement certainly began much earlier. In the sixteenth century the Reformation and the rise of national states decisively challenged the substantial social homogeneity of mediaeval Christendom, and, in the famous words of Maitland, 'for the first time, the Absolute State faced the Absolute Individual'. Outside the political and religious sphere, however, change was slow, and it is likely that it was not until the further development of industrial capitalism, especially in England and in the Low Countries, that a mainly individualist social and economic structure came into being and started to affect a considerable part, although by no means a majority, of the total population.

It is, at least, generally agreed that the foundations of the new order were laid in the period immediately following the Glorious Revolution of 1689. The commercial and industrial classes, who were the prime agents in bringing about the individualist social order, had achieved greater political and economic power; and this power was already being reflected in the domain of literature. The middle classes of the towns, we have seen, were becoming much more important in the reading public; and at the same time literature began to view trade, commerce and industry with favour. This was a rather new development. Earlier writers, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne, Ben Jonson and Dryden, for example, had tended to

support the traditional economic and social order and had attacked many of the symptoms of emergent individualism. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, Addison, Steele and Defoe were somewhat ostentatiously setting the seal of literary approval on the heroes of economic individualism.

The new orientation was equally evident in the philosophical domain. The great English empiricists of the seventeenth century were as vigorously individualist in their political and ethical thought as in their epistemology. Bacon hoped to make a really new start in social theory by applying his inductive method to an accumulation of factual data about a great number of particular individuals; [1] Hobbes, also feeling that he was dealing with a subject that had not been properly approached before, based his political and ethical theory on the fundamentally egocentric psychological constitution of the individual; [2] while in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) Locke constructed the class system of political thought based on the indefeasibility of individual rights, as against the more traditional ones of Church, Family or King. That these thinkers should have been the political and psychological vanguard of nascent individualism, as well as the pioneers of its theory of knowledge, suggests how closely linked their reorientations were both in themselves and in relation to the innovations of the novel. For, just as there is a basic congruity between the non-realist nature of the literary forms of the Greeks, their intensely social, or civic, moral outlook, and their philosophical preference for the universal, so the modern novel is closely allied on the one hand to the realist epistemology of the modern period, and on the other to the individualism of its social structure. In the literary, the philosophical and the social spheres alike the classical focus on the ideal, the universal and the corporate has shifted completely, and the modern field of vision is mainly occupied by the discrete particular, the directly apprehended sensum, and the autonomous individual.

Defoe, whose philosophical outlook has much in common with that of the English empiricists of the seventeenth century, expressed the diverse elements of individualism more completely than any previous writer, and his work offers a unique demonstration of the connection between individualism in its many forms and the rise of the novel. This connection is shown particularly clearly and comprehensively in his first novel, *Robinson Crusoe*.

## II (a)

*Robinson Crusoe* has been very appropriately used by many economic theorists as their illustration of *homo economicus*. Just as 'the body politic' was the symbol of the communal way of thought typical of previous societies, so 'economic man' symbolised the new outlook of individualism in its economic aspect. Adam Smith has been charged with the invention; actually, the concept is much older, but it is natural that it should have come to the fore as an abstraction expressing the individualism of the economic system as a whole only when the individualism of that system itself had reached an advanced stage of development.

That Robinson Crusoe, like Defoe's other main characters, Moll Flanders, Roxana, Colonel Jacque and Captain Singleton, is an embodiment of economic individualism hardly needs demonstration. All Defoe's heroes pursue money, which he characteristically called 'the general denominating article in the world'; [3] and they pursue it very methodically according to the profit and loss book-keeping which Max Weber considered to be the distinctive technical feature of modern capitalism. [4] Defoe's heroes, we observe, have no need to learn this technique; whatever the circumstances of their birth and education, they have it in their blood, and keep us more fully informed of their present stocks of money and commodities than any other characters in fiction. Crusoe's book-keeping conscience, indeed, has established an effective priority over his other thoughts and emotions; when his Lisbon steward offers him 160 moidores to alleviate his momentary difficulties on return, Crusoe relates: 'I could hardly refrain from tears while he spoke; in short, I took 100 of the moidores, and called for a pen and ink to give him a receipt for them'. [5] Book-keeping is but one aspect of a central theme in the modern social order. Our civilisation as a whole is based on individual contractual relationships, as opposed to the unwritten, traditional and collective relationships of previous societies; and the idea of contract played an important part in the theoretical development of political individualism. It had featured prominently

in the fight against the Stuarts, and it was enshrined in Locke's political system. Locke, indeed, thought that contractual relationships were binding even in the state of nature; [6] Crusoe, we notice, acts like a good Lockean—when others arrive on the island he forces them to accept his dominion with written contracts acknowledging his absolute power (even though we have previously been told that he has run out of ink). [7]

But the primacy of the economic motive, and an innate reverence for book-keeping and the law of contract are by no means the only matters in which Robinson Crusoe is a symbol of the processes associated with the rise of economic individualism. The hypostasis of the economic motive logically entails a devaluation of other modes of thought, feeling and action: the various forms of traditional group relationship, the family, the guild, the village, the sense of nationality—all are weakened, and so, too, are the competing claims of non-economic individual achievement and enjoyment, ranging from spiritual salvation to the pleasures of recreation. [8]

This inclusive reordering of the components of human society tends to occur wherever industrial capitalism becomes the dominant force in the economic structure, [9] and it naturally became evident particularly early in England. By the middle of the eighteenth century, indeed, it had already become something of a commonplace. Goldsmith, for instance, thus described the concomitants of England's vaunted freedom in *The Traveller* (1764):

That independence Britons prize too high,  
Keeps man from man, and breaks the social tie;  
The self-dependent lordlings stand alone,  
All claims that bind and sweeten life unknown;  
Here by the bonds of nature feebly held,  
Minds combat minds, repelling and repell'd ...  
Nor this the worst. As nature's ties decay,  
As duty, love, and honour fail to sway,  
Fictitious bonds, the bonds of wealth and law,  
Still gather strength, and force unwilling awe. [10]

Unlike Goldsmith, Defoe was not a professed enemy of the new order—quite the reverse; nevertheless there is much in *Robinson Crusoe* that bears out Goldsmith's picture, as can be seen in Defoe's treatment of such group relationships as the family or the nation.

For the most part, Defoe's heroes either have no family, like Moll Flanders, Colonel Jacque and Captain Singleton, or leave it at an early age never to return, like Roxana and Robinson Crusoe. Not too much importance can be attached to this fact, since adventure stories demand the absence of conventional social ties. Still, in *Robinson Crusoe* at least, the hero has a home and family, and leaves them for the classic reason of homo economicus—that it is necessary to better his economic condition. 'Something fatal in that propension of nature' calls him to the sea and adventure, and against 'settling to business' in the station to which he is born—the upper station of low life'; and this despite the panegyric which his father makes of that condition. Later he sees this lack of 'confined desires', this dissatisfaction with 'the state wherein God and Nature has placed' him, as his 'original sin'. [11] At the time, however, the argument between his parents and himself is a debate, not about filial duty or religion, but about whether going or staying is likely to be the most advantageous course materially: both sides accept the economic argument as primary. And, of course, Crusoe actually gains by his 'original sin', and becomes richer than his father was.

Crusoe's 'original sin' is really the dynamic tendency of capitalism itself, whose aim is never merely to maintain the status quo, but to transform it incessantly. Leaving home, improving on the lot one was born to, is a vital feature of the individualist pattern of life. It may be regarded as the economic and social embodiment of the 'uneasiness' which Locke had made the centre of his system of motivation, [12] an uneasiness whose existence was, in the very opposite outlook of Pascal, the index of the enduring misery of mortal man. 'All the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact, that they cannot stay quietly in their own room' Pascal had written. [13] Defoe's hero is far from agreeing. Even when he is old, Crusoe tells us how: '... nothing else offering, and finding that really stirring about and

trading, the profit being so great, and, as I may say, certain, had more pleasure in it, and more satisfaction to the mind, than sitting still, which, to me especially, was the unhappiest part of life'. [14] So, in the *Farther Adventures*, Crusoe sets out on yet another lucrative Odyssey.

The fundamental tendency of economic individualism, then, prevents Crusoe from paying much heed to the ties of family, whether as a son or a husband. This is in direct contradiction to the great stress which Defoe lays on the social and religious importance of the family in his didactic works such as the *Family Instructor*; but his novels reflect not theory but practice, and they accord these ties a very minor, and on the whole obstructive, role.

Rational scrutiny of one's own economic interest may lead one to be as little bound by national as by family ties. Defoe certainly valued individuals and countries alike primarily on their economic merits. Thus one of his most patriotic utterances takes the characteristic form of claiming that his compatriots have a greater productive output per hour than the workmen of any other country. [15] Crusoe, we notice, whom Walter de la Mare has justly called Defoe's Elective Affinity, [16] shows xenophobia mainly where the economic virtues are absent. When they are present—as in the Spanish Governor, a French papist priest, a faithful Portuguese factor—his praise is unstinted. On the other hand, he condemns many Englishmen, such as his English settlers on the island, for their lack of industry. Crusoe, one feels, is not bound to his country by sentimental ties, any more than to his family; he is satisfied by people, whatever their nationality, who are good to do business with; and he feels, like Moll Flanders, that 'with money in the pocket one is at home anywhere'. [17] What might at first appear to place Robinson Crusoe in the somewhat special category of 'Travel and Adventure' does not, then, altogether do so. The plot's reliance on travel does tend to allot Robinson Crusoe a somewhat peripheral position in the novel's line of development, since it removes the hero from his usual setting in a stable and cohesive pattern of social relations.

But Crusoe is not a mere footloose adventurer, and his travels, like his freedom from social ties, are merely somewhat extreme cases of tendencies that are normal in modern society as a whole, since, by making the pursuit of gain a primary motive, economic individualism has much increased the mobility of the individual. More specifically, Robinson Crusoe's career is based, as modern scholarship has shown, [18] on some of the innumerable volumes which recounted the exploits of those voyagers who had done so much in the sixteenth century to assist the development of capitalism by providing the gold, slaves and tropical products on which trade expansion depended; and who had continued the process in the seventeenth century by developing the colonies and world markets on which the future progress of capitalism depended.

Defoe's plot, then, expresses some of the most important tendencies of the life of his time, and it is this which sets his hero apart from most of the travellers in literature. Robinson Crusoe is not, like Autolycus, a commercial traveller rooted in an extended but still familiar locality; nor is he, like Ulysses, an unwilling voyager trying to get back to his family and his native land: profit is Crusoe's only vocation, and the whole world is his territory.

The primacy of individual economic advantage has tended to diminish the importance of personal as well as group relationships, and especially of those based on sex; for sex, as Weber pointed out, [19] being one of the strongest non-rational factors in human life, is one of the strongest potential menaces to the individual's rational pursuit of economic ends, and it has therefore, as we shall see, been placed under particularly strong controls in the ideology of industrial capitalism.

Romantic love has certainly had no greater antagonist among the novelists than Defoe. Even sexual satisfaction—where he speaks of it—tends to be minimised; he protested in *The Review*, for example, that 'the Trifle called Pleasure in it' was 'not worth the Repentance'. [20] As to marriage, his attitude is complicated by the fact that economic and moral virtue in the male is no guarantee of a profitable matrimonial investment: on his colony 'as it often happens in the world (what the wise ends of God's Providence are in such a disposition of things I cannot say), the two honest fellows had the two worst wives, and the three reprobates, that were scarce worth hanging ... had three clever, diligent, careful and

ingenious wives'. [21] His puzzled parenthesis bears eloquent testimony to the seriousness with which he views this flaw in the rationality of Providence.

It is not surprising, therefore, that love plays little part in Crusoe's own life, and that even the temptations of sex are excluded from the scene of his greatest triumphs, the island.

When Crusoe does notice the lack of 'society' there, he prays for the solace of company, but we observe that what he desires is a male slave. [22] Then, with Friday, he enjoys an idyll without benefit of woman—a revolutionary departure from the traditional expectations aroused by desert islands from the *Odyssey* to the *New Yorker*.

When eventually Crusoe returns to civilisation, sex is still strictly subordinated to business. Only when his financial position has been fully secured by a further voyage does he marry; and all he tells us of this supreme human adventure is that it was 'not either to my disadvantage or dissatisfaction'. This, the birth of three children, and his wife's death, however, comprise only the early part of a sentence, which ends with plans for a further voyage. [23] Women have only one important role to play, and that is economic. When Crusoe's colonists draw lots for five women, we are gleefully informed that:

He that drew to choose first ... took her that was reckoned the homeliest and eldest of the five, which made mirth enough among the rest ... but the fellow considered better than any of them, that it was application and business that they were to expect assistance in as much as anything else; and she proved the best wife of all the parcel. [24]

'The best wife of all the parcel.' The language of commerce here reminds us that Dickens once decided on the basis of Defoe's treatment of women that he must have been 'a precious dry and disagreeable article himself'. [25]

The same devaluation of non-economic factors can be seen in Crusoe's other personal relationships. He treats them all in terms of their commodity value. The clearest case is that of Xury, the Moorish boy who helped him to escape from slavery and on another occasion offered to prove his devotion by sacrificing his own life. Crusoe very properly resolves 'to love him ever after' and promises 'to make him a great man'. But when chance leads them to the Portuguese Captain, who offers Crusoe sixty pieces of eight—twice Judas's figure—he cannot resist the bargain, and sells Xury into slavery. He has momentary scruples, it is true, but they are cheaply satisfied by securing a promise from the new owner to 'set him free in ten years if he turn Christian'. Remorse later supervenes, but only when the tasks of his island life make manpower more valuable to him than money. [26]

Crusoe's relations with Man Friday are similarly egocentric. He does not ask him his name, but gives him one. Even in language—the medium whereby human beings may achieve something more than animal relationships with each other, as Crusoe himself wrote in his *Serious Reflections* [27]—Crusoe is a strict utilitarian. 'I likewise taught him to say Yes and No', [28] he tells us; but Friday still speaks pidgin English at the end of their long association, as Defoe's contemporary critic Charles Gildon pointed out. [29] Yet Crusoe regards the relationship as ideal. He is 'as perfectly and completely happy if any such thing as complete happiness can be found in a sublunary state'. [30] A functional silence, broken only by an occasional 'No, Friday', or an abject 'Yes, Master', is the golden music of Crusoe's *île joyeuse*. It seems that man's social nature, his need for friendship and understanding, is wholly satisfied by the righteous bestowal or grateful receipt, of benevolent but not undemanding patronage. It is true that later, as with Xury, Crusoe promises himself 'to do something considerable' for his servant, 'if he outlive me'. Fortunately, no such sacrifice is called for, as Friday dies at sea, to be rewarded only by a brief word of obituary compassion. [28]

Emotional ties, then, and personal relationships generally, play a very minor part in *Robinson Crusoe*, except when they are focussed on economic matters. For instance, after Crusoe has left, it is only when his faithful old agent in Lisbon reveals that he is now a very rich man that we get any emotional climax: 'I turned pale and grew sick; and had not the old man run and fetched me a cordial, I believe the sudden surprise of joy had overset nature, and I had died upon the spot'. [32] Only money—fortune in its modern sense—is a proper cause of deep feeling; and friendship is accorded only to those who can safely be entrusted with Crusoe's economic interests.

Sitting still, we saw, was 'the unhappiest part of life' to Robinson Crusoe; leisure pursuits are almost as bad. In this he resembles his author, who seems to have made as few concessions to such distractions as anyone. The fewness of Defoe's literary friendships has been commented on, and he is perhaps a unique example of a great writer who was very little interested in literature, and says nothing of interest about it as literature. [33] In his blindness to aesthetic experience Crusoe is Defoe's peer.

We can say of him as Marx said of his archetypal capitalist: 'enjoyment is subordinated to capital, and the individual who enjoys to the individual who capitalises'. [34] Some of the French versions of Robinson Crusoe make him address hymns of praise to nature, beginning 'Oh Nature!' [35] Defoe did not. The natural scene on the island appeals not for adoration, but for exploitation; wherever Crusoe looks his acres cry out so loud for improvement that he has no leisure to observe that they also compose a landscape.

Of course, in a wintry way, Crusoe has his pleasures. If he does not, like Selkirk, dance with his goats, he at least plays with them, and with his parrot and his cats; but his deepest satisfactions come from surveying his stock of goods: 'I had everything so ready at my hand,' he says, 'that it was a great pleasure to me to see all my goods in such order, and especially to find my stock of all necessaries so great.' [37]

## II (b)

If Robinson Crusoe's character depends very largely on the psychological and social orientations of economic individualism, the appeal of his adventures to the reader seems mainly to derive from the effects of another important concomitant of modern capitalism, economic specialisation.

The division of labour has done much to make the novel possible: partly because the more specialised the social and economic structure, the greater the number of significant differences of character, attitude and experience in contemporary life which the novelist can portray, and which are of interest to his readers; partly because, by increasing the amount of leisure, economic specialisation provides the kind of mass audience with which the novel is associated; and partly because this specialisation creates particular needs in that audience which the novel satisfies. Such, at least, was the general view of T. H. Green: 'In the progressive division of labour, while we become more useful as citizens, we seem to lose our completeness as men ... the perfect organisation of modern society removes the excitement of adventure and the occasion for independent effort. There is less of human interest to touch us within our calling. ...' 'The alleviation' of this situation, Green concluded, 'is to be found in the newspaper and the novel.' [38]

It is very likely that the lack of variety and stimulation in the daily task as a result of economic specialisation is largely responsible for the unique dependence of the individual in our culture upon the substitute experiences provided by the printing press, particularly in the forms of journalism and the novel. *Robinson Crusoe*, however, is a much more direct illustration of Green's thesis, since much of its appeal obviously depends on the quality of the 'occasions for independent effort' in the economic realm which it offers Defoe's hero, efforts which the reader can share vicariously. The appeal of these efforts is surely a measure of the depth of the deprivations involved by economic specialisation, deprivations whose far-reaching nature is suggested by the way our civilisation has reintroduced some of the basic economic processes as therapeutic recreations: in gardening, home-weaving, pottery, camping, woodwork and keeping pets, we can all participate in the character-forming satisfactions which circumstances force on Defoe's hero; and like him, demonstrate what we would not otherwise know, that 'by making the most rational judgement of things, every man may be in time master of every mechanic art'. [39] Defoe was certainly aware of how the increasing economic specialisation which was a feature of the life of his time had made most of the 'mechanic arts' alien to the experience of his readers. When Crusoe makes bread, for instance, he reflects that '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, procuring, curing, dressing, making and finishing this one article of bread'. [40] Defoe's

description goes on for seven pages, pages that would have been of little interest to people in mediaeval or Tudor society, who saw this and other basic economic processes going on daily in their own households.

But by the early eighteenth century, as Kalm reported, most women did not 'bake, because there is a baker in every parish or village', [41] and Defoe could therefore expect his readers to be interested in the very detailed descriptions of the economic life which comprise such an important and memorable part of his narrative.

*Robinson Crusoe*, of course, does not deal with the actual economic life of Defoe's own time and place. It would be somewhat contrary to the facts of economic life under the division of labour to show the average individual's manual labour as interesting or inspiring; to take Adam Smith's famous example of the division of labour in *The Wealth of Nations* [42] the man who performs one of the many separate operations in the manufacture of a pin is unlikely to find his task as absorbing and interesting as Crusoe does. So Defoe sets back the economic clock, and takes his hero to a primitive environment, where labour can be presented as varied and inspiring, and where it has the further significant difference from the pin-maker's at home that there is an absolute equivalence between individual effort and individual reward. This was the final change from contemporary economic conditions which was necessary to enable Defoe to give narrative expression to the ideological counterpart of the Division of Labour, the Dignity of Labour.

The creed of the dignity of labour is not wholly modern: in classical times the Cynics and Stoics had opposed the denigration of manual labour which is a necessary part of a slaveowning society's scale of values; and later, Christianity, originally associated mainly with slaves and the poor, had done much to remove the odium on manual labour. The idea, however, was only fully developed in the modern period, presumably because its compensatory affirmation became the more necessary as the development of economic specialisation made manual labour more stultifying; and the creed itself is closely associated with the advent of Protestantism. Calvinism in particular tended to make its adherents forget the idea that labour was God's punishment for Adam's disobedience, by emphasising the very different idea that untiring stewardship of the material gifts of God was a paramount religious and ethical obligation. [43] The quality of Crusoe's stewardship cannot be doubted; he allows himself little time for rest, and even the advent of new manpower—Friday's—is a signal, not for relaxation, but for expanded production. Defoe clearly belongs to the tradition of Ascetic Protestantism. He had written much that sounds like the formulations of Weber, Troeltsch and Tawney; in Dickory Cronke's aphorism, for example: 'When you find yourself sleepy in a morning, rouse yourself, and consider that you are born to business, and that in doing good in your generation, you answer your character and act like a man'. [44] He had even—with a certain sophistic obtuseness—propounded the view that the pursuit of economic utility was quite literally an imitation of Christ: 'Usefulness being the great pleasure, and justly deem'd by all good men the truest and noblest end of life, in which men come nearest to the character of our B. Saviour, who went about doing good'. [45] Defoe's attitude here exhibits a confusion of religious and material values to which the Puritan gospel of the dignity of labour was peculiarly liable: once the highest spiritual values had been attached to the performance of the daily task, the next step was for the autonomous individual to regard his achievements as a quasi-divine mastering of the environment. It is likely that this secularisation of the Calvinist conception of stewardship was of considerable importance for the rise of the novel. *Robinson Crusoe* is certainly the first novel in the sense that it is the first fictional narrative in which an ordinary person's daily activities are the centre of continuous literary attention. These activities, it is true, are not seen in a wholly secular light; but later novelists could continue Defoe's serious concern with man's worldly doings without placing them in a religious framework. It is therefore likely that the Puritan conception of the dignity of labour helped to bring into being the novel's general premise that the individual's daily life is of sufficient importance and interest to be the proper subject of literature.

### III

Economic individualism explains much of Crusoe's character; economic specialisation and its associated ideology help to account for the appeal of his adventures; but it is Puritan individualism which controls his spiritual being.

Troeltsch has claimed that 'the really permanent attainment of individualism was due to a religious, and not a secular movement, to the Reformation and not the Renaissance'. [46] It is neither feasible nor profitable to attempt to establish priorities in such matters, but it is certainly true that if there is one element which all forms of Protestantism have in common it is the replacement of the rule of the Church as the mediator between man and God by another view of religion in which it is the individual who is entrusted with the primary responsibility for his own spiritual direction. Two aspects of this new Protestant emphasis—the tendency to increase consciousness of the self as a spiritual entity, and the tendency to a kind of democratisation of the moral and social outlook—are particularly important both to *Robinson Crusoe* and to the development of the presuppositions on which the formal realism of the novel is based.

The idea of religious self-scrutiny as an important duty for each individual is, of course, much older than Protestantism; it derives from the individualist and subjective emphasis of primitive Christianity, and finds its supreme expression in St. Augustine's *Confessions*. But it is generally agreed that it was Calvin, in the sixteenth century, who re-established and systematised this earlier pattern of purposive spiritual introspection, and made it the supreme religious ritual for the layman as well as for the priest: every good Puritan conducted a continual scrutiny of his inner man for evidence of his own place in the divine plot of election and reprobation.

This 'internalisation of conscience' is everywhere manifested in Calvinism. In New England, it has been said, 'almost every literate Puritan kept some sort of journal'; [47] and, in England, *Grace Abounding* is the great monument of a way of life which Bunyan shared with the other members of his sect, [48] the Baptists, who were, with one or two minor additions and subtractions, orthodox Calvinists. In later generations the introspective habit remained even where religious conviction weakened, and there resulted the three greatest autobiographical confessions of the modern period, those of Pepys, Rousseau and Boswell, all of whom were brought up under the Calvinist discipline; their fascination with self-analysis, and indeed their extreme egocentricity, are character traits which they shared both with later Calvinism in general [49] and with Defoe's heroes.

#### III (a)

The importance of this subjective and individualist spiritual pattern to Defoe's work, and to the rise of the novel, is very evident. *Robinson Crusoe* initiates that aspect of the novel's treatment of experience which rivals the confessional autobiography and outdoes other literary forms in bringing us close to the inward moral being of the individual; and it achieves this closeness to the inner life of the protagonist by using as formal basis the autobiographical memoir which was the most immediate and widespread literary expression of the introspective tendency of Puritanism in general.

Defoe himself, of course, was born and bred a Puritan. His father was a Dissenter, perhaps a Baptist, more probably a Presbyterian, in any case a Calvinist; and he sent his son to a dissenting academy, probably intending him for the ministry.

Defoe's own religious beliefs changed a good deal, and he expressed in his writings the whole gamut of doctrines, from intransigent predestinarianism to rational deism, which Puritanism held during its varied course of development; nevertheless, there is no doubt that Defoe remained and was generally considered to be a Dissenter, and that much of the outlook revealed in his novels is distinctively Puritan.

There is nothing to suggest that Robinson Crusoe was intended to be a Dissenter. On the other hand, the note of his religious reflections is often Puritan in character—their tenor has been seen by one theologian as very close to the Presbyterian Shorter Catechism of the 1648 Westminster Assembly. [50] Crusoe certainly exhibits frequent signs of Bibliolatry: he quotes some twenty verses of the Bible in the



first part of Robinson Crusoe alone, besides making many briefer references; and he sometimes seeks divine guidance by opening the Bible at random. But the most significant aspect of his spiritual life is his tendency to rigorous moral and religious self-examination. Each of his actions is followed by a passage of reflection in which Crusoe ponders over the problem of how it reveals the intentions of divine providence. If the corn sprouts, it is surely a divine miracle 'so directed for my sustenance'; if he has a bout of fever 'a leisurely review of the miseries of death' [51] eventually convinces him that he deserves reprobation for neglecting to show his gratitude for God's mercies to him. The modern reader no doubt tends to pay little attention to these parts of the narrative; but Crusoe and his author showed their point of view very clearly by allotting the spiritual realm as much importance as the practical, both in space and emphasis. It would therefore appear that what are probably the vestigial remnants of the Calvinist introspective discipline helped to provide us for the first time in the history of fiction with a hero whose day-by-day mental and moral life is fully shared by the reader.

This crucial literary advance was not, of course, brought about by the introspective tendency of Puritanism alone. As we have seen, the gospel of work had a similar effect in giving the individual's daily economic task almost as much importance as his daily spiritual self-examination; and the parallel effects of both these tendencies were supplemented by another closely related tendency in Puritanism.

If God had given the individual prime responsibility for his own spiritual destiny, it followed that he must have made this possible by signifying his intentions to the individual in the events of his daily life. The Puritan therefore tended to see every item in his personal experience as potentially rich in moral and spiritual meaning; and Defoe's hero is acting according to this tradition when he tries to interpret so many of the mundane events of the narrative as divine pointers which may help him to find his own place in the eternal scheme of redemption and reprobation.

In that scheme, of course, all souls had equal chances, and it therefore followed that the individual had as full an opportunity of showing his spiritual qualities in the ordinary conduct of life as in its rarer and more dramatic exigencies. This was one reason for the general Puritan tendency towards the democratisation of the moral and social scale, and it was assisted by several other factors. There were, for instance, many social, moral and political reasons why the Puritans should be hostile to the aristocratic scale of values; nor could they fail to disapprove of its literary expression in the traditional heroes of romance, extrovert conquerors whose victories are won, not in the spirit or in the counting-house but on the battlefield and in the boudoir. It is at all events clear that Puritanism brought about a fundamental and in a sense democratic orientation in the social and literary outlook of its adherents, an orientation which was described by Milton's lines in *Paradise Lost*: 'To know / That which before us lies in daily life / Is the prime wisdom', [52] and which evoked one of Defoe's most eloquent pieces of writing, an essay in Applebee's *Journal* (1722) on the funeral of Marlborough. The essay's peroration begins:

What then is the work of life? What the business of great men, that pass the stage of the world in seeming triumph as these men, we call heroes, have done? Is it to grow great in the mouth of fame, and take up many pages in history? Alas! that is no more than making a tale for the reading of posterity, till it turns into fable and romance. Is it to furnish subject to the poets, and live in their immortal rhymes, as they call them? That is, in short, no more than to be hereafter turned into ballad and song, and be sung by old women to quiet children; or, at the corner of a street, to gather crowds in aid of the pickpocket and the whore. Or is their business rather to add virtue and piety to their glory, which alone will pass them into Eternity, and make them truly immortal? What is glory without virtue? A great man without religion is no more than a great beast without a soul. [53]

Then Defoe modulates into something more like the narrowly ethical evaluation of merit which was to be one of the legacies of Puritanism to the middle-class code: 'What is honour without merit? And what can be called true merit, but that which makes a person a good man, as well as a great man'. Neither Crusoe, nor indeed any of Defoe's heroes, it must be admitted, are conspicuous by these standards of virtue, religion, merit and goodness; and, of course, Defoe did not intend them to be so. But these standards do represent the moral plane on which Defoe's novels exist, and by which his heroes must be judged: the ethical scale has been so internalised and democratised that, unlike the scale of achievement common in epic or romance, it is relevant to the lives and actions of ordinary people. In

this Defoe's heroes are typical of the later characters of the novel: Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders and even Colonel Jacque never think of glory or honour; they have their being on the moral plane of day-to-day living more completely than those of previous narratives, and their thoughts and actions only exhibit an ordinary, a democratic goodness and badness.

Robinson Crusoe, for instance, is Defoe's most heroic character, but there is nothing unusual about his personality or the way he faces his strange experiences; as Coleridge pointed out, he is essentially 'the universal representative, the person, for whom every reader could substitute himself ... nothing is done, thought, suffered, or desired, but what every man can imagine himself doing, thinking, feeling, or wishing for'. [54] Defoe's presentation of Robinson Crusoe as the 'universal representative' is intimately connected with the egalitarian tendency of Puritanism in yet another way. For not only did this tendency make the way the individual faced every problem of everyday life a matter of deep and continuing spiritual concern; it also encouraged a literary outlook which was suited to describing such problems with the most detailed fidelity.

In *Mimesis*, a brilliant panorama of realistic representation in literature from Homer to Virginia Woolf, Erich Auerbach has demonstrated the general connection between the Christian view of man and the serious literary portrayal of ordinary people and of common life. The classical theory of genres had reflected the social and philosophical orientation of Greece and Rome: tragedy described the heroic vicissitudes of people better than ourselves in appropriately elevated language, whereas the domain of everyday reality belonged to comedy which was supposed to portray people 'inferior to ourselves' in an appropriately 'low' style. Christian literature, however, reflecting a very different social and philosophical outlook, had no place for this *Stiltrennung* or segregation of styles according to the class status of the subject-matter. The gospel narratives treated the doings of humble people with the utmost seriousness and on occasion, indeed, with sublimity; later, this tradition was continued in many of the mediaeval literary forms, from the lives of the saints to the miracle plays; and it eventually found its greatest expression in Dante's *Divina Commedia*. [55] The classicising tendencies of the Renaissance and the Counter-Reformation, however, re-established the old doctrine of genre, and indeed elaborated it to an extent that would certainly have surprised Aristotle. The supreme example of this elaboration is found in French literature of the seventeenth century, and especially in tragedy; not only was the unremitting use of a fully codified *style noble* prescribed, but even the objects and actions of everyday life were banished from the stage.

In Protestant countries, however, the *Stiltrennung* never achieved such authority, especially in England where neoclassicism was confronted by the example of Shakespeare and that characteristic mingling of the tragic and comic modes which was part of his legacy from the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, in one important respect even Shakespeare followed the *Stiltrennung*: his treatment of low and rustic characters is very similar to that of the protagonists of the neo-classical tradition from Ben Jonson to Dryden, and there is nothing egalitarian about it. It is very significant that the main exceptions to this derogatory attitude are found in the works of Puritan writers. In Adam, Milton created the first epic hero who is essentially a 'universal representative'; Bunyan, seeing all souls as equal before God, accorded the humble and their lives a much more serious and sympathetic attention than they received in the other literature of his period; while the works of Defoe are the supreme illustration in the novel of the connection between the democratic individualism of Puritanism and the objective representation of the world of everyday reality and all those who inhabit it.

### III (b)

There is a great difference, however, between Bunyan and Defoe, a difference which suggests why it is Defoe, rather than Bunyan, who is often considered to be our first novelist. In the earlier fiction of the Puritan movement—in such works as Arthur Dent's *Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven*, or the stories of Bunyan and his Baptist *confrère* Benjamin Keach—we have many elements of the novel: simple language, realistic descriptions of persons and places, and a serious presentation of the moral problems of ordinary individuals. But the significance of the characters and their actions largely depends upon a

transcendental scheme of things: to say that the persons are allegorical is to say that their earthly reality is not the main object of the writer, but rather that he hopes to make us see through them a larger and unseen reality beyond time and place.

In Defoe's novels, on the other hand, although religious concerns are present they have no such priority of status: indeed the heritage of Puritanism is demonstrably too weak to supply a continuous and controlling pattern for the hero's experience. If, for example, we turn to the actual effect of Crusoe's religion on his behaviour, we find that it has curiously little. Defoe often suggests that an incident is an act of Divine providence or retribution, but this interpretation is rarely supported by the facts of the story. To take the crucial instance: if Crusoe's original sin was filial disobedience—leaving home in the first place—it is certain that no real retribution follows, since he does very well out of it; and later he often sets out for further journeys without any fear that he may be flouting Providence.

This indeed comes very near to the 'neglect' of the 'Cautions, warning and instruction ... Providence' which Crusoe called a 'kind of Practical Atheism' in his *Serious Reflections*. [56] Where Providence is bringing blessings—as, for instance, when he finds the grains of corn and rice—things are different: Crusoe need only accept. But the trilogy as a whole certainly suggests that any of the less co-operative interventions of Providence can safely be neglected.

Marx sourly noted this somewhat gratuitous character of Crusoe's religious life. 'Of his prayers we take no account, since they are a source of pleasure to him, and he looks on them as so much recreation.' [57] He would have been pleased to find that Gildon thought that the 'religious and useful reflections' were 'in reality ... put in ... to swell the bulk of Defoe's treatise to a five-shilling book'. [58] Both Marx and Gildon were right in drawing attention to the discontinuity between the religious aspects of the book and its action: but their explanations do Defoe some injustice. His spiritual intentions were probably quite sincere, but they have the weakness of all 'Sunday religion' and manifest themselves in somewhat unconvincing periodical tributes to the transcendent at times when a respite from real action and practical intellectual effort is allowed or enforced. Such, certainly, is Crusoe's religion, and we feel that it is in the last analysis the result of an unresolved and probably unconscious conflict in Defoe himself. He lived fully in the sphere of practical and utilitarian action, and could be wholly true to his being when he described this aspect of Robinson Crusoe's life. But his religious upbringing forced him from time to time to hand over a brilliant piece of narrative by a star-reporter to a distant colleague on the religious page who could be relied on to supply suitable spiritual commentaries quickly out of stock. Puritanism made the editorial policy unalterable; but it was usually satisfied by a purely formal adherence. In this, too, Defoe is typical of the development of Puritanism; in the phrase of H. W. Schneider, 'beliefs seldom become doubts; they become ritual'. [59] Otherworldly concerns do not provide the essential themes of Defoe's novels: but they do punctuate the narrative with comminatory codas that demonstrate a lifetime of somewhat mechanical practice.

The relative impotence of religion in Defoe's novels, then, suggests not insincerity but the profound secularisation of his outlook, a secularisation which was a marked feature of his age - - the word itself in its modern sense dates from the first decades of the eighteenth century. Defoe himself had been born at a time when the Puritan Commonwealth had just collapsed at the Restoration, while Robinson Crusoe was written in the year of the Salters' Hall controversy, when, after the last hopes of Dissent in a compromise with the Anglican Church had been given up, even their effort to unite among themselves proved impossible. In the *Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe* Defoe's hero meditates on the ebbing of the Christian religion throughout the world; it is a bitterly divided minority force in a largely pagan world, and God's final intervention seems remoter than ever. Such, at least, is the conclusion to which Robinson Crusoe is forced by his own experience in the last words of the book:

... no such zeal for the Christian religion will be found in our days, or perhaps in any age of the world, till Heaven beats the drums itself, and the glorious legions from above come down on purpose to propagate the work, and reduce the whole world to the obedience of King Jesus—a time which some tell us is not far off, but of which I heard nothing in all my travels and illuminations, no, not one word. [60]

‘No, not one word’: the dying fall leaves Crusoe to his despair. What he was told to expect and what he has experienced do not agree. Until heaven beats the drums itself he must reconcile himself to a pilgrim’s progress through an effectively secular world, make his own way along a path no longer clearly illumined by God’s particular providences.

The causes of secularisation in the period are many, but one of the most important, especially as far as Puritanism is concerned, was economic and social progress. In New England, for instance, the Pilgrim Fathers soon forgot that they had originally founded ‘a plantation of religion, not a plantation of Trades’; and it has been said that Governor Bradford, in his *History of Plymouth Plantation*, shows how a Puritan saint came to write ‘less and less like a Puritan preacher and more and more like the author of Robinson Crusoe’. [61] In England, by Defoe’s time, the more respectable dissenting sects at least were dominated by wealthy and somewhat time-serving merchants and financiers; and opportunities for further gain drove many prosperous Dissenters not only to occasional conformity, but into the Anglican Church. [62] In his early years Defoe had violently denounced occasional conformity, but Robinson Crusoe, we notice, is an occasional conformist with a vengeance—he even passes as a Papist when it is economically expedient to do so.

The conflict between spiritual and material values is an old one, but it was perhaps more obvious in the eighteenth century than at any other time; more obvious because so many people thought, apparently in perfectly good faith, that it did not really exist. Bishop Warburton, for example, argued that ‘to provide for utility is, at the same time, to provide for truth, its inseparable associate’. [63] The reluctance to consider the extent to which spiritual and material values may be opposed is very marked in Defoe’s novels, and it can even be argued that the crucial critical problem which they raise is whether they do not in fact confuse the whole issue. But, whatever our decision on this point, it is at least clear that the mere possibility of such a confusion only exists because Defoe presents us with a narrative in which both ‘high’ and ‘low’ motives are treated with equal seriousness: the moral continuum of his novels is much closer than was that of any previous fiction to the complex combination of spiritual and material issues which moral choices in daily life customarily involve.

It would seem, then, that Defoe’s importance in the history of the novel is directly connected with the way his narrative structure embodied the struggle between Puritanism and the tendency to secularisation which was rooted in material progress. At the same time it is also apparent that the secular and economic viewpoint is the dominant partner, and that it is this which explains why it is Defoe, rather than Bunyan, who is usually considered to be the first key figure in the rise of the novel.

De Vogüé, the Catholic opponent of the French Realists, found an atheistic presumption in the novel’s exclusion of the non-natural; [64] and it is certain that the novel’s usual means—formal realism—tends to exclude whatever is not vouched for by the senses: the jury does not normally allow divine intervention as an explanation of human actions. It is therefore likely that a measure of secularisation was an indispensable condition for the rise of the new genre. The novel could only concentrate on personal relations once most writers and readers believed that individual human beings, and not collectivities such as the Church, or transcendent actors, such as the Persons of the Trinity, were allotted the supreme role on the earthly stage. The novel, Georg Lukács has written, is the epic of a world forsaken by God; [65] it presents, in de Sade’s phrase, ‘*le tableau des mœurs séculaires*’. [66] This, of course, is not to say that the novelist himself or his novel cannot be religious, but only that whatever the ends of the novelist may be, his means should be rigidly restricted to terrestrial characters and actions: the realm of the spirit should be presented only through the subjective experiences of the characters. Thus Dostoevsky’s novels, for example, in no sense depend for their verisimilitude or their significance on his religious views; divine intervention is not a necessary construct for an adequate and complete explanation of the causes and meanings of each action, as it is in Bunyan. Alyosha and Father Zossima are portrayed very objectively: indeed, the very brilliance of Dostoevsky’s presentation shows that he cannot assume, but must prove, the reality of the spirit: and *The Brothers Karamazov* as a whole does not depend upon any nonnaturalistic causation or significance to be effective and complete.

To sum up, we can say that the novel requires a world view which is centred on the social relationships between individual persons; and this involves secularisation as well as individualism, because until the end of the seventeenth century the individual was not conceived as wholly autonomous, but as an element in a picture which depended on divine persons for its meaning, as well as on traditional institutions such as Church and Kingship for its secular pattern.

At the same time the positive contribution of Puritanism, not only to the development of modern individualism but to the rise of the novel, and to its later tradition in England, must not be underestimated. It was through Puritanism that Defoe brought into the novel a treatment of the individual's psychological concerns that was a tremendous advance in the kind of forensic ratiocination which had previously passed for psychological description in even the best of the romances, such as those of Madame de La Fayette. Nor does the fact that, in the words of Rudolph Stamm, who has given the most complete account of Defoe's religious position, Defoe's writings show that his 'own experience of reality had nothing in common with that of a believing Calvinist' [67] disprove the positive importance of Defoe's dissenting background. For we can say of him, as of later novelists in the same tradition, such as Samuel Richardson, George Eliot or D. H. Lawrence, that they have inherited of Puritanism everything except its religious faith. They all have an intensely active conception of life as a continuous moral and social struggle; they all see every event in ordinary life as proposing an intrinsically moral issue on which reason and conscience must be exerted to the full before right action is possible; they all seek by introspection and observation to build their own personal scheme of moral certainty; and in different ways they all manifest the self-righteous and somewhat angular individualism of the earlier Puritan character.

#### IV

We have until now been primarily concerned with the light which Defoe's first work of fiction sheds on the nature of the connections between economic and religious individualism and the rise of the novel; but since the primary reason for our interest in *Robinson Crusoe* is its literary greatness, the relation between that greatness and the way it reflects the deepest aspirations and dilemmas of individualism also requires brief consideration.

*Robinson Crusoe* falls most naturally into place, not with other novels, but with the great myths of Western civilisation, with *Faust*, *Don Juan* and *Don Quixote*. All these have as their basic plots, their enduring images, a single-minded pursuit by the protagonist of one of the characteristic desires of Western man. Each of their heroes embodies an *arete* and a *hubris*, an exceptional prowess and a vitiating excess, in spheres of action that are particularly important in our culture. Don Quixote, the impetuous generosity and the limiting blindness of chivalric idealism; Don Juan, pursuing and at the same time tormented by the idea of boundless experience of women; Faustus, the great knower, his curiosity always unsatisfied, and therefore damned.

Crusoe, of course, seems to insist that he is not of their company; they are very exceptional people, whereas anyone would do what he did, in the circumstances. Yet he too has an exceptional prowess; he can manage quite on his own. And he has an excess: his inordinate egocentricity condemns him to isolation wherever he is.

The egocentricity, one might say, is forced on him, because he is cast away on an island. But it is also true that his character is throughout courting its fate and it merely happens that the island offers the fullest opportunity for him to realise three associated tendencies of modern civilisation—absolute economic, social and intellectual freedom for the individual.

It was Crusoe's realisation of intellectual freedom which made Rousseau propose the book as 'the one book that teaches all that books can teach' for the education of *Émile*; he argued that 'the surest way to raise oneself above prejudices, and order one's judgement on the real relationship between things, is to put oneself in the place of an isolated man, and to judge of everything as that man would judge of them according to their actual usefulness'. [68] On his island Crusoe also enjoys the absolute freedom from

social restrictions for which Rousseau yearned—there are no family ties or civil authorities to interfere with his individual autonomy. Even when he is no longer alone his personal autarchy remains—indeed it is increased: the parrot cries out his master’s name; unprompted Friday swears to be his slave for ever; Crusoe toys with the fancy that he is an absolute monarch; and one of his visitors even wonders if he is a god. [69] Lastly, Crusoe’s island gives him the complete *laissez-faire* which economic man needs to realise his aims. At home market conditions, taxation and problems of the labour supply make it impossible for the individual to control every aspect of production, distribution and exchange. The conclusion is obvious. Follow the call of the wide open places, discover an island that is desert only because it is barren of owners or competitors, and there build your personal Empire with the help of a Man Friday who needs no wages and makes it much easier to support the white man’s burden.

Such is the positive and prophetic side of Defoe’s story, the side which makes Crusoe an inspiration to economists and educators, and a symbol both for the displaced persons of urban capitalism, such as Rousseau, and for its more practical heroes, the empire builders. Crusoe realises all these ideal freedoms, and in doing so he is undoubtedly a distinctively modern culture-hero. Aristotle, for example, who thought that the man ‘who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god’, [70] would surely have found Crusoe a very strange hero. Perhaps with reason; for it is surely true that the ideal freedoms he achieves are both quite impracticable in the real world and in so far as they can be applied, disastrous for human happiness.

It may be objected that Robinson Crusoe’s achievements are credible and wholly convincing. This is so, but only because in his narrative—perhaps as an unconscious victim of what Karl Mannheim has called the ‘Utopian mentality’ which is dominated by its will to action and consequently ‘turns its back on everything which would shake its belief’ [71]—Defoe disregarded two important facts: the social nature of all human economies, and the actual psychological effects of solitude.

The basis for Robinson Crusoe’s prosperity, of course, is the original stock of tools which he loots from the shipwreck; they comprise, we are told, ‘the biggest magazine of all kinds ... that was ever laid up for one man’. [72] So Defoe’s hero is not really a primitive nor a proletarian but a capitalist. In the island he owns the freehold of a rich though unimproved estate. Its possession, combined with the stock from the ship, are the miracles which fortify the faith of the supporters of the new economic creed. But only that of the true believers: to the sceptic the classic idyll of free enterprise does not in fact sustain the view that anyone has ever attained comfort and security only by his own efforts. Crusoe is in fact the lucky heir to the labours of countless other individuals; his solitude is the measure, and the price of his luck, since it involves the fortunate decease of all the other potential stockholders; and the shipwreck, far from being a tragic peripety, is the *deus ex machina* which makes it possible for Defoe to present solitary labour, not as an alternative to a death sentence, but as a solution to the perplexities of economic and social reality.

The psychological objection to *Robinson Crusoe* as a pattern of action is also obvious. Just as society has made every individual what he is, so the prolonged lack of society actually tends to make the individual relapse into a straightened primitivism of thought and feeling. In Defoe’s sources for *Robinson Crusoe* what actually happened to the castaways was at best uninspiring. At worst, harassed by fear and dogged by ecological degradation, they sank more and more to the level of animals, lost the use of speech, went mad, or died of inanition. One book which Defoe had almost certainly read, *The Voyages and Travels of J. Albert de Mandelslo*, tells of two such cases; of a Frenchman who, after only two years of solitude on Mauritius, tore his clothing to pieces in a fit of madness brought on by a diet of raw tortoise; and of a Dutch seaman on St. Helena who disinterred the body of a buried comrade and set out to sea in the coffin. [73] These realities of absolute solitude were in keeping with the traditional view of its effects, as expressed by Dr. Johnson: ‘the solitary mortal’, he averred, was ‘certainly luxurious, probably superstitious, and possibly mad: the mind stagnates for want of employment; grows morbid, and is extinguished like a candle in foul air’. [74] In the story just the opposite happens: Crusoe turns his forsaken estate into a triumph. Defoe departs from psychological probability in order to redeem his picture of man’s inexorable solitariness, and it is for this reason that he appeals very strongly to all

who feel isolated—and who at times does not? An inner voice continually suggests to us that the human isolation which individualism has fostered is painful and tends ultimately to a life of apathetic animality and mental derangement; Defoe answers confidently that it can be made the arduous prelude to the fuller realisation of every individual's potentialities; and the solitary readers of two centuries of individualism cannot but applaud so convincing an example of making a virtue out of a necessity, so cheering a colouring to that universal image of individualist experience, solitude.

That it is universal—the word that is always to be found inscribed on the other side of the coin of individualism—can hardly be doubted. We have already seen how, although Defoe himself was an optimistic spokesman of the new economic and social order, the unreflecting veracity of his vision as a novelist led him to report many of the less inspiring phenomena associated with economic individualism which tended to isolate man from his family and his country. Modern sociologists have attributed very similar consequences to the other two major trends which are reflected in *Robinson Crusoe*. Max Weber, for example, has shown how the religious individualism of Calvin created among its adherents a historically unprecedented 'inner isolation'; [75] while Émile Durkheim derived from the division of labour and its associated changes many of the endless conflicts and complexities of the norms of modern society, the *anomie* [76] which sets the individual on his own and, incidentally, provides the novelists with a rich mine of individual and social problems when he portrays the life of his time.

Defoe himself seems to have been much more aware of the larger representativeness of his epic of solitude than is commonly assumed. Not wholly aware, since, as we have seen, he departed from its actual economic and psychological effects to make his hero's struggles more cheering than they might otherwise have been; nevertheless Crusoe's most eloquent utterances are concerned with solitude as the universal state of man.

*The Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe* (1720) are actually a miscellaneous compilation of religious, moral and thaumaturgic material, and cannot, as a whole, be taken seriously as a part of the story: the volume was primarily put together to cash in on the great success of the first part of the trilogy, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures*, and the smaller one of the *Further Adventures*. There are, however, in the prefaces, and the first essay, 'On Solitude', a number of valuable clues as to what, on second thoughts at least, Defoe saw as the meaning of his hero's experiences.

In 'Robinson Crusoe's Preface' he suggests that the story 'though allegorical, is also historical': it is based on the life of 'a man alive, and well known too, the actions of whose life are the just subject of these volumes, and to whom all or most part of the story most directly alludes'; and Defoe hints that he is himself the 'original' of which Robinson Crusoe is the 'emblem'; that it is his own life which he is portraying allegorically.

Many critics have denied, and even derided the claim. Robinson Crusoe had apparently been attacked as fictitious, and it is argued that Defoe was merely using the allegorical argument very largely to controvert this criticism, and also to alleviate the popular Puritan aversion to fiction which he largely shared. Still, the claim to some autobiographical relevance cannot be wholly rejected: Robinson Crusoe is the only book for which he made the claim; and it fits in very well with much of what we know of Defoe's outlook and aspirations.

Defoe was himself an isolated and solitary figure in his time; witness the summary of his own life which he wrote in the preface to a 1706 pamphlet, *A Reply to a Pamphlet, Entitled 'The Lord Haversham's Vindication of His Speech'* where he complains:

how I stand alone in the world, abandoned by those very people that own I have done them service; ... how, with ... no helps but my own industry, I have forced misfortune, and reduced them, exclusive of composition, from seventeen to less than five thousand pounds; how, in gaols, in retreats, in all manner of extremities, I have supported myself without the assistance of friends or relations.

'Forcing his way with undiscouraged diligence' is surely the heroism which Crusoe shares with his creator: and in 'Robinson Crusoe's Preface' it is this quality which he mentions as the inspiring theme

of his book: 'Here is invincible patience recommended under the worst of misery, indefatigable application and undaunted resolution under the greatest and most discouraging circumstances'.

Having asserted an autobiographical meaning for his story, Defoe goes on to consider the problem of solitude. His discussion is an interesting illustration of Weber's view of the effects of Calvinism. Most of the argument is concerned with the Puritan insistence on the need for the individual to overcome the world in his own soul, to achieve a spiritual solitude without recourse to monasticism. 'The business is to get a retired soul', he says, and goes on: 'All the parts of a complete solitude are to be as effectually enjoyed, if we please, and sufficient grace assisting, even in the most populous cities, among the hurries of conversation and gallantry of a court, or the noise and business of a camp, as in the deserts of Arabia and Lybia, or in the desolate life of an uninhabited island'.

This note, however, occasionally relapses into a more general statement of solitude as an enduring psychological fact: 'All reflection is carried home, and our dear self is, in one respect, the end of living. Hence man may be properly said to be alone in the midst of crowds and the hurry of men and business. All the reflections which he makes are to himself; all that is pleasant he embraces for himself; all that is irksome and grievous is tasted but by his own palate.' [77] Here the Puritan insistence on possessing one's soul intact from a sinful world is couched in terms which suggest a more absolute, secular and personal alienation from society. Later this echo of the redefined aloneness of Descartes's *solus ipse* modulates into an anguished sense of personal loneliness whose overpowering reality moves Defoe to his most urgent and moving eloquence: What are the sorrows of other men to us, and what their joy? Something we may be touched indeed with by the power of sympathy, and a secret turn of the affections; but all the solid reflection is directed to ourselves. Our meditations are all solitude in perfection; our passions are all exercised in retirement; we love, we hate, we covet, we enjoy, all in privacy and solitude. All that we communicate of those things to any other is but for their assistance in the pursuit of our desires; the end is at home; the enjoyment, the contemplation, is all solitude and retirement; it is for ourselves we enjoy, and for ourselves we suffer.

'We covet, we enjoy, all in privacy and solitude': what really occupies man is something that makes him solitary wherever he is, and too aware of the interested nature of any relationship with other human beings to find any consolation there. 'All that we communicate ... to any other is but for their assistance in the pursuit of our desires': a rationally conceived self-interest makes a mockery of speech; and the scene of Crusoe's silent life is not least a Utopia because its functional silence, broken only by an occasional 'Poor Robinson Crusoe' from the parrot, does not impose upon man's ontological egocentricity the need to assume a false façade of social intercourse, or to indulge in the mockery of communication with his fellows.

*Robinson Crusoe*, then, presents a monitory image of the ultimate consequences of absolute individualism. But this tendency, like all extreme tendencies, soon provoked a reaction. As soon as man's aloneness was forced on the attention of mankind, the close and complex nature of the individual's dependence on society, which had been taken for granted until it was challenged by individualism, began to receive much more detailed analysis. Man's essentially social nature, for instance, became one of the main topics of the eighteenth-century philosophers; and the greatest of them, David Hume, wrote in the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) a passage which might almost have been a refutation of *Robinson Crusoe*: 'We can form no wish which has not a reference to society ... .

Let all the powers and elements of nature conspire to serve and obey one man; let the sun rise and set at his command; the sea and rivers roll as he pleases, and the earth still furnish spontaneously whatever may be useful or agreeable to him; he will still be miserable, till you give him one person at least with whom he may share his happiness, and whose esteem and friendship he may enjoy. [78]

Just as the modern study of society only began once individualism had focussed attention on man's apparent disjunctions from his fellows, so the novel could only begin its study of personal relationships once *Robinson Crusoe* had revealed a solitude that cried aloud for them. Defoe's story is perhaps not a novel in the usual sense since it deals so little with personal relations. But it is appropriate that the tradition of the novel should begin with a work that annihilated the relationships of the traditional social



order, and thus drew attention to the opportunity and the need of building up a network of personal relationships on a new and conscious pattern; the terms of the problem of the novel and of modern thought alike were established when the old order of moral and social relationships was shipwrecked, with Robinson Crusoe, by the rising tide of individualism.

## Notes

- 1 Advancement of Learning, Bk. II, especially ch. 22, sect. xvi and ch. 23, sect. xiv.
- 2 Advancement of Learning, Bk. II, especially ch. 22, sect. xvi and ch. 23, sect. xiv.
3. Review, III (1706), No. 3.
4. The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation, trans. Henderson and Parsons (New York, 1947), pp.186-202.
5. The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, ed. Aitken (London, 1902), p. 316.
6. Second treatise, 'Essay concerning... Civil Government,' sect. 14.
7. *Life*, pp.277, 147.
8. See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Parsons (London, 1930), pp.59-76; *Social and Economic Organisation*, pp.3412-354.
9. See, for example, *Robert Redfield, Folk Culture of Yucatan* (Chicago, 1941), pp.338-369.
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11. *Life*, pp.2-6, 216.
12. *Human Understanding*, Bk. II, ch. 21, sects. xxxi-ix.
13. *Pensées*, No. 139.
14. *Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Aitken (London, 1902), p. 214.
15. *A Plan of the English Commerce* (Oxford, 1928), pp.28, 31- 32.
16. *Desert Islands and Robinson Crusoe* (London, 1930), p. 7.
17. *Moll Flanders*, ed. Aitken (London, 1902), I, 186.
18. See especially A. W. Secord, *Studies in the Narrative Method of Defoe* (Urban, 1924).
19. Weber, *Essays in Sociology*, trans. Gerth and Mills (New York, 1946), p. 350.
20. I (1705), No. 92.
21. *Farther Adventures*, p. 78.
22. *Life*, pp.208-210, 225.
23. *Life*, p. 341.
24. *Farther Adventures*, p. 77.
25. John Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, revised Ley (London, 1928), p.611 n.
26. *Life*, pp.27, 34-36, 164.
27. *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Aitken (London, 1902), p. 66.
28. *Life*, p. 229.
29. *Life*, p. 229.
30. *Life*, pp.245-246.
31. *Farther Adventures*, pp.133, 177-180.
32. *Life*, p.318.
33. See James R. Sutherland, *Defoe* (London, 1937), p. 25; W. Gückel and E. Günther, "D. Defoes und J. Swifts Belesenheit und literarische Kritik", *Palaestra*, CIL (1925).

34. My translation from Notes on Philosophy and Political Economy, in *Oeuvres Philosophiques*, ed. Molitor (Paris, 1937), VI, 69.
35. See William-Edward Mann, *Robinson Crusoe in France* (Paris, 1916), p. 102.
36. See Appendix, *Serious Reflections*, ed. Aitken, p. 322.
37. *Life*, p. 75.
38. "Estimate of the Value and Influence of Works of Fiction in Modern Times", *Works*, ed. Nettleship, III, 40.
39. *Life*, p. 74.
40. *Life*, p. 130.
41. *Account of His Visit to England*, p. 326.
42. Bk. I, ch. 1.
43. See Ernst Troeltsch, *Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trans. Wyon (London, 1931), I, 119; II, 589; Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (London, 1948), pp.197-270
44. *The Dumb Philosopher* (1719), ed. Scott (London, 1841), p.21.
45. *The Case of Protestant Dissenters in Carolina*, 1706, p.5.
46. *Social Teaching*, I, 328.
47. Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, *The Puritans* (New York, 1938), p. 461.
48. See William York Tindall, *John Bunyan: Mechanick Preacher* (New York, 1934), pp.23-41.
49. Troeltsch, *Social Teaching*, II, 590.
50. James Moffat, "The Religion of Robinson Crusoe", *Contemporary Review*, CXV (1919), 669.
51. *Life*, I, 85, 99.
52. VIII, 192-194.
53. *Cit. W. Lee, Daniel Defoe* (London, 1869), III, 29-30.
54. *Works*, ed. Potter, p.419.
55. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Trans. Trask (Princeton, 1952), especially pp.41-49, 72-73, 148-173, 184-202, 312-320, 387, 431-433, 466, 491. I translate *stiltrennung*, from the German edition (Bern, 1946), 'segregation of styles', as slightly more specific than Mr. Trask's 'separation of styles'. The two succeeding paragraphs continue to summarise from *Mimesis*, except for what is said about Puritanism.
56. p.191.
57. *Capital* (New York, 1906), p.88.
58. *Robinson Crusoe Examin'd*, ed. Dottin, pp.110-111.
59. *The Puritan Mind* (New York, 1930), p. 98. A close analogy to Crusoe's gloomy spiritual self-accusations which have so little effect upon his actions, is provided by the rituals described in Perry Miller, 'Declension in a Bible Commonwealth', *Proc. Amer. Antiquarian Soc.*, LI (1941), 37-94.
60. p. 235.
61. William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York, 1938), p.191.
62. See A. L. Barbauld, *Works* (London, 1823), II, 314; Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, p. 175.
63. *Cit. A. W. Evans, Warburton and the Warburtonians* (Oxford, 1932), p. 44.
64. See F. W. J. Hemmings, *The Russian Novel in France, 1884-1914* (London, 1950), pp.31-32.
65. *Die Theorie des Romans* (Berlin, 1920), p. 84.
66. *Idée sur les romans* (Paris, 4th ed., n.d.), p. 42.
67. Daniel Defoe: An Artist in the Puritan Tradition, *PQ*, XV (1936), 227. On the very difficult problem of Defoe's religion, see especially Stamm *Der aufgeklärte Puritanismus Daniel Defoes* (Zürich and Leipzig, 1936); John R. Moore, "Defoe's Religious Sect", *RES*, XVII (1941), 461-467; Arthur Secord, "Defoe in Stoke Newington", *PMLA*, LXXVI (1951), 217.

68. *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (Paris, 1939), pp.210, 214.
69. *Life*, pp.226, 164, 300, 284.
70. *Politics*, Bk. I, ch. 2.
71. *Ideology and Utopia* (London, 1936), p. 36.
72. *Life*, p.60.
73. See Secord, *Narrative Method of Defoe*, pp.28-29.
74. *Thraliana*, ed. Balderston (Oxford, 1951), I, 180.
75. *Protestant Ethic*, p. 108.
76. *De la division du travail social*, Bk. II, chs. 1 and 3.
77. Pp. 7, 15, 2, 2-3.
78. Bk. II, Pt. 2, Sect. V.