A. The Author Biography

By the time he took up his pen to write Robinson Crusoe at about the age of fifty eight, Daniel Defoe had a broader range of experiences behind him than most can claim for a lifetime. At one time or another he was a merchant, a manufacturer, an insurer of ships, a convict, a soldier, an embezzler, a spy, a fugitive, a political spokesman, and of course an author.

Defoe’s life was, to say the least a strong one. He was born Daniel Foe to a family of Dissenters in the parish of St. Giles, Cripplegate, London. His exact birth is unknown, but historians estimate that it was in the year 1659 or 1660. James Foe, his father, a butcher by trade, was a sober, deeply pious Presbyterian of Flemish descent—one of perhaps twenty percent of the population that had relinquished ties to the main body of the Church of England.

Very little of known of Daniel’s childhood. However, it is reasonable to assume as the son of a dissenter much of his time was spent in religious observances. It is likely that this spurred the fervent belief in Divine Providence that is so evident in his writings. Since they barred from Oxford and Cambridge universities, Dissenters sent their children to their own schools.
Defoe’s education began in the Rev. James fisher’s school in Dorking, and later, at about the age of fourteen, he was enrolled in the Dissenting academy in Newington Green. Newington’s headmaster, Rev. Charles Morton, a plain-spoken Puritan, was a progressive educator. He gave his students a thorough grounding in English as well as the customary Greek and Latin. Morton is seen as a major influence on Defoe’s writing style and the other influence was the bible.

Although intended for the ministry, Defoe settled instead on a career as a commission agent. For more than a decade he traded in a wide range of goods, including stockings, wine, tobacco, and oysters. Trade was a beloved subject of this man. He wrote countless essays and pamphlets on economic theory which were advanced for his time.

Indeed, had he taken his own advice, he would have been a wealthy man. While his years as a broker endowed him with insight into human nature, his risky and unscrupulous ventures (he was sued at least eight times, and once bilked his own mother-in-law out of four hundred pounds in a cat-breeding deal), combined with bad luck and faulty judgment, more often than not steered him into debt, deceit, and political double-dealing.

Still, in his mind and heart, Defoe undoubtedly saw himself in the role of solid, middle-class family man. He wrote numerous treatises which demonstrated that he considered himself an expert on most, if not all, family matters. However, his own marriage to Mary Tuffley, a merchant’s daughter, despite its length of forty-seven years and fecundity of eight children, cannot have been a model of matrimonial paradise.
Defoe’s unstable fortunes, his extended visit abroad, and his absence while a fugitive from enemies and creditors would have tried the patience of the most patient, loving spouse. There is evidence also that, in spite of loving them deeply, Defoe alienated some, if not all of his children. A year after his marriage, Defoe took up arms as a Dissenter in Monmouth’s failed rebellion against the Catholic King James II.

Unlike three of his former classmate who were caught and sent to the gallows, Defoe narrowly missed the troops and hastened to safety in London. When the king was deposed, Daniel rode with the volunter guard of honor that escorted William of Orange and his wife Mary into the city. Due mainly to losses incurred by insuring ships during a war with France, Defoe faced bankruptcy in 1692.

with creditors hot on his trail he fled to a debtor sanctuary in Bristol, and from there was able to negotiate terms that spared him the humalization of debtor’s prison. Whitin ten years he had repaid most of what he owed. Unfortunately, Daniel never fully recovered from that fiasco. Debt would haunt him as long as he lived. This circumstance can be credited for his ambivalent political actions and his prodigious output as a writer.

He was able to win King William’s favor, and was appointed Commissioner of the Glass Duty. He was put in charge of proceeds from a lottery and became the King’s confidential advisor and leading pamphleteer. Defoe’s fervent sense of justice often led him to tweak the noses of those in high places. His essay, The Shortest Way, would bring him great grief. A satire that poked fun at the manner in which the
church and State dealt with Dissenters, it infuriated the powers at large and forced Daniel to go into hiding.

He was betrayed by an informant and brought to trial for “seditious libel against the church.” He was jailed and sentenced to three days in the pillory, a manacle device that exposed a criminal to public ridicule. A pardon some months later from Queen Anne hardly was a chance to start over. Defoe’s tile and brick business had fallen apart during his absence, and he once again faced debtor prison. A grant of 1000 pounds from the Earl of Oxford allowed Defoe to climb out of debt and start his own newspaper, the review.

He ran his views and was frequently in trouble for them. After another arrest in 1751 for libel, Defoe spent his time covertly editing other newspapers as he worked on novels such as Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders. And he died in 1731, poor and fighting.

B. Summary Of The Novel

Young Robinson Crusoe told his parent that he wished more than anything else to go to sea. His father bitterly opposed the idea, and warned his son that “if I did take this foolish step, god would not bless me-and I would have leisure hereafter to reflect upon having neglected his counsel, when there might be none to assist in my recovery.” These words proved prophetic.

The youthful Crusoe set out on his first voyage, with little knowledge about the perils of a sailor’s life. In telling later about the tremendous storm in which is ship was caught, he remarked, “it was my advantage, in one respect, that I did not know
what they meant by ‘founder’, till I inquired.” So ill and afraid was he during this first harrowing crisis, that he vowed never again to leave solid ground if he was blessed enough to escape drowning.

But once safe on shore he found his old longing resurfacing, and Robinson took sail aboard another ship Alas, the ill-fated vessel was captured by Turtish pirates. Crusoe managed to avoid capture and made off in a small craft. Together, he and a young companion navigated along the coast of Africa, where they were pursued by both wild beasts and natives. A Poryuguese ship finally rescued them and they sailed for Brazil.

In the new land Crusoe established a prosperous sugar plantation. But again a feeling on lonely dissatisfaction overcame him: “I lived just like a man cast away upon some desolate island, that had nobody there but himself.” Then came an offer from some planters for Crusoe to act as a trader on a slave ship bound for Africa. But this voyage also met disaster, fierce hurricanes wrecked the ship, drowning everyone aboard except Robinson, who was finally tossed up on a desolate beach.

A subsequent storm washed of its supplies to land, where he stored them in a makeshift tent, after a few days, he climbed a hill and discovered that was on what he assumed to be an uninhabited island. On his thirteenth day there, still another storm pushed the ship wreck back out to sea, where it sank, leaving him with no reminder of civilization.

Crusoe soon discovered that goats inhabited the island, and began domesticating some of them to provide himself with meat, milk, butter and cheese.
Near the entrance of the cave where he stored his provisions taken from the ship, he
painstakingly built a well-fortified home.

After crafting a table, a chair and some shelves, Crusoe also began keeping a
calendar and a journal. Over the next few months, an earthquake and a hurricane
damaged his supply cave, and though he still spent most of his time at his coasatal
home, in case a ship should happen by, he decided to erect an additional inland shelter.

Later, during a brief but raging fever, the adventurer was confronted by a
terrifying apparition, who announced, “Seeing all these things have not brought thee
to repentence, now thou shalt die!” Remembering the advice of his father, Crusoe
commenced to pray and to read from the Bible. In a strangely inverted search, Crusoe
found an abundance of wild grapes, lemons, limes, and other fruits and vegetables.

From the grapes he made raisins, which became a favorite staple food. In his
wanderings ha also caught a parrot, whom he taught to speak. With a few grains of
rice and barley from the bottom of one of the ship’s sacks, the sailor planted what
would became large fields of grain. For several years he experimented with making
bread and waving basket.

One of Crusoe biggest frustrations was the lack of bottles or jars in which to
cook or store food. Over time, he cuceeded in making clay containers and even fired
some pots that were solid enough to hold liquids. After four years on the island, he
was a changed man: “I looked now upon the world as a thing remote, which I had
nothing to do with, no expectation from, and indeed no desires about…”
Crusoe dedicated his entire fifth year as a castaway to building and inventing. He constructed a “summer home” on the far side of the island, he fabricated for himself a suit made from, skins, as well as an umbrella, he fashioned a small chance in which he traveled around the island. And so the years passed in solitude.

One day, in his fifteenth year on the island, Crusoe spied a human footprint in the sand. When he finally summoned the courage to measure it against his own foot he found the strange print to be much larger. Once, while exploring, Crusoe came upon a beach spread with human bones. He quickly abandoned the area, and for the next two years he stayed close to home, never fired a gun, and avoided making fires.

Twenty-four years had passed when one night Crusoe heard gun fire. And in the morning he spied a ship’s hull impaled on the rocks. Then he saw something that sent shivers down his spine about 30 cannibals on the beach, enjoying a gruesome feast.

Robinson shot at them, killing some and driving the others away. He rescued one of their native prisoners and named his new companion Friday, for the day upon which he was delivered. Friday proved to be strong, loyal and intelligent, thought Crusoe still had cause to worry—Friday was also a bit cannibalistic. Crusoe began introducing Friday to his mode of living, especially hoping to turn him to Christianity.

Friday managed to learn English quite well, and was pleased to answer his benefactor’s questions concerning the surrounding islands and their inhabitants. Crusoe discovered that his island must be near Trinidad.
One day in the course of their conversation, Friday told Robinson about seventeen white men who were held prisoner on his home island, survivors of a shipwreck. This time Crusoe and Friday were able to save of their prisoners from the cooking pot, a Spaniard, and another islander who turned out to be Friday father.

After assuring Crusoe that the other Spanish and Portuguese prisoners would willingly follow the English castaway in an escape attempt, the Spaniard returned to the island with Friday’s father to explain the plan and have the men sign an oath of allegiance.

Finally, the wander married and had two sons and a daughter. But alas, Crusoe’s wife died and he was compelled to join one of his nephews on a voyage to the East Indies. Miraculously, this ship sailed safely. Ultimately, Robinson Crusoe, after a total of 54 years abroad, returned home, an old, weathered man, and lived out his remaining days in peace, never to take to the sea again.