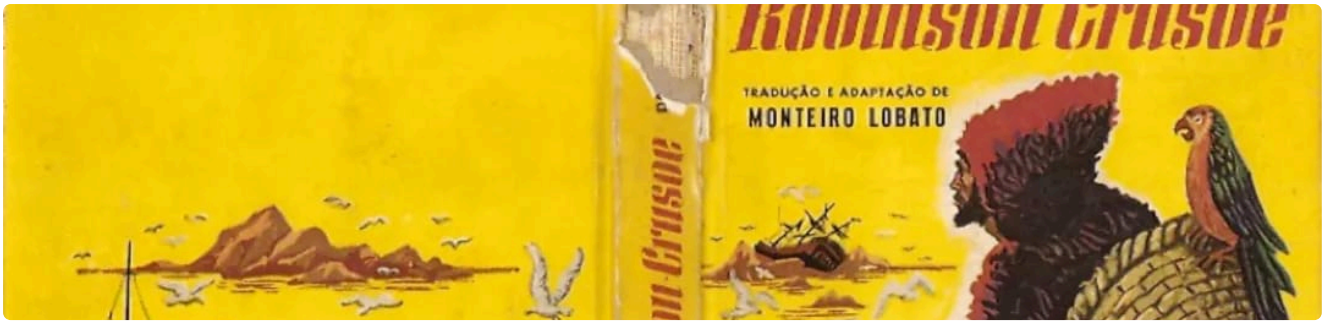
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Robinson Crusoe

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In 1719, Daniel Defoe published The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe. The story and the circulation of the book are an extraordinary example of the transatlantic dimension of the text.

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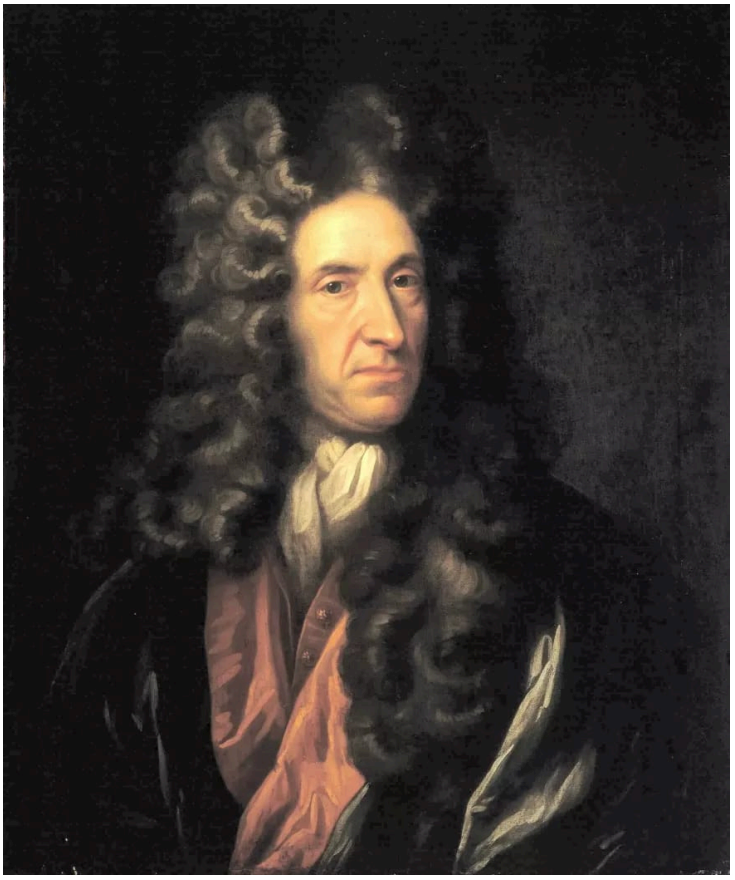
Published in 1719, *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) is one of the great landmarks in the history of Western literature and is seen by the specialized critics as the first modern novel written in English. It was an immediate success, with various printings, translations, and appropriations since the eighteenth century, and its narrative has remained alive in the imagination of successive generations over the last three centuries. In addition, *Robinson Crusoe* is presented as a synthesis of certain values emerging at the time of its writing and also as an emblematic example of its transatlantic dimension.

A novel from a moving world

Daniel Defoe drew on the real story of the Scottish sailor Alexander Selkirk (1676-1721) to write *Robinson Crusoe*. Selkirk was marooned as a punishment by a captain of a buccaneer ship on Más a Tierra island (now Robinson Crusoe island) in the Juan Fernández archipelago on the Chilean coast. This occurred in 1704 and Selkirk lived there completely alone for four years until he was rescued by another British ship which brought him back to Europe.

Coming from a family of Presbyterian merchants, Defoe appeared destined for the area of trade and finance. However, his business did not prosper and he ran into debt. For this reason he was imprisoned for the first time in 1692. He travelled through Great Britain and Western Europe for commercial activities which also did not do well. Simultaneously, as a publicist he wrote pamphlets on political and economic questions. In some, he defended positions close to the Tories, in many others he wrote in favor of the Whigs, supporting the new system of public credit, important issue at the beginning of the 18th century in England. A sympathizer of the 1688 Revolution, in 1697 he wrote a poem in defense of King William, *The true-born Englishman*. In 1703, his reputation as a rebel and volatile person contributed to his new imprisonment, this time accused of having written a pamphlet disrespectful to the Anglican Church, *The Shortest way with the Dissenters*. He was put in the stocks for three days and then sent to prison.

At almost sixty years of age, he wrote *Robinson Crusoe*, his first novel, which brought him fame, but did not resolve his financial problems. Between 1719 and 1724, he produced another seven novels. The best known of them was *Moll Flanders* (1722), which narrates the story of an unscrupulous prostitute. Daniel Defoe died in 1731, still in debt.



Portrait of Daniel Defoe. Attributed to Godfrey Kneller. N.d. Oil on canvas. 76.2 cm x 63.5 cm. London, National Maritime Museum

Source: National Maritime Museum

Initially the story of Robinson Crusoe did not interest the various publishers to whom Defoe showed it. However, in May 1719, William Taylor decided to publish it and its success was as unexpected as it was impressive. Six editions were published in just four months, with an approximate total of 80,000 copies sold. A good means of measuring the success of the text is the proliferation of pirate editions, as well as the precocious appearance of abridged publications, such as the one by T. Cox, who in July 1719 released a cheaper edition 100 pages shorter. Another manifestation of the popularity of Defoe's work can be seen in its imitations; for example in 1719 the *Authentic Memories of Captain Falconer* was published as an emulation of Robinson's story.

The impact and the transformations experienced by *Robinson Crusoe* since the 18th century were capable of pointing to the success, albeit in an ambiguous manner, of Daniel Defoe's creation. On the one hand, since it had a quite complex plot, full of economic, moral, and philosophic discussions, it found a place in the Western literary canon as one of the founding works of the modern novel. On the other hand, thanks to the underlying adventure nature of the story and the later pedagogical aspect attributed to it, its narrative was diluted to the point of being transformed into a book aimed at a juvenile public. However, when placed on the shelf among children's books, *Robinson Crusoe* was stripped of the meanings and implications present in the original text.

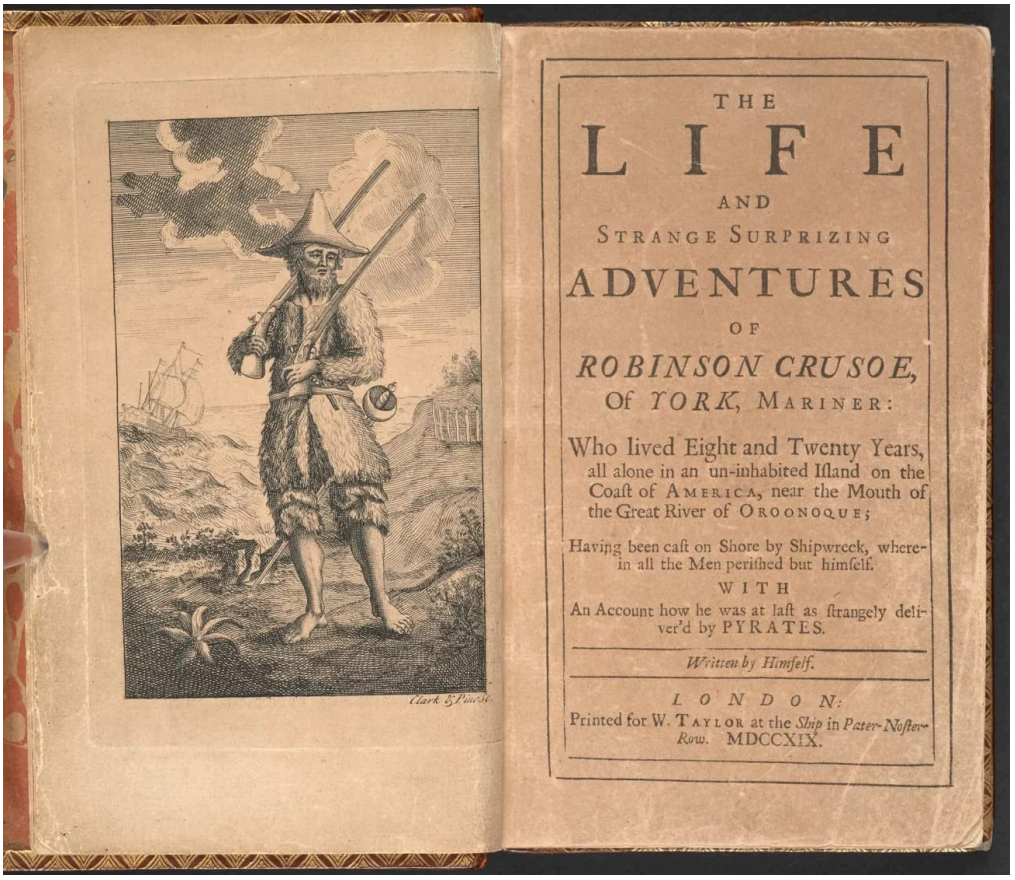


Daniel De Foe in the pillory. Unknown author. Wood engraving. 22.4 cm x 27.7 cm. London, Welcome Museum

Source: Wellcome Museum

Everyone knows the story of the castaway Robinson Crusoe, who spent 28 years on a desert island, developing his individual potentials in confrontation with nature and finding the means to survive based on his abilities and knowledge. As James Joyce stated, the castaway on the island, with a knife and a pipe in his pocket, is transformed into an "architect, carpenter, knife sharpener, astronomer, baker, shipbuilder, potter, farmer, tailor, maker of umbrellas, and cleric." [1]

In this way, we agree with Ian Watt [2] when he writes that *Robinson Crusoe* can be read as an ode to bourgeois individualism based on a Calvinist matrix which seeks to make explicit an optimist model of the possibilities of man's dominion over nature using rational knowledge. Robinson plants crops, raises goats, builds a house, and erects a fortress to defend himself against possible enemies. With the exception of rare moments, he maintains his lucidity, using reason as his compass. Religion is a comfort to him, he reads the Bible, prays, and seeks explanations for the designs of God. He lives in a small organized world, with laws, order, and a reflected division of time.



THE
LIFE
AND
STRANGE SURPRIZING
ADVENTURES
OF
ROBINSON CRUSOE,
Of *YORK*, MARINER:

Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of AMERICA, near the Mouth of the Great River of OROONOQUE;

Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself.

WITH

An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by PYRATES.

Written by Himself.

LONDON:
Printed for W. TAYLOR at the *Ship* in *Pater-Noster-Row.* MDCCXIX.

Frontispiece of the 1st edition of Robinson Crusoe (1719). London, British Library

Source: British Library

It is also important to underline that this new individualist, bourgeois, and Protestant perspective is part of a broader context of transformations caused by commercial capitalism during the Modern Age. In other words, Robinson Crusoe is not restricted to the paradigm of the entrepreneur adventurer, diligent and God-fearing worker, capable of constructing a new world when he is lost on a desert island. The story of the English castaway also acquires a dual significance by being conceived by Daniel Defoe at that specific historic moment.

First, Robinson is configured as a type that represents the European colonialist model, capable to name, organize, govern and dominate the wild nature, becoming, due to his supposed moral capacities, master and lord of inhospitable lands and barbarian peoples. Defoe imagined a protagonist who is adventurous, hard-working, and religious man, the prototype of the civilizing western individual, and here particularly Anglo-Saxon and Protestant, whose mission is to redeem extra-European regions and peoples from their backwardness through the values of capitalist enterprise.

Second, Robinson Crusoe's trajectory is presented as the product of possibilities opened by the circulation of people, ideas, and goods, due to the maritime travel and intercontinental trade existing at the time of the writing of the novel. Moreover, the trajectory of the British adventurer can only be understood in the context of mobility resulting from interoceanic travel increasingly common in the Modern Age. Understood this way, rather than a European in the Americas, Robinson Crusoe can be classified as an essentially transatlantic character.

Analyzed from this perspective, from a European viewpoint Crusoe represented the ascension of an ideal of mobility and circulation, not only physical, but also social, opposed to a more static and conservative conception, represented in the novel by his own parents. At the beginning of the narrative, Robinson hears for example from his progenitor, a member of the middle class, - who was seeking to dissuade him from his projects for adventure - about the hardships experienced by the 'upper' and 'lower' sectors on the social scale and about the advantages of belonging to his own class. Establishing himself at this intermediary social place would signify for the protagonist of the novel a peaceful and smooth life, but at the same time one that was monotonous and lacking objectives.

Travel and the possibilities opened by oceanic navigation acted as a sign of new times, promising not only mobility and a less static life, but also interconnection between Europe, Africa, and the Americas along the Atlantic routes. On deciding to adventure on the seas, Robinson Crusoe highlights this picture in an extremely complex manner through cultural and religious disputes, economic interests, and colonialist practices. These aspects of Daniel Defoe's novel were dissipated by the adaptations and simplifications repeatedly incurred by the narrative. Therefore, the story of the English sailor cannot be reduced to his shipwreck in the Caribbean, but must be seen as an interwoven web which showed the emergence of economic and social relations and cultural practices with a transatlantic perspective in the Modern Age.

In one of his first voyages, Robinson, hoping to become a merchant in Guinea, possibly of African slaves, is captured by a Moorish pirate and becomes a captive of Muslims in Morocco. After escaping, helped by a Muslim boy, Xuri, he coasted Sub-Saharan Africa, eventually meeting a Portuguese vessel, possibly working in the slave trade. Rescued by this Portuguese caravel, he became a friend of the captain and was brought to Brazil, more precisely to the outskirts of Salvador. In the Brazilian northeast he became a landowner, growing food, tobacco, and finally sugarcane. However, dissatisfied with the relative stability of his life as a mill owner in Bahia, he decided to go on a new maritime adventure related to trade with Africa, seeking to get slaves for agriculture. In this new adventure Robinson Crusoe was the victim of the celebrated shipwreck of which he was the only survivor and on which the rest of the novel was based.

In general terms, the first part of the narrative of *Robinson Crusoe* is a sign of a world in movement, marked by the transatlantic circulation of people, ideas, and goods, guided both by the desire of Europeans to discover the world, and by the economic interests related to the advance of commercial capitalism in which Europe, the Americas, and Africa participated asymmetrically.

The shipwreck which marked the inflection in the narrative of the novel occurred after the vessel had sailed north and passed the mouth of the Orinoco River, letting Robinson believe that he was near the island of Trinidad, in the Caribbean. After the accident, a second part of the plot begins, when the protagonist finds himself alone confronting the tropical nature. Isolated from the signs of 'European civilization,' he acts as the archetypical colonizer, according to its Anglo-Saxon Protestant model, leading a solitary and ascetic life, completely orientated to work, the transformation of the natural environment, and the glorification of the actions of Divine Providence.

Only in the final years of his life on the island, in a kind of third part of the novel, does Robinson Crusoe again begin to interact with other human beings: the Caribbean cannibals and the Spanish and English sailors. At this point, besides the striking appearance in the plot of the emblematic character Friday, the 'savage' and submissive friend of the European castaway, a series of events leads the novel to converge on the elaboration of a type of microcosmos of an idealized colonial world, structured and hierarchized

according to an Anglo-Saxon logic. Having established the complex construction of the bourgeois individual - disciplined, ascetic, and religious -, a central element of the second part of Defoe's text is to present Robinson Crusoe as master of himself and of his world in the Caribbean.

He starts to refer, for example, to the elements which surround him with possessive pronouns: the fortified cabin he built becomes 'his castle;' the land which sheltered him after the shipwreck is 'his island;' and obviously the indigenous person whom he saved from the cannibals and whom he took as his servant is 'his Friday.' Those who came to live in his dominions necessarily become 'his subjects' and, in one episode, he is addressed by the English captain, later responsible for his return to Great Britain, as 'governor' of that insular space. Similarly, this part of the novel also contained discussions about how to act towards cannibals, how to civilize savage populations, and how to convert gentiles to the 'true' Divine Providence.

The fourth and last part of Daniel Defoe's novel consisted of Robinson's return to Europe. In England, without any trace of his family or without the wealth he had left under the care of an English widow, he decided to leave for Lisbon, with the objective of reencountering the Portuguese captain who had brought him to Brazil decades before. In Portugal, he is told that his plantation in Bahia has prospered, providing him with income and transforming him into a rich man. At the end of the narrative, Crusoe, bored with the conventional life he had constructed in Great Britain, finding himself to be someone of wealth decides to leave on new maritime adventures, showing once again his restless and adventurous character.

In the novel, Robinson's enrichment after the years he had spent lost in the Caribbean is represented as a type of reward for his discipline and for keeping his Protestant values. During his time on the island, Calvinist asceticism, self-discipline, and arduous work guided his behavior. Crusoe believed that his misfortunes had been a punishment for his disobedience with the destiny which his prudent father had traced for him. Believing that God uses his own actions to punish him, he shows that he believes in predestination according to the English Calvinist tradition. Robinson kept the seventh day of the week as the day of the Lord, following the imagined calendar he prepared. He acquired the habit of asking God for blessing before eating and was not able to stand the idea of nudity, even being alone on the island; thus, he covered his body entirely.

Following the same religious tradition, he kept a diary in which he wrote down the good and bad things that happened to him as a kind of spiritual balance. He also marked his 'profits' and 'losses.' These annotations are the proof that the survival and final enrichment of Crusoe is due to constant work and the refusal to lose time. According to Christopher Hill, traditional Protestantism in the novel is accompanied by a vision of morality in business, in accordance with the perspective of Max Weber's spirit of capitalism. [3]

However, showing a certain ambiguity in his religious perspectives, Robinson does not baptize Friday, although he considers him a Christian; nor does he know how to respond when Friday asks why God allowed the existence of the devil. Moreover, when he was on the island far from the commercial world, it was the Portuguese Catholic captain and the Brazilian Augustinian convent who looked after his lands and income. There is a perspective of religious tolerance, at least among Christians, since he is very comfortable in Brazil under 'papist' rule and has good relations with the Spanish when they reach the island.

Robinson Crusoe is strongly linked with - and this is its novelty at the beginning of the 18th century - a series of values which were becoming important in the middle of transformational processes being caused by capitalism: bourgeois individualism, economic initiative of the middle sectors of society, idea of social

mobility, and rationalism. There is no way to disentangle these premises from the postulates of Calvinist Protestantism, marked by asceticism and valorization of work as a form of approximation of the sacred.

Daniel Defoe's novel was essentially connected with an ideal of a colonialist and transatlantic world, based on an Anglo-Saxon and Protestant perspective. While Crusoe became the prototype of the bourgeois individual sought by modernity, the island in which he lived was transformed into the colonial space *par excellence*, to be molded by capitalist economic activity and converted to Christianity.

The transatlantic dimension is not restricted to the plot of *Robinson Crusoe*, but can also be seen in the history of the book's circulation, its appropriations and its translations. Taken favorably as an instructive model since the 18th century, it has also been a target of a series of criticisms during recent centuries for its colonialist and bourgeois nature. In this sense, it is necessary to shed light on some of these appropriations, in particular the readings it received in the Atlantic world.

Circulation and appropriation of *Robinson Crusoe* in the Atlantic world

As highlighted previously, *Robinson Crusoe* was an immediate publishing success in its first edition in 1719 in England, as well as during the whole 18th century with many printings and adaptations. In its original language, it not only became famous in England, but also started to be a book widely read in the colonies on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean and later, after the process of independence in 1776, in the United States of America. It is interesting to note that before the independence, two editions of *Robinson Crusoe* had been published in the Thirteen Colonies, in 1757 and 1774. And in the last two decades of the 18th century it had around 40 reprints in the newly independent country.

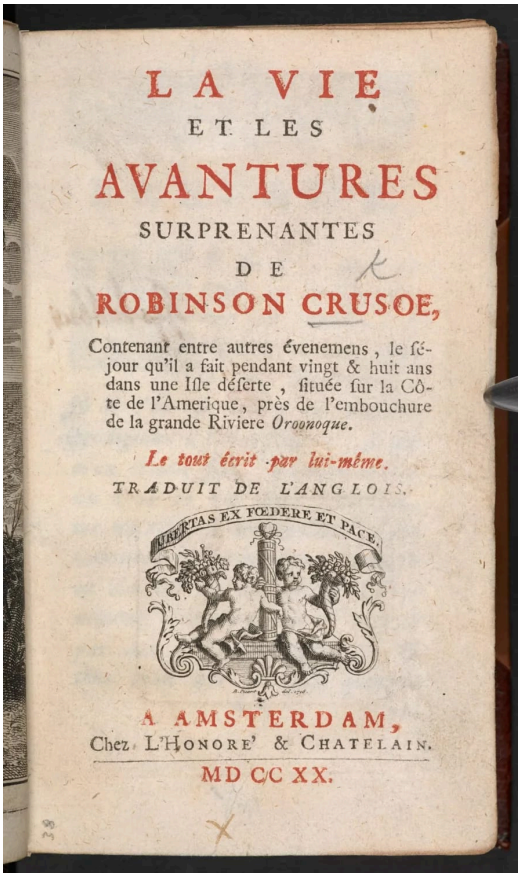
It should also be noted that in the United States, in particular in the period between Independence and the Civil War, *Robinson Crusoe* came to have various interpretations, many of which are still reproduced today, even in academic environments. Echoing an idea existing in the final quarter of the 18th century, but without any great critical examination, Russell L. Martin III, for example, transforms Daniel Defoe's novel into a synthesis of the trajectory of his own country, stating that "*Robinson Crusoe* is the American book *par excellence*. Above all, it is the story of a man who disobeys his English father, constructs an empire in the New World, reads the Bible daily, and converts and conquers 'savages'." [4]

A reference for various American intellectuals and politicians, *Robinson Crusoe* is considered, for example, to be one of the foundations for the writing of Benjamin Franklin's celebrated *Autobiography* (1791). However, it was not restricted to 'great men,' as it was read widely among the general public. According to Thomson, the illustrated edition published in 1835 by Harpers & Brothers from New York became a central parameter for education, in particular for boys, through the exaltation of values linked, amongst other things, to the idea of the *self-made-man*. In a laudatory review of this edition, an author of the importance of Edgar Allan Poe saw it as a form of instructing American youth with an ideal related to a heroic individualism at the dawn of an era which marked the beginning of the expansionism of the country and the affirmation of Manifest Destiny. [5]

Considering these approaches, it is no wonder that, in particular during the 19th century, Robinson Crusoe's story found echoes in narratives about the Conquest of the West and in the mythology constructed in the United States around the idea of *wilderness*. The shipwrecked Englishman was, like the 'pioneers,' a solitary individual who had abandoned his family to build a new world through his isolation in supposedly 'deserted' regions, submitting nature to his will and imposing civilization on 'savage

populations.' Similarly, it also has parallels, though marked by some great differences, in particular ideological, with the work of an author such as Henry David Thoreau, who like Defoe's protagonist, abandoned life in society and had to reconstruct a new way of life in the middle of nature.

In addition to its presence in the United States, what also draws attention in the history of the transatlantic circulation of *Robinson Crusoe* is the trajectory of its translations and adaptations in other languages. For example, although its first transposition to French occurred in Amsterdam, a year after it appeared in English, it was only first published in France in 1761. During the 19th century, other translations were made to French, not always true to the original, but quite well successful and reprinted numerous times. In the 20th century, there was a single relevant translation, that of Maurice Lachin for Fayard Publishers in 1931, but what predominated in France were reprints resulting from Pétrus Borel's 1836 version, considered for many years as being the closest to Defoe's text.


LA VIE
ET LES
AVANTURES
SURPRENANTES
DE
ROBINSON CRUSOE,
Contenant entre autres évenemens, le ſéjour qu'il a fait pendant vingt & huit ans dans une Iſle déſerte, ſituée ſur la Côte de l'Amerique, près de l'embouchure de la grande Riviere *Oroonoque*.
Le tout écrit par lui-même.
TRADUIT DE L'ANGLOIS.
LIBERTAS EX FŒDERE ET PACE.
A AMSTERDAM,
Chez L'HONORE' & CHATELAIN.
MD CC XX.

Frontispiece of the 1st edition in French of Robinson Crusoe (1720). London, British Library

Source: British Library

In France, *Robinson Crusoe* found in the Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau one of its principal defenders during the century of the Enlightenment. Rousseau, supporter of the idea that the closer to nature and the less corrupted by civilization better would be the man, saw in this book a type of ideal text for the education of new generations. Not by chance, in his plan for the education of young people synthesized in the classic *Emile or On Education* (1762), he recommended Daniel Defoe's novel as the first, and for a certain time, the only book to be in the library of his disciple Emile. According to Rousseau,

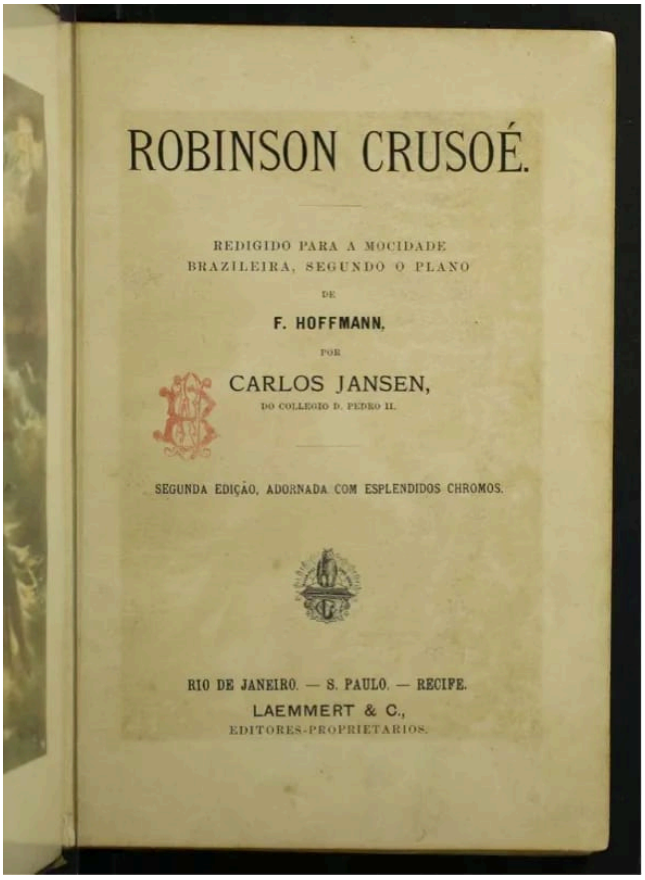
"the most secure means of rising above prejudice and ordering your judgments on the true relations of things is to put yourself in the place of an isolated man and judge everything as this man must judge himself, due to its utility." [6]

Rousseau's defense of the educational value of *Robinson Crusoe* inspired various authors, such as Feutry (1766) and Montreille (1767), to make adaptations of this work for a younger public in the 18th century. The translation made from German of a version of Defoe's novel by the German pedagogue, Joachin Heirich Campe, also a disciple of the author of *Emile*, also had some impact in France. These editions continued to influence how *Robinson Crusoe* was read during the 19th and 20th century: in general, through the filter of adaptations and summarized versions aimed at a child public.

In the Iberian Peninsula, the first edition of Defoe's novel in the vernacular appeared in Portugal between 1785 and 1786, in four volumes translated not from English but from French by Henrique Leitão de Souza Mascarenhas. In the Luso-Brazilian world, in particular between the final decades of the 18th century and the firsts of the19th, Robinson Crusoe found an intense reception, circulating in a recurrent manner between Portugal and Brazil.

In Spain, the first publication of *Robinson Crusoe* in Castilian, a children's version, as left explicit by the title *El Robinsoncito o Aventuras de Robinson Crusoe, dispuestas para diversión de los niños*, appeared in 1826 in Paris. It is curious to note that a large part of the first editions of the work in Spanish were published in the French capital. The first translations of the book only appeared in Madrid in the 1840s, in general also as adaptations for children. What calls attention is the fact that these editions occurred close to the first printing of the novel in Latin America, in Mexico City in 1846 by the *Imprenta* of Ignacio Cumplido. Moreover, it is also worth noting that the first relevant translation of *Robinson Crusoe* produced in Spain, that of José Alegret de Mesa, translated from a French edition, appeared later than the Mexican one dating from 1849.

Even though in the 18th century it could not be read in Iberian languages, *Robinson Crusoe*, particularly in its French versions, was also appropriated in Hispanic America. For example, Simón Rodríguez (1769-1854), a professor and theorist of education from Caracas, known in Hispano-American history as the tutor of the 'Liberator' Simón Bolívar, was strongly inspired by Daniel Defoe's book, mainly due to his reading of *Emile* by Rousseau. Not by chance, during the time he spent outside of Venezuela, when he was in exile for political reasons in Europe between 1797 and 1823, Rodríguez adopted the pseudonym Samuel Robinson in a clear tribute to the celebrated English castaway.

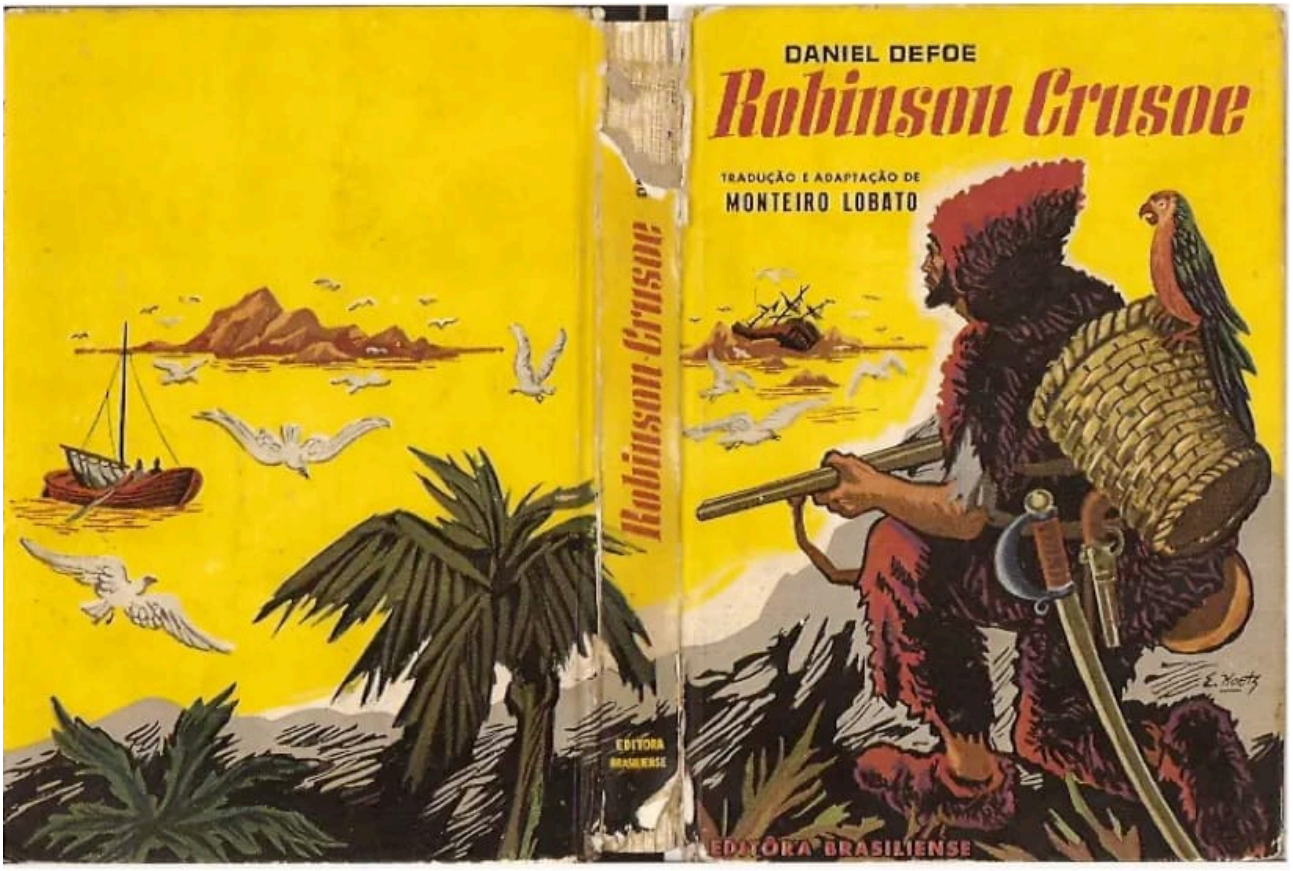


Frontispiece of the 2nd Brazilian edition of Robinson Crusoe (1884), adapted by Carlos Jansen

Source: Biblioteca Barasiliana Guita e José Mindlin

In addition to Rodríguez, another important reader of *Robinson Crusoe* in Hispanic America was Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. The Argentine intellectual and politician stated in his celebrated autobiography, *Recuerdos de província* (1850), that one of the most striking books in his education had been *Robinson Crusoe*. Sarmiento stated that he remembered a teacher who had told him, while he was learning to read, "the Robinson's precious story." He also concluded: "I repeated it, three years later, in full without letting any scene escape, without forgetting anything". [7] Not by chance, in *Memoria*, written in 1843 for the Faculty of Humanities of Santiago, Sarmiento put *Robinson Crusoe* in first position among "the books suitable for pleasant and instructive reading for children." [8]

In Brazil the first adaptation of Daniel Defoe's work only appeared at the end of the 19th century, with the translation by the German teacher from Pedro II School, Carlos Jansen (1829-1889). He was responsible for the publication of various texts written for the youth, including *Robinson Crusoe* published in 1885 by Laemmert & Cia., with a preface by Sílvio Romero.



Cover of the 9th Brazilian edition of Robinson Crusoe (1960), adapted by Monteiro Lobato

Source: Carvalho, Diógenes Buenos Aires de. A adaptação literária para crianças e jovens: Robinson Crusoé no Brasil. Tese de Doutorado (Letras). Porto Alegre: Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul, 2006, p. 544.

Notwithstanding its precursory publication in Brazil, Jansen's work would be eclipsed by what is now the most famous version of the story of the English castaway in the country: that of Monteiro Lobato, published by Companhia Editora Nacional in 1931. Already an established author at the beginning of the 20th century, Lobato demonstrated in 1916 his interest in writing for children. His reference for this was *Robinson Crusoe*: "I have ideas to follow this path: books for children. I am sick of writing for the big guys. They are dull. But for the children, a book is the whole world. I remember how I lived within Laemmert's *Robinson Crusoe*. I want to make books where our children can live. Not read and throw away, but live, as I lived in *Robinson* and *In Search of the Castaways* [by Jules Verne]". [9]

Taken, therefore, as a paradigm of children's literature by various authors in different circumstances around the Atlantic World, *Robinson Crusoe* was stripped of some of its most complex aspects, generating only the idealization fed by its admirers.

In addition to the important academic analyses of the work made in the second half of the 20th century by historians and literary critics such as Ian Watt, Christopher Hill, and Peter Hulme, critical fiction readings of *Robinson Crusoe* also appeared. These moved the perspective to other aspects of the novel, in particular the relationship between Robinson Crusoe and Friday. For example, two important literary works published in the second half of the 20th century were *Friday or the Other Island* (1964) by the French writer Michel Tournier and *Foe* (1987) by South African J. M. Coetzee. Despite starting from very different perspectives and places, both subvert the central premises of the original English narrative of the 18th century, making harsh criticism of colonization and European ethnocentrism.

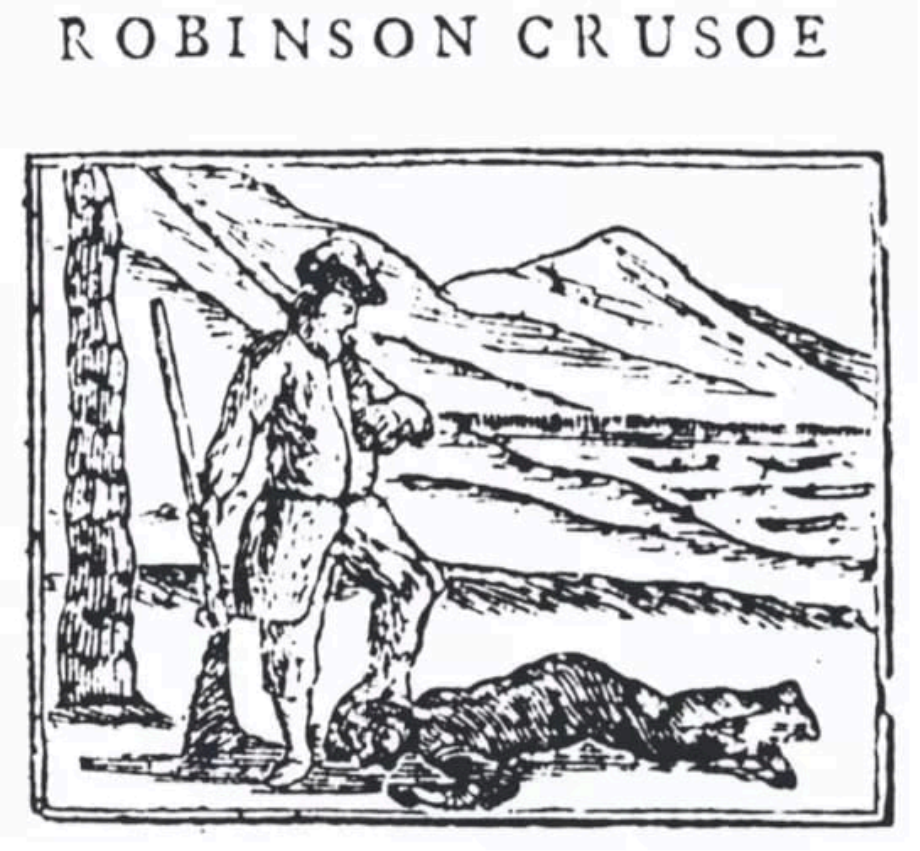
Also important of being remembered are the numerous adaptations, appropriations, and subversions of the figures of Robinson Crusoe and Friday, particularly in the audiovisual milieu, since the beginning of the 20th century. A rapid search in the IMDb (Internet Movie Database) shows dozens of results including featured films, short films, animations, television films, and episodes of series.

Among the cinematographic adaptations are many works by important directors from the history of cinema, such as George Méliès (1903) and Luis Buñuel (1953). And also less conventional versions of the story, such as *Atoll K* (1951) starring the comedians Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy; *Erotic adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1975), an Italian-American film with erotic content (1975); and *Robinson Crusoe in Mars* (1964) which located the story of Robinson and Friday on the red planet. There is also a Brazilian version of the English castaway: *As aventuras de Robinson Crusoe* (1978), directed by Mozael Silveira and produced by J. B. Tanko. With the air of a slapstick film, its stars are two historic comedians from the Brazilian audiovisual scenario: Costinha as Robinson Crusoe and Grande Otelo as Friday. In addition to these, other films, despite not being direct adaptations of Daniel Defoe's novel, are clearly inspired by the Robinsonian universe. Perhaps the most paradigmatic example in this sense is the US film *Castaway* (2000) by Robert Zemeckis, starring Tom Hanks.

Robinson Crusoe and Friday: images of colonialism in the Atlantic world

Rereadings of Robinson Crusoe and Friday have a long history. Not only the texts, but also the images, have contributed to the construction of narratives about these two characters in a broader scenario marked by colonial projects and imperial perspectives.

Having presented aspects about the circulation, adaptations, and subversions which *Robinson Crusoe* received in the Atlantic world, it is necessary to highlight how the characters of the English castaway Robinson Crusoe and Friday became paradigmatic for the elaboration of representations about the dynamic of asymmetric human encounters involving the Old and New Worlds.



Robinson Crusoe and Friday (18th century)

Source: Defoe, Daniel. Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe. Londres: Jewkes, s.d., p. 75.

First, it is important to highlight that the meeting between Robinson Crusoe and Friday occurred when the English castaway saved the life of the native American who would otherwise have been eaten in a cannibal feast. Within the logic of the novel, the expected response from the indigenous person is someone eternally grateful. Since he was rescued by the use of a firearm, a product of modern technology, Friday also bows to European superiority and accepts his subordinate place. The result presented by Defoe is that of a harmonious relationship in which both know their places and do not doubt them.

Friday's submission is described in detail in the novel. First, Robinson does not even consider the indigenous person worthy of baptism, but gives him a name in reference to the day he arrived on the island according to his imaginary calendar. Crusoe teaches him English, but Friday is never capable of learning it correctly, stuttering it. Symptomatically the first word taught and learned in this process is *Master*. Robinson provides him with clothes to cover his nudity and makes him sleep outside the cabin, more precisely at the door. Clothing, a palpable exteriority of "civilization", makes the English castaway a differentiated being from the naked indigenous barbarian. The act of dressing Friday has a symbolic value, since it represents the first step in the rite of passage from savagery to civilization.

Robinson taught Friday to plant crops and raise goats. With rational arguments, he explains to him that he should abandon the custom of eating human flesh, a warning also accepted by Friday. In the treatment given to the Caribbean native the question of the individuality of the 'other' is not questioned. Asking about the previous beliefs, languages, habits, and customs of the indigenous person is outside the cultural universe of Robinson/Defoe. His previous life, in which he must have had a name, is erased. His real

existence begins on the day of his meeting with the white man. Contact between both establishes the moment of the origin of the relationship, making a *tabula rasa* of the individual and cultural past of the indigenous man.



"Rescue the Spaniard" (1885)

Source: Hulme, Peter. Colonial encounters: Europe and native Caribbean, 1492-1797. Nova York: Methuen, 1986, p. 174.

The moment of the arrival of Friday on the island is significant of these representations of the coexistence between the civilized European and the submissive indigenous person. An episode always present in the illustrated version of the novel, this scene frequently functions as a synthesis of the relations constructed between these two characters. In the 18th century English edition, for example, Robinson, dressed in goatskins with one gun on his shoulder and another resting on the ground and the air of a victorious hero, looks towards Friday, totally naked, stretched below him, humbly kissing his feet. The culmination of the act of submission/domination is represented by the posture of Friday who puts Robinson's foot on his head.

Almost at the end of the story, a group of Spanish prisoners of the Indians arrives on the island, while the latter prepare to execute the former. In this episode, the perfect conversion of Friday to civilization occurs with his decided choice of English values. Robinson allows him to wield a firearm - supreme proof of the trust of the Englishman - to help him save the Spanish, killing the indigenous Caribbean natives. By firing against his 'savage brothers,' Friday demonstrates his complete adherence to the order of the white colonizer. Due to its importance, the episode appears constantly in the illustrated versions of the novel. In the engraving of the 1885 English edition, Robinson supports the Spaniard who, as a civilized European, wore clothes in contrast with the naked indigenous people. Friday, wearing the same goatskin clothes, is turned away shooting at the Indians. As Peter Hulme states, the half-buried skull at the front of the

illustration functions as a *memento anthropophagi*, as a reminder why these battles need to be fought. An 1837 French edition contains the same composition of this scene; while Robinson comforts an injured Spaniard, Friday is firing at his 'enemies,' the indigenous people.



"Robinson delivers the Spaniard"

Source: Defoe, Daniel. Aventures de Robinson Crusoe. Vol. I. Paris: Didier Libraire-Éditeur, 1937, pp. 304-305.



"Robinson saves Friday"

Source: Defoe, Daniel. Aventures de Robinson Crusoe. Vol. I. Paris: Didier Libraire-Éditeur, 1937, p. 266-267.

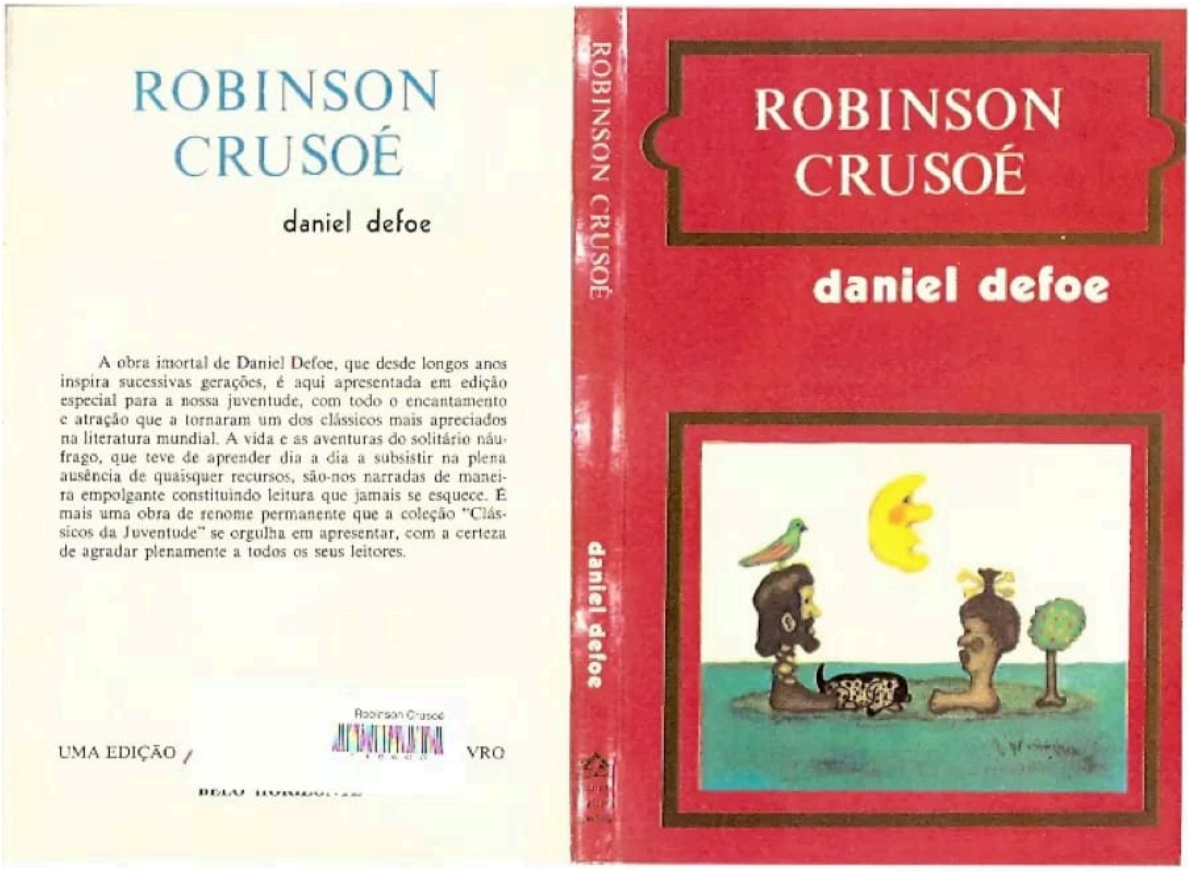
It is worth noting that in many of the narratives about the saga of Robinson Crusoe and Friday, the place where the story was set - the Caribbean - undergoes a type of forgetting. This non-place, allied to the possibility of the suspension of the time in which the story takes place, contributed to the proliferation of re-appropriations of the theme. In this way, the narrative gained mythical dimension - outside time and space, indicating the metamorphoses which Friday underwent over time.



"Robinson saves the life of Friday that the savages were about to devour"

Source: Delmas, Marie-Charlotte & Meunier, Jacques. Les aventures de Robinson Crusoé : parcours éditorial d'une œuvre littéraire. Issy-les-Moulineaux: Association d'Animation de la Médiatèque d'Issy-les-Moulineaux, 1995, p. 40.

In the 18th century editions, he is represented as an indigenous person in both his physiognomic traits and the color of his skin. However, in some 19th century editions a fundamental transformation occurs of the Indian 'savage' into a black African 'savage.' This alteration in the contours of the figure of the colonized people is processed in a gradual manner. In the 1837 French edition, Friday's skin assumes a darker tone to the point of being confused with an African. However, an unequivocal transformation can be noted in another French edition from the beginning of the 20th century: Friday was completely transfigured. In front of a Robinson whose clothing consists of goatskin 'trousers' and the jacket of a European military uniform, kneels a semi-naked black African, extending his arms with his palms facing upwards, in an attitude of submission. The illustration contains the traits of a colonialist vision in a time in which Europe produced justifications for intervention and dominion over Africa.

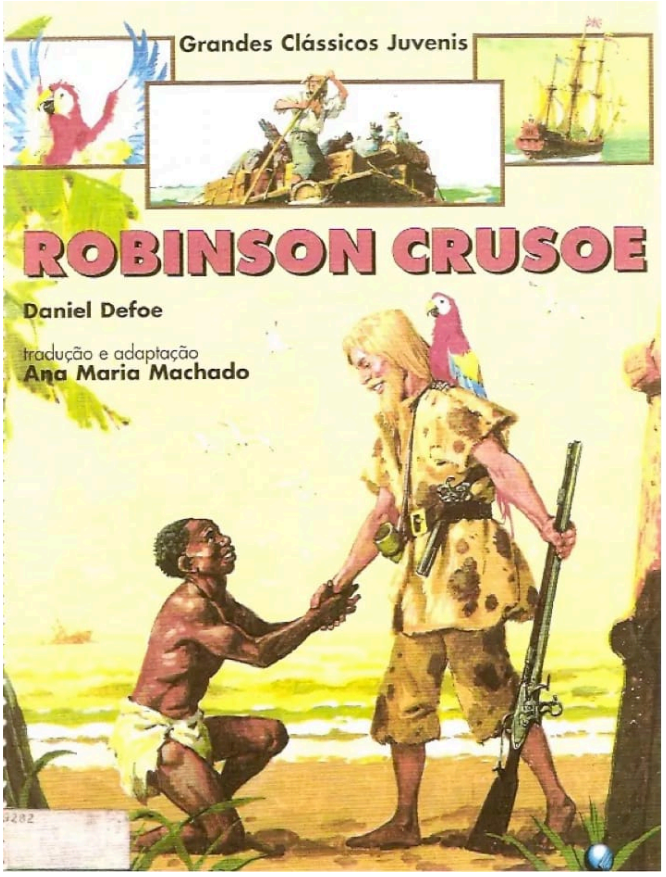


Cover of Robinson Crusoe (Editora Itatiaia, 1964), adapted by Junnar Moutinho Pinheiro

Source: Carvalho, Diógenes Buenos Aires de. A adaptação literária para crianças e jovens: Robinson Crusoé no Brasil. Tese de Doutorado (Letras). Porto Alegre: Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul, 2006, p. 558.

In the history of publications of *Robinson Crusoe* aimed at a child/youth public in Brazil, these mutations in the representations of Friday can also be seen. In the illustrations and descriptions in the first two adaptations of Daniel Defoe's novel in the country, by Carlos Jansen in 1885 and Monteiro Lobato in 1931, Friday is presented as an indigenous person who, even with some stereotypes, remains a native from the Americas, as in the original text. However, the same did not occur in later adaptations. This can be seen, for example, in the 1964 Brazilian edition from Editora Itatiaia, which is part of the Youth Classics Collection. On the cover, Friday is painted as a black African with thick lips and curly hair; his hair is tired with little bones, associating - in a mistaken manner - Africa with cannibalism. Similarly, the version from Editora Globo, part of the Great Juvenile Classics Collection, published in 1995, translated and adapted by Ana Maria Machado from an originally Italian publication, contains in all its illustrations a strikingly African Friday. On the cover, he is almost kneeling with a look of gratitude towards a benevolent Robinson.

The appropriations and adaptations of the original story of Robinson Crusoe and Friday have strong cultural and political meanings, which have been continually renewed and still exist in the present. The story of the shipwrecked Englishman in the Caribbean offers elements which allow re-readings and contribute to subtly defending the logic of the superiority of 'civilization' over 'barbarism' and justifying the asymmetric encounter between colonizer and colonized at any epoch of history. In the history of the print editions of *Robinson Crusoe*, the imperial eyes are frequently manifested naturalizing this relationship and hiding its violence.



Cover of Robinson Crusoe (Editora Globo, 1995), adapted by Ana Maria Machado

Source: Carvalho, Diógenes Buenos Aires de. A adaptação literária para crianças e jovens: Robinson Crusoé no Brasil. Tese de Doutorado (Letras). Porto Alegre: Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul, 2006, p. 552.

Robinson Crusoe is thus presented as a novel with many meanings. From its plot, with economic, moral, and philosophic discussions, to the history of its editions, appropriations, and translations. For all these references, it is necessary to once again historicize *Robinson Crusoe*, stripping it of its mythical and atemporal character and inserting the book in the transformations promoted by commercial capitalism and by European colonialism in the New World in the Modern Age. It is necessary to understand it initially from a Caribbean perspective, but also to position it within a transatlantic logic, with all the resulting implications of this movement: evidencing the circulations, transformations, and cleavages, but also the asymmetries and the forms of domination made explicit not only by the original romance, but also by all those who created texts and images inspired by the castaway invented by Daniel Defoe.

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NOTES

1 James Joyce, "Daniel Defoe [1912]", *Buffalo Studies* 1, no.1 (Dec. 1964), 24.

2 Ian Watt, *A ascensão do romance: estudos sobre Defoe, Richardson e Fielding*, (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2010).

3 Christopher HIll, "Robinson Crusoe", *History Workshop Journal*, vol.10, no.1, (1980): 6-24.

4 Martin III, Russell L., "North America and Transatlantic Book Culture to 1800", dans *A companion to the history of the book*, edited by Simon Eliot & Jonathan Rose, 259-272. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 271.

5 Thomson Shawn, *The Fortress of American Solitude: Robinson Crusoe and Antebellum Culture*, (Madison and Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), 31.

6 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emílio, ou Da Educação*, (Lisboa: Publicações Europa-América, 1990) 201.

7 Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Recuerdos de Província*, (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1979 [1850]), 147.

8 Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Memória (sobre ortografía americana) leída a la Facultad de Humanidades*, (Santiago: Imprenta de la Opinión, 1843), 38.

9 See Gentil de Faria, "As primeiras adaptações de Robinson Crusoé no Brasil", *Revista Brasileira de Literatura Comparada* 10, no.13 (2008): 27-55.