The New Romance may be divided into the Serious and the Comick: and each of these kinds may be variously subdivided.

I.1. Of Serious Romances, some follow the historical arrangement; and, instead of beginning, like Homer and Virgil, in the middle of the subject, give a continued narrative of the life of some one person, from his birth to his establishment in the world, or till his adventures may be supposed to have come to an end. Of this sort is Robinson Crusoe. The account commonly given of that well-known work is as follows.

Alexander Selkirk, a Scotch mariner, happened, by some accident which I forget, to be left in the uninhabited island of Juan Fernandez in the South Seas. Here he continued four years alone, without any other means of supporting life, than by running down goats, and killing such other animals as he could come at. To defend himself from danger during the night, he built a house of stones rudely put together, which a gentleman, who had been in it, (for it was extant when Anson arrived there) described to me as so very small, that one person could with difficulty crawl in, and stretch himself at length. Selkirk was delivered by an English vessel, and returned home. A late French writer says, he had become so fond of the savage state, that he was unwilling to quit it. But that is not true. The French writer either confounds the real story of Selkirk with a fabulous account of one Philip Quarl, written after Robinson Crusoe, of which it is a paltry imitation; or wilfully misrepresents the fact, in order to justify, as far as he is able, an idle conceit, which, since the time of Rousseau, has been in fashion amongst infidel and affected theorists on the continent, that savage life is most natural to us, and that the more a man resembles a brute in his mind, body, and behaviour, the happier he becomes, and the more perfect. Selkirk was advised to get his story put in writing, and published. Being illiterate himself, he told every thing he could remember to Daniel Defoe, a professed author of considerable note; who, instead of doing justice to the poor man, is said to have applied these materials to his own use, by making them the groundwork of Robinson Crusoe; which he soon after published, and which, being very popular, brought him a good deal of money.

Some have thought, that a lovetale is necessary to make a romance interesting. But Robinson Crusoe, though there is nothing of love in it, is one of the most interesting narratives that ever was written; at least in all that relates to the desert island: being founded on a passion still more prevalent than love, the desire of self-preservation; and therefore likely to engage the curiosity of every class of readers, both old and young, both learned and unlearned.

I am willing to believe, that Defoe shared the profits of this publication with the poor seaman: for there is an air of humanity in it, which one would not expect from an author who is an arrant cheat. In the preface to his second volume, he speaks feelingly enough of the harm done to him by those who had abridged the first, in order to

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1 Essay on Poetry and Musick, Part I, Chapter 5.
reduce the price. “The, injury,” says he, “which these men do to the proprietors of works, is a practice all honest men abhor: and they believe they may challenge them to show the difference between that, and robbing on the highway, or breaking open a house. If they cannot show any difference in the crime, they will find it hard to show, why there should be any difference in the punishment.” Is it to be imagined, that any man of common prudence would talk in this way, if he were conscious, that he himself might be proved guilty of that very dishonesty which he so severely condemns?

Be this however as it may, for I have no authority to affirm any thing on either side, *Robinson Crusoe* must be allowed, by the most rigid moralist, to be one of those novels, which one may read, not only with pleasure, but also with profit. It breathes throughout a spirit of piety and benevolence: it sets in a very striking light, as I have elsewhere observed, the importance of the mechanick arts, which they, who know not what it is to be without them, are so apt to undervalue: it fixes in the mind a lively idea of the horrors of solitude, and, consequently, of the sweets of social life, and of the blessings we derive from conversation, and mutual aid: and it shows, how, by labouring with one’s own hands, one may secure independence, and open for one’s self many sources of health and amusement. I agree, therefore, with Rousseau, that this is one of the best books that can be put in the hands of children. – The style is plain, but not elegant, nor perfectly grammatical: and the second part of the story is tiresome.