The Celebrity of *Robinson Crusoe* appears to have arisen from two Causes; the affecting Situation in which he is placed, and the lively Fancy of *De Foe* in delineating the peculiar Difficulties with which it is attended. On the first of these alone, depends the Success of the following Sheets; my Design being to relate nothing but absolute Facts, for which I shall bring my Authorities. Being thus limited, although the Narrative may be less entertaining, it will be valuable, in the same proportion as Truth is preferable to Fiction. I shall, however, be able to exhibit the interesting Circumstances of such a seclusion from the World, in a variety of points of view, by giving not only Mr Selkirk's Adventures, but those of several others, most of whom were by a singular concurrence of causes, left upon the same Island. Their History will be related in order of time, after a general Description of the Theatre of their Adventures: in doing which, it will appear that Sir Richard Steele was mistaken in saying, 'I do not think it foreign to my Design, to speak of a Man born in her Majesty's Dominions, and relate an Adventure in his Life so uncommon, that it's doubtful whether the like has happened to any other of human Race.'* Perhaps Selkirk's History, which is universally allowed to be the Ground-work of *Robinson Crusoe*, is the most remarkable, but the Instances I have to produce, are similar and authentic, and not foreign to my general Purpose.

* Englishman

[...]

To return to Mr Selkirk. He arrived in England, after having spent eight Years, one Month, and three Days in surrounding the Globe, reckoning from his Departure from Kinsale to his Return to Eriff. More than Half this Period he passed on the Island, and while returning, visited America, Asia, Africa, and Europe.* On his Passage he freely related his Adventures to those who were curious to know them, and the Singularity of them furnished a considerable Topic for Conversation in London. He became well known to the Merchants and Captains On the Exchange. Sir Richard Steele thus mentions his Acquaintance with him:

The Person I speak of is Alexander Selkirk, whose Name is familiar to Men of Curiosity. I had the Pleasure frequently to converse with the Man soon after his Arrival in England, in the Year 1711. It was Matter of great Curiosity to hear him, as he is a Man of good Sense, give an Account of the different Revolutions in his own Mind in that long Solitude. When I first saw him, I thought, if I had not been let into his Character and Story, I could have discerned that he had been much separated from Company, from his Aspect and Gesture; there was a strong but cheerful Seriousness in his Look, and a certain Disregard to the ordinary Things about him, as if he had been sunk in Thought. The Man frequently bewailed his Return to the World, which could not, he said, with all its Enjoyments, restore him to the Tranquility of his Solitude. Though I had frequently conversed with him, after a few Months Absence he met me in the Street; and though he spoke to me, I could not recollect that I had seen him. Familiar Converse in this Town had taken off the Loneliness of his Aspect, and
quite altered the Air of his Face. This plain Man's Story is a memorable Example, that he is happiest, who confines his Wants to natural Necessities; and he that goes farther in his Desires, encreases his Wants in Proportion to his Acquisitions; or to use his own Expression, ‘I am now worth eight Hundred Pounds, but shall never be so happy, as when I was not worth a Farthing!’

Selkirk very probably was called upon to tell his Story so often that he grew tired of it, for Mr Smith, Father to the Print-Seller, above-mentioned, reported him to be an unsociable, odd Kind of a Man, far from being so free in Communication as Steele found him. Mr Smith asked him many Questions, but could get but very little in Answer. He seemed to be punning and playing upon People. Mr Damaris Daniell, Daughter to Major Wade, was in his Company at Bristol, as she informed Mr Shurmer Bath, now of that City; but he spoke in so broad a Scottish Dialect, that she could understand but little he said.

His Adventures were published both by Rogers and Cooke in 1712, and by Steele the Year after. It has been almost universally believed, that, at the Desire of many People, he drew up a Narrative of them himself, and put it into the hands of Daniel De Foe, to transcribe and improve the Style; but that the latter, mingling the Products of his own lively Fancy, with the real Adventures of Selkirk produced the celebrated Novel of Robinson Crusoe; and afterwards returned Selkirk his Papers, telling him his History would not sell. Nor is it likely it would, since Crusoe being at first almost universally thought to be true, Mr Selkirk's History must have appeared very inferior in Point of Incident.

How the above Story should gain such general Belief, and that, most probably, while Selkirk was living, is very strange, if there were no Foundation for it. The Reverend Robert Gentleman, of Shrewsbury, with whom I lived in 1777, told me, he had heard upon good Authority, that when De Foe was upon his Death-Bed, Nothing seemed to lie with such Weight upon his Mind, as this unjust Transaction with Selkirk. Upon the whole, I still am inclined to think the above Representation is just, though it has lately been called in Question, particularly by Mr Chalmers. Two Circumstances indeed may be mentioned in De Foe's Favour. The first is, That Crusoe was not published till seven Years after Rogers and Cooke had appeared in Print, and eight after Selkirk's Return. The other, that even Selkirk's Relations do not know that he left any Journals behind him. But these are of little Weight, if we consider that various Motives might deter him from becoming an Author before, and that when he left his Relations afterwards, he most probably would take his Papers with him, if he had committed his Adventures to writing.

Mr Chalmers relates a Tradition current among the Booksellers, ‘That when Drelincourt's Consolations against the Fears of Death first appeared, the Book would not sell. De Foe said he would make it sell, and he made the Apparition recommend Drelincourt's Book of Death, as the Best on that Subject ever written.’ Now if this be true, a Man, who could be so impious as to forge so solemn a Story, as that of Mrs Veal, upon the awful Subject of Death, would not surely, hesitate to deal by Mr Selkirk, in the Manner that universal Tradition (of equal Weight, undoubtedly, with that of the Booksellers) has all along represented.
The first Volume of *Crusoe* was published in April, 1719. ‘The Reception was immediate and universal; and Taylor, who purchased the Manuscript after every Bookseller had refused it, is said to have gained a Thousand Pounds.* The second Volume came out in August following, and in August, 1720, were published *Serious Reflections during the Life and surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe; with his Vision of the Angelic World.* In the Preface to this is a Passage evidently referring to Mr Selkirk, viz.

I have heard that the envious and ill-disposed Part of the World have raised some Objections against the two first Volumes: That the Story is feigned, that the Names are borrowed, and that it is all a Romance; that there never was any such Man, or Place, or Circumstances in any Man's Life; that it is all formed and embellished by Invention to impose upon the World. — *I Robinson Crusoe,* do hereby declare, their Objection is an Invention scandelous in Design, and false in Fact; and do affirm that the Story though allegorical, is also historical. Farther, *that there is 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.* This may be depended upon for Truth, and to this I set my Name. The famous History of *Don Quixote,* was an emblematic History of, and a just Satire upon the Duke *De Medina Sidonia;* a Person very remarkable at that Time in *Spain.* Without letting the Reader into a nearer Explication of the Matter, I proceed to let him know, that the happy Deductions I have employed myself to make from all the Circumstances of my Story; will abundantly make him amends for his not having the Emblem explained by the *Original.*

*Robinson Crusoe*

I shall now give the Sentiments of a few Authors upon this Subject, from which it will appear that even *De Foe* has not always been thought the Author of *Crusoe.*

1. *Entick,* 1757. ‘Mr Selkirk, on his coming to *England,* supplied Daniel de Foe (who was pilloried) with his Memoirs, in order to digest them for Publication; but that honest Writer stole the Materials which he gave to the Public under the Name of *Robinson Crusoe.*’ - *Naval History*

2. *Biographia Britannica,* 1766. Dr Arbuthnot ‘shared the like Fortune with his Friends *Pope* and *Swift,* in having several Brats illegitimately fathered upon him, among which the famous Romance of *Robinson Crusoe* is worth mentioning. This Romance was written in so natural a Manner, and with so many Incidents, that it was judged for some Time to be a true Story. It was the delectable Offspring of the teeming Brain of *Daniel De Foe,* a Writer famous in his Generation for Politics and Poetry.’

3. *Watson,* 1775. ‘The Subject was taken from the Papers of Selkirk, who had given his Memoirs to this Daniel to methodize; who, instead of doing as his Friend desired, struck out this entertaining Novel, and by the Publication of it, prevented Alexander's Design of making some Advantage from a Recital of his Adventures.’ - *History of Halifax*
4. Dr Beattie, 1783.

Selkirk was advised to get his Story put in Writing and published. Being illiterate himself, he told every Thing he could remember to Daniel De Foe, 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 Ground-Work of Robinson Crusoe, which he soon after published, and which being very popular, brought him a good Deal of Money. I am willing to believe that De Foe 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 him by those who had abridged the first, in order to 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 shew the Difference between that, and robbing on the Highway or breaking open a House. If they cannot shew any Difference in the Crime, they will find it hard to shew 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.

– Dissertations, Moral and Critical

5. Gentleman’s Magazine, March 1788.

Dublin, February 25.

Mr Urban,

In the Course of a late Conversation with a Noblemen of the first Consequence and Information in this Kingdom, he assured me, that Mr Benjamin Holloway, of Middleton Stony, assured him, some Time ago, that he knew for Fact, that the celebrated Romance of Robinson Crusoe was really written by the Earl of Oxford, when confined in the Tower of London; that his Lordship gave the Manuscript to Daniel De Foe, who frequently visited him during his Confinement; and that De Foe, having afterwards added the second Volume, published the Whole as his own Production. This Anecdote I would not venture to send to your valuable Magazine, if I did not think my Information good, and imagine it might be acceptable to your numerous Readers, notwithstanding the Work has heretofore been generally attributed to the latter.

W.W.

It is certain the Earl was in Possession of Selkirk’s History, the Pamphlet called Providence Displayed being preserved in the Harleian Miscellany.

The Tongue of Detraction is seldom at Rest. It has often been repeated, that *De Foe* had surreptitiously appropriated the Papers of Alexander Selkirk. But let no one draw Inferences till the Fact be first ascertained. The Adventures of Selkirk had been thrown into the Air, in 1712, for literary Hawks to devour; and *De Foe* may have caught a common Prey, which he converted to the Uses of his Intellect, and distributed for the Purposes of his Interest. Thus he may have fairly acquired the fundamental Incidents of *Crusoe's Life*; but he did not borrow the various Events, the useful Moralities, or the engaging Style. Few Men could write such a Poem; and few Selkirks could imitate so pathetic an Original.

- *Life of De Foe*

How long Mr Selkirk resided in England I cannot ascertain, but most probably till 1720, or after, as appears from the passage in the *Serious Reflections*. It is certain that some Time or other he returned to Largo, his native Place, and settled there.