

# Robinson Crusoe, Home School Hero

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FROM 1970 to 2006, the only paperback edition of Daniel Defoe's first sequel to *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), came from an unlikely source: Focus on the Family. The evangelical Christian organization chose to use a Victorian edition as their copy text, to which they made further changes and added an original introduction and reader's guide. The differences between the Focus on the Family edition and the first edition are slight but telling; for example, the most amusing alteration involves a moment of levity that turns serious. In an attempt to prevent a confrontation with a flotilla of natives in canoes, Crusoe sends Friday to determine their purpose. Friday's summons elicits an unusual response: "Six of them, who were in the foremost or nighest Boat to us, turn'd their Canoes from us; and stooping down, shew'd us their naked Backsides, just as if in *English*, saving your Presence, they had *bid us kiss---*; whether this was a Defiance or a Challenge, we knew not; or whether it was done in meer Contempt, or as a Signal to the rest" (first ed., 208).<sup>1</sup> The Focus on the Family edition's more succinct rendition of the incident sacrifices key details: "Six of them who were in the foremost or nighest boat to us turned their canoes from us and showed us their naked backs. Whether this was a defiance or challenge, or whether it was done in contempt or as a signal to the rest, we knew not" (146). This version, with the wording reprinted exactly from the Victorian edition, not only replaces "backside" with "back," but it also excises Crusoe's attempt to explain the gesture as idiomatic, reducing the likelihood that the reader would understand "back" as a euphemism for "backside."<sup>2</sup> Anyone vaguely familiar with Focus on the Family and the evangelical Christian values that the group claims to represent could hardly be surprised by their reliance on a copy text that covers the asses left bare in Defoe's original.<sup>3</sup> What is more surprising, and the subject of this essay, is the way in which Focus on the Family's publication of the first two Crusoe

novels reinterprets this canonical piece of Western mythology and how that interpretation might serve their interests. Editorial emendations, both those preserved from the copy text and those instigated by the editor, along with the metatextual apparatus surrounding the Focus on the Family editions of both Crusoe novels, use the violent content of *Farther Adventures* as a tool for building a Christian identity that is resolutely unperturbed by the sight of blood. This emphasis on violence, despite the demonstrable squeamishness at depicting actual bodies noted above, makes this version of the Crusoe story consistent with contemporary evangelical Christian media, including child-rearing manuals and the *Left Behind* series. Focus on the Family's insistence that the first two Crusoes be read together allows for a reading that simultaneously celebrates the autonomy of home schooling while underscoring the necessity of Christian community.

Evangelical Christians enjoy faith-based versions of many elements of the secular world: faith-based gyms, diets, heavy metal, and even their own Baldwin brother.<sup>4</sup> All represent attempts to refashion the secular world into something familiar but Christ-centered. This movement to "co-opt or colonize the modern" does not limit itself to popular culture (Cavalcanti 15). By publishing its own editions of *Robinson Crusoe* and its sequel, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, currently little-known to the general public, Focus on the Family colonizes some of the most colonizing texts of the Western Canon. Where organizations like Christian Exodus and Quiverfull explicitly seek to re-settle and repopulate the United States,<sup>5</sup> Focus on the Family's version of the Crusoe saga rewrites the country's intellectual heritage, not only by the metatextual framing of the novels, but by insisting that the Crusoe story consists of both the first novel and the second, a distinction at once anachronistic and artificial.<sup>6</sup> Focus on the Family effectively creates its own version of the Crusoe story, appropriating one of the most widely taught novels into its own parallel canon. Significantly, Focus on the Family includes guides for home instruction in its editions; thus, these editions attempt to replace both the conventional Crusoe saga and the institutions in which it might be encountered.

What kind of parallel canon does Focus on the Family seek to construct? As illustrated by the dearth of current editions, Focus on the Family's inclusion of *Farther Adventures* in its version of the Crusoe story is an unusual choice. Even during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the novels were routinely published together, the second part was disparaged. Charles Dickens called *Farther Adventures* "perfectly contemptible" (158). No less a champion of Crusoe, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who felt *Robinson Crusoe* was the sole book Émile should read before his twelfth birthday, wanted his ideal pupil to study only Crusoe's initial trip to the island. The rest, according to Rousseau, was pointless "rigmarole" (185). In choosing to end the saga with *Farther Adventures*, Focus on the Family overlooks Defoe's explicitly theological final sequel *Serious Reflections on the Life of Robinson Crusoe* (1720) in favor of a text that is far more violent than the first novel, which is hardly a feast for

pacifists. The organization's selection of the first two novels and editing choices reflect a tolerance for depictions of bloodshed as an essential part of developing a Christian identity. Brutal images punctuate both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Farther Adventures*. Everett Zimmerman notes that together the novels constitute "an intricate exploration of social and legal rationales for violence" ("Robinson Crusoe" 523), while Melinda Rabb recently used both novels as evidence of eighteenth-century England's fascination with male dismemberment (106). Still, like a sequel to a summer blockbuster, the body count rises from the first book to the second. Zimmerman considers *Farther Adventures* "a documentation of ungovernable passion," enumerating the rage-driven massacres and threats of massacre within the novel ("Defoe" 385), while Robert Markley notes that even Crusoe's fantasies become more violent in the second book ("Crusoe's *Farther Adventures*" 43). Crusoe's response to the idol-worshipping Tartars in *Farther Adventures* encapsulates the protagonist's shocking amenability to the use of force in the second novel: "I related the Story of our Men at *Madagascar*, and how they burnt and sack'd the Village there, and kill'd Man, Woman and Child, for their murdering one of our Men, just as it is related before; and when I had done, I added, that I thought we ought to do so to this Village" (333). In short, where Crusoe once imagined shooting and stabbing cannibals, in the second novel he daydreams of torching heathen women and children.

Though Focus on the Family anticipated contemporary critical approaches in considering the books together — Markley, Coby Dowdell, and Michael Austin have all published insightful work on Defoe premised on reading *Farther Adventures* as integral to Defoe's vision of the Crusoe story — the organization's aims have little to do with those of contemporary literary scholars. Unlike Dowdell and Markley, for example, Focus on the Family does not include *Farther Adventures* as primary documentary evidence of English anxiety around trade and cultural exchange with the Far East. So what pedagogical merit do Christian homeschoolers find in *Farther Adventures*? If we consider Defoe's Crusoe books alongside *Dare to Discipline*, Focus on the Family's influential child-rearing manual, as well as in the context of political debates about homeschooling and children's corporal punishment, we begin to fathom why from 1999 until 2003 a Christian organization would produce a teaching edition of *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, a text that mainstream academic publishers continue to ignore despite increased scholarly interest. Focus on the Family encourages home study of *Robinson Crusoe* with *Farther Adventures* because the addition of the second book along with editorial interventions shifts the nature and function of the story. Focus on the Family transforms Crusoe from Ian Watt's *homo economicus* to a man struggling to understand violence and its proper application within a Christian context. In Focus on the Family's version of *Farther Adventures*, the autonomous hero must accept and be guided by the wisdom of his Christian community, wherever he finds it, or risk committing atrocities. This parallels Focus on the Family's mission to make families less subject to state control, particularly in

terms of education and corporal punishment, but not so autonomous that they will not act in concert according to Focus on the Family's agenda.

## Focus on the Family and Education

Focus on the Family was founded as a non-denominational evangelical Christian ministry whose stated mission is “to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with as many people as possible by nurturing and defending the God-ordained institution of the family and promoting biblical truths worldwide” (“About Us”). While Focus on the Family has historically presented itself as countering mainstream social movements as part of the faith-based parallel universe I allude to above, the organization has had a profound impact on mainstream American politics. James Dobson, the influential founder and, until 2009, chairman of Focus on the Family has, with his organization, been cited as a major factor in the 2004 reelection of George W. Bush, in which two of every five votes for Bush came from evangelical Christians (“The Triumph of the Religious Right”). Dobson and Focus on the Family are also credited with igniting the national political career of Sarah Palin, as Dobson withheld support for the 2008 Republican Presidential ticket until her vice-presidential nomination (Malcolm). The catalyst for Focus on the Family's widespread political and cultural influence was *Where's Dad?* — a 1981 short film designed to increase white-collar fathers' involvement in the lives of their children, a message still at the heart of Focus on the Family's “media ministry” (Gilgoff 24).

From its inception, Focus on the Family concerned itself with the installation of parents as the moral center of children's lives, a structure difficult to maintain if children divide their waking hours between home and school, as Dobson implies in *Dare to Discipline* (1970). Dobson's first book situates itself squarely opposite to “permissive” trends in parenting as represented by Dr. Benjamin Spock, whose *Baby and Child Care* has been issued in eight editions since 1946, selling over fifty million copies (Melson). As the title suggests, Dobson finds fault with Spock and his successors' abandonment of corporal punishment as a means of correcting behavior. In addition, Dobson's educational agenda is at least as direct as his domestic agenda. While the challenge to Spock is implicit, Dobson attacks progressive educator A.S. Neill methodically and by name throughout *Dare to Discipline*.<sup>7</sup> Dobson presents Neill's theories and contradicts them point by point, concluding by encouraging his readers to “note how many elements of the new morality can be traced to the permissive viewpoint represented by Neill: God is dead; immorality is wonderful; nudity is noble; irresponsibility is groovy; disrespect and irreverence are fashionable; unpopular laws are to be disobeyed” (113). Dobson established himself as a public expert on family matters as an alternative to popular mainstream thinkers of the day, an oppositional relationship that would come to define Focus on the Family.

In contrast to Spock, Dobson formulates the nuclear family as a domestic version of biblical hierarchy, creating a “farmer-in-the-dell”-like chain of similes: the child is led by the mother as the mother is led by the father as the father is led by the Father. Mothers embrace their role in this hierarchy by responding swiftly and physically to children’s defiance. Dobson advocates spankings for children who talk back, because “when a youngster tries this kind of stiff-necked rebellion, you had better take it out of him, and pain is a marvelous purifier” (27). Dobson details the physical punishments delivered by his own mother and the reassurance it gave him to know that incidental problems, like tardiness or poor time management, could be reasonably discussed, while challenges to authority would be settled by whatever object his mother found to strike him with, even a girdle (30). Eithne Johnson observes that Dobson encourages mothers to emulate his own as a means of empowerment within the strict domestic hierarchy. If mothers have, as Dobson presumes, the support of a husband and a broader Christian community, they can be confident in their ability to apply force in the home properly. Physical punishment manifests mothers’ authority over their children tangibly and permanently, as Dobson’s own recollections attest.

Dobson devotes nearly as much space to education as family management. The third and fourth of the book’s seven chapters, “Discipline in the Classroom” and “The Barriers to Learning,” are designed for educators as well as parents, and teachers are addressed throughout. After outlining techniques for increased harmony and productivity at school, Dobson seems to dismiss this possibility by devoting almost equal space to the dangers of public education. “Discipline Gone to Pot” begins with a litany of facts and bullet points illustrating the signs and varieties of drug abuse in public schools before launching into a harrowing second-person tale describing how the influence of Bill, a schoolmate, leads a middle-class sixteen-year-old down a seemingly inevitable path from casual drug abuse to heroin addiction. At the chapter’s close, Dobson quotes a heroin addict: “The doctor told my family it would have been better and indeed kinder if the person who first got me hooked on dope had taken a gun and blown my brains out, and I wish to God she had. My God, how I do wish it” (217). By ending on this defeatist note rather than with the questions and answers that usually conclude each chapter of *Dare to Discipline*, Dobson characterizes drug addiction as a school-borne contagion without a cure — no space is necessary to qualify or explain. Dobson wavers in *Dare to Discipline* between two mutually exclusive messages. He encourages teachers to give the positive and negative reinforcement that complement the discipline he advocates in the home while simultaneously diminishing the moral potential of public schools and teachers.

Once he founded Focus on the Family, Dobson acted on the concerns enumerated in *Dare to Discipline* by aligning his organization with Christian home school activists and child development researchers Dr. Raymond and Dorothy Moore. Beginning in the early 1980s, Raymond Moore became a frequent guest on Dobson’s

popular radio show (Stevens 26). Focus on the Family's endorsement effectively disseminated Moore's conception of children as both unique and fragile. Unlike home school pioneers like John Holt, who found fault with public schools as authoritarian and hierarchical institutions, Moore felt that public schools were simply the wrong kind of authoritarian institution, with a dubious figure at the hierarchy's zenith. Rather than freeing children from the school's authority and allowing them to follow their own interests, as Holt prescribed, the Moores advocated shifting authority from the schools to the parents (Stevens 43–45). Their conception of children as vulnerable and schools as dangerous became more elaborate as the Christian home school movement expanded. Christian home school materials stigmatize public schools as sites of moral turpitude, referring to alarming but unverified statistics, such as “50 percent of [public school] girls will become pregnant out of wedlock before graduation day” (Stevens 51). While the Christian home school movement predates Focus on the Family, the organization has taken up the cause on both the personal and legislative levels. On the organization's official website, Dobson responds to a parent considering home schooling by noting that children should stay in a “protected environment,” personalizing the advice by concluding that if he and his wife “were raising our children again, we would home school them” (“Ask Dr. Dobson”).

For evangelical Christian political activists home schooling is only a part, though a significant one, of a larger cause, often formulated as parents' rights. Currently, Focus on the Family is coordinating with other evangelical Christian organizations to support a movement to add an amendment to the United States Constitution guaranteeing “the liberty of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children” (parentalrights.org). This coalition of evangelical Christians drafted the amendment in response to the near-ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2009, meant to protect children from abuse and secure their rights to express their own opinions. The convention, originally adopted by the UN in 1989, found little resistance in the vast majority of member nations. However, Focus on the Family saw this treaty as potentially infringing on parents' legal abilities to physically discipline children and, along with other lobbying groups, was successful in making the United States the only UN nation besides Somalia to reject the treaty (Mason 955). The parents' rights movement holds up Article 37a of the UN convention for particular scrutiny, which states “No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” (“Convention”). Parentalrights.org interprets this article as the end of a parent's prerogative to “administer reasonable spankings,” an objection that reappears throughout their promotional materials (“Twenty Things you should Know”). This resistance to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child along with the continuing popularity of *Dare to Discipline* reveals the extent to which Focus on the Family's notions of educational autonomy are entangled with the idea that physical force, or a measure of violence, has a place in the home, a place that can be

successfully moderated by parents without state interference. *Robinson Crusoe* and *Farther Adventures* may not seem unduly violent to an audience that openly defends its ability to mete out suitable punishment.

### Focus on the Family's Editions

In addition to encouraging families to take their children out of schools and lobbying for the relaxation or abolition of statutes regulating parents' abilities to discipline home school children, Focus on the Family provides resources for teaching in the home, in effect offering to manage the autonomy sought on behalf of evangelical Christian families. Among these resources is the series Focus on the Family Great Stories, an imprint of Tyndale House Publishers, which includes classics like *David Copperfield*, *Little Women*, and *Anne of Green Gables*. The most famous in this series of twelve books is *Robinson Crusoe*. *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* is the only novel in the series that, during its four years in print (from 1999-2003), was exclusively available in paperback from Focus on the Family. The organization's commitment to promoting the centrality of the family in general and the importance of paternal involvement in particular makes the Crusoe books a peculiar vehicle for their message. Indeed, far from depicting parental control, the first and second Crusoe novels describe the title character's escape from and success outside of family life. In *Robinson Crusoe* the title character ignores his father's advice and eventually reaps material and spiritual rewards. In *Farther Adventures* Crusoe develops from insolent son to absent father — at the beginning of the novel Crusoe longs to go back to sea, but his wife prevents him from doing so by insisting that she accompany him. Conveniently, she dies, and he leaves for his "farther adventures," abandoning three young children. Though "Where's Dad" would make a suitable (if snarky) alternate title for *Farther Adventures*, initially the novel hardly seems consistent with Focus on the Family's core values. Setting aside Crusoe's apparent lack of interest in fatherhood, the book is horrifically violent — villages are sacked, villagers are raped, and often Crusoe himself is the catalyst. The inclusion of both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Farther Adventures* in the series resonates with Focus on the Family's aims because only the second book suggests that violence is a useful tool — with the caveat that it must be utilized with the support of other Christians.

### *Robinson Crusoe*

*Robinson Crusoe* more overtly promotes Focus on the Family's educational agenda; Crusoe's successful attempt to educate Friday can be read as an idealized depiction of the home school environment, complete with Crusoe's rescue of Friday from

cannibals only slightly more ferocious than a child's classmates in American public schools. Crusoe and Friday's isolation both models the possibility of productive intimacy between student and instructor in a home school setting and parallels the estrangement of Focus on the Family's evangelical Christian constituency from mainstream America. Series editor Joe Wheeler encourages these parallels in his introduction to *Robinson Crusoe*. In describing the difficulties Defoe faced as a Nonconformist, Wheeler calls the impact of Defoe's religion on his education "an unexpected blessing" (xxi), taking several pages to explain, correctly, the historical advantages enjoyed by the students of Nonconformist Academies over those attending Oxford, Cambridge, and the public schools.<sup>8</sup> Wheeler clearly delineates how Defoe's devotion to a religion with its own leaders, intellectuals, and, most importantly, institutions of learning, contributed to his literary success.

While Wheeler notes the biographical details that might make Defoe seem like a product of a culture marginalized in the same way as American evangelical Christians, Wheeler does not highlight Crusoe's education of Friday in the way one might expect. The results of Friday's makeshift schooling would seem to be of primary importance in an edition designed to appeal to non-institutional educators and students, yet Wheeler gives it no more space in the discussion guide than Crusoe and Friday's escape from the wolves, an episode squarely in what Rousseau would consider the "rigmorole" category. As I will detail below, Wheeler's approach comes through in the content of the discussion questions, but just the allotment of discussion questions reveals certain editorial priorities. Treating the two sections as equally relevant would be an idiosyncratic choice in any classroom, but it seems particularly odd in a Christian homeschool setting. Crusoe teaches Friday English, ethics, and cosmology with the Bible as their only text — should not this be of greater interest than the various wounds and attacks catalogued in the encounter with the wolves? Instead, the violent interlude becomes part of Friday's pedagogical journey. As Christopher Loar notes, when Friday defends Crusoe and the rest of their party from the wolves we see exactly how educated Friday has become as he demonstrates his mastery of European weaponry (18-19). Wheeler's allocation of discussion questions gives equal importance to Friday's martial and spiritual development. This tendency to underline, even privilege, violent scenes comes to define Wheeler's approach to the two novels.

The content of the discussion questions serves much the same purpose. The chapter titled "Footprint in the Sand" records Crusoe's spiritual struggles. Crusoe first interprets the footprint he discovers in the sand as the work of the devil, then attributes it to man and finds his faith in God no match for his paralyzing anxiety at the prospect of confronting the savages. After several days of reflection, Crusoe's faith returns, only to be rewarded with evidence of cannibalistic rituals. Rather than focus on Crusoe's spiritual journey here, Wheeler provides the following question as the catalyst for discussion: "*Cannibalism* — we recoil in horror at the very word. What

are the lessons about life and death we can learn here?” (289). Though the openness of the question allows Wheeler’s readers to bring in their interpretation of Crusoe’s shifting notion of Providence, Wheeler invites explicit discussion of cannibalism while making no reference to the internal struggle that actually constitutes most of the chapter. Likewise, to *Robinson Crusoe*’s final chapter, “Wolves,” Wheeler appends this prompt: “Wolves are an integral part of our folklore and even our daily language. Like any other animal — human beings included — a wolf is one creature during ordinary times and quite another when it is starving. This differentiation needs to be taken into consideration when discussing this chapter” (290). Crusoe and Friday confront wolves several times in their journey over the Pyrenees, but as this is the conclusion to the novel, concentrating on the wolves makes violence and its causes the focal point for understanding not just the chapter, but the novel as a whole. In the prompt, Wheeler directs his readers to empathize with animals, a problematic suggestion in the context of the chapter. Despite the near-constant threat of attack, Crusoe’s party mostly escapes injury, but animals suffer greatly. Friday shoots a wolf in the head to defend their guide. He subsequently downs a bear by the same method, but with a difference: the bear presents no threat to the group until Friday teases it for Crusoe’s entertainment. In the course of the journey, Crusoe’s party kills over sixty animals, which seems justifiable, if bloody. With guidance from Wheeler’s prompt, this incident takes on a depressing air of inevitability: animals behave in their own best interest, whatever the cost. Violence is part of a natural world that forces humans, like wolves, to spill the blood of others. Wheeler not only chooses to emphasize violence here, but violence that is free of moral ambiguity. He does not mention Friday’s bizarre dance with and subsequent slaughter of a bear, arguably the most memorable incident after Crusoe leaves the island, instead choosing to discuss the least ambiguous acts of violence — those involving the wolves.

Even on the most superficial level, Wheeler presents the novel as a series of violent conflicts, using chapter titles and subheadings that play up the goriest parts of the novel, occasionally dressing even placid moments blood-red. Eighty percent of Wheeler’s titles and subheadings are identical to those running along the top of the odd-numbered pages in the Victorian copy text. When Crusoe discovers the human bones left behind by the cannibals, the incident occurs under the subheading “A Cannibal Orgy” (157), which Wheeler recycles, with modernized spelling, from the copy text. Crusoe’s preparation for a confrontation that never occurs takes up a chapter called “A State of Siege” (160), a title that Wheeler picks up from the copy text and uses twice, as a title and a subheading (170). In both examples, Wheeler’s preservation and repetition of the Victorian copy text’s evocative headings prepares the reader for far more gore than he or she will actually find. Wheeler prefaces the text, structures the body, and asks discussion questions to keep the reader’s focus on violence in *Robinson Crusoe*, an editorial approach that continues through *Farther Adventures*.

Nothing undermines the potential impact of the Christian education of Crusoe and Friday in the first book so completely as Wheeler's insistence that it is only part of the story. In his introduction to *Robinson Crusoe*, Wheeler includes Siberia, a setting from *Farther Adventures*, in his discussion of the way Defoe uses Crusoe to give readers an omnibus of early eighteenth-century travel literature (xi). More pointedly, Wheeler announces the projected release of *Farther Adventures* twice: once in the introduction and once in the main body of the text (xii, 282). Wheeler closes his edition of *Robinson Crusoe* with the portentous "End of Part One," while concluding the sequel *Farther Adventures* with a definitive "The End." Why does Focus on the Family dilute *Robinson Crusoe's* overt pedagogical message by using its edition of *Robinson Crusoe* to point toward *Farther Adventures*?

I would argue that Crusoe's evolving comfort with violence from the first book to the second might offer an explanation. In *Robinson Crusoe*, when Crusoe realizes that his island is the site of cannibal sacrifices, he vacillates between urges to annihilate or merely observe them. After first viewing the human remains left behind on the beach, Crusoe dreams of killing cannibals in large numbers swiftly and efficiently with his superior weapons but draws back, engaging them only to free Friday. When the cannibals return months later, Crusoe, after arming himself and Friday, finds his rage subsiding as he considers the situation: "It occur'd to my Thoughts, What Call? What Occasion? Much less, What Necessity was I in to go and dip my Hands in Blood, to attack People, who had neither done, or intended me any Wrong? Who as to me were innocent, and whose barbarous customs were their own Disaster" (232). Crusoe realizes that he has no spiritual or legal mandate for his aggression. He allows that Friday does have cause to attack, as he has not only been abducted by the cannibals but his people are "in a State of War with those very particular People" (275). Though this does not prevent Crusoe from engaging the cannibals when he sees that they intend to sacrifice a European (the Spaniard), he gives Friday credit for most of the body count in the skirmish. In his careful tally of the eighteen or nineteen cannibals killed, Crusoe identifies five as definitely killed by Friday, three as the Spaniard's kills, and the rest as injured or killed by "our shot" or "found dropp'd here and there of their Wounds or kill'd by *Friday* in his Chase of them" (281). After thinking through his proper relationship to the cannibals as a civilized man and a Christian, Crusoe avoids implicating himself solely or specifically with their extinction. Instead of ending with this Crusoe, Focus on the Family draws its readers toward the second book, where Crusoe becomes less capable of relying on his own judgment in matters of violence, and is at the same time more eager to engage in violent acts. Focus on the Family yokes the books together in order to leaven Crusoe's individual success with the revelation that Crusoe needs other Christians to help him direct his violent impulses, a revelation that only comes in the second book.

## *Farther Adventures*

*Farther Adventures* presents Crusoe as far less circumspect about aggression toward people who do not share his values than in *Robinson Crusoe*. Markley calls the Crusoe of the second book a “fanatic crusader,” and while the Focus on the Family edition is unlikely to use the same terminology, it does not shrink from presenting the events that inspire Markley’s characterization (*Far East* 179). Midway through *Farther Adventures*, Crusoe’s crew systematically destroys a village and most of its inhabitants in retaliation for a crewmate whose throat was cut by the natives for the abduction and rape of a young girl. Crusoe protests and is left behind. Later Crusoe reveals that it is not the crew’s actions that he finds reprehensible but their motivation; he brings up the story when explaining to his traveling companion what he would like to do to a Tartar village of idol-worshippers. It is his companion and fellow Christian, the Scots merchant, not Crusoe, who suggests that they target the idol rather than the villagers, and Crusoe and his co-conspirators sneak out of their caravan, burn the idol, and terrorize the villagers without conscience or consequences. The Focus on the Family edition draws attention to Crusoe’s moral failing here. Wheeler takes Crusoe to task in a discussion question, writing: “What I find sadly amusing here is that the same righteous person who roundly condemned the mariners for the massacre after they at least had *some* provocation, was willing (even eager) to do the same thing here *without* any provocation...[A]t no time in the long saga does Crusoe appear less admirable than he does in this section” (Wheeler 266, italics in original). Wheeler insists that the reader or student try to account for Crusoe’s inconsistency, drawing attention to a moment that might otherwise recede into the ceaseless torrent of incident and observation in *Farther Adventures*. Instead, Wheeler brings the violence forward, part of a strategy begun in the Focus on the Family edition of *Robinson Crusoe*. The Crusoe of Wheeler’s *Robinson Crusoe* demonstrated a capacity to talk himself out of such acts through deliberate reflection. Even where acts of unjustified violence do occur, as in Friday’s dance with the bear at the novel’s close, Wheeler does not comment, as if reserving criticism of the protagonist for the second book. In *Farther Adventures*, Wheeler draws attention to unjustified violent acts while, in this case, inviting the reader to consider what constitutes a justified act of violence. To prevent Crusoe from carrying out this bloody plot, another Christian must intervene, not to counsel him that his aggression is inappropriate, but that it should be more focused. Tellingly, Wheeler directs his criticism not at the violence but at its source; the problem is not one of actions but their justification, paralleling Dobson’s suggestion, contrary to Dr. Spock, that there is a place for corporal punishment in child-rearing, a place Focus on the Family continues to defend. To preserve the idea that violence can be an appropriate response in some circumstances, the Focus on the Family edition cannot simply protest atrocities as they appear in the text. Wheeler has to make finer

distinctions in order to avoid any appearance of condemning Crusoe's actions for their violence rather than the intent behind them. As a result, Wheeler is so eager to clarify that it is the unjustified violence, not violence in general, that he objects to in this scene that he nearly endorses the actions on Madagascar. By underlining the difficulty of determining when and how to resort to violence, Wheeler carves out the role an organization like Focus on the Family could have for even the most independent, Crusoe-like Christian, by defending Christians' rights to use force in their own households, and giving them the sage counsel required to apply it.

The Focus on the Family edition of *Farther Adventures* takes many approaches that subtly suggest a proper context for violence. At times, Wheeler's editorial emendations close the distance between the reader and Defoe's occasionally gruesome imagination. Before returning to his island in *Farther Adventures*, Crusoe's ship encounters a storm-delayed vessel that had gone eleven days without rations. Crusoe brings two survivors, a young man whose mother starved feeding him the last of her food, and his maid. Over a hundred pages later, the maid revisits their ordeal and tells Crusoe that, dazed by hunger, she struck her nose on a bed and bled into a basin. Later, in a scene that James Maddox aptly calls "ludicrously horrible" (45), she drinks the blood and it preserves her until Crusoe's ship arrives. In the first edition, Crusoe observes that "[t]his was her own Relation, and is such a distinct Account of starving to Death, as, I confess, I never met with, and was exceeding entertaining to me" (203). Wheeler's copy text reproduces this wording. In the Focus on the Family edition, Wheeler includes the account of the creation and consumption of the blood-filled basin in full, but omits some of Crusoe's reaction, rendering it, "This was her own story and as truthful an account of starving to death as, I confess, I ever met with" (142). In the original and in Wheeler's copy text, the sentence leaves room for ambiguity — the clause "I confess" may function as an assertion of Crusoe's sincerity or suggest that Crusoe is admitting to something when he calls the story "exceeding entertaining." Maddox regards this moment as a consequence of Crusoe's craving for violent spectatorship (44–50). This idea — that Crusoe may be observing violence to suit his own desires—is minimized in the Focus on the Family edition; the possibility of taking pleasure from proximity to bloodshed might open up uncomfortable questions for Wheeler's Christian audience. Late twentieth- and twenty-first-century Christian entertainment unflinchingly accepts gore, at least in contexts where it seems to serve a function besides mere entertainment. Graphic violence in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) and the *Left Behind* series of novels (which debuted two years before Focus on the Family's edition of *Robinson Crusoe* was issued by the same publisher) did little to hinder evangelical Christians from embracing them, as the violence was explained as part of each work's fidelity to Scripture. However, by erasing Crusoe's admission that he is stimulated by the bloody tale, Wheeler does not simply obviate the potential that the audience will share the thrill. Wheeler's omission of Crusoe's enthusiastic response to the maid's story makes the reader, not Crusoe, the

spectator; rather than react to Crusoe's reaction, the Focus on the Family edition's readers must determine for themselves if they are "entertained" by the scene.

Wheeler presents the Focus on the Family edition of *Farther Adventures* as "a rather unvarnished, sometimes brutal story, complete with...acts of violence against helpless victims." In his introduction Wheeler praises this aspect of the story as evidence of its fidelity to its times, concluding that, "there is no Monday morning quarterbacking here, no revisionistic [*sic*] rewriting of the past" (xii). This first mention of violence, with its juxtaposition of jargon ("revisionistic") and sports metaphor, makes any objection to the book on the basis of its violent content seem both pretentious, and, by association, politically correct, even unsportsmanlike.

Wheeler's final caution about the book's violent content serves as the best example of the contradictory impulses in adapting *Farther Adventures* for the modern evangelical Christian family. Again, his warning comes in a guise that is strangely hostile to the idea of giving a warning on the basis of violent content, despite the youth and moral sensibilities of the intended reader. Wheeler opens "A Word to the Reader," by stating: "*The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* is a troubling book because it is an honest one" (lxv). After cataloguing the violence, disasters, and vivid acquaintance with mortality that was commonplace in Defoe's time, Wheeler begins to make the case that comfort with "the realities of life" is integral to one's identity as a Christian. Wheeler then takes a standard note on content and transforms it into a manifesto on the durability of the Christian stomach:

Sadly, many people today, particularly among the media, perceive Christians as unwilling or unable to accept these realities. They believe that we deliberately close ourselves off from the world's ugliness, thinking that if we don't know it's there, it won't hurt us. But if Christians really believed this, we would not read our Bibles. After all, the Scriptures cover a particularly bloody period in human history, and biblical writers don't sugarcoat or shy away from discussing topics such as wars, slavery, idolatry, cannibalism, adultery, pride, incest, and treachery...Our consciences are not V-chips that block evil from our too-impressionable souls; rather, they are divine prisms through which we are to discern good from bad, truth from lies. (lxv)

In his final warning, Wheeler implies that the reader who shrinks from violence is not only cowardly, but also insufficiently educated as a Christian. The Christian unable to cope with *Farther Adventures* is guilty of both Biblical illiteracy and conforming to stereotypes propagated by "many people" and the media. The familiarity with the Bible Wheeler ascribes to his presumed audience distinguishes them from the mainstream because it makes them better equipped to contend with "the world's ugliness." Here Wheeler explicitly connects Christian identity to a facility with comprehending violence. This facility takes on particular import because, according to Wheeler, the ability is both deeply symbolic and widely misunderstood, making a particular relationship to violence part of what differentiates Focus on the Family's

audience from the greater public. The weight of this separation becomes crucial to understanding claims Wheeler makes in the introductions to both editions.

### A Robinson of Our Own

The introductions to Focus on the Family's editions of Defoe's novels contain nearly identical portions of text that present them so they may more comfortably reside within the parallel cultural universe I mention above. In particular, the "Movie History" sections of both introductions demonstrate the extent to which these editions of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Farther Adventures* are meant to replace previous iterations of the story. In his introduction to *Robinson Crusoe*, Wheeler writes, "strangely enough, I have not found any movie versions of *Robinson Crusoe*" (xiii). Wheeler's fruitless search is very strange indeed—film adaptations of *Robinson Crusoe* date back to 1903 (Mayer, "Robinson Crusoe" 169). At the time Wheeler published his edition of *Robinson Crusoe* in 1997, there were several films available in English, including Caleb Deschanel's *Crusoe* (1988), starring Aidan Quinn; Rod Hardy and George Miller's *Robinson Crusoe* (1997), starring Pierce Brosnan; and Luis Buñuel's *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1954) starring Dan O'Herlihy, not to mention the myriad less faithful adaptations like Jack Gold's *Man Friday* (1975), Byron Haskin's *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* (1964), and Wolfgang Peterson's *Enemy Mine* (1985).<sup>9</sup> As Robert Mayer explains, most films barely touch upon Crusoe's spiritual transformation, emphasizing instead the sorrows of isolation, the triumph of man's will over nature, and, with increasing regularity in the second half of the twentieth century, the complicated dynamic between Friday and Crusoe ("Three" 36–45). In fact, Buñuel's version has been characterized as both an "atheistic" depiction of the story and, along with Gold's *Man Friday*, has been credited with confronting Crusoe as a sexual being, which Wheeler (and arguably Defoe) studiously avoids (Anderson; Mayer "Three" 41–43). After expressing surprise at his inability to find a film adaptation of *Robinson Crusoe*, Wheeler muses that "it would be a difficult book to capture in celluloid — especially, aspects such as the cannibalism and ever-present violence and bloodshed of the time. However, if done correctly, it would make a wonderful miniseries" (xiii-xiv). Surprisingly, despite all the ways film versions of *Robinson Crusoe* might come up short in Wheeler's eyes — too invested in their revision or critique of the master/slave dynamic between Crusoe and Friday, too limited in their portrayal of Crusoe's spiritual development — the amount of violence seems to be the deciding factor. Wheeler writes of the limits of film specifically as a medium for depicting violence, never mentioning or acknowledging the other possible complications of adapting *Robinson Crusoe*.

Still, that Wheeler would fail to recommend any films based on *Robinson Crusoe* is odd in light of his inclusion of mainstream film adaptations in the movie

sections of other books in the Focus on the Family Great Stories series. To compare, the Focus on the Family edition of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* lists the three most popular film adaptations: George Cukor's 1933 film starring Katherine Hepburn; the 1949 adaptation, directed by Mervyn LeRoy featuring June Allyson, Margaret O'Brien, and Elizabeth Taylor; and Gillian Armstrong's version from 1994, starring Winona Ryder and Susan Sarandon (xii). Wheeler's inclusion of so many versions of *Little Women* suggests that the filmmakers' interpretive approach to the source material may not have sole bearing on his decision to recommend them in his introductions. Like the *Robinson Crusoe* films Mayer analyzes, Armstrong's *Little Women* fails to convey the religious aspects of the story — in fact Armstrong's *Little Women* was understood by mainstream and even some academic critics as an explicitly feminist rendering of the novel (Francis 1312–13).<sup>10</sup> How can Wheeler recommend this film but not find a single acceptable adaptation of *Robinson Crusoe*? It would appear that while *Little Women* can be left to others to interpret, the Crusoe story must be strictly regulated and interpreted for the evangelical Christian audience: Focus on the Family's "complete" version of the story must consist of not just one but of the first two novels, and it must be so specific to evangelical Christians that mainstream films cannot successfully capture its meaning. By ignoring literally dozens of films based on *Robinson Crusoe*, Wheeler exerts control over the Crusoe story.

Furthermore, in the introductions to both novels, Wheeler claims that his editions are the first to insert paragraph and chapter breaks, update the language, and incorporate illustrations (Wheeler, *Robinson Crusoe* xii; Wheeler, *Farther Adventures* xiii).<sup>11</sup> However, even full text editions of *Robinson Crusoe* often include illustrations, as detailed by David Blewett in *The Illustration of Robinson Crusoe 1719–1920*. Indeed, Robert W. Lovett's *Robinson Crusoe: A Bibliographical Checklist of English Language Editions, 1719–1979* lists over thirty unabridged editions of *Robinson Crusoe* that would seem to satisfy all of Wheeler's requirements. Rather than assume any insincerity or ignorance on Wheeler's part, I want to suggest that because Wheeler sees himself as reclaiming these novels for an evangelical Christian audience, previous editions simply do not exist in the same cultural universe. Denying the existence of secular media versions of *Robinson Crusoe* allows Wheeler to put more distance between the evangelical Christian audience — including himself and his readers — and the public at large who cannot understand them. Wheeler must emphasize this estrangement to make the Crusoe novels acceptable vessels for Focus on the Family's stated values.

According to Wheeler, and by extension Focus on the Family, evangelical Christians are so separate from the mainstream that even a straightforward film version of *Robinson Crusoe* is as incomprehensible as the gestures of the natives in their canoe. The Focus on the Family editions firmly locate both novels within a separate canon. By including *Farther Adventures* in what Wheeler calls "the full saga of Crusoe," Focus on the Family more than doubles the violence of their version of

the Robinson Crusoe myth (ii). While scenes of massacre, rape, lynching, and, in the case of the maid's story, auto-cannibalism, might explain *Farther Adventures's* unpopularity with mainstream American schools and families, with Wheeler's slight alterations it resides happily on the same media shelf with the *Left Behind* series, a DVD of *The Passion of the Christ*, and, as Wheeler notes, the Bible. The logic Wheeler uses to guide his subtle changes to Defoe's text recalls *Left Behind* authors Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins's approach to violence. The novels in the series include scenes of dismemberment, decapitation, and even petite women beaten to death at the hands of large men. When explaining the way a character uses an inflatable slide to exit a plane, LeHaye and Jenkins demurely describe the character landing "not on his seat, but on his shoulders" (42). Wheeler's decision to follow the Victorian copy text in replacing "backside" with "back" in Focus on the Family's rendition of the famous mooning scene in *Farther Adventures* echoes LeHaye and Jenkins' modesty. Both follow the principle that only bodies undergoing some kind of physical punishment may be exposed — after all, one of the values James Dobson sets out to challenge in *Dare to Discipline* is the idea that nudity is noble. Women's lingerie appears in *Dare to Discipline* only because it is used as a weapon. As sales of *Left Behind* attest, James Dobson's parenting manuals recommend, and Focus on the Family's activism defends, there is a place for violence within Focus on the Family's version of the Christian home. Just as there is a right time, according to Dobson, to use physical force to discipline a child, there are moments when violent acts are necessary in the wider world. Part of the shared Christian identity assumed by the editor of Focus on the Family's *Robinson Crusoe* and *Farther Adventures* is a willingness to observe and interpret violence. A more violent Crusoe is by extension more, not less, suitable for Christian homeschool use, because witnessing violence gives the reader more chances to assert his or her identity as a Christian. Wheeler's editorial interventions, both in his decisions to follow or deviate from the copy text and in his introductions and discussion questions, invite the readers of the *Robinson Crusoe* and *Farther Adventures* to admire, then judge the protagonist not for resorting to violence, but for picking the right moments and motives to do so. Wheeler asserts in his Note on the Text cited above that this ability to discriminate between the just use of force and simple goremongering is developed and maintained through Biblical study. Understanding *Robinson Crusoe* and *Farther Adventures* in the broader context of Focus on the Family's activism, the properly educated Christian need not limit these distinctions to literary study. Violence, according to the parents' rights movement and Focus on the Family founder James Dobson's *Dare to Discipline*, is not an unalloyed evil in the home. Instead, violence can be understood, managed, and even applied by a capable Christian.

Focus on the Family's editions of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Farther Adventures* are chary of depicting bodies, but not their dismemberment. Despite specifically designing these editions for the homeschooling audience, the prefatory materials and

discussion questions for both novels emphasize violence over education. This emphasis may seem counterintuitive, but it actually explains why Focus on the Family includes *Farther Adventures* in their version of the Crusoe myth. Studying force and its proper application over the course of the two novels gives Focus on the Family a new version of Crusoe's journey where the hero, instead of becoming more autonomous through his individual study of the Bible, becomes more dependent on other Christians. The impulses that Crusoe can modulate through personal reflection in the first novel must be subjected to the approval of other Christians in the second. Focus on the Family makes this reading distinctly their own by omitting references to secular versions of the Crusoe story, including other editions and films. The celebration of autonomy in the first novel correlates with Focus on the Family's drive to give parents absolute control over their children's educations, while contrasting the portrayal of violence in the first book and the second resonates with an idea underlying *Dare to Discipline*: with the support of a Christian community, violence can be an acceptable way to assert authority. This version of Crusoe shares little with recent mainstream iterations like *Lost*, *Survivor*, and *Castaway*, but might carry more resonance for a constituency that defines itself by its ability to comprehend and occasionally employ force. Examining the way Focus on the Family distinguishes their Crusoe from the standard contemporary version of the story — adding the second book, reducing nudity, flagging gore without excluding it, and ignoring adaptations — uncovers the ideological utility of *Robinson Crusoe* as encountered outside of the academy.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> All quotations from *Robinson Crusoe* and *Farther Adventures* come from the first editions of the texts unless indicated in the body of this article or attributed to Focus on the Family's editor Joe Wheeler in the parenthetical citation.

<sup>2</sup> The copy text used by Focus on the Family Great Stories editor Joe Wheeler for both *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* is the 1897 McLoughlin Brothers edition, itself a reprint of the 1891 Cassell edition, as Robert Lovett notes in his *Robinson Crusoe: A Bibliographical Checklist of English Language Editions, 1719–1979* (190). Both include the same Walter Paget illustrations used in the Focus on the Family editions. The Cassell edition's text is the basis for many recent editions or reprints of *Farther Adventures*, including those published by secular presses, for example, Reagent Press (2006) and Serenity Publishers (2009).

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<sup>3</sup> In this essay I use the term “evangelical Christian” to refer to the people that Focus on the Family and related organizations perceive as their North American constituency. Many North Americans self-identify as evangelical Christians without sharing all or any of the values attributed to evangelical Christians by coalitions claiming to represent them.

<sup>4</sup> I refer here to Stephen Baldwin, actor and brother of actors Alec, William and Daniel Baldwin, who detailed his conversion to evangelical Christianity with co-author Mark Tabb in *The Unusual Suspect: My Calling to the New Hardcore Movement of Faith*. Eileen Luhr provides an insightful introduction to Christian heavy metal in her essay “Metal Missionaries to the Nation: Heavy Metal Music, ‘Families,’ and Youth Culture, 1984–1994.” Ruth Marie Griffith’s *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* gives an excellent account of faith-based weight loss (141–50). For Christian weight training, see Kathleen Amende’s essay “Better than Sex: Working out with Jesus at the Lord’s Gym,” in *Shopping for Jesus*, ed. Dominic Jane.

<sup>5</sup> Founded in 2003 by Cory Burnell and Jim Taylor, Christian Exodus organizes its members to relocate to influence regional, and eventually national, political policy with the ultimate goal of forming an “independent Christian nation that will survive after the decline and fall of the financially and morally bankrupt American empire” ([www.christianexodus.org](http://www.christianexodus.org)). See Joanna Sweet and Martha F. Lee’s article, “Christian Exodus: A Modern American Millenarian Movement.” Families identifying themselves with Quiverfull eschew family planning, both in deference to Biblical prohibitions and as part of a missionary effort to spread Christianity by increasing Christian families. Kathryn Joyce’s *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement* gives a thorough history.

<sup>6</sup> Melissa Free traces the publication history of packaging *Farther Adventures* with *Robinson Crusoe* through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in “Un-Erasing Crusoe: *Farther Adventures* in the Nineteenth Century,” attributing the drastic decrease in editions of *Farther Adventures* to twentieth-century critics’ ideological investment in considering Crusoe the perfect proto-capitalist.

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed examination of the contrast between the educational philosophies of A. S. Neill and James Dobson, see Jackie Stallcup’s essay, “Power, Fear, and Children’s Picture Books.”

<sup>8</sup> According to Paula Backscheider, under the right leadership Nonconformist academies could provide an education superior to Oxford or Cambridge in terms of practical, useful knowledge. In contrast to students at Oxford or Cambridge, those at Charles Morton’s academy, which Defoe attended, took courses in English, studied modern languages, learned and applied the latest scientific research, and read a wider range of philosophy and theology, including the works of John Locke (15).

<sup>9</sup> Film and television adaptations of the Crusoe myth are plentiful enough to fuel chapters in several recent books, including *Approaches to Teaching Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe* and

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*Eighteenth Century Fiction on Screen*, as well as at least two dissertations: Anne Colvin's "The Celluloid Crusoe" and Sophia Nikoleishvili's "The Many Faces of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*."

<sup>10</sup> Armstrong's *Little Women* is widely categorized as a feminist update of the story because it makes Jo's marriage seem completely compatible with her budding career. Within the academy, the quality of the feminism the film represents is debatable. Linda Grasso attacks Armstrong's *Little Women* for portraying feminism as a *fait accompli*, while Karen Hollinger and Teresa Winterhalter criticize the film for being ahistorical but finally find it valuable as a reflection of contemporary women's desires.

<sup>11</sup> In both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Farther Adventures*, Wheeler discusses his editorial work in identical sections labeled "About This Edition." He writes, "It has been a formidable task to update, and make more readable, this three centuries' old icon. I do not think it has ever been done before. Let me explain: First, the language was generally archaic. What was most confusing was not the words themselves, but their current usage and connotations. Frequently, after reading a section I would shake my head and think, *What is Defoe saying?* Individually, the words made sense, but the way in which they were grouped was sometimes unclear. I decided to resort to my unabridged dictionary and dig backward in time. Once I discovered what the word meant to Defoe, I could understand what he was saying . . . To help the reader I either footnoted the term or phrase (by far the easiest option) or found substitute words that were used during the eighteenth century. Second, the book is filled with sentence-paragraph monstrosities . . . I found them hard to restructure without appearing heavy-handed. In most cases, I left the paragraphs as they were, only breaking them up where I found significant topic shifts or change of speaker. Third, and even more of a problem, there were no chapter divisions or subheadings to break up the text . . . I reread the text carefully to see if I could find built-in chapter breaks. Fortunately, Defoe's text has a rhythm to it that made these breaks fairly easy to determine. As for chapter titles, I tried whenever possible to use Defoe's own words (often borrowed from running heads in the original text). Fourth, I wanted to bring back what has been virtually lost during the last century: marvelous woodcut illustrations" (Wheeler, *Robinson Crusoe* xii-xiii; Wheeler, *Farther Adventures* xiii, italics in original).

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