

Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*. Ed. Evan R. Davis. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2010. Pp. 442. \$13.95. ISBN: 978-1-5511-1935-9.

Evan R. Davis's fine edition of *Robinson Crusoe* for Broadview joins an already well-populated field of classroom paperbacks of Defoe's first novel. Penguin Classics and Oxford World's Classics both offer good editions (edited by John Richetti and Thomas Keymer, respectively), as does W. W. Norton, with the Norton Critical Edition edited by Michael Shinagel. The Broadview edition holds its own in this company, and offers much to recommend itself. It provides everything one would want from a text for classroom use (or for reading outside the classroom, for that matter): a reliable text, annotations that are clear and sufficient without being obtrusive, and an intelligent and thoughtful editor's introduction. Moreover, it provides a rich selection of supplementary materials—including a truly surprising number of illustrations—aimed at provoking classroom discussion or simply thoughtful reflection.

First and foremost, Davis's approach to the text of the novel is quite sensible ("conservative" is the word he chooses [39], though one might say "judicious"). In an informative note on the text, Davis describes the novel's flurry of early authorized printings and explains his choice of the first edition for his copytext: no subsequent edition has any greater textual authority (there being no reason to think Defoe was involved in directing such changes as they display), and the second, third, and fourth editions were produced by multiple printers in tandem, meaning that variations in accidentals in these are likely the result of differing compositorial practice in different houses.¹ Davis's text preserves the first edition's spellings (inconsistent as they sometimes are throughout the book), as well as its use of italics and initial capitals. The text presented is essentially a transcription of the British Library's C.30.f.6 (microfilmed as part of *The Eighteenth Century* and now available through *Eighteenth-*

Century Collections Online) with minimal emendation. Obvious compositor's errors (reversed sorts, for example) have been silently corrected, as have the points identified in the published errata list. Additionally, punctuation from later editions has been adopted in a small number of cases where the meaning of the first edition's prose was "seriously undermined" (39). (There are thirty-eight such cases, all enumerated in a table. This table does not indicate which edition supplies the adopted reading, but such a degree of textual fastidiousness is probably beyond the scope of a classroom paperback.) The resulting text, Davis suggests, may not offer readers the same ease they would find in a more liberally modernized edition, but preserves the novel's "characteristically Defoeian style" (39). This is a reasonable approach for an edition of this sort. Readers new to early eighteenth-century texts (students or otherwise) may need a little time to get accustomed to unfamiliar-looking print, but should acclimate quickly.²

This solid text is generously annotated, with the needs of undergraduate students in mind.³ All notes are given at the foot of the page, which some will welcome (as it makes them more easily accessible than if one had to flip to the back of the book) and some will deplore (as they are harder to ignore than they would be if they were tucked away at the end). Some of the notes helpfully sketch in bits of historical context, identify sources of allusions, or explicate passages that might be obscure (including stretches of nautical terms, for instance). The bulk of the annotations, however, are simple, efficient glosses of words and usages that may be unfamiliar even to generally well-prepared students. It is precisely glosses of the kind Davis provides, encountered when they themselves were students, that likely provide the bulk of the casual background knowledge that experts enjoy: if you already know what "oakum" is, you probably have an editor like Davis to thank for it. Davis's notes are explanatory, but rarely—if, indeed, ever—interpretive: he offers readers information for comprehending the text they are reading without really nudging them towards any particular understanding of the novel. This, it seems to me, is just what one would want in a text intended for classroom use.

This is not to say that Davis offers no guidance in approaching *Robinson Crusoe*. In his introduction to the volume, Davis frames *Crusoe* as an extraordinarily fertile cultural myth, one that condensed a range of cultural concerns—religious, psychological, political, and commercial—that Defoe, in 1719, was almost uniquely positioned to synthesize in fiction, and one that has given rise since to innumerable adaptations and revisions. Davis capably situates the novel in the context of Defoe's life and career, explaining both how his position as a Dissenter and sometime man of commerce inform the intersection of spiritual and economic thought in the novel and how his experience as a poet, journalist, and political writer prepared him for the attention to particulars in narrative that characterizes his fiction.

In his introduction, Davis singles out for especial consideration two broad themes—the novel's interest in the figure of the castaway as the occasion for reflecting

on the nature of solitude, and Crusoe's implication in systems of colonialism and slavery that conditioned Britain's commercial fortunes in the period. On both heads, he offers thoughtful accounts that direct attention to the novel's complexities and ambivalences. Noting Defoe's probable familiarity with stories of castaways like Selkirk and others, Davis observes that Defoe is never a wholesale appropriator of such stories: while *Crusoe* may resemble them in some particulars, Defoe often writes with quite different ideological and narrative ends in mind. "Defoe's literary tendency," Davis cautions, "was to synthesize and transform, not to plagiarize" (22). In scrutinizing Defoe's fictional technique for rendering Crusoe's first person account of his solitude, which amalgamates (sometimes confusingly) contemporaneous journal-keeping with retrospective assessment, Davis suggests that the novel "socializes solitude," raising the matter of individual experience to universal significance (23–4). As we read Crusoe both registering and reflecting on what passes in his own mind and spirit, we are invited to reflect on the fundamental solitude of mental experience.

Davis turns from the individual to the social in his examination of Crusoe's relationship with Friday, which serves as a lens, in his account, for considering the slave economy that undergirds the world of transoceanic commerce. Certain of Defoe's other works, as Davis notes, indicate that he was aware of and not entirely indifferent to the human costs of slavery. But of course neither did he condemn it as an institution. Seeing slavery as indispensably requisite to the plantation trade, Defoe passes over it without overt comment as an economic given, an enabling element in the matrix of commerce through which Crusoe moves. While Crusoe appears, as Davis says, "blissfully disinclined" to examine the question of slavery directly, however, Davis notes that we may detect traces of Defoe's own ambivalent sense of its place in the world he represents (27). Crusoe's very reticence to call Friday a slave, Davis argues, together with his elaborate account of Friday's Christian education (the greatest spiritual beneficiary of which may be Crusoe himself), show the fantasy work involved in reconciling the spiritual and economic strains in Defoe's fictional account: "Friday performs the labor of a slave while obviating the anxieties that accompanied the system of slavery" (29).⁴ By framing Crusoe's relationship with Friday in this way, Davis prepares readers to grapple with what Crusoe does not say as much as with what he does.

It is the supplementary materials, ultimately, that differentiate Broadview's editions from their competitors', and Davis has assembled a good collection of sources to extend students' senses of the issues highlighted by his introduction.⁵ These include texts that help to situate *Crusoe* in the context of Defoe's career as an author; selections from contemporary castaway narratives; religious, poetic, and philosophical discussions of solitude; economic writings; selections from other works by Defoe touching on slavery; and European accounts of cannibals, from the fanciful to the quasi-anthropological. Without delving into the details of the various selections, it is

worth noting that the readings stretch both backward and forward in time from the publication of *Crusoe*, allowing students to explore both the novel's antecedents and texts that it can plausibly be said to have influenced. Likewise, the readings range across genres and forms, taking in philosophical and religious writings, economic and commercial treatises, fiction, and poetry, and so offer students a number of different perspectives on the questions that Davis highlights. Of particular interest are the illustrations included in the volume. In addition to reproductions of the frontispiece and title page of the first edition, students will find the map of Crusoe's island from the *Serious Reflections* and the world map of Crusoe's voyages from the *Farther Adventures* (this last, delightfully, is a fold-out, so that the details of the map are actually legible—though just). Most striking, however, is an appendix of ten pictorial representations (ranging from 1720 to 1913) of the moment when Friday places Crusoe's foot on his head. This collection of images offers fruitful possibilities for exploring the ways we might read that encounter by examining the different ways that the scene has been imagined in the past. I do wish that more bibliographical information had been provided for the images so that readers could get a clearer sense of the conditions under which *Crusoe* came to be illustrated.⁶ But the images themselves provide too rich a teaching resource to quibble with, and Davis directs interested readers to David Blewett's *The Illustration of "Robinson Crusoe," 1719–1920* (1995), so enterprising students can pursue the matter further.

Evan Davis's edition of *Robinson Crusoe* offers a very good teaching text with valuable supplementary materials. It makes *Crusoe* accessible to undergraduates and its provocations to further exploration make it suitable for graduate courses as well.

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NOTES

¹ There were, Davis notes, six identifiable editions between late April and early August 1719—even before the appearance of the *Farther Adventures*—though the title pages of the third and fourth editions both read “The Third edition,” while the title pages of the fifth and sixth editions, similarly, both read “The Fourth edition.”

² Michael Shinagel pursues a similar textual policy for the Norton Critical Edition. John Richetti, by contrast, articulates plausible reasons for his somewhat more liberal treatment of the first edition text for the Penguin edition (which dispenses with many initial capitals and regularizes—though without modernizing—that edition's inconsistent spellings).

³ In a piece for the alumni magazine of Hampden Sydney College, Davis notes that he approached the annotation of Defoe's text by asking his students what sorts of things they

felt they needed to have explained and enlisting their aid in tracking down answers to questions that they themselves raised (Davis 2010). The notes are, as a consequence, well suited for first-time readers of the novel who may have little background in writings of the period.

- ⁴ Though Crusoe instructs Friday to call him “Master” and sets him to work as though his labor were entirely at Crusoe’s disposal, Friday is not precisely Crusoe’s slave—Crusoe calls him many things (“my savage,” “my man,” “friend,” and “faithful, loving, sincere Servant,” as Davis notes [27]), but never a slave. Even in the famous scene in which Friday places Crusoe’s foot on his head “in token of swearing to be [Crusoe’s] Slave for ever,” Crusoe does not exactly endorse the label (218).
- ⁵ The Norton Critical Edition also provides supplementary readings, and there is a small amount of overlap between the Broadview’s choices and the Norton’s: both offer multiple accounts of Alexander Selkirk, both include Defoe’s Preface to the *Serious Reflections* (as does the Oxford World’s Classics edition), and both include an excerpt from Charles Gildon’s *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Mr. D— De F—* (1719). The Norton edition, of course, provides excerpts from scholarly treatments of the novel, whereas the Broadview focuses on primary contextual documents. Davis does include a lengthy and good bibliography for further reading. Students wishing to pursue research on the novel will do well to begin with the leads that he provides.
- ⁶ At least two of the images (the first and third) are drawn from French translations, for instance, and it seems significant that the “sixth” edition of 1722 (from which the second image is drawn) was the first to be “adorned with cuts” (as the title pages of both the octavo and duodecimo issues indicate).

WORKS CITED

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