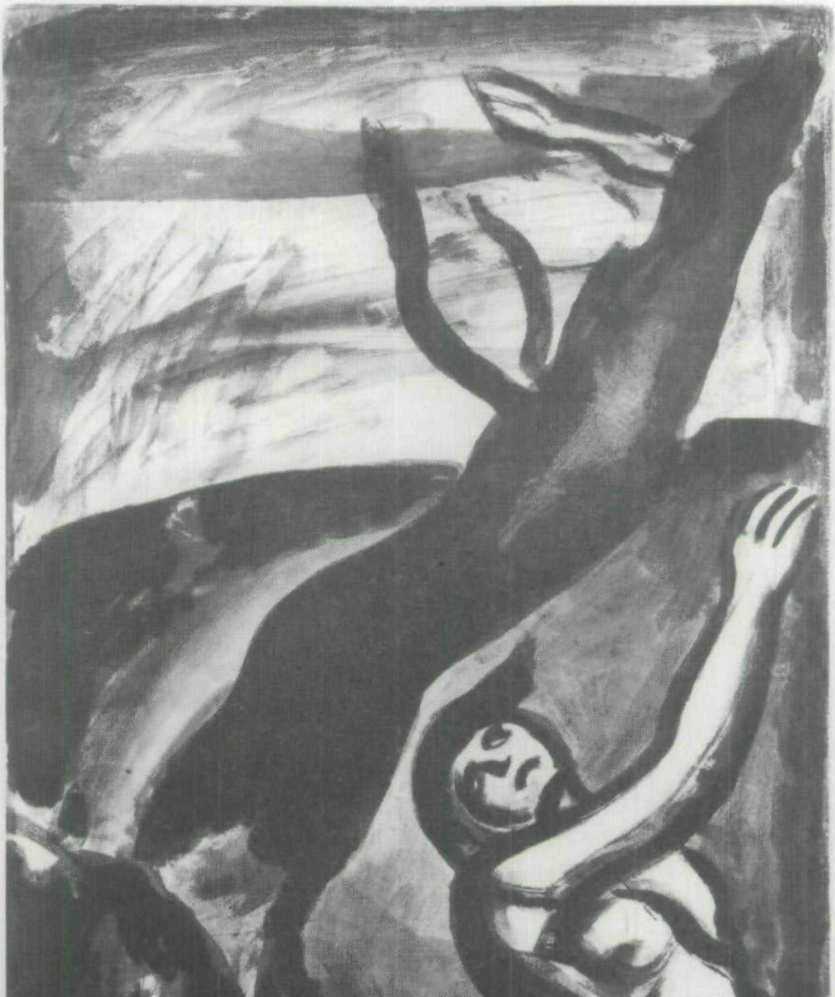

Tomorrow will be beautiful,
said the shipwrecked man . . .
From the *Miserere* Series
(Aquatint, drypoint and etching)
(French)

Georges Rouault
(1871-1958)

© 1997 Haggerty Museum of Art (58.1.11)
Marquette University
Gift of Mr. Leonard J. Scheller

Daniel E. Ritchie

ROBINSON CRUSOE AS NARRATIVE THEOLOGIAN

DANIEL Defoe's three volumes of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719-20) appeared at a time of great change in biblical hermeneutics. As described by one of the founders of "narrative theology," Hans Frei, western reading of the Bible up to the eighteenth century was "strongly realistic, i.e., at once literal and historical, not only doctrinal or edifying" (*Eclipse* 1). Under the pressure of the historical-critical method, however, historical readings of Scripture began to split apart from the "edifying" ones. I hope to show that Defoe's volumes reflect both the earlier, unified reading of Scripture, and the contemporary split. In the first and most well-known volume, *Robinson Crusoe* reflects an earlier reading of Scripture. There, the biblical narratives are considered "true" in that Crusoe comes to recognize the authority of biblical narratives for the purpose of reinterpreting his past life and for shaping his future life. He comes to understand his own life story as he learns to interpret it with respect to sacred stories. That is, Crusoe learns to "read" his life by orienting his own patterns of experience with respect to the stories of Scripture, rather in the manner of recent narrative theologians. By contrast, the second and third volumes (and especially their prefaces) give evidence of the hermeneutical shift taking place. There, Defoe becomes extremely concerned about the "truth"—by which he means the historical verifiability—of the narrative and his fictional character. Rather in the manner of the emerging historical-critical readers of Scripture of the early eighteenth century, Defoe's reading of his own novels begins to separate their "edifying" meaning from their historically unverifiable fictions.

The split between "the edifying" and "the historical" has had large consequences for the reading of Scripture since the eighteenth century. Those consequences may be seen in church history in the split between "the historical Jesus" and the "Christ of Faith." They may also be seen in the Enlightenment assumption, still held by many religious liberals and conservatives of today, that the fictive elements of a narrative cannot have any claim to truth (see Green 81). Having recognized the fictive elements of Scripture, liberals have sought to locate biblical meaning in various kinds of nonhistorical areas (myth, existential affirmation, etc.), while conservatives have labored all the harder to verify the historical accuracy of Scripture. Both sides, however, share the assumption that the "plain sense" of sacred history would, in principle, emerge from a scientific

REN 49.2 (Winter 1997)

reconstruction of the biblical world and its events, particularly the events of the life of Jesus. Recent narrative theologians have contested these assumptions. While acknowledging fictive elements, they have asserted the "history-like" character of biblical narrative, as distinct from the mythical character of Greek legends (see Frei, *Eclipse* 11-12). "[The] 'plain sense' of biblical stories is not their historical reference," writes narrative theologian Garrett Green, "but their narrative meaning. Quite simply, the meaning of the texts is the story they tell—'fictive' elements and all!" (91).

In this essay I hope to demonstrate that the terms of recent narrative theology may give us a way of understanding why *Robinson Crusoe* has pleased more readers than its sequels.[1] In the first volume of *Robinson Crusoe*, the pre-critical hermeneutics of Scripture—the assumed unity of the Bible's narrative meaning and fictive elements—translates into the way Crusoe interprets his own life. I hope to show, however, after the first volume, that Defoe becomes immersed in disputes that parallel those of the emerging, critical reading of Scripture, especially when he shows concern about the split between the edifying and the historical significance of his story. Along the way, I hope to show that it is more fruitful to "historicize" the novel by restoring Crusoe's pre-critical reading of his life through the perspective of biblical narrative than by recent attempts (suggestive though they are) to view it in terms of imprisonment, cannibalism, or Crusoe's own acquisitive desires.[2]

Along with H. Richard Niebuhr, Stephen Crites, and Erich Auerbach, Hans Frei is viewed as one of the founders of narrative theology. Frei saw that in pre-critical readings of Scripture, neither Christian doctrines nor the historical events recounted in the Bible had any significance apart from the larger narrative context in which they occurred. The world described by the narratives of the Bible was considered to be the "primary world," from which everything else derived its significance. In his well-known contrast between the effect of Homeric fiction and that of biblical literature, Erich Auerbach wrote,

> The Bible's claim to truth is not only far more urgent than Homer's, it is tyrannical—it excludes all other claims. The world of the Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality—it insists that it is the only real world, is destined for autocracy. All other scenes, issues, and ordinances have no right to appear independently of it, and it is promised that all of them, the history of all mankind, will be given their due place within its frame, will be subordinated to it. (12)

Before the rise of the historical-critical method, there was ultimately only the one, single world of the biblical narratives, wrote Frei, and it was the reader's duty to find his or her story in it (*Eclipse* 2-3). In Stephen Crites's explanation, the "sacred stories" of a culture "are not like monuments that men behold, but like dwelling places. People live in them" (295). And when people begin to tell their *own* stories—"mundane stories," in Crites's terms—those stories attain their resonance as they clarify the contemporary world with respect to the culture's sacred stories (296-97). In the Enlightenment, however, the rational inquiry of the historical scholar, independent of the traditional interpretations of the Church, came to be viewed as the authoritative means of arriving at the literal meaning (or "plain sense") of the biblical text. To be sure, doctrinal statements about the Trinity or Creation, for instance, could still be made. Personal significance could still be derived from Scripture. But both doctrine and personal significance were, in principle, divorced from historical inquiry by Enlightenment scholars. Many of those scholars often believed in Christian doctrine and took its personal significance quite seriously; but they made the "true" meaning of the Bible entirely dependent upon their inquiries into the historical factuality of the scriptural narratives. The miracles, legends, and saga-like elements of the Bible were consequently relegated to positions of little importance. As Frei writes, when the value of a text came to be partly or wholly dependent upon its historical veracity, the narrative threatened to split. In his controversial writings of 1724 and 1727, for instance, the deist Anthony Collins maintained that because the *literal* sense of Isaiah 7:14 refers to a young woman in the days of King Ahaz, Matthew's claim to find the verse fulfilled in Christ's birth (Matt 1:22-23) is meaningless (*Eclipse* 66-69).

As the eighteenth century progressed, there was no longer "one story" in the Bible, no longer a single narrative in which one was challenged to find one's own story. Rather, there were numerous fragments, some of which were probably historically accurate, others not. The religious meaning of these fragments changed more with reference to prevailing intellectual trends rather than in continuity with the interpretations given by the community of Christians down through the ages.

Recently, narrative theologians have sought to bring together both historical-critical and pre-critical ways of reading Scripture. This kind of reading attempts to restore some of the ways of Bible reading that most of Defoe's audience took for granted. For instance, the meaning of a text is not detachable from the stories it tells (see Placher 8). In the face of modern critical readings and postmodern suspicious readings, the narrative theologians seek a "hermeneutics of restoration" (Frei, *Theology and Narrative* 130). They seek a "second naïveté" that locates the "plain sense" of Scripture not in its historical reference but in its full narrative meaning. Remarkably, for a movement so closely related to literary hermeneutics, narrative theology has been largely ignored by scholars who deal with earlier fiction.[3]

Defoe was part of a Protestant culture that was vigorously intellectual and energetically literary. During his time, the split between historical-critical and doctrinal-personal readings began to show itself. One can see it in Defoe's growing unease about writing a story that is "not true"—that is, fictional. He tried to keep up the pretense that Robinson Crusoe (like his later fictional characters) was a real man. When Defoe was derided by Charles Gildon for having written an allegory, he responded by accepting the criticism: "The story, though allegorical, is also historical," he wrote in the preface to *Serious Reflections* (ix). By the time he wrote the preface to the third volume, however, we see Defoe straddling the emerging gap between the historical realism of a story and its meaning.

We know from J. Paul Hunter and G. A. Starr that the narrative shape of *Robinson Crusoe* derives from Puritan literature. The basic pattern involves the Lord's providential doings before conversion, conversion itself, recovery, decay, and the subject's present position (see Starr 40). These autobiographies saw the Christian life as a narrative whole, often as a journey, in which the climactic moment was conversion.

Every Christian's life was therefore both typical and unique: the unique events of one's own life answered to the types provided by biblical narratives. The biblical narratives were accepted as true, "literally" true, without an independent inquiry into their historical factuality. Moreover, the one story of the believer's life answered to the "one story" of the Bible. Thus, the truth of *Pilgrim's Progress* rested, for contemporary readers, on the believable correspondences between the stories of the Bible, of Christian and his family, and of the readers themselves.

Recent narrative theology sees life in similar terms: "Christian narrative emerges from the collision between an individual's identity narrative and the narratives of the Christian community" (Stroup 95). "Collision" emphasizes the "disorientation and reinterpretation" that spiritual transformation causes. In the first volume of *Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe's life frequently collides with biblical types or narratives. These collisions produce the most striking illuminations of his sinfulness, his setbacks on the road to conversion, and later, his spiritual maturity. In this novel and in contemporary spiritual autobiographies, the reader could ultimately come to see that even the disasters of the believer's life were necessary for some providential purpose.

Robinson Crusoe appeals to its audience in a way that is analogous to the way biblical narratives have appealed to their audiences: most readers do not puzzle over the empirical truth of Crusoe's adventures any more than Bible readers puzzle over miracles. The audience finds the events "history-like," to use Auerbach's phrase. These events are "indispensable to the rendering of a particular character . . . or a particular story" (Frei, *Eclipse* 14). In short, there is a unity between narrative and meaning in this earlier reading of Scripture and in *Robinson Crusoe*, without any prior investigation of the narrative's historical verifiability.

An example from Psalm 78, which later has great significance for Crusoe, may help to clarify this unity. The Psalm recapitulates the history of the exodus and God's providential care for the people of Israel. In the opening twelve verses, however, the psalmist gives the reason for telling the story: by rightly hearing the story, our children may trust in God. Unlike the Israelites of the exodus, they may remember his works and keep his commandments (vs. 8). It does not occur to the psalmist, any more than it occurs to Crusoe, to inquire into the historicity of his narrative and to base its meaning only on the verifiable details. The whole psalm is a unity whose meaning is inseparable from the story it tells.

THIS kind of unity has evaporated by the time Defoe writes his preface to volume three. There is a gap between narrative and meaning that the Psalmist—and the Crusoe of volume one—would not have recognized. In the later preface, Defoe defends the first two volumes of *Robinson Crusoe* because of the "moral and religious Improvement" they bring. But this preface (and volume three as a whole) makes a peculiarly modern distinction between the historically dubious tale of Robinson Crusoe and its allegedly true meaning, even as Defoe desperately affirms its historicity:

> In a word, there's not a circumstance in the imaginary story, but has its just allusion to a real story, and chimes part for part, and step for step with the inimitable Life of Robinson Crusoe. . . . (*Serious Reflections* xi)

What is this "real story"? Many readers have seen in Defoe's own confinement in Newgate the "real history [that] is represented by a confined retreat in an island" (*Serious Reflections* xii). Paula Backscheider and John Bender, in particular, have shown the novel's relationship to both Defoe's imprisonment and contemporary views of the penitentiary. But more significant for my purpose is a prior question: why isn't the fictional *Robinson Crusoe* a "real story"? Why must there be an allusive relationship between the imaginary and the real, whether in Defoe's mind or in the minds of modern interpreters? The answer, with respect to Defoe, is that he has already begun to assume that "fiction" (including legend, saga, allegory, allusion) is the opposite of "real" and "true." If it cannot be empirically verified, the "fiction" is false, even if the *moral* of *Robinson Crusoe* is still true, as Defoe loudly asserts.

> Here is invincible patience recommended under the worst of misery; indefatigable application and undaunted resolution under the greatest and most discouraging circumstances; I say, these are recommended, as the only way to work through those miseries, and their success appears sufficient to support the most dead-hearted creature in the world. (*Serious Reflections* xii)

Defoe has come to believe that the moral truth of the novel can stand alone, apart from the "false" surrounding fictions. Earlier in the preface, however, he implies that true religious reflection depends upon historical verification in every particular.

> . . . [A]ll those parts of the story are real facts in my history, whatever borrowed lights they may be represented by. Thus the fright and fancies which succeeded the story of the print of a man's foot, and surprise of the old goat, and the thing rolling on my bed . . . the description of starving, the story of my man Friday, and many more most material passages observed here, *and on which any religious reflections are made, are all historical and true in fact*. (x-xi, emphasis added)

These words look back, in part, to the Puritan unease with fiction, familiar to English readers since Stephen Gosson's debate with Sir Philip Sidney. But the assumption that true religious meaning *depends upon* historical verification also looks forward. It looks forward to the assumed conflict between the origins (or reliability) of a text and its value. This conflict, which was just beginning to be felt in biblical criticism during Defoe's day, is already reflected by the preface: how can a narrative be true if its veracity is not susceptible to empirical investigations by a detached, rational observer? Defoe fears that if *Robinson Crusoe* is known to be fictional, it will also be considered meaningless.

I think it very likely that the audience for *Robinson Crusoe* has remained large, while that of the *Farther Adventures* and *Serious Reflections* is virtually non-existent, precisely because the conflicts in Crusoe's life are literally inseparable from the narrative's moral and religious meaning. In other words, *Robinson Crusoe* is "history-like" in that its representation of reality cannot be separated from its particular narrative. An early, influential biography by Walter Wilson (1830) corroborates this. Wilson, a dissenter, very much unites the realism of the novel with its religious significance:

> The fine sentiments that abound in *Crusoe*, its delicate touches, and pure morality, are not the least parts of its beauties, and give it a decided superiority over every other work of the same description. Whilst it instructs us in the development of the human powers, under the guidance of natural reason, it points to the Almighty as the source from whence man derives his capacities, and to whom his homage should be directed. The reader of *Crusoe* is taught to be a religious, whilst he is an animal being. But his lessons of this [religious] kind are no where out of place; they are closely interwoven with the story, and are so just and pertinent in themselves, that they cannot be passed over, but the attention is irresistibly rivetted to them as an essential part of the narrative. (Rogers 91)

Some of the most influential readings of *Robinson Crusoe*, beginning with that of Ian Watt, see the challenges before him as those of overcoming the environment and subjugating the persons with whom he comes in contact. But the deeper challenge is for Crusoe to learn to acknowledge God, and for his worldly actions to reflect a mature trust in Providence in each new scene of his life. The book is structured around Crusoe's growing trust in God. At each point where the narrative comes to either a lull or a point of high tension, Defoe invents a new series of incidents that push Crusoe to a higher level of trust in God.

In the early episodes of the novel, Crusoe passes up his many opportunities to learn from experience. Then, in the days following his shipwreck, Crusoe is beset by fear—the response considered by Defoe's contemporary Dissenters as the direct opposite to trusting in Providence. Crusoe still learns little. In the eight months after the shipwreck it becomes increasingly clear that Crusoe is going to escape starvation. But achieving a state of relative prosperity is not the climax of the narrative. The climax comes in the ninth month, when Crusoe falls deathly ill of a fever and dreams of an angel holding a spear: "Seeing all these things have not brought thee to Repentance, now thou shalt die," says the angel (87). At this point Crusoe's conscience begins to awaken. As a first step, he is led to acknowledge God's existence and providential control over nature. He even acknowledges his own misspent life. But these acknowledgments are the products of Crusoe's "natural" theology, the spiritual insight he can achieve without God's direct help. A saving knowledge of God must come from divine revelation. At this point we can start to see how Crusoe's pre-critical reading of Scripture works, especially the unity of story and meaning that it assumes.

As Crusoe begins to recover, he finds a Bible. Between doses of his medicine, Crusoe "opened the Book casually," reading the first words he finds: "Call on me in the Day of Trouble, and I will deliver, and thou shalt glorify me" (94; Ps. 50:15). Crusoe now begins to consider the possibility that his identity is captured and explained within the narratives of Scripture:

> The Words were very apt to my Case, and made some Impression upon my Thoughts at the Time of reading them, tho' not so much as they did afterwards; for as for being deliver'd the Word had no Sound, as I may say, to me; the Thing was so remote, so impossible in my Apprehension of Things, that I began to say as the Children of Israel did, when they were promis'd Flesh to eat, Can God spread a Table in the Wilderness [Ps. 78:19]? (94)

There are three parts to the "plot" of Psalm 50:15: calling on God, being delivered, and glorifying God. As he returns to health, Crusoe can now see how God has continually delivered him. "But I had not glorify'd him," he realizes (95-96). During his very next Bible reading, Crusoe places himself among the audience that listens to the testimony of Peter and the apostles: "[Christ] is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give Repentance, and to give Remission" (Acts 5:31). This verse calls forth Crusoe's own prayer for repentance, and enables him to understand the "deliverance" of Psalm 50 "in a different Sense from what I had ever done before" (96). That is, he seeks (and finds) deliverance from the guilt of his past life, compared to which deliverance from the island would be a figure or analogy. The two passages in Psalms and Acts are quite brief, but their brevity does not diminish the effectiveness of the narrative sequence, as both Crusoe and recent theologians recognize (see Frei, *Theology and Narrative* 208). The continued popularity of *Robinson Crusoe*, especially among Christian readers, probably rests on moments like these, where the realism of the spiritual narrative is united with the realism of the island adventure. This unity makes Crusoe a biblical Everyman, recapitulating in his island existence the drama common to everyone who learns to trust God.

BEGINNING with his climactic conversion, Crusoe begins to find his world in the stories of Scripture. During the next decade he recognizes that his life is indeed described by Psalm 78:19—God's Table is spread in the Wilderness—as he learns to make clothes and pottery and becomes a baker and goatherd. He also comes back to Psalm 50:15 during the next turning point of his life, a crisis that I shall discuss at length below, when he discovers a human footprint on the island and fear again threatens to overmaster him (153).

Equally important, Crusoe now begins to reinterpret his past life (before conversion) in terms of biblical narrative. As in other contemporary autobiographies, conversion is the most significant plot element of the story: the subplots make sense when viewed from its perspective. In parallel fashion, recent narrative theology helps one see how conversion becomes the central "plot" element in establishing the Christian identity of the individual believer. As George Stroup explains, the believer's past self-understanding comes into question at the moment of conversion and must be reworked. The previous elements of his life are reinterpreted, now as indispensable elements of a new self-understanding that is re-oriented around Christ (Stroup 116-17). As his identity is re-formed by Christian narrative, Crusoe is able to look back at his original opposition to his father as his "original sin" (194). It is important to note that this mode of self-understanding provides Crusoe with a hermeneutic for his life story: now that his past and present life make sense in the terms of biblical narratives, he can see the truth of a fictional story like the Prodigal Son for his own life. In other words, Defoe's narrative does not make the Enlightenment distinction between empirically verifiable/true *versus* fictional/false. Instead, his character grants the claims that the "history-like" stories of Scripture make over the believer's life.

The biblical narratives provide a structure for *Robinson Crusoe*, but they are unobtrusive enough that many modern scholars may underestimate their importance. Instead, they treat *Robinson Crusoe* as a novel about economics and survival, in which theology provides Crusoe with a way to internalize his own desires (McKeon 323) or to rationalize his underlying capitalist manner of life (Watt 105-06). Michael McKeon, for instance, dismissively describes Crusoe's climactic reading of Psalms and Acts as listless experiments with "bibliomancy" (317)—a term that hardly does justice to Crusoe's later study of Scripture.

Even in the passages where Crusoe's economic concerns are prominent, his growing understanding of Providence is usually more fundamental. During his third year on the island, for instance, Crusoe's barley and rice crops are increasing so fast that "I really wanted to build my Barns bigger," he says (123). This would enable him to plant only once a year rather than twice. This plan—which he does not carry out—is almost certainly an allusion to the foolish man who longs for greater barns (Luke 12:18-21) The man in the parable—who never carries out his plan either—is not "rich toward God." Immediately thereafter, another plan begins to obsess Crusoe: to build an immense canoe to leave the island. The project costs him six months of fruitless labor, for Crusoe finds it impossible to move the huge craft from the construction site to the water (127). In reflecting on this, he alludes to Luke 14:28 in remarking "the Folly of beginning a Work before we count the Cost." The point of these allusions is that Crusoe is learning to interpret his own narrative by means of biblical narratives.

As the fourth anniversary of his shipwreck approaches, he says that his "constant Study, and serious Application of the Word of God" had produced

> a different Notion of Things. I look'd upon the World as a Thing remote, which I had nothing to do with . . . and well might I say, as Father Abraham to Dives, Between me and thee is a great Gulph fix'd. (128; cf. Luke 16:19-31)

The word "as" is significant. It implies the possibility of a plurality of perspectives on just what "the real world" is. Crusoe invites us to accept his perspective—but his own perspective may be radically flawed, as recent historicizing work by McKeon and others tends to assume. Or (as I would maintain) Crusoe may not be capable of sustaining this perspective throughout his entire fictional, three-volume life. The large amount of religious material in volumes two and three may not have the power of *Robinson Crusoe* because Defoe's narrator and characters no longer face fruitful collisions between one's ordinary perspective and the perspective offered by Scripture.

The narrative theologian Garrett Green describes the significance of "as" in these terms:

> Kant called "is" the copula of judgment; we can call "as" the copula of imagination. In this quite technical sense, imagination is common to the natural scientist, the poet, and the religious believer. . . With the help of this concept of imagination as the "as" faculty, we can give conceptual precision to Paul Ricoeur's suggestive distinction between a "first" and a "second naïveté." (Green 89)

For Crusoe, this "second naïveté" means that he views the pre-shipwreck "world" as the distant, tormenting fires of Christ's parable. On the island, by contrast, there is an immediate connection between Crusoe's plans—whether to build barns or canoes—and their true value in God's eyes. The connection is that of Providence. In this setting, coveting more grain or wine or timber than he can use is obviously and immediately foolish, as Crusoe comes to realize. By contrast, prudential plans and temperate consumption are rewarded.

By this time, four years into his island existence, Crusoe is taking major steps on his pilgrimage. Although his steps are often backward as well as forward, he knows which direction is the correct one. His life frequently answers to Psalm 78, which prompts him to "admir[e] the Hand of God's providence, which had thus spread my Table in the

Wilderness" (130). He is learning, through successes and follies, that his life can indeed run in the providential patterns of the Psalmists and gospel writers.

The significance of Crusoe's life is not reducible to the abstract values that he later identifies (prudence, temperance, etc.), nor to the ideologies of sociopolitical control identified by recent readers. Rather, prudence, temperance, and the other qualities Crusoe needs for a good life on the island have been developed through recognizing the intersection between the events of his life and the narratives of Scripture.

Crusoe's chief conflict has been to understand the narrative of his life in terms of the stories of the Bible. He treats the Bible as "true" in the sense that he gradually comes to recognize the authority of its stories for the purpose of reinterpreting his past life and shaping his future life. The earlier and more famous volume of *Robinson Crusoe*, in contrast with its sequels, gives us a picture of how a fiction becomes history-like when it appropriates the narratives of Scripture to establish the identity of its protagonist.

BY his fifteenth year on the island, Crusoe appears to be leading a balanced Christian life. At this point, Defoe interrupts Crusoe's calm in a way that will force him back to Scripture so that he can attain a higher level of trust in God:

> It happen'd one Day about Noon going toward my Boat, I was exceedingly surpriz'd with the Print of a Man's naked Foot on the Shore. . . . I stood like one Thunderstruck, or as if I had seen an Apparition. (153)

Crusoe is immediately overwhelmed with a fear of cannibals. This "Fear banish'd all my religious Hope; all that former Confidence in God which was founded upon such wonderful experience as I had of his Goodness, now vanished . . ." (156).

As in his conversion, Crusoe looks back to Psalm 50:15 in the current crisis: "Call upon me in the Day of Trouble, and I will deliver, and thou shalt glorify me." But Crusoe finds himself unable to do this successfully. Instead, he thinks of releasing his goats and plowing under his grain. He begins to look upon his dwelling as a "castle," which he fortifies and conceals again, as he had done in the fearful days before his conversion. In short, the incident subjects him to "the constant Snare of the Fear of Man," and prevents him from "resting upon [God's] Providence" (159). After several wasted years, he begins to ask whether he should consider himself the executioner of the cannibals. "How do I know what God himself judges in this particular Case?" he asks (171). Since God alone is the "governor of nations," he concludes, he decides to avoid intervening altogether "unless I had a more clear Call from Heaven to do it, in Defence of my own Life" (173).

After this point, Crusoe makes no further advances in his outward manner of life (176). But as with his earlier crises the narrative is really leading in another, inner direction. It is leading Crusoe to renew and deepen his trust in God, through identifying the truth of his life with a fuller knowledge of Scripture. Since Crusoe already sees his own "mundane story" (to return to Stephen Crites' phrase) in terms of biblical stories, his next step will be different from the earlier ones. Crusoe is ready to understand how he is an active participant in providential history.

Although Crusoe achieves some peace of mind by deciding he will probably not attack the cannibals, his despair over the lack of society increases to near insanity. As the happiness of Crusoe needed interrupting after his first fifteen years, so his despair in the twenty-fifth year needs interrupting now. Crusoe goes so far as to consider breaking up a cannibal feast to get one or more slaves. At the very next visit of the cannibals, one of their victims escapes, running directly toward Crusoe as two of the cannibals pursue him. Crusoe kills one and the fugitive kills the other, leaving the fugitive free. Thus commences the relationship between Crusoe and his "man Friday," which continues for their final three years on the island. This is the first of several incidents in which Crusoe is able to understand himself as an agent of Providence, saving the lives of Friday and several others, one of whom is the captain of the ship that will return Crusoe to Europe.

Some modern readers have suggested that Crusoe treats Friday as little more than a slave. Defoe makes it clear, however, that Friday's "conversation"—their relationship as a whole, and not the services he provides—makes their years "perfectly and compleatly happy" (220). The first fifteen years charted Crusoe's growing ability to see how God had "spread a table for him in the wilderness." The next nine had forced him to come to terms with his fear of cannibals. The final three years show Crusoe capable of bringing the blessings of Providence to others, especially in the physical and later the spiritual salvation of Friday.

Defoe does not explore Friday's conversion in any detail. The narrative purpose of Friday's conversion is rather to lead to deeper growth in Crusoe. The episode shows that Crusoe's knowledge of Scripture is broad enough to convey to Friday "the same plain Instruction" that had earlier taught Crusoe "the great Work of sincere Repentance for my Sins, and . . . Obedience to all God's Commands" (221). He ultimately comes to admire Friday as a "much better [Christian] than I" (220). For instance, Friday speaks of returning to his own land (along with Crusoe) to teach his people to "know God, pray God, and live new Life" (226). This relationship, like the previous climactic incidents in the book—Crusoe's shipwreck, illness, and discovery of the footprint—push Crusoe to a new level of trust in and understanding of his life in biblical perspective.

From this point on, Crusoe experiences few inner conflicts. Nor are there any more incidents that cause significant growth in his life. The narratives of Scripture diminish in importance. The end of the novel, like the first sequel, reads more like an adventure tale with a Christian character rather than the tale of a man whose character is being fashioned in mysterious harmony with biblical narratives.

THERE is quite as much "religious" matter in volume two, *Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, but Crusoe has nothing to learn in this later book. This is not to say the religious material is uninteresting: Crusoe has significant ecumenical discussions with a Catholic priest; the priest wishes to perform marriages for the men and women who live together on Crusoe's old island; the crew on Crusoe's vessel later sack and massacre a village in Madagascar; and Crusoe's constant preaching on "the Massacre of Madagascar" ultimately leads to his being discharged from the ship at Bengal, where his adventures continue.

The most significant treatment of religion in the second volume is the lengthy conversion of Will Atkins and his wife, Mary, a native woman (140-63). This set of scenes is rather disconnected. Defoe's interest in the first part seems to be the Catholic priest's insistence that, prior to marrying them, Will and Mary profess Christian faith. Defoe then turns to the oddity of this priest participating in a Protestant conversion. Will Atkins's relationship with his father, a reprise of Crusoe's own, comes next. Finally, Defoe concludes with a catechetical dialogue between Will and Mary, similar to the conversations in Defoe's earlier work, *The Family Instructor* (1715). There is no narrative connection among these scenes that can compare with Crusoe's struggle to learn how to trust in God. Significant religious issues arise, but they arise more in the form of argument than narrative. Unlike the reader's experience in *Robinson Crusoe*, the reader has not sufficiently participated in the life of Will or Mary Atkins to see how their new Scriptural perspective collides with that of their former life.

Later in the second volume, Crusoe visits the Chinese port city of Quinchang, where he makes critical observations on Catholic missionary activity. Crusoe afterwards embarks on a bizarre, religious holy war against some pagans of the Russian plains, destroying an idol and proposing the slaughter of an entire village as vengeance for a Russian who was sacrificed to the idol. (The difference between the heathens of

Madagascar and the pagans of Russia seems to be that the pagans are actively engaged in idol worship.) Defoe returns to this theme in *Serious Reflections*, in which he has Crusoe propose a bloody "crusado" against the Muslims and Chinese (who administer "the kingdom of the devil") "for Gospel labourers to enter upon the harvest" (240).

It is almost as if, by the third volume, Defoe has forgotten the narrative use of Scripture. *Serious Reflections*, in fact, is a series of essays (on solitude, honesty, providence, etc.) and not a tale at all. Scripture has become merely a set of doctrines or illustrative examples. The doctrines, however edifying or meaningful, make few demands on Crusoe. Perhaps this is because their edifying material is divorced from the historical truth of the biblical narratives, and the narrator of the later volumes no longer believes he can discover the truth through fictional material. There is no fruitful clash between Crusoe's story and the scriptural narratives that had earlier formed the basis for his identity. When Crusoe refers to Scripture at all, it merely confirms what he already "knows." For instance, in the discussion of the "crusado" in *Serious Reflections*, Crusoe refers to the Israelites' conquest of Canaan to justify military operations against pagans (224). But in *Robinson Crusoe*, Scripture did not justify Crusoe: it showed his shortcomings and pointed to the need for transformation. Scripture is discussed and applied to life in this volume, but it is not the primary means for interpreting one's life. It is not "the real world" anymore. By the time of *Serious Reflections*, Defoe has abstracted the fictional narrative of the book from its "meaning." The book's very structure—true, non-fiction essays as opposed to false, fictional narrative—illustrates the hermeneutical shift that was taking place.

Narrative theologians have encouraged us to recover a "second naïveté" that restores the full meaning of Scripture by understanding the life of the believer within the narratives of the Bible. This approach to Scripture is different from an exclusive reliance upon the modern hermeneutics of higher criticism or upon the postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion. *Robinson Crusoe* shows us how a fictional character enters that "second naïveté." When he begins to see that the world he encounters in Scripture is the real world, his entire life begins to make sense for the first time. The language of this world, biblical language, merges with that of his own narrative. Crusoe finds that the truths of biblical narratives are validated in his own narrative. But when Defoe begins to hesitate over the validity of Crusoe's fictional narrative, he is mirroring a larger hermeneutical change. In the emerging hermeneutics of the Enlightenment, an unverifiable narrative like Crusoe's cannot lead to truth, although the meaning that one detaches from that narrative may be valid. Narrative theology has recently begun to suggest ways for us to recombine narrative and meaning. Both Defoe's first volume of *Robinson Crusoe* and his later hesitations may have wider significance than we have yet realized for the way modern readers recognize the truth of fictional narratives.

Notes

1) Following the original printings of these books, the first sequel (*Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, 1719) is usually designated "volume two" and *Serious Reflections* "volume three" of the series. I have used this designation as well, reserving *Robinson Crusoe* to refer, as usual, to the famous volume one, *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*.

2) These three readings come, respectively, from John Bender, Carol Flynn, and Michael McKeon.

3) Frei's major work, for instance, was reviewed in only three journals that keep abreast of literary studies, *TLS*, *Yale Review*, and *Philosophy and Literature*. See the bibliography in Green (200-01).

Works Cited

Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trans. Willard Trask. Garden City, NY: Doubleday-Anchor, 1957.

Backscheider, Paula. *Daniel Defoe: His Life*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989.

Bender, John. *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.

Crites, Stephen. "The Narrative Quality of Experience." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39 (1971): 291-311.

Defoe, Daniel. *Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. Vol. 1 of *The Works of Daniel Defoe*. 16 vols. Philadelphia: John D. Morris, 1903.

___. *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. Ed. J. Donald Crowley. London: Oxford UP, 1972.

___. *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. Vol. 2 of *The Works of Daniel Defoe*. 16 vols. Philadelphia: John D. Morris, 1903.

Flynn, Carol Houlihan. *The Body in Swift and Defoe*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990.

Frei, Hans W. *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1974.

___. *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*. Eds. William C. Placher and George Hunsinger. New York: Oxford UP. 1993.

Green, Garrett. "'The Bible As . . .': Fictional Narrative and Scriptural Truth. *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation*. Ed. Garrett Green. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987. 79-96.

Hunter, J. Paul. *The Reluctant Pilgrim: Defoe's Emblematic Method and Quest for Form in* Robinson Crusoe. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1966.

McKeon, Michael. *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987.

Placher, William C. Introduction. *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*. By Hans W. Frei. Eds. William C. Placher and George Hunsinger. New York: Oxford UP. 1993. 3-25.

Rogers, Pat, ed. *Defoe: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge, 1972.

Starr, G. A. *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1965.

Stroup, George W. *The Promise of Narrative Theology: Recovering the Gospel in the Church*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1981.

Watt, Ian. "*Robinson Crusoe* as a Myth." *Essays in Criticism* (April 1951): 95-119.

Copyright of Renascence is the property of Marquette University. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.