

BA-thesis English Language and Culture

Puritanism in *Robinson Crusoe*

Call on Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver, and thou shalt glorify Me.
(Psalm 50:15)

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Introduction

According to the Biblical book of Jonah once upon a time a man was sent by God to preach at the wicked city of Nineveh. He did not want to go, disobeyed and fled by taking a ship to Tarshish. The ship nearly perished in a great storm. Then the crew cast lots and the lot fell on God's servant, because he was the cause of this storm, since he had sinned against God. This man, whose name was Jonah, was then thrown into the sea and swallowed up by a great fish. In the fish he prayed to God, thanking Him for his deliverance. When God spoke to him a second time he decided to obey God and preach to the people of Nineveh (Jonah 1). A similar story is told by Daniel Defoe in his famous novel *Robinson Crusoe*. Robinson Crusoe, against the will of his father, leaves England by ship to see foreign countries. Within a few days Robinson meets a great storm during which his conscience begins to speak. When all is over he feels quite comfortable again. A second storm is as mighty as Jonah's storm and the ship is about to perish. In the novel an explicit reference is made to the prophet Jonah. After the last storm one of the crew considers it his duty to tell Robinson: "(...) as you made this voyage for a trial, you see what a taste Heaven has given you of what you are to expect if you persist; perhaps this is all befallen us on your account, like Jonah in the ship of Tarshish. Pray,' continues he, 'what are you? And on what account did you go to sea?'" (Defoe, 13).

Similar religious references are made more often throughout the novel. Apart from those references religion plays an important role in the plot of *Robinson Crusoe*. In the course of the novel Robinson is converted and starts to have a relation with God, whom he often calls Providence. In my thesis I will focus on the religious features in *Robinson Crusoe*, particularly Robinson's relation to God, comparing this with the author's religious life and the religion of society in those days. By discussing these issues I will argue that Robinson Crusoe's perception of God represents Defoe's religion and that of contemporary Puritanism.

First of all I want to deal with the historical context of *Robinson Crusoe*, focusing on the religious aspects of society around the time in which the novel was written, in order to get a better understanding of the Puritan tradition in which Daniel Defoe was born and raised. The historical background will also help to understand the religious notions in the novel and the way in which Crusoe perceives God. Paul Hunter draws attention to the Puritan pattern of the first part of *Robinson Crusoe*, and its “rhythm of disobedience and punishment, repentance and deliverance” (Spaas & Stimpson, 17). Ian Watt, however, when dealing with the argument between Crusoe and his father, argues that the debate is “not about filial duty or religion, but about whether going or staying is likely to be the most advantageous course materially.” Alan Downie considers Watt’s view as a “fine example of a critic’s twentieth-century concerns obscuring Robinson Crusoe’s eighteenth-century context” (Spaas & Stimpson, 17). I will argue the novel breathes a spirit of eighteenth century Puritanism, supported by Hunter’s view on the novel.

I will compare and contrast the religious context to the spiritual life of the author. No critic can deny the existence of autobiographical elements in the novel. The question is to what extent the religious elements in the novel represent the spiritual state of Defoe. Maximillian E. Novak states that the original sin represents an economic autobiographical element: “There can be no doubt that there is an economic problem in *Robinson Crusoe*; the opening pages present a clear conflict between the hero and his father on the question of Crusoe’s future profession and social status. (...) I want to suggest that Crusoe’s sin is [Defoe’s] refusal to follow the ‘calling’ chosen for him by his father and that the rationale for this action can be found in Crusoe’s personal characteristics” (Novak, 19). Others simply see a parallel between Defoe’s and Crusoe’s religious experiences. Moore, for example, states the following: “Certainly [Defoe] gave his hero his own background as a Presbyterian who recalled the Shorter Westminster Catechism, read his Bible, and recalled his religious

experience like any young Puritan” (Moore, 225). I will argue why Crusoe’s religion reflects Defoe’s religion, discussing to what extent Defoe agreed with the Puritan doctrine and way of life and trying to find out what his personal relation was to God.

Having discussed the historical background and the author’s personal life, I will zoom in on the main character of the novel, Robinson Crusoe. According to G. A. Starr, “[a] well-marked cycle of sin and regeneration underlay Crusoe’s experiences throughout the novel” (Starr, 124). First of all I will follow Crusoe’s own religious development, which starts with his “original sin” against his father when he refuses to obey and leaves his “father’s house and (...) native country” (Defoe, 5). I will also discuss his conversion on the island and how he perceives God.

Having discussed all those religious features which occur in the novel itself, the life of the author and Puritan society around 1700, I will try to answer the question what role religion plays in the novel and to what extent *Robinson Crusoe* can be called a religious novel, considering the biblical allusions and Crusoe’s personal relation to God.

1. Historical background

Nobody exactly knows when Defoe started writing *Robinson Crusoe*, nor does anyone know how many years he worked on the novel. Alan Downie assumes that he had been working on *Robinson Crusoe* until immediately prior to its publication (Spaas & Stimpson, 13). We do know for sure, however, that the novel was first published in 1719. The period which is relevant to us at this point is the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century. In the following paragraphs I will briefly discuss the historical context of *Robinson Crusoe*, and in particular the religious context and tradition in which the novel was written, focusing on the Puritans and Dissenters whom Defoe himself belonged to. I will also briefly mention the autobiography, which is also a feature of late seventeenth century religious life. It is impossible to cover all important events and developments during the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth centuries. Therefore I will look ahead to the life of Defoe which I will discuss later on and concentrate on those historical events and religious movements that were important to him.

The year in which Daniel Defoe was born, 1660, has been considered to be the beginning of a new England, the Restoration. England had been a republic under the regime of Oliver Cromwell for eighteen years. Cromwell believed that he was appointed by God to fulfill His will by guiding the people to the Promised Land. When Cromwell died in 1658 the republic collapsed, leaving the country in chaos. Eighteen months after that, elections were held again and Charles II was called back. The king immediately started to restore everything he could in order to stabilise national life. Charles set up a new regime; he punished the enemies of the monarchy by means of the Act of Indemnity and Oblivion. This Act demanded the death of those who signed Charles I's death warrant. Apparently he gained authority, for

Morgan says that “plots against Charles II were few and restricted to radical religious sects” (Morgan, 330).

Although Charles restored parliament, his attempts to restore the unity of the Church of England failed. He tried to make the Church of England acceptable to the Puritans, who did not agree with the doctrine and ceremonies of the church and demanded a thorough purification of the church ceremonies as well as a reformation of the Prayer Book. Charles’ wish for a moderate settlement was defeated by the side of the Anglicans in Parliament as well as by Puritan leaders. Because he could not meet the wishes from both sides, he finally assented to the Act of Uniformity which restored the old Church (Morgan, 331). This Act is defined in the *World Encyclopedia* as an: “English Act of Parliament regulating the form of worship in the Church of England after the Restoration of the monarchy. It required all ordained clergy to follow the Book of Common Prayer. The Act also required the clergy to repudiate the Solemn League and Covenant, to forswear the taking up of arms against the Crown, and to adopt the liturgy of the Church of England.” An increasing number of Puritans, who at first had preferred to wait for better times, now separated from the Church and began to set up their own meetings. These people were originally called “Dissenters” (Morgan, 344). Among this group several subgroups originated: Independents, Baptists, Quakers and Presbyterians. Moore describes the Presbyterians (to which Defoe belonged) as follows: they “tended to stress predestination and to prefer extemporaneous prayer; they practiced baptism of adults and infants alike; they rejected the authority of bishops; and (at least in theory) they sought a close-knit organization like that which became the national church of Scotland” (Moore, 39). Defoe not only moved in Presbyterian circles. “[H]e had been educated by Independents, and later he had some friends among the Quakers” (Moore, 39). Therefore, whenever Defoe is discussed in connection to religion in the literature, he is either called a Puritan or a Dissenter rather than Presbyterian.

As a result of the Act of Uniformity of 1662, hundreds of Nonconformist teachers were not allowed to teach any more at the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. They set up new Academies (Porritt, 678). At the so called Dissenting Academies students from the Nonconformist Churches were able to take either a five-year course in theology or a three-year course for lay students. Since Defoe as a Dissenter was not allowed to go to Oxford or Cambridge either, he also studied at the Dissenting Academy. In theology the textbooks represented the Reformed tradition; students were taught the Puritan doctrines (Rupp, 177). Martin J. Greif, in an essay on the conversion of Robinson Crusoe, summarises the Puritan belief as follows:

The concept that God's grace and man's faith are essentials of salvation (...) is universal in all Christianity. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the fundamental principle of the Protestant scheme of salvation was the necessity of justification by faith as the decisive beginning and the persisting accompaniment of the new life. The justification of the sinner, the cardinal principle of this scheme, followed a specific order of procedure: first, forgiveness on the sole condition of a heartfelt trust in the mercy of God in Christ; then a progressive sanctification by the Holy Spirit whose help is the confirming fist of the reconciled Father. (...) The motives leading to conversion were two: fear of the wrath of God, and love of God for His goodness. (Greif, 552-53)

The doctrine of the justification of the sinner, as explained in the quotation above, emphasises the personal experience of the individual. According to Starr "the entire Reformation tended to stress the importance of the spiritual welfare of the individual" (Starr, 4), which explains the rise of the autobiography in the end of the seventeenth century: "such belief gives strong impetus to self-examination and self-revelation, and makes it only natural that autobiography should be regarded as weighty and necessary business" (Starr, 5).

Although *Robinson Crusoe* is considered to be one of the first English novels, it is not completely different from the works of contemporaries. In the course of this thesis I will argue that *Robinson Crusoe* is autobiographical, at least to some extent. Starr, in his chapter on “Spiritual Autobiography” gives a list of autobiographical authors from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Through the example of Richard Baxter (one of the great Puritans), he argues that an autobiography was not only common practice those days, but also necessary, especially when it concerned spiritual experiences. The Bible says: “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul” (Psalm 66:16). Many eighteenth-century writers considered the autobiography as an expression of thankfulness (Starr, 9). One famous example is *Grace Abounding*, in which John Bunyan describes his own conversion. Another more allegorical work by Bunyan is *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, which concerns the individual’s personal search for peace and salvation. There is no doubt that Defoe was influenced by this great work (Starr, 10).

Apart from the religious-minded people in England at the beginning of the eighteenth century, an anti-religious movement developed. This movement rejected, or at least questioned the image of God as Providence and Authority and man being totally dependent on God’s arbitrary will. Philosophers from this skeptical group began to attach great value to the reason and knowledge of man, approaching everything from their own reason and excluding everything that could not be understood by human reason. “Reason will enlighten every man that cometh into the world, for Reason herself is light” (Hazard, 37-42). It may be clear that this “doctrine” was completely different from Puritan religion. However, the Enlightenment or Natural Religion, as it was called, had great influence on the common man, the Anglican clergy and even some Dissenting ministers became influenced. The latter began to change their messages in church, stressing religious duties towards other men rather than the

necessity of the work of God in one's soul (Morgan, 347). In 1688 the Glorious Revolution provided freedom of religion.

The Restoration Period forms the genesis of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. England had gone through a great number of changes politically as well as ecclesiastically. Concerning the political level, Charles II tried to stabilise everyday life by taking away the factors which would be dangerous for the monarchy. He appeared not to be able to reconcile the Anglicans and the Puritans. The Act of Uniformity caused a split in the Anglican Church and created many new religious movements and institutes like the Dissenting Academies. From these Puritan denominations which attached great value to experience, originated the literary genre of the autobiography. Another important movement which developed throughout the eighteenth century is that of the Enlightenment or Natural Religion. This movement had great influence on many people in eighteenth century England and would also shed its "light" in the coming centuries.

2. Daniel Defoe

The fact that G.A. Starr in Chapter one of his book discusses the “Spiritual Autobiography” in connection with Defoe, makes clear how he considers the works by Defoe. In the following chapters he constantly links events in *Robinson Crusoe* with historical facts of Defoe’s life. Having discussed the historical background of *Robinson Crusoe*, I will focus on one representative of the period around 1700, Defoe. Focusing again on the religious side of his life, important events will pass the revue, starting with his boyhood and ending with his death. The conclusion will deal with the overall impression one gets of his relation with God.

Daniel Defoe was born and raised in Restoration London in a Dissenting family. Until two years after his birth, Defoe’s parents attended the services in the Church of England in St. Giles (Moore, 13). The Act of Uniformity caused their preacher, Dr. Annesley, to flee to the countryside and the Foe family went along with him. Thus Daniel Defoe was cut off from the Church of England forever and from that time onwards he would belong to the Presbyterian Dissenters (Moore, 18). It is important to realise that the Dissenters were oppressed by all kinds of Acts and that they had to worship in secret. These unnatural circumstances must have had their effect on the young Defoe. Another important event which evidently made a deep impression on Defoe is the Plague of London in 1665 and the Great Fire of London one year after the Plague. The Dissenters, who saw in every single thing the hand of God, attributed these calamities to the judgment of God against their wicked persecutors (Sutherland, 11). As a boy Defoe spent his days on the street, enjoying the city life of London and talking in particular with the seamen who were able to tell him about foreign countries and the things happening there. Thus he gathered knowledge about all kinds of things, especially about political developments abroad (Moore, 21). “By this means, as young as I [Defoe] was, I was a kind of an historian” (Moore, 20). In later years he showed great interest in sports and arts.

It has been questioned whether his interests were allowed by the Puritan tradition. Concerning the arts Moore argues that it would not have been a problem, quoting Calvin's words: "so long as it is used in the fear of God and in the service of mankind" (26).

Another part of his religious upbringing is his education at Morton's Academy. According to Moore "[e]ducation was emphasized by seventeenth-century Dissenters" (29). Since his parents were not able to teach him at home, Defoe was sent to the boarding school at Dorking. By the time he had finished his education there, it was agreed upon, partly due to the advice of the family pastor Dr. Annesley, that Defoe would be sent to Morton's Academy, the foremost Dissenting Academy in England, to be prepared for the Presbyterian ministry (Moore, 32). Defoe had a high regard for his tutor, the Rev. Charles Morton. References to him in Defoe's work make it clear that he had found in Rev. Morton a great model and example (Moore, 37). And yet Defoe never became a minister. When he was twenty-one, "he realised that he was not meant for that high vocation" and probably he had not been called (Moore, 39).

After Defoe had made his decision against entering the Presbyterian ministry, he did not pass his time in idleness for long. Two years later, he became a successful merchant (Moore, 44). "He seems to have dealt in haberdashery at first, making journeys in various parts of Great Britain and the Continent, perhaps to buy his goods at the great country fairs and to find markets for them abroad" (Moore, 83). Towards the end of 1683 his home and place of business was already well established and on the first day of the new year he married Mary Tuffley. Like we saw earlier with the discussion of Defoe's childhood, Defoe had always been extremely interested in the (political) world around him. This interest led to involvement in English politics and the political debate. In the same year he set up his business, he published his first political tract, which in the future would be followed by a great number of others (Moore, 44). Being a convinced Dissenter, throughout his life Defoe politically stood

on the side of the Dissenters. He not only participated in the political debate, he sometimes even joined the army. King James II had succeeded his brother Charles II, and persecuted Dissenters even more than his brother. When in 1685 James' nephew the Duke of Monmouth came to claim the throne because he was the illegitimate son of Charles, Defoe joined the rebels which stood on the side of Monmouth, hoping for the end of James' regime (Moore 52). When William III came to England to ascend the throne, Defoe became very close friends with the king. He served the king's policy by sustaining him with pamphlets which favoured William's policies (Moore, 72).

Moore states that Defoe often showed "a martyr's zeal for religious or political freedom" (Moore 70). This became literarily true when Defoe was persecuted because of the writing of a tract called *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*. The tract was written as a protest against the Test Act which had been passed in 1673. This act required communion with the Church of England as a qualification for public office and was originally meant to keep the Roman Catholics out of the office. At the same time, however, the Protestant Dissenters were also excluded from public office. And yet many Dissenters conformed to the national church for their own benefit. Those people were supporters of the so called "Occasional Conformity". Defoe saw that both parties were wrong in a sense and he offended both of them in his tract. "As a political observer, he recognized that the Dissenters were treated unfairly and that the nation needed their services. As a conscientious Dissenter, he allowed no room for 'playing Bo-peep with God Almighty'" (Moore, 107). As a result he was sent to Newgate and was exposed to public shame, standing in the pillory. According to Moore "[t]he greatest books in his long list (...) which grew out of his sympathy for men and women and his deep understanding of human life and character would never have come into being if he had not suffered in Newgate and pillory" (149).

Defoe's political career of which the above paragraph only mentions a few things is characterised by a strong sense of justice. Defoe did not want to play up to someone and standing on the side of the Dissenters he did his utmost to plead their causes; on the other hand he also attacked them for being unfair to God, for example in the case of the Occasional Conformity.

Why should a man who so often experienced the ingratitude of the Dissenters, and who repeatedly declared that he would gladly subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England except for a few dealing with Episcopal power and ceremony, refuse the advantages of the compromise called Occasional Conformity?

To Defoe, as to most thoughtful men of his age, religion was the central experience of human life. And to him it was the Church itself which had gone into dissent from the principles on which it had been founded. (Moore, 13)

It appears that Defoe tried to be just to all men, sometimes even at its own expense, as in the behaviour that brought him in the pillory. Moore calls him "more Christian than Presbyterian, more lover of the Church of Christ than Dissenter" (19). There are a couple of other things in which Defoe showed himself a good Christian. Concerning his marriage it is assumed that they lived happily together until death separated them. "Mary was a good wife, and Defoe meant to be a good husband" (Moore, 49). He is also referred to as an affectionate parent towards his children (Moore, 65), although it must be mentioned that due to his love of travel and adventure he stayed away very often (Moore, 49). Another good deed was done by Defoe when he was only eighteen or nineteen years old. He "undertook to copy the Bible into shorthand, so that it could be concealed from spies and informers whenever its reading was prohibited" (Moore, 82).

It would not be fair to mention only the good sides of Defoe. Especially in the business sphere Defoe made some gaffes. He himself admitted that he was tempted by

avarice. This led to a reckless way of trading and a continually developing of new interests. Those additional interests became fatal to his business in the end and he went bankrupt (Sutherland, 34). Defoe's bankruptcy caused him to "lie continually to God and man". And to a Dissenter bankruptcy was not only a disgrace but almost a sin (Moore, 103). It is attested that between the years 1688 and 1694 many people claimed they had been defrauded by Defoe (Sutherland, 35). After he had gone bankrupt he never really overcame his debts. That is why he was so often persecuted and sent to prison. Before he died, he wrote a letter to his son in which he called himself unlucky. Just after his seventieth birthday he died of lethargy in a lodging house in Ropemaker's Alley (Sutherland, 273-74).

Apart from all those political tracts and pamphlets mentioned above, Defoe has written a couple of other works in which his religious point of view is expressed. The first work to be mentioned is Defoe's *Family Instructor*, in which parents in particular are told how they should bring up their children according to the rules of religious education and how to solve problems which may arise in the domestic sphere. Defoe does not direct his advice to a Dissenting audience only, he simply included the whole range of Christian families (*The Literary Encyclopedia*, 1). An example of a lesson on what repentance should be like is quoted in Starr: "a hearty Sorrow for your Sins already past, and solemn, serious Resolutions, to commit no more; and this Sorrow must proceed not only from a Fear of eternal Punishment, but from a Hatred of Sin, for its own evil Nature, and as it is offensive to the Holiness of God" (42). What is made explicit as a moral lesson, also occurs in Defoe's fiction. In the novel *Moll Flanders*, for example, Defoe also teaches his audience the features of true repentance. A few pages before her conversion Moll tries to repent, but discovers she has no grief for sin but she only suffers because of the consequences of sin (Starr, 138). Defoe describes the experience of the true conversion as follows: "I was covered with shame and tears for things past, and yet had at the same time a secret surprising joy at the prospect of

being a true penitent, and obtaining the comfort of a penitent – I mean the hope of being forgiven” (Starr, 158-59). Starr highlights the subdued description of rebirth in contrast to the enthusiastic way in which the Baptists or Quakers would experience their conversions those days (159).

Considering the life of Daniel Defoe, we can conclude that his religious upbringing influenced his entire life. From childhood he went along to church and who can tell how many times he listened to the words of the Bible. Although he decided not to enter the ministry, he remained loyal to his fellow Dissenters politically and theologically, although he considered Christians from different denominations as his brothers in Christ as well. The teaching at Morton’s Academy offered him on the one hand knowledge about the secular world as well as skills to write and speak on the other hand. He put his lessons into practice by being involved in the political debate and contacts with kings and queens. On the other hand, the theological lessons he had learned were put into didactical works like *Family Instructor*. Also Defoe’s fictional work is full of religious and theological issues. The issue of repentance is made very explicit in *Moll Flanders* for example. Although there is no non-fictional work by himself which describes his own conversion, the fact that he has written about regeneration and repentance might suggest that the conversions in his novels are to some extent to be considered autobiographical. (Häusermann, 455)

3. Robinson Crusoe

Whatever Defoe's own religious experiences might have been, in *Robinson Crusoe* Defoe describes a spiritual development which takes place in the main character Robinson Crusoe. There is not really an agreement among critics what the significance is of this side of the novel and whether it really adds to the literary value of the book. On the one hand there are critics who think that economy is the most important aspect of the novel, while on the other hand critics emphasise personal characteristics of the hero. In order to get an overview of those varying opinions I will first quote and discuss some critics. In addition I will analyse some of the many religious references in the novel and find out to what extent Robinson Crusoe is portrayed as a Puritan and how his perception of God can be defined.

One of those critics who emphasise the hero's personality is Maximillian E. Novak. He has written an article on what Robinson Crusoe himself at a certain point calls the "original sin," that is, Crusoe's "refusal to follow the 'calling' chosen for him by his father" (Novak, 19). He objects to critics who interpret Crusoe's disobedience as an issue of economic individualism for example. "Gildon suggested that Defoe was trying to insult the English navy, Paul Dottin appealed to the power of the father in puritan homes, while Ian Watt has argued that Crusoe's sin was 'really the dynamic tendency of capitalism itself' and part of his desire to improve his economic status" (Novak, 20). The question remains, however, why Crusoe despite the religious objections runs away from home. Novak thinks Crusoe's personal characteristics have always been overlooked. It is his inner unsteadiness and love of travel which does not allow him to stay in one place for a long time.

In another article the characteristics are being specified as those belonging to a Puritan. In "Aspects of Life and Thought in *Robinson Crusoe*" Hans W. Häusermann discusses several elements that appear in the novel, on the one hand the religious aspect and

both the commercial and social elements on the other. The religious elements like Crusoe's conversion and the Biblical references are obviously there, but the commercial and social elements can also be traced back to Calvinistic ideas. He describes some Puritan features of Crusoe: in comparison to the comic Friday, "Robinson Crusoe in person is far too severe and gloomy a Puritan to be able to induce the reader to smile" (Häusermann, 440). When describing the ethics of a Puritan merchant, he says: "his chief qualities were prudence, honesty, diligence, moderation, sobriety, and thrift. (...) [D]uring his life on the island, Robinson acquired them all" (Häusermann, 441). Finally he writes concerning the level-headedness of Crusoe: "[w]e have seen that this domination of instinct and emotion by will is ultimately a result of the ascetic doctrine of Puritanism. To the same religious source can be traced the spirit of drudgery, the effort of unceasing hard labour which we discover in Robinson Crusoe" (Häusermann, 442). The fact that Robinson Crusoe has been alone on the island for such a long time has to do with the individualism in Calvinism, according to Häusermann. "In the most important question of human life, the question of salvation, man stands alone and with nobody to help him" (Häusermann, 447). Häusermann's conclusion is that "the commercial and social elements in the novel take first place in importance among the aspects of life and thought met with therein" (Häusermann, 456).

The religious point of view is supported by Martin J. Greif. He goes deeper into the matter and describes the conversion of Crusoe in great detail. He highlights the religious aspect of the novel and argues that the story of Robinson Crusoe "is primarily an account of a spiritual experience, (...) far more than the account of a practical man's adjustment to life on a deserted island, (...) the record of a notable spiritual pilgrimage across the sea of life" (Greif, 551). In a footnote he supports his statement with evidence from "The Preface" to the novel. Defoe himself states the aim of the novel, which is threefold: "with a religious Application", "to the Instruction of others" and "to justify and honour the Wisdom of

Providence” (Greif, 551). In the following Greif pays much attention to the way to and the moment of Crusoe’s conversion. He constantly compares the text of the novel to theological and literary Puritan works. In the conclusion Greif refers to the novel as “Christian allegory” (Greif, 574).

Like Novak and many others mentioned above, G.A. Starr deals with the “original sin” in *Robinson Crusoe*. He finds the motive for this sin in the “natural waywardness of every unregenerate man” (Starr, 79). It is not the running away in itself that makes it a sin, it is the inward rebelliousness that comes out which provokes the wrath of God (Starr, 80). This statement is supported by examples from the Bible. The Fall of mankind, the story of Jonah and the parable of the Prodigal Son all began with a fairly small error which turned out to have far-reaching consequences. The following events in the story have to be regarded in the light of God’s providence as it was believed by the Puritans. The storms right after Crusoe’s embarkation are not coincidental. Puritans believed God could shake the elements for the sake of one individual. Every person should examine himself when a tempest or earthquake happened (Starr, 89-90). Crusoe, however, refuses to see the hand of God in all those things until he repents. According to Starr, Crusoe’s conversion takes place in the traditional manner: “First there was the provocation to repentance (...); next there was ‘a coming to oneself’; this was followed by ‘conviction’; then there came the stage ‘conversion’, when God actually relieved and reclaimed the sufferer” (Starr, 106).

The above mentioned critics show there is no agreement on the subject of the importance of religion in the novel. In the discussion of Novak, Ian Watt is reviewed and his economic interpretation of the novel. Novak himself sees the cause in the unsteady character of Crusoe and his desire for adventure. Others, including Greif and Starr, present the religious aspect of the novel as the most plausible interpretation; Greif referring to the term allegory and Starr calling the novel a spiritual biography. Also Häusermann, although he does not

think the religious aspect is the most important element in the novel, even in his discussion of social and economic elements continuously refers to Defoe's Puritan or Calvinistic background. No critic can deny the Puritan influence, but some of them seem to prefer a different interpretation. Greif and Starr conversely seem to be overestimating the religious elements in the novel. This is in particular true for Greif who argues from the statement that *Robinson Crusoe* was primarily and only written to teach people a religious lesson and to glorify God. His evidence comes from Defoe's Preface to his novel, in which he says: "The story is told (...) with a religious application of events to the uses to which wise men always apply them, viz. to the instruction of others by this example, and to justify and honour the wisdom of Providence (...)" (Defoe, 1). In the same preface, however, Defoe also states that everything in the novel is a fact. Greif should believe that part as well. Starr also allows other interpretations, but argues that *Robinson Crusoe* has been written as a spiritual autobiography. In his book *Spiritual Autobiography* he also discusses *Moll Flanders* and *Roxanna*. Starr wants to argue that these books all have the form of an autobiographical work. They pretend to be autobiographies, but they are in fact works of fiction.

Considering the different views discussed above, we can conclude that *Robinson Crusoe* is to a certain extent a religious novel, even though the economic elements for example may play an important role in it. Taking into account Defoe's life, which was penetrated with Puritan religion, it would be inconsistent to claim that there is not a vast number of religious elements in the story. In the following paragraphs I will concentrate on those elements and if possible link them to Defoe's own life and the historical background of *Robinson Crusoe*. I will deal with the elements in a more or less chronological order in which they appear in the novel. Special attention will be paid to the description of Crusoe's conversion, as it is considered to be the central and most important event in a person's life according to Puritan religion, since it gives one eternal life. The conversion can be subdivided

into three classical Calvinistic stages: misery, deliverance and gratitude. This subdivision is a frequently used arrangement, for example in the epistle of St. Paul to the Romans. The Westminster Catechism which has been part of Defoe's upbringing works with the same arrangement.

The first encounter of a Biblical reference is already in the very beginning of the novel. There is an account of Robinson Crusoe's decision to leave his father's house and his native country against the will of his father and without asking God's blessing. He goes on board a ship and becomes involved in a frightful storm and his conscience begins to charge him. He makes many vows and decides to go home to his father "like a true repenting prodigal" (Defoe, 5-9). Defoe explicitly refers to the parable of the Prodigal Son from Luke 15, who left his father's house and got into trouble and realised he had sinned against his father. The passage can also easily be compared to Jonah who disobeyed God, went aboard a ship, got into a big storm and admitted his disobedience towards God (Jonah 1). Another history from the Bible teaches a similar lesson: one should never leave one's native country without asking a blessing from God: the book of Ruth. Elimelech and his wife Naomi try to escape the famine in their own place and leave for Moab. In the end Naomi is the only one left, together with her two daughters-in-law. She then confesses her sins and decides to return home (Ruth 1). Martin J. Greif mentions a number of accounts from the seventeenth century in which a runaway young man is brought to repentance through a storm at the sea, for example: "John Ryther, speaking of shipwreck, writes that 'God by bringing us into danger, hath a design upon us to convince of sin'" (Greif, 560). In the novel this design is time and again emphasised by Defoe, even though Crusoe himself does not notice or refuses to notice the hand of Providence, as appears from the fact that he forgets his vows which he promised during his distress (Defoe, 9). As it were in retrospect Defoe inserts some phrases which reveal Crusoe's belief in a divine plan in order to bring him to repentance:

But I was to have another trial for it still; and Providence (...) resolv'd to leave me entirely without excuse. For if I would not take this for a deliverance, the next was to be such a one as the worst and most harden'd wretch among us would confess both the danger and the mercy. (Defoe, 10)

Following miseries do not lead Crusoe to repentance either, on the contrary, he is angry with God who placed him in such a terrible condition (Defoe, 47). He also starts to neglect his keeping Sundays (Defoe, 55). This lasts until he finds himself in a sad condition, very ill and almost frightened to death. He then prays to God "for the first time since the storm of Hull." A few days later he has a terrible dream about a man descending from a black cloud, almost killing Crusoe with a spear and speaking: "Seeing all these things have not brought thee to repentance, now thou shalt die" (Defoe, 65). From then on the conversion process starts. Pages are devoted to describing Crusoe's thoughts and reflections in great detail. Two elements are essential in that account. He discovers who he has been, wicked and without the least thankfulness. Secondly, he sees the hand of God in all past events, on the one hand a God who punishes the wicked and who on the other hand preserved him so well, being merciful to a sinner. Crusoe remains under deep conviction of sin for a few days, being still sick and terrified. Finally he finds a Bible in a chest, "directed by Heaven" (Defoe, 69). This part of the novel, before Crusoe's conversion, describes the misery state of a sinner. He purposely runs away from God, like Adam in Paradise, and gets more and more far away from his Creator. God in his love tries to bring a sinner to repentance by either adversity or prosperity, until the sinner finds himself in the most terrible condition and begins to reflect upon his life. The parable of the Prodigal Son says: "And when he came to himself (...)" (Luke 15:17). It may be noted that the physical condition Crusoe is in when he is convinced about his sin reflects his spiritual condition.

The Calvinistic tradition teaches that the misery state of a sinner ends after a longer or shorter period and is usually followed by deliverance. According to one of the Reformation principles, that of *Sola Scriptura*, such a deliverance always takes place by means of the Word of God. It is therefore no wonder that the sudden discovery of a Bible is inserted at this crucial moment in the story. When Crusoe opens up the Bible he reads: “Call on me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver, and thou shalt glorify me” (Psalm 50:15). At first it does not make much impression on him, because he cannot see how he could be delivered from this place, meaning the island: “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?*” (Defoe, 70). Defoe here shows that the promises of God have no power as long as they are not believed in. Crusoe keeps musing on these words and finally, believing in the promises of God, he kneels down and prays to God to fulfill his Word to him. Puritans would call this pleading: showing God His own Word and trusting Him that He will fulfill His promises. After his prayer he immediately falls asleep and awakes when it is nearly three o’clock the day after. Defoe pays special attention to Crusoe’s idea that he slept through an entire day and night. It explains and emphasises the rest Crusoe receives from this sleep, for it says that he awakes and finds himself exceedingly refreshed. The remarkable thing is that he is not immediately aware of his deliverance. He notices he feels better now physically, but he still finds himself on the island. The following days in his account are without any reference to a deliverance. Occupying himself with food and health, he seems to completely forget God’s intervention in the past days. At the same time his physical condition gets worse again, until it occurs to his mind that he has been delivered from sickness and “from the most distress’d condition that could be” (Defoe, 71). Again his physical condition reflects his spiritual state. Crusoe realises he should have been thankful for the wonderful deliverances he has received and referring back to the scripture he says: “God

had delivered me, but I had not glorify'd Him” (Defoe, 71). He then immediately thanks God aloud for his recovery.

The above mentioned passage contains the three stages mentioned before, but somehow Crusoe seems to get only a little benefit from his deliverance. It may be noted that his deliverance only concerns his recovery from sickness, while in his misery state his problem was much deeper: he was concerned about his sin. When reading Psalm 50 he applied the deliverance to his physical condition in the sense that he would be liberated from the island. That is why he did not see the recovery of illness as a benefit from God at first. That is also why he is blind to the necessity of being delivered from sin. Many examples from the Bible resemble this idea. Jesus’ disciples expected an earthly kingdom, a deliverance from the Roman repression those days, and they quarreled about who would receive the most important position in that kingdom (Matthew 18). They did not realise that Jesus would have to suffer and die for their sins, in other words, to deliver them from a far greater problem. The disciples’ blindness for this problem is reflected in the misinterpretation of the scripture by Crusoe. And yet, his first deliverance and his thankfulness for that finally leads to a conversion in its deepest sense.

After he has considered his recovery as an act of God’s mercy, he starts to seriously read the Bible every day, morning and evening. He then begins to realise that he has only been superficially delivered. There remains a restlessness in his soul because of the wickedness of his past life. Again, while he is earnestly begging of God to give him repentance, Crusoe writes: “when it happen’d providentially the very day that reading the scripture, I came to these words, *He is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance, and to give remission*” (Defoe, 72). His account emphasises the difference from his former deliverance. In contrast to that he says: “now I pray’d with a sense of my condition, and with a true scripture view of hope founded on the encouragement of the word of God” (Defoe, 72).

The “true scripture view” is elaborately described by Defoe. He reconsiders Psalm 50:15 and learns “to take it in another sense” (Defoe, 72). Crusoe wants to encourage the reader to seek deliverance from sin: “And I add this part here, to hint to whoever shall read it, that whenever they come to a true sense of things, they will find deliverance from sin a much greater blessing than deliverance from affliction” (Defoe, 72). His conversion makes Crusoe to see all things from a different perspective. He is now able to bear the affliction of being still captivated on the island, for he has found the greatest blessing there is, forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul puts it like this in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” Later on in the novel Crusoe expresses his gratefulness towards God by glorifying him in sharing with Friday the knowledge he has received from God.

Going back to the scripture from Psalm 50, there are several reasons to assume that this scripture verse has been chosen by Defoe on purpose. As Greif states in his article on “The Conversion of Robinson Crusoe,” “this biblical passage occurs frequently in treatises on conversion.” The reason is that sinners are usually drawn to God by adversity and this scripture “is fitted to comfort the weak and the fearful” (Greif, 572). An analysis of the particular bible verse leads to the discovery of the three stages I mentioned earlier: misery, deliverance and gratefulness, which is the universal pattern of conversion. The passage is to be divided thus: “Call on me in the day of trouble” is about misery; deliverance comes back literally in: “and I will deliver”; gratefulness appears in the last phrase: “and thou shalt glorify me.” I agree with Greif that Psalm 50:15 as it appears in the three stages “may be considered a major theme of his [Defoe’s] novel” (Greif, 572). When reading the novel from the beginning up to Crusoe’s conversion, the reader comes across several deliverances which look ahead at his conversion. Those deliverances serve the purpose of drawing him to God. When Crusoe is delivered from the island later in the novel, this is not to be considered as a greater

deliverance than his conversion. It is rather a symbol of the eternal deliverance which has been prepared for those that have been delivered from sin during their life.

Conclusion

A literary work often reflects the developments of the period in which it has been written. This is also true for the one by whom such a work has been written. When a lot is known about the author, certain elements from a novel can be traced back to the life of the author. Supposing this is true for the eighteenth century novel *Robinson Crusoe* I have listed some relevant details and developments of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth century. The next section covers the life of Daniel Defoe, only highlighting some particular events and characteristics. Both the historical background and Defoe's life have been described from the angle of (Puritan) religion. That is also the perspective of the discussion of some elements from the novel which covers the rest of my thesis. The first question is to what extent *Robinson Crusoe* can be called a religious novel. The following question is in what sense Puritan religion around 1700 and Defoe's own religious upbringing and further life is found in the novel.

As far as the measure of religiousness in *Robinson Crusoe* is concerned, many critics do not want to read the novel from a religious perspective. The "original sin", for example, which sounds very much like a religious term, is however explained in many different ways. I would not exclude those readings, but there are several reasons to conclude that the novel, if not totally religious, is at least totally penetrated with religion. The first reason is that there are so many explicit and implicit biblical references in the novel which connect to the reading public those days which was quite familiar with the Bible. From the description of Defoe's life we learned that he was raised and bred with biblical stories and Puritan doctrine. Also the story itself leads to the idea that religion plays a major role in the novel. Real joy and happiness only is described when it has to do with Crusoe's relation with God. His conversion which covers quite a few pages of the book causes a turning point in the story. Moreover,

those passages from the novel which have to do with religion are described as having a very deep impact on Crusoe.

The brief and fragmented historical overview gives an impression of the turbulent time in which the author and the reading public grew up. There was a lot of struggle politically as well as ecclesiastically. Minorities were driven together by all sorts of laws and acts. The minority group of the Dissenters to whom Defoe belonged developed their own academies on which the Calvinistic doctrine was taught. This doctrine comes back in the description of Crusoe's conversion. I repeat two elements from the quotation from Greif's article. The first one describes justification as forgiveness on the sole condition of a heartfelt trust in the mercy of God in Christ. This is exactly what is experienced by Crusoe. He receives forgiveness of sin because he trusts in the mercy of God which he meets in the promises of the Bible.

Another element that Greif describes is the motives leading to conversion. Those are fear of the wrath of God, and love of God for His goodness (Greif, 552-53). Both motives appear in the way that leads him to repentance. Moreover, literary history around 1700 shows a great amount of autobiographies as far as conversion descriptions are concerned. Like *Grace Abounding* by John Bunyan, those books were all written to the honour of God and to a testimony for others. The fact that such an element occurs in *Robinson Crusoe* adds to the impression that the novel cannot be merely interpreted as an economic novel like we saw with Ian Watt. Further research might come up many more elements from the pages after Crusoe's conversion which support the idea that *Robinson Crusoe* is to a great extent a religious novel.

Besides the religious climate in the Restoration period which comes out in the novel through the author, also Defoe's life itself made the novel what it has been. Thanks to Defoe's strict upbringing and the excellent lessons he was taught at the Academy he was more than the common man familiar with the Bible and the Puritan doctrine. He knew exactly what a conversion process should be like, for he describes in great detail what goes on in Crusoe.

This might say something about his personal relation with God, but he also easily could have repeated things that he knew rationally considering his knowledge. As appears from the life of Defoe, he risked everything to do justice to his country and its people. That means that he remained loyal to his family and friends, not being afraid, however, of the consequences if he passed on some critical notes on the Dissenters. Like a true Puritan father he loved his wife and children until death. A great drawback was his financial situation. Several times he ran out of money and it might be as a result of that that he was charged in court for fraud several times. A suggestion for further research is to compare the lives of Robinson Crusoe and his creator Daniel Defoe to see to what extent they look alike in their relation with God and their (Godly) life. It remains clear, however, that Defoe describes Crusoe as a Puritan, like himself. As far as Puritanism is concerned *Robinson Crusoe* can be regarded autobiographical.

Analysis of the few pages on Crusoe's conversion shows in great detail the Calvinistic principles which were being cherished by the Puritans. The Scripture from Psalm 50 is the guideline for the three stages Crusoe goes through. The central Bible verse can be applied to physical things like illness or captivity, but in the deepest sense it is about the deliverance of misery because of sin. Crusoe experiences that the forgiveness of sins makes him to see all other miseries from a different perspective.

From the close reading of only several passages from the novel we can conclude that Defoe has drawn a clear picture of a Puritan. Crusoe has a close relation to God which is a result of his vigorous conversion. He gets to know God as just and merciful: just, in the way God deals with him in the tempests and in his illnesses, and merciful, in the way Crusoe recognises the love of God in drawing him near by adversity and prosperity. According to Puritan habit he calls God Providence. This name of God fits in with the rest of the novel. It is Providence who leads the life of Crusoe so that he finally is brought to repentance. After his conversion it is Providence who cares for him in spiritual ways, in the teaching of the savage

Friday for example, but Crusoe also experiences the providence of God in more material ways, for example his liberation from the island. In short, Robinson Crusoe is a clear example of a true Puritan who lives in a close relation to God, reading Scripture, trusting Jesus Christ and living a life to the glory of God.

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