

Chapter 1

London's Birchin Lane is a short and narrow street, running north-south between the larger Cornhill and Lombard streets. Known in the Middle Ages for its collection of secondhand clothing shops, it eventually became home to several fine men's clothiers, a destination where men of distinction could pick up something special: a whalebone doublet, perhaps, or a "captain's suit . . . stuffed with points, and a pair of velvet slops scored thick with lace." By the 18th century, it was also home to Old Tom's Coffee House, which would gain fame by the end of the century for being a hangout of the famous Shakespearean actor, David Garrick. But in 1729, it hosted a no less interesting figure, the rather curious and shadowy Robert Drury.

Across town, the famous author Daniel Defoe, widely considered the inventor of the realistic or historical novel, and working under the alias Andrew Moreton Esq., toils over what will be his final work, *Second Thoughts Are Best: or, a Further Improvement of a Late Scheme to Prevent Street Robberies*. Drury's story was precisely of the type that most appealed to Defoe and, considering the proximity, there's little doubt that the famous author had already paid Drury a visit well before his residency at Old Tom's.

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Now forty-two years old, Drury sits in Old Tom's with a mug of coffee, a pile of books on the table in front of him. It's a closed-in place, full of chatter, laughter, and barracking. Men sip coffee and read their expensive newspapers or listen for fresh news coming up from the boys sent to the docks for that purpose. Most of the men around Drury wear elaborate white wigs, parted down the middle and extending below the ears. They have little interest in Drury; they've already heard his story and they're busy plotting political careers or working out the details of business deals.

But slowly a small group of commoners—men, women, even two young lads—congregate near Drury's table. They've paid a penny to get in, so the stories Mr. Drury has for them had better be worth the cost; they're certainly not here for the coffee included in the price. Stories of shipwrecks and castaways and wild adventures have been popular for years, ever since English sailors have returned from trips all over the world. In the hands of skilled writers, these stories and the books in which they've been recorded have not gone out of style. Indeed, one book, *Robinson Crusoe*, published ten years earlier by Daniel Defoe, also a Londoner, is still in print and still selling copies.

"Mr. Drury?" one man asks, his head ringed by tufts of natural hair about his ears and the base of his skull. His income doesn't allow for a fancy wig, but he has powdered his hair to approximate the fashion as best he can.

Drury looks up. He appears to be a man who has spent much of his life working outside, certainly not a member of the privileged class that his father's successful business would have once allowed for him. His face reveals deep lines crisscrossing his forehead from the tip of one ear to the other. But his eyes hold a spark; there's still something boyish about them. They're wide and they betray wonder, even as they seem to express a certain world-weariness. "That's me," he says, tapping the books. "Please, sit."

The assembled take their places around his table. "My design is to give a plain and honest narrative of matters of fact," he says, delivering his words from rehearsed memory. "I shall not make use of any artful inventions or borrowed phrases to lengthen or embellish it. Nor shall I

offer any other reflections than what naturally occurred from my many uncommon and surprising adventures.”

Drury picks up one of the books and opens it. The cover reads: *Madagascar; or Robert Drury's Journal, during fifteen years captivity on that Island*. Drury looks up. “This following tragical scene,” he begins, fixing each member of his audience with a sorrowful and sincere look, “Has made such a deep impression on me that when any accident brings it to my mind, I start, and am shocked with the frightful remembrance.” Drury leafs through his book, finds the passage he is looking for, and begins to read: “Safely in Madagascar, brand new to its shore, it was shocking and even terrible to me to see the natives cut the beast, skin and flesh together, and even the guts too, then toss it into the fire and eat it half roasted. I did not know but they would devour us so, for they seemed to me like what I had heard related of . . . cannibals.”

Drury looks at the two young lads sitting cross-legged in front of his table. Their eyes threaten to pop their lids. Drury smiles at them; he remembers what it is like to be young and to be very, very frightened.

“Is it true, sir,” says one of them, “That you took a native wife?”

Drury smiles again.

“Please, sir,” says one of the men, “Please—start at the beginning.”

Drury raises his hands in mock surrender. He pauses for effect, a showman who knows his audience. “I was born here in London, at Crutched Friars, on July the 24th, in the year 1687. It would not be long before I would be at sea, a boy of just thirteen.” Drury rubs his fingers over his closed eyes, recalling the pain, suppressing the terror.

“I would not come back to England until I had become a man of thirty,” he says. “Seventeen years hence I departed. But, alas . . .”

Drury takes a long sip from his mug. “I shall start at the very beginning,” he says.

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The church of St. Katherine Cree sits on the north side of the east end of Leadenhall Street, Aldgate Ward, London. St. Katherine Cree church was already a half-century old when Robert Drury was born in 1687. Drury was still an infant when his father John moved the family to Old Jewry, halfway between the London Wall and the River Thames. There, John Drury took over the King's Head Inn, “a great resort of merchants, and other gentlemen of the best rank and character.” By this time, Robert had a sister, Elizabeth, one year younger. In another three years, there would be another Drury child, John. But as the oldest son, Robert was expected to inherit the family business—and it was a good one: His father eventually accumulated half a dozen properties and was a well respected and well connected member of the ward, serving as questman (collector of parish rents) and churchwarden (the parish's legal representative) for the Church of England. But Robert wasn't interested in following his father into the family business. No, young Robert wanted to go to sea.

Who could blame him? It was a difficult, dirty, and often dangerous business, but the prospect of sailing the world's oceans, heading off to the exotic Far East, engaging in the international world of commerce—and earning a living doing it: What a lure for an eleven year-old kid. It was at that age that his mind and imagination had bent so much to the salt and exoticism of sea travel that he thought of nothing else save hitting the wide expanses. Indeed, some kids had sailed off as young as eight. Robert spent the next two years pestering his parents to let him go.

John Drury tried to convince his son to stay home. Drury's poor mother literally fell to her knees in supplication, begging Robert to look instead toward his father's inn, to remain safe at home under her attentive eye. But it was a pointless protest. Robert gently raised his mother, kissed her on the cheek, and told her that his mind was made up and it would never change.

The lure was too much. Robert could head down to Blackwall Yard and see the great ships being built. It was an uncomplicated enough trip there: just down Cheapside to the Thames to follow its curvy contours east not even five miles. He could easily make it there in an hour and a half. And in the yard he would see the great well-armed ships with tall sails bearing their fluttering, wind-whipped colors: Union jack, Admiralty flag, royal standard, Union flag, white ensign. He would see the East Indiamen, with their guns and masts, booms and flags of country and company—these “Lords of the Sea” returning from all corners of the globe with exotic goods and exotic tales. His mind was made up, and it would not change. Robert wanted adventure.

Seeing their protests were in vain, Robert's parents settled upon a compromise. They would procure passage on a short voyage—perhaps just to the Canaries and back. In the course of it, they were sure, Robert would see firsthand the hardships and dangers of the seaman's trade and would come back ill-disposed toward a seafaring life.

Robert Drury had a cousin, John Steel, then in the employ of the New East India Company, and stationed in Bengal (India). For that reason alone, Drury, now thirteen, firmed in his mind the idea that nothing less than a voyage there on an East Indiaman would salve his burning desire for adventure. His parents' compromise wasn't good enough. Besides, he was thirteen now, and he could make decisions for himself.

Lucky for him, the *Degrave*, commanded by the able Captain William Young, was being fitted for a trip to Bengal in the early part of 1701. She weighed 700 tons burthen and was fitted out with fifty-two guns. The *Degrave* was a new and “lucky” ship; she wasn't even two years old and her maiden voyage had gone remarkably well—back and forth to India in a mere ten months. The New East India Company bosses were eager to get her back out for a repeat performance.

After Captain Young, the First through Fifth Mates were, in order: Charles Newton, Nicholas Young (the captain's son), Matthew Pratt, John Benbow (son of a famous admiral with the same name), and William Carleton.

By the time the *Degrave* broke up off the coast of Madagascar, two years later, all of these men except for Benbow would be dead. When Benbow eventually returned to England, he had an incredible story to tell of massacres, pirates, slavery, and war. But his story would pale in comparison to the one Drury would have. And Daniel Defoe, already in England, would have by then become a famous writer in part for penning stories just like Drury's.

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Despite his misgivings, John Drury outfitted his son as extravagantly as would be allowed, seeing him off with a cargo in excess of one hundred pounds value. He appealed personally to Captain Young to watch over his son and accept him on the *Degrave* as a passenger. Certainly it was with a heavy heart but with a glint of pride that the elder Drury saw Robert off in February 1701. Robert's mother most probably said her tearful goodbyes at home and went to St. Katherine Cree to pray for good fortune and safety for her eldest son.

For the first leg of the trip, she got her wish. The *Degrave* was a mere three months and twenty days in passing the ocean to Fort St. George. Situated off Madras (today's Chennai) in India, it was—and still is—an impressive stone fort with fifteen-foot walls, fronting the

Coromandel Coast of the Bay of Bengal. But the *Degrave* merely showed its colors at Fort St. George and sailed north for Masulipatam.

The *Degrave* rested at anchor at Masulipatam, six miles off land. In the morning, a crew of thirteen men hoisted a barge and set off with a jeweler, Samuel de Paz, who intended to settle and make a business in India. The crew would drop de Paz, his son, and a servant on land and return in the evening. Later, in the inky blackness of night, some on board the *Degrave* could discern the voice of Joseph Chamberlain, one of the barge's crew, floating toward them over the waves. Several men hoisted out the pinnace and rowed toward Chamberlain's voice until they found him clinging to an oar, half-drowned. They hauled him aboard, where he told of a rogue wave that struck the barge with de Paz and the rest larboard and sent it toppling. Only Chamberlain survived; the other men sent with de Paz all drowned.

Robert Drury was not yet fourteen years old. To this point, one can assume that the natural bravura of the young and newly-independent, combined with all the assurances given to his parents of the safety of the ship, plus the uneventful passage to India, had all conspired to convince Drury that in fact all was perfectly safe. But here was a reminder: the sea could be an angry beast and could make a play toy of any ship; all it took was one rogue wave. Whatever misgivings this incident instilled in Drury, if any, he had no choice now. He was far from home and he wouldn't see England again, if all went well, for at least a year.

The *Degrave* continued on its voyage to Bengal. There, Drury's cousin heard of his arrival and came on board to see him. But Captain Young, remembering his promise to Drury's father, intercepted Steel and would not allow him to take Drury off ship—who knew the reputation and honesty of this guy? Captain Young had some reason to doubt it; though Steel had been with the Old East India Company sixteen years, he had only three years earlier been brought up, but acquitted, on a charge of piracy. But he was an excellent pilot, and because what awaited the *Degrave* was a rather treacherous stretch of river to the settlement of Hugli (outside today's Kolkata), Captain Young allowed Steel to steer the *Degrave* to Hugli, landing there in August. No doubt Drury had ample time to pump his cousin for exciting tales of a life at sea. And since he had been doing it for more years than Drury was alive, no doubt Steel regaled him with all the flourish but cool calculation of one idealized by someone younger.

But Steel died soon after their arrival at Hugli. Maybe this didn't faze Drury; he made little mention of it in his subsequent book. But as the *Degrave* was detained for eighteen months in India, a time during which another forty plus crewmen died, Drury could not have remained immune to the vicissitudes of mortality.

The reason the *Degrave* had been so badly delayed was because of war clouds over the waters of southeast India. Native armies were attacking Fort St. George; European pirates were detaining ships in the Bay of Bengal; and the French and Dutch were at hand to attack and lay claim to the valuable English holdings. With her 52 guns, the *Degrave* would prove a nice deterrent to any force intent upon sacking Hugli.

But it was no secret that the hot and wet climate wreaked havoc on ships and men with northern European constitutions. While the salt and moisture ate away at the wooden *Degrave*, men continued to fall ill until Captain Young himself “died of a fever.” Just before his death, he gave his last wishes that upon expiring, his heart should be removed and taken for burial to England. As the First Mate, too, had died, the command fell to Nicholas Young, the dead captain's son.

Some of the *Degrave*'s cargo was damaged by pouring rain seeping through the decks during the year in port. By the end of October, the *Degrave* was leaking at a rate of an inch an

hour. In mid-November, after some cursory repairs, the *Degrave* was finally allowed to go—lighter in crew, under new command, and with damaged cargo—but ready in all other respects for the long voyage home.

The *Degrave* set off from Bengal, finally, on Christmas Day 1702 with about 120 hands on board, plus two women and four or five passengers including Drury. “The only good which I got at Bengal,” during the long period there, Drury would later write, “Was that I here learnt to swim,” a skill that would soon save his life.

As the *Degrave* left Hugli and descended the river toward the bay, she struck bottom and damaged her rudder. In so doing, she either worsened the leak that she gained in port, or she opened up a new one. Problem was, no one knew just how bad a shape the *Degrave* was in until she was in the middle of the Indian Ocean.

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Just behind the *Degrave* in leaving Bengal was the *Bengal Merchant*, Captain Cockburn, command. Cockburn reported terrible weather all the way from Bengal to the Cape of Good Hope. Rain, thick fog, and angry swells had marked the trip to southern Africa. Cockburn reported no sight of the *Degrave*. When he reached Ireland in October, he delivered the bad news that the *Degrave* never landed at the Cape, nor at St. Helena, another possible stopping point. By January, the Company directors declared her officially lost. Yet another year passed; all hope had been abandoned. It was as if the *Degrave* had simply disappeared.

The reason for Mary Drury’s death isn’t known, but it’s possible that the broken heart she suffered in the news of losing her son to the sea contributed to her demise. Whatever the cause, Robert Drury’s mother died in September 1703. His father, trying to regain some semblance of a normal life after losing both wife and son, remarried. Robert Drury could not have known any of this. There was no news where he was.

While Cockburn had been making his transit back home to Europe, the *Degrave*’s crew was furiously working the pumps to clear the *Degrave* of the effects of her terrible leak. They managed to get her to Dutch controlled Mauritius. The Dutch Governor there welcomed the *Degrave*, but he was alarmed at her condition. Inspections revealed that she was riding very low in the water and had lost some six feet off her rudder. The men set to work trying to get her repaired; to help with the work onboard, the *Degrave* had picked up some forty men off Mauritius, most of them Indian traders who had been abandoned on the island by the pirate captain John Bowen more than a year earlier. Together, they were able to leave Mauritius the following month.

Back in the Indian Ocean, the men soon realized that not only had they failed to fix the leak, but the *Degrave* was in even worse condition than any of them had feared. The Indians kept at the pumps without rest. But despite the work, the *Degrave* was soon carrying four feet of water in the powder magazine. It was alarmingly clear; if something wasn’t done, the *Degrave* was going to sink. Captain Young changed his course and steered for Madagascar, less than a hundred leagues away. When they spotted the massive island—with the passenger Drury high up in the rigging on lookout—Captain Young headed straight for it with little regard for the usual safety concerns. The crew scurried about, tipping over guns, cutting masts and rigging, and throwing over cargo: anything to lighten her. They tossed overboard the one remaining small boat for ferrying to shore and hurriedly lashed together planks and yards to make a raft for the same purpose. On shore, natives signaled the distressed ship with smoke and waved the men in.

The waves coursed around them, the *Degrave* listed, and no one could discern the intent of the men on shore; ignorance about them among the *Degrave*'s crew translated into the most horrific assumptions.

The raft was completed during the night. In the morning, First Mate Matthew Pratt and four others clambered in the boat with a rope and hawser to attach to rocks on land so that the crew on the *Degrave* could shimmy the way over the rough surf. As they approached land, the surf carried the boat and smashed it into the rocks, staving it to pieces. The men were dumped into the sea, but fought the waves and swells and managed to swim ashore.

Next up was the raft, which held forty or fifty people, including one of the women and Drury. The other woman as well as the captain refused to get onto the raft. Drury stripped off all his clothes, fashioned two purses, which he stuffed with money and a silver cup, and lashed them around his middle. As the raft neared the shore and flounced among the breakers, a high sea turned the raft over and threw everyone into the ocean. Some of the crew began to swim for shore; others swam back to the raft. The woman bobbed and fought in the waves, her head piercing the swells and then falling under again. She could not yell out for the water at her mouth. Drury made an effort for her, but could not keep her from going down. She slipped under to her death.

Drury turned toward shore and dove under each successive wave until he was deposited on the rocks and sand. The raft flailed about in the pounding rollers. Back on the *Degrave*, Captain Young ordered the cables cut and he steered the ship as near shore as possible. He and the others on board leapt off into the water just as the *Degrave* began to disintegrate. For the next ten minutes or so, the remaining crew washed up on shore in ones and twos, each clinging to the detritus from the dying *Degrave*. Captain Young made it, clutching the bottle that contained his father's heart for burial at Dover—a promise he would ultimately be unable to keep. Behind him, his father's ship fell to pieces in the Indian Ocean.

In all, only three people drowned. But others were so full of water that they had to be rolled and pumped and pressed amidst the wood and bales of cotton, silks, and fine calico that was once the *Degrave*'s cargo. The incapacitated began to disgorge the water from their lungs, spitting and vomiting the seawater from their stomachs, and gradually returned to the land of the living. A large fire was made, and the one hundred and sixty or so survivors huddled near. All around them, the native—some two or three hundred, according to Drury's estimates—picked their way through the bonanza washing up on shore. Of especial value was anything metal, and they took great care to break apart any timber they spotted that had iron nails within.

Thus far, none of the natives showed any predilection toward violence to the unarmed Europeans. In fact, one of them came forward with a bullock and offered to slaughter it for the castaways. When Captain Young told them they had no guns, one of the natives produced one, handed it to one of the *Degrave*'s crew, and allowed him to shoot the bullock between the ears.

With the ghostly shadows of the fire sending plumes of thick smoke like a supplication to the heavens; with the rhythmic pound of the surf a constant reminder of how hemmed in these men were; with hundreds of barely clothed natives surrounding them, speaking in incomprehensible languages and presenting the most fearful aspects to the frightened Europeans—with all of this sensory overload right in front of the fifteen year old Drury, even the generous act of slaughtering the bullock took on a horrifying specter. This would be the scene that Drury would recall decades later, one that would come back to him at the most unexpected times, one that would never fail to cause a start: "I did not know but they would devour us so, for they seemed to me like . . . cannibals. Everything before our eyes appeared horrid and frightful

and excited most dismal thoughts and dreadful expectations.”

Robert Drury was alive, but he was cast ashore to a strange and dangerous place that would be his home for the next decade and a half. For now, he was a bit more than 5,000 miles from home. But in some respects, he couldn't have been further from home had he landed on the far side of the moon.

Chapter 2

Alexander Selcraig was born in Largo, Scotland in 1676. His early years were troubled and marked by rebelliousness. At age fifteen, he was disciplined for “undecent behaviour” in a church. He failed to appear for punishment, however, opting instead to sail off to sea. Back home five years later, Selcraig was once again called to a disciplinary panel at the local church, this time for a violent fight in his home. Selcraig had beaten up his brother and only timely intercessions kept him from shooting his kin.

Perhaps searching for a fresh start, Selcraig changed his name to Selkirk and signed on to the two-ship team, *Cinque Ports* and *St. George*, led by the irascible privateer (distinct from “pirate” in having the patronage of a national government) William Dampier, who, according to one contemporary source, considered discipline to consist of “calling his subordinate officers ‘rogues, rascals, or sons of bitches’.”

The *Cinque Ports* arrived at the Juan Fernandez Island chain, off the coast of Chile, on August 6, 1703, captained by Charles Pickering. Selkirk served as the *Cinque Ports*'s Master, or navigator. A respite at the remote flyspeck of Más á Tierra offered the men a chance to revive and set out for raids along the Chilean coast: the great prize would be the treasure-laden Spanish galleon heading back home from Manila.

Más á Tierra was a forbidding place, despite the fact that it contained food, water, and enjoyed moderate weather year-round: “The melancholy howling of innumerable seals on the beach . . . rocky precipices, inhospitable woods, dropping with rain, lofty hills, whose tops were hid by thick and dark clouds, on the one hand, and tempestuous sea on the other.” Dampier didn't like it, and he didn't stay long. He took the *St. George* and headed toward Peru, leaving the *Cinque Ports* in the charge of Thomas Stradling. Selkirk and Stradling simply didn't get along; Stradling was an aristocrat, and the rough and tumble Selkirk found him incompetent and insufferable. After several months on Más á Tierra, Stradling ordered the boat loaded and the men ready for sail. Selkirk tried to convince the men to stay and await Dampier's return, pointing out not only Stradling's ill personality but also the sorry state of their ship. It would sink within the month, he predicted. But Selkirk couldn't convince any of them to stay and Stradling obligingly left Selkirk alone, mocking him even as Selkirk changed his mind and charged into the surf, calling after the ship.

In horror, Selkirk watched the ship sail away. He was alone with only his possessions: bedding, a few articles of clothing, a knife, a gun and powder, a cooking pot, some navigation instruments, and his Bible. His new island home must have felt at once immense and constraining: twelve by four miles, a circumference of thirty-four miles, and surrounded by an unforgiving and fuming sea.

He found an abandoned hut near the shore, where he stored his things.

Three times a day, he climbed to a high point overlooking the bay and scanned the horizon for a passing ship. None came. His misery continued for a full eight months before he reconciled himself to his isolation. During this period, “He grew dejected, languid, and melancholy, scarcely able to refrain from doing himself Violence.” He stopped eating fish

“because they occasion’d a Looseness.” He turned instead to the many goats that had colonized the island. He kept up his “faculties of speech” only by shouting exhortations to the heavens.

Weeks turned to months, which turned to years. He exhausted his ammunition and became as much an animal as the goats, cats, and rats that roamed around him. At night, the rats chewed on his feet and clothes while he attempted to sleep. To solve that problem, he lured feral cats into the hut, but as he watched them chase, kill, and eat the rats, he was disturbed by what inevitably awaited him: “After his death, as there would be no one to bury his remains, or to supply the cats with food, his body must be devoured by the very animals which he at present nourished for his convenience.”

He scoured the shoreline for metal implements. He fashioned tools and became adept at catching goats—some for fornication, others for food and pelts. He made crude forks and spoons out the goats’ horns. He carved a notch in a tree every day, marking the duration of his imprisonment. He fashioned a flute out of a stick and played for the woodland creatures. The hair on his head met that on his face, twisting into one knotted mat. He used his fingernails to dig and carve.

Selkirk “wore out all his Shoes and Clothes by running thro the Woods; and at last being forc’d to shift without them, his Feet became so hard, that he run every where without Annoyance.” On one harrowing occasion, he pursued a goat with so much eagerness that he caught it “on the brink of a Precipice . . . so that he fell with the Goat down the said Precipice a great height, and was so stun’d and bruis’d with the Fall, that he narrowly escap’d with his Life, and when he came to his Senses, found the Goat dead under him. He lay senseless for the space of three days and was scarce able to crawl to his Hutt, which was about a mile distant, or to stir abroad again in ten days.”

He recovered and eventually spotted a ship. He ran to the shore, waving a burning branch. Then he saw the Spanish flag fluttering atop the ship. They would take him as a slave, so he ran. The Spaniards pursued, calling him “savage” and “dog.” He climbed a tree and watched as they killed a goat and ate it just below him. They gave up the search, destroying some of his possessions before boarding their ship.

On January 31, 1709, William Dampier returned, this time with able captain Woodes Rogers, leading two ships, the *Duke* and the *Duchess*. Selkirk spotted them. The ships flew French flags, so Selkirk lit a fire and leapt along the shore. The men in the ships saw the fire and assumed there were Spanish on the island, so they readied for a fight.

When the men came ashore with guns cocked, they faced instead what appeared to be a half man, half woodland beast. He was dressed in animal pelts. It was difficult to tell where his hair ended and the pelts began. His face was bronzed by the sun and his feet were blackened and rough. He lifted his hands and muttered incomprehensibly. One of the sailors later remarked, “He had so much forgot his Language for want of Use, that we could scarce understand him, for he seem’d to speak his words by halves.” Finally, Selkirk made himself understood: “Marooned,” he managed, tears running down his cheeks.

When Selkirk was brought back to the ship, Rogers wrote that the returning sailors had with them “A Man cloth’d in Goat Skins who look’d wilder than the first Owners of them.” There on board was Dampier, the captain of the original expedition from which Selkirk had been marooned. Dampier, knowing Selkirk’s abilities and confirming Selkirk’s story for the skeptical sailors, recommended that the Goat Man be appointed Second Mate on the *Duke*.

When Selkirk offered to show the men where to find food and water, they had him perform feats and were mightily impressed at his adaptability. “We had a Bull-Dog, which we

sent with several of our nimblest Runners, to help him in catching Goats; but he distanc'd and tir'd both the Dog and the Men, catch'd the Goats, and brought 'em to us on his back," one of the men remembered. The men took to calling Selkirk, "the Governour."

There would be more raids along the way, but after more than fifty months alone—and over eight years since he left—Selkirk was heading home. Eventually, he received a payday of 800 pounds, his share of the plunder from the raiding parties.

The epilogue to the tale, probably apocryphal, was that Selkirk never could reconcile himself to a normal life back home. He got into fights, tired of mealtime conversation, withdrew, eventually built himself a cave behind his father's house, and lived there in solitude. According to Richard Steele, Selkirk lamented his exile from his island, exclaiming, "I am now worth 800 Pounds, but shall never be so happy, as when I was not worth a farthing."

An uninhabited island in the Juan Fernandez chain now carries the name, Isla Alejandro Selkirk. In 1966, the government of Chile officially changed his old island home's name to reflect his posthumous, and fictionalized, fame. Selkirk's story—in highly embellished fashion—formed the spine of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the work widely considered the English language's first historical novel.

It is a mistake, however, to assume, as many casual observers do, that *Robinson Crusoe* is merely a fictionalized version of Selkirk's story. If nothing else, the portrait of Selcraig/Selkirk as unruly and irascible is at odds with the morally upright Crusoe.

But whether Selkirk's tale was the cause or the effect, Defoe's writing of *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719 marked a turning point in his considerable oeuvre. To the lasting dismay and frustration of his scholars and biographers, Defoe left nothing behind that explicitly explains why, at the advanced age of fifty-nine, he began to write novels such as *Robinson Crusoe*. But Selkirk's story would have been irresistible to Defoe for a couple of reasons: in a purely economic sense, Defoe could have simply seen an opportunity to capitalize on the tabloid nature of the story. Expanding it and fictionalizing it was perhaps simply a good way to make money, following the reading public's interest in such stories.

Even if this is the case, Defoe's interest in the tale would have been at least as influenced by an obsession with travel, piracy, and exotic locale that would last until the end of his life. Typical of a work from his latter years is *A New Voyage Round the World, by a Course Never Sailed Before*. Its title is an obvious play upon two already existing nonfiction travel narratives: William Dampier's *A New Voyage Round the World* (1697) and Woodes Rogers' *A Cruising Voyage Round the World* (1712). But whereas those two works, and others like them, concerned themselves with a dry recitation of places and events, Defoe presented his work as another travel narrative but one that included all manner of embellishment and entertainment. In no case does he stray too far from existing fact, but his additions take in the body of work in the field already extant and present them as a unified whole: the sights and smells of places, new lands ripe for colonization, exchanges with natives on those lands.

As it was for Crusoe, Defoe used Selkirk's story, it is true, but not that story alone. Instead, Defoe had perfected a technique he had earlier employed: utilizing myriad, sometimes disparate, nonfiction sources to create a unified, fictional narrative.

But long before *Robinson Crusoe* and *New Voyage Round the World*, Defoe had become a master at crafting that rather peculiar and heretofore novel kind of prose. In crafting fiction as apparent nonfiction, he often employed the device of prefatory assurances as to the piece's verisimilitude or claiming that the manuscript in question had been obtained directly from a trustworthy source intimately—and often solely—familiar with the facts at hand.

His 1706 work, *A True Relation of the Apparition of Mrs. Veal* (notice the insistence even in the title), is one of this kind. It is a fictionalized tale of a ghost, Mrs. Veal, who visits Mrs. Bargrave, an alleged “intimate friend” of the author. Here is the short piece’s prefatory remarks:

This relation is matter of fact, and attended with such circumstances, as may induce any reasonable man to believe it. It was sent by a gentleman, a justice of peace, at Maidstone, in Kent, and a very intelligent person, to his friend in London, as it is here worded; which discourse is attested by a very sober and understanding gentlewoman, a kinswoman of the said gentleman’s, who lives in Canterbury, within a few doors of the house in which the within-named Mrs. Bargrave lives; who believes his kinswoman to be of so discerning a spirit, as not to be put upon by any fallacy; and who positively assured him that the whole matter, as it is related and laid down, is really true; and what she herself had in the same words, as near as may be, from Mrs. Bargrave’s own mouth, who, she knows, had no reason to invent and publish such a story, or any design to forge and tell a lie, being a woman of much honesty and virtue, and her whole life a course, as it were, of piety.

The story of Mrs. Veal is relayed through the only person to have experienced it. Facts, then, cannot be undermined or contradicted—at least that’s the narrative structure involved.

But what Defoe had become practiced at was creating fictional narratives steeped in nonfiction events that were often told through the voices of real historical characters, designed to lend even more authenticity. Or, alternately, he presented factual occurrences through the attentive eyes of fictionalized characters. *Journal of the Plague Year* is but one famous example. The book is often mistaken as a true historical account (and often mistakenly believed to have Daniel Defoe as its narrator, an impossibility considering the fact that the title’s year in question is 1665, when Defoe was five years old). Its striking similarity to the historical record may be due to Defoe’s having used his eyewitness uncle’s diaries as its main source. However, and this would be a pattern Defoe would employ throughout his career, the narration is fictionalized, told by a saddle-maker Defoe created for the purpose. Again, the history is presented through the microcosm of the personal; the grand event is most understandable when given through the eyes of the individual. The works attributed to Defoe passed off as histories often include wholesale retellings of already published accounts by actual participants. Defoe’s project, then, was to expand the record by offering touches of the personal: the heat of battle as much as the result; the stench of a plague-ridden body as well as the numbers of perished.

In his 1718 work, *The Family Instructor*, Defoe presents, inasmuch as this was his design, an overt argument for the creation of fiction (the heat and the stench), even within the parameters of the strictly nonfiction. *The Family Instructor* concerns the management of families; it’s divided into five parts: “Respecting Parents And Children,” “Masters And Servants,” “Husbands And Wives,” “Relating To Family Breaches,” and “Management Of Children.” In its introduction, Defoe stakes an interesting and original path, hiding nothing from his readers:

Though much of the story is historical, and might be made appear to be true in fact; yet the author, resolving not to give the least hint that should lead to persons, has been obliged to leave it uncertain to the reader, whether it be a history or a parable; believing it may be either way adapted to the sincere design; which is (1) to reprove those parents who neglect the instruction of their children; and (2) to direct young persons in their first reflections, guiding them to inquire about

themselves, their original, their state, their progress in this world, the reason of their being born into it, their passing out of it, and, which is the main cogitation, their condition beyond it.

Writing of this intentional blurring of fiction and nonfiction and referring to a previous 1715 edition, Defoe continues:

The method is new, as is said above, but perhaps may be the more pleasing . . . If novelty had only recommended the first part, then indeed we might suggest, that the thought of the reader being once entertained, could not be pleased again with the same scheme; but this can no way affect us here: for if novelty, the modern vice of the reading palate, is to judge of our performance, the whole scene now presented is so entirely differing from all that went before, and so eminently directed to another species of readers, that it seems to be as perfectly new as if no other part had been published before it. If we would but duly reflect upon the different scenes of human life, and the several stations we are placed in, and parts we act, while we are passing over this stage; we should see there are follies to be exposed, dangers to be cautioned against, and advices to be given, particularly adapted to every part of it.

In other words, the author of the work should be free to add the flourish and the fictional detail without deviating from the central message or facts. This is, in short, entertainment. Sometimes taken to task for this position by both peers and subsequent critics, Defoe here argues that embellishment in the cause of story and entertainment is no sin, an argument modern readers would recognize in the popular literary genre of memoir.

1718 was an important year in this respect. In addition to the second edition of *The Family Instructor*, Defoe also produced two more historical fictions masquerading as quasi-fiction in that same year: the first was *A Continuation of Letters of a Turkish Spy* (with this fantastic explanatory rider: “Written originally in Arabick, Translated into Italian, and Thence into English”). Defoe’s contribution was the ninth volume of these letters, the first eight authored by others. In essence, Defoe was picking up the mantle—whether there was a real Turkish spy who had been translated in the first volumes is irrelevant; Defoe penned the next, thereby taking a “real” historical figure and grafting his own work onto the preexisting. The second 1718 work, *The Memoirs of Majr. Alexander Ramkins*, was a different animal, and a good precursor to the sort of work Defoe would produce the following year with *Crusoe: Ramkins*, the person, was a fiction, a vehicle for Defoe to propound a political point of view. It’s rarely regarded as one of his better works, and its tension between pure fiction and the exposure it attempts to espouse—French evil and an impending alliance with the English Jacobite cause—undermines it as an entertainment on the level of *Robinson Crusoe*. But *Ramkins* represents a promise: the type of realist fiction to come.

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In 1720, Defoe published *Memoirs of a Cavalier*. Again, it is a fictionalized account of history where Defoe, working under the guise of another, takes great pains to present historical events through personal eyes. The pretense for the book is suggested by its full title: *Memoirs of a Cavalier; or A Military Journal of the Wars in Germany, and the Wars in England. From the Years 1632 to 1648. Written threescore years ago, by an English gentleman, who server first in*

the army of Gustavus Adolphus, the Glorious King of Sweden, till his death, and after that in the Royal Army of King Charles the First, from the beginning of the Rebellion to the end of the War.

Defoe begins his book with some prefatory notes, designed again to lead readers to believe the truthfulness within because the facts derive from eyewitness accounts, recently discovered, and now being made available:

As an evidence that it is very probable these memorials were written many years ago, the persons now concerned in the publication, assure the reader, that they have had them in their possession finished, as they now appear, above twenty years: That they were so long ago found by great accident, among other valuable papers, in the closet of an eminent public minister, of no less figure than one of king William's secretaries of state . . . a memorandum was found with this manuscript, in these words, but not signed by any name, only the two letters of a name, which gives us no light into the matter; which memoir was as follows: Memorandum.—I found this manuscript among, my father's writings, and I understand that he got them as plunder, at, or after, the fight at Worcester, where he served as major of 's regiment of horse on the side of the parliament.

Memoirs of a Cavalier was written after the success of *Robinson Crusoe*, when Defoe was well-versed in such fictions. But even in the years leading up to the creation of *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe had dabbled in other fictionalized histories, mostly, like in *Ramkins*, for the purposes of putting forth a political position: *The Memoirs of John, Duke of Melfort* (1714) and *Minutes of the Negotiations of Msnr. Mesnager* (1717) most notably, each written under the guise of an eyewitness to historical events, a fictionalized narrative and character positing political positions Defoe himself held. The idea in these cases was to render the historical personal. *As in Plague Year*, Defoe takes pains to hew to the historical record (so much so, in fact, that his fictions were often cited as historical record long after his death, as noted) while offering the effect on an individual, something relatively unheard of in the histories of Defoe's day.

So it is with *Crusoe*. Men were shipwrecked, men became castaways. In the era of naval exploration and commerce in which Defoe lived, such stories were commonplace. Generations hence, these stories were often collected in volumes of sketches concerning the fates of these ships and their crews, such as Archibald Duncan's *Mariner's Chronicle*, in the early 19th century. Where Defoe distinguishes himself is in the rendering of these stories as fictionalized wholes: a sailor such as Selcraig, reborn as Selkirk, then reborn as Crusoe, is given an entire life. His feelings, his struggles, his fears and desires: all are on display and all are beyond reproach. They come, as it were, straight from the horse's mouth. And in Daniel Defoe's capable hands, these feelings are rendered in glorious psychological and physical detail.

But while Selkirk was a flesh and blood human, Crusoe, of course, was a fiction. Indeed, how could such a fantastical story as his really be true?

Many would later ask the same question of Robert Drury. That he and Defoe inhabited London at the same time, that they easily could have crossed paths, that Defoe, the tireless collector of tales of exoticism, piracy, travel, and adventure would have had a supreme interest in Drury's story: all of it hints at some interesting points of intersection.

It's small wonder that many, if not most, later scholars assumed that Drury was simply one more in a long line of Defoe inventions. If indeed this was the case, Defoe created Drury at

the end of his life, long after honing his novelistic chops on characters such as Robinson Crusoe, to say nothing of Captain Carleton, Moll Flanders, and Roxana, to name some of his more famous creations.

Was Robert Drury simply the next in line?