

## INTRODUCTION

xi

mand over the mere carpentry and scaffolding of realism was used by these two writers for very different ends. Defoe's excess of detail was not entirely or even mainly owing to his theory of realistic art. He loved detail for its own sake. The great ambition of his life was to know more of the wonderful world in which he found himself than other men knew. For the acquisition of knowledge upon every subject under the sun he had what might almost be called a devouring passion. Consequently, what astonishes the reader of Defoe, not only in *Captain Singleton* and *Robinson Crusoe*, but also in many another book, such, for instance as the *Life of Duncan Campbell* (a story of spiritualistic motive which deals with the adventures of a deaf and dumb seer, famous in Defoe's time as a fortune teller), and indeed all his writings, is the material at the novelist's command—its massiveness, its variety, and the genuineness of its quality.

In this respect it is very interesting to compare his work with that of a writer of his time, Afra Behn. While he shows a positive genius for knowledge, she shows an equal genius for ignorance. Actually, the author of *Oroonoko* had lived in Surinam, had been brought into touch with the negroes there, and yet when she attempts to describe them she is quite unable to do it, and gives us fantastic pictures of a race that could never have lived anywhere on this planet, not even in any part of Asia, though perhaps they would not have been quite so absurd as Asiatics as they are as African negroes. Defoe had never set foot in Juan Fernandez; and yet it is by force of his knowledge as much as by his vigorous imagination that he has been able to make *Robinson Crusoe* live in an atmosphere as true as if the novelist had spent half his life there. It is the same in regard to his scenes in Africa.

For a writer to give "a local habitation and a name" to scenes that he never saw except by the eyes of his imagination, whether it be the terrible seascapes of *The Ancient Mariner* or the landscapes and seascapes of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Captain Singleton*, is to achieve a