

political agent, traveller, tradesman, brickmaker, projector, and prisoner in Newgate. He had an inexhaustible store of miscellaneous reading; he delighted especially in travels and adventures; he had extraordinary aptitude for minute and realistic detail; he had an indefatigable habit of the pen. For all these gifts the experiences of Selkirk, as developed in *Robinson Crusoe* afforded a favourable field, while its very limitations and restrictions tended to control and concentrate his 'thick-coming fancies.' Moreover, it is supposed that certain affinities—of which too much may easily be made, but which he certainly desired<sup>1</sup> should be recognised—between the circumstances of his imagined castaway and his own solitary and self-reliant career, gave a subjective note to his work, which, save in the *Farther Adventures* and the *Serious Reflections* of Robinson Crusoe, it does not attain elsewhere. It is certainly not equally perceptible in *Colonel Jack*, *Moll Flanders*, *Roxana*, and the rest of the fictitious narratives that followed his admitted masterpiece, books which are nevertheless characterised by the same exactitude of trivial particulars, the same intentional negligences and repetitions, the same homely, pedestrian, and even flat phraseology. For the most part, they are chronicles of such careers as, in real life, would have fallen to the recording pen of the Ordinary of Newgate, from whose historiographic efforts they differ mainly by their greater variety of incident, their practised penmanship, and their faculty (in their writer's own words) 'of forging a story.' In this last art Defoe is unrivalled. By the mental stenography and systematic stocktaking of a lifetime, he had accumulated so vast a reserve of facts and illustrations that, in the absence of anything to 'report,' in a journalistic phrase, he could concoct a report of such astounding verisimilitude that to this day it remains debatable whether some of his performances are true, or partly true, or not true at all, in the sense that the events which they profess to narrate were never combined in the experiences of one and the same individual.

From the fact that Hogarth makes *Moll Flanders* the chosen literature of his 'Idle Apprentice,' it may be presumed that many of what Lamb calls the 'secondary' fictions of Defoe, though professedly didactic in their intention, were directed at readers not more illustrious than the apple-woman whom Borrow's Lavengro found studying the same absorbing work on London Bridge. But there were other

reasons why they might be expected to appeal to the people more than to the cultivated classes. It was Defoe's boast that his tales were true histories, always an additional attraction to the humbler reader; and that, being true, they had no connection with such novels and romances as then existed. It was not with the *Oroonoko* of the warm-blooded Aphra Behn, or the *Cassandra* of the sempiternal Sieur de la Calprenède, that he wished them to be compared: his fitter analogue in unrelieved veracity, had he sought for it, would have been more easily found in Bunyan's sombre and relentless *Life and Death of Mr Badman*. But if, in addition to his singular gift of 'lying like truth,' he had combined with his work any appreciable plot to be unravelled or problem to be solved; if he had included any material admixture of passion, or any delineation of the domestic life of his day, he might fairly have claimed—what is sometimes claimed for him—to rank as the Father of the English Novel. These things, however, he did not do. His invented biographies of rogues and pirates and *bona robas* differ from those which are not invented only in being fictitious as wholes; and they no more entitle their author to priority in fiction as we now understand it than if he had been the author of the wonderful book—not a little indebted to his own *Robinson Crusoe*—which seventeen years later was given to the world by the maimed and melancholy genius of Jonathan Swift. But *Gulliver's Travels*, that unique and unclassable masterpiece, must be left for treatment in the special pages on Swift that follow. In tracing the history of the Novel, it is nevertheless impossible not to refer to it, if only on account of the circumstantiality in fiction in which Swift rivals Defoe; but it has little or nothing to do with the development of the form.

That development came suddenly and unexpectedly, nine years after Defoe had been laid to rest in the Dissenters' burial-ground at Bunhill Fields. And it came from a most unhelpful source. It would have been as easy to predict that a middle-aged printer should become the author of *Pamela* as that a sexagenarian journalist should sit down and write *Robinson Crusoe*. There are indeed certain superficial resemblances between Richardson and Defoe. Both belonged to the lower middle classes; both posed as moralists; both wrote the English of common speech; both were circumstantial in manner and copious in style. But