Robinson Crusoe and the Aesthetic of Survival

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"If I were stranded on a desert island, I would bring this book with me…" this hackneyed expression at the heart of the BBC show "Desert Island Discs" doesn't mean that the speaker ever considers being stranded on an island. It refers to a common trope in Western culture which I call the fantasy of survival. Survival is often addressed as a way to explore one's priorities and necessities and one's know-how. The success of the guidebooks, movies, and reality-TV of the contemporary survivalist culture confirms this fascination for survival. In all cases, *Robinson Crusoe* is a major reference to exemplify all these aspects of the survival scenario: he re-discovers his favourite book, the Bible, he explores human skills and know-how by discovering all the crafts necessary to human life, such as cooking, sewing, pottery, weapon making. This article will investigate the notion of survival by examining the prevalence of this plot in many of Defoe's works of fiction: *Captain Singleton*, *Journal of the Plague Year*, *Colonel Jack*, *Moll Flanders*, *Roxana*. I explore the historical and aesthetic reasons which make the possibilities of being stranded on an island, left alone in a pestilential city, or stuck in the desert with no freshwater provide pleasure to the early modern, and contemporary, readers.

L'île déserte est un lieu commun dans la culture occidentale qui permet d'évoquer une situation de survie fantasmée, mobilisée pour parler de nos valeurs et de nos références : le livre ou le disque que l'on emmènerait sur une île déserte sont ceux dont on ne peut se lasser. Les récits d'une situation de survie permettent ainsi d'explorer nos priorités et nos besoins, ou de reconnaître notre savoir-faire. Le succès des guides, des films et de la télé-réalité de la culture survivaliste contemporaine confirme cette fascination du monde occidental pour la survie. Depuis 1719, Robinson Crusoé *est devenu une référence incontournable. Ce récit fondateur émarge à toutes les fonctions du scénario de survie : en redécouvrant son livre, la Bible, le héros redéfinit ses valeurs ; il explore ses compétences et mesure la diversité des savoir-faire de sa propre civilisation en découvrant tous les métiers nécessaires à la vie humaine tels que la cuisine, la couture, la poterie ou la fabrication des armes. Mais* Robinson Crusoé *n'est pas le seul récit de Defoe où les personnages sont dans une situation où leur survie dépend de leur propre capacité de choisir et d'agir : la survie sous-tend l'action des nombreuses fictions écrites et publiées par Defoe de 1719 à 1724. Cet article suit la manière dont l'intrigue de la survie réapparaît dans* Capitaine Singleton, Journal de l'année de la peste, Colonel Jack, Moll Flanders, *et* Roxana. *Il s'agit d'exposer les raisons historiques et esthétiques qui font de la possibilité de s'échouer sur une île, d'être laissé seul dans une ville pestilentielle, ou d'être isolé dans le désert sans eau potable un plaisir de lecture tant apprécié au dix-huitième siècle. Ces récits posent les structures d'une esthétique*

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de la survie dont les formes nouvelles, au-delà des Robinsonnades, sont tant prisées par les survivalistes, trois cent ans après la publication de Robinson Crusoé.

I would like to start this article with a short and honest account, to paraphrase many an eighteenth-century gazetteer, of the reason that prompted me to discuss survival in Defoe's works. It stems from my exasperation with what I call the "fantasy of survival" in contemporary Western culture. *Robinson Crusoe* was one of the first books I studied for research purposes and it became the lens through which the cultural trope of survival became obvious to me. Survival, methinks, is overrated, says one whose mere act of writing this statement is indebted to surviving several life-threatening situations. By "overrated" I mean that survival has become a measuring rod for the value of our actions which I find unjustified compared to the efforts that are made to enrich and give meaning to life when it is not directly threatened.

This is particularly true in the professional sphere: of all professions, medicine is the most respected, as medical doctors have the skills to help people survive. Within medicine, emergency medicine ranks the highest, so much so that cultural representations of medicine abound in life-saving actions, from the hustle and bustle of emergency rooms (*E.R.*, 1994-2009) to the brilliant medical investigations into the rare and life-saving diagnoses of *House, M.D.* (2004-12). By way of contrast, three quarters of medical acts are not survival-oriented but deal instead with the difficult and often unsatisfactory care of chronic diseases. We have a biased representation of the nature of a profession that is currently being probed by several groups of scholars, doctors and patients who are trying to put the care of the living patient, rather than the survival of the patient, at the heart of medical thought (Lefève, Benaroyo, Worms). This obsession with survival in medicine, I will argue, is already in the making in Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*. Many diseases were not life-threatening, and illness was experienced in everyday life: the gout, for example, was a well-known disease of the time that Defoe had little interest in. The plague, on the contrary, was a highly threatening disease of overpowering force and a quick killer which rendered survival almost impossible, and the sense of emergency quite absolute. The writers of *House, M.D.* saw this potential and one episode is devoted to the sudden re-emergence of bubonic plague (2.19 "Sleeping God Lies").

Defoe's works, which consider survival from religious, medical and economic perspectives deeply connected to early modern anxieties, remain a major reference for the multifaceted representation of what is now called "survivalism." In contemporary Western entertainment, the fantasy of survival keeps popping up in very diverse contexts with *Robinson Crusoe* as the central trope, a narrative paradigm almost universally recognised yet only remotely connected to Defoe's 1719 novel. Scholars have studied the multifaceted genre of the *robinsonade*,

the ways in which they followed almost immediately the publication of *Robinson Crusoe* and continue, unrelenting, to today. The adventure T.V. show *Expedition Robinson*, for example—a 1992 Swedish reality show that started the many versions of *Survivor* around the world, including the French *Koh-Lanta* set on the eponymous Taiwanese island—is a *robinsonade* of the reality T.V. genre that relies on the pleasure induced by the spectacle of survival. The purpose of this article, however, is not to add to the numerous analyses of *robinsonades* and their paradigm in contemporary culture—research on this genre has underlined the success of survival as a narrative trope and a recurrent setting for religious, ethical, social or economic revelations (Fallon; Blaim).

I want, rather, to use this trope as an entry into Daniel Defoe's other fictions, in which characters regularly find themselves in dire situations comparable to that of Robinson on his island. Starting from *Robinson Crusoe*, I will explore how the aesthetic of survival unfolds in Defoe's other works of fiction. Such an investigation might be seen as problematic and somewhat restrictive in its attempt to impose coherence on the works of a versatile author. Yet survival may be approached as a vein of writing that spreads organically through Defoe's works, a philosophical and religious idea that was a resource for him because it resonated with some contemporary concerns. What's more, the fictions under study in this article were published over a span of five years, and this chronological element suggests some degree of coherence in Defoe's interests, aesthetic and ethics. I offer a librarian's stroll among the Defoe shelves (741.5942, DE) and follow the chronological order of Defoe's publications to investigate how, in most of the works of Defoe's fiction, major characters find themselves in hostile and life-threatening environments where their survival is at stake. Rather than "trial by danger" (Cohen 71), a common narrative function of early modern romances, I use the term "survival" because Defoe's characters, in the novels under study, have to face a situation in which one or several vital needs such as water, food, health and safety, are attacked by an external element, whether it be climatic, environmental, biological or social. In all cases, the characters must survive the absence of that specific necessity which threatens the balance of life, unrelated to the action of one specific enemy. While danger can come indeed from a specific enemy or any other agent, the term "survival" is used when characters are isolated and fighting overpowering conditions: the elements, the climate, an epidemic, or extreme poverty for instance.

The Origins: *Robinson Crusoe* as the Epitome of Survival

Survival is at the heart of the plot of Defoe's 1719 first and most well-known story of Robinson Crusoe, *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, as well as its sequels. Robinson escapes with Xury, survives the tempest that destroys the rest of the crew, organises his life strategi-

cally on an unknown island by recycling material from the shipwreck, encounters cannibalistic practices and fears being eaten himself. Later, Robinson and Friday unexpectedly survive and win the battles against the natives and Spaniards, at the very end of the book, to cross Europe from Lisbon to England by land through the most remote mountains of the Pyrenees. There, they are circled by famished wolves. All these events are told retrospectively by a narrator who explicitly says he has survived, and makes moral, spiritual and practical comments on the situation. The reader is given direct access to Robinson's experience of survival as at least part of it is written like a journal, started once he was settled on his island, and copied entirely to create the novel. The journal rewrites part of the events already described by the narrator, as he himself notes ("in it will be told all these Particulars over again," Defoe 2001, 70), and goes on presenting his new life on the island, the evolution of the climate, his animal encounters, new realisations, worries and spiritual reflections.

Among the many instances of Robinson's creativity and determination to survive, I would like to dwell on his malady as a specific moment when Crusoe, overpowered by his symptoms and the climate at the same time, lacks agency. After a heavy rain, Robinson falls ill and notes "*June 19*. Very ill, and shivering, as if the weather had been cold." He then notes the oncoming headaches and fever, and turns to God: "*June 21*. Very ill, frighted almost to death with the apprehensions of my sad condition, to be sick, and no help: Pray'd to GOD for the first time since the storm off of Hull, but scarce knew what I said, or why; my thoughts being all confused" (Defoe 2001, 71). The fear and confusion brought on by the illness which threatens his life, already threatened by the circumstances, are conducive to spiritual revelation, in the tradition of spiritual journal-keeping. In this entry, Crusoe interprets his first prayer as the sincere emotional and spiritual outburst in reaction to the imminence of death, but still moved by fear rather than revelation. He gets somewhat better and then worse, until the disease culminates in a major crisis six days later:

> *June 27*. The Ague again so violent, that I lay a-Bed all Day, and neither eat or drank. I was so ready to perish for Thirst, but so weak, I had no Strength to stand up, or to get myself any Water to drink: Pray'd to God again, but was light-headed, and when I was not, I was so ignorant, that I knew not what to say; only I lay and cry'd, *Lord look upon me*, *Lord pity me*, *Lord have mercy upon me*: I suppose I did nothing else for two or three Hours, till the fit wearing off, I fell asleep, and did not wake till far in the Night; when I wak'd, I found myself much refresh'd, but weak, and exceeding thirsty: However, as I had no water in my whole Habitation, I was forc'd to lie till Morning, and went to sleep again. (Defoe 2001, 72)

The representation of spiritual revelation in sickness has been the object of many critical readings of Defoe's works, which have emphasised the connections between this turning-point in the narrative and non-conformist practices. Spiritual diaries are interesting texts to look at ways

in which illness was reported and yet, scholars have argued, should not be too quickly interpreted as spontaneous and self-expressive, but rather as shaped by the convention of other contemporary practices such as account-keeping (Thorley 28-29). Of the numerous interpretations on journal-keeping, G.A. Starr's seminal work on spiritual autobiography remains central to the interpretation of *Robinson Crusoe*. Starr showed how Crusoe's writing was consistent with the early Christian literature of conversion reenacted by dissenters whose journals and memoirs were crucial to their communities for the understanding of an experience-based faith (Starr 74-125). "Crusoe's malady," he writes, "is another striking instance of Defoe's ability to exploit fully the narrative possibilities of commonplace events, and at the same time to avail himself of their conventional spiritual significance" (Starr 103). In the context of this article, Crusoe's malady highlights the spiritual component at stake in the elaboration of the aesthetic of survival. The litany and imploration for God's mercy that accompanies delirium and fever are signs of a spiritual thirst that echoes Robinson's physical thirst. Robinson's vital needs, eating, drinking and sleeping, are on trial, and survival does not depend on him anymore, unlike the previous situations on the island, which depended on his agency and quick-mindedness.

Crusoe's malady, however, could also be read in the context of early modern medicine, in which the Hippocratic notion of a "healthy crisis" is commonly accepted as the self-realising cure of a feverish sickness. This medical concept is well described in an article the French vitalist doctor Théophile de Bordeu wrote for the *Encyclopédie* in 1751:

> La *crise*, dit Galien, & d'après lui toute son école, est précédée d'un dérangement singulier des fonctions ; la respiration devient difficile, les yeux deviennent étincelants ; le malade tombe dans le délire, il croit voir des objets lumineux ; il pleure, il se plaint de douleurs au-derrière du cou, & d'une impression fâcheuse à l'orifice de l'estomac ; sa lèvre inférieure tremble, tout son corps est vivement secoué : les hypocondres rentrent quelquefois, & les malades se plaignent d'un feu qui les brûle dans l'intérieur du corps, ils sont altérés : il y en a qui dorment ou qui s'assoupissent ; & à la suite de tous ces changemens se montrent une sueur ou un saignement du nez, un vomissement, un devoiement, ou des tumeurs. Les efforts & les excrétions sont proprement la *crise ;* elle n'est, à proprement parler, qu'un redoublement ou un accès extraordinaire, qui termine la maladie d'une façon ou d'autre. (Bordeu)

By "terminating," Bordeu means that the crisis brings either death or life, and he goes on to explain that the Ancients considered a crisis as the final battle between the disease and Nature. Robinson Crusoe's profuse sweating, his excessive thirst and delirium are the manifestation of this final battle. The representation of survival is thus related to the medical notion of a healthy crisis. Hannah Newton's work on representations and experiences of recovery in early modern England confirms that such a crisis was seen as "the decisive battle between Nature and the illness, upon which the outcome of sickness depended; such imagery was

appropriate given the personification of this agent as a virago fighter" (Newton 52). The aesthetic is powerful and simple: crises make for short and intense episodes with a powerful narrative impact on the reader, usually a turning-point in the story.

Captain Singleton: Hostile Environment as Laboratory

One of the joys of survival narratives relies on the spectacle of the material solutions found to cope with the difficult surrounding conditions, which in *Robinson Crusoe* include make do, recycling and craftsmanship. In *Captain Singleton*, material solutions come from experimental science, and reach a higher degree of technicity which I would like to examine in parallel with contemporary survivalist cultures. Robinson's thirst can be read as an echo of the pirates' lack of water in the middle of the desert in *Captain Singleton*, published the following year. In the first half of the book, a group of pirates find themselves in the desert under the leadership of Captain Singleton, with little or no food. Among the fictional hostile settings elaborated by Defoe, the desert ranks above the island in terms of hostility, at least initially. The pirates, more at ease on sea than land, must fight unidentified savage animals. They soon lack fresh water and look to relieve their thirst—they walk to the mountains, hoping to find springs, which they do, but Singleton notes that "the first Spring we came to, and which looked admirably clear and beautiful, [was] salt as Brine: it was a terrible Disappointment to us, and put us under melancholy Apprehensions at first" (Defoe 1969, 110). The source for survival is thus unattainable, and the men have to overcome one more obstacle to survive. The general discouragement is countered by one of the pirates, a former surgeon, who gives orders to filter the water, and transform the salt water into fresh water. Singleton is sceptical and curious at the same time: "I still wondered by what Witchcraft it was that our Artist the Surgeon would make his salt Water turn fresh, and I long'd to see the Experiment, which was indeed a very odd one" (Defoe 1969, 111). As a surgeon, the character has the qualities of a life-saver, and a scientific knowledge which is summed up in Singleton's ambivalence about his companion's skills, as he hesitates between black magic ("witchcraft") and science ("experiment").

In both cases, Singleton's desire to be a direct eye-witness to the life-saving process introduces the reader to the scene and offers a detailed account of his observations. He starts by describing the material conditions for the experiments, defining the tools and the measures needed, as any writer belonging to the Royal Society would have done at the time. This particular trait is underscored by Ilse Vickers as one of the methodologies of the New Sciences at play in *Robinson Crusoe*: "Crusoe defends an attitude to reality that can be directly related to the Royal Society," she writes, "taking up the traditional Baconian interests in mechanical arts, the Fellows had stressed that scientific discoveries and inventions

must be directed to everyday needs of life" (Vickers 102-3). In *Captain Singleton*, the experimental aspect of the scene is made even clearer by the spectacle of chemistry in the making, while *Crusoe* mostly deals with the elaboration of trades and crafts. Singleton thus describes: "He took two of our large Matts, and sow'd them together, and they made a kind of Bag four Foot broad, three Foot and a Half high, and about a Foot and a Half thick when it was full" (Defoe, 1969, 111). A step-by-step description of the filtering process ensues, requiring two bags of sand and the assistance of a slave:

> He caused us to fill this Bag with dry Sand, and tread it down as close as we could, not to burst the Matts. When thus the Bag was full within a Foot, he sought some other Earth, and filled up the rest with it, and still trod it all in as hard as he could. When he had done, he made a hole in the upper Earth, about as broad as the crown of a large Hat, and bad a Negroe fill it with water, and still as it shrunk away, to refill it again, and keep it full. The Bag he had placed at first cross two Pieces of Wood, about a Foot from the Ground, and under it he ordered some of our skins to be spread, that would hold Water. In about an hour, and not sooner, the Water began to come dropping thro' the Bottom of the Bag, and to our great surprise, was perfect fresh and sweet. (Defoe 1969, 111)

One of the arguments made by Shapin and Schaffer on experiments in the seventeenth century is that they are described by the experimenters so as to be reproducible by the readers (Shapin and Schaffer 43). Singleton's experimental account seems to follow the lines of the New Science, which Defoe was familiar with, having been educated at one of the dissenting academies of London. Morton's school on Newington Green, one of the schools that was most engaged with teaching the principles of mathematics and natural science, had even invested in a laboratory (Novak 41; Vickers 33-51). The legacy of Francis Bacon was a major influence in these new dissenting academies, and the 1627 posthumous edition of *Sylva Sylvarum* describes the sand water filter in similar details in the first experiment of the first century, which is the source for Defoe's account (Bacon, I, 1). Further, Margaret Cohen talks about the "performability" of "Crusoe's entire deed of survival on a desert island," which is directly connected to the mariner's travel accounts and instruction books, an appeal to the reader's desire to perform the trades described by Crusoe in a step-by-step process very similar to the experiment depicted in *Captain Singleton* (Cohen 72). Performability is one of the elements that interest me as it goes beyond the scientific context informing the scene and focuses on the impact of the scene on the reading process. The scene appeals to a desire for technical knowledge on how to survive in dire situations that has more to do with the aesthetic of the narrative than with the science of survival per se.

I am tempted here to make a bold anachronistic comparison with *The SAS Survival Handbook*, a best-seller manual from the 2000s. It was first published in 1986 by a former officer of the British Air Force, Jonathan

Lofty Wiseman. The book gives detailed instructions on how to survive a plane crash, how to jump from a roof or fight a shark, and it includes, unsurprisingly, directions on how to distil salt water into drinkable water. Wiseman developed a profitable business out of his survival handbook: he published sequels, such as *The SAS Urban Survival Handbook* and *The SAS Outdoor Survival Handbook*, labelled some tools (the "Lofty Wiseman Survival Tool" still costs £ 169 in 2018), produced an Android app based on his book in 2011 and took part in the creation of the "Trueways Survival School" in 2005, which offers intense courses ranging from the two days "survival kids" to a three or four days "advanced shelter building" or "urban survival." In the midst of this thriving survival business, Wiseman's greatest professional achievement is not to have trained soldiers, paramedics or firemen—in fact, there is no reference to this—but rather to have been hired by the entertainment industry as a consultant on the movie *Memphis Belle* (Michael Caton-Jones, 1990) and as a survival instructor on the reality show *Castaway 2000* (BBC, 2000-2001). If survival becomes a business, therefore, it belongs to the entertainment industry. Coming back to the early eighteenth century, I would like to suggest that the fascination for survival that permeates Defoe's novels is as deeply aesthetic and commercial as it is philosophical or scientific. Although the publishing and reading context is radically different, Wiseman's survival business and Defoe's work share an aesthetic based on the display of technical knowledge in hostile environments that is related to pleasure and fantasy through performability, rhythm, and the technical imagination more than any other aspect.

Surviving the Plague: Risk-Taking and Violence in *A Journal of the Plague Year*

One year later, in 1722, Defoe published *A Journal of the Plague Year*, the narrative of a tradesman who remains in London during the great plague of 1665, as well as *Due Preparations for the Plague*, a compilation of recipes, devotions, moral and social advice in the form of short narratives or dialogues. This joint publication is part of a larger trend of English exploitation of the outbreak of the plague in Marseilles in 1720, which triggered major anxiety in France and Europe (Nixon). *A Journal of the Plague Year* is the transposition, into an urban context, of the extreme conditions above mentioned in *Robinson Crusoe* and *Captain Singleton*. The plague immediately creates a situation in which characters are confronted with almost certain death and attempt to survive through various creative and desperate measures. In some ways, the book could be read as the inventory of desperate undertakings when faced with the imminence of death. H.F., the narrator, lists all kinds of superstitious practices, violent attempts against one's friends and families, suicidal or criminal behaviours by individuals or groups of individuals who are either sick or locked up with a sick parent. Raised in a culture

in which *habeas corpus* remained one of the basic rights of the people, the narrator strongly criticises the public measure that consisted in the "shutting up of houses" (Defoe 1986, 58-59). He explains how wardens were placed in front of the main door, how windows and exterior accesses were barred, to contain the sick inside the house and prevent further extension of the contagion, all of which led to collective fear of being confined with the sick and greater spreading of the contagion than might have been, were it not for such violence. As the epidemic becomes an overpowering destructive force, H.F. reports several mad attempts of individuals faced with the imminence of death, as well as sick people who either died instantly or were miraculously cured.

I would like to focus on one self-contained micro-narrative of survival:

> I heard of one infected Creature who, running out of his Bed in his Shirt in the anguish and agony of his Swellings, of which he had three upon him, got his Shoes on and went to put on his Coat; but the Nurse resisting, and snatching the Coat from him, he threw her down, ran over her, ran downstairs into the street, directly into the Thames in his Shirt. (Defoe 1986, 175)

Unlike in other situations earlier in the narrative, where characters believe themselves sick, this one exhibits the typical swelling that can kill a man in a few hours. The nurse's task is not to provide care, but to keep the patient confined in his home and calm him down until death comes. The sick man's violent struggle for life, however, leaves him naked, and ready for a new birth. He reverses the destructive force of the disease by using the potential of contagion as a protection and means of escape: "the Nurse running after him, and calling to the Watch to stop him; but the Watchman, frighted at the man, and afraid to touch him, let him go on" (Defoe 1986, 175). Thus protected by his own sickness, he moves on, and "being a good swimmer, swam quite over the River; and the Tide being coming in, as they call it, (that is, running Westward) he reached the Land not till he came about the Falcon Stairs" (Defoe 1986, 175). Falcon Stairs is not just opposite Steelyard, where the sick man started, but further up the Thames and not far from the South Bank, a less populated part of the city. This brings him to a no-man's land which he visits during the night:

> he ran about the Streets there, Naked as he was, for a good while, when, it being by that time High water, he takes the River again, and swam back to the Still-yard landed, ran up the Streets again to his own House, knocking at the Door, went up the Stairs and to his Bed again; and that this terrible Experiment cured him of the Plague, that is to say, that the violent Motion of his Arms and Legs stretched the Parts where the Swellings he had upon him were, that is to say, under his Arms and Groin, and caused them to ripen and break; and that the cold of the Water abated the Fever in his Blood. (Defoe 1986, 175)

Deemed "terrible" because this event gives the sick man a heroic role akin to a soldier at war with his own body, the scene can be interpreted

as a medical experiment, with a physiological account of the self-administered cure. Just like Robinson's ague, the swellings ripen and break in a self-destructive crisis promoted by "violent motion" while the effects of the cold water echo contemporary medical theory on cold bathing such as Sir John Floyer's *Psychrolousia: Or, the History of Cold Bathing* (Floyer). Cold bathing was thought to tighten the fibres and brace the circulation of the fluids, as illustrated in the story by the abatement of the fever and a refreshed blood. Unlike the freshwater filter, this experiment requires no tools, and even though it could be read as a baptism, as the naked man plunges into the water to be saved, it is accounted for by H.F. with the same rationality displayed by Captain Singleton when faced with scientific creativity. The aesthetic of survival differs, however, as the sick man relies not so much on invention as on rage and resistance. Violence is at the heart of this attempt, suggesting that violent diseases require violent treatments. *Singleton* and *A Journal of the Plague Year* both emphasise the characters' agency, a powerful criterion of reader's satisfaction in early modern literature (McKeon 118-28).

Children's Strategies for Survival in *Colonel Jack* and *Moll Flanders*

The eponymous heroes of *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack*, both published in 1722, the same year as *A Journal of the Plague Year*, also deal with what John Lofty Wiseman would call "Urban Survival." Both characters are reduced to extreme poverty in a crowded city, and both are reduced to—and seduced into—stealing to save their own lives, which has been read as part of a paradigm of criminal biographies (Rawlings 11). Both stories start with narratives of the character's childhood and early orphanage, in what was earlier interpreted as a variation on the picaresque genre—the poor orphans evolve from one encounter to another and find new resources every day to survive in a hostile world.

Colonel Jack starts with the death of Jack's nurse, who leaves him alone with no money. He finds shelter—yet another pillar of survival, Wiseman argues—in a glass-house, sleeping on the floor, and feeding on what the "folks in Rosemary-Lane," a market street, would give him in exchange for his errands. He meets two gentlemen who take pity on him, and offer to give him money. Defoe writes a moral story which could have been inspired by Horace's first epistle (Horace I,7) or even by La Fontaine's fable *The Rich Man and the Shoemaker* (La Fontaine VIII, 2), and might well have been inserted in his 1715 *Family Instructor* as this small episode bears all the characteristics of the anecdotes that pervade conduct books: it is a short dialogue that gives the example of a virtuous yet pragmatic boy confronted with a problem he strategically solves. It shows young Jack anxious for his safety, afraid to be robbed, and going back to the gentlemen who "observ'd to one another, how naturally Anxiety and Perplexity attends those that have Money" (Defoe 1947, 44). One of the two gentlemen concludes "when this poor Boy

had no Money, he slept all Night in the Straw or on the warm Ashes in the Glass-House, as soundly and as void of Care as it would be possible for any Creature to do; But now as soon as he has gotten Money, the Care of preserving it brings Tears into his Eyes, and Fear into his Heart" (Defoe 1947, 44). The condition of poor children was a crucial social and political question in eighteenth-century London, partly embraced by charities and religious institutions (Levene). Yet the text departs from social questions inspired by the realistic depiction of children's poverty, to borrow from the fable genre leading to a moral conclusion in one of Defoe's favourite paradoxes:

> This was enough to let anyone see how all the Sorrows and Anxieties of Men's Lives come about, how they rise from their restless pushing at getting of Money, and the restless Cares of keeping it when they have got it. I that had no Thing, and had not known what it was to have had any Thing, knew nothing of the care, no concern about where I should get my victuals, either of getting or of keeping; I wanted no Thing, who wanted everything. (Defoe 1947, 44)

Jack's poverty is much more extreme than that of the characters from Horace or La Fontaine, who, though poor, earn their wages every day, so that Defoe introduces the notion of survival in the initial fictional settings. Jack's final statement on desire and poverty ("I wanted no Thing, who wanted everything"), relying on the ambiguity of the verb "want," is more reminiscent of Franciscan ethics than Defoe's Presbyterian culture would suggest, yet stands at the heart of a novel which revolves around the idea of dependence. *Colonel Jack* is well known, for example, for tackling the question of servitude, as Jack is confronted to what Denis Todd calls "fake choices," that is, stealing or becoming an indentured servant (Todd 90-91). The purity of a child's survival skills, his Christian confidence in the arrival of his daily bread, and his lack of desire for the autonomy brought by money are only nuanced by the rest of the story: Jack is also conscious that his pocket might become an object of desire, and threaten one of the only things he has secured for his survival: his shelter in the glass-house:

> What art [thou] afraid of.
> They will know I have Money.
> Well, and what then.
> Then I must sleep no more in the warm Glass-house, and I shall be starv'd with cold.
> They will take away my Money. (Defoe 1947, 44)

Property and stealing among the poor lead Jack to entrust the generous gentleman with his money for several years, with an interest rate and a secure contract, rather than give him his money back as in the fables of both Horace and La Fontaine. Such strategy foreshadows Jack's improvement as an indentured servant, since he will rise from servitude

to mastery, and from dependence to ownership, all thanks to his narrative skills since his promotion is due to his master's being seduced by the narrative of his life. Jack's survival, therefore, does not rely so much on naivety as a moral reading would have us think, but rather on his ability to evaluate risks and priorities: sleeping in a safe place (as he can get food by other means) is thus more important to him than taking the chance of being robbed of his money and a place to sleep altogether. The aesthetic of survival takes over the moral fable and Jack's careful handling of his money, which he will retrieve after a few more adventures, and counteracts the moral plot with a survival plot: Jacks wants nothing, because everything he now has, he has secured in the hands of his original benefactor.

A similar argument is made by Jack's contemporary character, Moll Flanders, when she is but eight, and threatened with going into service—a terrifying prospect she calls "the bugbear of service" (Defoe 1981, 16), often depicted in Defoe as a tyrannical and life-threatening situation. Young Moll argues with her guardian, a nurse and schoolteacher, to let her stay with her and become a "gentlewoman," which, in Moll's words, simply means "being able to work for myself." Her nurse gently mocks her:

> "Why, what can you earn?" says she; "what can you get at your work?"
> "Threepence," said I, "when I spin, and fourpence when I work plain work."
> "Alas! poor gentlewoman," said she again, laughing, "what will that do for thee?"
> It will keep me, *says I*, if you will let me live with you. And this *I said* in such a poor Petitioning Tone, that it made the poor Woman's Heart yearn to me, as she told me afterwards.
> But, *says she*, that will not keep you and buy you Cloaths too; and who must buy the little Gentlewoman Cloaths? *says she*, and smil'd all the while at me.
> I will Work harder, then, *says I*, and you shall have it all.
> Poor child! it won't keep you, *says she*; it will hardly keep you in Victuals.
> Then I will have no Victuals, *says I again*, very Innocently, let me but live with you.
> Why, can you live without Victuals? *says she*. Yes, *again says I*, very much like a Child, you may be sure, and still I cry'd heartily. (Defoe 1981, 17)

Moll's passion finally convinces her nurse to keep her; not unlike Jack's benefactors, she is moved by the girl's sincerity. Moll insists on her own lack of strategy: "I had no policy in all this; you may easily see it was all Nature" (Defoe 1981, 17). Yet the result is the same: by offering to starve for companionship, young Moll is rewarded by companionship *and* victuals. The condition for survival, in her childish mind, is to be ready to die in order to choose who she can live with. In Defoe's works, this condition for survival is defined by gender, since women's associations with men or other women are crucial to save their lives, or threaten them—their options are always social, when men have the option to take a solitary path.

Survival and Natural Disasters: Roxana's Storm

Defoe's obsession with survival was not limited to epidemics, urban poverty or desert places: he also had an interest in natural disasters, and many storms can be found in his fictions, as is the case in *Roxana*. Among Defoe's protagonists, Roxana is the furthest from Robinson Crusoe, as she is the least tried by life-threatening situations, and her choices and options are not reduced to survival strategies. And yet, as one of Defoe's last works of fictions, it strangely ties in with one of the prolific author's earliest works, *The Storm* (1704), a pamphlet written after the great storm of 1703. *The Storm* has a place in this "Gazetteer" issue, as it starts with a detailed account of the event, based on many direct testimonies sent to Defoe who had published an advertisement in the *London Gazette* in 1703 (McKay). Although written almost twenty years apart, *The Storm* and *A Journal of the Plague Year* share a similar structure: they are both built on the accounts of survival strategies when faced with the imminence of death. Each work compiles miracle stories as well as narratives of utmost despair, such as, in *The Storm*, the narrative of the suicide of a ship captain, and recurrent accounts of people aboard a ship travelling between France, England and Holland, and their utmost despair as their ship is about to collide with another.

In *The Novel and the Sea,* Margaret Cohen points out that Defoe's account of the storms oscillated between the early journalistic report, the adventure narrative and the "Calvinist shipwreck narratives" (Cohen 59). Roxana's instant—and temporary—conversion recalls the religious more than the journalistic, just like Robinson's anxious prayer early in the novel when he is first caught in a storm on the ship from Hull to London: "In this Agony of Mind, I made many vows and Resolutions" (Defoe 2001, 9). Amy and Roxana find themselves in a tempest as they are embarked on a ship to go from France to Holland, so that Roxana can settle her bills before returning to her "beloved country." As she sees the coast of England when she leaves Dover, she becomes "secretly wishful that a storm would rise that might drive the ship over to the coast of England" so that she might be "set on shore anywhere upon English ground" (Defoe 1981b, 126). The secret wish is partly fulfilled, and a tempest suddenly rises. Both Amy and Roxana fear for their lives, and Roxana is brought to regret her past deeds:

> All this repeated itself to my Thoughts at that very Moment; and every one of *Amy*'s Cries sounded thus in my Ears: I am the wicked cause of it all; I have been thy Ruin, *Amy*; I have brought thee to this, and now thou art to suffer for the Sin I have entic'd thee to; and if thou art lost for ever, *what must I be?* What must be my Portion? (Defoe 1981b, 126)

Roxana's anxiety, however, differs from Robinson's, as it bears the weight of her responsibility towards her friend and servant Amy. Her survival will not bring the repentance announced during the tempest,

which, to Defoe, is more cause for her later downfall. According to Hannah Newton, shipwrecks and tempests were common near-death narratives that tapped into the collective mariners' imagination: "mariners' tales were widely disseminated in early modern England, the subjects of innumerable ballads, so it is likely that even those patients with no personal experience of shipwrecks felt some affinity with the plight of sailors," she writes, adding that "accounts of these seafaring calamities bear striking similarity to those of survival from illness" (Newton 169). What Roxana fails to see after the tempest is the truth of her emotions and religious yearnings, and her blindness echoes Robinson's short-lived pangs of consciousness after his first experience of a storm during his first journey at sea. Because it rids the character of the superfluous, a survival situation is thus interpreted as a test for truth, a lie-detector compelling characters to disclose their soul or, in twenty-first century popular culture terms, their "real self."

I would like to conclude with a final chronological sidestep, to another robinsonade in the form of a radio show. Episode 642 of *This American Life*, entitled "The Impossible Dream," narrates the ultimately unsuccessful efforts of Republican Senator Jeff Flake to push the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) bill through Congress in a bipartisan vote. Reporter Zoe Chace, having explained that one of the issues was an ongoing conflict between the Senator and the U.S. President, even though they initially belonged to the same political party, gave this crucial information in the form of a conclusion:

> Jeff Flake failed. For the last few years, Jeff Flake has done this weird, very non-political thing. He goes to a remote Pacific island and lives there for a week to see if he can survive on his own.
> He grew up obsessed with survival stories—his favourite guilty pleasure, he says—Shackleton, Robinson Crusoe, anyone who was basically in a sailboat, capsized, ended up on a life raft, and got to an island. He wanted to know, if I were marooned on an island, could I survive? (…)
> The Discovery Channel filmed it. Called it *Rival Survival.*
> (*This American Life*, 642, April, 06, 2018)

Rival Survival dramatically narrates the painful five-days collaboration of two Senators, one Republican, one Democrat, under the scorching sun of the Marshall Islands, and their struggle to find freshwater, to start a fire and to build a shelter. Although the show is not directly meant to be political, the overarching message is that their first reluctant, yet necessary and ultimately successful collaboration is a clear claim for bipartisanship, currently under threat in the U.S. Congress, as if their compulsory cooperation on the island was a sign of a deeper political truth for the country. This political statement, however, was already Jeff Flake's major concern before he started training for the survival challenge. Presented as a revelation on the island, the idea seems to bear

a more dramatic weight, a universal truth tried by the ordeal of life-threatening conditions on the island. How does this late night television show connect with Defoe's early modern version of survivalism? I would argue that the material pleasure of watching the physical—and highly visible—struggles such as lighting a fire or purifying stagnant water is extremely satisfactory, and intensified by the sense of danger created by the threatening environment. What remains from the experience of the show, far from any political or spiritual message, is the entertaining vision of two senators drinking rainwater from the dead palms of a tree, and covering their legs with sand to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes at night on the beach—pure pleasure at the spectacle of the fantasy of orderly human life sliding into the wild.

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