

THE MANY FACES OF DANIEL DEFOE'S *ROBINSON CRUSOE*:  
EXAMINING THE CRUSOE MYTH IN FILM AND ON TELEVISION

Sophia Nikoleishvili

Dr. Haskell Hinnant, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the cinematic versions of the Robinson Crusoe story. Starting from the early 1900s, a significant number of films rewrite, reinvent, and rework the Crusoe myth. Instead of replicating Defoe's text, contemporary filmmakers interpret, critique and interrogate it. Each cinematic version of the Crusoe story offers an original perspective on Crusoe's character and sees the events from a different point of view. As the rich diversity of interpretations presented in this study demonstrates, the Crusoe story changes and transforms constantly; it responds to contemporary viewers' expectations and desires, reflects modern-day values and anxieties, and exposes the sins and the vices of today's world. Accordingly, some of its retellings are tragic, some comic, some romantic, some sarcastic, some funny, and some fantastic. Consequently, viewing audiences have seen many faces of Crusoe: happy and self assured, joyless and lonely, arrogant and cruel, powerful, powerless, and even laugh-out loud funny. Imaginative renderings and critical rewritings of *Robinson Crusoe* examined in this study demonstrate the immediacy and resilience of the Crusoe myth, its protean nature, its potential to be shaped by different times, nations and cultures, as well as the many possibilities inherent in Defoe's text. The Crusoe story continues to fascinate audiences because it addresses the universal themes of solitude, survival, hope, and exploration of unknown, among many others. A close analysis of the filmic Robinsonades also reveals a paradox. Most cinematic versions of Defoe's novel generally attempt to redress or critique the source text's racist and colonialist conventions; yet, whether purposefully or not, they end up simply reproducing just what they aim to criticize.