Island Fictions:

Castaways and Imperialism

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines nearly three centuries of island novels by focusing on Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and its textual legacy. Fictional islands lie at the heart of this analysis. A broad range of novels are discussed: Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Johann D. Wyss’s *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812-13), Frederick Marryat’s *Masterman Ready* (1841-42), R. M. Ballantyne’s *The Coral Island* (1858), Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* (1883), William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954), Muriel Spark’s *Robinson* (1958), Michel Tournier’s *Friday* (1967), J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* (1986), and Marianne Wiggins’s *John Dollar* (1989), together with a selection of castaway popular romance novels from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Analytical attention to setting gives original insight into these texts, and provides a scholarly lens through which they are brought together in a new light. Whilst the legacy of *Robinson Crusoe* now includes postcolonial novels, I contend that island representations within the later stories remain largely imperial: characters engage with their surroundings through inherited ideological assumptions and attitudes. Ranging from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century, these novels are principally focused on human mastery over, and conquest of, the island terrain.

The examination of insular settings is an invaluable means of understanding *Robinson Crusoe* and the island novels that came in its wake. Such analysis also gives insight into the function of islands within fiction in general. This thesis is located in literary studies, and is informed by scholars such as Martin Green, Diana Loxley, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Rod Edmond, Gillian Beer, and Rebecca Weaver-Hightower. It also speaks to the interdisciplinary field of island studies, which has, to date, largely neglected literary islands. An examination of *Robinson Crusoe*—an archetypal island text—and its legacy provides an opportunity to begin addressing this gap in the
scholarship. Literary islands are brought to the forefront, and their relevance to the scholarly discourse on islands is made apparent. This study of island fictions draws on space/place theory, and borrows from the overlapping fields of island studies, ecocriticism, and cultural geography. Overall, the thesis re-evaluates several significant island novels in order to explore the broader role of islands within fiction.
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