

Daniel Syrový

On Literary Shipwreck before *Robinson Crusoe*

For seafaring nations, shipwrecks are a fact of life. As with most ancient realms of experience, the phenomenon is also at the center of a complex metaphorical network. While changing in accordance with the challenges and risks of the nautical enterprise, there were also continuities over long stretches of time. The sea or ocean, the harbor, the storm, the vessel, the pilot, and – later – the figure of the captain are fixed points of reference for metaphorical thinking, providing ample opportunity to imagine human life in general. “The repertory of this nautical metaphoric of existence is very rich” (“Das Repertoire dieser nautischen Daseinsmetaphorik ist reichhaltig”), wrote Hans Blumenberg,¹ who was among the first scholars to draw attention to this theme. He ultimately settles on *Shipwreck with Spectator* for the title of an analysis which presents various readings of human life through the lens of the ever-threatening ‘shipwreck’, and – based on a passage from Lucretius (*De rerum natura*, II, 1–19) – identifies the precarious status of humans even as ostensibly safe spectators of catastrophe. Broadly speaking, journeys by sea are used as metaphors for life itself,² or for certain activities like writing, as E.R. Curtius famously asserted.³ The variety of meanings given to seafaring is as wide-ranging as the literary texts that portray it, up to and including the image of the pilot (*kubernetes*) of Norbert Wiener’s exploration of recent cybernetics developments.

1 Hans Blumenberg: *Shipwreck with Spectator. Paradigm of a Metaphor of Existence*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Cambridge, London 1997, p. 8; original: Hans Blumenberg: *Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer. Paradigma einer Daseinsmetapher*. Frankfurt/M 1997, p. 9.

2 Blumenberg: *Schiffbruch*, p. 9: “Die Bewegung seines Daseins im ganzen jedoch sucht er [sc. der Mensch] bevorzugt unter der Metaphorik der gewagten Seefahrt zu begreifen”.

3 Ernst Robert Curtius: *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*. Elfte Auflage. Tübingen, Basel 1993, pp. 138–141. Citing Terence’s *Andria* (III, 1, v. 480), Petrarch also spoke of possibly arriving at the harbor after a period of youthful passions: “superatis procellis iuvenilium passionum, prope iam, ut ait Comicus, “in porto navigo”?” (Rer. fam. IX, 5; Pétrarque. *Lettres familières*. T. III. Edited by Ugo Dotti. Paris 2003, p. 157); this may seem doubtful in light of his own description of life as a ship’s journey, in VIII, 1: “Ut multorum dierum navigatio, sic multorum annorum vita est: non unum cedo sidus, non una tempestas pelago; sepe flectendus clavus, sepe contrahenda sunt carbasa, et sepe, quo nil periculosius habet ars nautica, pro ventorum varietate flectenda sunt. Nunquam expectes ut diu sit immota tranquillitas aut maris aut vite” – “never expect the unmoving calm of the sea or of life to last very long” (ibid., p. 27).

From the *Odyssey* to the Egyptian “Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor” (Twelfth Dynasty, 1991–1802 BCE),⁴ from *Gilgamesh* to the Biblical *Book of Jonah* as well as other mythological stories, the sea and the threat of shipwreck form part of the oldest extant narratives. Several volumes have recently been dedicated to the complexity of the metaphor’s allegorical dimension and cultural import in literature and philosophy: we find the Ship of Fools and the Ship of State (from Plato onwards), but also the rite-of-passage of the sea journey; the sea as heterotopy, the liminality of the coastline, the archeology of shipwrecks and their contribution to the anthropocene.⁵

Even such a provisional list already suggests a general problem that I propose to discuss here. While preparing materials on shipwreck narratives in the Early Modern Period, the kind of ‘literary shipwreck’ Defoe might have known, their actual variety turns out to be more striking than any particular tradition. *Robinson Crusoe*, in its combination of literary traditions and its claim to render an authentic life leads to an overlaying of codes, which makes the novel difficult to be deciphered along the lines of allegory, even despite its clear-cut metaphysical theme, namely that of all-pervading Providence. Such at least seems to be confirmed by the text’s reception history. Rather than an attempt to explain the novel’s meaning, the following pages are intended to draw attention to certain parallels and conventions, which are nevertheless intended to contribute to a new understand of certain aspects of the text.

Providence in Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe-Novels

Providence, as already suggested, is central to *Robinson Crusoe*. The “Preface” emphasizes the story’s usefulness for “the instruction of others by this example, and to justify and honour the wisdom of Providence in all the variety of our circumstances, let them happen how they will.”⁶ Indeed, this “wisdom of Providence” is an overarching theme in the novel (the word occurs at least 57 times

4 “The wind rose, and made an endless howling, and with it a swell of eight cubits. Only the mast broke it for me. Then the boat died. Those in it – not one of them survived. Then I was given up onto an island by a wave of the sea.” *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940–1640 BC*. Translated by R. B. Parkinson. Oxford 1998, pp. 89–101, here p. 93.

5 Burkhardt Wolf: *Fortuna di mare. Literatur und Seefahrt*. Zurich, Berlin 2013; Hans Richard Brittnacher, Achim Küpper (eds.): *Seenöte, Schiffbrüche, feindliche Wasserwelten. Maritime Schreibweisen der Gefährdung und des Untergangs*. Göttingen 2018; Steve Mentz: *Shipwreck Modernity. Ecologies of Globalization, 1550–1719*. Minneapolis, London 2015.

6 Daniel Defoe: *Robinson Crusoe*. Edited by John Richetti. London 2001, p. 3.

in the main text). Divine intervention of the miraculous sort is generally absent, because the underlying worldview, as espoused by Robinson himself, only confirms that whatever happens, happens for a reason. Scholars have consistently pointed out the Calvinist tradition of Defoe's religious philosophy. And whether or not it is seen as integral to the novel, Defoe's sequels confirm this reading. If anything, Providence is even more strongly foregrounded in *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and the largely non-narrative *Serious Reflections* (1720). The latter contains a whole chapter "*Of listning to the Voice of Providence*" and concludes that there is "a great Super-intendency of Divine Providence in the minutest Affairs of this World."⁷ In *The Farther Adventures*, there is slightly more ambiguity, because the "secret powerful Impulse of Providence" that compels Crusoe to set forth once more, is indicated by his wife. It is for her sake that the hero delays his journey but, after her untimely death, he is "like a Ship without a Pilot" and to hesitate any further "would be a kind of resisting Providence."⁸

At the root of Crusoe's story, therefore, is a conversion narrative. The success that Crusoe sees in his life (despite the many deaths and disasters along the way) is a consequence of his accepting the wisdom of Providence. In this worldview, the path is open to sincere repentance; therefore, Providence offers opportunities: it is not the immediate punishment of an angry God.⁹

This is of some importance, because one of the first instances of religious speculation occurs during young Robinson's first journey by sea, where the as yet unconverted Robinson muses: "The ship was no sooner gotten out of the *Humber*, but the wind began to blow, and the sea to rise in a most frightful manner; and as I had never been at sea before, I was most inexpressibly sick in body, and terrify'd in my mind: I began now seriously to reflect upon what I had done, and how justly I was overtaken by the judgment of Heaven for my wicked leaving my father's house, and abandoning my duty."¹⁰ Although Crusoe will maintain

7 Daniel Defoe: *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1720). Edited by G. A. Starr. (The Novels of Daniel Defoe 3). London 2008, p. 273.

8 Daniel Defoe: *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Edited by W. R. Owens. (The Novels of Daniel Defoe 2). London 2008, p. 7, 11.

9 See the discussion in the editor's Introduction to Daniel Defoe: *Serious Reflections*, pp. 1–47, here pp. 34–37. Even so, "Punishment" is invoked as a result of the "impetuous Desire [...] to wander into the World", because "Heaven can gorge us with our own Desires" (Defoe: *Farther Adventures*, p. 126); see also Defoe: *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 32: "all these miscarriages were procured by my apparent obstinate adhering to my foolish inclination of wandring abroad, and pursuing that inclination, in contradiction to [...] those measures of life, which Nature and Providence concurred to present me with".

10 Defoe: *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 9.

that not heeding “the excellent advice of my father” was his “Original Sin,”¹¹ his years on the island allow him to come to the conclusion that “God had dealt bountifully with me; had not only punish’d me less than my iniquity had deserv’d, but had so plentifully provided for me,” thanking “that Providence, which had deliver’d me from so many unseen dangers.”¹²

Much like in the Old Testament story of Jonah, to which the captain on Crusoe’s second trip alludes explicitly, it demonstrates how a tale of apparent punishment may be for the ultimate good:

but as you made this voyage for a trial, you see what a taste Heaven has given you of what you are to expect if you persist: perhaps this is all befallen us on your account, like Jonah in the Ship of Tarshish. Pray, continues he, what are you? and on what account did you go to sea? Upon that I told him some of my story; at the end of which he burst out with a strange kind of passion, What had I done, says he that such an unhappy wretch should come into my ship? I would not set my foot in the same ship with thee again for a thousand pounds.¹³

Crusoe adds that the Captain “extorted me to go back to my father, and not tempt Providence to my ruin,”¹⁴ but the Captain only seems to consider the first part of Jonah’s story, namely that the unclean person is a danger to the whole ship, arguably a less nuanced take on the lesson Crusoe learns throughout his adventures.¹⁵ There was a tradition of using the Jonah-story as a template for religious-

11 Defoe: Robinson Crusoe, p. 154: “the opposition to which, was, *as I may call it*, my ORIGINAL SIN.”

12 Defoe: Robinson Crusoe, p. 105, 138.

13 Defoe: Robinson Crusoe, p. 14.

14 Defoe: Robinson Crusoe, p. 14.

15 To recapitulate, Jonah tried to avoid a decision about Nineveh and took to a ship, “But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken” (1:4). Jonah admits to the sailors that he is the reason for the impending disaster: “Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you” (1:12), which is exactly what occurs: “So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.” (1:15). Jonah is of course later saved by a “great fish” that “the Lord had prepared” (1:17) and, refusing once more what God asks of him, shaded by a gourd in the desert. (The Bible. Authorized King James Version. Edited by Robert Carroll, Stephen Prickett. Oxford 1998, p. 1008). The idea that having ‘unclean’ people on board posed a risk was common in other ancient traditions, see Wolf: *Fortuna di mare*, p. 65: “Zu guter Letzt hatten sich die Schiffe und ihre Besatzung kathartischen Riten zu unterziehen, von Reinigungsopfern für einzelne Schiffe bis hin zur groß angelegten *lustratio classis*, wie sie noch der gesamten römischen Flotte galt. Unreinheit fürchtete man als eine Art Garantie für den Untergang, weshalb an Bord Tote und sexuell Befleckte Tabu waren und das Glücken oder Scheitern einer Fahrt auch zur regelrechten Gottesprobe auf die Reinheit eines Passagiers geraten konnte.”

ly motivated shipwreck-narratives, such as the often reprinted *Mr. James Janeway's Legacy to His Friends, Containing Twenty-Seven Famous Instances of God's Providence In and About Sea-Dangers and Deliverances* (1674).¹⁶

It is only when he comes to accept the wisdom of God that Crusoe “acquired in the dispositions of Providence, which I began now to own, and to believe, order'd every thing for the best.”¹⁷ Thus he finds true religion, even becoming something of a missionary after he eventually converts Friday, and briefly plans to do the same for the natives of the Oronooko delta.

This reading is as straightforward as it gets, but it obviously does not take into account what happens within specific episodes. Crusoe certainly is no Jonah, personally protected by God. Whereas in historical narratives of shipwreck, for instance the report of the wreckage of the *São João* in 1552 analyzed by Mentz and others, “religion and maritime experience” may “coexist uneasily,”¹⁸ the logic of many episodes in *Robinson Crusoe* arguably tends less towards faith than active problem-solving. As Margaret Cohen argues, it is the mariner's craft that is the guiding principle in the construction of Crusoe's adventures.¹⁹ His own resourcefulness becomes a central aspect of Crusoe's survival. This allows Robinson to make the best of his situations and subsequently dominate the wilderness, colonize his island and make a fortune out of his apparent misfortune. This doesn't have to indicate a pattern contrary to Providence,²⁰ but at

16 Wolf: *Fortuna di mare*, p. 80; see also Mentz: *Shipwreck Modernity*, pp. 46–48. The book was “later republished under the title *A Token for Mariners* (1711)” (Mentz: *Shipwreck Modernity*, p. 46).

17 Defoe: *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 87.

18 Mentz: *Shipwreck Modernity*, pp. 11–18, here p. 12. The text referred to is the *Account of the very remarkable loss of the Great Galleon S. João*, translated from the Portuguese, in C. R. Boxer (ed.): *The Tragic History of the Sea*. Minneapolis 2001, which I did not see myself. That volume is a translation in part of the 1735–36 *História Trágico-Marítima* edited by Bernardo Gomes de Brito, which opens with the “Relação da muy notavel perda do Galeão Grande S. João”, from a (lost) 1555 edition. <http://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10691220-6>

19 “Even as Defoe modeled Crusoe's strange and surprising adventures on the remarkable occurrences in sea voyage literature, he wrought some significant formal changes. Defoe was critical of such narratives, along with their seaman authors, for a diffuse organization and for their understated enumeration of dangers. Defoe, in contrast, dramatized the search for a solution as part of the action, including mistakes as well as the successful expedient.” (Margaret Cohen: *The Novel and the Sea*. Princeton 2010, p. 7; for her extended analysis of *Robinson Crusoe* see pp. 60–98).

20 There is a strange connection between the spirit world and material profit in an anecdote reported in the *Serious Reflections*, where a man has an irrational “Impulse of Mind” to go to London, “no doubt, a good Spirit communicated it [...] and when he came there he found a Letter and Messengers had been at his House, to seek him, and to tell him of a particular Business,

least in this respect, Cohen's notion of a "maritime picaresque"²¹ seems quite fitting for the novel. Resourcefulness is at the very least a way to overcome a static world order, as Michael McKeon emphasizes in his interpretation of the text: "Our duty and calling are not objective entities, but conditions in which we find ourselves and which we are able to intuit and interpret into fulfillment."²² When the narrator states that "it would be an ill Account we should give of the Government of divine Providence in the World, if we should argue, that its Events are so unavoidable, and every Circumstance so determined, that nothing can be altered,"²³ the flexibility that McKeon detects is acknowledged by Defoe himself.

Additional Narrative Structures

Such a flexible strategy towards Providence should come as no surprise, given the perennial connection in literary texts between the concept of Providence and the idea of *emplotment*. For Robinson to trust in God throughout would not make for compelling storytelling. Although it is not my main purpose here to touch on the problematics of truth and fiction in the presentation of *Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe's 'own' Preface to the *Serious Reflections* explicitly rejects any suggestion "that it is all a Romance", and the character does "affirm, that the Story, though Allegorical, is also Historical."²⁴ Such a strategy is certainly important for a conversion narrative that wants to be taken seriously. Perhaps more interesting, however, is the way that certain structural elements associated with genre carry with them readerly expectations, one of the reasons why we need to consider the literary legacy of shipwreck, desert islands and other

which was first and last worth above a thousand Pounds to him, and which if he had not been found that very Night, would have been in Danger of being lost." (Defoe: *Serious Reflections*, p. 249).

21 Cohen: *The Novel and the Sea*, p. 88. See also Simon Zeisberg: *Passagen des Erzählens. Meeresfahrten und Lebensläufe in pikarischen Romanen des 17. Jahrhunderts – mit besonderem Blick auf Grimmelshausens Continuatio des Abentheuerlichen Simplicissimi (1669)*. In: Brittnacher, Küpper (eds.): *Seenöte*, pp. 157–177.

22 Michael McKeon: *The Origins of the English Novel 1600–1740. Fifteenth Anniversary Edition*. Baltimore, London 2002, pp. 315–337, here p. 322. See also Wolf: *Fortuna di mare*, p. 12: "Die Buchhaltung unter den Vorzeichen der Providenz ist es, die die Theodizee mit einer 'Oikodizee' zusammenfallen lässt."

23 Defoe: *Serious Reflections*, p. 195.

24 Defoe: *Serious Reflections*, p. 51.

strange and surprising adventures, all of which can shed light on how *Robinson Crusoe* is “engaging earlier shipwreck literature.”²⁵

Of prime importance is that the frequency of shipwreck meant that it was not only a literary trope but a news item, the relative familiarity of which did not detract from its inherently spectacular nature. As Jennifer H. Oliver shows in the case of the *Grande Françoise*, a gigantic vessel wrecked by a storm while it was still docked at Le Havre in the 1520s, literary texts were quick to take up the symbolic dimensions of such real-life occurrences. This is not only true for the early sixteenth century but may be observed at least up to the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1911. Events like these sparked the imagination: in epic, drama, or broadsheets and pamphlets.²⁶

How do we interpret this mutual influence between reportage and literature? The “maritime corpus,” as Margaret Cohen puts it, is a phenomenon of the Age of Print, beginning mainly in the 1520s.²⁷ The list of shipwreck-tales in literature is, however, much older and more established. In the same way that the Spanish *Conquistadores* partly made sense of the New World in terms of chivalric romance, older narratives, secular as well as Biblical (*The Book of Jonah*; *The Acts of the Apostles* with Saint Paul’s shipwreck), not only helped people to give meaning to certain events: but they also furnished models to set them down in writing.²⁸

A work like Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca’s *Naufragios* (1542) was mainly intended to inform its readers of an expedition along the coast of Florida, involving the writer’s prolonged contact with native peoples, his imprisonment and escape, all of which was inevitably caused by shipwreck. Set in the years 1527 to 1537, the wonders of the foreign lands and cultures are depicted along with their dangers. Although the specific situations were unforeseeable, at least the potential risk of the venture could be anticipated.²⁹ If disaster is avoided, it was assumed to be through God’s mercy. Nothing was seen as pre-ordained,

25 Mentz: *Shipwreck Modernity*, p. 172. Many more examples could be given than follow: The most immediately obvious formal-structural imitation in *Robinson Crusoe* is perhaps the (ship’s) journal (see Cohen: *The Novel and the Sea*, pp. 69–70).

26 Like those cited by Mentz: *Shipwreck Modernity*, pp. 3–6.

27 Cohen: *The Novel and the Sea*, p. 5.

28 There is for instance a rich literature on tropes from chivalric romances in the *Crónicas de Indias* starting with the 1948 study *Amadises de America* (Ida Rodríguez Prampolini: *Amadises de América. La hazaña de las indias como empresa caballeresca*. 2. ed. Carácas 1979).

29 Burkhardt Wolf defines “*fortuna di mare*” as the Early Modern “Terminus technicus für all jene Seegefahren, die einzukalkulieren aktives ‘Risikohandeln’ meint” (Wolf: *Fortuna di Mare*, p. 11).

and even the worst situations are nobody in particular's fault. Cabeza de Vaca usually structures his scenes in that sense:

Y llegados sobre la ysla de la Belmuda nos tomó vna tormenta que suele tomar a todos los que por allí passan; la qual es conforme a la gente que dizen que en ella anda, y toda vna noche nos tuuimos por perdidos. Y plugo a Dios que venida la mañana cessó la tormenta y seguimos nuestro camino.³⁰

And when we reached the island of Bermuda we were overtaken by a storm such as strikes everyone who passes through, as the people there say, and for a whole night gave ourselves up for lost. And it pleased God that when morning came the storm abated, and we continued our voyage.³¹

Despite the use of first-person narrative, the text is a complex web of different formal models, from its use of foreshadowing the catastrophic journey (“embarcarse era tentar a Dios” – “to put to sea was to tempt God”³²), a narrative strategy of course familiar from epic poetry, to its many distinct echoes of pilgrim narratives.³³

As Cabeza de Vaca shows, in the early modern period literary tropes are not at all foreign to texts we might label as ‘nonfiction’. In the French sixteenth century, as Jennifer H. Oliver argues, “the learned reconfiguration and redeployment” of models and sources “extended to supposedly ‘factual’ accounts of seafaring generated by merchants, soldiers, and shoemakers. The fictive and allegorical (near-)shipwrecks [...] find echoes, over the course of the century and beyond, in early modern travel writing.”³⁴

This also means, however, that even for an imaginative text such as *Robinson Crusoe*, literary allusions need not necessarily indicate the fictitious status of the text. On the contrary, many reports and accounts were specifically designed with their entertainment value in mind, as Margaret Cohen points out:

30 Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca: *Los Naufragios*. Edited by Enrique Pupo-Walker. Madrid 1992, p. 309. Cf. “nos tomó vna tormenta que hizo perder la otra varca y por gran misericordia que Dios tuuo de nosotros no nos hundimos del todo” (216); “quiso Dios” (207); “plugo a nuestro Señor” (212; 221); God’s “misericordia” (234; 246; 141); “Dios nuestro Señor nos fauoresció” (291); “nuestro Señor [...] nunca nos faltau su remedio” (253); “dimos muchas gracias a Dios nuestro Señor por auernos traýdo allí” (290).

31 Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca: *Castaways*. Edited by Enrique Pupo-Walker. Translated by Frances M. López-Morillas. Berkeley 1993, pp. 121–122.

32 Núñez Cabeza de Vaca: *Naufragios*, p. 192; and Núñez Cabeza de Vaca: *Castaways*, p. 15.

33 For the transcultural aspects in particular, see the chapter on Cabeza de Vaca in Federico Italiano: *Translation and Geography*. London 2016, pp. 51–72.

34 Oliver: *Shipwreck*, p. 141.

In the ship's log, "the remarkable occurrence" was a category where mariners recounted any unusual events of the voyage, and in particular extraordinary dangers and the measures they took to survive. When mariner-authors consolidated accounts of their travels, writing for a mixed audience of professionals and general readers, these episodes of danger took pride of place. The account of remedies for unexpected dangers served the welfare of navigation, potentially of use to voyagers who might navigate the same waters. Such "remarkable occurrences" were also the most thrilling parts of sea voyages and valued by readers seeking entertainment.³⁵

On the other hand, a "manual" like Antonio de Guevara's 1539 *El arte del marear* is concerned mostly with philosophical precepts for would-be sailors. Despite a certain pragmatic dimension, the short work is designed mainly to understand and confront the risks seafaring poses: "pues no hay navegación tan segura en la cual, entre la muerte y la vida haya más de una tabla" ("there is no going by ship so secure that between life and death there were more than planking"³⁶). Any and all practical information is also structured according to the advantages and disadvantages of being on board a ship, with excerpts from classical philosophers and short maxims to be easily remembered (e.g. "La mar es una mina a do muchos se hacen ricos, y es un cementerio a do infinitos están enterrados"; "The sea is a mine where many bring forth riches and it is a cemetery where countless are buried."³⁷)

The purpose of any narrative in part determines its 'ingredients'. Later literature on literary shipwreck belongs to the tradition that includes such highlights as the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid* and other epic poems; reports of shipwreck in drama, from the Greeks to Shakespeare's *Tempest*; Dante and the Bible. Less attention is usually paid to texts such as the *Story of Apollonius* (*Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri* included in the *Gesta Romanorum*, later translated into various languages and ultimately the source of Shakespeare's *Pericles*) and the Greek novel in general. Indeed, shipwreck is so common here that Mikhail Bakhtin put it front and center in his short catalogue of plot points in the Greek romances in "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel": "the flight of the lovers, their journey, a storm at sea, *shipwreck*, a miraculous rescue, an attack by *pirates*, *captivity* and *prison*."³⁸

For reasons of brevity I want to limit myself to the case of Heliodorus's *Aithiopika*, not least because it was often cited during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a model worthy of imitation. And it was indeed most elaborately imitated by Miguel de Cervantes in his last novel *Los trabajos de Persiles y*

35 Cohen: *The Novel and the Sea*, p. 7.

36 Antonio de Guevara: *El Arte del Marear*. Edited by Ángel Sánchez Crespo. Madrid 2016, p. 40.

37 Guevara: *Arte*, p. 82.

38 M. M. Bakhtin: *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*. Austin 1981, pp. 84–258, here p. 88.

Sigismunda (1616), translated into French in 1618 and into English in 1619 (with eight Spanish editions appearing during these first few years).

The religious aspect of Providence taking care of two innocent lovers against all odds, already central to Heliodorus as a structural device, was Christianized by Cervantes in a most peculiar manner. As with almost any human endeavor, the possibility of hubris was coupled with the adventurous spirit in many tales of seafaring. “Oceanic voyaging” and shipwreck not only functioned as a “theological parable,”³⁹ but there was, according to Jennifer Oliver, a “moral ambivalence associated with seafaring at the beginning of the sixteenth century.”⁴⁰ This notion arguably extends back at least to Dante’s Ulisse in *Inferno* XXVI and can still be found in the pages of *Robinson Crusoe*. But despite the sea’s special status,⁴¹ the metaphorical meaning did not limit the risk to seafaring; what good is a ‘warning’ that stands for the perils of life in general? Robinson Crusoe, the character, realizes, in the course of his *Farther Adventures* that his “Disasters at Sea were at an end; my future Rubs and cross Events were to befall me on Shore; that it might appear the Land was as well prepar’d to be our Scourge, as the Sea; when Heaven, who directs the Circumstances of Things, pleases to appoint it to be so.”⁴²

Cervantes’s *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*, with its endless succession of episodes concerning pirates and captivity, deliverance and shipwreck, seems at first closely to follow the model of Heliodorus. However, the details betray an overarching structure that soon appears to be allegorical. So far, the scholarship on the novel has found no universally accepted reading of the text.⁴³

Cervantes, at any rate, is aware of what he is doing. The storms are tropes from Greek romance, but they are also symbolic: “comenzó a turbar el viento y a desasoesgarse el mar y el recelo de alguna gran borrasca comenzó a turbar

³⁹ Mentz: Shipwreck Modernity, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Jennifer H. Oliver: Shipwreck in French Renaissance Writing. The Direful Spectacle. Oxford 2019, p. 67.

⁴¹ “Sobald sich der Mensch aufs Meer hinaus begibt, lässt er den Boden, die Gesetze und Verpflichtungen, die Ordnungen und Sicherheiten des festen Lands zurück.” (Wolf: *Fortuna di mare*, p. 61).

⁴² Daniel Defoe: *Farther Adventures*, p. 127.

⁴³ Javier González Rovira: *La novela bizantina de la Edad de Oro*. Madrid 1996, pp. 227–247; Alban K. Forcione: *Cervantes’ Christian Romance. A Study of Persiles y Sigismunda*. Princeton 1972; Diana De Armas Wilson: *Allegories of Love. Cervantes’s Persiles and Sigismunda*. Princeton 1991; Michael Nerlich: *Le Persiles décodé, ou la ‘Divine comédie’ de Cervantes*. Clermont-Ferrand 2005; Marina S. Brownlee (ed.): *Cervantes’ Persiles and the Travails of Romance*. Toronto 2019; see also Ursula Kocher: Wenn die Novelle Schiffbruch erleidet. In: Brittnacher, Küpper (eds.): *Seenöte*, pp. 139–155, esp. pp. 148–151.

a los marineros, que la inconstancia de nuestras vidas y la del mar simbolizan en no prometer seguridad ni firmeza alguna largo tiempo” (“the wind kicked up and the sea turned rough; the threat of a heavy squall began to make the sailors uneasy, for the sea is a symbol of the inconstancy of our lives, neither one promising safety or stability for any length of time”).⁴⁴ Nor is it an accident that we find an echo of Petrarch’s sonnet 189, “Passa la nave mia colma d’oblio,”⁴⁵ about life as a ship’s journey between Scylla and Charybdis, at the point in the story where the characters sing a sonnet, “Mar sesgo, viento largo, estrella clara.”⁴⁶

What interests me in particular, however, is the macro-structure itself, with respect to seafaring. In Cervantes’s novel, the first two books mainly take place on ships, or on islands, while book three and four, by contrast, detail a journey to Rome on land. This pilgrimage is the answer to the miraculous survival of the protagonists through God’s mercy. But here, too, the characters soon have to realize that “travails and dangers are not only the law of the sea, but of all the land” “los trabajos y los peligros no solamente tienen jurisdicción en la mar, sino en toda la tierra.”⁴⁷ Even Cabeza de Vaca draws the parallel indirectly when, finally home, he exclaims (employing the same words as Cervantes): “di gracias a nuestro Señor por auerme escapado de los *trabajos* de la tierra y *peligros* de la mar” (“I thanked our Lord for having liberated me of the *travails* of the land and the *dangers* of the sea”; my emphasis⁴⁸).

This notion obviously chimes with Robinson’s own realization in the *Farther Adventures* quoted above. Indeed, the very structure of that novel partly echoes that of Cervantes’s book. The first half of the *Farther Adventures* mainly consists of Robinson’s return to the island of Part One, which is now a flourishing colony (as announced at the end of the original novel). Shipwreck is encountered twice (but not directly experienced) by Crusoe and his companions; once, they rescue the crew and passengers of a ship on fire, another time they encounter a mastless ship adrift at sea.⁴⁹ The back stories of the characters as well as of the colonists on the island provide most of the narrative action. The second half takes Crusoe to the East Indies, China and Russia. Despite various minor storms and an encounter with pirates, as he says, “my future Rubs and cross Events were

44 Miguel de Cervantes: *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*. Edited by Carlos Romero Muñoz. Madrid 2004, p. 396; Miguel de Cervantes: *The Trials of Persiles and Sigismunda. A Northern Story*. Translated by Celia Richmond Weller and Clark A. Colahan. Berkeley 1989, p. 174.

45 Francesco Petrarca: *Canzoniere*. Edited by Alberto Chiari. Milano 1985, p. 314.

46 Cervantes: *Persiles*, p. 196.

47 Cervantes: *Persiles*, p. 457 (with my translation).

48 Núñez Cabeza de Vaca: *Naufragios*, p. 310.

49 Defoe: *Farther Adventures*, pp. 15f. and 21f.

to befall me on Shore.”⁵⁰ This is exactly what happens, as we follow him by way of Siberia, Moscow and Hamburg back to England. At this point, of course, the peregrinations of Robinson Crusoe in the world of letters had barely begun.

Robinson Crusoe is often seen as an important starting point in the English novel and is therefore mainly analyzed from the point of view of its influence on what came after. While this might be justified, we should nevertheless remember that Defoe wrote within a rich and diverse tradition, and this too should be taken into consideration.

Bibliography

- Bakhtin, M. M.: *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*. Austin 1981.
- Blumenberg, Hans: *Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer. Paradigma einer Daseinsmetapher*. Frankfurt/M 1997.
- Blumenberg, Hans: *Shipwreck with Spectator. Paradigm of a Metaphor of Existence*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Cambridge, London 1997.
- Boxer, C. R. (ed.): *The Tragic History of the Sea*. Minneapolis 2001.
- Brittnacher, Hans Richard, Achim Küpper (eds.): *Seenöte, Schiffbrüche, feindliche Wasserwelten. Maritime Schreibweisen der Gefährdung und des Untergangs*. Göttingen 2018.
- Brownlee, Marina S. (ed.): *Cervantes' Persiles and the Travails of Romance*. Toronto 2019.
- Cervantes, Miguel de: *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*. Edited by Carlos Romero Muñoz. Madrid 2004.
- Cervantes, Miguel de: *The Trials of Persiles and Sigismunda. A Northern Story*. Translated by Celia Richmond Weller and Clark A. Colahan. Berkeley 1989.
- Cohen, Margaret: *The Novel and the Sea*. Princeton 2010.
- Curtius, Ernst Robert: *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*. 11th ed. Tübingen, Basel 1993.
- De Armas Wilson, Diana: *Allegories of Love. Cervantes's Persiles and Sigismunda*. Princeton 1991.
- Defoe, Daniel: *Robinson Crusoe*. Edited by John Richetti. London 2001.
- Defoe, Daniel: *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1720)*. Edited by G. A. Starr. (The Novels of Daniel Defoe 3). London 2008.
- Defoe, Daniel: *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1719)*. Edited by W. R. Owens. (The Novels of Daniel Defoe 2). London 2008.
- Forcione, Alban K.: *Cervantes' Christian Romance. A Study of Persiles y Sigismunda*. Princeton 1972.
- González Rovira, Javier: *La novela bizantina de la Edad de Oro*. Madrid 1996.
- Guevara, Antonio de: *El Arte del Marear*. Edited by Ángel Sánchez Crespo. Madrid 2016.
- Italiano, Federico: *Translation and Geography*. London 2016.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

- Kocher, Ursula: "Wenn die Novelle Schiffbruch erleidet." Brittnacher, Küpper (eds.): *Seenöte, Schiffbrüche, feindliche Wasserwelten. Maritime Schreibweisen der Gefährdung und des Untergangs*. Göttingen 2018, pp. 139–155.
- McKeon, Michael: *The Origins of the English Novel 1600–1740*. Fifteenth Anniversary Edition. Baltimore, London 2002.
- Mentz, Steve: *Shipwreck Modernity. Ecologies of Globalization, 1550–1719*. Minneapolis, London 2015.
- Nerlich, Michael: *Le Persiles décodé, ou la 'Divine comédie' de Cervantes*. Clermont-Ferrand 2005.
- Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Alvar: *Castaways*. Edited by Enrique Pupo-Walker. Translated by Frances M. López-Morillas. Berkeley 1993.
- Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Alvar: *Los Naufragios*. Edited by Enrique Pupo-Walker. Madrid 1992.
- Oliver, Jennifer H.: *Shipwreck in French Renaissance Writing. The Direful Spectacle*. Oxford 2019.
- Petrarca, Francesco: *Canzoniere*. Edited by Alberto Chiari. Milano 1985.
- Petrarca, Francesco: *Pétrarque. Lettres familières. T. III*. Edited by Ugo Dotti. Paris 2003.
- Rodríguez Prampolini, Ida: *Amadises de América. La hazaña de las indias como empresa caballeresca*. 2. ed. Carácas 1979.
- The Bible. Authorized King James Version. Edited by Robert Carroll, Stephen Prickett. Oxford 1998.
- The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940–1640 BC. Translated by R. B. Parkinson. Oxford 1998.
- Wolf, Burkhardt: *Fortuna di mare. Literatur und Seefahrt*. Zurich, Berlin 2013.
- Zeisberg, Simon: "Passagen des Erzählens. Meeresfahrten und Lebensläufe in pikarischen Romanen des 17. Jahrhunderts – mit besonderem Blick auf Grimmelshausens *Continuatio des Abentheuerlichen Simplicissimi* (1669)." Brittnacher, Küpper (eds.): *Seenöte, Schiffbrüche, feindliche Wasserwelten. Maritime Schreibweisen der Gefährdung und des Untergangs*. Göttingen 2018, pp. 157–177.

