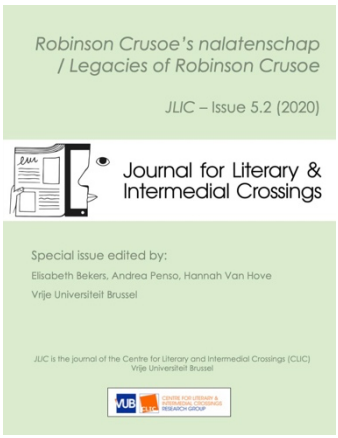

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Literature, Authorship and Childhood in Friedrich Forster's and Josef von Báky's *Robinson soll nicht sterben*

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1. Introduction

In 1931, German author Friedrich Forster (1895-1958) published his *Robinson soll nicht sterben*, a play in three acts, which premiered the following year at the Altes Stadttheater in Leipzig (cf. Forster, *Spiel* 91). Forster stages the story of an impoverished, blind and nearly crippled Daniel Defoe who has lost the original manuscript of his renowned novel *Robinson Crusoe*. Embarking on a Homeric rescue mission, a diverse group of young children traverse London and come to the rescue of their favorite literary idol, seeking to retrieve the invaluable literary artifact. In 1942, Forster started adapting his successful play into a novella ("Erzählung") and the text was published in 1949 by the Kurt Desch Verlag in Munich. In 1957, Forster's play and novella furthermore provided the background for the Hungarian filmmaker Josef von Báky's eponymous movie adaptation, which featured, amongst others, the German actress Romy Schneider (1938-1982), who played the role of Maud Cantley, Defoe's young friend and confidant in Forster's texts.

Forster's and von Báky's *Robinson*-inspired works have received scare academic attention, yet they inscribe themselves into a long tradition of Germanic 'robinsonades' (cf. Stach 1991), which includes famous historical examples such as Joachim Heinrich Campe's *Robinson der Jüngere* (1779) or Johan David Wyss's *Der Schweizerische Robinson* (1812). From a literary-historical point of view, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) served as a

complex and dynamic catalyst for genre development and gave rise to multiple interpretations and adaptations in different national contexts. Following Linda Hutcheon's terminology, Forster's play (1931) and novella (1949) as well as von Báky's film (1957) can be considered as intermedial adaptations and "inherently palimpsestuous works" (Hutcheon 6) that offer an extended intertextual and intermedial engagement with Defoe's novel through shifts in medium, genre, context and perspective.

However, rather than updating the diegetic story world of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and bringing it temporally, geographically or socially closer to contemporary audiences, i.e. what Genette calls a hypertextual act of 'proximisation' (Genette 431), Forster and von Báky retain the historical setting of 18th century London and focus primarily on the production and reception of the novel through the fictionalized life story of Daniel Defoe. This contribution seeks to analyze Forster's play and novella and von Baky's film as intermedial adaptations and proposes a comparative analysis of three interlocked themes: firstly, it will analyze the narrativization of Daniel Defoe as a literary character in the play, novella and film; secondly, this contribution will contextualize the economic and ideological notion of authorship, literature and canon developed with regards to the *Robinson*-intertext and thirdly, it will focus on the role and importance of children and children's literature in the respective adaptations of Forster and von Báky. In so doing, this contribution aims to shed new light on intertextual and intermedial adaptations and appropriations of Defoe's novel in 20th century Germany through the genre-lens of biography, detective story and fairy tale and their related processes of canonicity.

2. Defoe as a Literary Character

In his play and novella, Forster develops a fictionalized biographical account of the last year of Daniel Defoe's life, set around the year 1730, which is mentioned explicitly in the paratext

of the play: "Das Stück spielt in London um das Jahr 1730." (Forster, *Spiel* 15) Frail, impoverished, old and blind, Forster's Defoe has lost all his valuable possessions to his drinking and gambling son Tom and lives out the end of his days in a small, rented room in the slums of London, being only able to survive thanks to the neighbourly support of Mrs. Cantley and her daughter Maud, who reside in the same house. In desperate need for more money so as to pay off his considerable debts, Tom Defoe finally decides to steal and sell the original manuscript of his father's novel. Rather than retelling the fictional autobiography of the Robinson-character, Forster and von Báky focus on the precarity of its author, who suffers like his own protagonist from the various storms of life, and they introduce Defoe as a literary character within a biographical and fictional framework. From the very onset, Forster establishes a precarious family narrative, showing Defoe as a socio-economic outcast, ruined by the amoral behavior of his son Tom. In Forster's play and novella, biographical elements from the life of the historical Daniel Defoe are projected onto the two main family members: Daniel and Tom Defoe. The fictional character of Tom, for instance, symbolically combines the (auto)biographical background of Daniel Defoe's historical career as a businessman dealing in wine, tobacco and hosiery with specific thematic references to the *Robinson Crusoe*-novel. Within the depicted fictional world, Tom both (re)commits Crusoe's "original sin" (Damrosch 374), i.e. disobedience to his father, while also facing severe financial troubles, threats of bankruptcy and – especially in von Báky's film – actual imprisonment.[1]

In a letter provided by Forster's publisher as well as in a postface to his published play, Forster paratextually elaborates on his biographical approach. Forster's biographical perspective allegedly resulted from his reading of a rudimentary, chronological overview of Daniel Defoe's life in a schoolbook edition of *Robinson Crusoe*:

[1] According to Pat Rogers, Defoe's financial problems and bankruptcies constituted the greatest "traumatic events" in his life and lay at the heart of his "life-long concern with businesslike method, with gentility, with survival in a hostile world" (Rogers 455). Historically, Defoe died on the 24 April 1731 in Ropemaker's Alley, London, in debt and hiding from his creditors. (cf. Richetti xiv)

> […] Da fiel mir in einer Schulausgabe Daniel Defoes *Robinson Crusoe* in die Hände. Dem Bändchen war eine dürftige Lebensbeschreibung des Dichters vorgesetzt. Der Welterfolg des Robinsonbuches ist bis heute nur von der Auflage der Bibel übertroffen worden. Einsames Alter, Not, Tod des Dichters…. Ich vergesse diese Stunde nicht. Ich las auf einem Dachboden im Stehen und Gehen diese magere Lebensbeschreibung eines großen Dichters, und durch eine Eingebung entstand dieses Stück. Ich schrieb es in fliegender Hast, ohne jene Gedanken an die Bühne, und es wurde bei der Leipziger Uraufführung ein Erfolg […] (Forster, *Spiel* 96)

Standardized overviews of an author's life in schoolbook editions of a classical work not only point to the philological and publishing practice of '*l'homme et l'oeuvre'*-criticism (cf. Diaz 2011). Due to their fragmentary and provisional nature, biographical overviews found in schoolbook editions necessarily leave out historical and personal information and contain 'Leerstellen', i.e. blanc spaces, which Forster creatively tried to fill in. Forster's interpretation of Defoe's rudimentary biography focused particularly on left out thematic focal points such as loneliness, old age, hardship and the death of the author ("Einsames Alter, Not, Tod des Dichters"). Forster thus provides an imaginative account of Defoe's later life after the publication of his novel. In so doing, he expands the blurred lines between depiction, interpretation and creation which typically characterize the genre of biography, caught between narrativization, fictionalization and historiographical techniques. According to Engélibert, the narrativization of Defoe as a literary character provides an extended intertextual engagement with Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe,* but also allows a critical deconstruction of the Crusoe-myth and "the way his novel was conceived" (Engélibert 268). In his works, Forster specifically develops this strategy to discuss the politico-ideological reception and impact of Defoe's novel, not only on the author's own life, but also on the life of Defoe's historical as well as contemporary readership.

Read against the German-speaking tradition of 20th century robinsonades, Forster was not the first author to offer a fictionalized biography of Defoe resp. to portray him as a literary character in difficult economic circumstances. In 1922, Austrian author Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote a fragmentary film script entitled *Daniel Defoe*, containing a prologue and three 'Abteilungen' which offered a similar biographical and production-oriented

approach to Defoe's novel. A brief comparison with Hofmannsthal's film script allows to further outline Forster's own perspective. Foster's play and novella focus on the year 1730, i.e. 11 years after the publication of the *Robinson*-novel, whereas Hofmannsthal's script, which was never filmed or adapted for the screen (cf. Stamm), starts with Defoe's early business career and provides an overview of the author's most important (political) activities. Hofmannsthal stages Defoe as a politically engaged author, focusing in particular on his career as a pamphleteer. Amongst others, he stages Defoe's involvement in the Kentish Petition – stylized by Hofmannsthal as a "Petition aller Unterdrückten an das Haus der Gemeinen" (269) – and the multiple repercussions of Defoe's political engagement on his personal and family life under the successive reigns of James II, William III, Queen Anne and George I: "Aber auf dieses Stück seiner Feder folgten andere, Flugblatt auf Flugblatt, und der Name Daniel De Foe wurde ein berühmter Name für die einen, ein berüchtigter für die andern; […]" (269).

Hofmannsthal situates the writing process of *Robinson Crusoe* at a critical turning point in the author's life, epitomized by the recurring metaphor of the shipwreck: Defoe's final assets are seized and the author, having suffered a stroke and now being himself "der Gestrandete" (Hofmannsthal 274), finally sells his own manuscript for 20 Pounds to a bookshop owner, a humiliating gesture given the immediate (financial) success of the published novel and the loss of royalties for its author: "Robinson Crusoe, das Buch und der Erfolg, der ungeheure Erfolg. Die Leute, die da und dort queue stehen, um das Buch zu kaufen, wenn ein neuer Druck davon erschienen ist. Und die Menschen, die es lesen, überall!" (Hofmannsthal 277) Hofmannsthal's staging of the novel's origin moreover points to the urban metropolis of London as the primary source of inspiration. Rather than assuming that literary writing was Defoe's *raison d'être*, Hofmannsthal shows Defoe as a critical author compelled to write due to the innumerable social and political injustices he witnessed in the

'wilderness' of 18th century Great Britain: "Aber abends und nachts sind das Gesehene so stark, und wieder, wie vor der glorreichen Revolution, drückt die Erregung ihm die Feder in die Hand […]" (Hofmannsthal 269).[2]

In contrast to Hofmannsthal's elaborate political design, Forster's economical and family portrait only gradually reveals a political subtext. In both his play and novella, Forster's Defoe is an economical outcast, but he also seems to have fallen politically out of favor with the king and his court. On the one hand, Forster's play and novella support the idyllic notion of an apolitical, literary author, freed from patronage and servitude. Having directly refused the kings demand to become his 'minister', Foster's Defoe was increasingly frowned upon by high-society elites for his insistence on authorial freedom and political isolation: "Er ging hier im Schloss ein und aus, und einmal fragte ich ihn so: 'Mister Defoe, wollen Sie nicht mein Minister werden?' Er antwortete: 'Sir, so lange nennen Sie mich Ihren Freund. Nun soll ich Ihr Sklave werden! Ja, Sie wollen einen freien Menschen um seine Freiheit bringen?'" (Forster, *Erzählung* 51) The historical Defoe, as is generally acknowledged, worked on the contrary as a secret agent and political journalist for Robert Harley, 1st Earl of Oxford and Mortime, and other politicians. (cf. Richetti xiiif.)

On the other hand, Defoe's position as a *persona non grata* in Forster's story world is not linked to his activity as a critical pamphleteer, which is strategically omitted from both play and novella. In clear opposition to Hofmannsthal's film script, Defoe's identity as an outsider rather results from the immense impact his *Robinson Crusoe* had on British society, leading to mutiny and desertion at different levels:

> Er ist Daniel Defoe, der Bücherschreiber, der für seine fürwitzigen Tintenklecksereien in des Königs Ungnade fiel? Ha! Robinson, die Schandschrift! Hunderte von Englands Soldaten sind ausgerissen, ja, Buben von den Schulbänken, um überm Meer auf einsamen Inseln mit

[2] Paula R. Backscheider puts forth a similar reasoning in her discussion of Defoe's autobiographical self-depiction: "Most people think that a writer can be found in the works and that 'writing was his/her life'. The writer, however, was a material body, a mortal body. […] Writing was not Defoe's life. Unlike most writers, for whom 'life' and its demands are obstacles to writing, except for the brief period of Defoe's poetic aspirations, he preferred life and resorted to writing when enraged, unoccupied, or in economic need." (Backscheider 5)

> Papageien und Affen zu leben! Ihm ist nur sein Recht geschehen, Daniel Defoe, in Ungnade und Vergessenheit gefallen zu sein! Bücher zu schreiben! (Forster, *Erzählung* 13)[3]

Forster alternatively shifts the focus to the 'real' impact of literature and the reception process of a classical work. In the case of *Robinson Crusoe*, this apparently lead to copycat mechanisms one might compare to the historical phenomenon of the so-called 'Werther Fever', which occurred after the publication of Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774). For Forster's Defoe, the act of writing a novel (and not political pamphlets) unintentionally creates a medium for political and social influence.

3. Literature and Authorship: *Robinson* as Canon

Forster's play and novella provide a heterogeneous mixture of different images and historical models of authorship and literature. The precarious setting of Foster's Defoe, who is barely able to provide in his own life support, can be interpreted as an intermedial version of Carl Spitzweg's famous painting, *Der arme Poet* (1839).

Spitzweg, Carl . *Der arme Poet*, 1839. © Neue Pinakothek München (CC BY-SA 4.0)[4]

[3] A similar argument can found in Foster's 1931 play: "PUM: Ja, warum hat Er auch so fürwitzige Schriften abgefasst, warum hat er auch so närrische Bücher geschrieben, die den Leuten den Kopf verdrehen! Dumme Lügengeschichten! Hunderte von des Königs Soldaten sind ausgerissen, über Meer, um wie Sein Robinson auf einer Insel mit Papageien und Affen zu leben! Der König, mein guter Freund, hat sehr recht daran getan, Ihn zu vergessen, sich Seiner nicht mehr zu erinnern, nicht wahr, Fräulein Mary?" (Forster, *Spiel* 19)

[4] Spitzweg, *Der arme Poet*: www.sammlung.pinakothek.de/en/artist/carl-spitzweg/der-arme-poet

Spitzweg's painting depicts an impoverished poet, lying on several matrasses in the corner of a cold and sparsely furnished attic room. It offers an ambiguous vision of the inspired, bohemian poet living an attic room existence, while at the same time revealing an existential sense of extreme poverty and socio-economic isolation. Forster's fictional depiction of Defoe's living conditions can paratextually be linked with the biographical background of Forster himself. Since 1927, Forster also lived as a 'freier Schriftsteller' in Solln (Münich) and Schlehdorf am Kochelsee (cf. Forster, *Spiel* 98), having allegedly read *Robinson Crusoe* in his own "damaligen kleinen Arbeitszimmer im Dachgeschoss" (Forster, *Spiel* 11). However, this staging of Defoe goes beyond basic biographical parallelisms with Forster's own career. Defoe's 'Schicksal' turns into an "allegorical history"[5] that represents the fate of all famous-canonical writers who find themselves in poor financial-economic situations after the zenith of their career:

> Zu gleicher Zeit bewegte mich das Schicksal eines einst angesehenen Schriftstellers, für den gesammelt und gebettelt wurde. Der Gedanke, dass für unverschuldet-verarmte alternde Schriftsteller der Staat sorgen müsse, lag mir so nah am Herzen, dass ich ihm durch die Gestalt des Königs Nachdruck verlieh. (Forster, *Spiel* 11)

In their search for the lost manuscript, several children set out on a rescue mission through London and eventually meet the king, who, as a *deus ex machina,* decides to intervene in the matter. Not only does he reconcile father and son, allowing the manuscript to be brought back to its author, he also creates a national resp. nationalistic framework in order to safeguard the precious manuscript for future generations. Extending the family narrative as a model for the state, the patriarchal figure of the king, as a 'father' to the nation, finally proposes to acquire the manuscript for Great Britain and provide proper housing for its author:

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[5] In the preface to the third volume of his *Robinson Crus*oe (*Serious reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, 1720), Defoe defended his novel against criticism intended on proving his story as a mere 'Romance', i.e. a fiction. Defoe presented his *Robinson* as a story that, "although Allegorical, is also Historical" and "it is the beautiful Representation of a Life of unexampled Misfortunes, and of a Variety not to be met with in the World, sincerely adapted to, and intended for the common Good of Mankind, and designed at first, as it is now farther apply'd, to the most serious Uses possible." (Defoe 240)

> ‚Sir, was wollen Sie mit meinem Buch? Es ist kein Haus wert. Können Sie es doch sauber gedruckt und mit vielen Bildern kaufen. Dieses aber ist nur mit Tinte geschrieben, ist voller Eselsohren, Kleckse, du wer kann meine Schrift lesen?‘ Doch der König gab nicht nach. ‚Gewiss, gedruckt kann ich es überall kaufen, ja ich kann so ein Druckbuch sogar in Gold und Silber einbinden lassen Aber nichts davon! Ich will gerade dieses Buch hier, das ist *der* Robinson, denn du selbst mit deiner Hand niedergeschrieben hast, Wort um Wort, Punkt um Punkt! Und *dieser* Robinson soll künftig nicht von Hand zu Hand, wenn du einmal nicht mehr bist… Nein, gerade dieses Buch soll unter Englands kostbarsten Schätzen aufbewahrt werden, es soll England gehören und damit allen Menschen und für alle Zeit gehören, ehrfürchtig verwahrt wie des Staates großes Siegel!‘ (Forster, *Erzählung* 71-72; emphasis in original)

Forster’s discourse thus presents *Robinson Crusoe* as a national classic and treasure (“Schatz”). It stages an ideological notion of literary and cultural canonicity that relies on the material and original literary manuscript as an epitome of authenticity. Revered as the original site of creation and meaning, Forster’s play and novella stress the representational value of Defoe’s novel for British society and its role in the construction of the nation’s cultural memory. On the one hand, the widespread popularity of the novel in the depicted story world ensures its place in the national canon, while the musealization of its manuscript, on the other hand, reinforces its “Fama” (Assmann 38) and mnemonic survival for future generations, even after the death of its author. “Robinson soll nicht sterben” thus becomes the rallying cry that transcends the children’s initial search for the manuscript and becomes a metaphor of constant rejuvenation, intended on keeping the novel and its spirit ‘alive’.

The authority of the royal request is furthermore emphasized through the construction of an “Intertextualitätshandlung” (Broich and Pfister 61), as characters not only seek to retrieve the manuscript as a material object, but also quote from it directly. Defoe is finally persuaded to ‘sell’ his manuscript as Maud reads aloud a passage from his own novel, apparently stressing the much required rest and peace seen as the fulfillment of his literary career:

> KÖNIG: […] Dann lies einmal die letzten Zeile des ‚Robinson‘, und laut, dass es alle hören können…
> MAUD (*liest laut und klar*): „Ich habe genug von aller Unruhe dieser Welt! Ich habe mich herumgetrieben auf dieser Erde und will nun, ein Greis, endlich das genießen, was ich schon lange als das größte Glück der Menschenkinder erkannt habe: Ruhe und Frieden! (*Stille*)
> KÖNIG: Du hast sie verdient, Ruhe und Frieden, Daniel Defoe! (*nach einer kleinen Stille*) Ruhe und Friede will ich dir schenken. Gibst du mir dafür diese alten, vergilbten Blätter?
> (Forster, *Spiel* 86)

Referring once again to the entrepreneurial background of the historical Defoe, the character of the king employs distinctly economical metaphors for the proposed 'transaction', having come to Defoe to settle a 'deal' – "ein Geschäft" (Forster, *Spiel* 84) resp. "einen Handel" abschließen (Forster, *Erzählung* 70)" – as two rational "Kaufleute" (Forster, *Spiel* 84). Forster's insistence on the financial, the material and the various states of impoverishment, especially when viewed against the socio-historical background of the 1920s and 1930s, can be thought of as partaking in the influential discourse of the economical. This discourse, "die umfassende ökonomische und monetäre Durchdringung aller gesellschaftlichen Bereiche" (Ackermann et al. 12), historically followed in the wake of the Great Depression and (hyper)inflation. The economic transaction from author to state is finally portrayed as the best guarantor of accessibility and preservation of national symbols.[6] Interestingly, Forster's adaptation explicitly retains the British setting of Defoe's biography and refuses an adaptational process of 'naturalization'.[7] Nonetheless, it also functions as an "allegorical history" (Defoe 240) for Germanic or any other national literature. Thus, it is not surprising that Forster dedicated both this play and his short story to Gerhart Hauptmann – considered as the ultimate national icon and representation of German 'Geist' in the 1920s and 1930s (cf.

[6] Forster's plays, especially those written during his time at the Munich Staatstheater, tend to reveal a strong thematic and stylistic affinity to the militant ideology of Nationalsocialism (cf. Killy 505). In 1933, Forster became Schauspieldirektor at the Munich theatre, not at least due to his personal relations with the (Bavarian) national socialist 'Kampfbund' (cf. Hartl 221) and he donated the manuscript of his drama *Alle gegen Einen – Einer für Alle* (1933) to the city of Munich. According to the fictional character of the king, Defoe told England the story of how Robinson, a "Taugenichts", became "ein ganzer Kerl" (Forster, *Spiel* 74), which not only serves as a moral example for Tom, but also as an ideological mantra for the country's youth. Furthermore, when confronted with his immoral actions by the king, Tom repeatedly chooses the 'third way', i.e. returning the manuscript to his father, rather than being sentenced to death or serving on the king's gallows as punishment for his crimes. This intertextual reference to Defoe's novel, which is repeated multiple times at the end of both play and novella – Robinson too is counselled by his father to take the 'middle' way out of three options (cf. Defoe 5) – , also recalls the metaphorical positioning of fascism and national socialism as a hybrid, 'third way' between liberal, democratic capitalism and soviet communism.

[7] Cf. Genette 431: "Le changement de nationalité n'est le plus souvent que l'effet de transpositions diégétiques plus massives. Mais on le voit assez bien à l'œuvre dans l'immense tradition robinsonienne, où il fonctionne régulièrement comme procédé de naturalisation, au sens juridique du terme: le Crusoé d'origine était anglais, chaque nation voulait donc avoir son Robinson national; d'où par exemple le *Robinson allemand* de Campe (1779) ou le *Robinson suisse* de Wyss (1813) […]"

Sprengel) –, whose sentimental review of both works, having predicted them "deutsche Unsterblichkeit" (Forster, *Spiel* 92), proved exaggerated.

Von Báky's film from 1957 alters Forster's story world in two crucial regards. In line with popular cinema narratives, it firstly adds a love story to the biographical fiction and transforms the character of Maud, played by Romy Schneider, into the primary love interest of Tom Defoe. The final return of the prodigal son prompts von Báky's Defoe to recognize his own shortcomings and failures a parent. It also enables the amorous connection to Maud, who is no longer portrayed like a child, as in Forster's version, but as a mature teenager and young adult in the film. Secondly, Von Báky's film departs from the nationalistic discourse proposed by Forster and adds a progressive political layer to the depicted authorship and literature of Defoe. Von Báky seeks to portray the author primarily as a writer engaged in the political fight against child labour and striving for the emancipation of children. From the very onset, von Báky's film portrays a strong Dickensian atmosphere through the elaborate depiction of harsh working conditions, which are strategically absent from Forster's story world. Von Báky's openings shots of the film symbolically juxtapose an exotic, sun drenched and deserted island with scenes of exhausted young children working in cotton factories in 18th century London. Such diametrically opposed images create contrasting effects that ultimately point to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as a form of escapist fiction: the novel functions as a daydream and projection of an idealized dreamworld that allows the children to imagine exotic alternatives to the harsh reality of factories, forced labour and capitalist exploitation. As such, the enlightened king in von Baky's film seeks out Defoe as a political ally. Inspired by the writings of Defoe, the king officially proclaims an (anachronistic) end to child labour in Britain: "Die Kinder sollen sich nicht mehr sehnen nach Robinson's Insel, sie sollen auch auf meiner Insel glücklich sein" (von Báky 01:29:56). In so doing, von Báky's Defoe refers once more to the journalistic activities of the historical Daniel Defoe. In his *Tour through the*

Whole Island of Great Britain, published between 1724 and 1726, Defoe offered a reflection on 18th century (work) life on the British Isles. However, his journalistic depictions of child labour are ambiguous and seem partially to "approve" the engagement of children in the local trades and factories, even classifying the parental prohibition of child labour as a case of "neglect" (cf. Hobbs et al. 57-58).

4. "Tag der Märchen und Wunder": Children, Childhood and Literature

Forster's and von Báky's biographical fiction allow to reflect on the authorial production and readerly reception of the *Robinson*-novel with regards to its genre-classification. Both author and filmmaker use the fictional character of Daniel Defoe to contribute to the deconstruction of the "Crusoe Myth" (Engélibert 268) and question the verisimilitude of the novel, which was historically presented as the anonymously published autobiography of the English mariner Robinson Crusoe (Defoe 2). Although the material manuscript itself is revered as a site of authenticity, the fictional nature of the text as well as its sources are increasingly debated by the various characters, revealing their (ideological) position vis-à-vis Defoe. Defoe's youngest readers and fans showcase an unyielding faith in the historical accuracy and truthfulness of the text, whereas Defoe's high-society critics univocally portray the novel as a lie, i.e. a fiction. From the very onset, Forster's as well as von Báky's Defoe confides in young Maud Cantley and reveals the primordial importance of Alexander Selkirk's story, one of the contemporary accounts of marooned men acknowledged as a source of inspiration for *Robinson* (Cf. Defoe 230-235):

> „Aber Onkel Daniel, du hast doch Mutter und mir gesagt, in Wirklichkeit wärest du niemals auf der Insel im Südmeer gewesen! Ein Matrose, Alex Selkirk habe er geheißen, und dieser habe dir die ganze Geschichte von Robinson Crusoe und von seinem braunen Diener Freitag, von den

> wilden…“ „Ja, Maud, Geistchen! So ist es! Alex Selkirk hat mir das alles erzählt, und ich habe es dann nur aufgeschrieben! […]“ (Forster, *Erzählung* 9)[8]

Apparently reducing his own role to that of a mere ‘scriptor’, having only written down resp. retold Selkirk’s story, Defoe gradually recognizes the effects of his own literary ‘labour’: “Alles Gute will erarbeitet sein…” (Forster, *Erzählung* 10). Furthermore, Forster and von Báky highlight the appropriating gesture of Defoe’s apparent ‘Nacherzählung’ through the frequent use of possessive pronouns and adjectives. Defoe constantly talks about ‘his’ adventures and ‘his’ island: “Auf *meiner* Insel wuchsen ganz andere Blumen” (Forster, *Spiel* 16; emphasis added). The authorial writing process is presented as an act of appropriation that eventually results in a process of total identification, blurring the lines between reality, fiction and dream and reveals a loss of critical distance between subject and object. On multiple occasions, this process of hybridization and ontological confusion is linked to the old age of the fictional (dementing) author:

> DEFOE: […] Aber weißt du, wenn man so etwas erzählt, wie ich den Robinson erzählt habe, dann glaubt man eines Tages, man wär’s selber gewesen… (lächelnd) Musst mir also nicht böse sein, Maud, hab‘ ja nichts anderes mehr als meine Insel, mein Geistchen…“ (Forster, *Spiel* 16-17)

> Ja, mein Geistchen, das schrieb ich alles auf… Und dabei, Maud, wurde ich selbst Robinson Crusoe (Forster, *Erzählung* 10)

In von Báky’s film, as well as in Hofmannsthal’s script, the story symbolically ends with a sleep- and dreamlike state that focalizes the subjectivity of Defoe’s final thoughts. In the end scene of the film, which shows Defoe lying on his deathbed, the camera presents a close-up of Defoe’s face, gradually blurs out of focus and finally shifts to an idyllic, dreamlike vision of Robinson’s pacific island. In suggesting a diegetic move to the dream world of the dying author, von Báky shows how literature and Defoe’s imagination bridge the various

[8] In his film script, Hofmannsthal also acknowledges the importance of Selkirk, effectively staging a meeting between Defoe and the Scottish sailor: “Da geht die Tür auf, und herein kommt der Mann, den er im Nebel gesehen hat, der mit dem Papagei auf der Schulter. Der Wirt führt ihn an einen Tisch zunächst Daniels Platz. Der Man ist ein Schotte und heisst Alexander Selkirk. Er hat viel erlebt. […] Das erzählt er und Daniel De Foe hört zu mit den anderen, und es gräbt sich in ihn ein.“ (Hofmannsthal 273-274)

geographical, temporal and ontological distances between history and fiction respectively between London and Robinson's island.

Although Forster's and von Baky's biographical fictions start from the context of Defoe's life, the main protagonists of the respective stories are the children who set out to aid their literary idol and constitute his primary audience. Though Forster stresses he did not conceive his texts as a "Jugendstück" (Forster, *Spiel* 96) or children's literature *per se* – calling it rather an "Aufruf" (Ibid.) for all ages –, he nonetheless reflects on the importance of childhood and the role of literature, imagination and playtime in children's education. Forster's play and short story grotesquely stage a direct opposition between the world of children, who adore reading, and the world of adults and grownups, who detest the apparently sinful act of reading and writing fiction: "[…]'Bücher zu schreiben! Welche Teufelssünde! Ich habe noch nie ein Buch gelesen, nicht wahr, Fräulein Mary?' Und diese bestätigte: ‚Ja, das Lesen macht krank'" (Forster *Erzählung* 13). In highlighting the connection between *Robinson* and young children, Forster inscribes his play and novella in the tradition of pedagogical and didactic readings of Defoe's novel (cf. Campbell 192f.), inaugurated amongst others by the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762), Rousseau famously forbids his pupil from reading any (literary) books, except for Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which is presented as an ideal treatise on natural education:

> Robinson Crusoe on his island, alone, deprived of the help of his fellows and of the instruments of all the arts, yet nevertheless looking after his own subsistence, and even procuring himself a kind of well-being, that surely is an object of interest for all ages, and of which one has a thousand ways to make agreeable to children. That will be how we make real the desert island which I first used as a comparison. That state, I must agree, is not that of social man; and in fact it is not to be that of Emile: but it is on that very state that he must evaluate all others. The judgement on the real relationships of things, is to put oneself in the position of an isolated man, and to judge everything as that man should judge it himself, as regards its usefulness to him. (Rousseau qtd. in Watt 211-12)

For Rousseau, the solitary position of Robinson Crusoe constitutes the ideal condition for moral evaluation and proper judgment beyond prejudice or discrimination. Read against this

background, both Forster and von Báky present the children are the only ones willing to come to the aid of Defoe and remedy the injustice done to him by his son Tom. While Rousseau encourages Emile to perform a total identification with Robinson, initiating a genuine "imitatio Robinsoni" (Watt 175) that focuses on solitude, personal commitment and utilitarianism, Forster and von Báky highlight the influence that literature has on children's imagination. Inspired by their reading of the novel, Jim and Charly play as 'Robinson' and 'Friday' in the parks of London. They identify with Defoe's protagonists, re-enact scenes from the novel and creatively construct their own *Robinson*-game, as exemplary *homini ludens*, until they accidently hurt a government official (Forster, *Spiel* 22f.; Forster, *Erzählung* 15f.) and are forbidden to continue playing.[9]

Robinson soll nicht sterben furthermore combines intertextual references and topoi from two different genre traditions associated with the historical context of (German-language) children's literature. On the one hand, the children's search for the stolen manuscript can be related to the motif of the quest found in the genre tradition of the urban detective and adventure story, which became popularized in Weimar Germany amongst others through Erich Kästner's novel *Emil und die Detektive* (1929). Kästner's wildly popular "Roman für Kinder" (Kästner 3), which was also adapted for the screen in 1931 by Gerhard Lambrecht, tells the story of Emil, a young pupil who travels to Berlin by train to visit his relatives. When the protagonist falls asleep during the train ride, a thief steals the money Emil was supposed to bring to his grandmother. With the help of several other children, Emil follows the thief through the German capital and their amateur society of 'detectives' finally manages to arrest the culprit and retrieve the money. Both Kästner's reference text and *Robinson soll nicht*

[9] Hofmannsthal also addresses the topos of re-enacting Robinson's story world through (universal) play: "Diese Millionen von Jungen, die Robinson spielen, Robinson träumen, Robinson sind. Diese Arbeiterjungen, die sich zu zweit ('Ich bin Robinson und du bist Freitag!') im hintersten Winkel eines Fabrikhofes aus halbverfaulten Brettern und Holzabfällen Robinsons Festung bauen… und diese einsamen Jungen, die sich fortstehlen aus einer Villa oder einem Schloss, in den Park und aus einer schilfichten Stelle sich ‚Robinsons Insel' machen, und dort ein Kanu aushöhlen – […]" (Hofmannsthal 263) On the connection between Robinson Crusoe, childhood and different forms of 'otherness' see also O'Malley 2012.

sterben stage a heterogenous collective of children, bound together by a symbolic rallying cry and motto – "Parole Emil!" (Kästner 104) respectively "Robinson soll nicht Sterben!" (Forster, *Erzählung* 37-38) – and adapt the story logic of an urban adventure. The "new realism" (Springman 518) of Kästner's Berlin innovated adolescent and children's literature at the time with accurate depictions of the contemporary city landscape and the everyday lives of its inhabitants. Forster, however, provides a selective urban panorama, condensing London through a selection of (geographically) unspecific sites of interaction (an unnamed park, bar, palace, …) so as to further emphasize the allegorical interpretation of the connection between authorship, literature and canonicity. In their own way, both authors present an idealized view of children in (historical, contemporary and/or future) society. The children protagonists continuously highlight the importance of imagination, inspired either by literature – as in the case of Forster – or by the upcoming genre of silent detective films, as portrayed by Kästner.[10] Moreover, the children's integrity, reason and discipline are sentimentally presented as the solution to all conflicts and injustices, a strategy which relies on moral absolutes and didactic narration that decidedly contrasts with the everyday life of children during the socio-political upheavals of the 1920's and 1930's.

On the other hand, Forster performs an additional genre shift that connects the biographical fiction on Defoe's life with the tradition of the fairy tale. Metatextual comments resonate frequently throughout the short story, repeatedly marking the plot and its ending as a "Tag der Märchen und Wunder" (Forster, *Erzählung* 68). Rather than pointing to one specific fairy tale, Forster's *Robinson* interprets the fairy tale primarily as an idyll, characterized by

[10] On multiple occasions, Kästner's protagonists compare their own adventures to film so as to emphasize the wonderous and exceptional nature of their undertakings: "'Also Emil, du Rabe', sagte sie, 'kommt nach Berlin und dreht gleich'nen Film!" (Kästner 105). Explicit references to the genre of the detective film are made by Pony Hütchen, Emil's cousin: "Wer ist den euer Stuart Webbs?" (Kästner 106). The fictional character of Stuart Webbs was a detective modeled on Sherlock Holmes who appeared in a series of German detective serials produced between 1914-1926. Cf. Abel 426.

the notion of the unexpected, the wonderous and a resolutely happy ending. In so doing, Forster conflates the ideological and historical differences between classical ("Volksmärchen") and modern fairy tales ("Kunstmärchen"), obscures the genre's complex origin and narrows it down to an idealized image that focusses on the imagination, courage and ingenuity of the depicted children. The protagonists not only manage to undertake a partly nocturnal quest through London, they also cross social boundaries, meet the king, enter the royal palace and convince him to intervene as a benevolent sovereign, resolving the initial conflict created by a dualistic worldview that permeates the text and opposes sons to fathers and children to adults. Furthermore, Forster's novella exhibits narrative and stylistic features of storytelling prototypically associated with the above mentioned genre traditions.

In his famous essay *Der Erzähler: Betrachtungen zum Werk Nikolai Lesskows* (1936), Walter Benjamin diagnosed the decline of the art of modern storytelling: "Immer häufiger verbreitet sich Verlegenheit in der Runde, wenn der Wunsch nach einer Geschichte laut wird. Es ist, als wenn ein Vermögen, […], von uns genommen wurde. Nämlich das Vermögen, Erfahrungen auszutauschen" (Benjamin 385). Benjamin's lament relies on the opposition between the contemporary, asocial and/or apolitical author and the tradition of the folkloristic storyteller, who seems to be socially, politically and physically present in the story told. The latter seems to be able to situate his narrative in an authentic, physical communicative situation, showing his/her presence in the narrative context of the utterance and the uttered. According to Benjamin, the oral, folkloristic tradition of the engaging storyteller can be traced back to the genre tradition of the fairy tale: "Der erste wahre Erzähler ist und bleibt der von Märchen" (Benjamin 403). As Smith (2007) has argued, Benjamin's claim can be operationalized for the study of adventure and fairy tale-intertexts in modern literature, especially with regards to its architextual and chronotopic setting (Cf. Smith 10f.).

Forster's unnamed narrator resembles Benjamin's trope of the storyteller, setting up what can be classified as a "storyteller chronotope" (Smith 87). The narrator's style repeatedly simulates the liveliness of oral, spontaneous storytelling discourse, amongst others through the frequent use of spatial ("Und da.."; "Und dort"…) and temporal deixis ("Und nun..", "Auf einmal…"). These structure the story and create suspense. Gradually, the narrator reveals himself to be a "beteiligter Beobachter" (Mártinez and Scheffel 86) of the children's story, as he shows discontent for bureaucratic officials like Mr. Pum and expresses sympathy towards the young protagonists and their quest for Defoe's manuscript. Specific emphasis is also added to the constructive manner of organizing the narration, which foregrounds the trustworthiness ("Aber genau so war es geschehen!", Forster, *Erzählung* 16) and the focalizing presence ("Es wird nun Zeit zu sagen, dass Jim und Charlie…", Forster, *Erzählung* 15) of the narrator addressing his audience. Through its foregrounding of unexpected actions and the story's happy ending, which strategically leaves out any reference to the socio-economic context of 18th century child labour, the (childish) belief in the fairy tale is kept alive in Forster's play and novella: "So gab es also doch Wunder und Märchen und traurige Dinge, die gut ausgingen!" (Forster, *Erzählung* 74)

5. Conclusion

Forster's play, novella and von Báky's film constitute an intermedial constellation that approaches Defoe's novel from the shifting perspective of different genres. As a fictional biography on the last year of Defoe's life, both works present Robinson's author as a literary character in order to discuss the historical reception of the novel and (de)construct the 'Crusoe myth' with regards to the novel's fictional status. In so doing, Defoe's biography provides the starting point for an intermedial reflection on the cultural and historical trope of the 'poor poet' and the underlying economic premises of modern authorship. As a children's detective

story, the quest for the lost manuscript stages a collective group effort that stresses the moral superiority of the children within the urban microcosm. The children's quest furthermore turns into a rescue mission of their impoverished and fallen literary idol, stressing the importance of reading, re-enacting and exploring literature during childhood against the genre background of the idyll and fairy tale. Finally, when considered as an "Aufruf" (Forster, *Spiel* 96), Forster and von Báky develop different approaches to Defoe's career and provide contrasting interpretations of the politico-ideological importance of Defoe's 'first novel in English'. Forster's emphasis on the novel's canonicity establishes a strict nationalistic point of view, promoting musealization and state ownership, whereas von Báky enlists Defoe as an (anachronistic) political ally in the fight against child labour. Forster's play and novella, as well as von Báky's film, provide an in-depth intertextual and intermedial engagement with Defoe's novel that stresses the historical and continuing relevance of the title's moral imperative as a metaphor of rejuvenation for 20th century audiences: "Robinson soll nicht sterben"

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