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Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe (Canto original series)

Ian Watt

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In this volume, Ian Watt examines the myths of Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan and Robinson Crusoe, as the distinctive products of modern society. He traces the way the original versions of Faust, Don Quixote and Don Juan - all written within a forty-year period during the Counter Reformation - presented unflattering portrayals of the three figures, while the Romantic period two centuries later recreated them as admirable and even heroic. The twentieth century retained their prestige as mythical figures, but with a new note of criticism. Robinson Crusoe came much later than the other three, but his fate can be seen as representative of the new religious, economic and social attitudes which succeeded the Counter-Reformation. The four figures help to reveal problems of individualism in the modern period: solitude, narcissism, and the claims of the self versus the claims of society. They all pursue their own view of what they should be, raising strong questions about their heroes' character and the societies whose ideals they reflect.

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