



A Pirate of Exquisite Mind: The Life of William Dampier: Explorer, Naturalist, and Buccaneer

By Diana Preston, Michael Preston

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A Pirate of Exquisite Mind: The Life of William Dampier: Explorer, Naturalist, and Buccaneer By Diana Preston, Michael Preston

Seventeenth-century pirate genius William Dampier sailed around the world three times when crossing the Pacific was a major feat, was the first explorer to visit all five continents, and reached Australia eighty years before Captain Cook. His exploits created a sensation in Europe. Swift and Defoe used his experiences in writing *Gulliver's Travels* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Darwin incorporated his concept of "sub-species" into the theory of evolution. Dampier's description of breadfruit was the impetus for Captain Bligh's voyage on the *Bounty*. He was so influential that today he has more than one thousand entries in the Oxford English Dictionary, including such words as chopsticks, barbecue, and kumquat. Anthropologists still use his work.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Dampier's adventures and observations ignited the imagination of a generation, but today his name is largely unknown. This exhaustive biography by Diana Preston (*Lusitania: An Epic Tragedy; The Boxer Rebellion*; etc.) and husband Michael won't make Dampier famous again, but it will give readers a clear understanding of one of the most well-traveled men in history. In the late 1600s, Dampier, an Englishman, circumnavigated the globe three separate times. The authors draw heavily on the books and articles Dampier published about his adventures, and they include the most mundane of details ("The buccaneers sailed on, pausing to bury at sea one of their number, who apparently expired of high fever exacerbated by hiccups brought on by a drinking bout at La Serena"). During his time as a buccaneer, Dampier launched dozens of raids on gold-laden Spanish ships, marched through Panama's jungles and mutinied many times. What distinguished him from an ordinary pirate, as the title indicates, was his sharp eye for observation. He was the first self-made naturalist to visit the Galapagos; his sketches of the region's turtles set the stage for Darwin's future visit. He also drew detailed maps of nearly every place he visited, charts that defined Western Europe's knowledge of the Americas and the South Seas. His theories about how wind patterns affect ocean currents are still used today. Indeed, Dampier's scientific and historical legacy holds up better than his swashbuckling escapades, which, though exciting, hold slightly less novelty. 65 b&w illus., maps.

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From [Booklist](#)

William Dampier's name crops up constantly in tales of adventure, exploration, and piracy (e.g., Diana Souhami's *Selkirk's Island*, 2001). His ubiquity creates high expectations for Preston and her husband coauthor's full-scale biography. Dampier was well esteemed in the days of Charles Darwin, who consulted Dampier's *New Voyage Round the World* (1697) while at sea. Darwin was probably less interested in yarns of depredation upon the Spanish Main, however, than in Dampier's precise and sensitive observations of nature, peoples, and geography. We contemporary readers, however, demand dollops of buccaneering, boarding, and the occasional mutiny, narrative elements that Dampier's three circumnavigations of the globe permit the Prestons to deploy. Integrating them with the England-bound events of Dampier's life--which included a marriage, publication and fame, organization of voyages piratical and scientific, and a court-martial--the Prestons make the "self-conceited" Dampier, as an acquaintance described him, every bit as complex and interesting on paper as he was in life. Supported by dozens of contemporary maps and illustrations, the authors credibly contend that Dampier was a pioneer of the travelogue--not bad considering his day job. A superbly rendered popular history in a superpopular genre. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Review

"A superbly rendered popular history." -- *Booklist, Starred Review, March 2004*

"Rich with incident and novelty" -- *Kirkus Reviews, Starred Review, March 2004*

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Jennifer Joseph:

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