

# Robinson Crusoe (Introduction)

▣ AGT

*ROBINSON CRUSOE*  
*BY DANIEL DEFOE (1719)*

THE FIRST MODERN NOVEL

# Truth and fiction

- ▣ *Robinson Crusoe* is considered the first modern novel. For the first time, we have a fictitious narrative which the author tries to present as true, and where realistic elements are very important. The story is told by a first-person narrator (“I”), and is so a “fake autobiography”. To reinforce its realism Defoe tells many facts about Robinson Crusoe: his name and surname, what part of England he comes from (York), who his parents and relatives are, and so on. It is given, briefly, a life-profile.

## “A new realism”

- ▣ Defoe wanted the readers to believe the story of Robinson Crusoe was true and to consider it as a “real” autobiography, giving detailed descriptions of TIME and SPACE. He inserted some realistic elements and precise information into a fictitious account to make the story seem true.
- ▣ The places Robinson visits in England and abroad (Africa, Brazil, South America) are real. Time is explained very precisely (day by day).

# Robinson as a mercantile hero

- ▣ Robinson Crusoe embodies the English mercantile spirit: he trusts in his own strength and intelligence, and he believes that God is on his side (Puritan conviction).
- ▣ He has been defined as the new *homo oeconomicus*, representative of the early 18th-century Englishmen who were founding Britain's commercial empire in faraway countries and colonizing the world.

# ROBINSON AND FRIDAY



▣ Robinson describes Friday in details expressed in negative form: «... his limbs are not too large... Not a fierce and surly aspect... Hair... Not curled like wool...Skin... Not quite black, but very tawny, and yet not of an ugly yellow nauseous tawny... Nose... Not flat like the negroes...».

# Robinson's portrait

- ▣ Robinson Crusoe is also the archetype coloniser (metaphor of colonialism). The relation between Robinson and Friday (the “savage” – the original inhabitant of the island) is often believed to be the relation between coloniser and native, or master and slave. Robinson's act of educating Friday follows a recurrent arrangement: name giving (Friday was saved by Robinson on a Friday); new European clothes; new language (English); new religion (principles of Christianity).