

Robinson Crusoe (Introduction)

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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).