

Daniel Defoe



Defoe's life

- 1660 Daniel Defoe was born in London
- 1683 He started working as a merchant and travelled around Europe. He became interested in politics.
- He attempted different business without success but he went bankrupt.
- 1702 He wrote his famous pamphlet *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* and he was arrested for the irony against religion in it.
- 1703 He became a spy for the Tory party
- 1704-1713 He founded and wrote for the periodical *The Review*
- 1719 He only turned to novelism in 1719, at the age of 59 and his novels made him successful
- 1731 He died in London.

Defoe's works

- In 1719, after many years writing journalism, Defoe published his first novel, *The life and Strange Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* of York, a Mariner, based on the memories of shipwrecked voyagers.
- In 1722 he wrote *Moll Flanders*, the fictional autobiography of a prostitute: in 1724 *Roxana*.
- Defoe is considered the founder of the English novel.

Robinson Crusoe: the plot I

- Robinson Crusoe tells the story of a shipwrecked man who stays on a desert island for 28 years. It can be divided in 3 parts:
 - 1) In the first part of R.C., despite his father's opposition, the protagonist **refuses** the life of leisure that his father promises him to go to sea and is a SAILOR and a MERCHANT.
 - He is taken by the Moors in Africa, then he becomes a **planter** in Brazil and a slave trader.
 - During one of his trips to take slaves from Africa, he is **shipwrecked** on a desert island in South America and is the only survivor.

Part II

2) In the second part of *Robinson Crusoe*:

- Robinson uses the things that were on the ship to build a house, furniture and utensils.
- He cultivates and goes hunting to get food.
- He uses paper and ink to write a **diary**
- He reads the Bible every day.
- During an exploration of the island, he sees a group of Indians that were killing another Indian. He saves the prisoner and calls him **Friday**, because that day was a Friday. Robinson becomes his master and Friday is his servant. He converts him to Christianity and teaches him his own language.

Part III

- Robinson stays on the desert island 28 years.
- One day, an English ship taken by a group of mutineers arrives on the island. Robinson defeats the mutineers and saves the crew.
- Robinson and the crew go back to England with Friday as his servant.
- When he's back to England, Robinson marries, but when his wife dies, he decides to go back to sea.

Stylistic features

- R. Crusoe is written in **first person**, in the form of an autobiography. So we think that it's the real story of a real man and that Defoe is only the editor.
- The book is characterised by **details** and **verisimilitude**. The style is very matter-of-fact because prose had to be plain.
- We have little access to Crusoe's feelings and thoughts; the narrator tells **what happens** and **his actions**.
- There is no real novelistic plot, but the story is written in the form of a **diary**.

Robinson Crusoe's success

1. It's an adventure story with an **exotic** setting.
2. It is **EASY TO READ**, written in a simple, clear, style. It contained many details and middle class liked this.
3. People could **IDENTIFY** in Robinson, who belonged to the middle class.
4. There are references to the **BIBLE**, which gives the novel a moral tone when religion had an important role in people's lives.

Interpretations of R. Crusoe

- *R. Crusoe* has given space to 3 different interpretations:

1) Religious allegory – The Puritans believed that man must save himself from the original sin; redemption on earth could be obtained through hard work. And through his hard work, Robinson gradually creates his reign.

2) Economic allegory

3) Imperialist (Colonialist) allegory

2) Economic allegory

- *Robinson Crusoe* is the manifesto of economic individualism.
- He is a symbol of MIDDLE CLASS and represents its economic and political aspirations.
- He was active and industrious and lives to improve his financial situation and seeks adventure.
- On the island, he **recreates a society** which is similar to his: **the island is his property** and Friday becomes a part of it.

3) Imperialist (Colonialist) allegory

- Robinson Crusoe represents the manifesto of *colonialism* because his relationship with Friday is a metaphor of the process of colonisation: he gives his slave a NAME, he teaches him his LANGUAGE and TECHNIQUES and imposes him his RELIGION.



Robinson represents the archetype colonist:

- 1) For the NAME GIVING – he gives his name to Friday to remind him of his debt, but Friday calls Robinson ‘master’
- 2) For the CLOTHES – Robinson covers Friday and gives him his old clothes
- 3) For the LANGUAGE – Robinson doesn’t learn Friday’s language and teaches Friday English
- 4) For the RELIGION – Robinson teaches Friday the principles of Christianity and underlines the defects of his religion
- 5) TECHNICAL SUPERIORITY – Robinson NEVER gives Friday a weapon and doesn’t show him how to use it.

He has:

TECHNICAL, LINGUISTIC and CULTURAL ADVANTAGE over Friday.

Why does Robinson represent Rousseau's '*bon sauvage*'?

- Rousseau said that in the natural state, man is good, but civilisation makes him bad. So there should be education in a natural environment.
- Robinson represents the *bon sauvage* because he becomes a hunter, a builder and a shepherd. He builds a shelter, eats and works regularly.
- Thanks to his hard work, determination and skills, he manages to survive on the island.
- He is a symbol of the EDUCATION of the BON SAUVAGE which was NATURAL supported by Rousseau.

Robinson meets Friday

- When Robinson meets Friday and describes him, Defoe focuses on Friday's physical details.
- He lists the features that make him a good-looking man, but they are always features that make him similar to a **EUROPEAN**. For example, "his nose small, not like the negroes".
- He also focuses on the Christian religion and criticizes the Catholic church.