

Salahaddin University/Erbil
College of languages

English Language department

Module: Novel 18th C. Semester 2 2022

The Rise Of The Novel

18th century
Novel

Robinson Crusoe Daniel Defoe

13,15, and 16 of March 2022 Lectures

Robinson Crusoe: Chapter One / Analysis (Biblical Allusions)

There are many biblical references in the novel in order to compare and contrast Crusoe's condition with the condition of certain individuals in the Bible. For example during Crusoe's first sea voyage, the captain of a ship upon which Crusoe sails in order to run away from his parents compares Crusoe's case to that of Jonah saying :

" Perhaps this is all befallen us on your account, like Jonah in the ship of Tarshish". P.10

Here the author uses this biblical reference in order to relate to the reader the spiritual and physical condition of Crusoe. The captain of a ship is born and bred for the sea, and owes his own duty to his father, but Crusoe is traveling for fun and pleasure, and has no place on the ocean. In this case, he wonders if Crusoe is inherently cursed to suffer misfortune whenever he sails; this pessimistic attitude is soon born out by pirates' attack and more shipwrecks.

The most important similarity to Jonah is Robinson Crusoe's willing defiance of his father, just as Jonah defied God. Jonah, rather than traveling to Nineveh to prophesize the destruction of the city, took to sea and was met with disasters. Crusoe, rather than remaining at home to study business, takes to sea and is met with disasters as well. Both characters eventually repent and accept the wisdom of their father (father figure).

Additionally, after his first shipwreck, Crusoe is directly compared to Jonah by the captain. Jonah disobeys God and takes a ship and is finally thrown overboard during a storm. In a similar way, Crusoe disobeys God because of disobeying his father and storms and disasters are God's punishment for sinners.

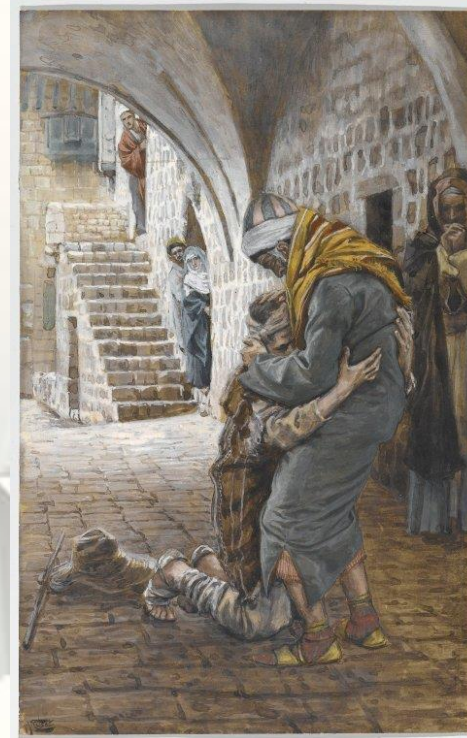
Robinson Crusoe: Chapter One / Analysis (Biblical Parable)

“Had I now had the sense to have gone back to Hull, and have gone home, I had been happy, and my father, as in our blessed Saviour's parable, had even killed the **fatted calf** for me; for hearing the ship I went away in was cast away in Yarmouth Roads, it was a great while before he had any assurances that I was not drowned.” p.9

Here, again **fatted calf** and blessed **Saviour's parable** are symbols of the prodigal son,=in the New Testament story of the prodigal son in which the forgiving father orders his best calf to be killed in order to provide a feast to celebrate the long-awaited return of his wayward/self-willed son.

This practice of killing calf is represented in the novel; It is embodied through the protagonist Crusoe and his father when he hears that he survived he shipwreck and Crusoe considers returning home but then changes his mind.

In Christianity, there is the this biblical **parable** of the prodigal son which says: there were two sons; while one stayed home and helped his father, the other **disobeyed** his father, which ,in turn, means **disobeying** God by going away (abroad) and wasted his inheritance. Crusoe also choses to disobey and acts rebellious since he is a self-centred individual.



Daniel Defoe and the Significance of Robinson Crusoe

Skilton (1977) states that Robinson Crusoe is certainly the first novel in the sense that it is the first fictional narrative in which the ordinary person's activities are the centre of continuous literary attention. Before that, in the early eighteenth century, authors like Pope, Swift, Addison and Steele looked back to the Rome of Caesar Augustus (27 BC—14 AD) as a golden age. That period is called the Augustan age. Literature was very different since it focused on mythology and epic heroes. However, to what extent can Robinson Crusoe be called the "first novel" and how is it different from all that have been done so far? Besides, what are the evolutions in the novel genre leading to Victorian novels, like *Pride and Prejudice* published almost one hundred years later (1813) in terms of style, themes and concerns?

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Augustan writers, before Daniel Defoe, were very protective of the status quo and their novels were philosophical and religious, based upon a myth of the eternal fitness of things. By contrast, Defoe stood for revolutionary change, economic individualism, social mobility, trade, and freedom of consciousness.

For Swift, Defoe was 'the fellow who was pilloried; I have forgotten his name'. He represented

at once a social literary and intellectual challenge to the Augustan world, and the Augustans reacted to him accordingly.

In Robinson Crusoe, Defoe deals with major points of Western civilisation like trade, mercantile capitalism since at that time, a great attempt was made to dominate other continents, spread culture, beliefs, like, for example, when Robinson tries to convert Friday into Christianity, as he considers him a savage. In the eighteenth century, Britain economically depended on slave trade, which was abolished on the early 1800s.

Therefore, Daniel Defoe was familiar with this practice, even though he did not actively criticise it.

There is consequently, no surprise that, Robinson treats Friday as his slave.

However, Crusoe was able to recognise Friday's humanity, though he does not see his slavery as a contradiction.

Robinson Crusoe was written within a context of a European colonialism well established around the globe.

Next, material wealth is a sign of prestige and power in Robinson's mind. For instance, he often lists his belongings, like the amount of land ploughed. His provisions and he stores the coins found on various wrecks.

On top of that, he calls his 'base', his 'castle', and eventually considers himself a 'King'.

Therefore, material power is an important element as well as religion and faith in the novel. Robinson rejects his father's advice and religious teachings at the beginning of the novel, in order to travel and have some adventure and wealth.

Although, his shipwreck can be considered as a moral punishment and his disobedience as a sin, the protagonist did accumulate wealth and did survive at the end of the novel.

Thus, the fact that he was punished can be argued and discussed. Robinson's opinion about religion is very clear.

He is a semi-puritan figure and tries to spread his convictions on the island to convert into Christianity. Friday, who is very rational. The hero simply refuses Friday's own beliefs, thinking that his religion is the best one. This thought may be due to the fact that British people believed that they had a right and a duty to transmit their knowledge, culture and Skilton continues and says that *Robinson Crusoe* was written in the first-person singular. As a consequence, we constantly have Robinson's point of view and opinion about the events happening. We have to wonder whether the protagonist, through which the story is described, may be reliable or not, and if we can trust him. If we had Friday's point of view instead, it is clear that we would have a complete different opinion about Robinson.

Probyn states that Chales Gildon, in his book, Defoe's *First Substantive Critic*, interpreted *Robinson Crusoe* as an allegory of Defoe's Defoe's own life, but Ian Watt endorses the economic theorists' view of the novel as illustrating homo-economicus and the rise of economic individualism.

Not everyone insisted on seeing this novel as a :

Lesclie Stephan's essay of 1868 reported that Crusoe was a 'book for boys rather than men', short of any high intellectual interest ... One of the most charming of books'. It is essentially, of course, a superb adventure story charged with the primary appeal of all narrative fiction: suspense, individual, resourcefulness, threatening disasters, an eventual triumph. Even Dr. Johnson wished it had been longer, Robinson, like Gulliver after him.

Major Themes in Robinson Crusoe

1. **Christianity:** The theme of Christianity is significant in the course of the novel through the physical journey of Robinson Crusoe to the island that is also a representation of his spiritual journey to become a good Christian. His initial disregard of the religious beliefs confirms this proposition that he considers his life faithless due to the warning of his father about God has not blessed him. His dream about his non-repenting attitude and his study of the Bible on the island confirms this assumption that Robinson has turned to Christianity and is engaged in its propagation. Also, it gives him a way out from his confusion and provides him with some solace during these dark moments on the island. This long and arduous rumination about religion provides him some confirmation about his belief's miracle in the shape of Friday, his servant, and an English captain. Some other such incidents and happenings, which first seem disastrous for him, later prove blessings only because of his leanings toward Christianity in that he considers them God's will and care for him.

2. **Society**: Society and social interaction is another major significant theme of the novel in that Robinson Crusoe flees from his family, including trying to escape from his middle-class social relations in England. It is, in a sense, an escape from responsibilities as well as the obligation of adhering to the social framework. However, when he lands on the island, he comes to know about the value of people and social relations and immediately makes Friday his companion to make a sense of the isolated living. His view of prioritizing his own life over that of the social life by leaving toward the sea shows that he is fed up with the society, which he, later, thinks is necessary for the balanced growth of an individual to survive. However, in another sense, it is also appropriate for an individual to be isolated to learn the value of society as Robinson learns it.

3. **Individuality**: The novel shows the theme of individuality through Robinson Crusoe's desire of leaving English society despite his father's warnings. When he is shipwrecked and ends up on an island, he learns about his individuality and the difficulties a person faces when they remain away from society. He also learns to live a sustainable life of independence that is free from the stress of everyday preoccupations and tensions. His final return to the English society, however, confirms to him that the individuality of a person can only prosper in a balanced lifestyle in a social setup where he has the will to leave the social fabric and then return to it when he wants. Yet what he values the most is his liberty and freedom that no harassing father or torturing relations could make a person to be loaded with cares and preoccupations.

4. **Isolation:** Isolation is torturing and also enriching from the social and spiritual point of view. Robinson Crusoe, when he faces himself all alone on the island, not only finds himself isolated from the society but also from his family and faith. However, this isolation from society teaches him the value of self-living and self-reliance, patience, and socialization. When he makes Friday his comrade, he also learns that isolation teaches a person to have others at his beck and call, though, it seems quite contradictory to his freedom-loving nature. This isolation and loneliness bring him close to God and Christianity as he starts preaching later in life after his return to England.

5. **Independent Living:** Self-reliance or independent living is another theme that Robinson Crusoe highlights through his life on the island. When he is alone on the island, he builds his own hut, and also domesticates different animals for his benefit, and starts using Friday for himself, though, at the surface level he is imparting his knowledge. His acts of escape from the master and his plantation in Brazil and later its sale and purchase point to his thinking of living an independent life away from the fever and fret of the daily living of the English urban life.

6. **Civilization:** The theme of civilization unfolds when Crusoe is stranded on an island following the shipwreck. He lives in the wild, taking the fittest of survival to his heart. However, he soon starts spreading civilization when he domesticates animals and parrots and teaches the English language and Christianity to Friday. In one sense, this becomes a tool to spread the civilization that Kipling has called a white man's burden.



7. **Nature:** Nature and the impact of its forces on human beings in setting the course of their lives is another major theme that Crusoe shows through his story. It entails not only human nature but also natural forces. When Crusoe does not pay heed to his father's advice, it is the rebellion of his nature, but when he faces a shipwreck, it is the wrath of the natural forces. Ultimately, he comes to know that his own nature mixed with the natural forces could balance the life of a person.



8. **Colonialism:** The novel is highly seductive in presenting the theme of colonialism. Robinson Crusoe's desire to execute his voyages to different lands and his desire to materially profit from his voyages are a reflection of human desire and the English bent of mind. Although the sane voice of his father restrains him for some time, he finally breaks the barrier by setting out to different islands. His idea of having a plantation in Brazil and its final sale is also a sign of the colonial mind to profit from such ventures.

9. **Morality:** The novel also shows the theme of the existence of a moral framework although it is mostly based on English and Christian morals. Robinson Crusoe considers it his moral duty to save Friday to whom he later teaches Christianity and civilization. He saves several others and kills the cannibals chasing them, considering it a morally upright task.

10. **Self-Reliance:** Crusoe presents the theme of self-reliance through his character that he faces the question of his survival takes measures beforehand to deal with a need or contingency and defend oneself against the animals at the island.





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