

Daniel Defoe

Daniel Defoe was a businessman, a journalist, a novelist, etc.

He was born in London in 1660 and was a Dissenter (or Nonconformist). Since he refused being a Dissenter, the doctrine of the Church of England, he couldn't study at Oxford or Cambridge, but he went to a Dissenting academy. He was a merchant and travelled a lot, but when his business went bankrupt. So he became a journalist for the Review (1704-1713).

In 1713 he began his literary career as a novelist publishing "The Life and Strange Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner". In 1720 he published "Captain Singleton" and in 1722 "Moll Flanders". Finally he published "Roxana" in 1724. He died in 1731.

Robinson Crusoe

Defoe belonged to the emerging middle class and represented it in his masterpiece, "Robinson Crusoe" (1719). It's the story of an ordinary middle-class man who shipwrecks on a desert island. But he doesn't lose heart: he builds a shelter, makes his own clothes and tools, domesticates goats and transforms a cannibal into a servant. We don't have the usual hero of the Middle Ages who was fearless and homeless. Robinson is a common man, but he succeeds in living for a lot of years: he is enterprising, ambitious, capable of building an empire, but also egocentric, racist and egocentric. He is determined to succeed because success is sign of salvation from God (according to Protestant religion). Even if Robinson is the protagonist he doesn't change throughout the story: in fact his mind is always the same and keeps considering Friday (the cannibal he educated as a servant) as inferior.

The form of diary gives realism to the story and the language is simple to appeal middle-class readers.

Defoe uses realism because he is a journalist and a Puritan. In fact Puritanism considers fiction immoral; but the author justifies it pretending "Robinson Crusoe" is a true story. And Defoe never admitted it wasn't.