

Robinson Crusoe A Study Guide

Book Summary

Robinson Crusoe is an Englishman from the town of York in the seventeenth century, the youngest son of a merchant of German origin. Encouraged by his father to study law, Crusoe expresses his wish to go to sea instead. His family is against Crusoe going out to sea, and his father explains that it is better to seek a modest, secure life for oneself. Initially, Robinson is committed to obeying his father, but he eventually succumbs to temptation and embarks on a ship bound for London with a friend. When a storm causes the near deaths of Crusoe and his friend, the friend is dissuaded from sea travel, but Crusoe still goes on to set himself up as merchant on a ship leaving London. This trip is financially successful, and Crusoe plans another, leaving his early profits in the care of a friendly widow. The second voyage does not prove as fortunate: the ship is seized by Moorish pirates, and Crusoe is enslaved to a potentate in the North African town of Salée. While on a fishing expedition, he and a slave boy break free and sail down the African coast. A kindly Portuguese captain picks them up, buys the slave boy from Crusoe, and takes Crusoe to Brazil. In Brazil, Crusoe establishes himself as a plantation owner and soon becomes successful. Eager for slave labor and its economic advantages, he embarks on a slave-gathering expedition to West Africa but ends up shipwrecked off of the coast of Trinidad.

Crusoe soon learns he is the sole survivor of the expedition and seeks shelter and food for himself. He returns to the wreck's remains twelve times to salvage guns, powder, food, and other items. Onshore, he finds goats he can graze for meat and builds himself a shelter. He erects a cross that he inscribes with the date of his arrival, September 1, 1659, and makes a notch every day in order never to lose track of time. He also keeps a journal of his household activities, noting his attempts to make candles, his lucky discovery of sprouting grain, and his construction of a cellar, among other events. In June 1660, he falls ill and hallucinates that an angel visits, warning him to repent. Drinking tobacco-steeped rum, Crusoe experiences a religious illumination and realizes that God has delivered him from his earlier sins. After recovering, Crusoe makes a survey of the area and discovers he is on an island. He finds a pleasant valley abounding in

grapes, where he builds a shady retreat. Crusoe begins to feel more optimistic about being on the island, describing himself as its “king.” He trains a pet parrot, takes a goat as a pet, and develops skills in basket weaving, bread making, and pottery. He cuts down an enormous cedar tree and builds a huge canoe from its trunk, but he discovers that he cannot move it to the sea. After building a smaller boat, he rows around the island but nearly perishes when swept away by a powerful current. Reaching shore, he hears his parrot calling his name and is thankful for being saved once again. He spends several years in peace.

One day Crusoe is shocked to discover a man’s footprint on the beach. He first assumes the footprint is the devil’s, then decides it must belong to one of the cannibals said to live in the region. Terrified, he arms himself and remains on the lookout for cannibals. He also builds an underground cellar in which to herd his goats at night and devises a way to cook underground. One evening he hears gunshots, and the next day he is able to see a ship wrecked on his coast. It is empty when he arrives on the scene to investigate. Crusoe once again thanks Providence for having been saved. Soon afterward, Crusoe discovers that the shore has been strewn with human carnage, apparently the remains of a cannibal feast. He is alarmed and continues to be vigilant. Later Crusoe catches sight of thirty cannibals heading for shore with their victims. One of the victims is killed. Another one, waiting to be slaughtered, suddenly breaks free and runs toward Crusoe’s dwelling. Crusoe protects him, killing one of the pursuers and injuring the other, whom the victim finally kills. Well-armed, Crusoe defeats most of the cannibals onshore. The victim vows total submission to Crusoe in gratitude for his liberation. Crusoe names him Friday, to commemorate the day on which his life was saved, and takes him as his servant.

Finding Friday cheerful and intelligent, Crusoe teaches him some English words and some elementary Christian concepts. Friday, in turn, explains that the cannibals are divided into distinct nations and that they only eat their enemies. Friday also informs Crusoe that the cannibals saved the men from the shipwreck Crusoe witnessed earlier, and that those men, Spaniards, are living nearby. Friday

expresses a longing to return to his people, and Crusoe is upset at the prospect of losing Friday. Crusoe then entertains the idea of making contact with the Spaniards, and Friday admits that he would rather die than lose Crusoe. The two build a boat to visit the cannibals' land together. Before they have a chance to leave, they are surprised by the arrival of twenty-one cannibals in canoes. The cannibals are holding three victims, one of whom is in European dress. Friday and Crusoe kill most of the cannibals and release the European, a Spaniard. Friday is overjoyed to discover that another of the rescued victims is his father. The four men return to Crusoe's dwelling for food and rest. Crusoe prepares to welcome them into his community permanently. He sends Friday's father and the Spaniard out in a canoe to explore the nearby land.

Eight days later, the sight of an approaching English ship alarms Friday. Crusoe is suspicious. Friday and Crusoe watch as eleven men take three captives onshore in a boat. Nine of the men explore the land, leaving two to guard the captives. Friday and Crusoe overpower these men and release the captives, one of whom is the captain of the ship, which has been taken in a mutiny. Shouting to the remaining mutineers from different points, Friday and Crusoe confuse and tire the men by making them run from place to place. Eventually they confront the mutineers, telling them that all may escape with their lives except the ringleader. The men surrender. Crusoe and the captain pretend that the island is an imperial territory and that the governor has spared their lives in order to send them all to England to face justice. Keeping five men as hostages, Crusoe sends the other men out to seize the ship. When the ship is brought in, Crusoe nearly faints.

On December 19, 1686, Crusoe boards the ship to return to England. There, he finds his family is deceased except for two sisters. His widow friend has kept Crusoe's money safe, and after traveling to Lisbon, Crusoe learns from the Portuguese captain that his plantations in Brazil have been highly profitable. He arranges to sell his Brazilian lands. Wary of sea travel, Crusoe attempts to return to England by land but is threatened by bad weather and wild animals in northern Spain. Finally arriving back in England, Crusoe receives

word that the sale of his plantations has been completed and that he has made a considerable fortune. After donating a portion to the widow and his sisters, Crusoe is restless and considers returning to Brazil, but he is dissuaded by the thought that he would have to become Catholic. He marries, and his wife dies. Crusoe finally departs for the East Indies as a trader in 1694. He revisits his island, finding that the Spaniards are governing it well and that it has become a prosperous colony.

Characters

Robinson Crusoe

While he is no flashy hero or grand epic adventurer, Robinson Crusoe displays character traits that have won him the approval of generations of readers. His perseverance in spending months making a canoe, and in practicing pottery making until he gets it right, is praiseworthy. Additionally, his resourcefulness in building a home, dairy, grape arbor, country house, and goat stable from practically nothing is clearly remarkable. The Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau applauded Crusoe's do-it-yourself independence, and in his book on education, *Emile*, he recommends that children be taught to imitate Crusoe's hands-on approach to life. Crusoe's business instincts are just as considerable as his survival instincts: he manages to make a fortune in Brazil despite a twenty-eight-year absence and even leaves his island with a nice collection of gold. Moreover, Crusoe is never interested in portraying himself as a hero in his own narration. He does not boast of his courage in quelling the mutiny, and he is always ready to admit unheroic feelings of fear or panic, as when he finds the footprint on the beach. Crusoe prefers to depict himself as an ordinary sensible man, never as an exceptional hero.

But Crusoe's admirable qualities must be weighed against the flaws in his character. Crusoe seems incapable of deep feelings, as shown by his cold account of leaving his family—he worries about the religious consequences of disobeying his father, but never displays any emotion about leaving. Though he is generous toward people, as when he gives gifts to his sisters and the captain, Crusoe reveals very little tender or sincere affection in his dealings with them. When

Crusoe tells us that he has gotten married and that his wife has died all within the same sentence, his indifference to her seems almost cruel. Moreover, as an individual personality, Crusoe is rather dull. His precise and deadpan style of narration works well for recounting the process of canoe building, but it tends to drain the excitement from events that should be thrilling. Action-packed scenes like the conquest of the cannibals become quite humdrum when Crusoe narrates them, giving us a detailed inventory of the cannibals in list form, for example. His insistence on dating events makes sense to a point, but it ultimately ends up seeming obsessive and irrelevant when he tells us the date on which he grinds his tools but neglects to tell us the date of a very important event like meeting Friday. Perhaps his impulse to record facts carefully is not a survival skill, but an irritating sign of his neurosis.

Finally, while not boasting of heroism, Crusoe is nonetheless very interested in possessions, power, and prestige. When he first calls himself king of the island it seems jocund, but when he describes the Spaniard as his subject we must take his royal delusion seriously, since it seems he really does consider himself king. His teaching Friday to call him “Master,” even before teaching him the words for “yes” or “no,” seems obnoxious even under the racist standards of the day, as if Crusoe needs to hear the ego-boosting word spoken as soon as possible. Overall, Crusoe’s virtues tend to be private: his industry, resourcefulness, and solitary courage make him an exemplary individual. But his vices are social, and his urge to subjugate others is highly objectionable. In bringing both sides together into one complex character, Defoe gives us a fascinating glimpse into the successes, failures, and contradictions of modern man.

Friday

Probably the first nonwhite character to be given a realistic, individualized, and humane portrayal in the English novel, Friday has a huge literary and cultural importance. If Crusoe represents the first colonial mind in fiction, then Friday represents not just a Caribbean tribesman, but all the natives of America, Asia, and Africa who would later be oppressed in the age of European imperialism. At the moment when Crusoe teaches Friday to call him

“Master” Friday becomes an enduring political symbol of racial injustice in a modern world critical of imperialist expansion. Recent rewritings of the Crusoe story, like J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* and Michel Tournier’s *Friday*, emphasize the sad consequences of Crusoe’s failure to understand Friday and suggest how the tale might be told very differently from the native’s perspective.

Aside from his importance to our culture, Friday is a key figure within the context of the novel. In many ways he is the most vibrant character in *Robinson Crusoe*, much more charismatic and colorful than his master. Indeed, Defoe at times underscores the contrast between Crusoe’s and Friday’s personalities, as when Friday, in his joyful reunion with his father, exhibits far more emotion toward his family than Crusoe. Whereas Crusoe never mentions missing his family or dreams about the happiness of seeing them again, Friday jumps and sings for joy when he meets his father, and this emotional display makes us see what is missing from Crusoe’s stodgy heart. Friday’s expression of loyalty in asking Crusoe to kill him rather than leave him is more heartfelt than anything Crusoe ever says or does. Friday’s sincere questions to Crusoe about the devil, which Crusoe answers only indirectly and hesitantly, leave us wondering whether Crusoe’s knowledge of Christianity is superficial and sketchy in contrast to Friday’s full understanding of his own god Benamuckee. In short, Friday’s exuberance and emotional directness often point out the wooden conventionality of Crusoe’s personality.

Despite Friday’s subjugation, however, Crusoe appreciates Friday much more than he would a mere servant. Crusoe does not seem to value intimacy with humans much, but he does say that he loves Friday, which is a remarkable disclosure. It is the only time Crusoe makes such an admission in the novel, since he never expresses love for his parents, brothers, sisters, or even his wife. The mere fact that an Englishman confesses more love for an illiterate Caribbean ex-cannibal than for his own family suggests the appeal of Friday’s personality. Crusoe may bring Friday Christianity and clothing, but Friday brings Crusoe emotional warmth and a vitality of spirit that Crusoe’s own European heart lacks.

The Portuguese Captain

The Portuguese captain is presented more fully than any other European in the novel besides Crusoe, more vividly portrayed than Crusoe's widow friend or his family members. He appears in the narrative at two very important junctures in Crusoe's life. First, it is the Portuguese captain who picks up Crusoe after the escape from the Moors and takes him to Brazil, where Crusoe establishes himself as a plantation owner. Twenty-eight years later, it is again the Portuguese captain who informs Crusoe that his Brazilian investments are secure, and who arranges the sale of the plantation and the forwarding of the proceeds to Crusoe. In both cases, the Portuguese captain is the agent of Crusoe's extreme good fortune. In this sense, he represents the benefits of social connections. If the captain had not been located in Lisbon, Crusoe never would have cashed in on his Brazilian holdings. This assistance from social contacts contradicts the theme of solitary enterprise that the novel seems to endorse. Despite Crusoe's hard individual labor on the island, it is actually another human being—and not his own resourcefulness—that makes Crusoe wealthy in the end. Yet it is doubtful whether this insight occurs to Crusoe, despite his obvious gratitude toward the captain.

Moreover, the Portuguese captain is associated with a wide array of virtues. He is honest, informing Crusoe of the money he has borrowed against Crusoe's investments, and repaying a part of it immediately even though it is financially difficult for him to do so. He is loyal, honoring his duties toward Crusoe even after twenty-eight years. Finally, he is extremely generous, paying Crusoe more than market value for the animal skins and slave boy after picking Crusoe up at sea, and giving Crusoe handsome gifts when leaving Brazil. All these virtues make the captain a paragon of human excellence, and they make us wonder why Defoe includes such a character in the novel. In some ways, the captain's goodness makes him the moral counterpart of Friday, since the European seaman and the Caribbean cannibal mirror each other in benevolence and devotion to Crusoe. The captain's goodness thus makes it impossible for us to make oversimplified oppositions between a morally bankrupt Europe on the one hand, and innocent noble savages on the other.

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

The Ambivalence of Mastery

Crusoe's success in mastering his situation, overcoming his obstacles, and controlling his environment shows the condition of mastery in a positive light, at least at the beginning of the novel. Crusoe lands in an inhospitable environment and makes it his home. His taming and domestication of wild goats and parrots with Crusoe as their master illustrates his newfound control. Moreover, Crusoe's mastery over nature makes him a master of his fate and of himself. Early in the novel, he frequently blames himself for disobeying his father's advice or blames the destiny that drove him to sea. But in the later part of the novel, Crusoe stops viewing himself as a passive victim and strikes a new note of self-determination. In building a home for himself on the island, he finds that he is master of his life—he suffers a hard fate and still finds prosperity.

But this theme of mastery becomes more complex and less positive after Friday's arrival, when the idea of mastery comes to apply more to unfair relationships between humans. In Chapter XXIII, Crusoe teaches Friday the word "[m]aster" even before teaching him "yes" and "no," and indeed he lets him "know that was to be [Crusoe's] name." Crusoe never entertains the idea of considering Friday a friend or equal—for some reason, superiority comes instinctively to him. We further question Crusoe's right to be called "[m]aster" when he later refers to himself as "king" over the natives and Europeans, who are his "subjects." In short, while Crusoe seems praiseworthy in mastering his fate, the praiseworthiness of his mastery over his fellow humans is more doubtful. Defoe explores the link between the two in his depiction of the colonial mind.

The Necessity of Repentance

Crusoe's experiences constitute not simply an adventure story in which thrilling things happen, but also a moral tale illustrating the right and wrong ways to live one's life. This moral and religious

dimension of the tale is indicated in the Preface, which states that Crusoe's story is being published to instruct others in God's wisdom, and one vital part of this wisdom is the importance of repenting one's sins. While it is important to be grateful for God's miracles, as Crusoe is when his grain sprouts, it is not enough simply to express gratitude or even to pray to God, as Crusoe does several times with few results. Crusoe needs repentance most, as he learns from the fiery angelic figure that comes to him during a feverish hallucination and says, "Seeing all these things have not brought thee to repentance, now thou shalt die." Crusoe believes that his major sin is his rebellious behavior toward his father, which he refers to as his "original sin," akin to Adam and Eve's first disobedience of God. This biblical reference also suggests that Crusoe's exile from civilization represents Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden.

For Crusoe, repentance consists of acknowledging his wretchedness and his absolute dependence on the Lord. This admission marks a turning point in Crusoe's spiritual consciousness, and is almost a born-again experience for him. After repentance, he complains much less about his sad fate and views the island more positively. Later, when Crusoe is rescued and his fortune restored, he compares himself to Job, who also regained divine favor. Ironically, this view of the necessity of repentance ends up justifying sin: Crusoe may never have learned to repent if he had never sinfully disobeyed his father in the first place. Thus, as powerful as the theme of repentance is in the novel, it is nevertheless complex and ambiguous.

The Importance of Self-Awareness

Crusoe's arrival on the island does not make him revert to a brute existence controlled by animal instincts, and, unlike animals, he remains conscious of himself at all times. Indeed, his island existence actually deepens his self-awareness as he withdraws from the external social world and turns inward. The idea that the individual must keep a careful reckoning of the state of his own soul is a key point in the Presbyterian doctrine that Defoe took seriously all his life. We see that in his normal day-to-day activities, Crusoe keeps accounts of himself enthusiastically and in various ways. For

example, it is significant that Crusoe's makeshift calendar does not simply mark the passing of days, but instead more egocentrically marks the days he has spent on the island: it is about him, a sort of self-conscious or autobiographical calendar with him at its center. Similarly, Crusoe obsessively keeps a journal to record his daily activities, even when they amount to nothing more than finding a few pieces of wood on the beach or waiting inside while it rains. Crusoe feels the importance of staying aware of his situation at all times. We can also sense Crusoe's impulse toward self-awareness in the fact that he teaches his parrot to say the words, "Poor Robin Crusoe. . . . Where have you been?" This sort of self-examining thought is natural for anyone alone on a desert island, but it is given a strange intensity when we recall that Crusoe has spent months teaching the bird to say it back to him. Crusoe teaches nature itself to voice his own self-awareness.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Counting and Measuring

Crusoe is a careful note-taker whenever numbers and quantities are involved. He does not simply tell us that his hedge encloses a large space, but informs us with a surveyor's precision that the space is "150 yards in length, and 100 yards in breadth." He tells us not simply that he spends a long time making his canoe in Chapter XVI, but that it takes precisely twenty days to fell the tree and fourteen to remove the branches. It is not just an immense tree, but is "five foot ten inches in diameter at the lower part . . . and four foot eleven inches diameter at the end of twenty-two foot." Furthermore, time is measured with similar exactitude, as Crusoe's journal shows. We may often wonder why Crusoe feels it useful to record that it did not rain on December 26, but for him the necessity of counting out each day is never questioned. All these examples of counting and measuring underscore Crusoe's practical, businesslike character and his hands-on approach to life. But Defoe sometimes hints at the futility of Crusoe's measuring—as when the carefully measured canoe cannot reach water or when his obsessively kept calendar is

thrown off by a day of oversleeping. Defoe may be subtly poking fun at the urge to quantify, showing us that, in the end, everything Crusoe counts never really adds up to much and does not save him from isolation.

Eating

One of Crusoe's first concerns after his shipwreck is his food supply. Even while he is still wet from the sea in Chapter V, he frets about not having "anything to eat or drink to comfort me." He soon provides himself with food, and indeed each new edible item marks a new stage in his mastery of the island, so that his food supply becomes a symbol of his survival. His securing of goat meat staves off immediate starvation, and his discovery of grain is viewed as a miracle, like manna from heaven. His cultivation of raisins, almost a luxury food for Crusoe, marks a new comfortable period in his island existence. In a way, these images of eating convey Crusoe's ability to integrate the island into his life, just as food is integrated into the body to let the organism grow and prosper. But no sooner does Crusoe master the art of eating than he begins to fear being eaten himself. The cannibals transform Crusoe from the consumer into a potential object to be consumed. Life for Crusoe always illustrates this eat or be eaten philosophy, since even back in Europe he is threatened by man-eating wolves. Eating is an image of existence itself, just as being eaten signifies death for Crusoe.

Ordeals at Sea

Crusoe's encounters with water in the novel are often associated not simply with hardship, but with a kind of symbolic ordeal, or test of character. First, the storm off the coast of Yarmouth frightens Crusoe's friend away from a life at sea, but does not deter Crusoe. Then, in his first trading voyage, he proves himself a capable merchant, and in his second one, he shows he is able to survive enslavement. His escape from his Moorish master and his successful encounter with the Africans both occur at sea. Most significantly, Crusoe survives his shipwreck after a lengthy immersion in water. But the sea remains a source of danger and fear even later, when the cannibals arrive in canoes. The Spanish shipwreck reminds Crusoe

of the destructive power of water and of his own good fortune in surviving it. All the life-testing water imagery in the novel has subtle associations with the rite of baptism, by which Christians prove their faith and enter a new life saved by Christ.

Symbols

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

The Footprint

Crusoe's shocking discovery of a single footprint on the sand in Chapter XVIII is one of the most famous moments in the novel, and it symbolizes our hero's conflicted feelings about human companionship. Crusoe has earlier confessed how much he misses companionship, yet the evidence of a man on his island sends him into a panic. Immediately he interprets the footprint negatively, as the print of the devil or of an aggressor. He never for a moment entertains hope that it could belong to an angel or another European who could rescue or befriend him. This instinctively negative and fearful attitude toward others makes us consider the possibility that Crusoe may not want to return to human society after all, and that the isolation he is experiencing may actually be his ideal state.

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The Cross

Concerned that he will "lose [his] reckoning of time" in Chapter VII, Crusoe marks the passing of days "with [his] knife upon a large post, in capital letters, and making it into a great cross . . . set[s] it up on the shore where [he] first landed. . . ." The large size and capital letters show us how important this cross is to Crusoe as a timekeeping device and thus also as a way of relating himself to the larger social world where dates and calendars still matter. But the cross is also a symbol of his own new existence on the island, just as the Christian cross is a symbol of the Christian's new life in Christ

after baptism, an immersion in water like Crusoe's shipwreck experience. Yet Crusoe's large cross seems somewhat blasphemous in making no reference to Christ. Instead, it is a memorial to Crusoe himself, underscoring how completely he has become the center of his own life.

Crusoe's Bower

On a scouting tour around the island, Crusoe discovers a delightful valley in which he decides to build a country retreat or "bower" in Chapter XII. This bower contrasts sharply with Crusoe's first residence, since it is built not for the practical purpose of shelter or storage, but simply for pleasure: "because I was so enamoured of the place." Crusoe is no longer focused solely on survival, which by this point in the novel is more or less secure. Now, for the first time since his arrival, he thinks in terms of "pleasantness." Thus, the bower symbolizes a radical improvement in Crusoe's attitude toward his time on the island. Island life is no longer necessarily a disaster to suffer through, but may be an opportunity for enjoyment—just as, for the Presbyterian, life may be enjoyed only after hard work has been finished and repentance achieved.

Important Quotes Explained

"O drug!" said I aloud, "what art thou good for? Thou art not worth to me, no, not the taking off of the ground; one of those knives is worth all this heap; I have no manner of use for thee; e'en remain where thou art and go to the bottom as a creature whose life is not worth saving." However, upon second thoughts, I took it away. . . .

Crusoe's contradictory relationship with money is seen in this affirmation in Chapter VI, when he declares that the gold he discovers is worthless, only moments before hauling it away for safekeeping. He does the same thing many years later, expressing scorn for the treasure on the Spanish wreck, but then taking it to shore. The conflict between spiritual aims (scorning worldly wealth) and material ambitions (hoarding gold) reflects the novel's tension between the practical and the religious. Moreover, Crusoe's combination of disdain and desire for money is also interesting

because Crusoe is conscious of his conflicted feelings only in a limited way. He calls money a drug and admits that he is addicted—but he is not interested in the way he fails to practice what he preaches. We see how Defoe’s focus in the novel is primarily on the practical rather than the psychological, despite the fascinating aspects of Crusoe’s mind. Crusoe’s mixed feelings about the gold also reflect his nostalgia for human society, since he tells us that money has no value in itself, unlike the useful knives to which he compares it. It has only a social worth, and thus reminds us that Crusoe may still be a social creature despite his isolation.

Quote 2

My island was now peopled, and I thought myself very rich in subjects; and it was a merry reflection, which I frequently made, how like a king I looked. First of all, the whole country was my own mere property, Baso that I had an undoubted right of dominion. Secondly, my people were perfectly subjected. I was absolute lord and lawgiver, they all owed their lives to me, and were ready to lay down their lives, if there had been occasion of it, for me.

This passage, from Chapter XXV, shows us Crusoe’s astonishing ability throughout the novel to claim possession of things. He sells his fellow slave Xury to the Portuguese captain even though he has no claim of ownership over the boy. He seizes the contents of two wrecked ships and takes Friday as his servant immediately after meeting him. Most remarkably, he views the island itself as “my own mere property” over which he has “an undoubted right of dominion.” We may wonder why he has no reason to at least doubt his right of dominion, but his faith in his property rights seems absolute. Moreover, Crusoe’s conception of property determines his understanding of politics. He jokes about his “merry reflection” of looking like a king, but it seems more than a merry thought when he refers to “my people” being “perfectly subjected.” Kingship is like ownership for Crusoe. He does not mention any duties or obligations toward his people. His subjects are for him like his possessions: he imagines them grateful for being owned, expecting nothing further from Crusoe. Of course, this view is only Crusoe’s presumption. It is hard to believe that the Spaniard sincerely sees himself as “perfectly subjected” to Crusoe, even if Crusoe does save his life. Nevertheless, Crusoe’s personal point of view dominates the novel and shows us

how deeply colonialism depended on a self-righteous, proprietary way of thinking.

Quote 3

I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, of a good family, though not of that country, my father being a foreigner of Bremen who settled first at Hull. He got a good estate by merchandise and, leaving off his trade, lived afterward at York, from whence he had married my mother whose relations were named Robinson, a very good family in that country, and from whom I was called Robinson Kreutznaer; but by the usual corruption of words in England we are called, nay, we call ourselves, and write our name “Crusoe,” and so my companions always called me.

Crusoe’s opening words in Chapter I show us the fact-oriented, practical, and unsentimental mind that will carry him through his ordeal. Crusoe introduces his parents objectively through their nationalities, professions, and places of origin and residence. There is no hint of emotional attachment either here or later, when Crusoe leaves his parents forever. In fact, there is no expression of affection whatsoever. The passage also shows that leaving home may be a habit that runs in the family: Crusoe’s father was an emigrant, just as Crusoe later becomes when he succumbs to his “rambling” thoughts and leaves England. Crusoe’s originally foreign name is an interesting symbol of his emigrant status, especially since it had to be changed to adapt to English understanding. We see that Crusoe has long grasped the notion of adapting to one’s environment, and that identities—or at least names—may change when people change places. This name change foreshadows the theme of Crusoe’s changing identity on his island, when he teaches Friday that his name is Master.

Quote 4

I might well say now indeed, that the latter end of Job was better than the beginning. It is impossible to express here the flutterings of my very heart when I looked over these letters, and especially when I found all my wealth about me; for as the Brazil ships come all in fleets, the same ships which brought my letters brought my goods. . . .

Crusoe’s comparison of himself to the biblical character Job in Chapter XXIX, after his return to England, reveals much about how

he gives his ordeal religious meaning. In Crusoe's mind, his shipwreck and solitude are not random disastrous events but segments of an elaborate lesson in Christian patience. Like Job, whose faith was tested by God through the loss of family and wealth, Crusoe is deprived of his fortune while nevertheless retaining his faith in Providence. This passage also showcases Crusoe's characteristic neutral tone—the detached, deadpan style in which he narrates even thrilling events. Although he reports that the emotional effects make his heart flutter, he displays very little emotion in the passage, certainly not the joy expected of someone who suddenly becomes wealthy. The biblical grandeur of the original Job is lost in Crusoe's ordinary and conversational opening, "I might very well say now." We see how Crusoe is far better suited to plodding and mundane everyday life than to dramatic sublimity. Even when the events call for drama, Crusoe seems to do all he can to make them humdrum. This emphasis on the ordinary was a new trend in English literature and is a major characteristic of the novel, which Defoe helped invent.

Quote 5

But no sooner were my eyes open, but I saw my Poll sitting on top of the hedge; and immediately knew that it was he that spoke to me; for just in such bemoaning language I had used to talk to him, and teach him; and he learned it so perfectly that he would sit upon my finger and lay his bill close to my face, and cry, "Poor Robin Crusoe! Where are you? Where have you been? How come you here?" and such things as I had taught him.

When Crusoe returns from his nearly fatal canoe trip in Chapter XVI to find his parrot calling his name, the scene expresses the pathos of having only a bird to welcome him home. Crusoe domesticates the bird in an attempt to provide himself with a substitute family member, as we learn later when he refers to his pets in Chapter XVII as his "family." Poll's friendly address to his master foreshadows Friday's role as conversation partner in Crusoe's life. Crusoe's solitude may not be as satisfying as he lets on. Moreover, Poll's words show a self-pitying side of Crusoe that he never reveals in his narration. Teaching the bird to call him "poor" in a "bemoaning" tone shows that he may feel more like complaining than he admits in his story and that his Christian patience might be

wearing thin. Poll's greeting also has a spiritual significance: it comes right after Crusoe's near-death experience in the canoe, and it seems to come from a disembodied speaker, since Crusoe imagines a person must be addressing him. It seems like a mystical moment until the words are revealed not to be God's, but Crusoe's own words repeated by a bird. Cut off from human communication, Crusoe seems cut off from divine communication too—he can only speak to himself.