



Daniel Defoe (1660-1731)

Compact Performer - Culture & Literature
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ZANICHELLI



Daniel Defoe

1. Defoe's life



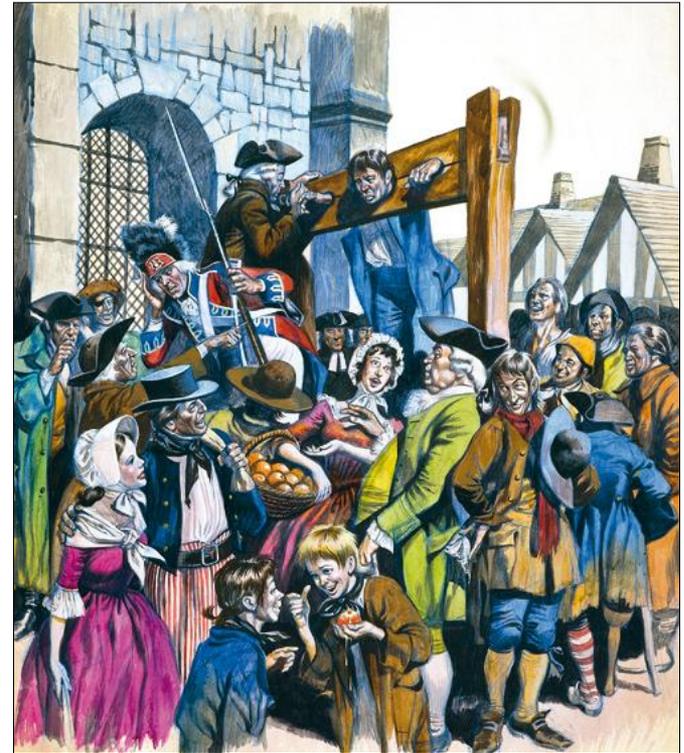
- Born into a family of **Dissenters** in 1660.
- Studied **modern languages, economics, geography**, besides the traditional subjects.
- Started to write in **Whig** papers; his greatest achievement was '**The Review**'.
- Queen Anne had him **arrested, tried** and **imprisoned**.



Daniel Defoe

1. Defoe's life

- Denied his Whig ideas and became a **secret agent** for the new government.
- Started to write **novels** when was about sixty.
- Died in **1731**.



Ron Embleton (1930-1988), *Daniel Defoe*. Private Collection.



Daniel Defoe

2. Defoe's main works

Robinson Crusoe
(1719)



The story of a shipwreck on a desert island.

Moll Flanders
(1722)

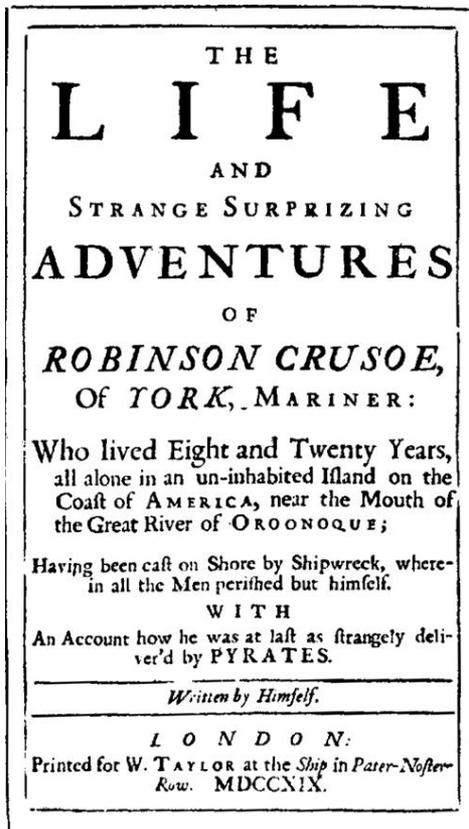


The adventures of a woman who becomes a thief and a prostitute to survive but finally leads a respectable life.



Daniel Defoe

3. Defoe's novels: structure



- Fictional **autobiographies**.
- A series of **episodes and adventures** (lack of a **coherent plot**).
- Unifying presence of a **single hero**.
- Retrospective **first-person narration**.
- The author's **point of view** coincides with the main character's.
- Characters presented **through their actions**.



Daniel Defoe

4. *Robinson Crusoe*: the middle-class hero

The novel (based on the real experience of the Scottish sailor Alexander Selkirk) is divided into 3 sections:

1. Robinson leaves his family, lands in Brazil and starts a plantation. (An act of transgression, of disobedience)
2. He is shipwrecked on a desert island where he spends 28 years and re-creates a primitive society (the self-made man)
3. He returns to England and learns that his plantation has made him rich (the individual as creator of his own destiny)



Daniel Defoe

5. *Robinson Crusoe*: a spiritual autobiography

Full of religious references to God, sin,
providence, salvation



The hero reads the Bible to
find comfort and guidance



Defoe explores the conflict
between economic motivation
and spiritual salvation



Daniel Defoe

6. *Robinson Crusoe*: the island

The ideal place for Robinson to prove
his qualities

Robinson organises a primitive
empire: he is the prototype of
the English coloniser

Not a return to nature, but
a chance to exploit and
dominate nature



Daniel Defoe

7. *Robinson Crusoe*: the individual and society

The society Robinson creates on the island is not an alternative to

but an exaltation of 18th-century England, its ideals of mobility, material productiveness and individualism.

Though God is the prime cause of everything, the individual can shape his destiny through action



Daniel Defoe

8. *Robinson Crusoe*: the style

He aims at **realistic description** through:

- First-person narrator
- Clear and precise details (long lists of objects).
- Description of the primary qualities of objects.



solidity, extension and number.

- Simple, matter-of-fact and concrete language