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## Daniel Defoe's Roxana: Puritanism and its subversion

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### **Introduction**

Daniel Defoe is well-known for his *Robinson Crusoe*, published in 1719 – we are celebrating in 2019 the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its publication – but he was an extremely prolific writer. In addition to a number of novels, which include *Roxana*, he also wrote poems, essays, pamphlets, and journal articles, and he edited a number of newspapers. His total output is so huge that some of the works which are attributed to him is still a matter of debate among scholars today.

Defoe, born in 1660, was educated in a school for dissenters. He then embraced the life of a soldier, then a spy, then a businessman, but after some flourishing years, his schemes did not turn out the way he expected, and he became bankrupt. A few years later, for a satirical pamphlet he had written about the dissenters, he was pilloried, ie he had to stand in public with his hands and head held by a kind of yoke. He always wrote somehow frantically, desperate to make money out of his various writing enterprises, and when he died in 1731, he was still pursued by a very cantankerous creditrix.

As regards Defoe’s novels, I would say that three of them particularly stand out: *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724). Defoe has been credited with the invention of the modern novel in England. He is most noted, among other elements, as a realistic writer whose protagonists are persons belonging to the middle-class. Drawing upon a range of literary genres of his time such as the confessional novel and the picaresque, Defoe lends a voice to two female characters: **Moll Flanders**, in the eponymous novel, the long title of which reads: “The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders Who was born in Newgate, and during a life of continued Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Years a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her brother) Twelve Years a Thief, Eight Years a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, lived Honest and died a Penitent”, and **Roxana**, in a novel which also has a longer version: “Roxana, The Fortunate Mistress: Or, A History of the Life and Vast Variety of Fortunes of Mademoiselle de Beleau, Afterwards Called the Countess de Wintelsheim, in Germany, Being the Person known by the Name of the Lady Roxana, in the Time of King Charles II.”

**[See article on-line]**