

Daniel Defoe



English novelist, pamphleteer, and journalist, author of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), a story of a man shipwrecked alone on an island. Along with Samuel Richardson, Defoe is considered the founder of the English novel. Before his time stories were usually written as long poems or dramas. He produced some 200 works of nonfiction prose in addition to close 2 000 short essays in periodical publications, several of which he also edited.



Daniel Defoe was born in London, the son of Alice and James Foe. His father was a City tradesman and member of the Butchers' Company. James Foe's stubborn puritanism – the The Foes were Dissenters, Protestants who did not belong to the Anglican Church – occasionally comes through Defoe's writing. He studied at Charles Morton's Academy, London. Although his Nonconformist father intended him for the ministry, Defoe plunged into politics and trade, travelling extensively in Europe.

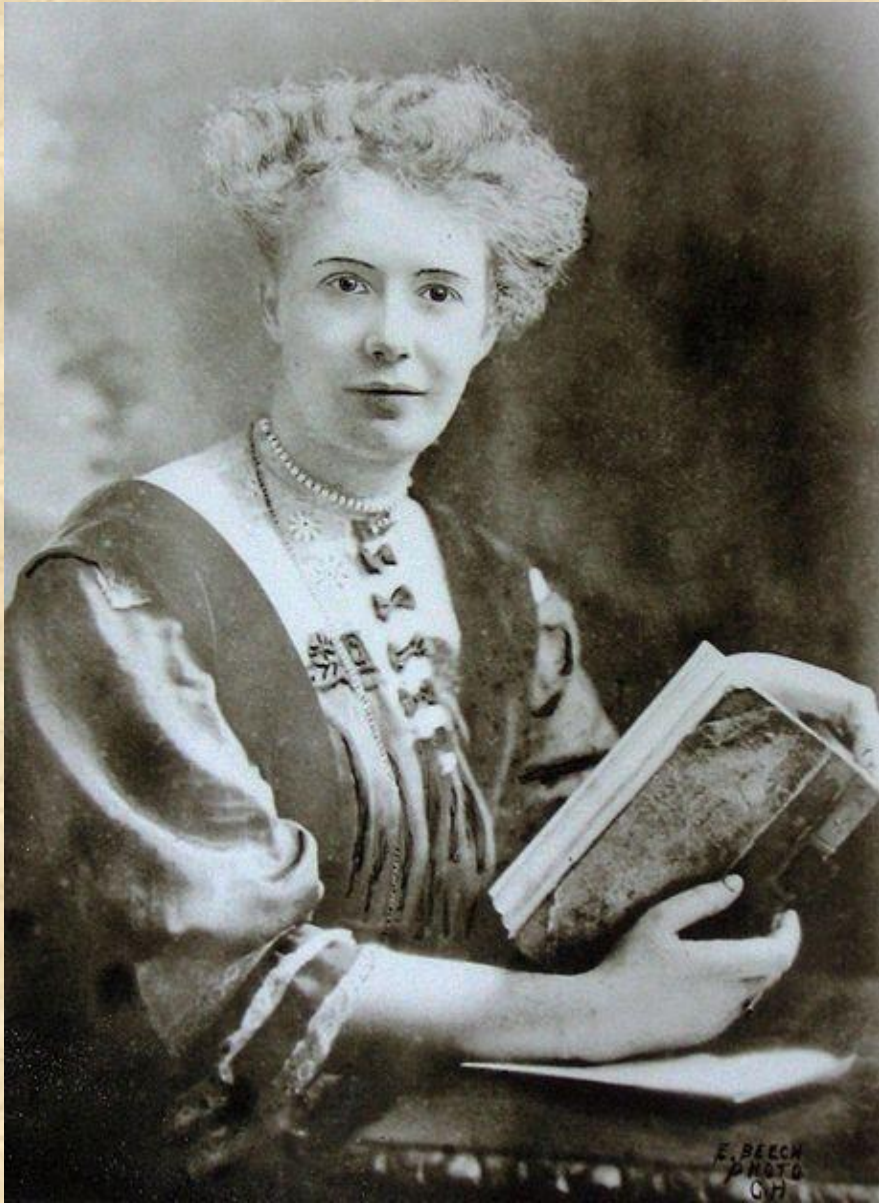


Throughout his life, Defoe wrote about mercantile projects, but his business ventures failed and left him with large debts, amounting over seventeen thousand pounds. This burden shadowed the remainder of his life, which he once summoned: "In the School of Affliction I have learnt more Philosophy than at the Academy



And more Divinity than from the Pulpit: In Prison I have learnt to know that Liberty does not consist in open Doors, and the free Egress and Regress of Locomotion. I have seen the rough side of the World as well as the smooth, and have in less than half a Year tasted the difference between the Closet of a King, and the Dungeon of Newgate."



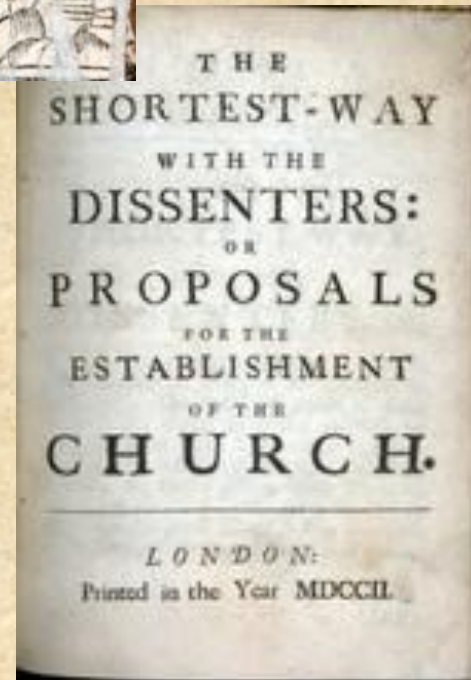


In the early 1680s Defoe was a commission merchant in Cornhill but went bankrupt in 1691. In 1684 he married Mary Tuffley; they had two sons and five daughters. Defoe was involved in Monmouth rebellion in 1685 against James II. While hiding as a fugitive in a churchyard after the rebellion was put down, he noticed the name Robinson Crusoe carved on a stone, and later gave it to his famous hero.

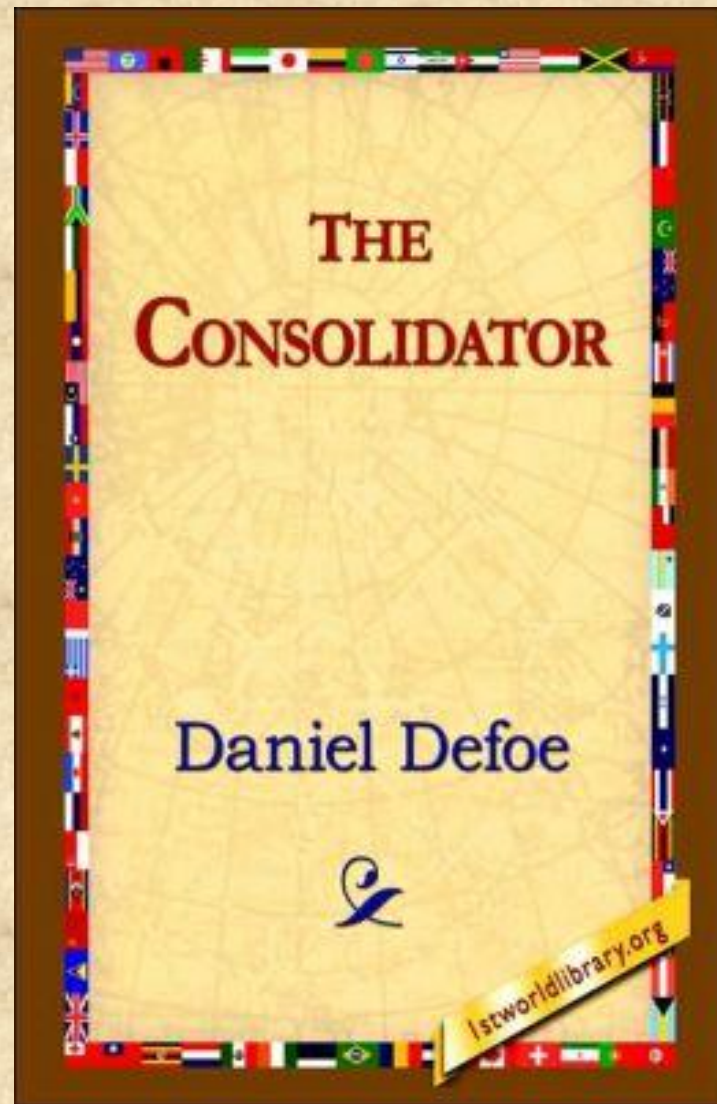
Defoe became a supporter of William, joining his army in 1688, and gaining a mercenary reputation because change of allegiance. From 1695 to 1699 he was an accountant to the commissioners of the glass duty and then associated with a brick and tile works in Tilbury. The business failed in 1703.

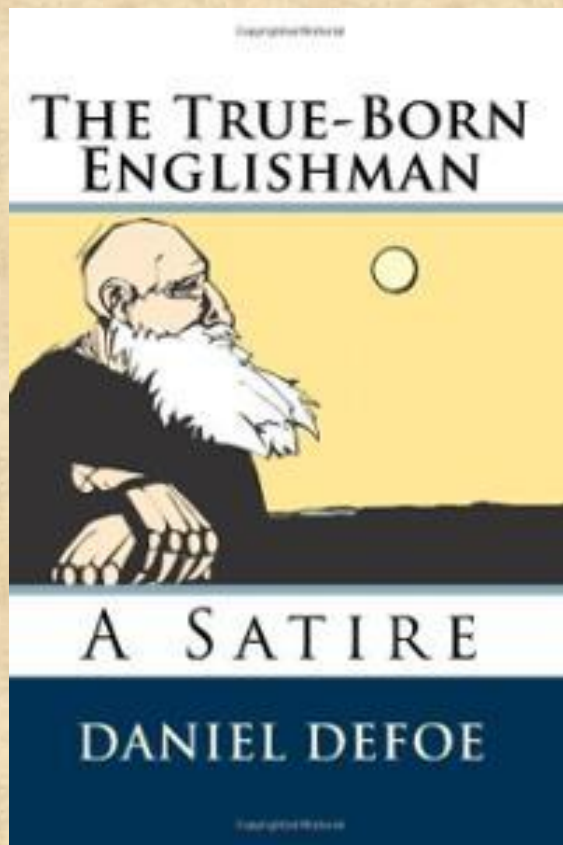


In 1702 Defoe wrote his famous pamphlet *The Shortest-Way with the Dissenters*. Himself a Dissenter he mimicked the bloodthirsty rhetoric of High Anglican Tories and pretended to argue for the extermination of all Dissenters. Nobody was amused, Defoe was arrested in May 1703, but released in return for services as a pamphleteer and intelligence agent to Robert Harley, 1st Earl of Oxford, and the Tories. While in prison Defoe wrote a mock ode, *Hymn to the Pillory* (1703). The poem was sold in the streets, the audience drank to his health while he stood in the pillory and read aloud his verses.



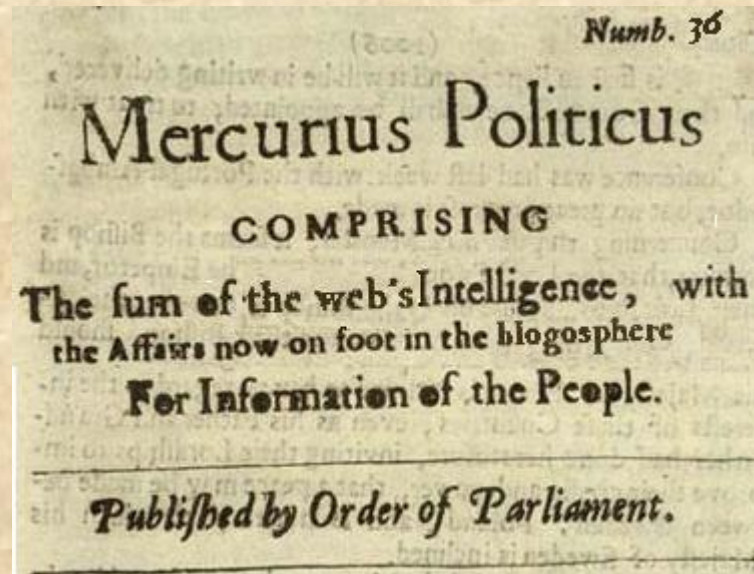
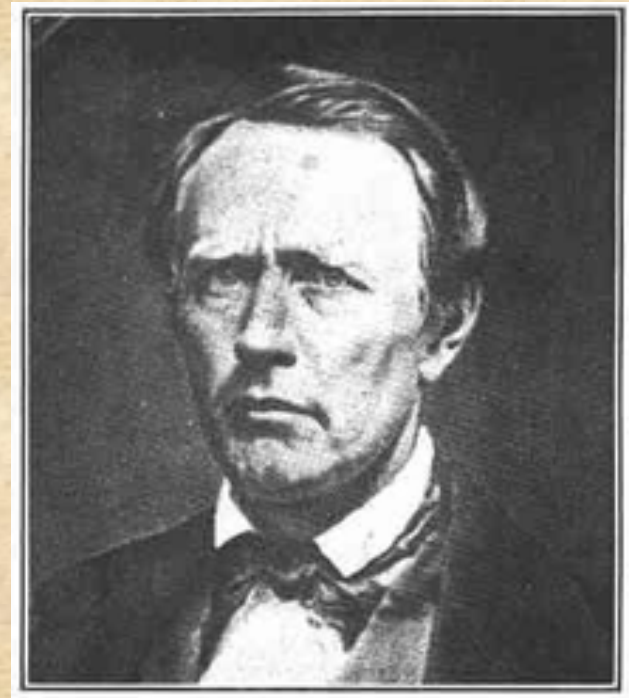
When the Tories fell from power, Defoe continued to carry out intelligence work for the Whig government. In his own days Defoe was regarded as an unscrupulous, diabolical journalist. Defoe used a number of pen names, including Eye Witness, T.Taylor, and Andrew Morton, Merchant. His most unusual pen name was 'Heliostropolis, secretary to the Emperor of the Moon,' used on his political satire *The Consolidator, or Memoirs of Sundry Transactions from the World in the Moon* (1705).





His political writings were widely read and made him powerful enemies. Often he was misunderstood. *The True-Born Englishman* (1701), an attack on nationalist pride, has been viewed both as a republican tract during the American Revolution and as a Jacobite tract in the second half of the eighteenth century.

William Minto suggested in *Daniel Defoe: A Biography* (1879) that he might have been "the greatest liar that ever lived." Defoe's most remarkable achievement during Queen Anne's reign was the periodical *A Review of the Affairs of France, and of All Europe* (1704-1713). It was published weekly, later three times a week and resembled a modern newspapers. From 1716 to 1720 Defoe edited *Mercurius Politicus*, then the *Manufacturer* (1720), and the *Director* (1720-21). He was contributor from 1715 to periodicals published by Nathaniel Mist.





Defoe was one of the first to write stories about believable characters in realistic situations using simple prose. He achieved literary immortality when in April 1719 he published *Robinson Crusoe*, a travelogue, which was based partly on the memoirs of voyagers and castaways, such as Alexander Selkirk, who spent on his island four years and four months.



Printed by W. Baynes & Co., London.

Engraved by J. G. Kay.

Published by J. G. Kay, 1719.

ROBINSON CRUSOE releases a SAVAGE whom he afterwards calls **FRIDAY**.

"I perceived presently he had a Bow and Arrow, and was lifting it to shoot at me; so I was then oblig'd to shoot at him, and kill'd him at the first shot."

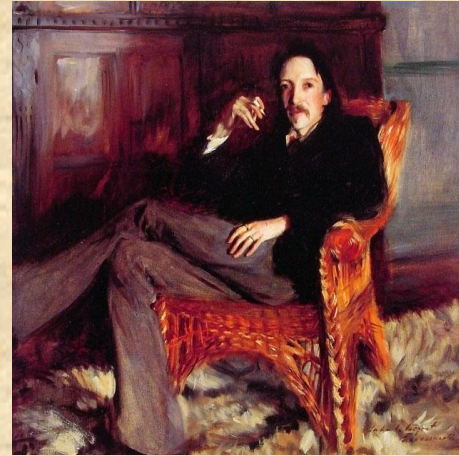
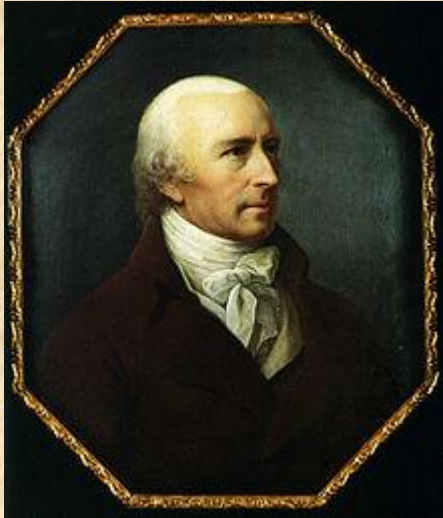
The first edition was printed in London by a publisher of a popular books, W. Taylor. No author's name was given. Although Defoe wrote it in the first person, his narrative voice is not overwhelmingly subjective. Throughout his life, Defoe himself was also traveler, whose voyages included visits to France, Spain, the Low Countries, Italy, and Germany.



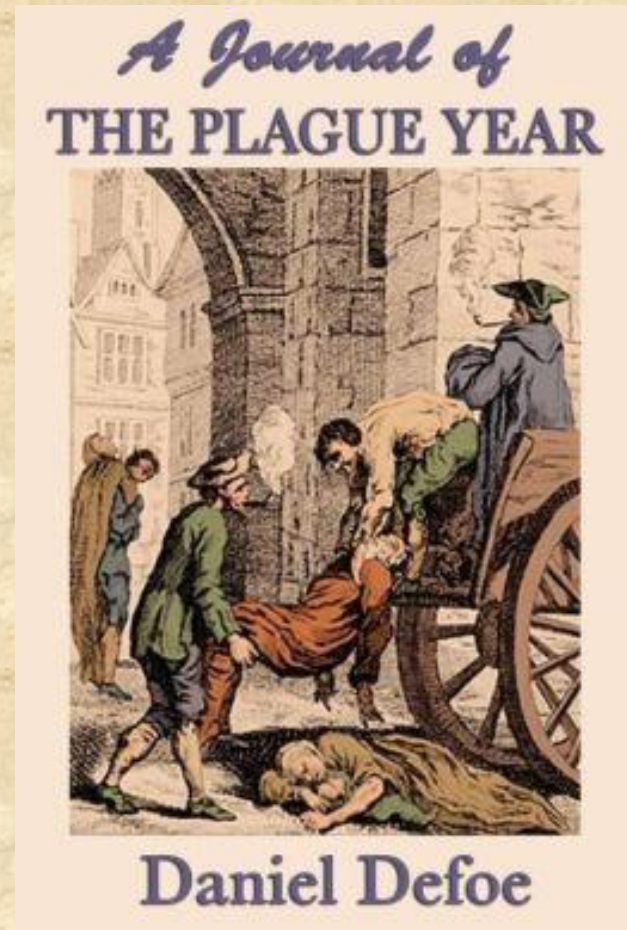
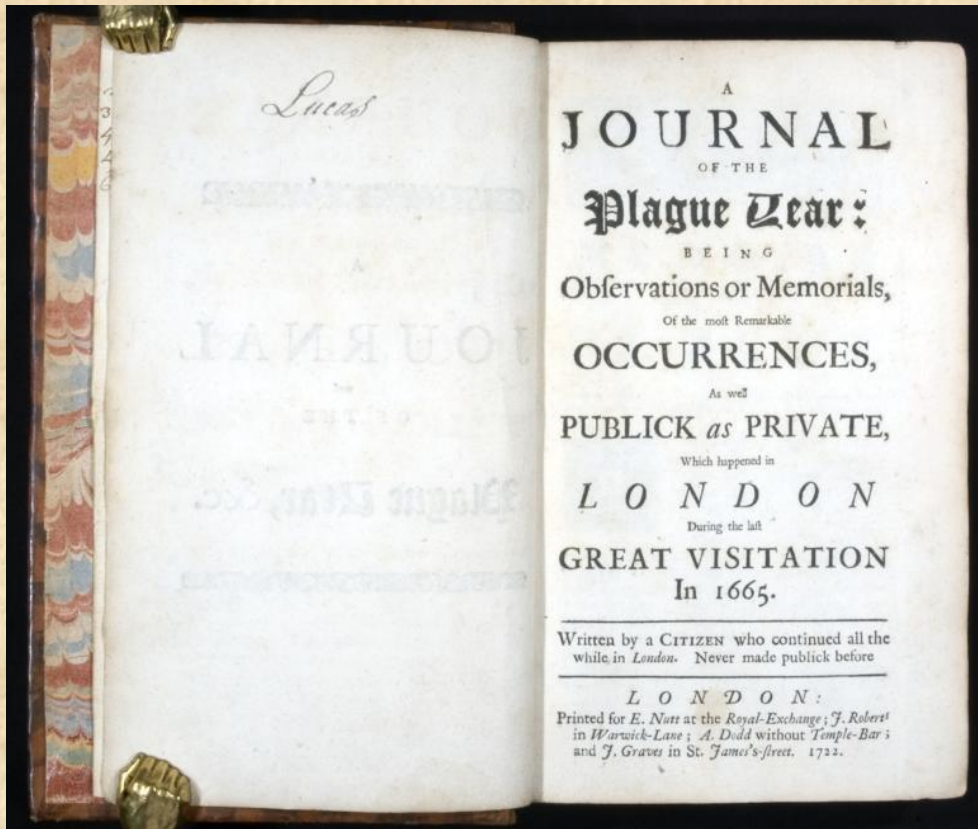
At first Defoe had troubles in finding a publisher for the book and eventually received £10 for the manuscript. Employing a first-person narrator and apparently genuine journal entries, Defoe created a realistic frame for the novel, which distinguished it from its predecessors. The account of a shipwrecked sailor was a comment both on the human need for civilized society and the equally powerful necessity for individual freedom.



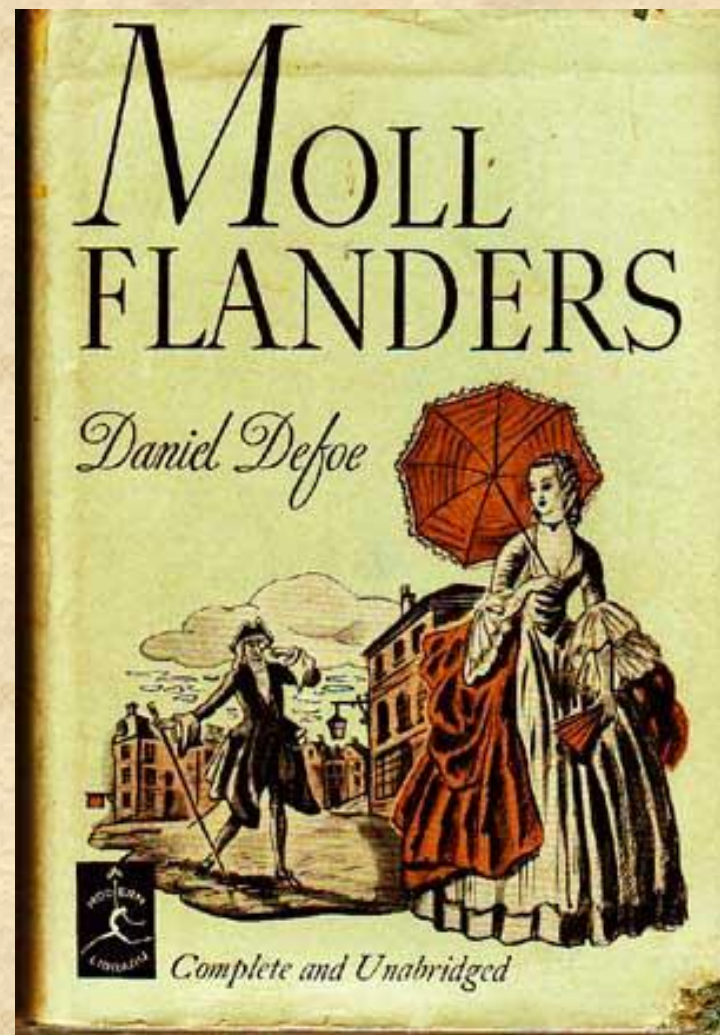
But it also offered a dream of building a private kingdom, a self-made Utopia, and being completely self-sufficient, without any political, social or religious constraints. By giving a vivid reality to a theme with large mythic implications, the story have since fascinated generations of readers as well as authors like Joachim Heinrich Campen, Jules Verne, R.L. Stevenson, Johann Wyss (*Der schweizerische Robinson*), Michael Tournier



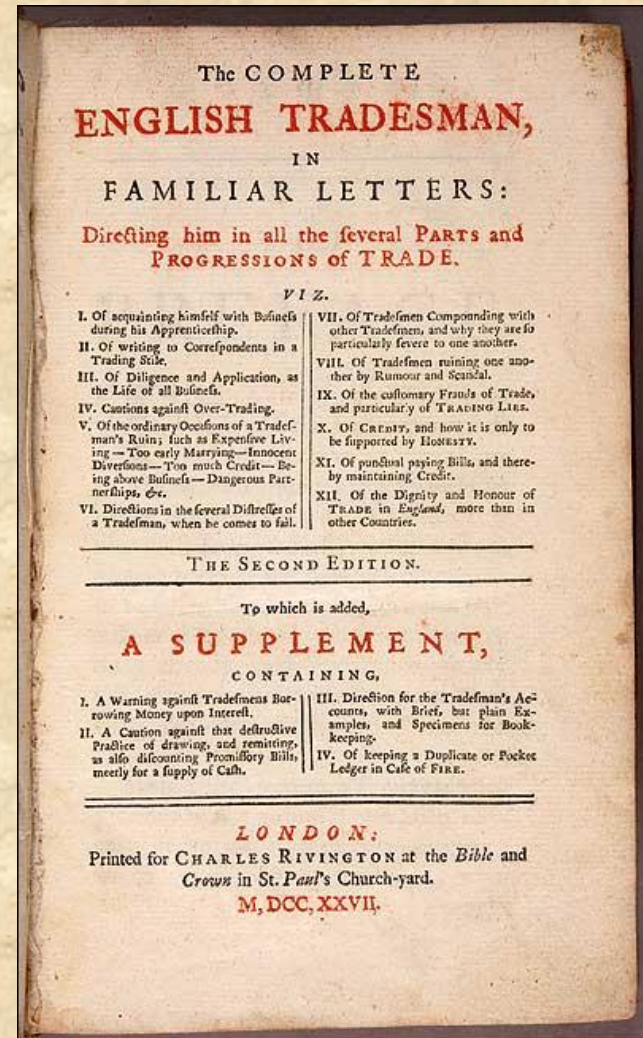
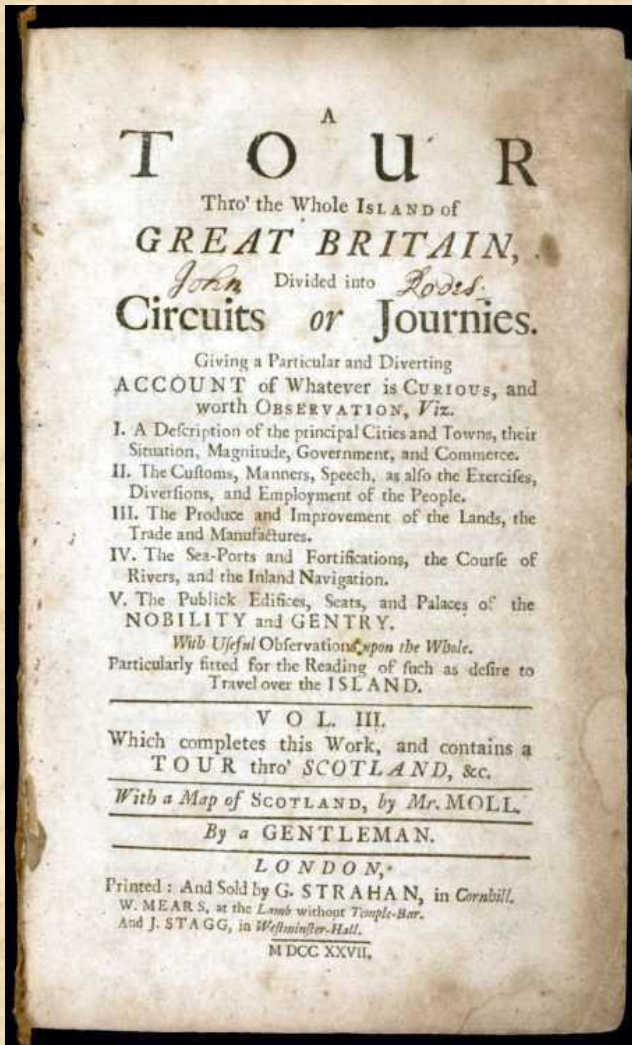
During the remaining years, Defoe concentrated on books rather than pamphlets. At the age of 62 he published *Moll Flanders*, *A Journal of the Plague Year* and *Colonel Jack*. His last great work of fiction, *Roxana*, came out in 1724. Defoe's choice of the protagonist in *Moll Flanders* reflected his interest in the female experience.



Moll is born in Newgate, where her mother is under sentence of death for theft. Her sentence is commuted to transportation to Virginia. The abandoned child is educated by a gentlewoman. Moll suffers romantic disillusionment, when she is ruined at the hands of a cynical male seducer. She becomes a whore and a thief, but finally she gains the status of a gentlewoman through the spoils of a successful colonial plantation.



After being close to the Whigs, Defoe moved back to the Tories. In the 1720s Defoe had ceased to be politically controversial in his writings, and he produced several historical works, a guide book *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-27, 3 vols.), *The Great Law of Subordination Considered* (1724), an examination of the treatment of servants, and *The Complete English Tradesman* (1726).





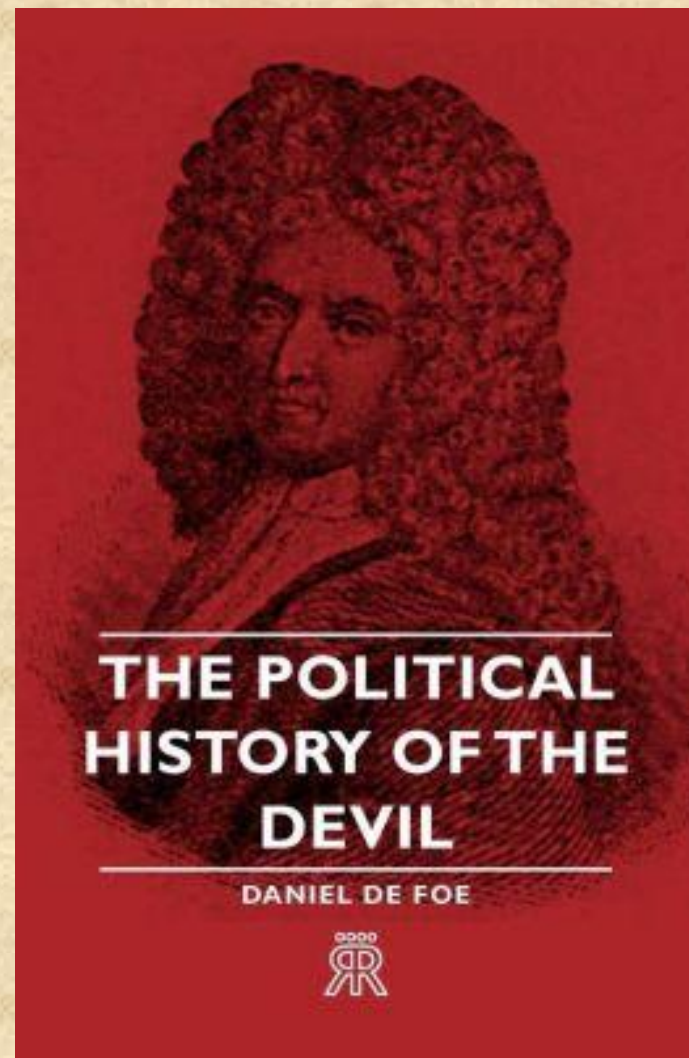
A JOURNAL OF THE PLAGUE YEAR

DANIEL
DEFOE



Defoe's father had stayed with his older brother Henry in London during the Plague Year of 1665, and their experiences possibly provided material for *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722). Defoe himself was about five years old at the time. The narrator has the same initials, H.F., than Henry Foe. For his account, Defoe also used printed records.

Phenomenally industrious, Defoe produced in his last years also works involving the supernatural, *The Political History of the Devil* (1726) and *An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions* (1727). One of the most complete bibliographies of Defoe's works lists almost 400 titles, ranging from pamphlets to books on the occult and novels. However, he was not a wealthy man at his death, but was deeply in debts and had to hide from a creditor. Defoe died of a lethargy on 26 April, 1731, at his lodgings in Ropemaker's Alley, Moorfields, and was buried in Tindall's burying-ground (now Bunhill Fields) under the name "Mr. Dubow, Cripplegate"—the entry in the register of Tindall's had been written by an ignoramus who had misspelled his name.

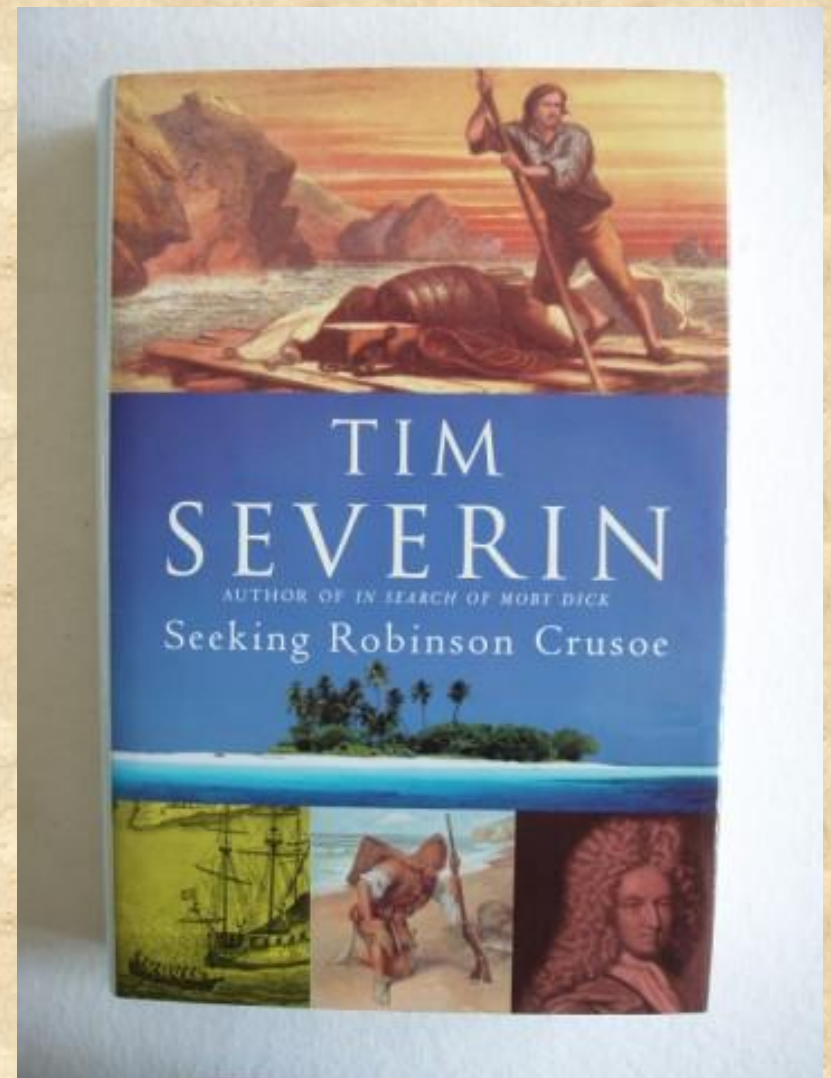


Robinson Crusoe

Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) tells of a man's shipwreck on a deserted island and his subsequent adventures. The author based part of his narrative on the story of the Scottish castaway Alexander Selkirk, who spent four years stranded in the Juan Fernández Islands. The island Selkirk lived on was named Más a Tierra (Closer to Land) at the time and was renamed Robinson Crusoe Island in 1966. Defoe may have also been inspired by the Latin or English translation of a book by the Andalusian-Arab Muslim polymath Ibn Tufail, who was known as "Abubacer" in Europe. The Latin edition of the book was entitled *Philosophus Autodidactus* and it was an earlier novel that is also set on a deserted island.



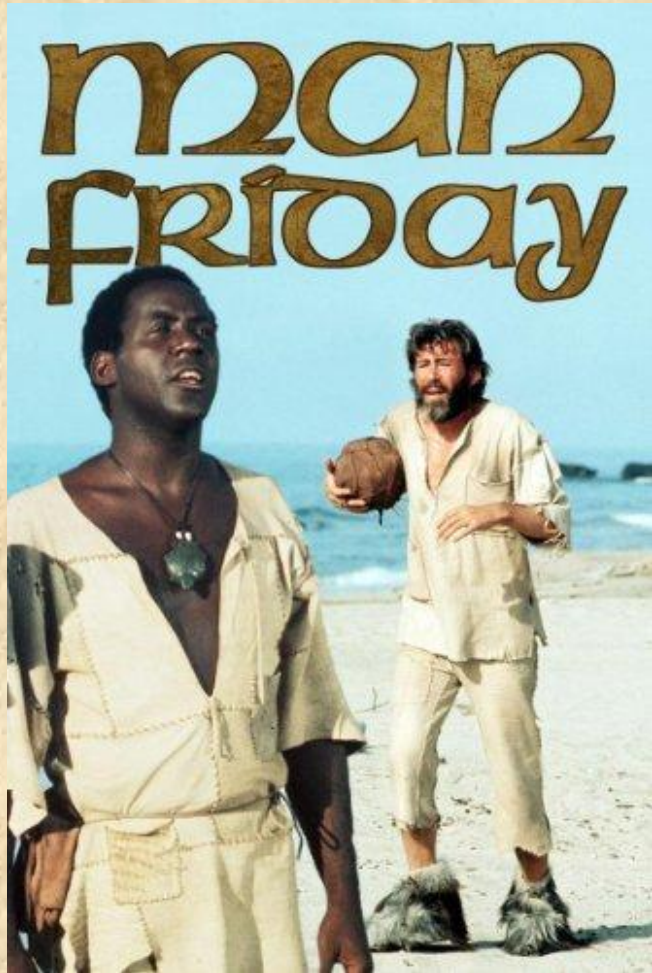
Tim Severin's book *Seeking Robinson Crusoe* (2002) unravels a much wider range of potential sources of inspiration. Severin concludes his investigations by stating that the real Robinson Crusoe figure was Henry Pitman, a castaway who had been surgeon to the Duke of Monmouth.



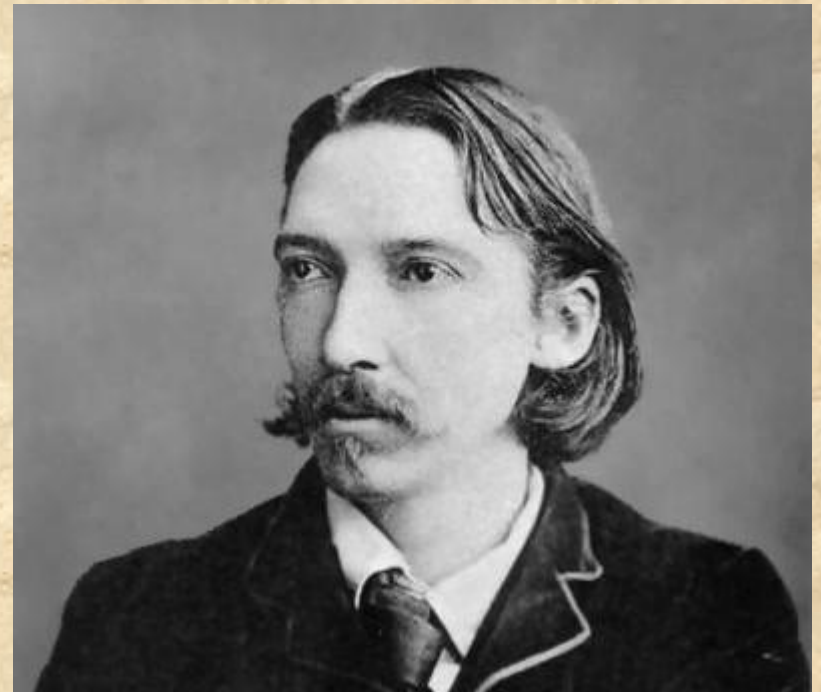
Pitman's short book about his desperate escape from a Caribbean penal colony for his part in the Monmouth Rebellion, his shipwrecking and subsequent desert island misadventures was published by J. Taylor of Paternoster Street, London, whose son William Taylor later published Defoe's novel. Severin argues that since Pitman appears to have lived in the lodgings above the father's publishing house and since Defoe was a mercer in the area at the time, Defoe may have met Pitman and learned of his experiences as a castaway. If he didn't meet Pitman, Severin points out that Defoe, upon submitting even a draft of a novel about a castaway to his publisher, would undoubtedly have learned about Pitman's book published by his father, especially since the interesting castaway had previously lodged with them at their former premises.



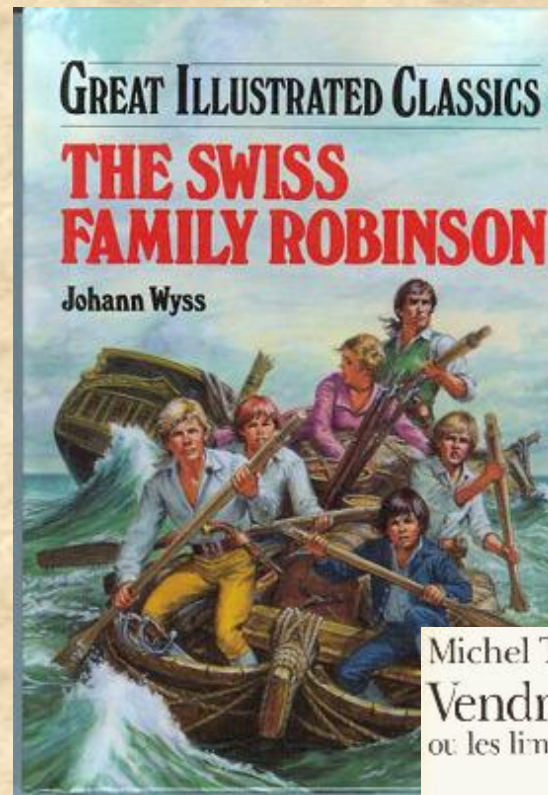
Severin also provides evidence in his book that another publicised case of a real-life marooned Miskito Central American man named only as Will may have caught Defoe's attention, inspiring the depiction of Man Friday in his novel.



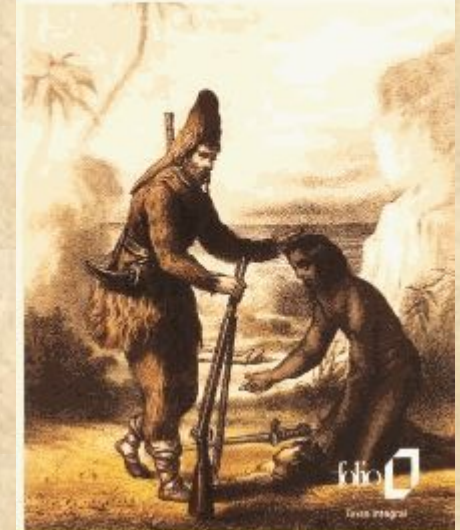
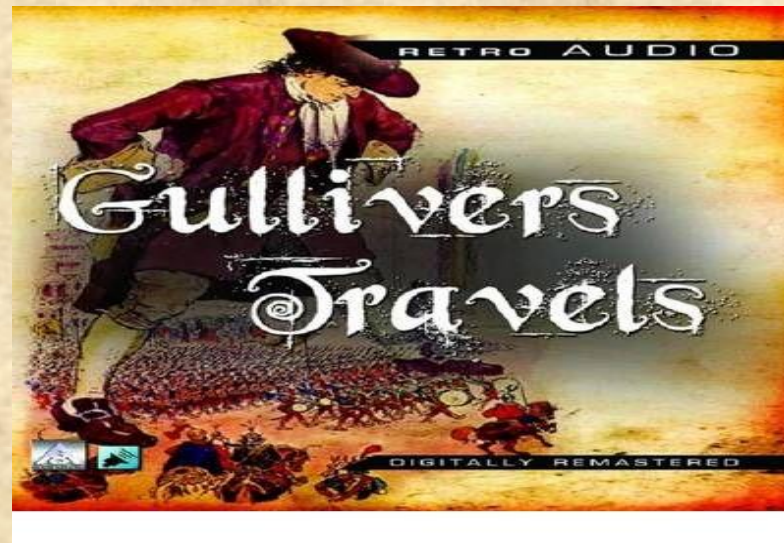
The novel has been variously read as an allegory for the development of civilisation, as a manifesto of economic individualism and as an expression of European colonial desires but it also shows the importance of repentance and illustrates the strength of Defoe's religious convictions. It is also considered by many to be the first novel written in English. Early critics, such as Robert Louis Stevenson admired it saying that the footprint scene in *Crusoe* was one of the four greatest in English literature and most unforgettable; more prosaically, Dr. Wesley Vernon has seen the origins of forensic podiatry in this episode.



It has inspired a new genre, the Robinsonade as works like Johann David Wyss's *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812) adapt its premise and has provoked modern postcolonial responses, including J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) and Michel Tournier's *Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique* (in English, *Friday, or, The Other Island*) (1967). Two sequels followed, Defoe's *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and his *Serious reflections during the life and surprising adventures of Robinson Crusoe: with his Vision of the angelick world* (1720). Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) in part parodies Defoe's adventure novel.

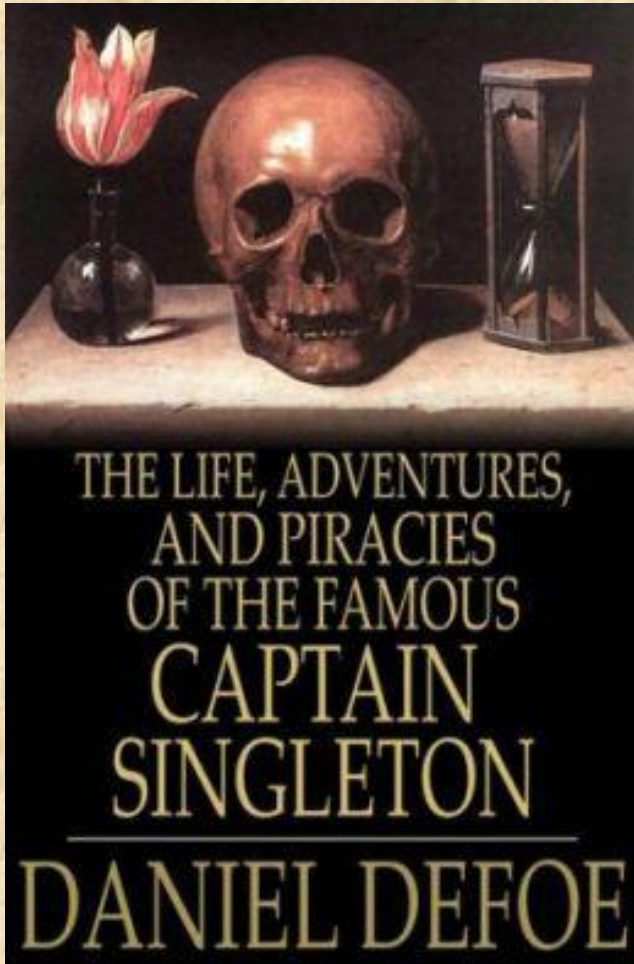


Michel Tournier
Vendredi
ou les limbes du Pacifique



Captain Singleton

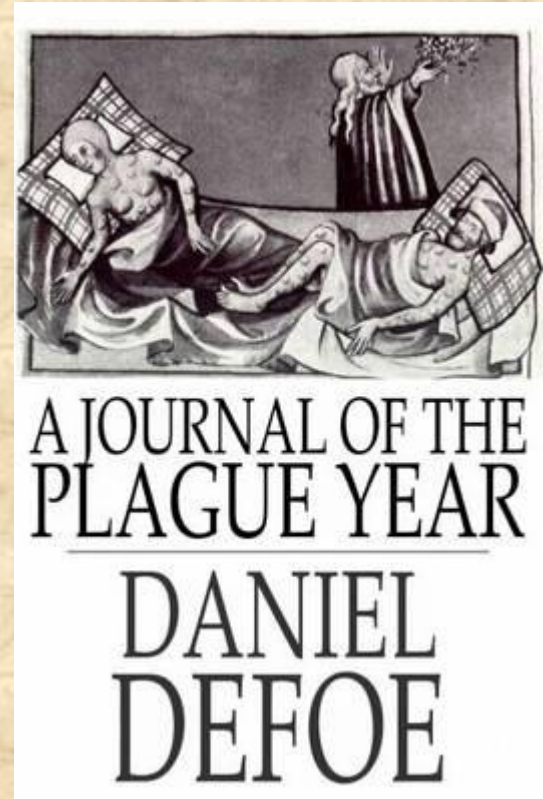
Defoe's next novel was *Captain Singleton* (1720), a bipartite adventure story whose first half covers a traversal of Africa and whose second half taps into the contemporary fascination with piracy. It has been commended for its sensitive depiction of the close relationship between the eponymous hero and his religious mentor, the Quaker William Walters.



A Journal of the Plague Year

A work that is often read as if it were non-fiction is his account of the Great Plague of London in 1665: *A Journal of the Plague Year*, a complex historical novel published in 1722.

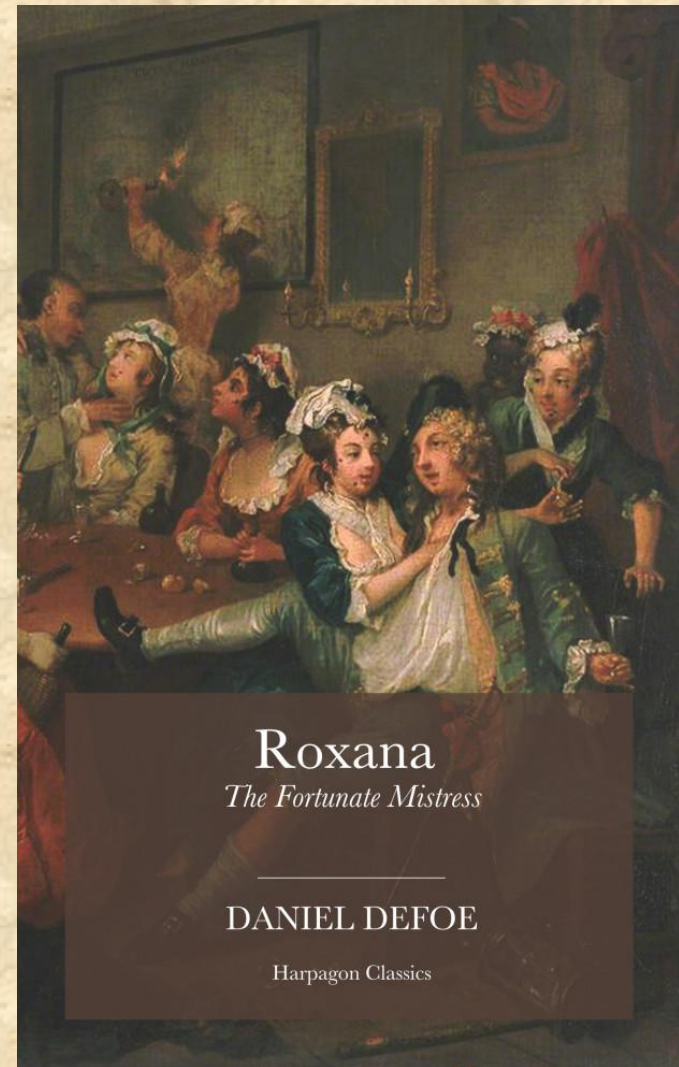
Bring out your dead! The ceaseless chant of doom echoed through a city of emptied streets and filled grave pits. For this was London in the year of 1665, the Year of the Great Plague ... In 1721, when the Black Death again threatened the European Continent, Daniel Defoe wrote "A Journal of the Plague Year" to alert an indifferent populace to the horror that was almost upon them. Through the eyes of a saddler who had chosen to remain while multitudes fled, the master realist vividly depicted a plague-stricken city. He re-enacted the terror of a helpless people caught in a tragedy they could not comprehend: the weak preying on the dying, the strong administering to the sick, the sinful orgies of the cynical, the quiet faith of the pious. With dramatic insight he captured for all time the death throes of a great city.



Moll Flanders and *Roxana*

Also in 1722, Defoe wrote *Moll Flanders*, another first-person picaresque novel of the fall and eventual redemption of a lone woman in 17th century England. The titular heroine appears as a whore, bigamist and thief, lives in The Mint, commits adultery and incest, yet manages to retain the reader's sympathy.

Moll Flanders and Defoe's final novel *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress* (1724) are examples of the remarkable way in which Defoe seems to inhabit his fictional (yet "drawn from life") characters, not least in that they are women. The latter narrates the moral and spiritual decline of a high society courtesan.



While little is known about Daniel Defoe's personal life—largely due to a lack of documentation—Defoe is remembered today as a prolific journalist and author, and has been lauded for his hundreds of fiction and nonfiction works, from political pamphlets to other journalistic pieces, to fantasy-filled novels. The characters that Defoe created in his fiction books have been brought to life countless times over the years, in editorial works, as well as stage and screen productions.

