Daniel Defoe
(1660-1731)
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.
1. Defoe’s life

• Queen Anne had him arrested, tried and imprisoned.

• Denied his Whig ideas and became a secret agent for the new government.

• Started to write novels when he was about sixty.

• Died in 1731.
2. Defoe’s works

*Robinson Crusoe* (1719)
- The story of a shipwreck on a desert island

*Captain Singleton* (1720)
- The voyage story of a captain who becomes a pirate

*Colonel Jack* (1722)
- The story of a pickpocket who repents
2. Defoe’s works

**Moll Flanders (1722)**
- The adventures of a woman who becomes a thief and a prostitute to survive but finally leads a respectable life

**Roxana (1724)**
- The adventures of a high-society woman who exploits her beauty to obtain what she wants.
3. Defoe’s novels: structure

- Fictional **autobiographies**.

- A series of **episodes and adventures**.

- Unifying presence of a **single hero**.
3. Defoe’s novels: structure

- Lack of a **coherent plot**.

- Retrospective **first-person narration**.

- The author’s **point of view** coincides with the main character’s.

- Characters presented **through their actions**.
An act of transgression, of disobedience

His isolation on the island after the shipwreck

Robinson shares restlessness with classical heroes of travel literature
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
6. Robinson Crusoe: the island

The ideal place for Robinson to prove his qualities

Robinson organizes a primitive empire

Not a return to nature, but a chance to exploit and dominate nature
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.
8. Robinson Crusoe: the style

- Clear and precise details.
- Description of the primary qualities of objects.

  \[\text{solidity, extension and number}\]

- Simple, matter-of-fact and concrete language.
9. Moll Flanders

Set in urban society

Insights into some social problems

Women were not able to support themselves legally in 18th-century society

Moll rejects emotional experience

Moll is Crusoe’s female counterpart

The novel includes «documents»
9. Moll Flanders

- It has insights into some **social problems** like crime and the provisions for poor orphans.

- Moll rejects **emotional experience**, seen as an impediment to the **accumulation of capital**.

- The novel includes «**documents**» – Moll’s memorandums, quoted letters, hospital bills – in order to increase the **illusion of verifiable fact**.