

E. A. Baker, 'Introduction' to *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders: also, The Fortunate Mistress, or The Lady Roxana* [3rd Edn.] (London: George Routledge 1906)

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DIFFERENT landmarks are assigned by different authorities as the starting-point of the modern English novel. Most critics would fix the Pillars of Hercules at Fielding and Richardson. *Pamela* and Fielding's burlesque of *Pamela*, *Joseph Andrews*, were undoubtedly pioneer works of the utmost significance. Yet they were, on the other hand, much less representative than *Tom Jones*; and there is a good deal to be said for conceding the honour unreservedly to Fielding, as he sums himself up in that master piece. *Tom Jones* stands to this day the most catholic type of the multiform literary species that was to be the ruling estate in English letters for the next two centuries, if not longer. Further more, in *Tom Jones*, Fielding, after the manner of innovators, said a good deal for himself, several of his prologues to the successive books being in the style of the aesthetic manifestos of Gautier, Maupassant and Zola. An able critic of other men's work as well as of his own, and with no false modesty, he was decidedly on the side of those who regard his fiction, not only as great in itself, but as epoch-making in the history of literature. Other authorities, again, would go very far back in our literary annals, to the germs of various forms of prose fiction in Elizabethan times; or farther still, to the earliest examples in the language, the narratives that were paraphrased or adapted from the metrical romances of the middle ages.

It simplifies the question to ask, what is meant by the modern novel. Of course, when we distinguish it from all antecedent fiction in prose, we are alluding to its predominant characteristic, Realism, the portraiture of life as it is. This accepted, there seems good reason for fixing the -point of departure at Defoe. There had been, it is true, a strain of indubitable Realism in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and the *Life and Death of Mr. Badman*; but the Bedford revivalist is hardly to be counted among the novel-writers. Defoe's stories, however, go with perfect propriety on the same shelf with Wilkie Collins and Anthony Trollope, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy; and his Realism is of that extreme and peculiarly modern kind denominated Naturalism.

It would be tempting to distinguish between Realism and Naturalism in some such manner as this: Realism is the portrayal of real life exactly as it appears; Naturalism implies a special study of the forces that react upon human nature and its development. This is the task which several of the most eminent professors of the craft have expressly set themselves. George Eliot, with her analysis of the influences determining mental and moral evolution; Zola, with his simplification of life as the resultant of two calculable forces, heredity and environment; Thomas Hardy, with his illustrations of the theory of Necessitarianism. But the solution of purely intellectual problems is scarcely proper work for art. In so far as this reaction of causes upon the human organism is regarded simply as an interesting spectacle, there is nothing to be said against it. But when it is boldly treated as a psychological or pathological thesis, or when deductions are drawn, as was attempted by Zola, from the novel-writer's demonstrations, then the novel is neither true art nor science. It aims at an object alien to the one; it is not the other, because the results of an imaginary process can have no real validity. The introduction of a non-literary purpose is bound to lead in the end to the pseudo-scientific fallacies of experimental fiction, in which the novel masquerades as an anthropological treatise, pretending to draw logical deductions from its arbitrary re-arrangement of facts. Art has no business with the natural history of the race, even though the novels of such a man as Defoe might justly be described as, in effect chapters in our natural history, in that they are so minute and accurate, and represent an experience so vast, as to furnish trustworthy statistics for the historian of society. It would be better, perhaps, to consider Naturalism simply as more complete and thorough-going Realism. Most of our Realists, from Fielding and Richardson to Jane Austen and Thackeray, were never content simply to mirror life; they gave us their own reading of it. Their novels are not a mere transcription of what they observed, but an interpretation, humorous or sentimental, ethical or philosophical. In a tale of Guy de Maupassant's one seems to be looking at life itself; in *Vanity Fair* or *Pride and Prejudice*, *Tom Jones* or *Clarissa*, we see

it through a medium interposed by the mind and temperament of the writer. This distinction, of course, is not an absolute one. Neither Maupassant, nor any other man, was able to eliminate himself entirely from his delineation of the world. But he was constantly straining to do so; he never betrayed himself intentionally; and he succeeded perhaps as far as a mortal can. In *Le Mouvement littéraire contemporain*, M. Pellissier describes his method, the typical method of Naturalism, as follows:

In Guy de Maupassant there is no trace of romanticism. Naturalist and nothing more, he has, so to speak, done nothing but reflect nature. He paints himself under the name of one of his characters, the novelist Lamarthe, "armed with an eye that gathers in images, attitudes, and gestures with the precision of a photographic apparatus".

And again,

What distinguishes him, particularly from Zola, is that his observation is free. He has, while he observes, no definite object before him. He does not wish to fill in a framework prepared in advance, verify by means of documents a theory already conceived. He lets his senses "gather in" the appearances of life; and in his writing, he will render it, in the true sense of the word, without the slightest alteration. Others have seen what they depict. But their vision has been that of professional observers, who are on the watch, who have their "idea" beforehand, if not their plan, and who, by that very circumstance, work more or less upon reality, instead of receiving its impression. Passive and neutral, Guy de Maupassant represents with perfect exactness the things he sees. [Note 1.]

Naturalism, in this view, is Realism carried to the farthest extreme, everything that might interfere with the accuracy of perception and translation being stringently excluded. It is representation, pure and simple, not interpretation. On either theory, Defoe stands out definitely and distinctly as a Naturalist.

It is a function of science to subserve the purposes of art, and there is no ground to suppose that Defoe thought of reversing the relation, and making art subservient to science. It is true, nevertheless, that *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* do exhibit in a most luminous way the trains of causes and effects by which character is moulded and transformed. The influences of material environment have never been exposed with acuter insight; nor has there been a more intelligent diagnosis of existing social conditions. But there is no reason to think that he arranged his materials to support any theory. His aim was identical with that of Maupassant, to mirror life. It does not affect this conclusion to admit that Defoe is often a critic of life, that he moralises often, and not seldom appears in the guise of a sociologist pointing out the defects of penal laws, indicting our treatment of the poor and the criminal classes, and exposing the manifold shortcomings of the social system in general. When a man of sixty, who has been engaged for a quarter of a century in journalism and pamphleteering, eulogizing or abusing the views of different parties on political, religious and social questions, takes to writing novels he is not likely to keep those questions out of his books; in fact, he could not if he would. But it would be a very superficial view to regard Defoe's stories as in any sense novels of purpose. As to the moralizations, they are as a rule, except in *Robinson Crusoe*, something foreign and extraneous; we must blame the contemporary prejudice against any kind of literature that did not minister to moral improvement. They are, virtually, his apology for writing novels, and the excuse often, perhaps, not entirely sincere for the risky nature of his themes. To our eyes, they appear in their proper light as so entirely gratuitous, that the stories would be infinitely better without them. Defoe, in short, is the first Naturalist in modern fiction, and it is only by virtue of the general advance in craftsmanship, and the more precise knowledge and subtler insight placed in the hands of the student of life by modern science, that the Naturalists of recent days are his superiors. By right of his personal achievement, Defoe ranks among the greatest.

It is hardly possible to attach too much importance to the revolution he carried out in English fiction. By the coming of Defoe, the novel, which had hitherto been a hybrid and non-descript thing, a kind of by-product of poetry, was at last differentiated as an independent art-form. Our first prose tales were derived from the metrical romances, and were scarcely less poetical in matter, form and spirit than their originals. Even when writers forsook the traditional material, and began to invent, the novel did not succeed altogether in taking a separate place in the literary hierarchy; for a long time to come, its authors were unable to make up their minds as to whether they were writing poetry or prose, or rather, they conceived themselves to be poets working in a looser and more popular medium. Euphuism, which, as recent investigators have established, was a force in literature before Lyly wrote, and even before the

writings of Guevara were read in this country, was a symptom of this hesitation. It represents an effort to retain in artistic prose some of the charms for ear and mind evoked by metrical diction. In its most elaborate form, imagery, assonance and alliteration, regulated by artificial laws of antithesis and recurrence, supplied an equivalent for the effects of verse. Sidney's *Arcadia* (included in this series, with an introduction in which this question is worked out further) was richer in imagery and more fanciful in style than the most flowery compositions of the medieval versifiers. But it is not merely a question of style. The world portrayed is hardly more a reflection of the real world than is the Faery Land of Spenser; the shepherd poets and pastoral princesses are not characters drawn from life, but facets of their creator's high and chivalrous personality. The sentimental idylls of Lodge and Greene come a step or two, but no more, nearer reality: but even in the most realistic Elizabethan novel, Richard Nash's *Jack Wilton*, a book that is sometimes described as an anticipation of Defoe, in spite of the genuine reminiscences that are no doubt embodied in it, there is a curious atmosphere of 'once upon a time', a curious lack of sharp definition, that illustrates how hard these early novelists found it to descend from the region of ideality, the world of poetry, into the proper sphere of the novel.

A century before there was as yet no prose competent to deal with such a theme. Prose was still an amphibious dialect, quite unfit for the service of criticism, science and history, and therefore of such fiction as dealt like these with actuality. The only prose known was that which Dryden had in mind when he said that blank verse is, 'properly, measured prose'. Only when prose had become thoroughly differentiated as the natural mode of expressing calm, dispassionate thought, and the truths of science, was it possible for prose fiction to be thoroughly differentiated from poetry. The long-winded heroical romances of Restoration days were of the same amphibious strain as the *Arcadia*, and equally divorced from reality. Mrs. Behn's novels, especially *Oronooko*, which is hardly a novel at all, show an approximation to the standards of real life. But her other stories contain nothing of the substance of life, do not attempt to portray their world in detail, or to realise the characters; all this has to be taken on trust, and the general impression they leave is that of a bald skeleton, the mere framework of a story.

The word Realism is used commonly in two meanings. It is often applied loosely to any treatment of real life, as opposed to fantasy and romance, the subject alone being taken into account in this sense. But in a stricter sense, Realism is a technical term, and denotes a certain method of attaining imaginative actuality for the creations of fiction. The personages and the incidents of both poet and realist are alike imaginary; both have to exert themselves in some way to make their inventions seem real. There are two totally different ways of attaining this end. While the poet, using symbols burning with emotion, strikes directly upon the imagination of his reader, compelling what Coleridge describes as 'that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith'; the proseman, confining himself to cold, intellectual terms, has to proceed by a more circuitous path. He makes his fictions real to the mind by assimilating them to the things, and to the order of events, with which we are familiar. To adopt the slang of the newspaper critic, he has to be 'convincing'. Prose is the language of the understanding; and prose fiction must restrict itself to the proper sphere of the understanding, the world of reality. No matter how vast the abstract significance of its creations, they must be reduced to the scale of the actual and the particular; personal peculiarities must be stamped on them; and they must be attached to the world we live in by specific dates, actual places, and the thousand links of circumstance. This implies, of course, that the writer of strict prose, such, for instance, as the unimaginative prose of the eighteenth century, has no option but to be a realist; he is left with no alternative to this use of verisimilitude; and, as a consequence, he is strictly circumscribed as to his choice of subject, which must be a phase of reality. Should he attempt fantastic themes, he has to pretend that they are real; and this is what the composers of prose fantasies have done, from Swift to Poe, unless they have abandoned the stricter prose canons, and like Jean Paul Richter, De Quincey, and their congeners, laid lawless hands on the arts of diction usually monopolized by the poets.

Defoe's work in the reconstruction of prose fiction was to bring the novel down at once from the region where the plastic imagination roams at large, and fix it firmly on the solid earth. He showed, more forcibly than any novelist before or since, the irresistible cogency of the circumstantial method.

In fact, he overdid the thing, and took upon him[self] to hoodwink his readers. Not content with poetic faith, he deluded them with the pretence that he was relating actual occurrences; and so, to this day, it is not quite settled whether certain stories are fictions by Defoe or records of authentic experiences by the supposed narrators. Some of his more elaborate frauds certainly go beyond all bounds of literary artifice. In order to pass off his account of the career of Jack Sheppard as an actual dying confession, he got the condemned man, as he stood on the scaffold, to hand a document, purporting to be the manuscript of the book, to a messenger who brought it to Defoe. There are instances of this kind of deception in both *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, which are brought into line with those memoirs of illustrious malefactors for which the general reader of the time showed such avidity. Here is the beginning of *Moll Flanders*:

My true name is so well known in the records or registers at Newgate, and in the Old Bailey, and there are some things of Mich consequence still depending there, relating to my particular conduct, that it is not to be expected I should set my name or the account of my family to this work; perhaps after my death it may be better known; at present it would not be proper, no, not though a general pardon should be issued, even without exceptions of persons or crimes.

It is enough to tell you, that as some of my worst comrades, who are out of the way of doing me harm (having gone out of the world by the steps and the string, as I often expected to go), knew me by the name of Moll Flanders, so you may give me leave to go under that name till I dare own who I have been, as well as who I am.

No evidence has yet been adduced by the efforts of many editors that these two works are not mainly fiction, though, of course, it is quite probable that they were suggested to Defoe by the careers of certain people who cannot now be identified.

It may be said in extenuation of these offences against literary ethics, that they were transgressions of laws not yet codified, and indeed not properly understood. With but a few exceptions, the Realism of these two books was of a thoroughly legitimate kind, and they are almost perfect examples of Defoe's use of detail as the most effective instrument of verisimilitude. He taught "once for all that the novel has its own method of imaginative actuality, and so laid the foundations of modern Realism deep and secure. He carried out the most decisive revolution in the history of prose fiction, and for that reason alone deserves to be counted as the first modern novelist. That it is no mere advance in skill and invention, but a fundamental change of principle, that we are witnessing, is forcibly realised if we compare the opening of the *Arcadia* with that of Robinson Crusoe, the type of the old poetical fiction with the type of the new prose novel. This is how Sidney begins:

It was in the time when the earth begins to put on her new apparel against the approach of her lover, and that the sun running a most even course becomes an indifferent arbiter between the night and the day, when the hopeless shepherd Strephon was come to the sands which lie against the island of Cithera, where, viewing the place with a heavy kind of delight, and sometimes casting his eyes to the isleward, he called his friendly rival Claius unto him; and setting first down in his darkened countenance a doleful copy of what he would speak, "O my Claius", said he, "hither we are now come to pay the rent for which we are so called unto by overbusy remembrance; remembrance, restless remembrance, which claims not only this duty of us, but for it will have us forget ourselves".

Sidney makes his appeal frankly to the imagination; Defoe as frankly addresses himself to our sense of the actual:

I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, of a good family, tho' 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 after whom I was called Robinson Kreutznaer; but by the usual corruption of words in England, we are now called, nay we call ourselves, and write our name Crusoe, and so my companions always called me.

I had two elder brothers, one of which was lieutenant colonel to an English regiment of foot in Flanders, formerly commanded by the famous Col. Lockhart, and was killed at the battle near Dunkirk against the Spaniards: what became of my second brother I never knew, any more than my father and mother did know what was become of me.

If we seek in the preceding age for a native production corresponding in any way to the realistic novel, we shall find it only in works that do not belong to literature, in the popular fictions, glorifying heroes of the soil, and derived in many cases from the old ballads, as romances of a higher order had been derived from the medieval epic. The best read novels before Defoe were the stories of *George a Green*

and of *Thomas of Reading*, of *Robin Hood* and of *Friar Bacon*. These rude chap-books, manufactured for a lower audience than those who revelled in the romance, were the work of mere journeymen of letters, who had no direct influence on the development of fiction, although they doubtless had an indirect one, in maintaining and stimulating the taste for sensational stories, and the practice of making novels out of the *gestes* of popular heroes and eminent criminals. Thomas Deloney, ballad writer and author of *Thomas of Reading*, the 'Learned Antiquary' who turned into prose the gist of several well-known ballads of Robin Hood, and Richard Johnson, author or compiler of *Tom a Lincoln*, with many anonymous retailers of cherished legends, were Defoe's immediate forerunners in a way that Lodge, Green and Nash, or even Mrs. Behn, could not claim to be.

Yet there is no Realism in these rough-and-ready effusions; the figures of Robin Hood, Little John, and their fellows are simply marionettes; for any effect of life they are to have, the writers trust to the familiarity of their readers with the figures of tradition. With this object, paying no heed to chronology, they associate their heroes indiscriminately with any historical names that cling to the popular memory. Robin Hood is boldly stated to have been outlawed by Henry VIII, and to have won the favour of Queen Katherine by his archery, the names of a king and queen so familiar to an Elizabethan audience being obviously adopted by the 'Learned Antiquary' for catchpenny reasons. Of portraiture, of either character or manners, there is hardly a trace. And it is strange how the old ballad spirit has entirely evaporated in its degenerate offspring, giving way to something closely akin to the appetite for crude sensation, to that indifference to true heroism, that worship of brute force and successful trickery, which distinguish the productions of our modern press of the baser sort. Robin Hood ceases even to be a sportsman, and the taste, (or the lack of it) shown by the author of *Tom a Lincoln* would disgust any decent-minded reader. This steady degradation of sentiment renders it only too certain that a large proportion of Defoe's readers were captivated rather by the accounts of Roxana's brilliant career in the world of gallantry, Colonel Jack's successes as a thief about town, and Captain Singleton's piratical enterprises, than by the history of their pangs of contrition, especially as Defoe's keen interest in the monetary affairs of his characters laid special stress on the profits to be gained in these lines of business.

In all the different kinds of fiction that had come and gone, in the romances and idylls, in the adaptations of Spanish picaresque novels, and above all in the tales from Boccaccio, Bandello, and other Italian noveltieri, the story as a series of dramatic incidents, more or less pointedly arranged, was the principal matter. Take away the story, and there is nothing left. With Defoe the story is of no importance. Plots he has none. His men and women are carefully limned; the tale takes care of itself. Though he is one of the finest masters of graphic narration in the language, his stories show hardly a trace of constructive art; in truth, that was a thing they did not require.

How did a man like Defoe come to invent something so momentous as the Naturalistic novel? That question has already been partially answered. The old, semi-poetic types of fiction were played out there was no possibly future for anything of that sort. Their lifeless survival, the heroic romance, with its unrealities and affectations, was so antipathetic to the dawning spirit of the eighteenth century that the mild satire of Mrs. Lennox's *Female Quixote* sufficed to snuff it out of existence. If any more fiction was to be written, it was bound to take a new turn, and the deep interest of the age in actuality would direct that turn towards Realism. Even in such a thing as religious allegory, as already observed, Bunyan had pointed out the new route. Defoe, we may be sure, did not think out a new theory of the novel. Take a man of his peculiar mental constitution, and set him writing novels (the last thing, perhaps, that would have been predicted of him) and the result will be something of the nature of pseudo-biography, pseudo-history, or fictitious narratives of travel. Let him display certain intuitions of the born artist, and the result will be Naturalism. Not that Defoe cared a pin for art. In the case of such a man as he, always ready to turn his hand to any lucrative employment, business considerations, of course, came foremost. Having, whether by design or accident, struck out a profitable line, he was sure to follow it up with indefatigable perseverance, without being swayed very much by literary motives. Now Defoe was an extraordinary collector of facts. As an observer, not even Zola, with his arsenal of note-books, surpassed the unwearied, the insatiable curiosity of Daniel Defoe. And for a romance writer, he was strangely

lacking in invention. He found, the moment he began to produce fiction, or rather he had found already in his accounts of illustrious criminals, that he had hit a huge section of the public who wanted facts, wanted to be told all about the world they lived in, especially about those phases of which they knew least. Having, in the course of an extremely versatile career, amassed an enormous store of this commodity, as soon as he found there was money in it, he began to pour out his facts in the copious stream of his novels.

Here was his special endowment, a mastery of fact. As a man with a marketable store of merchandise, he gave his public interesting portraits of existing types, and descriptions of things been; as a born artist, he traced the inner meaning of the picture. His novels are, in effect if not in intention, chapters in the natural history of his kind. Caring nothing for romantic or comic, dramatic or melodramatic effects, he chose the simplest possible mode of telling his story. He took a perfectly ordinary and representative character, a Moll Flanders, a Roxana, a Colonel Jack—people who had no charms of personality—and related their adventures with the utmost directness, in the natural form of biography. There was a resemblance here to the picaresque novel, inasmuch as events there too followed each other with the fortuitous consecutiveness of life. But there the incidents were carefully selected, in Defoe we get the typical life of a typical person. That is all the difference. His affinity to the old romancers of roguery was, indeed, rather an accidental than a genealogical one: in spirit he is quite unlike them. The comedy of life was not an idea with the remotest attraction for Defoe. He is not a satirist; nor is he at bottom a moral philosopher, like the author of *Guzman d'Alfarache*, for instance. His object in writing novels was to interest and entertain his readers by reconstructing the world of his experience in the simplest and most direct manner he could.

Defoe has no style. There is here no more searching after effect, or trying to impress himself upon his work, than in the tenor of the narrative. Prose had at length come down to earth. Literary diction had at last been assimilated to the common language of life; and Defoe's was the commonest and plainest that had yet appeared in books. His single aim is to tell his story clearly; and with that aim he seeks neither grace nor polish, disdains grammar, strives for nothing but to intelligible. Solecisms and common colloquial errors are in every sentence the page bristles with them. And, strange though it seem to connect him in these characteristics with an accomplished writer like Maupassant, this rough homespun of his testifies to the same single-minded endeavour to render life as he saw it, neither to heighten nor adorn; to state his facts clearly, and let the manner of the statement go. Maupassant wrote well unconsciously; Defoe wrote badly unconsciously. Neither aimed at literary effect; both attained in their several ways the effect of supreme simplicity and truth.

A parallel might be drawn between the two even as to their character-drawing. I spoke of Defoe as a careful limner of character; but it must be borne in mind that the psychology of the Naturalist is of a restricted kind. The interest of his pseudo-biography is not in the idiosyncrasies of personality, but in the traits common to all men. Moll Flanders, Roxana, Colonel Jack, are individuals; but their delineator's object was to depict, not an interesting character, but the typical individual, the representative of a whole class. Our sense of personality has developed enormously since Defoe. The inexhaustible interest and variety of human character has become the finest theme of fiction. Yet the naturalists, as a class, still cleave to the principle observed by Defoe. In Maupassant, Zola, Hardy, there are few figures that stand out as strongly marked individuals, independently of the drama in which they are involved; the workings of individual minds are exposed, but not the points in which minds differ one from the other. The interest is still, not in peculiar traits, but in what the persons of the story undergo, and in what they become as ordinary men and women. One thing, however, the modern naturalist knows that was a sealed book to Defoe—the phenomena of temperament, the shades and differences of which play such a dominating part on the psychological stage of all modern novelists. The absence of any sense of the meaning of temperament accounts for the peculiar impression which the modern reader gets on first opening Defoe.

This characteristic deficiency comes out prominently if we compare a book like *Moll Flanders* with the character-drawing of modern naturalists. Take for example one of the most recent, the *Journal d'une*

femme de chambre by Octave Mirbeau, a book that has many points of similarity with both the novels included in this volume. Mirbeau is one of the novelists who have abandoned the fallacies of experimental fiction; but whose Realism, in its minuteness, closeness to actual life, and the repudiation of any scruples interfering with absolute truth, shows the effect of several decades of Naturalism. The purpose of the *Journal* is to satirise the present corruption of society in France, but the satire is dissembled under the form of a naturalistic account of the life it holds up to execration. The style is not comic, nor ironical, nor denunciatory; the book purports to be, under the form of a novel, an exact statement and diagnosis of terrible truths. The satirical intention may be left, for the time being, out of sight; and what remains, the autobiographical record of a woman's life, one of those women who are born in sin, flung helpless to the cruel mercies of the world, and driven eventually by sheer force of circumstances into the ranks of the criminal classes, is material enough for our comparison. *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* is, in fact, the latest of a long family that are derived from one ancestress, *Moll Flanders*. Mirbeau's Celestine is a French *Moll Flanders*, and a *Moll Flanders* modernized. The object of both men was to paint a natural woman, a woman having no true place in society, and therefore at war with the world for her own existence. Neither Celestine nor Defoe's heroine is bad by nature: their moral downfall is the work of those who should have been their protectors. They become sinners through being sinned against; and the immediate result is, not that they are transformed into abandoned creatures and enemies to their kind, they simply become non-moral; the question of right and wrong has no longer any appreciable effect upon conduct. Be it objected that *Moll Flanders* never loses her moral sense, but is continually a prey to pangs of remorse; the answer is, that her moralizations are not really a part of her character. Her mind is engrossed by other interests altogether; in her acutest throes of conscience, her eye is always on the main chance. Both women cease at an early stage of their careers to pay more than a formal obeisance to the name of feminine virtue. Few compunctions about her missing husbands trouble *Moll Flanders*, when an opportunity presents itself of getting a new one. Celestine takes the world as she finds it, surrendering herself to any lover who will save her from the one thing she loathes and shrinks from with horrible dread—destitution. '*Après tout, je n'avais pas de choix; et cela vaut mieux que rien.*' This is the regular method of the Naturalists, to reduce life to its elements, to present mankind freed from the fetters of law and the trappings of conventionality.

Of course, characters like Celestine and *Moll Flanders* must be carefully distinguished from such characters as Fielding's *Jonathan Wild* and Thackeray's *Barry Lyndon*, in whom conscience is represented as absolutely dead. In Defoe's heroine and Mirbeau's, the moral nature is paralysed into inactivity by the pressure of things outside; at the back of their minds there is still a semi-conscious perception of right and wrong, which throws the incidents recorded in their autobiography into moral relief, and makes us feel that they are human creatures. The moral sentiment must have a place in the book, or such narratives of ill-doing would be unreadable. In Fielding and Thackeray it is supplied by the continuous irony of the novelist: but their two masterpieces of iniquity being devoid of it cease to be human, and are little else than idealisations of vice. Neither *Moll Flanders* nor Celestine ever lose their hold on our sympathies entirely, although Roxana, who has none of their good nature and never shows a trace of real affection or passion, has but a feeble claim even on our pity.

The ups and downs of Celestine have many resemblances to the two stories included here. In their candour and honesty, the two authors are alike, save, perhaps, that the French novelist has bitten in his lines with a sharper acid. But Defoe's patient transcription of the smallest essential detail; his resolute adherence to the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; and his contempt for every romantic or sentimental motive that would glaze over real causes, and represent the conduct of human beings rather as we would have it to be than as it is, these characteristics reproduce themselves in the author of the *Journal*, and prove him the lineal successor of Defoe. It is to some extent a confirmation of this view, that one of the most successful books in France at the time when interest in the works of the Naturalist school was particularly absorbing, should be Marcel Schwob's translation of *Moll Flanders*.

The points of inferiority in Defoe's novel compared with such a book as the *Journal*, are due in part to the limitations of his genius, but more perhaps to the time when he wrote. One would not look in

Moll Flanders for the constructive art, or the subtly calculated use of suggestion, displayed by a French realist in the last year of the nineteenth century. Even in criticising the narrowness of Defoe's outlook, and the shallowness of his psychology, we must make due allowance for the circumstance that the novel was in his day in a very rude and experimental stage of development. Whilst keeping our attention enchained by the sensations and mental states of Celestine, Mirbeau contrives, not only to convey the atmosphere of crowded life, but to give his reader through her eyes a clear and vivid insight into the actual life of the main classes of French society. Moll Flanders and Roxana themselves monopolize attention; the reader gets glimpses of the world about them; but these are but the accidental features of their story. No doubt, these two novels owe much of their strength to this simplicity and concentration; but, at the same time, it is obvious that Defoe's imagination was limited. He had no special intuition into feminine character, any more than any feeling for the more elusive factors of temperament. Very rarely indeed, in any of his stories, does one come across anything so profoundly true to human nature as the scene where Roxana persuades her maid Amy to be ruined, from an instinctive desire to drag her down to her own level. Defoe's are very simple types of character; Celestine is a complex product of our civilization; and what enthralls one most is the revelation of the workings of her mind, the close analysis of her own sensations and impulses by a keenly self-conscious autobiographer. Compared with this, Defoe has no psychology. The coldness and impassibility of his disposition are genuine, not the effect of an artistic attitude of detachment. These traits are patent to every one in *Robinson Crusoe*, where he never dwells on the imaginative significance of the situation, but sets down moving incident and meaningless detail with the same cold precision. So too in *Colonel Jack*, *Captain Singleton*, and the present pair of stories, the group that represent him best in the light of Naturalist, instances abound of this curious lack of sensibility. Take but one example, the episode of the heroine's discovery that she is married to her own brother. Here is material for tragedy, if you like; but the full meaning and realisation of the episode is left entirely to the reader's imagination. Defoe simply tells us that his heroine was horror-stricken, the husband fainted, and the mother was shocked; but all this is related with the same absence of emotion, or of any sense of its dreadful significance, as if it were but another of the monetary misfortunes that at last brought Moll Flanders to the dogs. The autobiographic form of these novels lent itself peculiarly well to the free expression of feeling; and the absence of it strikes one as an unnatural thing. And yet, when the reader has come to appreciate Defoe's stark, passionless realism, he will, if he have any imagination, discern a strength and grim impressiveness in this simplicity, which is lacking in the conscious art of other story-tellers. In such a narrative as Defoe's *History of the Plague*, where the tremendous facts speak for themselves without any need for emphasis, this style is seen at its best.

Mirbeau's Celestine, alter many changes of masters and mistresses, few of whom are credited with any estimable traits, comes at last into the service of a miserly woman and a hen-pecked husband, where her life soon becomes a torment. In this curious household, she is fascinated against her will by a rugged and uncouth coachman, whom she suspects to be guilty of a peculiarly revolting murder. Just as Defoe, in his own version of Roxana (which appears to have been continued by some inferior hand) leaves her, on the last page, uncertain whether the too-faithful Amy had carried out her threat of putting her troublesome daughter out of the way, so the author of the *Journal* never tells us whether Joseph was actually the murderer of little Claire. The mystery that hangs about the man is far more dreadful than certainty of his guilt would be. To Celestine the doubt, while it repels for a moment, comes gradually to cast a horrible spell over her mind. The strength and invincible cunning of the man seem to dominate her utterly, until, when she feels at length convinced that he is the criminal, yet cannot force him to confess, she is mastered altogether, and throws herself into his arms. ' *Chez moi*', she says, *tout crime, le meurtre principalement, a des correspondences secretes avec l'amour. Eh bien, oui, lá! un beau crime m'empoigne comme un beau male.*' Joseph plans and carries out with consummate address, a robbery of the Ravour mansion, which enables him and Celestine to set up as well-to-do tradespeople at Cherbourg, and is felt to be but the right measure of poetic justice on their detestable employers.

This is by no means the only episode in which crime is the theme of Mirbeau's story. The fact is, the naturalist almost inevitably deals with the subject of crime. Defoe's characters are made criminals by circumstances; all four of those treated of in the group of pseudo-biographies under discussion were the victims of social injustice. Singleton was stolen as a child, and sold to the Gypsies; his foster-mother was hanged, and he was thrown helpless on the world. He goes to sea, becomes in the natural course of events a thief, and being mixed up, through no fault of his, in a mutiny, turns pirate. "Colonel" Jack is a London waif, without father or mother, or even a surname. He runs wild about the City, herds with thieves, and is an expert thief himself before he learns that stealing is not an honest trade. In the struggle for existence, these characters simply follow the path of least resistance. The picture of submerged London in those days, and the further account of the criminal classes in *Moll Flanders*, make even our modern tales of mean streets sound almost Arcadian. Moll Flanders is the child of a woman who has been sent to the plantations for felony. Her downfall is the work of her master's son. But she is not cast at once upon the tender mercies of the world. For the present she is saved from poverty and its concomitant, crime, by a comfortable, though loveless, marriage. Widowed a year or two later, she marries a second husband, who fails in business and leaves her in the lurch. Want stares her in the face, and frightens her into her first act of dishonesty she makes off with goods that were legally the property of her husband's creditors, and takes refuge in the Mint, where she loses no time before seeking an opportunity to commit bigamy. In the sequel, she becomes a regular thief, and narrowly escapes the fate of her mother.

Roxana's history is likewise a history of wrong-doing. She was born in comfortable circumstances, and came to grief through the folly of an extravagant husband, who was, in the eye of the law, absolute master of her fortune. He absconds, leaving her penniless, with five children, whom she gets provided for by a stratagem that, in the circumstances, may be winked at. Not so her ensuing conduct. Inexorable circumstance may be held responsible for her initial lapse from virtue, but it was her insatiable covetousness and a vicious twist in her nature that made her fall such a ready prey to the general corruption of morals. In her case, Defoe does not think it necessary to provide an escape from the consequences of her guilty life, and a comfortable opportunity for repentance. At the same time, in Roxana the other side of the picture is more fully delineated; while the autobiographic form is maintained, we get a much better idea of the external conditions that reacted upon the central character. There are one or two excellent portraits, such as Roxana's aider and abettor, Amy, and the Quaker landlady, who is a very taking creature. Then there is more than a glimpse of Restoration society, with its brilliance and dissipation; and a study of the loose morals and reckless extravagance that brought young men of good station to take to the highway. Often, in the analysis of coarse vices, we are reminded of Mirbeau's Celestine and her exclamation, '*Et dire qu'il existe une société pour la protection des animaux!*' 'Ah! .. oui! Les hommes! .. *Qu'ils soient cochers, valets de chambre, gommeux, curés ou poètes, ils sont tous les memes . . . Des crapules! ...*'

The naturalists have always shown a special proneness to this class of subject. Balzac's *Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes*, Hugo's most realistic novel, *Les Misérables*, Bourget's *Disciple*, Zola's Rougon-Macquart series, and many others equally typical, might be instanced as dealing largely in the study of crime and criminals. The motive is not, as is so often objected, a fondness for the base and obscene. It is a desire to get at the natural man; to pierce through the artificialities and affectations of social life. Only in low life can the primitive man be run to earth, he who is the special quarry of the naturalist, who is less interested in social man, or man as thinker, lover, idealist. If the naturalist represents him in society, it is usually in a state of war with society; the primordial man and his struggle for existence are still the subject. So the naturalist descends inevitably to the criminal classes, because the man whose nature has not been refashioned by the influence of society and thought, is there seen unrestrained, except by external forces, from taking the most direct means to win himself subsistence, pleasure, predominance. He follows the elemental instincts, because he remains in the primitive stage.

Defoe's history of Roxana probably ended with her marriage to the merchant who buys her the title of countess, and takes her to Holland. There, says Roxana, 'after some few years of flourishing and

outwardly happy circumstances, I fell into a dreadful course of calamities.’ The continuation supplied by an edition in 1745, twenty-one years after the first edition, and fourteen after the death of Defoe one of several continuations by various hands is reprinted here. Divers inconsistencies indicate that it is spurious. The dark hints of the original story as to the fate of the daughter Susanna, who, we are led to believe, was made away in some mysterious manner by the faithful Amy, are forgotten, and Susanna is brought on the scene again. And, as Mr. Aitken points out, the austere husband who leaves Roxana to want is not the easy-going man to whom she was married by Defoe. The statement that she died at Amsterdam in 1742, in her sixty-fifth year is at variance with Defoe, who makes her ten years old in 1683, and therefore sixty-nine in 1742 (not fifty-nine, Mr. Aitken). But, of course, his own dates are obviously wrong, since Charles II, to whom she is said to have given an entertainment, died in 1685, when she was only twelve years old, according to Defoe (not two, as Mr. Aitken puts it). On the other hand it cannot be denied that Defoe himself was singularly careless in chronological and other details. When Roxana’s first husband decamps, she states distinctly:

It must be a little surprising to the reader to tell him at once, that after this I never saw my husband more; but, to go farther, I not only never saw him more, but I never heard from him, or of him, neither of any or either of his two servants, or of the horses, either what became of them, where or which way they went, or what they did or intended to do, no more than if the ground had opened and swallowed them all up, and nobody had known it, except as hereafter.

But the following passage, a few years later, is a direct contradiction to this:

After we had seen the king, who did not stay long in the gardens, we walked up the broad terrace, and crossing the hall towards the great staircase, I had a sight which confounded me at once, as I doubt not it would have done to any woman in the world. The horse guards, or what they call there the *gens d’armes*, had, upon some occasion, been either upon duty or been reviewed, or something (I did not understand that part) was the matter that occasioned their being there, I know not what; but, walking in the guard-chamber, and with his jack-boots on, and the whole habit of the troop, as it is worn when our horse guards are upon duty, as they call it, at St James’s Park; I say, there, to my inexpressible confusion, I saw Mr—, my first husband, the brewer.

I could not be deceived; I passed so near him that I almost brushed him with my clothes, and looked him full in the face, but having my fan before my face, so that he could not know me. However, I knew him perfectly well, and I heard him speak, which was a second way of knowing him.

However certain we may feel as to the truth of any theory about Defoe’s authorship of books like the *Journal of a Cavalier* and the *Memoirs of Captain Carleton*, or parts of books like that under discussion now, we are always met by these difficulties in proving them.

E. A. B.

1906.

Notes

1. *Chez Guy de Maupassant, nulle trace de romantisme. Entierement naturaliste, il n’a fait pour ainsi dire que mirer la nature. Lui-meme se peint sous le nom d’un de ses personnages, le romancier Lamarthe, ‘arme d’un ceil qui cueillait les images, les attitudes et les gestes avec la precision d’un appareil photographique.’*

Mais ce qui l’en distingue, et de M. Zola particulierement, c’est que son observation est libre. Il n’a, en observant, aucun propos defini. Il ne veut pas remplir tels cadres fixe’s d’avance, confirmer par des documents une the’orie preconçue. Il laisse les sens “cueillir” les images de la vie; et, en e”crivant, il la rendra, dans le sens propre du mot, sans la moindre alteration. D’autres ont vu ce qu’ils peignent. Seulement leur vision est celle d’observateurs professionnels, qui sont a l’affut, qui ont deja leur “idee”, peut être leur plan, et qui, par cela même, agissent plus ou moins sur la realité au lieu d’en subir l’impression. Passif et neutre, Guy de Maupassant represente les choses vues avec une parfaite exactitude.’

