‘Defoe, Daniel’. Preface. *The History of Mademoiselle de Beleau; or, The New Roxana, The Fortunate Mistress. Published by Mr. Daniel De Foe, and from Papers found, since his decease, it appears was greatly altered by himself*. London, 1775. 1-10.

Proper for the Reader to be acquainted with.

When I first published the life of this beautiful Lady, which was in the year 1724, I sent one of the books, as a present, to my old friend and acquaintance Mr Thomas Southerne, author of the *Tragedy of Oroonoko*.

When he had read my book, he paid me a visit at my house in Islington; and, agreeable to his usual facetiousness, for he was an excellent companion, rallied me severely in my making the Lady, the Heroine of the work, so unnatural to her children in her disowning them; and added, that what I had related concerning her circumstances, as to her poverty, in the latter part of her life, he knew to be false; for, on the contrary, he knew her not only to be rich, but very rich; and he was so free with me, as to tell me that I knew it also; and that, he imagined, I afflicted her, in that particular, for the sake of the moral only, that her wickedness, he said, as I was pleased to call it, might not go unpunished. He further added, her deportment, elegance of manners, and graceful behaviour, were equal, if not superior, to the beauty of her features, and that he ever attributed her successes to the former, as much as to the latter; yet, said he, her complexion and features were so happily, and so agreeably united, that when she was at the age of forty, no person whatever in her company could have believed she exceeded four-and-twenty; nay, he added, when he saw her in the fiftieth year of her age, had she not told him herself to the contrary, he should not have taken her to be much above thirty.

He still further added, she was in the possession of two inestimable jewels; that is to say, a good head, and a good heart; the fruits of whom, her friends were sure always to be plentifully provided at her table; the one from her agreeable conversation and politeness; the other from her generosity and liberality; as were likewise the poor; who had their share of the latter, and who were seldom or ever sent empty away. And though she frequently in her reflections, calls herself a prostitute; a strumpet; yet, said he, in the true sense of the words, she was as chaste, with respect to the person whom she lived with, as the most virtuous wife could be to a husband.

In my excuse, for Mr Southerne is an excellent judge of what is proper in history, as well as in poetry; I told him, as to that part concerning her children, I not only had it from her original papers, but also from the Lady herself; in the several conversations that had passed between us, and those so lately as the year 1723, in which year she died; and the reasons she gave me were: she was, she said, terrified, in her thinking of her two eldest daughters, who survived her, and who are both married, to whom she gave ample fortunes; I say she was terrified, for fear they should ever come to the knowledge of the wicked course of life she had formerly led, both in England and in France.

But upon my Friend’s saying so much to me, and he giving me some few hints, has occasioned me to restore the children, and alter the catastrophe, by rescuing
her from that pretended poverty, though not from her remorse, which at the conclusion, I before had plunged her in.

The history of this extraordinary Lady, is to speak for itself. If it is not as beautiful as the lady herself was known to be; if it is not as diverting as the reader can desire, and much more than he can reasonably expect; and if all the most diverting parts of it are not adapted to the instruction and improvement of the Reader, it must be from the defect of my own performance; dressing up the story worse than the Lady, whose words I relate, prepared it for the world.

Though she had in her history of her life, omitted the names, yet as I afterwards came to the knowledge of the persons whom she meant, and, what she had said of them, excepting of her husband, and his sister, being much to their credit, I have thought proper to insert them. She likewise went on with her history, from the beginning to the end, without any obstruction: I have thought proper, for the ease of the reader, to throw it into chapters; that he, like a traveller on the road, when he espies a good inn, may put up his horse, and rest both himself and his beast; may also when tired, lay down the book, at the several resting places, I before have appointed.

I take the liberty to say, that this story differs from most of the modern performances of this kind, though some have met with a very good reception in the world: I say, it differs from them in this great and essential article, namely, that the foundation of this is laid in truth of fact; and so the work is not a story, but a history.

I was particularly acquainted with this lady’s first husband, Mr Bacon, the brewer, and with his bad circumstances; I knew his father also, and know that first part of the story to be truth.

This may, I hope, be a pledge for the credit of the rest; and though some part of her history lay abroad, and cannot be so well vouched as the first; yet, as she told it to me herself, I have not the least reason to question the truth of that part also.

In the manner she has told the story, it is evident she does not insist upon her justification in any one part of it; much less does she recommend her conduct, or indeed, any part of it, except her repentance to our imitation: On the contrary, she makes frequent excursions, in a just censuring and condemning her own practice. How often does she reproach herself in the most passionate manner; and guide us to just reflections in the like cases?

It is true, she met with surprising success, in all her intrigues; but even in the highest elevations of her prosperity, she makes frequent acknowledgments, that the pleasure of her wickedness was not worth the pain of the repentance; and that all the satisfaction she had, all the joy in the view of her prosperity, no, nor all the wealth she rolled in; the gaiety of her appearance; the equipages, and the honours, she was attended with, could quiet her mind, abate the reproaches of her conscience, or procure her an hour’s sleep, when just reflections kept her waking.

The noble inferences that are drawn from this one part, are worth all the rest of the story; and abundantly justify, as they are the professed design of, the publication.
If there are any parts in her story, which being obliged to relate a wicked action, seem to describe it too plainly; all imaginable care has been taken to keep clear of indecencies, and immodest expressions; and ’tis hoped you will find nothing to prompt a vicious mind, but everywhere much to discourage and expose it.

Scenes of crime can scarce be represented in such a manner, but some may make a criminal use of them; but when vice is painted in its low-prized colours, ’tis not to make people in love with it, but to expose it; and if the reader makes a wrong use of the figures, the wickedness is his own.

In the mean time, the advantages of the present work are so great, and the virtuous reader has room for so much improvement, that I make no question, the story will find a passage to his best hours; and be read both with profit and delight.

DANIEL DE FOE
Islington, August 9, 1730

The Lady, the heroine of the following history, having passed through a Variety of interesting, and uncommon scenes in life, a parallel of which can scarce be met with, either in ancient or modern history; and I being desirous of having them published to the world, as a monitor to her sex, to avoid their falling into the same errors, which she had lived in for several years; and fortunately having in my possession, the genuine papers, as they were altered, which compose the work, have taken the liberty to make them known to the public.

THE EDITOR
December 1, 1774.