Preface

The following Tragedy is founded upon an incident in a novel commonly said to be written by Daniel Defoe, and entitled *Roxana, or the Fortunate Mistress*. Of this novel there are three editions. The first, published in 1724, breaks off somewhat abruptly, and does not contain the incident which I have employed. The second was printed in 1745, and is the only complete one. Mr Noble, a bookseller in Holborn, a well-known publisher of new trash, and of old novels new vamped, about forty years ago, printed a third edition after his manner in 1775, in which nearly every thing that is excellent and interesting in the original work is carefully suppressed. The reader therefore who should have the curiosity to compare my fabric with the materials from which it is composed, can only satisfy himself by consulting the edition of 1745.

One curious circumstance attending this piece of fictitious history, is that Defoe died in 1731, fourteen years before the publication of the complete edition. Is he therefore the true author of the additional part? Or, may not the whole book, though usually imputed to him, be the production of some other writer? No light is to be derived on these points, from any thing attendant on the perfect edition. The style certainly bears a most striking resemblance to that of the unquestioned productions of Defoe. The incident on which my production is founded, made a strong impression on my fancy when a boy, and always rendered the book which contains it, though otherwise coarsely written, somewhat a favourite with me. The terrors of a guilty mind, haunted with mysterious fears of retribution, have seldom been more powerfully delineated. To fit the subject for the stage, I felt it incumbent upon me to diminish the faults of the mother, to make the child whose pursuit she fears a son instead of a daughter, to elevate the rank of the personages, and otherwise so to disguise the story, that few persons would have been able to trace me to my source, had not my habits prompted me to this frank avowal.

Prologue by Mr Charles Lamb

As author who has given you all delight,
Furnish’d the tale our stage presents to night.
Some of our earliest tears He taught to steal
Down our young cheeks, and forc’d us first to feel.
To solitary shores whole years confin’d,
Who has not read how pensive *Crusoe* pin’d?
Who, now grown old, that did not once admire
His goat, his parrot, his uncouth attire,
The stick, due-notch’d, that told each tedious day
That in the lonely island wore away?
Who has not shudder’d, where he stands aghast
At sight of human footsteps in the waste?
Or joy’d not, when his trembling hands unbind
Thee, *Friday*, gentlest of the savage kind?
The genius who conceiv’d that magic tale
Was skill’d by native pathos to prevail.
His stories, though rough-drawn, and fram’d in haste,
Had that which pleas’d our homely grandsires’ taste.

His was a various pen, that freely rov’d
Into all subjects, was in most approv’d.
Whate’er the theme, his ready Muse obey’d –
Love, courtship, politics, religion, trade –
Gifted alike to shine in every sphere,
Novelist, historian, poet, pamphleteer.

In some blest interval of party-strife,
He drew a striking sketch from private life,
Whose moving scenes of intricate distress
We try to-night in a dramatic dress:
A real story of domestic woe,
That asks no aid from music, verse, or show,
But trusts to truth, to nature, and *Defoe*. 