

The Rhetoric of First-Person Narration in Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*

Naghmeh Varghaiyan

Agri Ibrahim Cecen University, Turkey
Email: nnayebpour@agri.edu.tr

Abstract

Most of the narratives constructed by Daniel Defoe represent the unfolding of the eponymous narrators' adventurous lives. Despite the fact that Defoe's narratives are not categorized as psychological novels, they are slightly coloured by the homodiegetic narrators' evaluation of the events they lived, and the decisions they made at different points. By recounting their memories of episodes in their past lives, Defoe's narrators mostly present us with the story of their own transformation or becoming. They narrate their life stories in an attempt to rationalize and justify past actions and decisions. In other words, they hope to persuade themselves, and at the same time their audience, about their transformed lives and identities at the time of narration. As this paper argues, narrating in *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724) is primarily used to relieve the tension between the two opposing versions of the narrators' selves—the experiencing self and the narrating self. Moll's and Roxana's accounts represent an attempt to reconcile their identities and experiences throughout their lives. Thus, the paper aims to show how the uses of the first-person mode of narration has different uses in the two narratives. While the converging aspect of the two voices is dominant in *Moll Flanders*, it is the diverging nature of the remembering I and the remembered I which is highlighted in *Roxana*.

Keywords: Storytelling, first-person narrator, Moll Flanders, Roxana, Daniel Defoe

Introduction

"Defoe's novels," according to Homer O. Brown (1971), "are based on a notion of radical egocentricity" (p. 565). The dominance of retrospective first-person or homodiegetic narration in Defoe's works is a shared narrative technique which functions based on self-centred character-narrators. Since Defoe's "fiction," in David Durant's (1981) words, "explores those whose life is fictive and in so doing provides the first self-conscious novel" (p. 236), his narrators are self-conscious storytellers and fabricators. Thus, the relationship between narrator and character in Defoe's works is a significant narrative property. As Ian Bell (1985) argues, "Defoe gradually

developed the role of his narrators, by making more problematic the relation between them as narrators of adventure and as agents of adventure” (p. 154).

In their autobiographies, Defoe’s narrators pretend to tell the truth. Defoe, in Percy Lubbock’s (1960) words, constructed his narratives “by the assertion of the historic truthfulness of his stories” (p. 64). However, the first-person narrators generally, as Monika Fludernik (2009) argues, “render themselves suspicious by repeatedly claiming to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth” (p. 28). In Ellen Pollak’s (2008) words, Defoe used first-person narration as a “rhetorical strategy”, in order to “sustain the illusion that [his] representations are not in fact fictions but true accounts of real people, [...] in each case, he performs an authorial disappearing act by assuming the voice of a first-person narrator looking back at his or her life and attempting to make sense of it through the act of writing” (p. 139).

Defoe’s eponymous character-narrators are certainly pioneers of the confessional narrator in the English novel. Not only do they transform their lives into something quite different in the story times, but also, by recounting their experiences, they might find a way out of the distorting mental effects of the trauma of their past lives. In their retrospective and realist mode of narration, Defoe’s first-person narrators share with us their autobiographical remembering, which in Zuzana Fonioková’s (2020) words, “entails the reflection of the subject on her earlier incarnations, the younger selves from which the present self has evolved” (p. 342). They narrate the story of how, why, and where they have become who they are at the time of narration. Accordingly, in his works, Defoe elevated first-person narration to a central narrative device; his “rediscovery of the use of narrators in the early eighteenth century,” in Jeffery Rothschild’s (1990) words, “eventually brought about the emergence of the critical concept of the narrator at the turn of the following century” (p. 27).

The first-person narrator’s storytelling activities in Defoe’s works help them to unveil their own different selves, or mobile identities, in different time periods, and where possible, to achieve some sort of reconciliation among their conflicting selves. Their narratives are thus their own bildungsroman since, despite their many ups and downs, they experience cognitive as well as emotional development at the end, both at the story and discourse levels. While looking back at their past lives, they narrate the difficult process of their survival under the life-changing and life-threatening impact of events and circumstances. Thus, Defoe’s experienced narrators are, on the one hand, affected by the representation of their own memories. On the other hand, via their own transformed adult perspectives, they try to reconstruct their memories and experiences by imposing on them their now-mature, and hence different, interpretations obtained through their recollections. In other words, they narrate their past lives and, at the same time, are formed or moulded by their own narrations since they are concurrently the subject and the object of their own narration(s).

In reviewing the defining role of narrator in the rise and development of the English novel, narratologist Monica Fludernik (2009) highlights Defoe's role in its establishment as an important narrative device. "First-person narrative as a form," in Fludernik's words, "not only correlates with the traditional 'birth' of the novel in the work of Defoe but also provides the key constituent of the epistolary novel which preceded Defoe (in English from Aphra Behn onwards) and which played such a large role at the beginning of the history of the genre" (p. 92). Similarly, in his survey of the emerging process of the narrator in English prose, Rothschild (1990) underlines Defoe's defining role in the use of narrator:

[I]t was Defoe's rediscovery of the use of narrators in the early eighteenth century that eventually brought about the emergence of the critical concept of the narrator at the turn of the following century [...] As a result of Defoe's ground-breaking efforts, the use of narrators in English prose fiction flourished on an unprecedented scale throughout the last half of the eighteenth century, most notably in the works of Smollett, Fielding, and Sterne. (p. 27-31)

Possibly, the most effective and related study in this case is Ian Watt's argument in his classic *The Rise of the English Novel* (1957). Watt gives a vital place to Defoe as he "initiated an important new tendency in fiction: his total subordination of the plot to the pattern of the autobiographical memoir is as defiant an assertion of the primacy of individual experience in the novel as Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* was in philosophy" (p. 15). Watt terms Defoe's innovation "formal realism," which he defines as:

the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms. (1957, p. 32)

Watt's definition of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding's narrative technique of formal realism is in line with the postclassical narratologists' understanding of narrative. For example, "narrative fiction," according to Alan Palmer (2004), "is, in essence, the presentation of fictional mental functioning" (p. 5). Likewise, Defoe's practice of storytelling is entirely compatible with the cognitive narratologist David Herman's (2009) definition of narrative: "rather than focusing on general, abstract situations or trends, stories are accounts of what happened to particular people – and of what it was like for them to experience what happened – in particular circumstances and with specific consequences. Narrative, in other words, is a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change" (p. 2).

The function of the narrator or storyteller, its different types, the degree of its reliability, and the nature of its relation to the presented sequence of events on the storyline have always been among the debated subjects in narrative studies, from

Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (1921) and E.M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), to the postclassical phase of narratological approaches to literary texts. Having re-examined Wayne C. Booth's category of the reliable and unreliable narrators presented in his *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), James Phelan and Wayne Booth (2005) argue that "narrators typically perform three main kinds of telling—reporting (on the axis of facts, characters, and events); interpreting or reading (on the axis of perception /understanding), and evaluating or regarding (on the axis of ethics)" (p. 390). The narrators' accounts in *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* include the three kinds of telling.

Gerard Genette's typology of narrator is the most famous one. By re-defining the older term 'point of view', Genette (1972) highlights the role of voice, vision, and location in relation to the narrator. He makes a distinction between the concepts of *vision* (who sees or perceives) and *voice* (who speaks). According to him, there are "two types of narrative; one with the narrator absent from the story he tells ... the other with the narrator present as a character in the story he tells." Genette calls the first type "heterodiegetic" [or the non-character narrator] and the second type "homodiegetic" [or the character-narrator] (p. 245). Homodiegetic narrators who are protagonists are called autodiegetic narrators. "Autodiegetic narration," as David Herman (2009) articulates, "constitutes a special case of first-person or homodiegetic narration in which the narrator does not only participate in the action being recounted but is also the main character in the storyworld evoked by the text." In other words, as Herman explains, "a homodiegetic narrator is one who has participated (more or less centrally) in the circumstances and events about which he or she tells a story, with completely central participation yielding the autodiegetic mode" (p. 66). In autodiegetic narration, there is usually a rift between the narrating I and the experiencing I. In Manfred Jahn's (2007) words:

in many first-person (homodiegetic) texts, such as this one, the point of perceptual origin hovers between two co-ordinate systems because first-person narrator and protagonist – also called the "narrating I" and the "experiencing I," respectively – are separated in time and space but linked through a biographical identity relation. This creates an – occasionally unstable – union between the current, remembering self and what French critics term *un autre* (literally, "an other"). (p. 100)

In explaining the relationship between the narrating I and the experiencing one, Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck (2007) underscore the dissonance between the two voices as a sign of narratorial reliability:

[When] the narrator and the character are the same, as in first-person narratives, things get even more complicated. The narrating-I may disagree with the acting and experiencing-I. This often occurs in autobiographical fiction, where the older narrator reflects upon his life as a young man. He might be critical about what he thought as a young man, and this criticism might give the impression that the narrator is wise and trustworthy. (p. 228)

The discrepancy between the ethical and ideological perspectives of the two selves in *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* are quite clear. Defoe's autodiegetic narrators are mostly reporters on the axes of facts, characters, and events. However, doing so in a retrospective manner and to a limited degree, they evaluate the autobiographical events on the axis of ethics. Their narratives thus change into a knowledge-giving resource for them as they try to come to a new understanding of how they became who they are now. The analyses reveal the way(s) the protagonists feel and think about what they did and how they lived. *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* primarily present us with how the titular character-narrators think and feel about their lives in the past and hence vividly recount the impact of their adventurous experiences on their mental lives at the time of narration.

In many critical approaches, *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* have generally been treated under similar categories. According to Virginia Woolf, they "stand among the few great English novels which we can call indisputably great" (qtd. in Ian Watt, 1957, p. 93). Defoe's anti-institutional female protagonists share some common points. Comparing them to Defoe's male protagonists, Christopher Borsing (2017) affirms that: "Instead of being geographically marginalised like Crusoe on his Caribbean island, Moll and Roxana are socially marginalised. Their stories depict the fortunes and misfortunes of autonomy, anomaly and deviance within the social order" (p. 118). From this perspective, storytelling for them becomes an emancipating mission despite their life-long habit of inclination towards concealment. Such a dual aspect, according to Brown (1971), is a shared feature in Defoe's works:

Defoe's narrators seem obsessed with concealing themselves, but the impulse leading them towards exposure appears equally strong. Complete concealment is impossible, perhaps not even desirable. On the one hand there is the insistence on building a faceless shelter around the self, but, on the other, a recurring compulsion to move out into the open. This double compulsion can be expressed as a double fear. (p. 569)

Moll and Roxana tell their stories at the end of their adventures. Despite the similarities between their accounts, their characters are different. As Defoe's last narrating female voice, Roxana is a sufferer as a psychologically conscious character. In Janet E. Aikins's (1985) words, "by both telling her story and feeling its full effect, she suffers far greater tortures than Moll Flanders [...] Roxana suffers because her language triggers her powerful memory, while Moll has both a tin ear for words and a weak memory" (p. 555).

Moll Flanders's Candid Acts of Confessions

Moll Flanders's main intention in storytelling is to familiarize her audience with her identity through time. However, her character, according to Liz Bellamy (2009), is "intriguingly paradoxical, comprising a fascinating blend of self-assertion and self-doubt; penitence for her criminality, and satisfaction at the success of her criminal

schemes; delight in her professional notoriety and desire for concealment and disguise” (p. 2). The duality is also present in her act of storytelling. Thus, her “confession,” as Christopher Borsing (2017) contends, “is a liar’s statement of a life dependent upon deception and disguise [...] Moll constructs the surface identity of an impenetrable persona” (p. 117-118).

The function of character in *Moll Flanders* closely corresponds with E. M. Forster’s (2002) famous statement that “a character is everything and is given freest play” (p. 44). In other words, *Moll Flanders* is a novel of character in which, as Ian Watt (1957) argues, “the plot throws the whole burden of interest on the heroine” (p. 108). In John Richetti’s (2005) words, “Moll is a moralizing observer; she draws from her experiences a number of conclusions about moral relationships and socioeconomic realities” (p. 238).

Published anonymously in 1722, *Moll Flanders* is generally considered a criminal biography of a shoplifter and prostitute. By recounting the intimate details of her history and misfortunes stretching from years of moral corruption, immorality, and degradation, through crime, prison, repentance and affluence, Moll feels proud to share her obtained prosperity with us.

Narration is thus Moll Flanders’s voluntary act of revealing herself, a desire against her long-life habit of concealment even though her narration, in a similar way to her life, is her intentional act of saving herself too. In her storytelling, she tries to present a persuasive or sympathetic self-image as, in Ian Bell’s (1985) words, she “strives to convince us of her initial naïveté and vanity” (p. 161). Thus, as William Krier (1971) holds: “The marked upsurge of critical discussion in the last decade concerning Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* has been too centered on the question of irony” (p. 397). For example, in his discussion of the importance of ambiguity and irony in *Moll Flanders*, Steven C. Michael (1996) argues that “language becomes *capital* for Moll: as narrator and character, she withholds and spends information as both actions suit and profit her” (p. 368, emphasis original). However, as highlighted by James Sutherland (1971), Moll “never pretends that the life she is living is anything but wrong” (p. 132). In other words, as Ian Bell (1985) argues, Moll-the-narrator’s “perception of her life is not authoritative,” or the ironies present in Moll-the-experience’s discourse “are not underlined by the retrospective Moll” (p. 159). Accordingly, the first-person narrator Moll relatively reveals to us a version of her identity she carefully concealed from her fellow thieves:

Tho’ I often robb’d with these People, yet I never let them know who I was, or where I Lodg’d; nor could they ever find out my Lodging, tho’ they often endeavour’d to Watch me to it. They all knew me by the Name of Moll Flanders, tho’ even some of them rather believ’d I was she, than knew me to be so; my Name was publick among them indeed; but how to find me out they knew not. (Defoe, 2005, pp. 221-22)

Moll Flanders's life begins in a mess. She is born in jail to an infamous mother and an anonymous father. In a similar manner to a typical Defoian protagonist, she knowingly changes her life into a totally different one by the end of her story, and is finally rewarded for the hardships she endured throughout her difficult life. The intimate recounting of her life story is the only certain way of her becoming assured about her life-long accomplishments. She tells us the story of her journey from humiliation to gaining a respected social status. Under the impact of her own narration, she feels purged of her sins. Through reflecting on her misconducts and weaknesses, she shares with us her penitence which she has achieved through her reflective confessions. Her self-acceptance is her primary motivation in telling us the dirty details of her mostly immoral life. Her repentance comes as a result of her long and critical reflection. She consciously comes to a decision to stop stealing. This change brings her ultimate prosperity:

I repented heartily of all my life past, but that repentance yielded me no satisfaction, no peace, no, not in the least, because, as I said to myself, it was repenting after the power of further sinning was taken away. I seemed not to mourn that I had committed such crimes, and for the fact as it was an offence against God and my neighbour, but I mourned that I was to be punished for it. I was a penitent, as I thought, not that I had sinned, but that I was to suffer, and this took away all the comfort, and even the hope of my repentance in my own thoughts. (Defoe, 2005, p. 254)

Through her confessions, Moll performs her penitence. Reviewing her experiences leads her to repentance and redemption. Moll the narrator's regretful penitence often overlaps with Moll the character's awareness of her mistakes. For example, her narration of a scene in which she critically self-scrutinizes her own behaviour towards a clerk, who had come a long way from Brickhill to marry her, reveals the way she feels and thinks about her own frauds in the past:

Then it occurred to me, 'What an abominable creature am I! and how is this innocent gentleman going to be abused by me! How little does he think, that having divorced a whore, he is throwing himself into the arms of another! that he is going to marry one that has lain with two brothers, and has had three children by her own brother! one that was born in Newgate, whose mother was a whore, and is now a transported thief! one that has lain with thirteen men, and has had a child since he saw me! Poor gentleman!' said I, 'what is he going to do?' After this reproaching myself was over, it following thus: 'Well, if I must be his wife, if it please God to give me grace, I'll be a true wife to him, and love him suitably to the strange excess of his passion for me; I will make him amends if possible, by what he shall see, for the cheats and abuses I put upon him, which he does not see. (Defoe, 2005, pp. 152-153)

The act of remembering, which is coincident with self-judgement, functions as a purifying force in Moll the narrator's case. The two divided voices, presented in the early part of the narrative, increasingly get closer to each other in a way that Moll

the penitent's conscience, which underlies the regretful atmosphere of the narrative as a whole, is finally rewarded by tranquillity and peace:

We are grown old; I am come back to England, being almost seventy years of age, husband sixty-eight, having performed much more than the limited terms of my transportation; and now, notwithstanding all the fatigues and all the miseries we have both gone through, we are both of us in good heart and health. ... [In England] we resolve to spend the remainder of our years in sincere penitence for the wicked lives we have lived. (Defoe, 2005, p. 285)

In other words, as is highlighted by Richetti, in her narration "Moll insists on two concurrent and potentially contradictory factors: one, that she has been formed by her circumstances, and, two, that she has always resisted them to some extent, negotiating an individuality that is part of her nature and not produced by culture" (Defoe, 2005, p. 242). As a result of her broad experiences gained through her marriages and pseudo marriages, thirteen children, and her felonies, Moll the narrator, like Betty or Moll the character, feels reintegrated into the (implied readers') society.

In her narrative, Moll introduces economic "necessity" and circumstances as the main causes of her immoral acts in the past:

I was now a loose, unguided creature, and had no help, no assistance, no guide for my conduct; I knew what I aimed at and what I wanted, but knew nothing how to pursue the end by direct means. I wanted to be placed in a settle state of living, and had I happened to meet with a sober, good husband, I should have been as faithful and true a wife to him as virtue itself could have formed. If I had been otherwise, the vice came in always at the door of necessity, not at the door of inclination; and I understood too well, by the want of it, what the value of a settled life was, to do anything to forfeit the felicity of it; nay, I should have made the better wife for all the difficulties I had passed through, by a great deal; nor did I in any of the time that I had been a wife give my husbands the least uneasiness on account of my behaviour. (Defoe, 2005, pp. 120-121)

When she encounters her ex-husband Jemy in Newgate, the most effective part of her repentance begins. He has a strong impact on her emotions and thoughts. When he is imprisoned, she accepts the responsibility and blames herself through reflecting on the process leading to his imprisonment:

I grieved day and night for him, [...] I was overwhelmed with grief for him; my own case gave me no disturbance compared to this, and I loaded myself with reproaches on his account. I bewailed his misfortunes, and the ruin he was now come to, at such a rate, that I relished nothing now as I did before, and the first reflections I made upon the horrid, detestable life I had lived began to return upon me, and as these things returned, my abhorrence of the place I was in, and of the way of living in it,

returned also; in a word, I was perfectly changed, and become another body. (Defoe, 2005, p. 260)

By referring to her narration of the events that happened after her imprisonment in the Newgate, Richetti states that “her narration is a form of rearrangement or reconstruction of her life in response to ‘guilt.’ This moment is hardly a ‘restoration’ of a selfhood that Moll possessed before; she claims nothing less than a newly-developed personality, fashioned under and out of the stress of Newgate” (Defoe, 2005, pp. 255- 256).

Moll finally comes to terms with her past deeds as she is persuaded that it was the urgent economic and social needs which forced her to be a thief and prostitute, and (re)marry unlawfully many times. More importantly, besides her awareness of the ills of her society, she accepts her own role and responsibility in becoming who she has become. Thus, she is, as Richetti writes: “an unsparing moral observer of her own actions and feelings” (Defoe, 2005, p. 244). She encourages us as readers of her history to reflect on her life, and evaluate it by sympathising with her:

I am not capable of reading lectures of instruction to anybody, but I relate this in the very manner in which things then appeared to me, as far as I am able, but infinitely short of the lively impressions which they made on my soul at that time; indeed, those impressions are not to be explained by words, or if they are, I am not mistress of words enough to express them. It must be the work of every sober reader to make just reflections on them, as their own circumstances may direct; and, without question, this is what every one at some time or other may feel something of; I mean, a clearer sight into things to come than they had here, and a dark view of their own concern in them. (Defoe, 2005, p. 266)

Accordingly, Moll calls her audience into action by asking them to consider her entire life before judging her. Richetti also draws out attention to the centrality of reader in the interpretation of her discourse. According to him, Moll “is a narrator but she is not, of course, an author or moral authority; she is forthright about her own moral shortcomings and saves her rationalizations of her conduct for moments of extreme necessity. She delivers the facts and feelings of her life story, but the moral meaning, such as it is, is meant to be extracted and evaluated by a thoughtful reader” (Defoe, 2005, p. 240). Moll recounts her transformation in the prison under “a good man,” and criticizes those who will not find her metamorphosis realistic:

This may be thought inconsistent in itself, and wide from the business of this book; particularly, I reflect that many of those who may be pleased and diverted with the relation of the wild and wicked part of my story may not relish this, which is really the best part of my life, the most advantageous to myself, and the most instructive to others. Such, however, will, I hope, allow me the liberty to make my story complete. It would be a severe satire on such to say they do not relish the repentance as much

as they do the crime; and that they had rather the history were a complete tragedy, as it was very likely to have been. (Defoe, 2005, p. 291)

Thus, not only she is happy she has changed, but she also demands her audience change their conventional perspective too. The outcome of Moll's narration is in keeping with the course of her life. After a long chain of events, Moll lives with her husband "with the greatest Kindness and Comfort imaginable" (Defoe, 2005, p. 315). Unlike Moll's autobiographical remembering, Roxana's storytelling does not yield her freedom from the conflict between her two selves.

Roxana's Painful Act of Storytelling

The collision between the narrating and experiencing selves in *Roxana* (1724) is a serious and unsolvable problem. By referring to the situation as a "curious duality," Janet E. Aikins argues that:

Roxana is an excellent storyteller who has progressed in the world through the clever use of her tongue. She tells us the tale of her life, and her narrative succeeds as the sensational account of a woman's rise from rags to riches, [...] Nevertheless, as she speaks, Roxana gradually realizes that she has also "expos'd" the true "Story of *Roxana*," the account of a woman who is not the "fortunate mistress" of the title but someone who has lived an immoral life and found herself so deep in crime that despite her voiced objections, her loyal servant has actually murdered her daughter to preserve her secret. The action is intricately involved in Roxana's manipulation of language both as a narrator and as the verbally adept subject of the narrative. (Defoe, 2008, p. 532)

Roxana is Defoe's last and the most novelistic novel. According to Richetti (2005), it "is the closest Defoe comes to producing what deserves to be called a novel in very nearly the full, formal sense of the term, since his narrator/heroine confronts with unsparing clarity the contradictions in her personality, coming in due course to a tortured self-understanding that is more complex in both a psychological and a moral sense than that of Defoe's other narrators" (p. 268). Richetti (2005) rightly argues that "among Defoe's fictional protagonists Roxana has the most distinctive voice and presence. She is his most complex (and most disturbing) character" (p. 268). Referring to Roxana's "complex moral consciousness" and "an unsparing candor about her motives" (2005, p. 269), Richetti evaluates Roxana as "sharply intelligent, satirical and shrewdly self-critical in her capacity as a retrospective narrator" (p. 270). "Roxana," according to Christopher Borsing (2017), "revels in show and display but her masquerade collapses in upon herself. [...] Roxana draws the reader into a representation of inner identity that becomes increasingly complex, incoherent and illegible" (p. 117-118). By comparing her to Defoe's previous protagonists, Homer Brown (1971) argues that "Roxana does not break free of a past marked by sin, error, and crime to achieve repentance and peace. Thus, unlike Crusoe, Moll, and Colonel Jack, she does not narrate her past misdeeds from a

position of physical and spiritual safety” (p. 523). Brown (1971) considers Roxana’s “self-awareness” as the primary cause of her complex character and narrative: “Intensely self-aware, she reasons with herself, judges herself, and ultimately cannot forgive hers [...] her tendency to argue with herself, and her inclination, as character, to judge herself” (p. 523-524). However, Roxana’s reflections and self-analyses, in Raymond Stephanson’s (1980) words: “become increasingly psychological in character rather than spiritual or moral” (p. 285) as she primarily shares with us “an account of her own psychological chaos and breakdown” (p. 288).

Roxana is a regretful recollection of a truly penitent woman. In Ian Bell’s (1985) words, she “looks back over her adventures with a sustained abhorrence” (p. 166). The self-scrutinizing narrating ‘I’ shares with us her “self-condemning recollections” (Mullan, 2008, p. xi), mainly to come to terms with her own grief. In the last part of her narrative, she tells us how, under the impact of “a dreadful course of calamities” (Defoe, 2008, p. 329), she suffers great mental torment and remorse for her self-deceptions, for who she was, what she did, and how she lived in the past.

By alternating “between triumphant social/sexual activity and retrospective remorse and contempt for her amorality” (Richetti 284), Roxana the narrator desperately endeavours to persuade us and herself to believe in her argument that her guilty past life was because of the circumstances and the Devil:

[I]t came so very strong upon my Mind one Morning, when I had been lying awake some time in my Bed, as if somebody had ask’d me the Question, *What was I a Whore for now?* It occur’d naturally upon this Enquiry, that at first I yielded to the Importunity of my Circumstances, the Misery of which, the Devil dismally aggravated, to draw me to comply; for I confess, I had strong Natural Aversions to the Crime at first, partly owing to a virtuous Education, and partly to a Sence of Religion; but the Devil, and that greater Devil of Poverty, prevail’d; and the Person who laid Siege to me, did it in such an obliging, and I may almost say, irresistible Manner, all still manag’d by the Evil Spirit; for I must be allow’d to believe, that he has a Share in all such things, if not the whole Management of them: But, I say, it was carried on by that Person, in such an irresistible Manner, that, (as I said when I related the Fact) there was no withstanding it: These Circumstances, I say, the Devil manag’d, not only to bring me to comply, but he continued them as Arguments to fortifie my Mind against all Reflection, and to keep me in that horrid Course I had engag’d in, as if it were honest and lawful.

But not to dwell upon that now; this was a Pretence (Defoe, 2008, p. 201)

Although the original ending of the story is still under debate, *Roxana*, as shown in the classical version published by Oxford University Press, presents us ultimately with the ambitious fortunate Mistress’s transformation. The plot focuses on the narrator-character’s mentality by showing how lost maternal feeling finally overcomes a penitent woman with an already hardened heart: “the Misery of my

own Circumstances hardened my Heart against my own Flesh and Blood” (Defoe, 2008, p. 19).

The source of Roxana the narrator’s pain is primarily the gap, or a lack of reconciliation, between her experiencing and narrating selves. While she shows her experiencing self to be a “sacred monster,” her narrating self is a “transformed” self, aware of her “guilt” (Richetti, 2008, p. 289 and 297). She recounts her self-concerns in order to free herself from the psychological impact of her conducts. She feels the necessity to tell her story to us so that she might soothe her guilty conscience: “with my Eyes open, and with my Conscience, as I may say awake, I sinn’d, knowing it to be a Sin, but having no Power to resist; when this had thus made a Hole in my Heart, and I was come to such a height, as to transgress against the Light of my own Conscience, I was then fit for any Wickedness, and Conscience left off speaking, where it found it could not be heard” (Defoe, 2008, p. (44). Despite her transformation, her double-voiced discourse does not end in a full reconciliation by the end of narrative plot.

Roxana shares with us the defining moments of her adventurous journey started by her younger self as a virtuous married woman. Her desire to leave her already ruinous marriage is finally realized by the unexpected disappearance of her impractical husband. Triggered by such a motive, she enters into a long series of lawful and unlawful relationships. She becomes a mistress to a merchant, a prince and, finally, a king. Rich and famous, she settles in Holland before being unsettled by one of her daughters who pursues her and insists on revealing her true identity.

In the last part of the novel, Roxana presents herself confused by an emotional paradox. Her recollections do not free her from the bondage of the past:

It was now that, for the first time, I felt any real signs of repentance. I now began to look back upon my past life with abhorrence, and having a kind of view into the other side of time, the things of life, as I believe they do with everybody at such a time, began to look with a different aspect, and quite another shape, than they did before. The views of felicity, the joy, the griefs of life, were quite other things; and I had nothing in my thoughts but what was so infinitely superior to what I had known in life, that it appeared to be the greatest stupidity to lay a weight upon anything, though the most valuable in this world. (Defoe, 2008, p. 239)

Roxana’s “anguish,” as Durant holds, “comes because she cannot find a true self” (235). She both wants to reveal her real self to her daughter and to hide it from her at the same time: “I was oblig’d to sit and hear her tell all the Story of *Roxana*, *that is to say*, of myself, and not know at the same time, whether she was in earnest or in jest; whether she knew me or no; or, *in short*, whether I was to be expos’d, or not expos’d” (Defoe, 2008, p. 284-285, emphasis original). Similarly, she experiences an unresolvable conflict between her true name Susan and the name given to her by the aristocratic gentlemen with whom she danced in her Turkish costume. She tells us

how she did not want, and still doesn't want, to be known by the name Roxana both to her daughter and to us readers: "I wou'd not have been seen, so as to be known by the Name of Roxana, no, not for ten Thousand Pounds; it wou'd have been enough to have ruin'd me to all Intents and Purposes with my Husband, and every body else too" (Defoe, 2008, p. 271).

Conclusion

The uses of the first-person mode of narration differ from *Moll Flanders* to *Roxana*. While the converging aspect of the two voices is dominant in the former narrative, it is the diverging nature of the remembering I and the remembered I which is highlighted in the latter. *Moll Flanders's* narration is mostly born out of a great feeling of satisfaction. It is a celebration of her accomplishments in the level of story as well as plot or discourse. By recalling the different phases of her mostly problematic life in the past, and through realising both the function of the circumstances and the role of her own self-interestedness, Moll's discourse reveals how her transformation has brought about lasting peace of mind. In other words, she is happy to share her repentance with us and ultimately feels happy with her coherent sense of identity. Roxana's narration, however, has another result for her. Through her acts of remembering, she comes to some realizations about herself. Reconciliation between her misconducts in the past and her new understanding, realizations, and interpretation of them becomes impossible for Roxana. Her repentance-dependent discourse does not lead her to forgiveness. She does not forgive herself for what she did and how she affected other people's lives. For example, she blames herself for the unfortunate life of her daughter when she realises that her fame and wealth fail to help her to restore already wasted maternal feelings she should have shown to her children. Thus, Roxana's storytelling is an act of a deep mourning as she cannot come to terms with the version of her older self and identity.

References

- [1] Aikins, Janet E. (1985). Roxana: The Unfortunate Mistress of Conversation. *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 25(3), 529-556. Retrieved February 02, 2019, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/450495>
- [2] Bell, Ian A. (1985). Narrators and Narrative in Defoe. *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 18(2), 154-172. Retrieved November 25, 2019, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1345774>
- [3] Bellamy, Liz. Introduction. (2009). In Liz Bellamy, (Ed.), *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders (1721)*(pp. 1-20). *Mundus Intellectuals*.
- [4] Borsing, Christopher. *Daniel Defoe and the Representation of Personal Identity*. Routledge, 2017.

- [5] Brown, Homer O. (1971). *The Displaced Self in the Novels of Daniel Defoe*. *ELH*, 38(4), 562-590. Retrieved October 22, 2019, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2872266>
- [6] Defoe, Daniel. (2005). *Moll Flanders*. ICON Group International, Inc.
- [7] Defoe, Daniel. (2008). *Roxana*. Oxford University Press.
- [8] Durant, David. (1981). *Roxana's Fictions*. *Studies in the Novel*, 13(3), 225-236. Retrieved September 02, 2019, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29532103>
- [9] Fludernik, Monika. (2009). *An Introduction to Narratology*. Routledge.
- [10] Fonioková, Zuzana. (2020). What's in an I? Dissonant and Consonant Self-Narration in Autobiographical Discourse. *Biography*, 43(2), 387-406. Retrieved February 18, 2023, from <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/781995>
- [11] Forster, E. M. (2002). *Aspects of the Novel*. Rosetta Books, LCC.
- [12] Genette, Gerard. (1972). *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Jane E. Lewin, Trans.). Cornell University Press.
- [13] Herman, David. (2009). *Basic Elements of Narrative*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- [14] Herman, Luc and Bart Vervaeck. (2007). Ideology. In David Herman. (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (pp. 217-230). Cambridge University Press.
- [15] Krier, William J. (1971). A Courtesy which Grants Integrity: A Literal Reading of *Moll Flanders*. *ELH*, 38(3), 397-410. Retrieved November 22, 2019, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2872226>
- [16] Lubbock, Percy. (1960). *The Craft of Fiction*. Jonathan Cape.
- [17] Jahn, Manfred. (2007). Focalization. In David Herman (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (pp. 94-108). Cambridge University Press.
- [18] Michael, Steven C. (1996). Thinking Parables: "What *Moll Flanders*" Does Not Say. *ELH*, 63(2), 367-395. Retrieved October 12, 2019, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30030225>
- [19] Mullan, John. (2008). Introduction. In John Mullan (Ed.), *Roxana: the Fortunate Mistress by Daniel Defoe* (pp. vii-xxvii). Oxford University Press.
- [20] Palmer, Alan. (2004). *Fictional Minds*. University of Nebraska Press.
- [21] Phelan, James and Wayne C. Booth. (2005). Narrator. In David Herman et al (Eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (pp. 388-392). Routledge.
- [22] Pollak, Ellen. (2008). Gender and fiction in *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*. In John Richetti (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Daniel Defoe* (pp. 139-157). Cambridge University Press.
- [23] Richetti, John. (2005). *The Life of Daniel Defoe: A Critical Biography*. Blackwell Publishing.
- [24] Rothschild, Jeffrey M. (1990). Renaissance Voices Echoed: The Emergence of the Narrator in English Prose. *College English*, 52(1), 21-35. Retrieved November 15, 2020, from <http://www.jstor.com/stable/377404>
- [25] Stephanson, Raymond. (1980). Defoe's "Roxana": The Unresolved Experiment in Characterization. *Studies in the Novel*, 12(4), 279-288. Retrieved October 22, 2019, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29532064>

- [26] Sutherland, James. (1971). Daniel Defoe: A Critical Study. Harvard University Press.
- [27] Watt, Ian. (1957). The Rise of the English Novel. University Of California Press.