

Dissenter, Merchant, Speculator, Writer

Hail to thee, spirit of Defoe! What does not my own poor self owe to thee! England has better bards than either Greece or Rome, yet I could spare them easier far than Defoe.

George Borrow, *Lavengro*

Defoe's Early Life

On approaching my subject, the first and most obvious feeling is regret, that an author whose powers of narration . . . whose simple naturalness in his relations of human intercourse, and in the charm of reality which he imperceptibly spread over the commonest incidents . . . should not have employed his masterly pen in telling the story of his own life to posterity.

William Lee, *Daniel Defoe: His Life and Recently Discovered Writings*

Tourists in London in search of the Barbican Center are likely to walk down Daniel Defoe Place, past a high-rise apartment building in that housing complex called "Defoe House," just across from "William Shakespeare Tower." Of these two writers, Defoe has the greater claim to be memorialized in that part of London. Among the major eighteenth-century English writers, most of whom like Swift, Gay, and Johnson were of provincial origins, he is almost unique as a Londoner born and bred (Pope was born in the City but grew up in Binfield, near Windsor). Although the landscape of his childhood has been transformed over the centuries, Defoe was born in 1660 or 1661 not far from the tower block of flats and the street that now bear his name, in the City of London, in the parish of St. Giles, Cripplegate (close to where in those years Milton, old

The Life of Daniel Defoe: A Critical Biography, First Edition. John Richetti.
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Figure 1 Defoe House in the Barbican center, London. Photograph author's own

and blind, was living, on Jewin Street). His parents were Alice and James Foe, his father a prosperous tallow chandler or candle manufacturer who in his later years branched out into overseas trade in other merchandise on a larger scale and became a fairly prominent person in the City of London business community. The Foes were descended from yeoman stock in Northamptonshire; Defoe's father had emigrated to London from Etton in that county. During Defoe's childhood, they lived in Swan Alley, in St. Stephen's parish, near St. Paul's Cathedral (the old one, before Christopher Wren built his masterpiece) and the Royal Exchange.

Defoe's childhood years at the heart of the City of London were full of transforming events for England: the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660; the Second Anglo-Dutch War of 1664–7 in which Dutch ships sailed up the Thames and destroyed much of the English fleet; the great bubonic plague that in 1665 killed over 70,000 people in the city; and then the Great Fire in September 1666 that destroyed most of the wooden houses of medieval London and launched a building boom in brick and stone. It is tempting to speculate about the boy Daniel in those years caught up in these great events, especially since he

later wrote about the plague year so memorably in *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722). Unfortunately, virtually nothing is known about Defoe's childhood, although his mother seems to have died when he was ten or eleven, and we do know that he was sent to primary school in Dorking in Surrey at a school kept by the Rev. James Fisher, a dissenting minister.¹ Frank Bastian suggests that the death of Defoe's mother when he was so young was an important, even a defining event in his life. He derives Defoe's "self-sufficiency and initiative" from an adolescence deprived of a close mother-son relationship.²

Looking back in 1705 in the *Review*, Defoe remembered a childhood in which he absorbed the anxieties of his fellow religionists when many feared that Popery would come in and take away the English scriptures. "How many Honest but over-frighted People, set to Work to Copy the Bible into Short-Hand, lest when Popery come in, we should be Prohibited the use of it, and so might secure it in little Compass? At which Work, I my self then, but a Boy, work'd like a Horse till I wrote out the whole Pentateuch, and then was so tyr'd, I was willing to run the Risque of the rest" (December 22, 1705).³ This anecdote may remind us of the daily strain of belonging to a persecuted religious minority. The Foes were dissenters, Protestants who did not conform to the prescribed rituals and exact beliefs of the established national church, the Church of England. Like a good number of others, especially among the merchant and trading classes in London, the Foes had followed their pastor, Dr. Samuel Annesley, and his congregation in refusing to conform after the 1660 Restoration of the Stuart monarchy and the Church of England to the Act of Uniformity, promulgated on St. Bartholomew's Day, 24 August, 1662. This act replaced the much looser and more lenient Elizabethan (1559) Act of Uniformity. The newly-revised Book of Common Prayer, prepared in Convocation of the Church of England clergy the previous December, was according to the terms of the Act to be used exclusively in church services, with every clergyman instructed to "openly and publicly before the congregation . . . declare his unfeigned assent and consent" to everything in the book. Moreover, any cleric who refused to do so was stripped of his office, which the Act added was valid only if the incumbent had been episcopally ordained.⁴ There was more persecution to come. In 1664, the Conventicle Act was passed (followed in 1670 by an even harsher Conventicle Act) that prohibited more than five people meeting together to conduct any sort of worship except using the official Prayer Book, and from then until 1672 a series of acts referred to as the Clarendon Code (after Charles II's Lord Chancellor, the historian, Edward Hyde, Lord Clarendon) tightened the screws on religious nonconformity and initiated a veritable reign of terror and persecution for dissenting Protestants in England. As James Sutherland put it, as a result of these edicts the dissenters were "a desperate people, harassed by severe laws, and at the mercy of bullies and informers and of all who happened to bear them any personal grudge."⁵

Defoe himself later estimated in 1707 that over 3,000 ministers left the Church rather than conform to the Act.⁶ N. H. Keeble cites a lower estimate of fifteen or sixteen hundred by William Hooke, a former chaplain of Cromwell's, and he notes that Richard Baxter, the great Protestant divine, put the figure at about 2,000.⁷ Whatever the actual number, this clerical exodus was a key moment in the history of English religious dissent. Even with this large defection from the established church, Protestant dissenters (excluding Catholics) were always a distinct minority in England, no more than about 5 percent of the population.⁸ But from the Stuart Restoration through the reign of Queen Anne (1703–14) and beyond, they played an important and controversial role in English religious and political life, at a time when those two realms were interdependent, indeed inextricable. Defoe's life from his earliest years is profoundly involved in the complex fate of being an English dissenter during these turbulent times. An angry marginality and a lingering resentment of the ruling elite, as well as of isolated auto-didacticism, such as one finds expressed in much of his writing, might well be traced to his growing up among this embattled minority.⁹

The historian David Ogg has suggested that as a persecuted and disenfranchised minority, excluded to a large extent from public life, dissenters tended to work in commerce in the emerging new financial order that was to transform Britain. They achieved, says Ogg, success and power disproportionate to their numbers.¹⁰ Defoe embarked as a young man on a commercial career such as was open to dissenters, on a much more ambitious scale than his father, and a series of spectacular failures as a wholesale merchant and entrepreneur would propel him for sheer physical survival into his life as a political operative and polemical journalist, where his identity as a dissenter (who dissented in his turn from much of what most dissenters of his class thought) would shape his career.

In 1662, the Foes' minister, Samuel Annesley, established his dissenting meeting house at Little St. Helen's, Bishopsgate. Annesley became a prominent Presbyterian divine, and Defoe memorialized him in a poem ("The Character of the Late Mr. Samuel Annesley, by Way of Elegy") when he died in 1697. Defoe's biographers have assumed that he attended Annesley's services as an adult, or at the least maintained an acquaintance with him.¹¹ Much more is known about the influence on Defoe of another prominent dissenting divine, Charles Morton, to whose dissenting academy at Newington Green, just north of London, he was sent when he turned 16. Students who would not declare their adherence to the Church of England were barred from attending the English universities at Oxford and Cambridge. A network of dissenting academies, as they were called, had evolved as a substitute system of higher education. Morton's school like others of its kind was conceived as an alternative education for the sons of prosperous dissenters who were intended for the ministry, as Defoe seems to have been. A distinguished scholar and a former fellow of Wadham College, Oxford,

Morton later emigrated to America and became the first president of Harvard College.

Near the end of his life, in a work that survived in manuscript but was not printed until 1890, *The Compleat English Gentleman*, Defoe looked back with great satisfaction to his unorthodox education at Morton's academy. He argues in that treatise that it would be much better for the education of gentlemen "if they were taught in English, and if all the learned labours of the masters of the age were made to speak English, to be levell'd to the capacities of the more unlearn'd part of man-kind, who would be encourag'd by that means to look into those happy discoveries in Nature, which have been the study and labour of so many ages." Let us have more translation into English of works both modern and ancient, he urges, to follow the example of the French. Then, "it must be granted men might be made schollars at a much easier expence as well of labour as of money than now, and might be truly learned and yet kno' nothing of the Greek or the Latin."¹² *The Compleat English Gentleman* offers a familiar complaint against the traditional curriculum: "If then a man may be learned in all the wisdom and knowledge of God so as to be a complete Christian, and that without the knowledge of either Latin or Greek, I see not reason to scruple saying he may be a complete phylospher [sic] or a complete mathematician, tho' he has no skill in the learned languages."¹³ During his years as a journalist in the fractious public arena, Defoe was often subjected to taunts from opponents for his lack of classical learning, borne out by occasional ungrammatical Latin scraps and tags in his journalism, and he was always defensive on that score. For example in the *Review* of May 31, 1705 he challenged his rival periodical journalist, John Tutchin, who had in the *Observer* ridiculed his bad Latin, to a translation contest: "by this he shall have an Opportunity to show the World, how much De Foe the Hosier, is inferior in Learning to Mr. Tutchin the gentleman." And earlier in this number, he declared: "I have no Concern to tell Dr. B – I can read English, or to tell Mr. Tutchin I understand Latin, *Non ite Latinus sum ut Latine loqui* – I easily acknowledge my self Blockhead enough, to have lost the Fluency of Expression in the Latin, and so far Trade has been a Prejudice to me; and yet I think I owe this Justice to my Ancient Father, yet living, and in whose Behalf I freely Testifie that if I am a Blockhead, it was no Bodies Fault but my own; he having spar'd nothing in my Education, that might Qualifie me to Match the accurate Dr. B – or the Learned *Observer*." When in 1710 Swift in the *Examiner* attacked the *Review's* author as "illiterate," Defoe responded at length and with great dignity, defining himself as a man of the world rather than what he called a "Learned Fool": "we have abundance of Learned Fools in the World, and Ignorant Wise-Men – How often have I seen a Man boast of his Letters, and his Load of Learning, and be Ignorant in the common necessary Acquirements, that fit a Man either for the Service of himself or his Country" (December 16, 1710). Many years later, he was still harping on this grievance:

“Will nothing make a man a schollar but Latin and Greek?” he has a character ask in a dialogue in *The Compleat English Gentleman*. His interlocutor replies that scholars are nothing but pedants, “a kind of mechanicks in the schools, for they deal in words and syllables as haberdashers deal in small ware.”¹⁴ Defoe’s aggrieved personality is still on display here in his old age, and the reduction of so-called scholars to dealers in haberdashery is a reprise of the jeers Defoe endured from rival polemicists all his life about being a hosier. But he balances this resentful complaint with what is clearly his memory of Morton’s effectively modern pedagogy, conducted in English and including current subjects such as Locke’s philosophy and Newton’s physics.

He calls Morton “a tutor of unquestion’d reputacion for learning . . . a critick in the learned languages, and even in all the oriental tongues,” who set out to correct the mistaken prejudices of “school learning” by lecturing in English and requiring “all the exercises and performances of the gentlemen, his pupils, to be made in English.”¹⁵ Defoe describes Morton’s “class for eloquence” in which the pupils “declaim’d weekly in the English tongue, made orations, and wrot epistles twice every week upon such subjects as he prescrib’d to them or upon such as they themselves chose to write upon.” His evocation of these school exercises throws a good deal of light on how Morton’s educational approach may have not only trained Defoe as a disciplined writer of muscular and direct English prose but helped to prepare him for his life of writing in many voices and multiple personae.

Sometimes they were Ministers of State, Secretaries and Commissioners at home, and wrote orders and instruccions to the ministers abroad, as by order of the King in Council and the like. Thus he taught his pupils to write a masculine and manly stile, to write the most polite English, and at the same time to kno’ how to suit their manner as well to the subject they were to write upon as to the persons or degrees of persons they were to write to; and all equally free of jingling bombast in stile, or dull meanness of expression below the dignity of the subject or the character of the writer. In a word, his pupils came out of his hands finish’d orators, fitted to speak in the highest presence, to the greatest assemblies, and even in Parliament, Courts of Justice, or any where; and severall of them come afterward to speak in all those places and capacities with great applause.¹⁶

The dissenting academies were mainly training schools for clergymen, and Defoe was clearly meant by his family to follow that calling. But as he remarked years later in the *Review* for October 22, 1709, “It was my Disaster first to be set a-part for, and then to be set a-part from the Honour of that Sacred Employ.” We can’t be sure just how true this claim is (the comment is a throwaway line in an issue of the *Review* and hardly a full autobiographical statement) nor in

this case why he turned away from this calling to enter the secular world of commerce, although his comments years later in a tract called *The Present State of the Parties in Great Britain: Particularly An Enquiry into the State of the Dissenters in England and the Presbyterians in Scotland* (1712) about the state of the dissenting clergy may be his retrospective rationalization of his youthful decision.¹⁷ Oddly enough in the light of his later idealized evocation in *The Compleat English Gentleman* of Morton's school, Defoe here has little good to say of the dissenting academies in general and even less that is positive of their students, although he specifically if disingenuously (listing Daniel Defoe among its distinguished alumni) exempts his own alma mater from blame. Otherwise, Defoe describes the dissenting academies as a poor alternative to the established universities, noting that they are "without publick libraries, without polite conversation, without suited authority, without classes to check and examin one another, and above all, without time to finish the youth in the studies they apply to."¹⁸ He also paints a dismal picture of the sort of second-rate young men who are generally sent to these academies, often those whose fathers have died or who have no family resources to depend upon and take to the calling as a last economic resort. Finally, he ridicules the training most receive at the academies, a weak parody of classical education whereby some students "have all their readings in Latin or in Greek, that, at the end of the severest term of study, nay, were to perform a quarantine of years in the schools, they come out unacquainted with English, tho' that is the tongue in which all their gifts are to shine."¹⁹

Some biographers have speculated that Defoe suffered a crisis of faith as a young man after three years or so at Morton's and so gave up his clerical vocation. Maximillian Novak suggests that Defoe must have felt isolated at school in Newington Green, cut off from the exciting events unfolding in London such as the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis of 1680 and 1681, when Charles II dissolved parliament as it sought to exclude his brother James from the succession to the throne. Novak goes so far as to say that Defoe witnessed events connected with these crises while on vacation in London from Morton's Academy and his blood was fired, so that the "chances are that he may found his fascination with the political events of the time had diminished his zeal for becoming a clergyman."²⁰ Whatever his reasons for choosing a secular career, Defoe's youthful piety is probably not in question, especially since there exists a manuscript in his hand dating from 1681 of verse religious meditations. These *Meditations*, not published until 1946, are conventional enough but strongly expressive of genuine devotion. They include, as in this representative example, moments of personal doubt as well as affirmation and acceptance of God's preeminence:

How is it Then That I
So Much Aversion To My Duty Find

That Tho' I Own it Due
And in A Sort performe it To
Yet Lord! How Little does my Act Explain My Mind
How Freely I Obey
Lusts That No Title To my Service Kno'
And Such as I my Self can hardly Sho'
Why I Should Serve or These should Sway
Ah My Degenerate Heart
How Freely can it With its Freedom Part
And Hug the Tyrants yt Destroy
Her Truer Interest and Ecclypse her joy²¹

We shall never know for sure just what prompted his decision to forsake a clerical vocation, and it may be that Defoe's progressively modern education at Morton's, reading Locke and studying Newton, had as much to do with his turning away from a religious calling as the lure of action in the political world. There is in Defoe's writing from his earliest productions an intellectual confidence, a self-satisfaction bordering on arrogance, that would have made the dependence of a dissenting minister upon the good will of his congregation intolerable. Such interesting but quite unverifiable conjecture is the pattern of Defoe's life as we know it, where there is usually on view for the aspiring biographer a teasing mixture of intellectual and political circumstances with half-glimpsed personal motives and self-dramatizations. For the rest of Defoe's life, his work expresses a consistent mixture of secular modernity, with all that implies about human agency and autonomy, and an apparently sincere religious conviction (and scriptural frame of reference) that humbly submits to providential arrangements and accepts supernatural mysteries. It may be that this early decision to forsake what he perhaps saw as the second-rate prospects of the dissenting pulpit for the worldly ambitions of the mercantile exchange is the beginning of this key tension in Defoe's life and mind between an early form of secular modernity and quite strongly held orthodox Christian beliefs.

His early days as a merchant are not clearly visible in the historical record but have been reconstructed in large part from anecdotes and remarks in his later writings. We know that he quickly became a wholesale dealer in hosiery and an importer of wine, tobacco, and other goods. He entered into a partnership with two brothers, James and Samuel Stancliffe, who dealt in haberdashery, although as Sutherland observes he always strenuously denied in the face of contemptuous references to him as a hosier that he kept a retail shop and served behind a counter.²² As Novak remarks, "so little is known of Defoe's business ventures" and so much about his writing and political life that "it is easy enough to ignore this part of his life entirely."²³ What can't be ignored is the importance of these early commercial experiences in which Defoe learned first hand the cut and

thrust of commercial wheeling and dealing, the risks and potentially great rewards of speculative ventures, of adventure capitalism. Those early years of his commercial career took place in what historians have called the “financial revolution” of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century in which modern financial practices began to emerge and when Great Britain began to take shape as an essentially commercial rather than an agricultural nation. Trade and commerce were to be among Defoe’s favorite topics as a writer, and his education in these topics began in practical experience in these years. He thought of the merchant as the new hero of the new age and its commercial ethos, and he frequently grew eloquent on the subject. Here is one famous celebratory passage from the *Review*:

A True-Bred Merchant . . . Understands Languages without Books, Geography without Maps, his Journals and Trading-Voyages delineate the World; his Foreign Exchanges, Protests and Procurations, speak all Tongues; he sits in his Counting-House, and Converses with all Nations, and keeps the most exquisite and extensive part of human Society in a Universal Correspondence. (January 3, 1706)

He may also in the 1680s have traveled to France, Holland, Italy, and Spain on business, or so it would appear from fairly detailed comments he makes about particular places in those countries later in his life. We know from his familiarity with much of Britain displayed in his *A Tour thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–6) that starting from his young manhood he traveled extensively in his own country.

On 1 January, 1684, Defoe married Mary Tuffley, the nineteen-year old daughter of Joan and John Tuffley, a rich wine cooper, and with his bride he received an enormous dowry of £3,700 (about £400,000 or nearly \$800,000 in current purchasing power), which helped set up the young Defoe in the wholesale trade. Four years later, in 1688, he was admitted to his father’s livery company, the Butchers, and by then he was apparently a thriving young professional merchant, with houses in town and in the country. Almost nothing is known of Mary, except that she bore seven or perhaps eight children, of whom six lived to adulthood. For biographers, this is a particularly frustrating aspect of Defoe’s private life, since we know that over the next forty years or so Defoe was away from home much of the time, possibly traveling in Europe on business, certainly riding around a good deal of Britain on political as well as commercial business. In the years from 1704 leading up to the Union of England and Scotland (1707), he was on the road and in Scotland itself (in 1706) just about all the time as a secret agent for the government. Sutherland’s comment that “there is some reason for supposing that his marriage was not one of the more romantic unions of the seventeenth century” is as plausible as it is amusing, especially given Defoe’s harshly practical views on sex and marriage to be found in his later

writings.²⁴ More sentimentally inclined biographers have found more affection in Defoe's marriage by reading the commonplace book, his personal collection of quotations and historical narratives called *Historical Collections*, that he presented to his future wife, complete with a flowery preface to *Clarinda* from *Bellmour*.

Another biographical mystery from these years is Defoe's part in Monmouth's rebellion. In June of 1685, the popular Duke of Monmouth, an illegitimate son of Charles II, landed on the south western coast of England at Lyme Regis to lead an abortive revolt against his uncle, the new and in some quarters unpopular Catholic King of England, James II. In his *Appeal to Honour and Justice* (1715), Defoe claimed that he "had been in arms under the Duke of Monmouth," and that is borne out by his appearance in 1687 on a list of thirty-three people pardoned for their part in the late rebellion.²⁵ Monmouth's forces were cut to pieces in a disastrous encounter at Sedgemoor, near Bristol, on 6 July, 1685, and Monmouth himself was executed a few weeks later. Three of Defoe's classmates from Morton's school were among those captured after the battle and executed, so it is likely that Defoe was among the dispersed remnants of the defeated army. Somehow and against all odds, he evaded the pursuing victors and the brutal proscription of rebels in the western provinces that followed the defeat of the revolt, administered by the infamous Chief Justice, Judge Jeffreys, who presided over the "Bloody Assizes" in which hundreds were hanged (some of their corpses hung along the roadsides) or transported to the colonies as slaves.²⁶ As Backscheider notes, very few of the rebel soldiers were from the City of London, so Defoe's ardor for the Protestant cause was genuine as well as courageous.²⁷ At the same time, his decision to risk the fatal consequences of rebellion is striking and may predict his future rashness in the commercial world. These events lend credence to Novak's analysis of the instability of his youthful personality: "The youthful Defoe, who abandoned his business interests and his young wife to fight for the Duke of Monmouth, was hardly the steady, dependable tradesman Defoe sometimes idealized."²⁸ Many years later, in his *The Complete English Tradesman* (1727), Defoe depicted very vividly the psychological strains of the commercial life, and the irascible Defoe his enemies would evoke during his career seems always to have been an aspect of his personality.

Defoe may have sought refuge in Holland for a while after this disaster, along with other Englishmen implicated in the rebellion. Bastian says that it seems likely that he spent part of his exile in Rotterdam, where he speculates he may have been in contact with the established Scottish community there.²⁹ What we know for certain is that he was back in London before too long after the defeat of Monmouth's army, actively pursuing his commercial career during the late 1680s and 1690s. Once again, our knowledge of his business dealings is tantalizingly sketchy, although certain facts are clear along with some spectacular

failures and, eventually, two bankruptcies. He had an interest in a passenger ship that sailed to America, the *Batchelor*, and in a cargo ship, the *Desire*. Mainly, he was an importer/exporter of whatever might turn a profit, and he seems to have played for high stakes, perhaps recklessly but certainly in the end unluckily. If we consider some cautionary passages from *The Complete English Tradesman* (1727) that seem to derive from his own chastening experiences as a young man of business, we can construct a plausible profile of Defoe as not only a reckless speculator in trade but also as a merchant distracted from his proper business by his intellectual and political interests as well as his literary aspirations.

One of those distractions, and not just for Defoe, came with the crisis that began in 1685 with the accession of Charles II's Catholic brother, James II, to the throne and peaked in 1688 when James was forced to flee to France, where under Louis XIV's protection and active support he and his family continued for many years to claim the throne now occupied by James's son-in-law, the Dutch Prince William of Orange, and his daughter, Mary, and then in 1702 by James's other Protestant daughter, Queen Anne. This rival claim to the English throne from the Stuart dynasty was for the next 60 years or so a genuine and constant threat, and there were several nearly-successful attempts by the Stuarts and their French protectors to seize power. It's worth remembering that the English monarchical succession was in these years extremely precarious. The situation in 1688 was extremely unstable: a widely-distrusted Catholic monarch was replaced by a widely-distrusted Protestant king related by marriage and blood to the ruling Stuart family (Kings Charles and James were his uncles). As far as Defoe was concerned, this dynastic shift was the most important political moment in his life, and we will see in all of his writing his sustaining enthusiasm for the Protestant cause, already evident in his reckless support of the Duke of Monmouth's rebellion, and his eloquent articulations in the years to come of the ideology of property, parliamentary privilege, and modified kingly prerogative that supported this bourgeois Revolution, with its refusal of the absolute monarchy James seemed bent on establishing.

The contemporary historian, John Oldmixon, provides a vivid description of the young Defoe (as well as a partisan attack on him and his political masters) as part of the ceremonies in the City of London that welcomed the new king on October 29, 1689 on Lord Mayor's Day: "a royal regiment of volunteer horse, made up of the chief citizens, who being gallantly mounted and richly accoutred, were led by the Earl of Monmouth, now Earl of Peterborough, and attended their majesties from Whitehall. Among these troopers, was Daniel Foe, at that time a hosier in Freeman's Yard, Cornhill; the same who afterwards was pillory'd for writing an ironical invective against the Church, and after that list in the

service of Mr. Robert Harley, and those brethren of his, who past the Schism and Occasional bills, broke the Confederacy, and made a shameful and ruinous peace with France.”³⁰

Early Writing and Political Polemics

*The wonder which remains is at our pride,
To value that which all wise men deride.
For Englishmen to boast of generation,
Cancels their knowledge, and lampoons the nation.
A True-Born Englishman's a contradiction,
In speech an irony, in fact a fiction.
A banter made to be a test of fools,
Which those that use it justly ridicules.*

Daniel Defoe, *The True-Born Englishman*

Defoe did much more than ride in parades to honor William. Novak calls Defoe the “enthusiastic propagandist, political theorist, and economic prophet” of the new order.³¹ He also became especially in his own eyes the champion of William III, whose memory he continued to revere all his life in his writing and in whose defense he wrote his most famous or at least until *Robinson Crusoe* his most popular work, the January 1701 poem “The True-Born Englishman,” designed to counter what Defoe saw as the pernicious slanders and xenophobic attack on William and his Dutch advisors in the Whig journalist John Tutchin’s poem, “The Foreigners.” Tutchin’s poem was only one of many assaults on William’s personality and his policies. Unlike many in his adopted country, William was concerned with the balance of power in Europe and struggled in those years to convince the political nation that Britain needed a large army to counter the expansionist ambitions of Louis XIV of France. In addition, many Englishmen resented the influence and power of William’s Dutch advisors, and it was even whispered that he had homosexual relationships with two of them, his close confidants, Hans Willem Bentinck (the Earl of Portland) and Arnout Joust van Keppel (the Earl of Albemarle). In *An Appeal to Honour and Justice* (1715) Defoe looked back to his rage at the “vile abhor’d pamphlet, in very ill verse” in which the author “fell personally upon the King himself, and then upon the Dutch nation; and after having reproach’d His Majesty with crimes that his worst enemy could not think of without horror, he sums up all in the odious name of FOREIGNER.” And he follows by describing with customary false modesty the intimacy with the King that came as a result of the effectiveness of his poem:

How this poem was the occasion of my being known to his majesty; how I was afterwards receiv'd by him; he employ'd; and how, above my capacity of deserving, rewarded, is no part of the present case, and is only mention'd here as I take all occasions to do for the expressing the honour I ever preserv'd for the immortal and glorious memory of that greatest and best of princes, and who it was my honour and advantage to call master as well as sovereign, whose goodness to me I never forget; and whose memory I never patiently heard abused, nor ever can do so; and who had he liv'd, would never have suffered me to be treated as I have been in the world.³²

Although he was in the poems and pamphlets he wrote during William's reign an eloquent supporter of the king's policies and was probably rewarded for his efforts, whether Defoe was actually an intimate counselor of William's is like so much else in his life uncertain. We have only his word for it. In 1704 as he entered Robert Harley's service, he sounds pretty convincing (and characteristically shrewd) when he recalls some advice he offered to William: "I Remember Sir when having had the honour to Serve the *Late King William* in a kind like this, and which his Majtie had the Goodness to Accept, and Over Vallue by Far, Expressing some Concern at the Clamour and Power of The Party, at his Express Command I had the heart or Face or what Elce you will Please to Call it, to give my Opinion in Terms like These: 'Your Majtie Must Face About, Oblige your Friends to be Content to be Laid by, and Put In your Enemyes, Put them into Those Posts in which They may Seem to be Employ'd, and Thereby Take off the Edge and Divide The Party.'³³ "The True-Born Englishman" provided for years a heroic nom de plume for Defoe, and his debut as an author rather than the producer of occasional or fugitive pieces is marked by the publication of his poems and pamphlets in the volume he entitled *A True Collection of the Writings of the Author of the True-Born Englishman* (2 vols, 1703–5).

The European political scene in those years was hugely troubled by the question of the Spanish Succession: the vast Holy Roman Empire presided over by Charles V (1500–58) had after his death been divided into Spanish and Austrian branches, and the last of his successors, Carlos II (1661–1700) of Spain, at the degenerated end of the Habsburg line, physically feeble and mentally retarded, was childless. Louis XIV of France had married Maria Theresa, elder daughter of Philip IV (1605–65), Carlos's father. Louis claimed in the last years of the seventeenth century that his eldest son, the Dauphin, was the legitimate successor to the Spanish throne and its empire. But there were rival claims from two others: the electoral prince of Bavaria, Joseph Ferdinand, a great grandson of Philip IV, and the Holy Roman Emperor, Leopold I, who had married a younger daughter of Philip and claimed the right of succession to the Spanish throne for his son, the Archduke Charles, later Emperor Charles VI. Britain and Holland

were alarmed by Louis's claim, since if successful it would add the vast Spanish dominions in America and in Italy and Sicily to the French empire and make France the most powerful country in Europe; but they were united with Louis in opposing the Emperor's claim, since that would have restored the unified power of the old Habsburg Holy Roman Empire. These dynastic rivalries led to the War of the Grand Alliance (1688–97) in which Louis XIV invaded the German Palatinate (western Germany), defeated the Dutch in various battles in the Low Countries, and marched into Catalonia but was himself defeated at sea at La Hogue by the British.

In the end, with the participants exhausted and a stalemate in place, the war concluded in the Peace of Ryswick, signed in 1697, between the French and Britain and her allies, notably of course the States General (the Netherlands). Louis recognized William as the king of Great Britain, but he continued to harbor James II and his family and to support their claim to the throne through the early years of the eighteenth century when a French-supported invasion of Britain was a constant and real threat. The Peace was followed by the First Partition Treaty (1698), which divided the Spanish empire between Louis's son and the electoral prince of Bavaria, the six-year-old Joseph Ferdinand, with the Archduke Charles receiving only Milan. Carlos II of Spain then declared that his entire empire should go to the electoral prince, but that prince died late in 1699. So in March 1700 a Second Partition Treaty was signed, with the French Dauphin to receive Spain's Italian possessions and the Archduke Charles to rule Spain, the Low Countries, and the Spanish American empire.³⁴ Finally, on 1 November, 1700, Carlos II of Spain died, and his will surprised everyone and terrified William and his allies by leaving his empire to the Duke of Anjou, Louis's grandson. Very quickly, Louis put aside the second Partition Treaty and accepted the will. That acceptance of Carlos's will and the enormous growth in French power that it signified precipitated the War of the Spanish Succession, which began in 1701 with Britain, Holland, and the Emperor ranged against the French. This war would last until 1714 and would provide the occasion for a good deal of Defoe's most impassioned journalism during those years when the fate of Europe and the destiny of Britain hung in the balance, as he tried to explain to his readers in the *Review*, who were he clearly felt badly informed about foreign affairs.

Meanwhile, in Britain, where conservative and isolationist opinion tended to look inward and to be wary of European power struggles, William found it difficult to muster sufficient support for his efforts to contain Louis. The parliaments of 1698 and 1701 were dominated by those who called themselves Tories, and they were extremely reluctant to provide money for the large army required for William's challenge to the expanding power of Louis. Whether Great Britain should have a large "standing army" with a professional officer corps, or whether

as Tory opinion favored the country should depend on the militia and the leadership of amateur officers recruited from the gentry was to remain a controversial issue for many years. In March of 1701, the House of Commons condemned the Second Partition Treaty, and a month later impeached Portland, Somers, Orford, and Halifax, the Whig lords who had helped to negotiate it. Public opinion, to some extent, came to William's rescue when the freeholders of Kent met at Maidstone and presented in May of that year a petition to the Commons to supply the king with what was needed to assist his allies in Europe. In part, it read:

We most humbly implore this Honourable House to have regard to the voice of the people! that our religion and safety may be effectually provided for, that your loyal addresses may be turned into bills of supply, and that His most sacred Majesty (whose propitious and unblemished reign over us we pray God may long continue!) may be enabled powerfully to assist his allies, before it is too late.³⁵

The five gentlemen who presented this Kentish Petition were immediately imprisoned by the Tory-controlled House of Commons.³⁶ Defoe responded to these events boldly by drawing up what he entitled "Legion's Memorial" (1701), which he presented in person to Robert Harley, the Speaker of the House; if we believe the pamphlet Defoe wrote shortly after, "The History of the Kentish Petition" (1701), this is what happened: "'twas delivered by the very Person who wrote it, guarded with about Sixteen Gentlemen of Quality, who if any notice had been taken of him, were ready to have carried him off by Force."³⁷ "Legion's Memorial" is a stirring piece of classic Whig rhetoric, sounding political themes that Defoe will rehearse many times in his career. Its title and its menacing last line come from the gospels, echoing the answer the man possessed by an "unclean spirit" gives to Jesus: "My name is Legion: for we are many" (Mark 5:9). In language that in 1701 with the events of the last century still fresh in everyone's mind would have resonated with rebellion, Defoe proclaims that "*Englishmen* are no more to be Slaves to Parliaments, than to a King."³⁸ Next to the mild and submissive language of the Kentish petitioners, the pamphlet is consistently threatening, even revolutionary in addressing the House of Commons: "You are not above the Peoples Resentments, they that made you Members may reduce you to the same rank from whence they chose you; and may give you a taste of their abused kindness, in Terms you may not be pleas'd with."³⁹ As Sutherland remarked of "Legion's Memorial," it is "a document that must still evoke a gasp of astonishment from any one who has the least historical imagination."⁴⁰

Defoe is speaking for the Kentish petitioners here, but even in "The History of the Kentish Petition" he displays that fractiousness that was to become his

signature as a polemicist (in an exceedingly fractious and combative age): “The Author of the following Sheets is not afraid to let the World know, that he is so sure every thing related in this Account is Literally and Positively true, that he challenges all the Wit and Malice the world abounds with, to confute the most trifling Circumstance.”⁴¹ Outraged by the insults to the petitioning freeholders of Kent, Defoe displays at the end of the pamphlet the freewheeling wit that would very soon get him in the deepest of trouble and change his life: the right to petition is so fundamental, he argues, that no tribunal or legislature he can think of denies it, even the most tyrannical: “nay, the *Inquisition of Spain* does not forbid it, the *Divan of the Turks* allows it, and I believe if *Sathan* himself kept his Court in publick, he would not prohibit it.”⁴²

Such dangerously outspoken political journalism was still in 1701 an avocation for Defoe the harried merchant, although it is astonishing just how much writing he managed in those years. In the early 1690s Defoe’s business career had plunged him into bankruptcy and the threat of debtors’ prison. That disaster was preceded, apparently, by a number of lawsuits against him; some eight have been documented between 1688 and 1694. As Sutherland recounts a few of these, they involved disagreements and charges of sharp dealing from some of his business associates, complicated in some cases by the uncertainties of late seventeenth-century international and colonial trade such as French privateers capturing vessels during the War of the Grand Alliance, bad sailing weather, and other unprofitable accidents. A few years later in the Preface to *An Essay upon Projects*, he remarks on “the losses and casualties which attend all Trading Nations in the World, when involved in so Cruel a War as this” and adds that he has suffered great losses.⁴³ He seems to have lost large sums of money insuring ships and cargoes that were captured by French privateers during the war. Defoe clearly played for high stakes and lost, but he also seems to have dealt at times from the bottom of the deck. In other more serious cases, Defoe was accused of fraud, and in the most grimly amusing of his financial entanglements he was involved in a botched project to farm civet cats in Stoke Newington for their secretions, used in making perfume. Sued by the person from whom he had borrowed the money to buy the cats, he sold them to his widowed mother-in-law, Mary Tuffley, who in turn sued him when it turned out that Defoe did not really have title to the cats, having used the money he had borrowed initially to pay a creditor.⁴⁴ As Paula Backscheider, not always a judgmental biographer, remarks in her account of Defoe’s shady deals in these years, he cheated his friends and relatives and “his conduct was reprehensible.”⁴⁵ At last, in 1692 Defoe was forced to declare bankruptcy to the tune of £17,000 (a staggering sum, almost two million pounds or about three and three quarter million dollars in current purchasing power). He lost his country house and had to give up that special sign of wealth and status, his coach and horses. The rest of his assets were forfeited to help pay his creditors.

But by coming to rapid terms with his creditors, Defoe spent only a few days in the Fleet Prison and in the King's Bench Prison for his debts, and his heroic efforts in the years that followed to pay off his huge debt are remarkable. By 1705 he had reduced his debt down to £5000, even though he was not after bankruptcy legally bound to pay back the sums.⁴⁶ In 1703 Defoe was not above claiming moral superiority out of his principled efforts to pay his creditors in full. In "A Dialogue between a Dissenter and the Observer," he has his rival journalist, John Tutchin, report that he has heard from one of those creditors: "I compounded with him, and discharg'd him fully; and several years afterward he sent for me, and tho' he was clearly discharg'd, he paid me all the Remainder of his Debt voluntarily, and of his own accord."⁴⁷ Bankruptcy and the unjust and illogical laws governing its punishment were to become almost obsessive topics of Defoe's journalism. Only more financial disaster provoked by other trials that year prevented him from repaying all of his past obligations. In the intervening years, he struggled with some success to make money again and to re-establish himself as a merchant. In part, this rehabilitation was a matter of exploiting his connections. Through the influence of one of William's courtiers, Charles Montagu (now Earl of Halifax and Chancellor of the Exchequer), he was appointed the accountant to Dalby Thomas, one of Defoe's patrons, a prominent financier who was one of the commissioners for the new duty on glass; and this post brought in a steady and reliable hundred pounds a year until 1699, when the duty was cancelled.⁴⁸ Defoe himself in his 1715 apologia pro vita sua, *An Appeal to Honour and Justice*, describes some "misfortunes in business" that "unhing'd me from matters of trade," and notes that he was "without the least application of mine . . . sent for to be accomptant to the commissioner of the glass duty."⁴⁹ We can be pretty sure that Defoe's claim that such an office was unsolicited is disingenuous and that this welcome appointment did not come out of the blue. This moment is suggestive of two complementary forces in Defoe's life that we will see articulated again at key moments: patronage and dependence on the powerful along with independent and aggressive entrepreneurial action. Like the characters in the fictions he would write many years later, Defoe was clearly a strong individual, but he needed to operate within the prevailing system of power and patronage. The result is often a curious combination of assertive independence and self-abasing servitude (presumably a matter of customary courtesy) to the powerful politicians who controlled his destiny.

Defoe's most serious and for a time successful project to regain prosperity came when on some marshland that he owned near Tilbury in Essex he established with money that he had received for his services to King William a factory for the manufacturing of bricks and Dutch style curved roof tiles (called pantiles), both materials much in demand in those years as London rebuilt after the devastation of the Great Fire and expanded rapidly during the late

seventeenth century. The factory seems to have provided some of the tiles used in the construction of Greenwich Hospital, one of Christopher Wren's masterpieces. This venture clearly prospered, with Defoe in later years boasting that he employed some hundred poor families and made a substantial profit of £600 a year. As he later told Harley in 1704, "I began to live, Took a Good House, bought me Coach and horses a Second Time. I paid Large Debts Gradually, small Ones wholly, and Many a Creditor after composition whom I found poor and Decay'd I Sent for and Paid the Remaindr to tho' Actually Discharged" (*Letters*, p. 17). He himself in these years had a large and steadily growing family. Between 1688 and 1701, his wife, Mary, gave birth to at least seven children, five girls (the first of whom died shortly after her birth) and two boys.

During these post-bankruptcy years, Daniel Foe first appears in documents as "Defoe"; he seems to have added this Frenchified aristocratic prefix to his family's name in 1695, a huge inconsistency with his assertively plain middle-class manner, and another aspect of his complex personality.⁵⁰ Financial help came again from Dalby Thomas, who controlled the African slave trade monopoly, and as Michael Seidel puts it, gave Defoe in these years an £800 "piece of the action."⁵¹ During those years, even as he struggles to pay his debts and to re-establish himself financially, Defoe begins to emerge as a prolific writer on political and moral subjects. His first substantial publication came in January 1697, *An Essay upon Projects*, a remarkable set of proposals ("projects") for improvements in English life and society based on his own experiences in the commercial world.⁵² Poems and political pamphlets, in a steadily increasing number, occupied Defoe in the years that followed, culminating in the grandiosely titled collected works of July 1703, *A True Collection of the Writings of the Author of the True-Born Englishman* (with a second volume in 1705), featuring as frontispiece an elaborate engraved portrait of the author, glaring defiantly at his readers in an elegant cravat, flowing gown, and a full-bottomed wig. The first volume of the collection was published, Defoe noted, to counter a pirated version of his writings published earlier that year. As these volumes make clear, Defoe's self-conscious construction of himself as an author is at the heart of his publishing history in the first tumultuous decade of the eighteenth century. One text leads to another, as it were, and Defoe in the self-advertising title of these collected volumes (an audaciously self-centered publishing project, by the way) claims identity as the author of a popular poem. His marketability lies precisely in that authorship, and his connection to that body of writing as he presents it is fragile, easily distorted not just by misunderstanding but by piracy and misattribution, as well of course by rival writers and polemical opponents. There is a narrative in Defoe's life that I've been tracing in this chapter, and it is mainly the story of his writing, of publication dates and collections like this, of self-presentation, of self-defense

and self-promotion. The *Review* is a week-by-week record of Defoe's thoughts about political, social, and moral issues of the day, and is in the end as much about him and his opinions, about what he has just or recently written as it is about the various controversies that are its ostensible subject matter. Defoe was throughout his writing life nothing if not fractious, combative to a fault, but he had his reasons. As Pat Rogers comments, Defoe is notable "for the quantity of hostile material directed against him in his lifetime . . . He was a popular target of newswriters and pamphleteers for thirty years." As he says early in *An Appeal to Honour and Justice*, he remained dignified and silent in a climate of clamorous self-justification (although in fact he gave as good as he got): "when other men, who, I think, have less to say in their own defence, are appealing to the publick, and struggling to defend themselves, I alone have been silent under the infinite clamours and reproaches, causeless curses, unusual threatnings, and the most unjust and injurious treatment in the world."⁵³ Rogers correctly calls this notoriety "one of the most potent factors affecting Defoe's development as a writer."⁵⁴

"The Shortest Way with the Dissenters" and After

*Let him whose fate it is to write for bread,
Keep this one maxim always in his head:
If in this age he would expect to please,
He must not cure, but nourish, their disease;
Dull moral things will never pass for wit;
Some years ago they might, but now's too late.
Vertue's the faint green-sickness of the times,
The luscious vice gives spirit to all our rhimes.
In vain the sober thing inspir'd with wit,
Writes hymns and histories from sacred writ;
But let him blasphemy and baudry write,
The pious and the modest both will buy't.
The blushing virgin's pleas'd, and loves to look,
And plants the poem next to her prayer-book.*

Defoe, "Reformation of Manners, A Satyr"

Like other men and women, Defoe had affections and passions, and much of what his many biographers present as his interior life obviously took place in something like the narrative they offer. But the story I want to tell in this book has a clear narrative line which is not half an invention nor a good guess but

follows rather the particular facts of his life as a writer and of course as a purveyor (and exploiter) of certain ideas in that writing. This book aspires to be a *critical* biography, and it therefore needs as I see it to resist the siren song of speculative biography or (excessively) imaginative life writing. We still read Defoe's work (or at least some of it) because he projects in it a spirit, energy, and intelligence that are personal and identifiable; his best work is as much about himself as it is about the various controversies he is treating. But we know that person mainly through the self-projection and even a sort of self-creation in the writing itself and not through external events in the very sketchy biographical record he left behind. So there is an interesting circularity in which the Defoe we know is the Defoe he gives us. Defoe himself may be said to license such an approach, since his life as we know it most certainly is precisely a series of publishing ventures and crises of one sort or another. In the preface to *A True Collection*, he claims that he has been forced to publish this collection to correct a pirated version of his works: "a certain Printer, who had forg'd a surreptitious [sic] Collection of several Tracts; in which he had the Face to put several Things which I had no Hand in, and vilely to dismember and mangle those I had."⁵⁵ The collection is also designed, Defoe adds, to correct misunderstandings about him and his work. I am not, he declares with transparent defensiveness, "an Incendiary." "Of all the Writers of this Age, I have, I am satisfied, the most Industrious avoided writing with want of temper, and I appeal to what is now Publish'd, whether there is not rather a Spirit of Healing than of Sedition runs through the whole Collection, one misunderstood Article excepted" (Sig A4v).

That misunderstood article is *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, the prime instance in Defoe's life of writing that highlights what a critical biography such as this must focus on. From the appearance of that pamphlet Defoe is in nearly constant dialogue with his enemies, and his work is a series of fierce polemics, ferocious attacks and counter attacks. Defoe is an author whose life was changed by one piece of writing. After the publication of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron said that he awoke to find himself famous; after *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* Defoe became a wanted man who was forced for the rest of his life to survive mainly as an embattled writer and political operative rather than a prosperous merchant and manufacturer who dabbled in writing. The transformative power of that moment is remarkable. It may be said to mark as well as any other incident in the publishing world in those years the new power of print and the literary marketplace, with Defoe as its exponent and victim. For nearly the rest of his life as an author, Defoe would return obsessively to the misunderstandings of his writing that landed him not once but twice in jail and once in the pillory, and his polemical journalism, notably the *Review*, would be to an important extent based on a continuing complaint, a life-long grievance, that he was misunderstood and misrepresented by both friends and enemies.

Contained in the first volume of his collected writings and in its title was the poem defending William from xenophobic attacks that made Defoe famous (and as he claimed made him the personal confidant of the King) but also *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, which first appeared in December 1702. As he was to explain many times in the months to come, Defoe intended this pamphlet as ironic mimicry of High Church polemics, a satiric exercise in which his rendition of the incendiary rhetoric of the conservative clerical antagonists of the dissenters such as the notorious Anglican firebrands, Dr. Henry Sacheverell and Charles Leslie, was meant to reveal its untenable extremism. The pamphlet urged measures such as forced mass emigration and the selective execution of religious dissenters, and certainly reads in its outrageousness like an obvious parody of extremism. The debate into which this pamphlet inserted itself was over the practice of what was called “occasional conformity,” whereby to qualify for public office dissenters attended Church of England services and even took the sacrament on occasion. In an earlier pamphlet, “An Enquiry into the Occasional Conformity of Dissenters, in Cases of Preferment” (1698), Defoe had criticized the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Humphrey Edwin, a dissenter who attended Anglican service in his official capacity at St. Paul’s Cathedral. Defoe felt strongly that occasional conformity was an abuse, but many of his co-religionists did not agree.

In any event, *The Shortest Way* was an unmitigated disaster for Defoe, a satirical hoax that misfired, that many of its original readers took as an actual, entirely serious proposal, and that the government, most troublesome of all, found deeply incendiary as well as seditious and ordered the arrest of its author. Novak argues that given his risky behavior as a businessman Defoe must have realized (“somewhere in the back of his mind”) the dangers in such ventriloquism, and he speculates that Defoe’s gambler’s instincts led him so that he “could not resist the perverse pleasure of approaching the edge of an abyss.”⁵⁶ He went into hiding to avoid arrest shortly after *The Shortest Way* appeared, going so far as to publish a self-exculpatory pamphlet, “A Brief Explanation of a Late Pamphlet, entituled *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*” (1703) in which he expressed amazement that anyone should have missed his ironies: “If any man take the pains seriously to reflect upon the Contents, the Nature of the thing and the Manner of the Stile, it seems Impossible to imagine it should pass for any thing but a Banter upon the High-flying Church-Men.”⁵⁷ But the apology got him nowhere. His printer was arrested, and a copy of *The Shortest Way* was ordered to be burnt by the “common hangman.” Advertisements were placed offering a £50 reward for information leading to Defoe’s arrest, and one issue of the *London Gazette* where this ad appeared contains a physical description of Defoe, then in his early forties and by all accounts no more than five feet, five inches tall. As one biographer puts it, “among pen-pictures of the great writers this is certainly one of the oddest. It reads like a criminal dossier, which is what it is.”⁵⁸

He is a middle Sized Spare Man about 40 years old, of a brown Complexion, and dark brown coloured Hair wears a Wig, a hooked Nose, a sharp Chin, grey Eyes, and a large Mould near his Mouth, was born in London, and for many years was a Hose Factor in Freeman's-yard in Corn hill, and now is Owner of the Brick and Pantile Works near Tilbury-Fort in Essex.⁵⁹

The government's enforcer in this case was Daniel Finch, Earl of Nottingham and Secretary of State for the southern region, a grimly reactionary High Tory whose nickname was "Dismal." Finch had no patience with Defoe's excuses, and when Defoe's wife pleaded for him Finch said "Let him surrender." In January 1702/3 Defoe wrote from hiding a contrite and abject letter to Finch evoking his fear of "your Lordships Resentments" as his reason for flight. Defoe threw himself at Finch's feet, crying for mercy: "My Lord a Body Unfitt to bear the hardships of a Prison, and a Mind Impatient of Confinement, have been the Onely Reasons of withdrawing My Self: And My Lord The Cries of a Numerous Ruin'd Family, The Prospect of a Long Banishment from my Native Country, and the hopes of her Majties Mercy, Moves me to Thro' my Self at her Majties Feet, and To Intreat your Lordship's Intercession." (*Letters*, pp. 1–2). But even as he groveled, Defoe also made a romantic gesture quite at variance with his desperate position as a wanted man and recovering bankrupt: he offers if he is pardoned to serve in the army "at my Own Charges," to raise a troop of horse for Queen Anne "and at the head of Them Ile Serve her as Long as I Live" (*Letters*, p. 3). One always wonders in reading Defoe whether one of his saving graces was this nearly delusional but unwavering sense of self-importance, here verging on the comically grandiose.

Brooding on his condition while in hiding from his pursuers, Defoe wrote in April of 1703 to his friend the important London merchant, William Paterson, that he felt betrayed by the very people he was trying to serve by his writing, and again his capacity for grandiose self-dramatization is quite remarkable. "Nay even the Dissenters Like Casha to Caesar Lift up the first Dagger at me: I Confess it makes me Reflect on the wholl body of the Dissenters with Something of Contempt More than Usual, and gives me the More Regrett That I Suffer for Such a People" (*Letters*, p. 4). Defoe is honest to his friend about his fear of prison, and says he prefers death in battle, if only the Queen would accept his offer to join the army. Years later when he wrote *The History and Reality of Apparitions* (1727), Defoe remembered with enduring bitterness his ordeal and describes his efforts to evade arrest. Writing in the third person about the event, he records that "he left his lodging where he had been hid for some time, and removed to Barnet on the edge of Hertfordshire; intending, as soon as he had settled some family affairs, to go away north into Scotland; but before he went away he was obliged to come once more to London." Walking back to London,

in spite of a dream the previous night that he will be taken if he returns, he goes by way of Hornsey and then Islington but in London is arrested “just in the very manner as he had been told in his dream.”⁶⁰ Turned in by an informer in May of 1703, Defoe was arrested at the house of a French weaver in Spitalfields where he was hiding. After harsh interrogation by Nottingham over several days, Defoe refused to betray his friends or to name accomplices, and he was sent to the pestilential Newgate Prison, a new low point in his chequered career. Defoe had enough money to secure relatively comfortable quarters in the old jail, but he spent the next month there, and one can only imagine his state of mind as he contemplated the government’s wrath. As he told Harley years later, he even burned some of his writings, including proposals about establishing an English colony in South America, so that the government could not seize them. Burning his writing must have been rather like cutting off his right arm, but “my Lord Nottinghams fury forced me to Burn Them with Other papers to keep Them Out of his hands” (*Letters*, p. 345, July 23, 1711). He was at length released on (extremely high, £1,500) bail on June 5 and stood trial a month later. Despite his defense in which he claimed that his intent was not seditious and that the pamphlet was ironical, he was convicted of seditious libel and sentenced with unusual severity to stand in the pillory three times, to pay a fine (£135), and to be incarcerated again in Newgate until he could “find good sureties to be of good behaviour for the space of seven years from thence next ensuing And that he do not depart from thence and . . . be of good behaviour with regard to our Lady the present Queen and her populace.” There is a letter extant that he wrote to the Quaker leader William Penn, who had some influence with the Queen. Defoe protested to Penn that he alone was responsible for the pamphlet, that he would not save his life “at the price of impeaching innocent men.” He swore to Penn that he had no accomplices, “No Sett of Men . . . with whom I used to Concert Matters, of this Nature” (*Letters*, p. 8). And yet, as George Harris Healey, the editor of Defoe’s letters points out, a few days later Penn was assuring the ministers that Defoe was ready to testify.⁶¹ Penn managed only to have the sentence delayed, and Defoe stood in the pillory on the last three days of that July 1703.

The pillory was a wooden framework erected on a post or pillar; it had two movable boards attached to it, hinged so that the head and arms of a person could be inserted and then locked in place. Such punishment was more than uncomfortable; persons placed in the pillory were often subject to ridicule, verbal abuse, and even physical punishment from unruly crowds who, in those days of rougher and looser public manners, gathered around and sometimes hurled dangerous projectiles such as rocks and rubbish at the hapless malefactor. As John Gay, in his mock-heroic poem, *Trivia; or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London*

(1716), describes it, the pillory's humiliation of offenders was a common urban spectacle:

Where elevated o'er the gaping Croud,
Clasp'd in the Board the perjur'd Head is bow'd,
Betimes retreat; here, thick as Hail-stones pour,
Turnips, and half-hatch'd Eggs, (a mingled Show'r)
Among the Rabble rain: Some random Throw
May with the trickling Yolk thy Cheek o'erflow. (Book II, lines 221–6)

Defoe was sentenced to stand in the pillory for an hour three times (on July 29, 30, and 31), the first day in Cornhill near the Royal Exchange and right next to Freeman's Yard, his old neighborhood as it happened, where he had set up as a merchant twenty years before. The next day he was to stand in Cheapside and the third day in Fleet Street by Temple Bar. The government resorted to this brutal punishment in the hope that he would reveal his accomplices but the strategy backfired in the end thanks to Defoe's ingenuity and irrepressible spirit. After his sentence was passed but before he was actually displayed in the pillory, Defoe managed to write a brilliant satirical poem, "A Hymn to the Pillory," which denounces with astonishing defiance all those who should be standing where he is:

. . . let all the statesmen stand;
Who guide us with unsteady hand:
Who armies, fleets, and men betray;
And ruin all *the shortest way*.
Let all those soldiers stand in sight,
Who're willing to be paid and not to fight.
Agents, and Colonels, who false musters bring,
To cheat their country first, and then their King.⁶²

According to tradition, the poem was hawked in the streets adjacent to the pillory and recited by ballad-singers to the crowds who gathered around and who, according to another less likely tradition, pelted him not with lethal or disgusting missiles such as rocks, rotten eggs and vegetables but with flowers. Tory pamphleteers claimed that the Whigs had hired a mob to protect Defoe, and that may have been the case. In "A Hymn to the Pillory," Defoe dramatized himself as a defiant martyr for conscience, rather different from the officially contrite petitioner on view in his letter to Nottingham. As he boasts at the end of the poem, he had certainly refused under strict questioning by Nottingham and others to reveal the names of his accomplices in producing the pamphlet.



Figure 2 Defoe in the Pillory, by Armytage. National Portrait Gallery

Thou bug-bear of the Law stand up and speak,
Thy long misconstru'd silence break,
Tell us who 'tis upon thy ridge stands there,
So full of fault, and yet so void of fear;
And from the paper in his hat,
Let all mankind be told for what:
Tell them it was because he was too bold,
And told those truths which should not ha' been told.
Extol the justice of the land,
Who punish what they will not understand.
Tell them he stands exalted there
For speaking what we would not hear;
And yet he might ha' been secure,
Had he said less, or would he ha' said more.
Tell them that this is his reward,
And worse is yet for him prepared,
Because his foolish virtue was so nice
As not to sell his friends according to his friends' advice;
And thus he's an example made,
To make men of their honesty afraid.⁶³

This is a remarkable story. As the Defoe scholar J.R. Moore observed, “no man in England but Defoe ever stood in the pillory and later rose to eminence among his fellow men.”⁶⁴ But despite this odd triumph, the whole episode would cost Defoe dearly and turn him decisively in the face of a desperate necessity

from merchant to a paid political writer and secret agent. During his long absence his brick and tile factory failed, and with his old creditors still clamoring for payment he was again a bankrupt, languishing in Newgate prison while his wife and children moved in again with his in-laws, the Tuffleys.⁶⁵ Defoe was after four months redeemed from Newgate by Robert Harley, the Speaker of the House of Commons, a man who will figure largely in a good part of the rest of his life as a writer. In a letter to William Paterson when his troubles began in April of that year, Defoe had asked his friend to mention his case to Harley, and “to convince him of my Sence of his Resentment, and My Earnest Desire to be set Right in his Thoughts” (*Letters*, p. 6). As he recounts matters in *An Appeal to Honour and Justice* in 1715, Harley had sent a messenger to him with the question, “Pray ask that gentleman, what I can do for him?” Defoe reports that he wrote to Harley and repeated the parable of the blind man in the Gospel (Mark 10:51–2) who said to Jesus, “Lord, that I may receive my sight.” Although four long months in Newgate went by, Defoe says that he learned afterwards “that this noble person made it his business to have my case represented to Her Majesty, and methods taken for my deliverance.”⁶⁶ As Backscheider remarks, this account of things is substantially true. Defoe was no ordinary prisoner, and his situation was clearly a matter of debate among various key ministers, including Sidney, first Earl of Godolphin, the Lord Treasurer, who responded to Harley’s suggestion that Defoe might be of use as a secret agent by agreeing that he might be just the man for their purposes.⁶⁷ The ministry in those years had a number of such agents whose assignments were essentially to gather intelligence from various constituencies, to vet opposition journalism, and to write pamphlets supporting government positions. Defoe, obviously, looked like a good prospect for such a job. Strings were eventually pulled by both of these ministers, and Defoe’s fine was paid by the government out of secret service funds, the word given to him as he was released in November 1703 that the Queen had decided to extend her mercy and bounty to him. Henceforth, Defoe would live almost entirely by his pen, in the new and expanding market for print of all kinds, although he would continue to dabble in trade in various commodities and commercial schemes.

From the end of 1703 until Harley’s fall from power in 1714, Defoe’s life was inextricably entwined with this cunning and ambitious politician, at first a Whig but then a moderate Tory who was Defoe’s age and had also come from Puritan stock, although he was now an Anglican. A bon vivant who liked good wine and collected books and manuscripts, Harley was a friend and patron of Swift and Pope and the other members of their circle. Like Defoe as Healey comments, Harley also “enjoyed secrecy and mystification.”⁶⁸ Most of Defoe’s surviving letters were written to him and deal with their secret relationship. That relationship began in gratitude of an obsequious and embarrassing sort, although

it was doubtless of the half ceremonial kind customary in client/patron relationships in those years. Defoe on November 9, 1703 wrote to Harley with his thanks and his offer to serve: "That I May have Some Opportunity Put into my hands by Providence to Make More Explicit Acknowledgements; And that as I have Recd Such an Obligation as few Ever Reciev'd, I Might be Able to Make Some Such Sort of Return as No Man Ever Made" (*Letters*, p. 11). All this bowing and scraping to Harley is probably conventional, formal politesse, but from the beginning of their correspondence Defoe is also daring in his ambitious advice and quietly boastful in his plans for an information and intelligence network for foreign and domestic affairs for Harley: "I shall Take time while I am abroad to Finish a Perfect scheme, and Such a One as I hope you will Approve . . . that if Possible the Affaires of all Europe may Lye Constantly before you in a True Light, and you may know what is a doeing all Over Europe, Even before *tis a doeing*, and In This weighty Perticular Go beyond all that Ever Were in That Place before you" (*Letters*, p. 20). In the years that follow, Defoe's letters to Harley are a fascinating record of his efforts as a secret agent and political journalist. And most interesting of all, as we shall see, is his reporting from Scotland in the year before the Act of Union (1707) when Defoe lived in Edinburgh and traveled around the country promoting the union of the two kingdoms then being negotiated. From the beginning of Queen Anne's reign, as the historian of English Toryism in those years, Keith Feiling, tells us, Harley had urged Godolphin to get "some discreet writer" to serve the government, and now in Defoe they had "secured perhaps the greatest, though hardly the most discreet, pamphleteer of the age."⁶⁹

In terms of pure political writing, however, Defoe had to be cautious in these years after his release from prison. Part of the terms by which he obtained his freedom was that he "keep the peace" for seven years, which meant that he could not take the chance of publishing pamphlets with a sharp political edge, although he certainly did write an enormous amount nonetheless. He continued in various publications right after his trial to sound a defiant note. For example, in a poem published in July 1704 entitled "An Elegy on the Author of the True-Born Englishman," he declared with characteristic bravado:

In vain they spend their Time and Breath
To make me starve, and die a Poet's Death:
In *Butler's Garret* I shall ne'er appear,
Neither his Merit nor his Fate I fear.
Heavens keep me but from Bullet, Sword and Gun,
I'm not afraid of being undone;
I'm satisfy'd it never shall be said,
*But he that gave me Brains will give me Bread.*⁷⁰

But instead of God it was Robert Harley who maintained Defoe. For the next eleven years or so, if we judge by Defoe's letters to him, Harley seems to have manipulated and exploited Defoe, never giving him the permanent position he wanted and paying him irregularly. Still, with his payments from the Secret Service fund (an average of about £200 to £300 a year) and his other income from his writing (and his dabbling in merchandise), he managed to earn in these years that he served Harley a substantial income, which as Novak reminds us would have been the envy of most writers at the time.⁷¹

From 1704 onwards, Defoe's literary production is by any standard absolutely staggering and unprecedented, astonishing in its range and extent, its unflagging fullness. The energy and fluency of his writing for the rest of his life have no equal in English literature, and the greatest instance of those qualities began on February 19, 1704 when the first number of the *Review* appeared, entitled *A Weekly Review of the Affairs of France* (when Defoe declared that his intent was to awaken the nation to the threat posed by Louis XIV's France, the most powerful force in eighteenth-century Europe), and then changed to *A Review of the State of the British Nation* (when Defoe turned more often to domestic controversies). The paper began as an eight-page weekly, published on Saturdays, but beginning with number five Defoe used smaller type and reduced the number of pages to four. Number seven introduced an issue on Tuesdays, and with volume II, number seven, Defoe added an issue on Thursday. The *Review* for most of the rest of its existence (the last issue was on June 11, 1713) appeared tri-weekly, and as Arthur Wellesley Secord observes the journal spanned nearly all of Queen Anne's reign. Secord is exactly right when he says that "in magnitude and variety of matter it is Defoe's greatest single achievement."⁷² Among its many other purposes, the *Review* continued Defoe's life long project of self-justification in the face of what he saw as ferocious opposition from a host of enemies. In the preface to the reprint of the first volume, he declares that the work "had its Birth in Tenebris," which may mean that the idea for it came to him in the dark and dangerous bowels of Newgate prison, or at least as he faced a bleak future after his release. The preface begins with Defoe at his most eloquently defensive and disingenuously self-serving: "I have pass'd through Clouds of Clamour, Cavil, Raillery and Objection, and have this Satisfaction, that Truth being the Design; Finis Coronat: I am never forward to value my own Performances, Let another Man's Mouth praise thee, said the Wise Man; but I cannot but own my self infinitely pleas'd, and more than satisfied; that Wise Men read this Paper with Pleasure, own the just Observations in it, and have voted it useful."⁷³ In the *Review* proper, in the first number published on February 19, 1704, he describes his efforts as an antidote to the prevailing bad journalism.

The persona Defoe adopts for this purpose in this very first number of the *Review* is rather like that of the stately *New York Times* in the face of tabloid scurrility: "a diligent Enquiry after Truth, and laying before the World the Naked

Prospect of Fact, as it really is; For this Paper is not design'd for so Trivial an occasion, as only Bantering the Nonsense of a few News-Writers, tho' that may come in often enough by the way: But the matter of our account will be Real History, and just Observation." In the preface to the reprinting of the eighth and last volume of the *Review* in 1712 Defoe is still at this work of vivid self-dramatization and defense: "I am now hunted with a full cry, *Acteon like*, by my own Friends, I won't call them Hounds, in spite of protested Innocence; in spite of want of Evidence; against all the genuine Sense of what I write; against fair Arguing; against all Modesty and Sense; Condemn'd by common Clamour, as Writing for Money, Writing for particular Persons, Writing by great Men's direction, being Dictated to, and the like; every title of which, I have the Testimony of my own Conscience, is abominably false, and the accusers must have the Accusation of their own Consciences, that they do not know it to be true."⁷⁴ Anticipating language he would use about his hero, Robinson Crusoe, some years later, Defoe evokes his life as a solitary struggle but also ambiguously as a self-sustaining effort aided by Providence: "I know too much of the World to expect good in it; and I have learnt to value it too little, to be Concern'd at the Evil; I have gone through a Life of Wonders, and am the Subject of a vast Variety of Providences; I have been fed more by Miracle than Elija, when the Ravens were his Purveyors." Over the years that the *Review* appears, Defoe is honest enough (or fractious and combative enough) to record a constant struggle with uncomprehending enemies and nonsensical, contemptible "News-Writers"; he dramatizes himself with unflagging energy over a very long haul as a lonely voice of accuracy, reason, and moderation (in about as immoderate a manner as you can imagine). "The life of a wit," as his younger contemporary Alexander Pope observed, "is a warfare upon earth," and Defoe's writing life was one of constant struggle with opponents in the political and journalistic arena. The sustained ferocity of Defoe's attacks and counter-attacks creates and sustains a polemical persona, Mr. Review, that we can say is the rhetorical embodiment of Daniel Defoe.

In many other works that accompany and follow that periodical Defoe projects distinct personae and in the book-length narratives of his later years fully-realized characters who define themselves rhetorically in similar fashion, by marking themselves as authors, by separating themselves specifically from the inferior competition by honesty and integrity, by an original kind of accuracy in their texts, by a self-proclaimed fullness of being and singularity in their articulations. We can think of that, especially in the fiction, as a thematic achievement, the imagining of particular and distinct individuals or subjects who are related inevitably to the biographical subject we call Daniel Defoe. We can also think of that process as Defoe's essentially rhetorical strategy whereby writing strictly speaking evokes a subject bound up with the demands of the printed page, where the insistence on virtuous singularity is a means of self-authorization for Defoe

in a proliferating publishing and printing scene where rival voices and opinions clamor for attention. In biographical terms, Defoe can be said to write his own life in his journalism. The entity we call Daniel Defoe is largely, in effect, what he expressed or performed in his writing, which has an inherent instability and fragility that is propped up precariously by Defoe's energy and rhetorical insistence. We know "Defoe" through his writing, through his unceasing and nearly lifelong articulation of words upon words.