

The Institution of the English Novel: Defoe's Contribution¹

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Astute and careful readers, even when acknowledging that what we now call the novel did not then exist, proceed as if Daniel Defoe were seized by the dynamics of the genre he unselfconsciously employed. Indeed, arguably none of us has been free of the platonic ideality or natural/supernatural power of form in our reading of Defoe, and it is this insistent force of genre that has given us the picture of the bumbling, artless, near illiterate, political journalist/hack, chronic liar, who stumbled into the invention of the novel somewhat on the model of the man who invents the telephone and immediately tries to wash his hands with it. In fact, our retrospective sense of genre and our knowledge or frustrating lack of certainty about much of Defoe's life have always worked together to generate readings of his works.

According to Defoe's contemporaries and critics during most of the eighteenth century, Defoe didn't invent anything or conversely he invented everything. That is, he had a powerful reputation for lying, for want of a better word, as Sir Leslie Stephen said (1: 3-4). Increasingly, he was credited with somehow producing a single mythic character whose story was sometimes thought, particularly in the nineteenth century, more fit for children or social theorists than for general adult readers. At any rate, he was not always considered the inventor of the novel.

How does one writer invent a genre? How does a new way of telling a story become a genre? How is the legitimacy of its name established and accepted? It would not seem irrelevant that this last question points to one of the predominant plot patterns and themes in what we now call the classic novel. And the question seems peculiarly apt given the fact that so many eighteenth-century fictions have as their title a proper name and at that, a name that turns out in the story to be false or inaccurate or misleading. Take, for example, Defoe's own novels, or even *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*.

We also know that the canonic three founders, Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, took great pains to distinguish what they wrote from what were then called novels. Defoe said very little about genre. He was too busy claiming factual truth or at least authenticity for his narratives. Given the more explicit assertions of a new species of writing by Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding, and given their greater discussion of the problem of genre, particularly by Fielding, it is a lot easier to see in their works the invention of a new or transformed genre than it was for contemporaries to discover such novelty in Defoe. At any rate, what Fielding and Richardson wrote came to be called novels rather late in the eighteenth century, and Defoe was often not included in those discussions or paired with Jonathan Swift when he was. The discussions themselves gave only

¹ This essay draws on the research and argument of the last chapter of Homer Brown's book, *Institutions of the English Novel*, forthcoming from the University of Pennsylvania Press.

vague definitions at best for the concept of the novel or the problem of genre. Consequently, we know little about how this new meaning given the term novel crowded out the earlier meanings, other than the fact that the production of the earlier kind of novel declined.

We do know that Defoe was virtually ignored for most of the eighteenth century. If he was remembered, moreover, it was as a political writer, for he had a reputation both as a patriot/statesman and as a historian that grew during the nineteenth century. If he did invent the novel in 1719, his invention had been ignored and lay dormant for more than twenty years when it was taken up by Richardson and Fielding, whose novels resemble his not at all, and who rarely, if ever, mention him, and not as a precursor. There may be some vague resemblances between the themes and plots (but not the form) of Defoe's conduct books, particularly *Religious Courtship*, and Richardson's novels, which as Nancy Armstrong points out, Richardson regarded more as conduct books than as novels. What is clear is that the linear history of the novel as having an "origin" and "rise," the history we have been brought up on, with its genealogies, lines of descent and influence, family resemblances, is itself a fictional narrative—a kind of novel about the novel. Moreover, such a story represses the irreducible heterogeneity of the discourses and forms that contribute to the institution of the English novel in a way that seems analogous to the usual English suppression of the heterogeneous sources of British culture and identity.²

The fact is, as one of Defoe's principal twentieth-century biographers and bibliographers John Robert Moore pointed out in 1941, that while there were collected editions of Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett in the eighteenth century, there was no collected edition of Defoe until the nineteenth century (710). "Until near the end of the eighteenth century," what is more, "there was no considerable biography or critical study of Defoe. No book lover is known to have assembled a collection of his writings. For nearly a century most of his works had been reissued (if at all) with no indication of his authorship. The less known writings had become almost totally lost, and the better known ones (like *Robinson Crusoe*) had become almost independent of his name. The anonymity which was a matter of choice or of professional necessity in his lifetime was apparently becoming permanent" (710). Moore also believed that "Defoe has been to a large extent the victim of a literary clique which determined more than two centuries ago (as Professor William T. Laprade once pointed out to me) that no writer of the Age of Anne should be known to fame except themselves and their friends" (734). One might add that this was the very clique who was busy producing the modern sense of what *literature* is. Defoe's chosen and sometimes necessary anonymity was apparently taken up and reinforced by the official Augustans. The remark to Robert Harley of Defoe's erstwhile fellow agent, Jonathan Swift, in his *Letter Concerning the Sacramental Test*, seems aptly characteristic of this intention: "One of these Authors (the Fellow that was *pilloryed*, I have forgot his Name) is indeed so grave, sententious, dogmatical a Rogue, that there is no enduring him" (qtd. in Rogers, *Defoe* 38).

² And sometimes with the collaboration of Scottish Enlightenment intellectuals who were also apparently the first to "invent" English literature for academic purposes. See Crawford.

In addition to the efforts of the Scriblerians to make of Defoe a non-person and the difficulty of attributing authorship to a confusing mass of anonymous and pseudonymous texts, there was yet another problem that remains with us—the problem of classifying these texts. Aside from the very small group of novels now accepted as Defoe's—including *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*, *Colonel Jack*, *Captain Singleton*, *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, some of which were labeled novels only as recently as the twentieth century—there were innumerable other autobiographies and memoirs cutting across uncertain lines between fact and fiction, editorship and authorship. Moreover, Defoe wrote in every conceivable category of discourse. As Moore points out,

[t]here is in Defoe no clear line of demarcation of literary methods or forms; history, fiction, moral tract, and economic treatise often run into the same mold. When Professor Sutherland wishes to illustrate Defoe's unparalleled fondness for dramatizing the incidents of everyday life, he chooses his example from An Essay upon Projects. Some of Defoe's most characteristic prose fiction occurs in such unlikely places as Due Preparations for the Plague or A System of Magic or Religious Courtship or The Family Instructor, in A General History of the Pirates or The History and Reality of Apparitions, or The Political History of the Devil or Memoirs of the Church of Scotland. Like his immemorial memorial to the house of Commons, Defoe's fictional writings remind us, "Our name is Legion, and We are Many." (716–17)

I will return to this question of unity by taxonomy and the identity of a proper name later on in this paper, not only because it characterizes the efforts of scholarly research, criticism, and literary theory to describe a national literature, but also because the quest for an impossible unity serves as a paradigm for the institutional formation of the novel.

I.

In fact, an important originating moment for both processes occurs in the same years. In 1809–10, the man who later called Fielding "the first of British Novelists" and *Tom Jones* "the first English novel" (48, 63), Sir Walter Scott, put together the first collected edition of what he called *The Novels of Daniel Defoe*. It is extremely difficult to find out about this edition, published by John Ballantyne in Edinburgh, much less to examine it. No biographer does more than mention it, and the edition is often confused with the larger collection of *Novels and Miscellaneous Works* in twenty volumes with prefaces attributed to Sir Walter Scott (Oxford 1840–43), or with the Bohn edition 1854–67. Moore complained about this situation in 1941, and it is difficult to see how the situation has changed since then.

Scott's edition contained *Robinson Crusoe* (two parts), *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, *Colonel Jack*, *Captain Singleton*, and *The True-Born Englishman*, *A New Voyage Around the World*, and the *History of the Plague in London*. As Moore points out, "the few titles accepted for the Scott edition have remained (with *Moll Flanders*

and *Roxanne*) the nucleus of all collections of Defoe; hence it is that a mediocre (and genuine) work called *A New Voyage saved the World* is to be found in every such collection, whereas a fascinating (and genuine) work called *Robert Drury's Journal* is virtually inaccessible except in Oliver's inexact reprint of 1890" (711–12). Moore points to several interesting inextricable problems of authorial, oeuvres, and genre formation in this statement. The future vicissitudes of *Moll Flanders* and *The Fortunate Mistress* themselves make an interesting chapter in changing ideas of what a novel is. The authorship and fictionality of *Robert Drury's Journal* are still being debated and there is still no recent edition of it. While most subsequent scholars, critics, and even the editors who included it would agree with Moore's assessment of a *A New Voyage*, many involved in the present moment of critical discourse would find it an interesting and significant work.³

What strikes me as particularly significant in the pattern created by this edition is its preference for male adventure romances and historical fiction, obviously favored by Scott, who anticipated later nineteenth-century critics in calling Defoe the inventor of the historical romance. These categories of fiction almost disappeared from the canon in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries as they were relegated to children's or popular escape literature. The first volume contains the biographical essay attributed to John Ballantyne but which Scott had some hand in. There are no notes of consequence, according to Moore, and only two critical introductions, and the last volume contains a list of a hundred works assigned to Defoe. Again, according to Moore, "the long critical essay which Scott added to the life and which he continued to expand—in 1825 ... and in 1827 for the collected edition of his own works—was one of the most influential commentaries on Defoe's art which have ever been written" (711).

In the same year, 1810, *The British Novelists, with an Essay, and Prefaces Biographical and Critical* by Mrs. Barbauld appeared in fifty volumes.⁴ Barbauld's introductory essay "On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing" and her individual prefaces constituted a very significant critical review of the genre. Her collection contained, in the following order, *Clarissa*, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*. This selection carries us through volume twenty-one and begins to resemble the modern canon. The following volumes are a bit spottier in that regard, but contain a good selection of the gothic and sentimental: *The Old English Baron* (Reeve) and *The Castle of Otranto* (Walpole), *Pompey the Little* and *The Vicar of Wakefield* (Goldsmith), *The Female Quixote* (Mrs. Lennox), *Rasselas* (Johnson), *Almorán and Hamet* (Hawthorne), *History of Lady Julia Mandeville* (Mrs. Brooke), *Nature and Art* and *A Simple Story* (Inchbald), *The Man of Feeling* and *Julia DeRoubrigne* (Mackenzie), *Humphrey* [sic] *Clinker* (Smollett), *The Spiritual Quixote* (Graves), *Zeluco* (Dr. Moore), *The Old Manor House* (Charlotte Smith), *Evelina* and *Cecilia* (Burney), *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Radcliffe), *Man as He is not or*

³ I am referring of course to post-colonial criticism. Minimally, in regard to Defoe one must mention Hulme's chapter on *Robinson Crusoe*; Green and Rogers are also still valuable starting points for this subject.

⁴ On Mrs. Barbauld, see C.E. Moore. Much of the detail about the editions that follows is from the second volume of Sadleir.

Hermesprong (Bage) and finally *Belinda* and *The Modern Griselda* (Edgeworth). The whole set sold for twelve guineas.

The battles of gender and class were immediately joined by the appearance of Medford's *British Novelists*, issued first in shilling parts (1810–17) and then in five volumes, and containing: *Peregrine Pickle* and *Humphry Clinker*; *Roderick Random*, *Ferdinand Count Fathom* and *Sir Lancelot Greaves*; *Tristram Shandy*, *Sentimental Journey*, *Gulliver's Travels* and the *Vicar of Wakefield*; *Tom Jones* and *Jonathan Wild the Great*; *Amelia*, *Joseph Andrews*, *A Journey from this World to the Next*. Michael Sadleir comments: "The whole affair is jerry-built"; it was issued by "catch-penny publishers," and "there is little doubt that their venture into 'British Novelists' was in parsimonious imitation of *Harrison's Novelist's Magazine* and provoked by the success of Mrs. Barbauld's collection" (141). What is interesting to me, however, is the way it more nearly approximates the strict modern canon, supplementing many of Mrs. Barbauld's omissions—and in editions to be afforded by almost anyone.

Next, and arguably the most influential collection given the great success of the Scott industry, was *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library* in 1821–24, edited by Sir Walter Scott, with biographical and critical introductions, in ten volumes: I, The Novels of Henry Fielding, Esq. (*Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, *Amelia*, *Jonathan Wild*); II and III, The Novels of Tobias Smollett, M.D. (*Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, *Humphry Clinker*, Smollett's Translation of Cervantes's *Don Quixote* preceded by his *Life of Cervantes*, *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, *Sir Lancelot Greaves*); IV, The Novels of LeSage and Charles Johnstone (*Gil Blas*, *The Devil upon Two Sticks*, *Vanillo Gonzales*, *Chrysal or the Adventures of Guinea*); V. The Novels of Sterne, Goldsmith, Dr. Johnson, Mackenzie, Horace Walpole and Clara Reeve (*Tristram Shandy*, *Sentimental Journey*, *Vicar of Wakefield*, *Rasselas*, *The Man of Feeling*, *The Man of the World*, *Julia de Roubigne*, *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Old English Baron*); VI–VIII, The Novels of Samuel Richardson, Esq. In Three Volumes (*Pamela*, *Clarissa Harlowe*, *Sir Charles Grandison*); IX, (1824) The Novels of Swift, Bage and Cumberland (*Gulliver's Travels*, *Mount Henneth*, *Barham Downs*, *James Wallace*, *Henry*); X, (1824) The Novels of Mrs. Ann Radcliffe (*A Sicilian Romance*, *The Romance of the Forest*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *The Italian*, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*).

One notices immediately the curious absence of *Pamela* in Mrs. Barbauld's collection and the total absence of Defoe's works in the Scott-Ballantyne. Actually Scott proposed an eleventh volume for Defoe, apparently as an afterthought, and revised and expanded his earlier prefatory essay for it, but it wasn't published. Sadleir says this about *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library*:

It seems almost certain that Scott deliberately supplemented Mrs. Barbauld's Collection when choosing titles.... [O]f the thirty-four novels he reprinted, only twelve had also been printed by Mrs. Barbauld; of his remaining twenty-two, many seem to have been chosen in order to amplify her selection from certain authors, while others (notably the novels of Sterne and some by Smollett) could appear without offence under masculine editorship, whereas Mrs. Barbauld, a stickler for

feminine decorum and an editor with an eye to family reading, might well have hesitated to include them. (88–90)⁵

In this process of constant and competitive supplementation are issues of gender, comprehensiveness, variety and range, fitness for family consumption, respectability, and affordability appearing perhaps chiefly as market considerations. Right in the middle of this period of "expansion," in the year Scott's *Waverley* is published, 1814, John Colin Dunlop's *The History of Fiction; being a critical account of the most celebrated prose works of Fiction, from the earliest Greek Romances to the Novels of the Present Day* appeared in three volumes and was reprinted throughout the nineteenth century. Both Scott's and Dunlop's accomplishments here underscore the validation of the historical nature of the collections and with the extensive reviews of all these ventures, the apparent economic stability of a public desiring what amounted to a new form of cultural capital underwritten by the authority of well known editors. All these factors mark a congruence of production and consumption that in turn indicates the viability of the institution of the novel. This institution is accomplished in spite of, or perhaps because of the somewhat frantic competition fired by the relatively new problem of obtaining rights to titles.

Now none of this can be reduced to the trivia of antiquarian bibliomania, as it might have been a few years ago. It should clearly be seen as a mistake to discount the significance or effects of these collections. All these different texts, written under various circumstances and in various contexts and with various labels, have taken on a lasting solidity in these magnificent sets. The English novel had been established. You could see it there on the shelves, just as you could continue to see it on the shelves of private, public, and school libraries in this country as well as in Britain on into this century. Many of us got our first introduction to the eighteenth-century novel either in Mrs. Barbauld's collection or in *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library*. The significance of the success of Sir Walter Scott's own novels for this moment of institution is not to be discounted either. Influenced or not, by Scott's novels, subsequent novelists now had an established, solid body of tradition, a genre, and a genealogy.

Thus it can with some accuracy be said that the eighteenth-century novel was invented at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Here we can identify something like the canon of the novel as it is accepted today, although too many of these books are still not available in inexpensive editions. If we were to start looking for editions of Defoe outside of the five or six titles made available in paperback by one publisher, we might well conclude that Defoe was an arcane, esoteric interest rather than a major Author. Ironically, the same could be said of Scott. In fact, the more economical or restricted canon is a product of modernism, F.R. Leavis, and the New Criticism. Defoe as marginal and eccentric seemed to have suffered more than any author other than Scott and the women novelists at the hands of the modernists, although he won the praise, sometimes ironic, of Woolf and Joyce, as well as some postmodern novelists. But he also won a different kind of canonization. In the late eighteenth century, his and/or Robinson's ghost

⁵ The best account of the publication and problems of *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library* I know of is Millgate's.

haunted novels such as Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House* and Godwin's *Caleb Williams*. In both cases, the island of solitude is Britain itself. In the first, Smith's hero, after fighting in the American revolution and being captured first by Indians and then by the French, is shipwrecked off the coast of England near his home but is shunned and isolated because of his tattered Crusoe-like appearance. Again, Godwin admitted reading Defoe as he wrote the part of *Caleb Williams* in which first London and then all of England is in effect transformed into an inescapable desert island by Caleb's persecutor and his agents who poison his identity, thus his possibility of making a living, and put a price on his head. In the nineteenth century, putting aside the proliferation of *Robinsonades* throughout the century and novels such as Cooper's *The Crater*, we find the reviews of each of Melville's novels drawing comparisons to Defoe, much to Melville's irritation. There is a running memorial to Robinson in another noteworthy series. A mysterious Crusoe figure, or at least vestiges of one, appears in each of these "boy's" adventure novels: *The Coral Island*, *Treasure Island*, and *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. I am sure there are other such memorials in many other stories as well. If the received history of the novel reads something like the Whig historian's creation in its linear, progressive development, then an institutional history of the novel would be something like Whig creation of the ancient constitution during the eighteenth century.⁶ Or as Hume put it, the legitimacy of a sovereign is often established retrospectively: "Princes often seem to acquire a right from their successors, as well as from their ancestors," adding the comment, "Nothing is more usual, tho' nothing may, at first sight, appear more unreasonable, than this way of thinking" (566). This account serves as a perfect allegory of the contemporary establishment of the legitimacy of the novel, that usurper in the domain of genre.

If, as I am claiming, the principal dimensions of our present history of the novel were established in the early nineteenth century, then its future could not have been any more continuous and developmental than the past it had successfully smoothed over. There would be new knots and detours in which what was left out or left over—Defoe, for example—would have a curious role to play. The tradition of the eighteenth-century novel was now complete. It was also in a sense closed off. Or better, along with those magnificent sets of books, for all intents and purposes it was shelved. If the novel was invented at this point, it was also at the same time reinvented, and reinvented as distinguished from its eighteenth-century precursors—except in one curious way. And here the chameleon-like nature of Defoe was especially important.

II.

First, the reinvention. In his long review article on Jane Austen in 1815–16, Scott developed an argument to the effect that her novels represented a totally new species of writing, a new kind of novel. Austen's novels, he said, "belong to a class of fictions which has arisen almost in our own times, and which draws the characters and incidents introduced more immediately from the current of ordi-

⁶ This was created in order to support the constitutional settlements following the 1688–89 Glorious Revolution.

nary life than was permitted by the former rules of the novel." Scott argues that "in its first appearance," that is, in the eighteenth century, "the novel was the legitimate child of the romance ... and ... the manners and general turn of the composition were altered so as to suit modern times." Yet, it still "remained fettered by many peculiarities derived from the original style of romantic fiction." Although the magical or supernatural effects "vanish'd into smoke, still the reader expected to peruse a course of adventures of a nature more interesting and extraordinary than those which occur in his own life, or that of his next-door neighbors. The hero no longer defeated armies by his single sword, clove giants to the chine, or gained kingdoms. But he was expected to go through perils by sea and land, to be steeped in poverty, to be tried by temptation, to be exposed to the alternate vicissitudes of adversity and prosperity, and his life was a troubled scene of suffering and achievement" (qtd. in Williams 227). Scott makes sure we know to whose novels he is referring here when he names Tom Jones and Peregrine Pickle as the heroes in question. These, he says, are the "essential and important circumstances" in which these "earlier novels differed from those now in fashion, and were more nearly assimilated to the old romances." The old novel appealed to the reader's curiosity "by the studied involution or extrication of the story, by the combination of incidents new, striking and wonderful beyond the course of ordinary life" (229). The reader was thus made to feel that "his wonder and interest ought at once to be excited. But gradually he became familiar with the land of fiction, the adventures of which he assimilated not with those of real life, but with each other" (228). Hence repetition led to certainty and boredom: the motive force of the intricate plot no longer generated suspense or "curiosity." The dominance of the appeal of story over that of character or depth of character was reversed. Excitement was exhausted by habit and the old "materials" became "stale and familiar" (230).

"Accordingly," Scott declares, "a style of novel has arisen, within the last fifteen or twenty years, differing from the former in the points upon which the interest hinges; neither alarming our credulity nor amusing our imagination by wild variety of incident, or by those pictures of romantic affection and sensibility, which were formerly as certain attributes of fictitious characters as they are of rare occurrence among those who actually live or die." The difficulties and the dangers for the new style stem from the very features that generate new pleasures, since "he who paints a scene of common occurrence, places his composition within that extensive range of criticism which general experience offers to every reader":

We, therefore, bestow no mean compliment upon the author of Emma, when we say that, keeping close to common incidents, and to such characters as occupy the ordinary walks of life, she has produced sketches of such spirit and originality, that we never miss the excitation which depends upon a narrative of uncommon events, arising from the consideration of minds, manners, and sentiments, greatly above our own. In this class she stands almost alone. (231)

Here then is Scott's "rise of the novel," "a class of fictions which has arisen almost in our own times," "a style of novel ... arisen ... within the last fifteen or twenty years," that is, between 1795 and 1800.

The distinction Scott makes between Austen and her predecessors is the same distinction he makes between romance and novel at the opening of his "Essay on Romance" and attributes to Dr. Johnson, although he continues to use both terms alternately, often without distinction, often about the same texts. Here the distinction is not only historical but generational. The novel is a deviant but legitimate offspring of the romance and therefore is another version of his story about the circumstances of the origin of romance. The distinction is more than one between the fantastic and the actual or ordinary, for the new fiction lacks story: "*Emma* has even less story than either of the preceding novels," *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* (232). The novelist "paints sketches" of ordinary people and ordinary life. The Romancer weaves a complex plot which eventually reaches improbable but perfect closure: "That combined plot, (the object of every skilful novelist,) in which all the more interesting individuals of the dramatic personae have their appropriate share in the action and in bringing about the catastrophe," or, as he adds later, "a regular drama, in which every person introduced plays an appropriate part, and every point of the action tends to one common catastrophe" (229-30). "Here," he announces, "even more than in its various and violent changes of fortune, rests the improbability of the novel" (228). This fall into story is, of course, what places such earlier eighteenth-century novels as Fielding's too close to its parent, or, "more nearly assimilated to the old romances" (229), as Ian Watt complains.

For Scott, what makes Defoe realistic is his lack of coherent "story." Defoe will introduce such characters as Robinson's older brother and never mention him again or set up lines of action that lead nowhere and to no effect. Again, a notion similar to Watt's argument: Defoe's novels have little plot or "story," which is good; Fielding's novels have too much form or plot, which is bad. It is as if the distinction between romance and novel could be measured by shades of degree between motivated action and form and lack of it, in which case, the romance form could never be completely avoided. The story of the disenchantment of romance for a protagonist such as Edward Waverley is still a romance. In summary of his praise of Austen, Scott uses a curiously durable and iterable analogy:

The author's knowledge of the world, and the peculiar tact with which she presents characters that the reader cannot fail to recognize, reminds us something of the merits of the Flemish school of painting. The subjects are not often elegant, and certainly never grand; but they are finished up to nature, and with a precision which delights the reader. (235)

You will, of course, recognize in this model, the very same one which George Eliot uses in *Adam Bede* to describe her own realism (implicitly attacking the romantic fictions of Dickens). Scott also used it to praise Defoe. Although no two novelists probably seem less alike than Defoe and Austen to modern readers, Scott was not the only reader to associate them with each other.

The question that remains is not whether the newly constituted eighteenth-century novel influenced (overtly or covertly) the development of the English novel as a genre in the nineteenth century, but how and by what (constantly changing) rules of inclusion and exclusion the formation of its institution took place and is still taking place and legitimacy was given to individual texts of this species. Since the word *canon* means rod of measurement, what is the canon of this canon? As I shall try to show, Scott has already provided some clues as to the basis on which canonization takes place. I will also suggest the role played by the continually marginal Defoe in this process.

III.

First, the problematic proper name Defoe. From at least the moment in the 1690s when Daniel Foe renamed himself DeFoe, no other proper name serving as indicator of an authorial function, not even that of Shakespeare, has suffered such an adventurous odyssey through such great perils, elevations, occlusions, charges and indictments, representations and misrepresentations, attributions and defrockings, and other miscellaneous transformations in the popular as well as in the "learned" mind. What Frank Kermode pointed out somewhere about a controversial renaissance romance, in another connection, could be said about Defoe as text: "the people who had difficulty with Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* were the learned who quarreled about its being epic or romance. What it called for, and got from the lay reader, was a new kind of attention related to several existing genres." The "novels" of Fielding and Richardson, on the other hand, were received with more ease and the debate over the novel by the learned in the late eighteenth century was much milder than that over the earlier vernacular romances. Defoe was first mostly ignored by the learned and embraced by the lay reader with varying degrees of, and sudden shifts between, suspicion or approval. A new kind of attention has been called by his attributed texts not only to several existing genres, but also to a dizzying variety of them. The problem of Defoe, from the beginning, has not been whether he wrote novels or romances but rather whether what he wrote was fact or fiction or even his writing at all. Since he signed very few of his currently estimated nearly 600 books and pamphlets, the figure and individual titles are still a matter of debate. As Pat Rogers has noted, Defoe's name was not regularly attached even to editions of *Robinson Crusoe* until the nineteenth century (*Robinson* 131). By rough count, Defoe is thought to have written around thirty-five fictional or semi-fictional pseudonymous biographies or autobiographies. All of them were published and most were read as authentic into the nineteenth century, and some even into the twentieth.⁷

Most of these books were written or at least published after *Robinson Crusoe* when Defoe was fifty-nine. It is estimated that in the last twelve years of his life, Defoe wrote or published one hundred forty-nine books and pamphlets including most of his novels or semi-novels, before dying at seventy-one of what some-

⁷ An important account of the scholarship concerning the development of the Defoe canon or oeuvre is in Furbank and Owens. They develop some of the questions I raise here, but still inconclusively. Rogers has interesting short accounts of the publishing and the biographical/critical tradition of the Defoe canon in both *The Critical Heritage* and in his book on *Robinson Crusoe*. Much of the information that follows comes from these sources.

one called "a lethargy." Since at least the time of Scott, the critical-scholarly effort has been to establish the *oeuvre* of Defoe. Scott, in addition to being Defoe's first editor, was also one of his first collectors. Professor Moore reported that "Scott's library at Abbotsford contained no less than seventy-one items of the Defoe canon, many of them in several different editions" (712). Ironically, however, Scott owned many other works he did not know were but are now thought to be written by Defoe. "As editor of the 'Somers Tracts' he assembled so many of the rarer anonymous tracts by Defoe that the total number of Defoe's writings in his possession must have been nearer to ninety. Some of the prefatory notes ... remain even now important contributions to the subject" (Moore 712). Scott even edited *The Memoirs of Captain Carleton* with an introduction, not knowing that it had been written by Defoe. The "Somers Tracts," as well as *The Memoirs of Captain Carleton*, and a number of other Defoe "fictions," were used as research sources by more than a few nineteenth-century historians. Both Captain Carleton and Major Alexander Ramkins, now listed among Defoe's original creations, were even included in the august *Dictionary of National Biography*. I don't mean to imply that *The Somers Tracts* were fictional, only the attributed authorship of some of the pamphlets included. In any case, here the opposition between fiction and history would seem particularly problematic, if not trivial.

In addition to the problem of Defoe's authorship, the facts of his life had to be established. As Rogers has pointed out:

between 1785 and 1925 there were eight full-length studies of Defoe, that is, general assessments rather than specialised monographs. Almost all of these were predominantly biographical, not critical. Each devoted considerable space to Crusoe, and indeed RC 1 furnished a hidden key to its author for some of these biographers. When Crusoe is not required in any other mythical role, he can be made without much trouble to play the part of an abstracted and idealised Defoe. (Robinson 133)

Rogers argues that these biographies played the most important role in creating or sustaining the position in eighteenth-century letters assigned to Defoe. With each biography the number of works attributed to Defoe climbed from the 1753 sketch attributed to Colley Cibber listing thirteen items (one spurious) with *Crusoe* and *Colonel Jack* the only novels mentioned, through the list of a hundred works attributed to Defoe in Scott's 1810 edition, to John Robert Moore's checklist and supplements of some five hundred sixty books, pamphlets and journals. Much of these attributions have been based on "internal evidence." Of course, the most arduous work of detective scholarship has been done in this century by men like Moore, Arthur Secord, and Maximillian Novak.

If one pauses to think about it, it seems a most extraordinary story. What other major modern authors in the English canon, let alone the imputed father of perhaps the most important modern genre, have had to be so totally constructed out of supposition, speculation, close reading, and argument? The question of the accuracy of these attributions aside, is there any other major modern author, the bulk of whose writings are still not in print or not even easily available to students?

Meanwhile, many myths about Defoe and his works have been or are being dispelled. It was once thought that Defoe wrote everything he wrote in a single, recognizable voice. This notion, like so many others offered by Scott, runs throughout Defoe criticism. Scott mentions how completely some authors could assume the character through whom they narrate their stories. Narrative personae such as Goldsmith's Vicar, Gaunt's Country Provost or Reverend Annalist of the parish, Wordsworth's Sea Captain in "The Thorn" should be, he says, distinguished in this class:

These are, however, all characters of masquerade: We believe that of De Foe was entirely natural to him. The high-born Cavalier, for instance, speaks nearly the same species of language, and shows scarce a greater knowledge of society than Robinson Crusoe; only he has a cast of the grenadier about him, as the other has the trim of a seaman. It is greatly to be doubted whether De Foe could have changed his colloquial, circuitous, and periphrastic style for any other, whether more coarse or more elegant. We have little doubt it was connected with his nature, and the particular turn of his thoughts and ordinary expressions, and that he did not succeed so much by writing in an assumed manner, as by giving full scope to his own. (qtd. in Williams 175)

A paradoxical claim of stylistic uniformity, one would think, for an author so much of whose works have been attributed to others, including even to Harley and Walpole! We can now argue safely, I think, even if most of the attributions are accepted, and even though most of them have been attributed to Defoe on sometimes minute issues of style, that Defoe was capable of writing in many voices and many levels of style, an argument which would in turn undercut the very rationale and the internal evidence for those same attributions.

Similarly, many of Defoe's virtues have been chalked up to accident, ingenuousness, shallow sincerity, or lack of imagination, an argument that would seem contradicted, first, by his considerable reputation in his own time and, in the nineteenth century, by his notoriety as a diabolically effective liar. More recently, the myth of the simple semi-illiterate tradesman and hack writer has been dispelled by investigation of Defoe's education, and the sale catalogue of his personal library. Adding to the confusion is the fact that Defoe's library shares a catalogue with that of a now unremembered gentleman clergyman named Philips Farewell.⁸ Nevertheless, it appears that Defoe had as large a library as many of his supposedly more erudite contemporaries.

The more we know or think we know about Defoe, then, the more mysterious he becomes. Peter Earle, the economist who waded through most of the Defoe attributions for his admirable *The World of Defoe*, admits that "even when I finished writing this book I found that I did not know him as a person too well.... I feel that I know far more about the world in which he lived, even if I still know too little about the man himself" (xi). Confronted with the prodigious corpus of work now attributed to Defoe, and without casting doubt on the scholarship, one has to feel confronted not by a man but by an industry, a school of Defoe, a sort of

⁸ *Librorum ex Bibliothecis Philippi Farewell, D.D. et Danielis Defoe, Gen, Catalogus* (1731).

eighteenth-century Homerides, or by the age itself. Defoe signed one piece as "the Age's Humble Servant." Indeed, the amount of effort required to make that library cohere as the work of a single author is the same required to bring coherence to his age.

The story of the scholarship is an exemplary one. First there are the biographies, each followed by a new list of attributions—the reconstruction of an *author*—an authority as ground to unite a diverse group of texts. Each new biography with its new details and interpretations incorporates a larger and more diverse set of texts. Critical interpretation then has the task of creating a totality, a motivated *concordia discors* out of that diversity, reading through, under, behind the anonymous, the pseudonymous writings, the ironic rhetorical strategies, reconstructing the variety of circumstantial occasions, changing political contexts and necessities or expediencies in order to account for apparent inconsistencies and to detect patterns of regularities, deeper consistencies of concerns and motivations, similarities of voice and timbre—in short, a complex intertextual structure guaranteed by the singularity of a single personality, motivated by a rational intention, stabilized by a single, unique origin in a proper though hidden name, and destabilized by a problematic lack of signature. This very great scholarly problem, at once unique and exemplary, overlaps with the problem of the institution of the novel. For this prodigious disseminator of a corpus of texts that refuses to close, of texts that cannot be guaranteed to return to any father, is also the putative father of a genre that itself denies closure, evades return or places into question the return to any origin. All this makes the case of Defoe so useful and so necessary for the study of canon and genre formation.

As it is, the present official canon of Defoe's novels is quite small: *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*, *Colonel Jacques*, *Captain Singleton*, *Roxana*, *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, and *Journal of the Plague-Year* (still somewhat inconsistently or uncertainly accepted as a novel). This list is striking for its remarkable similarity to Scott's 1810 collection. Simply drop *The New Voyage* and add *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, which was, incidentally, no easy addition—it took pretty much the whole of the nineteenth century. But setting aside, for the moment, the fact that it was a long time before Defoe was widely granted a major role in the founding of the English novel, the canon of his novels was virtually complete with Scott. Now, we know (or think we know) about all these *other* "novels" which are still excluded from the genre or institution of the novel. What distinguishes them from the accepted "novels"? By what generic or discursive law are they excluded? In whose jurisdiction does the judgment lie? How is it to be determined whether or not they are to be considered "literature"?

Obviously, there are no easy answers to these questions. We can, however, begin to explore the implications of the fact that such questions exist. The central questions would seem to be whether determinations can be made in terms of intrinsic textual evidence or only by institutional judgment. But if we are to understand the novel as a genre and a socio-literary institution, and its formation as a historical process, the questions are very important indeed. There are not only important issues at stake but also a uniquely pertinent body of texts as a basis of

investigation: a group of texts published before the novel was acknowledged as a genre but which are now almost universally known as the first novels.

To progress beyond this tautology, I believe, we must first understand its historical logic: how and when were Defoe's major novels, the ones accepted now as canonical, accepted into the category of the English novel, and what might such a study reveal about the nature of the genre and its institution? We would next have to consider on what grounds were those fictional writings excluded that are still not widely considered novels—not only those presumed to be Defoe's fabrication but also similar narratives not so easily authorized by a recognized name. Do either or both of these indistinct groupings constitute a permanent reserve, a new margin from which new novels could appear as the result of scholarly efforts, widespread university teaching, and adventurous publishers to make them available? On the other hand, will the uncanonical fictions remain a permanent limit—an outside *within* the total range of Defoe's quasi-novelistic fictional practices? And if so, on what basis? Or, on the other hand, as limit, how do such texts define the structure of the genre or institution, revealing at the same time what will forever and necessarily be missing or excluded from it? To begin to sketch out the implications of these issues might require something like a rigorous Foucauldian analysis of the formation of what could be called "novelistic discourse," which would include in its field both novels and discourse about novels. A decisive first step in this direction was taken by Lennard Davis's too much neglected *Factual Fictions*.⁹ It would be wise, of course, to keep in mind Pierre Bourdieu's caveat about Michel Foucault's analyses remaining within the limits of a given discourse (179). For no doubt the influence on a discursive formation of what is outside and different from it needs to be reckoned in its institution, especially since it has always been a claim of institutions that they are immanently self-generated and autonomous. It could be argued that any such cultural formation is defined by its margin, limit, other.

By consulting in the most precursory manner two of the standard histories of critical discussion of the novel in the nineteenth century, certain salient features emerge. I am thinking of Richard Stang's *The Theory of the Novel in England 1850–1870* (1959) and Kenneth Graham's *English Criticism of the Novel 1865–1900* (1965)—the first written toward the telos of the Jamesian novel and the second a slightly modified version of the same. These histories reveal two things immediately germane to my argument: one is the extent to which *Robinson Crusoe* was used almost always for polemical purposes—as an example by which to damn Thackeray or Dickens, or to praise Austen or Eliot. The second is that whether the critics were friends or enemies of Defoe, they characterized his work in approximately the same way. And most of the themes they sounded in doing so were originally set in motion by Sir Walter Scott, who was by this time generally condemned along with Defoe and for many of the same reasons.

Defoe's novels were described as novels of incident, not of character, "adventures for their own sake, not for any light they throw on the suppositious narrator." While Defoe was granted an "exquisite accuracy" in depicting external circumstantial detail—what we call fact—he demonstrated no power of analysis,

9 A further decisive move has been made more recently by Hunter (*Before*).

particularly analysis of the psychological kind. While some critics found his narratives emotionally flat and lacking in sensitivity, others used praise of his emotional restraint and first person reticence as a bludgeon on Dickens's emotionalism. Generally, Defoe was praised or criticized for the plotlessness of his novels, which are frequently described as a succession of adventures lacking any fixed direction.

The modernist novelist might try to represent what is most suggestive of a particular state of mind. Even a late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century novelist might try to represent the psychological development and inner motivation of a protagonist. Defoe seems to have focused on what his central character-narrator would actually do under certain, usually extreme, social or even physical circumstances in a way that, as Alan Bewell once suggested to me, has links to what the Scottish Enlightenment would call "conjectural history."¹⁰ The former would register psychological motive as a major causal agency of the action of the story. In contrast, Defoe uses the extreme limitation of possible choices as the factor motivating action. Such a reduction might seem arbitrary to later readers, but this is socially motivated arbitrariness. It should be recognized that psychological motivation and the whole system of internal development that it presupposes is just as arbitrary a social/cultural construction as the earlier one. Moreover, it would be difficult to argue that the later one requires any more imagination than Defoe's procedure, the projection of actions rather than the display of character.

Defoe became a major novelist when professional readers were able to read him in a way that moved him from one pole to the other, that is to say, when they were able to read him as a novelist of character rather than of incident—or more precisely, as a novelist who used incident to reveal character. But there is yet another chapter in the stories told by Stang and Graham. The novel of psychological analysis fell out of favor to be replaced by the well-made novel, with its new emphasis on story, plot, meaningful incident—the organically structured novel. Here again Defoe's plotlessness, his lack of a structured rising sequence and clear resolution, damned him. This criticism sometimes took the form of an opposition between "historical method" (by which was meant chronological narration) and dramatic presentation.

Finally, there is the opposition marked in every Defoe preface: on the one hand, the imperative of explicit moral didacticism, not integrated as ethical choice, and on the other, pleasure, but not an aesthetic pleasure, in the artifice of the well-made plot. Here most eighteenth-century novels were either considered deficient or had to be tortured, as in the case of Fielding, to unite the pleasure of the well-made plot with a sequence of ethical choices. The case of Defoe was even more complicated, colored as it was by later nineteenth-century revelations about the author's supposed political and economic immorality, his opportunist political ambitions, his writing for two opposing party newspapers at the same time, his espionage activities and so forth. This view of Defoe's life provided the background for attacks on the hypocritical didacticisms so easily contradicted by his narrators' smug pleasures in immoral activities and the values exposed by

¹⁰ Dugald Stewart coined this expression (see Ross 292–93). See also Bewell 59.

their quest for money and position. While these accusations can be traced back in Defoe criticism to the eighteenth century, they have been periodically revived with different nuances by critics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Arguments about Defoe's use or lack of irony center around this question.

This criticism, although it touches importantly on *Robinson*, has had the greatest impact on the fortunes and misfortunes of Defoe's rogues, particularly his female rogues Moll and Roxana, condemned throughout the nineteenth century, from Scott's snobbish dismissal on. After commending Defoe's power of conception as like that of the picaresque or the gypsy boys of the Spanish painter Murillo, and despite admitting that these books "contain strong marks of genius" which "are particularly predominant" in *Roxana*, he proceeds to demur:

But from the coarseness of the narrative, and the vice and vulgarity of the actors, the reader feels as a well-principled young man may do, when seduced by some entertaining and dissolute libertine into scenes of debauchery, that, though he may be amused, he must be not a little ashamed of that which furnishes the entertainment. So that, though we could select from these picaresque romances a good deal that is not a little amusing, we let them pass by, as we would persons, howsoever otherwise interesting, who may not be in character and manners entirely fit for good society. (qtd. in Williams 166-67)

This form of condemnation persisted throughout the nineteenth century, making recuperation of Moll and Roxana all but impossible until early in the twentieth century. The problem of Defoe's female rogues was further complicated by the fact that his biographies habitually read *Robinson* as an allegory of the author. Were Moll and Roxana enacting his economic hopes and political ambitions as well? The judgment on *Moll Flanders* began to undergo a reversal near the beginning of the twentieth century. According to the critics, this change was at least in part a reaction to Victorian standards of morality, but it was specifically writers like E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf who prompted this change in their status by praising these novels for their psychological accuracy of character. *Moll's* recuperation has reached the point where some critics claim it as the first English novel, implicitly demoting *Robinson* to an accident of nature or genius.

To give an adequate account of how Defoe's novels became so central to the rise of the novel in modern times would obviously require another essay. A careful analysis of Watt's argument as well as that of the most severe canonist F.R. Leavis would be necessary, among other things. What I am interested in suggesting here is only the general pattern of what actually was a process of making the heretofore marginal fictionalist retrospectively the origin and source, and often the only begetter of a genre the properties of which had been previously developed—often in opposition to what Defoe's practice was believed to have been.

Watt, contemporaneously with Stang, placed the formal characteristics of Defoe's fiction in the context of eighteenth-century epistemology and related socioeconomic assumptions about the individual. He provided a motive for Defoe's apparent plotlessness by seeing it as an attack against previous literary conventions. Later critics such as Maximillian Novak refined this intellectual context and

found in Defoe plots derived from eighteenth-century speculations about the nature of man, society, and natural law. Paul Hunter and George Starr supplied another plot structure derived from the tradition of spiritual autobiography (see Hunter, *Reluctant*). More recently, criticism has preferred to psychologize Defoe's narrators, showing how they construct a stable self in a world of unstable values and against the existential limits of extreme situations.¹¹ The most recent turn of Defoe criticism has been towards studying his fiction's participation in the economic imperialism and colonialism of his time, an obvious but nevertheless neglected dimension of his adventure narratives.

The point of all this is the concerted project to make Defoe's texts meaningful within some recognizably generic notions of *the* novel, even to allegorize, metaphorize, or otherwise motivate all those "circumstantial details" to the point of recuperating even those "notations" to which Roland Barthes ascribes an "effet de réel":

notations which no function (not even the most indirect) can justify: such notations are scandalous (from the point of view of structure), or, what is even more disturbing, they seem to correspond to a kind of narrative luxury, lavish to the point of offering many "futile" details and thereby increasing the cost of narrative information. (141)

A description strangely echoing nineteenth-century complaints in regard to Defoe. But then, of course, Barthes goes on to motivate those details in a new way: "Flaubert's barometer, Michelet's little door finally say nothing but this: *we are the real*; it is the category of 'the real,' (and not its contingent contents) which is then signified; in other words, the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, becomes the very signifier of realism" (148).

It is this very compulsion to motivate, to make signify, with nothing left over, that we must reflect on—it is perhaps the last rule of genre—without losing track of the fact that this quest for transparency is a redoubled compulsion in Defoe's novels. Each of Defoe's narrators seems to enact the same paranoiac compulsion—the necessity to make significant every lone footprint, every glance in the street, even the names and sequences of streets—to incorporate, in short, what may be intrinsically meaningless into a system of significance, a plot or story. But there will always be something left over, something excessive, marginal, or eccentric. Indeed, inasmuch as Defoe's novels themselves have occupied that role, it may be that what is left over is precisely the outside, the limit that defines the generic system and creates the possibility of change, without which there could hardly be an institutional history of a genre of which the "essence" is its lack of essence, its reach for what is not proper to it, or what does not "belong."

I have tried to follow the wandering adventures of the Defoe text, more complicated but not unlike the wanderings of Yorick's sermon in *Tristram Shandy*. I think it is safe to assume these restless wanderings, not unlike those of Robinson himself, have not yet returned home and perhaps never can. Such a story might

¹¹ See my "The Displaced Self," which argues, against this critical tendency, how consistently Defoe's fiction undermines or casts doubt on the very possibility of a stable or central self.

suggest that the Defoe text has always been at the mercy of changing protocols of reading, each of which from its own perspective has tried to fathom the source of its peculiar power—power it would be erroneous to regard as purely or even mostly literary—and failed. Just as those lives that Defoe described take place on the margins of society, their narratives lie on the margins or outside the limits of the now institutional Defoe novels, those that come to mind as the ones that set an agenda for a genre. As for these other narratives, the question remains whether they are merely *not yet* novels. We must also conclude that the problem of their institutional status is only intensified by the fact that they *only* may be written by Defoe, and so their *generic* status cannot be determined by any mere discovery of an author's name. This is a question about the very nature of what we call the literary. The institution of the novel takes place about the same time as the institution of what is always called literature, in the modern sense of the term. Thus it might be fair to imagine both finding neither shelter, nor closure, nor anything more than partial autonomy within the grounds or walls of their institutions. And if the novel must constantly renew its search for novelty, its very newness, in what is by definition outside or beyond it, in its other, so would literature, driven by a similar cultural logic, have to follow in that pursuit.

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