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Marriage and Rebellion

On the first day of January 1684 Daniel Foe married Mary Tuffley, the only daughter of John Tuffley and his wife, Joan, formerly Joan Rawlins. Tuffley was a cooper, and Defoe may have become acquainted with him and his family in connection with one of his major business activities—buying, selling, and importing wines. The event took place at St Botolph Aldgate, a parish church located just outside the ‘bars’ marking the limits of the old city of London and not very far from where Defoe’s uncle, Henry Foe, had lived in his spacious house with six chimneys. They were married more than a year after Defoe had presented Mary with his gift of ‘Historical Collections’. The manuscript at the Clark Library is bound in a white vellum embossed with green and gold. Whether this was in any way connected with the original binding is impossible to determine. Pages seem to have been added in the nineteenth century, but it would certainly have been the kind of decorative volume that an ‘Adorer’, such as Defoe professed himself to be, might have presented to the woman he wished to marry.

In that work, Defoe quoted one wise man on the folly of marrying young, but Mary was just 20 and Daniel about 24, young for someone just beginning his career as a merchant. The equivalent of the modern marriage licence had been obtained on 28 December 1683 and appears in the *Allegations for Marriage Licences Issued by the Vicar-General of the Archbishop of Canterbury* as follows:

Daniel Foe, of St. Michael, Cornhill, Lond., Merchant, Bachelor, about 24, & Mrs. Mary Tuffley, of St. Bottolph’s, Aldgate, Lond., Spinster, about 20, with consent of her father; alleged by Charles Lodwick, of St. Michael’s aforesaid; at St. Bottolph’s aforesaid, St. Lawrence, Jewry, or St. Giles, Cripplegate, London.¹

The formula is the same as that used for hundreds of other couples and

¹ Ed. George J. Armytrage, Harleian Society 30 (1890), 155.

contains no surprises. Marriages at the time were often made for advantage. In a passage that John Robert Moore thought aimed at Defoe, Swift has Lemuel Gulliver comment on the progress of his life, 'I took Part of a small House in the *Old Jury*; and being advised to alter my Condition, I married Mrs. *Mary Burton*, second Daughter to Mr. *Edmond Burton*, Hosier in *Newgate-street*, with whom I received four Hundred Pounds for a Portion.'² In this account, the nature of the dowry is given as the important matter. Passion has no part in his selection of a wife, and but for her name, we are told nothing about her, as if such information would be insignificant; but when Defoe was to tell Harley about his wife, he spoke with feeling about her as a person. If Swift was trying to depict what he considered to be the impassivity and lack of imagination among the middle classes he could hardly have done better. But Defoe was certainly no Lemuel Gulliver. He was unquestionably deeply in love with his Clarinda—Mary Tuffley.

I

The day of the marriage must have been extraordinarily cold, cold enough to have made all the participants eager to get before a roaring fire. This was no ordinary English winter. Luttrell described the weather as 'freezing very bitter'.³ The Thames, only a few streets away, had frozen over, allowing Londoners the opportunity to hold a 'Frost Fair' on the ice by way of celebration. Although the 'whole Streets of Shedd's' that was to turn the Thames into a small city did not go up until the middle of January, there was already some activity at the beginning of the month.⁴ Luttrell remarked on the 'great row of booths crosse the Thames, where is sold diverse liquors and meat roasted', and the scene inspired a number of poets to describe the crowds of people and the cries of the vendors:

... *Good Beer and Ale,*
Coffee or Mum or Wine, the heart to chear,
*Roast Beef, or Mutton boil'd, or Brandy clear.*⁵

Defoe regarded marriage as a solemn and crucial occasion. 'Tis one of the

² Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, in *Prose Writings*, ed. Herbert Davis (14 vols., Oxford: Blackwell, 1959), xi. 20. See John Robert Moore, 'A Defoe Allusion in *Gulliver's Travels*', *Notes & Queries* 3 (1940), 79–80.

³ Luttrell, i. 295.

⁴ Thomas Tryon, *Modest Observations* (London, 1684), 1.

⁵ See the contemporary broadside, *Thamasis's Advice to the Painter from her Frigid Zone: or Wonder upon the Water*; and Luttrell, i. 295

most Weighty Affairs of Life,' he wrote, 'and ought no more to be trifled with; all that we call Happiness in this Life, depending upon it.'⁶ But he was also fascinated by extraordinary natural phenomena. Certainly he could hardly have resisted taking his young bride for a stroll through the booths, however vain he may have considered many of the attractions of the fair. He had chosen to live in the world of trade and business, which to John Bunyan was 'Vanity Fair' itself, and he could not have refused Mary a sight so wonderful.

Before his wedding Defoe may have used his father's shop and warehouse as his place of business, but after his marriage he moved into his own residence in Freeman's Yard, a court on the north side of Cornhill close to that centre of commerce, the Royal Exchange. He appears on the records of Cornhill Ward as a junior member of the Petty Jury for 1684. He is listed simply as 'Foe' with no Christian name attached, a newcomer to the group.⁷ Mary's dowry probably financed this move to so splendid an area. By 1711 Defoe was famous enough to have a wholesaler of gowns, Henry Bright, advertise that his establishment, which could be entered directly from the street, had formerly been 'the Ware-House of Mr. Daniel Defoe'.⁸ Defoe probably had his rooms for conducting business above the warehouse area and his residence on the top floor. It was a part of London which, at the time, had been 'fill'd with Wholesale-Men, and Rich Shopkeepers . . . and such People who managed the necessary Appendices of Trade',⁹ an ideal place for a young man eager to make his fortune as an importer of wines and as a middleman in selling stockings.

II

So little is known of Defoe's business ventures, so busy does his life as a writer and as a secret agent seem without this knowledge, that it is easy enough to ignore this part of his life entirely. The most spectacular facts of his business dealings are his two bankruptcies in 1692 and in 1703. In our time, when a bankruptcy may simply be carrying on regular business by somewhat extraordinary means, conceiving of how terrible an experience such an event must have been is difficult. In some seventeenth-century utopias, bankruptcy was made *the* significant crime and indeed a capital

⁶ *Review*, i. 379.

⁷ Cornhill Ward Jury Duty Wardmote, Guildhall MS 4069/2, fo. 358. He is the only person without a first name.

⁸ Frank Bastian, *Defoe's Early Life* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 101.

⁹ *Review*, viii. 507.

offence. Defoe was continually inveighing against the absurdity of putting bankrupts in prison and therefore making it almost impossible for them to pay their debts. The reasonableness as well as the humanity of his pleas were listened to appreciatively, but bankruptcy continued to be regarded as the unforgivable sin for a businessman. In 1704 one writer, who was no friend of Defoe or his political principles, left a manuscript with the title of 'A Character of Daniell de Foe writer of the Pamphlet Called the Review' that has a few comments on his business reputation:

Daniel Defoe the Author of the Review is no French man, but born here in England, bred an Hozier, and followd that trade till he broke for a considerable Sum. His Creditors run him into an Execution of Bankrupcy, but to no purpose, he haveing fraudulently, as they seem assur'd, Conceald his Effects. So that His Reputation amongst ye fair Dealers of the City is very Foule. He is a profest Dissenter, tho' reckond of no Morals.¹⁰

Although there are a number of errors in this account (for example, Defoe was certainly not trained to be a hosier), this was probably the way his enemies viewed him. That some of his creditors felt he had cheated them seems likely enough. Most of his biographers prefer to adopt the view that the reasons for his failures may be discovered in a certain incompatibility between the daydreaming future novelist and the man of business.

But entering into trade in London during the late seventeenth century was risky even with the best financial backing and finest training. One modern historian has noted that without influential connections and good luck success was impossible. At least ten years were necessary for becoming established; the merchant who died young also died poor:

The risks of trade cannot be underestimated, particularly for a young man starting on his own . . . All trades were subject to arbitrary factors—both human and acts of God—seasonal fluctuations, disruptions through weather or war, fire, earthquake, piracy, price movements, fiscal exactions, the failures of other merchants, the condition of the currency, sudden shifts in demand. The speed with which a ship reached a market could turn on the wind or the temperature or the timing of arrival could mean profit or ruin on a cargo. The unpredictable nature of events could be modified to a certain extent by insurance, by distributing cargoes between several ships, by adjusting profit margins and prices to risk. But as Michael Blackett wrote, 'I never yet Adventured anything but which I durst trust God withall to let his will be done.' Time and good luck were essential.¹¹

¹⁰ (1704), BL MS 28,094, fo. 165.

¹¹ Richard Grassby, 'Social Mobility and Business Enterprise in Seventeenth-Century England', in *Puritans and Revolutionaries*, ed Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 368.

Like Michael Blackett, Defoe preferred to believe in a ruling Providence rather than chance or fortune, but even he might have allowed that his 'luck' was not the best.

The economy of England at this time resembled that of what is now called a developing nation. Under such conditions, the businessman was likely to deal in a variety of goods. Although Defoe was most familiar with the clothing industry and with wines and brandies, he also handled whatever products seemed to offer an opportunity for profit. John Robert Moore once tried to show that, when Defoe was attempting to convince the Scots that he was in Scotland to establish himself in business, the many lines of trade in which he pretended to be interested were actually areas that he knew well. Recently discovered letters from John Russell, Defoe's factor in Edinburgh, reveal that Defoe was trading in horses as well as wines and liquors.¹² *The Compleat English Tradesman* reveals his knowledge of all kinds of merchandise, from linen cloth to products connected with gardening and planting. He traded for tobacco and lumber from America in his early years, sending hose and woollen cloth to the colonies, and purchased large amounts of oysters and cheese when he was in his 60s. He seems to have known something about manufacturing bricks as well as of commercial fishing for herring and cod. He thought that a good tradesman should be capable of handling any kind of business, and after listing a number of successful transformations from one branch of trade to another, he concluded that a tradesman ought to know a wide variety of areas and be prepared to do business in any one of them that seemed capable of yielding him a profit.¹³ Defoe's ideal tradesman was akin to a universal genius, or, perhaps, something like Defoe himself.

III

In his *Compleat English Tradesman*, Defoe gave ample enough illustrations of the ways in which a tradesman might encounter disaster. His first example involved the failure to learn thoroughly enough in the fifth and sixth years of an apprenticeship. Defoe may have grown up in close contact with his father's business, but at the very time when he might have been learning to appraise the value of goods bought and sold, he was at Morton's

¹² See Paula Backscheider, 'John Russell to Daniel Defoe: Fifteen Unpublished Letters from Scotland', *Philological Quarterly* 61 (1982): 161–77.

¹³ *The Complete English Tradesman* (2 vols., London, 1727), i. 35, ii. 73. Although the publisher changed the title to the more modern-looking 'Complete', within the text Defoe always spelled the word as I have indicated. Although I will refer to the title as furnished by the publisher of the 2nd edition in my footnotes, I will use Defoe's preferred spelling in my references within my text.

Dissenting Academy in Newington Green. 'If a young man neglects this part,' Defoe wrote, 'and passes over the season for such improvement, he very rarely ever recovers it; for this part has its season, and that more remarkable than in many other cases, and that season lost never comes again; a judgment in goods taken in early is never lost, as a judgment taken in late, is seldom good.'¹⁴ Defoe was learning much at Morton's Academy, but the value of goods was not part of that education. Nevertheless Defoe followed this warning with a personal anecdote of how he avoided being cheated by a seller of brandies:

I liked the goods very well, but the merchant, as they call'd him, that is to say, the knave appointed to cheat the poor strangers, was cunningly out of the way; so that no bargain was to be made that night. But as I had said that I lik'd the brandies, the same person who brought me an account of them, and who was indeed the owner of the goods, comes to my lodging to treat with me about a price. We did not make many words: I bad him the current price which I had bought for, some days before, and after a few struggles for five crowns a ton more, he came to my price . . . and as I had seen the goods already, he thought there was nothing to do but to make a Bargain, and order the goods to be deliver'd.

But as young as I was, I was too old for that too, and told him, I could not tell positively how many I should take, but that I would come in the afternoon, and taste them over again, and mark out what I wanted.¹⁵

When the owner of the goods speaks of other customers, Defoe answers 'coldly' that he should sell to whomever he wished. On tasting the brandy again, Defoe discovers that the seller has extended his supply by adding other ingredients and refuses to buy more than three casks. Defoe may have had a number of problems in importing wines and brandies, but he showed a native shrewdness in dealing with this 'knave'.

Three other reasons that he gave for business failures involved excessive involvements with literature, with giving the appearance of a gentleman, and with contemporary politics. In illustrating all of these certain roads to ruin, Defoe was surely attempting to exorcise certain demons that he felt within himself. Although he seemed shrewd enough in turning the tables on the seller of brandies, 'Historical Collections' reveals a strongly idealistic attitude toward trade that may have tended to undercut Defoe's native shrewdness. Similarly, his mockery of the wit, the tradesman with a hankering after gentility, and the shopkeeper eagerly following every shift in the wind of politics should not blind us to his own ability to see himself in the mirror of his satire.

¹⁴ *The Complete English Tradesman*, i. 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* i. 9.

The second distraction, then, may have been his fancying himself a man of letters superior to the concerns of trade. Defoe certainly ridicules the tradesman who carries a love of literature into the counting house. 'He that affects a rumbling and bombast stile, and fills his letters with long harangues, compliments, and flourishes, should turn Poet instead of Tradesman, and set up for a wit, not a shopkeeper,' Defoe warned.¹⁶ Did Defoe have his mind on poetry rather than hosiery? Although Defoe mentioned only his attack against the English supporters of Teckely and the Hungarians as an example of his early writing, he more than likely contributed something to the mass of political poetry composed during this period, even if such works sometimes circulated only in manuscript. His first published poem was hardly the work of a novice. He would have been unlikely to have assigned himself the entire poetical province of the lampoon in his *Pacificator* (1700) had he not written a fair amount in that genre. And he was probably a member of an academy, perhaps that established by the poet Lord Roscommon around 1683.¹⁷ However, the evidence for his membership in such a group is slight indeed. Frank Bastian remarked that in his discussion of a 'small Society' of which he had been a member that had dedicated itself 'to Refine and Correct' the English language, Defoe had quoted from Roscommon's *Essay on Translated Verse* published in 1684. This is the only link between Defoe and what is known as 'Roscommon's Academy', and to dismiss it as wild speculation would be easy enough. The trouble is that this is precisely the way Defoe liked to communicate little pieces of information. Readers may have been able to recognize the allusion to Roscommon's effort to continue the work begun and abandoned by a committee of the Royal Society in the 1660s. But why would this academy have wanted Defoe in their midst? The answer to that is simple. Seventeenth-century academies tried to avoid a bias toward scholarly and pedantic language. As a young, literate merchant with a turn for poetry and as the product of a Dissenting Academy famous for its dedication to excellent English style, Defoe would have brought to such a group a knowledge of commercial terminology and an ability to make distinctions between jargon of the counting-house and true English. And since a dictionary and a grammar were among the usual products of such academies, Defoe could have been useful in one of the major projects of such a society.

If Defoe was indeed part of this group, he may have been introduced into

¹⁶ *The Complete English Tradesman*, i. 17.

¹⁷ See *An Essay upon Projects*, ed. Joyce Kennedy, Michael Seidel, and Maximillian E. Novak, in *The Stoke Newington Daniel Defoe Edition* (New York: AMS Press, 1999), 89. For some other candidates for this academy of which he was a member, see the note on p. 192.

their company by Francis Lodowick, the uncle of his friend Charles Lodowick, who signed as a witness at Defoe's wedding. Francis Lodowick (1619–94) did not become a Fellow of the Royal Society until he was 60, but he had contact with scientists such as Hooke and Wilkins for several decades. He was fascinated by the idea of a universal language, and his scheme for a phonetic alphabet appeared in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society in 1686. His desire for a language that would 'truly express things', along with his fascination for hieroglyphics and shorthand, may have had a direct influence on Defoe. It is also possible that Lodowick himself and a group of admirers constituted the 'Academy' to which Defoe was referring, but if not, he would certainly have been the most likely contact between Defoe and the Roscommon group. Yet it seems questionable that such a group would have taken up very much of Defoe's time, or that whatever poetry Defoe might have written during these years would have detracted from his involvement in the world of commerce.

A third possibility among the negative examples provided by Defoe as the source of ruin in business is what Moll Flanders calls 'this amphibious Creature, this *Land-water-thing*, call'd, a *Gentleman-Tradesman*'. Moll realizes that her second husband managed to be a 'Rake, Gentleman, Shop keeper, and Beggar all together'.¹⁸ Doubtless she would have preferred someone who was not a beggar, but she desired a husband who would carry a sword and show no sign of the shop apron when he was not working; and she found him in her extraordinary Draper:

Vanity is the perfection of a Fop; my Husband had this Excellence, that he valued nothing of Expençe, and as his History you may be sure has very little weight in it; 'tis enough to tell you, that in about two Years and a Quarter he Broke, and was not so happy to get over into the *Mint*, but got into a *Spunging-House*, being Arrested in an Action too heavy for him to give Bail to, so he sent for me to come to him.¹⁹

Moll's husband eventually closes his shop and flees to France with whatever money he can raise. And he does this at the expense of his creditors before a formal 'Commission of Bankrupt' could seize them.²⁰

Moll feels somewhat confused about her longings after gentility, or rather the appearance of it, and perhaps Defoe shared some of her bewilderment. His decision to change his name to Defoe or De Foe, his references to himself as a gentleman, his discussion of the family of the De Beaux Faux in his *Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, his hint

¹⁸ *Moll Flanders*, ed. G. S. Starr (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 60–1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 62.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 63.

that he carried a sword—all these outward trappings of gentility that he treasured, despite his insistence that true gentility came from a combination of virtue and knowledge, suggest some leanings in the direction of Moll's 'Gentleman Tradesman'. Yet it would be impossible to conceive of Defoe taking an expensive trip to Oxford in the manner of Moll and her husband during which they flaunted their supposed wealth and status. According to contemporary wisdom, a tradesman could not be a gentleman. In fact, Defoe was contemptuous of the idle aristocracy, and by way of contrast, almost every page that Defoe wrote about commerce was filled with interest and excitement. If there may have been something of the gentleman tradesman in Defoe during the years he was starting his family in Hackney, of extravagance and pretence to gentility, the evidence suggests his main failing lay elsewhere.

A fourth way in which someone like Defoe might have strayed from the rigid demands of the tradesman's calling would have been an excessive involvement in the politics of the time. Politics was to dominate so much of his life that we might ask the question: was it involvement in the anxiety of having James as King followed by the excitement of William's reign that detracted from the concern he should have shown over his accounts? Defoe warned against this temptation:

In order then to direct the Tradesman how to furnish himself thus with a needful stock of trading knowledge, first, I shall propose to him to converse with tradesmen chiefly: he that will be a Tradesman should confine himself within his own sphere: never was the gazette so full of the advertisements of commissions of bankrupt as since our shop-keepers are so much engaged in Parties, form'd into clubs to hear news, read journals, and study politicks; in short, when tradesmen turn statesmen, they should either shut up their shops, or hire some body else to look after them.

The known story of the upholsterer is very instructive, who, in his abundant concern for the publick, run himself out of this business into a jayl; and even when he was in prison, could not sleep for the concern he had for the liberties of his dear country: the man was a good Patriot, but a bad shopkeeper; indeed he should rather have shut up his shop, and got a commission in the army, and then he had served his country in the way of his calling.²¹

The upholsterer of whom Defoe speaks so mockingly would probably have been hopelessly inept in the realities of politics as in the terrors of the field. The lesson of all of these admonitions is—stick to your trade. 'Trade was the Whore I doated on,' wrote Defoe in the last number of the *Review*. Although he was speaking of writing about economic subjects, the image

²¹ *The Complete English Tradesman*, i. 38.

might be extended further. Whores are not wives to whom one remains faithful; they belong to the illicit activities of life, mistaken and unfortunate adventures which could prove fatal. He seems to have treated business as a kind of adventure. The drudgery of keeping books and handling the routine of business does not seem to have interested him at all. He was able to write about the importance of careful bookkeeping, but he does not appear to have relished it himself. As a businessman, he was essentially a gambler, excited by new deals, new prospects.²² What we see in many of the speculations that led to his bankruptcy is an almost compulsive interest in taking risks. 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.

Finally, it should be noted that the kinds of business that attracted him were connected with a new consumer society. His involvement with civet cats, whose glands exuded a strong and lasting scent, brought him into the manufacture of perfume. His hosiery trade was associated with the booming fashion industry, and his importation of wines and brandy from Spain was also among the trades that many considered part of the new luxury that was supposed to be destroying the moral fibre of England. Everything suggests that Defoe belonged with those thinkers such as Nicholas Barbon who defended the expanded building in London and luxury in general as part of a new consumer society. His business transactions belonged to that new world of changing tastes in luxuries and fashion—a world in which business failures and bankruptcy were to become more and more commonplace.

IV

Certainly Defoe did not help his prospects as a business man by riding forth in the manner of Don Quixote to join the forces of the Duke of Monmouth after he landed at Lyme Regis on the afternoon of 11 June 1685. He had been married for just a year and a half and had everything to lose. Did Mary say nothing more than 'Be careful'? Was her family so caught up in the persecution of the Dissenters at the time that she would have thought that her husband was merely doing his duty? What would the steady and cautious James Foe have thought? Why would Defoe do such a thing

²² Defoe's many legal problems appear to have stemmed from this aspect of his character. On 15 Oct. 1684, long before the suits between 1688 and 1692 that were a sign of his growing difficulties, Defoe lost a suit with a William Whetton which involved his paying 'all claymes & demands'. Guildhall London Records Office, Lord Mayor's Waiting Book, xiv. 32.

unless, somewhere in his imagination, he envisioned himself as one of those great heroes whose mighty deeds he recorded in his 'Historical Collections'? Of course he was not alone. The army was composed of just such enthusiasts who had left their shops and their young wives to fight against James II who, after the death of Charles II, had assumed the throne. Defoe was not the only student of Charles Morton in the group either. Years later, he was to list some of his former schoolmates who, had they not lost their lives in Monmouth's Rebellion, might have been great poets.²³

Of course, these young Dissenters thought that they were fighting to preserve their religion and their freedom, and those who, like Defoe, kept a careful watch over events in France thought they could see in James II another Louis XIV, and in their own future the same experiences that the Huguenots were undergoing in the years before the final revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Defoe was to write about those events in France later in his life with something of the same emotion as he must have felt when he was 25. After describing the original Edict, which had permitted the French Protestants to retain their religious freedom, he heaped scorn on the King who ignored such a solemn promise:

But in Contempt of God and Man, and to the eternal Infamy of Popery, and of the very Name and Memory of the late *Lewis XIV* it was disown'd, revok'd, and rescinded by the particular Order of that Prince in the Year 1685, and the Protestants thereupon treated with such Cruelty and Inhumanity, as can scarce be express'd by Words; and which in some Cases was more insupportable than Death even by Torments; and therefore it may be justly said to exceed the Cruelties of the Ten primitive Persecutions, such in particular as the ravishing Children and Women in the Presence of their Parents and Husbands, besides innumerable Cruelties studied by the most refin'd Understandings to wound even the Souls of the Sufferers, and which surpass the Wounds of the Body, as much as the Soul is more capable of Resentment.²⁴

'I must be Blind', wrote Defoe in his journal, the *Review*, '... if I do not see a most exact Connection of Measures and Circumstances, between the Prosecution and Destruction of that Innocent People in *France*, and the present Steps a Party among us take at this time to Ruin and Extirpate the *Dissenters* among us.'²⁵ If Defoe could write this in 1712, how much more serious this parallel must have seemed to him in 1685, when refugees arriving in England from France had spread news of torture and massacres.

²³ *The Present State of the Parties in Great Britain* (London, 1712), 319.

²⁴ *Atlas Maritimus & Commercialis* (London, 1728), 57.

²⁵ *Review*, viii. 593.

Whereas Defoe's fellow journalist and friendly rival for the hearts of the Whig audience during the reign of Queen Anne, John Tutchin, emphasized his participation in Monmouth's Rebellion and wrote in celebration of the 'Western Martyrs', Defoe mentioned the event sparingly. One biographer imagines his riding to look over the rebel forces on 6 July 1685, during the battle of Sedgemoor, and, after observing the disorder among Monmouth's forces, deciding wisely to retreat. Indeed, James II's regular forces inflicted a devastating defeat upon the raw recruits who composed Monmouth's army. Admittedly, this attempt to cast Defoe in the role of Stendhal's Fabrizio in *The Charterhouse of Parma*, as the hero who somehow misses the great romantic moment in which he so longs to participate, has its attractions. Two of Defoe's fictional heroes, Colonel Jack and the Cavalier, miss the main part of such a crucial day, and so perhaps did Defoe. But Defoe remarked in the *Review* of 31 March 1713 that if, of those who talked so boldly about fighting for the Duke of Monmouth, 'half of them had as boldly joyn'd him Sword in Hand, he had never been routed at Kings-sedg-moor; and as they kept their Hands off from acting, so when he was defeated, we heard but little of their Tongues neither afterwards.'²⁶ Defoe was in an extremely vulnerable position at this time, and had he not himself fought with Monmouth's forces, there would have been hundreds of his enemies who could have attacked him either for cowardice on the field of battle or for claiming for himself a soldierly role that was false. That no such enemy stepped forward suggests that, in the general rout that occurred at Sedgemoor, Defoe's conduct was no worse than that of most of Monmouth's troops. If he was among the mounted troops led by Lord Grey, like many of those among this inexperienced cavalry, he may have found that his horse, unaccustomed to the sounds of cannon and rifles, was uncontrollable and carried him away from the battle before he could gain command.²⁷ Apparently Defoe did not enjoy recalling what happened at Sedgemoor. Defeat is never pleasant, and the aftermath was terrifying enough to make his avoidance of the subject understandable.

One other piece of evidence of Defoe's participation is a remarkable picture of the kind of suffering that an army must endure in the intervals between battles. Criticizing those who object to the pleasure-seeking soldier off-duty, Defoe painted a grim picture of the soldier's life:

But if they did but see them in a Rainy Season, when the whole Country about them is trod into a Chaos, and in such intolerable Marches, Men and Horses dying and dead together, and the best of them glad of a bundle of Straw to lay down their

²⁶ *Review*, ix. 154.

²⁷ See Peter Earle, *Monmouth's Rebels* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 127–8.

wet and weary Limbs: If they did but see a Siege, besides the daily danger and expectation of Death, which is common to all, from the General to the Sentinel; the Watches, the Labours, the Cares which attend the greatest; the ugly Sights, the Stinks of Mortality, the Grass all wither'd and black with the Smoke of Powder, the horrid Noises all Night and all Day, and Spoil and Destruction on every side; I am sure they would be perswaded, that a State of War, to those who are engag'd in it, must needs be a state of Labour and Misery.²⁸

Although caution might suggest that Defoe could have described such a scene through imagination and wide reading, a preponderance of detail would suggest that he had been through a campaign. What he describes are exactly the kinds of observation that never appear in print. It was rain on the night of 23 June that caused Monmouth to delay his abortive attack on Bristol, and Defoe probably witnessed the six hours of cannonading between the two armies through a rainy night at Phillips Norton a few days later. He could have learned of the horror of sieges by reading of the taking of Magdenburgh in the Thirty Years War, but something of the rain and mud of Somerset in 1685 and a desperate rebellion seeps through this passage. He was there.

Somehow, perhaps by managing to flee the country or by going into hiding, Defoe escaped the vicious reprisals that followed the failure of the rebellion. James II wanted the rebels hanged for all to see, and with the aid of his Chief Justice, Jeffreys, men were hunted down throughout the region. Some of the prisoners were sold as transported felons, others fled to Holland and even to New England. Many of those hanged were given the full punishment, their entrails burned, their bodies quartered, and the remains displayed all over the South West of England. The wives and children of those executed were often reduced to begging. Only the Amnesty of March 1686 put an end to the butchery, but a profitable trade in transporting the prisoners to the West Indies continued for some time.²⁹ Defoe was to receive a special pardon in 1687, probably the kind that, at this late date, could be purchased for £60.³⁰ Under any circumstance, his business must have suffered during 1685 and 1686, and some of his troubles may really have dated from that time.

All of these matters considered, we must revise our understanding of Defoe's character somewhat along the lines of his hero, Robinson Crusoe. For Crusoe was an extraordinarily successful businessman when he applied himself to his various trades. As he remarked to his partner, who had

²⁸ *A Short Narrative of the Life of His Grace John D. of Marlborough* (London, 1711), 41.

²⁹ See David Ogg, *England in the Reign of James II and William III* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 152-7.

³⁰ CSPD, 31 May 1687.

upbraided him for a certain slackness in the pursuit of gain, despite his hatred of 'sitting still', once he embarked on a business venture, he pursued it with remarkable industry.³¹ Crusoe's problem is his 'Wandering Fancy', his desire to travel, and such a romantic motivation must be laid to Defoe's account in the affair of the Monmouth Rebellion. He was industrious enough, and he loved the idea of trade with a passion, but with not so much of a passion as he loved his various causes. For them, particularly for his political causes, he would put on the armour of the knight errant and charge at the nearest windmill.

V

With the prospect of James's revenge—of the bodies of rebels hanging along the roads from Somerset to London—where did Defoe go in the confusion of the defeat at Sedgemoor on 6 July 1685? He had a relative at Martock, fifteen miles away, who ran a free school which Defoe had visited on various occasions, but a thorough search was being made throughout the West Country. Houses were invaded without any legal ceremony, and the trials were almost modelled on those of the Queen in *Alice in Wonderland*, with the verdict first and the trial after. Defoe would have been wise to have left the country, at least until a pardon was obtained. Certainly he would never have had a better time to take a voyage to some of those lands he was to visit imaginatively in his fiction.

How far he went and how long he stayed are perplexing questions. His knowledge of the places of the earth and their products was so extensive that he was chosen to write the commentary on this subject for *Atlas Maritimus & Commercialis* (1728), a large undertaking by a consortium of publishers. He did this in conjunction with the famous contemporary scientist Edmund Halley, who supplied the maps. But Defoe often boasted of the power of the imagination to recreate places never seen. In *Captain Singleton*, he was to send his hero across parts of Africa that were unknown in Defoe's day, and he did much the same for the South Pacific in *A New Voyage Round the World*. The descriptions are vivid enough, yet he was surely never in either place. In describing a person who was a 'SCHOLLAR' in Defoe's eyes despite his ignorance of the classical

³¹ After listening to a criticism of his 'indolent Temper', Crusoe remarks, 'I begin to be a Convert to the Principles of Merchandizing; but I must tell you . . . you do not know what I am doing; foir if once I conquer my backwardness, and embark heartily; as old as I am, I shall harrass you up and down the World, till I tire you; for I shall pursue it so eagerly, I shall never let you lye still.' *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, in *Shakespeare Head Edition* (1927–8), iii. 112.

languages, Defoe listed his knowledge of geography: 'You can not name any country in the known part of Europe but he can give you extempore an account of its situation, latitude, rivers, chief towns, its commerce, and, nay, and some thing of its history and of its political interests.'³² If such a person had the imaginative and creative abilities of Defoe, he could make places come alive in such a way that we might conclude he had surely been there. And for the most part, Defoe's accounts of foreign parts are probably nothing more than an imagined reality.

On occasions, he will speak of certain events that occurred to him when he was in another country. Such statements have to be examined with scepticism, particularly when they occur in a work such as his *Tour thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, which he published between 1724 and 1727. This work is written in a series of 'Familiar Letters', and the narrator is supposed to be a world traveller capable of comparing gardens, buildings, and the natural landscape with similar features in other parts of the world. For example, in his description of Wilton House in Wiltshire, he remarks that a statue of Venus was unmatched by any sculpture in England and only equalled by artefacts to be seen in Italy: 'In Italy, and especially at Romne and Naples, we see a great variety of fine columns, and some of them of excellent workmanship, and antiquity, and at some of the Courts of the Princes of Italy the like is seen; as especially at the Court of Florence; but in England I do not remember to have seen any thing like this.'³³ While Defoe may have wandered about Italy sampling the best in art and culture, what is most important about this passage is that we feel we are in the presence of a connoisseur. The same is true when he shifts to what seems like a confession of a direct experience. Commenting on a bas-relief of Marcus Aurelius in the same collection, he states, 'I never saw any thing like what appears here, except in the chamber of rarities at Munick in Bavaria.'³⁴

As Samuel Johnson, quoting Castiglione, was to remark about writing in a 'Mask' or under the disguise of anonymity, it confers certain privileges, and among them was a release from an excessive regard for the truth.³⁵ Defoe may have actually viewed the great art treasures of western Europe; he was curious about everything in the world around him, but whatever travelling he did, it probably had little resemblance to the 'Grand Tour' taken by gentlemen as part of their education during the eighteenth century. As with his Robinson Crusoe, such travel would usually have had as its ostensible goal some interest in trade. Merchants often travelled a great deal. His friend Charles Lodwick and Lodwick's half-brother

³² *The Compleat English Gentleman*, 200.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 195.

³³ *Tour*, i. 193-4.

³⁵ Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, No. 208.

Matthew Clarkson both travelled to New York, where they acted as factors on behalf of Defoe, and Defoe had firm links with Spain, probably through his dealing in wines. France and Holland lay but a short distance across the Channel. He seems to have visited Germany and Italy, and perhaps, like his own Colonel Jack, his French was good enough to pass for a native of that country. That one of his aliases was 'Claude Guilot' may suggest that he thought he would not be detected in such a disguise.

At any rate, in fleeing for his life after the defeat at Sedgemoor, Defoe may have used his contacts as a merchant to board the first available ship to the Continent. A likely place for him to have gone would have been Holland. It was to Holland that Shaftesbury had fled after being freed by the London jury, and as the most tolerant of Europe's states, it held attractions for a large number of those who fled the wrath of James II. Many were to return to England from Holland with William of Orange in 1688. But none of the exiles mention an ardent young Englishman named Daniel Foe in any of their correspondence.³⁶ At this point in his career, he would have been more interested in keeping his business going than in political intrigue among professional plotters such as Robert Ferguson and Major Wildman. He appears to have returned even before 10 March 1686, when James issued his general pardon. On 24 January 1686 he posted bail for a relative, Jane Foe, and for a Mary Deering, who had been arrested for attending an illegal conventicle at Tenter Alley in Little Moor Fields.³⁷ He may have already paid a ransom that assured his safety, but as has been mentioned, he appears on a list for 31 May 1687 of those pardoned.³⁸ Individual entrepreneurs purchased such lists at a flat rate to make what money could be earned at so late a date. Defoe's is among the names of those purchased by a George Penne—names of those who were to be transported to the West Indies. When Defoe depicted the servitude of Colonel Jack in Virginia, he may have experienced a vicarious sense of relief at his hero's ability to overcome his situation. In real life, the rebels transported to the West Indies were fortunate if they survived the voyage itself.

The Petty Jury list for the Cornhill Ward lists Defoe's name for 1685 and 1686. His name does not appear for 1687, but he was back on the Petty Jury in 1688.³⁹ Much of the fervour had gone out of the search for the rebels by 1686, and Penne may have been content with £60 or £65. Ransoms of

³⁶ Frank Bastian presents some evidence for a Dutch connection, but nothing entirely persuasive. See *Defoe's Early Life*, 118–20.

³⁷ Guildhall, London Records Office, Lord Mayor's Waiting Book, vol. 14, 503. He also paid for a Maria Deering.

³⁸ CSPD, 31 May 1687.

³⁹ Cornhill Ward, Jury Duty Wardmote, Guildhall Library MS 4069/2, fo. 379.

£15,000, such as Edward Prideaux paid to the King and to Chief Justice Jeffreys, were no longer to be obtained.⁴⁰ On 4 April 1687 James II had issued his Declaration of Indulgence, hoping that by suspending the Test Acts against Dissenters and Catholics, he would be able to manipulate these two groups against the reigning Anglican establishment in both church and state. Toleration was the important notion he was attempting to sell to the nation. One of the most respected Dissenters, Richard Baxter, was released from prison, and James actively courted the Quaker William Penn. In posing as the newfound friend of the Dissenters, James could hardly wish to revive memory of the Bloody Assizes. Defoe could not have felt seriously endangered by his involvement in the Monmouth affair at this point in time.

He apparently felt confident enough to write a work in which he urged his fellow Dissenters to reject the King's overtures. In *An Appeal to Honour and Justice*, he described his disagreement with many among the Dissenters who believed that James II ought to be trusted as his second disagreement with his fellow Nonconformists after he had upbraided them for supporting the Turks during the siege of Vienna:

*The next Time I differed with my Friends was when King James was wheedling the Dissenters to take off the Penal Laws and Test, which I could by no means come into. And as in the first I used to say, I had rather the Popish House of Austria should ruin the Protestants in Hungaria, than the Infidel House of Ottoman should ruin both Protestant and Papist, by over-running Germany; So in the other, I told the Dissenters I had rather the Church of England should pull our Cloaths off by Fines and Forfeitures, than the Papists should fall both upon the Church, and the Dissenters, and pull our Skins off by Fire and Fagot.*⁴¹

Some of his fellow Dissenters believed that there was some advantage to be gained in lifting the state of siege under which they had lived during the last years of Charles II and under James II. In the period between Monmouth's rebellion and James's declaration of a new toleration of Dissenters and Catholics, the King had encouraged brutal treatment toward anyone attending illegal conventicles or violating the other laws that had been passed to discourage religious dissent, and a horde of spies and informers were only too eager to collect rewards for testimony against some of the most distinguished of the Nonconformists. Defoe's teacher, Charles Morton, was among those who found the climate in England impossible and left for New England. But rather than making him eager for accommodation, such violations of what Defoe considered to be religious

⁴⁰ See Ogg, *James II and William III*, 153.

⁴¹ *An Appeal to Honour and Justice*, in *Shakespeare Head Edition*, 233.

freedom simply made him angry. He was already showing the extraordinary resilience that was to mark his entire life. A fugitive just a few months before and perhaps still on a secret list of known traitors, he was ready to attack a policy which he saw as the prelude to an attempt to turn England back into a Catholic nation.

John Robert Moore identified *A Letter to a Dissenter from his Friend at the Hague, Concerning the Penal Laws and the Test* as the work to which Defoe was referring, suggesting that there was another production in 1687 attacking those 'Addresses' who congratulated James on his generosity in suspending the Test Acts. Such Addresses continued to be published in the London Gazette until the end of James's reign, and he repeated his Declaration of Indulgence on 27 April 1688, a year after the first.⁴² This makes the dating of Defoe's work difficult. The brief four-page pamphlet named by Moore, with its argument for the Test Acts as a way of keeping the Catholics from power, hardly seems the kind of work that would have angered any large section of the Dissenters at such a late date. The irony directed against James II is very much in the style of Defoe, but he may indeed have written a longer and more explicit attack earlier.

VI

William III landed at Torbay on 5 November 1688, blown there by what seemed, to those who looked for the signs of Providence in history, a miraculous 'Protestant Wind'. With this event began what was called the Glorious Revolution, as James found his power slipping from him and, after one abortive attempt at departing, finally left England for France on 23 December. Perhaps no event in English history has been the occasion of such revisionist thinking as the Glorious Revolution. Advocates of the 'Whig theory of history' saw in this event a crucial moment in English history and, indeed, in the history of the world, a moment when England progressed toward liberal democracy and toward everything that the nineteenth century regarded as the modern world. Many modern historians have argued that William succeeded by various subterfuges, that for the most part the idea of 'Revolution Principles' remained meaningless for the greater part of the population, and that the introduction of a society based firmly on the rights of property created a heartless exploitation of the poor. It also gave England a monarch whose right to the throne was dependent not upon a divinely ordained succession but rather upon the necessity of a

⁴² Ogg, *England in the Reigns of James II and William III*, 186.

state apparatus to maintain law and order. It ushered into England what has been called the 'Financial Revolution' by one modern historian and an atmosphere described by a contemporary poet as 'The Corruption of the World by Money'.⁴³ Even if we now can perceive that there are at least two ways of seeing the Glorious Revolution, we should not surrender to the kind of nostalgia that afflicted those who longed for a return of James II and his family to the throne of England—those who became known as Jacobites. If absolutism seemed to many contemporaries the correct political direction of the future, we know that it was not: that whatever evils came in with the creation of a state geared for capitalist expansion and for the eventual development of liberal democracy, it was a far better system than one governed by the caprice of a single monarch. Defoe was to be the enthusiastic propagandist, political theorist, and economic prophet for the Glorious Revolution and for its hero, William III. He thought that the Dissenters should have gained more from it—more, that is, than toleration of their dissent—but he never criticized the political settlement created by the Glorious Revolution.

To demonstrate his pleasure in the extraordinary turn of events, Defoe participated in the Lord Mayor's Show on 29 October 1689, to which William III had been invited. John Oldmixon noted that it was more elaborate than anything the magistrates of the city of London had ever staged before:

and what deserv'd to be particularly mention'd, says a Reverend Historian, was a Royal Regiment of Volunteer Horse, made up of the chief Citizens, who being gallantly mounted and richley accoutred, were led by the Earl of Monmouth, now Earl of Petersborough, and attended their Majesties from Whitehall. Among these Troopers, who were for the most part Dissenters, 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 did after that list in the service of Mr. Robert Harley . . .⁴⁴

How proud Defoe must have been to have ridden with a troop led by the son of the man for whom he fought at Sedgemoor! No one watching at the time would have seen the vision that Oldmixon attempted to give his readers by projecting the future upon the past, by projecting an image of Defoe, the future traitor, upon that of the young merchant proudly playing out his role as a soldier enlisted in the cause of King William.

⁴³ The modern historian was P. G. M. Dickson, whose book *The Financial Revolution* was published in 1967. The contemporary poet was Robert Gould.

⁴⁴ John Oldmixon, *The History of England during the Reigns of King William and Queen Mary* (London, 1735), 37.

Although the next few years were to bring some genuine pleasures, they were certainly mixed with the anxieties of family life and the uncertainties of business. But on that day in October, Defoe must have seen before him the prospect of a brilliant future. He was 29. His wife, Mary, had either just given birth to their second daughter, Maria, or was pregnant with her.⁴⁵ On the other hand, Defoe's excitement over the successful invasion by William of Orange, now William III, ruling jointly with his wife, Queen Mary, would certainly have been tempered by his grief over the death of his first child. On 7 September 1688, he had buried Mary in the parish church of St Michael Cornhill.⁴⁶ Although some historians have argued that the high mortality rate among children must have inured parents to feelings of excessive grief over the deaths of their children, such 'evidence' contradicts everything that we know about individual grief. For someone as oriented toward family life as Defoe, the death of a child must have come as a stunning blow. Concern over the wellbeing of new children being born may have relieved some of the sadness in the home, but we should not let modern statistics of mortality blind us to our sense of what must have been tremendous sorrow. It was to be Defoe's genius in *A Journal of the Plague Year* to contrast the individual, tragic death with the Bills of Mortality, and his insight into the disparity between the cold numbers and the reality of whole families being wiped out makes that work so poignant and believable.

So little is known of Defoe's children that his biographers tend to avoid the subject. James Sutherland, wonderful scholar that he was, limited himself to a discussion of the supposed illegitimacy of Benjamin Norton Defoe, who was probably Defoe's third child, concluding that Defoe's sins were probably 'not those of the flesh' and that the charge, coming from the unreliable Richard Savage, was doubtful. The little that we know is that Defoe had eight children in all: Mary, Maria, Hannah, Benjamin, Henrietta, Daniel, Margaret, and, finally, Sophia, in December 1701. All of these children, all of Mary's pregnancies, must have made the Defoe household a busy place, full of excitement and affection. If Mary were to live through the experience of having eight children in so short a time, she would obviously need help, and by 6 March 1692 the poll tax list revealed not only a second child but five servants. Richard Addis was apparently there to assist Defoe in his business, but Ralph Besey, Mary, Anne, and 'Nourse' were there to help with the burdens of the household and the

⁴⁵ The taxation rolls of the Cornhill Ward for 1690, Box 6, MS 10, at the Guildhall list Defoe as living with his wife, one child, and two servants, a man and a woman.

⁴⁶ See *The Register of St. Michael's Cornhill 1546-1754* (London: Harleian Society, 1882), 270.

nursery. In this list, Defoe is listed as a 'Whole Sale Hosier' rather than as the 'Merchant' he described himself as in his marriage licence.⁴⁷

In a sense, Defoe had really settled down for the first time since his marriage. That there were no children in the first few years is hardly surprising. Until the general pardon was issued for the participants in Monmouth's Rebellion, he probably made only brief appearances at his home, and perhaps not until the particular pardon at the end of May 1687 did he really feel secure. But as suggested, arrangements for that pardon may have been made long in advance, for on 12 January 1687 he applied for the status of Livery Man in the Butchers' Company on the basis of his father's membership. He agreed to pay a fine of £10 15s. for the privilege of being discharged of any obligations to serve as an officer or of any duties.⁴⁸ He thereby assumed his rights as a citizen of London.

VII

Four years after the Glorious Revolution, on 29 October 1692, Defoe was in the Fleet prison, his career as a merchant and tradesman sliding toward ruin. He was sentenced by Sir John Powell on a suit brought by Walter Ridley, Cornelius Shadwell, Jerome Whichcote, and Nicholas Barrett. Walter Ridley is identified as a 'haberdasher', and all four were probably associated with Defoe's dealings in hosiery. Pat Rogers, who first uncovered the records of this incarceration, suggested that it threw doubt on Defoe's claims of being a merchant. He was deeply involved with these London tradesmen, Rogers argued, and it was in this area rather than that of marine insurance that Defoe met disaster.⁴⁹ But as Frank Bastian has demonstrated, Defoe's business dealings were immensely varied, and, as the records of the Port and Custom Books at the Public Records Office reveal, he was engaged in importing and exporting goods.⁵⁰ Considering that only a small portion of his dealings were recorded in such records and court cases, everything suggests that he dabbled in anything that might enable him to turn a profit.

He apparently owned a vessel with the provocative name *Desire*, for we know he attempted to sell it to a Robert Harrison for £260 on 13 August 1688. Harrison could only manage to raise £195, leaving Defoe with a

⁴⁷ Guildhall Library, Poll Book, Mar. 1692, Cornhill Ward, 1st Precinct.

⁴⁸ Guildhall Library, Court Minutes, MS 6443-1.

⁴⁹ Pat Rogers, 'Defoe in Fleet Street Prison', *Notes & Queries* 216 (1971): 451-5.

⁵⁰ His name appears in the records of the Collector of Customs, E.90. 144/1 on 28 Mar. 1688 (item 10); and Port Books, 145/1 for 3 July (item 51) and 6 July (item 39). His dealings were relatively small compared to merchants such as William Joliffe.

quarter share.⁵¹ Just a few months before, on 18 June, he had signed an agreement with Humphrey Ayles to transport merchandise and passengers to Boston, New York, and Maryland, and to return with a specified cargo, a transaction that was to end in litigation.⁵² And in July he was being dunned by a merchant from Kings Lynn named Joseph Braban for £396 7s. 1d. not yet collected from his customers. Defoe agreed to pay Braban the money in monthly instalments, a sure sign that he had extended his credit far beyond any cash that he had to hand.⁵³ In fact, this was the period that saw a huge expansion in the use of credit in financial transactions. Defoe was to extol the magic powers of Lady Credit in his later writings, but for a relatively young merchant, the ability to obtain unlimited credit was dangerous. Given Defoe's exuberant temperament, the temptation to invest in seemingly exciting projects must have been irresistible.

The two projects that brought him the most grief were his investment in a diving-engine to search for treasure and in a civet cat farm for the extraction of ingredients used in making perfume from the urine of these animals. The image of diving into the depths of the ocean for gold and sifting the urine of civet cats for perfume seems to combine utopian dreams with the kind of scientific project that Swift was to satirize in the wonderful academy of Lagado in the third book of *Gulliver's Travels*, but as Defoe was to remind the readers of his *Essay upon Projects*, deciding on whether a scheme is completely mad or a stroke of genius is not always so easy:

There is, 'tis true, a great difference between *New Inventions* and *Projects*, between Improvement of Manufactures or Lands, which tend to the immediate Benefit of the Public and Employing of the Poor, and projects framed by subtle Heads, with a sort a *Deceptio Visus* and *Legerdemain*, to bring people to run needless and unusual hazards. I grant it, and give a due preferenc to the first, and yet Success has so sanctifi'd some of those other sorts of projects, that 'twou'd be a kind of Blashemy against Fortune to disallow 'em: witness *Sir William Phip's Voyage to the Wreck*; 'twas a mere Project, a Lottery of a Hundred thousand to One odds; a hazard which, if it had fail'd, every body would have been asham'd to have own'd themselves concern'd in, a Voyage that wou'd have been as much ridicul'd as *Don Quixot's Adventure upon the Windmill*.⁵⁴

Even as he speaks of the £200,000 that Sir William Phipps managed to salvage from the Spanish wreck off Florida, the reader can feel Defoe's eyes glowing and his excitement returning.

⁵¹ See PRO. C7. 179/188.

⁵² Ibid. C7/122/36; C7/122/9.

⁵³ Ibid. C8. 548/96. For an excellent summary of these cases, see James Sutherland, 'Some Early Troubles of Daniel Defoe', *Review of English Studies* 9 (1933), 275–90.

⁵⁴ *An Essay upon Projects*, 11.

After mentioning diving-engines among some doubtful projects, Defoe noted, 'I could give a very diverting history of a patent-monger whose cully was nobody but myself.' The person Defoe had in mind was Joseph Williams, who experimented with such a machine in May 1691 off the coast of Scotland. He patented the machine on 17 October of that year and formed a company. Defoe purchased ten shares with £200 and was voted secretary-treasurer. An additional 10s. per share was added to provide working capital. Williams, who received 400 shares of stock for his invention paid Defoe partly in money and partly in notes, but by 3 February 1693 he was suing Defoe for having cashed some of his notes. The diving-engine proved to be unsuccessful. Whether Williams managed to recover any of the money and notes he gave Defoe is unknown, but at the very least, Defoe lost the £200. That Defoe's enthusiasm for such a discovery was undiminished is shown by a letter from his brother-in-law Robert Davis to Defoe's patron, Robert Harley, on 30 October 1713. After mentioning Defoe's name and obvious approval of his scheme, Davis provided testimony to his going down in an engine and singing the hundredth psalm under water in September 1704. More important than this moment in the history of music was the recovery of several silver bars from a wreck. Defoe may have pictured himself as the naive victim of Williams, but he apparently never gave up hope that he would find a diving machine that would make him rich.⁵⁵

Defoe's adventure into the perfume trade was both more expensive and more questionable from the standpoint of his business practices. On 21 April 1692, he agreed to take over a civet cat farm owned by John Barksdale for the sum of £852 15s. He borrowed £400 from an old acquaintance, Samuel Stancliffe, to whom he already owed £1100, but almost £800 came from his mother-in-law, Joan Tuffley. When the sixty-nine cats were seized by the Sheriffs of London, Sir Thomas Lane and Sir Thomas Cooke, they were appraised at half the value, and the operation was taken over by Sir Thomas Estcourt. Joan Tuffley sued Defoe for misrepresenting the price of the civet cats, charging 'manifest fraud' and referring to Defoe as a 'gay deceiver'.⁵⁶ By July of that year Defoe, faced with a Chancery suit over a bill for £40, admitted that he owed the money and that he did not have the money to meet the note. At this point he was obviously bankrupt.

The question of Defoe's guilt in all of this has been a point of contention between his biographers. When Theodore Newton first discussed Defoe's

⁵⁵ *Portland Papers*, 350-1.

⁵⁶ PRO C7.373/33. Joan Tuffley filed to recover her investment on 17 May 1693. Sir Thomas Estcourt replied on 2 June and John Barksdale on 12 June of that year.

involvement in the transactions over the civet cat farm, he accused Defoe of doing anything to save himself, and that included deceiving his own relatives. John Robert Moore rushed to the defence of Defoe's character. The lawsuit of Joan Tuffley, he argued, was actually an attempt to get Sir Thomas Estcourt to disgorge some of his money. James Sutherland, balancing the evidence, thought that Defoe could not be excused from practising a degree of deception upon Joan Tuffley.

Such views have the benefit of hindsight but do not suggest the misery that Defoe must have experienced at the time. Sutherland aptly quoted a number of the *Review* for 19 February 1706, in which Defoe confessed, 'I freely name myself, with those, that are ready to own, that they have in the Extremities and Embarrassments in Trade, done those things, which their own Principles Condemn'd, which they are not Asham'd to Blush for, which they look back on with Regret, and strive to make Reparation for, with their utmost Diligence.'⁵⁷ As evidence for Defoe's innocence, Professor Moore argued that Defoe remained on excellent terms with the Tuffley family, but Defoe clearly took money from them and others which he used to balance out other accounts rather than those in which they thought they were investing. That he was later to move his family into the Tuffley home may show that they found him a likeable human being and that they thought his financial problems were more the result of inexperience and youth than of malicious intent. But there appears to be no question about his misuse of funds.⁵⁸

Defoe expressed his thoughts on bankruptcy most tellingly in *The Compleat English Tradesman*, where the subject occupies 100 pages near the beginning of the second edition of 1727. The positioning of this discussion shows how close to Defoe's feelings was this experience, and the warning against 'over-trading' suggests that he considered this to have been his chief error:

Over-trading is among tradesmen as over-lifting is among strong men; such people vain of their strength, and their pride prompting them to put it to the utmost trial, at last lift at something too heavy for them, over-strain their sinews, break some of Nature's bands, and are cripples ever after. I take Over-trading to be to a shop-keeper, as ambition is to a prince. The late King of France, the great King Lewis is a flagrant example. . . . Thus the strong man in the fable, who by

⁵⁷ *Review*, iii. 86b.

⁵⁸ For a balanced approach, see James Sutherland, *Defoe*, 2nd edn. (London: Methuen, 1950), 41–2. Sutherland concludes that the apparent anger shown by Joan Tuffley in her law suit was real enough. On the other hand, he may underestimate the nature of family unity at the time. She may have been acting in a practical manner, attempting to salvage something from the general wreckage of Defoe's finances, but she must have been angry at Defoe's apparent duplicity.

main strength us'd to rive a tree, undertaking one at last which was too strong for him, it clos'd upon his fingers and held him till the wild beasts came and devour'd him.⁵⁹

Defoe reached back into his 'Historical Collections', to the story of Milo Crotoniates, for this fable of the man who overestimates his powers. His most detailed comparison for the able tradesman who overestimates his strength is drawn from history—the attempts of Louis XIV to conquer all of Europe and his ultimate defeat at the hands of the forces he succeeded in uniting in opposition to him; Spain, England, and Holland. Both examples suggest his tendency to mythologize the fall of his 'compleat tradesman' and his own bankruptcy. Of course Defoe did not refer specifically to himself in this discussion, but those readers who could guess at the author might sense a certain lack of modesty in Defoe's picture of the ruin of a powerful entrepreneur.

In urging the tradesman to 'break' early, before his situation becomes desperate, Defoe was clearly thinking of the horrors of his own situation. He imagines the entire scene as an epic struggle. The tradesman is like a fighter knocked down, unable to resist, or like a 'soldier surrounded with enemies, he must be kill'd; so the debtor must sink, it cannot be prevented'.⁶⁰ Defoe believed strongly that he would always be able to overcome difficulties by his skill or cleverness. Bankruptcy taught him that, in certain situations, capitulation was the only recourse. Before the final disaster, he probably tried to retrench as much as possible. He gives a dialogue between a tradesman and his wife in which the husband is reluctant to worry his wife. It is she who insists on knowing the true state of his affairs and who offers to cut back from five maids and a footman to just two maids. He, on the other hand, is reluctant to give up his horses and groom: 'It is very hard, I han't your spirit my Dear.'⁶¹ That this was a version of a conversation between Mary Foe and her husband is the more likely because the details of the family depicted, including numbers of servants and children, are very close to those of the family of Daniel Foe.

As has been mentioned, by the end of October 1692 all efforts at saving his business had failed. His debts totalled £17,000. Of 140 creditors, all but four agreed to accept 15s. to the pound, the amount that Defoe considered fair in his *Complete English Tradesman*, but four of the creditors holding debts amounting to £2000 refused to accept the agreement. This ended efforts at a reasonable solution. After his imprisonment on 29 October, he was again committed to the Fleet on 4 November for a debt of £700 owed

⁵⁹ *The Complete English Tradesman*, i. 57–8.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 77–8.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 143.

to Thomas Martin and an unstipulated sum owed to Henry Fairfax. As with his arrest in October, he was quickly removed to the King's Bench Prison. From there, he may have gone to the Mint, a sanctuary for debtors, but like his heroine, Moll Flanders, who passed some time there only to find that she was 'not wicked enough' for such company, he probably left as soon as he could.⁶² Moll's observations, made despite her feeling that preaching was not her particular 'Talent', express what must have been Defoe's horror at seeing the ideals of the commercial world flaunted by the inhabitants of this sanctuary:

It was indeed a Subject of strange Reflection to me, to see Men who were overwhelm'd in perplex'd Circumstances; who were reduc'd some Degrees below being Ruin'd; whose Families were Objects of their own Terror and other Peoples Charity; yet while a Penny lasted, nay, even beyond it, endeavouring to drown their Sorrow in their Wickedness; heaping up more Guilt upon themselves, labouring to forget former things, which now it was the proper time to remember, making more Work for Repentance, and Sinning on, as a Remedy for Sin past. . . . I have heard them, turning about, fetch a deep Sigh, and cry *what a Dog am I! Well Betty, my Dear, I'll drink thy Health tho' meaning the Honest Wife*, that perhaps had not a Half a Crown for herself and three or four Children: The next Morning they are at their Penitentials again, and perhaps the poor weeping Wife comes over to him, either brings him some Account of what his Creditors are doing, and how she and the Children are turn'd out of Doors, or some other dreadful News; and this adds to his self Reproaches; but when he has Thought and Por'd on it till he is almost Mad, having no Principles to Support him nothing within him, or above him, to Comfort him; but finding it all Darkness on every Side, he flies to the same Relief again, (viz.) to Drink it away.⁶³

That Defoe understood how it felt to experience this sense of helplessness and despair there can be no doubt. If he sensed within him a conviction that somehow he would recover from his bankruptcy—a conviction supplied both by an invincible faith in his own abilities and by his religious beliefs—he nevertheless understood what these men were suffering. Bankruptcy was a disaster for Defoe in all kinds of ways, but it supplied him with an understanding of human anguish that was to be the making of a great writer of fiction.

Like the families of these men, Defoe's family was living upon charity. Mary Foe and her children had taken refuge in the house of Joan Tuffley and her son, Samuel, at Kingsland, and Daniel joined her there some time in 1693. The home in Freeman's Yard was gone, though Defoe continued

⁶² *Moll Flanders*, 66.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 65.

his hosiery business with the help of two assistants, Richard Addis and James Moyer. He had not abandoned his business career, but the fear of arrest through the demands of his creditors must have made his life uncomfortable. Indeed, it may have been the secret kind of life he had to live in evading arrests for debt that introduced him to various other forms of secrecy. Apparently he even thought it unsafe to attend public worship on Sunday, since he was to mention how he had been deprived of that pleasure.

And as if matters were not bad enough, he may have experienced further financial disaster when, on 26 June 1693, the Smyrna fleet of 400 ships was attacked by a French force of fifty men-of-war. In his *Continuation of the Letters of a Turkish Spy* (1718) Defoe was to describe this battle as a great victory for the French, with sixty-six ships captured or destroyed, 'most of them richly laden'.⁶⁴ Defoe's name was among those on the 'Merchant Insurers Bill' which passed through the Commons and went to the House of Lords, where it was rejected on 9 March 1694. If it had passed, Defoe would have been able to make suitable arrangements with his creditors for paying off his debts, for he already had agreements from two-thirds of those to whom money was owed. The bill stated that if two-thirds agreed to a certain composition, the others would have to accept the amount agreed upon. John Robert Moore argues conclusively that as a late applicant among the nineteen, Defoe would have had his credentials examined very carefully.⁶⁵ This means that some of his losses must have involved his insuring ships. Was he still investing in insurance in 1693? His late application may suggest that he was taking advantage of the mishandling of the naval protection of the Smyrna fleet to make claims for some insurance disasters earlier in the war. These may have been the shocks that forced him into the desperate measures at the end of 1692.

In some ways Defoe could count his blessings. At least he was free to recover his fortunes. What might have been is suggested by a volume published in 1691 by Moses Pitt with the title *The Cry of the Oppress'd*. Pitt, a former book publisher, was unable to find the means to get out of prison. He printed a series of horror stories of debtors around the country who were forced to suffer unspeakable indignities. Some were forced to capture and devour rats to stay alive. Their wives were attacked sexually by the prison guards; they were often kept under the filthiest conditions; and they sometimes had to live alongside the corpses of fellow prisoners who had died from their sufferings.⁶⁶ A number of published proposals for projects

⁶⁴ Daniel Defoe, *Continuation of the Letters of a Turkish Spy* (London, 1718), 299.

⁶⁵ Moore, *Daniel Defoe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 92–4.

⁶⁶ Pitt added illustrations to his work to make his descriptions even more vivid.

that would help the nation came from men who claimed that they need only be released from prison to put their schemes into effect. Defoe was to be imprisoned several more times during his life, but it never ceased to be the nightmare that haunted his soul.