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‘Dramatick’ Realism: Defoe, Drama, and Jacobean City Comedy



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Abstract

This article explores Defoe’s relationship with drama and his Jacobean inheritance in *Moll Flanders*. To explore this point, it will address the theoretical implications of Defoe’s narrative intentionalism, which furnishes him with the seemingly ambiguous role of an orator-historian. In making an allowance for ‘fiction’ as long as the truth is contained, Defoe values authorial intent over literary form, which allows him to blend a realist rhetoric with a veracious historiographic method. In accordance, it will be maintained that Defoe’s theory of fiction allows for dramatic interventions despite his well-documented anti-theatricalism. In strengthening Defoe’s much overlooked relationship with drama, it will be argued that *MF* derives from Jacobean city comedy a ‘dramatick’ realism and that he chooses to cloak it under novelistic truth. The conclusion will arrive at the point that the narrative coordinates of Defoe, the dramatist, are to be found in Defoe, the realist.

Keywords

Daniel Defoe · *Moll Flanders* · realism · drama · Jacobean city comedy



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Introduction: *Dulce et utile—et verax*: Defoe as an orator-historian

In Book III of *Emile, or On Education*, the narrator speaks of a brief period in human life which he chooses to name “the third stage of childhood,”¹ which is the “peaceful age of intelligence.”² Working within a Stoic framework, the narrator exhibits a sense of urgency as he loathes the fact that once this period is over, it will be superseded by a period of desirousness that will obstruct the path to proper education.³ For fear that the third stage will be over in a short period, the narrator outlines his educational aim, which ought “not to teach him the sciences but to give him the taste for loving them and the methods for learning them when this taste is better developed.”⁴ More often than not, he refers to the principality of experience. He declares that he detests books since they fail to leave a long-lasting impression on the human mind⁵ and he forsakes the bookish methods of “armchair philosophy.”⁶ However, he later reveals to the reader that he will not shy away from describing one particular book which will instruct Emile in the Petronian art of morality.⁷ He pronounces *Robinson Crusoe* a “marvellous book” due to its “truth and simplicity” and continues:

*This novel, disencumbered of all its rigmarole, beginning with Robinson's shipwreck near his island and ending with the arrival of the ship which comes to take him from it, will be both Emile's entertainment and instruction throughout the period which is dealt with here. (...) I want him to think he is Robinson himself, to see himself dressed in skins, wearing a large cap, carrying a large saber and all the rest of the character's grotesque equipment, (...). This is the true “castle in Spain” of this happy age when one knows no other happiness than the necessities and freedom.*⁸

Rousseau was not the sole admirer of Defoe's adroit narration. Similarly, James Beattie in 1783 wrote that he was on par with Rousseau since he believed that he saw in *Crusoe* “a spirit of piety and benevolence,” *par excellence*, and argued that Defoe's realism “fixes in the mind a lively idea of the horrors of solitude.”⁹ The point that the liveliness of Defoe's style was an admirable trait of his fictive works was also later evoked by Sir Walter Scott when he, mostly in relation to the *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, announced that “De Foe knew so well how to convey, make the hair bristle and the skin creep.”¹⁰ However, as different from Defoe's other commentators, Rousseau proposes *Crusoe* as a literary matrix through which his pupil will “learn to escape the influence of amour-propre, of vanity.”¹¹ He pronounces the pedagogical value of the novel's fictionality due to the degree of truthfulness it contains by opposing him to Aristotle, Pliny, and Comte de Buffon.¹² To this end, *Emile* looks for ways to convince the reader that this ‘castle in Spain’ is a study in symbolic

¹Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*. Trans. Allan Bloom (Basic Books, 1979), 165.

²Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, 172.

³Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, 172. For the Stoic connection, see Kennedy F. Roche's immensely valuable study. Roche, *Rousseau: Stoic and Romantic* (London and New York: Routledge, 1974: 2019).

⁴Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, 172.

⁵In this respect, experience is also further implied to hold a mnemonic value. He continues: “It is said that Hermes engraved the elements of the sciences on columns in order to shelter his discoveries from a flood. If he had left a good imprint of them in man's head, they would have been preserved by tradition.” Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, 184.

⁶Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, 166.

⁷In the middle of a discussion concerning arts, he quotes Petronius: “There is a public esteem attached to the different arts in inverse proportion to their real utility. (...) The importance given to them by the rich does not come from their use but from the fact that the poor cannot afford them. *Nolo habere bona nisi quibus populus invidet.*” Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, 186.

⁸Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, 185.

⁹Beattie, “Dissertations Moral and Critical (1783),” in *Daniel Defoe: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Pat Rogers (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 60.

¹⁰Walter Scott, “The Miscellaneous Works of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.,” in *Daniel Defoe: The Critical Heritage*, 68.

¹¹M. L. Bellhouse, “On Understanding Rousseau's Praise of *Robinson Crusoe*,” *Canadian Journal of Social and Political Theory / Revue canadienne de théorie politique et sociale* 6, no.3 (1982): 120-37; 129.

¹²Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, 184.



veracity that will eventually help the child imagine himself as a solitary person since “*raising oneself above prejudices and ordering one’s judgments about the true relations of things is to put oneself in the place of an isolated man (...)*”¹³ It has been suggested earlier that Rousseau falsely recognises in *Crusoe* “*an Enlightenment anti-hero, someone who rejected the excesses brought about by attending to social opinion so that he might restrict his labour to catering only for natural needs.*”¹⁴ However, it is hardly avoidable that he also seeks to convince the reader of the efficiency of Defoe’s truth-seeking method by alluding to his attention to detail, where honesty “*is a necessary condition of accessing truth.*”¹⁵ Indeed, the philosopher attempts “*to turn his audience away from Hobbesian acquisitive values and the lure of power held out by that modern-day ring of Gyges*”¹⁶ and this attempt does not necessarily overlap with the economic individualism of Defoe’s hero. However, Rousseau’s commendation of Defoe’s truthful style provides early hints of his theory of fiction. Problematically enough, however, we are forced to face one vital point: how should we address Defoe’s fictional relationship with truth when he styles himself in *The Storm* as a historian whose duty is “*to set every thing in its own Light, and to convey matter of fact upon its legitimate Authority,*”¹⁷ regretful of the fact that “*the Actions of whole Ages*” are “*drowned in Fable*”?¹⁸ How do we praise Defoe’s truth and simplicity in *Crusoe*, as Rousseau once did, when he refers to Homer’s “*Fragments of Truth*” and laments the fact that he “*sung the Wars of the Greeks, and the Siege of Troy from a Reality, into a meer Fiction*”?¹⁹ Under these terms, should this mean that Rousseau’s revering attitude towards Defoe’s ‘castle of Spain’ becomes emblematic of an internal paradox? In other words, how is it even possible to praise the moralised truth of *Crusoe* when it is doubtful that fiction, by Defoe’s standards, is a worthwhile enterprise?

The almost proverbial argument that Defoe was “*perhaps a unique example of a great writer who was very little interested in literature, and says nothing of interest about it as literature*”²⁰ descends from a similar point of hesitation. In *An Essay upon Literature*, Defoe engages the reader with a rather unusual history of literature and hardly ever establishes the development of fictive writing as one of his narrative *foci*. In an attempt to explore the origins of writing, he narrates the instance of divine intervention when God provided Moses with the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai²¹ and propagates a progressive history of the development of letters. Elsewhere, writing to Robert Harley concerning his anti-High Church advocacy for the Dissenters, he identifies himself as the “*Unhappy Author*” of *The Shortest Way*, which introduces a fabulistic cock and horse story only to the effect that he is “*Unhappy Onely in Saying too much Truth*”²² and not too much fiction. Even the Lucianesque travel to the moon in *The Consolidator*, where his laudatory remarks of China serve a satirical purpose since the Chinese claims are “*deftly exposed by the imputation that Chinese enterprise originates in the moon,*”²³ seems to lack the figurative prowess of Swift’s *A Tale of a*

¹³Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, 185.

¹⁴Matthew Watson, “Rousseau’s *Crusoe* myth: the unlikely provenance of the neoclassical homo economicus,” *The Journal of Cultural Economy* 10, no.1 (2017): 81-96; 82.

¹⁵Jason Neidleman, *Rousseau’s Ethics of Truth: A Sublime Science of Simple Souls* (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), 50. However, it should also be noted that Rousseau’s sentimentalism and the implications of his conception of solitariness are not shared by Defoe.

¹⁶Bellhouse, “On Understanding Rousseau’s Praise of *Robinson Crusoe*,” 134.

¹⁷Defoe, *The Storm*. Ed. Richard Hamblyn. (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), 4.

¹⁸Defoe, *The Storm*, 5.

¹⁹Defoe, *An Essay Upon Literature* (London: Tho. Bowles, 1726), 22.

²⁰Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), 69.

²¹Defoe, *Essay Upon Literature*, 22-3.

²²Defoe, “Defoe to Robert Harley, August-September 1704?,” in *The Cambridge Edition of the Correspondence of Daniel Defoe*. Ed. Nicholas Seager, 85-94. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 87.

²³N. L. Shaw, “Ancients and Moderns in Defoe’s *Consolidator*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 28, no.3 (1988): 391-400; 399.

*Tub*²⁴ so much so that it almost threatens any claim to a genuine interest in literature. Similarly, the preface to *Roxana* declares that “*this Story differs from most of the Modern Performances of this Kind, (...), Namely, That the Foundation of This is laid in Truth of Fact; and so the Work is not a Story, but a History.*”²⁵ If so, is it even possible to speak of an overlap between fiction and truth throughout the Defoean corpus? And even if it is, are we supposed to take the Swiftian path of feigned forgetfulness and consider his management of literary truth the making of a “*so grave, sententious, dogmatical a Rogue*”²⁶ or to follow the Mintonian track and read it into the conflict between “*Defoe’s want of honesty*” and “*his dishonesty*”?²⁷

If we consider the possibility that Defoe’s relationship with truth was not primarily of a literary character but was dominated by the eighteenth century’s *genius saeculi*,²⁸ neither option sounds commonsensical enough. For, by the standards of early modern England, truth already seemed to be a volatile concept. Barbara J. Shapiro develops this notion by extrapolating the argument that the establishment of truth was of perennial concern to the practitioners of the English common law. This sensibility to truth produced, she argues, a *de jure* difference between the “*matters of fact*” and the “*matters of law*”²⁹ as different from canon law. Eventually, this bore the distinction between factuality and legality, which supposedly flourished in Thomas More’s *Debellacyon of Salem and Bizance*.³⁰ The distinction later contributed to the idea that the factual account of an event would have to be verified as “*an established truth*” rather than remain “*an issue of truth.*”³¹ As a result, judiciary spaces were re-created as “*sites of epistemological inquiry,*”³² and the legal intervention in early modern England helped establish the configuration of truth as a factual matter. Shapiro maintains that the instalment of the ‘matter of fact’ as a cultural phenomenon was firmly established during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries since now

*ephemeral “facts” of human action could be established with a high degree of certitude and that ordinary persons had sufficient ability to evaluate testimony for credibility and documents for authenticity in order to arrive at impartial, truthful verdicts guided by their intelligence, reason, and conscience.*³³

In common law, the development of the idea of truth, according to Shapiro, displays the legal consciousness underlying the cultural value of *epistêmê*. This consciousness, in return, leads to the creation of a cultural sensibility for factualness where “*the epistemological thinking characteristic of legal fact finding came to pervade English thought and culture.*”³⁴ When considered from this perspective, Defoe’s truthful fiction becomes the product of a cultural shift in legal thought, which was further shaped by Thomas Sprat,

²⁴John F. Ross’s comparison between Defoe and Swift beautifully captures this contrast through the image of an egg, although it is possible to argue that from time to time, he falls into the unsafe pit of critical reductivity. He argues: “When Swift writes “egg,” it means the normal product of the fowl, as it would in *Crusoe*—but only to begin with. (...) Allegorically, it is the basis for religious and political strife. Satirically, it indicates that such strife has ridiculously petty causes. (...) When Defoe writes “egg,” he means only that object laid by a bird or turtle.” See Ross, *Swift and Defoe: A Study in Relationship* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1941), 107.

²⁵Defoe, *Roxana*. Ed. John Mullan. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996: 2008), 2.

²⁶Swift, “A Letter Concerning the Sacramental Test,” in *Daniel Defoe: The Critical Heritage*, 38.

²⁷William Minto, *Daniel Defoe* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1879), 169.

²⁸Maike Oergel, *Zeitgeist—How Ideas Travel: Politics, Culture, and the Public in the Age of Revolution*. (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 21. Oergel traces the origin of the word “Zeitgeist” to John Barclay’s *Icon Animorum*, and I adopt this term instead of the German equivalent for contextual unity and discursive familiarity.

²⁹Barbara J. Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550-1720*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 9.

³⁰Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550-1720*, 10.

³¹Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550-1720*, 31.

³²Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550-1720*, 30.

³³Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550-1720*, 32.

³⁴Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550-1720*, 33.

the Bishop of Rochester's *History of the Royal Society's* call for factualness.³⁵ If so, Defoe's truthful *Crusoe* would be the climactic expression of an epistemic paradigm shift that aims at the fustian comfort provided by figurative language. This indicates that Defoe's relationship with truth relates itself to the growing legal tendency in early modern England, where unlikelike narrations were now being dismissed as "*ridiculous Stuff*."³⁶ In other words, Defoean truth allies itself with a changing epistemic culture where it mirrors a culminating legal effort that growingly asserts itself as a socio-literary asset; a feature of his writing that makes even better sense when we notice that he signs the preface to *The Storm* as "*The Ages Humble Servant*."³⁷ Still, and even if we welcome the argument that Defoe's engagement with truth was the making of a legal interest in factuality, how is it possible that fiction, in Defoe's case, as a long-term sufferer from allegations of deception served as a means of conveying the truth?

It has been proposed earlier that Defoe manages to find a way out of this conundrum by posing as an ambiguous impersonator whose narrative riddles' answers lack the clarity of the ancient Sphinx's.³⁸ However, I believe the proper answer to this question seems to reside in what Maximilian E. Novak identifies as "*verbal portraiture*."³⁹ Defoe usually downplays language itself as a doubtful mode of communication⁴⁰ and refuses to consider fables and romances as dependable sources of truth.⁴¹ However, he does not entirely reject the idea that a work of art could maintain its impartiality. For, he does not shy away from showing leniency towards fiction as a possible container of realistic fideism. Despite the deceptive role he might wish to attribute to the very idea of fiction itself, he does not necessarily oppose it as long as it can be impartially descriptive of truth. In accordance, Novak argues:

*One of his favourite phrases in his early writings is deceptio visus, the concept of the way the eye is fooled by the painter. He usually applied this concept to discussions of the ways in which his enemies created a verbal structure for the purpose of deceiving the reader. In his journal, the Review, for 16 March 1718, he compared viewing the Jacobites, with their continual plots against the government, to the difference effected by proper distance in a painting: (...). The image of the painter or draughtsman who can create a picture of the truth came easily to him.*⁴²

On one hand, it is possible to read the disallowance Defoe makes for a truthful painting as a sign of his factual sensibility and historiographic anxiety. This feature of his writing is further supported by his commitment to textual moderation for the sake of maintaining an unbiased look into the truth of things.⁴³ However, it is also possible to build a case for the allowance Defoe makes for *verus visus* in an artwork that strengthens Defoe's position as a bona fide novelist with a genuine interest in truthful meaning-making

³⁵Watt relates this point to Defoe's designated vocabulary, which "is certainly that of 'artisans and countrymen' in the sense that it contains a higher proportion of words of Anglo-Saxon origin than that of any other well-known writer, with the significant exception of Bunyan." See Watt, *Rise of The Novel*, 100.

³⁶Defoe, *The Storm*, 6.

³⁷Defoe, *The Storm*, 9.

³⁸Leopold Damrosch, "Defoe as Ambiguous Impersonator," *Modern Philology* 71, no.2 (1973): 153-59; 159.

³⁹Novak, "Picturing the Thing Itself, or Not: Defoe, Painting, Prose Fiction, and the Arts of Describing," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 9, no.1 (1996): 1-20; 13. Novak addresses Defoe's much-overlooked interest in the visual arts and how the Flemish connection persisted in the English novel as a byword for realist technique.

⁴⁰For instance, *Essay upon Literature* features Defoe's preference for hieroglyphs over language. Also, on this point, see Novak, "Defoe and The Arts of Describing," 6.

⁴¹Defoe, *Essay upon Literature*, 115.

⁴²Novak, "Picturing the Thing Itself, or Not: Defoe, Painting, Prose Fiction, and the Arts of Describing," 5-6.

⁴³I have in mind Nicholas Seager's discussion of *Memoirs of a Cavalier* as "a conciliatory version of familiar, but misrepresented, events; it aims to show how history should be written, with justice and magnanimity, and without opportunism or incitement." See Seager, "A Romance the likest to Truth that I ever read": History, Fiction, and Politics in Defoe's *Memoirs of a Cavalier*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 20, no.4 (2008): 479-505; 491.

in fiction. For, if he can recognise that a painter can orchestrate a fair depiction of truth by remaining impartial, why should he not also be able to see through the possibility of endorsing a fictional project for the advancement of an 'artless' art of truth via a just employment of this 'verbal portraiture'?

However, probabilities do not necessarily make a convincing case. Besides, it is hard to keep track of Defoe's interest in the reliability of arts apart from the Flemish connection, which catches the end of his interest in the minute particularities of life.⁴⁴ Furthermore, even in those instances when Defoe poses as a novelist, his fiction seems to be less inclusive of art with "*no dazzling plots, not much in the way of the form—just a kind of dogged attention to the cumulative details, to getting the story down on record*"⁴⁵ as compared to the 'proper' novelistic attitudes of Richardson and Fielding. However, should we consider that Defoe's discursive habits hide a highly rhetorical impulse, it becomes clearer how he manages to become a practitioner of art without indulging in its impracticalities. As Defoe's fiction vigorously creates an unorthodox fusion between empirical truth and its mimetic re-evaluation, it is not bereft of a certain textual rhetoric in the conveyance of that truth. It is his rhetorical skill that enables him to prioritise veracity in art without any hindrance to writerly impartiality and much damage to the conventions of the medium he is working with.⁴⁶ To understand this point, I would like to argue that we can try to reconcile with the possibility that Defoe the realist was bred in the schools of Cicero since the truth and simplicity of his prose fiction catch the end of a "*stated purpose in writing*" which was "*to communicate clearly and to persuade.*"⁴⁷ It has been argued earlier that as opposed to Swift's "*superior authority,*" whose voice was "*a voice ex cathedra,*" Defoe "*spoke as an honest, direct, plain Englishman, full of common sense,*" which supposedly made him "*one of the folk, a homespun Cicero of the mobile.*"⁴⁸ Thus, his truthful fiction endorses a textual strategy that pursues an 'artless' art. To achieve that end, Defoe exercises an oratorical force in his fictive writings that aims at awakening in the reader a sense of plausibility with regard to that artlessness. In bringing together matters of literature with matters of truth, Defoe devises for himself a refreshingly new authorial role. Through that role, his narrative voice encapsulates the activities of an orator-historian whose responsibility lies within the truthful representation of all human activity; a feature which resounds again with Ciceronian skill. Let us compare this point with *De Oratore* II.XV, where in response to Catulus, Antonius acknowledges that the rules of oration are self-explanatory:

Nam quis nescit, primam esse historiae legem, ne quid falsi dicere audeat? Deinde ne quid veri non audeat? Ne qua suspicio gratiae sit in scribendo? Ne qua simultatis?

*(For who does not know history's first law to be that an author must not dare to tell anything but the truth? And its second that he must make bold to tell the whole truth? That there must be no suggestion of partiality anywhere in his writings? Nor of malice?)*⁴⁹

And later, he implies that an orator's field of study cannot be limited to a single aspect of human life since

⁴⁴For an exhilarating investigation of this continuity, see Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Art of the Everyday: Dutch Painting and The Realist Novel* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁴⁵Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of The English Novel*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 155.

⁴⁶This should also explain why Defoe writes "with the watchword of moderation," with the aim "to reform historiography, promoting a standard of historical veracity that was free from party interests." See Seager, "A Romance the likest to Truth that I ever read," 488.

⁴⁷Novak, "Defoe's Theory of Fiction," *Studies in Philology* 61, no.4 (1964): 650-68; 667.

⁴⁸Ross, *Swift and Defoe*, 11.

⁴⁹Cicero, *De Oratore*. Trans. E.W. Sutton. (London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), II.XV.62; 242-5.

In eodem silentio multa alia oratorum officia iacuerunt, cohortationes, consolationes, praecepta, admonita: quae tractanda sunt omnia disertissime; sed locum suum in his artibus, quae traditae sunt, habent nullum. Atque in hoc genere illa quoque est infinita silva, (...). Si enim est oratoris, quaecumque res infinite posita sit, de ea posse dicere, dicendum erit ei, quanta sit solis magnitudo, quae forma terrae: de mathematicis, de musicis rebus non poterit, quin dicat, hoc onere suscepto, recusare.

(In a like silence have languished many other duties of the orator, those of encouraging, comforting, teaching and warning, all worthy of most eloquent treatment, yet having no place of their own in those systems hitherto propounded. In this region also there lies a boundless forest of topics: (...). For if it be an orator's part to be able to speak on any subject whatever that is laid before him in general terms, he will have to discuss the size of the sun and the contour of the earth; and after undertaking this duty he will not be able to refuse to handle mathematics or the cult of the Muses).⁵⁰

The insinuation here is that there are no rules to oratory since oratorical expertise spans many topics, which renders it “*indeterminate, unrestricted and far-extending*.”⁵¹ But, in its far-extendedness, an orator's mission is strictly defined as the conveyance of truth. Cicero suggests that an orator should follow the rules of veracity in historiography and that it is the responsibility of a rhetorician to truthfully invest himself in “*all things relating to the intercourse of fellow-citizens (...)*.”⁵² But also, compare this point to a follow-up argument in *Brutus*, which suggests that a portion of arbitrariness can be included in history writing:

At ille ridens. Tuo vero, inquit, arbitrato, quoniam quidem concessum est rhetoribus ementiri in historiis ut aliquid dicere possint argutius.

(However, laughing, he said: it is true that rhetoricians are allowed to lie in their histories so that they can make a clever argument).⁵³

If achieving veracity in history writing is of perennial importance, taking liberties with historical representation is an ancillary and yet a perfectly acceptable side of it for Cicero. Should we transfer this rhetorical logic to Defoe's truthful fiction, it is possible to discover a unified and plausible theory with regard to his theory of fiction. For, detecting the Ciceronian impulse in Defoe's fictional writings allows us to glimpse into the inward particularities and outward contours of the Defoean authorial self through which he refashions himself as an orator-historian. Through his Ciceronian ability to tamper with historical phenomena, he maintains his persuasive tone as it descends from a far-extending power of observation, a devotedness to fact, and an ability to lie to posit a sound argument. Through this knowing act of persuasion, Defoe offers a collaboration between truth and fiction and rhetorically strengthens his image as an ardent explorer of truth. As a result, Defoe retains “*the benefit of both realism and a powerful narrative interest*” in fiction as “*rooted in reality and history but with the generality of myth and fairy tale (...)*.”⁵⁴ Or, alternatively speaking, the minutest particulars pertaining to reality become “*a series of dodges, feints, and poses to rationalize the use of fiction*.”⁵⁵ Working within this framework, the following section elaborates on Defoe's relationship with drama. The final part will embrace the view that Defoe's Ciceronian move produces a ‘dramatick’ realism

⁵⁰Cicero, *De Oratore*, II.XV, 65-66; 244-47.

⁵¹Cicero, *De Oratore*, II.XV, 65-66; 247.

⁵²Cicero, *De Oratore*, II.XVI, 68; 249.

⁵³Douglas R. Thomas, *Cicero's Brutus: Edition, Textual Commentary, and Study of the Transmission*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 42.11-12; 85. The translation is my own.

⁵⁴Novak, *Realism, Myth, and History in Defoe's Fiction*. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 15-6.

⁵⁵Davis, *Factual Fictions*, 156.

in *Moll Flanders*, which both communicates his authorial strategy and exposes the formerly underexplored aspects of Defoean fiction.

Defoe and Drama: The Marriage of Heaven and Hell?

If Defoe’s relation to fiction is already complex, trying to align him with the stage is an even more difficult task. Defoe did indeed write *about* the stage, but he neither wrote a play nor wrote in favour of the eighteenth-century playhouse and actor. In many of those instances where he writes about the stage, he comes close to the extremist position of William Prynne’s *Histrion-Mastix*, where the theatre is thought to have a “*primarie conception from the very Deuill himselfe*.”⁵⁶ His disdain for drama even aligns itself with Jeremy Collier’s *A Short View*, in which the author praises the Romans as they were “*awake upon the Theatre, and would not suffer the Abuses of Honour, and Family, to pass into Diversion*.”⁵⁷ In this context, Cynthia Wall asserts that he was not only heir to “*this anti-theatrical company*” but also, drawing on J.A. Downie’s view, he was running “*a political vendetta*” against the stage since he could not admit that it was the Whig party which “*propped up the theatrical scene*.”⁵⁸ Even more so, his disdain for the pro-theatrical activities of the High Church led him to attack “*the use of benefit performances at Drury Lane Theatre and at Oxford to help with the building and repairing of church structures as examples of pandering to immorality*,”⁵⁹ suggesting that he saw an overlap between the immorality of the stage and the unrighteousness of the Tories. In the *Review* for 31 July 1707, he uses the stage as a metaphor for moral depravity and continues: “*Tis a wonderful thing to Reflect upon the Folly of the Times, and the ridiculous Conduct of the Princes of this Age: how the Popes Court has always been the Theatre; where the several Princes of Europe have Acted their State-Comedies (...)*.”⁶⁰ However, Wall persuasively argues that “*Defoe’s criticisms of the theatre are not one-sided, lying, vicious poisoned arrows*” and that his criticism of the theatre “*like Jeremy Collier’s, attack the current practices of plays, not the genre itself*.”⁶¹ In fact, with reference to the *Review* of 8 August 1706 she maintains that Defoe shows some signs of leniency towards the stage should the actors refuse to portray vice instead of virtue.⁶² Aside from his softening tone towards the theatre, however, it is also an unmistakable part of Defoe’s prose fiction that it hides a subtle dramatic element since “*he can set up, in narrative, a scene that is vivid precisely as a mise en scène*.”⁶³ Although he could not resolve his conflict with the theatre as a Dissenter, as “*a fabulous Proteus, he could not but love drama*.”⁶⁴ As part of his partisanship, Defoe could not come to terms with the theatre. However, from his *The Family Instructor* to *Robinson Crusoe*, he could not hold himself back from employing dramatic techniques and methods where the former employs dramatic dialogisms and the latter prepares the reader to a stage-act where Crusoe and his company fabulate “*a dramatic fiction to convince their enemy that they have fifty men instead of eight*.”⁶⁵ He alludes to the dramatic works of an earlier age in his titles and echoes the Shakespearean corollary between human life and the stage.⁶⁶ Dramatic dialogues,

⁵⁶Prynne, *Histrion-mastix, The Players Scourge*. (London: E.A. and W.I., Michael Sparke, 1633), 9.

⁵⁷Collier, *A Short View of The Immorality and Profaneness of The English Stage*. (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1967), 24.

⁵⁸Wall, “Defoe and Drama,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Daniel Defoe*. Eds. Nicholas Seager and J.A. Downie, 69-90. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 71; 73.

⁵⁹Novak, *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001: 2023), 291.

⁶⁰Defoe, “Review, Vol. IV, Numb. 73, July 31 1707,” in *Defoe’s Review*. Ed. Arthur Wellesley Secord, 289-92. (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1965), 291.

⁶¹Wall, “Defoe and Drama,” 73.

⁶²Wall, “Defoe and Drama,” 74.

⁶³Wall, “Defoe and Drama,” 87, 89.

⁶⁴Wall, “Defoe and Drama,” 87, 89.

⁶⁵David Marshall, *Figure of Theater*, 79 qtd. in Wall “Defoe and Drama,” 88.

⁶⁶John Robert Moore refers to the “proverbial currency” of *The True-Born Englishman* as “a conscious allusion to Bolingbroke’s farewell to Richard II: “*Though banish’d, yet a trueborn English man*.” Also, Moore refers to the *Review* of 16 August 1707 where he “echoed the moralizing of Jacques in *As You Like It* (II. vii. 139-166).” See Moore, “Defoe and Shakespeare,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (1968): 71-80; 72; 73.



soliloquies, stage directions, and stage-sets are never accidental occurrences in Defoe's fictional and non-fictional writings.⁶⁷ His protagonists are either emblematic of or responsive to the Restoration drama's commonplace use of comic stereotypicality.⁶⁸ Despite his troublesome relationship with the theatre, these instances point us towards the dramatic quality that lurks behind Defoe's imaginative world.

At first glance, and despite the textual evidence that has been brought forward, Defoe's relationship with drama might still be perceived as improbable, let alone convincing. I would like to respond to that possible opposition by re-introducing the argument that these dramatic instances are extensions of the Ciceronian force in Defoe's fiction. Under his hands, this truthful force develops itself into "*a theatre of moral struggle*"⁶⁹ through which an overlap between drama and the novel is made possible. For, the dramatic element in Defoe Works in perfect harmony with his realist rhetoric, where truth is bent to the will of the historian. Theatre, in other words, is barely a means of fictionalisation. It emerges in Defoe's writings as a structural means to comment persuasively on reality and to instil in the reader a sense of moral judgement. For, while Defoe understands that fiction should be guided by truth and moderation, he plays with the idea that it should also display a rhetorical promotion of these principles. To promote the truth, Defoe turns to the theatre as part of his realist agenda. Despite her criticism of Defoe's narrative technique, Virginia Woolf once implied that he was responsible for propelling into the literary scene a "*peculiar merit*" which "*at the outset limited his scope and confined his ambitions he achieves a truth of insight which is far rarer and more enduring than the truth of fact which he professed to make his aim.*"⁷⁰ This particular merit of which Woolf speaks, I will argue in the following part, is achieved through a rhetoric of truth-telling that makes considerable use of dramatic technique and tradition. In other words, the claim here is that Defoe barges in with his 'dramatick' realism only to strengthen his claim to realist authenticity. This, in return, allows us to conclude that there is a dramatism to the realist form as much as there is "*a realism to the dramatic form.*"⁷¹ The following part will now turn to *Moll Flanders* to determine how Defoe borrows from an earlier literary tradition to enforce this argument.

Moll, the roaring girl: Defoe's Jacobean Inheritance

Moll Flanders marks an interesting moment in the Defovean canon for its infusion of prose realism with drama. It bears the mark of Defoe, the dramatist, alongside the image of Defoe, the realist. It makes consistent use of theatrical vocabulary and devices and mirrors Defoe's Protean interest in drama. The preface, for instance, attacks the "*Advocates for the Stage*" as they fallaciously argue that they "*fail not to recommend Vertue, and generous Principles, and to discourage and expose all sorts of Vice and Corruption of Manners.*"⁷² Contrasting the untheatrical virtue of the novel with the theatrical lewdness of the stage, the preface to *MF* declares that "*this Fundamental is most strictly adhered to*" and that "*there is not a wicked Action in any Part of it.*"⁷³ The stage seems to present itself as a semiotic other to the novel, and yet this mode of defence becomes null and void once it is declared that there is "*not a superlative Villain brought upon the Stage.*"⁷⁴ Despite the initial charge at the voluptuousness of the stage, the dramatic imagery dominates over the narrative voice-over's vindication of the novel's unpretentiousness. Through an apparent act of self-negation, the novel's unusual stage claims to practice virtue by bringing the protagonist to either "*an*

⁶⁷See esp. Wall, "Defoe and Drama," 78-87.

⁶⁸Novak sees Roxana, for instance, as "somewhat like Manly of Wycherley's Restoration comedy *The Plain Dealer*, wrong-headed but still admirable in many ways." Novak, *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions*, 623.

⁶⁹Novak, *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions*, 619.

⁷⁰Woolf, *Collected Essays*, vol.1 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), 67.

⁷¹Wall, "Defoe and Drama," 76.

⁷²Defoe, *Moll Flanders*. Ed. G.A. Starr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981: 2009), 3.

⁷³Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 3. Hereafter abbreviated as *MF*.

⁷⁴Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 3.

unhappy End" or asking her "to be a Penitent."⁷⁵ Curiously enough, the novel resorts to dramatic imagery to argue and counter-argue against theatre, although vindication of the novelistic form comes at a dramatic price. For, later in the novel, Moll's realist report is embroiled in a playful form of articulation since the historiographic report is constantly haunted by the use of dramatic dialogues. Following her nurse's unfortunate death and having been sexually approached by Robert, the elder brother of the family who now forsakes her under the pretence that he cannot marry Moll since he has not yet received his own estate, she puts on a brilliant show of dialogism and protests the suggestion that she should marry Robin, his younger brother. She continues:

I could not deny a Word of this, and had nothing to say to it in general; but why then, says I, can you perswade me to such a horrid step, as leaving you, since you have not left me? Will you allow no Affection, no Love on my Side, where there has been so much on your Side? Have I made you no Returns? Have I given no Testimony of my Sincerity, and of my Passion? are the Sacrifices I have made of Honour and Modesty to you, no Proof of my being ty'd to you in Bonds too strong to be broken?

But here my Dear, says he, you may come into a safe Station, and appear with Honour and with splendor at once, and the Remembrance of what we have done may be wrapt up in an eternal Silence, as if it had never happen'd; you shall always have my Respect, and my sincere Affection, only then it shall be Honest, and perfectly Just to my Brother; you shall be my Dear Sister, as now you are my Dear—and there he stop'd.

*Your Dear whore, says I, you would have said, if you had gone on; and you might as well have said it.*⁷⁶

The verbatim account of the encounter between Moll and Robert assumes a historiographic form. On closer inspection, however, the dialogic format visibly renders the entire scene unexpectedly dramatic. The dramatic repartee betrays her later contention that she is not a "Mistress of Words," and that the reader should "make just Reflections on them, as their own Circumstances may direct."⁷⁷ On the contrary, the verbal exchange between the two confirms that her encounter with Robert exposes her as a dramatically skilled mistress of words. Of specific importance here is the nuanced fact that her theatrical skill, however, does not work against a traditional background since Defoe's fictive stage is not immobile, let alone 'staged'. James, the highwayman's abandonment of her is superseded by a travel back to London to meet the banker in Stony-Stratford, and she is seen to take "a Chance Coach" which

*having been hired on purpose to carry some Gentlemen to West Chester who were going for Ireland, was now returning, and did not tye it self up to exact Times or Places as the Stages did (...).*⁷⁸

If we can read the chance coach as a metaphor for Moll's constant state of travel that is largely characterised by the exigencies of life, we can also read it as an anti-thesis for the stationary build of the theatre, which is time and location-bound. For, the dramatic dialogue's sense of immediacy derives its power from Moll's mobile 'stage', which renders the notion of realist immediacy the making of a new form of dramatic mobility and contingency. This, in return, could point us towards the differentiation between drama and theatre in the Defovean imagination, which echoes the Swiftian disgust with the theatre but admiration for

⁷⁵Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 3.

⁷⁶Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 38-9.

⁷⁷Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 288.

⁷⁸Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 179.

drama.⁷⁹ Despite the level of intolerance with which Defoe treats the stage's stability, Moll's chance coach becomes a metaphor for an anti-static theatre that encapsulates the essence of her mobile drama. Her dramatic dialogism generates a truthful drama and a stage that is in constant motion and is insistently defined by its kinetics.

The theatricality of *MF*, however, does not solely reveal itself upon close inspection of the dramatic dialogue. The prevalence of the internal monologue/soliloquy throughout the text adds another layer to its dramatic quality. When Moll's long-lost Mother, who had once pleaded her belly at Newgate Prison, discovers that she is mother to her son and her assumed daughter-in-law, her reaction melts into the form of a dramatic tirade rather than a prose narration. She continues:

*Unhappy Child! says she, what miserable chance could bring thee hither? And in the Arms of my own Son too! Dreadful Girl! says she, why we are all undone! Married to thy own Brother! Three Children, and two alive, all of the same Flesh and Blood! My Son and My Daughter lying together as Husband and Wife! All Confusion and Destruction for ever! miserable Family! what will become of us? what is to be said? what is to be done?*⁸⁰

Surely, the novelistic report is an inseparable feature of the mother's tirade and of the others', including Moll herself. When Moll recounts a dialogue, she is always present to account for the reliability of the report. She adamantly interrupts those dramatic instances through a 'says I,' a 'says she,' or a 'says he.' Ideological criticism has decisively argued that these interruptions result from Defoe's formal realism, which corresponds to "particularity" as defined by its "rejection of what it brackets as fantastic or romantic, an insistence on a disenchanted world where only empirical evidence counts as real."⁸¹ However, it is hard to discern how her report of the Mother's response brackets the dramatic as it takes the form of both an internal monologue and a soliloquy. In this sense, the rhetorical force of the Mother's internal monologue/soliloquy expands the limits of Moll's reportative realism, which is usually read as part of Defoe's novelistic crusade against the metaphorical zeal of romance. The dramatic tirade lives side by side with the reportage, which strengthens the sense of veracity found in ordinary accounts of daily life. Thus, the dramatic quality of *MF* allows an amalgamation of dictions that is between the novelistic (or realist) and the dramatic. As a result of that amalgamation, the empirical quality of the reported speech, which is dependent on the "news/novels discourse"⁸² where no fine line between fact and fiction is drawn, leaves the internal monologue/soliloquy an almost post-Shakespearean commentary on the continuity between the world and the stage where women and men "have their exits and their entrances" (II.VII.141).⁸³

These technical devices, which comprise theatrical vocabulary, dramatic dialogue, and internal monologue/soliloquy, establish the core centre of 'dramatick' realism in *MF*. From a structural point of view, however, Defoe adds to this core value of dramatism not simply through the employment of dramatic forms and techniques but also through a re-negotiation of an earlier literary tradition. After Moll arrives in London and begins her cruel business of thievery, she refers to her newly found dexterity in the trade. As she narrates

⁷⁹The divergence was earlier proposed by Joseph McMinn. For an extended discussion of this point in relation to Swiftian comedy, see Ozbas, "Swift's Alberti? The Geometrical Comedy of *Gulliver's Travels*," *IDEAS: Journal of English Literary Studies* 4, no.2 (2024): 43-57; 44-5.

⁸⁰Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 96.

⁸¹John Richetti, "Defoe as narrative innovator," in *The Cambridge Companion to Daniel Defoe*. Ed. John Richetti, 121-38. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 122.

⁸²Davis, *Factual Fictions*, 49.

⁸³Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, in *The Complete Works*. Ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 627-652. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 638.

her rise to prominence among the London mob with a melancholy heart, she refers to a certain Moll Cut-Purse compared to whom she considers herself not beautiful enough:

O, Mother! says I, that is a Trade I have no skill in, and if I should be taken I am undone at once; says she, I could help you to a School-Mistress, that shall make you as dexterous as her self: I trembled at that Proposal for hitherto I had had no Confederates, nor any Acquaintance among that Tribe; but she conquer'd all my Modesty, and all my Fears; and in a little time, by the help of this Confederate I grew as impudent a Thief, and as dexterous as ever Moll Cut-Purse was, tho' if Fame does not belie her, not half so Handsome.⁸⁴

This sounds like a rather odd statement for someone who admits that she has “*the common Vanity of my Sex*” and has “*as good an Opinion of myself, as any body else could have of me.*”⁸⁵ Still, she refers to Moll Cut-Purse as an urban legend whose celebrity status is not only warranted by her success in the trade but also by her physical allure. By doing so, she situates Moll Cut-Purse as a cultural measure for celebratory roguishness and as a picaresque *exemplar*. In a world that pits the friendless individual against a cruel externality and creates “*the tension between an (eventually) controlled external world and a turbulent interiority,*”⁸⁶ Moll Cut-Purse emerges as a familiar and friendly face for Moll Flanders. Although it could be argued that Cut-Purse is a practical reference point for self-flattery and individual success, which will eventually cause her downfall, her name echoes her personal skill and aptitude. In *MF*'s context of criminality, she is more than a passing reference to an iconic rogue, and the text awakens our readerly interest in her literary genealogy.

As a scrupulous observer of city life, it could be argued that Defoe transfers this image from Jacobean city comedy to comment on the eighteenth-century female criminal. Or better put, Moll Flanders is an Augustan version of one of Jacobean city comedy's most prominent characters. Scholarly evidence indicates that Defoe acquires this point of familiarity from the Elizabethan/Jacobean rogue literature, which consisted of pamphlets “*published between 1550 and 1620 and helped reshape the image of the hapless vagabond into the covert member of a vast criminal underground of organized guilds,*”⁸⁷ displaying the early modern criminal as “*caterpillars of the commonwealth.*”⁸⁸ But more importantly, and despite the fact that “*these pamphlets became familiar characters in the novels and plays of London's print industry throughout the modern period,*”⁸⁹ *MF* specifically acquires from the image of an exemplary thief of Jacobean city comedy. For, Moll Cut-Purse turns out to be none other than the tobacco-smoker and cross-dresser Moll Cutpurse, as imagined a century earlier by Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton in *The Roaring Girl* who is modelled after the infamous London ‘caterpillar’, Mary Frith. In Dekker and Middleton's play, we find an ancestral proclamation of Moll Flanders's reverential figure who is an equally renowned celebrity of the London underworld, although she is rather named a “*mermaid*” (I.ii.218)⁹⁰ and a “*wench*” who “*strays so from her kind*” (I.ii.217)⁹¹ rather than a caterpillar. Following Roman comedy's game topos, the play makes a traditional move in centralising the troubled relationship between the boastful *senex iratus*, Sir Alexander

⁸⁴Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 201.

⁸⁵Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 19.

⁸⁶Richetti, “Defoe as narrative innovator,” 132.

⁸⁷Craig Dionne, “Fashioning Outlaws: The Early Modern Rogue and Urban Culture,” in *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture*, Eds. Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz, 33-61. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 33.

⁸⁸Dionne, “Fashioning Outlaws,” 48. Dionne derives this phrase from Thomas Dekker's *The Bellman of London*.

⁸⁹C. Dionne and S. Mentz, “Introduction: Rogues and Early Modern English Culture,” in *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture*, Eds. Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz, 1-32. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 8.

⁹⁰Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, “*The Roaring Girl*,” in *The Routledge Anthology of Renaissance Drama*. Ed. Simon Barker and Hilary Hinds, 327-377. (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 337. Hereafter abbreviated as *RG*.

⁹¹Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, “*The Roaring Girl*,” 337.



Wengrave who is “*unhappy in the follies of a son*” (IV.i.1)⁹² and the prodigal and the ironical son, Sebastian Wengrave, who wishes to marry Mary Fitzallard despite his father’s stern opposition to the alliance due to the unsatisfactory amount of dowry the potential bride promises to bring into the Wengrave family. To convince his father, Stephen feigns love for Moll Cutpurse, who is a notorious cross-dresser and an unlikely female whose “*case is alter’d*.”⁹³ To rectify the manners of his son, Sir Alexander Wengrave wishes to ensnare Moll Cutpurse in his net through a narrative proxy, Trapdoor. The expected result is that she will be condemned by Sir Alexander Wengrave so that Sebastian will be cured of his erroneous ways. Structurally speaking, the play follows a traditional catch-me-if-you-can rivalry between an *alazon* (the boaster) and an *eironeia* (the ironical).⁹⁴ However, the play’s Latinate structure appears to be somewhat downplayed by a refreshingly new Jacobean post-structure. For, Moll Cutpurse is not only functionalised as the discursive centre of the play but also as its moral touchstone rather than as its ‘mermaid’.⁹⁵ She emerges from the play as the *tour de force* of a unique genre that flourished at the beginning of the seventeenth-century and acquired its literary value from the lampooning of urbanism as a result of the growing interest in the vast set of opportunities laid out by commercial life.

City comedy, which found one of its most astute expressions in Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist* and *Every Man plays*, portrays an urban conflict that is integral to *MF*. In this sense, the dramatic take of *RG* on urban life stands out as a predecessor to Defoe’s city novel. Yet, a comparison between the Jacobean Moll and the Augustan Moll might still sound unfamiliar and should be carefully scrutinised. For, the Jacobean playwright’s response to criminality begs to differ from the eighteenth-century novelist’s response at certain points. *RG*’s prologue acknowledges that tragedies, “*tragic passion, / And such grave stuff, is this day out fashion*” and promises to present a much-awaited moment for mirth among the audience. In accordance, the play presents itself as a comedic autopsy rather than a tragic cataclysm. In this sense, the play develops the dramatic structure of Roman comedy and centralises a “*Mad Moll*” (30) who flies “*With wings more lofty*” (26) than a midnight-roaring girl who is a petty criminal and a “*civil city-roaring girl*” (22)⁹⁶ whose pride disrupts marital peace. The play ends on a rather conventional note where Stephen achieves his heart’s desire and his father is reconciled with his son. However, by allowing Moll’s unusualness to dominate the tone and mood of the dramatic action, the Jacobean sentiment of it reverses the ancient comic plot unto itself by retaining its own comic voice and choosing to criminalise the epicureanism of London society without convicting Moll. As a result, in their treatment of the seventeenth-century female criminal, Middleton and Dekker refuse to villainise Moll however morally ambiguous a character she might be in the eyes of Sir Alexander, Trapdoor, and Laxton. Since she is more than a base thief and an unusual representative of moral virtue, the comedy of the play resides in the fact that London society’s members judge Moll impudently⁹⁷ and it is among them that “*vice does so excel*” (I.ii.63)⁹⁸ and not in her. On the other hand, Defoe’s treatment of Moll appears to be less comedic than tragic, and the female criminal is far from being a misjudged public figure through

⁹²Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, “*The Roaring Girl*,” 357.

⁹³Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, “*The Roaring Girl*,” 326. I borrow from the 1620 pamphlet of the same title that condemns cross-dressing among women. Hence the title *Hic mulier (Man-Woman)*. It is followed by *Haec-Vir (Womanish Man)*, which was published in the same year. See *Hic Mulier: Or, The Man-Woman and Haec-Vir: Or, The Womanish-Man*. (University of Exeter, 1973).

⁹⁴Refer to *Tractatus Coislinianus*. R. Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy: Towards a reconstruction of Poetics II*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 39.

⁹⁵Although her textual functionalisation resembles Terence’s kind-hearted prostitute, Thais who wilfully protects Pamphila under her own roof against any possible threat of rape in *The Eunuch*. See Terence, *The Comedies*. Trans. Peter Brown. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 185.

⁹⁶Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, “*The Roaring Girl*,” 331.

⁹⁷She puts it to Sebastian in the following manner: “There it should have been still then for Moll, for / though the world judge impudently of me, I ne’er / came into that chamber yet where I took down the / instrument myself.” Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, “*The Roaring Girl*,” IV.i.93-6; 359.

⁹⁸Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, “*The Roaring Girl*,” 334.

whose image the wider society is condemned for their vices. Societal dysfunctionality, as testified by her almost Timonian friendlessness in an unfriendly world⁹⁹, is akin to the Jacobean sense of communal futility. Following the assumed death of the Linen-Draper, she meditates on her loneliness and rationalises her current situation:

*I had no Acquaintance, which was one of my worst Misfortunes, and the Consequence of that was, I had no adviser, at least who cou'd advise and assist together; (...) and I found by experience, that to be Friendless is the worst Condition, next to being in want, that a Woman can be reduc'd to: I say a Woman, because 'tis evident Men can be their own Advisers (...).*¹⁰⁰

The matter of friendlessness is representative of an outer influence, which is a recurring theme throughout the novel. As different from her Jacobean counterpart, however, Moll always returns to the point that she is already a vain creature and that if the forces of the outer world impose their will upon her, it is also her personal *vanitas* from which her unfortunate condition descends. In her Colchester home, she not only enjoys the high praise she is given with regards to her beauty, her singing skills, and her advanced use of French¹⁰¹ but also delights in the flattery she allows herself through the advances of Robert, the elder brother. She holds him responsible for her destruction while she cannot fail to notice the pride in her when she notes: "*It is true, I had my Head full of Pride, but knowing nothing of the Wickedness of the times, I had not one Thought of my own Safety, or of my Vertue about me (...).*"¹⁰² Defoe does not necessarily villainise Moll and yet she differs from Moll Cutpurse in the sense that she fails to turn a deaf ear to the libertine's romantic conceit, which contributes to the autobiographical sense of self-development of the *Entwicklungsroman*.

Since the divergence between the discursive functions of Moll Cut-Purse and Moll Cutpurse is genre-dependent, the moralising attitude of Moll Cutpurse is bound to diverge from the moral complications arising from the large-scale complicity of Moll Flanders. The dramatists of city comedy combine the allegorical structure of the Morality tradition with the precepts of Roman comedy¹⁰³ to serve their audience with a refreshingly critical attitude that lays bare the insecurities of an urban society in the form of comedic dysfunctionality. However, in *MF*, the influence of the Morality tradition and classical Roman comedy seem to weigh less than the textual liberties Defoe takes with factual writing as "*Defoe's protagonists and their stories share the tendency toward self-contained systems in philosophy and law that developed during the late seventeenth century.*"¹⁰⁴ Thus, if Moll Cutpurse's moral stance bears the imprint of a moral conventionalism that paradoxically gives voice to city comedy's anti-conventionalism, it is because she issues a societal complaint against stock-characterisation through a re-working of that stock characterisation. Moll Flanders, on the other hand, seemingly lacks the moral stance on which her literary ancestor thrives. Her narrative does not work within the limits of a comedic schemata; it works within the broad view of a small-scale "*Miniature*" as she provides her Lancashire husband, Jimmy with "*an Abridgement of this whole History,*" a "*Picture of my Conduct.*"¹⁰⁵ Unlike Cutpurse, who is a curiously organic embodiment of virtue, she is a Cut-Purse who endlessly divides the narrative into experiential pieces. The sequential action of the novel

⁹⁹Compare with the point Timon makes: "We are born to do benefits; and / what better or properer can we call our own than / the riches of our friends? O, what a precious comfort 'tis / to have so many like brothers commanding one / another's fortunes." Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, in *Complete Works*, I.I.99-102; 889.

¹⁰⁰Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 128.

¹⁰¹Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 18.

¹⁰²Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 22.

¹⁰³See Brian Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 11.

¹⁰⁴Novak, *Realism, Myth, and History*, 11.

¹⁰⁵Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 288.

prospers in her “*plain and homely stile*” since “*easy, plain, and familiar language is the beauty of Speech in general (...)*.”¹⁰⁶ Accordingly, her final penitence follows the plainness of her speech, which is a reflection on Defoe's acceptance of “*a 'Balance of Parties' as the practical working principle of contemporary politics*” through which he realises “*the gulf separating the ideal from reality as a paradoxical part of human.*”¹⁰⁷ For that reason, when the city comedy's moral virago cross-dresses it is because “*(...) she that has wit and spirit / May scorn to live beholding to her body for meat*” (III.i.138-9),¹⁰⁸ rendering her transvestism a means of protection and herself “*an honourable, comic, sentimental peacemaker, who does not take purses, but recovers them.*”¹⁰⁹ In contrast, when Moll Flanders temporarily adopts the habit of transvestism, it is done for the sake of the business and she insistently repeats her discomfort in her new appearance, “*in a Dress so contrary to Nature.*”¹¹⁰ While dissident forms of clothing secure Moll Cutpurse's consistency in character, in *MF* they reveal Moll's akratic behaviour. In response to Sebastian's fake promises of love, Moll Cutpurse declares that she will never marry as

(...) *I have the head now of myself, and am man
enough for a woman; marriage is but a chopping and
changing, where a maiden loses one head, and has a
worse i'th'place* (II.ii.43-6).¹¹¹

Moll Flanders, however, is quite overcome with the kindness her banker husband offers her that she confides in the reader:

*I TURN'D from him, for it fill'd my Eyes with Tears too; and I ask'd him to leave to retire a little to my Chamber: If ever I had a Grain of true Repentance for a vitious and abominable Life for 24 Years past, it was then. O! what a felicity is it to Mankind, said I, to myself, that they cannot see into the Hearts of one another! How happy had it been for me, if I had been Wife to a Man of so much honesty, and so much Affection from the Beginning?*¹¹²

Despite these structural differences, we can hardly overlook the technical similarities between the concerns of city comedy and the Defovean novel. A comparison between the two does not only yield the literary lineage of Moll Flanders. It also exposes the contextual affinity between Defoe's notorious cutpurse and the Jacobean playwrights' *hic mulier*.¹¹³ Just as Moll Cutpurse is a reflection on the city comedy's intended contrast between “*the idealized Tudor philosophy of the state, which owed much to Christian doctrine*” and a “*stylized, complaint-derived account of the lamentable evils of 'nowadays,'*”¹¹⁴ Moll Flanders recognises the wickedness and vice of the age.¹¹⁵ Moll Cutpurse's presence asserts city comedy's anarchic sense of protest against the vices and follies of London life, and its “*critical realism*”¹¹⁶ pays particular attention to

¹⁰⁶Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*. (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969), 26.

¹⁰⁷Novak, *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions*, 30.

¹⁰⁸Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, “*The Roaring Girl*,” 349.

¹⁰⁹Stephen Orgel, “*The Sub-texts of The Roaring Girl*,” in *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*. Ed. Susan Zimmerman, 9-20. (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 17.

¹¹⁰Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 215.

¹¹¹Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, “*The Roaring Girl*,” 344.

¹¹²Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 182.

¹¹³See footnote 93.

¹¹⁴Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy*, 15.

¹¹⁵Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 169.

¹¹⁶Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy*, 2.

the complexities of citizen life. Similarly, *MF* works along a familiar discursive line as her sense of immediacy secures the currency of the play as well its critical realism, which fills Moll with disgust at the disorderedness of urban life.¹¹⁷ City comedy proves itself an antecedent to Defoe's realist rhetoric since in its currency it disbands "material appropriate to romance, fairy-tale, sentimental legend or patriotic chronicle"¹¹⁸ and delivers various facets of citizen life. Borrowing from the unsentimentalised form and content of city comedy, *MF*'s realism becomes a citizenly effort and a generic extension of *RG*'s attention to the individual as located in an urban context. With a Ciceronian flair for rhetorical betterment, Moll Flanders becomes a fictively developed version of the city comedy's moral virago who is now bestowed with a full-grown 'citizenly' touch. Cyclically, *MF* fulfils the Rousseauesque promise of truth and simplicity by offering a myth of citizenry that wields much literary power from the material consciousness of the city comedy. It is a literary statement made by the orator-historian who looks back to the example of the stage and reaches for its rhetorical devices to assert his claim of realist authenticity.

Conclusion

As an early modern defender of Momian sincerity, Defoe's imaginative canon displays a problematic relationship with fiction. His theory of fiction, however, which furthers a Ciceronian versatility, allows him to retain historical veracity alongside imaginative artistry. Through a curious combination of these two distinct discursive stances, he is able to maintain his posture as a recorder of truth and devise forms of truth-telling in his imaginative works. This is best observed in his texts where the novel form melts into the dramatic structure through the frequent use of dramatic terminology, dialogism, inner monologue, and soliloquies. These uses not only suggest a continuity between the Defovean novel and drama but also refer us to an earlier dramatic tradition that strengthens Defoe's claim to the position of an orator-historian. *Moll Flanders*, by incorporating dramatic devices and borrowings from Jacobean city comedy, unfantasises the reality to which it claims to hold a mirror. It represents a climactic point in Defoe's career as a novelist since this dramatic sub-consciousness allows him to shape the early English novel's reportative realism. In conclusion, the amalgamation of two seemingly distinct traditions of writing in *Moll Flanders* awakens us to the fact that Defoe's *verus visus* conceals a dramatic sense of amazement at the curiosities of city life as re-told in prose form. Eventually, this collaboration tells us that Defoe is not simply a conjurer of 'fantastic' lies but a textual innovator. Through this implied sense of innovation, his fantastic lies project into the mimetic possibility of a 'dramatick' realism.



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¹¹⁷Although Novak points us towards Defoe's undiminished interest in London as a superior sight. See Novak, "Defoe and the Disordered City," *PMLA* 92, no.2 (1977): 241-52.

¹¹⁸Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy*, 11.



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