

University of Dundee

Defoe's foes

Cook, Daniel

Published in:
Neo-Georgian Fiction

Publication date:
2021

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Cook, D. (2021). Defoe's foes: The Author as Character. In J. Lipski, & J. Maciulewicz (Eds.), *Neo-Georgian Fiction: Reimagining the Eighteenth Century in the Contemporary Historical Novel* (1st ed., pp. 23-39). (Routledge Focus on Literature). Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. <https://www.routledge.com/Neo-Georgian-Fiction-Reimagining-the-Eighteenth-Century-in-the-Contemporary/Lipski-Maciulewicz/p/book/9780367430146>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in Discovery Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from Discovery Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge/CRC Press in *Neo-Georgian Fiction: Reimagining the Eighteenth Century in the Contemporary Historical Novel* on June 8th 2021, available online: <http://www.routledge.com/Neo-Georgian-Fiction-Reimagining-the-Eighteenth-Century-in-the-Contemporary/Lipski-Maciulewicz/p/book/9780367430146> or <http://www.crcpress.com/Neo-Georgian-Fiction-Reimagining-the-Eighteenth-Century-in-the-Contemporary/Lipski-Maciulewicz/p/book/9780367430146>

Chapter 2

Defoe's Foes: The Author as Character

Daniel Cook

Few Georgian authors have cameoed in works of fiction as often as Daniel Defoe has.¹ In his own lifetime he starred in Charles Gildon's satire *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Mr. D— De F—, of London, Hosier* (1719), soon after *Robinson Crusoe* was first published. The fictional cloning persists. Different Defoes appear prominently as spies-cum-authors in Diana Norman's *Shores of Darkness* (1996), Nicholas Griffin's *The House of Sight and Shadow* (2000) and Andrew Lane's *Dawn of Spies* (2016). Jake Arnott's Defoe is a seasoned story-fixer in *The Fatal Tree* (2017), where he and various hacks capture the confessions of convicted criminals. Harrumphing across the country alongside the modern-day narrator of Stuart Campbell's *Daniel Defoe's Railway Journey* (2017), a surreal iteration quite literally leaps out of the pages of a Penguin Classics edition of his real-life counterpart's travel writing. The most famous fictional Defoe features in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), a parable of canonical rereading, as Radhika Jones puts it.² Reverting to one of his real names (Mr Foe), Defoe (Defawe, Faugh, Du Foo, Du' Foo, D'Foe, DeFoe, De Foe, or De Foe³) is here a hired pen who conjures his best-known tale out of a memoir by a "true" castaway. That year, Defoe, a journalist, stole Robinson Crusoe's story in Gaston Compère's *Robinson '86*.⁴ Setting aside a long train of neo-Georgian novels in which Defoe cameos as a seventeenth-century spy, a Defoe-as-character only for all intents and purposes, this chapter attends to two complex cases in the genre of author fictions: Coetzee's *Foe* and Campbell's Defoe.

Narrowing the focus will allow us to consider an array of tropes and techniques that trouble the seeming stability of author fictions as a biographical genre. For Laura E. Savu the genre humanises familiar figures "in all their concrete particulars".⁵ Within this purview these Defoes would be weak biofictional clones because they fail to conform to the concrete particulars of the flesh-and-blood man. A fantastical textual agent, Campbell's Defoe lacks stable corporeality as he simultaneously exhibits the signs of a mundane physicality (repeatedly touching his unsightly mole) and defies the laws of physics (hiding and residing in a book at will). Although confined to a modern copy of *A*

Tour, he speaks in repurposed fragments from a range of already published works, and even offers new observations in response to present stimuli. Coetzee's Foe, more than thirty years earlier, had left behind traces of a bodily existence, in the tatty clothes, wigs, papers and pens strewn across his barely furnished writing room.⁶ If, as Patrick Corcoran puts it, Foe is "the writer who is reluctant to write", Campbell's Defoe is the writer who cannot stop.⁷ Both caricature their real-life peer's marketplace machinations: scribbling for survival. Read as metafictional commentary, Coetzee's 1986 novel belongs in the tradition set by Gildon's 1719 *Life*, where Defoe's characters lay claim to an independent existence in threatening to punish the author "for making us such Scoundrels in thy Writing".⁸ Foe is wholly dependent on other characters – not merely for the books he produces but for the very existence he has within the neo-Georgian text. Like Campbell's Defoe, Foe should be considered as a character-like author and as an author-like character, rather than a poststructuralist conflation of the roles. By character-like I mean to suggest that the figures recall but do not embody the real Defoe or the connotations with which his name has become associated. Author-like denotes a knowingly pantomimic existence in the service of narrative rather than an otherwise blandly biofictional personation of "the author".

Tellingly, other characters in each novel take on the dual roles of author and narrator most of the time. Susan Barton, in *Foe*, reluctantly picks up the pen literally and figuratively abandoned by the eponymous figure. A writer in his own right, the unnamed narrator of *Daniel Defoe's Railway Journey* contends with a scribbling ghost who refuses to be shut away. As a character, Foe is written into existence by Susan, an amateur memoirist keenly conscious of her pre-novel experiences, as she needs a noteworthy hack to superintend her materials into print. Eventually, Susan realises that Foe the author has written her into existence. Cruso (a fuzzy version of Crusoe), meanwhile, has little interest in recounting his version of the shipwreck story, so Coetzee swiftly kills him off. A tongueless Friday has had his voice taken away. In his more recent novel, Campbell provides a similarly counterintuitive exemplar of the author-as-character topos: his Defoe, though faithfully carried around in a dog-eared paperback, is frequently shut away, interrupted or otherwise rendered mute by the exacerbated narrator whenever he seeks to record new experiences and thereby write himself back into existence. These

Defoes riff on the paradigm of the professional author who has accrued (or is perpetually accruing) a recognisable if restless body of works. Coetzee and Campbell work with and against Defoe, the author-as-character and (within the texts) the character-as-author.

Coetzee's Foe; or, Who is the Author?

“My novel, *Foe*, if it is about any single subject”, Coetzee writes, “is about authorship: about what it means to be an author in the professional sense [...] The notion that one can be an author as one can be a baker is fairly fundamental to my conception of Foe”.⁹ Foe has not yet written *Robinson Crusoe* or *Roxana*, but he has already produced a short anecdote attributed to the flesh-and-blood Defoe, *The Apparition of Mrs Veal*, a copy of which Susan Barton uses as proof of his credentials: “‘This is a book, Friday,’ I say. ‘In it is a story written by the renowned Mr Foe. You do not know the gentleman, but at this very moment he is engaged in writing another story, which is your story, and your master’s, and mine’”.¹⁰ Frustrated with the absconded author, Susan later defines him as a hired pen adept at “writing up” with little apparent invention the stories of “those thieves or highwaymen of yours who gabble a confession and are then whipped off to Tyburn and eternal silence” (123). By that point, Susan has grown uneasy with scribal authorship as she realises that its apparent artlessness obfuscates its unvetted fabrication, “leaving you to make of their stories whatever you fancy” (123). This Foe will fix the materials sent to him just as casually as a tailor alters clothes.

For Jean-Paul Engélibert, taking the connection between Foe and Defoe too literally, the persona of the author-as-character “does not serve as a way of fixing the origins of the text, but on the contrary of showing the impossibility of writing about origins”.¹¹ Dominic Head, furthermore, suggests that Foe the author caricatures poststructuralism as “a cavil over words”, a “dispute we know to be endless”.¹² But origin is just one facet of a complex matrix of authorial concerns in *Foe*, in which the mechanics of writing itself is just as prominent. And the book has multiple text-bounded endings. After all, we begin the book with a finished product, a completed memoir by Susan Barton. Later, in her pursuit of Foe, we learn that her own memoir (the pre-text, as it were) had taken her barely three days of cramped composition in bed (61). Foe never completes his reworking (a novelisation of the memoir), though in conversation with

Susan he does outline its structure. Against that unwritten (or pre-written) book, *Foe* is itself structured in four main parts, setting aside the sectional breaks indicated by asterisks. The first part, we belatedly learn, comprises the lost shipwrecked memoir upon which Foe is tasked with basing his ghost-written book for Susan.

Softly mimicking eighteenth-century typographical practice, each paragraph of Susan's story has been enclosed in inverted commas. A persistent marker on the page, the inverted commas signal Susan's ownership of the story; equally they mark it off as enclosable, quotable, and therefore extractable. Susan, in this part, continually emphasises the tension between authorship and ownership. Early on, for instance, she tells her audience (Foe, we soon learn) about how she met Cruso (the logophobic counterpoint to Defoe's Crusoe):

I would gladly recount to you the history of this singular Cruso, as I heard it from his own lips. But the stories he told me were so various, and so hard to reconcile one with another, that I was more and more driven to conclude age and isolation had taken their toll on his memory, and he no longer knew what was truth, what fancy. (11-12)

Cruso is an anti-author, or at least an anti-Crusoe who "kept no journal, perhaps because he lacked paper and ink, but more likely, I now believe, because he lacked the inclination to keep one, or, if he ever possessed the inclination, had lost it" (16). Writing in the first-person voice, Defoe's eponymous narrator performs the labour of writing in *Robinson Crusoe*: "now it was when I began to keep a Journal of every Day's Employment".¹³ Cruso's lack of record-keeping perturbs Susan: "would you not wish for a memorial to be left behind, so that the next voyagers to make landfall here, whoever they may be, may read and learn about us, and perhaps shed a tear?" (17). This speech conflates seemingly incompatible notions of authorship. The first is a hermeneutic model of authorship in which Susan intends to record their lives as accurately as possible.¹⁴ The second is a novelistic model predicated on human interest, which would fit with the pseudo-autobiographical approach taken in Defoe's fictions. A significant difference concerns their approach to the materials. Susan wants a complete account; Crusoe favours

highlights that expend “many dull things”.¹⁵ Crusoe pre-exists his book (“I was born in the Year 1632, in the City of York, of a good family...”).¹⁶ But Coetzee’s *Foe* has been brought into being, as Alexandra Effe puts it, by Susan, solely to record her story and therefore bring her to life.¹⁷

Postmodern authors, for Brian McHale, are at once vehicles of autobiographical fact within the projected fictional world and the maker of that world.¹⁸ *Foe* is a co-opted conjurer. Susan’s authorship entails recording rather than creating, whatever writerly tools may be lying around: “to burn the story upon wood, or engrave it upon rock?” (17). Crusoe implicitly follows a similar model of authorship, one thwarted by circumstance. As Friday’s tongue has been cut out, he will never be able to tell his story: “How will we ever know the truth?”, Crusoe laments (23).¹⁹ Does such limitation suggest a lack of imagination or an over-zealous commitment to the story? In any case, Susan is aware that the reader “expects stories from its adventurers” (34). Crusoe is neither a storyteller nor an adventurer. Read within a metafictional purview, the conversation Susan has with Captain Smith, to whom she told “my story, as I have told it to you” (40), takes on extra importance. Unlike Crusoe, the captain encourages the author: “‘It is a story you should set down in writing,’ he urged – ‘There has never before, to my knowledge, been a female castaway of our nation. It will cause a great stir’”. Despondent, Susan shakes her head. “A liveliness is lost in the writing down which must be supplied by art”, she concedes, “and I have no art”. Captain Smith retorts that “the booksellers will hire a man to set your story to rights, and put in a dash of colour too, here and there”. (Built into this account of Georgian bookselling practices is an assumption that a male author will need to enhance the female castaway’s story.)

Susan, disagreeing, reasserts her hermeneutic principles: “their trade is in books, not in truth”. “If I cannot come forward, as author, and swear to the truth of my tale, what will be the worth of it?” (40). Inadvertent or otherwise, the pun on *worth* (ethically, monetarily) signals again the tension between authorship and ownership that troubles Susan and, as we shall see, drives *Foe*. Here, *Foe* more closely resembles Defoe – or rather, Coetzee-the-critic’s account of Defoe as “a businessman trading in words and ideas”, not an artist.²⁰ The opening part of *Foe* ends with a direct address to the professional author to whom Susan will entrust her story:

Do you think of me, Mr Foe, as Mrs Cruso or as a bold adventuress? Think what you may, it was I who shared Cruso's bed and closed Cruso's eyes, as it is I who have disposal of all that Cruso leaves behind, which is the story of his island. (45)

The first question gestures toward a crisis of characterisation seen in Gildon's metafictional *Life* as early as 1719: will Foe make her a diminished figure in Cruso's shipwrecked memoir or will he promote her above a man whom Susan earlier characterised as a reluctant storyteller, and ergo a failed adventurer? Whether sharing Cruso's bed, as a pretended wife who calls herself Mrs Cruso solely to mitigate gossip, or closing the corpse's eyes after his death on board Captain Smith's ship, Susan presents herself as the shaper of the story's raw material. If not quite an author – not yet – she remains an owner.

Dear Mr Foe

Foe rejects the story he receives on behalf of a prospective readership with little interest in truth, as Annamaria Carusi argues.²¹ In Macaskill and Colleran's reading, the exchange between the female castaway and her appointed scribe amounts to a grotesque form of collaboration that extends beyond "a competitive literary labouring to become a working on behalf of the enemy, a siding with the foe".²² Lewis MacLeod offers a different reading: Susan "hasn't been hijacked by narrative conscription so much as she has been outplayed in a game she volunteers to play".²³ Foe says as much (presumably in Susan's paraphrasing, the quotation marks notwithstanding): "I did not ask you to come visiting, you came of your own will" (120). I propose an alternative view: Susan's Foe is not a biofictional Defoe but rather a Defoeian character-as-author. Defoe's narrators assert their autonomy. In *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1720), Defoe (in character as Crusoe) insists that "there's not a Circumstance in the imaginary Story, but has its just Allusion to a real Story, and chimes Part for Part, and Step for Step with the inimitable Life of *Robinson Crusoe*".²⁴ On behalf of the title character, the fictional editor of *Roxana* similarly asserts the uniqueness of the story: "*this Story differs from most of the Modern Performances of this Kind [...] the*

Foundation of This is laid in Truth of Fact".²⁵ Susan begs Foe to take her unique story ("You have not heard a story before like mine"), wilfully monetising her value ("I am the good fortune we are always hoping for", 48). (Missing the mercantile pun on "good fortune", Judie Newman assumes Susan presents herself "innocently" as a figure of fortune in need of rescue.²⁶) Foe does not respond, but he does invest in her: he gives her three guineas and lodging, so we learn in a follow-up letter from Susan. In material terms, Susan will have no financial independence until her book (a novelisation of her memoirs) hits the market. "Will you not bear it in mind", she reminds Foe, "that my life is drearily suspended till your writing is done?" (63).

Despite her reservations about scribal authorship, Susan must take up the pen of the absent author when she finds herself in his barely furnished room: "I have your table to sit at, your window to gaze through. I write with your pen on your paper, and when the sheets are completed they go into your chest. So your life continues to be lived, though you are gone" (65). For Susan, writing is an assertion of authority, even if the game of bookselling excludes her. The act of writing, in other words, offers bodily autonomy: "I sat at your bureau this morning [...] and took out a clean sheet of paper and dipped pen in ink – your pen, your ink, I know, but somehow the pen becomes mine while I write with it, as though growing out of my hand" (66-67). Though she may not realise it, this uncanny bodiliness matches Defoe's Roxana, a character tacitly based on Foe's Susan after the fact: Roxana will "give my own Character [...] as if I was speaking of another-body".²⁷ As she gains confidence, Susan moves away from the hermeneutic model of authorship towards novelistic invention: "Are these enough strange circumstances to make a story of?" (67). She even second-guesses Foe's market-led alterations: you will say to yourself "Better without the woman" (72). Ironically, she is right – Foe's real-life alter ego relocates Susan to another novel, *Roxana*. To her dismay, Susan gradually recognises that Foe's powers of invention are so potent he can conjure up flesh-and-blood characters, such as a "father-born" child claiming to be Susan's daughter, with whom she shares her full name (Susan Barton).

Favouring realism in fiction, Susan (the putative biological mother) considers the invention of the child to be absurd as it lacks generic precedent: "The world is full of stories of mothers searching for sons and daughters they gave away once, long ago. But

there are no stories of daughters searching for mothers” (77). This is not the first time the sly inventiveness of Defoe-as-author has angered his creations. In one of the most surreal scenes in Gildon’s 1719 *Life*, Defoe’s characters reek savage revenge on the writer by making him eat a copy of the book in two volumes: “me will make him swallow his own Vomit”, Friday warns.²⁸ Largely an homage to the real Defoe, Jane Gardam’s *Crusoe’s Daughter* (1985) ends with an elderly Polly Flint conversing with a shadowy figure identified as Crusoe, with whom she discusses the fictionality of *Robinson Crusoe*. “My creator had quite a facility”, claims Crusoe, conceding authority to the author; “Stood him in very good stead. Memoirs”. “Nonsense”, retorts Polly, “he made it all up”.²⁹ Susan herself has been conjured up by Foe, so she slowly apprehends. Inadvertently, she had raised that possibility in our minds, as eavesdropping readers, when she calls herself “a being without substance, a ghost beside the true body of Cruso”, and implores Foe to “return my substance to me” by telling her story (51).³⁰ At the outset, Susan had sought out Foe because of his reputation as a writer-up of sources, such as *The Apparition of Mrs Veal*, and not as a novelist prone to market-led invention.

When confronted later, Foe outlines his conjuring model of authorship in rather explicit terms: “In a life of writing books, I have often, believe me, been lost in the maze of doubting” (135). The trick to authorial conjuring, as Foe puts it, is “to plant a sign or marker in the ground where I stand” (135-136). If, as Susan Naramore Maher suggests, Susan is “a conglomerate of novelistic conventions”, she is precisely the sort of marker upon which an experienced writer such as Foe would rely.³¹ Another character seemingly lifted from Defoe’s *Colonel Jack* makes an appearance: Jack, “a notable pick-pocket” (128). As with Susan and her alleged daughter, Foe refuses to take responsibility for Jack (“he has his own life to live”, 128). In this reading, Susan is a reluctant author who abandons her property; Foe is an opportunistic writer who manipulates whatever he finds. Defoe’s Jack the pickpocket has been quietly repurposed by Foe as Jack the messenger boy. If Foe represents (to Susan’s mind) the quintessential eighteenth-century author who gains professional status only when reworking found materials, Susan is more like the postmodernist author who, in Brian McHale’s words, flickers in and out of existence. “I continued to trust in my own authorship”, she asserts. Yet within a matter of lines she becomes “doubt itself”: “Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom too?” (133). Even when

lost in a maze of doubting, Foe never loses his craftsmanship. We finally meet him, substantially at least, in the third part of the novel, which switches to first-person narration with reported speech (as opposed to an authored memoir or one-way epistolary exchange).

Susan and Friday find Foe in Bristol. Some basic hospitality aside, Foe promptly resumes the role of the professional author. He does not write, in the mechanical sense, as Susan does. But he gathers his sources, and composes his structure, out loud. Against Susan's indeterminacy, Foe summarises the gist of the story he wishes to write up:

We therefore have five parts in all: the loss of the daughter; the quest for the daughter in Brazil; abandonment of the quest, and the adventure of the island; assumption of the quest by the daughter; and reunion of the daughter with her mother. It is thus that we make up a book: loss, then quest, then recovery; beginning, then middle, then end. As to novelty, this is lent by the island episode – which is properly the second part of the middle – and by the reversal in which the daughter takes up the quest abandoned by her mother. (117)

Susan does not wish to shape the story in such a way: “All the joy I had felt in finding my way to Foe”, she says to herself, “fled me”. But the island story is nothing more than a loaf of bread, Foe reasons: “It will keep us alive, certainly, if we are starved of reading; but who will prefer it when there are tastier confections and pasties to be had?” However, Susan later reaffirms her longstanding faith in a hermeneutic model of authorship: “These I would not accept because they were not the truth” (121). She also more boldly asserts her authorial rights: “It is still in my power to guide and amend”; “Above all, to withhold”. She will be “father to my story” (123). Foe attempts to nullify Susan's newfound desire to father her own story by conjuring up two anecdotes in which he asserts the power of his authorship. One is the confession of an Irishwomen sentenced to death for committing infanticide and bigamy, among other things. The moral of the story, claims Foe, is to recognise the importance of telling your story but then holding your peace for ever after. Susan, more cynically, suggests instead that the moral is: be wary of the appointed author who gets the final word.

Foe's second anecdote concerns a condemned woman worried about the infant daughter she will leave behind. A gaoler and his wife finally agree to adopt the child. The application, says Foe, is there are "more ways than one of living eternally" (125). Entrusting her child to strangers, like Susan trusting her story to Foe, the nameless woman can rest easy. In retaliation, Susan conjures up her own authorial motif, lamenting that there is no such thing as a "man-Muse, a youthful god who visited authoresses in the night and made their pens flow" (126). The insinuation of reproductive fertility circles back to the borrowed paternalism innate to Susan's hermeneutic model. Where Foe's authorial parables casually reinscribe a singular flow of materials, from the female body to the male pen, Susan favours an image of sexual power verging on violence: "It is always a hard ride when the Muse pays her visits" (140). She also makes a telling quip about being paid for sex that revisits her ongoing concerns about the vexed relationship between authorship and ownership: "he gave me sixpence, which, though no great payment for a visit from the Muse, I accepted" (145). Money aside, this bodily interaction between the male author and the female subject suggests a collaboration between muse and author will always be vital for productivity: "She must do whatever lies in her power to father her offspring" (140). The gender confusion here (fathering her offspring) continues in her challenge to his professionalism: "Am I to damn you as a whore for welcoming me and embracing me and receiving my story?" (152). Ultimately, she embraces Foe's model of appropriation by shifting the value judgements: "It is not whoring to entertain other people's stories and return them to the world better dressed", she informs him (151-152).

Foe ends with a curious coda, or a reboot, as Jo Alyson Parker has it.³² An unknown narrator – a new author of sorts – surveys a dusty room three hundred years after the events of the main part of the novel have occurred. The lifeless bodies of the characters lay strewn on the floor, their skin "dry as paper" (153). Foe's name is restored; or perhaps a separate Defoe has been referenced: "At one corner of the house, above head-height, a plaque is bolted to the wall. *Daniel Defoe, Author*, are the words, white on blue, and then more writing too small to read" (155). The memorialising model of authorship that Susan had largely championed, before she adopted the role of Defoevian scribbler, gives way to a more literal memorialisation of the real-life author. At the same

time, Susan's pre-text memoir, the bulk of part one of *Foe*, remains. The reboot does not threaten to "unwrite" the story, as Tisha Turk would have it.³³ After all, we even return to the first line: "Bringing the candle nearer, I read the first words of the tall, looping script: 'Dear Mr Foe, At last I could row no further'" (155). In fact, a slight discrepancy occurs between the lines. Only here, at the end, do we have the address to "Dear Mr Foe". To whom does the story really belong, then? Who has the final word? Which authorial model finally triumphs? Where is Defoe, really?

Travels with Defoe

Introducing him as the canonical author of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, *Daniel Defoe's Railway Journey* reminds readers that Defoe also published *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain*. The publisher even provides an approximate facsimile of the original title page for the latter, a suitably bookish relic in a metafictional novel. Along with another eccentric pensioner (as the book's blurb styles them), named John, the unnamed narrator undertakes a series of long-distance train journeys with "one of my literary heroes, Daniel Defoe".³⁴ Unlike the jobbing Foe, this fictive clone has lived his life. Now he is a textual ghost conjured out of the pages of a Penguin Classics edition. Hero-worship notwithstanding, Stuart Campbell draws the eponymous character in markedly different shades: as petty, puritanical, flirtatious, sombre, and sarcastic, among other things. This Defoe is a product of his period ("as a protestant dissenter you have strong opinions on these matters", the narrator tells him, "but frankly, I don't want to hear them", 21). Equally, he remains alert to modern concerns ("The miners have my sympathy", he observes in passing, 55). (Foe, by contrast, outsources the faculty of observation to Susan: "Come back and report to me how the world does" (*Foe*, 150)). Positioned within the genre of author fictions, Campbell's Defoe recalls the historical figure Daniel Defoe expressly as a canonical author. But, read in a metafictional context alongside the more sardonic *Foe*, the book-dwelling genie is better understood as a textual gimmick through which Campbell explores the comical mundanity of the experiences shared by jobbing writers across the ages.

The narrator will embrace "embellishment" (his word) as a universally human instinct that, so he claims with knowing irony, is decidedly not "a disingenuous literary

ploy” (xv). Unlike Coetzee’s Susan, the narrator more matter-of-factly adopts the habits of a Defoeian author (by his definition): “Who would I accost? Whose stories would I steal?” (43). As a professional author, Campbell’s Defoe follows two impulses: an intellectual need to record his observations about the world around him and a perpetual fear of debt. Coetzee’s Foe has a similar fear, perhaps more overwhelmingly so, as his writerly impulse gets subsumed into hack work. Although singled out for his renown among hired pens, Foe has not yet written the fictional masterpieces with which Coetzee’s novel most blatantly engages, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana*. Not only has Campbell’s Defoe written *A Tour*, by contrast, his book has long been a “classic”. That said, the modern narrator does not statically canonise the work so much as engage with its author’s restless spirit: “Although he seemed quite contained within the 700-odd pages of my well-thumbed Penguin Classic, there was no guarantee that a spirit so passionate, curious and contradictory would be happy to stay there for long” (xvi). The author-as-character in Coetzee’s novel might be called a parallel Defoe, one that has yet to write his major works of fiction. In Campbell’s, he has been boxed into a single-volume construct, even if he is also more akin to a conventional fictional character capable of demonstrating independent agency.

A sign of the restraints imposed on his character comes early on, when the narrator notices that his companion looks anxious: “The cockiness he had shown just moments earlier had vanished” (14). “I remembered a reference in his biography to moments of black despair when hounded by creditors”, the narrator continues. Coetzee teasingly conflates Foe with the works of his flesh-and-blood counterpart, as well as the authorial personae associated with those works; this Defoe, in a different way, cannot escape the historical circumstances defined by his real-life self’s autobiographical (and biofictional) records. The author-as-character in *Daniel Defoe’s Railway Journey* cannot straightforwardly be called a fictive clone of Defoe. He is a fantastical representative of the imperilled lives of the authors who strove for recognition in the age of anonymous print: “A writer’s lot is a thankless task”, the made-up Defoe observes; “You could end up impoverished and imprisoned” (134). At the same time, Campbell’s Defoe conforms to the paradigm of the successful, “classical” author at once subjected to the haphazard machinations of the marketplace (“Printers! Pah! The spawn of the devil. They’ll pirate

your work for a shilling”) and given a catalogueable name, an authorial brand (“Now it is written by Daniel Defoe”, 247). Regardless, this Defoe keeps writing throughout his journeys: “Defoe [...] put aside the manuscript he was working on, shook his head and sighed” (65). A bookish afterlife prolongs his writerly impulses even as it frustrates them.

Campbell’s Defoe certainly takes the profession of authorship very seriously. He frequently attacks the narrator for his comparative shortcomings: ““Do your duty’, said Defoe who was becoming annoyed at my apparent reluctance to talk to other passengers” (33). And he asserts his own expertise: “I speak with authority. I wrote a History of the Devil” (105). But he is also restrained by his pre-established authorship. Although he freely walks out and about in the streets with the narrator, Campbell’s Defoe, as a textual figment of the imagination, remains largely tethered to his papery cage. “Back into your book!”, the narrator blasts at him (21). Defoe’s introduction within the novel is absurd: “Without warning, Defoe burst from page 576! The cloying reek of civet from his perfumed wig filled the carriage” (2). The account evokes a human body, but only by association (smells, chiefly). Belatedly, almost fifty pages later, the narrator does describe Defoe’s appearance in the terms we would expect with any regular character:

Defoe was asleep and I took the opportunity to stare at him.

‘A middle siz’d spare man, about forty years old, of a brown complexion, and dark brown-coloured hair, but wears a wig; a hooked nose, a sharp chin, grey eyes and a large mole near his mouth.’

He opened his eyes, he had obviously heard every word.

‘How dare you!’

‘Sorry?’

‘You stole those words from the *London Gazette*. If you recall, they were prefaced with the invocation, “Whosoever shall discover Defoe so he may be apprehended...” And all because of a piddling pamphlet that I penned in an idle moment.’ (51)

An extreme textuality unsettles a seemingly straightforward description. The description, that is, has been borrowed (as Defoe recognises) from a contemporary periodical. As an

historical figure – and a familiar author, no less – Defoe has become a repository of lived experiences (“That lawyer! He’s pursuing me for the debts I can’t pay”, 194). At the same time, as a character who can continue to express opinions, he will not be a closed book: “‘One of my children died when I was in Newgate prison’, said Defoe, who had been surprisingly quiet up until this point. When the time was right I would probe him about his incarceration, but now wasn’t the time” (39).

As a repository of knowledge who jumps out of his book when summoned, a papery genie rather than a verbal simulacrum of a human being, he is subject to a reader’s spontaneous inquiry: “Realising that part of me was actually missing him”, the narrator writes, “I held *A Tour through the Whole Island* by the front and back covers and shook it, but he wasn’t for coming out” (82-83). On other occasions, the narrator-as-reader craves peace from his imaginary companion: “Mercifully, Defoe crept back into the book and pulled the pages over his head” (16). At other times, the narrator chastises Defoe: “‘Stop right there.’ He looked up, confused. ‘If I remember, you spend the next twenty odd pages describing the building in tedious detail’” (86). And, offsetting the apparent hero worship of the elder author, the narrator frequently becomes overfamiliar: “Do you really think so, Danny? Surely a small hint of hyperbole there? We have had this discussion before” (237). The narrator does not wish to provoke his “imaginary friend”, to be sure, but their exchanges can be competitive when it comes to their role and function as authors. More than that, the narrator hints at a discord between them: “This was a good conversation, only spoiled by Defoe’s intrusion” (92). Later, he even asserts complete control: “I wasn’t certain that I had granted Defoe permission to instigate conversations. He was my creature, and accordingly could only respond when I chose” (159). The fictional author – the Great Fabricator, as Pat Rogers dubs him in the Penguin Books edition³⁵ referenced by Campbell – goads the narrator:

‘Look’, I said. ‘Sometimes I make things up. I mix fact with invented nonsense.’

‘The delineation between what is observable and the fruits of your odd imagination should be clearer’.

‘Look, whose book is this?’

‘I suggest Sir, you look again at the title that you have chosen for your narrative.’ He smiled smugly. (28)

Much later, the narrator finds a definitive way of dealing with the fictional agitator: “I snapped shut my Penguin Classic, cutting him off in mid-sentence” (192). Interrupted or suspended sentences recur throughout the book, though with less overt violence than the writerly exchanges between Susan and Foe in Coetzee’s 1986 novel: “Defoe also did his best to encourage me but to little effect. He even offered to take over the narrative but he too struggled to find much to say” (268). And when Campbell’s narrator appropriates the words of the real Defoe he puts them into quotation marks and gives them to the author’s biofictional peer. Even then, polite citation can be immediately undermined by an in-text reaction: “I think we know that, Daniel”, the narrator quips (273). Nevertheless, the pertinent point here is this: even when appropriating Defoe, Campbell retains the authorial integrity of the original. If anything, he enhances the authorial integrity of the original as the words he quotes in *Daniel Defoe’s Railway Journey* largely come from belatedly attributed works. An abrupt death of sorts comically undercuts the narrator’s bantering veneration for Defoe:

On the train back to Glasgow I asked John if my copy of *The Tour* had fallen off his side of the table.

‘Christ!’ he said. ‘It must have been with the papers when the man came collecting rubbish.’

‘What!’ I said.

‘I must have bundled everything up together’.

I felt a profound sense of loss. It was only a paperback but I was bereft. My Figment had left me. (317)

The inky legacy of the once-flesh-and-blood author Defoe will survive, even if the semi-sentient Defoe of this novel has been farcically snuffed out. A death of a copy – a literal copy of the book, as it were – nevertheless causes some distress for the human companion who conjured the make-believe Defoe into being. Characters die in books

only until readers bring them back to life again. But the loss of a book remains permanent, unless the reader can procure another copy.

The author-as-character explicitly named as Defoe (or Foe) in contemporary author fictions resembles in appearance (however unreliably) and (in parts) the character of the seventeenth-century figure we now call Daniel Defoe. In *Daniel Defoe's Railway Journey* he becomes a bookish genie flitting in and out of a Penguin Classics edition of one of his lesser known works. In *Foe* he is a largely absent scribbler renowned for fixing stories such as Susan Barton's "true" tale of the female castaway. The metafictional games extend into other novels that lie beyond our scope here. Jake Arnott's Defoe in *The Fatal Tree* similarly reworks raw materials into literature, though primarily he is an important spy. A spymaster in Andrew Lane's "Crusoe Adventure" series, Diana Norman's *Shores of Darkness*, and Nicholas Griffin's *The House of Sight and Shadow*, among other recent works, Daniel Defoe habitually occupies the imaginative pockets between truth and fiction. The Great Fabricator has himself been refabricated again and again, against his will or otherwise.

Notes

- 1 For a representative list of authors as characters see *Biographical Fiction: A Reader*, ed. Michael Lackey (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 427-436. See also *The Author as Character: Representing Historical Writers in Western Literature*, ed. Paul Franssen and Ton Hoenselaars (London: Associated University Presses, 1999).
- 2 Radhika Jones, "Father-Born: Mediating the Classics in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*", *Digital Defoe* 1.1 (2009), 45-69. See also Linda Carter, "Contaminated Copies: J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*", in *Generic Instability and Identity in the Contemporary Novel*, ed. Madelena Gonzalez and Marie-Odile Pittin-Hédon (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 26-33, and Derek Attridge, "Oppressive Silence: J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* and the Politics of Canonisation", in *Critical Perspectives on J. M. Coetzee*, ed. Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1996), 168-190.
- 3 See John Robert Moore, *Daniel Defoe: Citizen of the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 7-8.
- 4 For *Robinson '86* see Jean-Paul Engélibert, "Daniel Defoe as Character: Subversion of the Myths of Robinson Crusoe and of the Author", in *Robinson Crusoe: Myths and*

-
- Metamorphoses*, ed. Lieve Spaas and Brian Stimpson (London: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's, 1996), 267-281.
- 5 Laura E. Savu, *Postmortem Postmodernists: The Afterlife of the Author in Recent Narrative* (Madison NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 2009), 15. See also Aleid Fokkema, "The Author: Postmodernism's Stock Character", in *The Author as Character*, ed. Franssen and Hoenselaars, 39-51.
- 6 On Defoe's and Foe's divergent biographies see Derek Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 78, n.15.
- 7 Patrick Corcoran, "Foe: Metafiction and the Discourse of Power", in *Robinson Crusoe: Myths and Metamorphoses*, ed. Spaas and Stimpson, 260.
- 8 Charles Gildon, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Mr. D— De F—, of London, Hosier* (London: J. Roberts, 1719), vii.
- 9 J. M. Coetzee, "Roads to Translation", *Tongues: Translation: Only Connect* 64.4 (2005), 145. See Kai-su Wu, "Decomposing the Authoritative Author: Truth and Confession in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* and *Summertime*", *Tamkang Review* 43.2 (2013), 107-129.
- 10 J. M. Coetzee, *Foe* (1986; London: Penguin Books, 2010), 58. Subsequent citations will appear in the body of the essay. Maria Lopez reads *Foe* as a response to *Mrs Veal*: "Foe: A Ghost Story", *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 45.2 (2010), 295-310.
- 11 Engélibert, "Daniel Defoe as Character", 271.
- 12 Dominic Head, *J. M. Coetzee* (1997; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 127. See also David Cowart, *Literary Symbiosis: The Reconfigured Text in Twentieth-Century Writing* (Athens GA and London: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 149-172.
- 13 Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Michael Shinagel, 2nd edition (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1994), 51. On Crusoe's "autobiographical impulse" see David Marshall, "Autobiographical Acts in *Robinson Crusoe*", *ELH* 71.3 (2004), 899-920.
- 14 See Chris Bongie, "'Lost in the Maze of Doubting': J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* and the Politics of (Un)likeness", *Modern Fiction Studies* 39.2 (1993), 267.
- 15 Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 51.
- 16 Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 4.
- 17 Alexandra Effe, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Narrative Transgression* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 35.
- 18 Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987; London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 202.

-
- 19 On Friday's enforced speechlessness see Christopher Peterson, "The Home of Friday: Coetzee's *Foe*", *Textual Practice* 30.5 (2016), 857-877, and Richard Begam, "Silence and Mut(e)ilation: White Writing in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*", *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 93.1 (1994), 111-129.
- 20 J. M. Coetzee, *Stranger Shores: Essays 1986-1999* (London: Vintage, 2002), 26.
- 21 Annamaria Carusi, "Foe: The Narrative and Power", *Journal of Literary Studies* 5.2 (1989), 136.
- 22 Brian Macaskill and Jeanne Colleran, "Reading History, Writing Heresy: The Resistance of Representation and the Representation of Resistance in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*", *Contemporary Literature* 33.3 (1992), 452.
- 23 Lewis MacLeod, "'Do We of Necessity Become Puppets in a Story?' or Narrating the World: On Speech, Silence, and Discourse in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*", *Modern Fiction Studies* 52.1 (2006), 5.
- 24 Daniel Defoe, *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (London: W. Taylor, 1720), [vii].
- 25 Daniel Defoe, *Roxana, The Fortunate Mistress*, ed. John Mullan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.
- 26 Judie Newman, "Desperately Seeking Susan: J. M. Coetzee, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana*", *Current Writing* 6.1 (1994), 2.
- 27 Defoe, *Roxana*, 6.
- 28 Gildon, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Mr. D— De F—*, xvii.
- 29 Jane Gardam, *Crusoe's Daughter* (London: Abacus, 1985), 303.
- 30 See M. J. Marais, "The Deployment of Metafiction in an Aesthetics of Engagement in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*", *Journal of Literary Studies* 5.2 (1989), 184.
- 31 Susan Naramore Maher, "Confronting Authority: J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* and the Remaking of *Robinson Crusoe*", *The International Fiction Review* 18.1 (1991), 39.
- 32 Jo Alyson Parker, "Crusoe's *Foe*, *Foe's Crusoe*, and the Origins and Future of the Novel", *KronoScope* 11.1-2 (2011), 35.
- 33 Tisha Turk, "Intertextuality and the Collaborative Construction of Narrative: J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*", *Narrative* 19.3 (2013), 308.
- 34 Stuart Campbell, *Daniel Defoe's Railway Journey: A Surreal Odyssey through Modern Britain* (Dingwall: Sandstone Press, 2017), xiv. Subsequent citations appear in the body of the text.

35 Daniel Defoe, *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, ed. Pat Rogers
(Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), 9.