to make war on even unfriendly Indians "without the consent of the body of the company."

Reviewed by FELIX MORLEY

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The Frustrated Climber


Daniel Defoe died in 1731, aged, ill, and solitary, while hiding from creditors, thus bringing to a close one of the most extraordinary careers in the history of English letters. The author of the world's most popular work of fiction was not recognized at his death by the keeper of the burial register of his home parish, who recorded him as "Mr. Dunbow." The registrar of Tindall's Burying-ground may well have read some of Defoe's works, but his reaction to their author differs little from that of the great mass of readers today who read Robinson Crusoe in virtually every language of the world yet often find no author's name listed on its title-page.

Throughout most of his life Defoe pursued simultaneously three major interests, politics, literature, and commerce, and they at times vied disastrously with each other, undermining on several occasions his greater goal of attaining the economic security of a gentleman. Michael Shinagel, in a display of sound scholarship, good judgment, and admirable clarity of style, has undertaken to trace out the events of Defoe's life and the ideas expressed in his works in relation to this central overriding concern. As Shinagel demonstrates, Defoe's fiction, his journalism, and his business career were largely organized around the hope of improving social status at a point in the history of England when businessmen were increasingly able to achieve gentility and, at times, even nobility through the creation of mercantile fortunes and through intermarriage with the upper classes.

If Defoe had been willing to follow his own advice toward effecting this increase in status (for he wrote a great deal upon the subject), he might well have grown into one of the most prosperous men of his day. Later in the eighteenth century Adam Smith was to write that prudence is the prime requisite of economic man, but prudence was a virtue almost completely absent in Defoe. In 1685 Defoe was young, newly married, and quickly rising in a wholesaling business financed largely by his wife's handsome dowry; he ran off to join the Duke of Monmouth's ill-fated rebellion, risking all in the hope of Monmouth's favor should he successfully usurp the throne. After three years of exile abroad he built his hopes upon the patronage of William III, whom he later defended as a True-Born Englishman despite the King's foreign birth; this promising source of patronage was abruptly cut off when William died, having been thrown from his horse in a freak accident.

Meanwhile, Defoe had overextended himself in foreign shipping and was ruined by French privateers, ending ultimately in flight to avoid debtors' prison. Later, when he was on the verge of compounding with his creditors, Parliament passed a bankruptcy act which served to hinder him from getting out from under these financial burdens. Nevertheless, rising from his own ashes like the phoenix he loved to discourse upon, he established a thriving brick and pantile factory, the first of its kind in England. But when he was within reach of paying off his earlier debts, he rashly wrote a popular poem "The Short-
est Way with the Dissenters” satirizing the state church, for which he was arrested, pilloried, and his brick works seized; shortly after his release from prison he witnessed a violent storm which created the largest demand in history for roofing tiles, while he remained unable to capitalize on it.

Rescued from prison by the Tory minister Robert Harley, Defoe, a Whig, became his creature, serving as a secret government agent abroad and as author of a Tory newspaper, the Review, at home. After further legal troubles and a change of ministers, he became the hired pen of Whig Secretary of State Townshend, for whom he continued his writing in Tory papers but with the new mission of quietly giving them a Whig slant. By performing such tasks as these and by becoming the father of the English novel at nearly sixty years of age, Defoe was able once again to rise to a comfortable, gentlemanly existence before a descendant of one of his original creditors began hounding him and forced him into his final flight from the law.

This is a career, as Shinagel points out, worthy of Defoe’s own novels. As we review the general outlines of his varied life, however, it is tempting to speculate (as Shinagel does not) on the probable course of Defoe’s adventures had he taken the advice he so often proffered his readers, that of emigrating to America. Although he died a couple of generations before our Constitutional guarantees of liberty were established, he would nevertheless have participated in a rather freer political climate than that in England, a climate in which the guarantees that were later enacted were gaining currency in the popular mind.

In fact, Defoe’s fortunes were imperiled or ruined at various times by limitations on the freedoms of religion and press (in his publication of “The Shortest Way with the Dissenters”), imprisonment for debt, imposition of ex post facto legislation, and the demise of a king. Despite his own lack of prudence, then, which must be reckoned as the chief cause of his misfortunes, Defoe might be seen, if not a martyr to later American ideals, at least a grim reminder of the quality of life even in a country justly proud of its citizens’ liberties but yet without a rigorous protection of them. In America or anywhere, however, Defoe would still have to contend for success with his greatest handicap, his speculative nature. If speculative shipping ventures, risky financial dealings, or even a track for horse racing were to be found, Defoe would certainly have sought them out. This much at least can be said with certainty: in the America of Defoe’s day he would not have suffered irreparable harm to his social standing for having been pilloried in England, whereas there, in a more highly structured and traditional society, when Pope or Swift (who could refer off-handedly to Defoe as “the fellow that was pilloryed, I have forgot his name”) confronted him with the fact, it had a telling force.

It is notable that Defoe, despite his many failures in business, never forsook either participating in (until his final flight he was involved in a series of entrepreneurial ventures) or writing about (“Writing upon trade was the whore I really doated on”) commerce. He realized that his own extravagant speculations were the chief source of his calamities and that many other businessmen who were willing to accumulate wealth more slowly, but more surely, were able to attain the settled life of a gentleman to which he aspired. His various writings on trade, the Review, The Complete English Tradesman, A Plan of the English Commerce, and A Tour through England and Wales, remain the most enthusiastic encomia of business yet written. This was, to be sure, the golden age of literary praise of commerce, a period in which Pope and Thomson, with a host of lesser poets, extolled the possibilities of trade in a variety of topographical poems, in which lengthy georgics celebrated England’s agriculture and industry, and in which major figures such as Swift, Berke-
ley and Burke dedicated prodigious efforts to promoting freer trade relationships between England and Ireland.

To most readers who know Defoe at all, of course, they know him through *Crusoe*, through *Moll Flanders*, perhaps also through *Colonel Jacke* and *The Fortunate Mistress*. Shinagel examines each of these works in relation to Defoe's notions of gentility and his passion for achieving it. Defoe's heroes and heroines do quest after and finally attain a settled condition as gentlemen and gentlewomen. Roxana is the exception here; she begins life both economically and socially as a gentlewoman but lusts after nobility. Shinagel is at his best in his suggestion that Defoe left *The Fortunate Mistress* unfinished because he had lost control of his material. In treating nobility rather than gentility Defoe may have ventured beyond his depth socially, and certainly he faced moral problems with Roxana insoluble by the formula of necessity and repentance he had used in the earlier novels. Shinagel's greatest feat, however, is in struggling with the intricacies of the life and art of so complex a figure as Defoe and producing a book which is at once authoritative enough to satisfy the scholar and graceful enough to charm the general reader.

Reviewed by T. K. MEIER

"Those readers who still feel the justice of the claim by Samuel Richardson's partisans that he be considered the first English novelist may mend the word "novel" to "long fictional prose narrative of value" or some such term.

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**Simone Weil on Israel and Rome**

AS MR. COLIN CROSS unanswerably observed some time ago, the Works of Shakespeare exist whether or not Shakespeare wrote them. And the same is true, he pointed out, of the works of Jesus. "Or one might compare Jesus to Socrates who, although only known at second-hand through the writings of Plato, can readily be recognized as an authentic person." The implications of these apparently simple observations are profound. Suppose it could be proved that Zoroaster and Buddha and Socrates and Jesus and Mahomet were purely mythical figures, with even less historical reality than Job or King Arthur. Millions of people would be distressed. And yet, what would they really have lost? We should still have the pervasive and seminal religious influence of Zoroastrian and Islamic Persia, the sermons of Buddha, the dialogues of Plato, and the words of Jesus. All this material, although it is mankind's supernatural, spiritual heritage, is also the product of human experience and thought. Do its truth and value depend upon correct and exact knowledge about the persons to whom we owe it? Surely not, because spiritual truth is its own guarantee. "Ce n'est pas ainsi qu'on invente."

I do not know what Simone Weil would have thought about this, but it seems very unlikely she would have disagreed. Not that she was uninterested in the historical traditions of the different religions, so various and each of them possessing its own unique value. But her interest was of an unusually disinterested kind, as the following passage from her notebooks clearly shows:

Suppose that I find myself in a room through the window of which I can see the sun, and that there is a communicating door between this room and another one, where there is somebody else, and which has a window facing the same way. Through the door I can see a rectangle of light projected on to the wall. I might say: 'The poor man! Here am I able to see the light of the sun, and all the light he can see is a patch of faint luminosity on a wall.' That is exactly the attitude of Catholics with regard to other religions."