

# *Asia Pacific Media Educator*

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*Issue 18*

2007

*Article 5*

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“An example to the rest of your scribbling crew”: The influential literary techniques of the Eighteenth-century journalist Daniel Defoe

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Daniel Defoe is regarded today as a literary genius who played a crucial role in the invention of the English novel and created the world-famous character Robinson Crusoe. It is less well known that Defoe was also an enthusiastic and influential pioneering journalist. This paper critically assesses the literary techniques Defoe used in his great work of journalism, the Review (1704- 1713). Defoe advised his readers how to write clearly and persuasively, and his advice is considered here, illustrated by examples from the Review. Whereas some of the examples clearly exemplify his advice, others show he did not always follow his own exhortations. In particular, although he emphasised the need to write truthful reports, he frequently included fiction in his journalism. Defoe's techniques included the use of stories, dialogue and bombast - techniques that survive in modern journalism.

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Daniel Defoe is regarded today as a literary genius who played a crucial role in the invention of the English novel and created the world-famous character Robinson Crusoe. It is less well known that Defoe was also an enthusiastic and influential pioneering journalist. This paper critically assesses the literary techniques Defoe used in his great work of journalism, the *Review* (1704–1713). Defoe advised his readers how to write clearly and persuasively, and his advice is considered here, illustrated by examples from the *Review*. Whereas some of the examples clearly exemplify his advice, others show he did not always follow his own exhortations. In particular, although he emphasised the need to write truthful reports, he frequently included fiction in his journalism. Defoe’s techniques included the use of stories, dialogue and bombast - techniques that survive in modern journalism.

## Introduction

Daniel Defoe (?1660-1731) holds a pre-eminent place in the history of English literature. He is regarded as one of the creators of modern fiction, with literary historians frequently citing his longer works of fiction, such as *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, as proto-novels (for instance, Conrad, 2006:330; Drabble, 2006:268; Head, 2006:289). His most famous creation, Robinson Crusoe, is a hero of world literature, endlessly recycled in adaptations for children and re-imagined for adults, such as Tom Hanks's movie *Castaway* (2000). Crusoe also appears in the writings of authors as diverse as Charles Dickens, Karl Marx, and P.G. Wodehouse.<sup>1</sup> None of Defoe's literary contemporaries can claim such lasting influence or fame.

A prolific writer, Defoe produced hundreds of publications over his lifetime (Richetti, 2005). His voluminous output included prose fiction, poetry, travel books, and practical guides for businesspeople and families. He was also an avid journalist. This paper considers the pioneering literary techniques found in Defoe's journalistic masterpiece, the *Review*, concluding that many of his techniques survive in modern journalism.

As others have noted (Payne, 1947; Boulton, 1965; Backscheider, 1989), Defoe wrote about writing, explaining to his readers how to write clearly and persuasively. His advice guides this paper's discussion, using examples drawn from the *Review*. But before delving into the *Review*'s literary secrets, let us take a moment to understand the journal's context.

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## Historical and biographical context

The English newspaper industry began in the seventeenth century, initially with the *corrantos* (single sheets of foreign news) and later with regularly produced domestic newspapers (Stephens, 2007; Clarke, 2004). Direct government control of the newspapers gradually waned over the century, and by 1700 there was comparative press freedom. The newspapers of the time, with circulations ranging into the thousands and sold primarily in England's major cities, included the *Post-Man*, *Post-Boy*, *Flying-Post*, *Daily Courant* and the official *London Gazette*.

It was at this stage that Defoe entered the picture (Novak, 2001; Backscheider, 1989). Born into a Dissenting (that is to say, a non-Anglican Protestant) family, Defoe was educated at a Dissenting academy, and remained a Dissenter all his life. Defoe's education prepared him for a life as a religious minister, but he ultimately decided to pursue a business career. He was a devoted family man, and raised a large family. Throughout his early business career he also produced a string of pamphlets and other publications, but plagued by poor decisions and bad luck, he went bankrupt in 1692.

He was gradually rebuilding his business fortunes when in 1702 he issued *The Shortest-Way with the Dissenters*, a pamphlet that parodied High Anglican intolerance. The pamphlet scandalised the establishment, and saw Defoe convicted for seditious libel, imprisoned and pilloried. Defoe's incarceration saw his business interests collapse, and on his release he turned his hand to full-time journalism with

the *Review* (1704-1713), a periodical he wrote virtually single-handedly (Defoe, 1938 edition).

Consisting of a few pages per issue, the *Review* was initially published once a week. It was soon a success, particularly with the London middle class, and had an estimated readership of 2000 to 4000 (Backscheider, 1989:153). Its popularity eventually saw it appearing three times a week. The *Review* was not a newspaper. Instead, it was Defoe's commentary on the political events of the day, particularly on the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714) and the Union of Scotland and England (1707), as well as on his other preoccupations, such as economics, history, religion, and social and familial relationships.

The *Review's* approach was not unique. Other commentary-based journals of the time included Tutchin's *Observer*, and Addison and Steele's *Tatler* and *Spectator* (Herd, 1952). But whereas the life-spans of those publications were often short, Defoe produced the *Review* for nearly 10 years. This was a remarkable feat of authorial stamina, especially as Defoe was frequently out of London engaged in espionage work for the government (including gathering intelligence on English and Scottish public opinion regarding the Union).

The *Review* usually consisted of a leading article followed by a section of smaller items. These smaller items were initially collected under the name of the Scandal Club, a group of tongue-in-cheek moralists invented by Defoe. He invited readers to send questions to the club, which were answered in the *Review's* pages. So popular was this device that Defoe was soon publishing Scandal Club material in two short-term spin-off publications. Despite this, he later dropped the club, renamed the *Review's* smaller section MISCELLANEA, and used it to present material similar to that found in the leading article. This may have been because Defoe found it easier when travelling the country to write opinion pieces, rather than receive and answer readers' letters (Secord, 1938). Indeed, Defoe apologised in the *Review* that while travelling he had lost some letters and been tardy in replying to others (4:7). About once a year, Defoe repackaged and reissued the individual issues of the *Review* in volumes.<sup>2</sup>

After closing the *Review*, Defoe continued to produce journalism in a host of other publications. These included work for *Mist's Weekly Journal*; his masterpiece of historical journalism, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, which Defoe purported to be a firsthand account of the 1665 London plague despite having been a young child at the time; and his great three-part travel book, *A Tour thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*. He also produced his enduring works of great fiction (he was about 60 when he wrote *Robinson Crusoe*).

His family continued to delight him, but he never totally escaped his financial difficulties. He died aged about 70 in a London lodging house, hiding from a creditor. It was a sad end to a remarkable life. His passing did not go unrecorded, with obituaries appearing in several newspapers. A typical one described Defoe as "a great natural genius" and "a person well known for his numerous and various writings" (*The Grub-street Journal*, 29 April 1731:3). Defoe's lasting fame is a testimony to the truth of those sentiments.

## The Review's literary techniques

Defoe boasted in the *Review* that he was a schooled and innovative writer: "I am, without *Vanity*, neither ignorant of the Rules of Writing, nor barren of Invention" (4:199).<sup>3</sup> Let us now consider his literary techniques and the journalistic innovations he helped pioneer.

### Plainness

One of the hallmarks of Defoe's writing is its clarity and directness. He would later declare in *The Complete English Tradesman*, Defoe's instructional guide for businesspeople, that "easy, plain, and familiar language is the beauty of speech in general, and is the excellency of all writing" (Defoe, 1839 edition:11). In the *Review*, he described the journal's writing style as "explicit, easie, free, and very plain" (*Preface to volume one*:4).

As part of this plainness, Defoe addressed his readers directly, referring to himself variously, for instance, as "I", "me", "the Author", "D.F." or "Mr. Review" (7:449; 9:90; 1:303; *Preface to volume one*:5; 5:317) and to the reader as "you", "the Reader", "Gentlemen" or, when gently mocking his readers, "Madman" (6:333; 3:10; 1:143; 5:317). This helped engender a sense that Defoe was talking directly to his readers.

Defoe's Scandal Club championed plain English. When the *Post-Man* published the words "Dethronization" and "Catholicity", the Scandal Club demanded the newspaper's editor "tell the Society what Country language these were" (1:36). When the *Gazette* reported that an Italian army "met 200 French Horse near Brono, whom they either kill'd or took Prisoners", the club asked the *Gazette*'s editor how many horses the army did in fact take prisoner. As he could give no satisfactory reply, the Scandal Club ordered the editor "receive a Reprimand from the Director of the Club" (1:23).

To help readers of his *A New Family Instructor* develop a plain style of exposition, Defoe advised them to divide their arguments into digestible pieces, bringing "all Things into as short and concise Heads of Dispute as he could" (Defoe, 1727:248). In this way, Defoe explained, the information imparted can be more easily remembered. Such heads of dispute can be found throughout the *Review*. For instance, Defoe informed his readers that the *Review* was seeking to address three points in sequence:

- First, *To treat of the French Greatness.*
- Secondly, *By what means they came to be so Great.*
- Thirdly, *The Influence the Greatness of France has now* (1:185).

Similarly, Defoe used numbered lists to summarise his arguments. In supporting an English slave-trade company, Defoe presented a four-point argument:

1. That no body can be an Enemy to the *African* Company, but who are so, because they are Enemies to the whole Trade of the Nation.
2. That the Ruine of the *African* trade would have been no small Blow to our General Commerce.
3. That if the Company had been overthrown, the Trade must have been lost.

4. That if the Company had been overthrown, and the Trade lost to us, the *Dutch*, who were next Oars, would have had it (9:89).<sup>4</sup>

Similar numbered lists can be found throughout the *Review* (for instance, 1:333; 2:11; 6:419; 7:451-452).

## Story

Defoe argued that as much as possible arguments should be presented in the form of story, to make the arguments “pleasant and diverting” (Defoe, 1727:247). Defoe regarded story-telling as central to his journalism, admitting that “I had rather tell you Ten Stories to no purpose, than omit one that may be useful” (2:369).

Defoe modelled the *Review*’s stories on fables – that is, he drew morals from them – explaining that “The Custom of the Antients in writing Fables, is my very Laudable Pattern for this, and my firm Resolution in all I write is to exalt Vertue, expose Vice, promote Truth, and help Men to serious Reflection” (*Preface to volume one*: 4). For instance, Defoe used a tale to criticise those who spread unfounded stories about the progress of the war. A man decided to frighten his neighbours, so told a blind man to cry out that a house was on fire. The blind man obliged, causing great panic. Defoe said some people may excuse the blind man because he is blind, but “I think the Man ought to be Punish’d as a Criminal, for a *Blind Man ought not to cry Fire*” (2:207). Such stories have an allegorical quality about them, and should not be accepted on face value as being necessarily true, a point I shall return to in a moment.

Many of Defoe’s stories are humorous, Defoe using the humour to balance the weightiness of some of his themes. This was the very reason he established the Scandal Club, declaring at the start of the *Review* that “After our Serious Matters are over, we shall at the end of every Paper, Present you with a little Diversion, as any thing occurs to make the World Merry” (1:4). A frequent butt of Defoe’s humour was the factual errors in the newspapers. An undertaker complained to the Scandal Club that he had read in the *Post-Boy* and *Flying-Post* that Sir Christopher Musgrave was dead, and so hurried to the deceased’s house to offer his services, only to find Sir Christopher very much alive. The club told the undertaker it was his own fault “for believing any thing such People write” (1:188).

His stories also mocked society’s hypocrisy, often using ribald humour to underscore his point. Defoe ran advertisements in the *Review*, and one was for a Doctor Harborough, who “Cures all the Degrees and Indispositions in Venereal Persons, by a most easie, safe, and expeditious Method” (1:48). The Scandal Club (1:51-52) received a complaint from a “Learned Gentleman, who was offended at Dr. H----- Advertisement, for the Cure of a Scandalous Distemper” (Defoe playfully alluding to, but not giving, the doctor’s name). Unmoved by the complaint, the Scandal Club resolved that “Six Months after the People shall be pleas’d to leave off Whoring, and consequently be out of Danger of this scandalous Disease” the advertisements could cease.

Some of Defoe’s most vivid stories featured dialogue. To argue that England’s law needs to be more stringently enforced, Defoe told the story of a servant, Jack. He and his master are laying in their beds on a cold winter’s night, with the window open. At first, the master politely asks Jack to get up and close the window: “*Jack*, says the

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Master; ay, Master, quoth Jack; I believe that Window's open, Jack, says the Master; I believe it is, Master, says Jack". After several such fruitless exchanges, the master finally loses his temper: "Jack, ye Dog, why don't you rise and shut that Window; if I come to you, I'll break your Head, &c. Ay Master, says Jack, now you speak like a Master, and up he gets and shuts the Window" (6:331).

Some of Defoe's stories were pure dialogue, presented in the form of questions and answers, such as this exchange between Defoe, as Mr Review, and his reader, Mad Man:

*Mad Man.* I Want to speak with you, Mr. *Review*

*Rev.* What is your Business, Sir?

*M.* I have a Message to you, and desire a Conference on the Subject-Matter of the last Conference

*Rev.* What is it? Pray, let's know the worst of it. (5:317).

In another *Review* (4:513-517), Defoe claimed to have found "an old Speech, made a long time ago by a noble Peer" which had attached to it a series of questions and answers. Defoe quotes from these questions and answers. This dialogue, including its marked repetition of the word "nothing" and ironic use of the word "noble", was Defoe's satirical commentary on political speeches:

Q. But what has the noble Peer said?

A. Nothing at all.

Q. But what did the noble Peer think he said?

A. Nothing to the Purpose.

Q. But why did the noble Peer say it then?

A. Because he has been used to do so.

Q. But what did the noble Peer mean?

A. Nothing.

Q. But why did he mean nothing?

A. Because he used to mean nothing. (4:514).

Many a good story includes a cliff-hanger, and Defoe ended some of his tales in mid-stream, promising to return to the story later. When a prostitute complained to the Scandal Club that a client had not paid her, Defoe told half the titillating tale, and then stopped, explaining "the farther hearing of this Matter was refer'd to the next sitting of the Club" (1:64). He would also use teasers, finishing each *Review* by indicating what would appear in the next. After the Scandal Club has finished excoriating the newspapers in one issue, Defoe told his readers: "The Club has had a great deal of trouble about the News Writers...we must give you the trouble of a

few of them in our next” (1:16). Such cliff-hangers and teasers encouraged Defoe’s readers to buy the next issue, in order to continue the story.

## Letters

Defoe invited his readers to send him letters (for instance, 1:247; 4:7), which he answered in the pages of the *Review*. These letters covered myriad topics, including whether animals think (2:39), the morality of extra-marital affairs (*Supplement No.1*:6), and personal financial management (*The Little Review No.12*:47).

Defoe specifically denied inventing letters for the *Review* (8:333), and doubtless many of the letters Defoe published were genuine. Indeed, he was obliged to publish the overflow in his spin-off journals. However, it was customary at the time for journalists to write their own letters and Defoe is known to have invented letters when writing for other journals (Sutherland, 1971:84; Backscheider, 1989:539-540). So it seems likely that at least some of the letters in the *Review* were written by Defoe himself.

Some of the letters satirised the powerful. One, purportedly from “J.J.”, reported the activities of a member of the clergy, “*the P-----n of B----f----ld, led homeward from an Ale-house between two Wenches*”, who throws himself face up in the local cemetery and declares of himself: “He is not Dead but Drunk by G-d” (1:138).

Similarly, in the first issue of the *Supplement*, Defoe recounted the actions of an unnamed Justice of the Peace. Having fallen out with an honest shopkeeper, the Justice whipped him. The shopkeeper thereupon “bestow’d a dusting upon him, and fairly thresh’d him to his Heart’s content” (*Supplement No. 1*:13). Later, the *Review* ran a letter from an outraged unnamed Justice, who said he recognised himself in the story but that the story was false. As violent as ever, the Justice demanded the *Review* retract the story “*or else, G---D D---m me, I will Cut your Author’s Ears off*” (1:291). The Scandal Club stood by its story because “the Story must be True; or else, how should his Worship know himself by the Character” (1:291).

One letter, which ran virtually the full length of a *Review*, told an extraordinary tale of villainy. Defoe began by insisting the letter was factual: “every thing has been attested in a Court of Justice already” (3:273) and the letter declared itself a “true History” (3:274). The letter related how a family conspired to have a young woman falsely declared insane and committed to a mental institution, in order to steal her inheritance. She is grossly mistreated at the institution, but eventually saved by some of her ex-neighbours “having providentially gain’d some Hints of her condition” (3:275). The neighbours are painted in quasi-religious terms, with their actions motivated by “meer Charity, and without any Design, but to redeem her” (3:280). The letter-writers are identified only as “*I. and P.*” (3:276). Explaining that he had deliberately not named anyone in the story as he is “very willing to Expose the Thing, and spare the People” (3:276), Defoe called for government regulation to prevent such incidents in future.

In another *Review*, Defoe was a little more explicit as to the source of his information, but the provenance is still highly doubtful. Explaining that he has learnt from “Gentlemen who have travel’d in *France*” (1:85) how grievances are settled across the Channel, Defoe gave various examples. In one instance, two French

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gentlemen quarrel over a mistress they share. After one beats his colleague with a cane, the local court ruled that the offender be likewise caned “by a Woman of the Meanest and most Infamous Character” (1:87) and the mistress banished. After this, the two men are reconciled - an outcome that Defoe acknowledged his readers would find “Remarkable”, indicating perhaps that he suspected they might doubt the story’s authenticity (1:87).

Defoe frequently claimed that the *Review*’s reports were truthful. As author of the *Review*, he said “his Pen is lifted in the Service of Truth; and as there shall be nothing but Truth, as near as he is able, in his Paper” (2:253, see also 9:1). Defoe insisted that by speaking truthfully, journalists served future generations: “Ages to come will have cause to Reproach the Men of this Generation, with leaving such Magazines of Scandal and Forgery, and so far Separated from the true Accounts of the same Fact, that they will not be able to know from our Testimony, when they speak Truth, or Report Lies” (8:832). Yet the above stories in letter form seem to have been fabricated: they feature outrageous incidents, broad irony, and no explicit provenance. Although Defoe’s cavalier attitude towards the truth may seem surprising today, it would not have seemed unusual to his readers, as the distinctions between rumour, fiction and fact were not regarded as important in his day (Head, 2006:289).

Indeed, Defoe used the same strategies in his fiction. His great novels frequently claim to have been written by the fictional main character and begin with assertions that the books are factual. The title page of *Robinson Crusoe*, for instance, says the book was “Written by Himself” and its preface describes the novel as “a just history of fact” (Defoe, 1972 edition:11). Likewise, the title page of *Moll Flanders* declares the book to be “Written from her own MEMORANDUMS” and its preface says the book is “her own History” (Defoe, 1971 edition:1). In fact, one letter in the *Review* tells a tale of a man who visits “a Bawdy-House”, but later discovers the prostitute has stolen from him (2:15). Similar incidents occur in *Moll Flanders* (Defoe, 1971 edition:225-229).

## Facts and details

By contrast, when Defoe’s reports were true, he was quick to include facts and details to heighten their verisimilitude. When attacking the garbled or incorrect reports in the newspapers, he was careful to give the details as to where he found the reports: “the *Gazette* of August the 7th” (1:200), “*Courant*, June 23” (2:193). Similarly, the history lessons he gave his readers - drawn from “a faithful Abridgement of former Authors” (1:2) - were full of facts: “The Death of the Younger Son of the same Earl of *Shrewsbury*, and Brother to the Present Duke, who was kill’d in a Duel by the late Duke of *Grafton*” (1:78). To underscore this accuracy, he published corrections of any factual mistakes he had committed in earlier issues: “for Prince Alexander, read Constantine; for L’Amand Honourable read L’Amende Honorable” (1:95).

Likewise, when he recounted events he had witnessed first hand, details abound. When informing his readers that in his travels around England he had seen fields full of corn, he listed the places he visited and the distances involved:

from *Rockingham*, I enter'd *Leicestershire*, the *North Side* of which, and the *South Sides* of *Darby* and *Nottinghamshire*, being a Tract of 25 Miles broad, and 40 Miles long, is wholly given up to Corn...From *Rockingham* to *Mount-Sorrell*, 14 Miles, from thence to *Nottingham* 16 Miles, and thence to *Darby* 12 Miles (6:327).

Defoe adapted this technique for his novels, using real-world details to enhance the books' sense of reality. When Moll Flanders steals a bundle, for example, she gives precise details of the streets she escapes down:

I walk'd away, and turning into *Charter-house-Lane*, made off thro' *Charter-house-Yard*, into *Long-Lane*, then cross'd into *Bartholomew-Close*, so into *Little Britain*, and thro' the *Blue-Coat-Hospital* into *Newgate-Street* (Defoe, 1971 edition:239).

### Other narrative devices

Defoe used a variety of other narrative devices to heighten the impact of his prose.

One was repetition, asserting: "I had rather say the same thing over twenty times, than once omit, what may this Way be useful" (4:199). When a man complains to the Scandal Club that he has a bad wife (1:184), the club asks him if his wife is:

- A Whore? *Answer*, No
- A Thief? ----- No
- A Slutt? ----- No
- A Scold? ----- No
- A Drunkard? ----- No
- A Gossip? ----- No (1:184).

The repetition of "No" to the club's list of potential faults emphasised that the man had nothing to complain about. The repetition also implied that it was the man who was really at fault, and the club resolved that he "go Home, Reform himself, and become a good Husband" (1:184).

Another device frequently used was digression - turning away from the topic at hand to consider another. Defoe used the technique quite explicitly. In one *Review* Defoe informed his readers that, prompted by a letter he had received, he would be "making a small Digression on the Subject Matter of Charity and Poverty" (1:417). He began another *Review* by declaring it would be "a very entire Digression from the Subject I am upon" (6:325). But sometimes he was sly, saying he would not speak of a topic, but doing so anyway. When describing a march undertaken by a German army, he declared "We need not trouble the World with the History of this March" and then proceeded to describe it in detail (1:45, another example is at 1:397). At least one of Defoe's readers disliked this device, writing him a letter complaining that Defoe was "pretending to write *This*, but making your *Discourse* consist as much of *That*" (1:143). Citing myriad faults with the *Review*, the complainant concluded

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that Defoe should be whipped “to make you an Example to the rest of your Scribbling Crew” (1:148). This letter-writer was apparently all too real, with an incensed Defoe denouncing the complainant as “a Querulous Pevish Enquirer” (1:145).

Another narrative device Defoe employed was irony. A supporter of England’s constitutional monarchy, Defoe used the term “Benefits” ironically when he declared, “If any Man ask me what are the Benefits of Absolute Monarchy to the Subject; I know but two, *Poverty and Subjugation*” (1:62). Rather given to self-pity, Defoe once ironically lamented: “I have the good Fortune to amass infinite Enemies” (7:65).

A deeply religious man, Defoe would use proverbs and biblical aphorisms to make his points. In highlighting the hypocrisy of the Turks calling the Germans unmerciful, Defoe noted, “*When the Fox preaches beware the Geese*” (1:258). Discussing the origins of crime, Defoe noted “*Lead us not into Temptation*” (8:303). To explain why he did respond to newspapers that criticised him, he observed: “*Solomon* directed it long since, *Answer not a Fool in his Folly*” (7:449).

Defoe insisted that good journalism must be based on sound, rational argument, not hectoring or abuse - “Arguments will obtain a greater Force from cool and calm handling, than from furious Words” (8:151) - and, certainly, the *Review* contains plenty of text that coolly recounts the history of, say, France and European affairs. But Defoe’s call for rational debate went counter to his training and natural inclination, and he frequently turned his arguments in the *Review* into religious bombast. In his highly religious age, Defoe’s style would have found a ready audience. For instance, insisting that the authorities were lax in enforcing the law, he railed:

Men may deny GOD, insult their Neighbours, break in upon Marriage-Vows, defile the Bed, debauch the Vertuous, delude the Simple, and rage in unrestrain’d Lusts, while the Silent Law puts neither Fetters upon the Crime, nor upon the Criminal (5:266).

Defoe reserved some of his greatest bombast for stock-jobbers (early share brokers), whom he despised. Defoe recounts the genealogy of stockjobbers and their ilk:

When the Bastards were born, they got Sirnames of their own (*for as for Christian Names they had nothing to do with them*)...They were Female brats, and as they began in Debauchery, they grew up in all the Infections of Commerce, till they became a perfect Contagion in their very Nature, and by their noxious Quality have brought a general Plague or Itch of ---- upon the whole Nation (5:427).

Defoe’s religiosity was not always so pulpit-thumping. In celebrating the large amount of corn he saw growing in Scotland, he described a pastoral paradise:

I can look out of my Window, and see the Fields standing full of the Shocks of Corn, the Quantity great, the Sheaves heavy, the Season kindly, and all Hands busie carrying it home...The Country People are chearful and glad-hearted at the Sight of their Corn, the Ministers are on every Occasion giving GOD Thanks for the good Season (6:329-330).

Defoe also used similes and metaphors. Arguing against the view that the Dissenters would eventually overthrow the Church of England, Defoe declared that “I shall begin to argue this from a Simily” (4:620) and so discussed Hamburg, a city surrounded by powerful neighbours. Although the neighbouring states covet Hamburg’s riches, none annex the city because each knows this will provoke the others. In the same way, Defoe argued, given the various denominations of Dissenters quarrel among themselves, none would choose a Dissenter as monarch, preferring a moderate Anglican who would best suit all their interests. Elsewhere, Defoe employed a shipping metaphor to show how he had argued for national peace, noting that he had “plac’d Buoys and Marks upon the Dangerous Sands and Shoals, where the Ship of the State may be in danger” (2:209).

Finally, he frequently used personification, such as when he observed “Peace and Trade are old Comrades” (9:90). When Defoe’s readers grew bored with his lengthy discussions on the Union and called on him to write on new topics, he chastised them for lusting after “*Novelty, the Age’s Whore*” (*Preface to volume five*:1). The final two words of the last issue of the *Review* used this device, with Defoe personifying his journal as an actor leaving the stage: “*Exit REVIEW*” (9:214).

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## Conclusion - Defoe’s influence today

As part of his training for the Church Defoe would have learned many of the devices he employed in the *Review*. Plain speaking, instructional stories, and religious bombast were all part of the armoury of any good eighteenth-century preacher. Indeed, at the start of one *Review*, Defoe asked his readers, “will you allow me to preach a little?” (6:341).

This religiosity, allied with Defoe’s often antiquated values, may make his journalism appear alien to modern eyes, merely a historical curiosity. Certainly, in looking at Defoe’s influence on modern mainstream journalism, we would struggle to detect much, if any, trace of his fire and brimstone, casual relationship with the truth, or explicit use of digression.

But many of his literary techniques are used by the modern journalist. Magazines and newspapers today are frequently separated into departments, with the serious journalism at the front and the more entertainment-focussed material nearer the back, just as Defoe followed his serious political discussions with the Scandal Club material. Newspapers and magazines encourage their readers to buy the next issue by advertising what will be in it, just as Defoe ran his teasers. Newspapers and magazines run letters to the editor and agony-aunt columns, just as Defoe did. Newspapers and magazines run corrections and clarifications, in part to show that they value accuracy, just as Defoe did. Many magazines run sections that reproduce typographical and grammatical errors printed in other publications, just as Defoe did.

Journalists today strive to write clearly, as Defoe did, and to include facts and details to give their reports authority, as Defoe did (when his stories were true). Modern news reports feature bullet-point lists of the main points, much like Defoe’s numbered lists. Modern journalism includes the question-and-answer format, often used by Defoe. Fly-on-the-wall feature articles frequently include dialogue, just as Defoe used dialogue to help tell his stories. Feature articles frequently include

case studies to illustrate the general points being made, just as Defoe used stories to illustrate his points. Newspaper columnists and online bloggers harangue their readers on their favourite topics, some invariably complaining that the government is soft on crime or that the news-media audience has a short attention span, just as Defoe did.

Viewed in this light, Defoe's techniques are not so alien to modern eyes after all.

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## Endnotes

- 1 For instance, in *A Christmas Carol* an early breakthrough in Scrooge's rehabilitation occurs when he recalls his childhood joy in reading *Robinson Crusoe* (Dickens, 1988 edition:31). In *Capital*, Marx notes that political economists frequently cite *Crusoe* on his island as an example of a simple economic system. Marx rehearses the argument, sarcastically observing that *Crusoe* draws up a ledger "like a true-born Briton" (Marx, 1938 edition:48). Indeed, Bertie Wooster, finding himself in a spot of bother in *Thank You, Jeeves*, recalls *Crusoe*'s practice of setting out a credit and debit ledger of his situation, and does the same (Wodehouse, 2003 edition:158-160).
- 2 Ultimately, the *Review* stretched to nine volumes. Defoe regarded the *Review* that he wrote in 1712-13 as a new publication, and labelled it volume one accordingly. However, modern scholars typically regard it as volume nine of the original *Review*, and I have followed that convention. Unless otherwise stated, all quotes are from the *Review*, with text citations given as volume:page. Again following scholarly convention, I have treated *The Prefaces* to the *Review*, the *Supplements* and *The Little Review* as all part of the *Review*, but for ease of reference I have separately identified them in the text citations. Occasionally, Defoe's printer accidentally numbered the *Review*'s pages incorrectly, errors I have silently corrected.
- 3 Eighteenth-century London was a time when men wore extravagant wigs and frock coats, and engaged in frank exchanges of views. Defoe's writing displays the energy of that age, even down to the way the text looks, so as much as possible Defoe's eighteenth-century typography and spelling are retained here. The long s has been modernised.
- 4 Although Defoe's frank support for slavery may seem startling to modern eyes, his view was commonplace at the time. Indeed, after saving Friday, without a moment's thought *Robinson Crusoe* insists the black man call him "Master" (Defoe, 1972 edition:196).

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