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INTRODUCTION

The Scope and Significance of Defoe's Correspondence

Daniel Defoe's (1660–1731) earliest surviving letter dates from January 1703 when he was in hiding, hunted by the government for seditious libel. His last surviving letter was written in August 1730 when, again, he was in hiding, 'about Two mile from Greenwich in Kent', this time from creditors pursuing decades-old debts. Defoe's correspondence sheds light on an elusive, fugitive personality and these letters chronicle the turbulence of Defoe's personal life and public career.¹ Those we have represent a small fraction of Defoe's total correspondence. Nothing has surfaced from his first forty-two years, considerable gaps puncture even comparatively well-covered periods, and few personal letters exist. Nothing survives to or from his wife Mary, the 'woman whose fortunes I have Ruind' as Defoe called her, who nonetheless remained his 'faithfull Steward' (Letters 10 and 39).² Defoe once wrote that to correspond with friends was 'the greatest pleasure of life' and John Fransham called their exchanges 'complemental correspondence' (Letter 45), but only a handful of letters to his own friends survive.³ In 1706 he lamented that he had 'so little time to correspond wth my Friends that I every day loose them who cannot bear wth it' (Letter 49). The extant letters do not reflect directly on the novels written from 1719 to 1724 that have made Defoe a household name, or on other important books across a variety of genres he wrote in his later years. The majority comprises his letters in Anne's reign to the politician Robert Harley (1661–1724), Earl of Oxford from 1711, the bulk of which are addressed from Defoe to his patron, preserved because Harley was a prolific collector and state officials at this time removed their correspondence as private property when they left office. Of the 278 letters and documents collected in this edition, 245 were written by Defoe and just 33 to him. Exchanges between Defoe and Harley account for 189 of the 278, but just 3 are from Harley to Defoe.

1 For Defoe's biography, see Backscheider, *Life*; Novak; and Backscheider's entry in *ODNB*.

2 The closest thing to connubial correspondence that has survived is the dedicatory epistle from 'Bellmour' to 'Clarinda' with which Defoe prefaced his 'Historical Collections' (c. 1683), a manuscript of vignettes transcribed from his juvenile reading in classical and modern history that Defoe presented to Mary upon their marriage (William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, MS. 1951.009, fols. 4–5).

3 *The Compleat English Gentleman* (c. 1729), *RDW*, x, 104.

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The epistolary record is thus incomplete to a degree that to claim it as representative is questionable, at least beyond the Defoe–Harley relationship. That important association, an intense decade within Defoe’s seventy-year life, gains a disproportionate emphasis in this edition. However, we also have specimens of Defoe’s correspondence with other politicians, tradesmen, clergymen, publishers, fellow writers, and members of his family. The letters are vital documents for the study of Defoe and of the political, literary, religious, economic, and social history of the early eighteenth century. Defoe’s correspondence illustrates the ways that eighteenth-century letter-writers performed identities in a highly codified medium. His letters are not merely functional or perspicuous documents; they are a mode through which Defoe fashioned and purveyed his selfhood in relation to cultural conditions and interpersonal contexts.⁴ Letters in Defoe’s time were social as much as private utterances, often written with an eye to readers besides the addressee. Defoe expected his letters to Fransham in Norwich, Samuel Elisha in Shrewsbury, and Edward Owen in Coventry to circulate in whiggish networks in those parts. He knew that Harley shared his political reports with Godolphin and others in government. He ardently hoped that Charles Delafaye showed his letters to Sunderland and Stanhope, for whose eyes Defoe truly wrote them. Defoe forwarded to Harley letters he received from his extensive network of correspondents, especially his Scottish contacts after 1710.

Defoe regarded his letters as a way of getting things done, and scholars have always emphasised their suasive aspects. He is usually trying to achieve something: a specific political objective, the more subtle swaying of his addressee’s opinions, his personal advancement or (often) remuneration. He was ready with advice on every conceivable topic, drawing on extensive learning, experience, and acumen, endeavouring to demonstrate his competence, dedication, and value. His letters to Harley traverse a significant difference of status. When their connection began in 1703, Defoe was an impecunious and disgraced author with tenuous claims to gentility. He had been saved from prison and financial ruin by Harley, already one of the most powerful men in government. Harley was the Speaker of the House of Commons, working in partnership with Godolphin’s ministry; he would soon be appointed Secretary of State and eventually raised to the peerage and entrusted by Queen Anne with the leadership of the nation. An

⁴ Recent scholarship argues for the ‘centrality of letters to eighteenth-century social, political, and literary life’, emphasising that ‘letters in the eighteenth century were cultural artifacts that revealed the interplay of public and private, political and personal’ and that the early modern letter is a ‘technology of the self’. See Eve Tavor Bannet, ‘Studies in Epistolary Culture’, *ECL* 35 (2011), 89–103 (at 90); Nicole Pohl, ‘The Plausible Selves of Sarah Scott’, *ECL* 35 (2011), 133–48 (at 134); James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-Writing, 1512–1635* (Basingstoke, 2012).

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adept lick of spittle, Defoe was nonetheless capable of incredible presumption, abasing himself in one breath but forthrightly offering Harley recommendations on major issues in the next, everything from election management to colonial expansion, from establishing a spy network to suppressing rival journalists. This is part of the performance, which became rhythmical as the relationship developed: expressions of humility precede an over-step before an apology that ingeminates rather than withdraws the proffered counsel. In November 1704, for example, he offered Harley 'a Genuine Candid Observaçon On ye Publick Affaires as Undr your Conduct' but quickly retreated – 'and yet who Am I that I Should Pretend to Advise you, Quallified to Advise a Naçon' (Letter 22). At one time he emphasised his willingness and ability to solve Harley's problems: 'I am Never Sr you kno' for Searching an Evill to be Amazed at it, but to Applye The Remedyes' (Letter 118). Yet elsewhere he uses identical terms but abrogates his agency: 'It is for me Onely to Represent Dangers to yo^r L^dpp, Not to presume to prescribe Remedies' (Letter 218). A profession that he will decline to give advice, because he is 'Affraid to be Officous' (Letter 199), usually means that counsel is coming. As well as public affairs, Defoe offered Harley guidance on preserving one's health from overwork and bearing the grief of losing a daughter. The letters move, often rapidly, between solicitude and temerity.

The period covered by the majority of Defoe's letters was a dynamic and transformative one in British history. Queen Anne's reign was marked by furious fighting between and within political parties divided by fundamental questions about the nature of government, the religious settlement, and foreign affairs. Hostilities were fuelled by debates about the constitution and fanned by frequent general elections. Britain was locked in an expensive war on multiple fronts, aiming to preserve the Protestant succession at home and a balance of power in Europe against the last surges of French aggrandisement under Louis XIV. The 1707 Act of Union joined England and Wales with Scotland as Great Britain, requiring delicate, ongoing negotiations regarding the economic, political, and religious composition of the new nation. Religion was at the heart of life and further divided the parties. With Whig support, Dissenters from the Church of England such as Defoe had enjoyed liberty of worship since 1689, but High Tories wished to consolidate the Anglican Church's statutory monopoly on political offices by strengthening legal restrictions on Dissenters. Uncertainty hung over the future direction of the nation. Due to the exhaustion of every contingency of the 1688–9 monarchical settlement, the question of the succession was open throughout Anne's reign. Parliament had decreed that a Protestant member of the House of Hanover would succeed her when she died, but Jacobites clung to the hope that the Stuart line would continue, even if that meant a return to Roman Catholicism at home and a reversal in foreign policy towards an alliance with France. Political, religious, economic, military, and diplomatic debates were opened up to

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much of the nation at large by an expanding press, as pamphlets, periodicals, and poems adopted partisan positions on a raft of topical matters and on the substratal ideologies that informed those viewpoints.

Defoe was one of the most prolific, percipient, and versatile commentators on public affairs in this period, aiming to shape opinion on just about every major topic from the 1690s until the 1720s, working across numerous genres. Owing to his own mobility and the regional distribution networks that he sustained through letters, his writings in Anne's reign had a considerable national reach too. His influence was widely acknowledged. Some contemporaries of course regarded Defoe as a political hireling and turncoat, 'an *Animal* who shifts his Shape oftner than *Proteus*, and goes backwards and forwards like a Hunted *Hare*; a thorough-pac'd, true-bred *Hypocrite*, an *High-Church Man* one Day, and a *Rank Whig* the next'.⁵ Such invective shows that his peers struggled to pin down his politics.⁶ In a combative print culture mobilised for partisan conflict, defamation of opponents was customary, but the allegations of Defoe's perfidy stand out. Few were accused, as was Defoe, both of playing 'the Old Game of *Forty One* over again' and of supporting the cause of 'young *J—s*'.⁷ In some eyes, he was 'a mean mercenary Prostitute, a State Mountebank, an Hackney Tool, a scandalous Pen, a foul Mouthed Mongrel, an Author who writes for Bread, and lives by Defamation'.⁸ The letters help us to see the toll this criticism took on him: 'No Man has been Used like me by this Furious Age', he complained (Letter 221). Others admired his steadfastness in the face of opprobrium and partisanship: 'He is not daunted with Multitudes of Enemies', wrote John Dunton, 'for he faces as many (*every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday*) as there are foes to Moderation and Peace'.⁹ John Oldmixon remarked that Harley 'paid *Foe* better than he did *Swift*, looking on him as the shrewder Head of the Two for Business', but he also put Defoe at the head of the 'lying scandalous Scriblers' who defended Harley, denouncing 'his abundance of Words, his false Thoughts, and false *English*'.¹⁰ Defoe's letters uncover the motivations behind public writings that attracted such extreme responses. They keep alive rather than settle the debates initiated in Defoe's lifetime about his polemical skill, political convictions, and moral compass.

5 *Judas Discover'd, and Catch'd at last: Or, Daniel de Foe in Lobs Pound* (1713), 3.

6 See Nicholas Seager, 'Party Politics', in *Daniel Defoe in Context*, ed. George Justice and Albert Rivero (Cambridge, forthcoming).

7 *The Review and Observer Reviewed* (1706), 6; *The Gates of Hell Opend, in a Dialogue between the Observer and the Review* (1711), 8.

8 *A Paper concerning Daniel DeFoe* (1708), 7.

9 John Dunton, *Dunton's Whipping-Post: or, A Satyr upon Every Body* (1706), 91; cf. Dunton, *The Preaching Weathercock* [1712], 79–80. He refers to the days on which the *Review* was published. Defoe and Dunton had fallen out by the end of Anne's reign (Letter 248).

10 John Oldmixon, *The Life and Posthumous Works of Arthur Maynwaring* (1715), 276; *A Detection of the Sophistry and Falsities of the Pamphlet entitul'd the Secret History of the White-Staff* (1714), 6, 7.

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EPISTOLARY CONDUCT AND EDUCATION

Defoe's letters reveal aspects of his political thought, religious beliefs, and economic ideas that informed his in-the-moment contributions to debates in published writings. They also show facets of his social being and his personality. His publications famously adopt personae and were usually published without identifying his authorship; even in his long-running periodical, the *Review* (1704–13), which contemporaries knew he wrote, there is a consciously public Defoe, 'Mr Review'. The letters give a more private and often less guarded voice. It is the voice of a man enmeshed in the public events on which he commentates, trying to figure out cataclysmic developments in situ, sometimes working in the loop and at the vanguard of ministerial objectives, but often marginal, neglected, and frustrated, 'Capable of Judgeing but by Outsides of Things, and of knowing Little but without doores' (Letter 252). In the letters, we encounter Defoe on location around Britain for Harley either side of the turbid 1705 general election, on the streets of Edinburgh as protests against the Act of Union raged around him in 1706–7, reacting to attempts from his erstwhile political allies to silence him with trumped-up prosecutions in 1713–14, and undercover among Jacobite journalists when working as a double agent for the government in 1718. As with much of his writings, Defoe's letters give a flavour of the urgency with which he tried to shape circumstances in accordance with his ideals. Being an effective letter-writer was as important as being a skilled pamphleteer, poet, and periodical essayist.

Epistolary Conduct and Education

Defoe's published writings indicate his immersion in a culture that equated epistolary skill with appropriate social and ethical conduct, as well as professional effectiveness. Defoe agreed with John Locke that

the writing of Letters has so much to do in all the occurrences of Humane Life, that no Gentleman can avoid shewing himself in this kind of Writing. Occasions will daily force him to make this use of his Pen, which ... always lays him open to a severer Examination of his Breeding, Sense, and Abilities than oral Discourses.¹¹

In Defoe's lifetime numerous letter-writing manuals gave directions on composing epistles to people of different ranks on various occasions, supported by samples that readers could imitate and adapt to confect their own letters. Two chapters of Defoe's *The Complete English Tradesman* (1725–7) resemble such manuals because Defoe's advice to burgeoning merchants includes guidance on writing professional correspondence as 'one of the first things a tradesman ought to be master of'.¹² To illustrate his precepts, he presents several sample letters that provide models to

¹¹ John Locke, *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (1693), ed. John W. and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford, 1989), 243.

¹² *RDW*, vii, 47.

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follow and to reject. Echoing axioms he had laid down in print thirty years earlier in *An Essay upon Projects* (1697), he urges tradesmen to adhere to an epistolary style that is ‘plain, concise, and to the purpose’, sufficiently detailed that meaning cannot be doubted but free of ‘long harangues, compliments, and flourishes’ and eschewing ‘quaint expressions’ and ‘book-phrases’.¹³ Defoe extends his recommendation of an unadorned style beyond the functional missives of tradesmen to characterise ideal communication in all walks of life:

If any man was to ask me, which would be supposed to be a perfect stile, or language, I would answer, that in which a man speaking to five hundred people, of all common and various capacities, idiots or lunaticks excepted, should be understood by them all in the same manner with one another and in the same sense which the speaker intended to be understood, this would certainly be a most perfect stile.¹⁴

The Complete English Tradesman equates prudence and regularity with rationality and integrity in approaches to business. Epistolary style is indicative of personal character. The tradesman who ostentatiously embellishes his prose betrays his profligacy and vacuity, showing off to his correspondent rather than cultivating a productive equality of exchange. The letter is an advertisement, a presentation of the professional self as knowledgeable, circumspect, dependable, and equally careful of his correspondent’s time as of his wares. Defoe insists that this plain mode will expedite and encourage business transactions, enhance the trader’s reputation and credit, and elicit the same sedulous and transparent treatment in return. Just as Defoe extends this ideal to all forms of communication, these principles undergird his self-presentation in his own letters as plain-dealing, concise, competent, attentive to detail, and considerate of his correspondent’s needs.

His unfinished book *The Compleat English Gentleman* (c. 1729) gives a glimpse of Defoe’s own education in letter-writing more than fifty years earlier. He describes the instruction offered at a ‘little Academy’ by ‘a tutor of unquestion’d reputation for learning’, appearing to refer to Charles Morton’s Newington Green Dissenting Academy where Defoe studied in the 1670s.¹⁵ Alongside a wide curriculum spanning science, rhetoric, languages, geography, and history, the students

wrote epistles twice every week upon such subjects as he prescrib’d to them or upon such as they themselves chose to write upon. Sometimes they were ambassadors and agents abroad at foreign Courts, and wrote accounts of their negotiations and reception in foreign Courts directed to the Secretary of State and some times to the Sovereign himself.

¹³ *RDW*, vii, 47–8. In similar terms in *An Essay upon Projects*, Defoe criticised ‘Stiffness and Affectation’ in prose, preferring a style he characterised as ‘Free and Familiar’ (*PEW*, viii, 110, 142).

¹⁴ *RDW*, vii, 52.

¹⁵ Lew Girdler, ‘Defoe’s Education at Newington Green Academy’, *SP* 50 (1953), 573–91; Ilse Vickers, *Defoe and the New Sciences* (Cambridge, 1996), 32–51.

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Some times they were Ministers of State, Secretaries and Commissioners at home, and wrote orders and instructions to the ministers abroad, as by order of the King in Council and the like. Thus he taught his pupils to write a masculine and manly stile, to write the most polite English, and at the same time to kno' how to suit the manner as well to the subject they were to write upon as to the persons or degrees of persons they were to write to; and all equally free and plain, without foolish flourishes and ridiculous flights of jingling bombast in stile, or dull meannesses of expression below the dignity of the subject or the character of the writer.¹⁶

Defoe must have reflected on how these acts of impersonation came in handy during the years when he did correspond with secretaries of state and monarchs. In his epistolary fiction, *A Continuation of Letters written by a Turkish Spy at Paris* (1718), Defoe engaged in a similar exercise. He composed a series of letters from Mahmut, a Muslim who poses as a merchant in the French capital and sends intelligence reports, in the form of general news and philosophical reflections on cultural and religious differences, back to Constantinople. Anticipating the rules on style laid out in Defoe's conduct books, the supposed translator of Mahmut's letters has endeavoured 'to make the Language plain, artless, and honest, suitable to the Story, and in a Stile easie and free, with as few exotick Phrases and obsolete Words as possible, that the meanest Reader may meet with no Difficulty in the Reading'.¹⁷ The implication is that Mahmut's candour and directness has facilitated the translation of his letters into plain, 'masculine' English.

Defoe saw manliness, plainness, politeness, freedom and ease, and the suitability of the register to the dignity of both subject and addressee as intersecting criteria for effective letters. He animadverted on epistolary carelessness not just in the example of the pretentious tradesman but also in that of the ignorant country squire. In *The Compleat English Gentleman*, Defoe expanded on a complaint he had made in volume II of *The Family Instructor* in 1718, that 'Gentlemen of Pleasure don't care to take the Pains to write Letters'.¹⁸ The deplorable literacy level of the aristocracy, discernible in their letters, is a particularly English defect, Defoe insists, which he sought to redress by urging gentlemen to value a practical and principally vernacular education. Defoe decries the misalignment between 'a gentleman of sense and of tolerable good discourse' and his woefully written letters. He has his laughs transcribing examples of bad orthography ('extraordinary English') and handwriting ('the most comical scrawl of a hand that can be imagin'd'), and would have had more had he published the book and inserted two sample letters he intended to include.¹⁹ However, the point is a serious one, brought home in dialogue between two gentlemen,

¹⁶ *RDW*, x, 163–4.

¹⁷ *SFS*, v, 46.

¹⁸ *RDW*, II, 66; cf. Defoe, *An Essay upon Literature* (1726), *TDH*, IV, 299.

¹⁹ *RDW*, x, 97. Harley's scratchy handwriting may have been in Defoe's mind.

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one of whom has his steward compose a letter for him to sign. Only gradually, with reluctance, does he admit delegating letter-writing to a servant not only because of a misguided sense of what constitutes drudgery beneath his dignity but also because he is illiterate.²⁰ The overall thrust of *The Compleat English Gentleman* is that learning, indicated among other things by epistolary competence, adorns even the grandest estate, whereas ignorance shames it and inverts social hierarchy.

Defoe's journalism shows a similar sensitivity to epistolary propriety. The first full book he wrote after his release from prison was *The Storm* in July 1704, and it shows that he regarded letters as valuable sources of 'intelligence', a capacious term in Defoe's understanding. In *The Storm* a multiplicity of reports cumulatively provides a comprehensive perspective on the event, the tempest that ravaged southern England in November 1703, anticipating in some ways the 'scheme of an Office For Secret Intelligence at home and Abroad' Defoe presented to Harley just months later (Letter II). Even as he apologised for 'the Meanness of Stile' exhibited by his countrified correspondents in *The Storm*, he described their contributions as 'authentick Vouchers' whose very rusticity attests to their 'Plainness and Honesty' as reliable witnesses of the tempest.²¹

In the early years of the *Review*, Defoe undertook with professed reluctance the task of 'Answering Letters of Doubts, Difficulties, Cases and Questions' sent in by readers.²² This is the 'Mercur Scandale' or Scandalous Club section of Defoe's periodical, later expanded first to a monthly supplement and then to *The Little Review*. John Dunton accused Defoe of stealing this 'agony uncle' idea from *The Athenian Mercury* (1691–7), though Defoe insisted that this feature was ancillary to the main design of his paper.²³ Nonetheless, it was soon an overwhelming task, as a 'Glut of Letters' came Defoe's way, some of which he answered in the *Review*, some in private.²⁴ By January 1705, Defoe complained that 'he has now near 300 Letters, both Publick and Private, before him'.²⁵ Even after he discontinued the feature, Mr Review continued to receive letters. Defoe was accused of fabricating them, which he denied.²⁶

²⁰ *RDW*, x, 104–5.

²¹ Defoe, *The Storm*, ed. Richard Hamblyn (2005), 8, 31.

²² *Review*, 1, 4 (preface, Feb. 1705).

²³ See Letter 248, note 40; Rachael Scarborough King, "Interloping with my Question-Project": Debating Genre in John Dunton's and Daniel Defoe's Epistolary Periodicals', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 44 (2015), 121–42.

²⁴ *Review*, II, 239 (*Little Review*, no. 1, 6 June 1705).

²⁵ *Review*, 1, 719 (30 Jan. 1705).

²⁶ Joseph Browne, *A Dialogue between Church and No-Church: Or, A Rehearsal of the Review* (1706), in *State Tracts*, 2 vols. (1715), 1, 9 ff. Defoe elsewhere admitted that inventing readers' letters was common practice (*The Commentator*, no. 15 (19 Feb. 1720), *RDW*, IX, 73–4).

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DEFOE'S EPISTOLARY STYLES AND PERSONALITY

Irrespective of their authenticity, his commentary on the correspondence reveals what Defoe thought constituted sound letter-writing. Predictably, he censures letters that disagree with him and commends those that compliment him, but the terms in which he does so indicate Defoe's epistolary ideals. At the greatest extreme is anonymous hate-mail that threatens Defoe with physical violence or assassination.²⁷ Other hostile letters are variously characterised as 'abusive', 'angry', 'bullying', 'gross', 'insulting', 'railing', 'scandalous', 'scurrilous', 'snarling', 'taunting', 'teizing', 'trifling', 'unmanly', and 'unmannerly'. These adjectives affirm Defoe's preference that communication, even political debate, be conducted in a respectful manner. As he wrote to the Tory author of manuscript newsletters, John Dyer, offering a truce: 'we May Differ Still, and yet preserv both the Christian and The Gentleman' (Letter 144). In the *Review*, he endeavours to treat even impolite journalistic rivals with good manners, attacking arguments, not authors; and he thought that letters readers sent in should abide by the same standards. Anonymous letters peeve Defoe even when not hostile because they frustrate exchange. Defoe spells out his distaste for letters that he feels are baiting him, trying to provoke him to speak out and entangle himself with the government; this kind of subterfuge in correspondence offends Defoe's sense of integrity. Even in his own letters that defame some third party such as Rooke (Letter 11) or Sacheverell (Letter 140), Defoe professes to adhere to a standard of fair play. Defoe describes some mail to the *Review* as 'candid', 'honest', 'ingenuous', 'judicious', 'kind', 'modest', 'plain', and 'respectful'. Notwithstanding obvious reasons for these commendations, Defoe's moralistic treatment of correspondence sent to the *Review* contributed to the cultural policing of letters and reveals the ideals for which he strove when he wrote letters himself.²⁸ Defoe's sense of acting with rectitude, probity, and dexterity in necessary causes – 'to Open The Eyes of The Honest and well Meaning' (Letter 216) – is reflected not just in *what* he wrote in letters to Harley, Godolphin, and Delafaye, but in *how* he wrote.

Defoe's Epistolary Styles and Personality

Notwithstanding Defoe's self-effacing apologies for his 'Tedious Epistles' (Letter 10), he had a high regard for himself as an effective letter-writer. A letter he wrote to Lord Chief Justice Thomas Parker in 1714, which he told Delafaye had averted

²⁷ *Review*, 11, 359 (7 July 1705); VI, 2 (preface, 25 Mar. 1710).

²⁸ On the affective qualities of letters in the *Review*, see Jean McBain, "'Love, Marriages, Mistresses, and the Like': Daniel Defoe's Scandal Club and an Emotional Community in Print", in *Passions, Sympathy, and Print Culture: Public Opinion and Emotional Authenticity in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Heather Kerr, David Lemmings, and Robert Phiddian (Basingstoke, 2016), 68–85.

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prosecution for libel and reconciled him to the Whigs (Letter 259), is unfortunately lost. However, in an autobiographical section of Crusoe's *Serious Reflections* (1720) Defoe reflects on that letter's efficacy:

The Letter was so stren[u]ous in Argument, so pathetick in its Eloquence, and so moving and perswasive, that as soon as the Judge read it, he sent him Word he should be easie, for he would Endeavour to make that Matter light to him, and in a Word, never left, till he obtained to stop Prosecution, and restore him to his Liberty and to his Family.²⁹

Among the surviving letters, that to Nottingham is the fullest exercise in the pathetic, self-exculpatory strain that Crusoe describes:

My Lord, a Body Unfitt to bear ye hardships of a Prison, and a Mind Impacient of Confinement, have been ye Onely Reasons of withdrawing My Self: And My Lord The Cries of a Numerous Ruin'd Family, The Prospect of a Long Banishment from my Native Country, and ye hopes of her Majties Mercý, Moves me to Thro' my Self at her Majties Feet, and To Intreat yor Lordships Intercession. (Letter 1)

Of course, this is a speech act, a dramatisation of obeisance, because, far from prostrating himself at the throne, Defoe had eluded the Queen's Messengers and fled. His request for Nottingham's mediation was not to be reciprocated by the surrender the statesman demanded, and leaving the country might be as much a threat of what Defoe would do unless negotiations start as what he feared would happen after surrender. Just as he could be laborious in trying to pin down meaning, Defoe could be cryptic and vague when it suited his purposes.³⁰

In the letter to Nottingham, Defoe employs military metaphors to apologise first for 'Raising Warr' against the Queen by absconding and now for the audacity of requesting she 'Capitulate wth an offending Subject'. Trusting his writerly talents, Defoe thought initiating a correspondence his best option. He asks Nottingham to send questions in writing:

I will as Soon as I Can Recieve them, give yor Lordship as Plain, Full, Direct, and honest Answers, as If I were in Imediate Apprehensions of Death from yor Resentments; and Perhaps my Lord my Answers may be So Satisfactory, as may Encline you to Think you have been Mis Inform'd Concerning me.

²⁹ *Novels*, III, 250.

³⁰ See for example P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens's attention to Defoe's deliberate ambiguity about the details of his work in Letter 259 ('Defoe, the De la Faye Letters and *Mercurius Politicus*', *BJECS* 23 (2000), 13–19). Paula R. Backscheider attends to Defoe's habits in his letters of trying to preclude misunderstanding; she says that this aim accounts for the prevalence of appositive phrases, relative clauses, elucidating paraphrases, and long-winded clarifications ('Accounts of an Eyewitness: Defoe's Dispatches from the Vale of Trade and the Edinburgh Parliament House', in *Sent as a Gift: Eight Correspondences from the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Alan T. McKenzie (Athens, Ga., 1993), 21–47).