An Outline of

*Positioning Daniel Defoe’s Non-fiction: Form, Function, Genre*

ANDREAS K.E. MUELLER & AINO MÄKIKALLI, eds

TO DATE, the focus of Defoe scholarship has been, overwhelmingly, on the first-person prose fictions which he produced from 1719 onwards. Countless volumes exist that explore the socio-historical contexts, the biographical aspects and the literary merits of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, to name just two of Defoe’s best-known prose narratives. The centrality of Defoe’s fictions, especially *Robinson Crusoe*, to the literary canon and his position as a key figure in the phenomenon described by Ian Watt as the rise of the novel have, moreover, earned him the debatable epithet of the ‘first true novelist’ (see entry for Defoe in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. M. Drabble). While Defoe’s so-called novels rightly occupy an important position within the literary canon, their prominence and the critical attention they have attracted obscure two important facts, namely that they represent only a tiny fraction of Defoe’s oeuvre, even in the context of Furbank and Owens’ reduced canon of less than 300 items, and that Defoe did not consider himself to be a novelist. The image of ‘Defoe, the novelist’ may be a deeply ingrained one in the minds of the general reader, students and literary experts, but it is nevertheless a reductive and misleading one.

One effect of this sustained critical focus on Defoe’s novels has been the relative neglect of his other writings. It is not too much to say that Defoe was one of the most versatile writers of his time, who used and appropriated for his purposes a wide range of established genres, producing heroic verse, politico-philosophical treatises, party-propagandistic pamphlets, conduct books, a guide book, journalistic opinion pieces, and accounts of significant events which are precursors to modern reportage, to offer only a sketchy outline of the breadth of Defoe’s writing. In spite of the ‘literary’ merits of these publications, they have been used largely as sources for biographical information, or as contexts for the exploration of Defoe’s first-person prose fictions.
The forthcoming collection, *Positioning Daniel Defoe’s Non-fiction: Form, Function, Genre*, seeks to interrogate Defoe’s non-fiction, loosely defined as those texts not generally thought of as novels, on its own terms, thus addressing a long-standing gap in Defoe scholarship. Each piece included in the volume explores the manner in which Defoe used a particular style of writing in response to the cultural and political situations and issues he wished to address. The historical-formalist readings of Defoe’s non-fictional works offered by the contributors not only anchor Defoe’s texts firmly in their most pertinent contexts, but also offer evidence for Defoe’s apparent ability confidently, if not expertly, to handle a wide range of generic conventions, and to adapt these conventions accordingly, if they did not satisfy his ultimate rhetorical goal.

The collection is comprised of ten essays and a substantial introduction (please refer to the ‘Table of Contents’ for more detailed information). Contributors range from leading international experts, such as Pat Rogers, to scholars who have recently completed, or are in the process of completing, innovative doctoral theses on Daniel Defoe. A number of contributors have already published monographs or journal articles on Defoe.

*Positioning Daniel Defoe’s Non-fiction* is envisioned as a ‘companion’ to the *Cambridge Companion to Daniel Defoe*, recently edited by John Richetti. While the *Cambridge Companion* is aimed predominantly at the undergraduate market, this volume will be of the greatest interest to postgraduate students and researchers, due to its focus on Defoe’s non-fictional texts.