

Lee. William. 'Servitude: A Poem'. *Notes and Queries*. 3rd Series. IX (17 February 1866): 141-43.

Until the appearance of the article referred to above, I did not know that this scarce pamphlet - the full title-page of which is given by Mr Riggall - had been re-issued with a different title, as set forth by the Editor, who is right in stating that "there was only one edition, which has two different title-pages." Having a copy of the *former*, I have since compared it with the *latter* in the British Museum; and find the two tracts, in all other respects, identical.

I have now to open out a fragment of literary history, which I think will be interesting to the readers of *Notes and Queries*.

In the *Country Journal; or, The Craftsman*, of September 20, 1739, is an advertisement: "This day is published, *Servitude; a Poem*," &c. &c., reciting the former title in full. I have not found an earlier notice of it; and believe the re-issue with the second title, claiming the work to be "By R. D. now a Footman," was, at least, a year and a half later.

Mr Riggall has correctly stated the collation of the pamphlet; and, in passing, I call attention to the fact that the poem itself nominally occupies twelve only of the thirty-two pages; while, in fact, it scarcely fills *eleven*, or *one-third*. The remainder is in prose.

I have carefully compared both prose and verse with that in *A Muse in Livery, or the Footman's Miscellany*, published in 1732, by subscription, for Robert Dodsley, and find the poetical parts of the two books so similar in style, diction, rhythm, and manner of thought, that I coincide with the dictum of the Editor to the extent, that the poetical portion of *Servitude* was written by Robert Dodsley, but I except a few lines in several places.¹

There is no resemblance whatever between the prose of the two pamphlets. No critical acumen is requisite in the comparison. The most cursory reader would pronounce these portions the work of different authors.

That the solution of this apparent enigma has no reference to anything recent in *Notes and Queries* will be evident from the fact that my copy was purchased a year ago, and I then had it bound and lettered, "Defoe. *Servitude, A Poem*. 1729." I have now no more hesitation in affirming, from internal evidence, that Defoe wrote the title, preface, introduction, and postscript, comprising two thirds of the pamphlet and also that he revised the poem, than I should have in declaring him the author of *Robinson Crusoe*.

Mr Riggall, inquiring as to the author, very properly says, he "must have been a practised writer"; and continues, "It is not likely that a *footman* would commence with a Terentian motto." The Editor, after citing the altered title of the re-issue, with the words "By R. D. now a Footman", adds "The motto from Terence is omitted." I may state that Dodsley's *Muse in Livery*, consisting of 150 pages, does not contain a word of Latin. The subscription list prefixed to the latter work includes about 200 names; while *Servitude* came into the world three years earlier, depending either upon

its own merits, or upon an unseen influence capable of insuring its success. On this part I shall only further say, that *Servitude* contains nothing about the avowed ignorance, and the craving desire of an awakened but uncultivated mind for education, so painfully exhibited afterwards by Dodsley in the frontispiece and dedication of his *Muse in Livery*. These considerations probably prevented Dodsley subsequently claiming more fully, and reprinting, a tract so obviously not wholly his own.

Robert Dodsley was born at Mansfield, Notts, in the year 1703, and, it is stated, ran away from his apprenticeship to London, where he became a footman. The poem, *Servitude*, exhibits a consciousness of his mental superiority to the menials his associates; but the livery he wore was a barrier to the acquirement of any literary friend or confidant of superior station. Having written his poem it seems that, in his isolated depression, he ventured to show it to a person, probably a bookseller², who, finding the subject to be the Behaviour of Servants, asked him if he had seen a pamphlet on the same subject (then passing through its seventh edition), entitled *Every Body's Business is Nobody's Business*, by Andrew Moreton, Esq., induced him to purchase it, and probably informed him that Mr Defoe, was its author.³

By whatever means, though probably by letter, it is certain that Dodsley must have sought and obtained access to Defoe.

At the time when *Servitude* was published, Defoe had entered upon his *sixty-ninth* year, and had written a letter ten days previously (September 10, 1729), to the printer engaged upon his work, *The Compleat Gentleman*⁴, in which, apologizing for delay in forwarding copy, he said, "I have been exceeding ill." But he was not too ill to aid a friendless young man who now sought for help. Finding merit in the author and his work, Defoe not only revised the poem, but seeing it would not fill a sheet, amplified in prose a preface and introduction, increasing it to twenty-six pages; and then kindly added, as a postscript, six pages of quiet banter on his own popular tract, *Every Body's Business is Nobody's Business*, in order to give his humble *prot—g—* the reflex benefit of such popularity.

On March 8, 1729, Defoe was still writing the editorials, or Letters Introductory, for *Applebee's Journal*; but I have found no copies of later date until after his death, and cannot therefore state whether or not he was so engaged in September of the same year. His "labour under the sun" was almost ended; and it enhances the interest of his goodness to Robert Dodsley that I know nothing published from his pen after *Servitude; a Poem*⁵.

Defoe died about a year and a half afterwards (April 26, 1731), and it is but justice to Dodsley to believe that gratitude to his first literary benefactor would prevent an earlier alteration of the title. There can be no doubt, however, that when it was determined to publish by subscription his second work, *A Muse in Livery, &c.*, in 1732, Lady Lowther, in whose service he lived, would find the distribution of the remaining unsold copies of his former pamphlet, with a new title, containing the words "By R. D. now a Footman", greatly aiding her efforts to obtain subscribers.

I do not forget that the columns of *Notes and Queries* are open to fact - not fancy. I shall but slightly use the latter in drawing aside the curtain, on whose folds hangs the dust of nearly a century and a half, that we may view the study at Stoke

Newington of the now aged and afflicted author of two hundred printed works in every department of literature. Above the mantleshelf hangs the stately full-wigged portrait, by Taverner, of the *True-Born Englishman*. The windows look out on a pleasant lawn, but the room contains no luxurious furniture, beyond the cases of books that cover its walls⁶. Everything is plain, substantial, and homely, like the genius of its owner.

This is the true birth-place of *Robinson Crusoe* - miscalled of York - mariner! And that care-worn old man, sitting at the massive old writing table, is he from whose fertile brain sprang “the Boy’s Hero” of all future time. From this room, and its present occupant, came teeming forth to the world in rapid succession a long array of other works, which “the world will not willingly let die.” Robert Dodsley is announced; and the suffering invalid writer turns away from his manuscript of *The Compleat Gentleman* to greet with benevolent countenance, and to help, the timid young Footman who humbly beseeches his judgment and advice as to the crude manuscript of *Servitude : a Poem*.

Drop we the curtain of a scene which was soon to close for ever upon Daniel Defoe! Erewhile would his spirit doubtless hear the words, “Forasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me!”.

William Lee

¹ The exceptions are parts of pages 18, 22, and the four concluding lines of page 26.

² See Postscript, page 27.

³ It is well known who *Andrew Moreton*, Esq., was. A book was published on October 26, 1728, entitled *Villainy Exploded : or, the Mystery of Iniquity laid open; in a faithful Relation of all the Street Robberies committed by the Notorious Gang now in Newgate. With several Diverting Stories and Remarks on Squire Moreton’s, alias D—l Def—e’s Schemes*”, &c. Price 1s.

⁴ This work was never finished so far as to be published. The manuscript and revised proofs of some sheets are, I believe, in the possession of James Crossley, Esq.

⁵ It is scarcely worth mentioning that Mr Walter Wilson attributed to Defoe, upon hearsay, without having been able to see a copy, *Dissectio Mentis Humanae*, 1730; a poem having the well-known name of Bezaleel Morrice at the end of the dedication. Mr Bohn has included it, without more authority, in his edition of Lowndes as a work of Defoe, but with a mark of doubt.

⁶ Two years after this supposed interview with Dodsley, Defoe’s library was sold. *The Daily Advertiser*, November 13, 1731, announced a catalogue to be had gratis, at various booksellers and coffee-houses, respectively named, of the library “of the late Ingenious Daniel De Foe, Gent., lately deceas’d. Containing a curious Collection of Books : relating to the History and Antiquities of divers Nations, particularly England, Scotland, and Ireland,” &c. &c. “N.B. Manuscripts. Also several hundred curious, scarce Tracts on Parliamentary Affairs, Politicks, Husbandry, Trade, Voyages, Natural History, Mines, Minerals, &c.”

The books were stated to be “in very good condition, mostly well bound, gilt, and lettered.” They began to be sold “on Monday, the 15th of November, 1731, by *Olive Payne*, at the Bible in Round Court, in the Strand, and to continue daily until all are sold.”