

Defoe in the Miscellanies

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AS A RESULT of the enormous success of his verse satire *The True-Born Englishman* (1700), Daniel Defoe was for some time one of the best known authors of verse in early eighteenth-century London. Moreover, the poem maintained its appeal and continued to be a bestseller for the rest of the century, reaching a twenty-fifth official edition in 1777. To place this in a commercial context, Defoe's perhaps most famous publication, *The Life and Most Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), reached 'only' its fourteenth official English edition in 1779. *The True-Born Englishman* was no fluke: several of Defoe's other poems, *A Hymn to the Pillory* (1703), *A Hymn to Victory* (1704), and *Jure Divino* (1706), to name but three, equally required multiple editions, official and pirated, to satisfy market demand. Although not as successful as *The True-Born Englishman*, *A Hymn to the Pillory* inspired an anonymous broadsheet imitation as late as 1760.¹ We might also note that, while Defoe's plans to have *Jure Divino* printed by subscription were sorely disappointed, the subscription edition of *Caledonia* (1706) fared rather better: as Pat Rogers (102-103) has pointed out, the list of subscribers to Defoe's last major poem could plausibly be described as a more distinguished one than those achieved by Pope, Gay, or Prior. Debates may certainly be had with regard to the merits of Defoe's poetry, but the popularity of several of his verse publications seems to be beyond doubt. There were usually enough buyers to warrant the printing of further editions of Defoe's poems and both his commercially most successful and his most ambitious verse tracts, *The True-Born Englishman* and *Jure Divino*, had the power to transcend their specific historical moments by appealing to later readers.² We should also remember that Defoe wanted his versifying to be recognized as an important aspect of his identity as a writer: while the vast majority of his prose publications were published anonymously, he signalled his authorship of almost all of his poems, often by proudly declaring on title pages that this was "the Author of the True Born Englishman."

Defoe's desire to be recognized and remembered as a poet met with some success. Influential men such as Charles Montagu, Lord Halifax, remarked about two of Defoe's poems that they "have some turns in them that are pretty" (Charles

Montagu to Sarah Churchill, 12 May 1705, cited in Snyder 57)³ and was instrumental in arranging a financial reward for Defoe for the tracts. Giles Jacob included a short entry on Defoe in his *Poetical Register* (1723), commenting that he had “thrown into the World two Pieces [*The True Born Englishman* and *Jure Divino*] very much admir’d by some Persons,” qualifying the entry with the assessment of Defoe’s poetic descriptions as “generally very low” (293). Three decades later, Robert Shiels, in Theophilus Cibber’s *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain* (1753), dedicated a twelve-page entry to Defoe. The entry is a rather curious performance in its obvious contradictions, but it usefully illustrates the combination of approval and dismissal that has characterized the reception of Defoe’s poetry to this day. Shiels begins his entry by asserting that Defoe “acquired a very considerable name by his political and poetical works” (313), but the account of Defoe’s achievements is in fact strongly dominated by a focus on those of Defoe’s prose publications that engage with questions of political philosophy. Shiels describes *The True-Born Englishman* as the work by which Defoe is “most distinguished” (313), but then strangely fails to include the poem in a list of Defoe’s “principal performances” (323), while *Caledonia* and *Jure Divino* are listed. In his initial discussion of Defoe’s famous verse satire Shiels remarks that it is “written in a rough unpolished manner, without art, or regular plan” (315), only later to quote twenty lines from *The True-Born Englishman* because he considers them to be “harmoniously beautiful, and elegantly polished” (324). In spite of lamenting the “carelessness” displayed by Defoe when composing verse, Shiels ends the entry with a categorical rejection of Pope’s inclusion of Defoe in *The Dunciad*: “De Foe can never, with any propriety, be ranked amongst the dunces” (325). The sense conveyed by Shiels in the entry is typical of much of the commentary on Defoe’s verse: there is enough in the poetry that warrants explicit commendation, elevates Defoe above the mass of poetasters, and therefore deserves to be preserved in the canon of English poetry. But Defoe’s poems also suffer from a carelessness and unevenness that causes frustration, even annoyance, in the reader and somewhat undermines any potential claims for his poems to canonicity.

A point of some interest with regard to the eighteenth-century reception of Defoe’s poetry is the extent to which the relative popularity of Defoe’s poems, when published as single works, is reflected in the hold-all of popular poetry, the miscellany verse collection. If these collections “paved the way for a canon” by helping to “establish ideological and aesthetic schools of verse,” while also allowing readers “to compare and rank authors and works” (Benedict 68), then the most popular of the miscellanies ought to offer some indication concerning the perceived importance of a given poet’s work. The recently established *Digital Miscellanies Index* (*DMI*) (University of Oxford, www.digitalmiscellaniesindex.org) represents an important new tool for investigating the role played by individual authors in these collections. While the creators of the *DMI* seem to disagree somewhat with Benedict’s assertions concerning the canon-forming power of miscellany collections (and with Paul Hammond, who makes a similar

point in *The Making of Restoration Poetry*, 8) by stating that miscellanies “tend to reflect the literary taste of the moment, rather than a canonical history of poetry” (<http://digitalmiscellaniesindex.org/about/miscellanies.php>), there is some validity in the notion that a consideration of a number of these historical moments will tell us something about the development of literary tastes and the canon. However, an important caveat is offered by Adam Rounce, who points out that the “whole culture of poetic commonplace books and anthologies was rooted in unacknowledged borrowing, where collections were constructed using their predecessors as building-blocks,” often for the pragmatic reason of convenience rather than careful selection (22). Rounce cautions us against assuming that inclusion in anthologies automatically offers a “measure of the influence, relevance, or popularity” of particular authors and their poems, and he rightly suggests that a more reliable picture may be constructed through the inclusion of factors such as the status of a given miscellany (e.g. sales figures and circulation) and published responses (23).

What, then, may we learn from Defoe’s presence in eighteenth-century miscellany collections? The first point to make is that, in spite of the good and occasionally excellent sales figures for his single edition poems, Defoe’s verse was included not nearly as often as that of some of his well-known contemporaries. A basic name search of the *DMI* yields the following number of “roles,” or citations, for a small but at least vaguely representative range of poets: 48 for Richard Blackmore, 65 for John Dennis, 1241 for John Dryden, 69 for Anne Finch, 839 for Alexander Pope, 383 for Matthew Prior, and 278 for Jonathan Swift. Defoe registers a mere 25 roles.⁴ Using these statistics alone, we ought to reach the conclusion that the appeal of Defoe’s poems simply did not extend beyond the literary taste of the moment of their publication. More importantly, these figures possibly also speak to the strong occasionality of Defoe’s verse: once the political issue to which Defoe’s poems responded had run its course (and it was most often political and associated moral matters that inspired Defoe to write verse), Defoe’s works perhaps lacked the necessary relevance – and possibly also the consistently high artistic quality – to continue to be of interest.

The political topicality of Defoe’s verse is reflected very clearly in his strong presence, mainly in 1703, in the “leading poetic miscellany for thirty years” (Lord xxvi), *Poems on Affairs of State*. But the relatively large amount of space given to Defoe’s verse in this popular miscellany also reveals an intriguing paradox with regard to the reception of Defoe’s poetry specifically, and our ideas concerning influence more generally: while the comparatively few instances of inclusion in miscellany collections seem to make Defoe a marginal figure in the landscape of eighteenth-century verse, the healthy sales figures for several of his single works and his inclusion in the leading miscellany of the period potentially suggest a somewhat more significant role and a wider circulation of some of his poetic works than the above *DMI* figure leads one to believe.

The publisher of the 1703 edition of *Poems on Affairs of State* evidently responded to Defoe’s rise to poetic prominence by early 1701. Beside Defoe’s *The*

True-Born Englishman, which, after John Tutchin's *The Foreigners*, is the second poem in the second volume of the miscellany, his *The Mock Mourners* (1702) and *Reformation of Manners* (1702),⁵ as well as a poem that is possibly by Defoe, *The Patriots* (1700), were also selected for inclusion. In other words, over 3,000 lines of Defoe's verse were reproduced in this popular miscellany, with *The True-Born Englishman* representing the longest poem included, followed in second and third places by *Reformation of Manners* and *The Mock Mourners*. We should also take note of the publisher's stated rationale for the selection of poems: "they either come from Considerable Hands, or the Dignity of the Subject requir'd their being preserv'd," and, more generally, "the Design of Collections of this kind, is to afford some assistance to History," in this case apparently above and beyond party bias (iv). It does not appear too much to suggest, therefore, that the relatively extensive presence of Defoe in this volume of *Poems on Affairs of State* and its stated function of preserving for future generations thematically and/or artistically important verse that mattered to its first readers tells us something about the early eighteenth-century reception of Defoe's poems: at least some of them were considered valuable enough not to be forgotten. One might point out here that the publisher of the volume succeeded in assisting posterity in its effort to (re)construct a literary history of the period: half of the lines reproduced in Volume 6 (1697-1704) of the twentieth-century Yale version of *Poems on Affairs of State* are by Defoe.

In addition to the poems mentioned above, Defoe's ballads *England's Late Jury* (1701) and *The Address* (1704) were respectively anthologized in the 1704 and 1707 editions of *Poems on Affairs of State* (the 1707 volume also contains a satirical poem that engages directly with Defoe's versifying activity, "Jure Divino toss'd in a Blanket: Or, Daniel de Foe's Memorial"). John Dunton's typically idiosyncratic *Athenianism: or the New Projects of Mr. John Dunton* (1710) integrated selected lines from *The Character of the Late Dr. Samuel Annesley, By way of Elegy* (1697) and *The Mock Mourners*. Extracts from *The True-Born Englishman* and *Jure Divino* were included, alongside extracts by John Milton, John Philips and Richard Steele, in the miscellany *The Bee. A Collection of Choice Poems* (1715), and selected lines from *Reformation of Manners* were given a place in *Fables, and other Short Poems; Collected from the most Celebrated English Authors* (1731), alongside works by Addison, Dryden, Gay, Prior, and Swift. The inclusion of extracts from Defoe's long poems obviously indicates deliberate choice on the part of the publisher, and it is this act of conscious selection that makes another miscellany, *A Collection of the Best English Poetry, by Several Hands* (1717), particularly interesting, because it allows us to explore the more detailed matter of the arrangement of poems in a collection. Five of Defoe's poems were included in this unusual miscellany.

The two-volume *A Collection of the Best English Poetry* was, as W. J. Cameron has explained, a "made up miscellany" (301) collated from already printed verse pamphlets that simply had a title page added to them; the collection lacks its own preface and has no contents list. These verse pamphlets were originally printed by Henry Hills, who, during the early years of the century, had "become notorious for pirating every good poem or sermon that was published"

(Plomer 155). Having bought what was left on Hills's shelves after the printer's death in 1713, the bookseller T. Warner, suggests Cameron, combined the verse pamphlets, of which there were unequal quantities and all of which were printed between 1708 and 1710, into the miscellany, randomly adding alternatives when he had exhausted the stocks of certain pamphlets. The consequence of this was that "[n]o two copies of Warner's collection are identical in make-up" (301), although the similarities between the five surviving copies of the miscellany, in terms of content rather than arrangement, are significant.⁶ What is perhaps of the greatest interest for my purposes is not so much that Warner added new pamphlets to fill the emerging gaps, but that he varied the order in which he arranged the poems. It is in this respect that one of the five versions of the miscellany, the British Library copy, differs most significantly from the other four copies.

Cameron theorizes, with some plausibility if not conclusively, that the New York copy of the miscellany was collated later than the Newberry (possibly the earliest issue), Harvard and Yale copies and that the British Library copy was likely to have been assembled after the Newberry and before the Harvard copies, that is, relatively early in the process of production of the different versions. This is important since it suggests that the contents and arrangement of the British Library copy were not determined, in the main, by the (non-)availability of individual pamphlets. Moreover, Cameron explains that "the single Yale volume is identical with volume I of the Newberry and Harvard copies" (301), and additionally suggests that they are "very similar" (302) to the second volumes of the British Library and New York copies. The latter assertion is misleading in its implicit linking of the British Library and New York issues, however: while there is some overlap in terms of content between these two volumes, the New York copy follows the distribution of pamphlets between the two volumes established in the Newberry and Harvard issues more closely than the British Library one.

The difference in arrangement of the first volumes is striking and allows us to make some observations concerning the reception of Defoe's verse, even if only on a speculative basis. Volume one of the Newberry and Harvard issues begins with John Denham's *Cooper's Hill* (1643), Jonathan Swift's *Baucis and Philemon* (1709), and Robert Howard's *The Duel of the Stags* (1709). Defoe is a marginal presence in this volume: only one of his poems, *An Elegy on the Author of the True-Born-English-Man*, is included here at position fifteen. The other three Defoe poems listed by Cameron for these issues, *A Hymn to the Pillory*, *A Hymn to Peace* and *The True-Born English-Man*, all appear in the second volume at positions 42 through 44, that is, in the final third of the entire collection; the New York issue retains this pattern and also offers these three poems in its second volume, at positions 7 through 9.⁷ Cameron surmises that, while certain pamphlets "may be linked deliberately, the general arrangement seems haphazard" (302). It is, of course, difficult to ascertain whether or not a rationale existed for the arrangements chosen by Warner, but it seems questionable that no thought whatsoever went into the way in which the miscellany was collated – after all, there

is every reason to believe that Warner wanted to make the materials he had to hand as appealing as possible to his customers. Whatever the case, one thing is clear: Defoe's work was not afforded pride of place in either the first or the second volumes of the Newberry, Harvard, Yale and New York issues of the miscellany.

This is dramatically different in the British Library issue. Volume one opens with *The True-Born English-Man*, followed by *An Elegy on the Author of the True-Born English-Man*, *The Storm. An Essay* (not mentioned by Cameron), and *A Hymn to the Pillory*. It takes 100 pages or so before the reader will encounter lines not by Defoe, Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*. In addition, Defoe's *A Hymn to Peace* appears later in volume one, at position sixteen. The first volume of the British Library issue of *A Collection of the Best English Poetry* thus appears strongly dominated by Defoe's poems. Among the poets that follow Defoe are Rochester, Dryden, Denham, Addison, Swift, Waller, Congreve, and Milton, all occupying less space than Defoe in that volume.

That the British Library issue, sandwiched as it was between the identical Newberry and Harvard issues, was not merely an afterthought is suggested by the similarities of pamphlet distribution between the early Newberry issue and the late New York issue. Instead, it does not appear too much to suggest that the British Library issue, also collated early in the process, represents a consciously arranged alternative to the other four issues. In this context, Cameron intriguingly suggests that "[t]he change in sequence [in the British Library issue] could be accounted for in many ways" (303), but, unfortunately, immediately dismisses the matter as foreign to his purpose. One way in which we can account for the arrangement of the British Library issue is that Warner was aware of the continued popularity and saleability of Defoe's verse, which is of course also signalled by the fact that Hills was still pirating Defoe's poems between the years 1708 and 1710, several years after they were first published. That this is one plausible way in which to account for the British Library issue is supported by the reissue in 1716 of the 1703 edition of *Poems on Affairs of State* that contained several of Defoe's poems. To be sure, the choice of Defoe's verse pamphlets was not Warner's, but the way in which he arranged them in the different issues of his miscellany was not imposed on him by anything other than market forces and perhaps his own aesthetic ideas concerning poetry.⁸ In 1717, Defoe's poems, it seems, were considered one of the more appealing assets among Hills's stock.⁹

Warner's *A Collection of the Best English Poetry* was not quite the end of Defoe's presence in eighteenth-century miscellany collections: sections from *Reformation of Manners* were reproduced in *Select Tales and Fables with Prudential Maxims in Prose and Verse* (1746, reprinted in 1756 and 1780).¹⁰ While some of Defoe's verse thus remained in circulation into the late eighteenth-century, the statistics offered by the *DMI* cannot be ignored: Defoe was not a frequently anthologized poet. This is perhaps not unsurprising given that some of Defoe's contemporaries, such as Giles Jacob, considered Defoe's poetic efforts to be of the low sort and that Defoe's reputation had suffered significantly as a result of the fiasco of *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1702). However, this needs to be

counterbalanced with the evidence presented in this note: especially during the first two decades or so after Defoe's poems were published his poetry enjoyed a healthy level of popularity and was even considered a commodity that had the potential to generate good sales figures. In addition, that some publishers consciously chose to reproduce specific sections from Defoe's poems in their miscellanies indicates that there was some recognition of the rhetorical force of his verse publications, if not their artistic value. The opinion of the eccentric Dunton that Defoe was one of the "chief Wits of the Age" (258) was certainly not one shared by all eighteenth-century consumers of poetry, but neither would it be accurate to claim that Defoe was no more than one of the also-rans among the early eighteenth-century poets.

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NOTES

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- ¹ *Justice W-'s Case, or, a New Hymn to the Pillory* (London, 1760).
 - ² An example of this for *Jure Divino* is discussed in Kyle Grimes, "Daniel Defoe, William Hone, and *The Right Divine of Kings to Govern Wrong!* A New Electronic Edition."
 - ³ Halifax's comment concerns *A Hymn to Victory* (1704) and *The Double Welcome* (1705). The Duchess had a "sizeable monetary" reward conveyed to Defoe via Halifax. See Paula R. Backscheider, *Daniel Defoe: His Life*, 196.
 - ⁴ The actual number for Defoe is probably even lower if we account for misattributions. For example, the *DMI* includes the broadsheet ballad *The Age of Wonders: To the Tune of Chivy Chase* (1710), which is unlikely to be Defoe's. When Defoe wrote ballads, such as *Ye True Born Englishmen Proceed* (1701) or *The Address* (1704), he employed five-line stanzas rhyming abaab, rather than the four-line abab stanzas in this poem. Moreover, by 1707 Defoe had effectively ceased to produce public poetry.
 - ⁵ It might be noted that both the unauthorized *A Collection of the Writings of the Author of The True-Born English-Man* (1703) and Defoe's *A True Collection of the Writings of the Author of The True Born English-man* (1703) offer the same opening sequence of poems.
 - ⁶ Cameron identifies the five copies by their location: Newberry Library, Chicago; Houghton Library, Harvard University; British Library; New York Public Library; Yale University Library (Volume 1 only). The British Library issue is now held in the British Library and is the only digitized copy, available via Eighteenth-Century Collections Online. The New York Public Library no longer appears to hold the issue to which Cameron refers, but I have been unable to identify its current location. The English Short Title Catalogue's record for the miscellany is of strictly limited use: further issues of the miscellany have apparently been identified since 1958 (Emmanuel College, Cambridge; Memorial Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Fondren Library, Rice University; United States, Library of Congress; University of Houston; Auckland

Public Library), but librarians at Emmanuel College, the University of Houston and the University of Wisconsin-Madison have confirmed to me that their respective libraries do not in fact hold a physical copy of *A Collection of the Best English Poetry*. Most of library catalogue records for the item link to ECCO, that is, the British Library issue, without noting the differences in arrangement. An exception to this rule is the Fondren Library, which includes a contents list for each volume (see http://alexandria.rice.edu/uhtbin/cgiirsi/x/0/0/57/5/3?searchdata1=1156838{CKEY}&searchfield1=GENERAL^SUBJECT^GENERAL^^&user_id=WEBSERVER).

⁷ Cameron's brief article is at times confusing in its cross-referencing of the contents of the five issues he discusses. I was not able to discern with sufficient clarity the contents of the first volume of the New York issue from Cameron's comparative lists and commentary, but, on page 303, he states unambiguously that the three poems by Defoe mentioned here appear in that issue's second volume. The issue held in the Fondren Library has *A Hymn to the Pillory*, *A Hymn to Peace* and *The True-Born English-Man* at positions 7 through 9 in volume one and therefore appears to be similar to the second volume of the New York copy.

⁸ Admittedly, there could also have been more mundane reasons for the different arrangements: for example, the different piles of the pamphlets could have been moved around the workshop to create space, affecting the order in which the poems appear in the miscellany. That this accounts for the British Library's copy's offering four of Defoe's poems successively at the beginning of volume one seem unlikely to me, however.

⁹ It might be noted that the poems are not attributed to Defoe in the miscellany. However, *The True-Born Englishman*, *An Elegy on the Author of the True-Born-English-Man* and *A Hymn to the Pillory* were well known to be Defoe's works even decades after their first appearance.

¹⁰ The *DMI* also lists a poem integrated into Defoe's *The Political History of the Devil* (1726) as appearing in *The Christian Poet, or Divine Poems on the Four Last Things* (1735). The poem is 74 lines in length and untitled in the *Political History*; the publisher of the miscellany titles it "On the Fallen Angels."

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