

The Man That Never Was: Daniel Defoe 1644–1731 – A Critical Revision of His Life and Writing, by John Martin. Kendal: Heritage Publications, 2013. Pp. 495 + xxxiii. \$35.00. ISBN: 978-0-9543-1724-9.

The Man That Never Was is John Martin's second biography of Daniel Defoe. His first, *Beyond Belief: The Real Life of Daniel Defoe*, received mixed reviews for its provocative and often unorthodox view of the life and works of Defoe. The point that Martin returns to in this second biography is that Defoe's year of birth was unknown until he discovered the writer's birth record, which indicates that the writer was born in 1644, some fifteen or sixteen years before his supposed birth year of 1659/1660. Martin also pursued this claim in another book on Defoe: *Alien Come Home: The Story of Daniel Defoe's Missing Years, 1644–1680*.

In *The Man That Never Was*, Martin claims that Defoe was the son of Daniel Foe and that James Foe was his uncle, not his father, as has been posited by Defoe scholars (xi). Martin explains that James Foe's brother Daniel took over the family farm in Northamptonshire after the death of their father, who was also named Daniel Foe. The biographer Frank Bastian, in *Defoe's Early Life*, notes that James Foe's brother Daniel married and mentions a family, though he claims his children were the writer's older first cousins. Martin disagrees, arguing that since Daniel Foe was the oldest male in the family, tradition dictated that the first born male would be named after the father: hence Daniel Defoe the writer was his eldest son rather than his nephew.

When we delve into this and other fascinating claims made by Martin, they soon begin to unravel, as J. A. Downie recently pointed out in "Defoe's Birth," a note in *The Scriblerian and the Kit-Cats*. First, Daniel was a very common name among the (De) Foe families of Northamptonshire, where Martin claims Daniel Defoe was born. It is, therefore, difficult to associate the writer with one of the several Daniel Foes

listed in the records of that region. Second, although Martin suggests that all historical facts are open to “misunderstanding” and are “a complex matter” (xv), he does not adequately address or explain away critical documents associated with the writer. This is evident time and time again, and I will offer four representative examples here.

First, in a marriage license dated December 28, 1683, Defoe’s age is given as about 24 years. For a man to state that he is fifteen or sixteen years younger than he is to his twenty-year-old wife and her wealthy father seems fanciful in the extreme. Further, in 1726, Defoe writes the following as “Andrew Moreton, Esq” in the preface to *The Protestant Monastery*: “[I] am in my 67th Year, almost worn out with Age and Sickness” (vi). If one deducts 67 years from 1726, we arrive at the year 1659 as Defoe’s birth year.¹ Second, Martin tries to persuade us that Defoe did not attend Morton’s Academy in or around 1676 because he was working in Brazil on his sugar plantations from 1663 to 1680, but he fails along the way to tackle the evidence in *The Present State of Parties* (1712), in which Defoe mentions three “Western Martyres” from that academy, not by name but nickname: Kitt. Battersby, Young Jenkins, and Hewlin. These are certainly the sorts of schoolboy nicknames that would have been used at Morton’s Academy. Third, according to Martin, Defoe visited North America from September 1699 to August 1700; however, during that time, Defoe was in London arranging a lease for a house at 87 Woolstaple Round, Westminster, which was on Christ’s Hospital land (Peterson 325). Fourth, Martin has Defoe visiting Brazil and Madagascar in 1705/1706 as does Crusoe in *The Father Adventures* (1719). However, it appears from Defoe’s letters that he had returned to London from a long trip around England for Robert Harley on November 6, 1705, and was hard at work establishing a distribution network for his *Review* until the spring of 1706. According to John Robert Moore, Defoe wrote *The Apparition of Mrs Veal* (1706) on his return from this trip (168–69).

Martin’s claims about Defoe’s origins and life also result in self-contradiction. For example, Martin argues that the first part of *Memoirs of a Cavalier* (1720) should be read as allegorical autobiography. If this is the case, the dreams of the protagonist’s mother, which she records in her prayer book, must be those of Defoe’s own mother (xix). In the invocation, the Cavalier mentions “several strange Dreams” his mother “had while she was with Child of her *second* Son, which was myself” (1). However, according to Martin’s own chronology, Defoe was the *first* son of Daniel and Ellene Foe (xxx). Martin does try to establish that Defoe’s father was married before and had a son with his first wife, Defoe’s half-brother Thomas King (53), but he later claims that Defoe had another older brother, Roger Fenwick, who served as Lieutenant-Colonel in Colonel Lockhart’s Regiment of Foot; Fenwick is identified by Martin as the older brother reported in the opening pages of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), although he never provides any biographical evidence in support of this supposition (453). While he states that he has made room for this brother in the family chart on

page 417 of *Beyond Belief*, there is no such chart on that page. Martin goes to some lengths to connect Defoe with Fenwick, but lacking evidence, he settles for trying to convince the reader that the connection *could* be possible. Martin seems to miss the point that the allusion to Lockhart in *Robinson Crusoe* serves a literary rather than a biographical purpose, with Defoe referring to Lockhart to connect Crusoe with the Commonwealth.

Martin also pursues at length the possible connection of Defoe to William Penn, querying Defoe's connection with the Jacobites. However, Martin's biography is so tainted by fiction, inaccuracies, and an unreliable chain-forging of evidence that any claims he makes on this topic are unconvincing. However, there is perhaps some measure of truth in Martin's assertion that the lives of Defoe's relatives, who clearly settled in Essex, inspired his works of fiction just as Henry Foe's journal may have led, in part, to the production of *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722).

Martin has clearly carried out a lot of research in Northamptonshire and the United States, and he has made some effort to link those records to the life and writings of Daniel Defoe. However, what he has not done is satisfactorily tackled the body of evidence that runs counter to his biographical conclusions.

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NOTES

¹ I do not doubt, however, that Martin is correct in his assumption that Defoe could not have been born in 1659 as the *legitimate* son of James Foe, as one of James's two daughters was born on June 19, 1659.

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