

**Proposed Monograph : *Before Crusoe: Defoe, Voice, and the Ministry***

**Sample Chapter Four : A Cold Ministry and a Careless People: Conduct and Self in Defoe's Early Works**

Towards the end of Defoe's *The Present State of the Parties in Great Britain* (1712), a work which describes at length the parlous state of contemporary English dissent, the anonymous speaker concludes with a series of specific reasons for these conditions:

It needs no Enquiry whether the Decay of Preaching should bring a Decay of Practice, and whether a cold Ministry should not produce a careless People.

Let the Manner of the Dissenters Conduct, under this new-fashion'd Dispensation, be but examin'd : Go to their Houses, and how is the Worship of God maintain'd there? Let it be enquir'd whether one Master of a Family in ten prays with his Family, or catechises his Children, or observes the Sabbath-Day, of that great Number who practis'd all these within these Twenty Years past : And where are their Reprovers? Where the Minister that examines them about it? Or reproves them for the want of it?<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will suggest that this work's sentiments articulate the same kind of growing disillusion, in terms of the moral and religious conduct of dissenters, as expressed about contemporary English society more generally in both Defoe's conduct works and later novels. In unequivocal language, Defoe's speaker makes clear that he refers neither to a decline in dissenters' numbers nor their economic wealth:

the Decay and Declining of the Dissenters lies in the Decay of their Interest; their Friends, their Ministry; their General Practice, whether Religious or Politick; their Union and Unanimity among themselves; their Knowledge and Pursuit of their own Cause; their Charity, largeness of Spirit, taste of Religious Matters, and management of Civil ---; and it is doubted it may be said, a decay of their Sanctity of Life, and even of their Morals.<sup>2</sup>

The principal text of *The Present State of the Parties*, the Preface informs readers, was written 'some eight years hence' but particular circumstances (most likely the Act against Occasional Conformity

passed in 1711) prompted its subsequent appearance in the press.<sup>3</sup> Throughout this work, an urgent and admonitory tone consistently warns dissenters that the time to reform their practice is running out; the concluding passage underlines the root of the problem: ‘If the Dissenters ever will restore their Figure in the World, it must be by restoring their Ministry’.<sup>4</sup>

The period eight years prior to the publication of *The Present State of the Parties* also encompasses a work considered here in Chapter Three. It was in *The Lay-Man’s Sermon Upon the Great Storm* (1704) that Defoe first proposed to address the religious significance of the 1703 tempest in print because ministers had failed in their ‘duty’ to do so. *The Present State* presents yet another text in which Defoe, though seeking to emulate certain aspects of narrative and rhetorical technique from ministers who were also popular authors, seeks also to remind readers that his speaker is not himself a minister.

In *The Present State* Defoe devotes an enormous amount of highly unflattering attention to his fellow dissenters, towards whom his anonymous speaker insists he is ‘a Friend ... and really knows their Interest.’<sup>5</sup> A rose-tinted and rather ironic nostalgia for the ‘better times’ of dissenting culture – that is, during the period of civil and religious persecution which preceded William III’s accession - is unmistakable, extending over several pages:

Their Ministers were Men known over the whole World; their general Character was own’d even by their Enemies; generally Speaking, they were Men of liberal Education; had a vast Stock of Learning; were Exemplar in Piety; Studious, Laborious, and unexceptionably Capable of Carrying on the Work they were embark’d in ... As were the Ministers, so, in a Proportion, were the People; they were Conscientious, diligent Hearers of the Word preach’d, study’d the best Gifts, encourag’d, but not worship’d their Ministers; they follow’d the Substance, not the Sound of Preaching, they understood what they Heard, and knew how to choose their Ministers [...] their Children and Families were dutifully Instructed, and themselves, when they came to Tryal, cheerfully suffer’d Persecution for the Integrity of their Hearts, abhorring to contradict, by their Practice, what they profess’d in Principle; or, by any Hypocritical Compliance, to give the World Reason to believe they had not Dissented, but upon a sincerely examin’d and meer conscientious Scruple.<sup>6</sup>

In 1704 and again in 1712, it is ministers who Defoe singles out for particular blame for failing to exercise their 'Ministerial Authority, suited to the Dignity of that Office'. These observations gain considerable momentum when one considers how small and relatively insignificant a role ministers tend to play across the whole canon of Defoe's fictional works. The essentially solitary nature of his later protagonists, for example, sees them acting almost exclusively as their own moral and religious guides. If seemingly less isolated in social or emotional terms, and as will be explored during this chapter, the characters depicted in *The Family Instructor* (1715 and 1718) and *Religious Courtship* (1722) are equally at a loss for ministerial support.

In these works the conspicuous absence of ministers reflects Defoe's growing tendency to portray a social landscape in a state of moral and religious decline. If many characters in *The Family Instructor* and *Religious Courtship* do achieve some form of spiritual redemption, a significant proportion do not. Taken en masse, the instances of failed versus successful salvation in the conduct works must be seen as part of Defoe's larger moral agenda in which the prospect of spiritual salvation becomes increasingly tenuous. While refraining from describing the nature of salvation in the conduct works as 'arbitrary' - we can safely assume that Defoe would attribute religious salvation to Providence - it is clear that he is already describing an English social landscape in which no formal infrastructure of religious and moral guidance supports the populace. This is a landscape we have since come to associate more readily with Crusoe's island; it is portrayed emblematically in those very few green stalks that appear from that protagonist's unthinking disposal of debris from the bottom of a bag of chicken-feed.<sup>7</sup> Applied across the vast social landscape of contemporary English life, as it is in the conduct works, Defoe's fairly modest estimation for one's chances of spiritual salvation must serve at least in part as an indictment of the failure of the ministerial function itself.

If read in conjunction with his earlier diatribes against ministers in *The Present State*, the social landscape depicted in Defoe's works of fiction represents no less than the disastrous conclusion he warned against in the final lines of the earlier work: 'if the Present Spirit remain both among Ministers and Hearers, I fear this Dreadful Prophesie of a Deceased Minister among the dissenters may take Effect in our Age, (*viz.*) That either God will remove this Generation from the Gospel, or the Gospel from this Generation.' Read in this way, Defoe's works of fiction offer a particularly bleak view of contemporary society and its prospects for salvation while implicating ministers into the bargain.

Expressed within a popular form of writing so readily associated with ministerial discourse, Defoe's conduct works are doubly critical of Protestant ministerial function (that is, both Nonconformist and episcopal ministers). Defoe's conduct works render a wider sense of social disillusion also evident in his contemporary pamphlets such as *The Conduct of Christians Made the Sport of Infidels* (1717) and *A Continuation of Letters from a Turkish Spy* (1718) in which, from the viewpoint of a non-Christian observer, English society is vilified as morally reprehensible and politically corrupt:

Sure the Gods of these Christians are going to cast them off; and are resolv'd to bring them to Destruction by the Agency of their own Follies: Seeing they suffer them to fall into such Breaches and such continual Quarrels as are not consistent with their being as a Nation; and which exposes them to the Scorn and Contempt even of all their Fellow-Creatures. While I was among them, such a Feud began among their Dervices or Priests, as had adminster'd Matter of Laughter to all the World, at the same time that it has left them at Home in the utmost Wrath and Confusion.<sup>8</sup>

Once again there is a specific sense that Defoe implicates Protestant ministers in the social ills he portrays. Moreover, all of these works articulate a point when Defoe is actively distancing himself from certain familiar aspects of his established authorial identity, for example, that of apologist dissenter or partisan pamphleteer.<sup>9</sup> He assumes in their place the role of a non-specific Protestant - although clearly non-ministerial – moral arbiter.

In tandem with Defoe's repeated attacks on Protestant ministers is a proportionally increased focus on the nature and portrayal of subjective experience. His fictional subjects become more complex and unique, more the reflection of their cumulative experience and therefore less easily assimilated into a predictable pattern of behaviour. *The Family Instructor* and other works from this period are transitional in nature; Defoe's fictional rendering of subjective experience will be considerably refined in the first-person narratives that appear from 1719. It is in these earlier works, however, that subjective identity and point of view – concepts that we now more readily associate with literary analysis of the novel - begin to have meaning. This is not merely because *The Family Instructor* and contemporary works

discussed in this chapter are works of ‘fiction’; problematic enough to apply to any of Defoe’s canon, the term ‘fiction’ is not readily reconcilable with *The Family Instructor*’s format of highly artificial dialogues interspersed with ‘Notes’ and other marginalia. Subjectivity, rather, is a by-product of these works’ increasing recognition of the cultural status afforded to the substantive notion of the individual.

Individualism is a highly attractive social concept which informs Western notions of modernity and sociopolitical progress as well as cultural forms such as the novel. It is, however, a social concept which also implicitly challenges traditional and community-centred cultural models and revalues the nature of duty, or social responsibility, incumbent upon their participants. Defoe’s conduct works articulate some of the tensions at the heart of the social concept of individualism, both in terms of their form and his developing portrayal of subjective experience.<sup>10</sup>

I propose two ways to explain why Defoe’s portrayal of subjective experience becomes particularly meaningful at this time. The first, obvious, reason is that in *The Family Instructor*, Defoe adapted a traditional format and in doing so effectively invented a new one. Paula Backscheider has suggested that ‘conduct books written after it were more often cast as stories, and the characters and their language became more realistic’.<sup>11</sup> Certainly earlier conduct books in the form of dialogues, such as William Darrell’s *The Gentleman Instructed* (1704) and Richard Baxter’s *Poor Man’s Family Book* (first published in 1674 but frequently reprinted), are considerably more brief both in descriptive content and character delineation. Nor are Defoe’s increasingly elaborate portrayals of fictional characters confined to *The Family Instructor*. The content of Defoe’s prefatory Introduction to *The Conduct of Christians* merits quotation at length on the basis of the elaborate background story it offers for his assumed narrator:

Kara Selym Oglan, Merchant of Amsterdam, is by Birth an Armenian of Lesser Georgia, on the Confines of Persia; he was born of Christian Parents, of the Greek Church. But being taken away young by his Mother’s Brother, and carry’d into Aleppo; he was then bred a Mahometan : And his said Unkle being a very considerable Merchant, he remov’d him afterwards to Constantinople.

Here he liv'd some Years in a flourishing Condition; and his Wealth and Commerce encreasing, and having contracted an Acquaintance with some of the Dutch and French Turkey Merchants, he resolv'd to travel. He took his first Tour thro' France and Germany, going in the Habit of an Armenian Merchant, or as we vulgarly stile them, a Grecian; and at length, with two of his Brothers, he settled in Holland; where he grew in Wealth and general Correspondence, to an exceeding Degree.

His Occasions, or his Curiosity, led him at length to come over to England; where, it seems, by the Tenour of his Correspondence, he resided when some very late Affairs were transacting; and which is more remarkable, he was, it seems, an Eye-Witness of the late remarkable Church-Quarrel between two Christian *Mufti*'s, or Bishops, as he calls them; from whence, whether he went over to Holland himself, or wrote to his Brothers to convey the following Letter to the *Mufti* at Constantinople, is not essential to the Story: But the Letter it self, as it came to our Hands, is as follows.<sup>12</sup>

Defoe's narrative here is strikingly reminiscent of the kind of circumstantial detail we would associate with his later novels. Here, it is also - within the context of the satirical pamphlet which follows - virtually superfluous. No more is ever mentioned concerning Kara Selym Oglan's past circumstances. While these details provide a vivid and interesting picture reminiscent of other episodes when Defoe reflects on the fluid nature of cultural identity, and the globe-trotting adventurousness of early modern mercantile experience, they have very little to do with the text at hand.

This becomes even apparent if *The Conduct of Christians* is compared with Defoe's best-known satirical pamphlet, *The Shortest-Way with the Dissenters* (1704), in which he similarly employs the device of an assumed narrator with an unexpectedly revealing perspective on contemporary political events. In both cases, also, the author's satiric vitriol is not confined to one political or religious group. In *The Shortest-Way*, High-Flying Tories are the main target but Whigs and Dissenters are also castigated for their complacency whereas, in *The Conduct of Christians*, Low Churchmen are the principal target though everyone involved in the Bangorian controversy receives some share of the speaker's criticism:

Were it not, that nothing can be so vile, but we may find Examples of it among the Pretenders of Religion in these Parts of the World, it would be Matter of Astonishment to see two Men dress'd up in Robes of Religion, dignify'd with Titles among the Teachers of the People, and esteem'd as Reverend Fathers in their Church; opposing each other with an equal Obstinacy, and Fury; affirming, with the greatest Imprecations, two Contraries, one of which can only be true: The one Pledging his Eternal Salvation on the Truth of his Part; the Other Imprecating his God to help him here, and judge him hereafter according to the Truth of his Part; and yet one of these, we all know, must speak falsly.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike Kara Selym Oglan in *The Conduct of Christians*, however, the speaker of *The Shortest-Way* – as is the case with most of Defoe's works in which an assumed narrator is deployed – virtually all information available concerning that narrator's identity or ideological standpoint must be gleaned from their 'own' words. While it can be argued that the text of *The Conduct of Christians*, similarly, might deliver its satiric content just as successfully *without* the highly interesting prefatory Introduction cited earlier, its inclusion begs the question of what Defoe's intentions were in providing it, unless we see this as a preliminary 'experiment' on Defoe's part in the more elaborate construction of his speaker's identity.

Those aspects of Kara Selym Oglan's identity most relevant to the satiric effectiveness of the text (namely, his Islamic faith and his presence in England during the Bangorian Controversy) are similarly employed in the same year's pamphlet *A Continuation of Letters from a Turkish Spy*, though this latter text possesses no such Introduction.<sup>14</sup> Its inclusion in *The Conduct of Christians*, however, implies not only Defoe's desire to provide a more descriptive portrait of his narrator but indicates his interest in many of the same themes - all concerned with identity - that will find further articulation in *Robinson Crusoe* and all of the later works of fiction. These include removal from original family circumstances, changes in religion, travel, and mercantile adventure.

There is a second and less obvious reason why Defoe may be increasingly concerned with individual identity and the portrayal of subjective experience. This could be a function of his increasingly elusive and non-specific portrayal of his own, authorial, identity. I have argued previously that Defoe's notion

of authorial identity would have been formed, perhaps to a large degree, by his views on contemporary ministers, many of whom were popular authors like himself and many of whom he would have held directly responsible for the doctrinal disputes and divisions which characterised English nonconformity (and indeed more widely, Protestantism as a whole) in his lifetime. In extricating himself from any association with ministerial function while exploiting the narrative techniques, genres and moral authority associated with that function, Defoe's rendering of authorial identity undergoes a strange kind of disappearing act. Authorial identity becomes an absence of ministerial identity while continuing to profess profound (though non-specific) Protestant conviction; the increasing detail with which fictional subjects are portrayed is in direct inverse proportion to the lack of detail employed to identify the author.

How far Defoe intended this to be the case is perhaps less relevant in the long run than the fact that his re-fashioning of the relationship between authorial identity and subjective experience led ultimately to *Robinson Crusoe*. What I am suggesting here is that Defoe's views on contemporary ministerial function are also implicated in this event; moreover, in the conduct works and all of Defoe's fiction, the conspicuous absence of ministers fulfilling their religious duties across the English social landscape is too significant to dismiss.

On one level the relative lack of effective ministerial function in Defoe's portrayal of the English social landscape points forward to the more secular world we might recognise as resembling our own. This is at least part of the reason why Defoe has been, in some scholars' estimation, associated with notions of 'modernity'.<sup>15</sup> On another level, Defoe lived in a period in which the cultural influence wrought by ministers was widespread and highly public in nature. As a Presbyterian living in London in the second half of the seventeenth century, Defoe's insight into the role of ministers would also have been informed by his awareness that the nonconformist 'community' which had gathered, albeit briefly, through the shared experience of post-Restoration persecution, was now irrevocably lost.

### **Authorial Personae and Subjectivity in the Conduct Works**

Defoe's evasive handling of authorial personae in *The Family Instructor* can be illustrated by his treatment of the same issues central to this investigation so far, namely, nonconformity and ministerial disputes. As discussed in the Introduction, one particular area of dispute between dissenting sects was (sometimes wide) discrepancy in religious practice. This topic makes a further demand on Defoe's

conduct works since any but the most passing reference to this subject could obviate an authorial preference. In the conduct works he rarely classifies religious distinctions beyond ‘dissenters’ and episcopalians. When he does, it generally takes the form of a reference to a ‘mixed marriage’ involving dissenters in some way. As with his subjects’ prospects for salvation, Defoe provides readers with examples of both successful and failed mixed marriages. A positive example is provided in Dialogue Five in the first part of Volume One of *The Family Instructor* (between the eldest daughter’s aunt and uncle) in which ‘they all agree to be a religious, sober, pious, family; the children are all under such government; do all things so prettily ... they are the pattern of all the town: my uncle every night and morning calls them all together to prayers : my aunt takes all her daughters together once a day, and makes one of them read a chapter’.<sup>16</sup> This example may be contrasted with the one described in *Religious Courtship* (1722) between a Quaker husband and ‘a church-woman’ in which the inference is clear that such a union will only result in domestic misery:

they live as well as ‘tis possible for two of so wide and irreconcilable principles to do, and it is owing to a world of good humour, affection, and charity, in both of them; but if you think there is not something wanting between them, which ought to be between a man and his wife, something essential to what we call happiness, something they would give half their estate to have, and the want of which robs them of the sweetest part relation, and of the best and most solid comfort of a married life; or if you think they are not both sensible of it, you are greatly mistaken ... There is no harmony or concurrence in their several principles and ways of worship, so there can be no public, stated, family worship...all the thing called family religion, the glory of a married state, and the comfort of family society, is entirely lost; and the servants are left ungoverned, the children unguided; and there again is her grief doubled.<sup>17</sup>

The fundamental distinction made here between more mainstream dissenters and the most avowedly separatist of its sects is thus easily managed in moral terms: extreme differences in faith and modes of worship are evidently irreconcilable in marriage (as will be further evidenced in *Religious Courtship* by the disastrous union between the middle sister and her Roman Catholic husband). Proportionally less of a moral problem, then, must be the variations between individuals of ‘similar’ belief since Defoe’s text

also provides an explicit example of a conformist married to a dissenter (presumably a Presbyterian or Independent rather than a Quaker) who successfully resolve these issues in *The Family Instructor* :

Husband : Why, my Dear, that very Thing [their religious difference] has been my Hindrance, lest my Dear being of a different Opinion as to the Form of Prayer, should not like it, or care to join me in it.

Wife : You very much wronged me, then, my Dear, I hope, though we differ in Opinion about Religion, we are not of two Religions; we may have differing Thoughts of the Manner and Forms of Worship, but not, I hope, of Worship it self : I hope we pray to the same GOD, and in the Name of the same Intercessor; nor is our Difference about Forms such, that you should refuse my Prayers because of the Form, or I yours for want of a Form; that GOD to whom we pray, certainly respects the Heart and not the Form; so that with the Form or without it, we shall be equally heard if we pray in Faith, and equally rejected if we do not.

Husband : And you would have joined with me, my Dear, in Family Prayer, if I had proffered it?

Wife : Most heartily, my Dear[.]<sup>18</sup>

It was precisely these kind of differences in ‘Manner and Forms of Worship’ which separated many dissenters from comprehension with the Established Church in the first place. That such differences may now be judged as irrelevant *within the context of family practice* points again to the central premise that Defoe blamed ministers for promulgating the damaging and divisive nature of religious dispute. This applies both to the decline of nonconformity in particular and (as seen in this couple’s initial failure to pray together on the mistaken assumption of their differences) the universal deterioration in Protestant moral and religious conduct.

Bitter divisions within the Established Church such as that which resulted in the Bangorian Controversy of 1717 could only have strengthened such views on Defoe’s part. As had been the case with the Antinomian Controversy nearly thirty years previously, the Bangorian Controversy was essentially a heated and very public debate, conducted in the press largely between ministers of ostensibly shared

religious beliefs, on matters of doctrinal difference and political interest.<sup>19</sup> According to David Blewett, the episode involved fifty-three writers and over two hundred pamphlets; Defoe's contemporary response is largely one of contempt for the petulance and unseemly behaviour of the participants (most of whom were Anglican ministers).<sup>20</sup> Disputes such as these made a mockery of the moral authority invested in ministers of all denominations; this is evident from the synopsis of events provided by Kara Selym Oglan in *The Conduct of Christians*:

At first thou mayst understand, that there hath been a Division first among them not meerly religious, but rather political; some of the Churchmen choosing rather to suffer the Loss of their Ecclesiastick Livings, than to take Oaths of Fidelity and Recognition to the Present King [ie. non-jurors], whom they esteem an Usurper: These, to maintain their Separation, renounce certain Doctrines formerly held among them; to wit, of the King being supreme Head of the Church; from whence they infer, that the present Government of the Church is Schismatical, that they are not lawfully depos'd and turn'd out of their Benefices, but that the Civil Power has usurped upon the Church, which they had nothing to do with; and that the Right of Succession to Ecclesiastick Promotion is still theirs ... Assuredly I do not miscall it, when I say it is a War, altho' it be not carry'd on with Sabre or Gun, or any other carnal Instrument of Offence: A War of the Tongue in these Countries is oftentimes more fatal than that of the Sword.<sup>21</sup>

His contemporary depiction of warring and politically ambitious ministers in this satirical pamphlet makes it considerably less surprising that Defoe should take such pains in the Preface to *The Family Instructor* to distance his authorial identity from ministers 'even of all Opinions' :

If then, after all the pains which have been taken by ministerial Labour and Instruction, and by the pressing Exhortations and moving Arguments of eminent Divines, even of all Opinions, in their Writings on this Subject, this mean and familiar Method should by its Novelty prevail, this will be a happy Undertaking, but no Reproach at all to the Labour of others.<sup>22</sup>

Even with its graceful acknowledgement of past ‘ministerial Labour and instruction’, the purpose of this passage is to remind readers that the author is not a minister; moreover, he promises them a method of moral instruction characterised by literary novelty rather than more ministerial features such as ‘pressing Exhortations and moving Arguments’. Curiously, the speaker’s promise is proffered to readers along with some castigation for their fickle or even immoral literary preferences. At the very least this seems to emphasise that the moral decline Defoe depicts within the early conduct works is intended to mirror the true moral state of English society as he saw it.

Backscheider has suggested a host of further reasons why Defoe, whose reputation was ‘at its lowest point’ at this time, would have wished to evade identification as the author of *The Family Instructor*:

[Defoe] had been writing political tracts in support of the Tory ministry and Harley...as the terms of the unpopular Treaty of Utrecht became known, he shared the opprobrium directed at the ministry by a disappointed populace. Because the treaty seemed to favor Catholic France over England’s Protestant allies and to sacrifice the interests of British merchants, a group Defoe had always insisted he championed, people, and especially rival journalists, accused Defoe of being an unprincipled mercenary hack...In addition, Defoe was under indictment for seditious libel. Accused of calling one of the new king’s regents a “Jacobite”...he could expect to be pilloried again and fined heavily if convicted.<sup>23</sup>

Out of government employ and therefore wholly dependent on booksellers for his income, Defoe would have realized, as Backscheider continues, that ‘a conduct book published with his own name would have drawn ridicule and few sales’. Anonymously published, the first volume of *The Family Instructor* went through ten editions during Defoe’s lifetime.<sup>24</sup> The fact that a non-ministerial, non-specific, religious identity is necessary because of the muddied and complex nature of his own professional reputation is less important than the fact that Defoe takes the need for Protestant religious neutrality (implicit both in authorial anonymity and the declining moral authority of Protestant ministers in general ) and successfully turns it into a new publishing opportunity.

In both volumes of *The Family Instructor*, the tensions between the traditional didactic form and Defoe’s particular manifestation of it are given extra critical impetus by their relationship (both in use of

narrative technique and timing of publication) to the ‘new’ narrative form employed in *Robinson Crusoe*. Defoe announces in the Preface to *The Family Instructor* that the work will straddle popular genres (here, he wishes the text to be read both as a ‘parable’ and a ‘history’):

this history will be the same thing as a parable to the ages to come, in which it may, I hope, be as useful as now; and, above all, as this work is designed for a general, not a particular reproof, I am willing to let it lie hid entirely, as to persons, that it may perhaps look less by that means like a history than really it is ... the design of the book is of a nature above a personal satire; the errors in family conduct are the business here, not the families themselves.<sup>25</sup>

As with *Robinson Crusoe* Defoe sought the widest Protestant reading audience for his conduct works; this might be the most important reason why his ‘parables’ needed to be universally applicable. Because of the need for universal acceptance, his careful treatment of key religious issues, such as the role of ministers, is necessarily thematic though no less clear in outlook: ‘In the pursuit of this book, care is taken to avoid distinction of opinions, as to the Church of England or Dissenter, and no offence can be taken here either on the one side or the other; as I hope both are Christians, so both are treated here as such, and the advice is impartially directed to both, without the least distinction.’<sup>26</sup> Such admirable sentiments are given added impetus by the anonymity of an author whose religious affiliation is, likewise, ‘without the least distinction’.<sup>27</sup>

An alternative reading of Defoe’s authorial position in the conduct works might choose to stress how far they reflect dissenting interests to the exclusion of the established church. Such a reading might reasonably point out that both the title and publication date for the first volume of *The Family Instructor* reveal it as an important response to the Schism Act of August 1714, which made it illegal for dissenters to teach publicly on pain of three months’ imprisonment.<sup>28</sup> In the wake of this Act, the duties of ‘family instructors’ would suddenly have assumed a higher level of importance for conscientious and law-abiding English dissenters (particularly Presbyterians, whose clergy were almost always formally educated). Its timing might have ‘inspired’ Defoe, however, to characterise *The Family Instructor* as first and foremost a response to the Schism Act (which discriminated against dissenters alone) seems somewhat wide of the mark. When one considers the vast social array of characters which he purposely

includes in these narratives, what remains striking is how far Defoe works to universalise their didactic significance. If considered primarily as a nonconformist's response to the Schism Act, *The Family Instructor* must be viewed as an extremely diluted and careful one.

Defoe's conduct works consider the religious duties of individuals within different social roles (as parents, children, spouses, masters and servants, and so on), duties generally observed to be in a state of moral decline. One of the questions repeatedly posed by the conduct works is: who may serve as a 'suitable' instrument of God to inspire faith and good works in others? The broad response to this question almost always suggests that 'anyone', even the most unlikely individual, may do so. We see this in numerous examples of children and servants who serve to convert or at least inspire others to follow a devout life, despite their personal lack of experience, education or social standing.<sup>29</sup> In the first volume of *The Family Instructor*, examples include the youngest child inspiring the father to confront his neglect of religious duties in the family household (Part I, Dialogue I) and Thomas, the good apprentice, who converts Will, the irreligious apprentice (Part II, Dialogue I). In the second volume, we encounter the devout maid-servant Margy who helps to redeem the angelic youngest child Jacky from the sinful ways of his reprobate family (Part II, Dialogue III). Jacky goes on to convert a number of individuals (including his servant, father, and sister) as a 'child lay preacher' in his own right (Part II, Dialogues III to V). In *Religious Courtship*, the wealthy suitor to the youngest daughter is helped towards a life of religious devotion by one of his own farm labourers.

Despite Defoe's myriad examples of unlikely and uneducated 'instruments of God', it worth noting that, in the conduct works, these naïve individuals never *wholly* replace the presence of a more authoritative figure. Usually, a brief suggestion is included to the effect that the admirable efforts of 'lay preachers' need clarifying or strengthening by others more educated in the ways of religion. Moreover, virtually every 'deathbed repentance scene' in Defoe's canon is presided over by the shadowy and indistinct presence of an actual minister even if they have played no previous part in the narrative.<sup>30</sup>

These episodes reflect Defoe's Presbyterian background in that they advocate the necessity of *some* formal religious education or ordination beyond the recognition of faith and good works alone; they represent, however, degrees of scale rather than outright declarations. To specify a necessary level of formal religious education needed by Defoe's 'lay preachers' would contradict the unbiased and popular

application his work was intended to serve. The continued effacement of any clear signals regarding his own religious belief is perhaps the strongest indication that Defoe associated notions of authorial identity with his ability to gain readership.

Equally, in the conduct works and *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe consistently expresses his unwavering faith in Scriptural authority and Scriptural sufficiency, that is, the Bible's use as a final court of appeal in matters of dispute. Scriptural sufficiency remained a fundamental tenet of faith for nonconformists throughout the seventeenth century (and was cited as such in *The Four Heads of Agreement*); this outlook must in turn be contrasted with the later breakdown of Presbyterian ideals in the wake of Augustan rationalism and widespread scepticism regarding Scriptural authority.<sup>31</sup> John Locke remains perhaps the most explicit spokesman of this philosophical development. His controversial tract *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures* (1695) ostensibly shared the theme of Baxter's more moderate *Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1667). Its altered title, however, emphasised its dramatic point of departure : faith and good works are sufficient articles of salvation for the common man; material contained within the creeds and 'informed Scriptures' is superfluous and only suitable for 'learned men':

Though all divine Revelation requires the obedience of Faith; yet every truth of informed Scriptures is not one of those, that by the Law of Faith is required to be explicitly believed by Justification. What those are, we have seen by what our Saviour and his Apostles proposed to, and required in those who they Converted to the Faith [ie: that Christ was the Messiah]. Those are fundamentals ... But any other Proposition contained in the Scripture, which God has not thus made a necessary part of the Law of Faith, (without an actual assent to which he will not allow any one to be a Believer) a Man may be ignorant of, without hazarding his Salvation by a defect in his Faith.<sup>32</sup>

As Roger Thomas concludes, in Locke's work, 'The essentials of Christianity were reduced to the Apostolic confession that Jesus was the Christ. Not very surprisingly the book, as Locke himself reported, displeased "our divines both conformist and Nonconformist"'.<sup>33</sup>

Locke's controversial work did displease many people, perhaps most notably Mary Astell.<sup>34</sup> There is no direct reference to it in Defoe's canon nor does it feature in the sale catalogue of titles in the Defoe/Farewell posthumous libraries.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, Defoe's widespread employment of the most unexpected and non-patriarchal representatives of society to serve as promulgators of religious salvation (including young children, farm labourers, maidservants and pagan cannibals) suggests in principle that he would not have agreed with Locke's general premise that the uneducated and labouring classes lack the rational capacity to benefit from further Scriptural consultation.

Defoe's conviction in Scriptural authority and Scriptural sufficiency are upheld throughout the early conduct works and *Robinson Crusoe*. By the time that he publishes *The History and Reality of Apparitions* (1727), however, Defoe's approach is demonstrably different and more cynical. He suggests that the use of extensive Biblical reference would bore or discourage his readers:

And though I shall trouble my readers with as little as possible out of Scripture, especially at the beginning of my work, because I am unwilling they should throw it by before they read it out, which there would be some danger of, if I should begin too grave ... I shall be as short as I can.<sup>36</sup>

Twenty-three years have passed since Defoe's unapologetic citation, in *The Storm*, of the Scriptures as direct 'proof' of God's power, equal if not superior to any empirical evidence presented by natural philosophers. Although he does not imply that his own religious outlook has changed, he makes clear that the tastes of his reading audience have; this is what dictates the alteration of his literary style. The change in the audience's tastes is itself a further indication of moral decline in English society since, as suggested in *The Present State of the Parties in Great Britain*, the two are mutually corruptible:

The Third and Last Article laid down, in the Beginning of this Essay, is the Taste of our People in Hearing; and, indeed, this suffers equal Defection : Whether the woful Degeneracy of the Ministry proceeds from that of the People, or this Error of the People from the Ministry, shall not be enquir'd here, least the Evil should appear Reciprocal, and they be found like Men in a Plague, mutually to Infect one another.

That our Taste of Preaching is alter'd with the Preaching, is evident from the People we run after, and the People we run from...These are so many Testimonies, that the Taste of the Town, debauch'd by Novelty, is corrupted and carry'd away with a Stream; that the true Gospel Principle of Hearing the Word without Respect of Persons, is lost from among us.<sup>37</sup>

Rather disturbingly, both in the early conduct works and *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe will justify his own employment of literary novelty in similar terms since it is the fickle tastes of his readers which dictate his use of 'new' forms. In the context of the passage cited here, the moral implications for a degenerate ministry and debauched congregation - 'mutually to Infect one another' with 'reciprocal Evil' – are ominous indeed.

### **Narrative Technique in Defoe's Works from 1715**

In *The Origins of the English Novel*, Michael McKeon's exploration of 'histories of the individual' describes in those works the 'recurrence, and...constant equilibration, of a formal tension between what might be called the individual life and the overarching pattern'.<sup>38</sup> In Defoe's fiction, this tension is made manifest by his increasingly complex representations of individual or subjective experience punctuated by episodes in which traditional literary devices are employed (the prophetic dream, the deathbed scene, dialogue, and so on). In his conduct works, this tension is also echoed in aspects of the physical setting Defoe selects for his narratives. The family household and its immediate domestic environment (incorporating neighbours, extended family members, and other acquaintances) represents the point of interface between the individual and their role as a member of the wider social community. It is a role with many moral and religious obligations incumbent upon it. This, despite its title, is the wider social realm of responsibility investigated in both volumes of *The Family Instructor*.

Taken en masse, the narratives do not merely consider how members of an immediate family household (spouses, children, servants, and apprentices) fulfil their moral and religious duties towards each other; they also explore how these roles are taken up by members of the wider social community. It is for this reason that my focus on Defoe's conduct works will not be overly concerned with sociocultural definitions of 'family' or 'kinship' as they apply to early modern England. Much excellent work on this subject has been undertaken by social historians whose analysis of contemporary literature and

demographic data have informed our understanding of the concept of family in this period.<sup>39</sup> *The Family Instructor* offers strong evidence to support Lawrence Stone's arguments concerning the increasingly exclusive nature of the nuclear family unit in early modern Europe.<sup>40</sup> This investigation acknowledges tacitly Stone's description of the growth of 'affective individualism' in this period; here it may be seen in Defoe's portrayals of subjective or individual experience versus that of characters' participation in a wider social landscape (including but by no means restricted to the family household).<sup>41</sup>

Ian Watt's scholarly analysis of affective individualism has definitely identified the social and emotional contours of many of Defoe's later protagonists in the novels. The utter isolation of these later narrators - in terms of severed family ties, changed names, and emotional distance from the social context in which they find themselves - is a defining feature of the later fictional works. Deeply implicated in this sense of isolation is the 'voice' of subjective experience these protagonists articulate through the use of first-person narrative, and yet, despite Defoe's employment of third-person narrative in the earlier conduct works, he is increasingly concerned in them with the depiction of subjective experience.

Because of the use of third-person narrative and dialogue throughout *The Family Instructor* and *Religious Courtship*, Defoe's portrayal of subjectivity is necessarily limited in scope. This, too, seems logical in that the remit of all of the conduct works is to describe the roles and responsibilities within a social landscape rather than to explore experience from the 'inside'. Defoe's more traditional format would also make these works readily identifiable to readers familiar with a popular genre including works as outwardly diverse as Thomas Brookes' aphoristic *Apples of Gold for Young Men and Women* (1662) and Richard Baxter's dialogues in *Poor Man's Family Book* (1674), both of which were still in print in the early eighteenth century.

Defoe's adherence to key aspects of the traditional genre of moral instruction, however, goes far beyond his desire for popular appeal. An author like Defoe, so readily familiar with the potential recognition to be achieved by works of satire – positively or negatively – might have made something very different out of the material to hand in *The Family Instructor*. Instead, the early conduct works address with all seriousness a series of domestic conflicts which contrast traditional moral and religious values with aspirations associated with the more recently-conceived cultural status of the individual. Christopher Flint has suggested that

Amplifying the scientific and philosophic rationalism synthesized by Locke and championed by others such as Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, and Newton, eighteenth-century writers of fiction began to address the problems associated with the newly-conceived social, political, and economic status of the individual without necessarily transforming the social contexts that produce individuals. They were concerned with the effect of these intellectual changes on the fabric of everyday life, on how individuals juggled their own interests with those of the family, the magistrate, the landowner, the mob, and the crown. At the same time, such writers also wanted to diminish some of the power of the individualism they were, in theory, promoting.<sup>42</sup>

Individualism, in these terms, becomes the highly desirable but morally ambiguous form of social, political and economic status embodied by Defoe's later protagonists. Certainly the tension between form and content in the conduct works also relates to the same binary distinctions (the needs of society at large versus those of the individual, traditional dialogue format versus passages of descriptive realism or those portraying subjective experience). Defoe's narratives stretch their traditional format to its very limits. It is worth observing that Defoe, at this point, remains untrammelled by the self-imposed boundaries of literary genre that would be 'stretched' so imaginatively and self-consciously by Laurence Sterne a few decades later; Defoe's near-palpable efforts to rein in the burgeoning narratives of *The Family Instructor* offer the reader a rare glimpse of some of formative processes which will result in that genre.

A brief structural analysis of *The Family Instructor* reveals a series of dialogues between members of an extended family; dialogues are preceded by authorial explanations, most of which are concerned with the establishment of setting (time and place) and an outline of family relationships. In turn, dialogues are generally followed by further explanatory 'Notes' in which the author guides the reader towards the correct interpretation of what they have read. As dialogues (and knowledge of previous dialogues) between family members accumulate, and the setting increases in scope and complexity (time frames shift forward and back; separate dialogues occur simultaneously in different rooms of a household), the supporting 'framework' of authorial Notes must work harder to accommodate the cumulative narrative as it is perceived by the reader.

This is exemplified in the third Dialogue of Part III in which four and a half pages of preliminary contextual material precedes the dialogue itself. The author explains that the previous two dialogues took place ‘some time past, in order to introduce this part, and preserve the Connection of the History. The Daughter is now to be talked of, as having been married some time. The Son was gone to Travel.’<sup>43</sup> Reading passages like this, it appears that Defoe’s cumulative narrative is beginning to gain the momentum of an extended work of fiction while being actively constrained by the structure in which it is presented. Defoe uses the authorial Notes to re-orient his readers at regular intervals through a burgeoning fictional narrative, constantly reminding us of underlying moral relevance ‘behind’ the story.

Simultaneously, the reader’s interest is increasingly engaged by other elements of Defoe’s narrative technique; character portrayal through lively and idiosyncratic dialogue, detailed visual imagery, the complex surface of objects. The third Dialogue of Part III also describes an episode in which the eldest daughter (first met at her parents’ home in Part I) has now married a sober and pious man but is not yet reconciled to his desire for proper religious conduct in their household. After an argument, and the husband’s departure, the following passage appears. Although written in the first person and ostensibly forming part of the dialogue, its significance is clearly in the portrayal of the wife’s internal emotional state observed through many small details:

When her Husband was gone, and she had sat a while, and mused upon what she had done; her Passion began to abate, and Reason to take Place again in her Soul; and first her Unkindness to her Husband began to shew it self to her; I believe (she says to herself), I have anger’d him heartily; well, it can’t be help’d now, let him ev’n take it if he will.

But a little further thinking brought her more to her self, and then her Affection to him stirred in her, and she breaks out again ... Away she goes to speak to him, but cannot find him; she enquires for him, the Servants say he is in his Closet; up she flies thither, but he has come down again, and was gone out; then looking out at the Window, she saw him at a Distance walking away very melancholly in some Fields near the House all alone by himself : By this Time she was entirely come to her self, and seeing him walk so solitarily, made her very uneasie; she sends a Servant to him, to tell him she desired to speak with him, and in

hopes of his coming, she run out into the Garden to meet him, but the Boy brought her Word again he was gone, and he could not find him.

Now she began violently to reproach her self with her ill Usage of her Husband, and shutting her self into her Chamber, she reflected bitterly on her self...[a page of her further self-recriminations, presented as internal monologue, follow]<sup>44</sup>

In a wholly traditional dialogue format, the didactic purposes of this episode could have been served by a one-line description of her distress. As it is, the myriad of detail contained within this passage is significant enough to recall what Ian Watt has observed concerning realism in the novel:

the relationship of realistic particularity to some specific aspects of narrative technique must first be established. Two such aspects suggest themselves as of especial importance in the novel – characterization, and presentation of background : the novel is surely distinguished from other genres and from previous forms of fiction by the amount of attention it habitually accords both to the individualization of its characters and to the detailed presentation of their environment.<sup>45</sup>

While remaining firmly established within the popular genre of conduct literature, both *The Family Instructor* and *Religious Courtship* present the reader with abundant examples of the kind of realistic particularity that we associate so readily with Defoe's extended works of fiction. This will be considered further in relation to *Robinson Crusoe* in the next chapter. Much of what I will suggest there concerning Defoe's ability to portray vividly the immediacy of sense-impressions, derived from his wholesale embrace of Lockean principles, also holds true for the early conduct works. Although realistic particularity is a considerably less prevalent feature of *The Family Instructor* than *Robinson Crusoe*, the difference is merely one of proportion (as Watt suggests above, an 'amount of attention') rather than any strict delineation of genre.

This is even more evident in the second volume of *The Family Instructor* (1718). Here, in an overall structure similar to that in Volume One, Defoe begins to employ dialogues 'within' dialogues, thereby allowing characters in the 'framing dialogue' to interject into the second, third, and respective dialogues,

both to react to their content in emotional terms and to reflect upon their moral significance in relation to their own circumstances. Part Two of this work, ‘regarding the religious education and the godly discipline of children’, begins with five pages of explanatory prose relating the circumstances of a ‘substantial trading man, above the world, as we say; a man in very flourishing circumstances’, widowed young with several children.

Despite appearing very sober and religious to others, this merchant-father has a violent temper; the first and ‘framing’ dialogue occurs between him and a passing neighbour who knocks at the door because he hears (and wishes to prevent) the severe beating of one of the sons for a minor misdemeanour. The merchant-father and neighbour have a lengthy debate regarding the correct discipline of children as written in the Scriptures before the neighbour begins to tell the father a brief story concerning another neighbour who suffered for the rash and violent treatment of his children; the two then agree to suspend the story until a more convenient time.

The second dialogue sees the neighbour resuming his story for the benefit of the merchant-father. By maintaining the ‘framing’ dialogue’ as a means of relating the second narrative, Defoe is able to include interjections, comments and questions from the merchant-father. The neighbour’s story actually consists of several separate anecdotes in which the behaviour of different fathers is considered; one features an overly fond and indulgent father while another tale depicts a father who favours one son at the expense of others. The narratives grow in complexity and number; the neighbour from the original framing dialogue narrates some details of his stories directly while other aspects are provided in the form of yet more dialogues. The conclusion of this section sees the merchant-father and his neighbour resume their discussion of child-rearing and religious conduct in families. On parting, the neighbour promises to return the next evening to tell another story (the extended narrative of Jacky and the naidservant Margy, which itself consists of numerous dialogues and complex shifts in time frames).

At its conclusion, the framing dialogue between the merchant-father and his voluble neighbour is resumed with yet another story of a violent man who nearly destroys his domestic happiness. More dialogues, and more interjections from the merchant-father and his neighbour concerning the story at hand, follow. What is being ‘stretched’, in Part Two of the second volume of *The Family Instructor*, is the dialogue format itself. In trying to represent more and more of the individual and subjective

experience of the merchant-father as witness to a spectrum of parental behaviour, Defoe has exploited the dialogue format to its very limits. The constraints of the traditional format make it extremely difficult to represent, with any virtuosity, the cumulative effects of all of the neighbour's stories on the merchant-father (in 1759 Tristram Shandy will have a similar problem in trying to describe the story of his birth). Yet, through his perception of the neighbour's stories (on which he has been able to make comments and ask questions), the merchant-father comes to a better understanding of what his own conduct should be towards his own unhappy family. Although no first-person narrative relates from the 'inside' how the merchant-father feels about what has taken place during the course of the neighbour's story-telling sessions, all of the impetus of those stories is focused upon the merchant-father's ability to reflect upon them and interrogate his previous behaviour in relation to them.

On one level, the merchant-father from the framing dialogue is simply the first of a series of anonymous and emblematic figures that Defoe employs in his moral tales. On another level, his is sole witness to the cumulative experience of the spectrum of life that has been related to him and which he may use to improve his moral conduct. The other figures who populate the subsequent narratives in Part Two (including a plethora of ill-tempered fathers, Jacky, Margy, and the sea captain) are purely emblematic; the subjective experience of the merchant-father alone serves as a cumulative witness to all of the moral examples they set.

A similar process occurs in *Religious Courtship* (1722), a conduct work produced after *Robinson Crusoe*, whose chronology therefore suggests that Defoe wished to explore further this particular form of narrative. In this sense, *Robinson Crusoe* represents only one of a series of possibilities exploited by Defoe in his portrayal of subjective experience and not the sole path 'towards' the novel. The narratives in *Religious Courtship*, once again in the form of dialogues and authorial 'Notes', all address the issue of religious compatibility within marriage. Like the merchant-father in the second volume of *The Family Instructor*, the middle daughter in *Religious Courtship* is the primary recipient for moral instruction; her individual experience is subject to the cumulative effect of all the narratives within the text. Unlike the merchant-father, the middle daughter does not act upon the examples set before her and lives to regret her careless choice of marital partner. In this estimation, both figures are protagonists within their respective narratives and share with Crusoe, Captain Singleton and Moll Flanders at least the prospect of some form of moral enlightenment and redemption. That the fledgling protagonist in *Religious*

*Courtship* should fail in so doing suggests, as in all of Defoe's works of fiction, the precarious nature of spiritual redemption as a function of individual moral choice.

In these early conduct works, the relationship between such disparate features of narrative technique (on the one hand, realistic particularity; on the other, more traditional didactic interludes in the form of dialogue and authorial 'Notes') is often an uneasy one. Whether this is more the case for readers today, so far removed from the cultural context of popular didactic literature that generated these texts, remains to be determined. It is clear that some of these didactic techniques continue to appear in the later extended works of fiction; *Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders* and all of Defoe's later protagonists offer their readers some grave admonitions on the moral significance of their personal experience. Equally, these passages have always proved problematic ones for readers and have generated ample speculative criticism concerning the 'sincerity' of such narrators. Putting aside the slippery notion of 'sincerity' in relation to a fictional protagonist, re-examination of Defoe's conduct works prior to *Robinson Crusoe* tells us a great deal about why Defoe made the change to first-person narration, and in doing so, altered his narrative technique so dramatically towards the literary portrayal of individual experience.

Defoe's conduct works lack any discernible sense of self-consciousness or irony in their didactic 'interludes' and overall intention because, at the time of their writing, the relationship between the reader and author-persona had not yet become codified. Defoe chose, in *Robinson Crusoe* and his later extended works of fiction, to reject at least the formal semblance of an external authorial 'presence' as adopted in the conduct works. In this sense at least, the nearest literary relations to *The Family Instructor* and *Religious Courtship* will be the novels of Henry Fielding and George Eliot. Defoe's author-persona in *The Family Instructor* and *Religious Courtship* possesses little of the consummate sense of control of narrative possessed by these later authors. At the same time, given their appearance in a cultural period always exactly halfway between *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Tom Jones*, there is at least a strong sense that Defoe, in his portrayal of fledgling protagonists such as merchant-father or the middle daughter, is also portraying subjective experience in a form now wholly removed from Bunyan's emblematic figures.<sup>46</sup>

In the conduct works, Defoe chose to work within the constraints of a popular genre which, by its very nature, is concerned with social behaviour and moral conduct (that is, interaction with *others*). Themes

are purposely addressed through a veritable catalogue of externally-rendered social roles (mother, father, younger and older children, servants, neighbours, business associates, aunts and uncles, and so on) in order to make their moral relevance as widely applicable as possible. At the same time, Defoe's burgeoning narratives, in which characters become increasingly enmeshed within a complex framework of moral circumstance, are moving towards a portrayal of experience that is *more* individual and subjective.

As has already been suggested, Defoe is an author fully aware that individualism, conceived in distinct terms of social, political and economic status, is both appealing and morally ambiguous. This may be surmised from a comprehensive reading of the early conduct works since Defoe contrasts instances of moral failure and success throughout. In balancing the proportion of variant endings, Defoe manages to remain resolutely on the fence regarding both the moral implications of individualism and, by extension, his wholesale endorsement of (particularly the religious component) of philosophic rationalism.

In the conduct works, Defoe is entirely reluctant to embrace wholeheartedly the religious implications of Lockean rationalism as put forth in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695). Defoe's use of non-patriarchal and socially peripheral figures (specifically children, servants and labourers) who succeed in converting others into good Protestants and interpreters of Scripture announces this agenda as it contradicts summarily the spirit of Locke's proposition that such individuals can derive no benefit from Scriptural consultation.

Perhaps more significantly, Locke's rejection as superfluous of all but a few basic tenets of the Christian faith also questions the justification for dissent itself:

The Dissenting Congregations are supposed by their Teachers to be more accurately instructed in matters of Faith; and better to understand the Christian Religion, than the vulgar Conformists, who are charged with great ignorance; How truly I will not determine. But I ask them to tell me seriously, whether half their People have leisure to study? Nay, Whether one in ten of those who come to their Meetings in the Country, if they had time to study them, do or can understand, the Controversies at this time so warmly managed amongst them, about Justification, the subject of this present Treatise. I have talked to some of their

Teachers, who confess themselves not to understand the difference in debate between them. And yet the points they stand on, are reckoned of so great weight, so material, so fundamental in Religion, that they divide Communion and separate upon them.<sup>47</sup>

This represents the end-point of Lockean rationalism in religious terms. The bleak social landscapes of the later works of fiction, lacking all but the most rudimentary features of religion, are also implicated in Locke's wholesale rejection of religious difference. For Defoe, Locke's deism illustrates the moral dangers incumbent in an over-rationalised Christianity and, as he warned dissenters against in *The Present State of the Parties in Great Britain*, a poorly-educated dissenting ministry:

I know the Spirit of God is not confin'd to study Learning, length of Time, or any Human Means. But even those who are most apt to lay stress upon the Efficiency of the Spirit, without helps of Letters, Study, and Application, will not pretend that these Helps are a Hinderance to that Spirit : But we are speaking now of the Interest, as it respects the Times, and the Dissenters as a Party; in which the want of these outward Means has produc'd such Mischevious effects among us.<sup>48</sup>

In the conduct works Defoe makes the tacit point that, although children and the uneducated are capable of spiritual salvation through rational thought and Scriptural interpretation, religious guidance of a higher calibre is often necessary. In the first volume of *The Family Instructor*, Will requires the help and guidance of his master's wife to read his Bible properly, and in Volume Two, even the angelic Jacky needs Lady Barbara's help to further his religious understanding.

Also implicated in Defoe's bestowal of spiritual wisdom on non-patriarchal figures is an indictment of the sort of patriarchal figures who *should* provide suitable sources of moral authority. Such figures must include ministers - outside the family household - since those who provide spiritual guidance are usually members of the wider community. These include neighbours, members of the extended family, or local acquaintances like Jacky's friend Lady Barbara. Others, less fortunate in chancing upon the spiritual mentors that a social landscape without ministers can – but does not always – provide, fall by the wayside.

Despite their capacity for rational judgement and their faith, individuals still require moral support and religious guidance from their community. In some instances, Providence offers this support in the form of caring neighbours or sympathetic sea captains. Taken as a whole, Defoe's variations of failed and successful instances of salvation across the conduct works attest to the complexity and variety of extenuating circumstances which impinge upon moral and religious conduct. Their diversity, and Defoe's fledgling portrayals of subjective experience in the conduct works, imply that variations of individual experience must be accommodated even if they are not always consistent with the moral objectives of the larger narrative or the didactic genre itself.

If portrayed from the 'outside' – and, as seen throughout the early conduct works, if readers are further guided by a distinct authorial presence – a protagonist's experience tends to be summarised in moral terms of black or white, salvation or damnation, resolution or failure. Such summative evaluations of an individual's experience are valuable, even necessary, to fulfil the didactic requirements of conduct literature. I would argue that Defoe's use of first-person narrative in the later fictions depicts a more morally ambiguous social landscape since his protagonists do not summatively evaluate their subjective experience in these terms.

First-person narrators such as Crusoe generate their own moral authority and are guided by it; as such, theirs is necessarily a more complex rendering of subjective experience. By the same token, Defoe's portrayal of subjective experience in the conduct works will always appear limited in scope when compared against what we have come to expect from novels. Christopher Flint has suggested that Defoe was fully aware of the limitations of literary representations of individualism:

In their distinct ways, early eighteenth-century writers like Behn and Defoe already knew that a transcendental ideal (the authentic self) was unrepresentable, and they therefore wrote fictions in which distinguishing individual desire from ideological constraints was both tantalizing and futile. As Defoe's narratives suggest, emerging concepts of identity often pitted the individual against the community, tradition, and social (particularly familial) responsibility while depending upon those traditional social structures individualism appeared to oppose.<sup>49</sup>

In the early conduct works, Defoe's employment of third-person narrative and a recognizable (if emblematic) English social landscape provides us with protagonists still clearly engaged in the battle for an 'emerging concept of identity'. They are also, therefore, still subject to the moral and religious duties incumbent upon that landscape even if the pressing appeal of individual desire may be discerned in the burgeoning descriptions of both their subjectivity and their surroundings. A preliminary glance at *Robinson Crusoe*, in which dramatic changes both in the visible landscape and the use of first-person narrative suggest a sea-change from the form of the conduct works, imply that this 'battle' has already been fought and won. This is only part of the picture; in many ways, *Robinson Crusoe* represents not the first of Defoe's 'novels' or extended works of fiction but rather an extended conduct book engaged in many of the same questions regarding moral and religious duty as *The Family Instructor*.

Although reconfigured within a wholly imaginative and emblematic landscape, and thus distanced from local or domestic wrangles concerning (for example) relations between Nonconformists and disputative ministers, *Robinson Crusoe* presents readers with a protagonist engaged in a complex journey towards spiritual resolution. Implicated in this very struggle is the relationship between community – at the very least human companionship – and faith itself; the direction is not merely an extension of the drive towards individualism and self-sufficiency since Crusoe's isolation is rendered in terms of physically threatening circumstances and emotional despair. Crusoe progresses through very distinct stages of spiritual development, much in the traditional matter of spiritual autobiography, in relation to (at first) his pious acceptance of his social isolation, and then his discovery of greater spiritual contentment through his companionate relationship with Friday. In this sense, *Robinson Crusoe* represents a drive not towards individualism but towards a newly-configured form of community.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Present State of the Parties in Great Britain: Particularly an Enquiry into the State of the Dissenters in England...*, London, 1712, p.329.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p.286.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, Preface (n.p). On the background to the passage of the Occasional Conformity Act, see N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987), pp.36-7.

<sup>4</sup> Defoe, *Present State*, p.342.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.285.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pp.288-90.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe...*, ed. By Michael Shinagel (New York and London: Norton, 1994), pp.57-9.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Conduct of Christians Made the Sport of Infidels (1717), Satire, Fantasy and Writings on the Supernatural by Daniel Defoe*, ed. David Blewett (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), pp.34-5.

- <sup>9</sup> M. E. Novak makes this observation in relation to Defoe's *Turkish Spy* works as well as his *Mercurius Politicus*. See his *Daniel Defoe : Master of Fictions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.501, pp.522-5; see also Paula Backscheider's Introduction to *The Family Instructor (1715) : A Facsimile Reproduction*, p.7.
- <sup>10</sup> On this depiction of Defoe, see for example James Sutherland, *Daniel Defoe : Citizen of the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), in particular pp.150-75, pp.283-305; James Sutherland, *Defoe* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971), pp.52-5. Brian Fitzgerald, *Daniel Defoe: A Study in Conflict* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1954), pp.89-102, pp.131-3. There has long been a critical tendency to 'modernize' Defoe within his critical milieu; see Manuel Schonhorn's discussion of this point in 'Defoe, Political Parties and the Monarch', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 15 (1986), 187-97 (pp.191-2).
- <sup>11</sup> Backscheider, op.cit., pp.5-7.
- <sup>12</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Conduct of Christians*, p.25.
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p.40.
- <sup>14</sup> It is important to note, however, that in *A Continuation of Letters from a Turkish Spy* (1718) Defoe adopted a narrator already familiar to readers from the highly popular volumes originally published in French from 1684; on this point see M. E. Novak's *Master of Fictions*, pp.528-530; and David Blewett's Introduction to *Satire, Fantasy and Writings on the Supernatural by Daniel Defoe*, pp.48ff. Although a new narrator is employed in *The Conduct of Christians*, the details of his identity as revealed in Defoe's Introduction are not exploited in the main text that follows.
- <sup>15</sup> Example of Defoe as modern...
- <sup>16</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Family Instructor (1715), A Facsimile Reproduction*, p.116.
- <sup>17</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Religious Courtship (1722), The Novels and Miscellaneous Works of Daniel De Foe*, ed. by Sir Walter Scott (London: Thomas Tegg, 1840), XIV:200-204.
- <sup>18</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Family Instructor (1715), A Facsimile Reproduction*, p.277.
- <sup>19</sup> On the Bangorian Controversy, see W. A. Speck, *Stability and Strife : England 1714-1760* (London : Edward Arnold Publishers, 1977), pp.94-5; see also contemporary documents reproduced in *Religion and Society in England and Wales 1688-1800*, ed. by William Gibson (London: Leicester University Press, 1998), pp.81-5.
- <sup>20</sup> David Blewett, Introduction to *Satire, Fantasy and Writings on the Supernatural by Daniel Defoe*, pp.6-7.
- <sup>21</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Conduct of Christians Made the Sport of Infidels*, pp.35-6.
- <sup>22</sup> Daniel Defoe, Introduction to *The Family Instructor (1715), A Facsimile Reproduction*, p.3.
- <sup>23</sup> Paula R. Backscheider, Introduction to *The Family Instructor, A Facsimile Reproduction*, p.8.
- <sup>24</sup> Figures for published editions of Defoe's conduct works may be found in Laura A. Curtis, 'A Case Study of Defoe's Domestic Conduct Manuals Suggested by *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature* 10 (1981), 411, 424.
- <sup>25</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Family Instructor, Volume I (1715), The Novels and Miscellaneous Works of Daniel De Foe*, ed. Sir Walter Scott, London 1841, XV:192-3.
- <sup>26</sup> Daniel Defoe, Introduction to *The Family Instructor (1715) from A Facsimile Reproduction*, p.2.
- <sup>27</sup> See also Laura Curtis' observation regarding Defoe's intentions in drawing the widest possible Protestant readership for *The Family Instructor* : 'A Case Study of Defoe's Domestic Conduct Manuals Suggested by *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England*', 409-428.
- <sup>28</sup> This is the central premise offered by Irving N. Rothman in 'Defoe's *The Family Instructor* : A Response to the Schism Act', *Papers of the Bibliographic Society of America* 74 (1980), 201-20; M. E. Novak, *Daniel Defoe : Master of Fictions*, pp.483-9.
- <sup>29</sup> This is also discussed by G. A. Starr in *Defoe and Casuistry*, p.4, pp.37-8; Christopher Flint, *Family Fictions : Narrative and Domestic Relations in Britain, 1688-1798* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp.138ff.
- <sup>30</sup> 'Deathbed repentance scenes' may be found in *The Family Instructor, Volume One* (Part III, Dialogues III-IV) and *Volume Two* (Part II, Dialogue IV).
- <sup>31</sup> Roger Thomas, *The English Presbyterians : From Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism*, pp.103-9, pp.127ff; see also Duncan Coomer, *English Dissent Under the Early Hanoverians*, pp.64-5, pp.145-6.
- <sup>32</sup> John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures*, London 1695, p.300.
- <sup>33</sup> Roger Thomas, *The English Presbyterians : From Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism*, p.146.
- <sup>34</sup> Mary Astell [1666-1731] expressed strong opposition to Lockean notions of religious pluralism as part of a wider (Tory) rejection of religious toleration generally and her sympathy with non-jurors; see her entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford 2004-5.
- <sup>35</sup> *The Libraries of Daniel Defoe and Phillips Farewell*; the catalogue contains numerous (and multiple) copies of Locke's other works including his *Two Treatises on Government* (1690); *Essay on Toleration* (1689/90); *Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (1695) and *Essay on Education* (1705).

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- <sup>36</sup> Daniel Defoe, *An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions*, London 1727, p.8.
- <sup>37</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Present State of the Parties in Great Britain*, pp.325-7.
- <sup>38</sup> Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p.90.
- <sup>39</sup> Of particular influence on this chapter are Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Penguin Books, 1977); Christopher Flint, *Family Fictions : Narrative and Domestic Relations in Britain, 1688-1798*. Flint's Introduction provides a useful overview of prevalent studies of the family in early modern England, pp.5-12.
- <sup>40</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, *ibid.* See in particular Chapter Four, 'The Decline of Kinship, Clientage and Community', pp.93-4, pp.145-6.
- <sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, pp.151-3.
- <sup>42</sup> Christopher Flint, *Family Fictions*, p.14.
- <sup>43</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Family Instructor* (1715), *A Facsimile Reproduction*, pp.344ff.
- <sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, pp.361-3.
- <sup>45</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel : Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Penguin Books, 1957 : reprinted 1970), p.18.
- <sup>46</sup> The two parts of *The Pilgrim's Progress* appeared in 1678 and 1684; *Tom Jones* was published in 1749.
- <sup>47</sup> John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures*, London, 1695, p.303.
- <sup>48</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Present State of the Parties in Great Britain*, p.339.
- <sup>49</sup> Christopher Flint, *Family Fictions*, p.118.