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THE METAPHYSICS OF *ROBINSON CRUSOE*

BY WOLFRAM SCHMIDGEN

For the last thirty years or so, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) has interested us mainly because it represents the political, economic, and material forces that helped shape the modern world. For most scholars today, *Robinson Crusoe* is still a novel that is preoccupied with physical objects and actions, with the self and its preservation, with the domination of nature, with empire and Britain's growing global reach. It is a novel deeply invested in problems of ownership, appropriation, accumulation, and exchange. We like to believe that these problems shape the way Defoe represents persons, actions, and things, and that this way borrows from empiricism's close observation of ordinary realities to generate a fictional realism that represents the things of the world as quantifiable resources, ready for manipulation and exploitation by the sovereign individual. The remarkable resilience of Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) and its interpretation of *Crusoe* as *homo economicus* is no doubt indebted to our investment in *Robinson Crusoe* as an expression of modern materialism.

The argument that *Robinson Crusoe* is a spiritual text whose hard material surfaces are ultimately wired to questions of faith and redemption seems far away. Such religious interpretations as George Starr's *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (1965) and J. Paul Hunter's *The Reluctant Pilgrim* (1966) lost authority after the political turn of the 1980s, which focused our interest on literature's relationship to social and political power. It did not help, meanwhile, that Starr's and Hunter's books (and Defoe criticism of the 1960s and '70s more generally) attempted to redeem Defoe as a self-conscious artist whose fictions displayed surprising unity and coherence.¹ For the political turn also nourished postmodern doubts about authorial agency and anything resembling Aristotelian ideas of structural order. As a result, our most accomplished religious readings of *Robinson Crusoe* lost further authority. But while Starr's and Hunter's interest in structural order continues to stand in the way of a full reconsideration of the arguments they offered in the 1960s, a recent historical event has helped to render aspects of their books newly relevant.

I am thinking of a fall day in 2001 that reminded us—brutally—that our very material world is still subject to the spiritual. 9/11 brought home the force of religious belief with devastating destruction and loss of life. On that bright morning, metaphysics defeated physics, melting our technological superiority in the heat of religious enthusiasm. This event prompted scholars of American literature and culture to rethink the place we have allotted religion in our histories of modern society. The decline of religious belief has for a long time served as a periodizing paradigm that closely associates the modernization of Western societies with their increasing secularization. This no longer seems viable. The shock of 9/11 made clear that secular society does not exist separately from intense religiosity. In response, scholars have begun to acknowledge religion as a constant of human culture that cannot be transfigured or neutralized, not even by the supposedly disenchanting rationalizations of modernity.² Scholars of American literature and culture have named this reorientation “post-secular criticism.” Given how our literary histories have leaned on the process of secularization—think only of the various arguments in which literature or the aesthetic assumes some of the functions of religion in a less overtly religious world—the question of how literary history has to be rewritten by a post-secular criticism has become pressing in many fields of literary study.

It is in the context of this historical shift—which also coincides with a substantial religious turn among historians and a rapprochement between philosophy and metaphysics—that Hunter’s and Starr’s arguments are regaining some of the authority they lost in the 1980s. What I find particularly valuable is their recognition that Defoe’s novels persistently interlace the material and the spiritual, the physical and the metaphysical. This essay grows out of the same recognition, but like Katherine Clark, I would like to leave behind the emphasis on Puritan traditions and genres as formative influences on Defoe’s fictions.³ The psychological slant of much of the work on the literary consequences of puritanism has constructed Defoe’s fictional order through the self-reflective character who tells his or her life story. Such construction handily supports the Aristotelian emphasis on beginnings, middles, and ends, unity of action, and so on. But I do not believe that such categories as character, life, or even self-reflection are primary influences on Defoe’s fictional designs. Our interest in these categories has distracted us, I would suggest, from the source of Defoe’s fictional order: the elaboration of an anti-Aristotelian aesthetic through religious metaphysics.

That Defoe had an aesthetic theory is today not widely advertised, perhaps because we have become used to acknowledging that Defoe's fictions are a bit irregular and may lack a tangible commitment to form. Yet this theory is prominently on display right at the entrance of Defoe's novels. Even a casual visit indicates where we might find the metaphysical roots of Defoe's fictional order. The central principle of his fiction, Defoe insists repeatedly, is infinite variety. The brief preface to *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, states that "the Wonders of this Man's Life exceed all that . . . is to be found extant; the Life of one Man being scarce capable of greater Variety."⁴ Defoe makes good on this promise: from being the son of a middle-class father with a clear place in the world, Crusoe becomes a sailor, a trader, a slave, a planter, a slave-trader, a jack-of-all-trades on a desert island where he makes umbrellas, bread, pots, boats, and ends up a rich trader whose fortunes exceed all that one would expect after 28 years in almost total isolation. Defoe's faith in variety (and the way it pays off) also inspired the novel's ending and sequels. To the consternation of many readers, *Robinson Crusoe* spins out in a fight with a pack of wolves, a hasty settlement in England, a return to his island at the ripe age of 62, and a sequel in which Crusoe sets out again on a seafaring life, undeterred by the fact that he is now in his seventies. Defoe suggests that it is the "surprising Variety" of the initial volume that explains its success, and he concludes the *Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by having his hero note that his life has consisted of "a long Variety of Changes": for 72 years it has been "a Life of infinite Variety."⁵ Similar claims can be found in *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724). The latter moves through a "Vast Variety of Fortunes" and the former experiences such an "abundance of delightful Incidents" that "infinite variety" is the only way to describe her life.⁶ In 1725, Defoe published a very different kind of fiction. But even without a central character telling his or her life story, *A New Voyage Round the World* contains Defoe's customary boast about an unprecedented "Variety of Incidents" issuing in a "perfectly new . . . Form," this time not organized by the arc of a life but the arc of a journey around the world.⁷

My quick tour indicates that Defoe saw infinite variety as the central aesthetic and commercial value of his fictions.⁸ He and his printers advertised this value on title pages and in prefaces again and again, clearly intending to lure the reader with the promise of the infinite riches heaped together in the singular volume they hold. But infinite variety was more than an aesthetic and commercial value. For Defoe, infinite variety was the providential principle that shaped divine creation

and human history. Defoe's religious beliefs provided the ultimate sanction for the pursuit of variety in his fictions.

In this essay, I will try to elucidate Defoe's metaphysics of infinite variety. I will argue that *Robinson Crusoe's* very preoccupation with the world of physical objects and actions makes it a metaphysical novel that unsettles the determinate structures of being to foster an enlarged sense of possibility and transformation. Much of the work of unsettling that *Robinson Crusoe* performs, we will see, is directed at loosening and expanding the established order of species. Defoe placed the idea of species in the rather more capacious semantic field in which it signified at this time. In early-eighteenth-century Britain, species designated not only animate, natural, and concrete things, but also inanimate, artificial, and abstract things. It signified broadly. A chair, for example, could be described as a species of furniture. Monarchy was a species of government. The term genre had not been imported yet from France, and so we hear about species of writing.⁹ Because the idea of natural species invoked divine creation, the conversation about species and their variety was metaphysically weighty. It bore on far-reaching questions of order, identity, generation, and difference. This semantic context provides one indication that Defoe's claim about the infinite variety of his fictions and their "perfectly new" form was more than a market-driven boast by an entrepreneurial author (though it was also that).

My argument about Defoean variety develops a subject that has been addressed recently by Robert James Merrett. Merrett's *Daniel Defoe: Contrarian* recognizes a stylistic feature of Defoe's writing that will interest me as well: Defoe's tendency to deploy lexical plurality to produce referential uncertainty. Like me, Merrett finds much to do about Defoe's tendency to provide alternate names for the same thing by using the conjunction "or." Merrett views this tendency primarily through the lens of reader response criticism. In cultivating such polysemy, he argues, Defoe wishes to enhance readerly engagement with his fictions—fictions that Merrett sees in a tragic light as stories of failed integration. But while he has many intriguing things to say about Defoe's interest in "the pluralities of selfhood," Merrett in the end views these pluralities as a means to let Defoe's reader accomplish what eludes his protagonists: the cultivation of "the reflexive practices required by the search for a healthy identity."¹⁰ Defoe's intention in depicting the failure of integration in *Robinson Crusoe* or *Moll Flanders*, in other words, is to enhance the reader's sense of identity.

What is missing in Merrett's argument and others like it is the recognition that disintegration is not only a fearful, but also a hopeful condition.¹¹ Understanding Defoe's metaphysics of infinite variety will allow us to see disintegration positively—not as something that prompts anxiety or a wish for reassembly, and not as something that results from deft authorial maneuvering in a volatile marketplace. Defoe's willingness to hail disintegration as the deliverer from oppressive structures is evident in his interpretation of the revolution of 1688. Defoe saw the revolution as a complete meltdown of governmental structures and thus allied himself with those radical Whigs who viewed it as a dissolution of all political forms and bodies, much to the distress of moderate Whigs, in 1688 and beyond. Such distress was caused not only by the frightening possibility of sudden dissolution, but also by the implication that new political forms—new species of government—could emerge from that which had no form or structure at all, from what Defoe almost gleefully called the "Mob," the "promiscuous Crowd," and "Chaos."¹² In Defoe's view, the disintegration of political forms and bodies in 1688 was liberating, and it empowered the people—dispersed, disorganized political matter—to give themselves new forms to live by.

I would therefore like to stress the utopian aspects of Defoe's polysemy, not its tragedy or strategy.¹³ I would like to show that Defoe's variety opens up being beyond the catalogue and hierarchies of established forms. As we shall see, Defoe's anti-Aristotelianism finds a ready ally in Longinus and the aesthetic of the sublime, which serves Defoe as a compositional guide that helps him translate his metaphysics of infinite variety into fiction. If successful, this line of argument would trouble all approaches to Defoe's novel that rely on such criteria as unity, coherence, and development as the formal building blocks of the hermeneutic endeavor.

Before we get on our way, I would like to return to the theme of empire, which I sounded earlier and which has informed many recent approaches to Defoe's novel. My attempt to trouble such criteria as unity, coherence, and development via the metaphysical might suggest that the imperial context of Crusoe's narrative will drop out of view. These criteria, after all, harmonize rather well with the content of the Crusoe story, which describes the unification and development of an island and so its rescue from a supposedly incoherent state of nature. Surely, an essay dedicated to the proposition of a metaphysical *Robinson Crusoe* that associates Defoe's novel with a sublime striving for infinity at the expense of coherence and its partners will not be able to address the worldly theme of empire. Yet the imperial context

remains indispensable to the metaphysical *Robinson Crusoe*. While there is textual evidence to support the argument that the novel expresses its colonizing desires by seeking to comprehend, reduce, and dominate alien territory, infinite variety disturbs this program. It suggests a different alliance of form and content and a different idea of empire.

I contend that *Robinson Crusoe* contains significant evidence that points to a mode of thinking about empire that is allied with both Defoe's metaphysics and his anti-Aristotelian stance. In what follows, I argue that Defoe's colonial fantasy aspires to transcend the ideational structures that support the actions of comprehension, reduction, and domination. The promise of colonial increase and gain is for Defoe most completely fulfilled when we move beyond human ideation and heed the providence of infinite variety. Defoe does not describe the imposition of European standards and perceptions on Crusoe's island world in a simple way. He grasps the island scenario as an opportunity to unsettle established assumptions, to display the narrowness of our conceptions, to undermine our belief in the fixity and finitude of the world, and to open up being toward limitless variety. This way of thinking about empire as the transcendence of limits and the multiplication of the forms of life aligns with the anti-Aristotelian aesthetic of infinite variety. For this reason and others, I believe that it is closer to Defoe's heart than the idea of empire as comprehension, reduction, and domination and its allied fictional form, the realist novel.

I will make my case by beginning small, with an analysis of Defoe's use of the conjunction "or." At first it will seem that this analysis irresistibly drifts into the framework of the established readings around empire that resonate, implicitly and explicitly, with an understanding of the novel as a form dedicated to unity, coherence, and development. But Defoe's conjunctive habits ultimately nurture a different colonial fantasy, one that creates an ontological opening with utopian overtones.

In *Robinson Crusoe*, the joining of words by the conjunction "or" is often pure habit, a verbal tic that Defoe cannot control. When Crusoe builds his first wall around his habitation, for example, he mentions the "Piles or Stakes," the "Posts or Piles" he uses (*RC*, 105). When he regrets not having a wheelbarrow, he notes that he had "no possible Way to make the Iron Gudgeons for the Spindle or Axis of the Wheel" (*RC*, 111). He retrieves "Boards, or Plank" (*RC*, 120) from

the wrecked ship, has enough “Tortoise or Turtles” (RC, 152), but is without “Copper or Kettle” (RC, 181). In these instances and others like it, Defoe’s doubling of names and their linkage by the conjunction “or” appears to serve no direct purpose. No explanatory value is implied, not much tension suggested: all of these pairs function as near synonyms.

Trying to make sense of this habit, we might turn to the didactic impulse that sometimes informs Defoe’s doubling of names. Thus, Defoe tells us that one of Crusoe’s fellow-slaves in Morocco is called “Ismael, who they call Muly or Moely” (RC, 72). He informs us that an open piece of land he encloses is a “Meadow-Land or Savanna, (as our People call it in the Western Colonies)” (RC, 165). Or he describes how Crusoe sees “one of the Villains lift up his Arm with a great Cutlash, as the Seamen call it, or Sword” (RC, 243). These examples indicate Defoe’s desire to display his grasp of the linguistic variety that such a merchant-adventurer as Crusoe is exposed to. There is confidence and pleasure in these didactic moments. Defoe relishes the opportunity to show his familiarity with a wide range of usages that cut across geographical, cultural, and social boundaries.

This expansive tendency is no doubt part of Defoe’s glorification of the figure of the merchant who, in an age of increasing colonial exchange, he imagines as connected to everything, universally conversant, and possessed of a “comprehensive Understanding.”¹⁴ When it occurs with something like the didactic explicitness evident here, Defoe’s doubling of names comes into focus as an expression of mercantile ideology, which Defoe promoted throughout his life with marked fervor. Knowing the different names by which different nations and professions refer to the same “species of goods” is one of the foremost duties of the successful merchant, Defoe tells us in *The Compleat English Tradesman* (1725).¹⁵ Approached this way, Defoe’s doubling habit invites a political analysis of style that would diagnose the desire for comprehensive reference as the expression of a global consciousness that finds its material basis in the British extraction of value from colonial exchange relations. That Defoe’s instinctive and his didactic doubling both take synonymic form is surely a sign that he intends to explain and stabilize reference so that the distant imperial sphere becomes a familiar semantic horizon for readers at home. The linguistic action of providing alternative names thus prepares the lexicon required for making yourself at home in a rapidly expanding colonial economy. The comprehension of this economy, in both senses of the word, would seem to be Defoe’s goal.

Similarly subject to such comprehension, we might continue, would be Crusoe's island, whose incomprehensible strangeness is stressed during the early stages of the novel. The "violent Tornado or Hurricane" that destroys Crusoe's ship takes his crew "quite out of our Knowledge" (*RC*, 87). As they are crashing toward land, Crusoe notes (once again using his favorite conjunction) that "we knew nothing where we were, or upon what Land it was we were driven, whether an Island or the Main. . . . What the Shore was, whether Rock or Sand, whether Steep or Shoal, we knew not. . . . [T]he Land look'd more frightful than the Sea" (*RC*, 88–89). Defoe continues to cultivate a sense of being out of one's knowledge after Crusoe's escape from the storm. Crusoe's first night is spent in an unfamiliar tree, "a thick bushy Tree like a Firr, but thorny" (*RC*, 91). On his first excursion into the island's interior, Crusoe fires his gun and an "innumerable Number of Fowls of many Sorts" rise into the air (*RC*, 96). This multitude protests his intrusion by a "confus'd Screaming, and crying every one according to his usual Note; but not one of them of any Kind that I knew" (*RC*, 96). The one bird Crusoe happens to kill seems "to be a Kind of Hawk, its Colour and Beak resembling it, but had no Talons or Claws" (*RC*, 97). A little later, he is "surpris'd and almost frighted with two or three Seals, which, while I was gazing at, not well knowing what they were, got into the Sea and escap'd me for that time" (*RC*, 110). Crusoe believes he has found "Hares, as I thought them to be, and Foxes, but they differ'd greatly from all the other Kinds I had met with; nor could I satisfy myself to eat them, tho I kill'd several" (*RC*, 138). The acknowledgment of unfamiliar species matters even later in the novel. When he builds a boat with Friday, Crusoe confesses he cannot "tell to this Day what Wood to call the Tree we cut down, except that it was very like the Tree we call Fustic, or between that and the Nicaragua Wood, for it was much of the same Colour and Smell" (*RC*, 225). In all of these cases, the world of the island escapes or deviates from the knowledge of species Crusoe brings with him. Many of the species of plants and animals he finds either completely resist established categories or can only be partially represented by them.

The drift of my reading should be recognizable. Establishing the lexicon of imperial expansion, recognizing and utilizing the island's strange plants and animals, cultivating its open land, establishing dominion: these actions are intimately related and make up Crusoe's colonizing project. Linguistic comprehension echoes the physical mastery of the island, which is transformed from a strange space to a known and familiar place, a place that may eventually appear on

the maps of colonial trade. On this reading, infinite variety would be little more than a canny ruse by which Defoe raises the engaging veil of multiplicity only to reduce, all the more dramatically, the many to the few, the multiform to the uniform, the strange to the known, the delightful to the useful. On this reading, reduction and comprehension are the natural allies of the sovereign, independent individual, of imperialism, and of the objectifying tendencies of a realist style inspired by empiricism. This is the reading that seems almost instinctively right to those of us whose critical practices were shaped during the political turn of the 1980s.

To my ear, this reading no longer rings true. It is too suspicious of infinite variety, too unwilling to register the seriousness with which Defoe embraces this concept. Reduction and comprehension, I wish to argue, do not dominate the linguistic and physical action of *Robinson Crusoe*. On both levels, Defoe's novel moves in the opposite direction, toward making multiplicity irreducible, blurring distinctions of kind, and unsettling identities, without much regard for luring the reader toward comprehension. Even Defoe's smallest unit for the cultivation of variety, his use of the conjunction "or," reveals this.

The material situation on the island leaves Crusoe with relatively few resources for survival. Despite the remarkable number of things he retrieves from the wrecked ship, Crusoe's island life is one of scarcity. Scarcity puts pressure on many objects to assume the role of several kinds. For example, when Crusoe decides to dig a cave in a hill close to his tent, he notes that it "serv'd me like a Cellar to my House" (*RC*, 102). He also remarks that in his "Fancy" he called the cave "my Kitchen" (*RC*, 102). A little later, he tries to enlarge the cave and notes: "I work'd to make this Room or Cave spacious enough to accommodate me as a Warehouse or Magazin, a Kitchen, a Dining-room and a Cellar" (*RC*, 112). Five lines down, Defoe expands the kinds of rooms further when he mentions that his "Cave or Vault" is now finished (*RC*, 112). In these ten pages, the place Crusoe creates begins to assume more and more functions, names, and identities until we begin to wonder where the cave's commodiousness might end. Kinds gather here. This is also true in a much more tangible sense, for when Crusoe reviews all the things he has retrieved and plans to store in the cave, he boasts that he "had the biggest Maggazin of all Kinds . . . that ever were laid up . . . for one Man" (*RC*, 98). In this improbable gathering of kinds, Crusoe's imagination turns scarcity into plenitude.

The gathering in the cave creates a densely crowded scene, but the conjunction of kinds by "or" adds a twist to such cultivation of variety.

While “Warehouse or Magazin” joins nearly equivalent terms, “Room or Cave” and “Cave or Vault” are non-synonymic pairs. They add to the proliferation of kinds in the passage, but they also create an oscillation between two kinds, a zone of uncertainty where it is not clear which of the two names applies. One might say that this is a domestic version of the more dramatic uncertainty expressed by the conjunctions “Island or the Main,” “Rock or Sand” when Crusoe is washed ashore. If Crusoe simply called the cave his room or his vault or if he noted that the cave was like a room or vault, he would let us construct the relationship between the two terms (as he does when he says that the cave is his kitchen or is like a cellar). But the conjunction “or” (a scheme rather than a trope) suspends two terms without informing us how the one relates to the other. If the gathering in the cave strains toward infinite variety through physical and figurative transformations, the conjunction of kinds by “or” creates variety by suspending such transformation and cultivating undecidability. I would like to suggest that such undecidability, such oscillation, indicates the arbitrariness of kinds and names and orients us toward their plasticity.

Whether one thing is another or can be another is of course an important issue in an environment of scarcity. The literal taking of one thing for another can be vital. Sometimes, this is rather straightforward, as when Crusoe uses “Iron Crows” “for a pick-axe” (*RC*, 111). Yet such translations are often complicated by Defoe’s conjunctive habits. When he has to “Mow or Reap” (*RC*, 144) his barley, Crusoe is “sadly put to it for a Scythe or a Sicle . . . and all I could do was to make one as well as I could out of one of the Broad Swords or Cutlasses” (*RC*, 143). When he has to improvise a “Sieve, or Search” to make flour, he uses some sailors’ “Neckcloths of Callicoe, or Muslin” (*RC*, 147–48). Much of Crusoe’s work of invention on the island has to do with discovering in one thing its ability to serve as another, yet the conjunction “or” often doubles such translation, making it less definitive, less complete, even when apparent synonyms are involved. One thing, it seems, is always more than one. One name is never enough.

The sequential manifestation of such multiplicity can be observed when we trace some of Crusoe’s transformations of his environment through metaphor. At one point, Crusoe begins to call his main habitation “Home” (*RC*, 132) and his rough outpost in the middle of the island his “Country-House” (*RC*, 171). These re-designations occur in response to events that change Crusoe’s perception of his environment or situation. Thus, Crusoe begins to call his habitation “Home” only after he has explored the island further and has discovered the

“delicious Vale” that will accommodate his country house (*RC*, 131). Once he has a place away, he calls the other place home. When Crusoe discovers the footprint in the sand and fears that cannibals may invade the island and devour him, he begins calling his “Home” his “Castle” (*RC*, 171). Even later, during a particularly anxious phase, he calls it his “Cell” (*RC*, 185). It is his home or castle or cell depending on circumstances. Crusoe’s muskets, once they are positioned for the defense of his property, become “Cannon[s]” (*RC*, 191) and his homely boat—at first “a Canoe” as well as “my little Periagua” (*RC*, 157–58)—becomes a “Frigate” (*RC*, 200). Both the sense of being at home and being threatened precipitate such metaphorical activity. But because Crusoe’s island life is precariously split between opposing poles—it is a “Life of Sorrow, one way” and a “Life of Mercy, another”—such activity is constantly subject to revision (*RC*, 155). Thus, when he is shaken with fear about the cannibals, Crusoe lies awake “in my Bed, or Hammock,” seemingly doubting the transformative powers of metaphor as he suspends his place of rest between bed and hammock (*RC*, 201). Metaphorical domestication is reversible and the conjunction “or” works here to return Crusoe to a more ambiguous sense of identity. But because they fluctuate with changing circumstances, Crusoe’s metaphors reinforce the plasticity of identity suggested by the conjunction “or.” The vicissitudes of Crusoe’s island life render the boundaries and identities of things flexible.¹⁶

In some of the more transformative actions of Crusoe the maker—when he is doing more than using one thing as another—we can see more concretely how cultivating the island is linked to unsettling the boundaries and identities of things. A good example is Crusoe’s attempt to make “a Shovel or Spade.” Like sickle and scythe, spade and shovel are two different kinds of things, the latter pair designed to perform different functions (even though the spade may, in a limited way, serve as a shovel and vice versa). Crusoe realizes that he absolutely needs “a Shovel or Spade” to cultivate the ground, but does not know “what kind of one to make” (*RC*, 111). He takes advantage of a tree that grows on the island which “in the Brasils they call the Iron Tree” (*RC*, 111). He cuts a piece from this tree and, with painstaking labor, “work’d it effectually by little and little into the Form of a Shovel or Spade, the Handle exactly shap’d like ours in England” (*RC*, 111).

It is quick work to read this episode as an allegory of the English colonizer appropriating native raw materials and imposing on them his own forms and purposes. Doing so, however, overlooks some important details. For example, even if the handle looks exactly like an English

handle, Crusoe displays a striking uncertainty about exactly what kind of tool he hopes to make (perhaps not the colonizer's confident imposition of form on shapeless native materials). There is also the curious concession that the form he does, in fact, create is that of a "Shovel *or* Spade." Given the different shapes of these two tools, the form Crusoe creates does not quite seem to fit either spade or shovel, and I would be inclined to read this episode as a moment of uncertain creation that results in a genuinely ambiguous product—both shovel and spade but neither completely. The conjunctive "or" represents such blurred identity. Only part of the English form is unambiguously impressed on the iron tree.¹⁷

Crusoe's uncertainty about form and about the extent to which the things he makes fit into the established catalogue by which we distinguish kinds or species is more generally significant. Crusoe is often embarrassed by his failure to give things determinate shape. When he tries his hand at making pots, for example, he invites the reader to pity or laugh at his productions. "What odd misshapen ugly things I made," he confesses and adds: "I could not make above two large earthen ugly things, I cannot call them Jarrs, in about two Months Labour" (*RC*, 145–46). These objects exist below the threshold of recognizable form, and Crusoe is almost ashamed about their shapelessness. A similarly disappointed tone informs a passage in which he describes an anchor he has made. Crusoe has constructed "a Thing like an Anchor," he reports, "but indeed which could not be call'd either Anchor or Graplin; however, it was the best I could make of its kind" (*RC*, 185). If the kind that Crusoe makes is neither anchor nor graplin, of what kind is the thing he has made? The thing serves the function of the anchor or graplin kind, but its dissimilar form excludes it from definitive membership in either group. Still, a blushing legitimacy seems to have been won for an object whose peculiarity lacks compelling similitude to the existing type, model, or sort. The anchor or graplin, just like the spade or shovel, works, somewhat.

At other times, Crusoe is unembarrassed about the peculiar and shapeless things that surround him. Resistance to the existing catalogue of forms and the linguistic conventions that underwrite them becomes a point of bemused pride in a famous set piece of the novel, the description of Crusoe's appearance after almost half of the 28 years of his isolation have passed:

Had any one in England been to meet such a Man as I was, it must either have frighted them, or rais'd a great deal of Laughter; and as

I frequently stood still to look at my self, I could not but smile at the Notion of my travelling through Yorkshire with such an Equipage, and in such a Dress: Be pleas'd to take a Scetch of my Figure as follows: I had a great high shapeless Cap, made of Goat's Skin, with a Flap hanging down behind. . . . I had a short Jacket of Goat-Skin, the Skirts coming down to about the middle of my Thighs; and a pair of open-knee'd Breeches of the same, the Breeches were made of the Skin of an old He-goat, whose Hair hung down such a Length on either Side, that like Pantaloons it reach'd to the middle of my Legs; Stockings and Shoes I had none, but had made me a Pair of some-things, I scarce know what to call them, like Buskins to slap over my Legs, and lace on either Side like Spatter-dashes; but of a most barbarous Shape, as indeed were all the rest of my Cloaths. (*RC*, 167)

The barbarity of the forms that clothe Crusoe undercut the attempt to represent them by their similitude to existing kinds. The cap is shapeless, the pants are very hairy, and for stockings and shoes Crusoe has nothing except some nameless “some-things,” like buskins (calf-high boots) and like spatter-dashes (leather leggings to protect clothes from dirt), but different from both. The savage and the civilized, the crude and the refined clash audibly in this description. The resulting noise underscores the extent to which Crusoe’s things do not fit existing forms. But unlike others, this passage treats the misfit and the misshapen with affection. Through their connotative range, the fashionable pantaloons Crusoe mentions diffuse this affection to French, Italian, Middle Eastern, and Asian associations.¹⁸ Crusoe embraces his own existence *sui generis* when he describes his facial hair in a way that seems to resonate with some of these associations. He has enough scissors and blades, he notes, to keep his beard pretty short. Not so his moustache, which he “had trimm’d into a large Pair of Mahometan Whiskers, such as I had seen worn by some Turks, who I saw at Sallee . . . I will not say they were long enough to hang my Hat upon them; but they were of a Length and Shape monstrous enough, and such as in England would have pass’d for frightful” (*RC*, 168). The shapeless, the foreign, the monstrous, the savage, the animal—the whole incongruous, laughable, frightening ensemble of Crusoe’s “figure”—are not reduced to some kind of familiarity or coherence. They are here not a source of embarrassment, but of a wry amusement that arises from their peculiarity and incomprehensibility within the context of English categories and perceptions.

Rather than insisting that the business of cultivating the island depends on the comprehension, reduction, and domination of the unfamiliar, Defoe’s novel invites us to imagine that this business entails

unsettling the boundaries between things—making them unfamiliar, as it were. It requires modes of representation in which things oscillate with possibility and transformative potential. No single thing can simply be itself or by itself for long; its potential for being something else or its service as something else and with something else is persistently invoked, conjunctively and figuratively. Because so much of the novel is devoted to the description of ordinary activities in a constrained environment, the ordinary develops affinities with the extraordinary. Crusoe's appetite for making things—bread, boats, pots, umbrellas, cheese—is so large that the boundaries, identities, and functions of the few things he has at his disposal assume an unusual degree of malleability. Whether they are made or found, things on the island frequently cannot be assimilated or reduced to the clear outlines of existing species or kinds. More often than not, this is a good thing. Improvisation and invention depend on a way of seeing things that makes them appear double, that lets them fall through the cracks of the established taxonomies. Unambiguous, fixed identities are of limited use on Crusoe's island. As Crusoe's celebratory self-description indicates, the misfit and the misshapen are not always the embarrassing result of necessity. In moments like the self-description, they become the smiling signifiers of a freedom and invention whose resourcefulness transcends existing molds.¹⁹

It is within a context permeated by a sense of translatability, malleability, and invention that we ought to situate Defoe's pairing of terms by the conjunction "or." The instinct for doubling speaks to an imagination that is deeply impressed by the idea that names are arbitrary, that they do not provide a reliable map of species, and that behind such names may lurk unforeseen possibilities. The stabilization of reference, in other words, is not the dominant motivation behind Defoe's conjunctive habits, whose effects are calculated to unsettle readerly comprehension. Stabilization does not serve Crusoe's project of domestication nor does it help Defoe's pursuit of infinite variety. When Defoe links synonymous terms with the conjunction "or" he may wish to enlighten us about the wide world of equivalent terms. But he is also teaching us a more important lesson: the lesson that designation is as arbitrary, variable, and open as the thing itself. Caves become kitchens, cellars, magazines, dining rooms, vaults. Sword or cutlass, sickle or scythe, sieve or search, calico or muslin: the possibility of translating one name, one thing into another is always raised. Domestication produces such multiplicity.

Seen from this perspective, the island's unknown species and kinds, their utter strangeness, or their half-resemblance to familiar things is not threatening, despite Crusoe's initial fear of being devoured by wild beasts. What the island flora and fauna reveal about species variety is part of the lesson that Crusoe learns in making things and that Defoe impresses on us with his conjunctive and figurative habits. What we think we know about things—about their shapes, their names, their identity, and their relationships to each other—is an arbitrary imposition on the variety of being. Opening the order of things, restoring a more fluid sense of identity, interrelation, and possibility is the work of *Robinson Crusoe*. This work is restorative because it loosens the congealed categories of human imposition and opens up being to a fuller sense of possibility. The encounter with new species, therefore, has to be understood not only as a threat, but also as a promise.

If *Robinson Crusoe* is a parable of the colonizing process, the success of this process depends not on seeing one thing or name as singular and same, but on seeing one thing or name as several and different. Identity is not singular, but plural. Variety is not finite, but infinite. It is by putting persistent imaginative pressure on the determinate structures of the given that Defoe nourishes the sense that overtakes Crusoe's visitors at the end of the novel: the sense that Crusoe's island, like Prospero's, is an "enchanted Island" (*RC*, 254). The different "figures" in which Crusoe appears to these visitors—generalissimo, governor, commander—produce much of the enchantment woven at the end, but they are only an extension of the fluidity of kinds that the novel and Crusoe's survival depend on throughout (see *RC*, 255–56). I would like to firm up this interpretation by showing how Defoe's religious beliefs link infinite variety and the history of empire in some of his other writings.

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Defoe writes extensively about the relationship between infinite variety and empire in *A General History of Discoveries and Improvements* (1725–26). The movement of civilization, he argues, is providentially guided by a repeated process of scattering and gathering. Defoe turns to the biblical story of the tower of Babel to identify a foundational moment in the providential story of human civilization. At this time shortly after the flood, humanity had a single language and gathered "in the land of Shinar" to settle (Gen. 11:1–9). The biblical story presents the ambition to build a tower "whose top may reach

unto heaven” as springing from a desire to “make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:1–9). God is displeased by this desire to tighten unity around a name and divides the people of Babel by giving them separate tongues so that they can no longer understand each other. As a result, they are “scattered . . . abroad . . . upon the face of all the earth” (Gen. 11:1–9). Defoe interprets the actions of the people of Babel as a violation of God’s blessing earlier in the Book of Genesis, which had exhorted humanity to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the Earth.”²⁰ The multiplication of cultures by the divine imposition of linguistic diversity is for Defoe an enabling moment in the history of human civilization. The forceful scattering of “Families and Tribes” who can no longer communicate leads to “*New Discoveries*” and the cultivation of various hitherto untouched regions (W, 4:31). “In about three hundred Years,” Defoe caps this initial chapter in the story of human empire, “the World [was] pretty well peopled, the Inhabitants possess of the greatest Part of it, and infinitely multiplying in People; Those People spreading themselves farther and farther, for new possessions” (W, 4:68). This first chapter is quickly followed by a second, equally crucial one.

After the scattering prompted by linguistic diversity, the dispersed communities eventually grow into small cities. These cities develop and begin to attract a divers population. Defoe’s example is the ancient city of Tyre, which “by the exceeding Conflux of People which from all Parts of the then known World flock’d thither . . . became very populous” (W, 4:45). Once density and diversity of population is achieved, the conditions are right for “that mighty, and now, most important Thing call’d TRADE, which we have Reason to believe had also its beginning here” (W, 4:45). The Tyrians were the “first of Sailors” and by the art of navigation were able to expand their connections to other nations (W, 4:44). Such correspondence and trade, in turn, creates prosperity, the visible manifestations of which are increased variety of people and goods in one place.

Defoe’s narrative of Tyre is indebted to the model of Holland, which preoccupied the imagination of English intellectuals in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth centuries. As William Temple explained in his influential *Observations upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands* (1673), the Dutch economy flourished because of Holland’s liberal immigration and toleration policies. These policies had attracted such a various population from different nations that civility and knowledge were improved and commercial activity had

to expand beyond Holland's narrow boundaries and limited natural resources.²¹ Gathering and scattering, the Dutch example shows, are closely related dynamics. The city of Tyre imparts this lesson as well, though in less peaceful form.

At one point of his story of civilization, Defoe wonders whether the damage inflicted on Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, was good or bad. He believes it was good. Although "the Citizens had a very great loss in the demolishing of their Houses, and ruining their public Edifices; yet as it scatter'd a diligent and useful People into divers parts of the World" Nebuchadnezzar's destruction also proved creative (W, 4:72). It helped spread knowledge and expertise to various regions, breaking the collection of diversity in one place and dispersing it widely. Civilization can advance by violence, division, and displacement. Such violent moves are sanctioned by divine providence, whose injunction to multiply and to replenish justifies the scattering as much as the gathering of persons and things. Though Defoe is often skeptical about the human ability to understand divine intentions, of this he is certain: divine providence makes scattering and gathering fundamental, interdependent forces of human history.

The same providential pattern informs Defoe's account of creation, a story of scattering that precedes the gathering at Babel. "How wonderfully the Blessings of the Creation are Disperst up and down," Defoe exclaims.²² "The different Climates and Soil in the World," he explains, "have, by the Wisdom and Direction of Nature Natureing, which I call God, produc'd such differing Species of things, all of them in their kind equally Necessary, or at least Useful and Desirable; as insensibly preserves the Dependance, of the most Remote Parts of the World upon one another."²³ The scattering of species and kinds across the face of the globe is a result of God's creation, which installs natural difference and separation to promote connection and exchange.

"This Variety," Defoe adds, "is not only Natural, but Artificial; and as the Climates and Soil, have produc'd in every Country different Growths or Species of Things; so the differing Genius of the People of every Country, prompts them to different Improvements, and to different Customs."²⁴ Defoe repeatedly measures states of civilization by the degree to which such artificial variety has progressed. He points to the circumstance that, before the rise of Tyre, "we never find any difference in the kinds of the Ships, which they made use of in those Times; but promiscuously they are call'd *Ships*, for what business, or in what places soever they were made use of" (W, 4:57). This circumstance shows that we are dealing with a less civilized time

period. The proliferation of new kinds of things and the names that distinguish them, on the other hand, is a clear indicator of an advancing civilization.²⁵ Defoe's reliance on lexical plurality in *Robinson Crusoe* telegraphs an advanced civilization whose signifiers Defoe uses to intimate the arbitrariness of kinds and the possibility of invention. The habitual use of the conjunction "or" to join things exhibits, in miniature, the relationship between the gathering and the opening of kinds: it is, at once, a gathering of kinds and a showing of their fluidity.

Providence, Defoe argues, enjoins us to gather the various species and kinds that exist in separation from each other. The merchant fulfills this providential design: "[T]he Merchant by his Correspondence reconciles that infinite Variety, which . . . has by the Infinite Wisdom of Providence, been scattred over the Face of the World."²⁶ Gathering and connecting that which lies separate in various cultures and regions of the globe, bringing the limitless diversity that God has spread across the surface of the earth into the narrow compass of individual countries, are the means by which the merchant reconciles (literally, brings together) infinite variety.²⁷ The providential goal of human history is bringing that which is found in several places into one place and bringing that which is found in one place into several places. The movement of civilization reveals the infinite difference of things, and it benefits those actors most who manage to increase the density of variety. By contrast, keeping things apart from each other, leaving them alone, shutting them down, assigning them fixed stations in natural or social hierarchies, puts you at the wrong end of providence and history. In writing *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe tried to be at the right end. The revival of the sublime in the late seventeenth century helped him.

The aesthetic of the sublime became widely popular in the second half of the seventeenth century after Boileau translated Longinus into French in 1674.²⁸ In England, its reception was especially intense in Whig circles, which were attracted by the links Longinus established between the sublime and political freedom. The poet and doctor Richard Blackmore, for example, was a prominent Whig and a major advocate of a Christian sublime who saw Milton as an important model.²⁹ John Dennis placed the sublime at the top of his hierarchy of religio-aesthetic values and used Milton's *Paradise Lost* as its prime example.³⁰ Alexander Welsted's 1712 translation of Longinus's treatise on the sublime is another sign of the Whig interest in the sublime and

the canonization of Milton as a major representative of the political and aesthetic values that Longinus had joined.³¹ Milton himself, it may be useful to add, was prolific in the production of sublime effects through the use of the conjunction “or.”³² Defoe was aware of these developments and joined the chorus of Whig praise for Miltonic sublimity even as he expressed reservations about Milton’s theology.³³ While the aesthetic of the sublime was not the only model available to promote a literalized infinite variety, it possessed a vital advantage over Epicurean philosophy (which could have served a similar function): it was seen as a natural ally of Christian religion. As a confirmed Whig and vigorous critic of atheism, Defoe would have found much to appreciate in Longinus’s sublime.

Defoe’s interest in the sublime has been noted by others, but it has primarily been addressed as a content Defoe is drawn to, from Crusoe’s shipwreck to the earthquake on the island and Crusoe’s response to the single footprint in the sand.³⁴ These scenes are important indicators of Defoe’s interest in the sublime, but I am less concerned with physical or psychological events than the compositional lessons Defoe takes from the sublime. As a compositional mode that stresses variety, combination, multitude, and expansion, the sublime supports Defoe’s project of producing fictions of infinite variety that unsettle the boundaries of the given.

There are several ways in which the aesthetic of the sublime helped Defoe in the composition of *Robinson Crusoe*, but I would like to focus here on how hyperbaton (literally, overstepping) assists Defoe’s cultivation of variety. Hyperbaton, Longinus explains, is a figure that transposes “Thoughts or Words out of the natural Order and Method of Discourse.”³⁵ “This Figure,” he continues, “naturally implies real violence and strength of Passion”:

Observe all those that are moved by Anger, Fear, Vexation, Jealousie, or any other Passion whatever . . . and their Minds you will see are under a continual Agitation; no sooner have they form’d one Design, but they enter upon another, and in the midst of that, proposing somewhat new to themselves, that is neither rational nor consistent, they frequently come back to their first Resolution. . . . [I]n this perpetual flux and reflux of opposite Sentiments they change their Thoughts and Language every Minute, and neither observe Order nor Method in their Discourse.³⁶

Readers of *Robinson Crusoe* will have little difficulty associating this description with the most iconic scene of the novel: Crusoe’s response to the unexpected discovery of a footprint on his solitary island.³⁷ This

discovery subjects him to “innumerable fluttering Thoughts” and renders him “a Man perfectly confus’d and out of myself” (*RC*, 170). It is not possible to describe, Crusoe explains, “how many various Shapes affrighted Imagination represented Things to me in, how many wild Ideas were found every Moment in my Fancy, and what strange unaccountable Whimsies came into my Thoughts by the Way” (*RC*, 170). Such is the impact of this discovery that in the space of six pages Crusoe first loses his hard-won religious belief, then regains it, loses it again, and then finds it again (though in less than perfect form).

A similarly radical, if slightly less rapid, alteration follows the footprint discovery when Crusoe first sees the remains of the grim cannibal feast. His outrage over the inhumanity of the cannibals’ practices immediately causes an impetuous desire to kill some savages. Then Crusoe persuades himself that he has no business killing savages. And then his “murthering Humour” returns with fresh force after the discovery of a second cannibal feast (*RC*, 192). Such sequences unsettle the reader. The “flux and reflux of opposing sentiments” is so persistent and pronounced that the movement between the extremes seems more important than the arrival at any one destination. Settling anywhere, it seems, is beside the point.

What we can see in these two examples, I believe, is a narrative conjunction of difference that echoes the oscillation achieved when two terms or kinds are linked by “or.” Of course, I am not suggesting that “Shovel or Spade,” “Scythe or a Sicle,” possess anything like the intensity of the narrative fluctuation between religious doubt and religious confidence. There is nothing very sublime about the conjunction of two tools, especially since they are not fundamentally different in kind (though “Island or the Main,” “Rock or Sand,” the conjunctions Crusoe uses to render his uncertain stranding on the island, come closer). But despite the fact that the narrative conjunction of difference I have observed joins extremes, I propose that the uncertain oscillation between things and states is central to both the syntactic and the narrative conjunction of difference. In both cases, we encounter the enabling suggestion that the distinction between different kinds or states is infirm and always preliminary. Given the right circumstances, one thing or state of mind can easily become another.

This kinship between the syntactic and narrative conjunction of difference should not be surprising. After all, Crusoe’s island is always the island of despair and the island of hope, and this double structure animates, as we have seen, much of the metaphoric and conjunctive activity in the novel. Whether his place of rest is a bed or a hammock,

his habitation his home, his castle, or his cell depends on whether Crusoe feels safe or threatened. Basic narrative and syntactic forces in *Robinson Crusoe* align in the demonstration that difference is relative and that the distinctions we make and the identities we assume are unstable. Circumstances are capable of changing everything and generate infinite variety. It is one of Defoe's great achievements to imagine the productivity of circumstance with near feverish inventiveness, but his embrace of infinite variety ultimately makes him rise above any single philosophical truth. Like Crusoe, Defoe does not really settle anywhere. We can understand this better when we take a closer look at Crusoe's oscillation between the desire to punish or spare the cannibals.

Enraged by the first instance of cannibalism, Crusoe begins a daily walk up a hill where he has a good view of the beach that served the cannibals as the setting for their inhuman feast. This daily physical action begins to interact with his determination to kill savages: "As long as I kept up my daily Tour to the Hill, to look out; so long also I kept up the Vigour of my Design, and my Spirits seem'd to be all the while in suitable Form" (*RC*, 82). The plan and the mindset to kill continue strong because of the daily physical routine. But when, having kept up this routine for a while, Crusoe becomes "weary of the fruitless Excursion," his "Opinion of the Action it self began to alter" (*RC*, 183). The intention to kill savages is initially fortified by Crusoe's daily tour, but when this tour becomes physically tiring and yields no results, the thought of the injustice of the design gains the upper hand.

Murderous passion may, in this way, be fanned and extinguished by the same repeated physical exertions, and the victory of principled moral reasoning may depend on the material difficulties of the less noble path. For Defoe, such sequences are sublime not only because they feature the flux and reflux of opposing sentiments. They are sublime as well because they cross boundaries and question hierarchies. They reveal that the small, the repeated, or the mechanical can trigger dramatic shifts of human desire and reasoning. Still, these sequences do not portray Crusoe's character, nor do they advance a doctrine about human agency and its dependence on circumstance. Defoe is only too keen to show us soon that Crusoe is perfectly able to keep up the vigor of his design to kill savages in spite of tedious physical exertions.

Going back to his hill, Crusoe renews his quest and sets himself "upon the Scout, as often as possible, and indeed so often till I was heartily tir'd of it, for it was above a Year and Half that I waited

. . . This was very discouraging, and began to trouble me much, tho' I cannot say that it did in this Case, as it had done some time before that, (viz.) wear off the Edge of my Desire to the Thing" (*RC*, 204). Crusoe's desire is now capable of dismissing providence and overcoming physical strains that earlier led him to make peace with God's provision for the savages. If before Defoe showed the susceptibility of desire and moral argument to small external circumstances, he now demonstrates the opposite possibility of desire overcoming all circumstances.³⁸ These variations, I believe, do not add up to the portrait of a character or an argument about human nature. Defoe does not invite us to see Crusoe as a certain kind of person, nor does he develop a position on the question of whether necessity or freedom describes the human condition.³⁹ Instead, he shows us necessity and freedom in one figure, without explaining how the one can subsist with the other.

In his fiction, Defoe's instinct is to gather what lies scattered, to reconcile the infinite variety of creation and human history. Crusoe is not irreligious or religious, brutal or humane, sovereign or dependent. Just like the crowd of things and names that swirl around him, Crusoe is not a certain kind of person. Instead, he displays the possibilities of being human beyond the narrow confines of a particular individual. More than anything else, *Robinson Crusoe* is driven by the desire to show the plasticity of being, figuratively and narratively. The cave that blossoms into six different rooms, the conjunctive oscillation between kinds and names, the constant refiguration of Crusoe's surroundings, the transformations and shifts of Crusoe himself: all of these aspects of Defoe's novel indicate the narrator's interest in opening up being to the full extent of its transformative potential. The point is not to settle. The point is to make the movement between kinds and states so robust that structures and identities lose their hold on being.

In *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe dares to imitate God's infinitely various creation and providence. He recognizes the sublime as a compositional mode that can liquefy the outlines that hold things apart, that can shake up the hierarchy of species and causes and open up being beyond what we know. In *Robinson Crusoe*, the sublime gives infinite variety wide fictional sway. The physical, the particular, the individual, the circumstantial: these hallmarks of realist representation and of the early novel have been misinterpreted for too long as the ends of Defoe's fiction. It is time to adjust our perspective. I have tried to show that these hallmarks are not just ends, but means. As such, they reveal the infinity of variety, the thinness of difference, and the plasticity of being. In *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe wants to bring his reader closer

to what he saw as the unique promise of his historical moment: the realization that nothing has to be the way it is; that names, distinctions, and hierarchies are mere human things without true power; and that the metaphysics of infinite variety can make anything possible—even the survival of a single man on a desert island for 28 years, even the prosperity of the man whose faith is always doubtful and whose actions are often sinful.

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NOTES

¹ For a useful overview of the development of Defoe criticism from the 1950s to today, see Ashley Marshall, “Fabricating Defoes: From Anonymous Hack to Master of Fictions,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 36.2 (2012): 1–35, esp. 1–13. Starr retreated, to an extent, from his emphasis on the “unified whole” of Defoe’s novels as early as 1971 (*Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965], viii). In *Defoe and Casuistry* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), xi, Starr argued that casuistry was a source of fragmentation in Defoe’s novels. Hunter revised his Aristotelian approach to Defoe’s fictional order as well. See, for example, Hunter’s “Serious Reflections on Farther Adventures: Resistances to Closure in Eighteenth-Century English Novels,” in *Augustan Subjects: Essays in Honor of Martin C. Battestin*, ed. Albert J. Rivero (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1997), 288–89.

² For a helpful account of the turn toward religion in American literary studies, see Sarah Rivett, “Early American Religion in a Postsecular Age,” *PMLA* 128.4 (2013): 989–96.

³ Katherine Clark, *Daniel Defoe: The Whole Frame of Nature, Time, and Providence* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 10–11. In addition to Hunter and Starr, the emphasis on Puritan genres and psychology also marks Leopold Damrosch’s *God’s Plot and Man’s Stories: Studies in the Fictional Imagination from Milton to Fielding* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985).

⁴ Daniel Defoe, preface to *Robinson Crusoe*, in *The Novels of Daniel Defoe*, 10 vol., ed. W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008–9), 1:55. Hereafter abbreviated *RC* and cited parenthetically by page number.

⁵ Defoe, *Novels*, 2:3, 174, 217. Compare also the comment Defoe makes at the end of *Robinson Crusoe*, when he boasts that Crusoe’s life has been “of a Variety which the world will seldom be able to show the like of” (*RC*, 283).

⁶ Defoe, *Novels*, 9:19, 6:24–25.

⁷ Defoe, *Novels*, 10:31.

⁸ Kate Loveman offers an excellent account of variety as the central commercial value of Defoe’s fiction in “‘A Life of Continu’d Variety’: Crime, Readers, and the Structure of Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*” (*Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 26.1 [2013]: 1–32). She sees Defoe’s cultivation of variety primarily as a means to open up his fictions to as many different readers, reading habits, and uses as possible. For this reason, Loveman does not see variety as an order or principle that exists in some independence from the marketplace. I argue, by contrast, that Defoe understood fictional variety as more than the pragmatic outcome of marketing calculations. Material and spiritual considerations jointly underwrote Defoe’s quest for variety.

⁹ For perhaps the most striking example of the continued currency of species as a concept that applies broadly, see John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). Book three, in which gold, circle, procession, cats, adultery are all presented as different species of things, even as species are no longer defined by essences, is particularly instructive.

¹⁰ Robert James Merrett, *Daniel Defoe: Contrarian* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2013), 69, 60.

¹¹ For Loveman and Merrett, the disintegrated state of Defoe's fictions is not a good. It is a flaw that becomes valuable only when it assumes constructive functions elsewhere: in the marketplace or the reader's mind. Merrett is indebted to Starr's *Defoe and Casuistry*, in which Starr turns from his earlier Aristotelian concern with structural unity toward an analysis of casuistry as a source of fragmentation in Defoe's novels. Still, Starr shares with Merrett an overriding sense of the direction of Defoe's inclusive multiplication of perspectives. Casuistry, after all, is an art directed toward resolution and reconciliation, a tendency that Starr also sees itself play out on the level of plot. "The careers of all of Defoe's heroes and heroines," he notes, "can be charted spatially in the same way: centrifugal motion sooner or later gives way to centripetal motion, which culminates in motifs of return, reunion and repose" (*Defoe and Casuistry*, 182). In Sandra Sherman's striking postmodern interpretation of Defoe's fiction, disintegration assumes the guises of "infinite deferral" and "suspension of genre" (*Finance and Fictionality in the Early Eighteenth Century: Accounting for Defoe* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996], 177, 73). Sherman's argument, however, does not convey a positive sense of Defoe's inclinations: where she sees a suspension of genre, I see a desire for the transcendence of genre, where she sees infinite deferral, I see infinite variety, and where she diagnoses anxiety as Defoe's response to incomprehensibility, I contend that Defoe relished incomprehension.

¹² Defoe's figurations of dispersed political matter in 1688 can be found in *The True-Born Englishman* (1700), in *Satire, Fantasy and Writings on the Supernatural by Daniel Defoe*, 8 vol., ed. W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003–5), 1:107, lines 808, 810, 812. For a discussion of dissolution as a signifier of Whig radicalism, see Richard Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics and Locke's Two Treatises of Government* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986), 555–89 and Julian Franklin, *John Locke and the Theory of Sovereignty: Mixed Monarchy and the Right of Resistance in the Political Thought of the English Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978), 87–126. Compare also J. G. A. Pocock's discussion of dissolution in "The Fourth English Civil War," in *The Revolution of 1688–1689: Changing Perspectives*, ed. Lois Schwoerer (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 52–64.

¹³ For a discussion of *Robinson Crusoe's* place in the tradition of utopian narrative, see Maximillian Novak's "Edenic Desires: *Robinson Crusoe*, the Robinsonade, and Utopias," in *Historical Boundaries, Narrative Forms: Essays on British Literature in the Long Eighteenth Century in Honor of Everett Zimmerman*, ed. Lorna Clymer and Robert Mayer (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2007), 19–36.

¹⁴ Defoe, *The Compleat English Tradesman, volume 2* (1727), in *Religious and Didactic Writings of Daniel Defoe*, 10 vol., ed. W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005–6), 8:43–44.

¹⁵ Defoe, *The Compleat English Tradesman, volume 1* (1725), in *Religious and Didactic Writings of Daniel Defoe*, 7:53.

¹⁶ Michael Seidel has commented on Defoe's use of metaphors and "doublets," but mostly as a strategy of familiarization ("*Robinson Crusoe*: Varieties of Fictional

Experience,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Daniel Defoe*, ed. John Richetti [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009], 192).

¹⁷ It is worth noting that the novel also deviates in other places from the imposition of English forms: Crusoe’s umbrella, for example, is made following procedures he has seen in Brazil. Similarly, his mortar for grinding barley into flour is made following the way “the Indians in Brasil make their Canoes” (*RC*, 147).

¹⁸ See OED, s.v., “pantaloen, n.”

¹⁹ Lynn Festa’s “Crusoe’s Island of Misfit Things” *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 52.3–4 (2011): 443–71 intriguingly splits its concerns between failure and promise. On the one hand, Festa sees the representation of things in Defoe’s novel as characterized by the always-failing need “to create provisional unity out of the irremediably heterogeneous elements that make up the world of the novel” (446). Accordingly, the failure of things to fit the category they belong to is emphasized repeatedly as a feature of the novel. On the other hand, Festa would like to reach a point of promise where the representational work of the novel lures us with “its multiple points of entry, its multitude of possible uses [and] embroils its user in an ongoing negotiation and activity” (466). But as long as Defoe is seen as aspiring to unity and homogeneity (however vainly), the positive vision of multiplicity Festa presents as the novel’s promise cannot be realized.

²⁰ Defoe, *A General History of Discoveries and Improvements* (1725–26), in *Writings on Travel, Discovery and History by Daniel Defoe*, 8 vol., ed. W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001–2), 4:31. Hereafter abbreviated *W* and cited parenthetically by volume number and page number.

²¹ See *The Works of Sir William Temple*, 2 vol. (London, 1731), 1:59–64. Defoe himself refers to the Dutch success as relying on “Numbers of People . . . found in a narrow[] compass” (*W*, 4:207). See also his comments on the Dutch economy in *Review* 6,2 (3 January 1706), in *The Review*, ed. Arthur Wellesley Secord (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1938), 7.

²² Defoe, *A General History of Trade, and Especially Consider’d as Respects the British Commerce, as well at Home as to All Parts of the World* (London, 1713), 24. This is the first pamphlet of four Defoe published monthly in 1713 between June and September.

²³ Defoe, *Review*, 6.

²⁴ Defoe, *Review*, 6.

²⁵ Defoe describes progress in the art of war very much in terms of a proliferation of new kinds, and he revels in his ability to enumerate the names that describe them. See *W*, 4:170–73.

²⁶ Defoe, *Review*, 7.

²⁷ If trade is one way of “reconciling” an infinite diversity, another is the exportation and cultivation of plants in different regions. There is no reason to assume, Defoe suggests, that certain species can prosper only in those regions in which they naturally occur. Coffee, he is virtually certain, may be grown in far more places of the world than it currently is, including the British possessions in the West Indies such as Tobago, St. Vincent, and Jamaica. Similarly, Defoe goes on, “can any Man persuade us to believe, that *Nutmegs* and *Mace* will grow no where but in the Isle of *Banda*; *Cloves* no where but at *Ternate*, *Amboyne*, &c. and *Cinnamon* no where but at *Ceylon*; that *Tea* will not grow in any Dominions but those of *China*?” (*W*, 4:223).

²⁸ For an incisive and wide-ranging account of the sublime’s currencies in the eighteenth century, see Jonathan Lamb’s “The Sublime” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism Volume 4: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet, George

Alexander Kennedy, and Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 381–93.

²⁹ For Blackmore's advocacy of a Christian sublime, see, for example, his preface to *A Paraphrase on the Book of Job* (London, 1700).

³⁰ John Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, in *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, 2 vol., ed. Edward Niles Hooker (1704; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1939–43), 1:325–74.

³¹ See Dionysius Longinus, *The Works of Dionysius Longinus*, trans. Alexander Welsted (London, 1712). Welsted calls Milton “our great Master” (*The Works of Dionysius Longinus*, 158).

³² Peter C. Herman has stressed the importance of the Miltonic “or.” See *Destabilizing Milton: Paradise Lost and the Poetics of Incertitude* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 43–60. Thanks to Esei Murakishi for referring me to this work.

³³ For Defoe's stance on Milton, see Merrett, 99–108.

³⁴ For a discussion of Defoe's interest in the sublime, see Gary Hentzi, “Sublime Moments and Social Authority in *Robinson Crusoe* and *A Journal of the Plague Year*,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 26.3 (1993): 419–34.

³⁵ Longinus, 73.

³⁶ Longinus, 73.

³⁷ Hentzi has singled out this moment in *Robinson Crusoe* as an instance of the sublime, though without linking it to Longinus. See 423.

³⁸ In *The Cure of the Passions and the Origins of the English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), Geoffrey Sill has convincingly argued that Defoe's fictions offer a natural history of the passions. I am not persuaded, however, that Defoe's fictions are as committed to taming and moderating the passions as Sill claims.

³⁹ For arguments that see the early novel as depicting a world in which individual freedom is submerged in the causal chains that determine agency, see Sandra Macpherson, *Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2010) and Jonathan Kramnick, *Actions and Objects from Hobbes to Richardson* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2010).