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**Daniel Defoe**  
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# Daniel Defoe(1660 - 1731)

Daniel Defoe born Daniel Foe, was an English trader, writer, journalist, and pamphleteer, who gained fame for his novel Robinson Crusoe. Defoe is notable for being one of the earliest proponents of the novel, as he helped to popularise the form in Britain and along with others such as Richardson, is among the founders of the English novel. A prolific and versatile writer, he wrote more than 500 books, pamphlets and journals on various topics (including politics, crime, religion, marriage, psychology and the supernatural). He was also a pioneer of economic journalism.

## <b>Early life</b>

Daniel Foe (his original name) was probably born in the parish of St. Giles Cripplegate London. Defoe later added the aristocratic-sounding "De" to his name and on occasion claimed descent from the family of De Beau Faux. The date and the place of his birth are uncertain, with sources often giving dates of 1659 to 1661. His father James Foe, though a member of the Butchers' Company, was a tallow chandler. In Defoe's early life he experienced first-hand some of the most unusual occurrences in English history: in 1665, 70,000 were killed by the Great Plague of London. The Great Fire of London (1666) hit Defoe's neighbourhood hard, leaving only his and two other homes standing. In 1667, when Defoe was probably about seven years old, a Dutch fleet sailed up the Medway via the River Thames and attacked Chatham. By the time he was about 10, Defoe's mother Annie had died.

His parents were Presbyterian dissenters; he was educated in a dissenting academy at Newington Green run by Charles Morton and is believed to have attended the church there. During this time period, England was not tolerant in religion. Controversy of religion was a political issue. Roman Catholics were feared and hated. Dissenters refused to conform to the services of the Church of England; they were despised and oppressed.

James Foe wanted his son to enter in ministry, but Daniel Defoe preferred other things. When he was about 18, he left school. After some years of preparations, he went into the hosiery business.

## <b>Business Career</b>

Although Defoe was a Christian, he decided not to become a dissenting minister and entered the world of business as a general merchant, dealing at different

times in hosiery, general woollen goods and wine. Though his ambitions were great and he bought both a country estate and a ship (as well as civet cats to make perfume), he was rarely out of debt. In 1684, Defoe married Mary Tuffley, the daughter of a London merchant, and received a dowry of £3,700. With his debts and political trouble, their marriage was most likely a difficult one. It lasted 50 years, however, and together they had eight children, six of whom survived.

In 1685, he joined the ill-fated Monmouth Rebellion but gained a pardon by which he escaped the Bloody Assizes of Judge George Jeffreys. William III was crowned in 1688, and Defoe immediately became one of his close allies and a secret agent. Some of the new king's policies, however, led to conflict with France, thus damaging prosperous trade relationships for Defoe, who had established himself as a merchant. In 1692, Defoe was arrested for payments of £700 (and his civets were seized), though his total debts may have amounted to £17,000. His laments were loud and he always defended unfortunate debtors but there is evidence that his financial dealings were not always honest.

Following his release, he probably travelled in Europe and Scotland and it may have been at this time that he traded wine to Cadiz, Porto and Lisbon. By 1695 he was back in England, using the name "Defoe", and serving as a "commissioner of the glass duty", responsible for collecting the tax on bottles. In 1696 he was operating a tile and brick factory in what is now Tilbury, Essex and living in the parish of Chadwell St Mary.

### <b>Writing</b>

Defoe's first notable publication was *An Essay upon Projects*, a series of proposals for social and economic improvement, published in 1697. From 1697 to 1698 he defended the right of King William III to a standing army during disarmament after the Treaty of Ryswick (1697) had ended the Nine Years' War (1688–97). His most successful poem, *The True-Born Englishman* (1701), defended the king against the perceived xenophobia of his enemies, satirising the English claim to racial purity. In 1701 Defoe, flanked by a guard of sixteen gentlemen of quality, presented the Legion's Memorial to the Speaker of the House of Commons, later his employer, Robert Harley. It demanded the release of the Kentish petitioners, who had asked Parliament to support the king in an imminent war against France.

The death of William III in 1702 once again created a political upheaval as the king was replaced by Queen Anne, who immediately began her offensive against Nonconformists. A natural target, Defoe's pamphleteering and political activities resulted in his arrest and placement in a pillory on 31 July 1703, principally on

account of a pamphlet entitled *The Shortest-Way with the Dissenters; Or, Proposals for the Establishment of the Church*, purporting to argue for their extermination. In it he ruthlessly satirised both the High church Tories and those Dissenters who hypocritically practised so-called "occasional conformity", such as his Stoke Newington neighbour Sir Thomas Abney. Though it was published anonymously, the true authorship was quickly discovered and Defoe was arrested.

According to legend, the publication of his poem *Hymn to the Pillory* caused his audience at the pillory to throw flowers instead of the customary harmful and noxious objects and to drink to his health. The historicity of this story is questioned by most scholars, although John Robert Moore later said that "no man in England but Defoe ever stood in the pillory and later rose to eminence among his fellow men". Thomas Cochrane, the 10th Earl of Dundonald and famous Royal Navy officer, was sentenced to the pillory but was excused for fear his popularity would cause a riot.

After his three days in the pillory, Defoe went into Newgate Prison. Robert Harley, 1st Earl of Oxford and Earl Mortimer, brokered his release in exchange for Defoe's co-operation as an intelligence agent for the Tories. In exchange for his cooperation with the rival political side, Harley paid some of Defoe's outstanding debts, improving his financial situation considerably. Within a week of his release from prison, Defoe witnessed the Great Storm of 1703 which raged from 26 to 27 November. It caused severe damage to London and Bristol and uprooted millions of trees and killed over 8,000 people, mostly at sea. The event became the subject of Defoe's *The Storm* (1704), a collection of witness accounts of the tempest. Many regard it as one of the world's first examples of modern journalism.

In the same year he set up his periodical *A Review of the Affairs of France* which supported the Harley Ministry, chronicling the events of the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–1714). The Review ran three times a week without interruption until 1713. Defoe was amazed that a man as gifted as Harley left vital state papers lying in the open, and warned that he was almost inviting an unscrupulous clerk to commit treason; his warnings were fully justified by the William Gregg affair. When Harley was ousted from the ministry in 1708 Defoe continued writing it to support Godolphin, then again to support Harley and the Tories in the Tory ministry of 1710 to 1714. After the Tories fell from power with the death of Queen Anne, Defoe continued doing intelligence work for the Whig government, writing "Tory" pamphlets that actually undermined the Tory point of view.

Not all of Defoe's pamphlet writing was political. One pamphlet (originally published anonymously) entitled *A True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal the Next Day after her Death to One Mrs. Bargrave at Canterbury the 8th of September, 1705*, deals with interaction between the spiritual realm and the physical realm. It was most likely written in support of Charles Drelincourt's *The Christian Defense against the Fears of Death* (1651). It describes Mrs. Bargrave's encounter with an old friend Mrs. Veal, after she had died. It is clear from this piece and other writings, that while the political portion of Defoe's life was fairly dominant, it was by no means the only aspect.

### <b>Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707</b>

No fewer than 545 titles, ranging from satirical poems, political and religious pamphlets and volumes have been ascribed to Defoe (note: in their *Critical Bibliography* (1998), Furbank and Owens argue for the much smaller number of 276 published items). His ambitious business ventures saw him bankrupt by 1692, with a wife and seven children to support. In 1703, he published a satirical pamphlet against the High Tories and in favour of religious tolerance entitled *The Shortest-Way with the Dissenters; Or, Proposals for the Establishment of the Church*. As has happened with ironic writings before and since, this pamphlet was widely misunderstood but eventually its author was prosecuted for seditious libel and was sentenced to be pilloried, fined 200 marks and detained at the Queen's pleasure.

In despair, he wrote to William Paterson the London Scot and founder of the Bank of England and part instigator of the Darien scheme, who was in the confidence of Robert Harley, 1st Earl of Oxford and Earl Mortimer, leading minister and spymaster in the English Government. Harley accepted Defoe's services and released him in 1703. He immediately published *The Review*, which appeared weekly, then three times a week, written mostly by himself. This was the main mouthpiece of the English Government promoting the Act of Union 1707.

In 1709 Defoe authored a rather lengthy book entitled, *The History Of The Union Of Great Britain*; an Edinburgh publication printed by the Heirs of Anderson.

The book was not authored anonymously and cites Defoe as twice taking credit for being its author. An evolution expounded in the book which attempts to explain the facts leading up to the Act of Union 1707 dates all the way back to the 6 December 1604 when King James was presented with a proposed embellishment for unification. This so-called "first draft" for unification took place a full one-hundred years before the signing of the 1707 accord, which

respectively preceded the commencement of Robinson Crusoe' by another full ten years.

Defoe began his campaign in *The Review* and other pamphlets aimed at English opinion, claiming that it would end the threat from the north, gaining for the Treasury an "inexhaustible treasury of men", a valuable new market increasing the power of England. By September 1706 Harley ordered Defoe to Edinburgh as a secret agent to do everything possible to help secure acquiescence in the Treaty of Union. He was conscious of the risk to himself. Thanks to books such as *The Letters of Daniel Defoe* (edited by G. H. Healey, Oxford 1955), which are readily available, far more is known about his activities than is usual with such agents.

His first reports included vivid descriptions of violent demonstrations against the Union. "A Scots rabble is the worst of its kind", he reported. Years later John Clerk of Penicuik, a leading Unionist, wrote in his memoirs that,

He was a spy among us, but not known as such, otherwise the Mob of Edinburgh would pull him to pieces.

Defoe being a Presbyterian who had suffered in England for his convictions, was accepted as an adviser to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and committees of the Parliament of Scotland. He told Harley that he was "privy to all their folly" but "Perfectly unsuspected as with corresponding with anybody in England". He was then able to influence the proposals that were put to Parliament and reported back:

Having had the honour to be always sent for the committee to whom these amendments were referred,

I have had the good fortune to break their measures in two particulars via the bounty on Corn and proportion of the Excise.

For Scotland he used different arguments, even the opposite of those he used in England, for example, usually ignoring the English doctrine of the Sovereignty of Parliament, telling the Scots that they could have complete confidence in the guarantees in the Treaty. Some of his pamphlets were purported to be written by Scots, misleading even reputable historians into quoting them as evidence of Scottish opinion of the time. The same is true of a massive history of the Union which Defoe published in 1709 and which some historians still treat as a valuable contemporary source for their own works. Defoe took pains to give his history an air of objectivity by giving some space to arguments against the Union but

always having the last word for himself.

He disposed of the main Union opponent, Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun by ignoring him. Nor does he account for the deviousness of the Duke of Hamilton, the official leader of the various factions opposed to the Union, who seemingly betrayed his former colleagues when he switched to the Unionist/Government side in the decisive final stages of the debate.

Defoe made no attempt to explain why the same Parliament of Scotland which was so vehement for its independence from 1703 to 1705 became so supine in 1706. He received very little reward from his paymasters and of course no recognition for his services by the government. He made use of his Scottish experience to write his *Tour thro' the whole Island of Great Britain*, published in 1726, where he admitted that the increase of trade and population in Scotland which he had predicted as a consequence of the Union, was "not the case, but rather the contrary".

Defoe's description of Glasgow (Glaschu) as a "Dear Green Place" has often been misquoted as a Gaelic translation for the town. The Gaelic Glas could mean grey or green, chu means dog or hollow. Glaschu probably actually means "Green Hollow". The "Dear Green Place", like much of Scotland, was a hotbed of unrest against the Union. The local Tron minister urged his congregation "to up and anent for the City of God". The "Dear Green Place" and "City of God" required government troops to put down the rioters tearing up copies of the Treaty, as at almost every mercat cross in Scotland.

When Defoe visited in the mid 1720s, he claimed that the hostility towards his party was, "because they were English and because of the Union, which they were almost universally exclaimed against".

### <b>Late Writing and Novels</b>

The extent and particulars of Defoe's writing in the period from the Tory fall in 1714 to the publication of *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719 is widely contested. Defoe comments on the tendency to attribute tracts of uncertain authorship to him in his apologia *Appeal to Honour and Justice* (1715), a defence of his part in Harley's Tory ministry (1710–14). Other works that are thought to anticipate his novelistic career include: *The Family Instructor* (1715), an immensely successful conduct manual on religious duty; *Minutes of the Negotiations of Monsr. Mesnager* (1717), in which he impersonates Nicolas Mesnager, the French plenipotentiary who negotiated the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) and *A Continuation of the Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy* (1718), a satire on European politics and

religion, professedly written by a Muslim in Paris.

From 1719 to 1724, Defoe published the novels for which he is famous. In the final decade of his life, he also wrote conduct manuals, including *Religious Courtship* (1722), *The Complete English Tradesman* (1726) and *The New Family Instructor* (1727). He published a number of books decrying the breakdown of the social order, such as *The Great Law of Subordination Considered* (1724) and *Everybody's Business is Nobody's Business* (1725) and works on the supernatural, like *The Political History of the Devil* (1726), *A System of Magick* (1726) and *An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions* (1727). His works on foreign travel and trade include *A General History of Discoveries and Improvements* (1727) and *Atlas Maritimus and Commercialis* (1728). Perhaps his greatest achievement with the novels is the magisterial *A tour thro' the whole island of Great Britain* (1724–27), which provided a panoramic survey of British trade on the eve of the Industrial Revolution.

### <b>Death</b>

Daniel Defoe died on 24 April 1731, probably while in hiding from his creditors. He was interred in Bunhill Fields, London, where his grave can still be visited.



# Introduction To The True-Born Englishman

Speak, satire; for there's none can tell like thee  
Whether 'tis folly, pride, or knavery  
That makes this discontented land appear  
Less happy now in times of peace than war?  
Why civil feuds disturb the nation more  
Than all our bloody wars have done before?  
Fools out of favour grudge at knaves in place,  
And men are always honest in disgrace;  
The court preferments make men knaves in course,  
But they which would be in them would be worse.  
'Tis not at foreigners that we repine,  
Would foreigners their perquisites resign:  
The grand contention's plainly to be seen,  
To get some men put out, and some put in.  
For this our senators make long harangues,  
And florid members whet their polished tongues.  
Statesmen are always sick of one disease,  
And a good pension gives them present ease:  
That's the specific makes them all content  
With any king and any government.  
Good patriots at court abuses rail,  
And all the nation's grievances bewail;  
But when the sovereign's balsam's once applied,  
The zealot never fails to change his side;  
And when he must the golden key resign,  
The railing spirit comes about again.  
Who shall this bubbled nation disabuse,  
While they their own felicities refuse,  
Who the wars have made such mighty pother,  
And now are falling out with one another:  
With needless fears the jealous nation fill,  
And always have been saved against their will:  
Who fifty millions sterling have disbursed,  
To be with peace and too much plenty cursed:  
Who their old monarch eagerly undo,  
And yet uneasily obey the new?  
Search, satire, search; a deep incision make;  
The poison's strong, the antidote's too weak.  
'Tis pointed truth must manage this dispute,

And downright English, Englishmen confute.  
Whet thy just anger at the nation's pride,  
And with keen phrase repel the vicious tide;  
To Englishmen their own beginnings show,  
And ask them why they slight their neighbours so.  
Go back to elder times and ages past,  
And nations into long oblivion cast;  
To old Britannia's youthful days retire,  
And there for true-born Englishmen inquire.  
Britannia freely will disown the name,  
And hardly knows herself from whence they came:  
Wonders that they of all men should pretend  
To birth and blood, and for a name contend.  
Go back to causes where our follies dwell,  
And fetch the dark original from hell:  
Speak, satire, for there's none like thee can tell.

Daniel Defoe

# The True Born Englishman (Excerpt)

...

Thus from a mixture of all kinds began,  
That het'rogeneous thing, an Englishman:  
In eager rapes, and furious lust begot,  
Betwixt a painted Britain and a Scot.  
Whose gend'ring off-spring quickly learn'd to bow,  
And yoke their heifers to the Roman plough:  
From whence a mongrel half-bred race there came,  
With neither name, nor nation, speech nor fame.  
In whose hot veins new mixtures quickly ran,  
Infus'd betwixt a Saxon and a Dane.  
While their rank daughters, to their parents just,  
Receiv'd all nations with promiscuous lust.  
This nauseous brood directly did contain  
The well-extracted blood of Englishmen.

Which medly canton'd in a heptarchy,  
A rhapsody of nations to supply,  
Among themselves maintain'd eternal wars,  
And still the ladies lov'd the conquerors.

The western Angles all the rest subdu'd;  
A bloody nation, barbarous and rude:  
Who by the tenure of the sword possest  
One part of Britain, and subdu'd the rest  
And as great things denominate the small,  
The conqu'ring part gave title to the whole.  
The Scot, Pict, Britain, Roman, Dane, submit,  
And with the English-Saxon all unite:  
And these the mixture have so close pursu'd,  
The very name and memory's subdu'd:  
No Roman now, no Britain does remain;  
Wales strove to separate, but strove in vain:  
The silent nations undistinguish'd fall,  
And Englishman's the common name for all.  
Fate jumbled them together, God knows how;  
What e'er they were they're true-born English now.

The wonder which remains is at our pride,

To value that which all wise men deride.  
For Englishmen to boast of generation,  
Cancels their knowledge, and lampoons the nation.  
A true-born Englishman's a contradiction,  
In speech an irony, in fact a fiction.  
A banter made to be a test of fools,  
Which those that use it justly ridicules.  
A metaphor invented to express  
A man a-kin to all the universe.

For as the Scots, as learned men ha' said,  
Throughout the world their wand'ring seed ha' spread;  
So open-handed England, 'tis believ'd,  
Has all the gleanings of the world receiv'd.

Some think of England 'twas our Saviour meant,  
The Gospel should to all the world be sent:  
Since, when the blessed sound did hither reach,  
They to all nations might be said to preach.

'Tis well that virtue gives nobility,  
How shall we else the want of birth and blood supply?  
Since scarce one family is left alive,  
Which does not from some foreigner derive.

...

Daniel Defoe