



Criminal Conversations: Rogues, Words and the World in the Work of Daniel Defoe

Adam Hansen Brasenose College, Oxford

Social and material structures in the eighteenth century were afflicted by a profound permeability, or so commentators feared: ‘*Walls, locks, bars* are of little avail against evil propensities of the mind’.¹ This permeability facilitated the intrusion by excluded illicit individuals and groups, especially those mobile or itinerant, into spaces and places they should not have been. Their presence, or the threat of it, subsequently destabilized normative moral distinctions between the licit and illicit.

Contemporary antipathy towards lowly itinerants was evident in both representation and reality.² The supposedly disruptive characteristics of the idle and indigent, particularly if, as fretfully imagined, they were organized to perpetrate acts of outright illegality and subversion, were troubling to some commentators and communities. From this perspective, Henry Fielding’s comment on the poor is apposite: ‘They starve, and freeze, and rot among themselves; but they beg, and steal, and rob among their Betters’.³ Fundamental to the contemporary debate about the roguish low was a desire to isolate, identify, and separate them from the lives of upstanding people, the insulation of whom was accordingly paramount. ‘The primal Augustan terror is that things will *merge*. It might be said that the eighteenth century could take anything so long as it was divided up’.⁴ Those writings of Daniel Defoe which touch upon or are deeply concerned with roguish antics, explicit criminality and illicit proscribed behaviour, notably *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack*, explore this state of affairs to potent effect.⁵



Itinerant identities

Several of Defoe's protagonists begin life in marginal socio-economic positions, either on the edge of illicit, itinerant cultures, or deeply part of them. Moll Flanders, born to a convict, falls in with some 'gipsies, or Egyptians'. To Defoe such terms included 'a sort of strolling, fortune-telling, hen-roost-robbing, pocket-picking vagabonds'.⁶ When she leaves them to live with a poor nurse, and the nurse dies, Moll is again reduced to vagrancy, with 'not so much as a lodging to go to, or a bit of bread to eat'. Later, in her new home amongst the provincial well-to-do, the threat of vagrancy looms over her as the matriarch threatens to turn her 'out of doors'. And when embroiled in a criminal lifestyle, Moll resorts to the disguise of a 'beggar-woman' in 'despicable rags'.⁷

Colonel Jack admits, in a reflective moment in his 'wandering Life': 'I was bred a Vagabond, had been a Pick-pocket, and a Soldier, and was run from my Colours, and that I had no settled abode in the world'.⁸ Likewise, in a depiction of a nightmare for respectable people, the infant Captain Singleton is stolen from his inattentive maid and 'disposed of to a Beggar-Woman that wanted a pretty little Child to set out her Case'; having been unwittingly incriminated in illicit acts Singleton is then given to a 'Gypsey' under whose 'government' he rests until 'about Six years old'. When this 'good *Gyspey Mother*' is hanged, Singleton is too young to apply what little he has learned of the 'Strolling Trade', and so is abandoned to the Parish. Here ensues a legally enforced itinerancy, as Singleton is 'frequently removed from one Town to another'. At twelve he is taken to sea, whereupon he learns to be 'an errant Thief and a bad Sailor'.⁹ The equivalence was often noted between maritime miscreants and 'Land Pirates'.¹⁰ They shared the '*same Sagacity*'.¹¹ In Captain Johnson's account of the exploits of Captain Bellamy, the presence of a 'Stroler', son of a miller, who had been a Servitor at Oxford, galvanizes the piratical crew.¹² In 1697, Defoe described sailors as '*Les Enfants Perdus*': Singleton is just such a lost child, adrift, aimless, never fixed.¹³ Thus there is continuity in all this motion of 'a vagrant Life', and Singleton's incarnation as a pirate is but a consummation of juvenile mobility, as a roguish seaman observes, 'My Lad . . . thou art born to do a World of Mischief; thou hast commenced Pyrate very young, but have a Care of the Gallows, young Man'.¹⁴

And yet vagrant status is not something any of Defoe's protagonists readily assent to. In fact they strenuously reject such positions, and yearn for extrication from lowly surroundings. Moll eagerly removes herself from the Gypsies, stating repeatedly and defiantly that she 'would not go any farther with them'. Equally, in typical fashion, she is simultaneously tactically aware, and seemingly innocently ignorant, of presumed ethnic differences, pointing out the dissimilarity (however superficial) between herself and her acquaintances: 'I had not had my skin discoloured, as they do to all children they carry about with them'.¹⁵ Moll either exaggerates and plays up to these

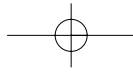
Literature & History *third series* 13/2

presumed stereotypical ethnic differences, or acknowledges real ones, but disingenuously disguises this awareness as a cute *faux-naïf* comment on their cultural and domestic habits.

Moll's technique of homogenizing her acquaintances into a group so strictly defined she *obviously* cannot be part of it is repeated in her later description of vagabonds as a 'tribe'. Though the ethnic-cultural difference is here more difficult to sustain, Moll simply emphasizes the moral separation implicit to such differentiations, to stress her distinction from those who may share her complexion but not her innocence and 'modesty'.¹⁶ Of the members of such a tribe Moll can be highly critical, terming them 'ugly rogues'.¹⁷ And when disguised as a beggar, she is consumed by disgust for her attire and all that it entails: 'I naturally abhorred dirt and rags; I had been bred up tight and cleanly, and could be no other, whatever condition I was in, so that this was the most uneasy disguise to me that ever I put on'.¹⁸ That insistence on being 'tight', that is, impervious to influence, continent, and genteelly restrained, is, to John Richetti, evidence of Moll's 'instinctive sense of strong isolation'. Though reduced to criminal acts she upholds her 'theoretical innocence' by employing 'a series of quasi-legal protective measures and self-reservations'.¹⁹

Colonel Jack offers distinctions similar to Moll's, referring to 'the Clan' to which he once belonged. What by Moll is expressed as an expedient 'taste', and indeed great competency, for 'genteel living', becomes to Jack, in his words at least, an essential part of his being, an 'Original something', an innate sense of high degree facilitated by the possibilities tantalizing facts about his birth and provenance throw up. This gentle heritage underscores Jack's willed separation from this clan. Jack adheres obsessively, ridiculously, poignantly, to any reference – however patently ironic – that might be seen to confirm his status as a gentleman: the word is always in his ears, and on his lips.²⁰ From this position, even as he is involved in the theft of their 'Bills' and suchlike, Jack readily sympathizes with those he considers related to him in rank, and who might be 'undone' by criminal acts.²¹

The corollary to this is that Jack is derogatory towards those with whom he works. He deems his nominal siblings 'very wicked Boys, Thieves and Pick-Pockets . . . a sad Pack'. He does not share their dissolute inclinations: 'contrary to the usage of the rest of the Tribe, I was extremely [*sic*] Frugal'. He is equally at pains to stress his alienation from their methods. Sometimes this is couched in cultivated ignorance: 'How he did to Whip away such a Bagg of Money from any Man that was Awake, and in his Senses; I cannot tell; . . . there was about 17 or 18 Pound in the Bag as I understood by him, for I cou'd not tell Money, not I'. *Captain* Jack's 'Pranks', as he and Colonel Jack abscond from the military, remain resolutely 'his'. When Colonel Jack is actively involved in a street robbery he later reworks events, denying his own agency and responsibility: 'it happen'd that before I was aware I cross'd a Field that came to the very Spot where I robb'd the poor old Woman, and



Criminal Conversations

that Maid, or where I should say *Will*, made me rob them'. Jack has, by his own frequent admission, a conscience, grounded in his pedigree and enhanced by his aspirations, preventing his easy enjoyments of ill-gotten gains: 'certainly this was not the Life of a Gentleman!'.²² Like Moll, he claims he is 'not harden'd enough' to coexist next to villains without problems. This conscience prompts Jack's attempts to police his brethren and their pursuit of a 'cursed' trade.²³ Colonel Jack holds Captain Jack 'by the sleeve', to arrest his complete absorption into what the former says are, in yet another abdication of responsibility, 'your old ways'.²⁴ And always, Jack observes strategically. His 'privilege as spectator' notes Richetti, 'certifies his apartness, celebrates it as such rather than the events that it allows him to view'.²⁵ One is left believing, in Maximillian E. Novak's words, that Jack's story 'is ultimately not that of a rogue'.²⁶

In all, such efforts by Moll and Jack are, one might argue, albeit reductively, intent on affirming the valency of guilt and repentance, and refuting the proverbial hypothesis, voiced but likewise rejected by the narrator of *Street-Robberies Consider'd* (1728), that '*Once a Thief, and always a Thief*'.²⁷

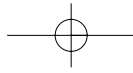
Liminal lives

Yet it requires only a little critical insight to discern that this clear-cut separation between these characters and their disreputable environment is not as certain as it seems. Historical evidence would suggest such distinction was untenable. Nicholas Rogers has observed that 'only a minority of cases brought before the magistrates conform to the stock-in-trade caricature of eighteenth-century vagabondage'.²⁸ At times anyone might be forced or reduced to vagrancy or nefarious itinerancy. Figures analyzed by J.M. Beattie showing the occupations of men accused of property offences at the Surrey and Sussex Assizes in the years 1786–87 convey one central point, confounding the notion that property crime was perpetrated by a 'separate group' or a criminal subculture: 'half the men on trial . . . claimed to have worked at a trade that had required training and skill'.²⁹

Those residing in urban areas were often vulnerable to, or accepting of, mobility; the uncertainty of unemployment and casual tenancy arrangements produced what M. Dorothy George termed a 'floating population'.³⁰ All this constituted a set of social circumstances which ensured the 'ubiquity of begging' so lamented by contemporaries, but also the subsequent catch-all punitive responses, such as the Vagrancy Act of 1744, hounding (with what Patrick Colquhoun would later scathingly term '*indiscriminate rigour*') what were, in reality, diverse individuals and groups.³¹

Thus it is fitting that Defoe's Jack is fundamentally as a 'Brother' to his adopted siblings: the term aptly indicates his willingness to partake of their profits, even as he scorns the method by which they were acquired. He lives at Captain Jack's 'Expence'.³² Indeed, Jack's 'pursuit of gentility' is, notes



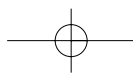


Literature & History *third series* 13/2

Everett Zimmerman, always 'laughably enmeshed in his ungentlemanly life'.³³ Furthermore, Jack's attempts to extricate himself from illicit acts perpetuates his incrimination.³⁴ He acquires a hat after enduring derision for his ragged clothes; the same hat later becomes a receptacle for stolen money.³⁵ His notions of his infantile descent from status, and his hopes of reclaiming the dignity of birth to a father who was a 'Man of Quality' and a 'Gentlewoman' mother, are predicated on the inefficacy of separations between gentle and lowly ranks: he is living proof that the exclusive world he yearns to re-enter is not so securely demarcated.³⁶ Clearly, transitions between decent and villainous lifestyles can be sudden. Jack learns to read and write, and in six months this one-time deserter, thief and vagrant, is 'fit for Business', and is taken into employ by a Customs Officer no less. Yet the security of this post – concerned with properly regulating and accounting for the flow of trade – is undermined when Jack's master, a presumed model of probity, is 'turn'd out of his Place . . . having been Charged with some Mis-applications'.³⁷

Similarly, when in the colonies, Jack enjoys a rapid rise to respectability, going into one room 'a Slave' and coming out 'a Gentleman'.³⁸ But even as he becomes a wealthy plantation owner, Jack's new, long-sought status is not secure: notably he remains ignorant of significant accoutrements of gentility, such as swordsmanship.³⁹ Equally, as Jack tries to conceal his own felonious past, keeping details of that aspect of his life 'close', he admits he experiences some 'Disorder' as a new convict tells his own story.⁴⁰ When more convicts begin to be transported Jack confesses: 'I expected several of them would know me'. He tries to insulate his new world, resolving 'to let none of them be bought into my Work or to any of my Plantations'. But as he realizes that 'the Danger was come Home to me', so he lives in fear as a 'poor self condemn'd Rebel'.⁴¹ Saved finally by Parliamentary pardon, Jack spends his days more easily, learning 'as *Job* says, *to abhor my self in Dust and Ashes*'.⁴² Yet any satisfaction at such a moral resolution, and certain assured distinction between past naughtiness and present humility (and, paradoxically, refinement), must be tempered. This biblical reference is echoic of Jack's vagrant youth, spent 'sleeping in the Ashes' of bottle-works.⁴³ The echo may entail a firm rejection; it equally revisits that past, emphasizing the connection of the present to it, and suggesting that any rejection can only ever be partial, given that Jack's new status is founded on the profits, accumulated, lost, and accumulated again, of previous phases of his life.

In his fiction then, Defoe superbly reconfigures the permeabilities, proximities and confusions between seemingly licit, decent, settled, normative society, and illicit, vagrant, deviant individuals, so pervasive in material and social relations. Yet as much as characters suffer under the confusions induced, so do they exploit and cultivate the dysfunction of separations, most notably in their use of language. Appreciating this requires an appraisal of contemporary perceptions of the functions, and instabilities, of language.



Training tongues

There was a troubled awareness in the period that no one person would be able to comprehend the many different dialects and languages, of regions, trades, and immigrant communities, constituting what seemed like an increasingly, and dangerously, polyglot nation: 'The People of this place are literally Savages & speak a Language not to be understood'.⁴⁴ In *Tom Jones*, the cosmopolitan sister of Squire Western protests to her bumpkin brother with his 'jargon of turneps and Hannover rats': 'you are now got beyond my understanding'.⁴⁵ The blustery humour of such exchanges barely conceals the severity of the problem: powerful interests cannot communicate with each other. Henry Fielding not only attempted to identify the problem, but also offered a corrective, ridiculing corruptions of plain speech. In *Amelia*, Murphy the Attorney converses in a garbled argot that befits the degeneracy of the law as he practices it. His speech is full of nonsensical Latinisms intended to baffle and bowl over the gullible. In one of the book's more positive conclusions, Murphy's babble is exposed by a doctor as 'incomprehensible nonsense'. He is tried at the Old Bailey for forgery, and 'after much quibbling about the meaning of a very plain Act of Parliament' is fittingly hanged at Tyburn.⁴⁶

Another response to linguistic confusion, as John Barrell has shown, was the cultural construction of the figure of the disinterested, objective, universal Gentleman, a project Defoe, amongst others, was implicated in. As socio-economics became a tangled mass of interlocking interests, trades and professions, each with their own codes, social and linguistic, only someone, a 'comprehensive observer' with 'no regular determinate task' might be able to perceive, reconcile, and hence organize and govern, the relations between occupational groups.⁴⁷ In the dialogues and declarations of *The Compleat English Gentleman* (1890), Defoe delineates such an ideal type. He is not so uselessly stuffed, by pedantry and impractical University learning, as to be 'full of tongues but no languages', but is instead equipped, through a process of education – by himself if necessary – with the abilities to communicate and comprehend the needs, weaknesses and strengths of others, and how society as a whole interrelated, as surely as he understood the 'conjunctions, revolutions and influences of the planets': 'he has it all in his view'.⁴⁸

This abstract Gentleman, as described by Barrell, was 'believed to be the only member of society who spoke a language universally intelligible: his usage was 'common', in the sense of being neither a local dialect nor infected by the terms of any particular art'.⁴⁹ Cultural consolidations of this universal, self-regulated and regulating personage included lexicographical projects which reified 'the language of the polite', in the face of the anarchic, mutable murmur of the rest of society.⁵⁰ Hence, in part, the 'prestige' enjoyed by Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755), with its emphasis on the exclusion of the usage of 'laborious' and 'mercantile' classes: 'it answered a need frequently felt by educated and literary people'.⁵¹ Even to a radical linguist such

Literature & History *third series* 13/2

as Thomas Spence, standardizing features of communication such as pronunciation was crucial, in the interests of furthering the 'education of the lower classes' which he deemed to be the key to the 'reform of society'.⁵²

Equally, if linguistic and hence social order were to be plainly appreciable and adhered to, it was necessary to open up and illuminate those shadowy places where corruptions of English were prevalent, and evidence of terrifyingly organized seditious subcultures. Thus the endeavour, undertaken in the footnotes and glossaries of commentary and fiction, to translate criminal cant terms, detecting, revealing, and putting in normal forms a deviant dialect.⁵³

This desire had deep-rooted, and complex, contemporary theoretical legitimation. In a sophisticated analysis of the period's conceptions of linguistic issues, Richard W. F. Kroll asserts that neo-classical language theorists 'all seem to think of language first as a series of discrete tactile or peculiarly plastic moments (whether originary gestures, letters, pictures or words)'; they subsequently viewed 'language-as-we-have-it' as a 'tissue of . . . almost concrete elements'.⁵⁴ To Kroll, this comprehension of the plasticity, or materiality, of parts of speech and the elements of communication and language, ensured that 'any argument cast in linguistic terms cannot escape some form of public institutional accountability or scrutiny, because these elements are imagined as incapable of escaping the conditions that define any phenomenal object'.⁵⁵ Language was conceived as being a 'public artefact', and thus 'negotiable', resisting appropriation from some supreme Cartesian observer or puppeteer'.⁵⁶ Though, as Kroll notes, such arguments on the one hand secured language 'as the possession of public institutions' (such as the Royal Society or Anglican church), the impetus for such theorizing lay in the 'fear' that if language was treated as anything other than 'material' it would disappear from the 'public forum' offering itself instead as a 'secret and insidious instrument of radical or tyrannical control'.⁵⁷ Linguistic practices which were in any way 'private or hidden' had to be interrogated: 'Certain kinds of power are prescriptively necessary to preserve the integrity of ordinary language'.⁵⁸ This interrogation was directed as much at the highest as the lowest. Thus in *Mercury* (1641), John Wilkins connects attempts to 'subvert' the 'integrity' of honest, plain communication by authority figures, with the 'aural maneuvers represented by "Melancholike Chymicks," "the Canting of beggars," or "the charms of Witches, and the language of Magicians."' ⁵⁹

Depending on what one reads of what Defoe thought about language and its proper usage, it would seem, on one hand, that he too was a stickler for linguistic lucidity and accountability. Kroll argues that his *Essay Upon Literature* (1726) 'emphasises first that (but not how) language by its very nature must operate as a condition of human institutions (like writing itself)'.⁶⁰ In this Defoe is in alignment with theorists who consistently returned to 'the question of who controls cultural and textual spaces'.⁶¹ The 'visibility of writing' propounded by Defoe, Kroll continues, 'subjects the claims of power to public scrutiny, which allows for the emergence of political opposition'.⁶²

Criminal Conversations

Equally, in 1697 Defoe called for the establishment of an English Academy 'to encourage Polite Learning, to polish and refine the *English* Tongue, and advance the so much neglected Faculty of Correct Language . . . and to purge it from all Irregular Additions that Ignorance and Affectation have introduced'.⁶³ Again the emphasis is on consolidating the universality of the common tongue, extirpating deviant, exclusive alternatives, which might permit misdemeanours high or low.

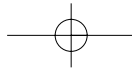
The measure of Defoe's discomfort when encountering 'foreign' dialects, especially when at 'home' (or where those dialects compromise assumptions of what is home and what is not) is presented in *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–26). When in the mountains of Wales, 'above the clouds', Defoe remarks that 'the names of some of these hills seemed as barbarous to us, who spoke no Welch, as the hills themselves'.⁶⁴

Yet despite his criticism of the likes of Richard Steele for neologistic innovations and foreign importations in speech and writing (and his later critical reputation as a writer of plain, unadorned English), Defoe was not averse to employing appropriated terms and phrases.⁶⁵ Indeed, on his travels Defoe himself employs local phrases to add local colour, in wry, socio-politically charged arrogation, as in this description of Stirling Castle. 'They who built the castle, without doubt built it, as the Scots express it, to continue aye, and till somebody else should build another there, which in our language, would be for ever and a day after'.⁶⁶

In cautiously appreciating, if not fearfully denigrating, a polyglot society, Defoe was characteristically responsive to the realities of his age: Douglas Hay and Nicholas Rogers estimate that even at the end of the century one-fifth of the population of the British Isles did not speak English as their first language, 'and a large proportion of that fifth did not speak English at all'.⁶⁷ Defoe recognized that there was 'a kind of cant in trade, which a tradesman ought to know' just as there was a 'gypsy cant' known to 'beggars and strollers . . . which none can speak but themselves', but unlike most of his contemporaries, this did not always simply appal him.⁶⁸ Ultimately, Defoe was mindful that 'English', like its speakers, place-names, and cultural habits, was a product of prolonged and various dislocations, hybridizations and accretions. And *translation*, in the sense of the conveyance, transfer, removal and carrying over of meanings and ideas from one situation, dialect, register or *language* – taken not simply as a 'system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather . . . conceived as ideologically saturated' – into another, was a key force in this.⁶⁹

Liminal linguistics

In formal acts of translation, as Stephen J. Greenblatt notes, the alternative is sought out and normalized in a 'linguistic mission'.⁷⁰ Such programmes, when they attempt to delineate and sustain a (denigrating) distinction



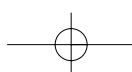
Literature & History *third series* 13/2

between translator and translated are, however, only ambiguously successful, as Greenblatt elsewhere observes: 'To learn another language is to acknowledge the existence of another people and to acquire the ability to function, however crudely, in another social world'.⁷¹ Translation can be seen to empower the translator, privileging their language, and denuding the linguistic and material autonomy of the translated. But the relationship between subject and observer can be more complex than that. While it would be reductive to suggest that acts of translation always have, or had, the same motivation or effects, it is possible to perceive that to translate is to communicate; to communicate is to be placed in propinquity with the other; propinquity may disclose, and corroborate, difference and otherness; it may also, simultaneously, engender connection, adulteration, contamination, commingling, precisely because, as Dick Leith recognizes, 'the demarcation of languages is a perennial problem', and consequently (in the words of Mikhail Bakhtin): 'languages do not exclude each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways'.⁷² As Patricia Fumerton puts it: 'The very act of translating a minor into a major language . . . could cause the latter to degenerate'.⁷³ To Richard Helgerson likewise, the process of attaining and reifying linguistic purity and security all too often actuates linguistic hybridity and mutability, 'entropy and disintegration'.⁷⁴

Thus, in *Captain Singleton*, one journey necessitates Singleton's reference to 'the *Cape of Good Hope*, as we call it; or *Cabo de bona Speranza*, as they [his Portuguese ship mates] call it'. The linguistic, and national, distinction seems to be explicit. But that distinction is inconsistently upheld by Singleton, who acquires 'a Smattering of the *Portuguese Tongue*': the text subsequently mentions the mixed form of 'the *Cape de bona Speranza*'.⁷⁵ If unsure of the utility of the phenomenon of hybrid expressions, Defoe – especially when in the role of curator of marvels and curiosities – can see that, for better or worse, individuals and communities are themselves multi-lingual hybrids. Thus his fascination with a Somersetshire schoolboy's instant translation of a passage from the Song of Solomon into a dialect form: 'How the dexterous dunce could form his mouth to express so readily the words, (which stood right printed in the book) in his country jargon, I could not but admire'.⁷⁶

With this in mind, it is disingenuous for Defoe's criminal protagonists to suggest there is a separation between licit and illicit contexts and acts. So much of their *linguistic* behaviour refutes such a conceit, and so much of it can be seen to play with, parody, and subvert efforts to translate baffling dialects into intelligible, governable forms, at once fulfilling and sabotaging the logic of linguistic theories that emphasized the plasticity, and materiality, of expression, *and* the importance of its gendered, public context.

Moll is an emulative parasite. As she is accepted into a home, however partially and conditionally as a teased and mocked domestic, she successfully copies and in her own way supplants her hosts, to their chagrin.⁷⁷ It is her great talent, like Roxana's, to inveigle herself into a vast variety of contexts.



Criminal Conversations

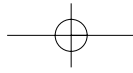
This does not occur, for either woman, without some strain. When passing herself off as a Quaker, 'as readily and naturally' as if she had been born one, Roxana affirms that though she lives 'very easie and quiet' she is also, at times, discomfited by the incongruity of her appearance and the reflection it induces:

I was like a Fish out of Water; I was as gay, and as young in my Disposition, as I was at five and twenty; and as I had always been courted, flatter'd, and us'd to love it, so I miss'd it in my Conversation; and this put me many times, upon looking-back upon things past.⁷⁸

As Firdous Azim has convincingly argued, the 'constant movements and fluctuations' necessary to Roxana's survival 'also entail loss'.⁷⁹ But the repeated, efficacious endurance of such strains by Defoe's protagonists furnishes them with a hard-won yet crucial knowledge of the requirements, sartorial, verbal, and otherwise, of roles in different positions. Richetti describes Moll's facility to do this as her '*modus operandi*' of 'social impersonation'.⁸⁰ This facility is most significantly exercised in Moll's use of language, which concords with her proficient magpie acquisitiveness: as she acquires various garbs and disguises, so does she accumulate the fitting parts of speech.⁸¹ Nonetheless, Richetti suggests that Defoe's 'garrulous autobiographers' vocalize a 'curiously monological quality' of his narratives, by denying 'the oppositional dialect of the lower orders in recording only their own distinctively singular idiolects, self-generated and unique'.⁸² Comparably, Hal Gladfelder asserts that Defoe 'allows his garrulous criminals to speak in their own voices'.⁸³ Both points, however, disregard the abilities of Defoe's protagonists to speak in *other people's voices*, to engage in disruptive dialogue with, absorb, reproduce (ironically, or straight-faced), and inhabit the words and worlds, semantic and material, of others. For those words and worlds are the very stuff out of which protagonists construct their linguistic and social personae.

In relation to this, Deidre Shauna Lynch offers an illuminating reading of the recorded antics of the self-styled 'King of the Gypsies', Bampfylde-Moore Carew. Lynch notes Carew's 'adaptability' when, as a beggar, petitioning 'all Sorts and Degrees of Persons, and that in all Shapes and Characters'. Carew, it seems, was significantly no less plastic, or pragmatic, when oscillating from one side of the Jacobite and anti-Jacobite divide to the other. Crucially, Lynch identifies a 'patent similarity', and often outright cross-referencing, between the hack-writing recounting Carew, and novels such as *Roderick Random* and *Tom Jones*. The suggestive point is that the stratagems of the 'versatile gentleman' and an itinerant 'con man' are not totally dissimilar.⁸⁴

Moll can be seen to be as versatile as Carew, but with added valency. Moll's peregrinations parody the wanderings of the trainee Gentleman on a



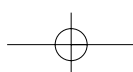
Literature & History *third series* 13/2

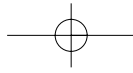
Grand Tour, dispatched, as Obadiah Walker recommended in *Of Education* (1673) to ‘learn the Language, Laws, Customes, and understand the Government, and interest of other Nations’ which would in turn ‘*produce* confident and comely behaviour, to perfect conversation’.⁸⁵ Thus, importantly, rather than it being some abstract, mythical, archetypal Gentleman who converses with, comprehends, assimilates, and controls the atomized linguistic and social domains of others, here a female protagonist assumes the authority of interpreter, or translator, between different moral and social positions, her multiple sexual and linguistic comminglings and spatial transgressions fulfilling the worst nightmares of those to whom *female* mobility, with all its associations of incontinent, immoral sexuality, and the debasing of male authority, was horrible: ‘Here are lasses that seem to hate enclosures, for they would lay all open’.⁸⁶ As John Essex charmingly counselled debutantes, in a demand for – brutally correlated – linguistic restraint and biological continency: ‘First Bridle the Tongue, and seal up your Lips’.⁸⁷

Criminal conversation

To Samuel Johnson, ‘conversation’ meant ‘Commerce; intercourse; familiarity’. It was the ‘manner of acting in common life’. It involved ‘Practical habits’.⁸⁸ It is therefore pertinent that the congress Moll enjoys with the brothers is termed a ‘conversation’.⁸⁹ In her various early intimate sexual proximities with her betters, and their termination, Moll gains and displays prodigious verbal and moral articulation. This induces a pragmatic comprehension of the utility of different registers and idiolects, the habitual boundaries by which they are defined, and how one might, with familiarity, perform and operate in a fashion contravening the integrity of those boundaries.

Conversation was of paramount importance in the construction and edification of a Gentleman able to conduct himself with cultivated polish, and the gentlewomen with whom he interacted. Contemporaries asserted that the presence of women in demarcated social spaces (parties, salons and so on) prevented male rudeness, and meant sloppy-minded female flibbertigibbets tested their airy conceits, thus encouraging gentility in all.⁹⁰ And yet, as Michèle Cohen suggests, this interaction was not without problems. ‘While mixed social intercourse and conversation were indispensable to the fashioning of the gentleman, they were, paradoxically, also the site for the greatest anxiety’.⁹¹ Cohen argues that the anxiety was aroused by the fear that by this interaction gentlemen might be rendered effeminate; one might add, that where the interaction was between low and higher, between gentle types and decidedly rougher sorts, as in the case of Moll and the two brothers, the fear becomes one of the degradation of morality and class distinctions, as much as gender separations. *Moll’s* ‘conversations’, especially in the context of the explicitly de-sexualized roles of English women when conversing in public or domestic spheres, alter the



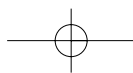


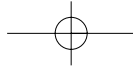
Criminal Conversations

regulated dynamics of genteel interaction, as they capitalize on the latent problems of such interaction.⁹²

When discussing the discursive position of women in the early modern period (crudely put, their social status and how this impacted on their powers of articulation), Catherine Belsey offers this description: 'Permitted to break their silence in order to acquiesce in the utterances of others, women were denied any single place from which to speak for themselves'.⁹³ But by means of her 'unbridled' tongue, Moll subverts this subjection to access actual spaces and linguistic contexts closed to her. Through a hybridizing translation of terms she only *seems* to 'acquiesce'. By rehearsing and verbalizing the moral and ideological perspectives of others, she is not saturated and consumed by those perspectives, but consumes and reconfigures them. Contingency is less evidence of subordination than proof of an ability to juxtapose or hybridize disparate discourses, to engage in a (Bakhtinian) *dialogic* process.⁹⁴ If denied a 'single place from which to speak', Moll capitalizes on this placelessness, and voicelessness, to inhabit a plurality of places, and to be in turn 'discursively mobile'.⁹⁵ As a figurative 'foreigner', cast-off, exiled, Moll is 'bilingual, multilingual, but in one and the same language, without even a dialect or patois'.⁹⁶ This is all the more subversive *precisely because* Moll is able to speak and operate within authorized discourses. However, she does not just impersonate normative authorities (gendered or otherwise), but, crucially, places the assertions of the normative and authoritative in propinquity with their alternatives, thereby at once, however contradictorily, exemplifying *and* contravening the bind of women's articulation in the period being marginalized and demonized – often counter-productively – as 'radically discontinuous, inaudible or scandalous'.⁹⁷

With circumspection, Moll can gentrify. Thus, voicing the words of unnamed, amorphous, highly 'moral' others, she employs euphemism to describe the survival of her own virginity: 'it did not go to that which they call the last favour'.⁹⁸ Such a usage conveys Moll's ability to overhear and copy how others talk, and yet maintain a speculative, ironic distance from the sensibilities behind such expressions, even as she expresses an aspiration to enter the world where such sensibilities prevail. For such circumspection is rarely enacted without equivocation. Hence, as well as mouthing polite commonplaces, Moll can tear the veil of propriety, her unforgiving translations acting as personal and social critique, in a manner at once a culmination of, and shattering extrapolation beyond, the logic of arguments emphasizing the necessarily *public* nature of communication. As Robin's older brother counsels secrecy about their affair ('you shall be my dear sister, as you are now my dear – '), Moll displays a typical apprehension of the realities lurking behind the stated communications of others to finish his sentence: 'Your dear whore'.⁹⁹ Later, she describes the governess' advice about abortion in the following way, thereby not evading the awful magnitude of the impending event: 'she said something as if she could help me off with my



Literature & History *third series* 13/2

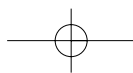
burthen sooner, if I was willing; or, in English, that she could give me something to make me miscarry'.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, the 'private account' undertaken by the governess, is 'in plain English, the whoring account'.¹⁰¹ An enterprise performed behind drawn curtains and closed doors, and hushed up hypocritically, is honestly exposed in its venality. The translation between registers, as figured by Defoe, can, it would seem, reveal relations between words, places and people, otherwise concealed.

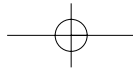
Paradigmatically, Moll describes the antipathy of the mother's 'speeches' in the following terms: 'she intended to put me out of the family; that is, in English, to turn me out of doors'.¹⁰² But this is more than Moll plain-speaking.¹⁰³ Translating again, *from* English (of one register, the tongue of a woman intent on preserving the propriety and insulation of her family and its good name) *into* English (of another mode, expressive of a girl's fears of homelessness), Moll tentatively balances both dialects and the epistemologies they vocalize, passing between the different contexts of their expression. As such she makes a mockery of the distinction between 'indoors' and 'outdoors', the interior, private scene of the gentle household and the public, outside world of desperate vagabondage. In a passage whose very content is concerned with the definition, maintenance, yet transgression, and ultimate indefiniteness of thresholds, domestic, sexual, and social, Moll evokes an awareness of the significance of 'articulation' in the full, liminal and ambiguous senses of the word: as co-joining and as distinction.¹⁰⁴

When thinking of Moll in this way, it is useful to consider the words of Homi Bhabha, writing of the complex, galling problems encountered by (and the varieties of resistance offered to) those trying to convert 'colonized populations' in Imperial India: 'in the very practice of domination the language of the master becomes hybrid – neither the one thing nor the other'.¹⁰⁵ Comparably, even as, *and indeed because*, a distinction, of the most material, physically segregating kind, is imposed by the reigning matriarchal authority Moll is able to disrupt the designs of that authority, and simultaneously problematize the concept of the sanctity of the marriage bed with words, as audaciously as she does with her body. Thus the conversation between mother and son:

'Well', says the mother, 'then there's one son lost'; and she said it in a very mournful tone, as one greatly concerned at it. 'I hope not, madam', says Robin; 'no man is lost when a good wife has found him'. 'Why, but, child', says the old lady, 'she is a beggar'. 'Why, then madam, she has the more need of charity', says Robin; 'I'll take her off the hands of the parish, and she and I'll beg together'.¹⁰⁶

Jacques Derrida offers a stimulating appraisal of the practice of paraphrasing in translation, that is to say, using *that is to say*, and figures like it (as Moll so often does), and the effects they have on the priority and primacy of univalent meanings:





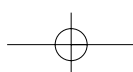
Criminal Conversations

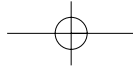
“in other words” does not put the same thing into other words, does not clarify an ambiguous expression, does not function like an “i.e.”. It amasses the powers of indecision and adds to the foregoing utterance its capacity for skidding. Under the pretext of commenting upon a terribly indeterminate, shifting statement, a statement difficult to pin down {*arrêter*}, it gives a reading or version that is all the less satisfactory, controllable, unequivocal, for being more “powerful” than what it comments upon or translates. The supposed “commentary” of the “i.e.” or “in other words” has furnished only a textual supplement that calls in turn for an overdetermining “in other words” and so on and so forth. . . . No one inflection enjoys any absolute privilege, no meaning can be fixed or decided upon. No border is guaranteed, inside or out.¹⁰⁷

The point is that rather than clarifying, the modifications and translations Defoe has his characters enact bring into play other, potentially contentious meanings, exacerbating the moral ambiguity of what is being expressed. Ultimately, in such quintessentially ‘dialogic’ moments, ‘no-one ever has the last word’.¹⁰⁸ For example, when Roxana describes herself and an adulterous lover being ‘in the middle of our unlawful Freedoms, that is to say, when we were in Bed together’, she realizes a discursive gulf. The candour of an unashamed admission (‘we were in Bed together’) defiantly counteracts and deflates the sanctimonious tone of ‘unlawful Freedoms’. Roxana seems to be suggesting that while others pontificate about such behaviour, it is, other than in its delightfulness, not worth getting worked up about.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, when Jack portrays the sentencing of the juvenile Captain, he states that ‘he was call’d out to be Corrected, *as they call’d it*’. The implication is that this conception and ritualized representation of ‘correction’ is only *one* way of understanding the scene.¹¹⁰

In Defoe’s *Street-Robberies*, this occupation of normative registers and modes by illicit agents is pervasive, and while manifested as an ironically ‘proper’ tone it is applied to improper antics. Such lightness of tone at once emphasizes the disparity between the world of the events described and the manner of their description, more suited to an urbane context, and yet, crucially, bridges that disparity. Accounts of criminal acts are hilariously couched in an innocence that can barely countenance illegality: ‘my poor Mother going into a *Goldsmith’s* Shop to purchase a Ring, by an odd Sort of a Miftake, I don’t know how, but it seems she walk’d off with a whole String of them: But the ill-natur’d Fellow had her purfu’d, took her up, and in fhort was very troublefome’.¹¹¹

Comparably, when disguised in a rich Quaker’s clothes, and enjoying his money, and, hating ‘Idlenefs’, having ‘compos’d a fhort Canting Vocabulary’ of his own (thus displaying some aptitude for, and awareness of, issues of linguistic differentiation and assimilation), the narrator temporarily assumes a completely new register, divested of the slangy argot of the street, and replete with polysyllabic Latin-derived hauteur and genteel intensifiers, suiting his different appearance:



Literature & History *third series* 13/2

I TOLD my Attendance I had committed a very great Oversight, and left the major Part of the Money in my 'Scrutore, which was to be the Auxilliaries of our Expedition, and was resolv'd to take Poft that very Evening: But my Intent was to get to Town to secure my Bank Note.

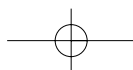
Whether this register befits a Quaker, however rich, or was intending in its incongruity to satirize the piety of such a figure is hard to say. What is certain is that on getting 'fnug to Town the fame Day' the adaptable urchin's tones return, and with a vengeance: a horse is described as 'not worth one T-d'.¹¹²

In delineating these forms of linguistic and expressive practice, Defoe actuated a significant feature of writing about rogues and criminals in the period. The occupation of domestic and/or decent spaces by illicit figures is often reconfigured in their occupation of the verbal register of the decent, as they simultaneously are shown to construct expediently exclusive dialects of their own to arrest the invasion of their circles by agents of the law.¹¹³ The ability of such figures to converse within and between dialects is conveyed in their own accounts of scenes of entering other spatial and social domains: 'we went a milling that Swagg, that is a breaking open that Shop'; 'at last Elger jump'd the Glass of a Gentleman's Keen; that is lifted up the Window of a House at the lower End of the Square, and jump'd into the Parlour'.¹¹⁴

This literally and metaphorically transgressive occupation is manifested in a letter recounting Jack/John Sheppard's 'Adventures' for five hours after his escape from Newgate, included in the conclusion to *The History of . . . John Sheppard*:

*Over a Bottle of Claret you'll give me leave to declare it, that I've fairly put the Vowels upon the good folks at Newgate, i.o.u. . . . and tho' I'm safe out of Newgate, I must yet have, or at least affect, a New Gate by Limping, or Turning my Toes in by making a right Hand of my Feet. Not to be long, for I hate Prolixity in all Business: In short, after Filing, Defileing, Sawing, when no Body Saw, Climbing (this Clime in) it prov'd a good Turner of my Affairs, thro' the house of a Turner. . . . From thence I soon slip'd through Ludgate, but was damnably fearful of an Old Bailey always lurking thereabout, who might have brought me to the Fleet for being too Nimble. . . . Being a Batchelor, and not being capable to manage a Bridewell you know . . . I could not forbear making a Somerset or two before Northumberland-House. . . . I ran Pelmel to Piccadilly.*¹¹⁵

The punning may be painful (and there's a lot more of it) but it serves a function. Puns compromise attempts to distinctly separate words and meanings. They do this by homophonically or homonymically mocking – parodying – the sounds or senses of one thing, and connecting those sounds or senses with something ostensibly unrelated.¹¹⁶ In this unrepentant missive, 'Sheppard'



Criminal Conversations

cheekily details his precise means of egress from prison. The description of leaving the prison itself metamorphoses into a description of his progress through London. Though he expresses some concern about the authorities, plainly nowhere is inaccessible to him and nowhere can hold him. And the connections and motion between and through material interiors, exteriors, and streets and lanes, continue in one breathless sequence, evocatively registered in 'Sheppard's' use of pun, the crudest, and yet most effective, form of acoustic or semantic concordance. In his mouth, 'Sheppard' rolls around the names of carceral institutions and aristocratic piles; he mingles the figurative and the fantastical; the flippant and the fearful. Uniquely, by his escapological prowess and his verbal trickery he irreverently invades, inhabits, exits from, and ultimately connects disparate contexts, meanings, places and people, and does so with an utter contempt – as well as a pragmatic regard – for those forces whose job it is to stop him doing this. Few more powerful realizations of the relationship between language and materiality can be envisaged.

Defoe's representations of roguish types show how they endure the destruction, and jeopardize the constructedness, of distinction, fulfilling the fears of those more settled, decent, and genteel than they concerning the awful appropriability and permeability of refined identities, registers, spaces and mores. By such representations Defoe does more than realize – in the sense of comprehend *and* express – the inconsistencies afflicting prevailing segregating, gendered, and inherently ideological linguistic, social and material schemes. He also creates a dynamic prose stylistics to achieve these representations, neither purging words 'of intentions and tones . . . alien to him', nor destroying 'the seeds of social heteroglossia embedded in words'.¹¹⁷ His many conflicted, conditional, dialogic articulations are responsive to the unstable matrix of texts, discourses, material phenomena, epistemologies and linguistic modes, recent and distant, formative to (and reconfigured by) novels, cultural products that are in consequence identifiable generically as 'a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized'.¹¹⁸ In this regard, however we choose to describe the genesis and development of the novel – the aesthetic form in which Defoe exhibits this stylistics – his contribution to that genesis and development has proved profoundly influential.

Notes

1 Patrick Colquhoun, cited in Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth, 1991, rpt 1993), p. 425.

2 See for example, Jonathan Swift, 'Sermon on Mutual Subjection' (1744) and 'The Poor Man's Contentment', *The Works*, 2nd edn. (Edinburgh, 1824), 19 Vols., Vol. 7, pp. 439–49, 504–515; Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, ed. with intro. by Paul-Gabriel Boucé (Oxford, 1979, rpt 1999), pp. 210–213; *The Spectator*, No. 232 (1711), in *Selections from the Tatler and the Spectator*, ed. with intro. by Angus Ross (Harmondsworth, 1982), pp. 451–54; Douglas Hay and

Literature & History *third series* 13/2

Nicholas Rogers, *Eighteenth-Century English Society: Shuttles and Swords* (Oxford, 1997), p. 5; Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century, Revised Edition* (Harmondsworth, 1982, rpt 1990), p. 18.

3 'A Proposal For making an effectual Provision for the Poor' (1753), in *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers and Related Writings*, ed. Malvin R. Zirker (Oxford, 1988), pp. 219–78, p. 231.

4 Pat Rogers, *The Augustan Vision* (London, 1974), p. 27.

5 Throughout, references will be made to texts whose provenance is, to say the least, shadowy. Not every title implicitly ascribed to Defoe here is accepted with such ease by P.N. Furbank and W.R. Owens in *Defoe De-Attributions: A Critique of J.R. Moore's Checklist* (London, 1994), and *The Canonisation of Daniel Defoe* (New Haven and London, 1988), critics who describe the canon in the earlier work as 'a remarkably strange and not very satisfactory construction'. (p. 1) Though it would be foolhardy to discount the exemplary scholarship and diligence of Furbank and Owens, this is not the place for further extensive biblio-textual exegesis. No less an authority than Maximilian Novak has offered his own contribution to the debate ('The Defoe Canon: Attribution and De-Attribution', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 59 (1997), 189–207), a debate which shows no sign of abating. As John J. Richetti puts it in *Defoe's Narratives: Situations and Structures* (Oxford, 1975): 'We shall never know, apparently, just what Defoe wrote'. (p. 1, n. 1) Ultimately, the interest here is in identifying a narratological milieu, a mode of prose representation that is pertinent and sensitive to the issues discussed in all the right places. This may or may not be found in works that may or may not be attributed to the hand of Daniel Defoe, a writer with diverse sensibilities. If not by Defoe *de facto* then some of the texts of uncertain authorship used have concerns very like his, for all his variety, and are hence, *de jure*, of note.

6 *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* (1722) [henceforth *Moll*], ed. with intro. by Pat Rogers (London, 1993), p. 8; *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–26), abridged and ed. with intro. by Pat Rogers (Harmondsworth, 1971 rpt 1986) p. 531.

7 *Moll*, pp. 14–15, 26, 201.

8 *The History and Remarkable Life of the Truly Honourable Col. Jacque* (1722) [henceforth *Jack*], ed. with intro. by Samuel Holt Monk (London, 1965), pp. 102, 116.

9 Daniel Defoe, *The Life, Adventures, and Pyracies, Of the Famous Captain Singleton* (1720) (London, 1969), ed. with intro. by Shiv K. Kumar, pp. 1–3, 5, 268.

10 *Street-Robberies Consider'd: The Reason Of their being so Frequent* (1728), ed. Geoffrey M. Sill (Stockton, New Jersey, 1973), p. 67. One must however be mindful of the observations of John J. Richetti concerning the comparison of pirates with other criminal types; see *Popular Fiction Before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700–1739* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 60–118.

11 Johnson (Defoe), *A General History of the Pyrates* (1724/1728), ed. Manuel Schonhorn (London, 1972), p. 5.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 587–90.

13 'An Essay Upon Projects', in *Selected Writings*, ed. James T. Boulton (Cambridge, 1965 rpt 1975), pp. 23–34, p. 25.

14 *Captain Singleton*, pp. 268, 25.

15 *Moll*, p. 8.

16 *Moll*, p. 159.

17 *Moll*, p. 197.

18 *Moll*, p. 201.

19 *Defoe's Narratives*, pp. 98, 110.

20 *Jack*, pp. 15–16, 27.

Criminal Conversations

- 21 *Jack*, pp. 29–30.
- 22 *Jack*, pp. 3, 155, 15–16, 27, 29–30, 39, 41, 44, 96, 83, 69.
- 23 *Jack*, pp. 69, 67.
- 24 *Jack*, pp. 99, 106.
- 25 *Defoe's Narratives*, p. 174.
- 26 Maximillian E. Novak, *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions, His Life and Ideas* (Oxford, 2001), p. 611. As Manuel Schonhorn has shown, these characteristics of passivity, disdain, and separation are present in Captain Singleton too. See 'Defoe's *Captain Singleton: A Reassessment with Observations*', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 7 (1971), pp. 45–47.
- 27 *Street-Robberies Consider'd*, p. 4.
- 28 'Policing the Poor in Eighteenth-Century London: The Vagrancy Laws and Their Administration', *Histoire sociale – Social History*, XXXIV, No.47, (May 1991), p. 133.
- 29 J.M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England 1660–1800* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 249–52.
- 30 *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth, 1925, rpt 1966), p. 102.
- 31 Hay and Rogers, *op. cit.* pp. 80; *Police of the Metropolis* (1797), in *Eighteenth Century Penal Theory*, ed. James Heath (Oxford, 1963), pp. 274–83, p. 280. On the inclusivity of the 1744 Act, see Hay and Rogers, p. 162; and Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750–1850* (New York, 1978), p. 25.
- 32 *Jack*, pp. 71, 102.
- 33 Everett Zimmerman, *Defoe and the Novel* (Berkeley, L.A., and London, 1975), p. 129.
- 34 See Lincoln B. Faller's brilliant reading of Jack's guilt at stealing from an old woman, in *Crime and Defoe: A New Kind of Writing* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 211–15; see *Colonel Jack*, pp. 85–86.
- 35 *Jack*, pp. 27, 44; see also Richetti, *Daniel Defoe*, p. 76.
- 36 *Jack*, p. 3.
- 37 *Jack*, p. 103. In *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680–1780* (New York, London, 1998), Miles Ogborn suggestively notes the importance of the geographical mobility of the eighteenth-century excise-man, as a guarantee against corruption (pp. 190–91). However, in yet another tantalizing effacing of the distinction between the decent and the deviant, is it here a case of the itinerant vocational infrastructure of a seemingly respectable profession not only mimicking the spatial vagrancy of lower types, but also their supposedly lax morals?
- 38 *Jack*, p. 127. As Wolfram Schmidgen observes, Defoe, in *A Plan of the English Commerce* (1728) writes of those seventeenth-century seamen who 'went out as Beggars and came Home Gentlemen'. See Schmidgen, 'Robinson Crusoe, Enumeraion, and the Mercantile Fetish', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 35, no.1 (2001), p. 29.
- 39 *Jack*, p. 201.
- 40 *Jack*, pp. 156–7, 168.
- 41 *Jack*, pp. 266–67; see also *Captain Singleton*, p. 276.
- 42 *Jack*, p. 291.
- 43 *Jack*, p. 7.
- 44 From a letter by the aristocratic Judith Milbanke, in June 1778, occasioned by a visit to Newcastle. Cited in Penelope J. Corfield, 'Walking the City Streets: The Urban Odyssey in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Urban History*, 16, No.2 (February 1990), p. 171, n.109. As Michèle Cohen observes, a 'major eighteenth-century preoccupation was the concern over the regulation of the English language'. See *Fashioning Masculinity: National identity and language in the eighteenth century*

Literature & History *third series* 13/2

(London and New York, 1996), p. 2. On the 'separation of different trades and employments from one another' see, of course, Adam Smith, *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), ed. with intro. by Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford, 1993 rpt 1998), p. 13.

45 Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones* (1749), ed. with intro. by R.P.C. Mutter (Harmondsworth, 1980), p. 297; see also p. 347.

46 Henry Fielding, *Amelia* (1751), ed. with intro. by David Blewett (Harmondsworth, 1987), pp. 52, 534, 544.

47 John Barrell, *English Literature in History 1730–80: An Equal, Wide Survey* (London, 1983), pp. 33–34, 178–79. On the construction of the figure of the Gentleman, see also Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, pp. 26–41.

48 *Selected Writings*, ed. Boulton, pp. 248–57, pp. 255, 253, 256. This work was first published in 1890, ed. Karl D. Büllbring (London).

49 Barrell, p. 34.

50 Barrell, pp. 158–59.

51 Dick Leith, *A Social History of English* (London and New York, 1983 rpt 1997), pp. 51, 238. For a detailed delineation of arguments and perspectives on language in the period, see also Murray Cohen, *Sensible Words: Linguistic Practice in England 1640–1785* (Baltimore and London, 1977), pp. 43–77.

52 Joan C. Beal, *English Pronunciation in the Eighteenth Century: Thomas Spence's Grand Repository of the English Language* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 8–9. As Beal notes (p. 11), the full title of Spence's great work (published in 1775) makes this abundantly clear: 'containing, besides the excellencies of all other dictionaries and grammars of the English tongue, the peculiarity of having the most proper and agreeable pronunciation'.

53 Examples are too numerous to list here, but see Fielding, *Amelia*, pp. 22, 53; and Defoe, *Street-Robberies*, pp. 30–35.

54 *The Material Word: Literate Culture in the Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore and London, 1991), pp. 19–20.

55 p. 20; Kroll clarifies his use of 'phenomenal' by stating he is not alluding to 'recent phenomenological philosophies of language but to the means by which language operates in the phenomenal world and resists mystification from being treated as a purely private or hidden property'.

56 *Moll*, p. 20.

57 *Moll*, p. 20.

58 *Moll*, pp. 20, 208.

59 *Moll*, p. 208.

60 *Moll*, pp. 20–21.

61 *Moll*, p. 186.

62 *Moll*, pp. 20–21.

63 'An Essay Upon Projects', in *Selected Writings*, p. 29.

64 *A Tour*, p. 382.

65 See E. Anthony James, *Daniel Defoe's Many Voices: A Rhetorical Study of Prose Style and Literary Method* (Amsterdam, 1972), p. 52, discussing the Latin phrases and quotations in *An Appeal to Honour and Justice* (1715).

66 *A Tour*, p. 612.

67 *English Society*, pp. 13–14; on linguistic diversity in the period, see also Robert W. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England 1700–1780*, (London, 1981), pp. 94–95; and Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*, pp. 134–36.

68 *The Complete English Tradesman* (1725), in *Selected Writings*, pp. 225–257, p. 228. Defoe was not alone in noting the equivalence. In an account of the thief Mary Young, the dialect of a 'West Country Clothier' is as foreign-yet-familiar-sounding as the cant Mary is shown to so frequently employ: see *Drunks, Whores*

Criminal Conversations

and *Idle Apprentices of the eighteenth century*, ed. Philip Rawlings (London, 1992), pp. 129–30.

69 Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, transl. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, 1981), pp. 259–422, p. 271; see also pp. 287–88. For an overview of Bakhtin's theories of language, see Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his world* (London and New York, 1990), pp. 52–53. Samuel Johnson's definitions of 'To TRANSLATE' evoke these meanings in *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), 4 Vols., Vol. IV, ed. H. J. Todd (London, 1818).

70 Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (London, New York, 1990), p. 16.

71 Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford, 1988), p. 49. Cf. Karl Marx's comments: 'In like manner a beginner who has learnt a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he has assimilated the spirit of the new language and can freely express himself in it only when he finds his way in it without recalling the old and forgets his native tongue in the use of the new'. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* (London, 1968, rpt 1970), pp. 96–179, p. 96.

72 Leith, *A Social History of English*, p. 1; Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', p. 291. Leith's observations concerning varieties of English in the present day are equally relevant, he argues, to English in the past: 'In reality there are only linguistic continua: different varieties of English shade off into each other, as English shades off into other languages'. (p. 1).

73 'Subdiscourse: Jonson Speaking Low', *English Literary Renaissance*, 25 (1995), p. 77. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, transl. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis, London, 1980 rpt 1987), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, suggestively explore the implications of the hybridity of languages, especially those deemed 'minor' and 'major', and the ways in which the former can destabilize and 'send' the latter 'racing'. (pp. 100–110).

74 'Language Lessons: Linguistic Colonialism, Linguistic Postcolonialism, and the Early Modern English Nation', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 11, No. 1 (Spring 1998), p. 297.

75 *Captain Singleton*, pp. 9, 5, 26.

76 *A Tour*, p. 216.

77 *Moll*, pp. 14, 18.

78 *Roxana*, pp. 213–4.

79 *The Colonial Rise of the Novel* (London and New York, 1993), p. 62.

80 *The English Novel in History 1700–1780* (London, New York, 1999), p. 59; see Faller's comments on the same facility in *Roxana*, in *Crime and Defoe*, pp. 216–17.

81 See Richetti, *Daniel Defoe*, pp. 90–91; and Zimmerman, *Defoe and the Novel*, p. 127.

82 *The English Novel*, p. 56.

83 *Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England: Beyond the Law* (Baltimore and London, 2001), p. 113.

84 *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago, 1998), pp. 83–84; Lynch cites from *The Life and Adventures of Bampfylde-Moore Carew, The Noted Devonshire Stroler and Dog-Stealer* (1745) reprinted in *Bampfylde-Moore Carew: The King of the Beggars*, ed. C.H. Wilkinson (Oxford, 1931), p. 22.

85 Cited in Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, p. 54. On the Grand Tour see Jeremy Black, *The British abroad: The grand tour in the eighteenth century* (Stroud, 1992, rpt

Literature & History *third series* 13/2

London, 1999); and Cohen, 'The Grand Tour: constructing the English gentleman in eighteenth-century France', *History of Education*, 21, No.3 (1992), 241–57.

86 This phrase, cited by Laura Gowing in her fine account of the anxious gendering of mobility in the earlier seventeenth century, 'The freedom of the streets': women and social space, 1560–1640', (in *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London*, eds. Paul Griffiths and Mark S.R. Jenner (Manchester and New York, 2000), pp. 130–51, p. 139), was used by Donald Lupton in his description of the working women of Turnbull Street in *London and the Countrey Carbanadoed* (1632).

87 *The Young Ladies Conduct, or Rules for Education* (London, 1722), pp. 12–14, cited in Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, p. 33.

88 *Dictionary*, Vol. I.

89 p. 46. Notably, the term 'carnal conversation' is used in a description of the affair between a streetwalker Ann Bains and her client Jonathan Joel (from whom she robbed a watch) in *Old Bailey Sessions Papers* (6–10 Sept., 1753), p. 250. For a useful investigation of the senses of 'conversation' in the period, and the ways in which some of these senses suggested an implicit, profitable dissimulation, see Timothy Dykstal, 'Commerce, Conversation, and Contradiction in Mandeville's Fable', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 23 (1994), 93–110. Cohen offers a typically brilliant analysis of the cultural construction of ideas of 'conversation' in *Fashioning Masculinity*, as they related to gendered social theories and practices in the period, pp. 17–22, 31–33.

90 See Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, pp. 2, 4, 69; and also Lawrence E. Klein, 'Gender, conversation and the public sphere in early eighteenth-century England', in *Textuality and sexuality: Reading theories and practices*, eds. Judith Still and Michael Worton (Manchester and New York, 1993), pp. 100–115, esp. p. 105. Klein suggests that while the allowed presence of women in the public sphere 'may not have liberated women in any transcendent sense' it did 'create spaces for women in the representation and practice of public discourse'. (p. 112).

91 Cohen, p. 4.

92 As Cohen notes: 'Disciplining and regulating the tongue of men thus positioned French and English women differently. In France, it engaged women and men in an erotic discourse. In England, it positioned women first as language teachers to their sons. This role appears less dangerous because it stripped the process of its sexuality'. (*Fashioning Masculinity*, p. 31). For all her professed innocence, Moll plainly puts the sex back into things.

93 *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and difference in Renaissance drama* (London and New York, 1985), p. 149.

94 As Bakhtin puts it: 'What is a hybridization? It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor'. ('Discourse in the Novel', p. 358).

95 Belsey, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

96 Deleuze and Guattari, *op.cit.* p. 98.

97 Belsey, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

98 *Moll*, p. 21.

99 *Moll*, p. 32.

100 *Moll*, p. 133.

101 *Moll*, p. 134.

102 *Moll*, p. 26.

103 In *Rogue's Progress: Studies in the Picaresque Novel* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), Robert Alter makes much of Moll's 'literal-mindedness'. (p. 43).

Criminal Conversations

104 In stating this the intention is not to homogenize the interrelations, or diminish the changes and ambiguities that affected definitions of the private and public in the period. The seminal examination of this complex interaction is of course Jürgen Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, transl. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1989); but see also Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (New York, 1986), pp. 80–124; Elizabeth Kraft, 'Public Nurturance and Private Civility: The Transposition of Values in Eighteenth-Century Fiction', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 22 (1992), 181–193; and Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, pp. 66–67, 77.

105 *The Location of Culture* (London and New York, 1994 rpt 2000), pp. 32–33.

106 Moll, p. 37.

107 'Living On: Border Lines', transl. James Hulbert, in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, eds. Harold Bloom, Paul De Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey H. Hartman, J. Hillis Miller (London and Henley, 1979), pp. 75–176, pp. 75, 78. One might compare this reading with that offered by Mary Butler in her analyses of Moll's use of the appositive clause in descriptions of the 'amphibious creature, this land-water thing, called a gentleman tradesman' (p. 48): see "'Onomaphobia" and Personal Identity in *Moll Flanders*', *Studies in the Novel*, 27 (1990), pp. 385–86.

108 Celia Britton, 'The Dialogic Text and the Texte Pluriel', *Poetics* 14 (August 1974), p. 57.

109 *Roxana*, p. 145.

110 *Jack*, p. 12.

111 *Street-Roberies*, p. 5; see also pp. 7–8.

112 *Street-Roberies*, pp. 29, 36–38.

113 For examples of the use of cant as protective insulation of criminal fraternity see *Drunks, Whores . . .*, ed. Rawlings, pp. 125, 127. Whether there is any historical veracity in such accounts is debatable; see V.A.C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770–1868* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 127–33.

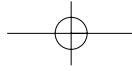
114 'The Discoveries of John Poulter' (1753–54), in *Drunks, Whores . . .*, ed. Rawlings, pp. 147–77, pp. 157, 160.

115 *Jack*, pp. 67–69. On the potent escapological prowess of Sheppard, and how this reverberated through concerns about, and representations of, 'excarceration' in the eighteenth-century, see Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*, pp. 7–41. Gladfelder offers an interesting, alternative appraisal of these scenes; see *Criminality and Narrative*, p. 122.

116 As Tony Tanner observes: 'we may say that puns and ambiguities are to common language what adultery and perversion are to "chaste" (i.e., socially orthodox) sexual relations. They both bring together entities (meanings/people) that have "conventionally" been differentiated and kept apart; and they bring them together in deviant ways, bypassing the orthodox rules governing communications and relationships.' See *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore and London, 1979), p. 53.

117 Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', p. 298. See the useful comments on heteroglossia, in Holquist, *Dialogism*, p. 69; and Ping Hui Liao 'Intersection and Juxtaposition of Wor(l)ds', *Tamkang Review*, 14 (Autumn/Summer, 1983–4), pp. 395–96.

118 Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', pp. 262–63. See Holquist, *Dialogism*, pp. 72, 89. For discussion and critique of Bakhtin's concept of the 'dialogic' or 'polyphonic novel', see Robert R. Wilson, 'Play, Transgression and Carnival: Bakhtin and Derrida on *Scriptor Ludens*', *Mosaic*, 19, 1 (Winter 1986), p. 77; Graham Pechey, 'On the Borders of Bakhtin: Dialogization, Decolonization', *Oxford Literary Review*, 9 (1987), pp. 66–69; and Ken Hirschkop, 'Bakhtin, Discourse and Democracy', *New Left Review*, 160 (November/December 1986), pp. 106–107.

Literature & History *third series* 13/2

For pertinent accounts of Defoe's prose style, especially in terms of its tendency and/or ability to cultivate ambiguity see James, *Defoe's Many Voices*, pp. 1–2; G.A. Starr, *Defoe and Casuistry* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1971), pp. 51–52; Starr, 'Defoe's Prose Style: 1 The Language of Interpretation', *Modern Philology*, 71 (February 1974), p. 278; and Bonamy Dobrée, 'Some Aspects of Defoe's Prose' in *Pope and his Contemporaries: Essays presented to George Sherburn*, eds. James L. Clifford and Louis A. Landa (New York, 1950), 171–84. In contrast see Furbank and Owens, *Canonisation*, pp. 8–9, 99; and Ian Watt *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Harmondsworth, 1957, rpt 1981), pp. 141–42.

A huge variety of texts and discourses have been implicated in the construction of the cultural matrix out of which developed the novel, or, to put it another way, to which those writers who have become known as novelists, not least Defoe, were responsive. For exemplary, contending, accounts of this matrix, see J. Paul Hunter *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth Century English Fiction* (New York and London, 1990); Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore and London, 1987); and Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York, 1983). On explicit connections with early rogue literature, see John Kazantzi 'Defoe and the Criminal Lives: A Study in the Interrelation of Biography and the Novel as Genres', unpublished doctoral thesis, Boston 1964.

Address for Correspondence

Adam Hansen, Brasenose College, Oxford, UK. E-mail: hansenadam@yahoo.com

