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The Bethlehem Hospital, the Newgate Prison and the *boudoir* as places of sociability in Defoe's *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*.

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What is the spirit of place, precisely? It is clear that the meaning and one's experience of a place tends to be wrapped up in its invisible as well as its visible qualities. However any empirical description of the spirit of place usually falls short; what places provide us with in terms of atmosphere cannot be easily anatomised. We have Alexander Pope's famous injunction, « consult the genius of the place in all[1] », that has to do, amongst other things, with aesthetic harmony and landscape gardening, and such questions as where the prevailing wind comes from etc. We also have the various

1 Pope, Alexander, 1731. *Epistle to Lord Burlington* (addressed to Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington «Of the Use of Riches»), *Moral Essays IV*, line 57.

ancient traditions of animism[2]. There are the modern schools of humanistic, behavioural, aesthetic and psychogeography[3], as well as environmental psychology, and the rich body of work on place theory[4] that has arisen from that in the past forty years or so. But these approaches tend either to reject unequivocally or to take for granted as self-evident the presence in nature of a spirit of place that exists externally of our consciousness; they do not attempt to anatomise what the spirit actually is. Spirit of place in 'nature' is surely different from spirit of place in a prison, or any other built environment, since in the latter human consciousness already has an input. It is necessary to distinguish landscape from built environment, even while admitting that most landscape

2 See Harvey, Graham (ed.), 2014. *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, New York, Routledge; Eliade, Mircea, 1989. *Shamanism. Archaic Tecniques of Ecstasy*, London, Penguin.

3 The term psychogeography was coined by Guy Debord in 1955. « La psychogéographie se proposerait l'étude des lois exactes, et des effets précis du milieu géographique, consciemment aménagé ou non, agissant directement sur les émotions et le comportement des individus. » Debord, Guy-Ernest, novembre 1955. « Introduction à une critique de la géographie urbaine », *Les lèvres nues*, Bruxelles, n° 6.
https://www.larevuedesressources.org/introduction-a-une-critique-de-la-geographie-urbaine,033.html

4 Guy Debord explains in his *Théorie de la dérive* how psychogeography, as a main reading key, fits into the concept of drift. Psychogeography is defined as « l'étude des lois exactes et des effets précis du milieu géographique, consciemment aménagé ou non, agissant directement sur le comportement affectif des individus ». As a consequence it contributes to understand how the individual can be influenced by the environment with which he interacts. Urban drift, seen through the prism of psychogeography, is an approach that allows the individual to understand the organization of a space through his own experience. Debord, Guy, décembre 1956. « Théorie de la dérive », *Les Lèvres nues*, Bruxelles, n° 9. Reprinted without the two appendices in: décembre 1958. *Internationale Situationniste*, Paris, n° 2.
https://www.larevuedesressources.org/theorie-de-la-derive,038.html

– other than, say, desert – is not wholly natural, since humans will have interacted with it.

Place should be understood not just in terms of location, but also in terms of meaning – its history, use, ecology, appearance, status, reputation, the people who interact with the place, its potential future. It refers to the actual life of the place as it is experienced by those who visit it, and therefore also encapsulates its psychic impact and assimilation into human consciousness. Visitors' access to the spaces of London's notorious Bethlehem Hospital and Newgate prison crucially fostered the exchange of information in Daniel Defoe's time, and promoted discussion in the public sphere. This generated a congerie of ideas and debates that developed gradually into an alternative culture that appealed to literati and liberal circles. Defoe's description of visitors' access to the spaces of London's brothels and boudoirs transcends any moralizing and hypocritical censorship. Instead, these visits become occasions of exchange and sociability. Place has no meaning outside human consciousness, but the atmosphere of places works on us in a dynamic way and, more controversially, in turn our minds and experiences act on and influence places.

Gaston Bachelard offered the term « topo-analysis » as « the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives[5] ». I would argue that we become co-creators of places as soon as we experience them, and inevitably influence the prevailing sense of place through our own interaction. Bachelard's « topo-analysis » is a useful term to the extent that it admits that our perception and representation of place is never wholly neutral. To borrow from Wordsworth

5 Bachelard, Gaston, 1994. *The Poetics of Space*, Boston, Beacon Press, p. 8 [First edition: 1958. *La poétique de l'espace*, Presses universitaires de France].

in « Tintern Abbey », the « mighty world of eye and ear[6] » is one we half-create, and half perceive. But of course there is a good deal of writing which claims, even if fancifully, that places record our presence – the verse beginning « Primeval rocks form the road's steep border » in Hardy's poem « At Castle Boterel[7] » is a fine example, but the poem also refers to the experience of « one mind », and to the mind of a man whose « sand is sinking[8] ». The Pathetic fallacy, obviously, turns on this idea: landscapes don't smile, the sea is not cruel, etc. The attitude to place and the aesthetics of landscape (including prisons) described in this essay represents a form of phenomenology, which emerged as one of the major strands of philosophical thinking in the twentieth century.

Phenomenology is a theory of knowledge that is descriptive rather than empiricist, and as such represents a departure from the prevailing, avowedly commonsensical tradition of philosophy that has flourished in Britain since the eighteenth century. Though Bachelard was a philosopher of science, he understood that empiricism was a poor means by which to understand subjective emotional experience, and so in *The Poetics of Space* he adopts the role of phenomenologist. Phenomenology is the philosophical study of affect, perception, and cognition—that is, of consciousness—as experienced in the first-person. Heidegger wrote of « the process of letting things manifest themselves[9] » and the

6 Wordsworth, William, 1798. « Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey », lines 18-19.

7 Hardy, Thomas, 1913. « At Castle Boterel », lines 21-25: « Primeval rocks form the road's steep border, / And much have they faced there, first and last, / Of the transitory in Earth's long order; / But what they record in colour and cast / Is—that we two passed ».

8 Hardy, Thomas, 1913. « At Castle Boterel », line 33.

9 Heidegger, Martin, 2010. *Being and Time: A Revised Edition of the Stambaugh Translation*, ed. Schmidt, Dennis J., New York, State University of New York Press, p. 49-51 [First edition: 1927. *Sein und Zeit*, Halle, Germany].

importance of « Being » as the key to the existence of all things and the source of all our understanding. So what has phenomenology got to do with prisons, maisons de santé and prisoners? Phenomenological thinkers who have treated of aesthetics have tended to concentrate on the established arts dealing with lofty places. This is not a conscious repudiation of the aesthetic potential of prisons and lower places, more a reflection of their historically lowly position in the hierarchy of art settings. With his innovative report of the prison itself as a space of subjective complexity rather than simplicity, density rather than exposure, Defoe depicts the prison both as an object of literary imagination and as a social text, a method that affords him new approaches to the evanescent facts of the subversive. His description of Moll Flanders' life, for instance, shows how limiting Enlightenment approaches to autobiography can be when it comes to scenes and spaces in life—like prisons or maisons de santé—that remain elusive, illegal, and undocumented. Moreover, unfolding the spaces of subversion, Defoe's rich, sensitive reading of the prostitute as a figure is the most realistic treatment of the question of sexuality we've ever encountered.

Defoe's narratives constitute an emotional account of the subterranean and elusive ambiance of the prisons and the boudoirs, the scene whose condition of possibility was its illegal extension of sociability beyond the official regimentation of closing space and time. It seems to me that prisons, *maisons de santé* and brothels, in all their changefulness, uncertainty and intensity of essence are the phenomenological art forms *par excellence*, because they reflect the way visitors instinctively think. They also open doors into the metaphysical world of a sense of place.

In *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-26)[10] Daniel Defoe cites the Bethlehem Hospital as an example of one of London's most popular attractions of the time[11]. Open to visitors, on payment of a small sum, on Sunday afternoons, it represents a circumscribed place acting as a warning to the community. As Andrews writes, « In 1610 Lord Percy recorded going to see the lions in the Tower, the show of Bethlem, and the fireworks at the Artillery Gardens. In those days there was nothing odd about permitting or encouraging such a spectacle: all the world was a stage and visiting Bethlem was regarded as edifying for the same reasons as attending hangings[12]. » In particular, going to the Bethlehem hospital/prison was meant to be a reminder to visitors to « keep baser instincts in check[13] » lest they, too, wind up on the other side of the bars.

Defoe's careful attention to the real and historiographic violences wrought on these forced intimacies makes his approach a methodological action to rectify static notions of identity. Emphasizing dominant tropes of his epoch, such as respectability and social standing, Defoe builds up a generous defense of prisoners, through a sympathetic criticism of this particular form of amusement. It offers Defoe a means to restore dynamism to what is sometimes presented as a

10 Defoe, Daniel, 1971. *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, ed. Rogers, Pat, London, Penguin, p. 329.

11 In 1681, City governors noted « the greate quantity of persons that come daily to see the said Lunatickes » (Andrews, Jonathan; Briggs, Asa; Porter, Roy ; Tucker, Penny and Waddington, Keir, 1997. *The History of Bethlem*, London, Routledge, p. 178). Though one figure that is often given the number of visitors – 96,000 a year – does not have much evidence behind it, there is no arguing that Bethlem was a popular attraction. It was also encouraged by the hospital itself, which benefited both from visitors' donations as well as from any later charitable contributions.

12 Andrews, Jonathan et al., *The History of Bethlem*, cit., p. 2.

13 Andrews, Jonathan et al., *The History of Bethlem*, cit., p. 183.

straightforward dismissal of those earthier writings focusing on criminals which found themselves conditioned by the fact that the most talented emerging writers occupied a liminal and contingent space.

This is an era where the poor man or woman ceases to be a positive figure, to become an element of disorder for bourgeois society and a threat bearer. The belief that immoral behaviour originated from an ignorance of the Christian faith had been a good reason for the establishment of houses of correction in the sixteenth century, and was reinforced significantly by Reformation of Manners campaigns in the seventeenth century. The same attitude remained in the early eighteenth century and particularly the belief in society's duty to restore its members to the condition in which God had created them, a point evidenced by the appreciation of the efforts of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge from 1699 onwards. One remarkable example of less extreme punishment is Timothy Nourse's proposal, published in 1701, to condemn to disciplinary hard labour in a house of correction only the most serious categories of criminals: « for lesser criminals, as pick pockets, petty-larceny, pimps, common-whores, sheep stealers, coney-catchers, hedgebreakers, and other like offenders, whose crimes deserve not death, twere very good they were condemn'd to Bridewell for a year or two, or more, as the nature and circumstances of their crimes do require[14]. » Although spiritual rehabilitation featured centrally in reformist discourses of the early eighteenth century, some of the contemporaries disagreed

14 Nourse, Timothy, 1701. *Campania foelix. Or, a discourse of the benefits and improvements of husbandry: Containing Directions for All Manner of Tillage, Pasturage, and Plantations; As also for the Making of Cyder and Perry. With Some Considerations upon I. Justices of the Peace and inferior officers II. On inns and alehouses, III. On servants and labourers, IV. On the poor: to which are added two essays: I. Of a country-house, II. Of the fuel of London*, p. 229. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo2/A52534.0001.001/1:5.14?rgn=div2;view=fulltext

that the solution to the apparent penal crisis was to be found in a change of legislation in the direction of institutionalised hard labour, rather than extreme punishment such as, for example, the death penalty. Catching the widespread fears about rising crime rates early in the century, the anonymous author of *Hanging Not Punishment Enough for Murtherers, High-way Men, and House-breakers. Offered to the Consideration of the Two Houses of Parliament*, also published in 1701, called for more severe penal inflictions to be imposed. Since bad men had apparently grown worse, he argued, so good men must « grow less merciful[15] ».

The expansion of pauperism as a social and international phenomenon gave rise, between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to that European phenomenon of great internment, which segregated beggars, madmen and disabled people, aligning them within a control policy inaugurated in France by Louis XIV, capable of coping with the growing number of poor. The act of 1706 for the first time introduced mass imprisonment to the English penal system and, despite being permissive, temporarily transformed the punishment of felons. The establishment of the social order and state administrative discipline[16] created a climate within which

15 Anon, 1701. *Hanging Not Punishment Enough for Murtherers, High-way Men, and House-breakers. Offered to the Consideration of the Two Houses of Parliament*, p. 17.
https://archive.org/details/hangingnotpunis00rgoog/page/n16/mode/2up

16 The processes of surveillance, control, classification of the mad, here described, are surely close to those that Foucault associates with the 19th century especially in Foucault, Michel, 2019. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, London, Penguin [First edition: 1975. *Surveiller et punir : Naissance de la prison*, Paris, Gallimard]. For an excellent account on narrative and captivity, see Cossic, Annick, 2010. « Les pérégrinations carcérales de Roderick dans *Roderick Random* (1748) de Tobias Smollett », *Les Cahiers du CEIMA*, Centre d'études interdisciplinaires du monde anglophone (Université de Brest), 6, p. 69-84.

madmen and paupers were in fact united. The Relief of the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 stated that only the poor who were incapable of work (« stark Bedlam mad ») be cared for by the parish, while the rest of the beggars who only pretended to be « lunatics » went to workhouses or even prison. These latter were known as « Tom o'Bedlams ». Even as Bethlem was becoming more and more well-known, it was also turning into an idea with a life of its own, coming to mean not just insanity but chaos in general. This interpretation was strengthened by contemporary ideas of London as confused and chaotic[17]. That made Bethlem not only the city's set piece, but its symbol. It didn't just apply to London, either. When William Hogarth updated his final panel in *The Rake's Progress* – which he famously set in Bethlehem Hospital – in 1763, he added a large British coin to the wall, a way to ensure the audience understood that his Bethlehem was a symbol of Britain itself. Even the world was sometimes a 'Bedlam', as the Bethlehem Royal Hospital was then known.

Throughout the eighteenth century there were repeated scandals concerning the treatment of prisoners. Despite the State's charitable operations, creating private charity for those in need, it soon became clear that the step from charitable protection to punitive separation was short. When the Bethlehem hospital was rebuilt in 1676, it was unlike any asylum before seen[18]. Although its façade resembled the opulent palace of Versailles, the interior (and reality) of the

17 In *The Dunciad* (1728) Pope places the throne of Dullness in Bedlam: the King of Dullness, Colley Cibber's father, Caius Cibber executed the two statues - Raving Madness and Melancholy Madness - standing before the asylum. These two statues, « Great Cibber's brazen, brainless brothers » are naturally suitable emblems for Pope's poem.

18 Designed by Robert Hooke, a City Surveyor, natural philosopher and assistant to Christopher Wren, its 540ft-long (165 m) façade – complete with Corinthian columns and cupola-topped turret – was inspired by Louis XIV's Tuileries Palace in Paris.

hospital was altogether different. Because the ornate frontage was so heavy, it immediately cracked at the back. Whenever it rained, the walls ran with water. And as the hospital was built on the rubble next to the city's Roman wall, it did not even have a proper foundation. Everyone picked up on such a contrast at the time: this grand façade – and how grim it was on the inside. In 1700, satirist Thomas Brown wrote amusingly that the project made you wonder « whether the persons that ordered the building of it, or those that inhabit it, are the maddest[19] ». So the sane were mad, and the mad were sane. Perhaps ironically, given the ways in which contemporaries responded to the asylum's 'mad' architects, one of the ways in which people girded themselves against becoming insane themselves was by visiting Bethlem.

When Daniel Defoe published his *Tour thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, he reported that there were twenty-two « public gaols » and many more « tolerated prisons » in London. Among these, together with Bedlam, he also included the Newgate prison where he himself had been previously confined principally on account of his December 1702 pamphlet entitled *The Shortest-Way with the Dissenters; Or, Proposals for the Establishment of the Church*, purporting to argue for dissenters' extermination. Defoe came from and wrote for a marginalised group within society. Hence, the question of the silenced subaltern voice and agency, and of subordinate experiences of writers is pertinent to the discussion of his work. Defoe is a subaltern not only because of class, but also because of his religious identity. He is subordinated as a writer of a lower society and marginalised as a dissenter. Various factors that contributed to his subalternity were enmeshed together and became grounds for his marginal

19 Brown, Thomas, 1927. *Amusements Serious and Comical, Calculated for the Meridian of London*, ed. Haywards, Arthur L., London, Routledge, p. 27. Originally published 1700.

status. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Defoe filled his narratives with images of ugliness, violence, and the bizarre. The episodic plot of his novel *Moll Flanders* (1722)[20], although not particularly refined, has a considerable thematic weight, underlining on the one hand a conflict that was already evident in the eighteenth century between individual interest and social instability, on the other reflecting the uncontrolled mutability of the times and the world. Although Defoe's narrative productions take place during the age of the rising Enlightenment, he sets *Moll Flanders* not in a palace or a garden, but in Newgate prison or an obscure back alley beside a brothel. The infernal penitentiary of Newgate is mentioned nearly forty times over the course of *Moll Flanders*, more than any other place or even any other character's name. This narrative device was instrumental in helping readers and writers understand that art could handle subjects both lofty, such as religious splendor and idealized passion, and base, such as murder, hatred, and madness. This statement raises the question of 'symphathy' *versus* judgement (Defoe's crucial innovation) which makes the tension between these two responses central to understanding Defoe. These new ideas about 'sympathy' and sensibility were early signs of an emerging interest in victims and outcasts, including the criminal and the insane. Moral philosophers and theorists of the early long eighteenth century (like Malebranche and Hobbes) and later Voltaire were more openly interested in tolerance, 'sympathy' and sensibility. Prisoners' exceptionally tragic lives, marked by all sorts of frustrations, were at the time forcefully exposed to the gaze of the visitor, arousing not only terror, but also empathy, compassion and piety in a humanity that had started to develop the ability to socialize with and, therefore, comprehend obscure passions.

20 Defoe, Daniel, 1989. *Moll Flanders*, ed. Blewett, David, London, Penguin. Originally published 1722. Any reference in the text will be to this edition.

The Bedlam hospital/prison is also mentioned in *Moll Flanders*: « My poor Governess was utterly Disconsolate [...] and sometimes Mourning, sometimes Raging, as to all outward Appearance as any mad woman in Bedlam[21]. » In this passage, Defoe makes clear that prisoners are insistently voyeuristically displayed as objects of interest. Yet the same prisoners may appear, to the same voyeur, menacing. The 'asylum tourism' of Defoe's time, involving visitors' empathy, was thus less voyeuristic than its earlier incarnations. Emerging almost as an apparition, the impersonal Bedlamite momentarily achieves apotheosis in the eyes of the gazer. Her/his scandalous disease dazzles gaze, signifying a body at once impure and sacralized, while his/her facelessness attests to a depersonalized state of being that affirms the qualityless nature of the convicted. In the context of Defoe's *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, the prison represents a sort of stage where the prisoners exhibit a performance of their condition. The visitors are offered exteriority instead of interiority, distance instead of closeness, impersonality instead of self all in order to forge a position within Bedlam or from which the inmates can remain outside of any forced structure of representation or discursive formation.

The most helpful analysis of sacredness is found in Heidegger's influential 1951 lecture « Building Dwelling Thinking », which introduced his concept of the fourfold of earth, sky, mortals and divinities[22]. However the most

21 Defoe, Daniel, *Moll Flanders*, cit., p. 363.

22 Heigegger, Martin, 1971. « Building Dwelling Thinking », in Hofstadter, Albert, ed., *Poetry, Language, Thought*, New York, Harper and Row. The fourfold defines what it really means to dwell (in this context simply 'to be') on Earth. It is a visionary explication of a dynamic process, although Heidegger also sees building, dwelling and thinking as a desirable human prerogative, in that dwelling is understanding our place in the cosmos, building is expressing those ideals, and thinking is our awareness of it.

physicalized description of the process of co-creation is Jean-Paul Sartre's discussion of the affective state of objects:

> When knowledge and feeling are oriented towards something real, actually perceived, the thing, like a reflector, returns the light it has received from it. As a result of this continual interaction, meaning is continually enriched at the same time as the object soaks up affective qualities. The object thus obtains its own particular depth and richness. The affective state flows [with] the progress of attention, developing with each new discovery of meaning…with the result that its development is unpredictable. At each moment perception overflows it and sustains it, and its density and depth comes from its being confused with the perceived object. Each quality is so deeply incorporated in the object that it is impossible to distinguish what is felt and what is perceived[23].

That is what presumably happened with prisons and prisoners in Defoe's age: when visitors were there on their tour, they experienced an intense interaction as co-creators, and the place generated its own field of meaning. Visitors' access to the prisons and interaction with prisoners crucially meant diffusion of the voices of the latter into the public sphere. Not only did removal from the public realm into the 'private' space of the prison fail to silence prisoners' voices; it often amplified them. Defoe's prison publication, *Hymn to the Pillory* (1703), might be interpreted as voicing the prisoners' grievances. Likewise, Moll's experience, and that of the many prisoners convicted in Newgate or Bethlehem, suggest that prison failed to inhibit participation in the public sphere. In the early eighteenth century there was a new impetus for reform. At this time reformist arguments had developed to such an extent that the solution to the contemporary crisis in punishment seemed more obvious than ever before. That penal reform ideas were, to some extent, revolutionary is testified by similarities in the intellectual contexts of

23 Cunning, Robert Denoon, ed., 1965. *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, New York, Modern Library Books, p. 89.

the sixteenth and early eighteenth centuries. As discussed above, the house of correction originated from a number of ideological currents, the result of which was a wider consensus on a more reasonable albeit rigorous punishment and physical and spiritual rehabilitation. The Act of 1706 was not, therefore, an unexpected piece of legislation as it had been inspired by ideas which had developed over the previous two centuries. In the early eighteenth century, in the face of an increase of criminality, reformers held the same diverse range of multiple penal objectives. The increase of social and economic problems induced early eighteenth-century society to deal more effectively with apparent rising tides of dissolute behaviour as had happened two centuries previously. At the same time, confidence in the multiple benefits of hard labour continued to grow, an attitude strengthened by the mercantilist belief that productive labour was the source of national wealth, and by the belief that criminals should pay for the punishment that they necessitated. Consequently, in 1718, the Transportation Act was passed. It is important to note that transportation not only represented a means of simplifying and hastening the process of criminal sentencing, but it also appealed to those members of society who believed in more constructive punishments. Such people hoped that the harsh discipline imposed on exiles might encourage outlaws to become more productive members of society[24].

By the turn of the eighteenth century, the number of published discussions dealing with the punishment of crimes grew extensively. This tendency was due, on the one hand, to the expiration of the Press Licensing Act in 1695 and, on the other, to people's growing anxiety regarding rising crime rates. The public debates over the status of prisoners

24 As early as 1663, a condemned thief argued that he should be transported to the colonies in order to « amend » his life « for the future ». Cited in Beattie, John Maurice, 1986. *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660 - 1800*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 473.

influenced public opinion, challenged the very notion of Englishness and altered the way the authorities responded to those imprisoned for minor crimes. Prison discourses about the prisoners indicate that the public sphere did not operate in isolation of the convicted. These socioeconomic categories, it turned out, were permeable. It is, thus, no wonder that prison tours gained some sort of respectability as they traded on a carefully managed and organized notion of transgression and a manufactured experience of intimacy, retaining the allure of the underclass but within highly scripted social scenes. Allowing for, indeed insisting on, the commercialism, classism, and calculated deceptions of concealed life in London in the first decades of the eighteenth century, Defoe takes the word 'tour' in two senses, both as a frame of spectacle circumscribed by certain theatrical and spectatorial conventions and, at the same time, as a hot spot, a sphere of activity, a place where things happened. If segregated and underprivileged life produced many tight spaces for prisoners, the seemingly looser spaces of brothels and boudoirs did not emblematise an escape door from those conditions as they represented the place where both looseness and tightness became objects of ongoing negotiation.

Prisons were and still are, indeed, complex places, whether we like it or not. It is impossible to conceive of them simply as agglomerations of surface details and even more so in the age of Defoe when economic changes and growing popular dissent made necessary a more systematic control over the individual members of society. Such control turned out to be a failure as prisons were indiscriminately accepting an even wider and more complex series of social problems. The vagabonds, the wanderers of misery and pain, the pilgrims without a homeland were the ones who were exorcised and locked up forever in a dwelling with no exit. Their confinement symbolically expressed the distance, set

in the eighteenth century, between the understandable self and the unrecognized one, and ended up by placing the poor Bedlamite at the center of the visitor's reflections driven by fear and curiosity.

Defoe's narratives are stories that speak the failure of the Age of Reason to convert England into a rational, secular space, effectively managed by scientific discourse. If medical science is the handmaid of Government, then England's efforts at rationally organizing a madman's experience represent something more than a personal failure. Bedlam or Newgate prison are places ironically appropriate to a narrative that investigates how unequal power relations may be challenged and thrown into disarray if the law appears complicit with disequilibrium and disorder. To function by illogic is the inescapable lot of the State administrator[25]. On the one hand, torture emerges as a coercive mechanism of a State that sought an impersonal kind of organisation – like a Benthamite machine – and realism was in some way an aesthetic equivalent to this.

In *Moll Flanders*, the tragic has the function of extending our sympathies, thus ensuring partial identification with the protagonist. According to Defoe, education, and culture in general can do little or nothing to overcome human passions. And since human beings, regardless of their social class, are characterized by the same passions and guided by the same

25 Sir Robert Walpole had come to power in the wake of the 1720 financial crisis known as the «South Sea Bubble». King George I became involved in the South Sea Company financial collapse. In the ensuing scandal it became apparent that George and his two German mistresses, the Countess of Darlington and the Duchess of Kendal, had taken part in South Sea Company transactions of questionable legality. King George I was far from popular in England. Ugly rumours concerning his treatment of his wife, Sophia Dorothea of Celle, imprisoned in the castle of Ahlden for 32 years, were widely disseminated and the greed of his mistresses reflected badly on his court.

instincts, they are all alike[26]. It follows that a prostitute in decline, a convict or a madman, have neither more nor less right to come together as a community. Defoe's view seems to be that the artist might do best to speak directly, the mask thrown off. This remarkably comes close to a whole series of statements in the nineteenth century about the value of sincerity, which became the pre-eminent touchstone for greatness in art: one thinks of Carlyle's idea of the Hero as poet: « it is a man's sincerity and depth of vision that makes him a poet[27] » or of Ruskin's Oxford lectures: « no noble nor right style was ever yet founded but out of a sincere heart[28] », or a sentence by Leslie Stephen that Thomas Hardy copied into his notebook on July 1st 1879: « the ultimate aim of the poet should be to touch our hearts by showing his own[29]. »

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26 In *An Explanatory Preface* (1703) to *The True-Born Englishman* (1701) Defoe defends the Dutch-born King of England William against xenophobic attacks by his political enemies, and ridicules the notion of English racial purity: « I only infer, that an English Man, of all Men ought not to despise Foreigners as such, and I think the Inference is just, since what they are to Day, we were yesterday, and to morrow they will be like us. If Foreigners misbehave in their several Stations and Employments, I have nothing to do with that; the Laws are open to punish them equally with Natives, and let them have no Favour. But when I see the Town full of Lampoons and Invectives against Dutchmen, Only because they are Foreigners, and the King Reproached and Insulted by Insolent Pedants, and Ballad-making Poets, for employing Foreigners, and for being a Foreigner himself, I confess my self moved by it to remind our Nation of their own Original, thereby to let them see what a Banter is put upon our selves in it; since speaking of Englishmen ab Origine, we are really all Foreigners our selves ». See Backscheider, Paula R., September 2004. « Defoe, Daniel (1660?–1731) », *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press.

27 Carlyle, Thomas, 2010. « The Hero as a Poet », *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, vol. 5: *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, New York, Cambridge University Press, p. 84.

28 Ruskin, John, 1872. *Lectures on Art, Delivered Before the University of Oxford in Hilary Term, 1870*, New York, John Wiley and Son, p. 72.

29 Creighton, Thomas Richmond Mandell,ed., 1982. *Poems of Thomas*

By the same token and anticipating Victorian values, Defoe seems to tease the idea of sincerity. After all he did hint in the preface to *Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe* (1720) that *Robinson Crusoe* was an allegory of his life[30].

As Donald Davie put it in his essay on sincerity in poetry in *Encounter* in 1968, « some poems have their value less in themselves than in pointing back to the life that they have come out of, which they bear witness to[31] ». It seems clear that if part of the value of a work of art is that it records an experience which we know to be inaccessible to most of us, then the sincerity of the artist's act of witness is of the first importance. Defoe's use of the grotesque anticipates the novels of Victorian author Charles Dickens, who filled his fiction with people from all *strata* of society, including the aristocracy and the very poor. Like Dickens, Defoe created characters who were capable of debauchery. *Moll Flanders* begins with the protagonist's assertion: « My True Name is so well known in the Records, or Registers at Newgate […] I was born in such an unhappy place[32] », then it quickly descends into a depiction of her crimes ranging from thievery to prostitution. To make the image even more grotesque, the speaker commits incest with her brother, although inadvertently. Even in prison, Moll manages to get more liberties than other inmates: she gets to visit her husband, she convinces the chaplain to believe her sob story, and she gets her death sentence turned into mere exile. In general, in Newgate Moll socializes with people and gets all

Hardy: A New Selection, London and Basingstoke, Macmillan, p. 316.

30 See Novak, Maximilian, 2014. *Transformations, Ideology, and the Real in Defoe's Robinson Crusoe and Other Narratives: Finding The Thing Itself*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, p. 86.

31 Davie, Donald, 1968. « Sincerity and Poetry » (delivered as a Hopwood Lecture in 1965), re-published as « On Sincerity: From Wordsworth to Ginsberg », *Encounter* 31.4, p. 61–66.

32 Defoe, Daniel, *Moll Flanders*, cit., p. 43-45.

kinds of special treatment. So, even though being in a prison like Newgate is pretty horrifying, if anyone can handle it, and maybe even turn it into a decent situation, it is someone like Moll Flanders. Defoe links Newgate with hell: he clearly wants to summon up a connection in the reader's mind between earthly punishment and eternal judgment, and Moll tells in ominous, religious-sounding terms of « the Place, where my Mother suffered so deeply, where I was brought into the World, and from whence I expected no Redemption, but by an infamous Death: To conclude, the Place that had so long expected me, and which with so much Art and Success I had so long avoided[33] ». The scene of Moll's terror upon entering the prison is one of the most emotionally evocative in the book. Moll describes Newgate as the very pit of hell:

> 'tis impossible to describe the terror of my mind, when I was first brought in, and when I look'd round upon all the horrors of that dismal Place: I look'd on myself as lost, and that I had nothing to think of, but of going out of the World, and that with the utmost Infamy; the hellish Noise, the Roaring, Swearing and Clamour, the Stench and Nastiness, and all the dreadful croud of Afflicting things that I saw there; joyn'd together to make the Place seem an Emblem of Hell itself, and a kind of Entrance into it[34].

Moll's fear of the prison launches her into a posture of repentance, and she spends several sleepless nights tormented by her conscience as well as by the mockery of her fellow inmates. However, she soon grows accustomed to her new surroundings:

> I can not say, as some do, this Devil is not so black, as he is painted; for indeed no colors can represent the Place to the Life; nor any soul conceive aright of it, but those who have been Sufferers there: but how Hell should become by degrees so natural, and

33 Defoe, Daniel, *Moll Flanders*, cit., p. 348-349.

34 Defoe, Daniel, *Moll Flanders*, cit., p. 349.

> not only tollerable, but even agreeable, is a thing Unintellegible, but by those who have Experienc'd it, as I have[35].

But the fact that Moll so quickly grows accustomed to her surroundings is typical of the novel's tendency to subordinate emotion to pragmatism (and literary contrivance to realism). Moll has ever been one to make the best of a bad situation, and the fact that she can engineer her own reprieve stands as an unavoidable reminder that Newgate is *not* Hell. The place may suggest eternal damnation, but it never loses its literal reality. During the eighteenth century crucial domestic issues such as health care, transport, education, and the running of prisons were matters left to private enterprises. Governors often referred to as 'keepers' or 'gaolers' bought the right to run a prison by paying a large amount of money to the government. As a consequence, prisoners were maintained at their own expense, and therefore had to remain in touch with their families and communities outside; they were not isolated or excluded from the community at large. Exactions and fees from the prisoners were imposed for nearly everything belonging to the everyday life in prison: food, bedcovers, and clothes or more exclusive services like beer, decent accommodations or prostitutes. It is said that some of the wealthiest prisoners were accommodated in the keepers' own houses[36]. Moll's religious repentance, however vividly depicted, has little bearing on her release from punishment. She finds rescue rather by means of a decidedly non-religious expedient: she essentially buys herself out of captivity and into a new life. By appearing to accept and even to fall down in the degraded conditions that characterized prisoners' and criminals' social life as imagined by a supremacist society,

35 Defoe, Daniel, *Moll Flanders*, cit., p. 351.

36 See Babington, Anthony, 1971. *The English Bastille*: *A History of Newgate Gaol and Prison Conditions in Britain 1188-1902*, London, Macdonald; Halliday, Stephen, 2009. *Newgate. London's Prototype of Hell*, Stroud, The History Press.

Defoe's criminal literature undermined the best-foot-forward approach of the leading men and women. Nevertheless, by resisting the easy equation of subjugation with degradation, literature concerned with the lives of criminals also resisted the exploitative conditions of the prison itself.

Defoe's *Moll Flanders* foregrounds the difference of the speaker's voice; we sense from the start that this is an odd, alien kind of mind. But there is also a sense in which it invites us to see more in Moll than is first obvious. Although Moll acknowledges that her life has been « a horrid Complication of Wickedness, Whoredom, Adultery, Incest, Lying, Theft, and in a Word, every thing but Murther and Treason[37] », she enjoys an active and varied love life. Moreover, the painful moments devoted, in the novel, to her regret and punishment are surprisingly concise. What makes her appalling is her assumption of her own rightness, but because of her bizarrely impressive energy we find ourselves compelled to enter her personality even as we despise it. But a second point is that the effort we have to make to get into this voice, this mind, is its own reward; as we read the novel, we are constantly aware that we are temporarily inhabiting a different mind. We are drawn in, in other words, even as we might very well want to pull away. The fact that we can only read this novel by using the speaker's words forces us into a degree of sympathy. But to talk here about the speaker seems wrong. Surely we feel that the force of this novel, of its plea that those who survived imprisonment should not forever be haunted by guilt at having done so, is bound up with our sense that we are not hearing the voice of a *persona*, an invented speaker, but the voice of a man who really did suffer in the ways the novel suggests. However much we value the imaginative sympathy which seems able to inhabit the mind of another being, there remains a special value which derives from the known sincerity

37 Defoe, Daniel, *Moll Flanders*, cit., p. 355.

of the author whose work we are reading. « In Prison », wrote Defoe, « I have learnt to know that Liberty does not consist in open Doors, and the free Egress and Regress of Locomotion. I have seen the rough side of the world as well as the smooth, and have in less than half a Year tasted the difference between the Closet of a King and the Dungeon of Newgate[38]. » Defoe is in some sense a witness, out there on the frontiers of experience and understanding, or perhaps on some more literal frontier of human experience – the witness to the awfulness of imprisonment, fighting to survive.

It is the way in which the story is related, rather than its symbolic content, that makes *Moll Flanders* linger in the reader's imagination. Part of this attraction derives from Defoe creating, unintentionally or not, a genre that is new. In Defoe's *Moll Flanders* the ideals of classical harmony, public decorum and mental discipline, fostered by the rising Enlightenment, are subverted by a revolutionary drive. Behind the theoretical substance of Defoe's new genre, we can discover the emergence of a new kind of heroine whose behaviours and actions are far from the traditional mentality. Defoe's construction of gender has its basis in rationality, realism and a more utilitarian approach to the phenomenal world of the proto-industrial, capitalist society of his time.

Through a blurring of the boundaries which undermines stable relationships, disrupts conventions of order and negates straightforward categorization, Defoe creates a sort of heterotopic[39] space which reflects a curious slippage between

38 Lee, William, 1869. *Daniel Defoe : His Life, and Recently Discovered Writings: Extending from 1716 to 1729*, London, John Camden Hotten, p. 68.

39 The enigmatic term « heterotopia » was popularized by Foucault, Michel, 2005. *The Order of Things* (1966), London, Routledge. It describes sites that seem familiar, as they are subsumed within a society's conventional ordering system that links them to other sites, yet they are

the familiar and the unfamiliar and challenges vision's role in producing empirical and reliable knowledge and also the role of science as an infallible system. Moreover, it allows the writer to raise questions about reality, identity's uncertainties and complexities. *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana. The Fortunate Mistress* (1724)[40], serve as key examples: in both these cases Defoe clearly focuses on psychological complexity, rather than on (say) complex moral issues. Moll, born in prison, zestfully and practically recounts her dubious liaisons with husbands, lovers, and seducers, and her progress through thievery to transportation to Virginia and final financial and moral happiness. Hers is a difficult social and moral progress which contrasts sharply with that of the demi-mondaine heroine of the Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* (1731). If Moll's memoirs somewhat awkwardly suggest a rather too meticulous retrospect on a period of personal disorder, those of Roxana reveal a darker process of self-description. Roxana declines from respectability, partly through the disgraceful treatment meted out to her by the men on whom she relies, partly through her own, highly selfish, sense of self-preservation. Lady Roxana is fully aware of the great power which her beauty can represent in a society which associates beauty with value. And she is inspired by this formula; for her there is only an instrumental conception of her body:

> Nor was I a very indifferent Figure as to Shape; tho' I had had two Children by my Gentleman, and six by my true Husband, I say, I was no despisable Shape; and my Prince (I must be allow'd the vanity to call him so) was taking his View of me as I walk'd from one End of the Room to the Other, at last he leads me to the darkest Part of the Room, and standing behind me […] led me to a Peir-

unfamiliar in that they simultaneously contradict the premises by which these relationships are sustained.

40 Defoe, Daniel, 2008. *Roxana. The Fortunate Mistress*, ed. Mullan, John, Oxford, Oxford University Press. Any reference in the text will be to this edition.

> Glass, and behold, I saw my Neck clasp'd with a fine Necklace of Diamond […] I was all on fire with the Sight[41].

Roxana's beauty is functional to the conquest of power that she wants to achieve even though crime and villainy are necessary for the completion of her plans. Painting a picture of a feminine identity not determined by the patriarchal or religious establishment, Defoe solicits our complicity and forces us to sympathize with a behaviour that is fundamentally transgressive, and the conflict launched by this identification ushers in the uncanniness that is his trademark. Defoe's complex elaboration of the two heroines' characters anticipates features of the female protagonists of the forthcoming centuries, as well as testifies to the attention he devotes to the body in ways previously unrecognized. Defoe was too committed to the cause of equal rights for both sexes[42] not to confront any cynical denials of a self-determined female corporeality. Moll's, as well as Lady Roxana's body hosts virile virtue, confronting so many hazards, while pursuing success. They are both attractive ladies and unrelenting warriors, and, strategically, their body is both masculine and feminine. This feature of Defoe's heroines will be partly developed by Le Fanu's *Carmilla*

41 Defoe, Daniel, *Roxana*, cit., p. 73.

42 See the chapter entitled « An Academy for Women », included in Defoe, Daniel, [1697] 1969. *An Essay upon Projects,* Menston, The Scholar Press, p. 282-304. He begins the chapter with the bold statement that it is barbarous to deny women an education, then goes on to outline details for the establishment of colleges for women. According to Helen Thompson: « Defoe claims externally imparted education as the primary adjudicator of human distinction, even the distiction of sex. Following both Morton and the empirical philosopher John Locke, Defoe's ‹Academy for Women› denies essential difference to assert that men and women alike are shaped from the outside in. » Thompson, Helen, 2018. « The Crusoe Story: Philosophical and Psychological Implications », in Richetti, John, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Robinson Crusoe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 112-127 (p. 115).

(1872) who, in a more fantastical way, represents femininity as metamorphosis[43].

Angels and demons at the same time, Defoe's heroines try to fit into a social context they have neither defined nor engineered. It is their engagingly aggressive dark double that manages to modify their role from a passive stance to human cases highly interesting for their peculiarities. When Roxana announces in her Preface that « all imaginable Care has been taken to keep clear of Indecencies, and immodest Expressions » we sense not only the impact of her soundly Protestant penitence but also that her narrative might be disappointingly elusive and unspecific. *Roxana* quickly lets us know that the mind we have entered is a strange one. Defoe's narratives promptly allow us to see that a mind we have entered more or less comfortably, is, after all, not a place in which we want to feel comfortable. Just like the Newgate prison holds Moll prisoner, so Roxana's body exemplifies the prison environment. She is just as much a prisoner of her flesh as Moll is in her prison. Roxana conceives her career as an adventure in acquiring wealth, made possible by turning her charms into articles of trade. Defoe's dialogic approach to the scene of the brothel is particularly evident in the following passage which describes the career of Lady Roxana:

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43 This characteristic can be regarded as a sort of dramatization of fear which the idea of bodily transformation evoked: metamorphosis means monstrosity just as Mary Shelley was to dramatize in *Frankenstein* (1818) whose plot can be regarded as a sensation novel *ante litteram*. We can find a character drawn along the lines of Lady Roxana in *The Woman in White*, which can be regarded as one of the best fictional works during a period of transition from gothic fiction to two distinct sub-genres of it: the popular gothic of Wilkie Collins, Sheridan Le Fanu and Mary Braddon with its stark denunciation of the domestic household, and the deeper more psychologically-oriented Gothicism of H. G. Wells and R. L. Stevenson.

> I say, I cou'd not but reflect upon the Brutallity and blindness of Mankind; that because Nature had given me a good Skin, and some agreeable features, should suffer that Beauty to be such a Bait to Appetite, as to do such sordid, unaccountable things, to obtain the Possession of it. It is for this reason, that I have so largely set down the Particulars of the Caresses I was treated with […] to draw the just Picture of a Man enslav'd to the Rage of his vicious Appetite; how he defaces the Image of God in his Soul, dethrones his Reason, causes Conscience to abdicate the Possession, and exalts Sence into the vacant Throne; how he deposes Man, and exalts the Brute[44].

Here again is the dialogic argument that resistance takes shape, not in another language that directly competes with hegemonic language, but through a reaccenting or reimagining of dominant tropes, themes, and narratives. Thus a novel dealing with a prostitute or a prisoner put on show reveals how their performances at the heart of England were able to expose authority as the larger farce. In Defoe's women-centred fictions, inversion comes to sound like an early version of Gilbert and Gubar's theory of the subversive strategies located beneath the surface of the text. Roxana addresses philosophical and ontological issues from the flat perspective of her bed, exposing to the reader's gaze a sexuality from which all sense of privacy and all sense of shame have been abstracted. In Defoe's extraordinary visual gallery of erotic tableaux, there is no feeling of guilt that Roxana wishes to tear from herself: « However, I say, as to my own Part, I enjoy'd myself in perfect tranquillity, and as the Prince was the only Deity I worshipp'd, so I was really his Idol […] I must mention the Sacrifices he made to his Idol, and they were not a few, I assure you[45]. »

Defoe could write against segregation or subvert the brothel from inside the tight spaces of its forced intimacies

44 Defoe, Daniel, *Roxana*, cit., p. 74-75.

45 Defoe, Daniel, *Roxana*, cit., p. 70.

with ruling classes supremacy. Roxana's manipulation of men could emerge from within the primitivist, sexist, and classist representations that conditioned popular figuring of boudoirs and brothels in Defoe's time. Even so, by casting Roxana's biography as a catalogue of conquests, Defoe reveals the limits of relationships based purely on personal needs. Whereas Moll succeeds in establishing her dominion over the prison and in escaping from it, Roxana, apparently a successful character, nevertheless remains a prisoner of her body. Thus, in these two novels, Defoe manifests a quick shift from the earlier optimism of Moll to the more complex and ambiguous pessimism which characterizes, for the most part, the psychological framework of Roxana. The chaotic world portrayed in *Roxana*, has lost its balance and its protagonist's falling into « Disorder and Confusion[46] », a dreadful course of calamities, is the logical consequence of her letting one part of her body cheat on another. In this more complex treatment of sexuality, Defoe makes explicit the costs of the sexual economy Roxana attempts to master. It is manifest that Defoe's novels provide insight into the way market forces were radically changing how people lived, but a deep analysis of Defoe's texts requires particular attention to the problems of society like crime and prostitution and misery for the orphans.

It is clear that no « sunny, orderly, unthreatening » world is portrayed in Defoe's fiction[47] and Bedlamites, as well as Roxana or Moll Flanders, represent the kind of men and women whom English society could not contemplate as part

46 Defoe, Daniel, *Roxana*, cit., p. 178.

47 Starr, George Alexander, 2005. « Introduction » to *An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions* in Owens, W. R.; Furbank, P. N., ed., *Satire, Fantasy and Writings on the Supernatural by Daniel Defoe*, London, Pickering and Chatto, vol. 6, p. 26-27: « even when he can identify 'natural' causes, his doing so does not transform the world into a sunny, orderly, unthreatening place. »

of its world. This kind of hero is the perfect representation of a vital counter world which, according to Knoepflmacher, is asocial, amoral, unbound by the restraints of the socialized Superego[48]. Defoe, like many Victorians, especially those with an interest in science, did not think in terms of 'good' vs 'evil', but (like George Eliot) he thought in terms of 'mixed' human beings, and reformulated, on these premises, the classical ideal that literature must both please and instruct. Through the elements of textual hybridity, he increasingly emphasizes the first of these goals even while proclaiming allegiance to the second. In *Roxana*, as well as *Moll Flanders*, he represents the world in a way that seems factual and realistic, but while dramatizing the latent erosion of moral values, he introduces a degree of textual ambiguity unusual for his epoch. Defoe shows his skill to investigate human nature, adopting an elusive proto-realistic ideological and structural framework.

Writing *Roxana* as well as *Moll Flanders* Defoe created two revolutionary novels (not fairy tales), within the framework of two short years, showing how the philosophical vision of Enlightenment did not echo what was really happening out on the streets or in Bedlam or in Newgate prison. Nevertheless, Defoe does not judge, let alone condemn, man's role in the universe. He merely states a process that reveals the sinister aspect of the environment through its contamination at the hands of man. He observes and records, but he finally stops imagining comic solutions to tragic problems of necessity and desire as he exposes the cost of a sexual market system that murders its children to feed its desire.

Defoe's novels indicate the degree to which he was dramatizing the ambiguities of his age concerning the

48 KNOEPFLMACHER, U. C., 1975. « The Counterworld of Victorian Fiction », in BUCKLEY, Jerome Hamilton, ed., *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction*, Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press, 1975, p. 351-371 (p. 352).

freedom of derelicts to act and think independently. The narratives of *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* are themselves a kind of ritual. Their bias is towards the anecdote in its original sense of a secret story, to be shared only among a select few who can be trusted to see its significance. Both as a social and as a literary form, the anecdote exists in and for the group; its function is to call into play the rules and values of the one uniquely understanding audience to which it is addressed, which are assumed to need no justification or commentary. By the act of narration the teller or writer implicitly claims to share those values, and to live within them. We are returned here to some sort of equivalent to the Masonic culture of the English club. Secrecy and occult creeds and rituals practised for mutual gain have implications for the governance of narrative as well as the governance of England. Alternative versions to official narratives may not be heard except by fellow members, who are complicit in preserving the political and cultural hegemony of an oligarchy. On the other hand, if a prostitute's life or life in Newgate or Bedlam is non-narratable, it provides for a paradoxical twist to the question of whether the subaltern speaks. Silenced subaltern narratives exercise a traumatic hold over the imagination of hegemonic groups precisely because their narrative logic cannot be managed by an aesthetic of idealism. By gaining the attention of a ruling class, such sensational narratives may infiltrate forbidden spaces, achieving dissemination in prohibited territories such as the English upper classes, in a process of counter-hegemony. The ethics of narrative, thus problematized, must transpire in the interstices between the value and belief systems of wealthy people and poor people.

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