

## ANNOTATING DEFOE: THE CASE OF A *JOURNAL OF THE PLAGUE YEAR*

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In 1982, *Essays in Criticism* carried a series of articles that put the case for better annotation of English novels, especially in editions likely to be used by undergraduates. Drama and poetry had been well served by series such as the New Mermaids and the Longman English Poets, but fiction lacked a tradition of proper annotation on the dubious grounds that its fields of reference had traditionally been thought more accessible, its language less obscure. Stephen Wall, the editor of *Essays in Criticism*, began the debate by taking *Dombey and Son* as his chief example; in October, Pat Rogers contributed a reading of proverbs in *Tristram Shandy*; and Ian Jack followed in the same issue with an account of annotating the Brontës that is distinguished partly for its very disenchanted reflections on Q.D. Leavis's Penguin edition of *Jane Eyre*.<sup>1</sup> Mrs Leavis could, however, be grateful that Jack saved his worst for tomorrow's readers. Making the valid point that even well-annotated texts must in time be re-annotated because cultural knowledge changes, he aims a despairing cuff at current students and future generations: 'There is always a new audience, with its new ignorance.'<sup>2</sup>

A similarly lapsarian tone colours Jack's definition of the annotator's chief aim: 'to attempt to enable his contemporaries to read a book as its original audience read it.' But that, as Ian Small observed in a 1986 contribution to the same journal, may be a chimera. 'What is to count as knowledge of contemporary culture,' says Small, 'is a profound problem for any annotator.' Who should figure among 'the original audience'? Would their knowledge and concerns necessarily have been the same? Isn't this simply naïve historicism? Such were the questions Small posed. Wall and Jack, he suggested, were in fact apologists for the illegal trade of smuggling critical interpretation into endnotes. 'At what point,' to cite Small's parting question,

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Wall, 'Annotated English Novels?', *Essays in Criticism* vol. XXXII no 1 (January 1982), 1-8; Pat Rogers, 'Tristram Shandy's Polite Conversation,' *Essays in Criticism* vol. XXXII no 4 (October 1982), 305-320; Ian Jack, 'Novel and those "Necessary Evils": Annotating the Brontës,' *Essays in Criticism* vol. XXXII no 4 (October 1982), 321-337.

<sup>2</sup> Jack, 323.

does the attempt to recreate the knowledge of an ‘original’ or ‘ideal’ audience become so conjectural that it produces commentary or annotation indistinguishable from criticism?<sup>3</sup>

Indeed. Wall’s wish that editors would abbreviate their introductions in order to make more space for notes tells its own story.

Today, the debate seems of its time, but not reductively so: if it is a case study of Oxford historicism challenged by a Gallic scepticism that dares to ask who the reader is, and who the author, that does not limit its significance for contemporary editorial practice, even though Stephen Wall aimed his own parting shot at those in the 1980s who thought ‘of texts simply as sign-clusters running wild in the desert.’<sup>4</sup> Annotators, argues Wall, should replace speculation with certainty, but his suspicion of Gallic frivolity can harden into Teutonic belligerence. We might, claims Wall, measure in a footnote the relative degrees of ‘record’ and ‘fantasy’ in Chapter 6 of *Dombey and Son*, a claim that makes one yearn for a bit of wild desert running.<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that Small’s objections do not bring problems of their own. His essay bears the curious title ‘Annotating “Hard” Nineteenth Century Novels,’ the epithet in this instance designating Pater’s *Marius the Epicurean*, a work which, through sometimes self-conscious obscurity, aims precisely to undermine the idea of shared cultural knowledge or ‘literary competence’ among its readers. What this leaves us with, however, is only a more nuanced view of Jack’s hypothesis of an ‘original audience.’ Where’s Jack’s audience is united, Small’s is not, but Small is only able to identify that quality by describing Pater’s capacity for exercising ‘an authorial ploy.’<sup>6</sup> And there is the ghost in his essay. Unhappy with Wall and Jack’s institutionalised model of reception, he senses the eerie presence of, but cannot quite bring himself to re-admit, the ‘once derided but now re-habilitated concept of authorial intention’ that haunted literary-critical discourse in the 1980s. Witness the following sentence from Small’s concluding paragraph, in which the passive mode both stages and keeps in the green room the idea of the author:

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<sup>3</sup> Ian Small, ‘Annotating “Hard” Nineteenth-Century Novels,’ *Essays in Criticism* vol. XXXVI no 4 (October 1986), 292.

<sup>4</sup> Wall 8.

<sup>5</sup> Wall 3.

<sup>6</sup> Small 292.

The real point at issue is what the annotator should do when he suspects that reference and citation are being used allusively; when, that is, he or she suspects that they are being used not to establish or invoke common cultural knowledge, but rather the opposite: when the editor suspects them of being an authorial ploy to create textual obscurity or ambiguity.<sup>7</sup>

‘Being used’ versus ‘the editor suspects;’ it is a curious annotator who, capable of such discriminating agency in the composition of footnotes, is reluctant to acknowledge its force in the author he edits. But we can be grateful to Small for showing so conclusively that however problematic the definition of originating intentions, they are nowhere near as hard to define as an original audience.

The scent of that conclusion is perhaps evident in the method used by all contributors to the debate, including the present one. There is universal reliance on a single case study, conclusions about which may have a generalized validity but do not transfer intact to other texts. Whatever principles of annotation we may set down bump up against what Derek Attridge has memorably defined as the ‘singularity’ of the literary work.<sup>8</sup> Describing the experience of such singularity, Attridge acknowledges a debt to reader-response criticism, with a decided slant towards the writings of Derrida. His account of Blake’s ‘The Sick Rose’ duly shows hermeneutic associations forming and re-forming through a series of readings that necessarily extend over days, years and generations. No annotator of fiction could venture down such a dizzying vista, and the very prospect makes it no surprise that Wall, Jack and Rogers prefer the illusion of an original and ossified audience: less an error than an attempt to draw the very dividing line between criticism and annotation that exercises Small, even if drawing the line involves simultaneously crossing it. But communicating the ‘singularity’ of the individual work must be an entirely legitimate – indeed, central – concern for any annotator. For every work, the question of a reader’s ‘literary competence’ is, as Small points out, symbiotic, but it is also singular in the sense that the *author* plays a role in creating it even as s/he assumes its passive existence. Small’s category of the ‘authorial ploy,’ in another words, must be of the greatest interest to the annotator. While it is merely circular to define the competence of readers with reference to what we find in the text, it remains meaningful to elucidate the text as the expression of the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004).

author's understanding of the context of language and history in the moment of writing. In that sense, there is no such thing as a 'hard' novel, since all novelists to some degree are engaged in the task of making distinctions between what their manifold readers might know, but only on the basis of what s/he, the author, already knows, or thinks s/he knows. The text to be annotated is far richer in evidence of that commodity than it is of the 'original audience.'

I propose to pursue this argument in relation to the practice of annotating the novels of Daniel Defoe, and with particular reference first to the Oxford English Novels editions, dating from 1964 to 1972, all of which have at various times been reissued in Oxford's World's Classics series, and second to the question of annotating topography in Defoe's 1722 *A Journal of the Plague Year*, in which I declare the following interest: while I have not, in the usual sense of the term, annotated the book as Small annotated *Marius the Epicurean*, I have checked, edited and augmented a set of notes for it widely held to be of exemplary value to readers and scholars.<sup>9</sup> In the process I have drawn conclusions beyond the particular demands of the *Journal* – for every text, when it comes to annotation, present some rules of its own – and, I like to think, beyond the work of its author.

(ii)

Even within the same series, the annotation of Defoe's novels has varied enormously in depth and range. Jane Jack's *Roxana* was the first Defoe to appear in the Oxford English Novels series, in 1964, and as an example of annotative practice it is hardly recommendable. Jack lighted on a handful of biblical citations and archaic terms but assumed that her readers had a map of Europe to hand, while making no attempt on the mysteries of Defoe's medical references (what precisely, any reader might ask, is a 'violent Fermentation in [the heroine's] Blood' in relation to early eighteenth-century physiology?). If there is an advantage to this approach, it is that Defoe emerges as a writer of the imagination whose signs do, as Stephen Wall put it, run a little wild in the desert, but only because his editor lets them. Samuel Holt

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<sup>9</sup> Louis Landa's Oxford English Novels edition first appeared in 1969. In 1990 the edition was reissued with a new introduction, bibliography and medical note by me. 2010 saw the publication of a further reissue, to which I contributed another new introduction, bibliography, medical note and a completely new topographical glossary, which replaced Landa's topographical notes. Scanning technology unavailable in 1990 also gave me the chance to revise Landa's annotations. Although capaciously informative, those notes were sometimes repetitive and inconsistent.

Monk's *Colonel Jack* followed *Roxana* in 1965, and it is a marked improvement on the earlier volume.<sup>10</sup> Its still economical notes focus on archaic terms, biblical citations, historical events and personages, authorial carelessness and – to a limited extent – topographical references. Here, Monk is sometimes cursory, often unconcerned (London parishes can speak for themselves, apparently), but on occasion wildly enthusiastic, as when he shows in two extensive paragraphs of notes that Defoe wrongly believed Pensacola to lie at the mouth of the Mississippi River. No one would deny that the intervention is necessary. It doesn't tell us anything about how the book's 'original audience' would have read the passage, although it's possible to imagine that Monk could have found all sorts of material that either confirmed or belied Defoe's assumption. What it does show is a contingent fact about the world that Defoe misrepresented, and it is his evident *misrepresentation* – whether shared or not – that furnishes a significant portion of the 'singularity' of what needs annotating.

Presumably Oxford commissioned its Defoes in pairs, for 1969 saw both *A Journal of the Plague Year* – of which much more below – and Shiv K. Kumar's *Captain Singleton*. Kumar's principal challenge was an array of nautical and topographical reference, and he met it with elegance and precision, unafraid to describe lacunae or oddities but more restrained in doing so than Monk. Thus, when Singleton's gunner predicts that they will soon 'meet with the great River *Congo*,' Kumar annotates as follows:

Defoe describes the Congo River, in conformity with fact, as flowing partly north of the equator, whereas the chart-makers of his day represented it as flowing directly westward to the Atlantic Ocean. This has led many critics to infer that either he had some uncanny faculty of guessing correctly, or he had access to some obscure source of information not readily available to his contemporary geographers.<sup>11</sup>

This is precise enough to be of use but does not burden the reader with detail that would make most commissioning editors anxious. Without interposing an interpretation between text and reader, it nevertheless says something interesting about the singular problems and attractions of reading Defoe.

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<sup>10</sup> Reissued in 1989 with a new introduction and bibliography by me for the Oxford World's Classics series, and cited here in the reissued edition.

<sup>11</sup> Defoe, *Captain Singleton*, ed. Shiv K. Kumar (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 280. The quotation from the novel is on p.108.

As though to demonstrate that achieving series consistency is no straightforward matter, the two Oxford Defoes of the early 1970s represent the best and the worst of editorial practice. J. Donald Crowley's 1972 notes to *Robinson Crusoe* are as meagre as Jane Jack's and depend very significantly on those of the Trent edition, whereas G.A. Starr's *Moll Flanders* of 1971 is concisely encyclopaedic, rich in references to London life in the early Eighteenth Century and, like Louis Landa's *A Journal of the Plague Year* and Kumar's *Captain Singleton*, attentive to contexts in a way that aids rather than limits interpretation.

If the best Defoe editions show the author as a man immersed in his world and full of suppositions, both false and unforeseeably true, about its material textures, they also suggest that one of the most regular challenges facing an editor is to deal with references to physical space. Novice creative writers are taught that care with topography is a pre-requisite for successful fiction; the fact that the first test case in Stephen Wall's 1982 article is the Staggs's Gardens passage from Chapter 6 of *Dombey and Son* suggests that for students of annotation it has no less significance. What, Wall asks, is Dickens referring to when he writes of 'a steep unnatural hill' with a 'chaos of carts' at the bottom? Is it a real, reported scene, or what Wall describes as 'a Hogarthian hallucination'?<sup>12</sup> Defoe was not given to hallucination but, as Kumar notes, his sense of place may be interpreted as either painstaking or – if this is not the same thing – uncanny, and the editor who fails to engage with his distinctive spatial representation is missing something fundamental about his writing. However, such engagement brings problems not just of annotation but representation for the editor, and how successive editors of *A Journal of the Plague Year* have handled those problems is the subject of the remainder of this paper.

(iii)

In the words of Louis Landa, *A Journal of the Plague Year* contains 'approximately 175 names of streets, alleys, inns, taverns, buildings, burial grounds, parishes, churches, districts, and liberties in London, of hamlets nearby, and a sprinkling of names of places more remote.'<sup>13</sup> Annotating them is a necessary task for

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<sup>12</sup> Wall, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Louis Landa, 'Topographical References,' in Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, new edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 292. Subsequent references are to this edition.

any editor since London's topography was etched on Defoe's consciousness; our ability to follow except in the most general terms his semi-anonymous narrator, H.F., in his rambles around (not to mention ramblings about) his creator's home city depends on our being tuned in to his radar. This is, after all, a real-world fiction whose textures are built from the ground up. However, among editors of the *Journal* there is no consensus as to what kind of topographical information to include or how to present it, with the result that this work of many genres and none tests the boundaries not just of 'literature,' 'history' or 'memoir,' but of what is achievable by scholarly procedure in the format of the printed book, especially one that is expected to appeal to a general audience. Like *Tristram Shandy*, *The Dunciad Variorum* or *The Covent Garden Tragedy*, in the latter two of which the modern editor must provide footnotes for the author's own footnotes, it is one of those works of the English Eighteenth Century in which the material text turns out to be so radical an experiment that it cannot comfortably be squared with normal editorial practice.

The four modern editors of the *Journal* who do more than introduce the book tackle topographical annotation in very different ways, working to individual series conventions and economies, and with very different results. There is Louis Landa for the 1969 Oxford English Texts edition, reprinted for the World's Classics series in 1990 with additional material by the present author; Paula Backscheider in her 1992 Norton edition; Cynthia Wall for Penguin Classics in 2003; and John Mullan in 2009 for the Pickering and Chatto series of Defoe's novels. Landa opted for some place annotation among general explanatory notes with a separate list of topographical references. Even in 1969, series economies meant that the latter ran to little more than a third of Defoe's forbidding total, with a number of puzzles and key resonances left unattended; this in an edition whose notes are generally acknowledged as by far the best available (no revision to them was possible in 1990). Omissions apart, it was always going to be an awkward means of guiding readers. Landa listed his chosen locales in the order in which they appear in the text and gave only first citation page numbers, somewhat counter to the logic of listing place references separately from other notes in the first place and underestimating the possibility evinced by the *Journal's* critical bibliography that the book might attract explicitly topographical readings. If one benefit of including some topographical items among the explanatory notes was that it served well those passages where Defoe mentions a number of locations in a brief compass (on page 7, for example, 'I liv'd without *Aldgate*, about

mid-way between *Aldgate Church* and *White-Chappel-Bars*'), the overall results were bound to confuse. Any reader – and there are plenty – mesmerized by H.F.'s repetitive narration might struggle to find Landa's note on a place mentioned, to give one example among scores, on pages 61 and 241 of the Oxford text.

Cynthia Wall acknowledges her dependence on Landa's notes but supplies a lot fewer of them herself. She does, however, solve in principle the problem of navigating the repetitions of Defoe's topography by providing a Topographical Index that lists place names in alphabetical order with the page numbers for each citation. As a result, readers with varying topographical knowledge have the choice of looking up places without having the text cluttered with numbers and the explanatory notes with cross-references. Wall also provides that invaluable commodity, a map, and has the immense advantage of having been able to consult Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert's *The London Encyclopaedia*, now in its third edition.<sup>14</sup> But her index of sixty-one locations leaves the reader with too many omissions and unlike Landa's list it contains errors such as a conflation of Blackwall and Blackwell (more commonly 'Bakewell') that could have been avoided by more careful reading of Weinreb and Hibbert.<sup>15</sup> In principle, however, her carefully devised multi-modal approach sets the standard for modern editions.

Backscheider's priority was to provide a teaching text rich in contextual and critical material, and in that respect her edition succeeds handsomely. Inevitably, beneath the abundance of plague writing from Athens to AIDS, extracts from Defoe's contemporaries and modern critical essays, topography slips down her list of priorities. While an early note reads 'Defoe is very particular about locations in London and its suburbs,' there is no matching particularity in the Norton notes.<sup>16</sup> It is hard to believe that the 'freshman class who volunteered to divide the book among themselves and list every word they believed needed explanation' was briefed to look out for place names.<sup>17</sup> A small map indicates up to fifty key sites and about the same number are represented in brief footnotes, with no separate provision for topography, on which Backscheider, like Wall, acknowledges her dependence on Landa. There are inaccuracies, all the same. For 'Swan Alley,' Backscheider inexplicably annotates,

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<sup>14</sup> Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert, *The London Encyclopaedia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan, 2008), first published in 1987. It should be added that this is a problematic source since its own citations are lightly attributed, while it reports thinly on the heart of the *Journal*, London's alleyways.

<sup>15</sup> Defoe, *Journal*, ed. Cynthia Wall (London: Penguin, 2003), 253.

<sup>16</sup> Defoe, *Journal*, ed. Paula Backscheider (New York and London: Norton, 1992), 9 n.4.

<sup>17</sup> Backscheider, xii.



‘Olave Street; this is the neighbourhood of Defoe’s earliest childhood’; the latter claim is true but Swan Alley was still there and called as such in 1746, when John Rocque published his map of London. ‘Olave Street’ never was and still isn’t.<sup>18</sup>

Against the recent trend, John Mullan includes no map but his topographical glossary is organised in the same way as Wall’s while having the advantage of greater comprehensiveness, listing what he describes as the 101 ‘main places and buildings’ mentioned in the text.<sup>19</sup> Acknowledging his dependence on Landa and Wall, Mullan nonetheless solves puzzles they had passed over, such as the identity of the Surrey hamlet Defoe calls ‘Lusum’ (114), in other words Lewisham.<sup>20</sup> Like Landa, he also uses the explanatory notes to explain place references where they come thick and fast or in relation to an over-arching theme, such as the rebuilding of London after the fire, and he is unfailingly accurate. It is just unfortunate that the many advantages of Mullan’s fine edition are offset by its astronomical cost. Because it forms part of an extremely expensive set, very few people are likely to use it, while its lack of a bibliography or extensive reference to Defoe criticism means that even in paperback (should that day come) it is unlikely to be adopted as a standard teaching or academic library text.

The revision of the 1990 issue published in 2010 attempts to synthesize the best qualities of other recent texts by supplying a complete if suitably economical topographical index of London with a map and accurate information, all in affordable covers. Some of the gaps left by previous editors are not especially significant in themselves, but no reader of the *Journal* should have to sort them out for himself: to take a few examples, the ‘Bull-Head Tavern’ in Gracechurch Street (196) that Wall and Mullan pass over and Landa could not trace, the vanished ‘Petty France’ alleyway in Bishopsgate that is easily taken for the surviving street in Westminster, the ‘Lord Mayor’s door’ in St Helen’s Church, (221) the churches referred to by names shared among several parishes, or the seven possible topographical errors identified by Manuel Schonhorn before any of the modern editions saw the light of day.<sup>21</sup> Then

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<sup>18</sup> Backscheider, 132 n.7.

<sup>19</sup> Defoe, *Journal*, ed. John Mullan (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009), 213.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Lusum’ is listed with the other southern rural parishes of ‘Dulledge’ (Dulwich) and Camberwell. Defoe appears to be using a colloquial contraction of ‘Leuesham;’ even today Lewisham may be referred to as ‘Loosiham’ or ‘Loosham.’ Backscheider, 94 n.7, offers no explanation but notes that Defoe ‘knew Surrey well.’

<sup>21</sup> Landa: ‘I have not identified a Bull Head Tavern in Gracechurch Street’ (298), but it appears to be a conflation of the Bull’s Head Inn at Clare Market and the Bull Inn, just off the junction of Leadenhall and Gracechurch Streets; it is a place H.F. hears of rather than visiting it himself. Backscheider

there are the occasions when H.F., reluctant parish bureaucrat that he is, either immerses himself in or detaches himself from the ‘folk’ geography that named alleys or rivers differently to how they appear in maps and reference works.<sup>22</sup> Readers should be given the official name, since that is an essential part of the ‘contextual understanding’ assumed by Defoe’s references.

There, of course, is the catch. What is ‘essential’ as far as the *Journal* is concerned? However worthy the cause might appear, there is one strong objection to a complete topographical index: with a map to hand it is arguably surplus to requirements, since many of Defoe’s references to place are primarily relational. When H.F. traces the edge of a former plague pit ‘Parallel with the Passage which goes by the West Wall of the Church-Yard, out of *Houndsditch*, and turns East again into *White-Chappel*, coming out near the three Nuns Inn,’ (60) the reader’s first need is simply to visualise a ground plan. The same goes for celebrated passages such as the one where the piper walks from a tavern in Coleman Street to sleep off his dinner on the part of London Wall adjoining Cripplegate, only to find himself dumped on a plague cart, (90) or where H.F. records his travels – and those of the plague itself – through knots of alleyways too dense for the same carts to pass. Even where he takes a broader view, grouping places together as (for example) the ‘infected Suburbs’ of Wapping, Ratcliffe, Limehouse and Poplar, the main purpose is to chart spatial distance from the city centre rather than the history or cultural significance of a particular location. Other references that may look like invitations to explain the history of a particular building or location are also relational. Churches usually signify parishes, not buildings – largely, in other words, areas for counting plague victims seen from the narrator’s geographical perspective - and perhaps for that reason get particularly short shrift from Landa and Wall.

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believes it to be simply an anachronism, asserting without evidence that there was a Bull’s Head in Gracechurch Street in 1722; there was, but only a passage, not an inn. Defoe (23) refers to ‘Petty-France’ leading into Bishopsgate churchyard, but *The London Encyclopaedia*, 612, lists only the street north of St James’s Park. The ‘Lord Mayor’s Door’ cited by Defoe is the South Door, now called the Royal Entrance. It gives out onto Great St Helen’s Street, home to the Lord Mayor in 1664-5, Sir John Lawrence, whose coat of arms appears on a sword rest in the church with that of the City of London. Defoe refers to both St Giles-in-the-Fields and St Giles Cripplegate but sometimes gives only ‘St Giles,’ always to mean the former; the same is true of St Martin in the Fields and St Martin’s Le Grand. For the seven possible errors, Manuel Schonhorn, ‘Defoe’s *Journal of the Plague Year*. Topography and Intention,’ *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol XIX, no. 76 (1968), 391 n.1.

<sup>22</sup> Two examples are ‘which we generally call’d *Ware River*, or *Hackney River*,’ (164) by which he means the *Lea River*; and ‘they call’d *Swan-Alley*,’ (86) He also calls the lane leading to the *White Horse Inn* off Coleman Street ‘*White Horse Alley*,’ although on maps from *Ogilby* to *Rocque* it appears only as ‘*White Horse Inn*.’ There were five other *White Horse Alleys*, however.

Moreover, a number of passages dense with topography seem designed to be self-annotating, if somewhat hypnotically so, rendered with the precision of the route-fetishist that orients readers already in the know while offering the rest a reliable map reference: ‘They told us a Story of a House in a Place call’d *Swan-Alley*, passing from *Goswell-street* near the end of *Oldstreet* into *St John-street*.’ (165) H.F.’s intuitive knowledge, his ability to navigate the streets and alleys with confidence, is one component of his obstinate individuality at a time when the authorities had reason to fear what in the *Tour* he described as London’s ‘straggling, confused manner,’ its failure to contain the wilfully itinerant: an author called ‘Quarantine’ thought to be Defoe had looked on with horror at reports of the Marseilles plague, where ‘Troops of Thieves and Murderers...range[d] the infected Streets.’<sup>23</sup> H.F. shows a moderated version of their ‘brutal courage’ and his ability to map it for us is, to put it bluntly, Defoe’s point, whether we construe that as a sign of conformity, charity or resistance: whether H.F. is a devotee of the penitentiary ideology described by John Bender, a precursor of Blake’s narrator marking in every face he meets marks of weakness and woe, or a diffident liberal who refuses to be a parish examiner on the grounds that ‘it would be very hard to oblige [him], to be an Instrument in that which was against [his] Judgment.’ (159).<sup>24</sup>

Against this it must be said that Defoe is very far from consistently helpful in such passages, and in any case a map with his 175-plus places would fill up much more than a double-page spread, or even four. We might also observe that the *Journal*’s passages of quick-fire topography fall into the category Pat Rogers, responding to Stephen Wall’s call for more exacting annotation in fiction, identified as ‘the loose change of composition,’ neglect of which makes it

all too easy to discourse in a facile way about, say, ‘tone,’ without any real sense of the social, cultural or associative coloration of key phrases.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Defoe, *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, ed. Pat Rogers (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), 286-7; *Applebee’s Journal*, 1 October 1720.

<sup>24</sup> John Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Blake, ‘London,’ in *Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 216, lines 3-4. H.F. tells us that he had ‘many dismal Scenes before [his] Eyes.’ (80)

<sup>25</sup> Pat Rogers, ‘Tristram Shandy’s Polite Conversation,’ *Essays in Criticism* XXXII no.4 (October 1982), 307.

The strongest argument for full annotation of topography in the *Journal* starts with the ‘associative coloration’ of such passages, which stem from the kind of purpose the work aimed to fulfil, the nature of the space it imagined – the ‘singularity’ of intention that brought it into being and worked on consciousnesses of readers. As Manuel Schonhorn demonstrated more than forty years ago, Defoe was writing about one natural disaster from the peculiar vantage point of the wreckage left by another.<sup>26</sup> On the extent of the damage inflicted by the Great Fire, Schonhorn cites Edward Chamberlayne, who did his best to compute it but gave up:

The Buildings on 373 Acres were utterly consumed, by that late dreadful Conflagration; also 63 Acres without the Walls, in all 436 Acres, 89 Parish-Churches, and 13200 Houses, besides that vast Cathedral of *St Paul’s*, and divers Chappels, Halls, Colleges, Schools, and other public Edefices, whereof the whole Damage is hardly to be computed or credited.<sup>27</sup>

To lend credence to his title-page claim that the *Journal* was ‘Written by a Citizen who continued all the while in London’ during the ‘last Great Visitation’ Defoe needed to be accurate when he peppered his narrative with ‘then’ and ‘now,’ and Schonhorn concluded that with the exception of perhaps three alleys, two taverns, a ditch and one plague pit he was - partly thanks to having Ogilby and Morgan’s 1676 plan of the city at his elbow as he wrote, and possibly with the benefit of recent publications such as Strype’s *Stow* (1720) and Edward Hatton’s *A New View of London* (1708).<sup>28</sup> It is easy to imagine how having an old map to hand could produce sentences such as, ‘a Place call’d *Swan-Alley*, passing from *Goswell-street* near the end of *Oldstreet* into *St John-street*,’ (165) even taking account of the fact that Defoe knew the neighbourhoods of Aldgate and Coleman Street from family history and early personal experience.<sup>29</sup> So conscious of the need to signal change was he that he sometimes forgot what was defunct and what survived: when he first writes of ‘a Place they call’d *Swan-Alley*,’ (86) it is as if the name or the street no longer existed, but only three pages later the same alley ‘remain[s] to Witness’ the difficulty of getting carts in to take away the dead. (89)

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<sup>26</sup> Schonhorn, op.cit.

<sup>27</sup> Edward Chamberlayne, *Angliae Notitia: or, the Present State of England*, 19<sup>th</sup> edn. (London, 1700), 344.

<sup>28</sup> For the seven possible errors, Schonhorn, 391 n.1. For Defoe and the Ogilby/Morgan map, 390 n.1.

<sup>29</sup> See Frank H. Bastian, ‘James Foe, Merchant, Father of Daniel Defoe,’ *Notes and Queries* ccix (1964), 83.

It is possible, Schonhorn notes, for modern readers to fall into the same trap by exaggerating the extent of the changes; London was, after all, ‘restored, rather than replanned,’ and Defoe took care to centre the *Journal* on those areas of the city he knew best, where any reader of 1722 could still walk.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, Mullan endorses Schonhorn’s conclusion that ‘no true fidelity to the past’ was intended, merely sufficient data to persuade readers that the book was the genuine article its title page proclaimed - ‘Observations or Memorials, of the most remarkable Occurrences’ recorded during the ‘last great Visitation in 1665.’<sup>31</sup> But there is no test of sufficiency for such data that does not return us to the question of ‘fidelity to the past.’ The differences between the two Londons are an unignorable feature of what we might call the contextual competence Defoe seeks to awaken among his readers; adequate annotation should therefore be consistently bifocal.

In writing about the differences between 1665 and 1722 Defoe set out to remind Londoners that further change might be imminent, and that project is what makes the *Journal* the radical oddity that is not simply a hoax memoir or even a dazzling experiment in historical fiction but a landmark in the imagination of dystopia that is, paradoxically, rooted in the past - a vision of the future fashioned from memory. Some day, he warns amid the Marseilles plague scare, the grass might again push up through the main thoroughfares and windows flap for want of people to shut them. Since the *Journal* was not reprinted until 1755, we can infer that the message was unwelcome (understandably, ‘How Not To’ books cornered the market for plague literature) and a book that invited readers to see the plague pit beneath the town house revived associations most people preferred to forget.<sup>32</sup> Few readers then could have welcomed the obsessiveness with which H.F. traces, ‘Parallel with the Passage which goes by the West Wall of the Church-Yard, out of *Houndsditch*, and turns East again

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<sup>30</sup> Schonhorn, 389

<sup>31</sup> Mullan, 8, citing Schonhorn, 393.

<sup>32</sup> In his review of Backscheider’s edition, Frank H. Ellis attributed the failure of the *Journal* in 1722 to its hypnotic repetitions – a facetious irrelevance, I suggest. The *Journal* was among the last of more than fifty works inspired by the Marseilles plague crisis, which began in July 1720, so Defoe simply missed the boat. By writing (in all likelihood) in support of the 1722 Quarantine Act, passed two months before the *Journal* was published, he helped quell the hysteria that had made plague books so popular. The really successful works, with multiple reprints, were Richard Bradley’s *The Plague at Marseilles consider’d*, which went into five editions in 1721, and John Hancocke’s *Febrifugum Magnum: or common water the best cure for fevers, and probably for the plague* (1722). The fact that they were outright medical works suggests that Defoe also picked the wrong genre; nascent historical fiction was worth little compared with the prospect of buying advice about a cure. Although Defoe recommends cures and prophylactics, his title promises only a sensational memoir. For Ellis, Review Article: ‘Defoe’s *Journal of the Plague Year*,’ *The Review of English Studies*, New Series XLV, vol 177 (1994), 78.

into *White-Chappel*, coming out near the three Nuns Inn,' the outline of a former plague pit. (60)

Defoe explores two historical trajectories for London. On the one hand he draws on the discourse of continuous expansion on ancient foundations, evoking a more pastoral London when the streets of 1722 were once green fields, where the economic infrastructure made of banks and prisons can be quickly rebuilt after what seemed to be disastrous fires, (92) and going right back in its archaeology to the 'Remains of the old lines or fortifications.' (232) It is the language of Stow and Strype, who conceived the city as a mighty, ever-maturing palimpsest. H.F. also reveals an enduring faith in the ability of its fundamental economic resource, its population, to renew itself, something divines such as the Reverend Benjamin Grosvenor found it difficult to contemplate as they aligned the natural fate of mankind with the mass fatality of plague, finding in both a stark alienation of person from place:

Within less than an Age there is not one of them whose Place shall know him any more. His Place in this City shall know him no more. His place at the Exchange, in the Church, and in his own Family, shall know him no more. Every Eye here shall be closed in the Darkness of the Grave; every Tongue silent; every Complexion turn'd into Rottenness; and this whole Congregation will be under Ground.<sup>33</sup>

Plague, Defoe observed, fell upon a city of 'above a hundred thousand people more than ever [London] held before' - an 'incredible Increase' that brought 'Fashion and Finery' as well as 'Work-men, Manufacturers, and the like,' yet he reassures us that he has seen 'a farther Increase, and mighty Throngs of People settling into London, more than ever.' He 'often wondred , that...there was yet so great a Multitude left.' (18-19)

But the *Journal*'s own jarring poetry of alienation tells another story, puncturing its economic optimism with alarming images of economic and social entropy. The Inns of Court might shut; (17) the Royal Exchange might empty. Instead of carrying goods overseas, ships might be tied up harbouring refugees from the plague, while fundamental liberties might disappear. The 'Orders conceived and published by the Lord Mayor' in 1665 (38-46) were a bracing manifesto for puritan

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<sup>33</sup> Benjamin Grosvenor, *Preparation for Death, the best preservative against the plague* (London, 1721), discussing Luke xii.47.

city government: a ban on plays, public drinking, feasting, begging, dirty streets and the definition of an apparatus to enforce house arrest and uninterrupted information to the authorities. They found their modern counterpart in the ‘Zealous and Well-meaning Steps’ which prompted one physician to produce a milder version of the 1665 orders that nonetheless envisages military occupation of London.<sup>34</sup> Whatever, H.F.’s reassurances about the ‘mighty Throngs’ who had revitalised the city, the chief effect of writing in 1722 about 1665 was to suggest that however foreign a country the past was, it could always be revisited given the wrong circumstances.

What may have been commercial misjudgement on Defoe’s part was integral to the eventual success of the canonical text, whose popularity today might be attributed to its resonance for readers better attuned to fantasies of environmental destruction and more wary of the imperialist discourse of *Robinson Crusoe*. For all its resemblance to *Crusoe*, the *Journal* distances itself from the earlier book’s fundamental myth by showing the commercial and spiritual centre of early empire falling apart. The double vision that allows Defoe to do that informs a more significant proportion of the 175 place references than any of the available editions acknowledges. If modern readers are to have any understanding of the book’s bifocal topography beyond what Defoe occasionally goes out of his way to explain in the text, they need an editor – and a series brief – as interested in London *circa* 1722 as 1665. So how do the four modern editions cope?

Wall is generous in her citation of Stow and Strype, but frequently their historical perspective is too long and too remote from the narrative context in the *Journal* to be of precise interest to readers of Defoe, as opposed to anyone taking general pleasure in the history of London. The same may be said of some information she derives from *The London Encyclopaedia*. Especially with restrictions on space, does the reader need notes on disputed etymologies or previous residents of Drury Lane? Names are a particularly luminous vapour for Wall, even though the *Journal* takes them for granted. Numerous examples of places mentioned by Defoe that altered substantially between 1666 and 1722 – buildings such as the Customs House on Lower Thames Street, streets such as Drury Lane that were in the midst of rapid social change – go unexplained. While Mullan provides detailed explanatory notes on passages where Defoe himself states that the built environment changed, his

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<sup>34</sup> Sir John Colbatch, *A Scheme of Proper Methods to be taken, should it please God to visit us with the Plague* (London, 1721), vi.

topographical glossary follows Wall's style, sometimes deploying only the most summary and general information from *The London Encyclopaedia*, as if all readers of the *Journal* needed was a left-field tour guide. Landa intermittently describes the character of locations such as Poplar, Bow Bridge or Blackwall in 1665 without drawing the contrast with 1722, as if the *Journal* were merely an historical novel that set out to recreate the world of a half-century before rather than using the London of the 1720s as its unavoidable lens.<sup>35</sup> Backscheider simply has other priorities.

The need for, as well as the difficulty of compressing, more complete topographical annotation can be demonstrated by one among many examples. Defoe refers to the rebuilding 'of the prisons of *Ludgate, Newgate &c*' after the Great Fire. (92) The choice may seem perverse in the light of John Bender's observation that H.F. 'never describes a single one of the twenty-seven public gaols listed in Defoe's *Tour* nor says anything about their condition during the plague.'<sup>36</sup> But readers need to know what Defoe believed he was referring to in 1722. Space prevents Cynthia Wall from annotating 'Ludgate,' while for 'Newgate' she cites Strype:

*Newgate-street*, well inhabited by good Tradesmen; it comes out of *Cheapside*, and *Blowbladder-street*, and runs to *Newgate*, the City Gaol for Malefactors; as also for the County of *Middlesex* for the like Criminals, and likewise for Debtors. It is a large Prison, and made very strong, the better to secure such Sort of Criminals, which too much fills it.<sup>37</sup>

On the surface this is an appealing solution, giving rounded contextual and topographical information by a contemporary source, but it creates several problems. By a minor sleight of hand, Wall hopes it will also do for the later reference to the old city gate, (242) but that really needs a note of its own to explain its destruction in 1666 and rebuilding in 1672, as does Newgate Market, not listed by Wall, which H.F. puzzlingly says did not exist in a recognisable form before the Great Fire. (241) It did: Defoe's own *Tour* describes it as one of seven 'ancient' 'flesh markets,' so the reference needs something more than Backscheider's bland assertion that in 1665

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<sup>35</sup> Landa, 296.

<sup>36</sup> John Bender, 'The City and the Rise of the Penitentiary: *A Journal of the Plague Year*, adapted from chapter 3 of his *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (1987) in Backscheider, 324.

<sup>37</sup> Wall, 257.



‘Newgate Market was an important meat market.’<sup>38</sup> Most importantly, readers surely need what they get from Mullan: a note on the rebuilding of Newgate prison in 1672 and on what Defoe meant by ‘Ludgate’ prison.<sup>39</sup> He may have had in mind the Fleet Prison, just north of the junction of Fleet Street and Ludgate Hill, and destroyed in the Great Fire; rebuilt soon afterwards, it would house Wycherley and Penn. But there was also a small prison for petty criminals above Ludgate itself, damaged in 1666 and, in the words of the *Tour*, ‘demolished at the fire, being beautifully re-built;’ it was ‘a prison for debt for freemen of the city only.’<sup>40</sup> Landa and Backscheider select items from the list of restored buildings on page 92 but omit the prisons altogether, leaving readers to take Defoe at his word.<sup>41</sup>

Whatever else Defoe thought he was doing by publishing his experiment with historical fiction, he was addressing and trying to disturb those who thought they knew their city. It follows that part of the annotator’s task in *A Journal of the Plague Year* must be to unfold the carefully crafted double vision that allowed Defoe to evoke the streets, alleys, inns, taverns, buildings, burial grounds, parishes, churches, districts, and liberties of 1665 through those of 1722. Since that task stretches the resources of the printed book to the limit – especially one in paper covers for a mass market - it may not be until someone attempts a hypertext edition that it is tackled successfully. Only then will readers be able, for example, to switch readily between maps of London and select different levels of topographical information at will. For the time being, a topographical index alert to the transformation of London in Defoe’s lifetime seems the best means of following a narrator who traverses for his readers not just obscure alleys, forgotten inns and hidden plague pits, but time itself.

(iv)

The borderline genre and particular compositional processes we associate with the *Journal* may appear to make it still more of an editorial special case than *Marius the Epicurean*. However, it is more usefully represented as an extreme instance of literary singularity that helps sharpen definitions of the annotator’s task. The original

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<sup>38</sup> Backscheider, 187 n.5. *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, ed, Pat Rogers (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 314.

<sup>39</sup> Mullan, 235.

<sup>40</sup> *Tour*, 320.

<sup>41</sup> Landa, 295.

audience sought by Ian Jack is indeed, as Ian Small observes, a phantom: elusive in itself, it deflects us from inquiring into the singular designs an author is likely to have on any reader. It is possible, in turn, to acknowledge without embarrassment the correlation between the terms ‘design’ and ‘intention’ on the basis that it is understood that intentions can only manifest themselves within a defined framework of reference. By re-creating a partly vanished world of alleys, fields and taverns for his readers, Defoe prompted his readers into considering what was and wasn’t already there. But it is part of the singularity of the literary that the intention renews itself with every reading. Immersion in the book in 2011 is, in a sense, precisely what it was in 1722: an education in reading the city. If no annotator can possibly capture the resonance a novel had for its original audience, he can and should hope to show how, with every reading, an audience is consciously guided up alleyways of interpretation and across fields of doubt into cognizance of a prior claim to authority that is, if it is anyone’s, the author’s.