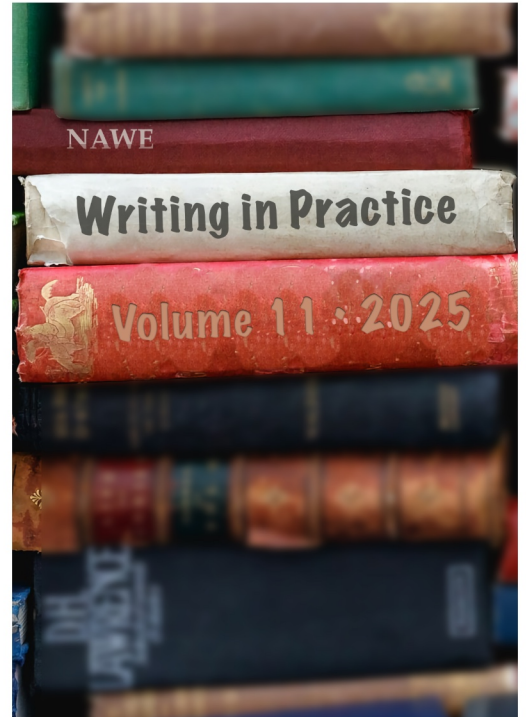




Negotiating Creativity: 1592-1731 and today

Dan Anthony

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ABSTRACT

My project is to develop a module for MA creative writing students to support our programmes of workshops through an interdisciplinary analysis of the way writers and artists negotiate creativity. Ultimately, I aim to offer the same module to business students at the same level, partly so that commissioners and creatives can be brought together in the same room, and partly because I believe the analysis and discussion of creativity as a negotiable, socially contingent medium would be useful to both groups of students. This essay explores how the concept of negotiating creativity links the study of literature, culture and economics through a practice-based enquiry.

After an introduction, discussing the conceptual context of artistic creative negotiations, I consider three case studies from the formative period of the UK's creative economy: Christopher Marlowe, Aphra Behn and Daniel Defoe's negotiations with creativity.

In the final section, I demonstrate how there is a need for this kind of analysis through reflections on teaching negotiating creativity in the classroom. I illustrate how this approach enhances students' understanding of their own creative processes and their confidence to produce new work.

KEYWORDS

Creative writing, Interdisciplinary, Interdisciplinarity, Negotiating creativity, Teaching, Creativity, Entrepreneurship, Literature, Markets, Creative industries, Production, Practice.

Newness and novels

Creative Writing has an uneasy relationship with markets. On the one hand, at the University of Iowa and the University of East Anglia, the founding parents of the subject deliver courses using a tried and tested approach: successful novelists workshop the craft of writing with students who want to emulate them. It's a practice that we all follow. The model spans an invisible, semi-permeable membrane between the commercial world of deals, publishers and readers and the ethereal creative processes at work in both novelist's and, as Barthes pointed out, reader's heads.

Novelists recognize that they have two incompatible jobs: to engage readers in a familiar form – ‘stories’; and to find new ideas – or ‘novels’. The success of creative writing as a subject, and as a means of generating publishable fiction (literary or otherwise), relies upon the fact that it focusses on the analysis of text, not its marketability. Considering the novelty and quality of text, accompanied by a commentary outlining how the writer wants the piece to be judged, is, for us, a more exact science than trying to decide whether an agent, publisher or reader will want to buy it. The systemic incompatibility exposed here was described in relation to the art market by Pierre Bourdieu as ‘dénégation’, a kind of structural, personal and collective agreement to differ when considering art (or for that matter literature) as a cultural statement or a cultural product. The issue can only be addressed through the application of a degree of what might be called hypocrisy. He explored the idea in his chapter on ‘The Production of Belief’ in *The Field of Cultural Production*:

The practices [those of ‘the art businesses’], functioning as practical negations, can only work by pretending not to be doing what they are doing. Defying ordinary logic, they lend themselves to two opposed readings, both equally false, which each undo their essential duality and duplicity by reducing them either to the disavowal or to what is disavowed – to disinterestedness or relief-interest. (Bourdieu, 1993: 74)

This paradox, between the search for newness, or perhaps ‘interestingness’ would be a better word, and markets’ predilection for consolidation, monopolisation, power and control, has been at the heart of creative writing since technology was used to animate creative production in Mainz in the 1450s, when Johannes Gutenberg began to fit moveable typefaces into his printing presses, well before people started teaching it for money in Iowa City and Norwich.

In this essay I first want to explore creative writing’s contemporary challenges with markets for new work by considering the modern matrix of cultural production. This now includes, AI, uncertainty regarding the effectiveness and purpose of copyright, instant translation, instant global reach, instant access to all human knowledge, instant access to all humans, multiple platforms, a plethora of creative forms ranging from ‘traditional’ stories recorded and expressed in a variety of culturally specific ways, novels, plays, poems, songs and screenplays, any number of hybrid techno-cultural forms, influencers, populists, propagandists, culture warriors, believers, non-believers, flat earthers, cosmologists, organised criminal gang members and, in a few years, moon-dwellers.

Notwithstanding the overawing possibilities creative technologies and cultures offer, which reach far beyond old school novels, poems, plays and screenwriting, to narrative and creative nonfiction, to creative writing in therapeutic and community contexts, to writing for games, technology and marketing, to the study of creativity itself, I want to suggest that there remains at the heart of the creativity we develop, a durable and recognisable process at work. There is a methodology that unifies all mutations, one that can be understood and taught.

I am not talking about our favourite phrase for the way we bottle our alchemy: ‘the creative process’.

The way writers negotiate with creativity, a culturally contingent concept that manifests in our histories and cultures, is a means of framing writers’ and artists’ relationships with the plethora of influences on them today. This process has been consistently and enduringly evolving since the Early Modern period. Moreover, notwithstanding economic and literary theories that see creativity and creative output as a kind of mood board representing the zeitgeist of a place and time, I argue that individual creative practitioners negotiate with the cultural circumstances of their eras through recognisable and consistent approaches to creative production in changing marketplaces.

Far from being distant relatives of current creative practitioners, the commonality of artistic creative negotiations forms a discernible pattern. It can be understood, explored and learned. It is the distinguishing feature of European (specifically) and ‘Western’ (generally) creative output, and it underpins our dependence on novelty. To illustrate, I want to look at three well known early writers from the UK who established the practice of negotiating creativity, more or less at the instant the markets for their products (plays and novels) emerged. I want to show how Christopher Marlowe, Aphra Behn and Daniel Defoe’s negotiations with creativity remain practically useful to our students today. To do that it’s worth taking a little time to explore today’s creative economy.

The creative economy

Writers only survive if they sell. Their consumers and patrons (publishers, governments, universities) may vary in their approaches to culture, but writers can’t afford to be choosy. Here, I am taking a familiar practitioner’s advice: ‘Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen and six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds nought and six, result misery.’

I am thinking about, you, me and Mr Micawber in the most basic economic terms. Dickens demonstrated how all of us negotiate with the

practical cultural understanding of what creativity is at the time of production *and* what value can be placed on that. Creative artists aim is to sustain Bourdieu’s compromise, to keep the accounts in the black and to make something new. This quasi economic, political, cultural, and artistic balancing act defines our creative practice. It can be summarised, to begin with, as concerning the relationship between big ideas and tiny ones; between macro-economics, Micawber’s equations and our personal creative practices.

In *Literature and Publishing, 1945–2020* Konstantinou and Sinykin make a similar observation from the related point of view of publishing. They conclude that literary analysis, without recourse to the context of production, is problematic in its isolation:

In pursuit of top-line growth, conglomerate publishers have produced historically new aesthetic forms that straddle the line between literary genre and marketing strategy. What is essential to note here is that aesthetic judgment isn’t removed from the marketplace but rather fully integrated within its functioning. Capitalism, before or after neoliberalism, doesn’t obviate or undermine aesthetic categories. But it does change them. (Konstantinou and Sinykin, 2021: 233)

They state: ‘Our contention is, therefore, that there is ultimately no self-evident contest or contradiction between aesthetic production and social history.’ (2021: 235)

In *Under the Cover: The Creation, Production, and Reception of a Novel*, Clayton Childress, through his analysis of Cornelia Nixon’s novel *Jarrettsville*, explores a similar idea from the point of view of an individual author’s work. He considers the creative, cultural, economic, social and reflective dimensions of one literary text and exposes the interconnectedness of authorial decision making in the context of our current market-orientated mash-up. He writes: ‘Nixon’s writing ritual is a story about her creative process, but it’s also a story about money.’ (Childress, 2024: 74)

Let’s reflect on this statement. Childress, Dickens and Micawber are all saying the same thing: ‘it’s the economy, stupid’. To understand how writers negotiate with creativity one must consider our place in the economy both at a tiny Micawban level and ideologically. Economist and founder of the World Economic Forum, Klaus Schwab’s concept of *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* places creative output in the context of a pattern of economic and social development. He writes of our time:

The changes are so profound that, from the perspective of human history, there has never been a time of greater promise or peril. My concern, however, is that decision-makers are too often caught in traditional, linear (and non-disruptive) thinking

or too absorbed by immediate concerns to think strategically about the forces of disruption and innovation shaping our future. (Schwab, 2014: 2)

Schwab described our situation as one where creativity and the management of creativity will either save or destroy the world, probably (as in the first, second and third industrial revolutions) both. This link between economic theory, which sees creativity as paradoxically benign (problem solving, entrepreneurial, inventive) and destructive (revolutionary, uncontrollable, counterproductive), and as the medium for economic growth in our century, resonates with the paradoxical relationships between creative writers and markets.

My contention here is, when viewed from the point of view of creatives teaching in universities (in this case writers), who practice in the conundrum of the fourth industrial revolution, dealing with creativity is more manageable, more familiar, more negotiable than one might imagine. ‘Typographic man’, as Marshall McLuhan described consumers and practitioners of literary production, has been involved in a creative negotiation with markets that has evolved in political, technological, economic and social complexity.

The term ‘creative economy’ was coined by John Howkins in 2001. He wrote in *The Creative Economy: how people make money from ideas* about creative industries as agents for economic growth, as enabling, democratising, educationally aware engines for change, and progress. He explained the process by connecting the products of cultural exchange to property. In a sense, new liberal thinking rebranded and inverted what might be termed a Marxist idea. The assumed banality of ‘culture industry’ as described by Adorno and Horkheimer had become its nemesis – aspirational ‘creative industry’.

It seems reasonable to treat our ideas as assets because they result from investments (attention, time, money) which we can increase or vary and they determine future outputs. Treating ideas as assets helps us to understand the nature of the creative market-place. In financial terms, asset markets are spheres of speculation, a world of one-off deals rather than mass production. Putting an effort into thinking increases its value and effectiveness as surely as do investments in other capital assets. (Howkins, 2013: 118)

From an artist’s point of view, Howkins’ argument is attractive, it values creative’s work and wants them (and the industries they work in) to expand and become more successful: An idea gains most when it is managed and made purposive. Ideas flourish best in small, flexible ecosystems with full-time thinkers, network offices and clusters who know about rights management and know if and when an

idea can or should be turned into property, and the most cost-effective means of doing so.

A society that stifles or misuses its creative assets cannot prosper but if we understand and manage our creative economy successfully, individuals benefit, and society is rewarded. Seeing creativity as a universal human quality, and the beginnings of a process of learning and adaptation, is the first step. (2013: 119)

In *Common as air: revolution, art, and ownership* Lewis Hyde cites the same issue, that of the increasing awareness and reliance on intellectual property (IP), in a less favourable way. He refers to the introduction of a ‘Respect Copyright’ badge for Scouts in Los Angeles, highlighting our interest in what was once a little-known backwater of legal practice. He suggests that our desire to own and profit from the wealth IP generates may inhibit the creative potential it seeks to reward.

There are many reasons why we’re more interested in IP than ever before. Perhaps the most important for writers is this. Ownership of IP rights is evidence of creativity. At least, that’s the way economists, politicians, managers, businesspeople and educationalists see it. If we create more IP, it follows that we must be succeeding in the fourth industrial revolution. It proves national, institutional and personal competitiveness in a kind of IP registration race. For technicians this means patents, for marketers this means trademarks, for designers it means design rights and for writers this means copyright credits.

Hyde, who focussed on the development of copyright as he explored the increasingly tight relationship between creativity, creatives and IP identified two key turning points in our journey towards overidentification with IP. The first was the Statute of Anne in 1710: “The very first copyright law... gave “the Authors and Proprietors” of books exclusive rights to their works for as long as twenty-eight years, provided that they paid a sixpenny fee and listed their works in the Register-Book of the Company of Stationers.” (Hyde, 2012: 9) And the second was the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991:

The 1991 fall of the Soviet Union, I believe, served to remove the primary oppositional force that had kept free-market capitalism on its best behaviour for half a century. Absent that force, the West entered a period of unabashed market triumphalism, during which many things long assumed to be public or common—from weather forecasting to drinking water, from academic science to the “idea” of a crustless peanut butter and jelly sandwich—were removed from the public sphere and made subject to the exclusive rights of private ownership. (Hyde, 2012: 11)

For Hyde, the creative energy released by the former, without the powerful checks and

balances provided by the Soviet Union’s alternative, collective version of reality, lead us towards an economy pointed wholeheartedly on the individual, the self, the monetisation of the self and the consequent stultification of our capacity to create imaginatively. He expresses his opinion about us and our matrix, and demonstrates how his own praxis ‘negotiating creativity’ plays out:

How are we to imagine the creative self? Is it individual and unique, or is it collective and common? Myself, I think it is always both of these, and that the question proposes a false distinction. In the United States, at least, the distinction persists, however, as does the presumption of an Emersonian answer with its tale of self-reliance, self-help, self-teaching, self-making, etc. These terms are part of the national myth, and as someone once said, a myth is a story you can’t get out of, so I doubt any analysis of mine will alter it much. But note, at least, how wacky are such phrases as “self-reliance” and “self-help.” To rely, to help: these are not reflexive verbs. When men and women yell “Help,” they usually mean to indicate they have a problem they cannot solve on their own. (2012: 71)

In *Culture Is Not An Industry*, Justin O’Connor expands the point, arguing that our creative industries are in danger of transforming our culture, our very essences into industrial commodities, in much the same way as Adorno and Horkheimer described the ‘culture industries’ in the aftermath of the Second World War. (O’Connor J., (2024). The critique of the structural limitations of rampant capitalism is well established and has provenance. It is part of the matrix of factors affecting our creative culture that writers must negotiate.

Writers work on their own. They always have and they always will. Even when writers work in teams, they *actually write* on their own, then they share their discoveries. Studying this process offers a way to understand the competing mass of influences, demands and questions writers deal with and organising them so that creative decisions become better informed.

In the next section of this essay, I discuss the works of three writers who characterise creative negotiations from the early stages of creative industrial development in the UK.

In the discussion I’ve explored aspects of their creative negotiations that are as valid today as they were in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Part of my argument is that, through considering writers’ or artists’ work in this way, students can study practically anyone they want, because the inquiry is practice led. There is no canon, but there is literature. The examples I have chosen: Christopher Marlowe, Aphra Behn and Daniel Defoe, will be familiar to you.

The disturbing consequences of the solitary

nature of deskwork is our starting point. At the inception of London’s creative economy Christopher Marlowe pointed out that negotiating creativity is dangerous. The Devil is in the detail.

1500s: ‘Received at Doctor Faustus... £3 and 12 shillings.’

Phillip Henslowe could be described as a producer. He was a Tudor impresario and one of his many specialisms was theatre. He built the Rose Theatre at Bankside in Southwark in 1587. There, as the manager the Lord Admiral’s Men, financed by his business partner, Thomas Alleyn, he staged plays at the same time as their rivals the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, who worked with Shakespeare. Henslowe’s ‘diary’ provides a record of his transactions. On the 4 October 1594, he noted that Christopher Marlowe’s hit, which had been performed many times before, grossed £3 and 12 shillings at the box office. (Greig, 1904) Henslowe’s Tudor theatre building and production programme represents the first manifestation of what is now described as a creative industry. His diary offers a snapshot of the action offstage. Cerasano describes Henslowe’s diary as a ‘memorandum book’, a ‘household book’, or a ‘book of account’. She reminds us that: ‘These are not the books of the great merchants who were operating large trading companies and who-by virtue of the magnitude of their enterprises, and the large amount of money that was changing hands, observed the methods of double entry bookkeeping that had originated among the Venetians. Rather, they are the books created by individuals who are simply interested in keeping track of personal affairs, on a modest scale.’ (Cerasano, 2005: 11-12)

The diary and the environment it was created in are replete with significance for those who want to trace the development of ‘creative industries’. There is a sense that, although Schwab’s super-intelligent techno-creative, fourth industrial revolution looks unlike the grimy events in Deptford’s former bear pits during the 1590s, the ‘revolution’ we’re experiencing today is merely a continuation of the one Henslowe, Marlowe, Alleyn, Shakespeare and the others set in motion.

The Tragical History of Dr Faustus opens with a chorus giving us a ‘taster’ of what’s to follow. They show us the brilliant Faustus, who studied in Wittenberg where ‘shortly he was grac’d with doctor’s name’.

All goes well until:

*... swoln with cunning, of a self-conceit,
His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
And, melting, heavens conspir’d his overthrow;
For, falling to a devilish exercise,
And gluttied now with learning’s golden gifts,
He surfeits upon cursed necromancy;
Nothing so sweet as magic is to him,*

*Which he prefers before his chiefest bliss:
And this the man that in his study sits.*
(Marlowe, 1604: Prologue 20-29)

The story Marlowe wrote, about an academic who makes a deal with Mephistopheles, exchanging 24 years of service from the Devil’s representative on earth for an existence of eternal servitude, explores a Schwabian concept: the creative process, it’s cost and its value. A solitary writer sitting in an office is visited by angels, a good one who tells him not to do any deals, and a bad one who knows human beings aren’t built to resist, especially when his debts hang up like ‘monuments’.

The story is as valid today as it was when it was first performed in 1592. It is about the magic in writing that all writers feel to be there. It is also about the doomed nature of creative endeavour. The same idea occurs in William Goldman’s *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. The outlaws are atop a mountain. Their pursuers have nearly caught up with them. Behind them, there’s a ravine with a river at the bottom. Butch has an idea – they’ll jump off the cliff and save themselves, but Sundance isn’t sure:

*BUTCH CASSIDY: What’s the matter with you?
SUNDANCE KID: I can’t swim.
BUTCH CASSIDY: Are you crazy? The fall will probably kill you.*
(Goldman, 1969)

At the end of the film, as Butch and Sundance emerge in front of their nemesis, shooting their way to inevitable destruction, Marlowe’s Chorus, who top and tail his play, reminds us of what’s at stake when the story is over:

*Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
And burned is Apollo’s laurel-bough,
That sometime grew within this learned man.
Faustus is gone: regard his hellish fall,
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise,
Only to wonder at unlawful things,
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits,
To practice more than heavenly power permits.*
(Marlowe, 1604: Epilogue, 1-8)

These early texts relate to a writer and a producer, Christopher Marlowe and Philip Henslowe. They are a play and a diary (of sorts). It is important to acknowledge here that the diary is emblematic of an interest in identity and a desire to explore motivation as an expression of some kind of internal essence or ‘character’, and that this is intrinsic to fiction writing. Similarly, the desire to record how the external world feels, to capture it using words that replicate its revelation through time is another fundamental aspect of fiction writing.

The practice of keeping diaries began in Marlowe and Henslowe’s time. Unlike Henslowe, not all diarists used them like old

fashioned Filofaxes. Elizabethan diarists weren't all anxious to keep a record of financial profit and loss; they were interested in a cosmic balance sheet. Here, the technology of printing, publishing, timekeeping and accountancy had a quite different moral dimension. Early puritans, equipped with newly translated and printed bibles, were anxious to record their actions in the world so that they could reckon up how God might account for them. At this time, writing in a book could be a physical act that connected the real with the transcendental.

As Marlowe's audiences knew, and Marlowe's play intimated, the Devil could be everywhere. Religiously motivated diary keeping demonstrated through reflection on day-to-day events, that an individual's behaviour was as free from sin, as close to God, and as far from Mephistopheles as it was possible to get. Marlowe's introduction hits home. Marlowe saw the drama of the desk. A hardworking man, sitting at his desk, studying theology, a little like a diarist, even he in a moment of weakness could conjure up the Devil's cup bearer. A loose thought is all it took.

The business of writing fiction as we understand today began soon after the means of communication, the printed page, was 'invented'. One of the first issues creative writers, professional or amateur, addressed was the whereabouts of the devil. For the handful of professional writers of the age, the self-doubt all writers deal with every time they turn on a laptop today was instantly apparent, manifesting with a familiar, disconcerting question. What can I make of this tragedy?

Our governments may urge us to 'unleash' our creative potential, to transform creativity into a force for economic good, but the fact remains, as Marlowe implied, creativity isn't really ours to deploy. Something about its position in our heads; half subconscious and dreamy and half conscious and 'mean' (as it were) makes it uncontrollable. It's a dark force which can consume anyone who toys with it. A glance around the mob invading the US Senate in 2020 reveals a man wearing horns on his head whilst, in the background, we hear through the kerfuffle someone quoting Laurence Olivier's line from *Clash of the Titans* (1981): 'release the kraken'.^[4] People are creative, but wild.

Negotiations with demons are at the core of our writing practices. Perhaps Marlowe was saying that his audiences should make sure they don't undercharge, and that they should read and understand the Ts and Cs. Marlowe's iteration of Dr Faustus didn't do those things carefully enough. Or maybe his subtext was less didactic; without the attractive, powerful, revolutionary, negativity devilish characters like Mephistopheles embody, dramas don't resonate. Conjuring sympathy, empathy and

understanding for characters and ideas that are anathema to our own is central to a writer's craft. It was John Milton who, sixty-five years after Dr Faustus arrived on the English stage, was able to show what Marlowe told. Consider this speech from a vanquished fallen angel:

*Farewell, happy fields,
Where joy for ever dwells! Hail, horrors! hail,
Infernal world! and thou, profoundest Hell,
Receive thy new possessor—one who brings
A mind not to be changed by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater?*
(Milton, 1674: Book I, Lines 229–239)

Those, at the very least, are not the words of a quitter. The sentiment was repeated in Vince Gilligan's *Breaking Bad*. Walter White didn't have time for a long speech – this is how he put it:

If you believe that there's a hell, we're pretty much already going there. (Gilligan, 2013)

1600s: global culture

By the early 1660s, London's theatre builders were at work again. This time the smell of freshly cut timber had been replaced by the curses of stone masons and scaffolders. Dukes Theatre was completed for Sir William Davenant's Company in 1662, and The Theatre Royal opened in 1663 for Thomas Killigrew's King's Company. As in Marlowe's time, the adaptable, risk-taking nature of a creative industry which still retained close connections to uncultured entertainment (before Davenant moved to Lincoln's Inn Fields, the company performed at the Phoenix Theatre, which was formally a cockpit), made it a good place for outsiders to make their names. Into this fast moving, instantaneous, politically insecure world, stepped a young woman, roughly the same age as Marlowe was when he wrote *Faust*.

She too was a (royalist) spy who came in from the cold. A Catholic child of Cromwell's puritan Protectorate, Aphra Behn was a writer who combined opportunism with principle, as she negotiated a position as a leading playwright, fiction writer and academic translator in London's literary scene. After a distinguished creative career during turbulent times, in which she established through her plays in particular, entertainment as a means of social and political discourse, whilst 'inventing' the epistolary novel in her romance *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister*, Behn disappeared from view.

The opinion formers from the first and second industrial revolutions (Georgians and Victorians) made judgments about the meaning of history and the value of literature, excluding

people like Behn. Defoe is often credited as the first English novelist. Behn seems to have got there first, and then been ignored, presumably because she was a woman, and possibly because her fiction was about grappling with the uncomfortable realities of global trade, slavery, power, love, sex, social upheaval and commerce.

Her intermingling of fact and fiction in her politically and socially activist plays and stories, drawing on her own experiences, share the same 'realistic' characteristics that Defoe honed. Her achievement was not acknowledged until she was rescued from obscurity by twentieth century Modernists. Virginia Woolf wrote of her: 'All women together ought to let flowers fall on the tomb of Aphra Behn . . . For it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds'. Behn's biographer, Janet Todd, describes her changing status after her immensely eventful life as follows:

Only in the last two decades of the twentieth century was Behn finally thrust into prominence when Oroonoko became part of the new literary canon, with numerous paperback editions appearing, usually with extracts setting it within later discussions of slavery. Now critical taste demanded the fragmentary and playful, and this, coupled with fashionable concern for race and gender, made Behn one of the most frequently taught Restoration writers in colleges and schools on both sides of the Atlantic.

At the same time, especially in Britain, Behn was discussed by scholars within a historical context: she was seen as a woman of letters, a huge influence on the Restoration theatre, from whose history she had largely been omitted by earlier critics, as well as a major force in the development of the early British novel. She also emerged as a political writer of stature, whose work revealed a growing sense of the power of art to influence politics and national culture. (Todd, 2004: 2)

Behn's novel *Oroonoko* stands out today as a striking, almost singular example of an early rejection of racism, written from what could now be described as a feminist, 'globalist' perspective, mitigated by the mores of its time of writing. Behn lived in the English colony of Surinam between 1663 and 1664. Her work was based on observation and experience. In the novel *Oroonoko* and Imoinda, an African prince and princess were entrapped as slaves and trafficked to Surinam where they organised a rebellion which was tragically crushed.

For Todd, Behn's literary abilities and her far-sightedness must be contextualised. Aside from her plays, novels, poetry and literary translation, she successfully negotiated the nascent world of Restoration cultural production and, as Todd points out, 'she wrote because she was good at it and made money.' (2004)

Behn shows us that writers, from the moment the forms they commit to take shape, are careful not to reveal all their motivations or their personal views. Perhaps through necessity, they cloak them, as Todd suggests here: 'All Aphra Behn's writings are rhetorical, all masks, all perspectives to be changed like clothes.' (2013: 4). This profound level of invention and subversion, perhaps equivalent to our understanding of writers as brands, has always been an aspect of literary and artistic practice.

Indeed, it is possible to view fiction writing as an attempt by an author *not* to reveal their true self or their real opinions, rather those of others. The words we often hear in relation to creative work and fiction: 'it rings true', 'it speaks the truth' can be misleading, because the act of negotiating creativity implies an abandonment of selfhood. The necessary tendency of authors to hold their cards close to their chest imbues their practice with a degree of mystery readers and critics enjoy. This sense of magic, writers know, does them no harm.

1700s: Projectors

Daniel Defoe's post-Elizabethan, post Jacobian, post-puritan, post-republican, post-restoration, post-revolutionary London was new. Here, Britain's identity crisis was as stoked as it is today. Relationships with Europe, with the country's constituent parts, with religion, government, empire, trade, class, slavery, god, identity, commerce and technology were in the balance.

Queen Anne's reign signifies the emergence of capitalism and markets as vectors of change, capable of leaving intractable disputes stuck in the mud of the past. A hitherto unknown concept, or perhaps even 'product' emerged on the market – *newness*. Defoe seems to have embodied all the contradictions implicit above. He had the cure. Unlike his Spanish predecessor and influence, Cervantes, there's no sense of playful duplicity, of the meaning of things being somehow always under scrutiny, of readers having a Barthesian role in the creative act in Defoe's work. There are no unrealistic trap doors in and out of his stories. He created the illusion of truth.

In Defoe's imaginative leaps into the new there is a paradoxical sense that the moral compass of what actually happens in a work is firmly set; that adventure should be readable; that the world is expanding; that life is interesting and the ups and downs of a single character's journey through a naturalistic story engages audiences; that creative negotiations mean something good; that the struggles his characters surmount were worthwhile. There's also a feeling that Defoe himself knew that a reader should get some entertainment in exchange for the purchase price, and that failure to make money was (as Micawber reiterated a

century or so later) not an option. It could (and did in Defoe's case) result in imprisonment and, ultimately, disaster.

Defoe's fiction offered certainty, or at least, an illusion of certainty. *Robinson Crusoe*, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, *Captain Singleton*, *Moll Flanders* all present 'true' stories. Crusoe is said to have been based on the privateer Alexander Selkirk's experiences after shipwreck, Singleton on the pirate Henry Eavy and *A Journal of the Plague Year*, Defoe's own family, whilst *Moll Flanders* was inspired by Moll King who Defoe met at Newgate Prison.

Perhaps the most telling evidence of Defoe's creative negotiations, his blurring of real and unreal events to create stories that feel true but are not, can be found in the little considered third instalment of the Robinson Crusoe franchise: *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. Here Crusoe writes what, if he were taking a creative writing course, we might call a critical commentary on the themes and ideas in his author's work, representing, or acting out his creative negotiations as a fictional character.

Even today this might seem a little 'meta', a little too far out for submission as part of a portfolio. Defoe's knack, if that's the right word for this aspect of his creative negotiation, was identification. He used plain language and realistic storytelling to include everybody in the far out. Even Crusoe becomes an identifiable person.

Defoe cross the line between truth and fiction imperceptibly, presenting one as the other, or both as amalgams, in which the reader participates in an illusion of fiction as 'realism'. This quality is one of the reasons why his work remained popular worldwide. Today, SF reproduces Defoe's formula most effectively.

Ridley Scott's film of *The Martian* [written by Andy Weir] is perhaps the most obvious contemporary reframing of Robinson Crusoe, but Crusoe is everywhere in space fiction.

As well as fiction, Defoe wrote journalistic copy for his own publication *A Weekly Review of the Affairs of France* ('The Review', 1704-1713). He produced textbooks and work on business practice and history. In 1697 he published an *Essay upon Projects* in which he discussed the development of a new kind of businessperson a 'projector'. He began his essay like this:

Necessity, which is allowed to be the mother of invention, has so violently agitated the wits of men at this time that it seems not at all improper, by way of distinction, to call it the Projecting Age. (Defoe, 1697: 1)

The similarity of subject matter and purpose between Defoe and Klaus Schwab is striking.

They are both concerned with the management and monetisation of creative processes, although perhaps Defoe was more of a thrifty Thatcherite, an admirer of the small businessperson, a micro economist, not a macro one. Defoe's view of how a 'projector', such as himself, should behave is surprisingly down to earth, puritanical even:

the honest projector is he who, having by fair and plain principles of sense, honesty, and ingenuity brought any contrivance to a suitable perfection, makes out what he pretends to, picks nobody's pocket, puts his project in execution, and contents himself with the real produce as the profit of his invention. (Defoe, 1697: 35)

Defoe's term 'projector' became an eighteenth-century word for what we now call an 'entrepreneur'. Another of Schwab's eighteenth-century counterparts, the Schwabian financier Richard Cantillon, coined the term we're now more familiar with today in his posthumously published *Essai sur la Nature du Commerce en Général*, first published in 1755. Defoe and Cantillon's approaches to 'projecting' or 'entrepreneurship' characterise the fascination with trade that delineates their age.

Here, Defoe offers a description of who, exactly, 'projectors' might be as he points to discrepancies in the usage of the term 'tradesman', seeking to define it more clearly:

The said term tradesman is understood by several people, and in several places, in a different manner: for example, in the north of Britain, and likewise in Ireland, when you say a tradesman, you are understood to mean a mechanic, such as a smith, a carpenter, a shoemaker, and the like, such as here we call a handicraftsman. In like manner, abroad they call a tradesman such only as carry goods about from town to town, and from market to market, or from house to house, to sell; these in England we call petty chapmen, in the north pethers, and in our ordinary speech pedlars.

But in England, and especially in London, and the south parts of Britain, we take it in another sense, and in general, all sorts of warehouse-keepers, shopkeepers, whether wholesale dealers or retailers of goods, are called tradesmen, or, to explain it by another word, trading men: such are, whether wholesale or retail, our grocers, mercers, linen and woollen drapers, Blackwell-hall factors, tobacconists, haberdashers, whether of hats or small wares, gloves, hosiers, milliners, booksellers, stationers, and all other shopkeepers, who do not actually work upon, make, or manufacture, the goods they sell. (Defoe, 1841: 26)

Tucked away in this quotation is the term 'booksellers. There is no room for 'authors' or writers. As Stern says:

When we look more closely at the writings of poets

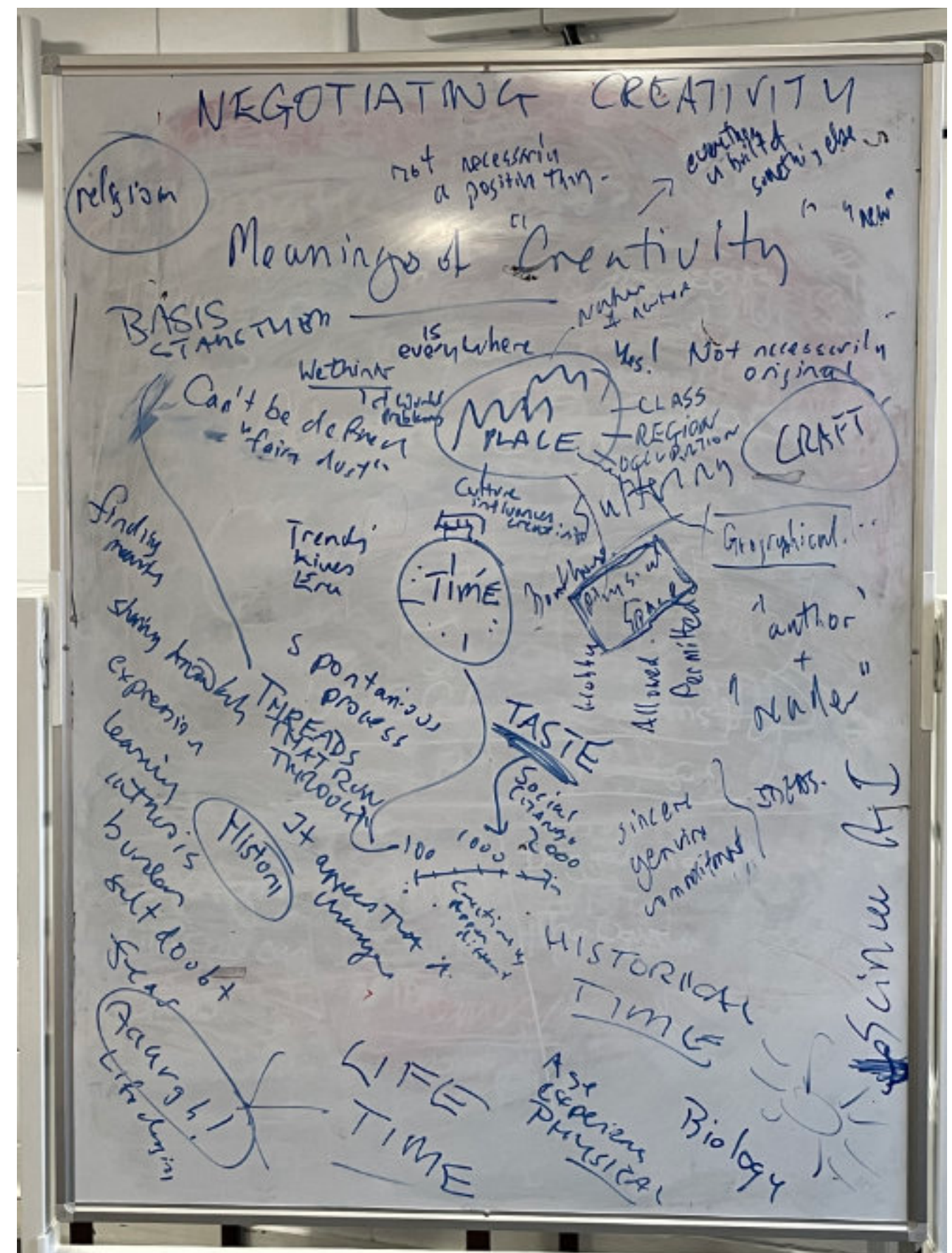


Fig. 1: 'The Meaning of Creativity – 11.42am, 11.30.2023, Room D3.042, UWE, Bristol'

and novelists during the eighteenth century, we find that even when they speak of property and the rights it imports, these authors rarely take the same view of the subject that the bookselling industry was seeking

to promote. Instead, writers tended to hold a very qualified conception of the property right, or to invoke it only to cast aspersions on it. (Stern, 2019: 461)

However, in *The Review*, in 1710, at the time of the creation of England's first copyright act, The Statute of Anne, at the moment the idea of authorship as a profession, funded by the proceeds of copyright licenses and the protection they afforded came into being, the moment when the creative industries (in the arts) became real, Defoe wrote:

A Book is the Author's Property, 'tis the Child of his Inventions, the Brat of his Brain; if he sells his property, it then becomes the Right of the Purchaser; if not, 'tis as much his own as his Wife and Children are his own – But behold in this Christian Nation, these Children of our heads are seiz'd, captivate. Spirited away, and carry'd into Captivity, and there is none to redeem them. (Defoe, 1938: 506)

So, although it seems that Defoe, the son of a tallow chandler, a failed trader and bankrupt, a writer of opinion and advice, a historian, a government propagandist and 'novelist' didn't quite recognize that his fiction, historical or journalistic work amounted to a 'trade' in the sense of all the occupations he included in his definition of the term 'tradesman', he did recognize the book, the 'child of his Inventions' was the property of its author.

And although Defoe may not have equated his writing to a trade in theory, in practice, with his 196 pseudonyms (including his own Frenchified version of his 'real' name Daniel Foe), his 318 publications and his global reputation, Defoe characterises an English, down to earth, and, if this isn't a contradiction in terms, 'unintellectual' (perhaps even 'populist') approach to authorship.^[iii]

Indeed, Defoe's use of pseudonyms and fictional characters as spokespeople for his ideas suggest that, perhaps unconsciously, he found it easier to access new ideas when he knew he wasn't being himself. This duality echoes Marlowe, and it prefigures the development of selfhood and identity as literary themes and aspects of creative negotiation. With its pomposity-busting directness, Defoe's work undermines the intelligentsia and class structures, which is probably why he acquired in some circles, the reputation of an unsophisticated hack.^[iiii]

In fact, Defoe's appreciation of people, his inventive delineation of narrative, his framing of story and place, his pace, his interest in new situations, discovery and the humanitarian undercurrent throughout his work explain its longevity. Defoe's negotiations with creativity focussed on a question each of us must resolve today: how do we write with integrity in an acquisitive age?

Negotiating Creativity

Marlowe, Behn and Defoe, notwithstanding their individual brilliance, represent a

somewhat motley crew in terms of the canon of English literature. Marlowe, killed before he got going, a kind of shadow Shakespeare, a John Cooper Clarke to the poet laureate, identified the fundamental psychological negotiation writers make as they take experiences held in common, enclose them, brand them and profit from them, as if directed by someone else, 'stealing' to borrow Picasso's word. Behn, for centuries airbrushed out of the literary canon because she was a woman, exposed the partiality of establishment decision makers of all kinds.

Through her practice she explored the extraordinarily productive synergy risk-taking writers in burgeoning markets can create. Defoe, the 'sloppy hack', whose name and influence is recognized all over the world, but whose reputation amongst some scholars seems to be that of a passing brush salesperson, recognized the close relationship between economics and creativity is both practical and psychological. All demonstrate how content, form, subject matter and practice are held in relation to the practical socio-economic influences of the day by individual writers who self-consciously negotiate with creativity to produce new work.

Marlowe and Behn worked during periods of freedom from repression either side of a puritanical shut down. Defoe was able to ride a revolution of publishing practices brought about by legal, rather than exclusively technological change coupled with a craving for progress that transformed early eighteenth-century London. All three wrote fiction, transferring their own personal relationships with creativity into a public realm, liberated from inarticulation by their theatre managers, publishers and audiences. The psychology of this spur of the moment practice, responding to and flowing into a zeitgeist, characterises the writer's role, it hasn't changed.

Today, our quest for newness remains consistent, but our situation, our zeitgeist, has changed. Books and plays only represent a small portion of the platforms and artforms available to agile fiction writers who, like Marlowe, Behn and Defoe, will be working in technological and cultural fields that are brand new. One way to explore these avenues is to focus on process; to explore the developing matrix of creative and cultural opportunities through the analysis and practice of negotiating creativity.

It suggests that, at a profound level, our techno-economic view of European history since the Middle Ages, with its four (and counting) industrial revolutions, does not account for a single, unrevolutionary, personal practice post-Gutenberg. It suggests that negotiating creativity is a discreet consistent process, masked by grandiose attempts to enclose

'newness' in corporate, doctrinal, or political estates, all of whom want to control it.

Teaching Negotiating Creativity

At the beginning of this essay, I mentioned my objective: to develop a course teaching 'negotiating creativity' to creative writing students and, if they are interested, business students intent on working in creative industries. To research the demand for the idea, I ran sessions with third year students at Cardiff Metropolitan University and the University of the West of England on Negotiating Creativity. I'm including here some of the feedback from 15 Level 6 Creative Writing students after a session in which the class explored the idea of creativity as a socially contingent concept.

To exemplify the idea, notes were taken on a white board which is illustrated in Figure 1 on the following page. One way to approach the image as a description of creativity is to imagine it's a weather map showing the meaning of the term captured at a particular place and point in time. A key concept in considering negotiations with creativity is that the term 'creativity' may have an obvious meaning to practitioners, but that meaning is not consistent; it changes depending on who, when and where one looks for it.

Understanding this 'unfixedness' is an important aspect of negotiating creativity, so a discussion concerning the current meaning of the term in a classroom is crucial. Please note that the following quotes from feedback and analysis are included as an exemplar of work in progress, not a formal interpretation of robust data.

'If our understanding of 'creativity' changes with time, what is it today?'
'It serves as a vessel to give yourself meaning.'
'An era of identity and self-expression, a lost and confused people looking to be understood,'
'So, so subjective. Creativity is largely accepted and encouraged – should be an active part of the school curriculum.'
'The same as always – a lifeblood, a way of life, something that we are all born with and we can choose to partake if we wish Innovation thinking outside the box, adaptation, suffering and healing'.
'Framing new ideas, be they stories, or designs.'
'Unfortunately, I think this is like trying to define and measure physical growth without a ruler. I think you can't measure creativity. Although, if you define creativity by the process that happens between having nothing and having something, it can become tangible.'

Give some examples of writers, artists, musicians and other creatives who negotiate with creativity?
'Luke Black, Serbian techno industrial artists must navigate the cultural and societal parameters of his home country.'
'Neil Gaiman, Aurora, Phil Lewis, Bob Ross, Me!'

'Taylor Swift? – Releasing music that she owns instead of her production company.'
'Neil Gaiman. JS Bach (maybe) first use of a piano as a solo instrument?'
'Stephen King – shuts himself away in his study, pencil sharpened, ready to write. Tidy space. 5 hours each day.'
'Daft punk came onto the scene with the begins of electronic dance music and were limited by the technology available. After producing more advanced music, they reverted back to '80s style music even though they could have continued to advance the EDM/French House genre.'

Analysis

The comments, which are a representative sample of those received, are interesting as much for what they don't say as what they do. Although students connected creativity to writers, Stephen King and Neil Gaiman for example, they related the question to music as much as they did to writing. Having studied creative writing for three years, no students referred to any of the work considered in class, or to their peers' creative process or (except for one comment) to their own processes, or to critical and theoretical research into creativity in an artistic or wider context, or to the value of feedback. Students preferred to rely on their own perceptions of creativity as unmeasurable and subjective. No students recognized these qualities as being explorable or expandable, perhaps relying on a general view that creativity is inherently, inexplicable, or even mysterious.

Conclusion

A modular course focussing on the processes of Negotiating Creativity improves our student's ability to contextualise the concept of creativity and deepens their awareness of the relationship between their work and that of their predecessors. Greater awareness of the long-term relationship between creatives and markets dispels uncertainty and develops confidence. The implicit interdisciplinary approach bridges the gap between the practice of creative writing, other creative arts and the study of literature, history, cultural studies, business and economics. It will facilitate viable creative output, giving our students the understanding they need to create better, new news.

BIOGRAPHY

Dan Anthony began his career as an audio writer. He has written plays, situation comedies, short stories and documentaries for Radio 4, Radio 3 and Radio Wales. He wrote TV scripts for shows such as CBBC's *Story of Tracy Beaker* and now focuses on novel writing for children and for adults having published nine novels, many of them set in his native South Wales. His research into the field of creative writing focusses on the interface between the real and the imagined in the marketplace. He creates

copy on the subject of intellectual property for the UK Intellectual Property Office, edited the annual UK IP Crime and Enforcement Report for five years and has presented and written journal articles on creative writers' relationship with entrepreneurship, markets and creativity.

NOTES

^[1] It's possible that the Trumpian revolutionary was quoting from the 2010 remake of the film, in which Liam Neeson delivers the line.
^[2] See British Library web page < <https://www.bl.uk/people/daniel-defoe> > (accessed 17/7/2022) and Hannis, G., (2008) Daniel Defoe's Pioneering Consumer Journalism in the Review, *Journal of Eighteenth Century Studies* 30 Issue 1b. Available at: <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.uwe.ac.uk/10.1111/j.1754-0208.2007.tb00323.x> > (accessed 17/7/2022).

^[3] "Until the 1960s, Defoe was regarded as a sloppy hack writer who happened to write a few interesting novels. In the last fifty years, his reputation has changed drastically: critics have reconceived him as a brilliant fiction-writer, a master craftsman, and the father of the novel. Defoe is treated very much like other canonical eighteenth-century authors, but he represents a different kind of writer and a unique set of problems, and we should therefore rethink the way we regard him and interpret his writings. For a variety of reasons—having to do with the nature of his life and work, the lack of much personal record, the anonymity and attribution problems—we are simply not on solid ground, as we are with Dryden, Pope, Fielding, or Swift. Marshall, A., (2012); Fabricating Defoe's: From Anonymous Hack to Master of Fictions. *Eighteenth-Century Life* 1 April 2012; 36 (2): 1–35. doi: <<https://doi.org/10.1215/00982601-1548018>> (accessed 23/4/2024).

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