

THE ALIENATED INSIDER AS SOURCE OF HOPE:

THE CASE OF DANIEL (DE)FOE (D.1731)

WITH PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO MOLL FLANDERS (1722)

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As I write this, the atmosphere in more than our country is more "D"s (disappointment, discouragement, derision, despair, etc.) than "H"s (hope, happiness, etc.). National politicians all would like to claim to be "outside the Beltway." Jobs feel insecure (for the employed) & unobtainable (for the unemployed). "Values," even the social essentials, are embattled. Interethnic tensions are rising in our nation (inner-city, educational [bilingualism, multiculturalism], even church). Elsewhere on our suffering planet, 32-35 wars are going on. Happiness seems to decrease as "freedom" increases. A Thinksheet on a man of hope might help a little. Can't expect a contented insider (panned in Galbraith's THE CULTURE OF CONTENTMENT) to be a source of hope. Even less an alienated outsider. But it's different with the alienated insider, as I hope to show in the case of D.D.

1 The 16th-c. Reformation was the work of alienated insiders (Luther, Calvin, etc.), who brought hope to a medieval ossified Europe, a hope soon transported to our shores. Daniel Foe (who at 42-43 toned himself up by adding "De-") was of this mind. A born & convinced Dissenter, Nonconformist (to the Church of England), Presbyterian (Jn.-Knox Calvinist), he had an excellent education in an academy headed by the man who became Harvard's first vice-president--a school which, like Harv., had the primary aim of preparing dissenting clergy. Not feeling called to the ministry, Defoe lived the Calvinist values in various secular employments--as a high-risking tradesman (two bankruptcies), the greatest journalist in British history, a royal ambassador toward the union of Scotland & England, & the author of more than 400 books & major pamphlets (as well as thousands of articles in the periodical he started, which became the model for Addison & Steele's two, which aimed--as Defoe's indirectly had--to make virtue fashionable).

2 D.D.'s life is a **survival struggle** story, as are the two stories he's most remembered for: a castaway sailor (Robinson Crusoe) who makes it back home, & a total-crime (except murder) woman who makes it to repentance & prosperity (Moll Flanders). Not sickening-sweet stories than stay with sweetness, but sour yarns that come to sweetness (& in this sense, as well as for their sometimes subtle, sometimes blatant humor, comedies). **Faith & humor** are our two God-given invisible legs to walk through the world (with only one, we hobble; with neither, we drag ourselves on our stumps), & D.D. & his hero & heroine had them both. Both are distancing virtues, & their marriage is hope-producing. We need teachers who can help us see "the news" (the tube, newspapers, periodicals) with eyes of faith & humor. And we need such teachers as heroes & models. D.D. is one.

3 Defoe was a life-long insider, though sometimes inside the pillory or prison. But he was alienated both from the Church of England (by his evangelical commitment) & from the all-classes, all-occupations moral degeneracy following the collapse of Cromwell's Commonwealth & the return of monarchy (the Restoration). Sixty years elapsed between my wide-eyed boyhood reading about a man living on the wilderness edge (ROBINSON CRUSOE, pub.1719) & my narrow-eyed reading about a woman living on the urban edge (MOLL FLANDERS, pub.1722). Both readings proved Defoe a master at arousing curiosity (an esthetic virtue) & sympathy (a moral virtue). Both books were written in the comparative calm of late life, when the author was full of experience, wisdom, wit, & compassion. For plain speech with mass appeal, he was the best author since Bunyan, as he was the best political pamphleteer since Milton. He understood the human hunger for adventure, & both books are first-person narratives of breath-taking impact, entertaining while preaching. Besides being "the inventor of modern English prose" (Ken. Rexroth, p.312 of MOLL FLANDERS, New Am. Library/64), Defoe in these two classics is so true-to-life (a verisimilitude created by the journalist's inquiring mind for details & the artist's fertile imagination for reasons & relations) that the

reader finds it easy to suspend disbelief. And he uses his realistic make-believe to support almost all the social-reform causes embattled in our time (our First Amendment freedoms, anticlassism, feminism, public education, insurance, mental-health care, full employment, moral reformation [you're wrong, Murphy Brown]-- & the income tax for fairer wealth-distribution--though of course not all these in our two classics)....Wesley was 19 when M.F. was published, & Hogarth (famous for his social-criticism etchings, "The Rake's Progress" & "The Whore's Progress" being virtual visualizations of M.F.) was 23....As for the type of fiction he invented, it was taken up by many others--eg, by Fielding (whose TOM JONES --27 years after M.F.--uses it for farce) & by Swift (whose GULLIVER'S TRAVELS--4 years after M.F.--lacks Defoe's compassion while continuing his bite)....The rest of this Thinksheet will be on M.F., edition cited.

4 The alienated outsider does not participate in either state (does not vote) or church (does not go): the alienated insider goes to church & votes (Defoe was a Christian in both senses, with the steady vision of an alternative world). M.F., till age 70, was an **alienated outsider**, neither church-going nor (of course) voting. She had the will & yearning to be an insider, but "fate" (her word) was always against her till in old age "Providence" rescued her. Often read as erotic literature, it's really the story of a long-delayed evangelical conversion by the prison ministry of an intelligent, compassionate, skillful clergyman a friend sent to M.F., who'd been condemned to death (250,253ff,258; in contrast to the unworthy prison-chaplain, 245f,254)....Erotic? Not by our standards. But behold the title: "The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous MOLLY FLANDERS, etc., who was born in Newgate [Prison, to a condemned woman], and was Twelve Year a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once [unknowingly] to her own Brother), Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest, and died a Penitent. Written from her own Memorandums, by Daniel Defoe." Little wonder that in those days a titlepage was called a "display"! And I left out a dozen unimportant words!

5 My index of M.F. (I make an index of every classic I read) has more references to **repentance** than to any other subject (the periods mean further reff. in the between-pages): 60...167,210,224,242,245f,249f,253,255,257f,266,298,301. This reversal-motion of the soul & life is the "cardinal," the swinging hinge, of both personal & social change. In Defoe there was, & in essential Calvinism there is, no personal/social-salvation split. Since the American paradigm is more Calvinist than anything else, it's been normal for us to expect conversion to lead to behavioral changes in society, not just in the soul. But with all basic issues now finessed inside the Beltway, is our de-facto federal government capable of the changes our de-jure system is structured to accomodate? What doctrine, if not repentance, is relevant to "Rodney King"? Without it, Hobbes' "war of all against all" (horribly exposed in M.F.) is an accurate description of any society, 1722 England or the U.S.A. 270 years later....Moll perpetually desires & performs cheap-grace repentance till she's condemned to death, then responds to the call (as often put by a friend of G.B. [Bush], viz B.G. [Graham]) to "give your whole life to Jesus," in her case (she thinks) there being little of it left. I'm not demeaning her deathbed repentance: Defoe's account of it should convince almost anyone inclined to....But some persist in rejecting fear as an incentive to conversion. Moll is in a squeeze between two fears: the government's going to kill her, then postmortem God is going to do her even worse. This squeeze is normal for the Christian religion. "'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear," sang ex-slaver Jn. Newton in his "Amazing Grace" $\frac{1}{2}$ c. after M.F. Yes, the next line is, "And grace my fears relieved." But grace can't relieve fears you ain't got: fears are the soil-preparation for grace. Evangelism begins with loving folks, then frightening them (as B.Graham does, & the liberal churches do not). Without afterlife-fear-relief, grace (including its cost to God, the atonement) is irrelevant & is replaced by a generalized benevolence such as one finds in all religions & almost all ethical systems: God, the biblical God, is dead, & the Christian gospel is merely a metaphor for said benevolence. Churches & their agencies become

benevolent institutions justifying their existence wholly by reference to the good they do. Evangelism degenerates into the processes of persuading to good will: penitent conversion, in any recognizable Christian-historical form, disappears.

6 Now add three more reff. to the "repentance" listing, viz vf,110,112. On p.v, this has misled many to suppose Moll's repentance was never sincere: Moll "pretends to be" "penitent and humble." Our expression, "false pretence," suggests the possibility of a true pretence, thus also of a neutral pretence. It's more than a possibility: OED has "To put forth or lay a claim to...; to claim -1761" (a meaning dying out soon after the publication of M.F.). Read, then, thus: Moll "presents herself" as penitent and humble, as her subsequent life (after being sprung from prison) evidences....On the same p., Defoe pretends (modern sense) to clean up Moll's language so it's "fit to be read. When a woman debauched [by rape] from her youth, nay, even being the offspring of debauchery and vice, comes to give an account of all her vicious practices, and even to descend to the particular occasions and circumstances by which she first became wicked, and of all the progressions of crime which she runs through in three score years, an author must be hard put to wrap it up so clean as not to give room, especially for vicious readers, to turn it to his disadvantage." Eg, Moll (ie Defoe) says she'll never say a word about bedroom action, and she never does. Some erotic novel! The modern potboiler erotic novel, I'm told, is nothing but bedroom scenes.

Early (p.110), Moll anticipates her true repentance: "those things that must be repented of must be also reformed." And p.112: "I desired to repent as sincerely as he had done."

7 As sincerely as his younger contemporary Wesley, Defoe intends his life to be a sanguine **moral influence**. "The publishing this account of my life is for the sake of the just moral of every part of it, and for instruction, caution, warning, and improvement to every reader" (p.287). But if you misread "pretend" (p.v), your mind will be set to see M.F. as as much a farce as T.J.(TOM JONES)! Note the very next p.: "As the best use is to be made even of the worst story, the moral, 'tis hoped, will keep the reader serious even where the story might incline him to be otherwise. To give the history of a wicked life repented of necessarily requires that the wicked part should be made as wicked as the real history..., to illustrate and give a real beauty to the penitent part, which is certainly the best and brightest if related with equal spirit and life." (Several times Moll confesses to fear that the reader's attention may flag when she gets to the nonwicked part--a fear that is a wicked little twinkle in Defoe's eye.) She hopes that "readers will be much more pleased with the moral than the fable, with the application than with the relation [ie, the relating]."

While the primary moral is to repent & lead a righteous life, the secondary one is prudential (p.vii): "All the exploits of this lady of fame [in the OED sense of "evil repute"], in her depredations upon mankind, stand as so many warnings to honest people to beware of 'em, intimating to 'em by what methods innocent people are drawn in, plundered, and robbed, and by consequence how to avoid them." Let her be two lessons to us: the novel's a two-point sermon (though, says Moll [p.60], "it is none of my talent to preach"). (Cp.107: "a caution to the readers of this story.") And did you notice the implied monition in her first name? A "moll," dimin. of "Mary," is (Web.) a prostitute or "a gangster's girlfriend." We never do learn her real name; criminal associates dub her "Moll Flanders." Why did she let no one know her name? The one time she appears in court, after a thousand crimes, she is, under her real name, a first offender! It's one of a hundred stratagems she uses as a brilliant, sly escape-artist. What fun to watch her get away again & again! It's a tiny wickedness Defoe is not so straightlaced as to disallow.Indeed, D.D. knows he must catch the sinner in the net of entertainment: "I could fill a larger history than this with the evidence of this truth [viz, conversion],...but...I doubt that part of the story will...be equally diverting as the wicked part" (p.298)....Again the explicit motive (p.238): "The moral of all my history [ie, story] is left to be gathered by the senses and judgement of the reader; I am not qualified to preach to them. Let the experience of one creature completely wicked and completely miserable be a storehouse of

useful warning to those that read."....The moral includes the truth that not only fear, but also gratitude, move the soul to repentance-conversion (p.257, in prison, having received a reprieve): "a greater detestation of my sins from a sense of...[God's] goodness ["the mercy of God in sparing my life"] than I had in all my sorrow before....many of those who may be pleased and diverted with the wicked part of my story may not relish this, which is really the best part of my life, the most advantageous to myself, and the most instructive to others. (Aside: Moll is given to extremely long, run-on sentences,* which take some patience, fathoming, "relishing." She wouldn't sell well in our sound-bite time. But she's wonderful for those increasing numbers who hunger for well-spiced food for contemplation.)

* One on pp.188f is 172 words.

8 Moll early learns that in early-18th-c. England (& in our end-of-the-20th-c. America), money talks & poverty is invisible to power. **Greed** so eats into Moll's soul that (as she often observes) she can't quit ill-getting gain even when she has enough ill-gotten gain to retire on. "Greed is good," quoth a freebooting Wallstreeter now in prison, & the S&L pirates just couldn't quit having Washington take their chances for them. All values & virtues have a pricetag for Moll, Defoe's stand-in for Britain's rising middle class. Yet we must be wary, for Defoe is complex, often ironic when statedly moral, a subverter of corruption but a secret Jacobite (Jas.II, Restoration) agent. He himself was greedy for influence, to improve humanity & society, but not greedy for money.

Moll's aware of divine impulses against her greed, but they're not as strong (she admits, by her own decisions) as those of the devil (28,171f,176,179f,189,210,243,247). P.180: I had a "blessed hint" to repent. "But my fate was otherwise determined; the busy devil that drew me in had too fast a hold of me to let me go back; but as poverty brought me in [to crime], so avarice kept me in, till there was no going back....in the devil's clutches" I "was held fast...as with a charm, and had no power to go without the circle till I was engulfed in labyrinths of trouble too great to get out at all."

No, greed was not the only cancer in her soul. She was beautiful & bright, & (p.26) "I had a most unbounded stock of vanity and pride, and but a very little stock of virtue." P.21: I was "a great beauty" & "a very sober, modest, and virtuous young woman," but also I had in excess "the common vanity of my sex," which became "my ruin." She seduced a gentleman into delivering her from her foster family, then ditched him, only to be raped by him. She abused the power of her beauty & fast tongue, he abused the power of his superior musculature.

But again, & not without some reason in that safety-net-less society, she blames her low-life on poverty (107; though with "secret reproaches of my own conscience for the life I led"): "as poverty brought me into it, so fear of poverty ["the terrible prospect of...starving"] kept me in it." And sex: she got hooked on one man after another, & the desire to stay with her current lover was stronger than her inner nudges to repent & abandon her life of crime.

But her autopsychanalysis uses "greed" as the code-word for her self-accusation, usually accompanied by expressions of self-loathing (in our current pop jargon, "low self-esteem"). But finally, just before her conversion, she hardens herself to the point where she no longer has twinges of conscience or self-disgust. P.107: "I leave it as a caution to the readers of this story, that we ought to be cautious of gratifying our inclinations in loose and lewd freedoms lest we find our resolutions of virtue fail us in the juncture when their assistance should be most necessary." Otherwise (p.60), we may degenerate to the point where we find ourselves "sinning on as a remedy for sin passed." P.62: Men married for "money only....the women had lost the privilege of saying no." In the money/sex connection, "the market run [sic] all on the men's side." (The antisexism theme in M.F. would be worth a separate study. Richardson was deeply affected by it, as visible in his CLARISSA.) (Another theme, slavery, on which he's not sensitive: he accepts both white slavery, the term sale of "transported" criminals in the colonies, & "Negro" slavery (93,291,295,299)--at least Moll accepts the custom: antislavery is the logic of Defoe's own social commitment.)

9 Moll can be viewed as a metaphor for underclass movement **from despair to defiance**. The peasant-revolt (vs. invasion) theory of Israel's origin fits this model, as now does the intifada (the Palestinian-Arab revolt against the Israelis, the new Canaanites.) So does the Rodney King Event: out of the despair from Watts I (1965), gangs of black young men formed & became, in Watts II (1992), the core of the most extensive internal violence in the U.S. since the Civil War. (The 1965 wake-up call woke up little; will the 1992 wake-up call better concentrate the American mind on what matters? So far, Washington's response has been limited to addressing inner-urban needs only up to what's necessary for the Nov. elections. But the wake-up call isn't only to government at all levels. It's to all our institutions, & all our citizens. To do what? Immediate relief, yes. But also radical rethinking of "justice" & "rights" & "responsibilities," with more honesty & courage.)

10 Moll, by God's grace & her repentance, managed the movement **from parasitism to productivity**. Her stages might be called (1) reluctant alienated outsider, (2) defiant alienated outsider (as the south L.A. hip-hop generation), (3) penitent alienated outsider, (4) productive insider. What, no alienated-insider stage that this Thinksheet's title describes "as source of hope"? Note her reluctance at stage one: she began as an insider & only reluctantly became alienated & excluded. The hope lies in stage-four's return to her original intention. What America now faces, in this late-stage culture of poverty, are youth who were, one might almost say, born defiant. (In 1980, when jobs were available in south L.A., unemployment remained at 30%.) Models--Jesse Jackson, Magic Johnson--are worthless to those who don't aspire. Who can reach them? If anyone, it's the alienated insider--& thus our circle returns to hope....Is parasitism too strong a word? Said a pastor to me recently, "Don't call them parasites! Many of them want to be productive citizens, & the opportunities just aren't there!" My response: "What has their desire to do with their being parasites? Parasitism is an economic analogy from biology. Eg, the four-trillion-\$ national debt makes us parasites on future generations. As for the present level of parasitism, it's too heavy a burden on state-&-federal income. Let's help the reluctant parasites to become nonpoor; fiscal realities will increase the squeeze on the defiant parasites. Yes, 'parasitism' is strong talk; but it's honest; & we'll not get strong action without honest, strong speech." Defoe used plain talk without prettified phrases; he models for us a forthright, simple, honest public discourse, which is what we may be getting now from Ross Perot (at least, millions think so).

11 Moll ain't much on "family values." Kids would have been an encumbrance to her way of life, so she rids herself of them: two she sells, and walks away from the rest after seeing to their foster care. But till she hits bottom, she dreams of a solid marriage to a non-criminal--a dream once fulfilled, but her husband turns out to be a half-brother, so she walks away from him (she's horrified at incest). But after her conversion, she's reconciled to the child of that marriage, who's become a wealthy Virginia planter--after which things looked up for her all the way to the close of her diary, which she dates 39 years before the publication of M.F. (She's happily married to an ex-highwayman, who was converted before she was.)It's a picaresque psychological novel, a rogue's internal debate on insider/outsider issues &, yes, family values--her decisional quandaries often containing the phrase "yet, on the other hand" (eg, p.289)....The story of her reunion with her son is touchingly told (p.293).

12 In M.F. we see clearly Defoe's fusion of **deuteronomism** (his biblical-Calvinist conviction that both the good & the bad get theirs, in this world and/or the next) & Stoic-Enlightenment **naturalism** (the right/wrong continuum through the cosmos, history, society, & the individual human life). Both motifs appear on p.166, in order: "I had a past life of a most wretched kind to account [to God] for, some of it in this world as well as in another....[Then the autonomic or reflexive sanction:] how much happier a life of virtue and sobriety is than that which we call a life of pleasure!" In the NT, the former (ie, direct divine action) is major, the latter (ie, indirect divine action, through "natural" law) is minor. Most of Amer-

ica's drafters of our founding papers, of the generation after Defoe, reversed this emphasis, as indeed Defoe tends to; & our present public-school has no use for the idea of direct divine action. One can see the motifs in action in Moll's doctrine of **God** (vi, 110f, 161, 169ff, 243, 245, 247, 250, 253 [in the account of her true repentance, the minister exhorting her "to look up to God with my whole soul and to cry for pardon in the name of Jesus Christ.... It was now that for the first time I felt any real signs of repentance"].... 257, 286, 294, 298).

Defoe stays in character as Moll, so in this book we don't get his nuanced views of deuteronomism (that sometimes the bad have it good &, as in the Crucifixion, sometimes the good have it bad) & naturalism (that "natural" law is a tricky, almost Rorschach, concept). Not that Moll is incapable of subtle thought with some self-transcendence (p. 242f): In my early days in prison, I "hardened my thoughts against all fear... now I was to expiate all my offences at the gallows, ... to give satisfaction to justice with my blood, ... to come to the last hour of my life and of my wickedness together. These thoughts... left me overwhelmed with melancholy and despair. ¶ Then I repented heartily of all my life past, but that repentance yielded me no satisfaction, no peace, ... because, as I said to myself, it was repenting after the power of farther sinning was taken away. I seemed not to mourn that I had committed such crimes, and for the fact that it was an offence against God and my neighbour, but that I was to be punished for it. I was a penitent, as I thought, not that I had sinned, but that I was to suffer, and this took away all the comfort of my repentance in my own thoughts." This is one of a number of her analyses of her phony repentances, the series leading up to her authentic repentance, in which she comes clean & gets clean & clear. (M.F. should not be required reading in courses on evangelism, but it's good supplemental reading. If things seem to turn out too easy & even cushy for her after her true repentance, she could plead the Book of Job in self-defense.)

13 Moll's central redeeming feature is her boldfaced, barefaced **self-candor**, her self-reportage as objective as if she were describing a bug, maybe more: "I am giving an account of what was, not of what ought or ought not to be (ie, have been; Defoe cleans up her vocabulary but not her grammar; p. 89). Till she became a shameless hussy in the Newgate female death pit among other such, shame was a string through the beads of her escapades: for what she is, she hates herself whenever she thinks of what she was (a moral, upright, considerate, respectful child) &/or of what she wants to be (a responsible, respected, productive adult). In these days of the secular dogma of self-esteem, we're rebuked for ever even thinking "You should be ashamed of yourself!" But that's how I translated ICor. 6.5 in devotional reading this morning (Paul's word here is literally "turning in on yourself," the word transliterated into Eng. as "entropy").... The other negative emotion essential for true repentance is guilt, the sense of having violated a "should" or "ought" vis-a-vis not one's self-ideal (which is "shame") but (1) an objective standard or law &/or (2) another person or persons. Of this, Moll has far less; in fact so little that she qualifies (in the PSYCHIATRIC DICTIONARY) as a psychopathic personality--projecting blame, acting out her conflicts at the expense of the environment, amorally "following her bliss" (pace Jos. Campbell), bent on & by self-gratification, sociopathic (as criminally minded), dyssocial. Yet she was not as victimized as millions are today by early-childhood affect starvation & sadistic treatment & by being socialized without the positive use of the shame & guilt sanctions. At the heart of our moral crisis at all societal levels, these victims are sociopaths, victimizers of society (on Wall St., in the inner city, in the historic professions, inside the Beltway, everywhere). As in Moll's personal case, social deliverance can come only by conversion to shame, guilt, love, & responsibility.

14 While Moll is a man-hater (from their forever using her) & man-despiser (from the ease with which she manipulated them), her conversion begins when she meditates on her betrayal of a man she loves (pp. 247f: sorrow & grief, two further emotional requirements for true repentance). Reason, too, is necessary (p. 249): "I began to think, and to think indeed is one real advance from hell to heaven."

15 P. 247: "The completest misery on earth" is to have no "heart to ask God's mercy or indeed to think of it."