The Compleat English Gentleman: Perspectives on Defoe's Major Unfinished Work

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ABSTRACT: During Defoe's life-time (c1660-1731) several projects were launched for the improvement of mankind. Defoe was in the forefront of this later seventeenth/early eighteenth-century phenomenon. It was the 'projection' age. Defoe's major unfinished educational work was *The Compleat English Gentleman* (CEG) 1729: an educational project. Defoe wrote the CEG as a means of improving the education of the English gentry, many of whom were elder sons for whom often formal education through the Classics was deemed to be unnecessary. Defoe's suggestion to improve this sad state was to suggest his Post-Entries, the study of the Classics through the vernacular.

Keywords: Daniel Defoe, English class system, liberal education, nurture, élite educational tradition

RESUMÉ: Au cours de la vie de Defoe (1660-1731), plusieurs projets furent lancés en vue d'améliorer l'humanité. Defoe joua un rôle de tout premier plan dans ce phénomène de la fin du XXVIIème, début du XVIIIème. Ce fut la « projection » de l'époque. L'œuvre majeure inachevée de Defoe, un projet éducatif, fut *The Compleat English Gentleman* (CEG) en 1729. Defoe le rédigea en le présentant comme un outil pour améliorer le système éducatif de l'aristocratie anglaise dont de nombreux hommes étaient les fils aînés de la famille et dont leurs études classiques étaient souvent jugées inutiles. Pour corriger cet état regrettable, Defoe dut proposer son *Post-Entries* qui était une analyse des études classiques d'une façon vernaculaire.

Mots-clés: Daniel Defoe, la hiérarchie des classes sociales en Angleterre, les études libérales, la culture, la tradition élitiste scolaire

'Brought up to nothing at a vast expense,
And while they feed his honour starve his sense:
Thus for the park and mansion he's made fit
And bred a fool in spite of mother wit'.

Daniel Defoe

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Daniel Defoe's Legacy

At the time of his death on 24 April 1731, 'of a lethargy',[i] Defoe left three unfinished literary works. The first of these was The Voyage of Don Manoel Gonzales[ii] which need not concern us further. The other two: *Of Royall Education*, a fragmentary treatise, only sixty-three pages and *The Compleat English Gentleman* (CEG), a much more substantial work of almost three hundred pages, were treatises on Education.[iii] It is the contention of this article that the CEG should be seen in the dual perspectives of first, Defoe's being a significant 'projector' of educational ideas in the early eighteenth century and therefore worthy of study as an 18th-century educationist,[iv] and secondly, of these ideas being part of a long and complex tradition going back to the ancient classics, the substantive starting point or source of Defoe's educational theory. Often a plucker of other men's flowers, it would seem that in his recommendations for the better education of some contemporary uneducated gentry, Defoe was making an original contribution to educational theory.

Defoe: The Great Projector

Throughout his very busy and (literally) intriguing life,[v] Defoe applied himself to undertakings which contemporaries called 'projects'. Projects *per se* may have existed in all time. As Defoe once observed, the building of Noah's Ark was the first recorded project in which human ingenuity was used to improve human life.[vi] It could be argued, however, that the idea of 'a project' is closely associated with that of 'progress'. Progress is made perhaps partly through the success of projects. Certainly the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries – with projects such as the foundation of the Bank of England (1694); the Bank of Scotland (1695); the creation of the SPCK (The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge) in 1698;[vii] the floating of the Darien Scheme[viii] (1698-1700) and the formation of the South Sea Company in 1711 - were periods of great change. Such projects were undertaken when science and commerce, ever close elements through capitalism, were making giant strides in an emerging intellectual world dominated by reason and the thinking of the **early** Enlightenment. In the late 17th century, the term 'project' was widely used to describe schemes for capital gain. Thus Edward Hyde, first Earl of Clarendon, observed in *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (1647) that, 'New projects were everyday set on foot for money which served only to

offend and incense the people'.[ix] Defoe, too, recognised the increasing tendency for projecting at the beginning of *An Essay Upon Projects* (1697) when he wrote:

> Necessity, which is allow'd 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* ... the past Ages have never come up to the degree, of projecting and inventing ... which we see this Age arriv'd to'.[x]

Defoe, himself, was not averse to projecting, both practically and theoretically. His early adult life in trade and commerce was rich in such experience. Early in his life, he was engaged in real estate, bricks and tiles, oysters, fisheries, linen-weaving and ship building. This practical experience in a wide variety of ways of earning a livelihood was complemented by a 'useful' education gained at Dr Morton's Dissenting Academy at Newington from 1674 to 1679, so that Defoe was a 'natural' projector. Unfortunately not all his projects were successful. For example, he was unsuccessful with a diving bell project; whilst another to breed civet cats, for the production of perfume from their secretions, compelled Defoe in 1691/2 to go into hiding to avoid the debtors' prison.

It could be argued that *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Defoe's first novel yet published when he was 59 years old, was another project – a literary project – which was very successful and moreover, profitable. Defoe, through Robinson Crusoe wrote a work which was of great value for later students of education. At least this was so in the eyes of one established educationist – Jean-Jacques Rousseau – who, in his *Emile*, wrote:

> There is one book which, to my thinking, supplies the best treatise on an education according to nature. This is the first book Emile will read: for a long time it will form his library, and it will always retain an honoured place .... what is this wonderful book? Is it Aristotle? Pliny? Buffon? No, it is Robinson Crusoe'.[xi]

It is ironic, however, that Rousseau, the exemplar for education by Nature (*educere* – to lead out) should heap such praise on Defoe, a traditionalist in education (education by Nurture, *educare* – the etymological root of Education, the culture of the mind).

Be that as it may, many of Defoe's writings were concerned with the implementation of projects for the improvement of mankind. Defoe's *An Essay Upon Projects* was written as early as 1697 but several other volumes[xii] featuring projects followed later: *The Great Law of Subordination to be Consider'd* (1724); the *Complete English Tradesman* (1726), *The Protestant Monastery*

(1727); *A Plan of the English Commerce* (1728); *Second Thoughts are Best* (1729) concerned mainly with reducing the London crime rate; *The Generous Projector* (1731), concerned, *inter alia*, with establishing hospitals for foundling children, of which there were a great many.

As for Education *per se,* Defoe was an intrepid author. In 1715 he wrote the weighty work, *The Family Instructor*, in three parts. As JR Moore observed, 'the book became one of the most popular moral treatises of the century.'[xiii] There were eight editions of this work in five years, from 1715 onwards. Three years later, in 1718, Defoe extended his thinking on family education with his second work on that subject with the same title. This was followed in 1727 with his *The New Family Instructor*. Like any good eighteenth-century projector, Defoe was keen to exploit that which sold well, thus creating capital.

In the following year, 1728, Defoe had published his *Augusta Triumphans* which, *inter alia*, was an early proposal for the setting up of a London University involving the leading (public) boarding schools around London. This treatise was followed by his *Chickens Feed Capons* (1730) which concerned itself with abuses within education, a topic dealt with before in *Augusta Triumphans*. As previously stated, Defoe died in 1731 leaving two more treatises on education unpublished, *Of Royall Education*, a fragmentary treatise – unfinished as well as unpublished – the title of which is self-explanatory as to its content. Finally, Defoe's *magnum opus* on education, though unpublished, was *The Compleat English Gentleman* which also was incomplete.

The CEG was an early eighteenth-century scheme for adult education – at least of the gentry. The pioneering significance of this volume cannot, therefore, be overestimated. Moreover, it places Defoe's CEG in the long established tradition of élite education which goes back to the Greek consideration of *arete*, of the Roman consideration of *virtus*; of the Renaissance concept of virtù and the 18th- and 19th-century concept of the English gentleman. Defoe himself, the son of a butcher, Mr Foe, longed to be recognised as a gentleman by his contemporaries. Naturally, as a product of Newington Academy under Dr Morton, Defoe felt that his educational experience had been different from those less fortunate who had engaged in gerund-grinding, without profit, at a local grammar school. Nevertheless his educational background was not one which was closely associated with gentility or the gentry. As an outsider to this world, Defoe could, and did apply his critical mind to it, and this quality is very evident in *The Compleat English Gentleman*. It is a detailed examination of his unfinished

educational treatise that attention is now given to highlight Defoe's thinking on this crucial topic.

The Compleat English Gentleman

In considering Defoe's arguments in CEG it is needful to keep in mind the two claims made for him that: (a) the CEG is a project of some significance and (b) that it is truly in the complex tradition of élite education concerned with the education of gentlemen 'hoi aristoi'. These two basic postulations form the basis of the **structure** of the remainder of this article.

(a) CEG as Defoean Project

There is an element in CEG of Defoe's being both adviser to and critic of the English gentry from which in the estimation of some, he was excluded.[xiv] This is one possible reason for his dwelling at such length in the book on the weaknesses of the English gentry. It was as if, because of his own relatively lowly birth or lack of resplendent family tree, he was anxious to reduce others to a similar humble status. For having defined a gentleman as:

> A person born (for there lies the essence of quality) of some known, or Ancient Family: whose ancestors have at least for some time been raised above the Class of Mechanics.[xv]

Defoe goes on to declare the folly of tracing back one's ancestry since all families have a common origin in the 'cannaille' (*sic*) or the mob.[xvi] But the English class system is based on the premise of upward social mobility, with some tracing their ancestry back to the Conquest. As Defoe comments in verse, caustically if anachronistically:

> Tho' what the hero was no man can tell,
> Whether a Drummer or a Colonell.[xvii]

Not only did the English gentry originate from a common stock but they also exhibited, in many ways, an astonishing ignorance which placed them, except for their wealth, in reality no higher than the common people.

Most of CEG (pp.1-287) is concerned with the BORN gentleman which imbalance gives rise to speculation as to how large a book Defoe originally had in mind for this major work. Only twenty-two pages are devoted to the gentleman BRED which suggests that Defoe was taking second wind only when the cares of his later years caused him to cease writing.

Having initially distinquished between gentleman 'born' and 'bred', the latter being gentrified through the experience of education, Defoe laid the foundation for his early outlining of the

project contained in CEG. 'Virtue, learning, a liberal education, and a degree of natural and acquired knowledge', he said, 'are necessary to finish the born gentleman: and that without them the entitled heir will be but a shadow of a gentleman.'[xviii] Like any good salesman or saleswoman who has created the consciousness of a need, Defoe presses home the nature of his proposed project in his short introduction to the book when he writes:

> I say, I must be allowed to show him some of these mistakes; but this ... is not only necessary ... but is very much for his service also. Yet in doing this I shall use him tenderly, treat him personally with all possible deference and respect, and humbly addressing him for his own benefit to retrieve the loss, lead him by the hand into the way to do it; showing him how to place himself in the rank which God and Nature designed him for, and at last deliver him up to himself and into his own possession in the full perfection of a gentleman.[xix]

In the 18th century, Defoe not only recognised the value to potential readers of the 'How do to it' manual but he also promised to do it as self-taught modern language courses: 'without tears'. Such practical manuals, as any modern publishing house knows, have not lost their universal appeal. But Defoe's CEG was more than just a 'practical manual', it was a well-thought out project for his day and age, even if his ideas were expounded at the gentle pace of a rambling book. He selected as his targets for emancipation the eldest sons of gentlemen who through the process of primogeniture inherited their fathers' estates and were thus equipped comfortably for life. Their future lot was one of plentiful ease and profound ignorance. Defoe contrasts the sorry plight of the eldest sons with that of younger sons who have perforce to make their way in the world not having an estate to inherit.

In a dialogue concocted by Defoe between two brothers, there is the following exchange:

Younger: I have heard my father thank God many a time that he was a younger brother.

Elder: And what for, pray?

Younger: Because if he had not, he said, he would have been a blockhead, an untaught lump of ignorance and pride, as his elder brother was and as most of the eldest sons of his acquaintance were.[xx]

It was common practice for elder sons to inherit their father's estate leaving younger sons little alternative but to earn a living. Study and entry to university were seen by them as one way of redeeming their necessitous situation. The younger son in Defoe's

dialogue was able to claim that perhaps no more than 200 eldest sons were at either Oxford or Cambridge whilst younger sons were in residence tenfold that number.[xxi] In his examination of the sad plight of elder sons, who because of their future life of magisterial ease, were deprived of a thorough liberal education, Defoe noted that not only were they generally not sent to university but also they were not even sent to school. Their lack of a sound beginning to life could be traced back even further. Many ladies, as Defoe noted, did not suckle their children but rather employed wet nurses to do so. Jonathan Gathorne Hardy has noted that this practice was in evidence as early as the thirteenth century[xxii] so that by Defoe's time it was commonplace amongst the aristocracy or gentry. Not too much credence, however, should be given to Defoe's view that such a practice contributed to the decline of the gentry's blood stock.[xxiii] For Defoe this was the beginning of the slippery slope to a life of crass ignorance.

Defoe was critical of the women in a young boy's life, mothers and aunts.

> Those directresses in his most early years who for want of erudition have exposed him to ignorance and weakness of understanding, and left his head unfurnished and his mind unfinished.[xxiv]

Defoe was an early advocate of the education of women as he declares in *An Essay Upon Projects* in 1697:

> I have often thought of it as one of the most barbarous customs in the world, considering us as a civilised and Christian country, that we deny the advantages of learning to women.[xxv]

In thus criticizing the lack of education of women, Defoe is pre-empting Rousseau in the *Emile* is concerned with cultivating reason and understand in the female gender.

In so far as women were usually responsible for the training of the very young, it seemed of great benefit to mankind to ensure that early education was of the very best kind by educating women equally with men. Defoe declared the ladies to be:

> the first instruments of instruction, and who have the particular power as well as opportunity of printing the most early ideas in the minds of their children, who are able to make the first impressions upon their imagination and perhaps the strongest and most durable.[xxvi]

He concluded that 'the ladies alone are the agents who have the fate of their sons in their power and can write them fools and fops

or men of brains and sense as they please'.[xxvii] If Defoe attacked the practice of leaving the early education of sons to womenfolk, fathers did not escape censure: 'the fathers are certainly guilty of it, as well as the mothers'.[xxviii] So many of the gentry 'look upon learning as a thing of indifference and of no great use to a gentleman'.[xxix]

There was a tendency for many of the gentry not to send their eldest sons to school preferring to engage a private tutor to educate them. The rationale for this preference for domestic education is to be found in the writings of John Locke who in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) strongly advocated the use of a private tutor to educate the scions of noble and gentle families. Rousseau, too, adopted a scheme of education involving a private tutor for the young Emile. Domestic education began to decline in England only some time well into the nineteenth century,[xxx] coinciding with the rise of the public schools.[xxxi]

Defoe, however, took a Quintilianesque[xxxii] stand in support of sending boys to school, as did later, of course, Vicesimus Knox II, Headmaster of Tonbridge School (1779-1812).[xxxiii] Defoe attacked private tutors as 'murtherers of a child's morals'.[xxxiv] Because of their relatively subordinate position in society, private tutors, said Defoe, were liable to be weak in face of the antics of a spoilt child and to succumb to threats of blackmail. Thus tutors tended to become 'rather playfellows to the children than instructors'.[xxxv] It was in his denunciation of nurses and private tutors on the one hand and in support of endowed schools on the other that one can discern the essential differences between the education of the eldest son compared with his younger siblings. Defoe encapsulated his whole argument thus:

> That our gentlemen have innumerable examples at their very door of the advantages of learning, of the difference between a liberal education and the mere old women literature of a nurse and a tutor: they may see the demonstration of it even in their own families, where the bright and the dull, the blind and the clear, the man of sense and learning and the blockhead, is as often to be discerned as the heir and the cadet are seen together, where one is untaught and good for nothing because he is to have the estate, and the other is polished and educated because he is to make his fortune.[xxxvi]

Having established his case that eldest sons tended not to be educated except in the skills of hunting, shooting, fishing and tending the estate, Defoe then justifies the nature of his project, which he is yet to unfold, by implying that most English gentlemen were not scholars. He wrote: 'the proposition is plain *that our English gentlemen are not men of learning*.[xxxvii] (Defoe's italics).

In the simulated dialogue referred to earlier, Defoe gave some indication of the size of the problem, when the educated younger brother declares:

> 'Tis a blessed character of the English gentry; there's scarce one in five of them can speak good English.[xxxviii]

This could, of course, mean that such rural gentry spoke with rustic dialects which perhaps is not so heinous a fault. But if it can be inferred from the younger brother's statement that four out of five of the gentry were poorly educated to the point of being inarticulate then Defoe's offer to educate them with a modicum of learning is of great significance and an important project for the age.

What then was Defoe's solution to this very alarming situation? He proposed a scheme of what he called 'post entries'.[xxxix] His post-entries scheme placed Defoe firmly amongst the pioneers of English adult education. It was all so simple in a pre-Birkbeckian age. But just as it can be observed that Defoe pre-empted Jeremy Bentham *et al.* in his suggestion for a University of London so it could be claimed, that in his 'post-entries' suggestion he foreshadowed the pioneer work of George Birkbeck at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries in supplying adult education to the citizens of Glasgow and London. The only difference between them related to the differing social classes involved.

Defoe, ever shrewd and with a nose for changes in society, had noted that Latin and Greek were no longer the sole languages of instruction in Oxford and Cambridge in subjects such as Mathematics and Natural Philosophy (or Science). The use of the vernacular language, a universal product of the Renaissance in Europe despite the reactionary influence of Desiderius Erasmus, was increasingly evident. John Locke had advocated in *Some Thoughts on Education* (1693) less influence for the Classical Language in the education of a gentleman; and had not Defoe himself attended the famous Dissenting Academy of Dr John Morton at Newington Green where subjects other than the Classics were given more emphasis?[xl] From such observations and such a background it was a very easy step for Defoe to suggest that those gentlemen who had failed to learn the classics because of earlier faulty education should make themselves acquainted with these studies through a study of them in translation.[xli]

As a student of the learning process and motivation, Defoe felt able to offer his *Post Entries* assured success. He wrote:

> Such voluntary students, such gentlemen, who thus being sensible of the deficiency of their education have applied themselves by a voluntary study to recover the loss, make a swifter progression by many degrees than those who are taught young and under the discipline of pedagogues and in domineering masters, who think to drive Greek and Latin into them with a beetle and wedge, as men clear blocks, and who in a word, spoil as many scholars as they make.[xlii]

In addition to the study of the Classics in translation, Defoe offers the ignorant gentleman a course of study which included Science and Philosophy which are not taught in grammar school. He observed triumphantly:

> Let them but go through a course of Philosophy, a course of Astronomy, Geography, History etc as far as the English tongue will carry them; and let us see whether their knowledge of philosophy and all the other Sciences will not dominate the scholars, or whether any after that will venture to call them men without learning, ignorant and untaught.[xliii]

It is difficult not to conclude from this that Defoe is also accrediting his own education at Newington Green Academy. Such then is the substance of Defoe's major project written towards the end of his life. It could be said to be visionary, far-reaching and yet relatively simple.

(b) CEG as an integral part of élite education tradition

At first sight it would seem that CEG is the antithesis of the élite position in education, the élite position in education is of course, a very woolly term, and demands some measure of review if it is to have any meaning in this context. In the twentieth century the term 'élite education' often implied selection, the education of the best. In the late twentieth/early twenty-first century, the term was used by some to refer to education that is bought, private education which excludes the majority. This was even the case in the fourteenth century with Vittorino da Feltre and his *Casa Giacosa*.[xliv]

But in the Greek world there was a more noble concept of 'arete', an Homeric term meaning EXCELLENCE, nobility or virtue. Both Plato and Aristotle recognised it. The Romans, too, had a similar concept of high standards: virtus which both Cicero and Quintilian entertained. During the third Renaissance,[xlv] writers pursued a similar concept of virtù, the chief quality of a man of action. Virtù was closely associated with the notion of *sprezzatura*, that is the ability to achieve any task in hand with effortless ease.

Such *sprezzatura* was for Renaissance times the acquisition of a second nature through the process of imitation.[xlvi] Imitation and practice allowed one to improve on what nature had bestowed on one. It was a way of attaining a second nature. This was the fundamental aim of Renaissance education theory.

It is at this critical point that Defoe shares the same ground with men of the Renaissance, although at first sight it would not seem so in view of his support of the use of the vernacular as a substitute for Latin and Greek in the reading of the Classics. He appears to be devaluating the Classical education with its emphasis on the study of the original Latin and Greek. But it will be recalled also that men such as Petrarch, Dante and Boccaccio advanced the use of the vernacular language and gave it respectability. But such an issue of language is a red herring. The main point is that Defoe saw Nature as that which is improved by instruction or education. For as Defoe himself observed:

> Whatever brightness of parts, whatever genius, wit and capacity the man is naturally furnished with, it is required that those jewels should be polished, that learning be applied to them, that rules and instructions be laid before them, and that histories and examples of times and persons be recommended to them, and that all this be enforced by the authority of instructors, parents, schoolmasters etc.[xlvii]

Defoe offered a religious justification for this improvement of nature by nurture when he commented:

> It is apparent that treasure of wit and parts is given from Heaven to be cultivated and improved: and as God set Adam to till the ground after the fall, and told him, if he did not do it, ay, and labour and sweat at it, too, he should have no bread and it should bring forth nothing but briars and thorns to him without tillage and cultivation: so it is in his brain and understanding to this day, if he will know he must learn.[xlviii]

Clearly, in the centuries-old Nature vs Nurture educational debate which revolves around the '*Educere'* and the '*Educare'*, Defoe is on the side of Nurture. But is he? If he believes in the power of education (to mould the pupil aright) he also subscribes to the view of innate ability. For example, at one stage of the *CEG* he admits:

> I am content to allow that, as some men are born dull and that 'tis ordinarily said of such a man he is a natural fool, so, on the other hand, some are born bright, have a sprightly wit, a great genius, a capacious soul, deep reach and clear thoughts even from their birth, I won't say from their parents: for some times 'tis so when the

> father, nay perhaps all the fathers from several generations past have been fools.[xlix]

Although Defoe is willing to admit that Nature plays a most important part in the make-up of an individual, he is nevertheless well aware of the lack of knowledge despite the debate concerning heredity and environment. Intellectual heredity, as apposed to the hereditary dimensions such as height or physical weaknesses or even diseases, is undoubtedly little understood, Defoe appreciated this when he wrote:

> We see that brains do not always descend, no, not to the greatest; sense and understanding is no appendage to the prince, nor is wisdom entailed upon the Crown. A King may lay his claim to the government of his Kingdom by hereditary right from his ancestors; he may have his crown that way: but he must have his governing qualifications by other methods, namely by application by instruction, by example and by experience.[l]

The links between Defoe's two posthumous educational treatises are thus forged: *Of Royall Educacion* has its provenance here. But to return to Defoe's concern about the relative influence of both heredity and environment, he continues:

> It is the same with us all. The gentleman may have his estate from his ancestors, nay, the beauty of his body may in part descend from his parents, and the health of constitution may owe much to birth and blood and if we may believe the learned, it is not a little advantage to be born of a healthy, vigorous race; but the brains are the matter in question, and there we see generation very little concerned in the case; the wise man begets the fool, and the fool gives a wise man to the world. Nature seems to have very little concern in the intellectual part, that seems guided by some other influence; nor is it any reproach to our understanding to say we know not how or by what secret operation 'tis wrought how comes a fool to convey strong capacities, and an empty weak head deliver a full capable genius to the world.[li]

But whatever the reason for the phenomenon of bright offspring from dull parents and vice-versa on which Defoe can throw very little, if any, light he is sure at least about the beneficial effects of education on both the bright and the not so bright. He is not quite in the category of the French eighteenth-century Helvetius for whom *L'education peut tout* or of even the nineteenth-century educationists James Mill and Robert Owen who were outstanding environmentalists but he was clear about the advantages of education no matter how limited (presumably idiots and imbeciles

were excluded) of the gifts of Nature in the individual. He observed:

> That even the most crooked, out of shape tree in the whole wood is capable by the help of the same art to be brought to the same perfection in its degree, and only with this difference, that the crooked stick requires more workmanship, more hewing and cutting ... before 'tis brought to take place among the ornaments of the palace, whereas the straight well shaped tree is finished with less trouble ... in a word the straight tree is wrought with less (sic) pains than the crooked but both require some.[lii]

Both the dull, then, and the quick-witted according to Defoe are in need of instruction but he is concerned more for the education of the brightest. This is in strict keeping with the Renaissance view of education with its emphasis on the cultivation of excellence. Supporting this élitist tradition Defoe declares:

> Some application is required in the brightest genius, and that is what I am pleading for. If we see a youth among the poor people of good natural parts, quick thought, strong memory, sharp wit, as it often happens, we are generally apt to say 'tis pity the boy should not be put to school, 'tis pity he should not be well taught'; and some times such a youth has been picked up and taught in mere charity by some man of learning and estate who has so pitied his circumstances; and some great men who[m] I could name if it were proper, have been raised in the world from such beginnings. But still this bright genius must be made brighter by art. What are the quick parts, the natural wit, the strong memory, the great capacities: what are they and what are they given for? 'Tis evident they are given for some uses which they are not wholly fitted for but by the application of other suitable helps. They are receptible of all the glorious things which science, learning and acquired knowledge can furnish but they are perfectly unqualified to act alone.[liii]

In arguing his case for the inestimable value of instruction, Defoe downgrades Nature to such an extent that he concludes 'there is something of original depravity in Nature.liv Taking the opposite view from Jean Jacques Rousseau who regarded man's nature as free of original sin, Defoe seemingly supported the Augustinian doctrine of man's fallen nature. It was the task of education to lift man up from such a depraved state. Because the original nature of man had its limitations, it was the task of education to remedy that weakness. Defoe observed:

> The mere knowledge attained by uninstructed nature is a poor dark lanthorn light, that glares in the sight of those that look at it, rather

> blinds them than helps them to see, and is only useful to those who stand behind it.[lv]

He concluded, 'Nature is a fund of sense, but instruction only is the fund of knowledge'.[lvi] This Renaissance view of Defoe about the need of instruction provides the raison d' être for the CEG. Defoe has observed that the English gentry, especially those buried bucolically, are ignorant and in need of enlightenment. 'This is the reason' he declared, 'why we have so much ignorance among all the bright men of this age, that some of our gentlemen who have the cleanest parts, the purest natural wit, and the best capacities that are to be seen anywhere are yet the most ignorant dark creatures ... The case carries its evidence in itself'.[lvii] He went on to note 'how few gentlemen in England are masters even of the English tongue itself.[lviii]

Having established, therefore, the extent of his self-allotted task, Defoe offered his solution to the problem: that of *post entries* as has already been observed. Although Defoe claimed through the observation of Gilbert Burnett that William III approved of a non-classical curriculum,[lix] the content of the alternative curriculum[lx] is not our main concern since it does not have much bearing on the establishment of Defoe in the long elitist tradition of teaching for excellence. Such a position is achieved not by a study of his proposed alternative curriculum but by some of the educational principles he espoused, the most notable, of course, being the enormous emphasis he placed on instruction. But there were others which place him firmly in the camp of the traditional educators.

In what has been stated so far, it is implicit that Defoe recognised differences between individuals. He readily recognised that amongst the gentry, to whom the CEG is addressed, there were a great many 'bright, accomplished polite' gentlemen who are ... the ornaments of their country for learning, wit, science and virtue, patterns of good breeding and of good manners'.[lxi] His recognition of the principle as currently termed of 'differentiation' brings Defoe to comment on the majority of the English gentry who:

> have the misfortune to be left behind, grovelling in the dirt of ignorance, and learning nothing but to glut themselves in plenty, wallowing in wealth and in the grossest part of what they call pleasures, not capable of enjoying the sublime and exalted delight of an improved soul.[lxii]

Linked closely with his recognition of differentiation[lxiii] between individuals, which is the foundation of Aristotle's principle of 'distributive justice' – that to treat unequals equally is as unjust as treating equals unequally – was Defoe's acceptance of meritocracy

and attendant downward social nobility amongst those who failed to make the grade. He referred to the 'setting up [of] a new class truly qualified to inherit the title [of gentleman]'. With such upward social mobility in mind from which undoubtedly Defoe thought himself to be an obvious beneficiary, there was inevitably a complementary movement down the social scale by those who had failed to reach the standards required of a gentleman. He observed:

When Learning, Education, Virtue and good manners are wanting, or degenerated and corrupted in a gentleman, he sinks out of the rank, ceases to be any more a gentleman, and is, *ipso facto*, turned back among the less despicable Throng of the Plebeii.[lxiv]

Such was Defoe's respect for education that for one to be without it was to be diseased. He wrote: 'The want of learning, the deficiency of education is a disease'.[lxv] To his readers, however, he did not regard the disease as incurable as he demonstrated in the later pages of *The Compleat English Gentleman*. His regimen of study in the vernacular for his Post Entries offered a pleasant short cut to learning and wisdom.

Conclusion

For those who may be thinking that Defoe's solution to a social and educational problem in *The Compleat English Gentleman* may be regarded as slick and not worthy of serious consideration –whoever heard of eighteenth-century educated gentry without a command of the Classical languages? Ponder on the value of Defoe's suggestion for the majority of the English gentry who were often boorish and little else. Most would never master those languages but they could with delight study or achieve a level of knowledge of English literature, history, geography and science. He offered them something which was attainable which is indeed a good educational principle.

But of even more import for an article concerned with élite educational tradition is Defoe's recognition of the primacy of moral education. As with Thomas Arnold,[lxvi] a century later, Defoe recognised that in the hierarchy of aims in education, Christian training and the inculcation of virtue took precedence over intellectual ability. Consider the well-known words of Squire Brown in *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857) where he ponders:

> I don't care a straw for Greek particles, or the diagamma [shades of CEG] no more does his mother. What is he sent to school for? ... if he'll only turn out a brave, helpful, truth telling Englishman and a gentleman, and a Christian that's all I want.[lxvii]

How very close in sentiment is Defoe in CEG where he attributed to the father similar notions concerning education even adopting the motto of Winchester School[lxviii] in his paeon on Christian virtue:

> To this purpose he very early causes his sons, the eldest as well as the rest [my italics] to submit to discipline and to know the reason and nature of governments and subordination, as well family government as national. He inculcates as early as possible good principles into their minds that so they may become good Christians, as also modesty, humility, and every branch of good words into their heads, in order to fit them for a life suitable to their birth, and that they may be made good men as well as good gentlemen, making it the stated, established foundation of all good instruction that *Manners makes the Man* (Defoe's italics) and that modesty and virtue and humility are the brightest ornaments of a gentleman.[lxix]

Squire Brown may have been meditating a hundred or more years on from Defoe in CEG, betraying may be a different *weltanschauung* or world view, but it is remarkable how they have shared a similar main emphasis in education. On reflection it has been ever thus. Only the twentieth century and twenty-first century with their emphasis on intellectual training have been heterodox in their educational aims.

NOTES

i He died in the most obscure circumstances in Ropemakers' Alley, London, only a short distance from where he was born. He spent his last days, as he had spent so many before, in hiding to avoid paying alleged debts. He died alone, away from his wife and children. The actual date of his death is subject to debate amongst scholars on Defoe.

ii See John Robert Moore A Checklist of the Writings of Daniel Defoe. Archon Books, 1971, (2nd edition), p.229-30.

iii Both Of Royall Education and The Compleat English Gentleman were published posthumously in 1895 and 1890 respectively, each of them being edited by Dr Karl D Bulbring.

iv See DP Leinster-Mackay The Educational World of Danial Defoe. No. 23 English Literary Studies, University of Victoria, BC Canada, pp.1-103.

v See inter alia William Freeman The Incredible Defoe. London: Herbert Jenkins 1950. Defoe was much appreciated by William III for his literary abilities.

vi Defoe An Essay Upon Projects (1697). Scolar Press, 1969, p.20.

vii The SPCK was closely associated with the development of Charity schools in England and Wales. See MG Jones The Charity School Movement, CUP 1938.

viii The Darien Scheme aimed at setting up a Scottish colony in Panama and was really an attempt by certain London merchant bankers to exploit Scottish national pretensions. A sum of £600,000 was to have been raised for this project.

ix Clarendon, op. cit., Oxford University Press 1849, vol 1, pp.35-6.

x Defoe, op cit., pp.1-2.

xi JJ Rousseau, Emile, Everyman Edition 1974, p.147.

xii See J R Moore: A Checklist of the Writings of Daniel Defoe, 2nd edition, Archon Books, 1971, passim.

xiii Ibid, p.123.

xiv This would be on grounds of both rank and religion. He was the son of a butcher and therefore not a 'gentleman born'. Furthermore he was excluded from the charmed circle of the Anglican establishment by dint of his being a dissenter.

xv Defoe: CEG, p.13.

xvi Ibid., p.14.

xvii Ibid., p.35.

xviii Ibid., p.5.

xix Ibid., p.6. all quotations from CEG in this article have been taken from Bulbring's 1890 edition but for the sake of clarity they have been transliterated into modern English.

xx Ibid., p.50-51.

xxi Ibid., p.55.

xxii Jonathan Gathorne Hardy The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny, Arrowbooks 1972, p.36.

xxiii Defoe: CEG pp.78-79.

xxiv Ibid., p.6.

xxv See Defoe: An Essay Upon Projects, Scolar Press, 1969, p.282.

xxvi Defoe: CEG, p.70.

xxvii Ibid.

xxviii Ibid., p.9.

xxix Ibid., p.10.

xxx F Musgrove: Middle-class Families and Schools, 1780-1880 'Interaction and Exchange of Function between Institutions in PW Musgrave, Sociology, History and Education, Methuen, 1970, pp.117-125.

xxxi T W Bamford, Rise of the English Public Schools, Nelson, 1967, pp.1-22.

xxxii Quintilian in the 1st century AD took the view that school had several advantages over domestic education.

xxxiii See Vicesimus Knox Liberal Education (1795) Vol II, p.260.

xxxiv Defoe: CEG, p.71.

xxxv Ibid., p.87.

xxxvi Ibid., p.68.

xxxvii Ibid., p.96.

xxxviii Ibid., p.54.

xxxix Ibid., p.229.

xl See Ibid., pp.218-219 for a description a tutor with whom Defoe was acquainted who seems to be suspiciously like Dr John Morton.

xli Defoe's emphasis on the education of younger sons of the gentry through the vernacular as well as the classics pre-empts A N Whitehead's The Aims of Education.

xlii Ibid., p.229.

xliii Ibid., p.217.

xliv William H Woodward, Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators, Cambridge University Press, 1921, pp.31-2.

xlv It is sometimes overlooked that the Renaissance of the fourteenth to the sixteenth century had been preceded by two other periods of 'rebirth': during the Carolingian period of the eight and ninth centuries during the time of Alcuin and Alfred and during the twelfth century at the time of the rise of the Universities.

xlvi See Baldassare Castiglione The Book of the Courtier Everyman's Library, No.807 J M Dent and Sons Ltd, 1956, pp.46-47, et passim.

xlvii Defoe, CEG, p.111.

xlviii Ibid., p.110.

xlix Ibid., p.108.

l Ibid., p.107.

li Ibid., pp.107-108.

lii Ibid., pp.108-109.

liii Ibid., pp.109-110.

liv Ibid., p.112.

lv Ibid., p.113.

lvi Ibid.

lvii Ibid.

lviii Ibid., p.116.

lix Ibid., pp.214-215.

lx The basis of Defoe's curriculum of his post-entries is based on the premise that English or the vernacular language can replace Latin and Greek. He observed that the Universities were increasingly using the vernacular as the medium of instruction that the subjects such as Science, History Geography, Mathematics had no need of the Classical languages.

lxi Ibid., pp.88-89.

lxii Ibid., p.89.

lxiii 'Differentiation' usually refers to educational policies involving different treatment of individuals and is the basis of the concept of meritocracy from Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. See W D Ross Ethica Nichomachea, 1975, Book V, Section H, OUP.

lxiv CEG, p.18. See also p.262.

lxv Ibid., p.185.

lxvi See A P Stanley, The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold DD. The Grand Colosseum Warehouse Co (nd), p.69.

lxvii Thomas Hughes Tom Brown's School Days, Nelson (nd) pp.73-74.

lxviii 'Manners maketh man'. Thomas Arnold was, of course, an old Wykehamist.

lxix Defoe, CEG, p.242.

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