

No Dishonour to Be a Pirate: The Problem of Infinite Advantage in Defoe's *Captain Singleton*

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In *Captain Singleton* (1720), Daniel Defoe rehearses the ethical and discursive justifications of predatory capitalism. Through an examination of Defoe's economic writings, I illustrate how the author confronts readers with the moral ambiguity of legal trade by comparing the "litteral" pirate Singleton with the "allegorical" pirates of London's central economic institutions. Through this comparison, Defoe places legal trade on an uncertain continuum with piracy. By extension, he explores the problematic necessity of reconciling the hero-outlaw Singleton's piracy to conceptions of national identity predicated on economic expansionism. Defoe suggests this reconciliation is best achieved by understanding trade in terms of "infinite advantage." This article contextualizes "infinite advantage" as an imaginative projection onto the world of the conditions necessary to sustain infinite trade, and argues that Singleton appropriates this ideology to palliate fears of Hobbesian scarcity. Thus, the novel examines the conditions of scarcity that precipitate predatory trade practices alongside the fantasy of economic infinitude that would make these practices obsolete.

abstract

IN *CAPTAIN SINGLETON* (1720), Daniel Defoe consistently confronts his readers with the ambiguous morality of legal commerce through the character of his pirate hero, whose actions in the novel underscore the slippage between piracy and legitimate trade. On a raiding cruise in the Dutch Spice Islands, Singleton's first mate, a Quaker named William, asks the captain, "Wouldst thou ... rather have Money without Fighting, or Fighting without Money?"; Singleton replies, "The first of the two, to be sure."¹ This moment illuminates one of the core problems of *Captain Singleton*, because William's exhortation suggests that men must adhere to a strict binary, choosing either piracy or legal commerce.

¹ Daniel Defoe, *The Life, Adventures, and Pyracies, of Captain Singleton*, ed. Shiv K. Kumar (1720; London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 153–54. References are to this edition. I thank Robert Markley, Tony Pollock, and the anonymous *ECF* reviewers for their valuable comments about this article.

Defoe complicates this binary because he sometimes equates legitimate trade with piracy in *Captain Singleton*, and at other times in the novel he juxtaposes legal trade and piratical acts. To muddy the waters further, the infamous pirate Singleton operates as a legitimate merchant only under an assumed identity in the Indian Ocean and South Seas, in what Singleton calls “the only trading Voyage we had made” (255). But the “trading Voyage” still involves stolen goods, and the pirates only pretend to be traders. This moment demonstrates the ways in which Singleton, like a legitimate merchant, is “constructed by a desire for profit,” and Defoe “is on the verge of depicting trade as a kind of state-sanctioned piracy.”² The novelist exposes the underpinnings of (most) legitimate trade as piratical in nature because the motivation of both legitimate trade and piracy remains the same—materialist greed—and the ambiguities with which Defoe confronts his readers emphasize the problematic relationship that England has with the piratical activity necessary for economic expansion.

As an outlaw, the pirate simultaneously functions as marginalized outcast and analogized representative of the commercial lifeblood of empire. In *Captain Singleton*, piracy serves as the naked representation of trade, a vision of economic imperialism in which the emperor has no clothes. The realities of scarcity that prompt the darker side of economic imperialism—thrift, slavery, murder, and mineral exploitation—clash with a vision of national identity that portrays the English as honest defenders of Protestantism and as shining examples of civility, diligence, and profit. Singleton paradoxically acts as both a subversive threat to these traditional characteristics of civility and diligence and as a foil to reveal piratical commerce as a normalizing, civilizing force. The realities of trade in *Captain Singleton* must be disguised, in this regard, because they threaten the complex vision of English national identity, even as they uphold it.

Rather than trying to reconcile this fundamental impasse, Defoe explores its origins by connecting conceptions of national identity and what he terms “infinite advantage.” “Infinite advantage” comes from his 17 July 1711 *Review of the State of the English Nation*, a periodical supporting the chartering of the South Seas Company. Defoe supports the company charter

² Hans Turley, *Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash: Piracy, Sexuality, and Masculine Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 117, 119.

on the grounds that trade in the South Seas “may be settled to infinite Advantage.”³ For my purposes, infinite advantage will refer to what Robert Markley calls “two related fictions,” that “capital itself is sufficient to generate wealth and the nature [capital] exploits is inexhaustible, its resources infinite.”⁴ Infinite advantage may appeal to an idea of national identity that asserts England’s primacy as a trading nation, allowing commerce “a vital role in the consolidation of national identity,” while also regarding commerce as “a vital form of material, cultural, and even spiritual exchange between nations.”⁵ Generally speaking, however, “exchange” is a loaded term, because the transmission of goods, culture, and spirituality is woefully one-sided in favour of the colonizing power, and the transmission thus acts as the locus of imperialist inequities, economic and otherwise. Modern-day scholars can recognize the underpinnings of “anti-conquest” in this conception of national identity. Coined by Mary Louise Pratt, the term “anti-conquest” explains the accompanying work of colonialism that exists outside its military arm, or the way Europeans “seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony.”⁶ The material, cultural, and spiritual exchanges that Aparna Dharwadker describes comprise anti-conquest, and who better to secure the illusion of British imperial innocence than a rogue pirate spurned by the state?

³ Defoe, *Review of the State of the English Nation*, ed. Arthur Wellesley Secord, 9 vols. (1704–13; New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 8:49, 200. References are to this edition.

⁴ Robert Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination, 1660–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 212. Markley analyzes at length the importance of the “infinite” in Defoe’s writings, showing that a concept of infinite advantage evinces a fantastical belief in an inexhaustible amount of trade wealth in the East Indies, the Americas, and elsewhere (224). Markley develops Glyndwr Williams’s argument that the South Seas served more as a site of these fantastic projections than as the point of any serious thrust of national policy. Williams points out that “the sporadic incursions of English adventurers into the South Seas between 1670 and 1750 were of negligible importance; but in terms of interest roused, speculation excited, and projects advanced, they form the essential preliminary to the upsurge of British activity in the Pacific in the late eighteenth century.” Williams, “The Inexhaustible Fountain of Gold: English Projects and Ventures in the South Seas, 1670–1750,” in *Perspectives of Empire: Essays Presented to Gerald S. Graham*, ed. John E. Flint and Glyndwr Williams (London: Pearson Education, 1973), 53.

⁵ Aparna Dharwadker, “Nation, Race, and the Ideology of Commerce in Defoe,” *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 39, no. 1 (1998): 63.

⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 7.

Situating piratical commerce within a discourse of anti-conquest enables Defoe to illustrate the rhetorical acrobatics necessary to make piratical commerce acceptable, or at least to dodge its outright condemnation, in polite society.

To bolster the anti-conquest discourse, the author yokes *Captain Singleton* to a patriotic tradition of scientific discovery by exploiting generic conventions of travel narratives, thereby conflating Singleton's identity as high-seas pirate with the patriotic privateer or buccaneer.⁷ An emphasis on the privateering tradition enables Defoe to perform some of the ideological equivocations that illustrate how predatory trade practices underwrite English commerce.⁸ *Captain Singleton* draws upon narratives written by William Dampier, Woodes Rogers, and A.O. Exquemelin, famous privateer/buccaneers and authors who propagated "the preferred literary genre" of anti-conquest.⁹ Dampier participated in the John Coxon and Bartholomew Sharpe expedition to sack Spanish Panama in 1680, and, although he turned back, he published in 1697 a narrative of his buccaneering adventures there and around the globe as *A New Voyage Round the World*. The publication probably saved him from execution because Dampier successfully claimed his journey was scientific in nature, rather than piratical. *New Voyage* offered "detailed meteorological, botanical and ethnographic accounts of hitherto unexplored parts of the Spanish American coast, and the most thorough English navigation of the Pacific to that date," and this text "[made] a claim that the value of scientific journalism [was] more important than the possibly criminal circumstances in which such data were collected."¹⁰ Moreover,

⁷ Srinivas Aravamudan notes that in addition to "the historian, trader, and missionary" who do the work of "anti-conquest," there also exists a scientific component. He points to "surveying topographies, collecting specimens, and observing customs" that "continues the conquest" long after an empire violently subdues an indigenous people. Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688–1804* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 73–74.

⁸ I do not intend to address the long and complicated relationship between privateering, commerce, and state economic interests (see Turley, chaps. 2 and 3), but I want to point out that many of the popular travel narratives of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were written by privateers and buccaneers who claimed (like William Dampier) that they were on missions of ethnographic discovery, rather than plundering.

⁹ Aravamudan, 73.

¹⁰ Anna Neill, *British Discovery Literature and the Rise of Global Commerce* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 41.

Dampier's manuscript was significantly amplified by the time it appeared in print, and "a huge amount of new material on natural history and geography" was added while accounts of violence were significantly downplayed or erased altogether.¹¹ Glyndwr Williams convincingly argues for the presence of ghostwriters whose "editorial help or intrusion" recast as scientific Dampier's "rather shadowy role on the voyages."¹² Such an occurrence suggests privateers and buccaneers could reintegrate themselves into polite society by providing useful intelligence or profits, and the English populace then seemed content to forget their past crimes.

In *Captain Singleton*, Defoe gladly conflates these high-minded motives with what they really were—thinly veiled forays into commercial reconnaissance. Singleton's march across Africa and his imaginative portrayal of the fauna and flora the crew find there reveals Defoe's fascination with the uncharted interior of the continent in what Peter Knox-Shaw refers to as "a feat of pre-covery."¹³ But the eastern side of the continent also intrigued Defoe. Singleton's march begins in present-day Mozambique, an area that Defoe had previously described in *A General History of Trade* as a site of European imaginative desire: "I doubt not but the *East* side of Africa, if the Turks were either curious in the search of Nature themselves, or would permit Collonies to be settled there of *European* Nations, that would be so curious, might be found Rich of many Productions, especially of Drugs, Gums, Minerals, Skins of Wild Beasts, &c. notwithstanding the Sandy Deserts; which would furnish Materials of Commerce, and make that part of the World more useful than it is yet to the rest."¹⁴ When at sea, Singleton and his crew hope to discover the fabled Northwest Passage, which Singleton describes as potentially "one of the most noble Discoveries that ever was made, or will again be made in the World, for the Good of Mankind in general" (203). On a previous voyage, Quaker William learns

¹¹ Philip Edwards, *The Story of the Voyage: Sea-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 20.

¹² Williams, *The Great South Sea: English Voyages and Encounters 1570–1750* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 113, 114.

¹³ Peter Knox-Shaw, "Defoe and the Politics of Representing the African Interior," *Modern Language Review* 96, no. 4 (2001): 938.

¹⁴ Daniel Defoe, *A General History of Trade* (London, 1713), 8. References are to this edition. Knox-Shaw notes that the first lateral exploration of Africa akin to Singleton's march did not occur until 1815 (937).

from an itinerant priest of a group of thirteen English sailors shipwrecked on the northern shores of Japan who claimed to have come from Greenland and the North Pole. The crew eagerly searches for the priest in order to learn the sailors' location. They want to rescue them, but the trail grows cold. Singleton's real concern, however, lies not with the sailors but with the lost opportunity of discovery. Defoe, of course, rarely separates "the Good of Mankind" from a chance to improve commerce. His *Atlas Maritimus and Commercialis* (1728) describes the situation directly: "It must be acknowledg'd, that could a Passage be found either of those ways, the Voyage would be much shorter both to *Japan* and *China*, as also to the *Moluccos* and any Parts of *India* beyond the Bay of *Bengal*."¹⁵ The "Good of Mankind" takes the imaginary form of a more efficient route for moving goods to the South Seas and East Indies. Defoe lays open the opportunistic "science" of anti-conquest as a rationalization for establishing new trade routes and trade networks, just as the buccaneer ethnographers like Dampier did.¹⁶ Admittedly, Singleton does not stand to gain wealth directly from discovering the Northwest Passage. But as the travel narratives Defoe modelled *Singleton* upon show, Captain Bob would stand to gain fame, prestige, and a pardon upon his return to England.

Singleton charting Africa and hoping to discover the Northwest Passage promotes the notion that scientific discovery can improve trade with great benefit to all people. Yet the novel's association with travel narratives and its pirate protagonist give scientific discovery the taint of self-interest, which suggests a continuum of piratical acts. Defoe realizes that, at one end, predatory commerce is demonized as self-interested and at the expense of the public good, but he also realizes that it maintains

¹⁵ Defoe, *Atlas Maritimus and Commercialis* (London, 1728), 279. References are to this edition. Defoe lumps together the Northeast Passage or Northern Sea Route (around northern Asia) with the fabled Northwest Passage. Each route would have cut significant time from voyages to the East Indies and South Sea, respectively.

¹⁶ Much like his reading of the South Seas, Williams points out that quests to discover the Northwest Passage were based on fantastic visions of wealth. James Knight's 1719 voyage carried a huge cargo of empty chests "to bring back gold." More "practical" speculators argued that British merchants could tap into the fabulous wealth of western North America, "where the maps still marked the imaginary countries of Cibola and Quivira." Williams, *Voyages of Delusion: The Quest for the Northwest Passage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 4, 49.

a nebulous position, in that it sometimes works to England's advantage. In these terms, the role that infinite advantage plays in defining England begins to appear more sinister, as is the case in *Captain Singleton* where visions of infinite advantage abut the brutal realities of Hobbesian scarcity. In the novel, property is consistently stolen and pirated; capital accumulation looks more like an exercise in who steals more effectively, rather than who establishes or invigorates trade networks. The ideology of infinite advantage seems constantly undermined, but paradoxically reinscribed, as it might be more aptly described as an ideology of the infinite exploitation of resources and people when necessary. Defoe foregrounds the material exchange between nations as a distinctly Hobbesian ethos of accumulation at any cost, much like Singleton's vacillation between pirate and legitimate trader to gain wealth. Timothy Blackburn points out that "Defoe had only to look to Hobbes ... to find the historical aptness of Singleton's piracy."¹⁷ Hobbes declares that "amongst men, till there were constituted great commonwealths, it was thought no dishonour to be a pirate, or a highway thief; but rather a lawful trade."¹⁸ Defoe exploits the paradoxical relationship between piracy and trade in order to rehearse the anxieties surrounding the ambiguous morality of economic imperialism. Singleton's trading (or pirating) missions overcome the anxieties of scarcity that seem ever-present in Africa and the South Seas, and Defoe thus leaves his readers with visions of commercial plenty, both in terms of resources and the natives' desire for "consumer goods," or the bits of glass and scrap metal that the pirates trade. Defoe appears to secure the moral innocence of unethical, if strictly legal, piratical trade by colouring it in terms of infinite advantage, thereby qualifying such a system as a surer and less morally problematic way of making money than illegal piracy. Of course, infinite advantage suggests that commerce is just piracy by another name, and Singleton appropriates this ideology to paper over fears of "a kind of state-sanctioned piracy" by stressing visions of commercial wealth that will overcome the realities of scarcity and render piratical commerce obsolete. In doing so, Defoe explores the ethical and discursive generation

¹⁷ Timothy Blackburn, "The Coherence of Defoe's *Captain Singleton*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1978): 129.

¹⁸ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Michael Oakeshott (1651; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 1, 10, 60-61; cited in Blackburn, 129.

of infinite exploitation as both a trade practice and as an imaginative projection onto the world of the conditions that would sustain an infinite trade.

Allegorical Pirates

Defoe connects predatory trade and piracy in their violation of polite business practices. Despite beginning as a mercantilist, Defoe later championed what twenty-first-century economists might call free trade, with the majority of his theories of polite commerce resting in the circulation of labour and goods. Maximillian E. Novak states that “Defoe believed that by passing through a multitude of hands, goods and money would enrich the nation.”¹⁹ In his *Atlas*, Defoe describes the nature of trade with the Americas as a “strange Circulation ... which begins and ends with *Great Britain*: so that here it may be truly said, the *French* proverb is made good, *That one Hand washes t’other Hand, and both Hands wash the Face*” (328). In the earlier *A General History of Trade*, Defoe describes free trade as divinely ordained: “The wise Disposer, has separated all those valuable things, by vast Oceans, unknown Gulphs, and almost impassable Seas, that he might joyn them all again, and make them common to one another, by the Industry of Men, and thereby propogate Navigation, Plantation, Correspondence, and Commerce to the Universal benefit of every part of the World” (25–26). Defoe promotes international trade because it supplies all parts of the world with wares, creates employment, motivates new discovery, and fosters diplomacy and cross-cultural exchange. Emphasizing mutually beneficial trade defies the classic Eurocentric mercantilist model that privileges protectionist trade policies, and recent scholarship by Andre Gunder Frank, Geoffrey Gunn, Frank Perlin, and Kenneth Pomeranz argues against the mercantilist model, showing that Europe was, until the mid-nineteenth century, in many ways economically and technologically inferior to Far East nations such as China and Japan.²⁰ Markley has extended these economic

¹⁹ Maximillian E. Novak, *Economics and the Fictions of Daniel Defoe* (New York: Russel and Russel, 1962), 29. An example of Defoe’s early mercantilist leanings was his protectionist stance regarding the importation of French brandy (24).

²⁰ Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Geoffrey C. Gunn, *First Globalization: The Eurasian Exchange, 1500–1800* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield,

arguments to the literature of the time, where he elucidates Defoe's anxiety regarding England's inability to wedge itself into profitable trading networks in Spanish America and the East Indies.²¹ Part of Defoe's "fantasy of commercial prosperity" relies upon unfettered and uninterrupted access to markets that leads to a free circulation of trade.

The vision of a "universally beneficial" trade, Defoe laments, often falls victim to an inordinate desire for wealth, which in turn leads to the interruption of trade. Greed disrupts an ideological notion of commercial prosperity. Defoe addresses this anxiety when he blurs the line between piracy and legal commerce in his 18 October 1707 issue of *Review*. His harsh criticism of piratical commerce anticipates his own paeans to the salving effects of infinite advantage, particularly when he exposes the realities of legal trade: "It would make a sad Chasm on the Exchange of London, if all the Pyrates should be taken away from the Merchants there, whether we be understood to speak of your Litteral or Allegorical Pyrates; whether I should mean the Clandestine Trade Pyrates, who pyrate upon fair trade at home; the Custom-stealing Pyrates, who pyrate upon the Government; the Owling Pyrates, who rob the Manufactures; the privateering Pyrates, who rob by Law" (*Review*, 4:425–26). The equation of literal and allegorical marauders suggests that piratical principles operate at the core of English commerce rather than on the fringes, and the almost inevitable slippage of infinite advantage into infinite exploitation reinforces the connection between literal and allegorical pirates. Novak more generally ascribes to Defoe's work an underlying economic morality: "not that crime does not pay, but merely that business pays better" and that "there is nothing more moral" in the actions of the allegorical pirates than the literal ones.²² Singleton engages in relatively few

2003); Frank Perlin, *"The Invisible City": Monetary, Administrative and Popular Infrastructures in Asia and Europe, 1500–1900* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993); and Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

²¹ Markley argues that "the confrontation of English writers with China and Japan became a catalyst for their recognition that the discourse of European empire was an ideological construct—part self-conscious propaganda, part wish fulfillment, and part ecometric extrapolation to sustain fantasies of commercial prosperity, if not imperial conquest" (9).

²² Novak, *Economics*, 108.

legally defined acts of piracy, although his ambiguous trading missions are often morally tainted. When acts of piracy do occur, Quaker William often rationalizes why these acts are morally acceptable, as he does when he and Singleton embark on their “trading voyage.” Erin Mackie points out that the eighteenth century saw a proliferation of pirate stories and literature, and she argues that yoking piracy and legitimate trade, as Defoe does in *Captain Singleton*, “seems largely linked to the ways these [texts] are used discursively to rationalize and mobilize economic imperialism” and “equivocate piratical accumulation.”²³ By eliding the distinctions between acts central to English commerce and piracy, Defoe places strictly legal trade on an uncertain continuum with piracy. And in revealing the central economic institutions of London as akin to piracy, Defoe can deploy the ideology of infinite advantage under the guise of fair trade, even as he castigates its hypocrisy.

What connects both the literal and allegorical pirates is not a proto-capitalistic sense of profit or accumulation, but materialist greed. Although merchants are emerging capitalists in the sense that they invest and reinvest their money, often in long-term ventures such as overseas trading voyages, pirates’ behaviour is antithetical to capitalist principles. What money pirates have they immediately spend on drinking, gambling, and whoring, as Singleton does when he first returns to England from Africa. Singleton earlier states, “I had no Notion of a great deal of Money, or what to do with my self, or what to do with it if I had it. I thought I had enough already, and all the Thoughts I had about disposing of it, if I came to *Europe*, was only how to spend it as fast as I could, buy me some Clothes, and go to Sea again to be a Drudge for more” (132). Novak argues that *Captain Singleton* preaches the moral dictate of being moderate with one’s money, or discontinuing business after “attain[ing] sufficient wealth.”²⁴ He goes on to argue that the immoral alternative to Singleton is presented in Defoe’s Colonel Jack, who “follows the road of economic individualism, destroying the established ‘Circulation of Trade’ to benefit himself at the expense of the public good.”²⁵

²³ Erin Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: The Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 126.

²⁴ Novak, *Economics*, 121.

²⁵ Novak, *Economics*, 126.

Defoe's 19 July 1709 *Review* states, "When every Branch of a Nation have their proper Work, they help, assist and rejoice in one another; and this Variety is what I have so often call'd the Circulation of Trade—But when you clash in your Labour, and fall into one anothers Business, you grow Thieves and Pirates in Trade, you prey upon one another, and joy in crushing your general Interest" (6:184). "Legitimate," predatory trade like that practised by Singleton is charged with masquerading as a higher order activity of national and self-improvement, when it in fact grossly breaches trade etiquette by placing self-enrichment above the public good.

Roughly the first half of *Captain Singleton* comprises the "African" section of the novel, which begins by describing the first years of Bob Singleton's life. Defoe quickly moves his protagonist from infancy to a seventeen-year-old scoundrel, marooned on Madagascar with twenty-three other crew members for their part in an attempted mutiny. These men eventually build crude boats that are seaworthy enough to carry them to mainland Africa, where the sailors resolve to set out across the continent on foot in hopes of finding a merchant vessel on the western coast that might take them back to Europe. The crew's adventures take them deep into the African interior where they discover, among other things, vast fields of gold and boneyards full of ivory. With the descriptions of such riches, Defoe rehearses his emphasis on infinite advantage that later culminates in *New Voyage Round the World* (1725). In *Captain Singleton's* Africa, Defoe deploys a vision of infinite advantage as commercial plenty, and the pirate gang exemplifies the civilizing effects of trade, as well as the exploitative practices undergirding it.

As Singleton and his company first embark on their African journey, he describes the land they encounter as "the most desolate, desert, and unhospitable Country in the world, even Greenland and Nova Zembia it self not excepted, with this Difference only, that even the worst Part of it we found inhabited, tho' taking the Nature and Quality of some of the Inhabitants, it might have been much better to us if there had been none" (47). Such passages tap into deep-seated anxieties that coloured views of Sub-Saharan Africa as a fallen, corrupt place, a picture of human savagery and the hostility of nature itself. Knox-Shaw points out the tendency in the eighteenth century to represent Africa as the stereotypical "heart of darkness," noting the "common practice

... to fashion an African soul, metonymically, out of jungle."²⁶ This trope carries through to Conrad and even to later writers, and other scholars have noted the similarities between *Captain Singleton* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.²⁷ John Richetti reads such passages as strategically placed "to provoke cunning and caution, to give us the pleasure of seeing Bob especially master complications of a staggering sort."²⁸ The desolation described and the scorn shown towards the native inhabitants establish a framework within the novel that illuminates the intricacies of trade as a civilizing force, at least from Defoe's point of view.

Defoe plays up the conventional view of Africa only to deconstruct it, emphasizing the civilizing potential of trade and the untapped wealth of the African continent. His *Essay upon the Trade to Africa* (1711) details the savagery of that place, but the threats to trade tend to come from European trading rivals rather than the natives. He fumes over these European threats and "the Necessity of Possessing the Coast of Africa, by Forts and Castles, and the Settlement of Factories, for the Management and Security of the Trade."²⁹ These fortifications perhaps protect trade from native incursions, but more importantly from "the Depredations of Interlopers and Separate Traders," Europeans and other English merchants who violate the Royal African Company monopoly in the region (*Essay*, 9). *Captain Singleton* confirms this suspicion of Europeans, because many of the hero's encounters with the natives focus on the Africans' primitivism, not their hostility. On the mainland, the first group of natives he encounters "stood wondering and staring at us, as if we had been Monsters" (46). When Singleton's gang teaches the basics of trade to the tribe, they warm to the crew, and even display an understanding of the ad hoc sign language that the pirates use to communicate.³⁰ The desolation the narrator describes gives way

²⁶ Knox-Shaw, 946.

²⁷ See Pat Rogers, "Speaking within Compass: The Ground Covered in Two Works by Defoe," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 15, no. 2 (1982): 103–13; and Michael Seidel, "Defoe in Conrad's Africa," *Conradiana* 17, no. 2 (1985): 145–46.

²⁸ John Richetti, *Defoe's Narratives: Situations and Structures* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 85.

²⁹ Defoe, *Essay upon the Trade to Africa* (London, 1711), 9. References are to this edition.

³⁰ Real attempts to use sign language with indigenous populations often failed, as Williams recounts: upon landing on Elizabeth Island (within the Strait of Magellan), Captain John Narborough "engaged in an amicable but

to an appreciation of the agricultural abundance of the land. In return for provisions, the captain gives the Africans junk. Gold and silver are of little or no value to the natives, but, Singleton says, "our Cutler went to Work, and as he had saved some Iron out of the Wreck of the Ship, he made an Abundance of Toys, Birds, Dogs, Pins, Hooks, and Rings ... [and] they brought us all Sorts of Provisions they had, such as Goats, Hogs, and Cows, and we got Victuals enough" (47). Encounter after encounter produces similar exchanges. Singleton trades more trinkets for provisions: "our artificer shewed [one "very frank, civil, and friendly" tribe] some of his Trinkets that he had made ... They had so much Judgment as to chuse that of Silver before the Iron, but when we shewed them some Gold, we found they did not value it so much as either of the other" (107). Trade, or at least a primitive understanding of exchange values, requires a series of complex efforts to assign and negotiate value across cultural divides.

Understanding trade value and a desire for consumer goods supports Defoe's insistence that trade equals civility, a view to which Dharwadker adheres when equating the construction of national identity with material, cultural, and spiritual exchange. Defoe's portrayal of trade value and its cogent application to formations of national identity also signal Great Britain's transition towards the ethos of a "polite and commercial people."³¹ Singleton and his crew take advantage of the one-sided exchange offered by the "uncivilized" tribes, but even the act of trading assigns the potential to be civilized and, more importantly, "civility" dictates that one drives a hard bargain. Roxann Wheeler maintains that "civility is determined through willing interaction and trade with Europeans, yet civility also connotes shrewd trading, even boldness in a colonial context."³² In a later

ultimately futile dumb show" in an attempt to discover if the natives had any gold or copper (*The Great South Sea*, 78). Markley connects an understanding of the dumb show to an understanding of mineral exploitation and trade: "Narborough's dumb show could work only if the values and assumptions of mercantile self-interest *already* had been interiorized by the natives of Patagonia" (*Far East*, 215). By this logic, the natives that Singleton meets have internalized this discourse, revealing their potential for exploitation at the hands of Singleton.

³¹ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727–1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

³² Roxann Wheeler, "Limited Visions of Africa: Geographies of Savagery and Civility in Early Eighteenth-Century Narratives," in *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*, ed. James Duncan and Derek Gregory (London: Routledge, 1999), 29.

encounter with “a more fierce and politick People ... not so easily terrified with our Arms as those, and not so ignorant, as to give their Provisions and Corn for our little Toys” (122), Singleton and his men treat the tribe members with great respect because they are too experienced to accept trinkets in exchange for provisions. Not surprisingly, the tribe has had previous trade encounters with Europeans. Furthermore, rather than supplying an abundance of goats, pumpkins, and beef, the tribe lays claim to an immense treasure of ivory that “they took and carried about sixty or seventy Miles South, where other trading Negroes usually met them, and gave them Beads, Glass, Shells, and Cowries, for them, such as the English and Dutch and other Traders, furnish them with from Europe” (123). Although the tribe and Singleton’s crew have different ideas of exchange value, the tribe displays a pragmatic understanding of trade, albeit a Eurocentric one linked to their willingness to exchange ivory for beads.

Of course, Defoe champions wealth in the form of gold and ivory over agricultural goods. The ideology of infinite advantage privileges trade goods over the more mercantilist establishment of plantation colonies. In his *Essay upon the Trade to Africa*, Defoe evaluates African wealth as “how many Negroes, they sent to the English colonies in the West Indies; and how many Thousand Ounces of Gold they brought into England, beside the Export of Foreign Goods by Debentures, and the Import of many Thousand Pounds Sterl. in Wax, Elephants Teeth, Drugs, and valuable Commodities,” which Defoe stresses as essential to “the Growth of the Country there, and necessary to ours here” (9). Essentially, *Captain Singleton* functions as a fictionalized, visionary account of great wealth. The fabulous influx of commodities necessitates a connection between infinite advantage and the slave trade. An ideology of infinite advantage cannot exist in Africa or elsewhere without an infinite source of labour power to mine, gather, and help transport these raw materials. Defoe views slave labour with an instrumentalist rationality or what Virgil Nemoianu calls Singleton’s “innocent inhuman practicality.”³³ The crew realizes that they will never survive the trek across the continent if they have to carry all of

³³ Virgil Nemoianu, “Picaresque Retreat: From Xenophon’s *Anabasis* to Defoe’s *Singleton*,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 23, no. 2 (1986): 95.

their gear themselves, hence the need for slaves. The mutineers display some moral qualms about slavery, but Singleton solves the problem: "At last I proposed a Method for them, which, after some Consideration, they found very convenient; and this was to quarrel with some of the Negro Natives, take ten or twelve of them Prisoners, and binding them as Slaves cause them to travel with us" (51). The plan, while duplicitous, absolves the Europeans of guilt, for Singleton says that "*by the law of arms* ... we secured about sixty lusty young fellows" (54; emphasis added). Paula Backscheider describes Singleton's actions as the "neutral choices" of a man "intent on telling his story without excuse or self-justification," which for the most part rings true.³⁴ Singleton does not try to hide the fact that he takes slaves, but he equivocates, echoing John Locke's contention in his *Second Treatise* (1690) that slavery is "nothing else but the state of war continued, between a lawful conqueror and a captive."³⁵ Captain Bob sees men as beasts of burden necessary for survival and lawfully obtained, much the same way Defoe views slaves as necessary for England's economic survival in his *Essay*.

Once the slaves have been taken, Singleton reinforces the subjugation by introducing them to European technology. Early in the march, Singleton's slaves marvel at the use of gunpowder. Rather than explaining the science of the firearms, Singleton and his gunner perpetuate the mystery by telling the leader of the slaves, a prince, that guns speak their own language. The gunner says to Singleton, "Tell them they shall see that [gun] in his Hand speak in Fire to one of those Beasts, and make it kill itself" (65). Ascribing linguistic agency to the rifle is odd enough, but Singleton extends this agency in even more sinister terms. Suspecting that his slaves have slaughtered a village of women and children on the journey, Singleton recounts how he threatened that "if [the slaves] had kill'd any Body, we would make them kill themselves, too" (69). Singleton, in reality, is describing how he would execute the slaves with firearms, but the way he words the threatened punishment warns that the natives would be forced to commit suicide. Although his explanation of gunpowder technology mockingly grants the slaves the power to kill themselves, the rifle strips the slaves of agency and

³⁴ Paula R. Backscheider, *Daniel Defoe: His Life* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 441.

³⁵ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980), 17.

free will, ultimately reducing them to the level of the beasts they have just witnessed being shot.

The ominous narrative points to the Africans' internalization of a European-style command and control structure, as the pirates begin indoctrinating the indigenous populations with discipline as well as trade practices. In this particular scenario, the natives are unknowingly stripped of agency even as they appear to be granted it. By ascribing punishment to the natives themselves, Singleton attempts to absolve himself and his crew of guilt. Just as Singleton justifies taking slaves via the law of arms, the threatened murder is mediated, distancing the executioner from his act. The executioner merely holds a gun which commands death, but not even the gun is truly responsible because the slaves murder themselves. The embodiment of the discourse—the slave is literally and metaphorically responsible for his own execution—exemplifies the ideology of anti-conquest, as the Europeans secure their innocence even as they consolidate their hegemony.

As if the bizarre scenario of internalized European discipline were not enough, Defoe explicitly links the technology/discipline dyad to trade. Although many of the tribal peoples that Singleton and his men encounter prove docile, some are not. Encountering one tribe of “fierce, barbarous, treacherous People,” Singleton boastingly asks the slaves if his gun “could not make a Thousand of those naked Creatures die at one blow?” (73). He orders his men to load the muskets with “small shot” in addition to the regular charges. The improvised grapeshot proves sufficiently lethal to drive off the offending tribesmen, but more interesting is the construction of the small shot, which echoes almost exactly the cutler's earlier fabrication of money or tokens of exchange: “Our small Shot was made of Bits of Lead and Bits of Iron, Heads of Nails, and such things as our diligent Artificer the Cutler help'd us to” (76). The similarity of the composition between ammunition and the “money” that the Africans prefer suggests links among technology, trade, and discipline. Just as the natives must internalize an idea of discipline wherein punishment is ultimately deserved and self-inflicted, so too must they internalize the capitalistic discourse of trade. In this scenario, currency becomes the literal means of discipline, in that the bits of iron used to make the money-like ornaments are fashioned

into bullets and used against the indigenous populations. And, in this case, a refusal to trade results in the literal internalization and embodiment of European discipline and mercantilist discourse. Put simply, the natives are shot full of money. Aside from the physical threat, the natives are left in a precarious Catch-22. The message that Singleton and his crew present is clear: "Trade with us, or be shot and killed with the money you would have received." Of course, from the slaves' points of view, the dilemma reads as follows: "We must trade with the Europeans, or we will be commanded to kill ourselves by their guns, and promptly comply." Defoe connects the refusal of trade with the uncivilized African body, and the refusal of trade is coded as both economic and bodily suicide.

Singleton's taking of slaves comprises the novel's most obvious example of what Laura Brown calls the "necessary violence of imperialist ideology,"³⁶ and by using the piratical figures to represent "necessary violence," Defoe suggests that even labour shortages can be overcome through a principle of infinite exploitation. Just as the land gives up fabulous amounts of gold, the continent also supplies a seemingly endless supply of labour power in the form of slaves. The slaves in *Captain Singleton* prove one of those troubling moments where Defoe confronts the reader with clashing ideologies. Defoe seems content to let the atrocity occur, folding the actions of slavery into a narrative of infinite advantage while simultaneously revealing the brutal discipline and control that lies at the heart of such an atrocity. In a move typical of Pratt's definition of "anti-conquest," Defoe uses his character Colonel Jack to claim that harsh treatment of slaves "was not owing to the Tyranny, and Passion, and Cruelty of the *English*, as had been reported [but] ... to the Brutality, and obstinate Temper of the *Negroes*, who cannot be manag'd by Kindness, and Courtesy; but must be rul'd with a Rod of Iron."³⁷ More to the point, Defoe justifies slavery from a purely economic standpoint: "No Negroes; no Sugars, Gingers, Indicos, &c" (*Review*, 9:89). Using the pirate to illuminate the necessary violence that accompanies even visions of commercial wealth, Defoe can maintain an ironic distance from the inherent evils

³⁶ Laura Brown, *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 165.

³⁷ Defoe, *Colonel Jack*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1927), 1:154.

of the trade projects that he endorses. The slaving episode also proves significant because it undergirds an ideology of infinite advantage through the potential market value of slave labour.³⁸ Cows, goats, and pumpkins—agricultural wealth—are not the type of trade goods that Defoe envisions when thinking of inexhaustible wealth; real value lies in the gold, ivory, and slaves captured along the coastal areas. The journey across the interior recuperates the fallen vision of Africa as a lawless wasteland not through a vision of colonial, plantation-style agriculture, but through a vision of trade.

Ultimately, the novel suggests that exploitation proves necessary for survival. As a character, Singleton functions as an image of survival. Scholars such as Backscheider, Novak, Richetti, and Anna Neill have all pointed to the rootless nature of Singleton and how his itinerant childhood and distance from England make him the ideal candidate to turn pirate. His cunning and theft allow him to survive those childhood years, and enslaving Africans allows Singleton to survive the trek across the continent. When his title character meets a mysterious white factor deep in the jungle, stark naked but wondrously civil, Defoe again reveals how survival depends upon economic exploitation: Singleton says, “We found his Behavior the most courteous and endearing I ever saw in any Man whatever” (121–22). The white factor speaks eloquently to Singleton, but the pirate captain remains most impressed by his understanding of the realities of trade. Stationed by the English Guinea Company at Sierra Leone, or “some other of their Settlements which had been taken by the French,” the white factor “had been plundered of all his own Effects, as well as of what was intrusted to him by the Company” (123). Abandoned by the company, the white factor decided to join with those very men who robbed him, who called themselves “separate traders.” Soon finding himself out of their favour, he “traded on his own Account” (124), echoing a phrase often used by sailors who had turned pirate. Although perhaps not pirates by legal definition, these “separate traders” are the interlopers whom Defoe describes

³⁸ One of the few concessions the South Seas Company received from the Spanish after the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) was exclusive rights to the *asiento*, or the right to supply the Americas with African slaves. Marcus Rediker notes that the slave trade proved a viable alternative to privateering, because its monies “proved a more dependable way to exploit Spanish wealth.” Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 24.

in his *Essay* as those who prey upon the monopoly of the Royal African Company.

In effect, the Hobbesian realities of legitimate trade have reduced the white factor to his state of abjection. His actions and what he endures illustrate the fundamental, Hobbesian nature of predatory capitalism. The breakdown of the rule of law allows others to plunder him, but lawlessness becomes business as usual on the African continent. Having twice been robbed of all he owned, the white factor is forced to "several times chang[e] his Landlords." Singleton describes his wanderings as "sometimes ... carry'd by Force, sometimes hurried by Fear, as Circumstances altered with him ... till at last he had wandred beyond all Possibility of Return, and had taken up his Abode where we found him" (124). Living in a Hobbesian state of nature where his property is constantly under threat, the white factor has little sense of security, yet he is not lost geographically: "He perfectly informed us where we were, and which was the properest Course for us to steer" to the west coast of the continent (122). The certainty of geographic location then suggests that the white factor is "beyond all possibility of return" culturally. He knows the way to the coast where he could secure passage aboard an English ship, but he simply chooses to remain in Africa. Defoe depicts the white factor's victimization at the hands of dishonest traders as an impetus for his move beyond the reaches of civilization. Having lived so long in his Hobbesian state, the white factor survives only by alternately receiving the benevolence of others and by pirating property.

The white factor, however, has not completely reverted to a native lifestyle, because he still possesses one quintessential European quality, the desire to accumulate capital. When first encountering the Europeans, he immediately converses in terms of infinite advantage, informing Singleton and his men of vast fields of gold nearby. Examining just a single clod of earth, Singleton says, "I believe there was between two and three Pound Weight of Gold Dust" (127). This country of ivory and gold enables Singleton and his crew to return to Europe as extravagantly wealthy men, but only through an exploitation of slave labour. Rather than simply letting the crew gather up gold themselves, Singleton masterminds "set[ting] our Negroes all to Work for us, [to] receive equally the Fruit of their Labour" (95). As the

crew and their slaves gather up the gold, the white factor blithely remarks, “If we stayed but one Month, we should see Thousands of Savages spread themselves over the whole Country, to wash the Gold out of the Sand, for the European Ships which would come on the Coast” (135). The crew need not use their slaves, because “thousands” of Africans are willing participants in the international trade network. The white factor stokes a vision of infinite advantage, and Singleton declares “the evident Prospect of so much Advantage, could not well be resisted” (135). Gold and the means of amassing it literally become part of the landscape.

Such a prospect of advantage is confirmed when no other Europeans come foraging for gold, letting the natives gather and transport it to the coast where they then trade it for junk. Defoe judges wealth not only by the gold on the ground, but also by the ostensible efficacy of civilizing the natives to trade for it, which really means teaching them to exchange it for shells, beads, and glass. *Captain Singleton* supplies a vision of plenty that cuts across both national and class boundaries—enough gold for England, Holland, Spain, and France, and enough gold for both pirates and gentlemen. The fields of gold energize an English understanding of Africa—and by extension the Americas—as continents that hold inexhaustible supplies of wealth if the English would only commit to establishing trade networks there. In this sense, Defoe supplies his readers with a normative reading of the purposes of investment in joint-stock ventures such as the Royal African Company and the South Seas Company: “one should not have to work to make money.”³⁹ Defoe’s description of African wealth, however, and its method of procurement, do little to distance his ideology of a “polite” version of infinite advantage from the practices of the allegorical pirates on the Exchange in London, more so because of Defoe’s ambivalent portrayal of anti-conquest. Singleton’s walk across Africa is more an act of commercial reconnaissance than a nature hike. In Africa, Defoe implicitly suggests, infinite exploitation is the key to the accumulation of wealth.

Litteral Pyrates

Singleton opens the second part of the novel by describing how he returned to England, only to lose all of the money he made on

³⁹ Markley, 221.

his fantastical trek through the African interior on “all Kinds of Folly and Wickedness” (138). Taking to the seas out of necessity, he once again finds himself conspiring to mutiny, except this time he and his comrades succeed and turn to literal piracy. The visions of commercial wealth contained in the African section of the novel give way to more realistic portrayals of scarcity in the novel’s “Cruising” section. Defoe maintains his focus on materialist greed, but capital accumulation takes place primarily through actual piracy. The distinction between allegorical and literal pirates also becomes more blurred as we finally meet William, the Quaker-turned-pirate who joins Singleton and the crew, and, through his shrewd trading practices, quickly rises to Singleton’s first mate. William walks the fine line between piracy and legitimate trade, acting as a front for the pirates, selling or fencing many of their stolen goods as an honest merchant. Displaying the same sort of instrumentalist reason that drives Singleton to the “necessary violence” of slavery, William and the pirates discover a ship of mutinous slaves. The crew proposes killing them outright, but William rightfully declares that “the Negroes had really the highest Injustice done them, to be sold for Slaves without their Consent” (157). Yet he then oversees their illegal sale, which results in Singleton’s encomium that he is “a very honest Fellow” (165). The Hobbesian element remains embedded within the character and values of even a pacifist Quaker. William’s black market sale of the slaves makes a large sum of money for the pirates, but also underscores the point that the slave trade, while a piratical sort of business, is necessary to imperialism and capital accumulation, as Novak succinctly points out: “while pirates could not claim to be engaged in legally sanctioned commerce, they were still trading in commodities.”⁴⁰ Defoe then, via the quasi-merchant William, rather than through the piratical, economic libertine Singleton, tacitly endorses the cynical rescue of the slaves for their resale value. More generally, “honest” William serves as a means to rationalize all sorts of dubious activities.

As Singleton and William’s cruise extends further into the Indian Ocean and the East Indies, their aims continue to reflect an instrumentalist rationality. Singleton explicitly states, “My long-projected design now lay open to me, which was to fall

⁴⁰ Novak, *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions, His Life and Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 588.

in amongst the Dutch Spice Islands, and see what mischief I could do there" (190). Although such a plan in some ways re-enacts the actions of privateers of the previous century, the goal of "mischief" functions more as a kind of English revenge fantasy for the humiliations of Amboyna, where twelve English merchants were massacred by the Dutch East India Company in 1623. A nationalist reading in this vein, however, proves a red herring. In the Far East, no European nation maintained a hegemonic trade presence before the mid-nineteenth century, but without question the Dutch maintained the strongest.⁴¹ Singleton's decision to prey on Dutch shipping acts more as an avatar of British expansionism in the trading arena than it does any sort of bloodlust. Even when the crew meets a Dutch junk bound for Amboyna, the reminder of national humiliation hardly rattles the unflappable Singleton, though he avers, "I had much ado to prevent our Men murdering all the Men, as soon as they heard them say they belonged to Amboyna, the Reason I suppose any one will guess" (191). While the crew clearly feels an especial hatred for these Dutch because of the Amboyna massacre, Singleton himself remains motivated solely by money, not revenge. The goal at hand remains capital accumulation by any means necessary.

Amid these examples of the cool rationalism of trade and accumulation, Defoe does insert one episode that recalls the "civilizing" force propagated by trade in the African section of the novel. Quaker William and the pirates once again display the beneficial effects of trade when they rehabilitate a Dutchman

⁴¹ Holden Furber compares the vast resources of the Dutch East India Company to the relatively meager holdings of the British East India Company in terms of capital and ships, and concludes that, in the Spice Islands, "the Dutch East India Company was most successful in maintaining its monopoly." Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600–1800* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 38–39, 79. Niels Steensgaard supplies invaluable information outlining the overwhelming discrepancy between the Dutch and British in outward-bound ships, tonnage, and invoice values from the Spice Islands during this period. Steensgaard, "The Growth and Composition of the Long-Distance Trade of England and the Dutch Republic before 1750," in *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350–1750*, ed. James D. Tracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 109–12. Jonathan Israel succinctly outlines Dutch military force in the region, noting that the Dutch monopoly was held with "around twenty well-garrisoned fortresses strung out from Pulicat to the Moluccas and around forty fighting ships." Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1585–1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 103.

who has “gone native” on the island of Ceylon. Through a dialogue coded in terms of trade and national identity, the pirates represent Defoe’s vision of an English identity based on trade, even if Hobbesian. With their ship beached on Ceylon, the crew sends William to parley with the particularly aggressive group of natives. He negotiates with “an old Dutchman, who had been their Prisoner many Years” (225), but the discussion becomes a struggle for the Dutchman’s very soul. William engages the unnamed Dutchman in an intense debate about whether or not Singleton and the crew will be treated harshly, about which the prisoner repeatedly equivocates. He cannot give William a clear response guaranteeing their safety, to the point that even William says, “thou art but a double-tongu’d Christian” (227). Having lived so long among the natives, the lone Dutchman has begun to internalize their idea of culture—one based on deceit and barbarity rather than on trade—just as the white factor did before meeting Captain Bob. Furthermore, the Ceylonese king and his envoys closely resemble the court of an absolutist monarch, a clear reference to the absolutist courts of Roman Catholic countries such as France, Portugal, and Spain. Ceylon is coded as militant, religiously intolerant, superstitious, and hostile to trade, “being inhabited for the greatest Part by Barbarians, which will not allow any Trade or Commerce with any European nation, and inaccessible by any Travellers” (238). The Ceylonese king and by extension these courts must be rejuvenated and reclaimed through the civilizing power of commerce. Such connections imply that the Dutchman has forgotten his role as a citizen of a Protestant trading power and also requires reformation.

More importantly, this episode exemplifies the imperialist practice of “making” Englishmen, as Crusoe did with Friday. The Dutchman has gone native in a world lacking trade and capitalist accumulation, and, as a result, Defoe codes him as corrupted and absolutist. William, after much convincing, persuades the Dutchman to leave the Ceylonese. To rejoin commercial, civilized society, the Dutchman asks, “What would you have me do?” William’s response is telling: “Not act like a Traytor, but like one that was once a Christian, and would have been so still, if you had not been a Dutchman” (233). The charge is backhanded, for, William suggests, only a Dutchman would have let himself turn native. Here, Defoe recasts the historically true story of Robert Knox, a prisoner of the Ceylonese for twenty years who eventually

managed to escape. Rather than bowing to their customs, Knox maintained his English, Protestant identity and published the account of his captivity in 1681.⁴² Defoe seems particularly interested in Knox's reading material. According to Defoe, Knox's only "comfort" was reading Charles Bayly's *The Practice of Pietie, Directing a Christian How to Walke that He May Please God* (1620) and Richard Rogers's *Seven Treatises Leading and Guiding to True Happiness* (1603) (242). At one point, Knox obtained a Bible from a young boy by trading a knit cap for it. Although Knox's connection to Defoe's conception of civilization remains these religious texts, the equation of the Bible with knowledge of trade customs suggests that a good Christian also knows how to be a savvy trader: Knox obtains the Bible for a price far below its actual value. He literally bargains his way into maintaining his hope, faith, and English identity.

When the Dutchman asks what Singleton and the crew plan to do with him, William responds, "We would make a Man and a Christian of thee again" (229). Defoe treats the Dutchman's rejection of a trade society as a betrayal not only of the Protestant faith, but also of civilization itself. The re-conversion narrative again points to the larger transition Defoe signals towards a "polite" society, where the discursive practices of imperialism remain intertwined with a normative theory of trade that must once again be taught to the Dutchman. Rightfully so, the Dutchman is apprehensive about how a crew of English pirates will treat him, until William tells him, "I will be thy Surety Body for Body, that thou shalt be a Freeman, and go whither thou wilt, tho' I own to thee thou dost not deserve it" (234). The legal and economic language of "surety" illustrates how William literally embodies the civilizing trade ethos, even to the point that he gracefully bestows mercy on the undeserved. As surety, William risks his own safety, but considering how far the Dutchman has fallen, or how native he has gone, William also risks his manhood and soul; if the Dutchman fails to reform, William's reputation as a civilized man and a Christian are also at stake.

William's legal guarantee of the prisoner ostensibly illuminates the way a trade society operates by laws. But the sudden turn to legal language out of the mouths of pirates depends upon the

⁴² Robert Knox, *An Historical Relation of the Island of Ceylon in the East-Indies: Together with an Account of the Detaining in Captivity the Author and Divers Other Englishmen Now Living There, and of the Author's Miraculous Escape* (London: Richard Chiswell, 1681).

reform of Singleton himself, and the ways in which his actions analogize trade and its role in an English national identity. William, in this respect, acts as the guarantor of the Dutchman and of Singleton. When Singleton finally reforms, it is only because of William, and he can only do so with William by his side. The last trading adventure for Singleton and William is quasi-legitimate. They resolve to sell off their cargo, but do so by costuming themselves as Quakers, to great success. Singleton refers to it as “the only trading Voyage we had made” (255). This trading voyage, however, reveals one of the necessities of trade that Defoe continually stresses: disguise. As a nationalist project, the realities of predatory trade must be disguised, or they threaten the virtuous vision of English national identity. Infinite exploitation has to be represented as infinite advantage, and this trading voyage accomplishes the representation via the literal and metaphorical conflation of trade and piracy. The “trading voyage” still involves stolen goods, and the pirates themselves must pretend to be traders.

William conveniently rationalizes the final voyage. When Singleton questions him about how they can expect to atone for years of thievery when they have not made remuneration for all their stolen goods, William points out that “we can never come to the Knowledge of the Owners” to return it all, and suggests instead that they “do what Right with it we are able” (266–67). The Quaker turns the exploitations of piracy into the stuff of Robin Hood legend, a rationalization that stretches far back into England’s conflicted history with privateering. By connecting William’s dubious rationalization to the accumulation of wealth, Defoe implicitly connects the successful privateering missions of Francis Drake and Thomas Cavendish and the wild profits accrued by Singleton and his crew.⁴³ Mackie, Hans Turley, and Srinivas Aravamudan all point out that Defoe, at times, equates piracy with legal trade, but Mackie goes further, arguing that “piracy is disavowed by legitimate power only at the risk of a hypocrisy that denies the power’s indebtedness to it.”⁴⁴ As far back as the 1570s, when Drake plagued Spanish shipping in *The Golden Hind*, privateers maintained a shaky legal status because

⁴³ For more on the exploits of privateers such as Drake, Cavendish, and others, see Williams, *The Great South Sea*, 13–48.

⁴⁴ Mackie, 131.

secret “letters of marque” from the crown licensed their high-seas robbery. Only this shadowy document, one that often arbitrarily was extended or revoked by the crown, differentiated privateers and pirates, and many sailors extended their raiding cruises long after their letters of authorization had expired.⁴⁵ England was willing to overlook the shared goals of privateers and pirates because these sailors played a crucial role in England’s ascendancy as a maritime state, underwriting economic and imperial aspirations with profitable spoils and contributing to English sea-craft with navigational maps and charts from cruises and circumnavigations of the globe.

While Defoe portrays discourses of anti-conquest as window-dressing for commercial reconnaissance, he also lambasts the hypocrisy of celebrating predatory trade practices (like those rationalized by William) that greater public then forgives. Defoe’s *Review* points out the English tendency towards selective memory: “When [pirates] get Estates in Jamaica or Barbadoes, or any of our Colonies or Factories abroad, when they have got Estates, they seek to come home and spend them; in order to do this, they soon lay off the Out side, adjourn the Thief, and putting the Badge of Gravity on, they come home for great Merchants, and live unquestion’d” (4:426). Aside from the notoriety Drake and Dampier garnered, the famous buccaneer Henry Morgan was even made lieutenant-governor of Jamaica. Singleton fits the mold, for he, too, performs scientific research (even if only the fictional “pre-covery” of Africa and his search for the Northwest Passage), in the sense that his journey takes him across parts of Africa completely unknown to Europeans;⁴⁶ and, after acquiring great wealth through devious methods, he and William live out their days in England as “great Merchants.” Situating Singleton within these discourses of anti-conquest performed by legally sanctioned pirates and buccaneers-turned-scientists, Defoe explores the hypocritical rationalizations of science and national improvement that buttress piratical commerce. The conventions of the travel narrative affords Defoe an ironic distance from his pirates, as he fashions them as cynical agents of anti-conquest rather than marauding thieves.

⁴⁵ Williams notes the “dubious legal validity” of letters of marque, which he says were usually outdated, and could be purchased from just about any enterprising foreign official (*The Great South Sea*, 83).

⁴⁶ Gary J. Scrimgeour, “The Problem of Realism in Defoe’s *Captain Singleton*,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1963): 21.

Just as the privateer or buccaneer fashions himself as a patriotic hero in order to downplay his rapacious actions, Singleton and William put on the badge of gravity and fashion themselves as legitimate merchants. When they arrive home, Singleton sets down these dictates: "Why first,' says [Singleton], 'you shall not disclose your self to any of your Relations in England, but your sister, no, not to one. Secondly, we will not shave off our Mustachios or Beards, (for we had all along worn our beards after the Grecian manner) nor leave off our long Vests, that we may pass for Grecians and Foreigners. Thirdly, That we shall never speak English in publick before any body, your sister excepted. Fourthly, That we will always live together, and pass for brothers" (277). The homosocial and homoerotic turn in the exhortation is apparent, but even more vivid is the focus on assumed identities. Singleton's assumed identity, however, suggests that Defoe himself remained troubled by the complex relationship between infinite advantage, piracy, and national identity, since his protagonists rely on deceptive methods to be accepted as merchants and pass for brothers. Singleton and William's return to England illustrates that the realities of scarcity and predatory commerce that accompany a Hobbesian ideology of trade are not socially accepted in English society. Just as a pirate has to "turn merchant" to reintegrate himself into polite society, the ideology of infinite exploitation and its Hobbesian undertones must be coded as infinite advantage. That Defoe recognizes the hypocrisy of the transformation in no way dampens his nationalistic fervor to exploit the wealth of Africa and the Americas. He simply disproves of what he sees as the unnecessarily predatory practices employed to do so, activities such as stealing from the white factor or outright piracy, which result in an interruption of trade. As the Cruising section of the novel and Defoe's later *New Voyage Round the World* shows well enough, infinite advantage has disappeared in the Dutch East Indies. There, Singleton and William are forced to turn pirate to accrue any modicum of wealth.

The second part of *Captain Singleton* also illuminates the troubling realities of scarcity that frame trade projects in Africa and the Americas not only as economic, but also as moral necessities. While the Dutch monopoly of the Spice Islands forces Singleton to turn pirate, the plenty of Africa allows him

access, at least it appears, to morally justified riches. At the end of the novel's African section, Captain Bob does not question the morality of his money as he later does with Quaker William, and his African riches do not necessitate a disguise upon his first return to England in the way his pirated cargoes do. Why pirate trade goods when Africans are literally waiting to bring gold to merchants in exchange for trinkets? Although to modern readers the infinite exploitation present in the novel's African section looks little different from the piracy in the Cruising section, the former promotes a circulation of trade, unlike the Cruising section's interruption thereof. In *Captain Singleton*, Defoe bemoans the often irreconcilable problems of infinite advantage as an alternative to predatory commerce. By situating these exploitations within the discourses of anti-conquest and by connecting the actions of Singleton's crew to privateer and buccaneer national heroes, Defoe rehearses for his readers the same moves used to justify the predatory trade practices of "state-sanctioned piracy" and the outright theft that accompanies it. Defoe then does not exactly argue against the exploitation of a continent's people and wealth, but against the individual who circumvents polite trade practices for personal gain. Defoe uses *Captain Singleton* to reveal predatory trade as the "necessary violence" of economic imperialism, framing the Hobbesian ethos as one underwritten by those in the very metropole of empire—"legitimate" merchants who can rewrite the immorality of infinite exploitation as infinite advantage.



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