

Prefatory Matters: Prefaces, Readers and the Evolution of the Novel in Nashe, Behn and Defoe

Stuart O'Donnell
University of Stirling

ABSTRACT

Throughout literary history writers have attempted to control the meaning, and influence the reception, of their books, as well as define their own role in society as 'authors', through prefaces, introductions and other forms of paratextual material. The various paratexts attached to Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594), Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko, or the History of the Royal Slave* (1688) and Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) each reveal much about the different literary worlds into which these authors were attempting to place their books. The various Dedications, Introductions and Prefaces to these texts share, to varying degrees, similar concerns about how the ensuing book should be interpreted, and about its place in the literary-cultural world of its day. They also display an acute awareness of the literary history, traditions and conventions within which the book is working, or, to be more precise, against which it is working. More specifically, the prefatory material attached to each of these texts sheds light on the rise of the novel in literary history. This paper will attempt to create a literary-historical trajectory, through the close reading of the paratexts attached to these three key texts in the history of the novel, in order to trace the evolution of the novel into the distinctive artistic form, and mass-market commodity, we recognize today.

KEYWORDS: Paratexts, Novel (evolution of), Authorial self-representation, Literary History, Literary Marketplace

ABSTRAKT

Od początku historii literatury pisarze próbowali kontrolować znaczenie swych powieści, wpływać na ich odbiór krytyczny, jak również określać swą rolę w społeczeństwie jako 'autorów', poprzez przedmowy, wstępy czy inne gatunki paratekstowe. Owe różne parateksty zastosowane w *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) Thomasa Nashe, *Oroonoko, or the History of the Royal Slave* (1688) Aphry Behn i *Moll Flanders* (1722) Daniela Defoe prezentują różne realia literackie, w których autorzy próbowali usytuować swoje powieści. Dedykacje, Wstępy i Przedmowy do tekstów przywiązują w różnym stopniu podobną wagę do tego w jaki sposób poszczególne powieści mają być zinterpretowane, jak i do ich miejsca w świecie kulturalno- literackim swej epoki. Pokazują one również wyraźną świadomość historii literackiej, tradycji czy konwencji, w których dana powieść działa, a raczej, przeciwko którym działa. W szczególności, przedmowa, którą tekst jest opatrzonej, rzuca światło na rozwój powieści w historii literackiej.

Poniższy artykuł ma na celu odtworzenie trajektorii literacko-historycznej w oparciu o analizę paratekstów wspomnianych trzech tekstów w kontekście historii powieści, w celu ujęcia ewolucji powieści jako gatunku literackiego w niezależną formę artystyczną, jak również produkt rynku masowego, którego współcześnie jesteśmy świadkami.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: Paratekst, powieść (ewolucja), autoprezentacja autorska, historia literacka, rynek literacki.

In his 'Editor's Advertisement' to *The Book of Prefaces* Alasdair Gray asserts that there are:

few great writers [who] have not placed before one of their books a verbal doorstep to help readers leave the ground they usually walk on and allow them a glimpse of the interior. Prefaces are advertisements and challenges. They usually indicate the kind of reader the book was written to please, the kind of satisfaction it aims to give. (Gray 7)

In short, prefaces entice the reader into the fictional world of the book by allowing them a glimpse into its 'interior'; they are nets with which to catch and pull in appropriate readers. However, these 'verbal doorsteps' do not only draw in and position the reader in relation to the world of the book, but also position the book itself in relation to the wider world. Indeed, prefatory material may also allow the reader a glimpse of the

exterior world of the author, the world in which he/she is attempting to place and position their book.

Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594), Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko, or the History of the Royal Slave* (1688) and Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) each feature prefatory material which does exactly this. The various Dedications, Introductions and Prefaces to these texts share, to varying degrees, similar concerns about how the ensuing book should be interpreted, and about its place in the literary-cultural world of its day. They also display an acute awareness of the literary traditions and conventions within which the book is working, or, to be more precise, against which it is working. More specifically, the prefatory material attached to these texts sheds light on the simultaneous rise of the novel as an artistic form and as a market commodity. Nashe's, Behn's and Defoe's prefatory authorial inscriptions provide a picture of the cultural shifts, and the artistic and moral concerns, which attended this evolutionary process, namely: the decline of literary patronage in the face of mass-market publishing, the evolution of the novel as a distinct form in literary history, and the resultant cultural anxiety about the moral/social influence of this increasingly dominant new mode.

Before going any further it may be useful to clearly establish the different forms that prefatory material may take. Gray classifies a preface as any of the following:

any beginning entitled PREFACE, PROLOGUE, PROHEME, INTRODUCTION, INTRODUCTORY, APOLOGY, DESIGN, FOREWORD or ADVERTISEMENT, [as well as] a few opening lines or paragraphs which are not labeled but prepare the reader for the following without being essential to it. I also include some dedicatory epistles that make a political statement. (Gray 7)

Thus, although dedications are not quite the same as prefaces, they should still be considered as prefatory material, particularly when they make some sort of 'statement' – be it literary, cultural, social or indeed 'political'.

Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* begins with the customary Dedicatory Epistle to a literary patron. This is then followed by an authorial, or editorial, Introduction to the story-proper, a first-person memoir-type narrative. This double prefacing of the narrative has both a structural and a satirical purpose. At the structural level it creates what Jorge Luis Borges describes in his playful essay 'Partial Magic in the *Quixote*' as a 'gradation' of fictional realities (see Borges 228-231); that is, stepping stones which lead the reader from the Dedication, which is written from the real world by the real author to the

real Earl of Southampton, to the Introduction by the more shadowy 'editor' figure who introduces the supposedly 'real' memoir of Jack Wilton, and then finally into the fictional world of the story proper.

The Dedication leaves the reader in little doubt that it is Nashe himself who is responsible for the ensuing text: 'By divers of my good friends have I been dealt with to employ my dull pen in this kind, it being a clean different vein from other my former courses of writing' (251). He likewise asserts that he is 'not altogether Fame's outcast' (252); that is, he is already a famous writer. He thus firmly establishes himself as the author of 'this fantastical treatise' (251). However, the reader is then confronted with 'The Introduction to the Dapper Monsieur Pages of the Court' (252-254), in which the fiction is created that Jack Wilton, supposedly a real personage, has passed his memoir to a pseudo-Nashe editor-figure to publish for the amusement of Jack's fellow pages. This Introduction ends with the editor ordering 'Every man of you take your places, and hear Jack Wilton tell his own tale' (254). In short, Jack and his memoir are presented as 'real'. The 'editor' is merely the middleman in the narrative transaction.

This clearly contradicts the Dedication, in which Nashe himself clearly takes credit as author of the text. However, this seemingly contradictory prefatory material actually makes sense from a structural point of view. The Introduction prepares Nashe's readers for the ensuing narrative; it is, to repeat Gray's phrase, a 'verbal doorstep to help [them] leave the ground they usually walk on and allow them a glimpse of the interior'. When the 'editor' declares that 'a proper fellow page of yours, called Jack Wilton, by me commends him unto you, and hath bequeathed for waste paper here amongst you certain pages of his misfortunes' (252-253), he is not merely addressing the book's supposed audience, Jack's fellow 'pages of the court', but also evoking, for the general reader, the kind of milieu in which Jack himself moves. He even gives his readers (who, of course, should not be confused with Jack's readers) a little foretaste of Jack's mentality when he passes on a message from him to his fellow pages:

every one of you after the perusing of this pamphlet is to provide him with a case of poniards, that if you come in company with any man which shall dispraise it or speak against it, you may cry '*Sic respondeo*', and give him the stockado. (253)

He likewise makes use of gambling terms, such as 'mumchance' (252) and 'ames-ace' (253), as well as some decidedly coarse language, 'printers are mad whoresons' (253), and rather earthy similes, 'weather-beaten, like a black head with grey hairs...mangy

at the toes, like an ape about the mouth' (253), all in order to convey a sense of Jack's language to his readers. This sense that the Introduction is preparing the ground, getting the reader in the right frame of mind for the ensuing narrative, is reinforced when the 'editor' declares that:

Many special grave articles more had I to give you in charge [from Jack]...Only let this suffice for a taste to the text and a bit to pull on a good wit with, as a rasher on the coals is to pull on a cup of wine. (254)

The reader is thus moved from the real world of the Dedication to the interior fictional world of the Memoir via the intermediate fictional world of the Introduction, in which the editor gives a 'taste' of Jack's voice and general character, specifically in order to prepare readers for the ensuing narrative.

However, the relationship between the 'Dedication' and 'Introduction' also operates on another, more antagonistic, level. In her article, 'Authorial Self-Consciousness in Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveller*' (2005), Wendy Hyman argues that the imagined audience of 'dapper pages' evoked in the Introduction 'form a counterpoint to the lordly audience' (Hyman 3-4) of the Dedication. Via Jack's plea to his fellow pages (as passed on by Nashe's 'editor') to 'give the stockado' to any who 'dispraise' (253) his book, 'the commoners as well as the lords are given a very active role in whether Nashe will be "outlandish Chronicler" more' (Hyman 3). Although the Introduction, with its address to the imagined 'pages of the court', is, as mentioned above, a literary device, it nevertheless, in Hyman's words, playfully 'signals Nashe's keen awareness of literature as commodity...[and] registers a precocious turn away from the patronage system and toward the emerging public literary marketplace' (Hyman 3). Even Jack himself addresses his target market, which apparently consists of all 'those who will pay money enough to peruse [his] story' (254).

Moreover, in the Dedication itself Nashe openly questions the 'blind custom methodical antiquity hath thrust upon us, to dedicate such books as we publish to one great man or other' (251), and subsequently rather overdoes his praise of Southampton, even to the point of parody:

Incomprehensible is the heighth of your spirit, both in heroical resolution and matters of conceit. Unretrievably perisheth that book whatsoever to waste paper, which on the diamond rock of your judgement disasterly chanceth to be shipwrecked [etc, etc]. (251-252)

It seems that Nashe is somewhat vexed at the fact that without his patron's 'authorized commendation' his book will never 'grow to the world's good liking' (252). His commendation of his Lordship's 'large-spreading branch of renown, from whence these my idle leaves seek to derive their whole nourishing' (252) is, at best, grudging.

Thus Nashe's double prefacing of the main narrative is both inward and outward-looking. Through it he not only prepares the reader for the ensuing text by providing them with a 'verbal doorstep' (the Introduction) from the real world of the Dedication to the fictional world of the Memoir, but also challenges the convention of literary patronage by anticipating the time when, as Ian Watt argues in *The Rise of the Novel*, 'the writer's primary aim [will] no longer [be] to satisfy the standards of patrons and the literary elite' (Watt 56), but to satisfy the needs of the literary marketplace. It seems then that Nashe is not only positioning the reader in relation to his text, but also the text itself in relation to the world.

His challenge to the patronage system could certainly be viewed as a key moment in the early development of the novel. Watt argues that the eventual transfer of 'literature from the control of patronage [to] the control of the marketplace', in the early eighteenth-century, 'made possible the remarkable independence of Defoe and Richardson from the classical critical tradition, which was an indispensable condition of their literary achievement' (Watt 55-56). In short, the emergence of the new novel form is directly related to the shift away from patronage to the relative freedom of the literary marketplace. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, as Ian Probyn points out, 'the author, the bookseller, and the book-buying public formed a new entrepreneurial nexus against the traditional custodians of cultural identity: the patron, the patrician, and the priest' (Probyn 12). Nashe's attack on literary patronage in the late sixteenth century certainly seems to foreshadow this later revolution in publishing, which would help facilitate the rise of the novel.

Yet nearly a hundred years later Aphra Behn, in *Oroonoko*, was still obliged to adhere to the convention of patronage. However, like Nashe before her, Behn critiques the custom in her 'Epistle Dedicatory to Lord Maitland', albeit with rather more tact than the combative Elizabethan, by questioning the practice whereby books are judged by the 'wit of the patron':

My Lord, since the world is grown so nice and critical upon dedications, and will needs be judging the book by the wit of the patron, we ought, with a great deal of circumspection, to choose a person against whom there can be no exception; and whose wit and worth truly merits all that one is capable of saying upon that occasion. (3)

Admittedly, Behn's subsequent praise of Lord Maitland, a fellow Catholic and favourite of James II (in her introduction to the Penguin edition Janet Todd reveals that Behn wrote 'political propaganda on behalf of Charles II and his brother James II' (Todd xv)), is not quite as equivocal as Nashe's commendation of Southampton:

You hoard no one perfection, but lay it out in the glorious service of your religion and country, to both of which you are a necessary honour. They both want such supporters, and it is only men of so elevated parts and fine knowledge, such noble principles of loyalty and religion this nation sighs for. Where is it amongst our nobility we shall find so great a champion for the Catholic Church? (4)

Given her political and religious allegiances, we can assume that these compliments, though rather overblown – she later compares Maitland and his wife to that '*beautiful pair in paradise*' (5) – are yet largely sincere. Maitland's literary credentials (he would later translate Virgil's *Aeneid*) may likewise have attracted Behn to him as a patron (indeed, she also praises his reading of '*innumerable volumes of books*' (4)).

However, all this praise is rather self-serving, since, as she asserts at the start of the Dedication, the world will 'judge [her] book by the wit of [her] patron' (3). Fortunately for her, she has a rather accomplished one. Of course, whatever she really thinks of Maitland it is clearly in her interest to lavishly praise him. Yet this does not negate her initial unease that the fate of her book depends on him. Like Nashe's 'idle leaves [which must] derive their whole nourishing' from Southampton's 'large-spreading branch of renown' (252), the '*humble fruits* [Behn's] *industry produces* [must be lain at the] *feet*' (5) of Maitland if they are not simply to wither away. The patronage system is thus still coming between the author and the reading public. It is perhaps significant that Behn had already been a victim of this system. As William Warner points out, she had been 'pushed away from writing for the theatre and toward the market in printed books' in the first place by the 'decline of royal patronage' (Warner 46-47) for the former. She was thus presumably aware of the vagaries of literary patronage by the time she came to write her 'Dedicatory Epistle' to Maitland.

Just over 40 years later Daniel Defoe will dispense with the need for a dedication in his novel *Moll Flanders* as a result of what Ian Watt describes as the 'steady decline of literary patronage' (Watt 52). It certainly seems that the cracks in this system can be traced back through Behn to Nashe. At any rate, by the early eighteenth century successful writers like Samuel Richardson and Defoe will no longer need to 'use dedications

to seek the “protection” of recognised cultural authorities, but instead will accept the rigorous independence the market imposes upon [them]’ (Warner 203). However, the new market-driven book industry raises new concerns for authors, particularly around hierarchies of genre (that is, the positioning of the novel in relation to earlier genres, such as the romance), and the moral/social purpose of the increasingly popular novel in society. Defoe deals with these issues in his ‘Preface’ to *Moll Flanders*, as does Behn in her prefatory material to *Oroonoko*.

Behn is particularly concerned with the question of genre, specifically with the distinction between ‘romance’ and ‘true history’. Her title-page announces that her story is ‘A True History’ of a ‘Royal Slave’, a claim which she is keen to reinforce, both in her ‘Dedictory Epistle’, and in the opening paragraphs of the story proper. Although not labelled as prefatory material, the first few paragraphs of the story yet ‘prepare the reader for the following without being essential to it’ (Gray 7), and thus, as Alasdair Gray argues, should be viewed as prefatory. The author-narrator here assures her readers that the ‘history of this royal slave’ is no mere fanciful entertainment; Oroonoko is certainly not a ‘feigned hero’ created by her ‘fancy’ (Behn 9). On the contrary, she ‘is relating the truth...there being enough of reality to support it and to render it diverting without the addition of invention’ (9). Although the phrase ‘enough of reality’ may jump out at the attentive reader as rather undermining her claim to historicity, she nonetheless goes on to assert that ‘I was myself an eye-witness to a great part of what you will find here set down; and what I could not be witness of I received from the mouth of the chief actor in this history’ (9). She thus claims to be giving the history of a real personage, whom she has actually met, and whom has told her his story (that is, the bits she did not witness herself).

These claims of historical authenticity echo those already made in the Dedication:

This is the true story of a man gallant enough to merit your [Maitland’s] protection ...The royal slave I had the honour to know in my travels to the other world...If there be anything that seems romantic, I beseech your Lordship to consider, these countries do, in all things, so differ from ours that they produce inconceivable wonders; at least they appear so to us because new and strange. What I have mentioned I have taken care should be truth, let the critical reader judge as he pleases. (5)

Thus, anything which seems ‘romantic’ can simply be put down to cultural difference; the ‘inconceivable wonders’ are only so because they are ‘new and strange’. Behn’s dismissal of ‘romantic’ elements in favour of ‘true history’ should perhaps be understood in

its literary-historical context. In his book *The Origins of the English Novel* Michael McKeon argues that print culture, from the late sixteenth century onwards:

helps 'periodize' romance as a 'medieval' production, as that which the present age – the framing counterpoint of the classical past – defines itself against. Medieval romance, in which the antecedents of our 'history' and 'romance' coexist...becomes 'medieval romance', the product of an earlier period and increasingly the locus of strictly 'romance' elements that have been separated out from the documentary objectivity of history and of print. (McKeon 45).

The pseudo-Behn narrator is certainly keen to characterize her narrative as true and objective history, as opposed to fanciful romance; after all, she herself was an 'eye-witness' (9) to most of the events she narrates. However, as McKeon notes, the 'claim to historicity' routinely exploited 'techniques of authentication by first-hand and documentary witnesses' (McKeon 47). Likewise, her defence that the 'inconceivable wonders' in her narrative are only so because they are 'new and strange' (a phrase which she uses both in the Dedication (5) and in the second paragraph of the story-proper (9)) is a common one in seventeenth century discourse, in which:

the old claim that a story is "strange but true" subtly modulates into something more like the paradoxical formula "strange, therefore true". The fact of "strangeness" or "newness" ceases, that is, to be a liability to empirical truth-telling, and becomes instead an attestation in its support. (McKeon 47)

This 'strange, therefore true' formula fits in nicely with Behn's defence of the more romantic elements in her narrative. Of course, she is describing an alien culture to her readers, so they will presumably expect a certain amount of strangeness.

Thus, Behn is keen to differentiate her 'true history' from fanciful 'romance'. However, as McKeon argues, the 'pronounced claim to historicity [made] through the posture of autobiographical memoir, secret history, or authenticated document', all techniques very much in vogue during the Restoration period (certainly, Behn uses elements from all these modes in *Oroonoko*), tend to 'orchestrate the collision between "history" and "romance" so listlessly as to assert very little, or evince no formal self-consciousness whatsoever' (McKeon 60). Indeed, as Paul Salzman points out, 'Behn is working within a series of conventions which do not distinguish between romance and realism in this

way... *Oroonoko* treats its protagonist as a character in a heroic romance' (Salzman 314), while simultaneously presenting him as a real historical personage. For instance, in the extravagantly grotesque and improbably protracted description, of Oroonoko's torture and execution, Behn very much leaves historical realism behind:

He had learned to take tobacco, and when he was assured he should die, he desired they would give him a pipe in his mouth, ready lighted which they did, and the executioner came and first cut off his members and threw them into the fire. After that, with an ill-favoured knife, they cut his ears and his nose, and burned them; he still smoked on, as if nothing had touched him. Then they hacked off one of his arms, and still he bore up, and held his pipe. (76)

Oroonoko's Roman-like heroism in the face of death strikes one as decidedly incongruous with Behn's claims of historicity. It also clashes somewhat with her attempt to establish a realistic, albeit 'new and strange', setting for her story. It certainly seems that, as Salzman argues, she is 'aware of the popularity of both the elevated hero of romance, and the detailed description of setting, and so puts both devices to good use' (Salzman 314).

Thus, despite her claims to the contrary, Behn makes use of decidedly romantic elements in her narrative. So then what is the purpose of her rejection of romance? McKeon argues that this tendency turns on the contemporary valorization of empirical truth:

In seventeenth century prose narrative, verisimilitude and the claim to historicity are incompatible...Verisimilitude will prevail, but only in the long run and only as the reformulated doctrine of 'realism'...the claim to historicity and its more extreme negation of 'romance' are preferable: they are a far more direct and immediate reflection of empirical and sceptical epistemology. (McKeon 53)

Behn certainly sets her book up in 'an oppositional relationship with romance', yet it fails to reach the level of realism expected in a modern novel: in Probyn's words, 'the defining characteristic of [the early to mid-eighteenth century] novel is a recognizable, familiar, and contemporary reality' (Probyn 2). Behn's 'new and strange' narrative fails to provide this, or at least not so rigorously as the likes of Defoe and Richardson will for their readers. Yet her vigorous rejection of 'romance' in her prefatory material nevertheless signals the shift towards realism. *Oroonoko* could thus be viewed as a mid-point between the 'romance' and the modern, realistic novel.

In his 'Preface' to *Moll Flanders* Defoe (or, to be more precise, a pseudo-Defoe editor-figure) likewise concerns himself with the question of literary genre and authenticity:

The World is so taken up of late with Novels and Romances, that it will be hard for a private History to be taken for Genuine, where the Names and other Circumstances of the Person are concealed, and on this Account we must be content to leave the Reader to pass his own Opinion upon the ensuing Sheets, and take it just as he pleases. (1)

Defoe here differentiates between the 'private History' he is presenting to his readers and 'Novels and Romances'. His emphasis on the former may reflect the growing belief that 'individual experience' should be viewed as 'the ultimate arbiter of reality' (Watt 14). Indeed, as Watt argues, Defoe's 'subordination of the plot to the pattern of autobiographical memoir is as defiant an assertion of the primacy of individual experience in the novel as Descartes's *cogito, ergo sum* [I think, therefore I am] was in philosophy' (Watt 15). However, his assertion that he is presenting a 'private History', and not merely a novel or (God forbid) a romance, also reflects anxiety around the association of the term 'novel' with such writers as Behn. As Probyn points out: 'the problem confronting the first wave of novelists, in the early eighteenth century, was of disassociation and redefinition of the form itself' (Probyn 3); in short, the novel had an image problem, which had to be addressed. William Warner argues that the object of early 'antinovel discourse was quite precise – namely, seventeenth century romances and novellas of continental origin, as well as the "novels" and "secret histories" written by Behn [and others]' (Warner 4), which, it was assumed, were mainly read by women, and purely as entertainment. As discussed above, *Oroonoko* contains a good deal of rather fanciful 'romance'. Writers like Defoe were now aiming for a purer form of realism than the likes of Behn aspired to in the previous century. Novel-writing was becoming a serious business, in every sense of the word.

Thus, Defoe sets up a new hierarchy of genre, at the top of which he places the 'private History' as the most 'Genuine' (1) mode. Behn's fiction has been relegated to the level of mere romance, the very mode she tried so hard to disassociate herself from. Yet, rather interestingly, Defoe leaves it up to the reader to decide if the 'ensuing Sheets' are really 'Genuine' (1), just as Behn, in her Dedication, had earlier challenged the 'critical reader' to 'judge' whether the ensuing narrative was the 'truth' (5). However, Defoe demands even more from his readers than Behn. In his 'Preface' he asserts that:

this Work is chiefly recommended to those who know how to Read it, and how to make good Uses of it, which the Story all along recommends to them; so it is to be hop'd that such Readers will be much more pleas'd with the Moral, than the Fable; with the Application, than with the Relation, and with the End of the Writer, than with the Life of the Person written of. (2)

Defoe here emphasizes the role of the reader in extracting the utilitarian 'Moral' from his text – which, of course, 'the Story all along recommends to them' – rather than simply enjoying the 'Fable' on its own account. He goes on to recommend his book 'to the Reader as a Work from every part of which something may be learned' (4). In short, his book is intended to have a didactic purpose; it is not merely entertainment.

This assertion is particularly significant at this point in the history of the novel. Warner argues that attention was increasingly being directed toward 'the psychology of response and the moral and pedagogical uses of novel reading', a trend which was a direct consequence of 'the conservative reaction against any novel reading for entertainment' (9). Ronald Paulson likewise points out that 'the early novel was created in an age when moral justification was still necessary, and the description of everyday life for its own sake was considered frivolous' (18). Of course, this moral justification is particularly important if you are presenting the life of a woman 'who was born in Newgate...was Twelve Year a Whore, five Times a Wife (whereof once to her own Brother), Twelve Year a Thief etc, etc', as Defoe's title-page announces of Moll. As Warner notes, 'any who would defend novels [including those going under the name of 'private History'] had to...respond to the accusation that they were corrupting their enthusiastic readers' (Warner 4).

Defoe actually goes even further than this by suggesting that anyone who merely enjoys reading his book, whilst failing to find the many morals, is already corrupt:

It is suggested there cannot be the same Life, the Same Brightness and Beauty, in relating the penitent Part, as is in the criminal Part: If there be any Truth in that Suggestion, I must be allow'd to say, 'tis because there is not the same taste and relish in the Reading, and indeed it is too true that the difference lyes not in the real worth of the Subject so much as in the Gust and Palate of the Reader. (2)

Defoe, through his 'editor' – who also assures his readers he has cut out 'some of the vicious parts' of Moll's memoir, and 'very much shortn'd several other parts' in order to

‘put it into a Dress fit to be seen’ (1-2) – thus rids himself of any potential blame for publishing the memoir by arguing that if you, the reader, enjoy reading the ‘criminal Part’ more than the ‘penitent Part’ it says more about you than him. Indeed, he asserts that ‘none can, without being guilty of manifest Injustice, cast any Reproach upon [the book], or upon our Design in publishing it’ (3). Thus, through his ‘editor’s Preface’ Defoe not only attempts to position his readers in relation to his book, by suggesting to them how it should be read, but also, by disassociating it from the fanciful ‘novels’ of the previous century and setting it up as a purely didactic text, tries to position it in the wider literary and social world of his day.

Thus, the various Dedications and Prefaces of Nashe, Behn and Defoe not only provide windows into the worlds of their texts, but also into the literary and social worlds in which they were attempting to place and position their books. They also shed light on the rise of the novel, as a distinct literary form, in society. Nashe’s double prefacing of *The Unfortunate Traveller* serves both a structural and a satirical purpose; it is both inward and outward-looking. It not only prepares the reader for the ensuing text but also critiques the literary culture within which the book must be placed. Likewise, in *Oroonoko*, Behn questions the custom whereby the success or otherwise of her book depends on the ‘wit of the patron’ (3). Nashe and Behn’s unease with the patronage system anticipates its later decline in the face of the increasingly dominant literary marketplace, a process which, as Watt argues, helps facilitate the rise of the novel. Indeed, by the early eighteenth century Defoe will feel no need to attach a dedication to *Moll Flanders*. Behn and Defoe also concern themselves with questions of authenticity and genre. Indeed, through their prefatory authorial inscriptions one can trace the move away from Romance to the modern, realistic novel. Defoe also deals with the position and purpose of the novel in society. In his ‘Preface’ he argues that his book is not merely an entertaining story, but a text with a clear didactic purpose, in order, it seems, to defend himself and his book against the growing moral censure of the now thriving novel form. It seems then that the various Dedications and Prefaces attached to each of these books are not merely ‘verbal doorsteps’ into the respective fictional worlds, but revolving doors between them and the literary-cultural/social worlds from which each writer was working. Through these doors we can get a glimpse of how the novel evolved into the distinctive artistic form, and mass-market commodity, we recognize today.

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