

## Plague, Fire, and Typology in Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*

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### I

The Great Fire of 1666 occurred less than a year after the most deadly months of the plague epidemic had afflicted London.<sup>1</sup> It did not take long for writers to draw associations between the two events. For many, indeed, the plague and fire became two strokes of a single catastrophic blow. Thomas Vincent's treatise, *God's Terrible Voice in the City* (1667), one of the major sources for Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*,<sup>2</sup> places the association between the plague and the fire at the core of its message. An early section of the treatise considers the characteristics of plague and fire against the general background of disaster—or, in Vincent's more frequently used expression, "judgements." Vincent lists seven kinds of "terrible speakings" in this introductory catalogue—plague, deluge, fire, sword, famine, "famine of the world," and "terrible things together." Each disaster receives a short explication according to its role in the Bible. This general overview of disaster quickly gives way to brief accounts of first the plague of 1665, then the fire of 1666. The bulk of the treatise, some hundred and fifty pages, is thereafter devoted to explaining the meaning of the plague and fire of London.

The gloss on the title of *God's Terrible Voice* assumes the equal prominence of the two disasters. The treatise depicts

the sound of the voice, in the Narration of the two late Dreadfull Judgments of *Plague* and *Fire*, inflicted by the Lord upon the City of *London*, the former in the year, 1665, the latter in the year 1666.<sup>3</sup>

In the body of his treatise, Vincent's homiletic exposition also connects the plague with the fire. Describing how the disasters offer the

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possibility of repentance, Vincent notes a "division of labor" between the plague and fire in their redemptive work:

. . . that with the loss of friends and relations by the Plague, and of houses and goods by the Fire; they may not lose the good of these Judgements too, though of another kind, yet of far greater value, which God intends them. (193)

The plague assaults personal relations, the fire property relations. Each judgement afflicts its separate domain of life; yet, when viewed in relation, the two events so aptly complement one another that they work as two sides of a single providential disaster.

A similar kind of schema is used when Vincent, tracing the common cause of the plague and fire, offers a figurative reading of London's sin:

It was the ungodliness of *London*, which brought the Plague and fire upon *London*. There was a general Plague upon the heart . . . before there was sent a Plague upon the body; there was a fire of divers lusts which was enkindled . . . before the fire was kindled in the City. (83)

The specific targets of the disasters have shifted slightly—personal relations are replaced by the body, and houses and goods by the city. But, again, while each disaster has its special domain, they work together in intelligent complicity to deliver God's terrible message. By emphasizing the specific yet partial role of these disasters, Vincent conveys their profound interdependence.

While Vincent, a dissenting minister and theologian, gives equal time to the twin disasters of plague and fire, Nathaniel Hodges, one of the four physicians who remained in London during the plague, devotes his treatise, *Loimologia: or, an Historical Account of the Plague in London in 1665*,<sup>4</sup> almost exclusively to medical issues related to plague. It stands to reason that the theologian would be impelled to ground his understanding of the catastrophe in the Bible, while the physician would rely on scientific data. But Hodges prefaces his specialized medical discussion with a reflective account of the plague of 1665 which makes clear that, in his view, too, the plague and fire are to be read as two pulses of a single affliction. The plague, writes Hodges, was

Not unlike what happened the year following, when a small spark, from an unknown cause, for want of timely care, increased to such a flame, that neither [the] tears of the people, nor the profusion of their Thames, could extinguish; and which laid waste the greatest part of the City in three days time: and therefore as there happens to be no great difference between these two grievous calamities, this mention of them together may not be improper; and the more especially, because by a like irresistible fate from a fever and a conflagration, both the inhabitants and their houses were reduced to ashes.  
(2)

The less than rigorous logic that Hodges uses to make the case for the near identity of the two disasters does not diminish the force of his conflation; on the contrary, it exposes all the more sharply Hodges' will to forge the two disasters into a single unit.

Hodges' account was, along with Vincent's, another major source for Defoe's *Journal*. Defoe follows Vincent and Hodges in exhibiting a penchant for stark detail, and a desire to make those details congeal into a portrait of grim destruction. What is striking, however, about Defoe's account when viewed against the backdrop of these contemporary sources is the length and breadth of his description of the plague. Vincent's narrative, the longer of the two, is some forty-five pages: Defoe's is on the order of two hundred and fifty pages. But a more subtle difference between Defoe's account and his sources is how little attention and importance it gives to the Great Fire of London.

That Defoe did not write about the Great Fire has been remarked on by some important readers. Sir Walter Scott thought it peculiar that Defoe, while providing an expansive account of the plague, would neglect another subject so well suited to his concerns:

It is a wonder how so excellent a subject as the Great Fire of London should have escaped the notice of Defoe, so eager for subjects of a popular character.<sup>5</sup>

While Scott expressed wonder that Defoe did not realize the fire was his kind of material, later publishers went to greater lengths to address Defoe's oversight, eventually finding a way to incorporate the plague and the fire in a single volume. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, the *Journal* had gone through several editions, its regularity of publication second only to *Robinson Crusoe* among Defoe's works.

The text of the *Journal* was subjected to alteration as early as the second edition, for which the title was changed from *A Journal of the Plague Year* to *The History of the Plague of 1665*.<sup>6</sup> Other early editions abridged the text, a procedure which, given the uncommon length of the chronicle, is hardly a surprize, and many subsequent editions followed suit. In 1830, however, the *Journal* had appended to it a portion of John Evelyn's account of the Great Fire. Thereafter, for the next fifty years, it became common practice to publish an account of the fire in conjunction with Defoe's chronicle of the plague. Indeed, an edition published in 1876, purposing to establish the first critical text of the *Journal*, at the same time assembled a prodigious range of material concerning the Great Fire, including two separate accounts, an inquiry into the origin of the fire, a description of the monument commemorating the devastation, the apprehension and trial of the alleged perpetrator, and other memoranda.<sup>7</sup> What Defoe in his own career had curiously neglected, his subsequent editors felt moved to amend.

Both Defoe's omission and the publishers' emendations suggest that fire as a literary subject had behind it a set of apocalyptic associations that lay waiting to be engaged. A better sense of the meaning of fire for Defoe's contemporaries will suggest how Defoe's depiction of the plague is to be read against the backdrop of the imposing, yet absent, fire of London.<sup>8</sup>

In the sequence of Vincent's catalogue of judgements, fire is listed third, following the plague and the deluge. The relation of deluge to fire, though not worked out explicitly by Vincent, is suggested by their juxtaposition. Both deluge and fire find their initial occurrence and depiction in the Bible. By indicating their Biblical origin, Vincent made sure that later examples of destruction by flood and fire would stand in relation to their Biblical predecessors. In emphasizing the alignment of historical disaster with Biblical prototypes, Vincent showed himself in tune with what might be called the typological sensibility of most contemporary interpreters of disasters.<sup>9</sup>

But the Biblical manifestations of flood and fire, according to Vincent, differ in how they relate to the subsequent events of flood and fire throughout history. With the flood, ". . . God never did, and never will speak so Terribly by a Deluge of Water, as by the great Deluge

in the daies of *Noah*, when the whole world was drowned thereby, excepting *Noah*, and those which were with him in the *Ark*" (12). Though the flood, Vincent seems to suggest, has continued to serve as one of the meaningful disasters in God's repertoire of judgements, no flood has or will exceed the magnitude of the flood depicted in Genesis. Nor is the event to be equaled, and thus repeated; the potential reenactment of the first flood has been checked by God's own pledge of restraint: ". . . but God hath promised he will never speak thus by water any more" (13).

In Vincent's movement from deluge to fire, there is a shift from an emphasis on the past to one on the future: while the paradigmatic destruction by water stands in the ancient past, the paradigmatic destruction by fire lies in the heralded future. This disaster by fire is, in Vincent's telling phrase, "yet to come":

But the most fearful Instances of Gods Terrible Voice by Fire are yet to come: Thus God will speak by Fire unto *Spiritual Babylon*, which may easily be proved to be *Rome*, from *Rev.* 17.18 . . . *Therefore shall her Plagues come in one day, Death, and Mourning, and Famine, and she shall be utterly burnt with fire; for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.* (14)

The Biblical world, to be sure, also knew judgement by fire: "God spake terribly by Fire unto *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, when he rained Fire and Brimstone on those Cities, and consumed them" (13). And history past (the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 b.c.e.) and present (the Great Fire of London in 1666) has witnessed fires in which God's terrible voice has spoken. But the ultimate role of fire in judgement and destruction will come into its own only in the future. Vincent refers to the New Testament, especially the Book of Revelation, Thessalonians, and 2 Peter, as principle guides as to when that disaster by fire will occur, and what will happen when it does.

It is instructive to consider the reading of the pertinent passage in 2 Peter by an early eighteenth-century Biblical commentator, Matthew Henry. A noted interpreter of both Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament, Henry's *Exposition of the Old and New Testament* served as a major commentary on the Scriptures for Protestants of Defoe's generation. Though culled from a general commentary, Henry's gloss

on 2 Peter 3:7-10 deals with the distinctive role of flood and fire in a way similar to but even starker than Vincent:

What the apostle says of the destructive change which is yet to come upon it: *The heavens and the earth, which now are, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men, v.7.* Here we have an awful account of the final dissolution of the world, and which we are yet more nearly concerned in. The ruin that came upon the world and its inhabitants by the flood, we read, and hear, and think of with concern, though those who were swept away by it were such as we never knew; but the judgement here spoken of is yet to come, and will surely come, though we know not when, nor upon what particular age or generation of men; and therefore we are not, we cannot be, sure that it may not happen in our own times: and this makes a very great difference.<sup>10</sup>

Henry is obviously deeply concerned with the implications of the difference between the two types of disaster: ". . . we were not in reach of the one, but are not sure that we shall not be included in the other calamity." As sure as one can be of the distance of the flood, so is there a corresponding conviction about the proximity of the fire: "The one is already past, and never to return upon us any more . . . the other is still behind, and is as certain to come as the truth and the power of God can make it . . ."

For Henry, as for Vincent, disasters are located in an identifiable place on a temporal continuum. Henry emphasizes even more forcefully than Vincent the relegation of the flood to the past; the paradigmatic fire is, again, located in the future. But Henry not only wants to delineate the position on the continuum the disasters occupy; he also wants to interpret what those positions mean in regard to the present moment—in other words, in regard to the reader he addresses. The flood, in these terms, becomes a kind of benign curiosity, its location in the past and its unrepeatability from that time forward minimizing its implications for the present. The paradigmatic fire, in contrast—and Henry is even more explicit than Vincent in reading the significance of one disaster over against the other—is located in the "future," but the nature of this future is of a kind to make it indeterminate. Not having the safe borders which cordon the past off from the present and make of it an unthreatening spectacle, the future, according to Henry, impinges on the present, forcing his contemporaries to endure a portion of the disequilibrium which is

certain to arrive with the onset of future disaster. Writing half a century after Vincent, Henry imputes to the future disaster of fire an immediate significance unexpressed by Vincent himself. When considering Defoe's *Journal*, this escalation of the importance of fire will be helpful to recall.

To make the meaning of one disaster contingent on that of another had considerable implications for the view of history of which disasters were a part. When read in reference to one another, the paradigmatic flood and fire had in common that they stood at the extremes of history. Within the brackets that flood and fire formed, history assumed a particular narrative shape. Indeed, history is that purpose-laden story which unfolds in the wake of one disaster and is eventually terminated by a second. In between, derivative versions of these great disasters occur. Given the authority of the scriptural paradigms of disaster, destructive events of lesser magnitude would always point backward in time to the beginning or ahead to the end.

According to Vincent's catalogue, the plague did not, however, function in the same way as the flood or fire. For Vincent, the plague is defined not by its place on the continuum, but rather by its range of pathological attributes: it is "poysounous," "noisome," "infectious," and "deadly"; it is even an affliction to those in its proximity who do not suffer the disease, for it engenders a terrible fear and thereby loosens the normal bonds of morality. But the plague receives no particular historical or temporal designation. In contrast to the decided emphasis on the place of flood and fire at the extremes of the historical continuum, the plague can seemingly occur at any point along the way.

The contrast between plague and fire is important for understanding Defoe's concern exclusively with the plague in the *Journal*. If Defoe had sought, as did many of his contemporaries, to create a narrative framework that could impose upon the chaos of disaster a discernible meaning, he would have done well to link the plague and the fire, thus activating a conventional typological schema. We have seen at least two ways in which such a pairing of disasters would invoke that kind of discernible meaning. First, Vincent and Hodges confer a sense of divine purpose on the plague by demonstrating the way its destructive character complements that of the fire. By looking

beyond the chaotic force of the single disaster, Vincent and Hodges perceive in the relation of the two disasters an aesthetic as well as a theological balance. And second, great fires, in their own right, summon forth an ordered historical narrative and teleological framework. Defoe's sources understand the Great Fire as part of this narrative and lying within this framework; hence, the meaning of the Great Fire is ready to be explicated. But Defoe refused to grant the Great Fire the status it has in his sources, and consequently deactivated the conventional typological schema for dealing with the plague of 1665.

## II

Defoe's circumvention of the Great Fire does not mean that all consideration of the role of fire in relation to the plague is omitted. Rather do the reflections on fire in *A Journal of the Plague Year* reinforce the view of Defoe's polemical stance.

It was a merciful Disposition of Providence also, and which I have many times thought of at that time, that no Fires, or no considerable ones at least, happen'd in the City, during that Year, which, if it had been otherwise, would have been very dreadful . . . .<sup>11</sup>

The affliction that accompanies a single disaster would, the narrator suggests, be exacerbated greatly had a second disaster conspired with the first. That a second disaster did not occur is something to be thankful for. Thanks are especially due in this time of the plague, for the pathological conditions which characterize society during the time of plague are those which are liable to beget further disasters:

Indeed considering the Deliriums, which the Agony threw People into, and how I have mention'd in their Madness, when they were alone, they did many desperate Things; it was very strange there were no more Disasters of that kind. (201)

"Of that kind" here refers to disasters of fire. The agony of plague, according to Defoe, brings about a loss of rationality, which in turn increases the likelihood of disaster. Not unlike his predecessors, Defoe



seems to posit a close association between the plague and the fire. But the association is evoked only to be questioned. What is at the center of Defoe's meditation is not the link forged between the fire and plague, but rather the conspicuous absence of fire. What, in other words, was wondrous was not the affliction visited upon the city by a second disaster but that when fire did break out, it was characterized by an unusual timidity. In a House in Swan-Alley,

a Family was infected there, in so terrible a Manner that every one of the House died; the last Person lay dead on the Floor, and as it is supposed, had laid her self all along to die just before the Fire; the Fire, it seems had fallen from its Place, being of Wood, and had taken hold of the Boards and the Joists they lay on, and burnt as far as just to the Body, but had not taken hold of the dead Body, tho' she had little more than her Shift on, and had gone out of itself, not hurting the Rest of the House, tho' it was a slight Timber House. (201)

The fire described here seems ineffective in its role as complement to the plague. The family having already died, there is no one to fear the fire, nor even to suffer the losses of property so characteristic of Vincent's account. Moreover, it is when the fire directly confronts the plague, as embodied in the corpse of the woman, that it is extinguished. Defoe's personification of the fire forcefully renders the submission of fire to plague: the fire "had gone out of itself; not hurting the Rest of the House, tho' it was a slight Timber House." Vouchsafed with a kind of resigned intelligence, this fire comes too late to be of real danger, and in essence causes no disaster. This strange picture of a fire that causes no harm and does no damage illustrates that the disastrous force normally residing in fire was neutralized during the time of the plague. Rather than viewing plague and fire as two complementary kinds of disaster, Defoe presents them as antagonists. Where plague is, fire is not.

Yet fire stands not only in a submissive relation to the plague. For Defoe, as for his contemporaries, fire was also known as a conventional remedy deployed in the struggle against the plague, and was used in the plague epidemic of 1665 in several different ways. In medical application, physicians used fire to cauterize the plague swellings which would not break (Bell 127). In a campaign to eliminate the questionable possessions left after death, bedding and clothing of a

plague victim would be burned in order to make less likely the transmission of the plague. In the most spectacular use of fire in the struggle against plague, public bonfires were lit in the streets.<sup>12</sup> Resort to fires was seemingly widely known to be an ancient prescription for use in vanquishing the plague. Bonfires were thought to be effective because, when burning certain kinds of fragrant material, the fire produced a pungent aroma which overcame the obnoxious fumes thought to generate the plague. William Kemp, for instance, in *A Brief Treatise . . . of the Pestilence*, refers to Hippocrates, who made "great fires in the Streets . . . and burning among them sweet Odors, Spices and Perfumes, fragrant Ointments and Compositions, whereby he freed the city of Athens from infection" (43). Despite the authority which reference to Hippocrates and the ancients bestowed on the practice of bonfires, its efficacy was sharply debated. The questionable effect of using the bonfires seems to underlie the caution exercised by London's magistrates, who waited until all other tactics had proven ineffective before issuing the order on September 2 to light the fires.

There are two items in particular to notice in Defoe's handling of the therapeutic properties of fire. Defoe begins this section on fire by reporting a bizarre incident in which a plague victim, overcome with agony, commits suicide by igniting himself (200). While only the most rudimentary outline of this incident is sketched, its placement and content seem ominous. For the "remedy" that fire offers here is one that eliminates suffering only as it destroys the sufferer as well. Acting as a departure point for the further account of fire in relation to the plague, this episode suggests that purgation is essentially linked to annihilation.

Viewed against the background of the Great Fire, Defoe's presentation of the London bonfires also appears polemical. The bonfires, as mentioned above, were authorized only after much debate and when the mortality rate had reached unprecedented figures. Defoe, following the general trend of commentators on the plague, refers to the disputation over when to light the fires and the desperation that finally drove the city of London to this expedient. What is special to his account, however, is the emphasis on the pivotal change that occurs once the bonfires have proved ineffective. It is the bonfires that act as the last human measure to be used against the plague. It is,

nonetheless, when the bonfires prove ineffective that the upward curve of the epidemic begins to drop off. The point, in other words, at which the fullest application of human ingenuity and resourcefulness fails to blunt the progress of the plague turns out to be decisive. For the change that occurs, according to Defoe, is not caused by human effort but by divine intervention (298).

There is thus a reversal that occurs in the role of fire in relation to disaster. In Defoe's account, fire functions not as the judgement sent by God to scourge the London populace, but rather is presented as the last in a series of desperate measures employed in the struggle against the plague. God indeed figures in the events and has an interest in their outcome. But, unlike those authors who place the Great Fire in the foreground of their account, Defoe does not recognize the divine will in the medium of fire; it is rather after the fire wanes that the divine purpose comes into its own.

### III

If, however, Defoe's omissions and modifications in *A Journal of the Plague Year* are meant to indicate the inadequacy of his sources in dealing with the plague and fire, the *Journal* also illustrates an alternative approach. In other words, Defoe's subversion of conventional modes of presenting catastrophe is not only an interesting critique of his predecessors, but signals a new narrative direction.

A central episode in the *Journal* implicitly dramatizes Defoe's quest for this new narrative direction. Not far into the *Journal*, H.F. leaves the relative safety of his own home to pay a visit to the burial pit in the Aldgate Churchyard, where the plague's most recent victims are interred. That he goes to see this terrible outcome of the plague against his better judgement establishes the mass grave as the unholy emblem of the plague. Though the burial site of the victims turns out to be an indiscriminate mass grave, H.F.'s account soon focuses on the plight of a single man, himself a bystander, who has made the trip to the terrible burial pit to take leave of his dead wife and several other members of his family.

As the mass burial in the Churchyard pit, in its anonymity and lack of ceremony, epitomizes the collective effect of the plague, so does the mourner provide its individual correlate. His sudden and simultaneous loss of several family members; his visit, alone and at night, to the indecent mass burial to which they are submitted; the way his initial composure, in the presence of the pit, is transformed into debilitating swoons—all those make him an epitome of accumulated grief (75-76). Portrayed by H.F. at first as a "silent figure," he turns out to be like the unspeaking pit itself, a "speaking sight" (75),<sup>13</sup> an emblem of the devastation the plague has rendered, something H.F. can see and thus, seemingly, understand.

The visit to the burial pit is not, however, enough to measure the full extent of the plague. The mourner is soon taken to the tavern opposite the burial pit, and it is in the tavern that the episode reaches its shocking peripeteia. The prospect of consolation that awaits the mourner at the familiar tavern is upset by the unnerving presence of a small group of mockers, a group of men who verbally abuse those afflicted by the plague. When the mourner arrives at the tavern, his grief still visible and fresh, their abuse finds a particularly susceptible target.

The ridicule which the mockers direct at the plague victims, the mourner, and eventually at H.F. himself appears to challenge the conventional significance of the plague. Viewing the plague as an opportunity to seek their particular brand of sarcastic amusement, the mockers expressly deny that the plague implies a judgement visited upon the community by God. To them the victims—epitomized here in the figure of the mourning man "brought out of the Grave" (79)—in no way serve the community of survivors as examples specially selected to show the wrath of God.

In their role as confirmed unbelievers, then, the mockers jeopardize the typological meaning of the plague. Standing outside the belief that the plague is to be attributed a higher meaning, the plague is for them merely a trivial event. Here Defoe uses the narrative possibilities of the memoir not only to reinforce but rebuke their outsider status. Because they know nothing of "the Hand of God," H.F. characterizes the mockers as worse than "the most wicked wretches that could be found," guilty not only of ridicule and mockery but of blasphemy

as well. Their words are so ill-suited to the occasion of the fearful judgement which afflicts London that H.F. will not quote them, refuses, indeed, to "fill my Account with any of the Words" which they so brashly spoke (80-81). By purging his memoir of their words, H.F. indicates that they stand outside his account of the plague which, fire or no fire, has its own typological bearings: the plague in itself is a manifestation of divine judgement. And perhaps even the mockers are not as much "outside" the account of the plague as the narrator's indignant expurgation would suggest. At first sight, the mockers seem indeed to be set against typology and the meaning which it confers on the disaster. Yet, outside though they may be, they play a leading part in this telling scene—a scene which, after all, plays a vital role in the typological framework.

Christians of Defoe's generation would understand typology as centrally linked with the figure/fulfillment model as expressed in the relation of the Old Testament to the New Testament. Samuel Mather defines the nature of a type in his authoritative work, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament* (1683, 1705):

A Type is some outward or sensible thing ordained of God under the Old Testament, to represent and hold forth something of Christ in the New.<sup>14</sup>

The depiction of Jesus' career in the divergent Gospel versions illustrates that his followers viewed him as the fulfillment of types. Those who refused to accept Jesus, on the other hand, refused to accept the typological associations upon which his authority was based.

Most flagrant among those who reject Jesus are those who mock him. These are prefigured in the Old Testament, for instance, by the scorers or mockers of the first or thirty-fifth Psalm.<sup>15</sup> Isaac Watts' *The Whole Scripture History* (1732), which provided a question-and-answer paraphrase of the New Testament in one of the classics of eighteenth-century typology, indicates how mockery was a central ingredient in the final climactic stage of Jesus' career:

Q. What were these indignities Jesus was made to suffer? A. They suffered their officers to mock and insult him, to smite and spit upon him, to blind his eyes and buffet him; then they bound him and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the Roman governor.

Q. What further indignities were cast on our Saviour? A. They stripped him of his own clothes and put on him a scarlet robe in mockery, because he did not deny himself to be *the King of the Jews* . . . .

Q. What affronts did he suffer on the cross? A. When soldiers had cast lots for his garments, the rulers mocked him, and so did one of the thieves that was crucified with him.<sup>16</sup>

While it was clear that the mockers of Jesus were hardly attractive figures, it was also clear that their brand of antagonism played a key role at crucial junctures of the unfolding drama.

Watts' distillation of New Testament "events," and other popularizing texts of its kind, continued to publicize to an eighteenth-century audience the relation between Jesus as "antitype" and the scenes of mockery which dramatized his martyrological career. Moreover, the words and gestures which mocked Jesus made their mark in other cultural realms in the period preceding Defoe. In rhetoric, for example, the sarcasm allegedly vented by the Jews against Jesus paradoxically became a model for what effective sarcasm might be. In *The Garden of Eloquence* (1593), Henry Peacham illustrates "Sarcasmus" by passages from the Gospel of Mark: "Let that Christ the king of Israell come downe now from the crosse, that we may see and beleeve him."<sup>17</sup> The troubling power of this example moves Peacham to justify explicitly his reason for its inclusion: "These examples of the Jewes against Christ are here set down to teach the forme of this figure, and not to confirme the abuse" (38). This qualification suggests that, in spite of the reprehensible conduct the example depicts, the sarcasm with which the Jews mock Jesus is the best known and most precise example Peacham could find, and thus must be cited. The association between sarcasm and the mockers of Jesus was thus strong enough for Peacham to run the risk of presenting ethically questionable material.

There are other associations that imbue the sarcasm of Defoe's mockers with a typological slant. Defoe takes special care in referring to the mass burial site as "the great Pit."<sup>18</sup> This ascription, apart from its strong apocalyptic overtones,<sup>19</sup> recalls the Biblical episode in which Korach and his followers, having attempted a coup against the authorized leaders of Israel, are punished for their rebellion by being

swallowed up in a pit. As Everett Zimmerman notes, Defoe artfully juxtaposed H.F.'s visit to the burial pit with the later encounter with the mockers. The eventual fate of the mockers of the plague—"after not more than four days . . . every one of them [was] carried to the great pit"—makes the allusion to the fate of Korach that much more prominent. The presence of the mockers in this scene, in other words, is carefully gauged in relation to the traditions of typology. On the one hand, the mockers, in their caricatured faithlessness, seem to stand outside the conventional devotional framework. In rejecting the idea that the plague is a judgement visited upon humankind by God, they also reject the typological framework which grounds that belief. Yet, as the Biblical allusions suggest, mockery is also a constitutive element of the typological schema. Viewed dialectically, mockery functions as a destructive force in the typological configuration only to be absorbed by it in the end.

Defoe's "mockery" episode, indeed, is a clever allegorization of this process. The tavern in which the mockers assemble is in strategic proximity to the "great Pit":

They sat generally, in a Room next the Street, and as they always kept late Hours, so when the Dead-Card came cross the Street End to go into *Hounds-ditch*, which was in View of the Tavern Windows; they would frequently open the Windows . . . [and] would make their impudent Mocks and Jeers at [the mourners]. (78-79)

The "great Pit" at Houndsditch stands as the abysmal symbol of the horror caused by the plague; it is thus fitting that the mockers choose to rail in its vicinity and against those who, because they are victims or penitents, are made to submit to its spell. But the mockers are eventually buried there as well, and their sarcasm is, as it were, muffled by the mounds of bodies of which they now form a part. Read in relation to the character of the typological schema, the episode suggests that typology requires outsiders who will, in their impudent disbelief, challenge the foundation of the typological model. And yet the nature of typology has, from its beginnings, been to absorb into it any who attempt to stand outside it.

The "message" this episode conveys can be translated into the terms of Defoe's artistic and theological predicament. Clearly, he is aware

of the power of typology to absorb into its framework those who challenge its applicability, but he also effects a new narrative approach to catastrophe, leaving behind an outdated typology.

Defoe's relation to typology has attracted recent attention of a number of critics. J. Paul Hunter analyses Defoe's relation to typology in the context of his elaborate discussion of "pilgrim allegory."<sup>20</sup> Together with "emblem" and "metaphor," typology constitutes a central feature of the Puritan construction of reality. "Typology, as the Puritan practiced it," writes Hunter, "was the particular device by which time was comprehended into their emblematic scheme" (122). The emblematic scheme, according to Hunter, is the resolute Puritan response to the crisis (theological, cultural, semiological) ushered in by the new science of the seventeenth century. No longer capable of maintaining a world view which was confident of a one-to-one correspondence between physical and spiritual realms, the Puritans sought to explain the world in terms of emblems rather than analogues. Things in the world could still be seen as displaying God's imprint and testifying to God's active engagement with his world, but apprehension of that imprint had to come through indirect rather than direct means; it had, in other words, to be "discovered" by means of "emblems." For Hunter, Defoe as one of the Puritan writers draws on typology to discern "purpose and plan" in that which appears "disordered, chaotic, and shapeless." This formula confines Defoe's relation to typology to benign acceptance. It is a formula not easily to be reconciled with Defoe's account, which is given over to the proliferation of chaos, not to the redemption of it.

While Hunter sees Defoe's deployment of typology as an ingredient helpful to the development of the novel, Paul Korshin appears to view Defoe's affinity to typology as a factor that had to be overcome to further this development. Korshin, in his study of typologies in England, addresses Defoe primarily as a novelist who is "a practitioner of the style" of typological narrative. *Robinson Crusoe* and *A Journal of the Plague Year* are, according to Korshin, the foremost examples of Defoe's typological interests, for both share a similar parabolic structure: "Both *Crusoe* and *The Plague Year* deal in different ways with apostasy, threats of destruction and death, repentance, and the promise of salvation" (223-24). This typical, one might almost say



"archetypal," structure is important. But what, to Korshin's mind, is essential to the typological nature of these two works is their reliance on predicative devices:

*The Plague Year* is not a typological exegesis, one which explains the types in *another* text. Rather, it is a self-contained typological narrative which creates its own shadows of apocalypse and redemption from it and which contains and meticulously interprets its own predicative structures. (223)

The *Journal*, in other words, is typological because it autochthonically reproduces the prediction-fulfillment framework that lies at the core of typology.<sup>21</sup>

Defoe, according to Korshin, eventually does break with the "typologically patterned narrative," and by so doing indicates a different tack that the novel will take thereafter. But Korshin views that break coming not, as I have argued, in the strategies which Defoe applies in the *Journal*, but rather in the refusal of *Moll Flanders* to fulfill its shadows and predictions: ". . . Defoe makes very little of the antitype of the many foreshadowings of Moll's doom with which he has provided us" (224). *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* represent Defoe's turning away from a narrative geared toward fulfillment of its calculated predictions; these novels indicate that Defoe has broken free of the deep influence of the Puritan mind and its accompanying penchant for typological patterning. Thus Korshin argues Defoe's break with typology, and suggests the implications for the development of the novel that follow from it. But Korshin's emphasis on a formal analysis of typology limits his particular assessment of the *Journal*, which, to his mind, is encumbered by its typological features: "The narrative . . . was stiff and ill-suited to the demands of dialogue and characterization, and did not readily accommodate subplots" (225). Lacking in suppleness, the *Journal* leads not in new directions, but rather is almost a relic of the past: "We will not," writes Korshin, "find this kind of abstracted typology in the novel very often beyond the 1720's" (225).

According to what I have argued above, the *Journal's* concern with typology must be read against the background of Defoe's specific sources. While Defoe inherits from Christian hermeneutics in general and Puritan sensibility in particular the typological reflex, his search

to find the appropriate strategy to present the Great Plague moves him to call attention to the inadequacy of that which he inherits. As reference to the particular sources of the *Journal* shows, typology figures as foil as well as frame. Defoe's turning to novelistic narrative—to "formal realism" or "circumstantial realism"—needs to be viewed as an alternative to typology, not, as Hunter suggests, simply an extension of it. While Korshin rightly identifies the tension between typology and novelistic narrative as central to Defoe's development, his assessment of the *Journal* overlooks its polemic against typology—and thus against the very constraints he identifies as marking the *Journal's* limitations.

#### IV

The mockery episode indicates a more convincing approach to Defoe's relation to typology, the novel, and catastrophe when it is read according to Mikhail Bakhtin's formulation of the "carnival sense of the world" and the theory of the novel that undergirds it.<sup>22</sup> Though Bakhtin's analysis does not explicitly deal with typology, his explication of carnival in the context of his treatise on Dostoevsky characterizes suggestively the status of Defoe's *Journal*.

In the mockery episode, several aspects of structure and substance are consonant with Bakhtin's description. The juxtaposition of the scenes of the pit and the tavern, for instance, conforms to one of Bakhtin's criteria of the carnivalistic. Speaking of Dostoevsky's method, Bakhtin says:

Such a *pairing* of scenes (and individual images) that reflect one another or shine through one another—one given in the comic and the other in the tragic . . . or one on a lofty and the other on a low plane, or one affirming, the other repudiating . . . taken together, these paired scenes create an ambivalent whole. It is evidence of an even deeper influence of the carnival sense of the world. (162)

The movement from pit to tavern, as noted above, registers a move from tragic grief to coarse ridicule, a swing of the pendulum that corresponds to the carnival sense. That the pairing of scenes culminates

in the tavern is also apposite. The tavern, as Bakhtin indicates, is a prime locale by which to evoke the carnival sense, allowing for a fraternization among groups of people usually separated by "socio-hierarchical inequality." In the "carnival square," or its equivalent, "all distance is suspended, and a special category goes into effect: *free and familiar contact among people*. This is a very important aspect of the carnival sense of the world. People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square" (123). Bakhtin offers a catalogue of places that function as "carnival squares": "Other places of action can, if they become meeting- and contact-points for heterogeneous people—streets, taverns, roads, bathhouses, decks of ships, and so on—take on this additional carnival square significance" (128).

The profanity, ridicule, and laughter that form the basic ingredients of the mocker's discourse in the tavern are also essential features of the carnival sense. We recall how Defoe's narrator conveys the profanity of the mockers by expurgating it from his memoir. Bakhtin's example (again dealing with Dostoevsky) shows how the sites and ceremonies of death lend themselves especially well to such profanation:

The entire description [by the narrator] is permeated with a markedly familiar and profaning attitude toward the cemetery, the funeral, the cemetery clergy, the deceased, the very "sacrament of death" itself. (138)

As with the mockers in Defoe's tavern, the profanity is meant to cause the "debasement" of death, an act that evokes the carnival sense.

Mockery has a special role in another sense. "The primary carnivalistic act," writes Bakhtin, "is the mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king" (124). This form of mocking reversal, says Bakhtin, is at "the very core of the carnival sense of the world—the *pathos of shifts and changes, of death and renewal*" (124). Mockery, then, is fundamentally associated with reversal. It is, indeed, a reversal that never ends, for the movement that mockery precipitates shifts perpetually to its opposite.

The elements of mockery represent an essential aspect of Bakhtin's understanding of the distinctive role of the novel. In the novel, the voices of all characters are expressed and commingled in the narrator's

voice, which always registers their influence and interpenetration.<sup>23</sup> The tavern serves as a metonym for both the narrator's voice and for the carnival sense of the world. For the loudness and exuberance of the tavern (especially, in the case of the *Journal*, when set over against the muteness imposed by the Pit) conveys the interpenetration of voices rather than their isolation. The voices in the "carnival square" of the tavern surmount the barriers of hierarchy. In consequence, characters who are usually overlooked or silent are given a voice.

This broadening of the range of voices and the testimony they provide is important for Defoe's rendering of the plague. While the Great Plague of 1665 was referred to as the "poore's Plague,"<sup>24</sup> most chroniclers, observes Maximilian Novak, were indifferent, if not hostile, to the predicament of the poor. In contrast, argues Novak, Defoe shows uncommon sympathy for the victims of "disorder," and especially for the poor.<sup>25</sup> Defoe's narrator, comments Novak, "is surely the first fictional character whose sympathies embrace the swarming poor of the city" (*Realism, Myth, and History* 66). In Defoe's concern for the marginalized poor Novak sees a new literary development: "No narrator in realistic prose fiction before H.F. reveals this type of general sympathy for the human condition."<sup>26</sup> Such sympathy, as Novak sees it, is not characteristic of Defoe's fiction in general, but is singular to the *Journal*, associated specifically with the disorder caused by the plague and the narrator's response to it. "I do not find it in those fictions of Defoe influenced by picaresque models," writes Novak.<sup>27</sup> Moll Flanders, Colonel Jack, and Robinson Crusoe are all too self-preoccupied to manifest this expansive sympathy for their fellow citizens. The idea of this sympathetic narrator in the midst of catastrophe is indeed pathbreaking: "In the process, [H.F.] set a pattern for fictional narrators that has been central to the development of the novel."<sup>28</sup>

The new direction identified with the sympathy of the narrator's voice can be viewed in terms of the contrast between the pit and the tavern. The pit, strongly suggestive of hell itself, is an emblem of the plague. It is, moreover, portrayed as having a voice of its own: "'twill be a Sermon to you," says the Sexton to H.F., "it may be, the best that ever you heard in your Life. 'Tis a speaking Sight, says he, and has a Voice with it, and a loud one, to call us all to

Repentance . . ." (75). The message issuing from the pit, according to its premier interpreter, the Sexton, is a sermon with a universal message. Its "loud" voice, he implies, is meant to overwhelm all other calls. The studied description of the grieving figure reinforces this silencing image of the Pit. The man was

muffled up in a brown cloak, and making motions with his hands under his cloak, as if he was in a great agony, and the buriers immediately gathered about him, supposing he was one of those poor delirious or desperate creatures that used to pretend, as I have said, to bury themselves. He said nothing as he walked about, but two or three times groaned very deeply and loud, and sighed as he would break his heart. (75)

The voice of the Pit, in other words, silences all other voices. This suppression of other voices, according to Bakhtin, is what characterizes monologue.<sup>29</sup>

The tavern, on the other hand, represents a multiplicity of voices, particularly those of the poor.<sup>30</sup> The carnival sense of the tavern promotes the mockery that, though harsh and blasphemous, illuminates a side of life that otherwise would remain dark. As Bakhtin writes with regard to the "mock crowning and decrowning," the mockery is "not naked, absolute negation and destruction (absolute negation, like absolute affirmation, is unknown to carnival)."<sup>31</sup> We can see how this aspect of mockery coincides with Novak's interpretation of the narrator as one who breaks new ground in the range of his sympathy.

The mockers themselves, to be sure, are mocked by the plague, for they eventually succumb to it and to the silence which "God's Terrible Voice" imposes.<sup>32</sup> But the voice of mockery asserts itself indirectly throughout the novel. The narrator continues to register the tone of the mockers. The fears of the gentry regarding the poor and unemployed are, for instance, held up to scorn. Again, the story of the three brothers, which qualifies as the longest episode in the *Journal*, mocks the gross irrationality confronted by the brothers as they attempt to escape London and take refuge in the country.

The voice of the mockers becomes especially prominent at the novel's conclusion. H.F. ends his memoir of the plague with what he refers to as "a coarse but sincere Stanza of my own, which I plac'd at the End of my ordinary Memorandums, the same Year they were written" (302). The "Stanza," then, is meant to have the last word:

A dreadful Plague in *London* was  
 In the Year Sixty Five,  
 Which swept an Hundred Thousand Souls  
 Away; yet I alive! (302)

The sentiment of the mockers returns here, expressed in H.F.'s exultation of survival over those condemned. The survival exulted in, however, is not only that of the narrator but of those voices which have informed and broadened his own.

That the "coarse Stanza" occurs as the last word in the novel suggests an association with Defoe's general approach to catastrophe. Defoe emphasizes the deliberateness behind the particular form of concluding the novel: ". . . which I plac'd at the End of my ordinary Memorandums, the same Year they were written" (302). The "ordinary Memorandums" presumably belonged to the writings which the narrator used to log the development of the plague as it occurred. According to the rhetoric of the narrator, the stanza thus served both as the "End" of the text written at the time of the plague and as the end of the later redaction which is allegedly the *Journal*. Twice placed as an ending, the stanza emphasizes that the conclusion of this narrative is subject to the discretion of the redactor rather than the judgement of providence.

As I noted earlier, Defoe subverts the typological framework of plague and fire by suppressing the fire in order to supply a tragic mode rather than a redemptive one.<sup>33</sup> It was the fire that, in Vincent's typological interpretation, served as the medium for God's Voice to speak a second and definitive time. By contrast, Defoe highlights his unprovidential ending by twice concluding with the mocking stanza. Through this maneuver Defoe suggests that the multiple voices which inform the mockery replace the single voice of God's judgement which conventionally would have marked the conclusion.

The absence of the Great Fire thus has wider implications for Defoe's narrative because it leaves room for new voices to make themselves heard. In terms used by John Cruickshank to characterize the linguistic trauma of a later catastrophe,<sup>34</sup> inexpressibility threatens to overwhelm the victims of the disaster and those who report their plight. But, in Defoe's representation of catastrophe, the disaster becomes, in

retrospect, an opportunity to extend the range of both the narrator's voice and the voices of those whose fate he describes.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Besides the well-known diary accounts of Evelyn and Pepys, there is a wealth of primary and secondary material on the Great Fire. See Walter Bell, *The Great Fire of London*, rev. ed. (London: Bodley Head, 1923). A more recent and provocative interpretation of the significance of the Great Fire for literature and literary interpretation can be found in Michael McKeon, *Politics and Poetry in Restoration England: The Case of Dryden's Annus Mirabilis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1975).

<sup>2</sup>Vincent's account is usually considered one of the two upon which the *Journal* relies. See Watson Nicholson, *The Historical Sources of Defoe's A Journal of the Plague Year* (Boston: The Stratford Co., 1919). Nicholson includes an excerpt from Vincent's plague narrative. Nicholson's discussion of Defoe's sources for the *Journal* is assessed by F. Bastian, "Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* Reconsidered," *RES* 16 (1965): 151-73.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Vincent, *God's Terrible Voice in the City* (London, 1667), tit. p.

<sup>4</sup>*Loimologia* was first published in Latin in 1672; an English translation appeared in 1720 under the title, *Loimologia: or, An Historical Account of the Plague in London in 1665, with precautionary Directions against the like Contagion*, trans. John Quincy, M.D. (London, 1720). The chronicle of the plague from *Loimologia* was reprinted as "Appendix A" in Nicholson 101-15.

<sup>5</sup>Sir Walter Scott, *The Miscellaneous Works of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, 6 vols. (Boston, 1829) 4:180.

<sup>6</sup>Published thirty-two years after the first edition, the full title of the second edition was, *The History of the Great Plague in London in the year 1665. Containing Observations and Memorials of the most remarkable Occurrences, both Publick and Private, that happened during that dreadful Period, etc.* (London, 1754).

<sup>7</sup>E. W. Braley, ed., *A Journal of the Plague Year, or Memorials of the Great Pestilence in London, in 1665*, by Daniel DeFoe, rev. ed. (London, 1876).

<sup>8</sup>That Defoe employed at times a strategy of "selective omission" has been argued previously by Paul Alkon, *Defoe and Fictional Time* (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1979). I came to this position independently of Alkon, but I am in sympathy with his approach to Defoe.

<sup>9</sup>The comprehensive secondary source dealing with the extensive role of typology in England during this period is Paul Korshin, *Typologies in England, 1650-1820* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1982).

<sup>10</sup>Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, rev. ed., 5 vols. (New York: Revell, n.d.) 5:n.p.

<sup>11</sup>Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (London: Shakespeare Head P, 1923) 200. All subsequent page references are to this edition of the *Journal*.

<sup>12</sup>Bell describes in some detail the methods used and the controversy surrounding them (236-37). In *Due Preparations for the Plague*, well-to-do residents make copious use of gunpowder to ward off the fumes of the plague.

There is an interesting wrinkle to the date of the bonfires which seemingly has not been remarked on. The bonfires were ignited on September 2, 1665. It was exactly a year to the day later—September 2, 1666—say the accounts, that the Great Fire of London broke out. I have not been able yet to make a more meticulous survey of the documentation of the bonfires or of the Great Fire to see if there are variant dates. Such a coincidence of dates would seem to confirm a meaningful relation between these two sorts of fire.

<sup>13</sup>The Sexton uses these words as he makes sure the meaning of the Pit is not lost on H.F. The particular significance of this trope will become clear in the discussion that follows.

<sup>14</sup>Samuel Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, intr. Mason I. Lowance, Jr. (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1969) 52.

<sup>15</sup>Of particular interest here is Ps. 1:1 in the Vulgate, where "cathedra derisorum" (in the translation from the Hebrew) corresponds to "cathedra pestilentiae" in the translation following the Septuagint.

<sup>16</sup>Isaac Watts, *The Whole Scripture History* (London, 1821) 251-52.

<sup>17</sup>Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (Gainesville, FA: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1954) 38.

<sup>18</sup>This is emphasized by Everett Zimmerman, "H.F.'s Meditations: A Journal of the Plague Year," *PMLA* 87 (1972): 417-23.

<sup>19</sup>See Rev. 9:1, 2, and 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1 and 3.

<sup>20</sup>*The Reluctant Pilgrim: Defoe's Emblematic Method and Quest for Form in Robinson Crusoe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1966).

<sup>21</sup>Korshin's terminology has met with criticism by Friedrich Ohly, "Typologie als Denkform der Geschichtsbetrachtung," *Natur, Religion, Sprache, Universität: Universitätsvorträge* 1982/83 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1983) 68-102, note 36.

<sup>22</sup>I have mainly relied on Bakhtin's discussion of carnival in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, intr. Wayne Booth (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984). Relevant also to this analysis is the explication of carnival and laughter in M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1968). For a critical assessment of Bakhtin's views on the novel, see Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984).

<sup>23</sup>See also Michael Holquist's summary of the basis of Bakhtin's theory in the introduction to Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) xx.

<sup>24</sup>The opening lines of Walter Bell's epic study of the Great Plague make this point: "This book tells a tragedy of the poor. A few men—very few—of birth, position, and wealth, stayed in London, sharing the suffering which was the lot of all, and there are names that gained added lustre in that year of calamity; but in its immensity and in overwhelming proportion it was 'the poore's Plague'" (v).

<sup>25</sup>"Defoe and the Disordered City," *PMLA* 92 (1977): 241-52. Compare a similar set of observations in Novak's *Realism, Myth and History in Defoe's Fiction* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1983).



<sup>26</sup>"Defoe and the Disordered City" 250.

<sup>27</sup>"Defoe and the Disordered City" 252.

<sup>28</sup>"Defoe and the Disordered City" 250.

<sup>29</sup>"Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other's response . . . Monologue pretends to be the *ultimate word*. It closes down the represented world and represented persons" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 293).

<sup>30</sup>In commenting on the seventeenth-century tavern, Peter Clark observes that the "puritan and other complaints that alehouses were run by the poor for the poor were certainly near the mark" (53). "The Alehouse and the Alternative Society," *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth-Century History Presented to Christopher Hill*, eds. D. Pennington and K. Thomas (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1978) 47-72. One section of Clark's essay is devoted to examining why the tavern was so intimately associated with the poor.

<sup>31</sup>*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 125.

<sup>32</sup>An allusion, of course, to the title of Vincent's sermonic treatise.

<sup>33</sup>These categories are a slightly modified version of Northrop Frye's. See his discussion of modes in *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957). Hayden White's application of these categories to historiography is relevant to this discussion of Defoe. See *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1973).

<sup>34</sup>*Variations on Catastrophe: Some French Responses to the Great War* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1982).