



Preparing for Plague in 1720s London Daniel Defoe's Grand Experiment

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Abstract

Soon after the Black Death reached Italy in the autumn of 1347, the city-states of the quadrilateral instituted Boards of Health dedicated to keeping the disease out, containing its spread and eradicating conditions in which it thrived. Italian practices were later imitated by countries across Europe but not until the early eighteenth century were preventative measures introduced at state level in England. When epidemic struck Provence in 1720, the Whig ministry took powers to impose embargoes, quarantining of ships and *cordons sanitaires* around infected towns, but was forced to beat a partial retreat by attacks from mercantile interests, by the Country opposition and by anti-contagionists, attacks fuelled by appeals to preserve 'English Liberties'. It was in this context that Defoe published *Due Preparations for the Plague, As Well for Soul as Body*. The treatise proposes measures both 'General' (to be carried out by governments and magistrates, and publicly financed) and 'Particular' (organised by individuals and families). Taken together they constitute a series of experiments in avoiding contagion by 'separating the People as much as possible from one another'. Experimental also with respect to serious plague discourse is Defoe's intermingling of narrative and dialogue as means of helping readers imagine themselves already under the plague, and motivate them to prepare for an event never experienced. In *A Journal of the Plague Year* Defoe was to rework his proposals, re-framing and reinterpreting them in a less prescriptive mode and a more collective slant.

Keywords: *Defoe, England, Plague, Preparations, 1720s*

1. Introduction

Thirty-five years ago Paul Slack closed his authoritative account of responses to plague in Early Modern England with a tribute to Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*:

Its value lies in its striving for genuine historical understanding. Though confused in its focus and often repetitive, it was an original and profound inquiry into the social consequences of plague and of the measures adopted against it. In fact it marks a watershed. It came at the end of the period in which plague was a tangible threat to

England, and it was the first serious attempt to come to grips with the social reality of the disease in the past. It showed why public health measures were adopted and also why they were resisted. (1985, 337)

As Marta Bardotti has shown in her monograph, careful analysis of Defoe's rhetorical strategies reveals *A Journal* to be more organic, and its repetitions more functional, than at first appears (1990, 12, 63). H.F.'s many moments of uncertainty, and his repeated turning back to reconsider partially resolved issues, contribute to the sense of 'striving for ... understanding', which is itself thematised in *A Journal*. A more perfectly structured text would not have communicated just how difficult it was, for an author, but also for those responsible for public health, and for ordinary people trying to survive an epidemic, to 'come to grips with' the realities (social, but also biological, theological, moral) of a disease which, until well into the nineteenth century, was to remain as mysterious as to its origins and mode of transmission as it was so clearly violent, swift and lethal in its effects.¹

Yet to speak of 'those responsible for public health' in the context of Early Modern England borders on the anachronistic. To quote from Slack's recent introductory volume on plague:

The obligation of governments to act to protect the public when epidemics threaten, even at the price of some limitations on private liberties, is something we now take for granted. But it was once a novelty ... It had to be invented and accepted. Most of what we understand by public health ... was first formulated in the context of plague... It was not achieved painlessly. (2012, 74)

Sections 2 and 3 of this essay outline the chronology of its invention in England, a process that began late and went on by fits and starts, with occasional retreats and always combining 'statist' with civil and private 'voluntarist' approaches to public welfare.²

Daniel Defoe's *Due Preparations for the Plague*, the subject of section 4, was published at a time of violent controversy over these issues. It may have played a part in reaching a political compromise, but it also aimed to be 'useful many ways, both to us and to Posterity' (Defoe 1722, ix). The 'grand Experiment[s]' prescribed in the book, all aimed at 'separating the People as much as possible from one another', comprise ambitious 'Publick' provisions to be effected by governments and magistrates, as well as 'Private' and 'Particular' ones to be undertaken by individuals and by families of substance. Both types re-emerge, but in different forms and with different emphases, in *A Journal*, which I touch on in conclusion.

2. Italian Practices

In April 1348, a few months after the Black Death entered Italy, first Venice, then Florence, instituted *magistrature della Sanità* (usually translated as 'Boards of Health') (Cipolla 1985, 13-15). As well as enforcing existing sanitary laws, the Florentine commission was to remove

¹ In other words, to understand the epistemology of plague. I would like to thank Angelo Turco and those who during the Spring of 2020 contributed to the on-line course 'Epistemologia della pandemia', of which a synthesis is available in Turco 2020. In trying to clear a path through the 'discordant voices of the many new figures who invaded the media in their capacities as "experts" on public health or on scientific and medical matters of which most know nothing' (60) Turco echoes Defoe's criticism of the 'publishing of a vast variety of Opinions' on the plague by medical writers whose contradictory pronouncements left readers 'uncertain and dissatisfied' (1722, vii-viii, 115-116).

² This mix was not exclusive to England; in varying proportions and modalities the 'same amalgam characterized other parts of Europe', including Italy, where confraternities performed social welfare functions which in England were carried out by the 'little platoons of parish vestries and voluntary associations' (Slack 1998, 156). Munkhoff (2014) makes a good case for the sixteenth-century parish nurse system as a form of public health.

from the streets ‘infected persons’, and ‘putrid matter’ that might cause ‘corruption or infection of the air’ (Slack 2012, 75). Soon city-states, towns and even villages across the northern quadrilateral were demanding health certification for travellers, isolating and destroying suspect goods. In 1377 the Venetian colony of Ragusa ordered that ships arriving from infected places be isolated, as did Marseilles in 1383. In 1423 Venice set up a quarantine station on an island previously used to isolate lepers; ex-lazarettos were soon being used to isolate the city’s own plague victims. On the same principle, that of separating the sick from healthy, the Duchy of Milan had shacks built for the infected outside the city gates, and in 1456 a special hospital built. Milan also led the way in attempting to identify contacts of the sick and have them segregated in their homes, and in requiring that all illnesses and deaths be registered (Slack 2012, 76; Cipolla 1985, 15-17). By this time Genoa had its own board of health, as did Livorno, Pisa and Pistoia. Always powerful but initially temporary institutions, in the course of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries they were made permanent, a change that signalled an important shift in policy: no longer improvised to deal with emergencies, they were made responsible for preventative measures, such as the regulation of overcrowding, sewage and refuse and the collection of information (Cipolla 1985, 18).

South of Florence and North of the Alps permanent boards of health were not established for at least another two hundred years,³ but as wave of epidemic followed wave, ‘Italian practices’ were introduced ‘piecemeal fashion’ across continental Europe, sea-ports and cities dependent on long distance commerce taking the lead (Slack 2012, 77). By comparison England remained ‘a benighted, backward country’, one to which, according to Cardinal Campeggio in 1517, ‘Italians are afraid of coming’ (Slack 1985, 201). The timid ‘beginning[s] of an English policy for public health’ came the following year with the issue of a royal proclamation ordering that infected houses be marked by bundles of straw hung from windows, and that inmates carry white sticks when on the street (Slack 1985, 201). Over the century Tudor Privy Councils repeatedly urged the City of London to take steps to identify and segregate the sick, and called on those who had ‘travelled in outward parts’ to imitate their ‘devices... so as we may be seen to have learned that point of civility, and to have among us as charitable a mind for preservation of our neighbours, as they have’ (quoted in Slack 1985, 203). In 1563 Cesare Adelmare, physician first to Mary Tudor, then to Elizabeth, advised Treasurer William Cecil on such ‘devices’, suggesting, among ways of providing against the ‘calamities which aggravate poverty in London’, the setting up of an adequately financed bureaucracy and a code of plague orders like those adopted by ‘other countries’ (Slack 1985, 207-208).

Some sixteen years later, a national code for England was published in the form of seventeen *Orders ... to be executed throughout the Counties of this Realm in such ... places as are ... infected with the plague* (Slack 1985, 209-210).⁴ To implement them Justices of the Peace were to meet every three weeks, receive reports from parish searchers of the dead, devise and administer taxation for the relief of the sick, arrange for bedding and clothing of victims to be burned, for funerals to take place at dusk to prevent large assemblies, and infected houses to be shut up for at least six weeks, with all the members of the family, whether sick or healthy, watchmen being appointed to keep them in and other officers to provide food. The last of the *Orders* prescribed that

³ In Britain not until the Public Health Act of 1848; even then the Board had ‘limited powers and no money’; <<https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/towncountry/towns/tyne-and-wear-case-study/about-the-group/public-administration/the-1848-public-health-act/>>, accessed 20 December 2020.

⁴ On the dating of the *Orders*, see McKeithen (n.d.).

if there be any person Ecclesiastical or laye, that shall holde and publishe any opinions (as in some places report is made) that it is a vayne thing to forbear to resort to the infected, or that it is not charitable to forbid the same, pretending that no person shall dye but at their tyme prefixed, such persons shalbe not onely reprehended, but by order of the Bishop, if they be ecclesiasticall, shalbe forbidden to preache, and being laye, shalbe also enjoyned to forbear to vtter such dangerous opinions vpon payne of imprisonment, which shall be executed, if they shall perseuer in that error. (England and Wales, 1578; 'The Plague Book', 9)

Slack calls this last provision 'prophetically defensive' (1985, 210). Compared to those adopted in continental Europe, the English rules were exceptional in providing for taxes to pay for supporting the sick (along lines established in the Poor Laws), and in imposing unmitigated household quarantine. Since the *Orders* of 1578 were republished without much revision at the occurrence of every new epidemic up until the Great Plague of London, 'The incarceration of whole families in infected houses characterised English policy between 1578 and 1665 ... it was this which stimulated most controversy' (Slack 1985, 211). Its harshness was exasperated by the Plague Act of 1604, which authorised watchmen to use force to keep people shut up, prescribed a whipping for anyone leaving an infected house, and felony charges (and hence the death penalty) against people with plague sores found wandering in the company of others (Slack 1985, 211).

In practice no one seems to have been hanged as a result of this grotesque addition to the Tudor Bloody Code, and it is not clear how strictly household quarantining was enforced. Resistance, or non-compliance, took various forms, individual and institutional. Certainly many people did not 'forbear to resort to the infected', especially those with whom they 'shared a space, knowledge of one another (good and ill), and obligations to one another (reluctant or willing)' (Wrightson 2011, 161). Keith Wrightson's picture of life in Newcastle during the terrible plague of 1636

confirms the power and resilience of the associational life of the city; of the bonds of family and civil society among people brought up, as the schoolmaster Richard Mulcaster put it, 'not to live alone, but amongst others'. (2011, 160)

While neighbourliness may have led many to behave in ways that contravened the *Orders*, it would not necessarily have led them to 'utter', or even 'holde' opinions critical of government measures. The broadcasting of 'dangerous opinions', especially from the pulpit, was another matter. In 1603, during a particularly acrimonious phase in the long running debate as to whether the causes of calamities were natural or divine, the Calvinist preacher, Henoah Clapham, proclaimed that, since plague was a direct manifestation of God's wrath, all attempts to fight or evade the disease were impious. He was imprisoned until persuaded to make a declaration accepting a 'blurred compromise':

That howsoever there is no mortality, but by and from a supernatural cause, so yet it is not without concurrence of natural causes also, for the most part ... And I clearly and expressly hold the plague to be infectious and that it is most expedient for the parties infected to be severed and shut up (they having things necessary and convenient provided for them). (quoted in Slack 1985, 235)

'Expedient' maybe – but enforceable? Affordable? City of London authorities complained that they had not the means to take on the large numbers of officials needed to identify infected families, keep them isolated and fed. Doubts were also raised by aldermen about the efficacy of shutting up whole households, a practice which 'seemeth by experience rather to increase

than decrease the infection' (Slack 1985, 215-216). Privy Councillors seem to have come round to this view. In 1630 the City was ordered to abandon household quarantine in favour of pesthouses or hospitals on the pattern of Henri IV's Hospital St. Louis. The following year Charles I's Huguenot physician, Sir Theodore de Mayerne, reported on measures for preventing plague in London. Identifying economic and social problems as threats to 'the public health of all', de Mayerne recommended a salaried corps of medical men, pesthouses for the sick, with contacts and relatives to be isolated elsewhere – solutions 'used in other countries and found to be the safer course'. To implement them, the report called for a magistrate with absolute powers, and a permanent office of health to deal not only with epidemics but also the conditions that produced them (Slack 1985, 218).

No action was taken during the rest of Charles's reign, and little during the relatively plague-free years of the Republic, so that when the 'Great Visitation' struck London in 1665 the same old problems had to be faced again. A proposal put before the Privy Council accused the 'total neglect of the prevention' of plague, and repeated the recommendations of Aldemare and de Mayerne (Slack 1985, 222). By now, the efficacy and ethics of household quarantining had become the target of a 'unanimous campaign' by medical writers,⁵ but as numbers of deaths rose the old *Orders* were republished and whole families, their servants and lodgers shut up once more. Only in May 1666, by which time the epidemic had faded, was official policy changed. The tenth and eleventh of the new *Rules and Orders* stipulated

That each City and Town forthwith provide some convenient place remote from the same, where a pest-house, huts, or sheds may be erected, to be in readiness in case any Infection should break out and ... That if any House be Infected, the sick person or persons be forthwith removed to the said pest-house, sheds, or huts, for the preservation of the rest of the Family. (Charles, 7)

'It was Mayerne's policy of 1631 revived, and it came too late for London', comments Slack (1985, 223), who sums up the scientific and religious controversies of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries:

Over the years intellectual assumptions about plague had been adjusted to remove potential obstacles to new policies of public health. They had not been remodelled so as to put those policies beyond the range of scientific or empirical dispute. (Slack 1985, 254)

This would become evident when, some fifty years after the Great Plague, a Hanoverian government attempted to assume powers to impose measures far more draconian than had before been contemplated in England.

3. *English Liberties*

After 1665-1666 no plague epidemic struck England, perhaps because Italian and French procedures for quarantining ships kept infection at a distance (Slack 1985, 323; Porter 2001, 9). But in 1709 an outbreak in the Baltic, where English soldiers were fighting for Sweden

⁵ George Thomson, for instance, praised nations 'that forbear to mure up in too severe, solitary and doleful manner those that are infected'; Nathaniel Hodges recommended the removal of the sick and sound to separate pesthouses; the anonymous author of *The Shutting up of Infected Houses as it is practised in England* denounced the practice as uncharitable and counter-productive: 'Infection may have killed its thousands, but shutting up hath killed its ten thousands'; see Slack (1985, 250-251).

against Russia and her allies, persuaded the ministry to provide for restrictions on suspect ships. Charles Mullet sees in these years signs of

a fundamental change in attitude ... The legislation and official intervention in the great plague epochs of the Stuart period came after the plague had started and sought at most to limit what had already begun. Georgian legislation both anticipated the distemper by setting up barriers and contained specific recommendations of how to treat it if the barriers were passed. (1936, 486)

Public readiness to accept more drastic state intervention was to be tested, however, during the epidemic that struck Marseilles in May 1720, killing half the city's population, and over the summer and autumn spread through Provence. Its horrors, and desperate attempts by inhabitants of infected towns to break through the lines of armed soldiers enclosing them, were graphically described in reports in English newspapers, several of them attributed to Defoe.⁶ In a 'quick and unusually comprehensive' response the House of Lords took advice from Richard Mead, the most prominent physician of the time (Slack 1985, 327). Mead, who had had access to previous advice to Council, insisted on the importance of quarantining suspect ships, and repeated earlier criticisms of household isolation as ineffectual, perhaps counterproductive, and in any case 'always ... [having] the Appearance of a severe *Discipline* and even *Punishment* rather than of a *Compassionate* care'; instead infected families should be removed from their homes, and lines established around infected towns (1720, 32). He also recommended that the sick and their contacts be stripped of their clothes, washed and shaved, 'a Venetian policy which might well have been instrumental against flea-borne infection' (Slack 1985, 328).⁷

Mead's advice formed the basis of a new Act of Parliament which imposed close quarantining of all vessels coming from infected places, with fines and prison sentences for transgressors (Mullett 1936, 487). In the event of plague reaching Britain, the government was empowered to set *cordons sanitaires*, and forcibly remove members of infected households, resistance being classed as a non-clergyable felony. The Act 'for the better preventing the Plague from being brought from foreign Parts' (cited in Mullett 1936, 487) passed through Parliament without opposition, receiving royal assent on 25 January 1721 and taking effect from 10 February. In June two English ships arriving from the eastern Mediterranean with cargoes of suspect goods were burnt, and when Parliament reconvened in October, the King's speech anticipated further measures. On 20 November a Bill was passed allowing embargoes on trade with any infected country and the use of force against suspect ships trying to enter a British port. On the domestic front, the ministry began to consider a public health commission for London, and a plan for housing the infected in barracks in open spaces round the city, with separate quarters for healthy contacts.

By the end of the year the new policies had come under fire from several sides.⁸ Mercantile interests bitterly opposed the powers to impose embargoes, while the Country opposition in the

⁶ Defoe had been following the progress of plague across Europe for over a decade, 'exhaustedly trying to prepare his fellow citizens for the virus's return' (Ellison 2006, 91). In the autumn of 1709 he warned of the Baltic danger in six numbers of the *Review*, and in August 1712 drew attention to other outbreaks, 'attracting ridicule for his "Melancholy Notions" '; see Landa in Defoe 2010, xii. As for the articles of the early 1720s, Landa is non-committal: 'An author in the government's pay believed to be Defoe rose vigorously to the Act's defence in a series of ten articles for the *Daily Post*, *Mist's Journal*, and *Applebee's Journal*, signing himself "Quarantine" ' (2010, xii).

⁷ Like the majority of Englishmen who 'wished to become doctors [and] went abroad for their education', Mead had studied at Leiden and then Padua; see Allen (1946, 130).

⁸ France too saw 'a discursive explosion' on 'absolutist' methods of containment in the 1720s: 'the *cordon sanitaire* policy was the subject not solely of celebration but also of critique' (Jones 1996, 116).

House of Lords united Tories and disaffected Whigs in denouncing the borrowing of practices ‘utterly unknown to our Constitution, and repugnant ... to the lenity of our mild and free government’ (Slack 1985, 332). On 6 December the City combined both lines of attack in a petition to reconsider the clauses in the Act making defiance of quarantine a felony and providing for lines around infected towns, clauses which ‘touched the rights, privileges, immunities, and trade, safety, and prosperity of the city of London’ (Mullett 1936, 490).⁹ The petition was rejected, as was a motion for repeal, and another protesting that the Act could never be wisely administered, that it undermined trade and credit, that such powers were repugnant to the English constitution, smacked of French practice, and had never been used in the past. Outside Parliament, rumours of Jacobite plots and the South Sea scandal fuelled fierce controversy in press and pulpit. On 8 December 1721, Edmund Massey preached before the Lord Mayor and aldermen in St. Paul’s a sermon on the disease as a punishment for the Deism, heresy, avarice and ambition affecting every order and degree, warning that ‘These things are not casual or spontaneous’. As Slack comments

Such appeals to providence against the sins of the Venetian oligarchy, which Walpole and his allies were erecting in 1721, did not encourage confidence in the government’s anti-plague measures – borrowed from Venice as in part they ironically were. (1985, 329)

Medical men meanwhile continued to debate the old, unsolved questions of cause, modes of transmission, precautions and remedies. Defoe was to complain about ‘the publishing of a vast variety of Opinions’ by physicians:

some declaring that the Plague is not dangerous one way, and some that it is not dangerous another way; while by common Experience, we find it dangerous every way, and this carried up to such a Degree as it is, that we know not whom to follow, or whom to give Credit to. (1722, 116)

To one group of opinion-makers he would give no credit at all. George Pye ‘set the tone’ for anti-contagionist pamphlets, denying that the disease could be passed from person to person and insisting that it depended on the quality of the air in a particular locality. Thus, ‘For the first time in England the concept of contagion was criticised, not because it conflicted with God’s will, but because it seemed incompatible with observation and past experience’ (Slack 1985, 330). Moreover

Pye and his allies added a new political and patriotic note. Lines of guards and savage isolation were the marks of an ‘arbitrary’ power in France; they were intolerable to people under a ‘free government’ in England.

These arguments gave the anti-contagionist views espoused by only an insignificant minority of medical writers wide public support. (Slack 1985, 331)

The pressures proved too strong for the ministry. Mead added a preface to new editions of his *Discourse*, disclaiming responsibility for the Act of 1721, recommending that government powers be limited so as not to ‘endanger the rights and liberties of a people’ and conceding that even the best laws needed to be amended when they aroused ‘popular prejudices and clamour’ (Slack 1985, 331). Amended they were. On 12 February 1722 the three hated clauses were repealed and replaced with the attribution to King and Privy Council of general powers to ‘make such

⁹On the part played by the City in the controversy see Henderson (1945, 33-45).

Orders and Regulations concerning the Quarantine, and prevention of infection, as shall be necessary for the Safety and Preservation of his or their Subjects’.

4. Defoe’s *Grand Experiment*

4.1 *The Occasion of Writing*

Due Preparations for the Plague, As well for Soul as Body: Being some Seasonable Thoughts upon the Visible Approach of the present dreadful Contagion in France, the properest Measures to prevent it, and the great Work of submitting to it had been published just four days before the passage of the revised Act. Louis Landa thought that Defoe had written it specifically to help it through (Landa in Defoe 2010, xii),¹⁰ but as a defence of the Act, a pamphlet by Edmund Gibson, Bishop of London, and ‘a henchman of Walpole’s’, is far more incisive and explicit. Gibson’s *The Causes of the Discontents, in Relation to the Provisions against the Plague and the Provisions against it, Fairly Stated and Consider’d* was ‘freely distributed across the country’, presumably for that purpose.¹¹ There are several points of contact between Gibson’s defence of quarantining and Defoe’s, but in method, mode, structure and style the two could hardly be more different. *The Causes* is short, cohesive, strictly structured according to traditional *dispositio*; written to ‘quiet the Minds of well meaning People’ (1721, 4), it avoids entering into the merits and demerits of specific measures. *Due Preparations* is long, ‘longer than almost any previous work about the plague’ (Moore 1992, 136), and ungainly in structure; designed to rouse to action, it criticises existing provisions and proposes new ones, some of them extremely ambitious, and it repeatedly shifts between modes, now discursive, now didactic, now narrative, now dramatic.

The preliminaries orient readers as to ‘the Thing aim’d’ (Defoe 1722, x), establishing a common ground of knowledge and values, and an ethos for the authorial ‘I’.¹² The title promises a focus on constructive and appropriate measures (‘Due Preparations’), and a balancing of spiritual and material (‘as well for Soul as Body’), while the subtitle underlines the urgency of preparing given the ‘Visible approach of the present dreadful CONTAGION’, while the epigraph reassures of God’s care (‘There shall no Evil befall the’).

¹⁰ Like other Defoe scholars (for example Backsheider 1989, 489), in referring to ‘Walpole’s Quarantine Act’, Landa does not distinguish between the statute passed in January 1721 and the revised version passed on 12 February 1722; Healy (2003) does, however. Wild (2009) sees the treatise in quite another light – as a critical response to Mead’s *Discourse*. *Due Preparations* does contest Mead at several points, but why would Defoe have waited for over a year to pass (by which time Mead had retreated anyway) before publishing a critique of his proposals? George Pye and the anonymous anti-contagionists are more likely targets.

¹¹ The title page of *The Causes of the Discontents* gives the date 1721, and Slack seems to assume that the pamphlet was written in an attempt to defend the original Quarantine Act with its three hated clauses. Gibson does reprint and analyse the three clauses to show that they did not *impose* strict constraints but only allowed for them to be imposed if absolutely necessary. But towards the end of the pamphlet he refers to the ‘General Powers’ in terms that suggest that they had already been conferred, which would suggest that he was writing after 12 February 1722: ‘[I]f this Humour continues among the People, of not bearing the thought of any Expedient that is attended with Terror, and no Expedient can possibly be found but what is very Terrible, I see not how any Fruit can be expected from these General Powers, nor who they are that will have the Heart to execute them, nor that any Scheme they can propose, is like to meet with better Treatment from the Populace, than what we have already seen’ (Gibson 1721, 13). Is it possible that the ‘1721’ of the title page is an Old Style date?

¹² In this as in many other aspects *Due Preparations* uses persuasive methods similar to those which Bardotti identifies in her analysis of the *Journal* as an ‘argumentative text’ (1990, chapter 4). For the sake of simplicity I have referred to the ‘I’ responsible for *Due Preparations* as ‘Defoe’.

The Introduction defends at length the ‘Seasonableness of the whole Work’ against possible charges of alarmism,¹³ presenting the book as fulfilling a need felt – as is suggested in the repeated use of the second person plural – by author and readers alike:

If then, we are in Expectations, and under just Apprehensions of it, what Appearance is there of our Preparations for it? Never less, I think, was to be seen in any Nation under Heaven; whether we speak of Preparations to avoid and escape it, or of Preparations to wait and expect it; whether we speak of Preparations for the Soul or for the Body; And this alone has been the Occasion of writing this Book. (1722, vii)

Blame for the failure to give clear instruction on how to avoid catching the plague is laid squarely on the physicians, who have treated only little and ‘very superficially ... of the Nature of the Disease, the best preventative Remedies, &c.’ Worse still, they ‘differ with, contradict, and oppose one another, and [leaving] ... their Readers uncertain and dissatisfy’d, as far to seek, and at a loss for their Conduct, as they were before’ (1722, vii-viii). The present work will, it is implied, offer clear and consistent counsel, leaving readers satisfied and certain as to what they should do. With respect to ‘our religious Preparations ... of this, indeed, I have seen, I may say, nothing at all offer’d in Publick; on the contrary, the whole World is intent and busy on their ordinary Occasions’ – stock jobbing, theatre-going and other ‘Follies’ (1722, viii). *Due Preparations* has both practical and moral purposes, immediate and long term: ‘tis Calculated for the present particular Occasion of the Terrors we are under ... yet may be useful many ways, both to us and to Posterity’ (1722, ix).

Up to this point nothing out of the way has been anticipated, in conclusion the Introduction justifies the interpolation of material not usually found in serious plague discourse:

To make this Discourse Familiar and Agreeable to every Reader, I have endeavour’d to make it as Historical as I could, and I have therefore intermingled it with some Accounts of Fact, where I could come at them, and some by report, suited to and Calculated for the Moral. (1722, x)

Addressed not to a small, specialist audience but to a general public, this advice book will be rendered more palatable and accessible by the presence of narrative.¹⁴ For his ‘Accounts of Fact’, the author/historian claims to draw on first-hand knowledge: ‘I very particularly remember the last Visitation ... and have had occasion to Converse with many other Persons who liv’d in this City all the while’ (1722, x). Then, in a typically Defoeian sleight of hand, he asks that we not expect full documentation: he ‘cou’d have descended to the very Names and Particulars’ in the ‘Histories’ of these persons,

But ’tis the Example that is the Thing aim’d at the Application to same Measures is argued, from the Reason and Nature of the Thing, as well as from the Success, and I recommend the Experiments said here to be made, no farther than they appear rational and just, with whatever Success they had been practis’d. (1722, x-xi)

The Introduction thus establishes the need and purpose of the treatise, and projects the author figure as a fellow citizen who has the good of his readers at heart and aims to be of service; he has

¹³ On earlier charges of alarmism levelled against Defoe, see above, note 6.

¹⁴ Margaret Healy places *A Journal* at the end of a long line of plague writings which reveal ‘a marriage of providential narrative and religious complaint with much more particularized social and political comment’, but also entertain and offer ‘aesthetic pleasure’ (2003, 27, 29).

shown himself to be informed on current events, familiar with the relevant science but neither erudite nor partisan, of strict religious and moral principles, but a plain speaker aware of the ordinary reader's need for pleasure as well as instruction. In addition, through his own and his acquaintances' status as eye-witnesses to the last plague to strike their city, he has something new and true to offer: 'Histories' which will serve as 'Examples' of successful preparation, to be followed only insofar as they seem 'rational and just'. With this implied compliment to the reader's reason and moral sense, Defoe without more ado 'proceed[s] directly to the Work itself' (1722, xi).

4.2 *Preparations Against: General, Public and National*

The 'index' with which the discourse gets under way hints that the preparations, like the text itself, will be out of the ordinary, but no less useful for that:

Perhaps my Method in the Preparations I am now to speak of, may be something singular; but I hope they shall not be the less Profitable. I shall make no more Introductions. I divide my Subject into two Generals: --

I. Preparations against the Plague.

II. Preparations for the Plague.

The first of these I call Preparations for the Body.

The Second I call Preparations for the Soul.

Both, I hope, may be useful for both, and especially the First shall be subservient to the Last. (1722, 1-2)

The simple, two-part organisation promised here will turn out to be a misleading guide to the overall contents of *Due Preparations*,¹⁵ but for a few pages Defoe keeps up the appearance of being in charge of his material. 'Preparations against' are subdivided into

(1.) General, Publick, and National Preparations, namely for keeping it out of the Country or City, or Town we live in, and preventing its spreading from one place to another: the Measures which are now taking, being, I must needs say, very Deficient; and (2) Particular Preparations, such as relate to Persons and Families for preserving us from infection in our Houses, when it pleases God that it shall come into the City, or Place wherein we live. (1722, 2)

Of the 'General' category, those 'Measures which the Government or Magistrates take', the current 'Limitations of Commerce, Prohibitions, and Quarantines' on shipping are approved, but as to whether they can be applied in England –

we are not a Nation qualify'd so well to resist the Progress of such a Distemper, or the Entrance of it into our Country, as others are; we have Set of Men among us, so bent upon their Gain, by that we call Clandestine Trade, that they would even venture to Import the Plague it self, if they were to get by it, and so give it to all that liv'd near them, not valuing the gross and horrid Injustice that they do to other People. (1722, 3-4)

As for 'very Deficient' present measures for 'preventing ... spreading',

¹⁵ The 'General Preparations' include both measures for 'keeping it out' and ones for preventing it spreading, while some of the 'Particular' ones turn out to be 'a kind of Publick', and the preparations 'for the Soul' in the end give way to further measures to preserve the body. These slippages reflect the difficulty of separating mental/spiritual from physical/material, and perhaps presage Defoe's recourse to more fluid textual flow in *A Journal*, which has no internal divisions; see Bardotti 1990, 21.

The Physicians seem at present to fall in with the *French* methods ... by surrounding the Towns where it shall happen to be, with Troops of Soldiers, cutting off all Communication ... I must Confess, I do not see that this can be made practicable in *England*; and we see it has not been Effectual in France, notwithstanding greater Severities have been us'd there, than I presume will ever be allow'd here. (1722, 5)

Defoe's critique of the *cordon sanitaire* is interesting, both for the reasons he includes and those he does not. Christopher Loar focuses on the stress laid on 'environmental and climatic conditions' in a long and detailed comparison of the geography of Provence with that of Great Britain (2019, 42). In addition Defoe puts the usual commercial and social arguments against forcible containment: it encourages people to conceal infection, and is therefore counter-productive; it harms trade and provokes public disorder; it is in any case unenforceable in a country lacking and armed force sufficiently large or free of local ties to be entrusted with policing confinement (1722, 7-11). But also significant, especially in the context of the political controversies gripping England during the winter of 1721-1722, are the objections Defoe does *not* raise, or even try to refute. He explicitly refuses to 'enter here upon the Debate of the Invasion of Liberty, and the Ruin of Property, which must necessarily attend such a Practice as this'.¹⁶ In place of nationalistic ideology he puts the humanitarian argument that to kill people trying to escape 'is really shedding Innocent Blood, which is a kind of Evil not to be done that good may come, no, not of any kind', and the pragmatic ones that such 'Severities ... will ... [never] be allow'd here', and in any case are 'not likely to answer the Means proposed' (1722, 5, 16).

By contrast Edmund Gibson energetically denounced the clamour over 'Rights and Liberties, and the Ease and Convenience of Mankind', accusing 'disaffected and designing Men' of using them as ideological cover for their vindictive purposes, and rejecting allegations that the *cordon sanitaire* was 'a FRENCH Scheme ... calculated only for a Country under *Arbitrary* Government' (1721, 7). In taking this line, Gibson seems to ask his readers to be ready to go along with 'Expedients' he has from the start admitted to be 'very dreadful, and shocking ... to human Nature' on the negative and unpalatable principles of necessity that underpin the whole of *The Causes of the Discontents*, namely that there is no alternative, and 'Where the Disease is desperate, the Remedy must be so too' (1721, 3).

Defoe adopts quite another strategy. Rather than trying to browbeat his readers into accepting a terrifying solution which they have no choice *but* to accept, he pulls a new and much less shocking one out of his hat:

It seems to me a much more rational Method, that as soon as any Town or Village appears to be Visited, all the Sound People of the Town be immediately removed and oblig'd to go to some certain particular Place, where Barracks should be built for them, or Tents pitched for them, and where they should be oblig'd to perform a Quarantine of Days ... and if any Families prov'd to have the Distemper in their Encampment, they should remove again leaving the Sick Families behind: And thus continually moving the Sound from the Sick, the Distemper would abate of Course, and the Contagion be less strong by how much fewer persons were affected by it.

Nothing is more certain than that the Contagion strengthens, and the infectious Particles in the Air, if any such there are, increase in Quantity, as the greater number of Sick Bodies are kept together ... and were it possible for all the People in the Populous Cities and Towns in *England* to separate on such an Occasion as this, and spread themselves over the whole Kingdom in smaller Numbers, and at

¹⁶ Conceding nothing to current xenophobia, Defoe later writes of the French as a 'Nation of Humanity' living under 'wholesome laws' and praises French court physicians as having 'made the greatest Proficiency in the Knowledge of Medicine, and in the Study of Distempers, of any Nation whatsoever' (1722, 122-123).

proper Distances from one another, 'tis evident even to Demonstration, that the Plague would have but very little Power, and the Effects of it very little felt. (1722, 12-13)

At the outset Defoe had warned us that his preparations would follow a 'method something singular.'¹⁷ The plan outlined here recalls the spirit of his early *Essay on Projects*, but is breathtaking in scope compared to the proposals for repairing highways, for national insurance, and academies put forward in 1697. This for defeating the plague involves shifting people on a huge scale, in effect redistributing the whole population of England, perhaps several times. In its aim it has something in common with 'the first project I read of', namely the 'building of the Ark by Noah', which the *Essay* describes as having seemed 'so ridiculous to the graver heads of that wise, though wicked age that poor Noah was sufficiently bantered for it' (Defoe 2008, 23).¹⁸ Defoe gives no opportunity for ridicule here, but confidently presents his plan for saving England as rational and feasible, conveying the impression that every need and eventuality has been thought of, from the building of barracks and supplying of tents to repeated removals, minimising of group size and proper distancing. At the same time not too much is promised: implementation of the measures will result not in complete and immediate victory over the plague but gradual abatement and weakening of its power.¹⁹

'Were it possible'. Defoe admits that his method 'cannot be done in *London*, or in other considerable Cites' where 'there will always be a great Number of People who care not to remove'. To those who do care to do so but are 'not permitted' by their circumstances, he offers a thirteen-point plan for evacuating two thirds of the city's population (1722, 19). People willing and able to leave are to be set a deadline, after which rigorous medical examinations and quarantining will be required; those who normally come to the city on business or for legal reasons are to be forestalled by closing the law courts and other institutions. The other 'effectual Measures' concern those at the bottom of society or on its margins. Thus,

A reasonable Encouragement should be given to the poorer sort of People, who had any Friends or Relations to receive them, to remove with their Families, even to the giving them Allowances for their travel; that as many poor Families as possible may quit the City and separate, which would be their Safety, and Contribute to the Safety of the whole City also. (1722, 20)

A similar logic underpins proposals that people lacking legal settlement be sent back to their parishes of origin, that parish pensioners and the like are to be removed, at the expense of the parish, at least twenty miles from the city, while debtors, and prisoners for debt, removed at least fifteen miles; 'all Criminals, Felons, and Murtherers' are to be 'forthwith Tried' and if not 'sentenc'd to Die', transported or banished to a distance of at least forty miles (1722, 20-21). Five provisions regard children. Charity school children are to be sent to the Blue Coat school's country properties; workhouse and other poor children are to be removed at least thirty miles and maintained at public expense; heads of families that intend to stay are to be exhorted to send

¹⁷ Kari Nixon argues that here and in the exemplary histories that follow Defoe is advising 'general public health strategies that catalyze regulated but permeable borders', making 'a case about the benefits of mediated flow' (2014, 76-77). I can see this as applying to *A Journal*, but not to *Due Preparations*.

¹⁸ Later Defoe explicitly claims affinity: to discover whether the plague is receding the master of the self-isolated house 'like Noah, who open'd the Window of the Ark, to send out his Dove, ... opened his Street Door for the first time and walk'd out' (1722, 103).

¹⁹ On the difference between 'two different models of ecological consciousness', one focussed on mastery and total control, the other on vulnerability and mitigation, see Loar (2019, 42-43). Loar convincingly associates *Due Preparations* with the first and *A Journal* with the second, but here the earlier book anticipates the later one.

all children under fourteen into the country with, if necessary, accommodation provided for a year. The outcome predicted is radical and absolute: ‘not a Child would be left in the whole City of *London*, and in all its vast extended suburbs’ (1722, 27).

During the early months of 1722, the months between the writing of *Moll Flanders, A Journal* and *Colonel Jack*, Defoe clearly had the poor of London, its migrants, criminals and especially its poor children, much on his mind (see Novak 2001, 606). But his plan for clearing the city, especially of its poor inhabitants, is inspired as much by concern for the safety of those – the lower middling sort who must or choose to remain, and who bore most of the financial burden, of plague²⁰ – as for the well-being of those who are to be helped (or forced) to leave:

These Evacuations of People, would greatly lessen the Numbers of the Poor in *London*, and consequently take away the Fuel which the Fire of the Pestilence generally Feeds upon ... All these Measures taken at the Beginning of the Infection, or at the first Approaches of it, we might reasonably hope, Gods infinite Mercy concurring, that the City would be in a Posture to bear the Visitation much better than ever it was before; for tho’ there would still be many Thousands of the Inhabitants left, yet they would live at large, unincumber’d with the Poor, and with Children, and with all the Stench and Filth that attend those who want Conveniences, and who would in such a Calamity only serve to Infect one another, and strengthen the Contagion in general. (1722, 22-24)

Early modern concerns about the economic effects of population loss also accompany humanitarian ones in Defoe’s insistence that the ‘Publick’ consider

how many ways a useful and valuable Charity it would be to have the Children of the poorer and middling sort of People remov’d at such a time as that, into Places of Health and Air, and to have them taken care of for one Year ... and what Charity and Alms would not effect, publick Stocks should supply. I cannot doubt but a Parliament wou’d consider such a Things, and establish some Tax on Coals, a Toll on Cattle and Corn, or some such Thing ... By this means, the Lives of an hundred Thousand poor innocent Creatures ... would be sav’d, and those Children be preserv’d for the good of Posterity; most of whom would otherwise inevitably Perish. (1722, 26-27)

Such innovatory proposals for state intervention, and indeed the whole evacuation scheme, may owe a debt to the plan for *Lessening the Plague* William Petty had drafted in a spirit of ‘political arithmetic’ some fifty years earlier.²¹ The remaining ‘General’ provisions are less adventurous. Defoe cites approvingly recent City and Middlesex Grand Jury calls for existing laws on cleaning the streets of London to be properly implemented, insisting that drains also be attended to. He reinforces his message with vivid evocations of corners of London that would have been familiar to the nostrils of many of his readers: carrion-blocked tide ditches, the insufferably smelling Whitechapel hog-keepers’ yards, and such notorious ‘fountains of stench’ as the Fleet Ditch, that ‘notorious and abominable Sink of publick Nastiness’ (1722, 30, 35-36). He also deploys his favourite documentary source, the Bills of Mortality, to highlight differences between death rates in poor suburbs, especially those ‘butting on the Thames’, and those in the wealthier inner City (1722, 33). As Loar notices (2019, 50-51), both here and in *A Journal*, Defoe stresses

²⁰ See Newman’s case study of the economics of the plague of 1636 (2012, 816).

²¹ Mullett summarises the main points of Petty’s plan: ‘he recommended that officials choose, in the circle of seventy miles diameter, ten large roomy disjointed houses with water and garden to each, whose inhabitants should be prepared to move at seven days’ notice. Convenient wagons or coaches should be prepared to carry away the suspected. Money should be provided and a method devised to furnish pesthouses with medicine; each house also should have books of devotion’ (1938, 20).

the magistrates' duty to take account of the importance of quantitative data as guides to the patterns future distempers will probably follow.

If on public hygiene Defoe agrees with the physicians – 'Nastiness and Nauseous Smells ... are Injurious and Dangerous ... they propagate Infection' (1722, 35) – he takes issue with them on 'Precautions or Preparations, as are Private and Personal', which he accuses most of ignoring. 'People ought to turn their Thoughts to Cleansing a worse Jakes than that of the Tide-Ditches', he warns: 'the People, specially such as are to stay here at all Adventures, should Universally cleanse themselves, cleanse their Bodies' by means of emetics, salivations and, above all, a moderate diet and virtuous living (1722, 36). Defoe also goes against Mead on the usefulness of lighting street fires to cleanse the air, and against Richard Bradley, who attributed the spread of infection to closely built houses and unpaved city streets.

Both issues relate to the long-running debate on the origins and transmission of plague. Slack writes of this:

we can see why Englishmen in the past disagreed so violently about them. For contemporaries were no less tempted than some historians have been to ... to underestimate the number of contingent factors involved in it. This search for simple answers is most evident in the great plague scare of 1720 to 1722. (1985, 312)

As we have seen, Defoe had little time for the medical polemics pouring off the printing presses in the early 1720s, but his understanding of epidemic is not simplistic: it accommodates many factors – air and water quality, overcrowding, undernourishment and poor hygiene. 'His writings treat plague as a multifarious phenomenon, something neither human nor purely natural', comments Loar (2019, 31). Yet on one aspect of plague he is adamant: '[t]he whole Scheme my Discourse... [which] aims at Separating the People as much as Possible from one another', is written 'upon a Supposition of the common Hypothesis, namely, That the Distemper is what we call Catching or Contagious' (1722, 113-114). As we have seen, it was a hypothesis that had recently come under fire.²²

4.3 *Preparations Against: Particular*

In 'Family Preparations against the PLAGUE', the first of two sections on the 'Private, as oppos'd to the Publick Preparations',²³ hypothesis gives way to narrative, not argued but imagined as concrete and actual. 'I must for the sake of this Head suppose, that the Plague (God forbid it) was at the Door, or perhaps really begun in the Nation', Defoe tells us (1722, 57). From an advisory, conditional mode – 'every Family should keep themselves from Conversing with one another' (1722, 58) – he passes to the historical and indicative, offering a long, exhaustively detailed account of a case of self-isolation:

In order to direct to any particular Family, who have Substance to enable them to shut themselves up in so strict a manner as would be absolutely necessary for preserving them effectually from Contagion ... I shall describe a Family so shut up, with the Precautions they used, how they maintained an absolute Retreat from the World, and how they provided for it, it being partly Historical and partly for Direction; by which Pattern, if any Family upon the like occasion, thinks fit to act, they may, I doubt not, with the Concurrence of Providence, hope to be preserv'd. (1722, 61-62)

²² Gibson refers to anti-contagionism as 'a new Notion in Philosophy' (1721, 14) and Defoe to it as a 'new Opinion' (1722, 125); for both it contradicts universal experience.

²³ Defoe seems to have come to doubt the validity of this distinction: unlike the 'Personal and Particular' sanitary preparations he adds, 'they are a kind of Publick' (1722, 57).

Step by step Defoe leads potential imitators through the process by which a prosperous wholesale grocer prepares his house in St Alban's Wood Street for 'absolute Retreat'. The apprentices are sent back to their families in the country, his dearest friends stopped from coming to the house, and the family and servants forbidden to go out, or even

so much as look out of a Window into the Street, or open any Casement, except a Wooden Window made for the Purpose, where the Pully and Rope was, and that up two pair of Stairs; and this Wooden Window, he caus'd to be covered with thin Plates of *Latin* or *Tin*, that nothing Infected or Infectious should stick to it.

Whenever this Wooden Window was open'd, he caused a Flash of Gun-powder to be made in the Room, so as to fill it with Smoke, which as soon as the Window was open'd, would gush out with some Force, so that it carry'd away what Air was at the Window, not suffering any to come in from abroad, till it was sufficiently Sing'd with the Sulphur that goes with the Gun-powder Smoke. (1722, 64)

To avoid sending to markets and shops, the 'Master' lays up a year's supply of food, drink, clothes, ingredients for making medicines, spices, household equipment, and even 'pretty things' to keep the women of the family happy (1722, 65-72). For water he builds

three great Terras Cisterns, and ... that every Room in his House might be frequently washed, and not content with the Water of the *New-River* in his Yard, which came in by a Pipe, caused a Well to be sunk in his ... Yard, and a Pump plac'd there, that he might have Water to Dress their Provisions with, which did not run open in the City Air, or could be touch'd by a dead Carcass, or have any living Body or Clothes wash'd in it, which was Infected with the Plague. (1722, 72)

These elaborate and expensive preparations are already complete by the time the disease reaches the inner City so that, when it does, all direct communications with the outside can be cut off. The porter, a poor employee who has been installed in a hutch at the door, at first sends letters up to the wooden window, but even these

he caus'd the Porter to Smoke ... with Brimstone, and with Gun-powder, then to open them, and then to sprinkle them with Vinegar; then he had them drawn up by the Pulley, then smoak'd again with strong Perfumes, and taking them with a pair of Hair Gloves, the Hair outermost, he read them with a large reading Glass, which read at a great Distance, and as soon as they were read, burn'd them in the Fire; and at last, the Distemper raging more and more, he forbid his Friends writing to him at all. (1722, 83-84)

Katherine Ellison discusses this routine as emblematic of an 'information age' of expanded, and potentially dangerous, communication: '[t]he letters described ... must ... pass through the same channel that transmits the virus, so that any communication *about* infection could be communication *of it*' (2006, 90). Loar, on the other hand, sees 'extreme - almost ludicrous - caution' in such 'hyperationalized procedures'; they add up to a 'narrative of exaggerated, Crusoesque isolation [but] does not offer a viable model for safety. Its very extremity renders it more than a little absurd' (2019, 43-44). Yet they constitute no laughing matter, being steps in an anti-ecological 'quest for absolute immunity':

The narrative in *Due Preparations* flirts with the idea of absolute safety, ensured by careful management of a built environment ... The interior of the home is ... an artificial environment, one hostile to contagion, and with, at times, its own microclimates. This sort of enclosure or withdrawal is characteristic of a certain refusal of a non-human environment: a retreat ... we might align with a certain triumphalist narrative of nature overcome. But this safety is itself precarious... (2019, 44)

That the search for absolute safety is in any case futile is borne out by the story as the plague kills the first porter, then his wife, then a second porter who, having been previously infected, wrongly thinks he is immune. Finally, just as the epidemic seems to be fading, the father himself falls sick and demands to be taken to a pest-house (Defoe 1722, 98). Although his illness turns out not to be the plague after all and he recovers, the episode contributes to the anxiety to which the reader is deliberately subjected. The Wood street narrative fulfils Defoe's initial promise to 'make this Discourse Familiar and Agreeable to every Reader' and in so doing performs a persuasive function in the manner traditionally thought best suited to audiences unaccustomed to abstract reasoning (Bardotti 1990, 44, 170). It also addresses a special problem facing eighteenth-century English defenders or proponents of precautionary measures against plague. Unless they had lived abroad or were well into their 70s, neither they, nor their readers, had any direct, adult experience of the disease. In *The Causes of the Discontents*, Edmund Gibson listed a series of 'false measures and ways of REASONING, which Men have fallen into, in relation to the Plague, and the Provisions against it', placing first among them the fact that

[Men] will not *suppose* themselves, in their *Thoughts* and *Imaginations*, to be *now* under the Plague; but they consider it at a great Distance, and themselves and the Nation in a state of perfect Ease and Safety. This imaginary Security makes way for all those inflaming Suggestions, of Breaches upon Law, and Inroads upon Liberty; and puts Men out of all Patience, when you propose any Expedient that is accompanied with Terror or even Inconvenience. But if they would first form within themselves an Idea and Imagination of our being actually *under* the Plague (as every one must do, who will reason wisely about Provisions to prevent it;) all those idle Speculations about Laws, and Liberties, and Conveniences, would vanish. (1721, 10-11)

To gain 'an *Idea* and *Imagination* of ... being under the Plague', Gibson refers his readers to the recently translated *Account of the Plague at Marseilles*. Defoe instead takes them to a location nearer home, provides them with ample food and every other thing necessary to sit out the epidemic and, by a combination of fear and reassurance, persuades them into supposing themselves shut up.²⁴

From the start, the Wood Street 'pattern' has been presented as guidance for 'substantial' families. That 'the poorer Inhabitants are not able to do this, and therefore this Example or this Advice, does not immediately reach to them', Defoe admits in conclusion, adding that since they will be employed as porters and watchmen and 'subsist with Provisions from within, that even those poor men would not be not expos'd to the Conversing with one another, which is the fatal part, in such Extremities as these' (1722, 112). This is hardly borne out by the fate of the porters, who are only a fraction of those disposed of rather too conveniently. The polemical refutation of anti-contagionism that closes 'Preparations against' confronts the old question of visiting the sick:

My Judgement, which I leave to Experience, is this; That be the Bodies of sick Persons infectious or not, be it safe to Visit and Converse with them, or be it not, Things which we may never determine in Theory; this is certain, that in declining Conversation with the Sick, nay in declining all Communications with one another, in time of Infection, there can be little Error, and 'tis the much safer Way for all People to act; in the Negative there can be no Danger; the retreat then, which I recommend, must be acknowledg'd to be most innocent mistake that any Man or Family can commit. (1722, 116)

²⁴ In this *Due Preparations* in part anticipates the *Journals*' "plague by proxy" method, in which Defoe forces the reader to inhabit the perspectives of H.F. and other citizens attempting to survive the visitation' (Lau 2016, 27).

How ‘innocent’ that mistake might look to the sick themselves, or to those who in fact looked after them, and what social, psychological and civic risks might be involved in ‘declining all Conversation with one another’ does not occur to our projector, who seems rather too pleased with his ‘safer Way’²⁵ ‘Family Preparations against the Plague’ concludes on a self-congratulatory note:

Innumerable such Prescriptions [for medicines] were to be had, built on the Experience of many who have practis’d them; but nothing of all this ever comes up to the grand Experiment, which I have recommended in this Work. I mean that of separating ourselves, and retiring wholly from Conversation, whether in Families or otherwise, and laying in Store of Provisions, to shut themselves up as entirely up as if *Lord, have mercy*, and a *Cross*, was set on their Door. (1722, 126)

It is a bitter irony that the healthy family must behave as if infected, and the well-stocked house take on the semblance of one marked for death.

4.4 Preparations For... and Against

The Wood Street ‘grand Experiment’ is, I suggest, only one of several by which Defoe demonstrates how his aim of ‘separating the People as much as possible from one another’ might be realised (1722, 113). The ‘Publick’ measures for dispersing the population and evacuating large cities of the first part of the book are experiments on an even grander scale, and the last section of the book, although largely concerned with preparing for death, makes proper preparation for death the prelude to a second illustration of how to survive. In ‘PREPARATIONS for the PLAGUE’, even more consistently than in those ‘against’, abstract argument is eschewed in favour of narrative, dialogue and ‘trialogue’.²⁶ Offering an illusion of an event taking place in our presence, direct speech is used to help readers do even more effectively what Gibson complained men will *not* do: ‘suppose themselves, in their *Thoughts* and *Imaginations*, to be *now* under the Plague’ (1721, 10). As George A. Starr suggested à propos of *Religious Courtship*, ‘instead of moral principles being laid down and enforced, the use of dialogue allows a more inductive spirit to prevail’ (1971, 49). Defoe had already applied this method of transmitting moral teaching in the *Family Instructor*, and was to do so again in *A Journal*, where H.F. and his brother help each other clarify their ideas as to whether to leave or stay, and a soldier, carpenter and biscuit maker work out together a solution to their plight (Bardotti 1990, 173-174). In contrast to the Wood Street story, in which a pre-conceived programme is imposed by the ‘Master’, ‘Preparations for’ accommodates multiple and initially conflicting points of view, and only slowly brings them to converge.

The setting is once again the City of London during the epidemic of 1665-1666, and the main speakers are once again members of a prosperous London merchant family, but one distinguished from the Wood Street household in having foreign shipping interests, and in lacking a father. The business is run by two brothers, both of whom are much occupied with worldly matters, and initially deny that the plague will come into the City. Edmund Gibson had placed those who prefer not to think of plague until it is upon them among his false reasoners:

²⁵ H.F. is not nearly so convinced. Peter DeGabriele reads *A Journal* as questioning whether ‘any type of community ... [can] survive when individuals spurn all social contact and make isolation their model of survival’ (2010, 10).

²⁶ On Defoe’s ‘wonderfully multi-dimensional’ use of ‘trialogue’ in *Moll Flanders* see Faller (1993, 149-151).

not to think of it at all, would be the wisest Part we should chuse, if our not thinking of it could keep it at Distance. But when it pleases God to give us so long a warning, and we have time (if we will but use it) to consider calmly of the best Expedients, and to digest them into proper Order and Method, while our Thoughts are yet free from that Terror and Confusion, which will necessarily attend a more immediate approach of the Plague; in these Circumstances, there cannot be a greater Folly in the World ... than to neglect the happy Opportunity which God gives. (1721,13)

This is the line taken by the mother, who arrives from her house in Cheshire to administer 'monitory Discourses' and relate personal memories of the plague of 1624 (Defoe 1722, 134, 137). A long dialogue between her and the elder brother, with interpolations from a young but 'most religious and well Instructed' sister, ranges across many of the issues discussed in plague treatises since the mid seventeenth century, from questions of divine punishment and mercy (1722, 140, 149-150), to the part played by 'the Passion of Fear and Anger' in weakening the body's defences (1722, 141-142) and unreliability of the Bills of Mortality (1722, 145-146).²⁷ There follows a series of dialogues and trialogues (sister-elder brother, the two brothers, younger brother-sister, all three siblings) which result in the younger brother joining his sister in a programme of regular bible reading, fasting, penitential exercises and discourses on how to prepare for death (1722, 211-212).²⁸ Meanwhile the plague enters the Inner City, the death toll rises, and the elder brother acknowledges that he has made no provision for the family (1722, 218). The younger brother and sister serenely accept what seems inevitable:

Brother: I propose nothing to my self, but to depend upon him, and to look for Life; for he is *the author of eternal Salvation, to all that Believe on him*. I desire to believe in him, and I rest on him; and this is all my Preparations for this dreadful Time.

Sister: I know no other Preparation, and I trust that this Preparation will carry us through whatever it shall please God to suffer us to meet with, in this dreadful time that is upon us. (1722, 228-229)

Had Defoe kept strictly to the plan announced at the beginning of *Due Preparations*, this would have been the end of his book, but it would not have been like the author of *Robinson Crusoe* or of *Moll Flanders* to leave us with a death bed scene. The story is got on the road again by the elder brother, who having 'met with some frightful Thing' on the riverside, announces 'in a Tone, rather of Horror than Anger', that he 'can stand it no longer ... I am at my Wits Ends, I'll take my Horse and go to Cheshire' (1722, 231-232). As his pious and well-informed siblings point out, it is now too late to travel so far, as by now villagers along the roads are refusing to let Londoners pass; it is also too late to 'keep within Doors', since provisions are no longer being brought into the City (1722, 233). Salvation then appears out of the blue in the shape of the captain of one of the brothers' ships, who shepherds them on board and provides all they need

²⁷ That Defoe repeatedly warns against trusting the Bills of Mortality has been noticed by many critics, recently by Seager in his carefully argued comparison of fictional narrative and statistics in *A Journal* (2008). What is often overlooked is that John Graunt had pointed out that the Bills understate plague deaths back in the early 1660s (Rusnock 2002, 24; Slack 1985, 149). For a corrective and examination of the 'construction' of the Bills, see Bellhouse (1998). I would in any case agree with Loar (2019, 51) that there is in neither book any 'binary opposition' between narrative and statistics as sources of information – the problem with the latter lies in the method of collecting and 'failure to process and monitor'.

²⁸ This 'Work' is not unlike that required by the Ordinary of Newgate of criminals awaiting execution. According to the Mother 'We should all look upon ourselves as dead Persons or as repriev'd Criminals' (1722, 144), and argues that 'If I was to go to a Condemn'd Criminal in Newgate, would it not be my Duty to Exhort him to prepare for Death ... we are all under Sentence' (1722, 154). Later the daughter and young brother compare themselves to criminals at the Bar of God (1722, 214-215).

to sit out the epidemic in safety on the River Thames. At this point ‘Preparations for the Body’ take over from those ‘for the Soul’:

The History of the Embarkation, tho’ not material to the Subject in Hand ... I yet cannot think proper to omit, because it may be a direction for others to take the same happy Measures in the like Danger, and perhaps with as good Success; for this, as you will hear, succeeded very well. (1722, 240)

And so, after many marine adventures, it does. But in choosing a happy ending, Defoe does not throw away a chance to punish the improvident and impious elder brother:

Having put off the Evil Day, and endeavour’d to keep all the Apprehensions of it from his mind, he had likewise put off his Preparations, as well of one sort as of another, either for Soul or Body; and what was the Consequence? his Passions, not his Piety, were Agitated when the Hour came upon him; he was in a continual hurry of Mind, and in a terrible Fright, even to Amazement and Discomposure: he thought himself secure nowhere, and he made all their Restraints when he was in the Ship, so much the more severe by his Constant uneasiness, lest the Infection would reach them. (1722, 170)²⁹

Resisting every stop on the way down the Thames, he would not

let any of the Men go on Shoar, no, not in the Marshes where there were no Towns, so much as to Buy Things that they wanted of the Farmers. His Mind was also full of Horror, and when he read the *Bills of Mortality*, his Flesh would tremble, and he would fall into such Agonies as can hardly be describ’d: And thus stood the Differences between the Prepar’d and the Un-prepar’d; *Let us choose for ourselves!* (1722, 272)

The author of *Due Preparations* leaves us in no doubt about which of the two options we must pick.³⁰ Learning how to really ‘choose for ourselves’, rather than follow a prescribed programme, more aptly describes the task set the reader in his second book on the plague.

5. *Choosing for Ourselves: HF and His Journal*

A Journal of the Plague Year: Being Observations and Memorials, of the most Remarkable Occurrences, as well Publick and Private, which happened in London During the last Great Visitation in 1665. Written by a Citizen who continued all the while in London. Never made publick before was published on 17 March 1722. By this time the epidemic in Provence had faded and the modified Quarantine Act had been approved, but not needed testing in practice. If *A Journal* had any immediate political purpose it might have been to help the new law bear the ‘Fruit’ Gibson feared it would not, encouraging those in authority to take ‘the Heart to execute’ the powers they had, and persuading ‘the Populace’ to accord those authorities ‘better Treatment ... than what we have already seen’ (1721,13).³¹ As Marta Bardotti comments, in its larger aim – that of offering exemplary guidance on preparing for plague – as well as in its focus on London during the Great Plague, and in including ample

²⁹ Maximillian Novak points out that whereas in the *Family Instructor* the son is punished physically, by 1722 Defoe had come to see that ‘The world ... did not operate that way’ (2001, 605).

³⁰ As George A. Starr commented, in *Due Preparations* his recommendations are ‘clear and emphatic... the narrator’s prevailing air is conclusive and assured, rather than tentative and guarded’ as in the ‘unprescriptive’ *Journal* (1971, 79 and n.).

³¹ In spite of criticisms of unpreparedness and – after several reconsiderations – of the policy of shutting up houses, the Mayor, aldermen, magistrates, parish officers and physicians of London are repeatedly praised in *A Journal*; see Bardotti (1990, 150-151).

documentation – the *Journal* resembles *Due Preparations* so closely that the ‘Introduction’ to the earlier book could also serve as a reader’s guide to the later one (1990, 18).

Bardotti also suggests, however, that if *A Journal* has no formal preface or introduction it is not through mere oversight. Its first pages plunge readers directly into the story while unobtrusively preparing them for the guidance to come, guidance which never threatens to overpower the narration or impose rigid constraints on our fruition of it (1990, 19). Although much of the matter that fills the pages of *Due Preparations* is recycled in *A Journal*, that matter is expanded, re-framed and opened up for reinterpretation.³² We meet the same criticisms of harsh quarantining, alternative proposals, exemplary narratives, polemical discussions of medical and epidemiological questions, investigative dialogues, quotations from the same official documents, moralising – but we hear them ‘re-worded and re-attributed’ through the voices of participants (Moore 1992, 137). The criticism of ‘French methods’ voiced by the unidentified author of *Due Preparations* re-emerges in H.F.’s several personal reflections on the policy of shutting up houses, a policy whose cruel effects he has witnessed and illustrates vividly. Proposals for dispersing the population and evacuating London set out in schematic abstract terms in *Due Preparations* are in *A Journal* given life and substance in the story of the three men who make their way to safety in Epping Forest. This exemplary story also helps to correct the class bias of *Due Preparations*, where the only ‘patterns’ of successful survival are realised by families of distinctly upper middling sort.³³ Methods of preparing for plague which in the earlier treatise are recommended in the form of dogmatic assertions by an extradiegetic author, in *A Journal* are arrived at through questioning and exchange of ideas and chosen by the actors as appropriate for their case. The result is a less absolutist, less extreme programme for survival, and one that does not entail such harsh judgements or such ruthless cutting of social ties. The three men, for example, survive by pooling their resources and skills, by talking and negotiating with the villagers, and in the end forming a community of equals, a rural utopian alternative to the dystopian city they have left.³⁴ For a time H.F. follows Dr Hodges’ advice to self-isolate, but while confined he never stops watching his fellow Londoners passing before his window, and imaginatively entering into their lives. And his first encounter after coming out is with a poor boatman who has devised strategies for keeping his infected wife and children alive while protecting, reconciling prudence with humane feeling in a way that *Due Preparations*, with its adamant ban on all communication with the sick, cannot imagine.

Crucial to these differences is the fluid journal form (Bardotti 1990, 66), and the complex relationship of the ‘highly developed fictional narrator’ to whom authority is transferred, one who as ‘both recorder and participant’ represents but must also be represented (Moore 1992, 138). While the component parts of the earlier work are presented as discrete and autonomous chunks, and are strung – or marshalled – together into an apparently fixed but ultimately unworkable order, in *A Journal* they are loosely interwoven into a multi-stranded story of a diversified and mobile collectivity of which the narrator is part (Bardotti 1990; Porter 2015). The many voices that contribute to telling that story represent diverse and often conflicting interests and beliefs,

³² In his study of French plague tracts, Jones detects a general ‘change ... in the form of the plague treatise. By the 1720s, many plague texts registered a higher degree of “literarity”. Utilization of techniques from current fiction (epistolary forms, narrative threads, more plangent appeals to sentiment, and so on) highlighted a greater authorial distance from the material and a growing sophistication in presentation and structure’ (1996, 117).

³³ Novak (2001, 606) emphasizes the sympathy for the London poor running through *A Journal*.

³⁴ On the ‘dystopian vision’ common to pedagogic texts on plague and the alternative pictures of daily life we may find in personal narratives, see Wrightson (2011, 7).

and they are orchestrated into the story of a populous city not by an omniscient author immune to doubt or indeed the plague itself,³⁵ but by an eye-witness, participant, historian and casuistic reasoner who risks his life to observe, record and comment, participating sympathetically in many of his fellow citizens' stories, but distancing himself from gossip and superstition (see McDowell 2006). Similarly with the statistics: however inaccurate, Londoners have to rely on the Bills of Mortality in deciding to where they can safely go, and magistrates in appointing officials and doctors, in deciding on quarantining, on distributing relief and organising burial grounds. H.F. 'strives for ... genuine understanding', but must do so on the basis of flawed and incomplete information, and in spite of unresolved questions and paradoxes (Ellison 2006, 100; Starr 1971, 75). He is far from certain about the nature of the plague and its mode of transmission, about the reliability of his sources, about how to interpret what he reads, sees and hears, and which course of action he should choose for himself, or the authorities for the city. Yet he – and they – must choose, nevertheless.

As it turned out, there was no need to prepare for plague in 1720s London, to shut up households, to evacuate or flee the city, to hoard provisions, avoid contacts with friends and neighbours, or abandon the sick to their fate. Neither has there been need since, throughout a Western Europe protected from this particular disease by quarantining of shipping and the *cordon sanitaire* deliberately created along the Austrian border later in the century (Slack 2012, 28). Other equally 'catching' and lethal diseases have, of course, forced such decisions on us, although since the cholera epidemics of the nineteenth century we have come to see them as more the business of 'government and magistrates' than of particular persons and families. *A Journal* was not republished during Defoe's lifetime, and *Due Preparations* was forgotten until 1895, when George Aitken included it, without its Introduction, in volume XV of his edition of *Romances and Narratives by Daniel Defoe*. One wonders what its author would have thought about his 'grand Experiment', which he hoped would be 'familiar and agreeable' but above all 'useful' to his time and to posterity, being classified in this way.

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³⁵ Unlike Carnochan (1977) and Bender (1987), who identify H.F. with social authority, Moore (1992) identifies contradictions in the narrator which he relates to the opposition between official and unofficial discourse. Bardotti (1990, chapter 4) offers a more modulated reading. Lau sees H.F.'s paradoxical 'immunity' to contagion as a depending on 'deliberate exposure' analogous to the smallpox inoculation practices being introduced into England at this time (2016, 32-33).

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