

ARTS & LETTERS

who, living in rural poverty while he wrote, variously experienced "madness, suicide, and early death." Both in his eyes and in theirs, he bore the blame for his family's misery. But Frost's guilt and fanatical perseverance in his work are two sides of a granite-like ego, driven by a need to convince the world of his superiority. From this compulsion, says Hall, Frost constructed his public persona (the simple rustic) and his professional image (the fierce competitor bent on sitting alone atop the "steeple of literary acclaim").

Frost himself believed that he was an evil man who had to be tricked into acts of kindness—he joined in efforts to free poet Ezra Pound from a mental hospital, but only because he thought Pound's release would bring personal publicity. In fact, says Hall, it was neither selfishness nor misanthropy but a more complex drive toward love and "fame" that motivated Frost. "Fame is the word for the love everyone wants," Hall writes, "impersonal love, love from strangers for what we are, what we do and have done." A deeper desire than vanity, a more demanding goal than mere celebrity, fame so honed Frost's ambition that he became in its pursuit both a heartless father and the creator of enduring works of art.

*The Adventures
of Daniel Defoe*

"Defoe, Edinburgh Spy" by Paul Henderson Scott, in *Blackwood's Magazine* (Oct. 1977), 32 Thistle St., Edinburgh EH2 1HA, Scotland.

Modern readers know Daniel Defoe (1660–1731) as the author of great adventure stories. Few realize, however, that his own life was at times as topsy-turvy as that of his characters, or that *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, which immortalized his name, represent only a small fraction of his literary output. Indeed, argues Scott, an Edinburgh writer, literature was simply an economic expedient for Defoe. His real loves were politics and commerce.

Defoe combined politics with writing during a career as an English spy in Edinburgh immediately before and after the formal Union of England and Scotland in 1707. A failed London merchant (he sold hosiery, wine, and bricks), he took up journalism to feed his wife and seven children. But his penchant for politics, along with his gratitude to the Queen's chief minister, Robert Harley, for arranging his release from prison on charges of illegal pamphleteering, led Defoe in 1706 to become Harley's paid eyes and ears in Scotland.

With his genius for inventing believable characters, Defoe adopted a variety of "covers," ranging from fishmonger to salt merchant and linen-draper. His secret mission included "black propaganda" work. Under pseudonyms implying either English or Scottish authorship, he wrote numerous polemics in favor of Union. One of the "Scottish" pamphlets recently fooled a modern historian.

Defoe's writing probably had little effect on the decision for Union. But he was intensely proud of one accomplishment: His proposal for a tax on beer got into the Treaty of Union in his own words.