DEFOE'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE POSITION
OF WOMEN IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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DEFOE'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE POSITION
OF WOMEN IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Nearly every English-speaking person from childhood is acquainted with Robinson Crusoe and can identify him as that rather unusual individual dressed in goatskins and carrying his home-made umbrella. However, not every English-speaking person can provide the name of the creator of this famous character, although Daniel Defoe is a name most of them have heard at one time or another.

Though not so well-known to the average citizen of the twentieth century, Daniel Defoe was one of the most prolific writers of his own century. His works make up "perhaps the most voluminous body of writing by an English author. Hitherto, The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature (II, 496) has given the count of Defoe's writings, including periodicals, at 'over 400.'"¹ William Lee, in his biography of Defoe in 1869, gave the author credit for 250 works, although he admits that "no one would be so insane as to read all of Defoe's two hundred and fifty odd works."² With the passing of time, new works

are found, and possibly the most recent count is that made by John Robert Moore. His total stands at 548.3

In spite of Mr. Lee's statement, much of Defoe's voluminous scribbling is very readable today. His novels do not fail to hold the reader's attention, although his non-fictional prose is admittedly of interest mainly to literary or historical scholars. His Review "is not his literary monument--he has that in Robinson Crusoe--but it is a treasure house of materials for the student of history and economics."4

In addition, many of his works had as their avowed purpose the improving of the English people, either economically, morally, or educationally. Defoe was a crusader during his entire lifetime (1661-1731), and he would no doubt be gratified to know that many of his suggestions have been carried out to the eternal betterment of mankind.

The suggestions with which this thesis will be concerned are those that apply not so much to mankind as a whole as those pertaining to womankind. Defoe surprisingly had much to say about women and their problems; it is surprising especially when we consider that hardly anyone other than the women themselves bothered to pay any attention to these afflictions. Women as a whole then were passive


and seemed to feel their lives could not be bettered, although a few
--such as Mary Astell, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu--attempted to bring about reforms. These ladies were inter-
ested mainly in bettering the education of girls and women. What they
advocated was rather revolutionary at the time but would be considered
very mild today.5

When the Review first appeared, women were just beginning to
develop into readers of magazines, and they did not relish dull polit-
tical debates. They were particularly fond of Defoe's invention of

letters introductory or "editorials" in the form of letters
which were supposed to come from interested readers.
De Foe [sic] succeeded in giving his letters a delight-
fully humorous and imaginative twist that suggested and, at
times, equaled the light and playful touches of Addison's
Spectator.6

A great portion of the section of the Review entitled Advice from the
Scandalous Club dealt with the problems brought about by man-
woman relationships. Defoe, in answering these purportedly genuine
letters from his public, always attempted to be fair and just to all
concerned. Still, in reading a number of them, one cannot help but

5See Myra Reynolds, The Learned Lady in England 1650-1760
(Boston, 1920), W. H. Davenport Adams, Good Queen Anne, Vol. II
(London, 1885).

6Paul Dottin, The Life and Strange and Surprising Adventures of
Daniel De Foe, translated from the French by Louise Ragan (New York,
see that he was a very unusual man for his day, or any day, in that he usually favored the feminine side of the question. This favoritism, of course, did not lessen his popularity with the ladies.

The purpose of this thesis will be to give a representative sampling of Defoe's views, opinions, and attitudes concerning women and their position in the eighteenth century. The works of Defoe which will be used most extensively will be the Review (1704-1713), Moll Flanders (1722), The Fortunate Mistress (Roxana) (1723), An Essay on Projects (1698), Religious Courtship (1722), Everybody’s Business Is Nobody’s Business (1725), and Conjugal Lewdness (1727). Other works which will be referred to but which were not available for actual perusal are The Family Instructor (three parts) (1715) and a short poem entitled "Good Advice to the Ladies" (1702). This last is of disputed authorship. Excerpts from The Political History of the Devil (1726) and a pamphlet entitled Augusta Triumphans (1728) are also used as references.

Women were more plentiful than were men in eighteenth-century England, and women’s problems were more numerous than were solutions. In fact, the disproportion of men to women was only one of the difficulties for which Defoe sought a solution in his Advice from the

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7 Robert Palfrey Utter and Gwendolyn Bridges Needham, Pamela’s Daughters (New York, 1937), p. 33.
Scandalous Club. Many other problems were taken up by the members of the Club, and Defoe's half-serious, half-humorous way of answering the letters which presented them proved delightful reading. His novels and didactic prose works often presented the same, or almost identical, situations in a more serious light.

Typical problems, other than the scarcity of men just mentioned, were very often concerned with marriage, love before or outside of marriage, divorce, bigamy, motherhood, unwanted children, and prostitution. The religion, education, and political interests of women came in for their share of criticism. Also, in spite of his usual praise of "the Sex," Defoe did not hesitate to condemn them for their vanities --such as love of fine clothes, use of cosmetics, lack of modesty, and admiration of self.

These problems were frequently aggravated, if not actually caused, by the position assigned to women in the eighteenth century. Therefore an account of women's status during this era will be given. Sufficient biographical information will be included to show that Defoe was indeed capable of judging society's treatment of women. This thesis will attempt to show that he was much advanced for his time in his judgment of woman's place in civilized society. According to Tommy G. Watson, "There is ample evidence . . . to substantiate the thesis that Defoe was concerned with the plight of the unattached female in his own
society.\textsuperscript{8} It seems that he was aware of the problems of the "attached" female as well.

\textsuperscript{8}Tommy G. Watson, "Defoe’s Attitude Toward Marriage and the Position of Women as Revealed in Moll Flanders," Southern Quarterly, III (1964), 1.
CHAPTER II

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The birth of a girl in the eighteenth century always came as a disappointment to the family involved. Not being a boy, she could not possibly be an heir destined to prolong the honors, the fortunes, and the name of a family of wealth. Born into a middle-class family, she could seldom be of real assistance in her father's trade or business. To furnish her a suitable dowry would be a large expense, and too many daughters could be serious liabilities to even the most prosperous merchant. In a very poor home any additional mouth to feed was a burden, but a boy could be expected to earn more than a girl when he was old enough. Therefore marriage was the only honorable way for a girl to be provided for; however, it did not add to a poor family's coffers.

This low status of women existed in England as well as on the continent, and it did not come about overnight. Doris Mary Stanton affirms, "Women ... enjoyed a position of independence in Anglo-Saxon times that they were not to regain until the end of the nineteenth

century. Great ladies, then, could be tyrants, pilgrims, missionaries, or abbesses, while even the small farmer's wife was the absolute mistress of her own store room, her box, and her cupboard.\(^2\) Divorce was easy because marriage was dissolved at the wish of either husband or wife. However, Christianity and its unfavorable attitude toward divorce changed all this. Women's place in society became more inferior. For example, after the Norman Conquest they became almost mere chattels, unable even to make wills without the consent of their husbands. Exceptions existed, of course.\(^3\)

Gradually . . . women began, again, to think and act for themselves. . . . The Renaissance brought a flowering of learned ladies but, under the Stewarts [sic], charm was required of a woman, not learning, and only among the Puritans did the tradition of the educated female persist.

By the time of Queen Anne, the position of women was constantly under discussion in a series of pamphlets, and it was soon possible for women to be dramatists, to study Anglo-Saxon, to translate and even to write for newspapers. But still a learned lady was apt to be "thought a comet" and the position of women was hopelessly subordinate to that of men.\(^4\)

The time of Queen Anne, which was also the time of Daniel Defoe, is the era with which this thesis is concerned. At that time a woman's position differed, depending upon her class. In each class she had


\(^3\)Ibid.

\(^4\)Ibid.
certain problems to consider; moreover, her class membership determined what these problems would be.

"The landed classes governed the country and led society not only because of their wealth and political power, but also because they formed an élite, educated and trained from childhood to fulfil their role in society." Parents realized the importance of education in the forming of a gentleman, and they took pains, many times at considerable cost, to make use of the best education available. Nothing but the best that could be afforded was good enough for the sons, especially so for the eldest. They were tutored privately at home or sent to public school and then the university. This was followed by continental travel, the grand tour, or by study while residing in the inns of court. However, "all this of course applied much more to boys than to girls. The education of girls was generally shallow and haphazard, and was concerned more with the acquisition of social graces than with the ripening of the mind and the command of knowledge," such graces being the ability to dance, to play the harpsichord, and to smile demurely at the right times.

Girls were not thought to need much formal education because a gentlewoman's business was generally acknowledged to be the ordering

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6 Ibid.
of her household. She would keep the still-room well stocked, see that the flower garden was well maintained, and visit her neighbors. The opinions of ladies upon politics or even the weather were deemed worthless, even indecorous. Knowledge of everyday news and any comments thereon were strictly the province of the men.\(^7\)

The tremendous cost of educating sons was one of the things which limited the amount of education provided for girls. The grand tour, at least for the eldest son, lasted three to five years; for example, the young Duke of Kingston's stay was unusually long, consuming ten years and 40,000 pounds. The Earl of Nottingham's heir's tour cost over 3,000 pounds. The second son had to content himself with a trip costing 415 pounds. When wealthy merchants and professional families began to send their sons on tours also, the prestige of the tour diminished. However, during the latter part of the eighteenth century daughters as well as sons (even those of farmers) were sent to private boarding schools. "In girls' boarding schools the emphasis was generally on needlework, music, art and dancing, but more solid fare was also available."\(^8\) The studies of one Anne Ferrier, in school in the 1780's, included English grammar, French, Italian, handwriting, and geography.\(^9\)

\(^7\)Neville Blackburne, Ladies' Chain (London, 1952), pp. ix-x.

\(^8\)Mingay, op. cit., pp. 141, 138.

\(^9\)Ibid., p. 141.
This limited education of young ladies did not keep them from playing important roles in society. Aristocratic ladies held salons in London, Bath, and other resorts; they supported the theatre, music, and the arts. Elizabeth and Georgiana, Duchesses of Devonshire, were known respectively as a patron of fine arts and a woman of literary ability and political importance. Numerous ladies joined their husbands in riding and shooting and in card playing and gambling. Inferior education and social conventions notwithstanding, a few women even became scholars and patrons of learning. Elizabeth Carter, though a mere clergyman's daughter, "published a volume of poems, translated a number of foreign works into English, and obtained the support of Richardson, the novelist, for her version of Epictetus. And Lady Elizabeth Hastings, who in 1705 inherited a large Yorkshire estate, founded many schools and instituted scholarships at Queen's College, Oxford."

Dr. Johnson seems to have found it necessary to apologize for Elizabeth Carter's intellectual attainments. Of her he said, "A man is in general better pleased when he has a good dinner on his table than when his wife talks Greek. My old friend, Mrs. Carter, could make a pudding as well as translate Epictetus from the Greek, and work a

handkerchief as well as compose a poem."\(^{11}\) So the old feminine occupations of cooking and sewing were not forgotten.

Mrs. Carter's great friend was Elizabeth Montagu. Dr. Johnson said of this first "blue-stocking": "She diffuses more knowledge than any woman I know, or indeed almost any man."\(^{12}\) As a charitable endeavor, each May Day she fed the chimney sweeps of London plum-pudding and roast beef.\(^{13}\) Even though the Queen of the Blue Stockings, she was tirelessly devoted to all sorts of hand-work, not only needlework but also beautiful things made of wood, ivory, shells, and feathers.\(^{14}\) Therefore, it would seem that even the most intellectually inclined ladies did not neglect domestic skills or their Christian duty to the poor.

An advocate of more education for women was Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. She resented the fact that young girls and women of breeding were expected to concern themselves with trifles. She wrote:

> There is hardly a character in the world more despicable, or more liable to universal ridicule, than that of a learned woman; these words imply, according to the received sense,


\(^{12}\)Ibid., pp. 188-189.  \(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 189.

a talking, impertinent, vain, and conceited creature. I believe that nobody will deny that learning may have this effect, but it must be a very superficial degree of it."\textsuperscript{15}

Although she was the champion of her sex throughout her career, she did not preach "women's rights." She maintained:

\begin{quote}
I am not now arguing for an equality of the two sexes. I do not doubt but that God and Nature have thrown us into an inferior rank; we are a lower part of Creation; we owe obedience and submission to the superior sex, and any woman who suffers her vanity and folly to deny this, rebels against the law of the Creator and indisputable order of nature; but there is a worst effect than this which follows the careless education given to women of quality, its being so easy for any man of sense, that finds it either his interest or his pleasure, to corrupt them.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

She goes on to say that the poor ladies are too ignorant to know how to withstand the men's arguments.

Mary Astell was another advocate of education for girls and women. She lamented that girls who overcame all the obstacles and became educated in spite of the existing conditions were "stared upon as Monsters, Censur'd, Envysd and every way discouraged."\textsuperscript{17} She had no use for women who accepted the idea that they were inferior.


\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 176-177.

\textsuperscript{17}Mary Astell, \textit{Reflections on Marriage} (1706), cited in Reynolds, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 300.
Mrs. Astell put forth her idea for a "Religious Retirement" where

... might go women tired of the world, young women waiting the arrangement of a suitable marriage, heiresses desiring to escape pursuit, spinsters anxious for some honorable retreat from a derisory world. All would find a serene and ordered life. But no vows were to be taken. In fact, one important purpose of the college was to provide England with virtuous and accomplished wives, through whom social regeneration might be brought about. 18

However, in spite of all her feminist proclivities, she says that the woman who cannot allow her husband to "govern absolutely and entirely... is no way fit to be a Wife." 19

A subscription of 10,000 pounds was given, supposedly by Queen Anne, for the building of Mary Astell's college. Later it was withdrawn because Bishop Burnett convinced Anne the college would be dangerous to the church. So the college never materialized. 20

All of the aristocracy did not live in London the year around. Many of the landed gentry lived on their land the greater part of the time. The country housewife's life was much more useful than, if not so exciting as, her city cousin's. There were plenty of servants at the country houses, but with large families, many visitors, and hard and time-consuming work done at home (everything from preparing food for the poor to the brewing of beer), the wife had much to attend to herself.

18 Reynolds, op. cit., p. 301.


20 Reynolds, op. cit., p. 302.
Even the wives of the wealthiest country gentlemen supervised all the work of their households and often helped with the work. Her husband might be away at Parliament, but that gave the lady no holiday. She was then expected to manage the estate as well as the house. It took brains and energy to keep things going smoothly.\(^{21}\)

Marriage for women in the upper class usually occurred at an early age and was arranged in most cases by the parents of the couple. This was not always for financial advantage, because it seems to have been seldom that girls were married to men they did not approve of, in spite of what the literature of the times would have us believe. Some unsuitable marriages as to the ages of the principals did occur, especially in a small number of very influential families; however, these were not the general rule for the upper class as a whole. Many women died in childbirth or soon after of related illnesses. Miscarriages were very common, and infant mortality was very high.\(^{22}\)

The wife's interests were protected by the marriage settlement. It specified the amount of her jointure and sometimes even gave her an annual allowance for her own use. This gave the women some independence and financial security and hindered too much masculine domination. Still, the husband or son firmly controlled family affairs.

\(^{21}\) Mingay, op. cit., p. 223.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 225.
Most ladies of the eighteenth century stayed in the background, with
the exception of fashionable London society. They kept themselves
occupied with their families, household cares, entertaining, clothes,
and other small details of family life. They enjoyed social life when
not awaiting the birth of children. They attended balls, read novels,
played cards, visited, wrote letters, and rode to the hounds.23

A large number of the women, and perhaps a majority of the men,
of the upper class were habitually immoral; this was especially true
in London. A man would keep a mistress until she became tiresome
and then cast her aside. London, every public resort, and every place
of amusement were crowded with these outcasts. People did not expect
a wealthy man to be a faithful husband or to lead a moral life. The
women often took lovers in spite or in consolation. This was often
said to be the result of parent-arranged marriages for the sake of
adding to the family fortunes.24

If parents objected too strenuously to a marriage, the couple
could usually elope. There were always parsons in the Fleet or the
Bench who would "marry anyone for a guinea, or even for a bottle of

23 Ibid., p. 226.

24 Rosamond Bayne-Powell, Eighteenth-Century London Life
wine."  

However, a girl was usually too indoctrinated with the idea of parental rights to attempt an elopement.  

Marriage was much easier to enter than to escape. Only a special Act of Parliament could grant a divorce; this was very expensive and troublesome to obtain. As a result wives and husbands usually agreed to part and forget the divorce. Although some upper-class marriages were based on love and lasted a lifetime, marriage in general was "looked upon with cynical aversion" by this group. 

The matrimonial laws of England at this time lacked clarity. This may be why Defoe was able to let Moll and Roxana realistically wonder whether or not they were married or free to marry. The existence of two types of law caused this lack of clarity. Canon law stated that no length of absence was grounds for divorce. Common law stated that the victim of wilful desertion would not be prosecuted if he remarried, but the second marriage was invalid. Conservative English marriage laws nowhere considered desertion as adequate cause for divorce. However, John Milton advocated allowing a woman to remarry had her husband been gone four years.  

25Ibid., p. 53.  
26Ibid., p. 54.  
27Ibid., p. 55.  
Proprietary rights of married women became stronger during the early eighteenth century. Still, in Defoe's time, common law stated a woman's property was in the hands of her husband. If a woman had property when she married and her husband then died, his executors were given her property. The husband was not required to keep any premarital promise should the conditions for fulfilling the promise arise. The husband could will everything except her "necessary apparel" away from the wife. If a husband became bankrupt, his wife and children had to suffer for his mistakes.  

At social functions the men often congregated together, excluding their wives, who had been invited to the same affair. Often the wife was obliged to get along without her husband's presence all day, seeing him only in the evening at some rout or ball. Some men were grossly cruel to their wives, even confining them to their rooms if they did not do as the men wished. Wives were left to solace themselves with their children. London was considered such an unhealthy place that often even the children were absent, having been sent to the country in the care of governesses or nurses. Toward the close of the 1700's mothers at last began to a large extent to bring up their own children.  

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29 Ibid., pp. 187-189.

30 Bayne-Powell, op. cit., p. 59.
this time "a so-called model mother boarded out her own children until they had outgrown the most troublesome period of infancy." 31

The fashionable lady is, indeed, the subject of ridicule, satire and admonition all through the centuries. She is reproached for her lack of sense and morals, for neglecting her children, betraying her husband and ruining her household. She wore a masculine riding dress, took snuff in church, and had even been known to drive a four-in-hand in the Park. It was all most deplorable, but the female never listened to reason, or to all the divines, essayists and playwrights who would have corrected her. She was, in fact, essentially very much the same sort of creature as the men who surrounded her. 32

An example of the ridicule and satirization of a fine lady's life is to be found in the anonymous The English Lady's Catechism. It follows:

'How do you employ your time now?'
'I lie in Bed till Noon, dress all the Afternoon, Dine in the Evening, and play at cards till Midnight.'

'How do you spend the Sabbath?'
'In Chit Chat.'

'What do you talk of?'
'New Fashions and New Plays.'

'How often do you go to Church?'
'Twice a year or oftener, according as my Husband gives me new cloaths.'

'Why do you go to Church when you have new Cloaths?'
'To see other Peoples Finery, and to show my own, and to laugh at those scurvy, out of fashion Creatures that come there for Devotion.'

'Pray, Madam, what Books do you read?'
'I read lewd Plays and winning Romances.'


32 Bayne-Powell, op. cit., p. 59.
'Who is it you love?'
'Myself.'
'What! nobody else?'
'My Page, my Monkey, and my Lap Dog.'
'Why do you love them?'
'Why, because I am an English Lady, and they are Foreign Creatures; my Page from Genoa, my Monkey from the East Indies, and my Lap Dog from Vigo.'
'Would not they have pleased you as well if they had been English?'
'No, for I hate everything that Old England brings forth, except it be the temper of an English Husband, and the liberty of an English wife; I love the French Bread, French Wines, French Sauces, and a French Cook; in short, I have all about me French or Foreign, from my Waiting Woman to my Parrot.'

In seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England tradesmen and shopkeepers were apt to marry into noble families, but as time passed, the notion came about that trade was degrading to upper-class people. Therefore, more of a distinction between the two classes developed than formerly existed. "The middle classes had begun to build up a separate life for themselves. . . . a prosperous comfortable life."  

The tradesman's wife in some cases helped in the shop besides seeing that the needs of her husband, children, the apprentices, and servants were supplied. People ate hot suppers and substantial dinners,

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and the wife was expected to provide them. The housewife did her own shopping in the markets of Covent Garden or with street traders.35

As the middle classes became wealthier, many of them moved to the suburbs to get away from dirty, bad-smelling London. The tradesmen who were rich enough lived almost as did the members of the upper class. Their wives and daughters dressed expensively. Family connections determined the middle-class citizen's right to mingle with the upper class.36

There were very good schools in London, and the sons of tradesmen attended them. Middle-class homes produced the nation's greatest scholars. However, a girl's education was very poor; arithmetic was neglected because it was considered as not suited to feminine minds. Many girls did not attend school at all but were taught by a governess at home, who often knew almost as little as her pupils. They were generally taught dancing and were instructed by their mothers in housekeeping, baking bread, washing, starching, and needlework. However, a girl could borrow books from lending libraries.37

Many middle-class girls were timid and sickly, conditions possibly due to the fact that they could not walk alone in the city and were forced to lead sedentary, indoor lives. Girls rarely engaged in a

profession or trade, although some were teachers or worked in their parents' shops. It was difficult even for widows to continue their husbands' businesses. The only career open to a girl was marriage.

During this period middle-class fathers began to draw up marriage settlements for their daughters' protection in imitation of their betters. Moreover, some marriages came about through matrimonial advertisements in the newspapers. 38

Since divorce was so costly, it was almost unheard of in the middle classes. Morality of the middle class was much stricter than that of the upper class; still, a wife was expected not to notice infidelity on the part of her husband. Since tradesmen rarely drank because they needed their wits about them, a tradesman's wife was usually spared a drunken husband. 39 The men were often too occupied in their businesses or too tired at the end of a day to seek amusement; so the ladies had their own card parties, routs, or balls.

Contemporary records do not give much information about middle-class country women, the wives and daughters of the farmers. Unlike their French counterparts, who worked as hard as their men and who became old before their time, the English farm women did not work in the fields. They dressed gaily and had clear and fair complexions. English country girls attended schools, sometimes boarding schools.

38 Ibid., pp. 69-71. 39 Ibid., pp. 72, 75-76.
Many of the daughters of the more prosperous farmers became quite ladies, priding themselves on their artistic and musical abilities. Country women married later than the city ones did. They had fewer young men to choose from, and country gentlemen did not rush into marriage. Women were the chief victims of the high birth-rate and the high incidence of illness. Even though the birth-rate was high, families were not always large because so many children died. Couples often had had as many as four children, not a particularly large number in that day, but were childless by middle age. Since the care of the sick was left up to them, many country housewives became skilled in medicine.

Because increased prices and better cultivation improved the living standards of the farmers in the latter eighteenth century, life for their women also improved. "The opulent farmer's daughter could not be distinguished from the daughter of a duke; both dressed equally well. . . . Both sons and daughters were now given a costly boarding-school education at thirty to fifty pounds a year instead of the former twenty to thirty shillings spent at some country day school."  

40 Mingay, op. cit., p. 246.  
41 Ibid.  
42 Ibid., pp. 254-255.
No one thought of training girls in a trade or profession, since they were expected to marry.

Few trades were customarily open to women; as a matter of fact there were only two, millinery and mantua-making. Into others, the only gate through which a woman could enter was matrimony. . . . In spite of all we can learn of her [a woman's] enterprise, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that marriage and prostitution were the only ways that were wide open to her. 43

If a woman did not marry and did not choose the other route, she became an "old maid." If she failed to marry because of lack of a suitable dowry, she might be lucky enough to remain independent in genteel poverty. If her finances were not sufficient for any measure of independence, she was forced to become a burden upon her family and friends. Men were scarce because of the various wars; therefore dowries were on the increase. "Not all the preaching that the church could devote to the beauty of virginity could make the mature virgin in real life anything but a by-word and a scoffing." 44

Most of the population of England in the eighteenth century, perhaps as much as nine-tenths, were not members of the aristocracy, the gentry, or the middle class. These masses were the lower class


44 Ibid., p. 33.
and consisted of "manual workers of one kind or another, the artisan, the petty shopkeeper and the labouring poor." Though these people were often found in very mean circumstances, as a whole they were considered by most contemporary authorities to be better off than the poor on the Continent. They were said to be better clothed, fed, and housed and with less labor than the French poor.

Almost the only education provided for the poor was in the Charity schools, which were supported by middle-class subscribers. The main aim of these schools was to teach the children to read the Bible to improve their morals. Some writing and arithmetic were given to the most promising scholars who learned to read well. Children were often taught simple tasks by which a few pence could be earned, such as straw-plaiting, lace-making, spinning, or knitting. While engaged in these manual tasks, they coned their lessons by rote. This was especially the case where girls were taught, because the object of teaching poor girls was to make them "good, reliable, God-fearing servants. . . ." In Hanoverian England to be poor was not to be totally deprived of all reasonable chance of being literate. This chance was, however, much greater in the urban areas. Sunday schools, begun

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in 1780, were of great advantage to those children who were already employed and could attend school only on Sundays. 48

Housing in the country was scarce; laws restricted the building of new cottages because no parish wanted too many poor living within its boundaries who might fall on evil times and have to be supported by its poor rates. Houses were cramped, damp, dark, with dirt floors and roofs that leaked. Women had only the open fire for cooking purposes. Still, inhabitants in the country were better off than those in the towns, especially large cities. London was the worst of all. A family in the country could collect fire wood, have a garden, breathe fresh air, and drink pure water. In large cities the poor were forced to live in the oldest, most congested areas to be near their work. The various industries and small manufacturers' shops produced so much coal smoke that London was covered with great clouds of smoke which shut out the sun. 49

The woman of the laboring class may have loved fine clothes as much as her more affluent sisters, but she seldom had any that were new. On occasion the parish provided clothing for the poor; often clothes were made at home or obtained from the second-hand clothes dealer. These dealers in used finery obtained their merchandise from thieves or from the servants of good families. This habit of wearing the

48 Ibid., p. 164.  
49 Ibid., pp. 166-169.
cast-off apparel of the rich and well-to-do tended to erase class
distinctions because the servants could afford to dress almost as well
as the masters.

Whereas the wealthy lady fretted about what to do to pass the
time and the middle-class girl concerned herself with having a dowry
large enough to attract a suitable husband, the poor woman was often
plagued with where to get food for the next meal.

The ordinary labourer could depend on his wages to procure
no more than the barest living, bread, cheese and weak tea
being his staple diet. . . . The wages of the worker in
industry were distinctly higher than those of the rural worker
. . . and . . . the wages of the village labourer were at
their lowest where the new industrialism did not offer any
alternative. 50

Where employment was available, the whole family worked
outside the home. Women and children had to accept even lower wages
than men. In the new textile industries two-thirds of the workers
were women and children, pauper children being imported from London
to fill any vacancies. The worst mills operated from five a.m. to eight
p.m. Some mill owners were more careful of their young charges'
welfare than others. 51 "Women's work, especially the stitching of
ready-made garments, and all kinds of needlework, was generally very
poorly paid." 52

50Ibid., p. 173. 51Ibid., pp. 273-274.
52Bayne-Powell, op. cit., p. 79.
Because wages were so low and it required all a family could earn to exist, there was little incentive to save. The usual motto was "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die." When a man was earning good wages, he often spent his money on drink. Many people did die also because of the unsanitary living conditions. Epidemics of typhus and smallpox were common. People depended on their children to support them if they lived till old age; if they had no children for assistance, the parish was obligated to keep them from starving. This was stipulated by the Poor Law, which was passed "to relieve the sick and the aged, to apprentice poor children and to find work for the able unemployed. This last . . . soon fell into disuse. By the eighteenth century the average parish official was concerned only with the relief of the sick and the aged and the care of orphans or other abandoned children."  

A parish provided only for its own poor, and the law said who these would be. A person was entitled to the charity of a parish if he had been born there; served an apprenticeship and was hired there for a year, paying parish rates; rented a house at ten pounds a year; had given written notice of his intention to acquire a settlement from the parish and then resided there for forty days; or, in the case of a woman, 

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53 Ibid., p. 84.
54 Marshall, op. cit., p. 186.
was married to a man who had fulfilled one of these requirements. No poor laborer ever rented a house worth ten pounds a year, and parish officers could expel from their parish anyone who seemed likely to need help before his forty days' residence was accomplished. All these rules tended to make poor people stay in one place; to move was to risk losing their rights to poor relief. Single women, unless they had jobs, and widows or women with children were usually moved out to reduce the liability of the parish. 55

Legitimate children were entitled to aid in their father's parish until they were seven, but illegitimate ones were to be supported by the parish in which they were born. Unmarried women who were apparently about to give birth were forced by the authorities to go from parish to parish until the child was actually born. 56 Because of this practice, these women frequently died of harsh treatment or exposure; as a last resort many went to the only person who would take them in—the brothel keeper. 57

Decay of religion and morality was only one cause of increased crime, especially in the cities. The greatest cause was poverty. Starving people frequently became violent. Abandoned boys and girls were often taken in by criminals, who introduced them to thievery or

55 Ibid., pp. 186-187. 56 Ibid., p. 188. 57 Bayne-Powell, op. cit., p. 91.
prostitution. Brothel keepers sent their agents to meet the coaches from the country, as can be seen in Hogarth's The Harlot's Progress. Any young, unprotected female was the prey of these creatures. The law forbade prostitutes to solicit, but still they infested the streets and public places. Those who had funds to bribe the parish constable remained free, but those who did not usually ended up beating hemp at Bridewell. Often honest women going home from work late at night were falsely arrested for soliciting by drunken or overzealous constables.

People were imprisoned for debt, either justly or on some falsified charges preferred by an enemy. A man could not always defend himself against such charges, and he usually took flight to avoid imprisonment. A wife or family left to fend for themselves were in desperate circumstances, as can be seen in Defoe's account of Roxana's troubles after her first husband disappeared. With the breadwinner gone, the family was forced to sell its possessions in order to buy food. As a last resort, they often had to depend upon the charity of the parish. If the husband was imprisoned, the same situation existed as far as the family was concerned. Sometimes the family disappeared along with

58 Ibid., pp. 197-193, 203-204, 200.
the father, and it was not uncommon for families to join the debtor in prison. 59

Thus, it appears women of the laboring class suffered little more than men and probably no more than children, who were completely helpless. The sufferings of women as a whole were determined by their class membership; therefore, afflictions differed in degree and in kind, but there is little doubt that most women of the eighteenth century did have problems.

59 Marshall, op. cit., p. 185.
CHAPTER III

MARRIAGE AND RELATED SUBJECTS

Women of all social classes in the eighteenth century had to consider the problems of marriage. Defoe does not fail to take up these difficulties in great detail in his novels, didactic writings, and journalistic offerings. Two of his most important works, Moll Flanders and The Fortunate Mistress, concern themselves primarily with women, paying special attention to the affairs of love and marriage. The Review is filled with "letters to the editor" either from or about women; these deal to a great extent with marital or premarital problems. The Family Instructor has a chapter (Volume I, Part III) entitled "To Husbands and Wives." Defoe also wrote Conjugal Lewdness, later called A Treatise Concerning the Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed, the long title and chapter heads of which are almost a brief summary of its over four hundred pages. Since these are by no means the only works by Defoe which consider marriage and its accompanying joys and troubles, a complete catalogue of his writings on the subject would take more space than will be available here. Therefore, only enough will be given in this chapter to present Defoe's main attitudes toward marriage and related subjects.
Defoe realized that he had learned from his mistakes—"he had . . . stumbled into becoming a merchant when he was intended for the ministry, into bankruptcy when he aimed at a fortune, into the pillory when he championed freedom"—and he was convinced that others needed guidance and that he was able to furnish it. Although Defoe gives the impression of attempting to be just to both men and women in this guidance, "no very profound reading of Mr. Review's counsel is needed to see that it is the woman, as wife and mistress, rather than the man, as husband and suitor, whom he favors."²

Defoe gave common-sense advice about marriage: A young man should not marry too young because marriage expenses would deplete his business stock. Since a very young man usually had little to offer financially, he could not expect to attract a girl with a sizable dowry. However, Defoe probably acquired this wisdom after his own marriage took place because he could not have been over twenty-four and not long settled in business when he married Mary Tuffley. She was only twenty but brought to him a sizable dowry of 3,700 pounds.³

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¹William Lytton Payne, Mr. Review (Morningside Heights, New York, 1947), p. 93.

²Ibid., p. 106.

No one can say how happy Defoe's own marriage was, but it may be assumed from his writings that the author was absent from home much of the time, even immediately following his marriage. Although his detractors accused him of imperfections, "he never seems to have been guilty of that abuse of the marriage bed of which he wrote in one of his latest pamphlets. Indeed, Mrs. Defoe must have seen surprisingly little of her husband for a woman who was married almost fifty years, and who bore him a numerous family." It is apparent that Defoe had tender feelings for his wife and children; for example, because he had seen them suffer as a result of his bankruptcies, he argued against unfair bankruptcy laws in the Review and other works on trade. He saw that his six children who lived through childhood were educated and that his unmarried daughter was provided for financially.

Defoe had much to say in favor of love and marriage. He intimated that love was not much considered in the marriages of the time but that it should have been because, next to dying, marriage is the most important matter in life; it ought not to be trifled with, "all that we call Happiness in this Life depending upon it."

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4Ibid.
5Peterson, op. cit., p. 189.
7Daniel Defoe, Review, I, Supplement 1 (September, 1704), 9.
8Ibid., I (January 6, 1705), 379.
Since marriage is such an important matter, Defoe often gave lengthy advice on the subject. On one occasion he attempted to list all the sorts of husbands which a "sober woman" would do well to avoid. They were

1. The drunken husband, whose drunken passions, humors, smell, bed-fellowship, and love were too much for Defoe to describe.

2. The debauched husband, who left his young, beautiful, pleasant wife to take up with a noisy, nasty, ugly strumpet. His only kind act was to give his honest wife a foul disease that caused her death and put her out of his reach and away from further torment forever.

3. The fighting husband, who took out on his wife all the passions he had stored up during the day. He was too cowardly to fight with men and so fought with his wife. One of these beat his wife a little too much, but she got even with him for it. She died, and he was hanged for her murder.

4. The extravagant husband (or ill husband), who spent his money in gaming and drinking while his poor wife sat quietly at home. He feasted himself and his gang at the taverns while his unhappy wife and children needed food. He would not work but dreamed away his time, ruining himself and starving his family. His usual end was to run away from his wife, either to the army or navy, where he died a rake. Or perhaps he took up residence nearer home in the local jail.
These four sorts of husbands were bad enough, but any one of the lot was better than a fool husband. The others might have redeeming qualities, but a fool was always intolerable, contemptible, and ridiculous. Therefore, the worst sort of husband a good woman could choose was a fool. If she did, the words "Lord Have Mercy" and the sign of the cross should be written above her door, as was done to houses infected with the plague.  

Roxana gave young ladies almost the same advice:

If you have any regard for your future happiness, any view of living comfortably with your husband, any hope of preserving your fortunes or restoring them after any disaster, never, ladies, marry a fool. Any husband rather than a fool. With some other husbands you may be unhappy, but with a fool you will be miserable... everything he does is so awkward, everything he says is so empty, a woman of any sense cannot but be surfeited of him twenty times a day. There are so many sorts of fools... that I am obliged to say, no fool, ladies, at all...; whether a mad fool or a sober fool, a wise fool or a silly fool, take anything but a fool; nay, be anything, be even an old maid, the worst of nature's curses, rather than take up with a fool.  

Furthermore, a foolish husband entails other risks, according to Roxana. For example, she lost a fortune of five thousand livres because her father entrusted it to her brother instead of to her foolish husband. The brother lost it in unfortunate mercantile adventures. She said, "Thus I

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9 Defoe, Review, IV (October 4, 1707), 403-404.
lost the last gift of my father's bounty by having a husband not fit to be trusted with it; there's one of the benefits of marrying a fool!"\(^{11}\)

The old saying goes, "A fool and his money are soon parted," but Roxana and Moll Flanders resolved not to be parted from their money, which to them was their only chance of being independent of the men in the world. Moll said on one occasion, "I had money in my pocket... I had been tricked once by that cheat called love, but the game was over; I resolved now to be married or nothing, and to be well married or not at all... I kept true to this notion, that a woman should never be kept a mistress that had money to keep herself a wife."\(^{12}\)

A woman's need for money in order to make a suitable marriage is shown in the speech by one of Moll's young sisters-in-law:

Betty wants but one thing, but she had as good want everything, for the market is against our sex just now; and if a young woman has beauty, birth, breeding, wit, sense, manners, modesty, and all to an extreme, yet if she has not money, she's nobody, she had as good want them all; nothing but money now recommends a woman, the men play the game all into their own hands.\(^{13}\)

When Moll matured a little more, she found that love had small share, if any, in the matter of marriage. She discovered:

\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 5.


\(^{13}\)Ibid., pp. 14-15.
... that money only made a woman agreeable; that men chose mistresses indeed by the gust of their affection, and it was requisite for a whore to be handsome, well-shaped, have a good mien and a graceful behavior; but that for a wife, no deformity would shock the fancy, no ill qualities the judgment; the money was the thing; ... the money was always agreeable, whatever the wife was.  

Many times Roxana and Moll act as spokesmen for Defoe, though not always. He gives Roxana such unconventional ideas of the marriage relationship that she becomes almost a disciple of free love. Her aim is to preserve her fortune, and she is willing to do almost anything to do so. In spite of the existing matrimonial laws, she says that she thinks a woman should be as free as a man, not merely an "upper servant," which is what marriage makes of her. Although her Dutch merchant argues that women have an easy life, especially if their husband's act as they should, Roxana is still adamant. She states that a single woman is accountable to no one and that any woman who has an estate and who agrees to give it up in order to be a great man's slave is a fool and fit to be only a beggar. Furthermore, she goes on to say that, if a woman wishes, she should be allowed "to entertain a man as a man does a mistress."  

Although her lover paints a picture of the ideal marriage with mutual love, aim, and interest, with no bondage for the woman, and with much happiness for both partners, Roxana replies that a woman

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14 Ibid., pp. 63-64.  
15 Defoe, Roxana, pp. 142-143.
becomes lost in her husband. She has no view, interest, or aim of her own. She is forced into an indolent life and knows nothing of her husband's business. If he is a fool, she must suffer. She may be forced into misery and beggary because of her husband's mistakes. The wife's money is taken to pay the husband's debts; consequently, she may rely on her friends, if any, for support or follow her husband into the Mint and live as she can on what little is left. Even then he will probably be forced to run away and leave her to watch her children starve. This last is similar to what happens to Roxana and her five children by her first husband.

Roxana knows that men often make generous promises before marriage and afterwards may change and do the opposite. Defoe accuses men of making "Angels of their [wives] first, and Slaves of them after." In one of his poems, he tells a young lady that she may suffer ill treatment from her husband, who may find:

Some kitchen wench, or filthy thing,
The common talk and scandal of the town;
This loathsome creature shall outdo thy charms,
And tear they wretched husband from thy arms;
Under thy nose he'll keep the baggage fine,
And whatsoe'er is dear and should be thine
She shall possess, and if you speak a word,
O then his wife is not to be endured.

16 Ibid., p. 144.  
17 Ibid., p. 145.  
18 Defoe, Review, I (December 30, 1704), 360.
A jealous peevish thing, diseased and mad,
Not fit for commerce or the marriage bed.¹⁹

The subtitle of this poem advised ladies "That as the World goes,
and is like to go, the best way is for them to keep Unmarried." The
poem was unsigned, but it has generally been credited to Defoe.
Since he did not wish to be thought an enemy of marriage, he blamed
a piratical publisher for issuing his work without being authorized to
do so.²⁰ The preface of the poem stated that he was not attacking
marriage but only those men unworthy to be husbands.²¹

Unfaithfulness was not the only abuse women suffered at the
hands of their husbands. Defoe complained that men beat their wives
and that no one did anything to stop them. A "riot" between a man and
his wife went unnoticed. Defoe called this practice of wife beating a
bad example to the young people who saw it; consequently, the hus-
band should be put into the stocks for the first offense, whipped for
the second, and sent to prison for the third till he should learn to
use more mercy regarding his wife. In case some readers should think
wife beating "too low a topic" for Defoe's attention, he replied that it

¹⁹Daniel Defoe, "Good Advice to the Ladies," quoted in Andrew
M. Wilkinson, "Good Advice to the Ladies: A Note on Daniel Defoe,"
Notes and Queries, CXCV (June 24, 1950), 273-274.


²¹Andrew M. Wilkinson, "Good Advice to the Ladies: A Note on
Daniel Defoe," Notes and Queries, CXCV (June 24, 1950), 273.
was a Christian and a charitable subject and therefore not "beneath the consideration of any man who had a woman for his mother."²²

Another cruel practice was that some men sent their wives to madhouses when they wanted to get rid of them. Defoe said they were sent away from their husbands, children, and homes so that the men might enjoy their debauches more freely. If they were not mad when they entered these houses, they soon became so. Defoe asked:

Is it not enough to make any one mad to be suddenly clapped up, stripped, whipped, ill fed, and worse used? To have no reason assigned for such treatment, no crime alleged, no accusers to confront? And what is worse, no soul to appeal to but merciless creatures, who answer but in laughter, surliness, contradiction, and too often stripes?²³

No messages could be sent to friends or relatives. Finally, when the poor creature was driven "stark staring mad," perhaps incurably so, the husband might let her relatives see her. These wives, who could have been mothers to numerous fine children, were left to die in the madhouses. To prevent these murders, Defoe suggested that all private madhouses should be outlawed; licensed asylums should be instituted for those who were really insane, and rules should be set up for admitting patients to them. He ended his work with a plea to the Queen

²²Daniel Defoe, Augusta Triumphant (1728), quoted in Trent, op. cit., pp. 292-293.
²³Ibid., pp. 294-295.
that she might restore these unfortunate women to their families and forbid any brutal husband to confine his wife at his will.  

The idea (already mentioned by Roxana) of the wife's being an "upper servant" is found in Dialogue III of The Family Instructor. Given in this work is an example of a wife who disliked being treated as a servant by her husband. She thought it should be her business to join in making orders, not merely to submit to them when they were made by her husband.  

"Defoe's lengthiest statement concerning the morals of marriage and love is a 'Satyr' on the evils of the age. This means that in [Conjugal Lewdness] he adopts a higher moral tone than he assumed in his novels."  

In Conjugal Lewdness Defoe states:

... I don't take ... that the Wife is to be us'd only as the upper Servant in the House. The great Duty between the Man and his Wife, I take to consist in that of Love, in the Government of Affection, and the Obedience of a complaisant, kind, obliging Temper; the Obligation is reciprocal, 'tis drawing in an equal Yoke; Love knows no superior or inferior, no imperious Command on one hand, no reluctant subjection on the other.  

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24 Ibid., pp. 295-296, 299.
25 Peterson, op. cit., p. 185.
Another main tenet of this work is that it is a kind of legal prostitution for a woman to be married to a man she does not love. As he states elsewhere, married love should be "founded in Sympathy, nourish'd by Suitability, strengthen'd by Property, and confirm'd by Honesty." However, all love was not married love, as Defoe was well aware. He himself had been accused of having an illegitimate son by a woman who sold oysters, but most authorities now agree that this was a mistaken idea furthered by the fact that Daniel Defoe wanted his personal affairs kept private. Benjamin Defoe was Daniel and Mary Defoe's first son and perfectly legitimate. When accused of drinking and debauching, Defoe replied that he would pay fifty pounds to anyone who could prove he was ever drunk, ever drank immoderately, or ever promoted drinking in others. He added:

As to Women, the Author professes himself a Lover of the Sex, in the Station in which God and Nature has plac'd them; there he esteems them, as the Second Glory of Creation, and a Public Blessing, bestow'd on God's principal Creature Man, for his Assistance, Comfort, and Delight--as to the Vice, he protests to Contemn it; and the Trifle call'd Pleasure in it; to be not worth the Repentance; and frankly defies all the World to bring fair Proof of his being Guilty that way.

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28 Ibid., p. 105.
29 Defoe, Review, V (November 23, 1708), 410.
30 Moore, Defoe, Citizen of the Modern World, p. 325.
But as to Drunkenness, Whoring, Swearing, or any of the Crimes, which our Society pretends to Detect, I without Pride or Vanity, boast myself clear, and am bold to say, All the World cannot prove me Guilty.  

In giving an answer to a young man who supposedly wrote to the Scandalous Club, Defoe presented his opinions on unmarried love. The young man had debauched his intended and, unable to keep a secret, had told his friends of it. The girl's father threatened to "go to Law" with him. Defoe advised him:

1. A Woman that will take a Man's word in this Case, really ought to expect such Usage.
2. He that Lyes with a Woman on a promise of Matrimony, is a Knave if he does not perform his promise, and a Fool if he does.
3. A Woman ought in Policy . . . never to admit a Man on the most Sacred promise in the World, for the following Reasons:
   1. Because she is under his Lash for ever, and Subject to the Insults of his Tongue.
   2. He will always plead his Merit, and think her obliged to him.
   3. He can never believe she will be Honest, because, Once a Whore and always so.
   4. She Forfeits the Dignity of her Office, as Wife, and makes her Consent of Marriage, which should be esteemed a Favor obtain'd by her Husband, be a Bounty bestowed upon her.  

Furthermore, the young rake who wrote the letter should be punished for deluding the girl, but he should be hanged for telling anyone what took place. The Scandalous Club, or the Society, advised

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31 Defoe, Review, I (January 20, 1705), 382-383.
32 Ibid., (September 5, 1704), p. 228.
him to offer to marry the young woman, if she should be fool enough to accept him. He should publicize his name so that no other "weak Sister" might be taken in by him. Also, he should expiate his crime by joining the Queen's service, perhaps keeping a bullet from killing another man. If all these remedies failed, he was advised "to hang himself out of the way."  

Roxana gave almost the same opinion. She said a woman who agreed to marry a man who had robbed her of her virtue was foolish. She maintained such action was

... to pin down the shame of it upon herself all the days of her life ... to bind herself to live all her time with the only man that could upbraid her with it. ... to take the man ... is the most preposterous thing in nature, and ... is to befoul oneself and live always in the smell of it. No, no, ... after a man has lain with me as a mistress he ought never to lie with me as a wife.  

If the man and woman parted, all was sooner or later forgotten. If they married, the husband, unless he was one in a hundred thousand, would remind his wife of her old folly. Their children would hear of it and, if virtuous, hate their mother; if not virtuous, they would follow in her footsteps, blaming her.  

This sentiment is repeated in *Conjugal Lewdness*.

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34 Defoe, *Roxana*, p. 147.  
Moll Flanders's story also should be an example to young girls.

Moll said that her first lover promised to marry her when he came into his estate; still she recalled "that he had never spoken a word of having me for a wife after he had conquered me for a mistress." 36 Roxana reiterated, "For where is the man that cares to marry a whore, though of his own making?" 37 Moll's first lover thought so little of her that he was eager for her to marry his brother. 38 Previously she had accused him of being like all other men, who made a joke of women's characters and counted the ruin of their cast-off mistresses as something of no value. 39

The Scandalous Club spoke very plainly to a young man who informed them that he had gotten a servant girl with child. He wanted to know how he could keep the news from his friends, from whom he was due some money and who would not approve of what he had done. Defoe, as spokesman for the Club, replied that the Society did not claim to tell "how to Conceal Crimes, how to Convey away Bastards, or how to] procure Secret Places for a Scandalous W____ to drop her Spurious Burthen in Private." 40 The Society reserved judgment until

37 Defoe, Roxana, p. 139.
38 Defoe, Moll Flanders, p. 35. 39 Ibid., p. 28.
40 Defoe, Review, II (April 21, 1705), 83.
the young man should show some signs of repentance and write again, "but as to the hiding of Bastards, and Great Bellies, they beg his Pardon; and Desire him to go to the next House, 'tis none of their Trade."  

Roxana compared and contrasted a wife and a mistress. At first she seemed to picture the mistress as having the better life, but ultimately Defoe's moralizing asserted itself in her discourse. She said:

I found that a wife is treated with indifference, a mistress with a strong passion; a wife is looked upon as but an upper servant, a mistress is a sovereign; a wife must give up all she has, have every reserve she makes for herself be thought hard of, and be upbraided with her very pin-money, whereas a mistress makes the saying true, that what a man has is hers, and what she has is her own; the wife bears a thousand insults and is forced to sit still and bear it or part and be undone, a mistress insulted helps herself immediately and takes another.  

However, by way of contrast

A wife appears boldly and honourably with her husband, lives at home and possesses his house, his servants, his equipages, and has a right to them all and to call them her own, entertains his friends, owns his children, and has the return of duty and affection from them, as they are her own, and claims upon his estate, by the custom of England, if he dies and leaves her a widow. The whore skulks about in lodgings, is visited in the dark, disowned upon all occasions before God and

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41 Ibid., pp. 83-84.

42 Defoe, Roxana, p. 127.
man, is maintained indeed for a time, but is certainly to be condemned to be abandoned at last, and left to the miseries of fate and her own disaster. If she has any children her endeavor is to get rid of them and not maintain them, and if she lives she is certain to see them all hate her and be ashamed of her. While the vice rages and the man is in the devil's hand, she has him, and while she has him she makes a prey of him; but if he happens to fall sick, if any disaster befalls him, the cause of all lies upon her... and if once he comes to repentance or makes one step toward reformation, he begins with her, leaves her, ... and sees her no more. ... the more sincere and unfeigned his repentance is, ... the more his aversion to her increases, and he curses her from the bottom of his soul; nay, it must be from a kind of excess of charity if he so much as wishes God may forgive her.  

Roxana was convinced of the truth of this rather lengthy passage by the repentance of her prince upon the death of his wife. Moreover, Moll's Bath gentleman was repentant after a serious illness. In both cases the mistress was abandoned. The Review had preached the same doctrine before: in the case of unmarried lovers, if time and circumstance lessened the love the man felt for the woman in the least degree, he would think of her as the "Cause of all his Misfortunes, and hate her in a Proportion to his present Passion."  

43 Ibid.  
46 Defoe, *Review*, I (December 19, 1704), 347.
That Defoe would have considered prostitution a form of unmarried love is debatable. His usual view was that women were forced into the evil business of prostitution by necessity and not by inclination; therefore, they felt no affection. Moll said:

> When a woman is . . . left desolate and void of counsel, she is just like a bag of money or a jewel dropped on the highway, which is a prey to the next comer. . . . the vice came in always at the door of necessity, not at the door of inclination; and I understood too well, by the want of it, what the value of a settled life was, to do anything to forfeit the felicity of it.  

Again Moll said of prostitutes, "They value not the pleasure, they are raised by no inclination to the man, the passive jade thinks of no pleasure but the money." 

Perhaps because of class difference Roxana and her maid Amy disagreed as to a possible justification of prostitution. The mistress said a woman should die, even from hunger, rather than give up her virtue. On the other hand, the maid stated, "It would not be lawful for anything else but for bread, madam. Why, nobody can starve; there's no bearing that, I'm sure." Moll salved her conscience by saying that poverty brought her into her wicked life and that fear of poverty kept her in it. She had thoughts of reforming, but these vanished when

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47 Defoe, Moll Flanders, p. 128.  
48 Ibid., p. 234.  
49 Defoe, Roxana, pp. 25, 24.
her Bath gentleman appeared; still she complimented herself that she was not a prostitute "for the mere vice of it."\(^{50}\) She called being a mistress "this happy but unhappy condition,"\(^{51}\) which seems to be a very descriptive phrase.

One thing which should be avoided, according to Moll, is "gratifying our inclinations in loose and lewd freedoms, lest we find our resolutions of virtue fail us . . . when their assistance should be most necessary."\(^{52}\) Roxana states it even more plainly: "So far does fooling and toying sometimes go, that I know nothing a young woman has to be more cautious of."\(^{53}\) Too, in comparing young men to fire and young women to saltpeter (used in making gunpowder), Defoe advised:

"1. Put out the Fire, and then there will be no Danger to the Salt Petre.

"2. Or if not that, keep them asunder."\(^{54}\)

Therefore, Moll, Roxana, and Defoe agree, though not so surprisingly, that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" when it comes to morality or the lack of it.

\(^{50}\)Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, pp. 119, 105.

\(^{51}\)Ibid., p. 119.  
\(^{52}\)Ibid., p. 118.


\(^{54}\)Defoe, *Review*, I, Supplement 1 (September, 1704), 25.
The sad results of unmarried love, prostitution, and even of some marriages were often unwanted children. Roxana's opinion that mistresses attempted to rid themselves of such burdens has already been given. Roxana herself was forced to send her five children by her first husband to relatives or to the parish in which they were born. Her children by subsequent mates were boarded out in various nurseries and schools. Moll's first two children were left with their grandparents with no apparent regrets. She on occasion patronized the baby farmers, while her only surviving child (as far as the reader is concerned) grew up in Virginia without his mother. Her child by the gentleman at Bath was left in his custody.

It is apparent from what he wrote and from his care of his own children that Defoe did not approve of such tactics. The main concern here, however, is not with the children in such cases but with the women. Moll Flanders was perhaps the first considerable literary work in the world which was based on an intelligent and sympathetic understanding of the misfortunes of an unprotected woman in contemporary society. The common attitude of the writers before Defoe was a scornful presentation of the criminal or the fallen, or a jesting presentation of sullied humanity as a subject for mirth.

55Defoe, Roxana, pp. 15, 75, 105, 159, 221-222.  
56Defoe, Moll Flanders, pp. 55, 180, 103, 123.  
Defoe did not scorn or laugh at vice and crime. On the contrary, he believed that it was often society which caused the crime, sometimes even in attempting to correct other wrongs. Prisons like Newgate created new criminals and seldom reformed the old ones. 58

Defoe's sympathy for women is nowhere more apparent than in references to childbearing and motherhood. Moll's old governess considered every lady under her care a married woman. She said, "'Every woman . . . that is with child has a father for it,' and whether that father was a husband or no husband was no business of hers." 59 Through Moll, who was usually rather callous at parting with her offspring, Defoe showed how a mother must have felt who was obliged to send her child to a baby farmer. He commented that "affection was placed by nature in the hearts of mothers" because without it "they would never be able to give themselves up, as 'tis necessary they should, to the care and waking pains needful to the support of children." 60

The story of Moll's meeting her son in Virginia after he had grown to manhood poignantly described the anguish a mother would have in not being able to identify herself to a long lost child. Moll said she lay on her

58 Ibid.

59 Defoe, Moll Flanders, pp. 164-165.

60 Ibid., p. 176.
face and wept, kissing the ground her son had walked on. She was actually speechless when she was finally able to reveal herself to him. Roxana had the same experience of meeting again a lost child, but it was not so happy as that of Moll.

Defoe supported, along with Hogarth and Handel at a later date, the Hospital for Foundlings. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he did not believe humane treatment of unwanted children encouraged vice. However much he disapproved of the arrival of unwanted children, he was not an advocate of birth control, as evidenced by the title of a chapter of his Treatise, "Of Marrying ... and of using Means physical or diabolical, to prevent Conception."

The strict divorce laws of England caused hardships for both men and women. An individual whose mate had deserted him, become insane, or simply refused to live with him often was torn between his desire for a companion and his wish to obey the law. Not overly concerned with legalities, Moll and Roxana were both bigamists; that is, they married after being deserted by their husbands, even though in all cases the husbands freely consented to their wives' remarrying.

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63 *Defoe, Roxana*, pp. 270-284.  
65 *Defoe, Conjugal Lewdness*, p. 123.  
There is no question about Defoe's opinion on this matter. Although he thought that women were worse off in marriage than men, he regarded marriage as a question of sovereignty, with the woman ruling during the engagement and the man after the wedding. . . . The merchant's reply to Roxana, that "Marriage was decreed by Heaven; that it was the fix'd State of Life which God had appointed for Man's Felicity, and for establishing a Legal Posterity; . . . that all the rest was sunk under Scandal and Illegitimacy . . .," was also Defoe's reply. 67

A reform in the divorce laws was especially important to women because a deserted woman was in much worse circumstances economically than a lone man. 68

In at least two answers from the Society Defoe advised that divorce was the only legal grounds for remarriage. In one case a man, married to a woman of "Nunnish Nature," remarried after she refused to live with him, whereas, in the second, a man left an unfaithful wife and remarried after eight or nine years, supposing the first wife dead. Defoe said both men did wrong to marry the second time without obtaining divorces. A divorce would clear them with the "Law," but divine mercy and repentance were recommended for clearance with God. 69

67 Ibid., p. 103. 68 Ibid., pp. 104-105.

Moll spoke of being a "widow bewitched," who had a husband and yet no husband and therefore could not remarry. She told her banker that he must obtain a divorce in order to marry some honest woman who would not live with him unmarried. Roxana knew she was sinning and breaking the law when she took her landlord for a lover, although both of them had living mates. Still, her gratitude to him, and his and Amy's arguments, overcame her desire to do what was legal.

Defoe affirmed that, although bigamy was not a sin in biblical times or in some nations, it would be a sin in England because it was illegal. It was, in his opinion, every man's duty to obey his government's laws. He called bigamy a sin "against God, against Government, against the Woman, and against our selves."

It was said that much marital unhappiness and consequent desire for divorce were brought about because parents chose their children's spouses. Defoe dealt with this problem in Chapter VI of *Conjugal Lewdness*, entitled "Of being Over-rul'd by Persuasion, Interest, Influence of Friends, Force, and the like, to take the Person they have no Love for, and forsake the Person they really lov'd." The problem

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71 Defoe, *Roxana*, pp. 31-36.
73 Defoe, *Conjugal Lewdness*, p. 166.
also arose in *Religious Courtship*, in which the father was told that he had, by "the Law of God," the right to forbid his daughter's marrying a man he did not like. However, he was told that he lacked the right to command her to marry someone she did not favor, the reason being that "the very Laws of Matrimony" forbade her to marry a person she had an aversion to. Furthermore, Defoe stated a girl forced to marry would be miserable.\(^7\)

In *Religious Courtship*, and elsewhere, Defoe mentioned what he called woman's "Negative Voice." By this was meant a woman's privilege to refuse a man or his proposals. In *Religious Courtship* the daughter told her father that the portion and settlement were his province in making arrangements for her marriage but that she "ought to be at liberty to like or dislike, receive or refuse the Person, and that absolutely."\(^7\)\(^5\) Another daughter explained the idea thusly: "All the liberty we take is in Negatives only; we don't offer to take any body that my Father don't like, only we don't care to take such as we don't like ourselves."\(^7\)\(^6\) Apparently Defoe allowed his own children to marry persons who suited their tastes; however, he had difficulties for several years in drawing up his daughter Sophia's marriage agreement.\(^7\)\(^7\)

\(^7\)\(^5\)Ibid., p. 122. \(^7\)\(^6\)Ibid., p. 128.
\(^7\)\(^7\)Moore, *Defoe, Citizen of the Modern World*, p. 327.
Defoe once consoled a young lady who could not prevail upon her bashful lover to propose by telling her it was to women's advantage that they could not be the "aggressors in love." If a woman were permitted to propose marriage to a man, society would be like a Seraglio, where man did woman a favor to "admit her to his Bed." If the women could ask, half the men would refuse; they would bully the women to an intolerable degree. Therefore, women ought to "maintain the Privilege of Negative Voice in all those Petticoat Affairs." Elsewhere Defoe maintained, "Unhappy is that Female Case, that comes to our door to beg Matrimony in Charity; when we Court we Creep, but Courted Scorn, with all the Insults and Extravagancies of Contempt." Moll spoke at length advising women to be less forward with men, to find out their characters before accepting them, to value the privilege of saying no, and not to rush into marriage as does a horse into battle. She maintained that no man of sense would think less of a woman who inquired of him before accepting his proposal.

The primary cause of a woman's rushing into marriage, according to Moll, was her fear of being an old maid. Moll advised women to conquer this fear, manage rightly, and stand their ground because "She

78 Defoe, Review, I, Supplement 4 (December, 1704), 25.
79 Ibid., I (January 27, 1705), 392.
80 Defoe, Moll Flanders, pp. 64-72.
is always married too soon who gets a bad husband, and she is never
married too late who gets a good one... there is no woman,
deformity or lost reputation excepted, but... may be married safely
one time or other." It has already been pointed out that Roxana
advised women not to marry at all rather than espouse themselves to
fools.

However, all young women were not so confident as Moll and
Roxana. Evidence that girls feared being old maids appeared in the
Review. A letter to the Scandalous Club mentioned sixty ladies who
were concerned about their fate, all of whom lived in one village. The
one of them who wrote the letter accused the men of the vicinity of
being so indifferent, languid, dull, and lumpish as to pay little
attention to the ladies; thus the ladies feared they would never marry
unless the Society could provide some helpful advice. Defoe replied
that the ladies were to be pitied and that it had come to the Society's
attention that such women had even been driven to meet men in the
fields and to run away with their fathers' coachmen, apprentices, or
others who would have them. Defoe, through the Society, replied that
sixty in one village was too many; only six might have a better chance
to wed. Therefore, the ladies should come to town if they wanted
better treatment; in town there would be more men, and besides, "Where

[81 Ibid., pp. 72-73.]
should Goods be Sold, but in the Market."\textsuperscript{32} This is obviously a
tradesman's remark and brings to mind Defoe's lifelong interest in trade.
On the other hand, immorality had become so great that cautious people
hesitated to go far from home to choose a mate;\textsuperscript{83} therefore, the ladies
might find it difficult to secure suitable husbands even in the city.

Since the records show that only three of Defoe's four daughters
living to adulthood married, he knew first hand what some of the prob-
lems of an unmarried woman were. His second daughter, Hannah, was
the first assured spinster in the family, and he provided for her through
the purchase of South Sea stock after the price became deflated. In
1722 the stock was sold and a ninety-nine-year lease on some land
purchased. Finally the property was bought instead of leased; it
increased rapidly in value, and Hannah had a secure income until she
died in 1759.\textsuperscript{84}

For a man to provide for his own daughters was only natural, but
for one to be interested in other spinsters, unwed mothers, mistreated
wives, and lone, helpless women of all descriptions was quite unusual
in the eighteenth century. "Defoe had a genuine passion for humanity,

\textsuperscript{82}Defoe, Review, I (February 10, 1705), 407-408.

\textsuperscript{83}Defoe, Little Review (June 8, 1705), p. 8.

\textsuperscript{84}Moore, Defoe, Citizen of the Modern World, p. 326.
and was a herald of social reform. 85 He felt compelled, perhaps because of his early instruction in a puritanical home, to give his readers moral instruction. 86 That is why "the manly voice of Defoe" 87 may so easily be distinguished behind those of Moll and Roxana and in his other writings. "A society that forced a woman such as Moll to become a whore and a robber to make a decent living" 88 obviously could use some improvement, and there is little doubt that the works of Daniel Defoe were directed toward that end.

86 Tommy G. Watson, op. cit., p. 2.
87 Ibid., p. 7.
88 Ibid., p. 3.
CHAPTER IV

WOMEN'S INTELLECTUAL, POLITICAL, AND RELIGIOUS CAPABILITIES

Besides being one of the most prolific writers of his century, Daniel Defoe was also undoubtedly a jack-of-all-trades.

Before becoming a newspaperman at forty-five, Defoe had been manufacturer, South Sea speculator, bankrupt and convict. In 1703 he spent three days in the stocks for publishing an annoying political pamphlet ["The Shortest Way with the Dissenters"]. Between jail terms he plumped mightily for freedom of the press, took secret cash handouts from ministers of all parties, acted as informer to governments and kings.¹

Since his interests were varied and since he was always concerned with people who needed assistance, it is not surprising that he should have opinions pertaining to women and their education, politics, and religion. His rearing in a dissenting home made him constantly aware of religion; because Dissenters were politically abused, he developed an early interest in politics; furthermore, Dissenters believed in educating girls as well as boys, a practice not then accepted by the English people as a whole. All these things

¹"Original Lonely Hearts," Time, XXXIII (March 6, 1939), 35.
possibly contributed to Defoe's opinions concerning the intellectual, political, and religious capabilities of women.

It is impossible to assess the importance of religious influence in Defoe's works. Surely, however, anyone familiar with his writings would agree that religion is of great importance when even such novels as Moll Flanders and Roxana are so filled with moralizing and diatribes.

Volume II of The Family Instructor (1715) is divided into two parts, Part I "Relating to Family Breaches, and their obstructing Religious Duties." A New Family Instructor (1726) is made up almost entirely of religious instruction. The Review also has its bit to say about women and religion.

However, the work which is chiefly concerned with the importance of religion to human happiness is Religious Courtship (1722), subtitled "being Historical Discourses on the Necessity of Marrying Religious Husbands and Wives Only. As also of Husbands and Wives being of the same Opinions in Religion with one Another. With an Appendix of the Necessity of taking none but Religious Servants, and a Proposal for the better Managing of Servants." The work consisted of a series of dialogues, mainly conversations of a father and his three daughters. It insisted that the husband must guide the wife in matters of religion,

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2 Dottin, op. cit., p. 289. 3 Ibid., p. 301.
4 Defoe, Religious Courtship, title page.
especially if the wife was young. The eldest daughter replied to her father, "We need no prophane Husbands to keep us back; a loose, irreligious Husband is a dreadful Snare." Early in the work, the youngest daughter learned that the man her father intended for her had no religion. She replied that, since she perhaps had no abundance of it herself, to marry a man who had none "would endanger my losing what I had, and I should rather have a husband to help me on towards Heaven, than pull me back."6

Moll advised that matrimony, like death, could be a leap in the dark. Likewise, a daughter in Religious Courtship said that she thought all marriage was a "Leap in the Dark, in one Respect or another," to which her sister replied, "It should not be so in matters of Religion."8

Not only was a woman to ascertain the sincerity and denomination of her future husband's religion, but also a man was advised to avoid irreligious ladies. An example was given of a man who was ruined by a "wild, giddy Playhouse-bred Wife, full of Wit, and void of Grace, that never had any Religion, nor knew what the meaning of it was. . . she has led him hoodwink'd to the Gates of Hell, and goes cheerfully along with him."9 As luck, or Defoe, would have it, a young

5Ibid., p. 27.  
6Ibid., p. 36.  
7Defoe, Moll Flanders, p. 72.  
8Defoe, Religious Courtship, p. 200.  
9Ibid., p. 84.
man in the book avoided the snare of an irreligious woman by deciding "if I should marry this Butterfly, we should ... go hand in hand very lovingly to the Devil."  

As might be expected, neither Moll nor Roxana professed much religion. As Moll said:

The truth is, I had not so much principle of any kind as to be nice in point of religion, and I presently learned to speak favorably of the Romish Church, ... I told them I saw little but the prejudice of education in all the differences that were among Christians about religion, and if it had so happened that my father had been a Roman Catholic, I doubted not but I should have been as well pleased with their religion as my own.

However, Defoe more nearly expressed his own feelings on the point in Religious Courtship. Here he had one daughter maintain that people should be friendly to those of faiths different from their own; "yet there is a great deal of Difference between Charity to them, and Union with them." Less tolerant than Moll, Roxana was tempted to absolve herself from sin by going to confessional; yet she did not go, because, as she said, "I could never bring myself to like having to do with those priests. ... I could not be of one opinion and then pretend myself to be of another ... in short, though I was a whore, yet I was a Protestant whore, and could not act as if I was Popish upon any account whatsoever."

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10 Ibid., p. 47. 11 Defoe, Moll Flanders, p. 143.
12 Defoe, Religious Courtship, p. 130. 13 Defoe, Roxana, p. 64.
Much of Moll's and Roxana's "religion" concerned guilt feelings and repentance. Both were constantly conscience-stricken but seldom did anything about it. Moll, when apprehended, was not sorry for her crimes but sorry that she was caught. She lamented, "I seemed not to mourn that I had committed such crimes, and for the fact as it was an offence against God and my neighbor, but that I was to be punished for it. I was a penitent, as I thought, not that I had sinned, but that I was to suffer, and this took away all the comfort of my repentance."\(^{14}\) However, she ended her memoirs by saying that she and her husband, almost as notorious as she, "resolved to spend the remainder of our years in sincere penitence for the wicked lives we have lived."\(^{15}\)

Roxana repented many times having forced Amy upon her landlord, saying it was the wickedest act she ever performed. Later qualms of conscience caused Roxana to suggest to the prince that he abandon her, but only for his legal wife.\(^{16}\) During a storm, while returning to England, she and Amy experienced "deathbed" repentance, which, however, did not last. Of this frequent phenomenon Defoe spoke through Roxana: "So certain it is that the repentance which is brought about by the mere apprehensions of death wears off as those apprehensions wear off, and death-bed repentance, or storm repentance,

\(^{14}\) Defoe, Moll Flanders, pp. 284-285. \(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 356.

\(^{16}\) Defoe, Roxana, pp. 42, 103.
which is much the same, is seldom true."17 Therefore, women like Moll, Roxana, and Amy needed something more than deathbed repen-
tance to save them.

However, Defoe was not so foolish as to consider religion the only quality desirable in a wife. A letter in the Review contrasted two respectable ladies, equal in beauty, fortune, birth, and age. A man's problem was to choose one of them for a wife, the one being religious but not a good housewife, the other being good natured and a good housewife. Defoe observed:

Every good Woman is not qualified to make a good Wife, and every good Wife is not a good Woman; the Pious, Religious Woman is good for nothing in her Family; and the good Housewife takes Care of everything but her Soul.18

Since the letter was unclear in its question, Defoe asked whether the writer wished to know which of the two ladies the Society advised him to marry or which would make him the best wife. The answer was finally given that the first lady would make the best woman and the last the best wife; the first would do herself the most service, the latter the man. It is a case of Mary and Martha. The Society finally advised the perplexed suitor to marry neither of them because "a Wife ought to be capable of every part of her Office. A Mother ought to be a good

17 Ibid., p. 123.
18 Defoe, Little Review (June 22, 1704), pp. 21-22.
Christian, and a good Housewife."\(^{19}\) Apparently Defoe recognized that religion was important but not the only thing required of a woman.

Defoe thought of religion as a helpmate to education. He said, "It's a Mistake to say, that Jewels should be worn by none but homely Women, it is just the contrary; so Religion adorns education, as Jewels give real Beauty a double Lustre."\(^{20}\) However, female education, except in such things as household skills and social graces, was woefully neglected in the eighteenth century. In spite of the attitudes of the times, "Defoe . . . may well share with Steele the honor of discovering that women had minds capable of cultivation."\(^{21}\) He made an almost unheard-of suggestion of an academy for women, claiming that the notion had occurred to him independently and that his academy would be "different from what is proposed by that ingenious lady [Mary Astell], for whose proposal I have a very great esteem."\(^{22}\)

That he had long concerned himself with this matter is evident from his remarks in *An Essay on Projects*:

> I have often thought of it as one of the most barbarous customs in the world, considering us a civilized and a

\(^{19}\)Ibid.  \(^{20}\)Defoe, *Religious Courtship*, p. 85.


Christian country, that we deny the advantages of learning to women. We reproach the sex every day with folly and impertinence, while I am confident, had they the advantages of education equal to us, they would be guilty of less than ourselves.

One would wonder, indeed, how it should happen that women are conversible at all, since they are only beholden to natural parts for all their knowledge. Their youth is spent to teach them to stitch and sew or make baubles. They are taught to read indeed, and perhaps to write their names or so, and that is the height of a woman's education. And I would ask... what is a... gentleman... good for that is taught no more?

... But why then should women be denied the benefit of instruction? If knowledge and understanding had been useless additions to the sex, God Almighty would never have given them capacities, for He made nothing needless. ... Does she plague us with her pride and impertinence? Why did we not let her learn...? Shall we upbraid women with folly, when it is only the error of this inhuman custom that hindered them being made wiser?  

In order to avoid any possibility of scandal in the academy, the building would be by itself, having three plain sides with nothing an intruder could hide behind. Gardens would surround it, as would a moat, there being only one entrance or exit. With these safeguards, there would be no need for spies to watch the girls, who would be on their honor. Showing a knowledge of human nature, Defoe said: "I am so much in charity with women, and so well acquainted with men, that it is my opinion there needs no other care to prevent intriguing than to keep the men effectually away."  

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23 Ibid., pp. 144-145.  
24 Ibid., p. 146.
Furthermore, there should be at least one of these academies in every county in England and about ten in London. Enrollment would be strictly voluntary, and no girl should be forced to remain any longer than she chose to. The girls were to be responsible for their own fees, paying for a whole year whether or not they remained that long. They should be taught music, dancing, proper speech, history, and languages, especially French and Italian. Humorously Defoe added that he "would venture the injury of giving a woman more tongues than one."  

Apparentely to show men the advantages of educating women, Defoe described them as generally sharp and quick. "A woman well bred and well taught . . . is a creature without comparison; . . . her person is angelic and her conversation heavenly; she is all softness and sweetness, peace, love, wit, and delight. . . . the man that has such a one . . . has nothing to do but to rejoice in her and be thankful."  

Defoe affirmed that a good-tempered woman without an education became soft and easy, impertinent and talkative, fanciful and whimsical. If she were bad-tempered, lack of education made her loud, insolent, and haughty; if passionate, she was a termagant and a scold; if proud, she became fantastic, conceited, and ridiculous. From these she became even worse—"turbulent, clamorous, noisy, nasty, and the

25 Ibid., pp. 147-148. 26 Ibid., p. 149.
Therefore, if men took great pains to breed and break a horse well, why not pay more attention to the education of women? The great "distinguishing difference" between men and women was in their education. In closing his plan for the academies, Defoe asserted, "I cannot think that God Almighty ever made them [women] so delicate, so glorious creatures, and furnished them with such charms, so agreeable and so delightful to mankind, with souls capable of the same accomplishments with men, and all to be only stewards of our houses, cooks, and slaves."28

Elsewhere, in his Review, Defoe complimented the ladies, saying "we always thought the Women had the quickest and justest Notions of things at first sight, tho' we have unjustly rob'd them of the Judgment, by denying them early Instruction."29 Even Moll was an advocate of education, so to speak, in that she believed she would have led a more moral life had she been taught to earn a living while she was in an orphans' asylum.30 Roxana, however, barely mentioned female education, saying only that a gentleman should be concerned with the instruction and improvement of his wife or daughter.31

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27Ibid.  
28Ibid., pp. 150-152.  
29Defoe, Review, I (July 4, 1704), 156.  
30Defoe, Moll Flanders, p. 2.  
31Defoe, Roxana, pp. 96-97.
To modern readers Defoe's defense of women may seem...
patronizing and in places facetious; but to his contemporaries his Academy for Women probably seemed the wildest of all his projects. Defoe's attitude to what was called "the fair sex" was a liberal one. He had almost none of that false gallantry or condescending playfulness with which the man of wit gilded over his contempt for female society. Whatever he may have thought of the morals of a Moll Flanders or a Roxana, he had nothing but respect for their wits. This seventeenth-century Dissenter, so narrow-minded on some questions, made no mistake on this one; and the good sense with which he writes of women may be attributed in part to his middle-class origin, and in part to his admirable intelligence.\[32\]

Besides being a "projector" Defoe was also involved in politics, and his political career forms a fascinating chapter of his life. Employed alternately by the Whigs and Tories, he was a government spy and propagandist. His feud with Dr. Henry Sacheverell, a high clergyman, about the rights of Dissenters prompted him to write "The Shortest Way with the Dissenters," a satirical poem which was misunderstood and which soon landed him in the pillory.\[33\] Defoe resented that some women favored Sacheverell's views. However interested in politics himself and however advanced his ideas concerning women, Defoe was no believer in female participation in politics. The Review sarcastically pictured women in politics and lampooned Sacheverell simultaneously:

The men leave off Smoking Tobacco, learn plain Work, and to knit Knots, play at Push-Pin, Anglice

\[32\]Sutherland, op. cit., p. 55. \[33\]Ibid., pp. 84-87.
... and leave the more Weighty Affairs of the Nation, to the newly assuming Sex, whose Business it is, they say, (under a Petticoat Government, as they call it) more now than usual. ... some of the Ladies talk of keeping Female Secretaries. The Head-Dressers and the Mantua-Makers have already felt ... trade [sink]; the ladies ... look all like Quakers ... no Body Dresses, no Body drinks Chocolate--Business, the Weighty thing call'd Business Engrosses the Sex; Matters of Government, and Affairs of State, are become the Province of the Ladies, and no Wonder if they are too much Engag'd to concern themselves about the common Impertinences of Life--Indeed they have hardly leisure to Live, little time to Eat, and Sleep, and none at all to say their Prayers.34

The parks, churches, walks, and retreats were ironically described as empty of the ladies usually there. The cause of this feminine invasion of politics was the "Sympathetic Influence of the Clergy upon the Sex, and the near Affinity between the Gown, and the Petticoat. ... as soon as you pinch the Parson, he holds out his Hands to the Ladies for their Assistance--and they appear as one Woman in his Defence."35

Although female government might do some good in the home, Defoe was convinced that on the national level it would be harmful.36 He further stated that the temper and nature of the females made them more able to accept passive obedience and non-resistance than the men were.37

Who was for Dr. Sacheverell and who against him? Defoe criticized both the Tory doctor and the ladies who supported him thusly:

34 Defoe, Review, VII (May 9, 1710), 69-70.
35 Ibid., pp. 70-71. 36 Ibid. 37 Ibid.
Among the Ladies—Shew me a Virago—a Termagant, a Stride-rider, that loves her Cold Tea, and Swears at her Maids; that Plays all Night, and Drinks Chocolate in her Bed; I'll hold Five to One, She's for the Doctor--Walk from St. Paul's to St. James's and Pick up all the Whores you can find, and that will be five hundred at least, in spite of all the Constables or Reformers--I Wager what you please, Nineteen in Twenty of them, are for Sacheverell.38

This seemed to imply that although respectable women might hold political opinions, they most certainly would not favor the doctor's views.

Defoe believed that all women must remain disinterested in politics. However, a necessary exception was Queen Anne, whom Defoe praised on most occasions. When he could not honestly praise her actions, he usually spoke of her as being misled by someone else in high position. He maintained it was not for him to decide whether she was the best of women or the best of queens, but that he believed everyone would agree she was the "Best of Wives." She was an example to all ladies, not just to queens, proving that it was not below a woman of quality, even a queen, to be "that mean out-of-fashion'd Thing call'd a GOOD WIFE."39

In Defoe's opinion, there was no higher praise for a woman. Still, Defoe would probably have been little surprised to find that women eventually attained the right to vote and to participate in politics. He knew women's

38 Ibid., p. 74.

39 Ibid., V (November 23, 1708), 410-411.
tenacity of purpose as evidenced in Moll’s statement, "It is said by the ill-natured world, of our sex, that if we are set on a thing, it is impossible to turn us from our resolutions." Therefore, if women really wanted the vote, Defoe would probably have been the last man to be shocked when they obtained it.

40 Defoe, Moll Flanders, p. 89.
CHAPTER V

THE VANITIES AND FAULTS OF WOMEN

Being human, women have faults, but in most instances Defoe considered women's faults and vices less vicious than those of the men. When women were accused of being false and vain, Defoe insisted that women lacked the lust, brutality, and forwardness of the males. Referring to sexual relationships, he stated, "As vicious as the Women may be, the Men must own themselves the aggressors, and I verily believe, Modesty never yet so far abandoned them as to make them first in the Crime; I mean also at first; if then we are the Beginners of the Sin, 'tis hard we should lay the whole Crime at their Doors."¹

When a correspondent wrote the Scandalous Club that he found a certain lady "unsteady, fickle, and uncertain" in temperament, Defoe countered that women are naturally so but that men are equally unstable and irresolute. He asked was it not ridiculous for men to severely censure women for faults which they too possessed. He even went so far as to say that falseness and dishonesty in men might be the cause and excuse for instability in women. The young lady in question could

¹Defoe, Review, I, Supplement 1 (September, 1704), 25.
not make up her mind whether or not to marry the young man. Defoe advised him to make use of her changeability—"... since she is so willing and easie to Day, tho' so backward and stiff to Morrow; take her to Day while she is to be had, and never stay till to Morrow for a Denial."^2

However, some faults in women were inexcusable. In advising her neighbors how to deal with a gossiping, lying, inquisitive female, Defoe suggested that they show her all manner of contempt and shun her in public and in private. "Let her be Treated like a Billingsgate, let the Footmen mention her name, when they have occasion to F____t, and the Ladies smell to their Bottles, when they pass by her."^3

Some of the "courser Breed" of ladies had been known to take up profanity and swearing. However, Defoe did not believe swearing or drunkenness would ever be called "Female Vices," because there was something so rude, so rough, and so harsh about them.^4 He repeated the point in An Essay on Projects: "'God damn you' does not fit well upon a female tongue; it seems to be a masculine vice, which the women are not arrived to yet; and I would only desire those gentlemen

^2Ibid., Supplement 3 (November, 1704), 27.

^3Ibid., I (November 21, 1704), 315.

^4Ibid., VIII (August 14, 1711), 247-248.
who practice it themselves to hear a woman swear. It has no music at all there, I am sure. . . ."  

The feminine fault most often mentioned by Defoe as a snare leading to more serious crimes is that of vanity. Moll Flanders spoke of it:

I had . . . the common vanity of my sex, viz., that being really taken for very handsome, or, if you please, for a great beauty, I very well knew it, and had as good an opinion of myself as anybody else could have of me, and particularly I loved to hear anybody speak of it, which happened often, and was a great satisfaction to me. . . . But that which I was too vain of was my ruin, or rather my vanity was the cause of it.  

Her first lover used "that unhappy snare to all women," flattery, to trap Moll. He knew she was vain, and he spoke to his sisters of her beauty while she was not present but yet within hearing distance. She remarked, "To have such a gentleman talk to me of being in love with me, and of my being such a charming creature, as he told me I was, these were things I knew not how to bear, my vanity was elevated to the last degree."  

When the young man added gold to his flattery, Moll was more confounded than ever. She realized in later life her mistakes as a girl and offered advice to other young women:

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6Defoe, Moll Flanders, p. 13. 7Ibid., p. 14. 8Ibid., p. 17.
I am the more particular in this, that if it comes to be read
by any innocent young body, they may learn from it to
guard themselves against the mischiefs which attend an
early knowledge of their own beauty. If a young woman
once thinks herself handsome, she never doubts the truth
of any man that tells her he is in love with her, for if she
believes herself charming enough to captivate him, 'tis
natural to expect the effects of it. 9

Since she had an unlimited supply of vanity and pride and very little
virtue, all she considered in her first affair was "the fine words and
the gold." 10

Roxana's career resembled Moll's in that she too was the victim
of flattery. "In fact, she is guilty of much the same sins, for the
vanity and avarice that characterize Moll are equally pronounced in
her." 11 Her first illicit affair was based not only on flattery but also
on gratitude to her landlord, but by the time she became the mistress
of the prince, she had money enough to support herself if she had
desired to avoid sin. The money and jewels left her by the landlord
made her financially independent. Therefore, her affair with the prince
was based only on vanity. She explained how the prince inflamed her
vanity with high compliments:

This was the way in all the world, the most likely to
break in upon my virtue, if I had been mistress of any, for
I was now become the vainest creature upon earth, and

9Ibid., p. 18. 10Ibid., p. 20.

11G. A. Starr, Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography (Princeton,
particularly of my beauty; which, as other people admired, so I became every day more foolishly in love with myself than before. 12

Roxana realized that although poverty forced irresistible temptations on the poor, vanity and expectations of great things were irresistible to others.

To be courted by a prince, . . . to be called handsome, the finest woman in France, and to be treated as a woman fit for the bed of a prince; these are things a woman must have no vanity in her, nay, no corruption in her, that is not overcome by it; and my case was such, that, as before, I had enough of both. 13

After refusing to marry her Dutch merchant, Roxana again let vanity guide her back to England. She admitted she was blinded by her own vanity; she knew she was rich, agreeable, beautiful, and "not yet old." She knew what influence she had had upon men, even upon a prince; if she had been admired by a prince, what was to stop her from being mistress to the King himself? Even in later years, Roxana found herself left with a reserve of pride. She enjoyed hearing her ex-maid, in reality her own daughter, tell of the beauty and grace of the Lady Roxana. 14

Defoe spoke of women in general when he told the story of how vanity had been the cause of Eve's downfall in Eden. Mother Eve

12 Defoe, Roxana, p. 57.

13 Ibid., p. 60.

14 Ibid., pp. 155-156, 280.
represented all womankind. He even pretended his evidence came
from naturalists by beginning:

Modern naturalists, especially some who have not so
large a charity for the fair sex as I have, tell us, that as
soon as ever Satan saw the woman, and looked in her face,
he saw it evidently that she was the best-formed creature
to make a fool of, and the best to make a hypocrite of, that
could be made, and therefore the most fitted for his purpose.

1. He saw by some thwart lines in her face . . .
that there was a throne ready prepared for the sin of
pride to sit . . . upon, especially if it took an early
possession. Eve . . . was a perfect beauty . . . there
needed no more than to bring her to be vain . . . and
having thus tickled her vanity, to introduce pride gradually,
till at last he might persuade her that she was really
angelic, . . . and wanted nothing but to eat the forbidden
fruit, and that would make her something more excellent
still.15

Seeing her imperfections more clearly, Satan observed that she
could be easily seduced by using flattery and by making her ambitious.
Besides this, he saw that she was witty, vivacious, charming, agree-
able, and able to influence Adam. He decided to ruin her and make a
devil of her; she would then ruin her husband. Defoe could not say
how far some wicked people might go in saying women had been devils
to their husbands ever since. Satan was penetrating and subtle to
recognize Eve's influence over Adam. However, if Adam was fool
enough to be duped by his wife, might not the Devil have worked
directly on him instead of going "round about, beating the bush, and

from the Prose of Daniel Defoe, edited by Roger Manvell (London, 1953),
ploughing with the heifer”? He perhaps could have as easily imposed upon the man as upon the woman. 16

Defoe observed, with some regret, that the Devil was not mistaken in his judgment of Mrs. Eve. He had made woman his tool ever since Eve succumbed, using the same methods he used with her. Woman was made "a complete snare to the poor weaker vessel man; to wheedle him with her syren's voice, abuse him with her smiles, delude him with her crocodile tears, . . . and terrify him with the thunder of her treble." 17 Some of the "learned" said she persuaded and entreated Adam to eat the forbidden fruit; others said she was a "true she-tyrant" and commanded him to eat, saying imperiously:

Here, . . . you cowardly faint-hearted wretch, take this branch of heavenly fruit, eat and be a stupid fool no longer; eat and be wise; eat and be a god; and know, to your eternal shame, that your wife has been made an enlightened goddess before you. 18

If Adam hesitated when she commanded him to eat, she replied:

What ails the sot? . . . what are you afraid of? did God forbid you! yes; and why? that we might not be knowing and wise like himself! what reason can there be that we, who have capacious souls, able to receive knowledge, should have it withheld? take it, you fool, and eat; don't you see how I am exalted in soul by it, and am quite another creature? take it, I say, or, if you don't, I will go and cut down the tree, and you shall never eat any of it at all, and you shall still be a fool, and be governed by your wife for ever. 19

16 Ibid., pp. 99-100. 17 Ibid., p. 100 18 Ibid., pp. 100-101 19 Ibid.
Therefore men had been afraid of women's voices ever since; even Vulcan's hammers could not silence the clamors of his goddess, and Juno once outscolded all Jupiter's thunders and was "within an ace of bawling him out of heaven." 20

This is quite an elucidation of the Genesis version of the story so familiar to Defoe from his youth on. As a boy he had copied the first five books of the Bible in case Catholicism should become powerful enough to confiscate the Dissenters' Bibles, but he became so tired that he was willing to risk losing the rest of it. 21 There is no doubt whatever that he considered the biblical version of the fall a serious matter, but his wit and liveliness enabled him to write his humorous version of it in The Political History of the Devil. "Defoe, in fact, without ceasing to be a Dissenter--and an extremely active one--had learnt to be far more liberal in his views than most of his religious brethren. ... To the average Dissenter Defoe was a great deal too clever--too clever, in fact, to be trusted." 22

Although varity and beauty often went together, it was not always so in Defoe's opinion. A beautiful woman was not automatically a vain one. The younger brother Robin in Moll Flanders remarked that "beauty will steal a husband sometimes in spite of [lack of] money, and when

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20 Ibid.
21 Sutherland, op. cit., p. 15.
22 Ibid., p. 17.
the maid chances to be handsomer than the mistress, she oftentimes
... rides in a coach before her." He continued later on the same
subject, "Beauty's a portion, and good humour with it is a double
portion."24

Both Roxana and Moll partly founded their careers on their good
looks. Roxana remarked that as her beauty declined with age and
childbearing, she expected her lover's ardor to cool; consequently,
she would be dropped like other mistresses of great men.25 The same
idea appeared in the Review, which said a woman who became a
mistress must have a vast opinion of her beauty and charms to suppose
she could hold a man forever under such conditions.26

In a letter to the Scandalous Club, a man asked whether he would
make a mistake to marry a red-haired woman; he had been advised by
his friends against it. Defoe advised him that beauty is in the eye of
the beholder. The man showed a weakness in accepting the world's
opinion of the lady, and he was told to take such a rare woman who
had only one discoverable fault, the color of her hair. He should
please himself and not others in the choice of a wife. Besides, he
might be more able to keep this woman to himself if other men shunned

23 Defoe, Moll Flanders, p. 15.  24 Ibid., p. 39.
25 Defoe, Roxana, p. 100.
26 Defoe, Review, I (December 19, 1704), 347.
red-haired ladies. In reality, these auburn-haired lasses were said to have the finest clear skins, and famous ladies from Juno to Queen Elizabeth were red-haired and esteemed as beauties. Women should not be judged by externals, nor should men.

Realizing the premium attached to beauty, women had for centuries attempted to make themselves attractive. The eighteenth century was definitely no exception, and Defoe found much to say about dress, the love of fine clothes, and the use of cosmetics. Having a wife and four daughters, Defoe must have been aware of fashions, and having been a hosier and ship owner, he was familiar with different materials and laces, their worth and selling prices.

Defoe made use of this knowledge many times in Moll Flanders and Roxana, giving details that add depth to the reality of the novels. Moll often spoke of the sort of goods she stole--lustring silk, bone lace, and Belgian linen. She depicted at various times the way she was dressed and admitted, "I loved nothing in the world better than fine clothes." Roxana would have understood Moll's love of clothes perfectly. She was given by her prince three magnificent suits of silk brocade fine enough for the Queen of France, five morning dresses, parcels of fine linen, and lace heads. She said, "I dressed me in the

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28 Defoe, Moll Flanders, p. 111.
second suit brocaded with silver, and returned in full dress, with a suit of lace upon my head which would have been worth in England two hundred pounds sterling. 29 The article of fine clothing was seldom mentioned without some hint as to its value. In London Roxana dressed her maid Amy like a gentlewoman; she herself "dressed to the height of every mode, went extremely rich in clothes, and as for jewels, ... wanted none." 30

Feminine garb in reality as well as in fiction concerned Defoe. The eternal English tradesman, he deplored the fact that the Indian trade was robbing the local wool market of business because so much women's clothing and household furnishings were being made of "Callicoes and Indian Stuffs." Even the queen wore china silks and calico. 31 Another detriment to the wool market was brought about by the ladies' desire to be fashionable. Defoe scolded them for being slavish followers of fashion and wearing black every time the Queen was forced to go into mourning because of the death of some foreign royalty. He maintained this constant going into public mourning was ruining not only the wool market but also the cloth merchants' trade and thus damaging the economy of all England. 32 Apparently the ladies did

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29 Defoe, Roxana, pp. 66-67. 30 Ibid., pp. 159-160.

31 Defoe, Review, IV (January 31, 1708), 606.

32 Ibid., II (March 3, 1705), 7-8 and VIII (May 19, 1711), 99.
not have such extensive wardrobes if they remained in mourning much of the time.

One number of the Review contained an account of a fire very similar to the one Moll visited under pretense of helping to rescue the children and valuables of the household. Defoe related that as he watched the fire he saw furniture tossed out of a shopkeeper's house that compared in richness with some removed at a recent fire at the home of the French ambassador. A woman appeared to be beside herself, trying to save her wardrobe from a neighboring house in danger of catching fire from the burning one. She was not interested in getting her child out, who was asleep upstairs in his bed, according to the maid who went in and saved him. Only when the roof of the second house actually took fire did the mother scream, tear her hair, and cry out for her child, not knowing he had already been saved. This example of a love of luxury that exceeded the concern for a child was an indication to Defoe of a decadence that might well cause the downfall of England as a prosperous trading nation. In his mind prosperity, trade, and morality were quite closely connected.

Apparently, in spite of his criticism of others, Defoe himself liked fine clothes.

33 Ibid., I [IX] (January 31, 1713), 105-106.
His success as a writer of distinction had made him a man of fashion. Well-dressed and well-powdered, he went out frequently on horseback to call upon his friends. His conversation, always lively and interesting, made him a favorite with the ladies, and he prided himself upon his success with women of position. One can imagine, then, his embarrassment when, one day, upon entering a room full of ladies, he embraced them all, as was the custom, and discovered, to his chagrin, that he had included a waiting-woman, whose dress, as fine as her mistress's, had led him into the error. He could hear the gossips. "Fie! Did you know Mr. Daniel Defoe embraced a lady's maid!"

He took out his fury by writing a severe reprimand addressed to servants who so forgot their place as to mimic their betters in matters of dress.34

In this reprimand to servants, Everybody's Business Is Nobody's Business, Defoe complained that maid-servants were a bad example to children because of

their saucy and insolent behavior, their pert, and sometimes abusive answers, their daring defiance of correction, and many other insolences which youth are but too apt to imitate.

Secondly, by their extravagance in dress, they put our wives and daughters upon yet greater excesses, because they will, as indeed they ought, go finer than the maid; thus the maid striving to outdo the mistress, the tradesman's wife to outdo the gentleman's wife, the gentleman's wife emulating the lady, and the ladies one another; it seems as if the whole business of the female sex were nothing but an excess of pride, and extravagance in dress.35

34 Dottin, op. cit., p. 228.

Defoe did not always have derogatory remarks to make about women's dress, however. He admitted that he did not agree with those who complained that England was in bad shape morally, financially, and every other way. He surmised that modern times (1713) were a big improvement over former ones, saying, "the Ladies never Dress'd so Modest, nor the Gentlemen so Grave and Becoming as they do now." He recalled in the past an estimate of seventy thousand "ribband-weavers" in Spittle-fields and other textile villages, but he believed in 1713 there were not half so many hundred in all England. Fewer ribbons, he surmised, must have indicated more modesty in dress. Furthermore, he remembered during his youth "the naked Shoulders and Breasts, the Monstrous Towers of Hair, the Heads three Story high, and the like, of the Women; the Pantaloons, the Shoulder-Knots, and the Shoulder-Belts of the Gentlemen—Both Sexes have tired themselves of those Follies."36

Although they dressed more modestly, Defoe stated that the ladies, both young and old, were fatter than in former times, in London especially. So were the men. He did not desire to affront the women, and he referred only to the married ones. He depended not on his own observations alone but had inquired of physicians, surgeons, and

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36 Defoe, Review, I [IX] (January 31, 1713), 105. 37 Ibid.
midwives as to women's increased size. These authorities agreed
with him that both sexes, but especially the women, were fatter than
formerly. Thus, "married Women from thirty years of Age, upwards,
are so universally fatten'd, especially in London, that, one with
another, there is not one lean Woman in Ten, to be found, thro' the
whole Town." 38

Causes for this increased weight might be that women were more
the "masters" in their households than they used to be, that men were
probably better husbands than their ancestors (Defoe hated to do his
late father the injustice of believing this), or that ladies in 1713 drank
more freely than their grandmothers. Although he had no proof, Defoe
presumed the ladies' increased weight also came from drinking choco-
late, bohea, and hot and cold tea, drinks unavailable to their ances-
tors. 39

Men and women alike in the eighteenth century "plastered them-
selves with cosmetics and sometimes died martyrs to the fashion. White
lead was an ingredient in many of the preparations; but though doctors
might warn and moralists preach, the fashion continued." 40 Defoe was
one of these moralists. For some reason of his own, which he attempted

38 Ibid., p. 106. 39 Ibid.
40 Bayne-Powell, op. cit., p. 178.
to explain, he condoned the use of "Patches and other Ornaments" but condemned paint. His reasoning was that ornaments made the parts they were applied to more beautiful, but paint did not; paint only served to cover up real beauty. Any lady who used paint was accused of not being satisfied with the face God gave her and of making a new one of her own; this, according to Defoe, indicated pride and dissatisfaction with God's disposition of his gifts. In addition, it was not only sin but folly for a woman to try to better her appearance with paint because paint damaged the skin. As a personal testimony, Defoe added:

Paint eats the skin, and Tarnishes it; I my self knew a Lady who had a Pimple on her Face, and Painted; she scratching this small excrescency, the Paint got into it, and eat one side of her Face so far, that you might see all her Teeth outwards, which kill'd her at last.  

Defoe added that paint also made women look much older than they really were; it could not substitute for Nature. He realized that women used cosmetics primarily to make themselves more attractive to men, but he insisted that paint only made men suspect that such women had faults they wished to hide. "She that will appear what she is not, in her Face, may Counterfeit too in the rest of her Actions, and her Modesty may be of the same Coin as her Face."  

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41 Defoe, Little Review (August 15, 1705), pp. 82-83.  42 Ibid.
Both Moll and Roxana made points of the fact that they used no paint, at least not until age forced them to. Moll admitted that there was "some difference seen between five-and-twenty and two-and-forty" but that she never stooped to paint until quite late in life. Then, for the first time, she "used a little art," having always had enough vanity before to believe she had no need of cosmetics. Roxana told of the incident when the prince hesitated to wipe her tears for fear of smearing her make-up. She replied, "How! my lord, . . . have you kissed me so often and don't you know whether I am painted or not? . . . I have not deceived you with false colours." She then forced him to rub her face with a handkerchief and even went so far as to dampen a cloth in warm water and wash her face to prove all her beauty came from Nature. Needless to say, the prince was amazed.

On at least one occasion Defoe used a sort of allegory to make his point about ladies' faults. This occurred in the Review and was a story about a wraith-like young lady, discovered sitting on a bench in a park near a pool, dressed in clothing of good quality but "all out of Fashion." Fearing she was about to drown herself, her discoverers brought her before the Society. She told of being shunned or snubbed

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43Defoe, Moll Flanders, p. 127.  
44Ibid., p. 243.  
45Defoe, Roxana, p. 67.  
46Ibid., pp. 67-68.
by all the ladies of quality in London. She was even overlooked in church; no one would ask her to sit down. Ladies crossed the street to avoid her. The gentlemen, however, offered to talk to her, and some went so far as to offer incivilities and insulting propositions. But as soon as they learned her name, they begged her pardon and left immediately. She finally told the Society that she came from an old family in the North and was the last of her family. Her name was Modesty.47

The Society immediately rose up at the mention of her Name, and all of them paid her the Respects due to her Quality, offered to send a Guard with her to her Lodgings, and told her, They were sorry her Ladyship was grown so much out of fashion.48

A story like this no doubt held the reader's attention, because at first he believed himself to be reading an account of a real event. Moreover, the message was unmistakable and needed no explanation.

Defoe constantly praised modesty and condemned pride. He wrote in the letters to the Scandalous Club of a woman who had received a small inheritance from an elderly husband. The money had made the woman so full of pride that she demanded to be called "my Lady" and expected everyone to pay homage to her. On one occasion, when she and her servant were receiving Holy Eucharist, she interrupted

47 Defoe, Review, I (August 8, 1704), 195-196. 48 Ibid.
her worship to ask the servant to bring her clogs from the church door.

In answering the question whether or not the woman was justified in her "putting on airs," Defoe said that true quality in people can be told only by their "Vertue, and Generous Behavior . . . [and] Honor." Being from a famous or wealthy family meant little; "'Tis Personal Vertue only makes us Great."

Even Moll Flanders said she had nothing left to recommend her after she had lost her virtue and modesty. She and Roxana both talked a great deal of modesty but seldom practiced the real thing. Moll mentioned that she always tried to appear modest regardless of what she really had become. She was not afraid for her banker friend to inquire of her character, because

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\ldots \text{all the people there knew of me was to my advantage; and all the character he had of me was that I was a woman of fortune, and that I was a very modest, sober body; which, whether true or not in the main, yet you may see how necessary it is for all women who expect anything in the world to preserve the character of their virtue, even when perhaps they may have sacrificed the thing itself.}
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Defoe was telling women not only to have the appearance of modesty but also to preserve their reputations as their most valuable possession.

Having digested much of Defoe's advice, the reader today cannot help but wonder what this man who almost became a minister might have

\[\text{\[49\text{Ibid.}, \text{Supplement 3 (November, 1704), 22.}\]} \quad \text{\[50\text{Ibid.}\]} \quad \text{\[51\text{Defoe, Moll Flanders, p. 24.}\]} \quad \text{\[52\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 139.}\]}\]
to say about society and its customs today. He was a critic of
eighteenth-century conditions, but much of what he wrote could apply
to us today. The majority of his works have been neglected and
ignored, but some are now being rediscovered. It has been said that
those men who are ignored for a time are often the ones who should be
remembered the most. Everyone knows Leonardo da Vinci, but few
remember the princes who employed him. Similarly, every educated
person recognizes the name of Daniel Defoe, but few recall the minis-
ters under whom he served.

Daniel Defoe—in so many ways a pioneer in liter-
ature and journalism and history, one of the germinal
minds in political and economic thought, a defender of
religious toleration and an opponent of the evils of human
slavery, an advocate of most of the effective reforms of
the past two and a half centuries—cannot be slighted by
anyone who would understand the world in which we live
today.  

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54 Ibid.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS YIELDED BY THE THESIS

Whether eighteenth-century England was any more in need of a counselor and guide than society today is a matter of conjecture. However, any student of the history of the period would no doubt be inclined to agree that conditions were far from ideal in many respects. This thesis has dealt with Defoe's attitude toward the problems of women in the eighteenth century, primarily those of English women, married and unmarried, rich and poor, and those in between. Of course, Daniel Defoe spoke in his Review and other journalistic writings, in his novels, and in his didactic works on a great number of subjects, but pervading these works is a continuing concern with women and their problems.

From the material on which this thesis is based, it would seem that Defoe thought of himself as a self-appointed counselor of the British people. He was concerned mainly with the way women were neglected in their education, were often abused by their husbands in the marriage relationship, and were mistreated shamefully if they were unwise or unfortunate enough to fall into the snares of immoral men. Though generally a firm friend of the female sex, he did not hesitate
to reprimand them when he felt they merited it. He condemned their vanity, their love of fine clothes, their use of cosmetics, their lack of modesty, and their attempts to take any interest in the masculine province of politics. It was not unusual for the men of Defoe's time to point out the ladies' faults; many of the letters to the Scandalous Club did just that. The average man expected women to know little, to obey their husbands implicitly, and to suffer the consequences should they lose their virtue. That Defoe believed that women should be educated and that they had certain rights in marriage made him an exceptional man of his day.

Defoe wrote whole volumes on the subject of marriage, for example, *Conjugal Lewdness* and *Religious Courtship*. Moreover, other works dealt with marriage, though not so exclusively as these two. Defoe believed children should be allowed to choose their own mates, within reason. A daughter should not be forced to marry someone she had an aversion to; however, she should not be allowed to marry completely outside the parents' choice. Then, too, only people of like religious beliefs should unite in matrimony. Especially disastrous would be the marriage of a Protestant and a Catholic. In some instances, it would be better for a woman to remain unmarried; for example, marriage to a fool was worse than spinsterhood. For an unhappy marriage, Defoe thought divorce should be the last resort; still, it was the only grounds for the remarriage of either partner.
Defoe constantly condemned premarital and unmarried love, even in his novels. He praised wedded motherhood but found the birth of children to unmarried women a pathetic thing, sad enough for the mothers but a lifelong blot on the children. This stigma of illegitimacy was shown plainly in the Dutch merchant's concern for his son by Roxana.

In addition, Defoe's opinions covered the subject of women in regard to religion, intelligence, education, politics, and business. He stated that women should make religion one of the prime concerns in their life, but a woman who was religious only made a poor wife. Women were said to be equal in intelligence to men; if women were unable to carry on enlightened conversations with their menfolk, their inability was probably due to neglect of their education, not to lack of wit on their part. Female education would help not only the women but also the men because it would make the ladies more agreeable companions for their spouses. However, there was one aspect of society completely unsuited to feminine judgment, and that was politics. Business also should be left to the men whenever possible, since the ladies were not thought to have intellects suited to the comprehension of facts and figures.

Servants, especially female ones, had gotten almost completely out of hand, and Defoe often reminded his readers that something must
be done about it. They were impertinent, dressed too finely, and demanded too high wages. Defoe, like everyone of his time, was quite class-conscious and believed servants should keep their places.

In general, then, the conclusion of the thesis is that Defoe believed that the women in England should be given better treatment, especially those who had to provide for their own livelihood. Also, women should attempt to conduct themselves at all times so as to merit better treatment.

Defoe wrote plainly so that no one would mistake his meaning. Moreover, he did not mince words, nor did he attempt to give people what they wanted to read, altogether. Even though he made his living, to a large extent, from his writings once he became a novelist, he yet did not feel that he could leave off advising his readers about their morals and ethics, their trade and commerce, and their politics at home and abroad. He seemed compelled to be England's conscience and would not be stilled no matter what was done to quiet him. Even today, Defoe's readers can sense that he had his country's welfare at heart and that he was using his talents to keep England a great nation.
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