

The Maternal Subject in the Budding British Novel

Considering Daniel Defoe's Fiction

This article attempts to create a three-part structure in which it can situate its more particular discussion of maternal subjectivities in the work of Daniel Defoe. In the first part, it looks at the British novel's relationship to the representation of human subjectivity. It discusses the connection to the nonfictional form of the autobiography as well as to ideologies of individualism. The article argues that representing maternal subjectivity in fiction poses a unique challenge to the British novel's form: the healthy relationality of the maternal subject is suppressed generically, as narrative requires a dominant character through which to create meaning. The second part looks at Defoe's three major novels—Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders, and Roxana—and how the prefaces instruct the reader about how to receive the scandalous stories about these mother figures. This overview highlights Defoe's interest in writing the gendered "other" and his difficulty in depicting a subjective relationality in Roxana without novelistic tragedy and narrative collapse. The third part involves a deeper reading of Moll Flanders, in which moments of Moll's maternal inclinations are read against the larger picture of her denial of maternal obligations. Moll's is a damaged child's subjectivity, one that still craves a mother's care, approval, and affection. The narrative structure requires that she stake a rhetorical claim that excises the subjectivities of others from the story. In concluding, the article argues that it is valuable to read Defoe's early experiments with the formation of the maternal subjectivity in fiction because they show a sensitive awareness of the factors that enable the composition and transmission of maternal narrative within the genre of the novel.

Introduction: Human Subjectivity and the British Novel

The British novel, in its early and mid-eighteenth-century manifestations,

writes the story of a particular character, documenting his or her personal subjectivity and his or her particular struggles. The dominant use of first-person and epistolary narratives sharpens this focus on the interiority of one central subject. Woven into the very fabric of the novel, then, is what appears, narratively, to be an inherent and natural sense that the protagonist's selfhood is the one worthy of representation and the one deserving of the reader's sustained attention and notice. The novel, however, eventually experiments formally with points of view, in which the readers gain entrance into the minds of several characters, and it shows an increasing tendency in the nineteenth century to interest itself thematically in communities and in the frictions resulting from a complicated web of subjectivities. The tyranny of the central character, of course, does not simply give way to democracy or equality in narrative representation. A single protagonist tends to dominate even in later versions of the novel, indicating that British authors continue to insist that narrative requires a locus around which a story must revolve and a particular person through which it derives its meaning.

The drama of how the novel tells the story of an individual selfhood is nowhere more apparent than in the presentation of or in the minimization of the maternal subjectivity. Mothers are pitted against children from the very birth of the British novel. The novel dominantly writes the story of youths growing up in the world, becoming educated by experience and people, occasionally by books, and eventually maturing into adults who find a vocation, mark out a path of adventure and self-fulfillment, or who marry and have children. However, this type of plot does not take shape without the narrative pathologizing or excising of the figure of the mother. The tension between a mother's and child's subjectivity is such that there is little evidence of their peaceful coexistence or reconciliation within eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British narratives. The results of this tension are one-sided stories in which the child must erase or overcome the mother to achieve a healthy selfhood. However, when maternal narratives erase or excise children, they are construed as "monstrous," and the maternal subjectivity is never read as a healthy one, although it may be considered, within the bounds of a story, entertaining. An example of this, one which I will expand on in this article, is Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, a novel about a thieving woman who serially abandons her children, yet whose fictional voice is seductive, exciting, and pleasurable. The necessity of triumph for a dominant subjectivity within the novel, whether it be the child's, or, occasionally, the mother's, is a function of genre; the novel encourages one main story to be told, calling for sympathy with this version of the events. It is partly due to the novel's rise alongside the autobiography and to the novel's initial desire to assert its "truth" by imitating a nonfictional form. An autobiography presents a narrow version of events filtered through

the subjectivity of an individual; the autobiographer or protagonist actively repels dominance by other parties. The struggle for narrative autonomy is written into the pages of the early novel and manifests itself particularly in the iteration and written formation of a maternal subjectivity, which is challenged as an individual subjectivity by its divided and relational nature.

The novel's interest in encapsulating any character's subjectivity is described by Patricia Meyer Spacks as a result of the budding genre's engagement with the Enlightenment problem of individualism and identity (2). Although influential philosophers of the period, such as John Locke and later David Hume, all criticize the notion of an intuitively understood and consistent notion of selfhood as deceptive and misguided, Spacks notes that characters of eighteenth-century literature show remarkable consistency and a limited capacity for meaningful change. Instead, "People are rewarded for being themselves," as in the case of Samuel Richardson's character Clarissa (8). Although I will discuss later how Daniel Defoe grapples with writing human identity, Spacks describes the difficulty as such: "All these problems of dependability derive from the nature of human consciousness.... Consciousness, our only instrument for understanding self and world, makes secure understanding impossible; we can never fully become conscious of that consciousness, as thinkers long before Freud were aware" (21-22). Nonetheless, Defoe's maternal protagonists, Moll Flanders and Roxana, show remarkable intuitive understanding of the self and its needs; they shape those selfhoods in narrative form and bequeath them to the readers' consideration. Moll is rewarded for being herself, but Roxana is tortured for it. Clearly then, the questions surrounding how people define themselves—and how their self-knowledge, external environments, and life choices contribute to their ultimate happiness or misery—fascinate Defoe.

The early British novel is full of characters whose writing of their lives fulfills some aspect of personal survival—psychological, emotional, and even physical. Part of that survival involves distinguishing themselves from others and insisting on the primacy of their own subjectivity. Writing acts as a way of strengthening internal resolve against the onslaught of destabilizing events and other personalities. Writing does, inevitably, create consistency and does smooth over the picture of personality as it is not possible in reality. Just as autobiography theory has ways of treating autobiographies that are riddled with inaccuracies and serve an authorial agenda, critics may apply similar ideas to an examination of fictional life stories that are the flawed efforts of an unobjective consciousness creating its own portrait. My interest is in examining the textual subjectivities of characters as they reflect an active desire for self-fashioning. I will argue that the early British novel, in fact, rewards protagonists who "make" themselves—who carve out a unique path and refuse to be stifled by external

expectations. This active shaping of the self involves not only the determination of the events of their lives but the documentation of them as well.

There is a long critical tradition of examining texts such as *Robinson Crusoe*, or *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, and the relationship between the textual selves written by the narrators and their (ultimately unknowable) actual selves. Scholars have pored over Crusoe's tale and have chipped away at what are likely its self-serving exaggerations; *Pamela* aroused enough ire that even contemporaries Eliza Haywood and Henry Fielding wrote their own versions of the story, maligning Pamela's supposed innocent intentions and rendering her a devious social climber; readers and critics of *Clarissa* have joined her parents and her friend Miss Howe in casting some blame, despite her defense of her actions respecting Lovelace. On the other hand, the confessions of mother-narrators, such as Moll Flanders and Roxana, have not been probed with the same attitude of suspicion concerning their intentions in writing their tales, likely because they have freely shown themselves as committed to living lives of morally reprehensible and highly self-serving behaviour. Moll Flanders tells of episode after episode of beguiling men into marriage for financial security after she is initially widowed. The offspring of her relationships are unsentimentally discarded, as she cannot afford their care and maintenance, and, eventually, she chooses not to sacrifice her hard won money for children. Roxana's story, too, is precipitated by financial insecurity in the form of abandonment. She trades her virtue for money, and deserts the children, who are inconvenient for her lifestyle. One child, Susan, will eventually insist on unmasking Roxana to discover her mother, threatening the careful guise Roxana wears to maintain her reputation and romances. Although critics interest themselves in Moll's romance with money or Roxana's "Amazonian" feminism, they rarely engage with these mother-characters as writers and highly conscious shapers of their eponymous texts. Instead, readers take their word for their monstrous natures and go from there.

The novel's love of fiercely independent, enterprising, and exceptional characters is complicated when it writes the subjectivities of mothers. Although youths who repel absorption into scripted parental and societal narratives are often rewarded in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fictions, mothers who resist absorption into the scripted cultural narratives of motherhood and who insist on remaining the heroines of their own stories by expelling children from their narratives are treated as interesting but disturbing characterizations. Daniel Defoe rewards Moll Flanders for her spirit and ingenuity, but he finds himself unable to do the same with Roxana when he attempts to write a maternal subjectivity for a second time. In her book *The Politics of Motherhood: British Writing and Culture, 1680-1760*, Toni Bowers writes the following: "In Augustan Britain, motherhood and what we might call 'personhood' began to be seen as

mutually exclusive alternatives. For the first time, it became obviously difficult to reconcile developing norms of self-sacrificing motherlove with increasingly powerful notions of individual subjectivity” (96). Bowers writes an important study of the historical circumstances informing the early novel’s portrayal of monstrous mothers. Marilyn Francus, too, describes the culture’s growing horror over unnatural mothers and the legal steps taken to prevent infanticide. However, here, I will explore how the early British novel’s representation of problematic maternal subjectivities is less a result of a cultural and historical interest in bad mothers during that period than it is the result of the novel’s experimentation with the incompatibility of positive and nurturing maternal subjects with the novel’s form and generic expectations.

The Case of Daniel Defoe

Not only have Daniel Defoe’s novels influenced the formation of the novel, but they have created some of the British novel’s most intriguing maternal figures, who are ruthless in their insistence on their own survival and on their own narrative centrality. As an author, Defoe is deeply interested in narratives of survival under extreme circumstances, as seen, for instance, in *Robinson Crusoe* and *Journal of a Plague Year*, published in 1719 and 1722, respectively. That he turns his attention to female characters, and to mothers specifically, shows that he is no less interested in their survival, even in less exotic locales or less ostensibly catastrophic situations. Moll Flanders’s extremity stems from her poverty. Roxana’s hardships also begin as economic but become more social and psychological. Defoe’s novelistic commitment to probing and exploring various self-hoods makes it unsurprising that he treats the threat of physical, social, and psychological self-erasure just as seriously for his mother-heroines as he does for his other protagonists. He teaches his audience to identify with a human being’s initial instinct for self-preservation and, eventually, for that being’s desire for personal success, whether it is financial, social or other.

As an author, Daniel Defoe makes an important statement by refusing to erase maternal subjectivities and to substitute them with the perspectives of their children. His mother-protagonists have more baggage than would female characters without children or female characters who were unmarried; the existence of children makes the trajectory of Moll’s and Roxana’s survival and success complicated. They must provide some plan of care for the children they abandon; their motherhood compromises their sexual availability and ability to be free for the sexual opportunities that form the basis for their financial success. But Defoe uses the novel to explore and to write through this complication. It is part of his interest in writing female narrators. He

proves in both his texts that maternal narratives are exciting and titillating. In fact, the narrative of maidenhood, courtship, or sexual anticipation, which will later flourish in the British novel tradition, assumes that not only sexual but narrative excitement lives entirely outside the bounds of marriage and motherhood. Defoe, instead, writes female characters whose sexual experience allows them greater freedoms to move within society and to have the type of adventures that stimulate a plot. As Defoe tries to grant Moll and Roxana the freedoms men enjoy, he comes to recognize particular challenges that are unique to women of the time.

In her book *Narrative Transvestism: Rhetoric and Gender in the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, Madeleine Kahn discusses the curious fact that many of England's foundational novels, such as those of Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson, were "written by men in the person of women" (2). By employing the term "narrative transvestism," which describes the case in which "a male author gains access to a culturally defined female voice and sensibility but runs no risk of being trapped in the devalued female realm," (6), she can theorize about the motivation of the authors. I agree that Defoe sees a value in an author's ability to explore and write the other gender, as the world of another gender boasts its own type of exoticism. Kahn stresses, however, that the male author will not become enmeshed in the political and social disadvantages of femaleness. Outside the text, he is certainly not caught in it, but as the narrative in Defoe's *Roxana* unravels, and his failure to keep up the experiment of novel writing beyond this text becomes clear, critics wonder whether he realizes his limitations in writing a female—and specifically a maternal—subjectivity, one that is internally at war and cannot be at peace with itself.

Defoe's own prolific career does not make him insensitive to the challenge of writing in general, and to the challenge for his female narrators particularly. His highly conscious and layered presentations of individual narratives in his fictions indicate that he understands the complication in the transmission of a person's story to a written text and then its distribution to a larger readership. In *Robinson Crusoe*, the protagonist's journal writing is only possible as a result of his lucky salvaging of paper and ink from the shipwreck. And, eventually, the ink runs out, and his journal ends. Defoe highlights how dependent the act of writing is on incidental and material circumstances. Moreover, Defoe's prefaces show a marked distinction in the treatment of male and female narratives. The prefaces emphasize the vulnerability of women's narratives to interruption, alternation, sanitization, and erasure. The maternal subjects of Defoe's fiction can be said to betray some awareness of this: they fight for the preservation of their autonomous stories. Moll defends her narrative centrality against her husband's, and Roxana refuses to allow her daughter to penetrate her stories and deceptions.

In each autobiographical fiction, there is some mediation between the character, who is telling his or her own life, and an editor figure, whose voice introduces the story to the audience. None of the tales is allowed to stand alone, which is likely the result of Defoe working within a conventional mode in which the “truth” of the narrative is authenticated when it is witnessed by another. Robinson Crusoe’s editor displays a warm admiration for his tale and provides a brief explanation of it without giving any evidence of tampering or alteration: “If ever the story of any private man’s adventures in the world were worth making public, and were acceptable when published, the editor of this account thinks this will be so” (3). He promises equal amusement and instruction to his reader, something that Moll’s and Roxana’s editors certainly do not boast.

Moll’s story contains the longest introduction and indicates the greatest interference with her writing. It warns the reader that her tale is “written in Language more like one still in *Newgate*” (37). The editor does not give himself a title or commit to a particular role. He is only the metonymic “Pen employ’d in finishing her story” (37). This voice admits to major revisions of Moll’s raw tale. He leaves out and shortens what is indecent and makes the “Penitent” part of her story more beautiful than the wicked. Readers can judge for themselves whether this is successful. He intimates that any reader who finds Moll’s criminal life more interesting has a disturbed “Gust and Palate” (38). He extols her story because an appropriate moral glaze has been applied to it. Yet what must be noted is that although the editor of the preface does mention the particular legal crimes of thieving, incest, and bigamy, he does not mention her moral crime—being a mother who refuses to care for her children. This refusal to nurture children seems completely irrelevant, the reader may assume, because she has put them in a situation, disreputable as it may be, that clears her of the crime of infanticide, according to the law. But in what ways does her own narrative indict her? That Moll knowingly confesses her sins and imperfections, almost boasts of them, shows that she would rather define herself as flawed, in writing, than not define herself at all. Flaws make for interesting stories and propel narrative. On the other hand, the subjectivities of perfect mothers appear, at least in the novel, to be unnarratable. The “Relator” of Roxana’s story likewise interferes with her narrative. First, he emphasizes that the tale is real: “the Foundation of This is laid in Truth of Fact; and so the Work is not a Story, but a History” (35). On account of its scandalous truth, the relator has attempted to edit indecencies. But overall, there appears to be less discussion of editing than with Moll’s story. It is possible that this editor has felt less of a necessity to tamper with it. He likewise warns that when “Vice is painted in its Low-priz’d Colours,” the purpose is to expose it and not to make it alluring (36).

However, the same words describing immoral behaviour may appeal differently to audiences. The relator tries to sway the readers' reception by asking them to see in these stories a moral lesson. On the whole, Roxana's editor appears to have interfered less with respect to elevating the good and punishing the bad. Instead, he emphasizes her pangs of conscience as enough to provide appropriate moral ideas. The difference between the prefaces to Moll's and Roxana's stories indicate that the (presumably) male editor will show more tolerance for a narrative that shows its maternal subject internalizing cultural norms, and being emotionally and psychologically tortured by them. As Susan Greenfield argues, "*Roxana* naturalizes the mother by suggesting that the heroine's true identity is her maternal one" (27). Because Roxana feels tortured by her conscience for harming her child in defense of her own life, the novel indicates that although she is so many other things—courtesan, mistress of the Prince, social star—she is primarily and primitively a mother who ultimately cannot deny her motherhood.

Despite being written by other fictional "characters" as imagined as Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders, and Roxana themselves, the prefaces present the clearest picture of Daniel Defoe's own feelings about how he would like his works to be read, as he means to emphasize contrition and spiritual redemption. He does not apologize, though, for the great disparity between the vice depicted and the good that hopefully emanates from it. The prefaces simply encourage a method of interpretation that rectifies this disparity. Defoe emphasizes that there is no record of the exact words spoken by his characters, as the editors or relators are able to distort them. Both Moll's and Roxana's stories are changed, although they are far from being completely sanitized. What were those stories before their words were handled? Defoe writes the women formed from these existing versions of their lives, but he leaves room to imagine other forms of those selves, ones that are potentially even more transgressive. Some critics have argued that Defoe perpetuates gender prejudices of his time, confirming female sinfulness and the right to censor its expression. It is likely, however, that his incredible literary investment in the narratives themselves, rather than in the distorted prefaces, paints his maternal protagonists as exciting, resourceful, uncommon, and valuable storytellers. Moll is at least as deft in turning a phrase and winning a reader's sympathy as she is in stealing property. Roxana skillfully weaves deceptive stories about her past and creates new identities, gaining lovers and heightening her social worth. Her harsh refusal to marry to the well-meaning Dutch merchant underscores her insistence that the institution only compromises female property and independence. That these interesting maternal narratives are driven by life events only made possible by the neglect of children is a point Defoe seems to be working out in his project.

In the progression of his final and most sophisticated novels, Defoe experiments with the triangular relationship between the formation of a healthy individual (gendered) subjectivity, its relationship to others, and its relationship to writing. *Robinson Crusoe* is able to write a more linear, cohesive, and narratively successful tale of his life partly because of his life of seclusion from the impositions and cares of others. His subject is his own industry, and developments of his own making. Moll and Roxana, however, are mired in the bustle of life. Defoe implies that this relationality is more distinctly female and reaches its pinnacle in the maternal subjectivity. It can be argued that Moll Flanders writes a successful story, but it is the less narratively sophisticated picaresque tale, in which she moves from episode to episode in a manner that attempts to break with traditional relations. If Moll had been sentimental about a past husband or child, for instance, she would also be starving and helpless. Even her narrative style reflects her tunnel vision and her attempt to move forward. Her writing of her plot is the refusal of her own personal stagnancy, or, even worse, her own drowning.

What Defoe does, though, is show his audience that the cost of this preserved individualism and cohesive narrative for a woman and a mother is significantly different than it is for *Robinson Crusoe*. Defoe remembers the children excised from Moll's tale, for instance, when he writes the letter *The Generous Projector, Or a Friendly Proposal to Prevent Murder and Other Enormous Abuses, by Erecting a Hospital for Foundlings and Bastard Children* in 1728. The letter was likely an inspiration for Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, although it is less well-known. Defoe does not, however, indulge in irony and satire to turn public attention to the cause of distressed mothers and victimized children; his tone is one of earnestness. There is none of Moll's humour and cleverness to gloss over bare and ugly facts. Instead, it is apparent that although Defoe shows attention to the subjectivity of mothers under various versions of duress in his novels, he has not entirely forgotten the children. Ultimately, Roxana's story shows that the web of human connection is a threat to a permeable subjectivity or selfhood. Defoe comes closest to replicating *Crusoe's* intense psychological horror of the cannibals when he writes about Roxana's child following her and threatening her narrative and her autonomy. But there is no personal or narrative triumph for Roxana when her daughter, the cannibalistic Susan, is vanquished as the cannibals are by *Crusoe*. Defoe's early experiments in the British novel tradition are critical, as he builds up to the great challenge of writing the maternal subjectivity. He starts with a mother-subject who easily sheds the burdens of inconvenient children and ends with the mother-subject who is indicted by her conscience when the most inconvenient child is murdered by her maid in a protective move. Defoe was challenged enough by the writing of Roxana's subjectivity that her narrative unravels along with his novel experiment.

Reading Moll Flanders as Maternal Subject

Literary critic Ann Campbell avoids resolving the “dissonance” between *Moll Flanders* and Daniel Defoe’s nonfictional corpus by saying that she relishes the “incongruity” (53). It is an old critical squabble to wonder how to read such a bad and brazen heroine as Moll in light of Defoe’s religious ideas and conservative tracts. Campbell refuses to get pulled into what she imagines is a futile inquiry. I take this valuable lesson from her and look at *Moll Flanders* instead as Defoe’s novelistic enterprise in line with his other fictional and audacious works. I try to imagine his interest in Moll not as an example to women or mothers but as a character helping him to work out ideas about the literary genre that will develop a vexed relationship with maternal figures. But the fact is that even in such a conservative work as *The Family Instructor and Religious Courtship*, Defoe thinks about parenting, whether it involves effectively disciplining children or finding mates for one’s children. John Richetti writes, “Defoe was clearly drawn to the dilemma peculiar to a woman alone in his society, like other socially marginal persons who feature largely in his fiction, such women face dramatic obstacles to survival” (131). Defoe’s interest in extreme situations and the survival of his characters is his way of exploring the selfhood of a protagonist; people reveal themselves fully when tested by ill fortune, poverty, or personal tragedy. When Defoe “tests” Moll and Roxana, they reveal maternal subjectivities that are bent on self-interest. Children are, with little trouble, sacrificed.

There is a long tradition of critical work attacking Moll Flanders as a mother. She has been called an unnatural parent, an utter failure, and one guilty of infanticide. I will not oppose any of these depictions. More recently, other studies have examined Moll’s “mercenary attitudes” (Campbell 56), which highlight her purposeful substitution of traditional family structures for temporary, surrogate ones, or which focus on the way “biological reproduction is bound up with capital increase” (Kibbie 1024). For Ann Louise Kibbie, the figure of the mother is metaphorical. The maternal body, and its fecundity, is a representation of the growth of wealth. Although Kibbie makes interesting connections, she assumes that Defoe’s interest in a mother-character is representative of something else—the masculine world of economics. My discussion of Defoe and Moll Flanders, instead, focuses on their efforts at crafting narratives, portraying subjectivities, and imagining the limitations of genre. Defoe is too often viewed as a sort of accidental novelist, and Moll as a cunning, quick adventurer, certainly a good storyteller, but not a real writer, and certainly not mother enough to teach us anything about a maternal subjectivity in the novel.

Moll Flanders narratively enacts a tug between writing as a daughter and writing as a mother. In *The Maternal Voice in Victorian Fiction*, Barbara Thaden

writes that “The best-known female Victorian authors must kill the mother or incapacitate her to allow their female protagonists to develop, because they write from the daughter’s point of view” (28). Thaden dedicates her study to Gaskell and Oliphant as mother-writers who do not write from the child’s perspective. Of course, Thaden’s discussion applies to more than just the literature of the Victorian period. Although it is important to examine those writers as portraying developed and healthy maternal subjectivities in the English novel, I wish to trace the tradition that finally allows them to do so. Thaden offers up a reason for the dominance of the child’s story in the English novel: “our most intense emotional experiences occur as children—and we identify more strongly with stories written from their perspective” (49). Moll feels poignantly as a daughter, and we read this in her narrative. She is surprisingly reunited with her mother in Virginia when she is listening to the tale of her mother-in-law’s experience as an inmate of Newgate Prison, and Moll recognizes her name. The story implies that it is the happy relationship between mother and daughter which is ruined by the discovery of incest in Moll’s marriage, rather than the bond between husband and wife. Moll only feels comfortable enough to confess her knowledge of this crime to her mother, initially holding the information back from her increasingly frustrated and confused husband. Far removed from this, Moll later evinces a shocking and unusual sensitivity when her Governess asks whether she is sure that her mother nursed her. Here, the novel lays bare the emotional scars of an abandoned child grasping at the shreds of her mother’s love and care. To see a hardened criminal so uncharacteristically affected makes an impression on the reader. Throughout the text, Moll seeks to fill the void left by her mother. She attaches herself to female substitutes, most notably, her “Governess” and partner in crime. Moll admits more than once in the text that the worst thing for a woman to be is friendless. Moll is overjoyed when she returns to Virginia to find herself the recipient of her mother’s estate. This good fortune gratifies Moll’s greed on one level, but it also makes her feel loved as a child, which is important to her even at the age of sixty. By observing how Moll, in many ways, replicates her mother’s (criminal) story—the very one that she listened to so intently, the one that reunited her to her mother—the inherent danger in a narrative about maternal subjectivity becomes evident. Such a narrative is too influential and too capable of determining a child’s plot. The mother, however, has never really threatened Moll’s autonomy because she has grown up with the freedoms offered by substitute care. To not have a mother to nurture and to care for her is also not to have a mother who interferes with her life and restricts her.

But *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* is a novel about a mother’s story, even as the heroine denies the obligations of motherhood.

The subjectivity of mothers who find themselves with major barriers placed before them absorbs and fascinates Defoe. Moll muses at one point in the text that “Affection was plac’d by Nature in the Hearts of Mothers to their Children” to ensure that they are cared for (234). But this is something that is also applicable to the animal kingdom and indicates maternal feeling on the most primitive level. But Defoe shows that there is also a primitive and natural instinct to preserve the self and to survive. Defoe is interested in the price of things. He obsessively tracks money in his novels and his works think actively about value. When he conceives of motherhood as a heightened form of relationality, Defoe creates a protagonist who will not simply hand over her life, her subjectivity, or her story to another. Moll deems it too high a price.

Moll must actively mother children at several points in her life, which are also the moments that she is in a stable “marriage” or relationship and that she is not actively adventuring or scheming. She becomes a mother in her first marriage to Robin. While Moll is a mistress to the man whose wife is mentally ill, she lives in London with a son. She mothers children with her “honest citizen” at Brickhill before he, too, passes away. But these particulars are not narrated. Moll’s story only begins in the intervals of instability and scandal. Moll’s textual subjectivity denies domesticity—certainly the details of care for children—but also her life as a wife or mistress. Moll says little about her feelings on leaving her children in the care of others, although she seems moved enough by abandoning the child of her Lancashire husband and “soul-mate,” Jemy, to claim to have some reservations: “I was not come up to that pitch of Hardness common to the Profession; I mean to be unnatural, and regardless of the Safety of my Child” (236-237). She imagines that women who realize how easy it is to get rid of a child “clandestinely gotten” will be tempted to vice (227). Indeed, despite her repeated experience with leaving her children to others, the act still shocks her, which makes the reader wonder how much she has suppressed. Moll’s concern for this particular infant is an anomaly in her story. She feels real pangs of conscience and becomes, momentarily, reflective and torn. By detailing and itemizing the price of everything related to her lying in and delivery, Moll expresses this maternal feeling. She even pays additional money for the maintenance of the child to have the opportunity to see it if she wishes, which, of course, she never does. For Moll, money is a surrogate form of care.

Moll’s display of emotion towards the abandonment of her child is resolved in the narrative when she tries to defend her internal debate about harming another child, this one not her own. Moll considers killing a small child in order to steal its necklace. Although she never stoops to the level of murder, she rationalizes its justification: “the prospect of my own Starving ... harden’d my Heart by degrees” (256). Moll pits her needs against the needs of her own

biological children as well as the needs of other people and children around her. As critics have mentioned, Moll continues to deny maternal obligations even after it is no longer impossible to support her children. Moll's happy reunion with one child—her son from her incestuous marriage—is unlooked for and happy precisely because everything has worked out conveniently for her. When she and Jemy return to the colonies as transported felons, and she observes her former husband and son from afar, she describes being in agony over the need to maintain her distance from her child. When they are reunited, he does not blame her for her absence, and he is overjoyed at her return. He offers to support her and to maintain the plantations; he treats his mother gallantly. Moll gives him a stolen gold watch. She describes the reunion as “the pleasantest Day that ever past over my Head in my Life” (421). After receiving such kind treatment from her son, she wants to shed the burden of her transported husband: “I was as if I had been in a new World, and began secretly now to wish that I had not brought my Lancashire Husband from England at all” (419). Moll is characterized from the beginning to the end of the book as a person who wants to remain unfettered and open to all profitable opportunities. Now later in life, when her grown child can maintain her and can even emotionally gratify her, she appears willing to dispense with the burden of a husband. Unnecessarily, she reminds the reader that “this is to be my own Story, not my Husbands” (424). This is, indeed, Moll's story, a mother's story, precisely because it is not her child's.

This concluding scene of a mother-child reunion preoccupies Defoe because he makes it the basis of his psychological unravelling of Roxana in his final novel. Moll's happy reunion with her son is the antithesis of Roxana's tense and tragic reunion with her daughter Susan. Moll's recognition of this child is not entirely without complication; the story of her crime of incest is inevitably retold and further spread when she is acknowledged as a mother. But her new identity and her return redeem her. Moll does not run from her child, and she is rewarded with a positive and, probably, a permanent relationship. Unlike Roxana, Moll owns her mistakes, confronts them, and extenuates her reputation as she can. The old crime seems buried and forgotten as she moves on from it. The novel concludes with a boy born to a servant girl on the plantation where Moll lives with Jemy. Here is another, albeit unconnected boy, asking the reader to consider, specifically, the role of the male child in this maternal narrative. Defoe reverses gender in the rewriting of this scene in *Roxana*. Moll's easy reunion with her son becomes a complicated and threatening relationship between Roxana and Susan. Does a daughter threaten the mother's subjectivity even more profoundly than a son? Defoe has his finger on the pulse of a specific kind of dynamic between mothers and children, and maybe gender does matter.

A Final Note

This analysis of Daniel Defoe's early novel experiments, as well as the examination of Moll Flanders as a maternal subject, may look as if it encourages feminism's casting of mothers' needs against those of the children, as if it encourages antagonism or even violence. After all, Moll (just as Robinson Crusoe and Roxana) must silence others to have her word in and to crystallize her subjectivity into the immortal written text. But I think this perspective misses a valuable point. The point is that Defoe represents some of the struggles of maternity and of relationality in the constitution, and specifically the rhetorical constitution, of the human subjectivity. This struggle is a part of the history of the genre of the British novel. And although in *Moll Flanders* a type of individual triumph results from the neglect and abandonment of maternal responsibilities, readers understand the intense importance of maternal care and influence by seeing the effects of its absence in Moll's character. When Defoe invites the reader in *Roxana* to peer at Susan's tragic longing for affection, care, and acknowledgment and at her mother's emotional and psychological fragility, he validates the personal and societal significance of the mother-child bond while he also acknowledges the host of things that interfere with and compromise it. Among those things are what John Richetti acknowledges as "the instability of modern identity, the fragility of communal bonds and support networks, the unforgiving laws of the market, the dangers of isolated individuality" (131). Despite being nearly 300 years old, the text continues to speak to audiences today about the pressures that surround the maternal subject as well as the complex dynamic that enables her story to be narrated within the pages of the novel.

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