
**PROSTITUTION OR THE REJECTION OF ORDEAL MARRIAGES THROUGH
THE CHARACTER OF ROXANA IN DANIEL DEFOE'S LADY ROXANA**

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ABSTRACT

This paper aimed at analysing the issue of prostitution as an act of will and pleasure or push factor based on extreme necessity. The study is conducted focusing on the character of Lady Roxana. She was an abandoned woman with her five kids who was obliged to become a prostitute in the 17th century British society. Prostitution and the quest of easy life has been the solution she found in her hopelessness situation. This paper does not aim at praising prostitution, neither at condemning Roxana but rather, to show the realities women faced in life. Feminism and sociological criticism have been used to complete this research paper. As result, I found that, marital life is not easy and the living environment has a great influence on individual's lives. Today we notice that women conditions improved compared to the Victorian area. They are more and more active and are no more considered as the weak sex.

Keywords: Marital life; Prostitution; Necessity; Marriage; women conditions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of prostitution is a social fact of great issue for almost all the nations in the world. Each has its definition of the phenomenon depending on his perception, social class and religion. Prostitution is often referred to as sex work which is defined in the Oxford dictionary as a paid employment in the sex industry, comprising prostitution and pornography¹. In the abstract of his article entitled would you think about doing sex for money? Structure and agency in deciding to sell sex in Canada, Benoit, C et al. (2017) wrote:

Entry into sex work is not typically considered as an occupational choice comparable to entry into other jobs. In the sex work literature, initiation is often thought to occur through predisposing factors deep in the structure of society, including childhood disadvantage, abuse and neglect. Some studies have also identified need for money as the main reason for entry, while others document entry due to a desire for more disposable income.

The above statement give us some of the reasons pushing women to sex prostitution. Poverty, hunger, injustice, family dislocations, early divorces and the need of money are some of the root causes. A part from that I would add the social environment, the quest of prestige and great ambitions in life may also be part of the reasons. This article examines the hard experience of women with social and economic problems. It focuses particularly on the main protagonist life in Daniel Defoe's *Roxana the Fortunate Mistress* who was obliged to become

¹ www.oxfordreference.com

a sex prostitute to take care of her five children after being abandoned by her husband. Through Roxana's story, Defoe highlights the harsh realities of women life conditions in the 18th century United Kingdom and the desperate measures they often had to take to survive and take care of themselves in ordeal marriages. .

2.METHODOLOGY AND STUDY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Documentary research is the mainly used methodology in this work. The novel under study and some previous works related to the topic and some articles have been exploited. To successfully conduct the study, feminism theory has been used. In fact, feminism is a literary theory that puts a stress on the issue of gender equality and on women emancipation; it also seeks to challenge and overcome gender-based discrimination, oppression and inequality. The use of this theory is well justified given the atmosphere of the novel under study, its plot and the social realities the main protagonist went through. Additionally, sociological criticism has been used. It is defined as a method of literary criticism aimed at the examination of literature through the lens of social and cultural issues. It's used can be justified by the socio-political system of the plot in Roxana by Daniel Defoe.

3.THE LIFE CONDITIONS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM EIGHTEEN CENTURY WOMEN

K. Lynette (2010) talking about women in the 18th century in the western world said:

Women were limited to two sexual roles in 18th century western society- that of wife and mother, or mistress and/or prostitute. All women, no matter their station, were the property of men and were to be used in whatever way men saw fit. The virgin daughters of royalty and nobility were expected to keep themselves pure for their future husbands, and often in an effort to keep them chaste until marriage, they were sent off to convents at very young ages and schooled by nuns until they began to menstruate. Once their periods began, usually around thirteen to fourteen years of age, they were betrothed and married off, generally too much older men of noble blood. The wife of a nobleman was expected to be sexually faithful to her husband, for she was the vessel from which sprang his heirs. The only way to guarantee that his legitimate heirs would carry on his name and entitlements was in seeing to it that his wife engaged only in sexual relations with him. Her celibacy was paramount, while his celibacy was a personal choice and not required.

From what have mentioned above it appears marriage was established in favour of men in the UK. Women were completely dominated by men. They are not free and are not even given the right to work. Their main job was to give birth and take care of the house and the children. It is an age defined by gender inequality and discrimination. As to complete on what I am saying Karabi Hazarika (2012) commented the 18th women life conditions as followed:

In addition to financial pressures, the severe restrictions, laws and customs of eighteenth and nineteenth century England placed on women made them look to marriage as a means of stability and made women even more dependent on men. Middle class women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not expected to think of themselves as members of the nation of individuals. It is found that society has generally favoured one sex over the other.

As you can see the no decisive place was let to women. They were living in society of men for men. It is under such conditions that the first novels appeared. Daniel Defoe was one the most paramount of the period writers. Novels such as *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* were published to portrait and share women conditions of life the 18th century England.

4. SEX PROSTITUTION OR THE NECESSITY TO SURVIVE THROUGH THE CHARACTER OF LADY ROXANA.

Published in 1724, *Lady Roxana* is Daniel Defoe's last novel. The novel is mainly a life narration of woman being the main protagonist as well. Two years earlier, *Moll Flanders* told the adventures of an orphan who refuses that her social condition obliges her to be only a servant while she wants to become a great lady. She becomes a liar, a sex prostitute, a theft and finishes in prison and after to deportation. Abandoned by her husband who has squandered his fortune and leaves her alone with five children, she has no other solution than to separate from them and become the mistress of a rich man, then of a foreign prince. Thanks to the gifts of her lovers, she accumulates a vast fortune and returns as a businesswoman, refusing any husband, behaving like no other woman in her time. The power of money intoxicates her and nothing holds her back.

Lady Roxana is an autobiographical novel in which Defoe shares with the readers the extraordinary life adventures of a fantastic woman, full of vitality, imagination and energy. Like in *Moll Flandres*, the author portrays the main character who happens to be a woman; and through her the whole female junta of the eighteenth century England. Lady Roxana, unlike *Moll Flandres*, comes from a merchant rich family. Roxana is described in the novel as being a great courtesan, with an unsavoury behaviour, very amoral. But to see more closely it is the reflection of the English society of the 18th in question. England was capital the capital of brothels of all kinds, for all social classes before the Victorian era, in reaction to the Puritan rigor of the 17th century.

Often presented as a social and feminist novel, one sometimes wonders if Defoe is not depicting the story of his own life through Roxana. The character is painted in an ambiguous style and she becomes rich thanks to her business sense and the annuities and gifts offered to him by her lovers. For those who know the author's career, we are tempted to make similarities.

5.ROXANA AS A HOPELESS AND AN UNHAPPY WOMAN

As I said earlier, the novel under study is an autobiographical novel. The use of I and we in the novel illustrates it if need be. Lady Roxana being the main protagonist. On the very first pages of the novel she said:

I was born, as my friends told me, at the city of Poitiers, in the province or county of Poitou, in France, from whence I was brought to England by my parents, who fled for their religion about the year 1683, when the Protestants were banished from France by the cruelty of their persecutors (Defoe 1724, p1).

She is informed about her place of birth by a friend not by her parents. She is not perceiving the fact to be brought in England as a good thing. But while regretting leaving her home country she could understand that it was because of religious persecutions.

I retained nothing of France but the language, my father and mother being people of better fashion than ordinarily the people

called refugees at that time were; and having fled early, while it was easy to secure their effects, had, before their coming over, remitted considerable sums of money, or, as I remember, a considerable value in French brandy, paper, and other goods; and these selling very much to advantage here,.. (Defoe1724, p2).

The protagonist presents herself as a beautiful woman, an artist and a woman that belongs to a special social class that normally should allow her to take some advantage. . She declared:

I was (speaking of myself at about fourteen years of age) tall, and very well made; sharp as a hawk in matters of common knowledge; quick and smart in discourse; apt to be satirical; full of repartee; and a little too forward in conversation, or, as we call it in English, bold, though perfectly modest in my behaviour. Being French born, I danced, as some say, naturally, loved it extremely, and sang well also, and so well that, as you will hear, it was afterwards some advantage to me. With all these things, I wanted either wit, beauty, or money. In this manner I set out into the world, having all the advantages that any young woman could desire, to recommend me to others, and form a prospect of happy living to myself. (Defoe 1724, p4).

Daniel Defoe also have the same perception of things. He can be considered as a feminist. I could say that writing as he did with *Roxana* and *Moll Flanders* shows his commitment to fight for women rights and for woman emancipation.

A woman well-bred and well-taught, furnished with the ... accomplishments of knowledge and behaviours, is a creature without comparison; her society is the emblem of sublime enjoyments; ... and the man that has such a one to his portion, has nothing to do but to rejoice in her, and be thankful. (Defoe, 1697).

Lady Roxana's misery started when her parents decided to marry her. Her dreams of profiting from life becomes a disaster according to her own words.

At about fifteen years of age, my father gave me, as he called it in French, 25,000 livres, that is to say, two thousand pounds portion, and married me to an eminent brewer in the city. Pardon me if I conceal his name; for though he was the foundation of my ruin, I cannot take so severe a revenge upon him. (Defoe1724, p5).

Having almost the same hobbies she thought she could fulfil her dream with her husband. He is tall good dancer and handsome. She accepted to marry because she is attracted to him sexually.

He was a jolly, handsome fellow, as any woman need wish for a companion; tall and well made; rather a little too large, but not so as to be ungentle; he danced well, which I think was the first thing that brought us together. (Defoe1724, p6).

Unfortunately after years of marriage and five children as fruit of their love her husband decided to leave her in order to preserve his dignity and respectability in the society. Roxana has seen such a behaviour as a treason and the lack of true love. She was considered him as fool a non-social human being.

After I have told you that he was a handsome man and a good sportsman, I have indeed said all; and unhappy was I, like other young people of our sex, I chose him for being a handsome, jolly fellow, as I have said; for he was otherwise a weak, empty-headed, untaught creature, as any woman could ever desire to be coupled with. (Defoe1724, p9).

Lady Roxana is deceived that she regarded her “so called husband” as she said as fool. Recommending other women to pay attention to such a person. According to her ladies should pay attention to whom they would like to get married to. They should not take only into consideration the person’s appearance but his commitment and love for their future happiness.

If you have any regard to your future happiness, any view of living comfortably with a 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. (Defoe1724, p11).

6.FROM ORDEAL MARRIAGE TO SEX PROSTITUTION

Many expectations are the behind the reason why people get married. Some of those expectations include, love, sex, the desire of having children, mutual respect and support, fun, financial and security and the idea of having someone by their side in bad and good time. This something do not always happens the way you expect it. The case of Lady Roxana is of good illustration. She does not used to exchange with her husband because always busy. She said talking about her husband:

He said nothing to me more than as usual when he used to go out upon his sport; neither did I rise, or say anything to him that was material, but went to sleep again after he was gone, for two hours or thereabouts. (Defoe1724, p12)

The husband leave home and let her with the children to bring up and to feed without the necessary fund. Having the support of anyone even the support of her husband family she was confused. On that issue she declared:

I remained in this dejected condition near a twelvemonth. My husband had two sisters, who were married, and lived very well, and some other near relations that I knew of, and I hoped would do something for me; and I frequently sent to these, to know if they could give me any account of my vagrant creature. But they all declared to me in answer, that they knew nothing about him; and, after frequent sending, began to think me troublesome, and to let me know they thought so too, by their treating my maid with very slight and unhandsome returns to her inquiries.

She continued in the same on page 18 of the novel under study and said again and added that she relieved herself with the constant assistant of the afflicted, meaning tears; for, relating to her how she was received by the other of my husband's relations, it made me burst into tears, and she cried vehemently for a great while together, till she made the good old gentlewoman cry too several times.

Bring five kids up without moral and financial support is not easy for any woman in the world. Roxana was jobless, she has to pay for the house in which she live with her children and she has to feed them and covered them with love. Surviving in such a life conditions obliged her to become the mistress of the landlord. Next she was confronted with a proposal of marriage after going through many love relations. Based on her pass experience, she decided not be the wife of anybody. She claims to be independent and free from any engagement. In her mind the most important thing is how to take care of her children. This raises the issue of women and marriage and the perception of the society of such women. But the question is should things be like that? Dealing with the same issue Greenblatt, Stephen, et al, said:

...A woman gave herself entirely away from herself, in marriage, and capitulated only to be, at best, but an upper servant, and from the time she took the man she was no better or worse than the servant...That the very nature of marriage contract was, in short, nothing but giving up liberty, estate, authority, and everything to the man, and the woman was indeed a mere woman ever after that is to say, a slave (Norton Anthology 1: 2291).

From the quotation and the protagonist behaviour toward new lovers Roxana, has become a woman whose main objective is to be mentally and financially free. In society where patriarchal law is in force she could not escape the sentence. So getting in a new relationship with a man would not allow her to keep that freedom now that she has become rich. For her being in a relation with a minimum of liberty and self-determination is an ordeal. She believes being married to a man does not mean being a servant but a collaborator.

According to Simon de Beauvoir:

Men define what is meant to be human, including what it means to be female. Since the female is not male, Beauvoir maintains, she becomes the other, an object whose existence is defined and interpreted by the dominant male. Being subordinate to the male, the female discovers that she is secondary or non-existent player in the major social institution of her culture (Bressler 7: 173)

Any way things have change, women and men are getting married on mutual respect and mutual understanding. The past realities of the British society are no more the same today. Under a condition of total domination women would continue suffering and would continue to be regarded as simple servants. Women should then take action by men sides. As de Beauvoir quoted:

Economic evolution in woman's situation is in process of upsetting the institution of marriage...the reproductive and domestic role to which woman is confined has not guaranteed her an equal dignity (de Beauvoir445).

7.CONCLUSION

This paper does not aim at praising prostitution or an opposition between women and men, neither is it condemning Roxana but rather, to show the realities women were faced in the 18th century England. Feminism and sociological criticism have been used to complete this research paper. The research shows that, society, culture and male domination have a great influence on women living condition within households. On the other hand, such works far from being object of fictions should draw the attention of men on women economic emancipation. Roxana is an example of millions of women who went through the hard conditions of marital life. Abandoned without the necessary fund to take care of her children and of herself, she comes to the conclusion that she has to be financially independent. Her mentality changed thanks to the experiences she went through. She is aware that being free and financially autonomous is the key for freedom and emancipation vis à vis of men but is hard to obtain in a patriarchal society. She then decided not get engaged in any formal marriage but she is not well seen in the society. Whatever what we are doing today, it has become a must to include women. Through this paper, a call is thrown towards every people to draw their attention on the fact that, the wheel turns, that the Earth is not big enough to host discrimination.

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