Women's 'Defence-Narrative' and its Role in the Formation of the Novel

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Nearly all women's nonfictional writings in English in the seventeenth century contains a defence of the practice— the practice of taking up writing and making themselves visible. This phenomenon was not surprising given the taboo against women making public utterances. However, women did feel compelled to tell their side of the story when defamed or maligned, since ideas like reputation and honour were considered to be vital for their social capital. Lady Anne Clifford, for example, involved in a legal battle with her husband, Richard Sackville, the second Earl of Dorset, expressed a common female sentiment when she issued a public statement defending her position- "Now my desire is that all the world may know that this stay of mine proceeds only from my husband's command, contrary to my consent or agreement" (Sackville-West, 23). Rather than submitting silently, allowing others to shape their stories and characterize their 'selves', these women were driven to articulate their own stories in order to defend their positions and/or their identities against often slanderous misrepresentation.

The tradition of women's defence-narrative (i.e. the practice of women defending themselves in writing) is one that emerged in the late medieval period and continued as a dominant vein in women's writing through the early modern period. Almost all of the prose writings by Englishwomen in the seventeenth century belong wholly or in part to the defence-narrative tradition. Women are seen defending themselves against castigation for having spoken out on a wide range of issues– from the religious and economical to the personal and the political. Along with this developing tradition of nonfictional defence-narratives was a fictional tradition of women characters defending themselves, often acting as their own attorneys in court. This tradition extends back to French late-medieval writer Christine de Pisan whose *Livre de citè des dames*, translated into English in 1521, had a considerable influence on seventeenth-century English women writers, such as Margaret Cavendish.

These two traditions (nonfictional and fictional) flowed into one another in such a manner that by the latter half of the century it is sometimes difficult to discern one from the other. Elspeth Graham notes, "the boundaries between fiction and autobiography […] were […] especially unfixed in the early modern period" (*Women and Literature in Britain,* 1500-1700, 212). Since writers often relied on fictional models in constructing their 'selves' and therefore their life-histories, fiction did shape nonfictional narratives. The idea that the construction of the self is to a certain extent a fictional project, in fact, became a commonplace in the early modern era. Especially prevalent was the idea that individuals might model themselves on fictional characters they encountered in reading. Interestingly enough, this is at the heart of a major genre of the early modern novel, the antiromance; *Don Quixote de la Mancha* is an obvious example.

The most important of the women's novelesque defence-narratives— those that hover between fiction and nonfiction— are the works by Mary Frith, Mary Carleton, Elizabeth Cellier and Delarivier Manley. All these works have an element of nonfiction because they were based

on verifiable historical events. But interestingly enough, these works also relied heavily on fictional models. The accusations against these women which included theft, bigamy and even treason were more serious than those seen in most of the nonfictional defence narratives. And yet these authors are similarly concerned with defending their reputations. Such writers are acutely aware that in defending themselves they are seen to be violating norms of female behaviour. Their narratives helped them establish the prototype of a maligned female figure protesting for her innocence and defending her reputation that Defoe satirized in what are considered the first examples of the English novel, *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana.*

As the editors note in the introduction to *Her Own Life*, a collection of autobiographical writings by seventeenth-century women, most of the pieces were written for the purposes of public vindication: "repeatedly we find the texts […] entitled […] 'a true relation,' 'a vindication,' a 'plea', or 'a record,' all of which suggest factuality or a demand to be believed." (Graham et al *Her Own Life*, 16). Anne Wentworth, for example, in her *Vindication* defends her decision to leave her husband who had forbidden her to write her religious reflections. For eighteen years, she notes, she endured "Severe and Cruel persecutions […] from the unspeakable Tyrannies of a Hard-hearted Yoak-Fellow" and from her coreligionist Baptists who "declared" her "an Heathen" (Skerpan-Wheeler 1). She protests against being "represented […] as a Proud, Passionate, Revengeful, Discontented, and, Mad Woman, and as one that has unduly published things to the prejudice and scandal of my Husband; and that have wickedly left him" (Skerpan-Wheeler 2). Besides denying these allegations, Wentworth defends herself through casuistical[1] reasoning, a practice much used by fictional women characters in their defence-narratives (a point developed at length in Josephine Donovan's *Women and the Rise of the Novel*). Wentworth argues that in leaving her "earthly husband," she was obeying her "Heavenly Bridegroom," who ordered her to "finish a work, which my earthly husband […] hindered me from performing, seizing and running away with my writings" (Skerpan-Wheeler 5). She concludes that "In the true reason of the case I have not left my husband, but he me" (Skerpan-Wheeler 5), because, as she argues in *A True Account*, he and her persecutors attempted the "rape of my soul," and "Soul oppression is far greater than Bodily oppression" (Wentworth 5). Wentworth basically argues the casuistical point, therefore, is that to rebel against unjust earthly authority is no sin. The real sinners, she argues, are her husband and those who harassed her for speaking out.

Anna Trapnel, in her *Report and Plea*, similarly states that she is writing to vindicate her reputation in "defiance against all the reproachful, vile, horrid, abusive, and scandalous reports raised out of the bottomless pit against her." (71). She had been arrested for sedition and also accused of witchcraft. In her address "to the Reader," she asserts, "I go not about to vindicate myself but the truth." (73). She claims to have been "forced [by her arrest] out of my close retired spirit by rulers and clergy who have brought me on the world's stage of reports and rumours, making me the world's wonder and gazing stock." People came to see her as a 'monster'. She wants them to see her as "a woman like others" (Trapnel 74). Like many other women who took up the pen in the seventeenth century she explains, "I have written […] to take off these falsities and contrary reports […] concerning my suffering" (Trapnel 84). Interestingly enough, the titles of these texts (*Report and Plea, Vindication)* point towards their chief preoccupation—self-defence. Moreover, the discussion above shows how these texts helped to

crystallize the prototype of the maligned female figure proclaiming her innocence and defending her reputation—a prototype that Defoe would work upon.

Most women were compelled not just to justify their own perceived audacity but the right of women as a class to speak publicly because the very fact of writing for publication or circulation made them appear ‘monstrous’ by conventional notions of womanhood. The activity of the women petitioners to the Parliament of the mid-century is considered to be the first widespread assertion by women of political agency— their “first breakthrough into public political discourse” (Suzuki 25). Tellingly enough, they felt the need to defend their behaviour, knowing that they were violating a deeply ingrained cultural prohibition. A petition dated 4 February 1641, titled *A True Copie of the Petition of Gentlewomen and Tradesmens-wives*, appended a list of “Reasons why their sex ought thus to Petition, as well as the Men” (Suzuki 147). While acknowledging that they thereby feel “imboldened” and that they anticipate “reproaches,” they deny that they are acting out of “selfeconceite, or pride of heart” (Suzuki 148). A petition of 5 May 1649 *To the Supreme Authority of England the Commons assembled in Parliament, The humble Petition of diverse Women of London and Westminster* defends their right as women to express their wishes: “we cannot but wonder and grieve that we should appear so despicable in your eyes as to be thought unworthy to Petition or represent our Grievance” (Suzuki 149).

As far as their attempt to assert themselves in writing is concerned, these women could very well have been influenced by the literary prototypes at their disposal. This exemplifies how the fictional tradition helped these nonfictional pieces to coalesce. Mihoko Suzuki suggests the character Isabella in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, who effectively petitions a magistrate for clemency for her brother (Suzuki 91). But there is a long literary tradition of women arguing their own cases in court that also likely provided models for women writers of both nonfiction and fiction in the seventeenth century. An early example is the story of Bernabo’s wife, a novella Christine reworked from Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, in her *Livre de la citè des dames*. Based on fraudulent evidence, Bernabo had come to a hasty conclusion that his wife was unfaithful and had ordered a servant to kill her. The convicted wife disproves the evidence in a court-like proceeding before the magistrate, where she acts in disguise as her own attorney. In Christine’s version the slandered wife displays considerable forensic skills, requesting the magistrate to rule “according to the merits of the case,” and confronting the husband directly for so gullibly accepting false evidence: “You deserve to die for not having sufficient proof!” (Christine de Pisan 182-83). Bernabo’s wife argues that it is her husband who has committed a moral offence by accepting false evidence. This is how Bernabo’s wife, like Wentworth, redefines the question of guilt and innocence. Spanish writer Maria de Zayas picked up this tale and elaborated it considerably in her *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* where the maligned woman ends up serving in disguise as judge in the trial of her accuser. In a social system which provides little to no opportunities for women and forces ‘honour’ to be their vital social capital, it does not come as a surprise that the women’s defence-narrative became popular in the seventeenth century.

Three of the novellas- no. 15, no. 21, and no. 61- in French writer Marguerite de Navarre’s *L’Heptamèron,* translated into English first in 1597 and again in 1654, feature women acting as their defence attorneys, as if in a court of law, arguing with casuistical reasoning similar to Wentworth’s that the crimes they are accused of are not really sins and/or that they are

justified in their commission. In novella no. 15, a woman, long ignored by her philandering husband, takes a platonic lover in courtly love fashion. When the husband forbids her to see the lover, she erupts with a lengthy speech damning the double standard in sins: Why is what is regarded a major crime for a woman considered a minor peccadillo for a man? Confronting her husband, she protests, "Now, Monsieur, do you intend […] to take revenge on me for the very kind of thing of which you yourself have been guilty for years ?" (de Navarre 123). In novella no. 21, Ronaldine argues her case before royal authority, contending that she and her bastard, penniless lover were morally justified in marrying outside the church and in opposition to royal decree. In her defence she claims, in terms similar to Wentworth's, that what she has done is not a sin: "If it were the case that I had sinned against God, the King, [the Queen], my parents and my own conscience, then indeed I would be obdurate not to weep tears of repentance" (de Navarre 248). A similar position is argued by the main character in novella no. 61. In the novella a wife has abandoned her husband and has lived in an essentially bigamous but happy second alliance for fourteen or fifteen years. In defending herself, the woman claims that she had not sinned against God and that it would instead be a sin to take her away from her second "spouse" and return her to the first: "Let no one imagine that my way of life contradicts the will of God. We live without either of us ever uttering a word of disagreement. And it would be a sin to make us part, for [he] is nearly eighty years old, while I am only forty-five, and he would not live too long without me!" (de Navarre 482). In all these cases, it is evident that these defence-narratives (as a literary form) were used by disenfranchised women to challenge misogynistic laws, norms, and assumptions by arguing for a re-conception of morality that is less prejudicial to women, calling for redefinition of sin, guilt, and innocence.

The fictional defence-narrative was picked up by Cavendish in *The Contract*, a novella in *Natures Pictures*. Cavendish relies on her French models in having her protagonist argue in court. However, while the issue remains that of a woman's right to choose her husband (in defiance of convention), Cavendish poses the conflict as between a young woman and her guardian, thus anticipating the English female bildungsroman, such as Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, by over a century.

The story presents a complex casuistical plot, revolving around the issue of which two marriages a bigamous duke has contracted is valid. The novella ends with a court hearing where Delitia, the duke's first wife successfully argues that her marriage to him is valid. Delitia has been contracted in marriage to him at the age of seven but had lost touch with him until as adults they fall in love, although he has by then wed another. An uncle-guardian wants her to marry an older, wealthier man, but in conversations with the uncle Delitia resists the idea of "trafficking for a Husband" (Cavendish 189). The uncle warns her "not to use Rhetorick against yourself, and overthrow a good Fortune" (Cavendish 197). In a court hearing over the validity of marriages, Delitia argues that the original marriage is valid, urging the judges to "cast aside your Canon Law and judge it by the Common Law" (Cavendish 210). Canon Law generally favored marriages made with free consent of the parties and opposed the arranged marriages of the minors. Canon Law would thus hold the duke's second marriage (and not the first, to Delitia) valid. The judges rule in her favor. Thus, Cavendish's protagonist presents her side of the story through clever casuistical subtleties— ironically "choosing" a contracted marriage but in the

process critiquing the practice of marriage "trafficking". The familiar trope of an accused woman having to defend herself is too glaring to be overlooked.

Whereas Cavendish's novella is clearly a fiction, *The Life and Death of Mrs. Mary Frith, Commonly called Mal Cutpurse*, written several years later by Mary Frith is ostensibly a nonfictional life-history. The narrative is infused with fictional or fiction like components, such as novella-like trickster tales and numerous allusions to fictional antecedents, particularly the antiromance. Interestingly, there is documentary evidence to suggest that at least certain parts of the narrative may be factually true. This can be taken to suggest that the author saw herself in terms of various fictional predecessors because she acknowledges being "well versed in Tale Books and Romances" (Frith 70). But at the same time, she rebels against the stereotypical female roles in the romance: "I was no Lady Errant nor this story a Romance". (Frith 25). She imagines herself as Sancho Panza, a character in *Don Quixote* (Frith 37). It does seem, therefore, that fictional models helped Frith to shape her conception of herself and her life-history.

That story is one of defiant resistance to conventional norms, acknowledgement of which compelled her to write a "*Defence and Apology*" (Frith 17). Hardly apologetic, Frith's tone throughout is cocky and prideful— itself a reflection of her determination not to be "beholden to any Stale-Artifice whatsoever of any Woman preceding me" (Frith 18). The introduction stresses that she had a "boisterous and masculine spirit" (Frith 9) and was "a libertine" (Frith 11). While Frith herself does not use these terms, she does pridefully admit to cross-dressing and engaging in unfeminine habits such as smoking tobacco: "no Woman before me ever smoakt any" (Frith 23).

Frith's story is that she was a pickpocket, indeed, the leader of a gang of pickpockets who specialized in stealing items which they held for ransom. She justifies her occupation in casuistical terms, believing "that it was no deceit, to deceive the Deceivers" (Frith 25), following the by-then familiar casuistical logic that it is no sin to sin against a sinner. And, just like many other authors of defence-narratives, Frith successfully defends herself in a court hearing, in her case by having an accomplice steal the evidence. Frith's contribution to the women's defence-narrative is therefore twofold. She paves the way for a satirical reading of such narratives by infusing it with fictional elements, derived from the antiromance tradition. Moreover, she was the first to use her life-history itself as a defence-narrative. This was a model picked up by her successors, including eventually, Defoe.

The Case of Madam Mary Carleton, which has been designated as part of "a missing chapter in the history of the English novel," is an autobiographical defence-narrative. The author, Mary Carleton, was a somewhat notorious figure tried for bigamy and later executed as a thief, about whom circulated a series of narratives that debated her guilt or innocence. She maintains her innocence in *The Case of Madam Mary Carleton,* arguing in the process that the *feme covert* laws, which deprived wives of legal standing and ownership of property, were unjust. The narrative includes a supposed transcript of her trial in which she acts as her own defence attorney against a charge of bigamy.

Like the other women writers of the defence-narrative, Carleton claims she is writing for self "vindication" (1-2). She also claims to counter the "diligent […] slanders of my accusers,

who by lewd and most false suggestions have precluded all ways to my justification and defence" (Carleton 3). Having heretofore "suffered those calumnies to pass unrefuted" (Carleton 3), she now feels compelled to lay out her defence in writing: "I will tell the world the naked truth" (Carleton 5). Just like Frith, Carleton, too, formulates her defence by recounting her life story: she was born in Germany, orphaned at age three, and placed in a nunnery, which she soon got tired of ("I was as it were buried as soon as I was born" [Carleton 14]). In fact, she wishes she were "(what my inclinations prompted me to) a man, and exempt from that tedious life because it was altogether passive and sedentary" (Carleton 16). In a language that harks back to the introduction to Frith, she admits to a "Libertine spirit" (Carleton 17) and to having "Masculine" ambitions (Carleton 19), which prompt her to leave the convent for the wider world. She goes on to acquire an English governess from whom she learns English and various other languages. After arriving in England, she engages in a duplicitous courtship with John Carleton. He has her arrested after discovering that she does not have the fortune he had assumed. He has, in the meantime, received a letter charging her with fraud and bigamy. She is imprisoned and brought to trial, in which she defends herself, winning acquittal from the jury by discrediting prosecution witness.

There has been considerable debate over whether Carleton's narrative is fiction or nonfiction. In her preface Carleton refers to her life as a series of novellas, asking her readers to "cast a favorable eye upon these Novels of my life, not much unlike those of Boccace, but that they are more serious and tragical". The term novel with the accent on the second syllable was used at the time to mean novella, which then meant a tale or a short story. At the very least, then, Carleton consciously constructed her life-story in terms of a received literary format— the framed-novelle (a collection of framed novellas, a form used by Christine, Cavendish among others). In addition, Carleton, like Frith, displays knowledge of other fictional traditions; she acknowledges reading romances and compares herself satirically to romance heroines: "I might as well have given luster to a Romance as any of those supposed Heroina's" (Carleton 33). She also uses the term "Lady Errant" (34), a female version of "knight errant"-somewhat differently than Frith, to refer to powerful, adventurous women who travelled widely. She also alludes to the Spanish picaresque tradition in her prediction that her husband will continue the "second part of the Gusman-story, against he shall knight-errand it abroad" (122). Here she is equating her husband with the charlatan trickster character Guzman, whom Frith saw as a model.

Carleton uses casuistry to argue her case just like the other women writers of the defence-narrative. In relating her amusingly deceitful courtship (where both she and her suitor are pretending to wealth and status that neither has), Carleton argues that "to deceive the deceiver is no deceit" (38). This she claims is "a received principle of Justice" (38). Indeed, it was a received principle of casuistry, one that was analyzed in the *Athenian Mercury* (a popular penny weekly). This was used by Frith and picked up by Defoe in *Moll Flanders,* one episode of which according to G.A. Starr is "built around a case of conscience […] namely, the question of whether it is legitimate to deceive a deceiver" (128).

Carleton, just like Frith, seems to have constructed her life-history in part based on received literary prototypes. However, this does not mean that that her story is not a complete fiction. It may very well be that the basic outline is historically accurate. What it does suggest is

that writers used literary models to identify aspects of their story and that in this way fictional models came to shape nonfictional narratives.

Another similar work is Elizabeth Cellier's *Malice Defeated*. On the one hand it is clearly a nonfictional record of her arrest for treason and subsequent trial. But at the same time it is infused with fictional allusions that further suggest how writers were using fictional models to shape their self-identities, relationships, and behavior. Cellier, a midwife married to a Frenchman, was arrested based on forged papers found in her home that purported to show a Whig conspiracy behind the so-called 'Popish Plot'— a Catholic plot to depose the king. Thomas Dangerfield, who had planted the papers, later turned informer, saying Catholics had "paid him to forge" (Gardiner iv) the material, thus implicating Cellier, who was a Catholic and active in Catholic political activity. Cellier was arrested after the discovery of the forged papers on October 28 1679. She spent several months in prison awaiting trial, in which she acted as her own defence attorney. She finally won acquittal on 11June 1680. In the trial Cellier defends herself primarily by unmasking Dangerfield as a fraud. (Interestingly enough, she renames Dangerfield as Willoughby in *Malice Defeated*.) She does so by providing witnesses who attest to her innocence and records to show Dangerfield having a history of criminal activity. *Malice Defeated*, which she wrote to tell her side of the story, includes a purported transcript of the trial *An Abstract of the Tryal of Elizabeth Cellier*. She also wrote a parody of Dangerfield's own autobiographical narrative, Don Tomazo, entitled *The Matchless Rogue*, placing him in the trickster rogue tradition. *Malice Defeated* includes numerous literary allusions, particularly to the romance tradition (albeit, treated satirically) and to *Don Quixote*. Her justification of her decision to stand as her own attorney is a clear reference to the romance literary tradition- "I was forc'd to defend my Life, both against the Knights and the Dragon, for in this unequal Combate there was no St. George to defend me" (Cellier 42). When Willoughby came to visit her in her prison cell, he "peep'd through it like Don Quicksot through his Helmet, when he was mounted upon Rosinant and going to encounter with the Windmil" (Cellier 13). Later when Sir William Waller tries to get her to confess, she rebuffs him, saying, "I am not such a Distressed Damosel to use your service. It is not in your power to fetch me out of this inchanted Castle" (Cellier 27). On another occasion Cellier requests for the presence of a third person during Waller's interrogation, "for I durst not trust myself with such a Doughty Knight lest he should make Romances of me" (Cellier 33). So, not only does *Malice Defeated* belong to the defence—narrative tradition, but it is also significant because it exemplifies how such nonfictional narratives were shaped by fictional models.

It can be safely said that Cellier is using the romance allusions to suggest that she has been falsely convicted. For example, in her first court appearance she says, "I was examined before His Majesty and the Lords of the Councel, where the Fable of the Husband-Man, and the Starved Snake, was proved a Truth; for Willoughby accused me of all the Forged Stories he tells in his Lying Narrative; and I unfeignedly told the Truth" (Cellier 18). But, Cellier also understands the transformative power of fiction. When she rebuffs Willoughby's attempt to bribe her to confess, she says, "Stone Walls and Iron Bars, do not make a Prison; but a Guilty Conscience" (Cellier 19) — an allusion to Richard Lovelace's 1642 poem "To Althea, From Prison." Furthermore, she asserts that she would rather remain in prison than "Lie myself to Liberty." She even claims that "I am a Prisoner for Truth sake, and that cause, and the joy I have

to suffer for it, makes this Dirty, Smoaky Hole to me a palace, adorned with all the Ornaments Imagination can think upon" (Cellier 26).

Like others in the defence-narrative tradition, Cellier is sensitive to the fact that she is transgressing gender roles, as seen in the St. George comment cited above. She further defends her allegedly "masculine" behavior in explaining why she was drawn into political activity in a lengthier discussion:

> I was left to study, manage, and to support myself. […] Thus have I laid open the Truth of my Case. […] As to my own Sex, […] though it may be thought too Masculine, yet was the effects of my Loyal […] Zeal. […] And in all my defence, none can truly say that I preserv'd the Modesty, though not the Timorousness common to my Sex. And I believe there is none, but had they been in my Station, would…have acted like me; for it is more our business than men's to fear, and consequently to prevent the Tumults and Troubles and Factions tend to, since we by nature are hindered from sharing any part but the Frights and disturbances of them. (Cellier 32)

Her point is that as women have no political power and can experience troubles only reactively by their frightful results, it is in women's interest to prevent such conflict, even if they have to violate cultural norms in order to do so. As far as the defence-narrative is concerned, it can be safely said that the trope of the marginalized woman defending herself from misogynistic laws, morals and assumptions had become a well-established tradition by now.

Frith's and Cellier's and, to a lesser extent, Carleton's explicit rejection of the romance is consistent with an already well-developed position in women's writing. As early as the women troubadours of the thirteenth century, women writers had repudiated aspects of the courtly love tradition. In seventeenth-century England, Cavendish was perhaps the most explicit in expressing strong dislike of the genre. In her 1671 preface to the second edition of *Natures Pictures*, she explains, "I would not be thought to delight in Romances, having never read a whole one in my life; and if I did believe that these Tales […] could create Amorous thought in idle brains, as Romances do, I would never suffer them to be printed" (Cavendish v). Cavendish is imagining what later became termed the "female Quixote"— a woman who internalizes romances to the point where she begins seeing the world in their terms. The best known examples of this satirical genre are Charlotte Lennox's *Female Quixote* and Tabitha Tenney's *Female Quixotism.*

By rejecting the passive roles women (damsels) played in the traditional romance more directly than the writers in the female Quixote tradition (who used satire to indirectly criticize its vapid heroines), Frith, Cellier, and to a lesser extent, Carleton advanced the antiromance tradition in women's writings seen in later writers such as Delariver Manley, Jane Barker, Sarah Fielding, and others (Donovan 113-27). Frith's case is interesting because it is a narrative where the woman character adopts the male roles of the antiromance.

A counter tradition to the women's defence-narrative tradition arose in the form of satires written by men which debunked the women writers' and characters' claims of innocence. The women petitioners of Parliament were subjected to satire and ridicule in the form of "parodic petitions" (Suzuki 154), which stigmatized them as "illegitimate and marginal" (Suzuki 17).

Such negative attention paradoxically succeeded in reinforcing the "collective identity" (Suzuki 152) of women as a protesting political group, Suzuki notes, in part because they often included reprints of the women's petitions, which gave them wider circulation. Similarly, Carleton was subjected to satirical treatment in a number of works, beginning shortly after her imprisonment with two pamphlets: *The Man in the Moon, Discovering a World of Knavery* and *The Lawyers Clerk Trappan'd by the Crafty Whore of Canterbury*. Several other lampoons followed, and her husband John Carleton published his side of the story (which debunked hers) in *Ultimum Vale […] Being a True Description of the Passages of that Grand Imposter, Late a Pretended Germane-Lady*. Similarly, Cellier was subjected to a number of satirical critiques, in some of which she was accused of being a "lady errant," which by this time had come to mean a transgressive woman. And she was, perhaps inevitably compared to Carleton. In his satirical pamphlet, *Answer to a Certain Scandalous Lying Pamphlet Entitled Malice Defeated, Or the Deliverance of Elizabeth Cellier*, Thomas Dangerfield ridiculed Cellier's rhetoric as "Female Tittle Tattle," deriding it as "Gossiping [which] is so much the soul of Midwifery" (Suzuki 259). As Suzuki notes, "In recounting [a] fabricated tale of […] serial marriages and extramarital affairs, Dangerfield renders Cellier a female picaro, on the order of Mary Carleton and Moll Flanders" (Suzuki 260). In retaliation Cellier wrote *The Matchless Rogue,* which satirizes his life-history in turn. The proliferation of this counter tradition gave the female writers wider circulation and was crucial in forging a sort of collective identity. All this helped to gradually crystallize the diffuse and disparate elements of the defence-narrative to something approximating what is now known as the novel.

Defoe adapted the women writers' defence-narrative in *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana.* Both protagonists have considerable similarity to Carleton, Frith and Cellier. All are victims of circumstances, all are touched by scandal, and all manage to survive by engaging in questionable moral behavior. Indeed, Roxana at one point acknowledges her resemblance to Carleton, noting "I might as well have been the German Princess" (Defoe *Roxana*, 271). And Moll Flanders, in a series of episodes where she is operating as a pickpocket, remarks "I grew as impudent as a thief, and as dexterous as ever Moll Cutpurse was" (Defoe *Moll Flanders*, 190).

Where the women authors of defence-narratives present themselves as innocent, Defoe's satirical presentation suggests that his protagonists are not only guilty of various crimes but are also appallingly self-deceiving hypocrites. He thus carries on the satirical tradition established in the parodies of the Parliament petitions and in the writings of John Carleton, Dangerfield, and other critics of Carleton and Cellier. He undercuts his characters' often feminist assertions through his ironical frame. For example, Roxana articulates one of the strongest feminist defences in early modern literature in her denunciation of the slave-like status of the wife, choosing herself to remain a whore, and thus retaining her independence— "The very nature of the Marriage-Contract was in short, nothing but giving up Liberty, Estate, Authority, and every-thing to the Man, and the Woman was indeed […] a Slave" (Defoe 148). But, both the context and the character provide an ironic tinge to the entire affair. Roxana soon repents of the vanity and "ambitious Mind" (Defoe 161) that led her to such an opinion. Her character, like that of Moll Flanders, is that of an unmitigated reprobate. Thus, as Starr notes, Defoe's heroines' use of casuistry can be seen to "confirm rather than qualify their guilt" (186) — unlike in the

defence-narratives by women. The ironical context is, therefore, Defoe's addition to the genre. It is clearly not present in any of the defence-narratives written by women.

Unfortunately, Defoe's negative treatment of the women's defence-narrative won the day, because women's writing in England with few exceptions lapsed for several decades into the sentimentalist "heroine's text," which focused on the trials and tribulations of woman seen as victim rather than on the escapades of woman as a defiant rebel. It is a matter of speculation as to why one of the first assertions of literary agency by women was thus subverted and superseded by its satirical inversion. Certainly, antifeminist political and ideological currents were at play. However, these transitions are interpreted it is important nevertheless that future literary historians take into account the critical modeling role played by women's defence-narratives in the formation of the early English novel and for the historians of women's literature to be aware of the submerged traditions such as the defence-narrative in their reconstruction of women's literary genealogies.

Notes

1. Casuistry is a method of reasoning for identifying justifiable courses of actions in situations involving moral conflict.

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