

# Defining Women: Masculine Violence in Defoe, Pope, and Swift

*Yao-hsi Shih*

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Amazon trope in the narratives of the early eighteenth century. Based on Defoe's *Roxana*, it first explores diachronically the origin of Amazon warriors in ancient Greek historical works and examines how the ancient foremothers and the modern English heiress are related; then it synchronically compares Roxana with her counterpart, Belinda, in Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, and further with Irish women in Jonathan Swift's *Irish Tracts*. The perpendicular approaches lay open different acts of masculine violence in literary works. Historically the Amazons were forced to murder, forced sexual acts, and humiliation; in like manner, Roxana is accused of filicide and cannot be exempt from her downfall. Contemporarily Roxana- and Belinda-like women are characterized as concealing male agency of mercantilism and male violence of imperial enterprise, while they, English or Irish, are further commodified and made the sites of cultural corruption and scapegoats for economic recession and trade deficits.

**KEY WORDS:** masculine violence, Daniel Defoe, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, diachronical, synchronical

\* Received: July 31, 2009; Accepted: December 1, 2009  
Yao-hsi Shih, Assistant Professor, Department of Applied English, Southern Taiwan University, Tainan County, Taiwan  
E-mail: donjose@mail.stut.edu.tw

The great advantage of a worldview that situates the two genders at opposite poles is that the boundary between the two is (at least temporarily) very distinct. . . . The great disadvantage (for that hierarchy of power) is that the two poles are inextricably linked; each pole is defined only by its opposition to the other. Thus the male must continually redefine the female to assert his identity as not-female.

—Madeleine Kahn, *Narrative Transvestism* (47)

Laura Brown, in her book chapter “The Feminization of Ideology: Form and the Female in the Long Eighteenth Century,” defines the eighteenth century as a century of “feminization”<sup>1</sup> and historically as a backlash to the women sectaries and writers of the late seventeenth century. Sectary, Margaret Fell, and writers, Margaret Cavendish and Mary Astell, argue in favor of gender equality, and advocate female autonomy. Their works,<sup>2</sup> newly canonized, “offered a challenge to female subordination, within the family and the church, but also in society at large” (Brown, *Ideology* 224).

Against these radical assertions of gender equality and autonomy, the early eighteenth-century conservative camp responds by coupling “misogyny, rape, commodification, and imperialism with the image of the woman”

---

<sup>1</sup> Laura Brown proposes that the English literary culture in the period between the English and French revolutions is “shaped by the representation of women.” Ideologically feminized, the English literary culture in the eighteenth century is saturated with “various, multivalent, discursive manifestations of the female” (223). While the period gives birth to the “feminization of ideology,” it provides a contesting ground where the opposing radical and conservative discourses meet hand to hand.

<sup>2</sup> Sectary and radical Margaret Fell propagates a woman’s right to preach in *Women’s Speaking Justified* (London, 1666). Margaret Cavendish, in *The Bridal* (1662), uses virginal nudity as she debates public attitudes towards the female body as property, and, together with *The Bridals*, her *Loves Adventure* (1662), *Bell in Campo* (1662), and *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668) exploit the trope of dress to investigate the role of women on the patriarchal, societal level. For these plays, see Margaret Cavendish, *The Convent of Pleasure and Other Plays*, ed. Anne Shaver (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999). And for Mary Astell’s *Reflections Upon Marriage* (1706), exploring the fundamental inequality of marriage and the consequences of an ill-judged match, see Astell 79-92.

(*Ideology* 223). Among the figuration and imagery of women, whether misogynist or imperialist or mercantilist, the Amazon, at the pivot of two axes of time, stands out as a significant image in that it is not only contemporarily associated with imperialism and mercantilism,<sup>3</sup> but also historically linked with the Amazon warriors in ancient Greek historical works.

Located at the intersection of time, the Amazon exceeds the confines of the dualistic/causal structure, or, as Brown puts it, the “cultural mode” (*Ideology* 225), in which the imagery of the woman is dualistically shaped by the discursive war between women writers and men writers, between assertions of female autonomy and misogynist attacks on women. This paper studies the Amazon trope by tracing the perpendicular axes of time. Based on Defoe’s *Roxana*, it first explores diachronically into the origin of Amazon warriors in ancient Greek historical works and examines how the ancient foremothers and the modern English heiress are related; then it synchronically compares Roxana with her counterpart, Belinda, in Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*, and further with Irish women in Jonathan Swift’s *Irish Tracts*. The perpendicular approaches lay open different acts of masculine violence in literature. Historically the Amazons were forced to murder, forced sexual acts, and humiliation; in like manner, Roxana is accused of filicide and cannot be exempt from her downfall. Contemporarily Roxana- and Belinda-like women are characterized as concealing male agency of mercantilism and male violence of imperial enterprise, while they, English or Irish, are further made

---

<sup>3</sup> The Amazon figure, in John Dryden’s translation of *The Sixth Satyr of Juvenal*, Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*, and Daniel Defoe’s *Roxana*, contemporarily serves to defend and consolidate mercantilism and imperialism. While the figuration of the Amazon discursively links gender with empire, the image of female dressing and adornment, as exemplified by Belinda, Roxana, and Jonathan Swift’s Irish women in *Irish Tracts*, associates women with commodification and becomes the emblem of commodity fetishism. This conjunction of women with the representation of commodification, mercantilism, and imperialism stands in the place of an explicit critique on the aggressiveness and violence of empire. Along with the Amazonian threat, the attribution of commodification to the female figure is the most common misogynist topic in the eighteenth century, which may explain the full-scale attacks on women in Swift’s misogynist poems.

the sites of cultural corruption and scapegoats for economic recession and trade deficits.

Dating back to ancient Greece, the Amazon was a fantasy that men created, an image of a superlative female that men constructed to conquer in order to certify manhood and male superiority. They constructed her to be either fierce and aggressive, or competent and independent, or physically attractive and even sexually desirable. But functioning as the product of male fantasy to enhance his worth, the Amazon was fashioned to be overcome and defeated by men. In light of this, Abby Wettan Kleinbaum, in *The War against the Amazons*, makes a comprehensive interpretation on the creation of the Amazons in Western culture:

Even as Western sensibility changed, as it shifted from pagan to Christian, from rational to romantic, from critical to emotional, the image of a struggle against Amazons has remained a vital motif. Whether they have been envisioned as a threat to the classical polis or to the Christian soul, or a challenge to the right order of civilization, the seemingly incorrigible Amazons must be opposed and overcome as a fresh contest in every age. (2)

Indeed, whether as “a threat” or “a challenge,” over the years the Amazons have remained and continued to be a “fresh” and “vital motif,” and have always performed the same function as “incorrigible” and negative others that discursively rationalize male suppression and necessitate male authority to either “oppose” or “overcome” them. In various narratives and genres throughout the ages, the Amazons either have to be tamed by marriage or subdued by force.

The first historical works made a multi-faceted representation of Amazon

women and gave eyewitness accounts of their physical beauty and love affairs. Herodotus, the world's first historian, outlined love affairs between Amazons and Scythians,<sup>4</sup> Quintus of Smyrna recounted Penthesilea's beauty,<sup>5</sup> and Diodorus rendered a more erotic and violent story of Melanippe's defeat.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Herodotus's story concerned the aftermath of the victory at the River Thermodon. The Scythians were attracted to the Amazons, and thus sent the same number of their young men to camp within the range of the Amazons, with orders to give ground if pursued, and then move near the women again. The motive behind this strange cat-and-mouse courtship was originally the Scythian tactic to desire that "children should be born of the women." When one of the Scythians laid hold of a stray Amazon, "the woman made no resistance but suffered him to do his will." Thereafter, in the same manner, the rest of the Scythians "had intercourse with the rest of the Amazons" (313). Herodotus recounted that the Amazons could not fit in and accustom themselves to the traditional roles of Scythian women. Showing their distaste for confinement on a nomad's wagon, the Amazons answered the Scythians, "We shoot with the bow and throw the javelin and ride, but the crafts of women we have never learned" (315). In contrast, the Scythian women "abide in their wagons working at women's crafts, and never go abroad a-hunting or for aught else." However, it was not marriage but the conventional role of wife that repelled the Amazons. A final proposition was eventually made by the Amazons that "if you desire to keep us for wives and to have the name of just men, go to your parents and let them give you the allotted share of their possessions, and after that let us go and dwell by ourselves" (315). The Scythians agreed to the Amazons' proposal, and after each man claimed his share of his family's possessions, the entire group of the newlyweds crossed the Tanais, and travelled east for three days, and then north for another three. There they established a tribe of the Sauromatian people.

<sup>5</sup> Reinforcing Penthesilea's loveliness, Quintus centred her tragic death around her intense beauty. After Achilles killed her with a spear above her right breast, Quintus noted her exquisite beauty in death, "a lovely face, / Lovely in death." Her deceased beauty was exalted and eulogized to emulate "an Immortal," and that ironically conquered Achilles' heart:

Achilles' very heart was wrung  
With love's remorse to have slain a thing so sweet,  
Who might have borne her home, his queenly bride,  
To chariot-glorious Phthia; for she was  
Flawless, a very daughter of the Gods,  
Divinely tall, and most divinely fair. (55)

In Quintus's narration, only when Achilles pierced Penthesilea to death with his spear was he stricken with "love's remorse." He regretted killing an Amazon, "sweet," "Flawless" and "divinely fair," who could have been his wife and returned with him to Phthia. And not only did Penthesilea's beauty seize the heart of Achilles, it also increased the Greek soldiers' longing for their wives back home: "The warriors gazed, and in their hearts they prayed / That fair and sweet like her their wives might seem, / Laid on the bed of love, when home they won" (55).

<sup>6</sup> The Greek male fantasy of violent domination over the beautiful but threatening Amazons in historical accounts seemed to become the standardized procedure that was again repeated in Diodorus's sequel of the siege of Athens by the Amazons. His story climaxed when Heracles captured Antiope as a present for Theseus. While setting Melanippe free, Heracles accepted her girdle as a ransom (397). As a sign of virginity, the erotic symbolism of the girdle does not imperatively exact the actual sexual violation of the Amazon's body so much as exercises the suggestive interplay of retaining or retrieving the girdle from Melanippe's body. The girdle, worn around the waist, was symbolic of the act of intercourse, because when retained, the female body would be safe from sexual attack, but when removed, it would be vulnerable to sexual violation. In addition to Melanippe's

Reviewing the defeat narratives of the Amazon warriors, Sue Blundell makes a revealing comment that “here, the two most common causes of the defeat of Amazonian resistance—physical force and love—are combined, and we encounter an analogy frequently made in Greek myth between violent domination and the sexual act” (60-61). But whether put to the sword or taken captive, Amazons are always portrayed as fierce but conquerable. And their fierceness and militancy invariably lead to their defeat and subjugation, which serve to glorify male dominance and superiority over female fierceness and rebelliousness. And their stories, narrated by the above Greek fathers of history, provide the Greeks with the instructive materials to inculcate and indoctrinate their civilians, men and women alike, that militant Amazons should be submitted to murder, forced sexual acts, and humiliation. Alison Taufer also agrees that “the response to the Amazonian threat given in the Greek texts is the conquest, domination, and annihilation of the Amazons at the hands of a Greek hero” (36).

Daniel Defoe, like his Greek predecessors, deals with the recurrent themes of marriage and male violence in his femiocentric *Roxana*. As Roxana’s bad marriage to a brewer, “a weak, empty-headed, untaught Creature” (7), dashes her dream of a good life, the eponymous heroine is forced into whoredom out of economic needs. Like her ancient foremothers, Roxana exists on the edge, though rather sociological than geographical. Yet, she adamantly refuses the option administered by “the Laws of Marriage” (171), codifying men’s power over women’s autonomy and household wealth, and chooses her own alternative for survival as courtesan or mistress.

Shawn Lisa Maurer views Roxana’s refusal both to marry the Dutch

---

connotative girdle, Antiope’s delivery of a baby boy, Hippolytus, further reinforced the theme sexual attack and violation (433). As slave to Theseus, Antiope’s child-bearing evidenced rape committed by her master, Theseus.

merchant, and to accept Sir Robert Clayton's proposition as challenges to the foundation of "male control and ownership of women's property" (366). She stresses, "It is crucial to recognize, however, that Roxana's Amazonian status emerges neither from her role as mistress nor from her position as 'She Merchant': it arises, instead, out of her refusal to marry" (365).<sup>7</sup> However, it is not so much the idea of marriage as "the Laws of Matrimony" (151) with which Roxana cannot come to terms. In Roxana's opinion, a woman secures as much freedom as a man, as long as she is "single" and has "the full Command of" her wealth and body (148). To be able to exercise her autonomy in her capacity as "Masculine" or a "Man" (148), a woman has to first and foremost be "controul'd by none" and "accountable to none" (149).

Roxana's cogent defense of female autonomy brings up the issue of sexual inequality between woman and man, because the Dutch merchant, annoyed at Roxana's polemics, explodes in his harshest comment that "there is something in it shocking to Nature, and something very unkind to yourself" (156). Criticizing Roxana's refusal to marry and her control of childbirth and upbringing as something "shocking to Nature," the Dutch merchant in fact pins down her decision and labels it as unnatural and inhuman. If Roxana's decision is inhuman, her "inhumanity" can well be traced to her earlier opinion that

While a Woman was single, she was a Masculine in her politick Capacity; that she had then the full Command of what she had, and the full Direction of what she did; that she was a Man in her separated Capacity, to all Intents and Purposes that a Man cou'd

---

<sup>7</sup> Maurer bases her argument upon the respective responses of the Dutch merchant and Sir Robert Clayton to Roxana's marriage refusal. Before Sir Robert Clayton's matchmaking, the Dutch merchant, learning of Roxana's pregnancy from their affair, is shocked at her refusal to marry him, arguing that "it is unkind to the Child that is yet unborn; who, if we marry, will come into the World with Advantage enough." He requests Roxana earnestly "not to let the innocent Lamb you go with, be ruin'd before it is born, and leave it to curse and reproach us hereafter" (156).

be so to himself; that she was controul'd by none, because  
 accountable to none, and was in Subjection to none; . . . .  
 (148-49)

Based on Roxana's feminist self-assertion and the Dutch merchant's vigorous censure, what to a man is natural and human is to a woman unnatural and inhuman.

The attack on Roxana's inhumanity is further accentuated in a dialogue between Roxana and Sir Robert Clayton, who volunteers to find her "some eminent Merchant," "who not being in Want or Scarcity of Money," would "maintain me [Roxana] like a Queen" (170). However, owing to the laws of marriage, men are granted full control over women's behavior and property, as Roxana has earlier stated her reason for refusing the Dutch merchant's proposal: "It is not you . . . that I suspect, but the Laws of Matrimony puts the Power into your Hands" (151). Thus "bent upon an Independency of Fortune" (170), Roxana rebuffs Sir Clayton's offer and is as resistant to the idea of marriage as ever. Perceiving men's privilege to inherit the property of liberty, Roxana aspires to be a "Man-Woman" (171), wishing for as much liberty as men are entitled to.

In response to her desire for "liberty," Sir Clayton considers Roxana's staunch belief "Amazonian." In line with the ancient Amazons in *Herodotus*, Roxana pleads her case, both with Sir Clayton and the Dutchman, which does not so much resist the marriage proposal as reiterates her right to "liberty" or her autonomy. She puts up an "Amazonian" self-defence of autonomy, which takes precedence over all others, and which recalls Herodotus' narration of the Amazon warriors, whose refusal was ascribed to their abhorrence of the Scythian female's conventional role as a spinning wife.

But siding with the Greek historians, Defoe cannot let Roxana's unnatural



independence pass unquestioned and go unpunished. Since Roxana's autonomy threatens and subverts the social fabric of eighteenth-century English society, the punitive patriarchal authority, as unforgivable and unbending as ever, holds this early eighteenth-century Amazon responsible for partaking of her own daughter's death, and by jeopardizing her "into a dreadful Course of Calamities" (329). As Helene Moglen notes, at the end of "Defoe and the Gendered Subject," *Roxana* "ends by demonizing the sexual mother," and "Defoe fully exposes the price that women pay for the cultural role that they have been assigned" (51). Even though Roxana finally marries the Dutch merchant to "put an End to all the intriaguig Part" of "prosperous Wickedness" (243), Defoe responds to Roxana's marriage refusal and entrepreneurial independence with the customary *modus operandi*. By "demonizing" the abandoning mother as a murderer, Roxana can never redeem her sin or "prosperous Wickedness." Worse than that, Defoe calls Roxana's individualism, together with her "Crime," into account by bringing about her eventual downfall.

This extended part of the novel's ending, closely monitoring the process of Roxana's internal struggling and eventual psychic disintegration, results in the murder of the heroine's own daughter and utter ruin in her own mercantile career. In other words, at the end of the narrative, the narrator puts down the Amazonian threat by making the eponymous character a murderess and bankrupt. Reviewing "this vehement repudiation of female liberty" in her essay, "Amazons and Africans: Daniel Defoe," Laura Brown concludes, "The female mercantile profiteer is shown to be nothing better than a murderess, and then stripped of her profits and reduced by 'a dreadful Course of Calamities' to 'the very Reverse of [her] former Good Days'" (*Ends* 156).

Defoe's novel diachronically rekindles this age-old but subsisting fear of female independence, and the narrator habitually resorts to this age-old male violence to crush Roxana's Amazonian threat. On the other hand, like his

contemporaries, Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, Defoe also synchronically bridges the discursive relation between gender and empire during the early eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Many eighteenth-century critiques place particular emphasis on female clothing in relation to social hierarchy, cultural difference, and the overall material culture of eighteenth-century English society. However, they either skirt or barely go into the relation between clothing and imperialist ideology.<sup>9</sup> Published during the first major period of British imperialism, *Roxana* is significantly implicated in colonial historiography, helping to shape and express the building of the British empire. The themes of mercantile capitalism and imperialist expansionism accordingly play a prominent part in the overall framework of *Roxana*, which interestingly zeroes in on Roxana's attire and adornment.

Laura Brown advances that “the outfitting of the English female body” in the “dress of the exotic” is the dimension of a “powerful motif of female dressing that characterizes eighteenth-century imperialist ideology” (*Ends* 148). Roxana's “Turkish dress” serves as the right example of this motif. During her tour of Italy, it comes into her hands by way of a “Maltese Man of War,” which captures “a Turkish Vessel,”

in which were some Ladies bound for Grand Cairo in Egypt;  
and as the Ladies were made Slaves, so their fine Cloaths were  
thus expos'd; and with this Turkish Slave, I bought the rich  
Cloaths too. (173-74)

---

<sup>8</sup> The second part of the essay discusses the relation between women's clothing and empire in Defoe's *Roxana*, Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, and Swift's *Irish Tracts*. It argues how masculine violence in terms of mercantile capitalism and imperialist expansionism is discursively whitewashed and displaced by female attire and adornment.

<sup>9</sup> Among them, four essays are particularly noted here. See Roche 160; Smith-Rosenberg 49; Sennett 64-88; Stadler 20-36.

Both the slave and dress are delivered to Roxana through the agency of male military aggression of the “Maltese Man of War.” Roxana uses her slave to help put on the exotic dress and various accoutrements. In addition, she also acquires “the Turkish Language,” “Dancing,” and “some Turkish, or rather Moorish Songs, of which I [Roxana] made Use, to my Advantage” (102).

As Roxana reveals, she is, for one thing, using the Turkish woman’s material culture to lead a life of luxury and lucrative whoring. For another, the Turkish woman’s material culture becomes a unique sign of Roxana’s individualism. As Eva Maria Stadler points out:

Because clothing confers social identity as well as personal individuality, it is not surprising that a number of ‘realist’ novels from the early eighteenth century on make complex use of references to costume, particularly to the clothing of women. (21)

Despite wearing the clothing of the colonized, Roxana maintains her unique “social identity” and “personal individuality.” Her suitors will never mistake her for a colonized “Mahometan,” because Roxana “had a Christian Face” and “cou’d dance like a Christian” (175). In other words, her exoticness is not so complete as to replace her racial superiority. Rather, the dress of the colonized is here “personalized” (22) or individualized to Roxana’s advantage.<sup>10</sup> Instead

---

<sup>10</sup> Stadler specifies the enslaved Turkish dress is here “personalized” (22) and individualized. It expresses Roxana’s “personal individuality” (21). It also becomes “a particular speech act,” negotiating the title character’s “interpersonal and social relationships by encoding social and sexual communication” (21). Symbolizing Roxana’s individual uniqueness, the dress is translated into “a speech act,” that bridges Roxana’s human relationships and commodifies her sexual attraction to accelerate her social “ascendancy.” The exotic dress, together with Turkish dancing and songs, enables Roxana to market herself to the English court culture, having “the Felicity of pleasing every-body . . . to an Extreme” (176). She is so “pleas’d” and “surpriz’d” at the magic the dress plays that it even engages the King’s attention. Roxana walks on air, basking in “that Notion of the King being the Person that danc’d with me, puff’d me up to that Degree, that I not only did not know any-body else, but indeed, was very far from knowing myself” (177).

of being relegated to the status of the inferior colonized, the “vestimentary” expressions of the dress “assert and assure” Roxana a higher social position. This piece of Turkish clothing not only enables the heroine to maintain the social prominence she needs, but also, as Stadler proposes, is turned into “a discourse of individualist empowerment, a tool in the (fictitious) ascendancy of women” (22).

But if the dress is put in the colonial context, doesn't the means of using the Turkish woman to help put on the dress and learn Turkish culture for the purposes of gaining social ascendancy and making profits parallel and pursue the very pattern of imperialist expansion? Such a process is repeated and replicated again and again in different areas such as mining, agriculture, and manufacturing as a means to gain control over the labour values of colonized peoples. Most obviously, doesn't Roxana's graphic and detailed description of the dress read like a laundry list of what Europeans had coveted of Middle-east and Asian societies since the journeys of travellers like Marco Polo in the Middle Ages? As Roxana marvels,

The Dress was extraordinary fine indeed . . . the Robe was a fine Persian, or India Damask . . . embroider'd with Gold . . . and some Turquois Stones; to the Vest, was a Girdle five or six Inches wide after the Turkish Mode; and on both Ends where it join'd, or hook'd, was set with Diamonds for eight Inches either way. . . . (174)

Perusing and detailing the texture, material, embroidery, and decoration, Roxana unconsciously unveils but serves as a mouthpiece for the rapacious nature of imperialism, disguised and displaced by this exotic, fancy dress. As the readers follow Roxana's appreciation of the exquisite design and refined

texture of the dress, colonized countries—Persia, India, and Turkey—and their looted spoils—gold, turquoise, and diamonds—should have recalled the violence of colonialist exploitation and accumulation that is barely alluded to or frowned on during the first period of imperialism, let alone Defoe’s apologist narrative.

While Roxana’s preferred form of attire and adornment enables her to market herself successfully, her clothing at the same time evokes the aggressiveness of British expansionism. In fact, Roxana’s active involvement of commodification blurs and muffles the grim reality of expansionist violence. The outfitting of the English female body steals the limelight and defocuses mercantile accumulation and imperial expansion. As an object of commodification, Roxana is thus discursively enlisted in the service of imperialist ideology to mask and keep dark its male agency and aggressiveness.

Preceding Defoe’s creation of Roxana, Pope’s heroine, Belinda, is also noted for her clothing, though *The Rape of the Lock*<sup>11</sup> is generically distant from *Roxana*. Like Roxana, Belinda in Canto V is “decked with all that land and sea afford” (11)<sup>12</sup>, as the readers are privileged to peep at her boudoir and observe her maid, the “inferior priestess,” assist her in performing “the sacred rites of Pride” (the make-up procedures):

Unnumbered treasures ope at once, and here  
The various offerings of the world appear;  
From each she nicely culls with curious toil,  
And decks the goddess with the glittering spoil.

---

<sup>11</sup> In *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope structurally uses the conventions of a serious epic: the hero, large setting, action, supernatural forces, elevated style, invocation of the Muse, *in medias res*, catalogue of warriors, formal speeches, etc. However, the conventions are employed to ridicule the pettiness and insignificance of the mocked, small, trivial subject matter: Belinda’s loss of hair.

<sup>12</sup> See Pope 81.

This casket India's flowing gems unlocks,  
 And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.  
 The tortoise here and elephant unite,  
 Transformed to combs, the speckled and the white. (1.129-36)

In this toilet scene, Belinda's beauty is fashioned by the products of trade (the "various offerings of the world") or even the plunder and loot of war ("the glittering spoil"). By whatever means, the "combs" made of tortoise shell and ivory, the spices of Arabia, and "gems" and gold from India all merge and work together to create Belinda's "heavenly image."

Resembling the laundry list of Roxana's clothing and adornment, the commercial and imperialist spoils that visualize Belinda's "heavenly image" are literally another living proof of British mercantile and imperialist expansion, which adroitly forges another link between women and empire. The miscellaneous spoils from "land and sea" all home in on Belinda, molded into another "warlike amazon" (3.67). Comparable with Roxana, this "warlike amazon" is also made to cover up male agency and violence of mercantilism and imperialism. Like Roxana, Belinda is targeted as the product of empire and mercantile capitalism on one hand; on the other, she is further rigged as the locus of cultural corruption.

Through this collage, not only is the masculine violence of imperialist looting and plundering sidestepped and male agency of mercantile capitalism concealed, but also the Amazon, Belinda, outwits and outdoes her male counterpart, the Baron or mankind in general, and pulls off two impressive victories in "Hampton" during the day. She first wins the card game of ombre.<sup>13</sup> Despite losing one of her two locks of hair, in the fight to "Restore

---

<sup>13</sup> Pope takes a card game and makes it grand by using military imagery, which dominates the description of the game: "force," "war," "unconquerable," "captive," "yield," "victor," "engage,"

the Lock,” Belinda conquers the Baron once again by sharp-wittedly throwing at him a pinch of “snuff” (5.82), causing the Baron to sneeze until “the high dome re-echoes to his nose” (5.86). Wolfgang E. H. Rudat puts an interesting interpretation on this cross-gender fist-fighting in “Pope’s Belinda, Milton’s Eve, and the Missionary Position,” explicating etymologically and sexually the conflict scenario between Belinda and the Baron. Rudat suggests that “the female not only refuses to submit to the male, but as ‘insulting Foe’ she actually becomes the sexual aggressor who attacks, or more precisely, ‘jumps upon’—from the Latin *in-sultare*—the Baron” (103).

In order to reclaim her lost hair, Belinda attacks the Baron in Canto V:

See, fierce Belinda on the Baron flies,  
 With more than usual lighting in her eyes;  
 Nor feared the chief the unequal fight to try,  
 Who sought no more than on his foe to die.  
 But this bold lord with manly strength endued,  
 She with one finger and a thumb subdued. (75-80)

Undaunted by the Baron’s “manly strength” and “the unequal fight,” Belinda, “fierce” and fearless, reverses the traditional sex roles between male and female, which most alarms the Baron: “All that I dread is leaving you behind” (5.100). On the epical and generic level, the ubiquitous and repetitious masculine military imagery in Pope’s mock epic is trivialized by the card game and further ridiculed by the petty skirmish for the heroine’s lock of hair, while, in terms of gender, the traditional masculine superiority, by Pope’s sex-role reversal, is demasculated and feminized by the militant Belinda, the

---

“victim,” “mowed down armies,” “invades,” “troops,” “conquest,” “battalions,” “band,” etc. The trivial card game is thus elevated and comparable to the mighty battle on an epic scale.

“warlike amazon.”

As Brown interprets perceptively in “Amazons and Africans,” Belinda functions “as a kind of discursive center from which the whole constellation of images and issues associated with empire emanates” (146). For one thing, Belinda is modelled as the product and defender of mercantilism and imperialism, dressed in and adorned with what British maritime and imperial enterprise could offer. Pope makes Belinda a “discursive center” that not so deflects as replaces male agency of mercantilism and masculine violence of imperial enterprise, the materials and spoils of which are now exclusively attributed to Belinda or womankind as a whole. In other words, by the reversal of subject and object, Belinda, as well as womankind as a whole, is designated as the defender, apologist, and scapegoat for empirical violence.

For another, by the same rhetorical device, the objectified and commodified Belinda, displacing active male mediation, becomes the site of cultural corruption and accounts for economic recession and trade deficits. As John F. Sena construes in “‘The wide Circumference around’: The Context of Belinda’s Petticoat in *The Rape of the Lock*,”

Petticoats for women of fashion were generally made from the richest of materials—silk, brocade, damask, lustrating, or satin—fabrics which had to be imported. Imported goods such as these, however, were the *bête noire* of a mercantilist economy, which sought to maintain a favourable balance of trade by exporting rather than importing commodities. (264)

The import of foreign materials, such as “silk,” “brocade,” “damask,” “lustrating,” and “satin,” is inimical to the balance or prosperity of trade. These luxury materials, threatening to undermine national economy and



welfare, are bitterly censured as *bête noire*, or an object of strong aversion. Made scapegoats for the trade deficit, the Belinda-like women of fashion, who are said to be laden with the sin of “Pride,” take the brunt of the censorship and are held responsible for the trade imbalance and economic recession, whereas the active male agency aptly stays behind the curtain.

This economic dimension of female commodities also expands across the Irish Sea. While the representation of Roxana’s and Belinda’s attire and adornment serves discursively to stand in for the aggression of mercantile capitalism and violence of imperialist expansionism, the same rhetorical mode of substituting object for subject can also explain Jonathan Swift’s attacks on their Irish counterparts, whose consumer goods are particularly singled out and sniped at in “A Proposal that All the Ladies and Women of Ireland Should Appear Constantly in Irish Manufactures” in Swift’s *Irish Tracts*.

Indignant at the imposition of the colonialist trade restrictions on Ireland, Swift calls in turn for an import restriction on “all unnecessary commodities” (126), specifically those for female luxury, to reduce the soaring trade deficit. To revitalize the Irish economy, Swift calls for Irish ladies to boycott exotic luxuries, “all unnecessary commodities,” and to purchase local materials instead. Citing the statistics targeting women, Swift makes his appeal to the female public:

There is annually brought over to this kingdom near ninety thousand pounds worth of silk. . . . Thirty thousand pounds more is expended in muslin, holland, cambric, and callico. . . . Let them [women] vie with each other in the fineness of their native linen. (126-27)

Turning a blind eye to other “foreign extravagancies” such as wine, coffee, and tea, Swift partially handpicks female luxury goods as solely responsible

for the soaring Irish trade deficit. At the end of the proposal, Swift is suddenly exasperated and states that if Irish ladies “will not be content to go in their own country shifts, I wish they may go in rags” (127). By manipulating a direct link between female consumption of luxury goods and the Irish economic recession, the active mediation of male-dominated mercantile capitalism is deflected and the underlying truth of imperial expansionism goes unquestioned.

Elsewhere in the *Irish Tracts*, the attack on female luxuries comes to that on the female body. In another similar reversal of object and subject, the female body, rather than consumer goods, becomes the site of cultural corruption. In “Answer to Several Letters from Unknown Persons,” Swift blatantly conflates the corruptions of mercantile capitalism with those of women. In tune with “The Fall of Man” in *The Book of Genesis* in the Old Testament, Irish women’s “Corruptions” are blamed for men’s suffering that “men should be such poltroons as to suffer the Kingdom and themselves to be undone, by the Vanity, the Folly, the Pride, and Wantonness of their Wives” (80).

In this round of attack, Swift charges women with social vices and holds them answerable to the rack and ruin of men and the whole of Ireland, whereas again male agency of mercantile or piratical activities is concealed. At the end of “Answer to Several Letters,” men/husbands are privileged to be either innocent of or miraculously absolved from all the shared human “Corruptions”: namely, “Vanity,” “Folly,” “Pride,” and “Wantonness,” whereas women/wives exclusively take the blame for men’s “poltroonery” and Ireland’s destruction. By performing the same sleight-of-hand trick, the shared human frailties have now wholly become women’s, and women have to fully account for “the Destruction of Families, Societies, and Kingdoms” (81).

In the same vein as “A Proposal,”<sup>14</sup> morally corrupted women, in “Answer to Several Letters,” are obsessed with “expensive,” “pernicious,” and “useless” articles of living: those women “play deep severall hours after midnight, sleep beyond noon, revel upon Indian poisons, and spend the revenue of a moderate family” (80). The Irish women are said to be indulging themselves in an inordinate and excessive life of “Sloth” and “Luxury” that eventually turns them into “a nauseous unwholesome living Carcase” (80).

To conclude, whether as commodified objects or conquerable warriors, Roxana- and Belinda-like women, British or Irish, are subject to different forms of masculine violence in the narratives of Defoe, Pope, and Swift. Roxana’s eventual downfall diachronically recalls the age-old masculine suppression and conquest of ancient Amazon warriors. On the ideological level, the impossibility of Roxana’s individualism discloses Defoe’s narratorial contradiction and limits. On the other hand, Defoe’s novel and Pope’s mock epic and Swift’s essays synchronically bridge the discursive relationship between gender and empire. The attire and adornment of Defoe’s Roxana and Pope’s Belinda displace active male agency. Through this collage, the masculine violence of imperialist looting and plundering is sidestepped and male rapaciousness of mercantile capitalism, concealed. By this reversal of subject and object, Roxana- and Belinda-like women are assembled to be the defenders, apologists, and scapegoats for male-dominated empirical aggression, while by the same rhetorical device, Irish women in Swift’s *Irish Tracts* are made the sites of corruption, and exclusively held responsible for the trade imbalance and economic recession.

---

<sup>14</sup> Instead of accusing British colonialism of perpetrating a large British trade surplus and an Irish economic depression, Swift directs his attack on female consumer goods, “unnecessary” and “ruinous” (123), which only “gratify the vanity and pride, and luxury of the women,” (126), and holds it accountable for “the growing poverty of the nation” (121) and the growing “national debt” (123).

## Works Cited

### I. Primary Sources

- Astell, Mary. *Reflections upon Marriage*. 1706. *The Eloquence of Mary Astell*.  
Ed. Christian Mason Sutherland. Alberta, Canada: U of Calgary P,  
2005.
- Cavendish, Margaret. *The Convent of Pleasure and Other Plays*. Ed. Anne  
Shaver. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1999.
- Defoe, Daniel. *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress*. Ed. John Mullan. Oxford:  
Oxford UP, 1998.
- Diodorus, Siculus. *Diodorus of Sicily*. Trans. Earnest Cary. Vol. 2. Cambridge,  
MA: Harvard UP, 1979.
- Fell, Margaret. *Women's Speaking Justified*. London, 1666.
- Herodotus. *Herodotus*. Ed. G. P. Goold. Trans. A. D. Godley. Vol.2.  
Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982.
- Pope, Alexander. *The Rape of the Lock*. Ed. Cynthia Wall. Boston: Bedford,  
1998.
- Quintus, Smyrnaeus. *The Fall of Troy*. Trans. Arthur S. Way. Cambridge, MA:  
Harvard UP, 1984.
- Swift, Jonathan. "Answer to Several Letters from Unknown Persons." *Irish  
Tracts: 1728-1733*. Ed. Herbert Davis. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971.  
75-81.
- . "A Proposal that All the Ladies and Women of Ireland Should Appear  
Constantly in Irish Manufactures." *Irish Tracts: 1728-1733*. Ed. Herbert  
Davis. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971. 119-27.

### II. Secondary Sources

- Blundell, Sue. *Women in Ancient Greece*. Harvard: Harvard UP, 1995.

- Brown, Laura. *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993.
- . *Ideology and Form in Eighteenth-Century Literature*. Ed. David H. Richter. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech UP, 1999.
- Kahn, Madeleine. *Narrative Transvestism: Rhetoric and Gender in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991.
- Kleinbaum, Abby Wettan. *The War against the Amazons*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983.
- Maurer, Shawn Lisa. "‘I wou’d be a Man-Woman’: Roxana’s Amazonian Threat to the Ideology of Marriage." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 46.3 (2004): 363-86.
- Moglen, Helene. *The Trauma of Gender: A Feminist Theory of the English Novel*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2001.
- Roche, Daniel. *The People of Paris: An Essay in Popular Culture in the Eighteenth Century*. Trans. Marie Evans and Gwynne Lewis. Berkeley: U of California P, 1987.
- Rudat, Wolfgang E. H. "Pope’s Belinda, Milton’s Eve, and the Missionary Position." *American Notes and Queries* 23.7-8 (1985):103-4.
- Sena, John F. "‘The wide Circumference around’: The Context of Belinda’s Petticoat in *The Rape of the Lock*." *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature* 16 (1980): 260-67.
- Sennett, Richard. *The Fall of Public Man*. New York: Random, 1978.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*. Ed. Teresa de Lauretis. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986.
- Stadler, Eva Maria. *Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space*. Ed. Margaret R. Higonnet and Joan Templeton. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1994.

Taufer, Alison Dale. *From Amazon Queen to Female Knight: The Development of the Woman Warrior in the Amadis Cycle*. Los Angeles: U of California P, 1988.

# 書寫女性： 狄福、波普與斯威福特 小說中的男性暴力

石耀西\*

## 摘 要

本文擬從歷時與共時二時間軸，檢視十八世紀早期英國文學作品中的亞馬遜女戰士。以狄福小說《羅克珊娜》為依據，本文首先從縱向歷史的角度，探討古希臘歷史作品中亞馬遜女戰士與羅克珊娜之間的歷史關連。其次，本文將羅克珊娜與同時期波普所著《秀髮劫》與斯威福特《愛爾蘭專文》中的女主角們，進行橫向比較。上述歷史縱、橫垂直的比對點出，狄福、波普與斯威福特文本中的男性暴力本質。自古以降，亞馬遜女戰士籠罩在謀殺、性暴力與屈辱的陰影中，而羅克珊娜的命運也同出一轍，她被控為弑女兇手，並且最終身敗名裂。與羅克珊娜同時期的女主角們則在帝國主義與擴張主義意識形態下，被塑造為強權貿易與男性暴力的代理人。這些女性不僅執行掩飾男性暴力的任務，更在文本中屢被物化與商品化，成為男性作家筆下道德敗壞、經濟衰退與貿易虧絀的代罪羔羊。

**關鍵詞：**男性暴力、狄福、波普、斯威福特、歷時性、共時性

---

\* 石耀西，南台科技大學應用英語系助理教授。  
E-mail: donjose@mail.stut.edu.tw