

## Female Bonding in *Roxana*

The bond between Roxana and Amy is not a standard bond between two female companions. It is different from the bond that would exist between two women of equal social standing, and different even from the bond that would exist between a mistress and her maid. It is closest, in fact, to the relationship that exists between a husband and his wife, at least in the way these relationships were regarded during Roxana's time. Roxana thus lives the life of a man in two ways—one, in being the sole manager of her affairs, and two, in having a kind of wife in Amy.

Amy and Roxana both hold a mutual affection for each other. Amy is devoted to Roxana from the beginning of their misfortunes, "I was not able to pay her the Wages that I was in Arrears to her, yet she would not leave me; nay, and as long as she had any Money...she would help me out of her own."<sup>1</sup> Amy stays with Roxana despite having no prospect of ever being paid for her troubles, and remains with her through every turn of her fortunes. Roxana, too, relies on and values Amy, trusts her with managing her affairs even when she is absent for months at a time: "leave Amy behind...with Directions to go to *London*, and stay there, to receive Letters and Orders from me what to do,"<sup>2</sup> "Having thus spent nine Months in *Holland*...[I] arriv'd safe at *Harwich*, where my Woman, *Amy*, was come."<sup>3</sup> Roxana looks after Amy all the time they are together, keeping her on with a salary whenever she has the means. Roxana even shows fear for Amy's life during a storm at sea, while she is also in fear for her own life: "I did not know whether she was

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<sup>1</sup> Page 49

<sup>2</sup> Page 169

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dead or alive; in this Fright I went to her.”<sup>4</sup> The bond between them must be strong, for they are together for the rest of their lives.

However, no matter how highly Amy esteems Roxana, Roxana esteems Amy to a much lesser extent. For instance, when Amy vows she would die for Roxana’s sake, Roxana’s only reply is, “Why that’s an Excess of Affection, *Amy*, said I, I never met with before; I wish I may be ever in Condition to make you some Returns suitable.”<sup>5</sup> Although Amy has essentially said she values Roxana’s life above her own, Roxana does not respond beyond mere pleasantries. “Returns suitable” is a trick of speech that could mean anything, and certainly doesn’t directly mean that Roxana would lay her life down for Amy. Roxana also deems it an “excess of affection,” which means Roxana herself doesn’t consider it normal or expected that Amy should feel this way, and she would likely never feel this way herself.

Roxana also maintains their status separation from each other throughout the book. Although they are often at equal physical standing with each other, as at the beginning when Roxana has no money, Amy is always under a title of lower rank than Roxana. And when Amy is dangerously close to appearing to have higher morals than Roxana is, Roxana forces the division to re-evolve by forcing Amy into bed with a man she is not wedded to: “but as I thought myself a Whore, I cannot say but that it was something design’d in my Thoughts, that my Maid should be a Whore too, and should not reproach me with it.”<sup>6</sup> Amy loves Roxana enough that she stays with her even after being treated thus poorly, but Roxana doesn’t esteem Amy enough to let her have a higher status than she herself does.

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<sup>4</sup> Page 163

<sup>5</sup> Page 62

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The bond between Amy and Roxana is paralleled with the bond between a typical husband and wife during Roxana's time. One example is the general rule that when a woman gets married, all her money and estate are at her husband's disposal, do do with as he pleases: "a Wife must give up all she has...and be upbraided with her very *Pin-Money*"<sup>7</sup>; "That the very nature of the Marriage-Contract was, in short, nothing but giving up Liberty, Estate, Authority, and every-thing, to the Man."<sup>8</sup> This is paralleled in Amy's relation to Roxana when Amy offers to support Roxana with her own money, "and as long as she had any Money, when I had none, she would help me out of her own."<sup>9</sup> Amy forfeits her money to Roxana, albeit willingly, just as any money a wife had of her own must go to her husband when he has need of it.

Another clear parallel between Amy's relationship to Roxana and that of a wife to a husband lies in the description Roxana often gives of a wife—that of an upper servant: "a Wife is look'd upon, as but an Upper-Servant."<sup>10</sup> Amy begins as a maid to Roxana, but gradually occupies the position of an upper-servant in truth, because she manages most of Roxana's household affairs. Amy also occupies, for a time, the position of a companion to Roxana, "*Amy*, who I now dress'd like a Gentlewoman, and made her my Companion."<sup>11</sup> Amy occupies the position of a wife because she is in Roxana's confidence, she takes care of hiring the household staff, but she relies on Roxana for a home and companionship. Amy also has free command of Roxana's coach and of some of her money, just as a typical wife would.

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<sup>7</sup> Page 170

<sup>8</sup> Page 187

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<sup>10</sup> Page 170

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Roxana's first husband sets the model with which Roxana judges all other marriages, and her life often reflects this model. Roxana's first husband "went abroad, kept Company, hunted much, and lov'd it exceedingly."<sup>12</sup> After her husband dies, Roxana herself goes abroad often, mingles with company of various societal standing, and it could be said she hunts men and enjoys it. Her husband didn't care for working at a trade to keep his business flourishing, and preferred simply to spend money and not have to work to get it. Similarly, Roxana decides to earn money through offering bedroom favors instead of applying herself to an actual trade. She also shuns marriage as a result of her first experience with it, "it had hurried me up and down in the World...that I had an Aversion to it."<sup>13</sup>

However, Roxana lives the life of a man much more successfully than did her first husband. She manages her money and business affairs with such alacrity that she rarely needs the relations she keeps with men for more money: "having large Sums to do with, I became as expert in it, as any She-Merchant of them all."<sup>14</sup> She also treats Amy with more trust and respect than her own husband treated her, "having sent *Amy* before-hand, and remitted her Money to do it, she had taken me a very handsome House."<sup>15</sup> This seems to suggest that the proper way for men to treat their wives in order to retain a happy existence is to follow Roxana's model, because Roxana and Amy were both mutually happy while they were together and while Roxana had no husband.

Amy does, however, tend to stifle Roxana with her affections. Just as such stifling often drives men away from their wives and to mistresses and whores, so might this have

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<sup>12</sup> Page 40

<sup>13</sup> Page 185

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been one of the reasons Roxana agreed eventually to marriage. Essentially, Roxana may have gotten married to escape Amy's adoration, which reached a peak of frenzy at the beginning of Roxana's second marriage. Amy's relationship with Roxana was one of extreme affection, as was shown when Amy said she would die for her, and throughout the book when Amy went abroad multiple times for Roxana to manage her affairs. And just as Roxana grew sick of one of her lovers, it may be assumed it was possible for her to grow weary of Amy. Amy is the only person other than Roxana who knows all of Roxana's secrets and everything about her life. When Roxana's daughter Susan is on the verge of discovering everything too, Amy feels the need to murder her. It is not a far stretch to interpret part of her fear for Roxana as jealousy, because Amy wants to be the only one who fully knows Roxana. In fact, Amy began talking of murdering Susan even before they are sure she knows more than she should. It is just after Susan guesses Roxana might be her mother that Amy flies into a rage, and this rage is very likely tinged with jealousy of Roxana. This time, at the beginning of Roxana's second marriage, is also when Roxana begins to become estranged of Amy, and eventually when she forces Amy out of her house.

In short, Roxana stops being a husband to Amy when Amy's affections become stifling, and begins being a wife to her Dutch merchant (who is an exception to the rule of a husband who takes over his wife's money). Roxana lives the life of a man for much of her life, then marries and lives the life of a woman for the rest. Thus, her marriage is not a break from her beliefs, but more a fulfillment of both these ways of living. In a way, Roxana lived a more complete existence because she had the experience of living like a man does, with a kind of wife in Amy, and living as a woman does with a husband.

However, it is interesting to note that Roxana was most prosperous while she remained unmarried, a hint either that a woman is more likely to life well if she lives without a husband, or that only a man's way of life can successfully retain money.