The illustrative focus of the paper will be a metaphoric tactic, the blank page or area, generally considered to be employed primarily by female modernists. It will show how a male writer from a rather different chronological space - Daniel Defoe - employs such a tactic, thus allowing characters a space in which to actualize certain valorized standpoints. *Moll Flanders* and *Robinson Crusoe* will be treated as representative examples of Defoe's proposed resolution to this pervasive dilemma of individual actualization. Examining the works of Defoe more generally it will be shown that, though the geographic area of retreat may vary, it will still function as a characteristic blank page to be inscribed by the character who seeks self-realization in a fashion transcending limited chronological and gender frames.

Establishing an aspect of the novel genre that has continued to be significant, Daniel Defoe creates protagonists who exhibit an extraordinary energy not merely in surviving, but in redefining the place allotted to them within their culture. The nature and direction of these individual struggles imply a rejection of accepted social guidelines, reactions as they are to the arbitrary constraint or pressure upon the individual on the basis of his/her birth. Refusing to accept the situation into which they are born, they forge their own paths to the material and social status that otherwise would be denied them.

Up to the present day, the novel often depicts such a confrontation, in which social structures more or less effectively resist or force modification of autonomous personal development. Certainly, there are considerable and intricate differences between the cultural standards defining the world of Defoe's marginal protagonists and the values noted and rebelled against by the innovative writers of the present century. Yet despite shifting mores, the conflict arising out of the confrontation of the energetic individual and constraining norms motivates certain novelists of all periods. As Arnold Weinstein expresses it, "the novel both is and often reflects precisely that untrammeled, uncensored, unconstrained expenditure of energy and desire
which history and society rarely accommodate." Giving form to that energy and desire, these early texts by Defoe reveal metaphoric strategies that are generally considered to be typical of much later authors.

What is distinctive of Defoe, however, is that he does not merely aim to establish the spiritual or creative freedom of his characters. Neither Crusoe nor Moll Flanders resemble Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier, who is willing to sacrifice everything for spiritual freedom. Defoe's protagonists demand the solid material rewards that a bourgeois culture offers to its privileged members. Yet at the same time material reward has no virtue in itself for these characters, hence the renegade prosperity of Jonathan Wilde is not for them. Indeed, these early narratives are made especially interesting by the way the characters refuse to accept that the social and spiritual status of the outlaw is necessary to achieving their revolutionary goals.

This generates an extraordinary tension in the novels, for, though struggling against the norms of society in such a way as to be burdened with guilt for their actions, the protagonists still insist on a final public recognition of their worth as human beings.2

Certainly, the biographies of most dynamic novelists reveal such tensions between self and society, and these are manifested in their texts, but as the novel form develops, also evident is an increasing skill in muting or concealing the conflict.3 But in the work of Defoe the generated tension remains nakedly evident. Each of his major novels shows, more or less obviously, a persistent tension between the need to define self in a personally determined fashion, and the deep insecurity demanding public, if not metaphysical, approval of those individual identities.4

Generally speaking, it can be said of these protagonists that on the one hand they reject the customary regulation of society, acting in ways adjudged for various reasons to be illegitimate; yet they value and wish to attain precisely those privileges, as well as the social respect and security associated with an inherited position.5

As to how Defoe accomplishes both the liberation of his characters and their subsequent integration into society at a level more amenable with their own designs, I would suggest the following: Although he mostly works in a far more intuitive and unconscious fashion than the highly self-conscious novelists of this century, this dynamic and significant aspect of Defoe's work can nevertheless be illuminated by critically examining a tactic employed by him in a fashion notably similar to that of certain innovative artists writing
around the time of the upheaval of values made most nakedly evident by WWI, for they face similar existential and aesthetic problems. These modernists, like their predecessors, embark on a quest for an area not overladen with societal norm and evaluation, in which they will be free to develop the potential of their creations.

As recent feminist criticism has thoroughly sketched, this artistic exploration for unappropriated metaphoric areas is an aesthetic move to cope with prevalent social perspectives. The quest is first of all to find some way to evaluate and develop the personality beyond preconceived judgements of society, yet somehow to be accepted in a new, hitherto unaccommodated role. Here as in other areas feminist insights are valuable as part of a general perspective; though the problem is more acute and widespread for the female artist, it is vivid too for the sensitive male nonconformist. Consequently I am extending the metaphor of the private or uncharted area, which feminists have articulated primarily in terms of the female body; the need for unrestricted space transcends gender geography as well as the historical chronology of the novel. Thus, as Defoe creates Crusoe and his other protagonists, he envisages a web of economic and metaphysical constructions precluding realization. It is necessary then for the artist to forge a non-appropriated area, a "blank page." The metaphoric area – it can be an altered version of a myth, as with H.D.’s Helen in Egypt; the interior of a mind as in Keats’s "Ode to Psyche"; a geographic blank space as Willa Cather’s Great Plains, or, as in the present case, Crusoe’s island is a creative space in which the artist may allow characters to roam more freely.

Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders, Defoe’s two most significant novels, are the works I am presently concentrating on. Robinson Crusoe is an excellent starting point not merely on chronological grounds, but because the basic terms for Defoe’s work are laid down so nakedly. The fear and guilt resulting when Crusoe breaks away from his father’s tenets are overt, and the blank area in which to develop is literally just that. The paranoid fears of being submerged, buried, or in other ways consumed as a direct or indirect result of flagrant disobedience are repeatedly evident, and the need, finally, for public sanction of newly-developed norms is quite obvious in his relation to the social and spiritual realms.

Defoe has thus created a dilemma for Crusoe that is characteristic of his protagonists; the very act of striking out to fulfil his own individual sense of self generates such guilty fear as to threaten the existence of that same self.
As I have pointed out: to consider the tactics of modernist writers – particularly the female ones – increases the sensitivity of the metaphor Defoe employs as he allows Crusoe the requisite open space for self-realization. Simply enough, Crusoe is propelled out of his frame, and he leaves, voyaging “into the unknown”. Arriving at the geographic blank page of the island, Crusoe finds not merely physical isolation, but also a congruent inner freedom, the opportunity to inscribe his universe with a self-constructed self.

In the case of Crusoe the story frame allows for a schematic employment of a strategy that will later be embellished considerably. First of all the loss of public identity is violent and abrupt. And the sojourn on the island involves, as Michael McKillop has pointed out, a transparent act of self-creation.

In significant ways anticipating the Thoreau of Walden and Willa Cather’s heroines of the Great Plains, Crusoe moves back to a state of nature, his garments and approach to life involving him in a literal rebuilding of civilization: his own civilization. His building of self starts with his physical surroundings (nature); Crusoe conquers incapacitating fear as he builds, cultivates and, finally, masters his world. Equally important, he comes to terms with his God, which is to say he seems to find divine acceptance and sanction for his acts. The final act of repatriation is not, however, rapprochement to the divine power, for even more arduous for a Defoe protagonist is interaction with human society. Crusoe’s insecurity is strikingly shown by his reaction at seeing a human footprint on the beach, for the mere evidence of the Other, of a living being outside his solipsistic kingdom generates irrational terror.

He rushes about, obliterating any sign of his existence, and confronts the savages with a portable armory.

Thus, though Robinson Crusoe is most often seen as a development of the myth of the self-sufficient bourgeois individual, perhaps more remarkable is the contrary, the guilty fear of obliteration with which the main character struggles. It is Crusoe’s father who personifies the social and spiritual demand for stasis, motivating this sense of guilt, yet ironically enough he too embodies the characteristic that Defoe needs to escape restriction: he finds it necessary to leave his home and change his name in order to find his own solution. As Timothy J. Reiss points out, the father has achieved a state of comfortable idleness and wants Crusoe to enjoy the same; he wants the process to end – but Crusoe wants to begin afresh and compose his own story. His sin, generated by the need to break away from his socially assigned role, places
Crusoe in an extraordinary dilemma; he becomes the victim of what R. D. Laing has called “ontological insecurity,” describing a basic insecurity of identity and “being in the world.” Torn by another characteristic polar tension, then, Crusoe finds the norms supplied by a society inadequate for a satisfying existence, yet when he denies it the right to take priority over his overwhelming wanderlust, he is cut adrift without the security allowed by public sanction.

The metaphoric blank page gives Crusoe the time and space he needs to develop in ways which he feels are appropriate or necessary. The crux is that, albeit isolated, he still remains very consciously, a member of this society. An immediate and amusing sign of his awareness of public norms is, as Reiss points out, the moans and protestations of innocence when Providence drags Crusoe—or other Defoe protagonists—into doing something that is obviously undertaken volitionally (such as a voyage) but without social sanction. It is as if, abrogating responsibility for his travels, he attempts to make Providence responsible, thus gaining a measure of authoritative approval for his growing economic and political power.14 This tactic of optimistic self-deceit is necessary to shore up Crusoe’s painfully inadequate sense of self, illustrated repeatedly by an obsessive fear of being consumed.15

With great psychological perspicacity, then, Defoe shows Crusoe in continual terror of being engulfed, from the time his ship begins to sink off the coast of the island and he fears being “swallowed” by the sea, through his horrified discovery of cannibalism in his miniature universe—which as forcefully as can be imagined represents the fear of being consumed by the standards of other people. It is only gradually that Crusoe learns to cope with other people, a task far more difficult and threatening than making pots or corralling goats. Indeed, as Homer O. Brown points out, in a Defoe text the very existence of an autonomous Other can threaten the self; hence Defoe gives Crusoe Friday, over whom he exerts complete control, and through whom he gradually learns to maintain his autonomy in interaction with other human beings.16

Yet—perhaps reflecting the author as well as his protagonist—this fear does not totally recede when Crusoe leaves the island as a protected and socially accepted individual. The nightmare spectre remains, for he may be consumed by bears or wolves: an independently derived self is not lightly purchased. Although the obsessive building of shelters and accumulation of goods may give the appearance of solidity, it does not remedy Crusoe’s deep-seated insecurity.
One of the most significant of Crusoe's defences against annihilation is the written word, which seems to lend him some visibility. On the island he both maintains a journal and comments on it as he weaves a presence. However, even when not suffering in isolation, Defoe's protagonist makes himself visible through the use of another, more literal sort of blank page: I refer to his reflexive habit of drawing up contracts, all sorts of contracts, for goods and services, for work rendered, and most interestingly, to record the exchange of goods to, as Reiss notes, publicly affirm an honest emotional relationship. The most significant — and comic — example of this in Crusoe involves his tearful reunion with his trusted benefactor, the Portuguese captain, which is marked by the exchange of gold and carefully made-out receipts.

As Crusoe leaves his island, a fascinating interplay of ontological “blank pages” occurs. As noted, his own sense of achievement must be granted some measure of social approval. What happens is that Crusoe’s newly inscribed mastery of his environment is given public seal: he confirms his status in the socially acceptable, publicly visible and valid form of a virtual page, a contract, which acknowledges his continued power over the island: approval takes the ultimate form of royal status.

Though Robinson Crusoe's obsessive wandering is extreme, his need for self-actualization is representative, rather than unique. The value conflicts he faces are faced to some extent by most members of society, especially in periods of instability. His way of facing and finally mastering his problems is, however, far from the life of an ordinary individual forced to cope with problems of daily social intercourse. Far from dealing with social preconditions and boundaries, Crusoe is allowed to step over them and reach his goals on fairly much his own terms, measuring his own resources with very little hindrance until he is ready to assume his place in society from a position of power.

*Moll Flanders* seems to be a different sort of novel; here a poverty-stricken woman turns to a life of crime in order to secure her fortunes. Yet despite the difference in gender and social situation, Moll’s basic situation is that of Crusoe. Though she seems to work out her fate within society she is, as Homer O. Brown points out, “just as solitary in the midst of society” as is Crusoe.

*Moll* is however a more complex text, and this tends to obscure its arriving
at conclusions much like those of the earlier work. Of necessity, Moll is forced to engage in an extended exploration of the alternatives offered to her both within and outside the law. From the beginning, rather than fleeing, Moll is thus more firmly committed to survival in society: she is determined that she will indeed be a gentlewoman and transcend the bitter irony that the term notoriously holds for one in her social position.

Moll has simply not been trained to accept the limitations of her birth or consequences staying in her predestined place. Not only is she handsome and intelligent, she has also been schooled beyond her station and made aware of herself. The ill-advised training afforded her in youth leads to her discovery of the deadening contradictions between the potential of the individual and the strict social game-rules hardly amenable to individual merit. Because Moll is so energetic in pursuing her career of survival, it is easy to pass over the pessimism of Defoe's judgement of the possibilities of the lowly born within his culture. Moll is lovely, intelligent, skilled – but with no money, no family. Naively enough, she tends to believe in the freedom of the individual to operate on the basis of these real merits, and learns to her cost that society does not permit such an overweening assumption.

Moll is first seduced by the skillful combination of money and linguistic subterfuge: she assumes that protestations of love are binding, but learns to her cost that the only binding matters are those that are palpable: gold. In Defoe's first novel, he avoided the dilemma of confrontation by simply allowing his protagonist to develop in seclusion. The classical alternative for a female is, of course the one of which Moll herself is aware: of marrying into society. This is the solution allowed other dynamic heroines such as Jane Eyre, whose marriage allows her love and status and even, with Rochester's dire injuries, a good measure of freedom from male dominance. But Defoe pauses to examine other possible alternatives, thus placing Moll in a terrible dilemma; lucky and intelligent enough to procure the gold she so values, there is no way for her to buy the secure genteel identity she has always craved, yet which her actions must preclude.

This is why life, even materially comfortable life outside the law, is not acceptable to Moll; she wants more than material or even spiritual security in her allotted frame: she will not be satisfied until she can enjoy these things in a socially acceptable setting. The conflict generating most of the work is thus established: though wishing to gain respectability, Moll is not about to subside into a life of poverty, even if virtuous poverty: she persists in deman-
ding, somehow, a life as a "gentlewoman"\textsuperscript{20} in which she needs not spend her entire existence securing that very existence; the only life allowing her a measure of this liberty is a life outside the law. Yet, as I have noted, outlawry is hardly equivalent to liberty if, like Moll, one wishes to enjoy the rewards of society allowed only to those born to them. For a woman of her station, society allows the alternatives of either respectable poverty or sinful gain, and Moll refuses to accept either. Thus, as David Blewett demonstrates,\textsuperscript{21} though Moll becomes mistress of her various crafts, she is always distanced from her constructed identity, or identities. As she drifts further and further into demeaning crimes, there is an increasing gap between her personal ideal of self and her actual behaviour. Though she prostitutes herself, robs and nearly murders a child, there is always a schism between Moll Flanders, the actual perpetrator of these deeds, and the woman, who has only assumed the name of Moll Flanders, and who at a distance can moralize about the ethics of her deeds.

That Moll finally manages to achieve in the fullest sense what she sets out to do is her own individual victory. Her struggle is, however, prolonged and destructive, and Defoe must finally allow her the alternative granted Crusoe: without the geographic liberation of the New World the entire tone of the novel might well be far more pessimistic.\textsuperscript{22} Even when Moll first leaves for the New World, she is constrained by the incestuously imprisoning presence of her past in dreadful visibility. Returning to England, through most of the novel she attempts to achieve her ends, but she cannot achieve the security of the identity she so craves:

Interestingly enough, in the midst of a confusion of false and increasingly negative identities, the carefully inscribed page remains avowedly sincere. As with Crusoe's journal we find Defoe calling on the reader to trust the written word. In the case of Moll Flanders this is remarkable, for example as shown in the ominous realm of the professional infanticide: how is Moll to be sure that Mother Midnight is not as infamous as her name implies? Moll — and through Moll, the reader — is reassured by carefully worked out details of tickets of fare and bills of lodging. Obviously, Defoe as the creator knows that Mother Midnight can be trusted. That he chooses to affirm this with a written page strongly emphasizes the value of the metaphor discussed, for Defoe's translation of feeling and substance into inscribed pages relates directly to the modernist perception of the artist as transforming the entire self into the pages of the text, as Joyce's "squidself" in \textit{Finnegans Wake} or
D. H. Lawrence's "Man Who Died" seeing his dormant body as "a returned letter." Having a contract publicly validate authorial assertion is an artistically self-reflexive gesture, as Defoe's characters somehow gain emotional security by recording its presence on paper.

Yet, assured sisterhood (even on a contractual basis) does not fully provide a satisfactory sense of being for Moll. Despite her inner sense of existing somehow apart from her own actions, Moll Flanders is not really herself. Unlike Crusoe, who in a rush of water is stripped of his problematic identity and gradually builds up a new, as I have implied Moll's education and survival implicates her in a process of disguise that, far from permitting more free intercourse with others, demands increasing isolation and fear of betrayal instead. She assumes a series of disguises, a series of identities, which she is aware are not her own. Increasingly, her disguises are such as to alienate herself from her social identity until, steeped in crime, she acts as a male and even as an old woman in rags until finally, in Newgate, she loses touch with herself to the degree that she "degenerated into Stone." Having denied her own inner self to the point of reification and complete despair in Newgate, Moll is still able to qualify for a renewed attempt by abandoning her egotism and stepping outside herself. When she finally feels for Jemmy's fate rather than for her own, she becomes in her words "a new Body." Accordingly, she is able to trust the validity of her own religious convictions, and this time, her trip to the New World is just that.

In the colonies, like Crusoe's island an unappropriated geographical area, Moll is not only allowed to plan a feasible future, she also accepts her past. In her new account she rewrites herself as a loving mother and financially independent, and she possesses a husband whose identity as a gentleman is of her own making and offers no threat whatsoever to her new, positive identity.

As with Crusoe, the charge of hypocrisy is often levelled at Moll for her distinctly material bent. She certainly is not transformed into sainthood, for, as Paula Backschneider notes, Defoe does not take the easy way out; Moll does not show a sudden and socially acceptable change in ambition. Her uncertain reconciliation to her society and the measure of her happiness and security is her money and goods and the freedom these allow her. I suggest that these goods, like the obsessively rendered contracts, are intended to witness public approval for a private survival strategy. Moll, like other Defoe wanderers as their voyaging ends, has in a fresh space created an identity
she can freely acknowledge as her own within the law and her own conscience, she is certainly a "new Body." Since she herself no longer needs distance from her own actions, we need not doubt the sincerity of Moll's rather worldly repentance.

It can be seen, then, that with Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders and others of his novels, Defoe foregrounds ontological questions as urgent to us as to him. As Arnold Weinstein has pointed out, the common question "How to be"26 is as relevant today and as difficult to answer. Faced with the same area of need, Defoe settled on certain metaphoric tactics to shelter and liberate his protagonists in a fashion similar to the modernists of this century: understanding the innovative work of our own time thus helps us to see what is essentially important about the island of Crusoe, the blank page of Daniel Defoe.

NOTES
2. Defoe's own biography seems to reflect this constant vacillation between polarities of violation and longing as seen in his fiction. His constant political and journalistic shape-changing seems in part to reflect a struggle to survive through expanding beyond the constrictions of a static social definition, yet with the normally sanctioned rewards always in sight. See e.g. Laura Curtis, The Elusive Daniel Defoe (London: Vision Press Ltd., 1984), 11.
3. For example, as Nina Auerbach shows, Smollett makes his hero Roderick Random more socially acceptable by upgrading him from "rogue to romance here" before allowing him stature (Romantic Imprisonment [New York: Columbia University Press, 1986] 63). A most amusing example of an author compromising what seems to be his approval of an outlaw is the spectacle of Thackeray's attempt to resist the appeal of his wonderful Becky Sharp. It seems evident that the author, like so many readers, is charmed by the aggressive Becky - who begins her career by literally tossing away the prescribed text - before he finally, and with a disturbingly ambiguous irony, conforms to accepted expectations by condemning her and elevating the muted half of his pair, Amelia.
5. The case of Crusoe is rather unlike that of the later, poverty-stricken characters, for his place in the world would allow him material privileges. Yet he is driven by an obsessive lust for travel not allowed to one of his station in life.
The Blank Page of Daniel Defoe

7. Solid and stimulating as usual, Maximillian Novack touches on the possible "symbolic significance" of the island in Realism, Myth and History in Defoe's Fiction (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 37, but he does not record the symbolic possibility of the unappropriated space.

8. As Pat Rogers points out, Defoe's characters have a habit of voyaging beyond immediate social constraint (""Speaking within Compass": the Ground Covered in Two Novels by Defoe". In: Studies in the Literary Imagination [Fall 1982]: 104). Crusoe's writings are merely the most well-known examples of the wanderlust inexplicable in material terms.

9. Captain Singleton is the most obvious variation of the Crusoe solution, arriving at a more free sense of roaming – not an island, but, in the fashion associated with the characters of such modernists as Woolf and Conrad, – the entire continent of Africa. Indeed, Conrad almost certainly had the captain in mind when he named his heroic old seaman "Singleton" in The Nigger of the "Narcissus." Particularly notable is the fact, that Defoe's Singleton sails up the Congo, and sees nothing there but "horror" (Captain Singleton [London: Oxford University Press, 1969], 113). He precedes Conrad's Kurtz into unrestricted darkness.


15. As Everett Zimmerman points out, Crusoe's fear of being devoured is greater than his fear of death ("Defoe and Crusoe," in: ELH 38 [1971]: 384). This particular terror of annihilation is, according to Laing, typical of Defoe's kind of ontological insecurity. (The Divided Self, 47).

16. Brown notes that Journal of the Plague Year takes this to its greatest extreme. The narrator stays ensconced in his "safe house," like Crusoe, an irrational need to wander sometimes seizes him, and it is not the violent sea or the savages which threaten him: even being in the vicinity of another person may result in death ("The Displaced Self in the Novels of Daniel Defoe" in: ELH, 38 [1971]: 565).

17. The Discourse of Modernism, 319.

18. Robinson Crusoe, 382–383. (This is a habit we will have occasion to discuss further with Moll Flanders).


20. Much as in Colonel Jack the orphaned hero manages to become a "gentleman." In this text as well, the New World is seen as a geographic "blank page", as in the case of Moll leading to a free development of the protagonist's self.


22. As can be deduced from Roxana, the heroine is astonishingly successful in her career, yet is allowed no final "blank area" in which to reconstruct a viably positive identity. Her end is similar to that of Jay Gatsby, whose fate also shows the belief that one cannot manipulate the norms of society and remain psychically unscathed.


