

Hansa's essay

Did eighteenth century women migrate to towns mainly because of the attractions of the towns, or mainly to escape from life in the countryside?

Eighteenth century society expected women to have accomplishments such as the ability to embroider, play the piano and sing. They were supposed to be fragile, delicate and innocent; they were taught at smart boarding schools or by private tutors, social skills to fit them for the role expected of them at the time, as 'embodiments of their husbands' and fathers' status'.

Life in the country during this period of history offered little scope for the indulgence of these skills owing to the sparcity of the popuation and the difficulty of transport, as women from the higher ranks were constrained to mix only with their own kind.

Thus the lives of these well born ladies were immensely boring. It was not considered fitting that a woman should take any part in the management of a country estate, or in the country pursuits of riding, hunting or fishing as enjoyed by the men and she was therefore reduced to spend her time reading or writing letters. However, in an urban environment, it was acceptable that women could socialize on a much wider scale and even organize and plan social events, an added dimension to their very constrained lives. Because of this, and because an urban environment offered women so much more scope, not only to display their accomplishments but also to indulge their own desire for sociability, amusement and companions', the female population of England's towns expanded dramatically.

In view of the somewhat prescribed role forced upon women in the eighteenth century by the male dominated society which formulated social mores, it was inevitable that women would be attracted to the towns where the skills that society required of them could be more widely indulged and more fully displayed. In the towns there were more people of the same rank, so that women could socialize on a wider scale, and as there was public transport they had greater mobility. They therefore fled from the country in order to escape the restrictions and consequent boredom placed upon them by the very limited pastimes that a high ranking women in the eighteenth century was permitted to indulge.

In effect, I think that the high ranking women of the eighteenth century were neither mainly attracted to the towns, or escaping from the countryside, what they were seeking to do was to fulfil the very limited role with which society had burdened them as fully as was possible.