Moll Flanders Study Guide

Moll Flanders by Daniel Defoe

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Introduction

Daniel Defoe published *Moll Flanders* in 1722 after a long career of writing nonfiction. Many critics have speculated that Defoe's story of a beautiful and greedy woman who turns to crime is not a novel in the true sense but a work combining biography and fiction. Defoe (and others) wrote numerous accounts of various women in early eighteenth- century London named Moll who made their fame as thieves and pickpockets, and the criminal records of that period in London reveal the accounts of women who were arrested for stealing. Many critics and historians argue that a woman named Elizabeth Atkins, a notorious thief who died in prison in 1723, was one of Defoe's inspirations for the character of Moll Flanders.

Whatever the sources of Defoe's popular work may have been, the novel has endured nearly three hundred years of changing tastes and mores and has secured its author's position as one of the most well-respected English writers and, some say, as the father of the novel form.

Author Biography

Looking over the full life of Daniel Defoe, there seems to be little that the Englishman did not attempt or experience. He was a trainee for the ministry, a poet, a businessman, a shopkeeper, a historian, an investor, a soldier, and a writer of fictional works as well as political and social tracts. Many of his business dealings put him on the brink of financial failure, and a number of his writings landed him in jail. His political writings, though, were ultimately so well-regarded and widely quoted that, according to Paula R. Backscheider in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography,* "echoes of them exist in, for instance, the United States Constitution." In spite of this, Defoe is currently best known for his works of fiction, including *Moll Flanders.*

Defoe is believed to have been born around 1660 to James and Alice Foe in London, England. While the family was solidly middle-class, Defoe grew up in hardship, primarily because of his father's religious views. James Foe was a Nonconformist, a Protestant who refused to conform to the tenets of the restored Church of England (Anglican). Because of this, his son could not attend Oxford or Cambridge but was able to attend one of the many dissenting academies set up in England, to be trained for the ministry.

Defoe decided in the early 1680s that he was much more interested in business than in religion. He first became a hosiery merchant, then he invested in a variety of ventures, including the diving bell, civet cats, international shipping, and property. In 1691, he went bankrupt but was able to settle with his creditors, and soon thereafter he started a brick business.

Amid all of these efforts, Defoe found time to fight with the Duke of Monmouth in an unsuccessful attempt to establish a Protestant monarchy in England. In 1700, he published a poem entitled "A True-Born Englishman", a satire on those who mocked King William because he was Dutch. According to Backscheider, this became the most popular poem of the early eighteenth century.

Defoe eventually began writing for a variety of publications and enjoyed a career writing on almost every conceivable topic. In 1702, he published a pamphlet entitled *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters,* angering nearly everyone and landing him in jail for seditious libel. He wrote successfully for an assortment of political and religious causes□some diametrically opposed to each other□and both in support of and against the current government and ruler. He is reputed to be one of the most prolific writers of nonfiction in the English language to this day.

In 1719, Defoe published *Robinson Crusoe,* supposedly based on the adventures of Alexander Selkirk (a Scottish sailor and castaway). Defoe used a style of writing in which he took supposedly true events and fictionalized them in an attempt to appeal to a broad audience. In 1722, he published *Moll Flanders,* purportedly taken from the exploits of an infamous female pickpocket of the day. Although historians disagree as to the exact number of books, articles, pamphlets, poems, and other pieces attributable to Defoe, more than five hundred works have been credited to him. Defoe continued

writing almost up to his death at the approximate age of seventy on April 26, 1731, in London.

Plot Summary

The Preface

Defoe's narrator opens *Moll Flanders* as the person who has edited Moll's first-person story of her life. He implores the novel's readers to learn something from his story of a woman drawn to crime and to pay attention less to the fabulous tales of misdeeds and felonies and more to the moral of the story.

Section One

Moll Flanders relates the circumstances of her birth at London's Newgate Prison to a woman imprisoned for stealing cloth. She is reared by gypsies until she is three years old when she is trans- ferred to a home run by a woman she refers to as the nurse, who schools Moll in needlework and manners.

By the time Moll is eight, she knows that she does not intend to become a servant, even though that is what is expected of her by the town authorities, given her lack of financial means. She decides, instead, to become a "gentlewoman," like a neighbor who seems to earn her living by needlework but is actually a prostitute. Moll's innocence and energy amuse the nurse, and she decides to keep Moll around as her assistant.

Moll, because she is pretty and clever, becomes a favorite of the wealthy ladies in town, and they enjoy visiting with her and giving her money for her living expenses. Her needlework is earning her money as well.

When Moll is fourteen, the nurse dies, and Moll is taken in by one of the wealthy women. The two brothers in the new family begin to take notice of her because she is becoming a woman. The elder brother, through flattery, succeeds in getting Moll to sleep with him. He offers to keep her as his mistress and to eventually marry her. They must keep their relationship a secret.

Meanwhile, the younger brother, Robin, makes it clear that he finds Moll very attractive and wishes to marry her. Moll expresses her concern to the elder brother, who says she must accept Robin's attentions. Moll eventually realizes that she is in a bad situation and that to protect her own and the elder brother's reputations, she must marry Robin. The family approves of the match because they are impressed that Moll is reluctant to marry Robin, meaning that she is not a fortune hunter. Moll and Robin live together for five years and have two children. Robin dies, and the children go to his parents. Moll is "left loose upon the world" and acts the part of the beautiful, young widow, attending parties and living a wild life.

Section Two

Eventually Moll finds a new husband, the draper, who is a rake and is arrested for his debts. He breaks out of prison and escapes to France. Moll finds herself in a tight situation again, gives herself the name of Mrs. Flanders, and changes her address.

She moves in with a woman (a captain's widow) who gets married soon after, leaving Moll on her own again. Moll, with the help of her former roommate, devises a scheme in which rumors are spread that Moll has a huge fortune. She receives quite a few suitors and is able to choose one based upon how much he loves her. After they are married, she reveals that she does not have quite as much money as was rumored, but she is not to blame because she herself never said anything about her finances. Her suitor confesses that his finances aren't quite what he had suggested either and says that, to save money, they must live at his plantation in Virginia.

Moll and her new husband live together for a number of years in Virginia and have three children. Eventually, through discussions with her mother-in-law, Moll comes to the horrible realization that the woman is her mother, thus making her husband her brother. Moll's mother urges her to cover up the entire affair, but Moll insists that she cannot. The mother promises Moll that she will secretly leave an inheritance for her, separate from her brother/husband's if she buries this problem and stays in Virginia, but Moll decides to break the news to him. He attempts suicide and becomes ill at the news, but agrees that she should leave.

Section Three

When Moll arrives in England, she realizes that her cargo has been destroyed and that she is beginning life again with very little money and few possessions. She goes to Bath, thinking that the fashionable resort will be a good place to find a new husband, but the men there only want mistresses. Moll spends platonic time with the gentleman in Bath, a wealthy man whose wife is mentally ill, and eventually accepts money from him.

The gentleman becomes quite ill while on a trip away from Bath and asks Moll to come and nurse him back to health, which she does. They stay together for two years in a platonic relationship until a night of much wine, after which Moll becomes his mistress for six years. All is well until the gentleman becomes ill again. He escapes death but ends their relationship.

Section Four

Moll is now forty-two years old, no longer a young woman. She is interested in finding a husband again. Moll goes to Lancashire and meets with a north-country woman who claims that her brother, Jemy, is wealthy and interested in marriage. Jemy and Moll marry, but they soon discover that, though they do sincerely love one another, neither has any fortune to bring to the marriage. Moll also discovers that Jemy and the north-

country woman are former lovers and had planned this scheme to claim Moll's supposed fortune. Jemy leaves, but he and Moll promise that they will someday meet up again.

Moll returns to London where she discovers that she is again pregnant. She moves to a house run by a midwife of questionable background. In the meantime, her bank clerk friend is pressuring her through letters to marry him and offering status reports on his efforts at securing a divorce.

After she has her baby and finds a home for it, Moll marries the bank clerk. They live a comfortable life for about five years. But the bank clerk dies from grief when he loses most of their money. Moll is again out on the street with little money and two children.

Section Five

Moll begins stealing to make a living. She does not know where or how to sell the things she steals, so she visits her old friend, the midwife, whom she also calls the governess. The governess is impressed with Moll's thieving skills and talks her into stealing full-time.

Moll becomes quite accomplished at stealing and is well-known around town for her exploits. She and her partners concoct various schemes, including using a house fire to distract the owners from their property and striking a deal with a customs official over some illegal Flemish lace. Moll always comes out safe, but her accomplices are usually caught and sent to prison or executed. Moll protects her identity, even from her partners, by disguises and also by changing her name and where she lives. The governess continues encouraging her to steal and is sharing in the plunder.

Moll goes to a fair and meets the baron, who has been drinking too much. They end up sleeping together, and Moll steals from him after he passes out. The governess knows the man and develops a scheme whereby he pays for the return of his stolen goods in exchange for her keeping quiet about how they came to be stolen. Moll becomes his mistress for a year during which time Moll does not steal. After this relationship ends, Moll begins stealing again. She becomes very wealthy, thanks to her thievery, but she does not want to stop. She is proud that she is so well-known and successful. This is her undoing; she is caught trying to remove some valuable cloth from a home and is sent to Newgate Prison.

Section Six

While Moll is at Newgate Prison, she hears that Jemy has been brought in for being a highwayman. Moll is tried and sentenced to death. Both she and the governess repent of their sins.

Moll's minister somehow secures a reprieve of her death sentence, and Moll is condemned to "transportation"; she must board a ship to America and become a slave

for five years. She contrives a way to meet with Jemy. He reluctantly agrees that going to America may be better than death, and plans to seek a "transport" sentence as well.

The governess, through various dealings with the ship's captain and others, arranges to have Moll and Jemy sent to America but released from their obligations once there. Moll arranges to have tools and other supplies shipped with them so that she and Jemy can set themselves up as plantation owners.

Section Seven

Once in America, Moll discovers that her brother/husband and son are still living nearby. She desires to see them and also to see if her now-dead mother has left her any inheritance, but she does not want Jemy to know anything about her past life. She and Jemy end up buying a piece of land in southern Maryland.

Moll goes to see her brother/husband and her son in Virginia. She and her son have a joyous reunion, but she learns that her brother/husband is ill and nearly deaf. Moll discovers that her mother did leave her a small plantation that produces a yearly income. Moll does not tell her son of Jemy and does not give Jemy the entire truth of what she has been doing in Virginia.

A year later, Moll returns to Virginia to collect the income on her inherited land, whereupon she learns from her son that her brother/husband is dead. She mentions to her son that she may now want to marry again. Ultimately, she lets her son know about Jemy and gives Jemy all of the background on her previous life in Virginia. Jemy is not disturbed, and they continue to live well and prosper, returning to England "to spend the remainder of our years in sincere penitence for the wicked lives we have lived."

Preface:

Preface: Summary

An anonymous editor informs the reader that the majority of the book will be told by the main character herself: a thief who has attained the status of a Lady. However, her story has been cleaned up by the editor to be suitable for public viewing. The editor introduces some of the "lewd" events to follow but urges the reader to pay attention to the moral of the story rather than be offended by the story itself.

Preface: Analysis

Although the preface seems only to be giving the reader a taste of what he or she will be reading, there are a couple of important things going on here. While telling us about how he has cleaned up some of the content and language, and warning us not to be offended by what is to come, Defoe invites the reader into the excitement of the book. He is sincere in his attempt to present a work of moral instruction, since the chance of it being criticized for immorality was very real at the time of its publication. In fact, while the book was successful, many eighteenth-century critics did condemn *Moll Flanders* as immoral.

Defoe also plays with the conventions of the role of the narrator. He tells us that he, the editor, has altered the main character's personal account of her life. He has had to alter language, and take some parts out. Defoe illustrates that one cannot always trust the narrator's account. The reader should question whose words he or she is reading at any given time, while keeping in mind that Defoe is ultimately behind all of them.

Pages 1-15:

Pages 1-15: Summary

Ending with the line, "The fright of my condition had made such an impression upon me, that I did not want now to be a gentlewoman, but was very willing to be a servant, and that any kind of servant they thought fit to have me be."

The story begins in London. The main character, who narrates the story, cannot tell us her real name because she is still wanted for crimes she committed in the past. Many of the people who used to know her called her Moll Flanders, and so she will use that name.

Moll's mother was a thief, who was transported to America for her crime of stealing some cloth, leaving Moll behind. She remembers little of her childhood, other than traveling with some Gypsies, until the Magistrates of the town had her taken in by a woman, whom she calls her Nurse, until she was old enough to work. The Nurse is a poor woman who makes her living running a small school for children like Moll. When finally called upon to enter the workforce as a servant at eight years old, Moll was terrified and begged her Nurse to let her stay and work for her. Eventually, the Nurse agreed, and Moll barely made enough money through sewing to avoid having to go into service. The mayor's wife and her daughters, as well as other ladies of the town, met Moll and were amused by her, since she declared she wanted to be a "gentlewoman," not knowing what the word meant. She went to live with one of the ladies and her daughters for a week, and thoroughly enjoyed living like a real gentlewoman. However, at 14 years of age, Moll's Nurse suddenly died and Moll was left poor, homeless, and terrified for her situation.

Pages 1-15: Analysis

While Part 1 is partially a cute account of a young girl who thinks that being a "gentlewoman" means not having to be a servant, it is also a depressing realization of what it means to be the child of a criminal in eighteenth-century England. Defoe makes it clear that the Magistrates provide for Moll only because of their compassion, not because they have to. It would have been a very real possibility for Moll to be left to her own devices to care for herself, which at that age would have likely meant she would starve. The Magistrates also want Moll to start work at the age of eight, which terrifies Moll since she fears she will not know how to do the job, will be beaten, and possibly thrown out on the street again.

We see that there is no security in life for Moll, and that she has actually managed to do well for herself in gaining the compassion of her Nurse, who lets her stay with her rather than become a servant. She also catches the interest of the ladies of the town, one of

whom invites her to live at their home for a week. Even as a child, Moll has had to rely on herself for survival. We will see this recurring theme throughout the novel.

Pages 15-47:

Pages 15-47: Summary

Ending with the line: "For in short, I could not bear the sight of his being given to another woman, tho' I knew I was never to have him myself."

Moll's future does not look good. Luckily, the gentlewoman whom she had met while working for her Nurse took her in. There, Moll, whom they all call Betty, spent most of her time with the gentlewoman's daughters, and as a result, received a lady's education while working as a servant. The gentlewoman, however, also had two sons. The oldest son began to try to win Moll's affections by telling her how much he loved her, and even promised marriage. She believed him, and allowed him to act inappropriately towards her. Their kissing and handholding escalated to sleeping together and his protestations of love turned to monetary gifts. He excused himself from marriage for the present because he must wait until he comes into his estate, and stressed that their relationship must be kept a secret until then. It seemed, however, that Moll could not decide which she was enjoying better, her lover, or the money he had given her, which she "spent whole hours in looking upon."

After six months, the younger son, Robin, approached Moll also protesting love for her. However, his conduct was very different from his brother's. He immediately proposed marriage to her. He did not try to touch or kiss her, let alone arrange private encounters. He was not secretive about his feelings, but told his mother and sisters of his love for Moll, despite their protestations. He truly wanted to marry Moll, whereas his brother used marriage as a ploy to seduce her into sexual relations. However, Moll wanted nothing to do with Robin because she saw herself as already married to the older brother "as if the ceremony [had] pass'd."

Moll and the older brother discussed the situation, and he, seeing the opportunity as the perfect way to detach him self from Moll, urged her to marry his brother. However, Moll was very much in love with the older brother and fully expected to marry him. She was furious, and told the older brother she would rather be his whore than his brother's wife. He told her that they could remain friends, but he would no longer sleep with her, since she may become his brother's wife. The ordeal was too much for Moll and she became ill. During that time, Robin proposed marriage several times, and Moll turned him down. Her seemingly honorable behavior convinced the gentlewoman to consent to her younger son marrying a servant. The older son tried to convince Moll, and even offered her 500 pounds (British monetary unit) "to make amends for the freedoms took" with her. Moll finally consented to the marriage for fear of not having anyone at all to provide for her.

She lived with her husband for five years, and had two children. Moll was never able to love Robin, and continued to long for his brother. After five years, Robin died, and the

gentlewoman and her husband took in the children. Moll was again "left loose to the world."

Pages 15-47: Analysis

The story of the maid who marries the rich gentleman is not new. Samuel Richardson's novel, *Pamela*, is one of the most famous novels concerning that plot, after which many other novels followed, including a satire by Defoe himself called, *Shamela*. Moll's story, however, is quite different from these other works in that she is presented in as imperfect, but not evil. The tendency of authors at the time was to present the female as a virtuous "angel" or the immoral "whore." Moll has qualities of virtue and of immorality. She describes herself as lacking in morals, and tells us that the older brother could have had her for much less than he gave her, and with much less effort. However, she comes to love him, and the thought of marrying his brother is unbearable to her. She also truly thought he would marry her. Defoe is one of the few authors to create such a complex female character.

We also begin to see a theme that will come to dominate the novel: Moll as survivor. Moll has no one to depend upon if she gets into trouble, and there are no government institutions to support her. There is only herself. This knowledge is what makes up her mind as to whether she should marry Robin: she fears that otherwise she will have no one to support her. At the end of this section, we see that Moll has saved the 500 pounds given to her by the older brother. She has thought ahead and not spent one cent of it, and she now has 1200 pounds to live on after Robin's death.

This section does a great deal to develop Moll's character. We see that some of her innocence has been eroded since her childhood. We also see that domestic events do not seem to be of great concern to her. While her affair with the older brother takes up almost 30 pages, her account of her wedding, 5-year marriage, the birth of two children and her husband's death are all contained within only two pages. Clearly the affair was a more significant event in her life than the marriage was.

Pages 47-83:

Pages 47-83: Summary

Ending with the line: "I came away for England in the month of August, after I had been eight years in that country, and now a new scene of misfortunes attended me, which perhaps few women have gone thro' the like of."

Left to fend for her self, Moll found rooms for shelter and became friends with her landlord's sister, who "brought [Moll] into a world of wild company." Moll was known in the neighborhood as the "pretty widow" and had a number of suitors, but she settled on a Draper who within two years time managed to run them into bankruptcy. She also had a child by this husband.

Moll moved again, changed her name to Mrs. Flanders, and lived for half a year with another widow later married a well-off man. Moll, however, was unsuccessful at finding a husband because she did not have much money. Her newly wedded friend suggested that Moll come stay at her new home for a while, and she would tell people that Moll's fortune was larger than it really was. As a result, Moll again had her choice of a number of suitors. She chose a man whose income came from plantations in Virginia. However, she was careful to tell him that she did not have much money. Either he did not care or did not believe her at the time; so they were married. Her new husband convinced her to move to Virginia because he would make a larger income from his plantations if he lived there.

Moll and her husband lived happily in Virginia with his mother, with whom Moll became good friends. Her mother-in-law often told Moll stories of the people being transported to Virginia, many of them from England, and a great number of them from Newgate prison in London. She tells Moll her life-story and admits that she herself was transported from Newgate. The details of the story convinced Moll that her mother-in-law was also her mother, and that she had been having an incestuous relationship with her brother, by whom she had conceived three children.

Not knowing what to do, Moll kept her discovery to herself, but she was so repulsed by her husband that her behavior towards him changed dramatically. As a result, they grew apart and frequently fought with each other. Moll asked to be allowed to return to England, but her husband/brother was so angry at her recent behavior that he refused. Moll ended up telling her the problem to her mother, who advised that she stay with her husband because she was afraid the scandal would get out and they would both be ruined. Moll said she could not bring herself to do that, but she also could not see what else to do. She kept the secret for months before finally telling her husband. He was so upset that he attempted to kill himself twice. They finally decided that Moll would return to England and live there where he would support her "as a sister." In addition, after a few months, Moll would send notice of her "death" so he can later re-marry.

Pages 47-83: Analysis

Marriage plays a primary role in Defoe's novel. In this section, we see how dependent upon marriage women could be. Left on one's own, with only a little money, there were not many options for women other than to find husbands who could support them. After her second husband is imprisoned for bankruptcy, Moll becomes almost desperate to find a new husband because she has so little money left, which leads to the scheme she carries out with her friend, in which a rumor is circulated that Moll has a fortune of at least 1500 pounds. The rumor never passes Moll's lips, and she actually tells her future husband that she is poor so that he cannot blame her when he finds out it is true.

As we have seen before, Moll recognizes the necessity of taking care of herself: she does not want to leave her fate to the mercy of others and, thus, does not sit around waiting for something to happen, but instead, goes out and makes it happen herself. She moves, changes her identity, re-creates herself as a desirable, marriageable woman in order to survive. However, it is not all about money. She was forced into her first marriage with a well-off man, and was unhappy because she did not love him. Her second marriage ended in bankruptcy, though she had a good relationship with her husband, and is not angry with him afterwards.

Moll's move to Virginia gives the reader a good idea as to how the English viewed America in the early eighteenth century. Transportation of criminals was common, and as Defoe describes, many of the people who amassed fortunes there began as criminals who were able to buy land for themselves once their term of service was up.

The incest scene is an important one in Moll's story. Up until her move to Virginia, Moll has not had any family to support her if needed; Moll has had to fend for herself. It is ironic that the very thing that ruins her chance at happiness is her reunion with her long-lost mother, which would normally be something that would add to her newfound happiness. She gains a mother and a brother, but the way in which she finds them leaves her out on her own again.

Pages 83-99:

Pages 83-99: Summary

Ending with the line: "but I leave the readers of these things to their own just reflections, which they will be more able to make effectual than I, who soon forgot myself, and am therefore but a very indifferent monitor."

Moll returned to England, and brought enough wealth with her from Virginia to set herself up as a somewhat wealthy widow and to take care of herself for some time. However, the ship carrying her cargo ran into some bad weather, and most of her cargo was lost or ruined. Moll moved to Bath, because it was quite cheap to live there, and again hoped to find a husband. She quickly learned that at Bath "men find a mistress sometimes, but very rarely look for a wife."

After some time, she met a man with whom she became close friends and spent most of her time with him. Her landlady made him aware of Moll's financial situation, and he began to give her money for support. He became very ill, and Moll nursed him through it as if she were his wife. She even slept on a couch in his room until he was well again. He regained his health and their friendship continued, until one day when he told Moll that he cared for her so much that he could sleep naked beside her and not make any improper advances. Moll had some business in Bristol, and her friend accompanied her there, and he took the opportunity to prove his earlier statement. He and Moll slept in the same bed together, but did not do anything else, although Moll admitted she would not have minded if he had tried.

Their relationship continued this way for two years, until one night when they were in bed together, as before and Moll told him she would not mind if he broke his promise of not touching her. They had sex, and they were awkward and repentant the next morning. However, they got over those feelings quite quickly, and "repeat the crime as often as [they] pleas'd" until, six months later, Moll discovered she was pregnant. Her "friend" promised to take care of her and their son financially, and he moved them to London near where he lived.

They continued their affair for six years. During that time, they had two more children together, both of whom died. Moll did not feel too guilty about their relationship because her lover's wife was "distemper'd in her head" and was not really a wife at all to him. Moll's relationship with this man, which she refers to as the height of her prosperity, ended when he became ill again. She could not nurse him because he was with his wife's family, and he almost died. Because of his near death experience, Moll's lover came to repent his actions with her, and refused to see her again, but he said he would care for their 5-year-old son. Moll said it was "death" for her to part with her son, but she did so because she did not think she could provide for him. Worried for her financial situation, Moll asked the gentleman for 50 pounds to help her get back to Virginia, and she promised never to bother him again.

Pages 83-99: Analysis

The character of the gentleman who becomes Moll's lover is somewhat strange. He professes his respect for Moll and promises he would not act inappropriately if they should be naked in bed together. The very act of being naked with her in bed, however, is just as inappropriate as if he had had sex with her. It is difficult to define exactly what their relationship is during those two years. It is also interesting to note that he believes he is behaving morally by abandoning Moll and his son after his near death experience.

Another interesting element of this scene is the lack of emotional description. Defoe does not tell us what Moll and the gentleman feel about each other, or if there is any emotion there at all. When her lover falls ill for the second time, Moll is very upset, but Defoe stresses her fear of losing her financial support, not her fear that her lover will die. The character of Moll has often been criticized for using marriage only as a source of money. However, until this point, Moll has always been selective with whom she chooses to marry. After her first husband dies, Moll refuses to marry many of the men who offer marriage because they are dull. She chooses someone she believes she will be happy with. She does the same with her third husband. Although Moll is looking for financial stability, she is also looking for happiness. However, this affair seems to be different. Moll does not hesitate to promise never to bother her lover again, and is quick to get some money from him first.

Pages 99-125:

Pages 99-125: Summary

Ending with the line: "he likewise let me know how to write a litter to him, so that he said he wou'd be sure to receive it."

At forty-two years old, Moll was afraid for her financial situation because living in London was very expensive. She, again, circulated the rumor that she was a rich widow hoping to attract a husband. She met a woman from North England who constantly spoke about how much cheaper it was to live where she is from, and she invited Moll to come with her there to meet her well-off friends and relatives. Moll agreed to go, but wanted to take care of her financial affairs before she left. She wanted to put her money in a bank, but she needed someone to help her manage her money. She was introduced to a clerk whom she had a meeting with and found to be very honest. They met at his house to go over some business and Moll found that he had made quite a nice little life for himself. He proposed marriage to her, which she was tempted to accept after seeing his house, but he was married. The clerk told her that his wife had cheated on him and left him, but Moll wanted him to get a formal divorce from his wife before any honest woman would think of marrying him. She also acted indifferent to his proposal in order to keep him interested. However, Moll thought she might find a richer husband when she goes north. Therefore, she told the clerk to contact her when he has divorced, and she may marry him. She planned to use the clerk as a back-up plan.

Moll then went north with her "friend" where she was wined and dined, since everyone believed her to be a woman of fortune. Moll's friend introduced her to a man she claimed was her brother and was worth over 1000 pounds a year. Moll was quite taken with the man's appearance and by his descriptions of his rich lifestyle, and they are married. The night after their marriage, however, Moll learned that the only reason the man married her was because his sister told him Moll had a fortune of 15,000 pounds. There was a confrontation between the three of them, and Moll found out that the man also had no money, and his "sister" was actually his mistress of two years who was paid 100 pounds for finding him a rich woman to marry.

Moll was not angry with her new husband, whose name we learn is James. He was a gentleman whose fortune had been lost, and she felt pity for him. Moll described him as "a lovely person indeed…of generous principles, good sense, and of abundance of good humour." The next day, Moll awoke to find James gone, and he had left a letter in which he apologized for what he had done. He explained that he had left because he could support her. Moll was extremely upset and claimed that she "would have gone with him thro' the world." She said that she would give him all she had if he would only come back to her.

James did return some hours later because he needed to see Moll again. They rapturously embraced and expressed their happiness to see each other again.

However, it was short-lived. James traveled with Moll a short distance on her way to London, and James planned to leave. Moll asked that he stay with her for 2 weeks while they try to figure out a way they can stay together. James agreed, and Moll suggested they move to America to try to build a fortune there. James would rather try to do the same in Ireland, since it was closer, but he wanted to see if he could be successful at it before he allowing Moll to come with him. He agreed to send for her if he was able to make a living in Ireland, but told her that she could marry someone else if she wanted to. After a month, Moll continued to London, and James presumably went to Ireland.

Pages 99-125: Analysis

Moll finally is beaten at her own game when James poses as a rich bachelor, and convinces Moll to marry him. It is interesting, though, that when Moll finds out about the scheme, she calls her friend, James' accomplice, a "she-devil" and she is very angry with her, whereas, her regard for James seems to increase. Unlike her last relationship, which seems to have been completely devoid of emotion though it lasted upwards of six years, this relationship is the most passionate we've seen since Moll's infatuation with the rich older brother at the beginning of the novel.

Some critics have claimed that James is Moll's one true love in the novel. She says she will give everything she has to him if he will come back to her, and is willing to walk the world begging for her bread. Moll has never displayed this kind of behavior before. However, when James does come back, she is given the chance to stand by him and does not. When James says he would like to try to make a living in Ireland, Moll is relieved that he does not ask her to come and help fund the experiment with her money.

While Moll's behavior can seem confusing, it is likely that she recognizes some of herself in James and admires him for it. We are told that he is an honest person, a gentleman whose wealth has unfortunately been reduced and, like Moll, James is only trying to survive. Neither of them intends to hurt anyone; their intentions are only those of self-preservation.

Pages 125-148:

Pages 125-148: Summary

Ending with the line: "it will certainly make them think not of sparing what they have only, but of looking up to heaven for support, and of the wise man's prayer, give me not poverty lest I steal."

Upon her return from London, Moll discovered she was pregnant, throwing a wrench into her plan of marrying the bank clerk, with whom she corresponded during her time in the north. Moll also worried about where she would have the child because town magistrates would want proof of income from her, which she did not have. Luckily, the landlady of the building she had taken a room at, knew of a woman who ran a house for women with problems like hers. Moll moved there for the duration of her pregnancy. The woman who ran the establishment, whom Moll calls "governess," suggests terminating the pregnancy, but Moll would not consider it. She later suggested adoption, which Moll also, at first, would not consider. However, Moll's worried about providing for the child, and the governess' assurances that her child would be treated well finally convinced her.

Moll was now going to meet with the clerk and marry him. However, she told him that she had been in the north all of this time, and so she traveled a little north to appear that she was coming in to town from there. They met in a town called Brickill and they were married that evening at the inn. Moll felt very badly that the clerk has been married to "a whore" and he was now marrying another far worse whore who has slept with two brothers as well as her own brother. She promised herself that she would make up for it by being a good and dutiful wife.

The morning following the wedding ceremony, Moll was shocked when her previous husband, James, showed up at the inn with two other men. She worried that he had learned of her new marriage and had come to claim her for himself. However, James did not know Moll was at the inn and left within a couple of hours. Later that day a magistrate followed by a mob arrived looking for three men who robbed some coaches. Everyone at the inn assumed they are looking for James and the two men that were with him. Moll, however, assured the magistrate that she knew one of the men to be an honest and well-to-do person who could not possibly be a highwayman. The magistrate was satisfied, and he and the mob gave up their chase.

Moll returned to London to live with her new husband and had two children with him. They lived a comfortable existence until her husband suffered a considerable loss of money. Moll encouraged her husband, knowing that if he worked hard, he could recover what was lost. However, he was inconsolable and died when Moll was 48.

Pages 125-148: Analysis

Moll's governess is an interesting addition to Moll's story. She cares for Moll during her pregnancy and, as Moll reports, is very kind to her. However, her kindness does not stem from emotional attachment, but from good business sense. Pregnant women are the governess' business, and she knows how to treat them. Moll frequently comments on the governess' keen business sense and her efficiency at running her establishment. Since, to her, pregnancy and birth are business, the governess can also suggest abortion and adoption without scruple. This ability is horrendous to the reader and to Moll who will not consider either option. Unlike Moll, the governess does not agree that a child needs its mother's love, but can be cared for just as well by a paid nurse. Although the reader may be shocked that Moll finally agrees to adoption, it should be understood that Moll's fears of poverty are real and terrifying for her. If she was to fall victim to poverty, which she so dreaded, so would her child. This section is full of Moll's feelings for her child and reluctance to give him up. However, only those with money can be virtuous (a theme that runs throughout the novel) and so, Moll gives up her child.

Defoe hints that the reader should view the governess differently from Moll's description of her as kind, caring, and efficient in her business. At one point, the governess is referred to as an "old Beldam," a term carrying the connotation of 'witch' or 'hag.' She is trying to convince Moll that adoption is the best choice for Moll and strokes her face while "going on in her drolling way." In addition, Moll wonders if the "creature" is a "witch" when she asks if Moll was raised by her own mother.

Moll's life with her new husband is comfortable and secure, and Moll believes herself a reformed woman. She "wept over the remembrance of past follies, and the dreadful extravagances of a wicked life." A theme begins to emerge here that virtue and morality are closely linked to security. Moll is able to reform herself because she now has the means to do so. Her husband has been a virtuous man because he has been successful. However, when his business fails, he no longer possesses the moral strength he once had, and is unable to rebuild his business to protect his family. Instead, he gives up, and dies. Moll, defending her past actions, says that she was "prompted by the worst of devils, Poverty." In other words, Defoe seems to suggest that sinners and/or criminals should not be too harshly judged, since many were only acting in order to survive. This idea is also evident in Virginia when Moll's mother tells her how most of the people living in the colony are former criminals who have managed to make lives for themselves.

Pages 148-174:

Pages 148-174: Summary

Ending with the line: "but was soon I tir'd of that disguise, as I have said, for indeed it expos'd me to too many difficulties."

Without a husband to support her, Moll again worried about her financial situation. She left her house and found a cheaper place to live-- everyday worrying that she would run out of money. She lived like this for a year, until one day she was out for a walk and saw a woman in a shop not paying attention to her bundle. Moll seized the opportunity to steals the woman's bundle, which turned out to be some linen, some silver dishes, three silk handkerchiefs and a little bit of money. Moll instantly repented what she had done. However, her poverty-stricken condition hardened her heart into acceptance. Moll then lured a child into an alley and stole her gold necklace, without the child knowing what Moll had done. Moll justified this action by blaming the negligence of the mother but was frightened for momentarily having considered killing the child to silence her.

Moll began to walk around town frequently to see if any opportunities presented themselves, which they often did, and Moll took advantage of them. One time a thief, being pursued, threw his sack of stolen linen in an alley behind Moll so he could retrieve it later, should he get away. Moll took it for herself. Another time, Moll saw two rings in a window. After tapping on the window to see if anyone was there, Moll broke the glass and took the rings. Not sure how to turn her stolen goods into money, Moll decided to contact her former governess for advice. The governess has had some bad luck with her business, and had since turned pawnbroker; she was, thus, able to take Moll's goods off her hands. The governess also offered Moll a room in her building for cheap, so Moll moved in and made money, for a while, by sewing.

Moll could not find much sewing work, and her governess suggested she try stealing again. Moll resisted the suggestion, partly because she did not know how to do it properly. The governess set Moll up with a woman who knew the business and taught Moll. They specialized in stealing watches, and they became quite rich. Moll considered returning to the honest business of sewing, but she said "poverty brought [her] into the mire, so avarice kept [her] in." Moll had become greedy; she could make far more money by stealing than by sewing. She decided to continue her thievery until she had 400 or 500 pounds so she would not have to work at all. Even when her "teacher" is caught stealing, put in Newgate prison and later hanged, Moll did not consider abandoning her newfound trade.

Moll eventually began to blame her continued thievery on her governess. Moll claimed that she often considered stopping her illegal activities, but each time her governess convinced her to do one more job. Moll learned that her governess was once a thief, and was transported for it, but she managed to talk/buy her way off the ship when it

stopped in Ireland. The governess knew thievery and taught Moll how to be a better thief.

Moll continued her successful career as a thief, avoiding capture because she was always very careful and did not take great risks. Many of the other people "in the business" knew of Moll and hated her because she had never been caught, while they had. They gave her the name of Moll Flanders. Some of these people vowed to get Moll caught. Moll was frightened by this, and stayed indoors. The governess, however, wanted Moll to continue her thievery and suggested she dress up in men's clothes to do her work. The governess also paired Moll with another thief—a man. The man never knew Moll was a woman. Her partner proposed a theft that Moll thought was too risky and she did not participate, but she was with him when he committed the crime. A mob chased them both. He was caught, but Moll ran into the house she shared with her governess, quickly changing into her own clothes. Since the thief they were looking for was a man, the mob gave up the chase when a constable searched the house, finding only Moll and her governess. Her partner, while in custody, tried to give information about the thief that was with him at the robbery. However, not ever having known his partner was a woman, his information was of no help, and he was hanged, much to Moll's relief.

Pages 148-174: Analysis

At the beginning of the novel, Defoe claims that the reader "will have something of Instruction" from his book. The prologue suggests that the reader will learn to avoid the vices that ensnared Moll. However, much of the novel to this point has taught that it is not easy to be virtuous when living in poverty. Moll cites this as the reason she turned to crime to support herself. The novel works against such black and white notions of people as good or bad, showing the reader that a good person may steal if need demands it. Therefore, while the reader should also be learning what an evil thing thievery is, thievery is depicted as far more profitable than honest work, and possible to get away with. Defoe also gives the reader tips on how to be a successful thief, while claiming to teach the reader how to avoid being robbed. It is also suspicious that Defoe spends so much time detailing Moll's crimes, while years of her life while she is married and having children are glossed over.

These scenes also provide a rare perspective of eighteenth century life: most novels represent only the upper classes. It is also somewhat alarming to see the harshness of the judicial system with which people lived in the eighteenth century. Moll's mother was transported for stealing some cloth, and her male accomplice is hanged for the same crime. The judicial system was unfair as well as harsh. Remember that Moll is able to appease the authorities' suspicions of James as a highwayman by telling them he is an honest gentleman of worth, i.e. he is wealthy. A man with little money would not have fared so well.

Pages 174-212:

Pages 174-212: Summary

Ending with the line: "so I came off with flying colours, tho' from an affair, in which I was at the very brink of destruction."

Moll laid low for a while, knowing that if she was caught she would be treated as an "old offender" because her name had been known at Newgate for so long. One evening, however, she met a man at a gaming house who took her for a ride in his coach. He was very drunk, and after they had sex, he fell asleep. Moll robbed him and quietly slipped out of the coach.

After hearing Moll's description of the man, the governess was sure she knew who the man is. She went to see him at his home and told him she knew exactly what happened to him (he was claiming to have been robbed by bandits). She assured the man of her knowledge, but she assured him she was not there to blackmail him, only to assist him if needed. The man, a baronet, was embarrassed, but he asks if she could get his gold watch back for him—he would be happy to pay for it. The governess sold back everything Moll stole from the Baronet, except for his sword, which she gave him free. He also asked if he could see Moll again. Moll, at first, refused, but her governess convinced her. The Baronet visited Moll regularly at her governess' house for about a year, and she was able to make a satisfactory living from the money he paid her for sleeping with him.

Moll returned to thievery after her relationship with the Baronet had ended. One day she was strolling about town dressed as a widow, waiting to see if an opportunity would present itself, when a mercer's journeyman seized her for stealing some cloth. Moll had obviously not committed the crime, but she was brought to the mercer's shop where he confirmed that she was not the person who had robbed him. The journeyman, however, swore she was the thief, refused to let Moll go and verbally abused her. She presented herself as a gentlewoman who was being wronged by such accusations, and she acted accordingly. Some other men who work in the shop eventually brought the real thief to the shop.

Moll pressed charges against the men who held her against her will and unjustly accused her of being a thief. The Justice could only reprove the men and imprison the journeyman for assaulting Moll and the Constable. Moll then sued them for their treatment of her. She settled out of court and received 150 pounds from the mercer who paid her legal fees and provided her with a silk dress. The journeyman, being poor, was let off with an apology. Moll now had a fortune of 700 pounds in cash as well as linens, plates, and other various stolen goods. She was the richest thief in England.

Moll did not stop "going abroad" as she called her thievery. She dressed up as a beggar woman, she but could not make anything of it because people were too afraid to go

near her. That evening she was standing near a tavern when a man left his horse with a bartender standing outside. The bartender was called away and he left the horse with Moll, who walked away with it. Upon getting the horse home, however, neither she nor her governess knew what to do with it. Therefore, they gave it back.

Moll was invited to work with counterfeiters and with a gang of housebreakers. However, she was not interested in either offer- they were both too risky.

Moll related stealing 20 pounds worth of lace and almost being caught. Another time, she saw two young, wealthy girls at St. James's Park. She asked their footman a number of questions about them, which he was happy to answer. Moll then approached the girls as if she was an old friend of their parents, since she now knew all about them and their family. The King passed by and Moll lifted the older girl, Lady Betty, so she could have a better view, and stole her gold watch from her. Moll then pretended to be separated from them by the crowd and she left. She found out later that Lady Betty noticed her missing watch not long after Moll had left, and she sent her footman after Moll.

Moll entered a gambling house and pretended she did not know how to play very well and did not want to bet her own money because the men's wagers are too high for her. One of the men gave her his money to wager. Moll played well and was able to win money for him, while at the same time slipping some into her pocket. When she finally decided to leave, the man split the money she won with her, giving her 30 pounds. Moll walked away with 73 pounds including the money she stole. Although she was able to bring away a large amount of money, Moll decided not to gamble again for fear that she would become addicted to it.

The governess suggested that since she and Moll had saved so much money for themselves, they should stop their illegal practices. However, Moll did not want to stop. She went to the country and stole a man's trunk but left it at an inn, afraid that she would be caught with something so large. She was careful to make tracing her back to London difficult in case she was being pursued.

Moll attempted another plot when walking past a silversmith's shop. She saw it was empty and planned to take some of the plates. Just as she was about to lay her hands on it, a neighbor seized her. Moll called out and stamped her foot just before he does so. When the silversmith and his wife came in, followed by a crowd of people, Moll claimed to have come into the shop to buy spoons and stamped her foot and called out to the family when she saw that the shop was empty. A passing Alderman was called in to decide the case. Luckily, Moll had an old spoon with her that she said she brought for the silversmith to use as a pattern. Her story stood up better than that of the man who seized her, and she is judged innocent. The alderman suggested that Moll should still buy the spoons she came for. Moll pulled out her purse full of money and did so, convincing the Alderman that Moll was telling the truth.

Pages 174-212: Analysis

Moll's relationship with the Baronet is the first instance of what we would recognize today as prostitution. Although her first lover gave Moll money, the older brother of the household she lived in, that was a relationship that involved love (at least on her side). Many readers have been shocked that Moll engages in prostitution. However, her earlier attempts to find a husband to support her were not very different from her relationship with the Baronet. In all cases, Moll was looking for a man to support her, and with whom she would be expected to sleep with. Emotion was not a primary factor in most of her relationships.

It should also be noted that prostitution was a common trade for women of lower classes. A woman who was unskilled, or who was not well connected in her community had few resources other than thievery or prostitution.

Moll's run-in with the mercer and his journeyman is amusing since she is mistakenly accused of a crime, but was planning to commit a crime if the opportunity presented itself. Moll is not only able to clear herself of the crime, but to profit from it by presenting herself as a wealthy widow. Mutability of identity is a theme that runs throughout the novel. Much of Moll's success comes from her ability to change her identity as needed. She moves across town and changes her name in order to pretend she is a wealthy widow and attract a new husband. She disguises herself as a man to protect her identity when stealing. She pretends to be a wealthy woman in a crowd whose watch has been stolen, when she herself has tried to steal a watch. She always manages to keep her identity hidden from those around her, even her husbands. Moll's cleverness and ability to adapt quickly to the situation at hand are what make her successful, and are what make readers view her as a heroine despite her apparent lack of morals.

It is made clear that Moll no longer needs to continue stealing. She has more than enough money to support herself. Her continued refusal to give up her illegal trade is somewhat confusing, especially considering all of her narrow escapes. Moll cites different reasons for not quitting: the devil, greed and especially her governess' encouragement to continue. However, after awhile, even the governess suggests they retire, but Moll refuses and does not even try to give an excuse. A plausible reason may be that Moll has become addicted to the 'rush' of stealing; she now derives pleasure from the act. This idea is supported by Moll and her governess both deciding that Moll should not try her gambling scheme again, despite the large amount of money she was able to obtain. Both women seem to recognize an addictive tendency in Moll that is dangerous. It is what keeps her stealing, and what would ruin her with gambling.

Pages 212-250:

Pages 212-250: Summary

Ending with the line: "we set sail again and in two and forty days came safe to coast of Virginia."

Moll was not put off from stealing by all of her close calls. She tried to steal some brocaded silk, but two women who work in the shop caught her. Moll pleaded with the master and mistress of the shop to have mercy on her; she is poor, and they lost nothing, and she would pay for what she tried to steal, even though they have it back. The mistress was willing to let Moll go, but the other two women had already brought a constable, and they testified that Moll was trying to leave the store with the silk. The master and mistress had no choice but to let the constable take her.

Moll was committed into Newgate prison. She was horrified of the place, so much so that she could not express it in words. She asked another prisoner how she was not bothered by the place. The woman told her that one gets used to it, which Moll found impossible to believe. However, after a time, she too became used to the place. She described herself as having "degenerated into stone; I turned first stupid and senseless, the brutish and thoughtless, and at last raving mad as any of them were." Her governess, meanwhile, tried everything she could to get Moll out. She tried to bribe the two women who caught Moll, as well as their master, but none of them would agree. She also tried to bribe some of the officials to find that there was not enough evidence to try Moll, but she was unsuccessful because of the determination of the two women who caught Moll.

Three highwaymen created a stir in the prison when they were brought in for robbery. Moll was shocked to find that the captain of the band was her Lancashire husband James, and she felt guilt over being the reason he had to turn to thievery. However, she felt no repentance for her own crimes, only for the fact that he was being punished for them, and that he will most likely be hanged.

Moll was tried for her crime. The two "jades" that took her testified against her and tried to make the crime sound as bad as possible. Moll tried to say that she was not going to steal, but she was only bringing the silk into the better light by the door to look at it—no one believed her claim. During sentencing she pleaded for mercy, pointing out that she did not break into anything, no one lost anything, and the storeowner himself had urged mercy. However, she was sentenced to death anyway. The governess took the fault on herself for encouraging Moll and becomes truly repentant of her past life.

The governess sent a minister to Moll to help prepare her for her hanging. Moll said that for the first time she became truly repentant for her past life. The minister believed this also and got Moll a reprieve, meaning she would not have to be hanged just yet, but she was not pardoned either. Moll's governess had been very ill since Moll's sentencing but

was overjoyed at her reprieve and began trying to get her transported rather than hanged.

Moll also derived a way to see James. There had not been enough evidence to try him yet, but the officials were waiting for people who could provide evidence against him to come forward. Moll claimed she was robbed by three highwaymen and went to see James to confirm if he was one of them. James did not recognize Moll at first. When she revealed herself, he was upset that she could be so cruel as to claim he robbed her. Moll explained it was a ploy to come and see him, and she told him she was also a prisoner at Newgate. He told her about his adventures, which the reader does not get to hear much of. However, most of the time was spent with Moll trying to convince James to apply for transportation. He believed it was beneath him as a gentleman and that death was preferable. However, Moll assured him he would not have to do service there, and they could make a life for themselves. He agreed, but hoped, as she said before, that he could somehow buy his way off the ship in Ireland. Circumstances prevented this, however, since he was allowed transportation because a powerful friend put in a good word for him. As a result, if James were to return, his friend would also have been held accountable.

Moll's governess was also successful in getting Moll approved for transport. Moll was already aboard the ship and her governess scrambled to get James on the same ship. James was depressed when he first arrived on the ship because he was being transported as a prisoner, rather than being allowed to transport himself as a gentleman as he was promised earlier. Moll was able to get herself and James better treatment on the ship than the other prisoners by presenting herself as a gentlewoman who had an unfortunate turn of luck. The captain was sympathetic and they were treated as regular passengers: given their own room, allowed to walk above-decks and dine with the captain and the other passengers. Moll's governess provided her with clothing, bedding, money and much of the goods Moll stole. With some of their money, Moll and James had the governess buy them everything they would need to live as planters when they arrive in Virginia, since such things were far cheaper in England, and money was of little use there. James' spirits were heightened by their better treatment on the ship and the prospect of their new life in Virginia. Moll tearfully said goodbye to her governess whom she loved more than her mother and never her saw again.

Pages 212-250: Analysis

Defoe presents Newgate as a terrifying place, as we see when Moll is first imprisoned there. Its horror is indescribable except as an "emblem of hell itself." What is more terrifying is the effect it has on people who are put there. Moll describes the other prisoners as mad. The woman she speaks with, like the other prisoners, has gotten used to the terrors of the prison, and she is now quite comfortable there. Moll herself "degenerated into stone." Earlier in the novel, Moll's mother says Newgate is "a cursed place" because it produces "thieves and rogues," which is the opposite purpose of a prison, which is supposed to correct such people. We see the evidence of this when Moll, as a result of her imprisonment in Newgate, "turn'd first stupid and senseless, then

brutish and thoughtless, and at last raving mad as any of [the other prisoners] were." Newgate makes Moll worse than she was.

The degenerative effect of Newgate may partly be attributed to the lack of belief in the afterlife depicted in the prisoners. When Moll first arrives at the prison, she talks with another inmate who dances and sings about possibly being hanged. She tells Moll she is not sad because she is only going to be hanged, and that will be the end of her—so why should anything matter? Also, the day Moll was supposed to be hanged, she sees six other prisoners being taken to their death. The prisoners not being taken out made a great racket, some crying for them, some wishing them well, others damning those who had testified against them, and "some few, but very few" prayed for them. There is a distinct lack of belief in an afterlife and, thus, religion in the prisoners of Newgate. This fact ties in with a theme seen in other parts of the novel: that morality is something for the wealthy. Defoe seems to extend that idea to encompass religion also.

Moll herself does not repent of the things she has done, only for being punished for them. Later, when she is on the verge of being hanged, Moll claims she truly repents. However, she admits her repentance is not so strong once she knows she will not die.

Once onboard the ship, Moll immediately makes friends with a boatswain and sees about improving her living conditions on board. She is so successful that they are invited to dine with the captain, and he trusts them enough to let them leave the ship whenever it docks for any length of time. James, in contrast, is depressed when he comes on board because he is being treated as a common prisoner, but does nothing about it. Moll is the only one that takes the initiative to improve their situation. She also thinks to buy supplies for themselves before they arrive in Virginia. Like Moll's bank clerk husband, James is unable to adapt when things are not going his way. If not for her, James would have most likely been hanged. In addition, Moll's Virginia husband tried to kill himself when he learned he was married to his sister. The men of the novel are consistently less able than the women are (i.e. Moll and her governess) to adapt to life's unfortunate events and survive.

Pages 250-271:

Pages 250-271: Summary

Moll and James arrived in Virginia. The captain found a planter to buy the couple as servants. They all had a drink together, and the planter gave them certificates of discharge—they were now free to do what they wanted. Moll secretly inquired after her mother, former husband and her son. A local woman told her that the old woman (Moll's mother) was dead, and she took Moll to see the place where her husband and son live. Moll saw her son from afar and she was overcome with emotion. She struggled to think of a way that she could make herself known to her son and to get access to whatever her mother left for her when she died without James finding out. She did not want him to know of her marriage to her brother. Moll's thoughts made her melancholy, which James noticed. She told him it was because some of her family members lived in the town they were staying in, and she was worried they would discover her.

They agreed that they should settle somewhere else, since they did not want it known that they were transported criminals, but Moll did not want to leave without seeing her son. They left, but they decided on Carolina, a place from which Moll could easily visit her son later. They did not make it to Carolina. They arrived in a place called Philip's Point to discover the ship they were to take has left. However, Philip's Point was nice, and they were well received by the people there, and so, decided to stay. After a year, they had 50 acres cleared with tobacco and corn crops started.

Moll returned to where her son and former husband lived, while James stayed at Philip's Point to continue running the business. He thought Moll was going to see a brother and her nephews. Upon arrival, Moll sent a letter to her husband/brother telling him she was in town, but she was not there to cause trouble; she only wanted to see her son and inquire about the legacy left by her mother. Her brother never saw the letter. Because her brother had lost most of his sight, his son opened his letters for him. After receiving Moll's letter, he returned with the messenger to see her. She was worried as to how he would react to her, but he hugged her affectionately and cried, happy to see her. Moll "can neither express or describe the joy that touch'd [her] very soul" at seeing her son. They decided that Moll should not reveal herself to her brother since he was old, infirm, and his mind was somewhat weak.

Moll stayed in town for 5 weeks, during which time she learned that her mother left her a small plantation. Her son would continue to run it as he had been doing and would give her the income from it. She also had papers drawn up that gave the plantation to him upon her death. Moll said that the time she spent with her son was of the best she had ever had. They were both sad when she left. Moll told her son that she lived at a friend's plantation on the other side of the Bay from him, not wanting to admit she had married again.

Moll returned to her home and told James all about her trip, only lying about her son's identity. She brought with her a great deal of livestock and supplies—all gifts from her son. Their plantation continued to flourish, and in their second year, Moll wrote to her governess to buy certain things with the 250 pounds she left with her and to send it all over to them. Clothes, linen, tools, tack, servants and gifts for her husband all arrive. James worried that Moll bought it all on credit and was running them into debt. She told him about the extra money she left in England, having not wanted to risk taking it all at once. James said that he was deceived when he married her in Lancashire—he really did marry a woman of fortune.

During their second year on the plantation, Moll went to visit her son again and learned that her brother had died. Moll told her son that she was going to marry a man who had a plantation near her now that her brother is dead. Although she was lying about the specifics, Moll wanted her son to know she married so he could visit her. She also finally told James the truth about her son and her husband that turned out to be her brother. He had no problem with what she told him, other than that she hid it from him for so long. "Thus," as Moll tells us, "all these little difficulties were made easy, and [they] lived together with the greatest kindness and comfort imaginable."

They continued to live on their plantation for eight years, making 300 pounds a year from it. After that time, they returned to England to "live the remainder of [their] years in sincere penitence for the wicked lives [they] have lived."

Pages 250-271: Analysis

Money plays an important role right up until the end of the novel. It is what gets Moll and James better treatment on the ship, and what allows them to buy their way out of the service they were supposed to do as part of their sentencing. As a result, Moll and James are able to start a new life for themselves.

Also throughout the novel, Moll has had to constantly change and conceal her identity from those around her. Here we see her having to play two different roles at once. Because of her having to create so many different identities, Moll has had to keep secrets from everyone around her. Until this point in the novel, she has not commented on having to conceal things about herself from others. However, in this section Moll reveals how difficult it is to keep such secrets, and how hard it has been on her. Moll's tranquility in her later life can be partly attributed to the fact that she has been able to tell most of her secrets to someone. Her governess knows all about her thievery, and her husband knows her secret about her marriage to her brother.

This last part of the novel gives us a glimpse of English colonies in America, although not all of the day-to-day details. Moll comments on the large number of servants needed to run such an operation, as well as the amount of supplies needed. However, plantation life is presented primarily as a good means for making money.

In the end, Moll and her husband live happily ever after in England rather than America, as wealthy and virtuous penitents. Do not forget that being virtuous requires wealth, as Defoe has shown us throughout the novel. In addition, one might wonder how penitent Moll and James are since they do not seem to have any qualms about living off money based Moll's thievery and James' banditry. Defoe never tells readers if we are supposed to view Moll and James as good or bad, and seems to suggest that we should think neither. By presenting Moll as a real, upper-class woman writing her life's story, but not revealing her name, Defoe suggests that his readership should look around them and wonder which of them has such a shady past. Defoe creates a character that lives in the grey area of eighteenth-century morality, causing his contemporaneous readers to question the value system they live with, and shading the area between "good" and "bad" for readers of any generation.

Characters

The Bank Clerk

Moll meets the bank clerk just before she is about to go to Lancashire and feels that she needs someone to hold her money in London while she is away. He almost immediately expresses romantic interest in her, telling Moll that his wife is a whore. Moll likes him, noting that he is a stable man, but she puts off his advances for some time, until he is able to divorce his wife. They eventually marry, have children, and live happily until the bank clerk dies from grief over losing most of the family's money.

The Draper

The draper is Moll's second husband. During her marriage to him, Moll says she "had the pleasure of seeing a great deal of my money spent upon myself." The draper ends up in prison for failing to pay his debts but escapes and flees to France, leaving Moll with "a husband, and no husband." Because of the draper's bad credit, Moll changes her name to Mrs. Flanders and moves to the Mint, a neighborhood where debtors find legal sanctuary.

The Elder Brother

The elder brother is Moll's first love, a handsome but tricky young man. His mother and sisters find Moll clever and ask her to live with them after the woman who originally took in Moll dies. The elder brother flatters Moll and eventually gets her into his bed with promises of marriage and gifts. But he considers Moll his mistress and has no intentions of marrying her. Eventually, he tires of Moll and creates a series of deceptions, putting Moll into a position where she must marry his brother, Robin. On Robin and Moll's wedding night, the elder brother gets Robin drunk so that he will not know that Moll is not a virgin.

Moll Flanders

Moll Flanders, the heroine and first-person narrator of the novel, was born in Newgate Prison to a thief who would have been hung had she not been pregnant with Moll. While Moll is still an infant, her mother is sentenced to "transportation" and sent to America to work on a plantation, making Moll an orphan. Moll spends her childhood living first with gypsies, then with a woman who takes in orphans, and finally with a family who enjoys her company.

Moll is a beautiful woman. She uses her beauty and cleverness to avoid servitude and poverty. She is forever seeking a rich husband and thinking up ways to acquire money. When she reaches middleage and realizes that her beauty has faded, she finds herself

in dire financial straights. Her solution is to turn to stealing to support herself. While she states throughout the book that she is sorry for the crimes she has committed, she blames others for forcing her to choose such a life. Despite her dangerous life, she seems always to be the lucky one: while her partners in crime often meet violent ends and her husbands either die or run into trouble, Moll is always left standing.

Moll is married a total of five times and has many lovers. Her first husband, Robin, is not her choice, but she has a contented, five-year marriage with him, producing two children before he dies. Her second husband is a draper by trade and careless with money. He is forced to leave England after escaping from debtors' prison. Theoretically, Moll continues to be married to this man throughout the book.

Moll's third husband ends up being her brother, whom she leaves after discovering this unsavory fact. She and her fourth husband, a highwayman, agree to separate when they find out they have lied to each other about their individual wealth. Her fifth husband is a bank clerk who dies after losing all of the family's money. After his death, Moll is destitute, and turns to picking pockets and other crimes to survive.

Moll eventually ends up in her birthplace, Newgate Prison, after she is caught stealing expensive cloth from a home. Her luck never seems to leave her, however, and her death sentence is commuted to "transportation," as her mother's had been. She connects up with her fourth husband, Jemy, and they move to Virginia to start a plantation together. She finishes the novel a prosperous woman in her sixties, still living with Jemy.

Moll reports that she changes her name a number of times (but usually does not indicate to what name), usually to protect her identity. She is known as Mrs. Flanders when living in the Mint neighborhood and, when she is living with the rich matron who takes her in after the nurse dies, she is called Mrs. Betty, or Betty. This term was used in the eighteenth century to indicate both a servant and female promiscuity.

The Gentleman in Bath

Moll meets the gentleman after returning, nearly destitute, to England from Virginia. The gentleman is married but claims his wife is crazy. He meets Moll in the fashionable resort town of Bath where he becomes quite enamored of her and wishes to help her financially. She refuses at first, but in time she does accept money from him as a gift. He leaves Bath, becomes ill, and asks Moll to nurse him back to health. She does, and they stay together for two years in a platonic relationship. One night, after drinking too much wine, Moll becomes his mistress. She has a child by him, and he provides for their care with an apartment and other necessities. Moll remains his mistress for about six years until the gentleman gets sick again, almost dies, and, in a moment of remorsefulness, ends his affair with Moll.

The Governess

The governess serves as Moll's midwife when she is pregnant (probably with Jemy's child). The governess runs a shady establishment, mostly catering to whores who need a place to stay during their pregnancies.

Later in the novel, Moll returns to the governess after Moll performs her first few thefts, unsure how to sell the items she has stolen. As it turns out, the governess is a pawnbroker and, seeing that Moll is an especially talented thief, encourages her to continue her crimes. She and Moll work together until Moll is caught and sent to Newgate Prison. This so unsettles the governess that she becomes remorseful about her life and sends a minister to Moll in prison to help her recognize the evil of her ways. But the governess also tries to bribe prison officials to help Moll and works a few deals to get Moll and Jemy's legal situation smoothed out.

Humphrey

Humphrey is Moll's son, born to Moll and her brother in Virginia. When Moll returns to Virginia with Jemy, she contacts her family there, and Humphrey responds to her letter. Their reunion is joyous, and Humphrey heaps gifts and money upon Moll. He arranges to help manage the land Moll's mother has left her, and Moll visits him whenever she returns to her brother's plantation to pick up her annual income from the land.

James

See Jemy

Jemy

Jemy is Moll's fourth husband, and she often refers to him as her "Lancashire husband." A northcountry woman claiming to be Jemy's sister introduces them to each other, representing Jemy as a gentleman with land and money and believing rumors that Moll is also fabulously wealthy. Moll and Jemy marry but soon discover the truth□that neither of them has any money. Moll also finds out that this arrangement was unsavory from the start; the woman who claimed to be his sister is actually his former lover and was to have received a fee for the match.

Moll and Jemy truly love each other and do not really want to separate. Jemy believes the parting is necessary but tells Moll he will try to make some money farming in Ireland and then will contact her. She tries to convince him to go with her to Virginia to start a plantation, but he is not interested. They part, promising to keep in touch.

Moll briefly sees Jemy again later in the novel, and saves his life by convincing a mob that he is not the highwayman they suspect him to be. She ultimately connects up with

him for good toward the end of the book when he is brought to Newgate Prison for highway robbery. She successfully persuades him to get his sentence commuted to "transportation," like hers, so they can leave together for Virginia and start a plantation together. In America, they become quite prosperous and return to England to live out their days together.

Moll's Brother/Husband

After planting gossip to make Moll's suitors believe that she is wealthy, Moll and a friend successfully attract a man of means. This man becomes Moll's third husband and, upon discovering that Moll has no wealth, he insists they move to Virginia to live more cheaply. There, after bearing him three children, Moll discovers that she is her husband's sister through conversations with his mother.

Eventually, against the wishes of her motherin- law, Moll tells her brother what she has learned. He agrees that she must return to England. Moll sees him again when she returns to Virginia in her sixties. He is ill and nearly blind, and does not recognize her.

Moll's Mother

Moll's mother appears twice in the book. Early in the novel, she is mentioned as being in Newgate Prison, where she gives birth to Moll. Soon after Moll's birth, she is sent to Virginia as punishment for her thieving.

In Virginia, Moll's mother serves first as a slave, then eventually marries her master and bears him two children□one of whom becomes Moll's third husband. Later in the novel when Moll moves to Virginia with this husband, she discovers his mother is also her mother. Moll keeps this information secret for a few years, but finally tells her mother what she knows. Moll's mother, like Moll, is horrified, but begs Moll to cover up the secret and continue living with her son as his wife, for the sake of the family. She promises Moll that she will leave her an inheritance apart from what she leaves her son, which she does.

The Nurse

The nurse takes in Moll when she is a young orphan and promises the town authorities that she will be responsible for her. At her home, The Nurse educates orphans and teaches them useful skills, in preparation for their lives as servants. She prevents Moll from having to become a servant by keeping her in the house as her assistant. The Nurse dies when Moll is about fourteen years old.

Robin

Robin is Moll's first husband, a man who truly loves and respects her. Moll is not interested in marrying him but has no choice, thanks to the scheming of his elder brother. Robin and Moll have a solid marriage, despite the fact that she does not find him attractive, and she bears him two children. After being married only five years, Robin dies, and his parents take the children from Moll.

Themes

Money

Truly, in *Moll Flanders,* money makes the world go around. Hardly a page goes by in the novel without a mention of money. Moll's money worries begin at the age of eight when Moll must figure out a way to avoid being placed in servitude. To do this, she tells the nurse who has taken her in that she can work, and that eventually she will earn her own way in the world. When the nurse expresses doubt that Moll can really earn her keep, Moll responds, "I will work harder, says I, and you shall have it all."

Though Moll is easily flattered by men commenting on her beauty, she is even more flattered at their attentions if the men are wealthy. When she and the elder brother are discussing their future, he shows her a purse full of coins that he claims he will give her every year until they are married, in essence for remaining his mistress. Moll's "colour came and went, at the sight of the purse," and at the thought of the money he had promised her.

Moll complains after the death of her first husband that no one in the city appreciates a beautiful, well-mannered woman, and that the only thing a man is looking for in a wife is her ability to bring money into the relationship. She notes that "money only made a woman agreeable" when she wanted to become a wife, and that only whores and mistresses are chosen because of their personal and physical qualities□and, of course, these relationships are built upon money, as well.

Ultimately, most of Moll's actions are precipitated by the need or desire for money. She searches for husbands who have money and usually tries to give them the mistaken impression that she is wealthy. She plots and schemes because she believes that all that matters in life is the acquisition of wealth. Even when she becomes the richest thief in all of England and her fame threatens her ability to continue stealing, she cannot stop her hunt for more money. Her greed is ultimately her downfall, for she gets sloppy and is caught stealing from a house where she cannot pretend to have been shopping.

Sexuality

Defoe is not shy about making clear that Moll is fairly free with sexual favors, and that they are often tied to receiving money. In fact, on the novel's original frontispiece, Defoe states that Moll is "twelve year a whore." She loses her virginity to the elder brother and remains his mistress in return for a promise of marriage and money. Although she and the gentleman she meets in Bath both insist on remaining platonic companions, she eventually initiates sex one night after they have shared a large amount of wine: "Thus the government of our virtue was broken, and I exchang'd the place of friend for that unmusical harsh-sounding title of whore." They go on to have a long affair, and he supports her financially for a number of years.

One of the more dramatic uses of Moll's sexuality comes after Moll has had good success as a pickpocket. She goes to a fair to see if she can lift any gold watches and meets up with a baron. They end up in bed together that evening, and because he is so drunk, she is able to relieve him of his money and jewelry. The next day, the governess concocts a scheme in which she and Moll sell back to the baron his own stolen valuables and Moll becomes his mistress for a year. This saves Moll the trouble of having to steal for her living for a while.

Secrets and Lies

Moll's life is filled with secrets and lies. She is cagey from the beginning as to her real name. She begins her story indicating that she has lived under a variety of names, but that the book's readers should refer to her as Moll Flanders "till I dare own who I have been, as well as who I am." Nearly every time she moves from one relationship to another, she gives a fabricated name to her latest beau; but oddly enough, she rarely reveals what that new name is in the text of the book.

Moll is also fond of disguises and uses them frequently in her career as a pickpocket. She disguises herself as a widow, as a woman of means, as a man, and as a beggar to confuse those from whom she is stealing. In one humorous instance, she dresses as a widow and comes just short of committing a theft but is nearly taken for the actual thief, who is also dressed as a widow.

Moll is never totally open about her past with any of her lovers. For example, she marries her first husband because she must lie about her relationship with his brother, and she catches her third husband because she and a friend spread gossip around town that she is a wealthy widow. In fact, Moll seems fairly comfortable with presenting herself to nearly every man as someone she is not, excusing her behavior as necessary given the treachery of men in general. She never reveals to husbands three, four, and five that she is still legally married to her second husband. And when she does marry, she usually keeps what money she has a secret. For example, even when she and Jemy, the love of her life, reunite and move to Virginia, she secretly keeps a healthy sum of her wealth back in London, managed by the governess.

Perseverance and Ambition

The story of Moll Flanders is the story of a woman who is nothing if not persistent in her quest to become independent and financially comfortable. From an early age she sets her sights on becoming something more than just a servant girl, pleading with the nurse to let her learn how to make money as a seamstress. Even though Moll spends much of her time in the book pursuing marriage, she is adamant that women should not have to settle for just any man. "Nothing is more certain than that the ladies always gain of the men by keeping their ground," she admonishes.

With every fall from fortune Moll suffers, she has a plan that will put her back on her feet. She is able to survey her situation quickly and come up with a solution□although,

granted, her solutions are not always legal and ethical, and they usually require a heavy dose of luck. When she is young and living with a wealthy family, she realizes that she must be even more beautiful and talented than the sisters. To that end, she learns French and dancing by listening in on their lessons. When she discovers that she has been married to her brother and has borne his children, she devises a plan whereby she is able to get on a ship for England and make a new start. When Moll, by her own reckoning, is forced into a life of crime, she becomes the bestknown and richest thief in England. And even when she is faced with the gallows, somehow she comes out of the situation fine, sailing back to America with her only true love and a cargo hold filled with tools and equipment that will make her a rich plantation owner.

Crime and Remorse

On the whole, *Moll Flanders* is a book about crime. Moll turns to crime after her affair with the gentleman in Bath leaves her destitute and aimlessly wandering around London. Her looks are gone and, in a daze, she steals a bundle of silver goods. Not knowing how to sell the items, she returns to her old friend, the governess, who, as it happens, is a pawnbroker and encourages Moll to pursue stealing as an occupation.

Moll seems to enjoy her occupation and excels in it. In fact, her vanity about her beauty is transferred to a sort of pride in being a great criminal, and she is always prompted to do more when the governess reminds her of how famous she is. Moll dabbles in a few other areas outside of theft and picking pockets, but she realizes that theft is her strong suit and wisely does not venture far from it.

Whether Moll is a hardened criminal is open for debate. She steals valuables from children and then transfers the blame for her act to their parents, who either should not have dressed them so well or should not have let them out by themselves. Throughout the section in which Moll is stealing, she vacillates from blaming her victim or society for putting her in a position where she must steal to urging the reader to learn something about remorse from her story of sin. Moll claims to be penitent just before her death sentence is commuted to "transportation," as does the governess, stricken with grief over Moll's fate. But soon after Moll realizes that she will not die in prison, she begins to scheme again with the governess to make her sentence a bit easier□although she does not accept the governess's offer to avoid completely the forced trip to America.

Style

Picaresque Novel

Moll Flanders is considered an example of a picaresque novel. These novels usually employ a first-person narrator recounting the adventures of a scoundrel or low-class adventurer who moves from place to place and from one social environment to another in an effort to survive. The construction of these novels, like that of *Moll Flanders,* is typically episodic, and the hero or heroine is a cynical and amoral rascal who lives by his or her wits.

Structure

Defoe did not use chapter or section divisions to break up the work. The action moves chronologically, though, and is divided into close to one hundred different episodes. Defoe covers long periods of time with sweeping statements, as when Moll refers to her first marriage by saying, "It concerns the story in hand very little to enter into the farther particulars of the family, . . . for the five years I liv'd with this husband."

Defoe begins the novel with a preface in which he claims that the story is more of a "private history" than a novel. He urges the reader to be more interested in the parts where Moll is remorseful about her crimes than in the crimes themselves, and he recommends the book "as a work from every part of which something may be learned."

Point-of-View

Defoe wrote the novel in the first person, with Moll telling the story of her life. This form brings Moll close to readers, as if she is speaking directly to them. As well, Moll tells her story from the vantage point of being nearly seventy years old and being, purportedly, repentant. She pauses occa- sionally in the action to speak from her position as a penitent seventy-year-old and cautions about particular behaviors and choices.

Hero/Heroine

Moll is not a typical heroine because she is not someone whose behavior is admirable. Very often her actions are morally reprehensible and open to condemnation. Her integrity, at the very least, is suspect. But she is the heroine of her own story, nonetheless, because she does capture some of the qualities of the traditional heroine: one who is brave in the face of adversity, successfully challenges the status quo, and progresses through the novel with a certain amount of fortitude and purpose. Moll's life is victorious, in a way, because in the end she both gets what she wants *and* appears sorry for the damage she has caused.

Romantic Tone

Defoe has written *Moll Flanders* in an exaggerated fashion, developing a protagonist in Moll who is, for example, not only a good thief but also the richest and most famous thief in the country. She marries not one or two men, but five, one of whom□almost beyond belief□just happens to be her long-lost brother. The novel is written with a romantic tone, meaning that actions are exaggerated and larger than life, not that people fall in love. The novel is almost soap opera-like given the amazing things that happen to Moll.

Foreshadowing

Defoe occasionally uses foreshadowing, a writing technique that creates the expectation of something happening later in the work. When she looks for a husband after the draper leaves her, Moll encounters a group of hard-drinking and hardliving rogues who try to interest her in a bit of fun, but she responds, "I was not wicked enough for such fellows as these yet." When Jemy and Moll break up because they have no money, she makes it clear that he will show up again later, noting, "But I shall have more to say of him hereafter."

Historical Context

The American Colonies and the English Economy

In the novel, Moll sails to Virginia twice: first as the wife of a plantation owner, and second as a convicted criminal sentenced to serve time as a slave. In the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, Virginia was an English colony, evidence of expanding English overseas interests in the name of trade and political power. Settled in the early 1600s, Virginia was a thriving and important complement to England's economy by the early 1700s.

During this period, wealth came progressively more from merchants' capital, creating a powerful and prosperous business class. Business was booming in England, fostering an attitude that there was lots of money to be made. England's major manufactured export product during this period was cloth, which, along with other manufactured goods, was shipped to the American colonies in exchange for an increasingly valuable commodity, tobacco.

The Role of Women

While the philosophy of the eighteenth century Enlightenment period addressed such issues as individual liberties, social welfare, economic liberty, and education, these concerns did not translate into major changes for women between the late 1600s and early 1700s. In fact, there are indications that the status of women declined during this period; in 1600, more than two-thirds of the businesses in London were reported to be owned by women, but by the end of the eighteenth century, that rate had been reduced to only ten percent.

Because the English economy at this time was based on the family unit, financial success determined that most people live within a family unit. In such an environment, society looked upon individuals who lived outside of a family unit with suspicion and assumed they were probably criminals, beggars, or prostitutes. Moll, when she finds herself in particularly difficult situations, frequently bemoans the fact that she does not have any family or friends whose household she could join. Essentially, her eternal search for a husband is a search for a family unit of her own.

Working-class women were expected to participate in the labor force as early as their sixth birthday. If a child was an orphan without anyone willing to provide financial support, as Moll's nurse did for her, the authorities expected the orphan to go into "service," usually household work for young girls. Women could rarely marry without a dowry, an amount of money that went to the husband as a sort of investment in the family economic unit.

Women of laboring families, married or single, worked in low-status jobs. Middle-and upper- class women had more economic options although by the seventeenth century,

as a woman's status increased, her ability to secure productive work diminished as she was not expected to be in a situation where she would have to work.

Many progressive Englishmen of the day believed that education was a paramount requirement for a civilized society; educational opportunities were extended to middle- and upper-class women in addition to men. But existing attitudes dictated that only men receive instruction in the more intellectual subjects such as philosophy and science, and that women should study subjects that would contribute to their moral development and to their desirability as marriage prospects. These subjects included singing, dancing, and languages, as demonstrated by the young girls in the household of Moll's first husband, Robin. Moll listens in on these lessons, giving her an edge that most girls in her economic status did not have.

Critical Overview

When *Moll Flanders* was published in 1722, most reactions to it focused on one of two points: which of the numerous infamous female pickpockets of the day Defoe was writing about when he created Moll, or the base nature of the story itself. On the latter count, a famous anonymous couplet, appearing in a 1729 edition of *The Flying Post; or Weekly Medley,* indicated that only members of the lower classes were reading Defoe's hugely popular book:

Down in the kitchen, honest Dick and Doll Are studying
Colonel Jack and Flanders Moll.

However, many have pointed out that, given the popularity of the work, more than just servants were buying copies of the novel. As to its reception and popularity, Maximillian Novak points out in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography,* "Although there were numerous chapbook versions of Moll Flanders, it was not the kind of work that was sufficiently 'polite' or proper for either the eighteenth or for most of the nineteenth century."

According to Edward H. Kelly in his foreword to the Norton Critical Edition of *Moll Flanders,* "the novel was often dismissed by nineteenthcentury critics and biographers as unimportant, 'secondary,' or immoral." Two critics of the nineteenth century found little to like about Defoe and his *Moll Flanders.* W. C. Roscoe in an 1856 issue of the *National Review* condemns Defoe for writing with little imagination and with too few attempts to delve into the interiors of his characters. Roscoe charges that Defoe "abides in the concrete; he has no analytical perception whatever. Never was there a man to whom a yellow primrose was less or anything more than a yellow primrose." Specifically about Moll, Roscoe writes, "We must use our own insight and judgment if we wish to know what really was the interior character of Moll Flanders, just as we must have done had we met her in life□not altogether a pleasant sort of person." Leslie Stephen, writing in his book *Hours in a Library,* picks up on Roscoe's sentiments, writing that Defoe accumulates merely facts in many of his novels, and that the story of Moll Flanders should not claim "any higher interest than that which belongs to the ordinary police report, given with infinite fulness and vivacity of detail."

Twentieth-century critics are considerably kinder to Defoe, possibly because of the passing of the Victorian Age and the introduction of less rigid concepts about the inclusion of sex and antisocial behavior in literature. Virginia Woolf was the daughter of the critic Leslie Stephen, and her impressions of Moll Flanders could not have been more different than her father's. In *The Common Reader,* Woolf praises Defoe's "peculiar genius" for creating a complicated "woman of her own account." And she directly confronts her father's earlier charge that Defoe was a writer little interested in the interior psychology of Moll Flanders, arguing that "the list of qualities and graces of this seasoned old sinner is by no means exhausted."

Moll's psychological underpinnings are of continuing concern for the contemporary critic, and increasingly most do not charge Defoe with being deficient in how he portrays his heroine. Ian Watt, writing in his book *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding,* is confident that Defoe gives Moll Flanders plenty of reasons to behave as she does and that her personality is much more than one-dimensional. "Defoe makes us admire the speed and resolution of Moll's reactions to profit or danger; and if there are no detailed psychological analyses, it is because they would be wholly superfluous," he argues. According to Watt, the perception that Moll is a one-dimensional character rests in the fact of when the novel was written. "We place Defoe's novels in a very different context from that of their own time; we take novels much more seriously now, and we judge his by the more exacting literary standards of today," writes Watt. This has caused many readers of *Moll Flanders,* in fact, to see irony where there was none intended by Defoe.

Despite the differing interpretations of Defoe's *Moll Flanders,* critics almost universally respect the author for his part in developing the modern novel form. In fact, Defoe is commonly known as the "father of the English novel."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Sanderson holds a master of fine arts degree in fiction writing and is an independent writer. In this essay, she argues that Defoe wrote his novel less as a book addressing Moll's soul and more as an entertaining book addressing Moll's social and economic success.

In Defoe's *Moll Flanders,* mind-boggling things happen to the book's heroine: events align to create amazing coincidences; consequences that might prove pesky in future episodes simply disappear; the heroine freely employs disguises and changes her name; and, though numerous trials and tribulations befall her, the heroine still rises above the fray to become a success. Sound familiar?

Give Moll a different set of clothes and move her to an anonymous mid-sized American city, and you have the basis for a character in a hugely successful soap opera. Defoe's novel, an enormously popular success in eighteenth-century England, is a story with a two-faceted appeal□the story of the spunky girl that audiences love to hate. On one hand, she is wicked and participates in activities no self-respecting woman would ever dream of; but, on the other hand, she ultimately achieves independence, finds happiness with her one true love, and lives out her final days in spiritual accomplishment.

Why would Defoe, a man raised on the tenets of conservative Protestantism, write such a book? Was it really, as his narrator claims in the preface, "a work from every part of which something may be learned, and some just and religious inference is drawn"? Or is it a story less concerned with the spiritual and moral saving of Moll's soul and more with her financial recovery and ultimate success?

The same features that drew readers to *Moll Flanders* three hundred years ago still draw viewers to similar stories on television. And similar to the denials many people make today that they never watch such popular television shows as *Dallas* or *All My Children,* many made claims in the eighteenth century that Defoe's work was vulgar and lewd, and therefore not fit reading for honorable men and women. But *someone* was reading and enjoying Moll Flanders's exploits, just as viewers today still enjoy stories of remarkable coincidence and lusty heroines, stories filled with lessons of romantic and financial success built on (not necessarily legal or ethical) hard work and audacity.

Even the most casual reading of *Moll Flanders* reveals a romantic world where nearly everything ultimately works in the heroine's favor. First are the series of remarkable coincidences that occur around Moll□some positive, some not so positive, but all placed in a way that turns the tide of events ultimately to Moll's benefit. Moll, through trickery, catches a husband whom she discovers later to be her half-brother. While this is, indeed, horrible news, and Moll is appropriately shocked, this ugly chapter of her life plants the seeds for her successful return to America□a return whose punishment aspect is muted considerably by Moll's ability to buy her and Jemy's way out of servitude. Would she really so happily consider traveling to Virginia after her death

sentence commutation if she were not hoping to take possession of whatever valuable inheritance her mother had promised her? When she urges Jemy to seek a reprieve of his death sentence and join her in America, she assures him that death would be much worse than moving to Virginia, for "you do not know the place so well as I do."

Moll's relationship with Jemy is filled with a series of even more coincidences, all paving the way to her eventual financial and romantic success with him. A number of years after she and Jemy have separated (because of their impoverished situations), Moll is freshly married again when she just happens to look out a window. She sees Jemy, who later leaves in a hurry, obviously due to his criminal occupation. When a mob comes by the next day, looking for Jemy as one of the highwaymen who recently robbed a coach, Moll vouches for him, swearing that he is an upstanding gentleman and not a villain. The next time she sees him is years later when they both just happen to be at Newgate Prison at the same time. She is able to persuade him to sail to America with her, primarily because she saved his life when she lied to the mob. "It was you that saved my life at that time, and I am glad I owe my life to you, for I will pay my debt to you now," Jemy promises.

Another resemblance to soap-opera style is the way Defoe creates difficulties for Moll and then simply drops them to move ahead in the story. E. M. Forster in his book *Aspects of the Novel* notes Defoe's tendency to toss away aspects of Moll's life, especially the mysterious disappearance of most of her children. "[S]tray threads [are] left about," according to Forster, "on the chance of the writer wanting to pick them up afterwards: Moll's early batch of children, for instance." While Defoe does mention in the book's preface the possibility of a sequel to the novel, as he did in *Robinson Crusoe,* the childrens' vanishing act could be simply a technique used by the author to both move the action along more quickly and smooth out the way for more bawdy adventures where the presence of children would be inconvenient, as well as distracting. When Moll does speak of her missing children, it is usually to recount that they were "happily" taken off her hands. Only two children seem to capture Moll's attention: the child she bears after her marriage to Jemy, and therefore most likely his child; and Humphrey, one of the children she has with her brother. Humphrey is the one who greets her in Virginia with loving tears and gifts of land and money.

But Defoe does more than create remarkable coincidences and sweep away troublesome details; Moll shares with her contemporary soap opera sisters a love of disguises. Moll is especially fond of dressing to deceive during her twelve-year criminal career, employing the costumes of a beggar, a widow, a wealthy gentlewoman, and a man. In a gambling house she pretends to be an innocent bystander who knows nothing about wagering and comes out of the afternoon a bit richer. In addition to simply changing her attire, Moll changes her name several times and, indeed, her identity. For example, after her marriage to the draper ends, Moll realizes that being the former wife of an escaped debtor has its problems. To combat this she moves to a different neighborhood, changes her name and, with the help of a friend, spreads gossip that she is a wealthy widow.

The character of the wealthy widow is one of her favorites. In fact, she often does not tell her male friends her real name and, even with Jemy, is not completely up front about her identity and her finances. She is proud of her ability to create a secret identity and to keep secrets when necessary. While most men might believe that women cannot keep secrets, Moll disagrees, and points to her life as evidence: "[F]or let them say what they please of our sex not being about to keep a secret, my life is a plain conviction to me of the contrary."

Ultimately, such a character must do more than run around wearing disguises and getting into trouble. For the audience to love her, she must, in the end, be a success, or the wicked and sinful things in which she has engaged will all be for nothing. Here is where Defoe excels because Moll Flanders, despite her sinful behavior, is nothing if not a tremendous success□in her love life, in her personal finances, and in her heart. She has risen from penury, born an orphan at Newgate Prison, to well beyond her original station in life. Her entire life is a concerted effort to avoid becoming anyone's servant, as Virginia Woolf notes in an essay in *The Common Reader,* "a woman on her own account." Moll becomes, by the end of the novel, a woman of independent means, beholden to no one, and, according to Woolf, "we admire Moll Flanders far more than we blame her."

Moll's tale, then, is more a story of the restitution of her self and less a story about the restitution of her soul, as Defoe might have his audience believe from his preface. Early in her prison experience, Moll tries to repent, but, in her own words, "that repentance yielded me no satisfaction, no peace" because she was sorry only for the punishment and not for the sin. Interestingly enough, though, when she does face the actual prospect of dying for her crime, she then believes she has truly succeeded in producing a real sense of repentance, although she is incapable of saying exactly what that is. "Indeed, those impressions are not to be explain'd by words, or if they are I am not mistress of words enough to express them," she says, an odd statement from someone who has put the last fifty or so years of her life into words.

Moll's life after declaring her repentance is not *precisely* like her previous life, but it certainly shares many of the same qualities. For example, to see Jemy and encourage him to follow her to America, she must again disguise herself. In addition, Moll has numerous discussions with Jemy and the governess concerning schemes to bribe their way out of the sentence of slavery and exile to America. And when she lands in America, Moll is obsessed with visiting her brother/husband's plantation to see if their mother has left her an inheritance. Moll prevents Jemy from learning anything about her inherited plantation until she is in a strong financial position□and even then she softens the news of her plantation and her sordid past with a huge bounty of expensive gifts shipped in from England.

Defoe's novel, written during a period of economic expansion and mercantile opportunity, is a lesson in financial boot-strapping and selfsufficiency, couched in an entertaining tale of one woman's climb up the socio-economic ladder. Pretending to frame it in cautionary language about avoiding the slippery slope of avarice and other

transgressions, Defoe challenges anyone to "cast any reproach upon it, or our design in publishing it." He argues in the preface that

> there is not a wicked action in any part of it, but is first or last rendered unhappy and unfortunate; there is not a superlative villain brought upon the stage, but either he is brought to an unhappy end, or brought to be a penitent.

But in the end, Moll is allowed to live out the last days of her life a wealthy woman, living with a man who may or may not be her legal husband, and her penance and punishment for her past life is indeed suspect.

Moll is a poster child for a sort of soapopera- type heroine who, through grit and determination, pulls herself up by her own bootstraps and offers her life as a lesson in how to "begin the world upon a new foundation; . . . [and] live as new people in a new world." This is a story people have loved to hear throughout the ages, one much more powerful than a tale of sin and punishment and failure.

Source: Susan Sanderson, Critical Essay on *Moll Flanders,* in *Novels for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay excerpt, Richetti focuses on Defoe's characterization of Moll Flanders, especially her moral ambiguity.

Critics have always recognized that Defoe's strong suit is the richly particularized incident, his weakness developing connections between epi-sodes. At first glance, *Moll Flanders* (1722) looks like the most formlessly episodic of Defoe's books, with over a hundred separate scenes tied together by rapid synopses of other events. And yet most critics would agree that Moll is Defoe's most memorable character, her story the most widely read and highly regarded of Defoe's fictions in the last fifty years. Where Jack seems a shadowy figure, an excuse for stringing adventures together, Moll has struck many readers as profoundly real. Her concreteness may be partially the result of her narrative's narrower setting; she spends most of her time in and around London. But a more important reason for the relative depth and unity of characterization Defoe achieves lies in her gender. As a woman of no fixed social position and limited financial possibilities, she has a unifying and recurring problem: female survival in a masculine world. But richly varied as they are, the episodes in *Moll Flanders* are not a plot in any strict sense; they do not all fit together like a jigsaw puzzle, and one could safely omit some or rearrange others. Taken as a whole, however, they do have a degree of continuity, evoking much more convincingly than *Colonel Jack* a dense tangle of sexual, economic, and moral relationships between self and society.

Like all Defoe's books, *Moll Flanders* has its origin in a popular genre. A criminal biography, based loosely on the lives of two famous thieves, Moll King and Callico Sarah, the book pretends to be a documentary, like *Colonel Jack,* crowded with a variety of incidents in actual places: *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, who was born in Newgate, and during a life of continu'd variety for threescore years, besides her childhood, was twelve year a whore, five times a wife (whereof once to her own brother) twelve year a thief, eight year a transported felon in Virginia, at last grew rich, liv'd honest, and died a penitent, written from her own memorandums.* Although it is far more detailed and complicated than they are, *Moll Flanders* has important affinities with the criminal narratives it imitates. Much of the moral ambiguity in *Moll Flanders* derives from its origins in criminal biography, for as a literary and moral type, the criminal in the early eighteenth century (and now, perhaps) excites a mixture of moral disgust and fascination. Thus, Defoe's characterization of the infamous Jonathan Wild in his 1725 biography stresses Wild's singular, even unique courage: "It must be allowed to Jonathan's fame, that as he steered among rocks and dangerous shoals, so he was a bold pilot; he ventured in and always got out in a manner equally superior; no man ever did the like before him, and I say no man will attempt to do the like after him." To write about a criminal, of course, requires some justification; the subject has to deserve the limelight by being a monster of vice (like Jonathan Wild) or sometimes by being the best at the trade, never just a runof- the-mill criminal. For example, Moll is hardly modest about her accomplishments as a thief. "I grew the greatest artist of my time, and work'd myself out of every danger," she brags, and goes on to note that where other thieves were in Newgate prison after six months, she worked for more than five

years "and the people at Newgate, did not so much as know me; they had heard much of me in- deed, and often expected me there; but I always got off, tho' many times in the extreamest danger." Even as Moll records with shame her "hardening" in crime, she still reports her unparalleled success at it, celebrating her fame even as she deplores its cause: "I grew more harden'd and audacious than ever, and the success I had, made my name as famous as any thief of my sort ever had been at Newgate, and in the Old-Bayly."

This blend of repentance and celebration is entirely typical of criminal biography, and it can be seen in cruder fashion in Defoe's own criminal biographies. For example, *The History of the remarkable Life of John Sheppard* (1724) validates as fact the incredible events of Sheppard's career as housebreaker and escape artist: "His history will astonish! and is not compos'd of fiction, fable, or stories plac'd at York, Rome, or Jamaica, but facts done at your doors, facts unheard of, altogether new, incredible, and yet uncontestable." In due course, Defoe's narrator is implicitly contemptuous of Sheppard's vulgar fame: "His escape and his being so suddenly re-taken made such a noise in the town, that it was thought all the common people would have gone mad about him; there being not a potter to be had for love nor money, nor getting into an ale-house, for butchers, shoemakers and barbers, all engag'd in controversies, and wagers, about Sheppard." But the overall effect is mitigation of Sheppard's guilt by detailed, admiring examination of his criminal techniques. The officers at Newgate, the narrator concludes, are not to blame for Sheppard's escapes. "They are but men, and have had to deal with a creature something more than man, a Proteus, supernatural. Words cannot describe him, his actions and workmanship which are too visible, best testifie him." But Defoe describes that workmanship at some length, dwelling with evident satisfaction on the smallest particulars. Visiting the scene of the escape, the narrator reports: "Three screws are visibly taken off the lock, and the doors as strong as art could make them, forc'd open: The locks and bolts either wrench'd or broke, and the cases and other irons made for their security cut asunder: An iron spike broke off from the hatch in the chapel, which he fix'd in the wall and fasten'd his blanket to it, to drop on the leads of Mr. Bird's house; his stockings were found on the leads of Newgate; 'tis question'd whether sixty pounds will repair the damage done to the jayl."

In all his work, fiction and factual journalism, Defoe is powerfully drawn to precisely how trades and crafts operate. This elaboration of techniques has a momentum of its own that blurs moral considerations, and crime becomes in the telling another set of fascinating procedures perfectly executed by masters like Sheppard or, in another, less violent mode, like Moll Flanders. Moll's skills as a thief are more subtle than Sheppard's spectacular escapes, a matter of watching for opportunity, walking the city and taking advantage of the rich prizes there, mastering the arts of disguise and social impersonation. This is how a confederate teaches Moll the art of stealing gold watches from ladies:

At length she put me to practise, she had shewn me
her art, and I had several times unhook'd a watch
from her own side with great dexterity; at last she
show'd me a prize, and this was a young lady big

with child who had a charming watch, the thing was to be done as she came out of church; she goes on one side of the lady, and pretends, just as she came to the steps, to fall, and fell against the lady with so much violence as put her into a great fright, and both cry'd out terribly; in the very moment that she jostl'd the lady, I had hold of the watch, and holding it the right way, the start she gave drew the hook out and she never felt it; I made off immediately, and left my schoolmistress to come out of her pretended fright gradually, and the lady too; and presently the watch was miss'd; ay, says my comrade, then it was those rogues that thrust me down, I warrant ye; I wonder the gentlewoman did not miss her watch before, then we might have taken them.

And yet the difference between the sketchy sensationalism of criminal biography and the novelistic fullness of *Moll Flanders* is also apparent. Even as Moll describes with obvious satisfaction how she mastered her trade, she also dwells on the moral and psychological significance of that satis- faction. Moll realizes, as she looks back, that this marks a new phase in her career. Drawn into crime by poverty, Moll continues in it even though she might well live honestly if poorly by her needle. "But practise had hardened me, and I grew audacious to the last degree; and the more so, because I had carried it on so long, and had never been taken; for in a word, my new partner in wickedness and I went on together so long, without being ever detected, that we not only grew bold, but we grew rich, and we had at one time one and twenty gold watches in our hands." Yet even as Moll deplores her moral condition, a note of irrepressible triumph is heard in those twenty-one gold watches, as her pleasure in remembering her triumphs mixes with tough-minded analysis of her moral failure.

As she herself warns, Moll is "but a very indifferent monitor," and readers are advised to construct their "own just reflections, which they will be more able to make effectual than I, who so soon forget myself." At the very end of her story, Moll wonders at the goodness of Providence, and the abhorrence of her past such wonder provokes, but breaks off the reflection: "I leave the reader to improve these thoughts, as no doubt they will see cause, and I go on to the fact." Characteristically, Moll is a sort of ironic chorus on the foolishness she has seen in her time, and her discourse is peppered with wry reflections. Women who run into marriage, for example, "are a sort of ladies that are to be pray'd for among the rest of distemper'd people; and to me they look like people that venture their whole estates in a lottery where there is a hundred thousand blanks to one prize." And Moll the underworld moralist views some of her old associates with compact sarcasm. She remembers with some distaste two thieves, a man and a woman, with whom she worked briefly. Clumsy and coarse in their larcenous techniques, they are caught in housebreaking, which Moll always avoids, and her sardonic summary reveals her own sense of propriety! "they were partners it seems in the trade they carried on; and partners in something else too. In short, they robb'd together, lay together, were taken together, and at last were hang'd together."

In other words, Moll Flanders is not the conventionally defiant and/or repentant criminal of popular biography but possesses a distinctive, individuated voice and a crafty intelligence. She sounds at times like the former pickpocket she is, speaking in a racy demotic style, capable of selfirony, double entendre, and word play. As Defoe arranges it, she is an old woman looking back on her life with complicated retrospection, repentant of course but also undiminished in wit and spirit and in fact pretty satisfied with a good deal of her story. The reader is conscious, in effect, of two characters, one narrating, the other acting. Much of Defoe's specifically novelistic innovation in *Moll Flanders* lies in just this process of interpretation old Moll brings to her narrative. What we are reading is not simply a record of a character in action but a process of remembering and interpreting that action whereby character is revealed and developed in complex ways through the act of narration itself. Moreover, many of Moll's interpretations of her life as she narrates it are open to question, morally inconsistent and thereby revealing (like the mixture of pride and repentance noted above) but also endearingly human. To an important extent, this tendency to ethical neutrality is the result of Defoe's realism which, as Ian Watt notes, subordinates "any coherent ulterior significance to the illusion that the text represents the authentic lucubrations of an historical person."

But this ethically neutral realism is accompanied, as always in Defoe's fictions, by elaborate didactic claims. The preface stresses that this is an expurgated autobiography, with Moll's saltier language cleaned up and "some of the vicious part of her life, which cou'd not be modestly told," left out. In spite of what it calls the book's "infinite variety," the preface claims that everything in it conforms to poetic justice: "there is not a wicked action in any part of it, but is first or last rendered unhappy and unfortunate: There is not a superlative villain brought upon the stage, but either he is brought to an unhappy end, or brought to be a penitent." The book is also, says the preface, a warning and an inspiration. Reading about Moll's criminal techniques will help honest people to beware of such thieves, and watching her "application to a sober life, and industrious management at last in Virginia" will teach the reader that "no case can be so low, so despicable, or so empty of prospect, but that an unwearied industry will go a great way to deliver us from it, will in time raise the meanest creature to appear again in the world, and give him a new cast for his life."

Whether Defoe wrote this preface is uncertain. But its promises of different satisfactions for readers of *Moll Flanders* point to the book's perennially fascinating ambiguities. As some recent critics have insisted, *Moll Flanders* is best understood, like *Robinson Crusoe,* as a version of spiritual autobiography, depicting in Moll a process of spiritual "hardening" dramatically resolved by her true repentance in Newgate. For G. A. Starr, the scat- tered, episodic quality of the narrative is unified by "a gradual, fairly systematic development of the heroine's spiritual condition." As she reviews her life of crime, Moll presents its roots in economic necessity and urges readers to remember "that a time of distress is a time of dreadful temptation, and all the strength to resist is taken away; poverty presses, the soul is made desperate by distress, and what can be done?" But mysterious forces cooperate with economic factors, and it is the devil who lays snares, who leaves on the counter top the unattended bundle that is Moll's first theft, who whispers in her ear, "take the bundle; be quick; do it this moment." Moll renders vividly

her guilty fear and remorse after this initial theft, but "an evil counsellor within" pushes her on. Coming upon a child wearing a costly necklace. Moll leads her into an alley and is tempted to kill the child after lifting the jewelry: "Here, I say, the Devil put me upon killing the child in the dark alley, that it might not cry; but the very thought frighted me so that I was ready to drop down." The inner life Moll shows us has its darkly mysterious side, and this hastily suppressed glimpse of homicidal possibility suggests that her will for survival is instinctively ruthless.

Defoe seems to be marking the limits of selfknowledge and social and economic determinants, which can only explain so much. Temptations like these and Moll's subsequent settling into a criminal life illustrate progressive spiritual and moral decay and identify the narrative for some critics as spiritual autobiography. For other readers, Moll seems to embody an irrepressible individualism rather like Defoe's and to affirm the possibilities of triumphant survival in a hostile modern environment. Strictly speaking, these critical views are not opposed but describe the two different levels on which Defoe's book operates. Defoe clearly intended, however unsystematically, to portray Moll's life according to the Christian pattern of sin and repentance. Various factors, not the least of which may have been the haste with which he worked, made those intentions operate only fitfully or at least inefficiently and helped to produce something more like a novel than a spiritual autobiography.

Spiritual autobiography is necessarily singleminded, driving toward the moment of conversion, sifting experience for evidence of spiritual evolution or erosion. *Moll Flanders,* from its outset, is distracted from such Christian intensity by an interest in secular variety and psychological plenitude, the excitement of extreme situations Defoe's audience clearly wanted. Moreover, Defoe's characteristic approach involves an almost consuming curiosity about experience in all its forms that tends to make his autobiographers only intermittently focused on their spiritual development. What Moll delivers most of the time is precisely what later novelists offer more self-consciously: the process whereby an individual gradually develops an identity in relation to society, coming to selfconsciousness both within and against an external world, establishing a social self and discovering a private self that may diverge radically from that public identity. As Leo Braudy puts it very forcefully, the peculiar power of Defoe's novels appears to come from his "awakening to the implications of speaking in his own voice or masquerading in the voice of another," in the process grappling "with the problem of individuality and identity with an energy bordering on obsessiveness." With all its clumsiness and inconsistency and to some extent because of them, *Moll Flanders* conjures up a personality, a character claiming quite aggressively to be a unique individual with a history entirely her own, not simply a moral or social type. In that struggle for individuality, a matter of mere survival at times, an opposing external world is richly revealed, and Defoe's psychological realism is always rooted in a corresponding social realism.

From the beginning, Moll's narrative turns on that revealing struggle. She is born in Newgate prison, as the title page advertises, but her childhood and adolescence are hardly predicted by such birth. What Defoe promises his readers, after all, is something out of the ordinary, so Moll does not become as we might expect part of the urban

underclass like Colonel Jack. As far as she can remember, she was kidnapped by gypsies and left at Colchester, in Essex, where she is raised by a poor woman paid by the local parish. When she is fourteen, her "nurse" dies, and she is adopted by an upper middle-class family. In these opening pages Moll is enmeshed in institutions like the rudimentary child welfare system of the time and the upper middle-class family, but she also actively resists their influence, an outsider somehow, different from other foster children in wanting to live by her needle rather than become a servant, precociously if innocently independent, conscious always as she tells us of her social difference even within the bosom of the wealthy family that takes her in. Thus, she absorbs the privileged education the daughters receive without being officially entitled to it: "as I was always with them, I learn'd as fast as they; and tho' the masters were not appointed to teach me, yet I learn'd by imitation and enquiry, all that they learn'd by instruction and direction." By her own account but also she insists by the "opinion of all that knew the family", Moll is the natural superior of these privileged girls: "and in some things, I had the advantage of my ladies, tho' they were my superiors; but they were all the gifts of nature, and which all their fortunes could not furnish."

In other words, Moll's history simultaneously dramatizes social inevitability and the personal freedom that operates to modify its effects. Carried along by circumstances and institutions, she exploits natural gifts that enable her to attract the attention of her adoptive family in the first place. Like all Defoe's heroes, self-made to some extent, she learns by "imitation and enquiry." In a sense, this opening set of events predicts the pattern of the rest of the book. Over and over, in increasingly difficult situations, Moll shows how she ultimately transformed limiting, nearly disastrous circumstances into opportunities for expansion and self-renewal. And yet, *Moll Flanders* is hardly schematic. Moll's early days in Colchester are a turbulent record of sexual awakening and betrayal. Seduced by the elder brother of the house, she is married off in due course to the younger, but before that dull outcome she has her moments of excitement and self-discovery. The exact nature of those moments is worth dwelling on, for they help explain how the book operates on two complementary levels.

Finding Moll alone one day, the elder brother impulsively kisses her and declares his love. Several days later, kissing her more violently on a bed, he gives Moll five guineas, repeating all this shortly after and giving her more gold. Here are Moll's reflections on these events:

It will not be strange, if I now began to think, but
alas! it was but with very little solid reflection: I had
a most unbounded stock of vanity and pride, and but
a very little stock of vertue; I did indeed cast sometimes
with myself what my young master aim'd at,
but thought of nothing but the fine words, and the
gold; whether he intended to marry me, or not to
marry me, seem'd a matter of no great consequence
to me; nor did my thoughts so much as suggest to
me the necessity of making any capitulation [i.e.,
striking a bargain] for myself, till he came to make

a kind of formal proposal to me, as you shall hear presently.Thus I gave up myself to a readiness of being ruined without the least concern, and am a fair *memento* to all young women, whose vanity prevails over their vertue: Nothing was ever so stupid on both sides, had I acted as became me, and resisted as vertue and honour requir'd, this gentleman had either desisted his attacks, finding no room to expect the accomplishment of his design, or had made fair, and honourable proposals of marriage; in which case, whoever had blam'd him, no body could have blam'd me. In short, if he had known me, and how easy the trifle he aim'd at, was to be had, he would have troubled his head no farther, but have given me four or five guineas, and have lain with me the next time he had come at me; and if I had known his thoughts, and how hard he thought I would be to be gain'd, I might have made my own terms with him; and if I had not capitulated for an immediate marriage, I might for a maintenance till marriage, and might have had what I would; for he was already rich to excess, besides what he had in expectation; but I seem'd wholly to have abandoned all such thoughts as these, and was taken up onely with the pride of my beauty, and of being belov'd by such a gentleman; as for the gold I spent whole hours in looking upon it; I told [i.e., counted] the guineas over and over a thousand times a day.

Highlighted here is the gap between Moll the actor and Moll the narrator. In her ironic, slightly brutal assessment of her young innocence, Moll reveals how she has changed since then, substituted a strategically precise (and coldly calculating) knowledge of human relationships for the spontaneous emotions and passionate involvement of her youth. And yet Moll is divided in the attitudes she projects, concerned about underlining the moral of her story, an illustration of vanity overcoming virtue, but revealing in her actual narrative mainly a disgust with her naivete rather than any moral regret. In the second paragraph, the relative formality and moral conclusiveness of the first sentence slide into the colloquial outburst "Nothing was ever so stupid on both sides." Moll outlines a selfprotective, legalistic approach to human relationships. The ideal course would have been not so much moral as blamelessly advantageous: "whoever had blam'd him, no body could have blam'd me." In a crucial metaphor in the first paragraph, Moll speaks of her small "stock" of virtue and her huge "stock" of vanity and pride. The expression seems conventional enough here, but as the book proceeds the reader will see how Moll's moral and psychological reflections are governed by the mercantile materialism implicit in "stock." Her story turns on the problems of accumulating capital; her personality is formed in terms of assets and liabilities. And in fact as Moll remembers it, what thrilled her chiefly about the elder brother's advances was not the sex, hastily summarized, but the gold obsessively, erotically counted. As Defoe

masterfully arranges it, young Moll's passion is compounded of various forms of excitement; her sexuality is inseparable from the thrilling prospect of money and social advancement. In fact, the scene's erotic center is Moll counting the gold over and over again, realizing instinctively the deeply sexual resonances of money and its power. To be sure, old Moll sees only the latter and disparages the sexual ("the trifle he aim'd at"), thus beginning a consistent and unifying refrain in the narrative.

In much Western literature, what often identifies female characters is a turbulent, compulsive sexuality. Granted a richer emotional life than men by a persistent patriarchal myth, women are both exalted and degraded in this sexual division of psychological labor. Their inner life can make them the moral superiors of men, more sensitive, caring and so on, but their emotional sensitivity frequently renders them sexually unstable, in early eighteenthcentury drama and fiction quite often the victims of self-destructive romantic passion. One recent commentator on *Moll Flanders* explains this situation in economic terms. Excluded from meaningful economic activity by early modern capitalism, women "were endowed with a moral superiority to compensate for their economic diminution." What is striking about Defoe's version of this myth is his subversion of it. After this initial, in some ways quite conventional seduction by the elder brother (the sexual exploitation of servants and lower-class women by upper-class men was a popular literary subject as well as a social reality), Moll quickly acquires a cooler, infinitely more controlled personality, bent upon survival and prosperity, out to use sexuality as a means to those ends, no longer the helpless prey of her emotions. At least, that is what old Moll quickly jumps to in her narrative, the hasty summarizing of her next five years married to Robin, the younger brother, pointing to her impatience with a discarded younger self. "It concerns the story in hand very little, to enter into the farther particulars of the family, or of myself, for the five years that I liv'd with this husband; only to observe that I had two children by him, and that at the end of five year he died." Instead, Moll provides the first of what will be regular accountings of her financial condition. Only moderately profitable is her comment on this marriage's bottom line: "nor was I much mended by the match: Indeed I had preserv'd the elder brother's bonds to me, to pay me 500 (Pounds) which he offer'd me for my consent to marry his brother; and with this and what I had saved of the money he formerly gave me, and about as much more by my husband, left me a widow with about 1200 (Pounds) in my pocket."

Moll now embarks on a tangled set of adventures, in all of which her object is to marry profitably: "I had been trick'd once by *that cheat call'd* LOVE, but the game was over; I was resolv'd now to be married, or nothing, and to be well married, or not at all." Experience soon teaches her that in London marriages were "the consequences of politick schemes, for forming interests, and carrying on business, and that LOVE had no share, or but very little in the matter." In much of what follows, Defoe displays his characteristic fascination with duplicity and manipulation of others. In sequences too complicated for extensive summary, Moll learns to hold herself in reserve, to assume false names, to pretend to fortune in order to attract men, and in general to adapt her identity for selfadvantage. What matters, above all, is self-control, keeping her true self secret and essentially apart, at least from men. A good half of the novel is, in fact, devoted to these adventures, which result in five sexual relationships, four of them

marriages, one of them incestuous and one of them bigamous. The abilities Moll quickly acquires to manage these relationships have seemed to many readers to be fairly implausible if interesting in their obvious affinities with Defoe's own talents. The marriage market where Moll wheels and deals is not essentially different from markets Defoe knew at first hand, and Moll's conspiratorial alliances with other women in her campaigns to bag suitable husbands echo the political maneuvers in which he was still involved.

And yet Defoe's own published opinions about marriage were very far from Moll's calculating materialism. *Conjugal Lewdness; or Matrimonial Whoredom. A Treatise concerning the Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed* (1727) is as eloquent in its praise of marriage as it is fiery in its denunciations of sexual and mercenary motives for entering into it. Defoe counsels caution, warning against the hell of an unhappy marriage: "HOUSHOLD strife is a terrestrial Hell, at least, 'tis an emblem of real Hell." But he also labels marriage the summation of "all that can be called happy in the life of man." Clearly, *Moll Flanders* provided an opportunity to imagine a subversive marginality otherwise unavailable to Defoe. An insolated and embattled woman like Moll is to some extent a metaphor for that marginality rather than a plausible version of reality, her experience in the marriage market, like her criminal career afterwards, serving as a means for exploring normally forbidden possibilities of action and self-consciousness and perhaps for enjoying the play of strategy and counter-strategy, as well as the exhilaration of impersonation and social movement that are so important in Defoe's own personality.

But some critics contend that moral irony governs the book, that Defoe intended his readers to see Moll's views on marriage as abhorrent and to realize that Moll is inconsistent, untrue to the selfserving materialism she claims to live by. The case to be made for this reading is a good one. Even old Moll has to admit that she was not immune to lingering traces of passion. While she lived with her first husband, the younger brother of her seducer, 'I never was in bed with my husband, but I wish'd my self in the arms of his brother. . . I committed adultery and incest with him every day in my desires." By her own admission, Moll is frequently for all her tough talk betrayed by her emotions. First, she is "hurried on (by my fancy to a gentleman)" to marry her second husband, the shopkeeper who goes bankrupt and deserts her. Later, at Bath she becomes a wealthy man's mistress and her moral qualms are stilled by growing affection: "But these were thoughts of no weight, and whenever he came to me they vanish'd; for his company was so delightful, that there was no being melancholly when he was there." In similar fashion, Moll later agrees to marry the banker who has just divorced his unfaithful wife and proposed to her, but she is struck by sudden guilt. He little knows, she exclaims, that he is divorcing one whore to marry another, "that has lain with thirteen men, and has had a child since he saw me." Her resolution would warm the heart of the most sentimental women's magazine reader: "I'll be a true wife to him, and love him suitably to the strange excess of his passion for me; I will make him amends, if possible, by what he shall see, for the cheats and abuses I put upon him, which he does not see." Finally, Moll's most elaborate scheme for mercenary marriage collapses comically when she discovers that the new husband she thought was a rich Irish peer is a penniless fortune hunter. But when he leaves her the next day, her reaction is intense:

"I eat but little, and after dinner I fell into a vehement fit of crying, every now and then, calling him by his name, which was James, O Jemy! said I, come back, come back, I'll give you all I have; I'll beg, I'll starve with you, and thus I run raving about the room several times."

Although there are times when Moll sounds like a female impersonator, she acquires skills at survival and manipulation by painfully repressing emotions that the book identifies as specifically female susceptibilities. At the least, Defoe tries to arrange a balance between the emotional melodrama that gives Moll's life shape and the artful manipulations by which she survives those psychological crises. Sometimes, he clearly falters in the attempt, and long stretches of Moll's marital career are really fascinated expositions of her cleverness as a sort of confidence woman, a skilled predator in the sexual jungle. "I play'd with this lover," she says and repeats an earlier image, "as an angle does with a trout: I found I had him fast on the hook, so I jested with his new proposal; and put him off." And yet as events show, Moll is herself being tricked and played with, by some of her male antagonists and ultimately by fate. Thanks to the disasters that follow Moll's manipulations and her own confessions of emotional vulnerability, a personality emerges rather different from the one Moll herself projects.

As the title page luridly advertises, Moll commits incest. But her marriage to the man who turns out to be her brother is the culmination of her first really elaborate and successful marital scheme. With the help of her female friend, a sea captain's wife, the first in a series of crucial female accomplices for Moll, she passes for a woman of fortune and attracts a number of suitors: "I who had a subtile game to play, had nothing now to do but to single out from them all the properest man that might be for my purpose; that is to say, the man who was most likely to depend upon the hear say of a fortune, and not enquire too far into the particulars; and unless I did this, I did nothing, for my case would not bear much enquiry." Even as Moll assumes an identity and undermines any sort of sincerity by her evasions and manipulations, she is ironically discovering an unlooked for biological identity, being cruelly manipulated by fate or at least by coincidence. Moreover, once she learns, in Virginia where she has gone to live with her new husband, that her mother-in-law is her mother and her husband her brother, the secrecy that she has chosen as a means of power is transformed into a hell of private anguish. "I resolv'd, that it was absolutely necessary to conceal it all, and not make the least discovery of it either to mother or husband; and thus I liv'd with the greatest pressure imaginable for three year more, but had no more children."

Moll's implausible resilience allows her to return to England hardly the worse for wear and to pick up her career as woman on the make. Defoe is not novelist enough to render the cumulative effects of emotional stress. What he does try to do some justice to is the coexistence in Moll of contradictory elements of controlling calculation and compelling emotion. Moll's life is at once a series of free choices and coercive circumstances, an at- tempt to balance various kinds of necessity, biological and social, with personal freedom. That attempt comes to a head in Moll's arrest and incarceration in Newgate prison, the most moving and significant sequence in the novel.

After several close calls in her fantastically successful career as a thief, Moll is finally caught in the act and with no real transition the episodic rush of narrative, with its high-spirited accumulation of tricks and disguises and its panorama of scenes and faces, slows to a melodramatic halt. Moll is, as she says, "fix'd indeed", for her narrative is suddenly restricted to one terrible location and the expansive forward movement of her criminal career is now shifted violently back to the past and the fate it has apparently fixed for her. Moll's narrative habits so far consist mainly of sketching her movements and rendering dialogue, giving us people and their interaction rather than the places they inhabit. What matters to her story are strategies and states of mind, and even exotic places like Virginia remain indistinct, mere stage backdrops. Unlike the London streets of her criminal career, which are diagramed to give the reader a sense of the swiftness and agility of Moll's movements, Newgate is solid rock, looming gigantically as a place of confinement, a palpable set of walls and an embodiment of inescapable, immovable circumstances. For almost the first time in her narrative, Moll attempts to describe a physical location, sliding from the fearful insight that she was destined for it, to a still half-boastful reminder of her skill in avoiding it, to her unique admission of its fateful force.

> I was carried to *Newgate;* that horrid place! my very blood chills at the mention of its name; the place, where so many of my comrades had been lock'd up, and from whence they went to the fatal tree [i.e., the gallows]; the place where my mother suffered so deeply, where I was brought into the world, and from whence I expected no redemption, but by an infamous death: To conclude, the place that had so long expected me, and which with so much art and success I had so long avoided. I was now fix'd indeed; 'tis impossible to describe the terror of my mind, when I was first brought in, and when I look'd round upon all the horrors of that dismal place: I look'd on myself as lost, and that I had nothing to think of, but of going out of the world, and that with the utmost infamy; the hellish noise, the roaring, swearing and clamour, the stench and nastiness, and all the dreadful croud of afflicting things that I saw there; joyn'd together to make the place seem an emblem of hell itself, and a kind of an entrance into it.

And yet that is hardly the worst aspect of Newgate, since Moll's (or Defoe's) powers of physical evocation are not great. Moll is plunged into fear and trembling and thinks night and day "of gibbets and halters, evil spirits and devils. . . harrass'd between the dreadful apprehensions of death, and the terror of my conscience reproaching me with my past horrible life." But what Moll describes at greater length than this terror is the transformation that follows and cancels it. Heretofore, Moll has evaded the full consequences of her circumstances; her story is a testimonial to the powers of individualistic self-creation. But Newgate operates as the concentrated essence of an

irresistible external world that erodes free will and individual agency, that determines personality and destroys freedom. In an unusually vivid image for the plainspoken Moll, she evokes the prison's compelling force. It operates "like the waters in the caveties, and hollows of mountains, which petrifies and turns into stone whatever they are suffer'd to drop upon," so her confinement in this enforced environment turns her "first stupid and senseless, then brutish and thoughtless, and at last raving mad." Moll is transformed, loses the identity she thought she had: "I scarce retain'd the habit and custom of good breeding and manners, which all along till now run thro' my conversation; so thoro' a degeneracy had possess'd me, that I was no more the same thing that I had been, than if I had never been otherwise than what I was now."

In the context of Defoe's fiction, this is a crucial moment. All his narratives challenge the notion of simple or stable identity. His characters record nothing less than the fluid and dynamic nature of personality, a matter of changing roles, wearing masks, responding to circumstances, and discovering new possibilities of self-expression. Up to now, Moll has defined herself by evading the restraint built into the idea of simple identity. Both as woman and as criminal, her survival has been a matter of reserving the truth about herself; and her identity, if she can be said to have any, lies in those repeated acts of deception and self-reservation. Those acts seem in stark contrast to this involuntary transformation into what Moll calls a "meer Newgate-Bird." But Defoe may have intended a profound irony. Without realizing it, Moll's immersion in crime past the point of necessity has "hardened" her in vice, slowly transformed her and eroded her powers of moral choice. Newgate is simply the culmination of that process, an accelerated revelation of the real Moll formed by a life of crime, "harden'd" in a sort of moral stupor long before she arrived in Newgate.

There are two events that restore Moll to selfconsciousness. One, of course, is her spiritual con- version, the true repentance that is the climax of her spiritual autobiography. Condemned to death, Moll is visited by a minister who leads her to regret her past out of more than fear of earthly punishment. Responding to his prayers and entreaties, Moll repents out of concern for having offended God, conscious as never before of her eternal welfare. The experience, Moll admits, is impossible to render, just as the minister's methods and reasonings are beyond her powers of narration: "I am not able to repeat the excellent discourses of this extraordinary man; 'tis all that I am able to do to say, that he reviv'd my heart, and brought me into such a condition, that I never knew any thing in my life before: I was cover'd with shame and tears for things past, and yet had at the same time a secret surprizing joy at the prospect of being a true penitent." Moll, once again, leaves it to "the work of every sober reader to make just reflections" upon her religious conversion; she is "not mistress of words enough to express them." What she is able to describe very precisely is the other event that brings her out of her lethargy, the arrival in Newgate of her Lancashire husband, Jemy, along with two other captured highwaymen. Overwhelmed with grief for him, she tells us, Moll blames herself for his taking to a life of crime, and the result is a return to self-consciousness: "I bewail'd his misfortunes, and the ruin he was now come to, at such a rate, that I relish'd nothing now, as I did before, and the first reflections I made upon the horrid detestable life I had liv'd, began to return upon me, and as these things return'd my abhorrance of the place I was in, and of the way of living in it, return'd

also; in a word, I was perfectly chang'd, and became another body." "Conscious guilt," as Moll calls it, restores her to herself, to what she calls the "thinking" that equals self-consciousness. "I began to think, and to think is one real advance from hell to heaven; all that hellish harden'd state and temper of soul. . . is but a deprivation of thought; he that is restor'd to his power of thinking is restor'd to himself"

This self-restoration precedes the spiritual conversion and is in effect a precondition for true repentance. Moll is restored to herself, we can say, by regaining her sense that she can exercise a controlling relationship with other people, and her rather (on the face of it) overstated guilt about Jemy marks the beginning of a revivifying connection with her past. As the last phase of her career begins, Moll resonstructs certain aspects of her past, no longer plunging ahead from episode to episode and improvising survival as she goes but revisiting and reintegrating past and present. Reprieved from execution and ordered "transported" to Virginia, she persuades the reluctant Jemy to come along and settles in Virginia with the help of carefully enumerated assets accumulated in her life of crime. Once there, she buys her freedom and establishes herself and Jemy as proprietors of a plantation, increasing her holdings when she discovers that her mother has died and left her an inheritance. This last she discovers by seeking out, in disguise, the son□Humphry, who is now a grown man□shed had with her brother-husband. The scene when she first glimpses her son is a fine moment but raises again the recurrent problem of psychological realism. When someone points Humphry out to her, Moll is deeply affected:

you may guess, if you can, what a confus'd mixture
of joy and fright possest my thoughts upon this occasion,
for I immediately knew that this was no body
else, but my own son. . . let any mother of children
that reads this, consider it, and but think with what
anguish of mind I restrain'd myself; what yearnings
of soul I had in me to embrace him, and weep over
him; and how I thought all my entrails turn'd within
me, that my very bowels mov'd, and I knew not what
to do; as I now know not how to express those agonies:
When he went from me I stood gazing and trembling,
and looking after him as long as I could see
him; then sitting down on the grass, just at a place I
had mark'd, I made as if I lay down to rest me, but
turn'd from her [the woman who has identified
Moll's son], and lying on my face wept, and kiss'd
the ground that he had set his foot on.

By itself, this is convincing, especially in the care with which Moll disguises herself and hides her intense emotions, preserving something of her old cunning at self-concealment even as she reveals herself to the reader. But within the context of Moll's career as a mother in which she has more or less abandoned or carelessly disposed of a string of children such intensity may seem strangely inconsistent at best. And yet without giving Defoe more credit for novelistic sophistication than he deserves, the

scene fits exactly into this last phase of Moll's career. Moll's intensity is a coherent reaction to her own maternal failures, and Humphry represents accumulated guilt as well as inexpressible joy. Moreover, the scene begins yet another sequence in which Moll can operate in her characteristically self-renewing way. As so often before, she has a secret and acquires a confidant to manipulate the secret to advantage. Only now her collaborator is her son and the secret links her joyfully and productively with a past rather than just concealing it. As she and Humphry huddle together and he hands over Moll's substantial inheritance, she looks up "with great thankfulness to the hand of Providence, which had done such wonders for me, who had been myself the greatest wonder of wickedness, perhaps that had been suffered to live in the world." The moral ambiguity in Moll's thanksgiving, with its irrepressible self-promotion, it a link with the unrepentant Moll of earlier times. For some readers, this particular inconsistency and adamant inability to become simply moral types are what make Defoe's characters a uniquely living collection.

Source: John J. Richetti, "Daniel Defoe," in *Twayne's English Author's Series Online,* G. K. Hall & Co., 1999.

Adaptations

In 1965, Paramount adapted *Moll Flanders* as a film entitled *The Amorous Adventures of Moll Flanders,* starring Kim Novak and Richard Johnson, and directed by Terence Young. It is available as a video in VHS format.

In 1996, Robin Wright, Morgan Freeman, and Stockard Channing starred in a big-screen version of the novel titled simply *Moll Flanders*, produced by MGM and directed by Pen Densham. It is available on MGM Video in VHS or DVD format.

In 1975, the British Broadcasting Corporation produced *Moll Flanders* for the television screen, in two episodes.

In 1981, Granada Television (U.K.) produced a four-part television version entitled Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders, starring Alex Kingston as Moll Flanders and directed by David Atwood. It is available as a videotape in VHS format from Anchor Bay Entertainment.

Topics for Further Study

Create a time line showing the major political, religious, social, scientific, and cultural events that occurred while Moll Flanders and Daniel Defoe lived (the late 1600s through the early 1700s).

Elizabeth Frye was an English prison reform activist who lived from 1780 to 1845. She especially worked to improve conditions for female prisoners at Newgate Prison. Investigate the prison reform movement in England and find out its history. Were there any prison reformers working during the time Moll Flanders was in Newgate? What were the typical conditions at a prison such as Newgate?

Syphilis and other venereal diseases were common in London during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Research the prevalence of these diseases and how it compares to their current prevalence in London and in the United States. Examine how venereal diseases were treated during the time of *Moll Flanders* and how this compares to current treatments.

Choose an episode from *Moll Flanders* that you especially like, and write a script for a soap opera featuring the episode. Update the characters, setting, and events as you think appropriate to a present-day story.

Compare and Contrast

1700s: London's population reaches 550,000, up from 450,000 in 1660. Despite losing as many as 100,000 citizens to the Great Plague in 1665, and the destruction of much of the city in 1666 during the three-day Great Fire, London is now the largest city in Europe. Rebuilding London after the Great Fire takes place quickly and haphazardly.

Today: London now boasts about seven million people within its six hundred and twenty square miles and is still the largest city in Europe. Major historical buildings, such as the Royal Opera House and the British Museum, are being renovated.

1700s: Middle- and upper-class English women have more economic options than lower-class women; however, women are increasingly excluded from productive work as their social status increases. Opportunities in areas such as teaching are growing, but trade guilds and apprenticeships exclude women in large numbers while some formerly female professions, such as midwifery, are being crowded out by new male health-care professionals.

Today: Women make up 45 percent of the workforce in the United Kingdom, and Britain employs more women than any other European country. Not only are women found in positions throughout government, education, medicine, business, and other professions, but they account for about 35 percent of new business ventures.

1700s: Black slaves comprise 24 percent of the Virginia colony's population in 1715, up from less than 5 percent in 1671. Slavery is not abolished in Virginia until after the United States Civil War.

Today: U.S. Census 2000 reports for the state of Virginia show that African Americans comprise about 20 percent of the total population.

Early 1700s: The English criminal Jack Sheppard is famous for his astonishing escapes from custody, particularly his 1724 escape from Newgate Prison. His exploits became the subject of numerous narratives and plays, some attributed to Daniel Defoe, and he is the hero of William Harris Ainsworth's 1839 novel *Jack Sheppard.*

Today: Newgate Prison was demolished in 1902, and today the front iron doors of the prison can be viewed in the Museum of London.

What Do I Read Next?

The setting is London in the 1750s in Paula Allardyce's novel *Miss Philadelphia Smith* (1977). This romantic novel looks at class differences on a London street that is divided between the odd-numbered houses of the wealthy and the even-numbered houses of the middle-class. Philadelphia Smith lives in an even-numbered cottage and attracts the attention of a wealthy rake whose family lives on the odd-numbered side of the street.

Jack Sheppard, written by William Harrison Ainsworth in 1839, is a novel that, like *Moll Flanders,* greatly romanticizes crime and criminals. In what is considered one of the "Newgate novels," named for the famous English prison, Ainsworth tells the story of Sheppard, a real-life burglar and jail-breaker.

Soldiers of Fortune (1962), by Peter Bourne, gives a profile of the colonists of Virginia as they make the hard trip across the Atlantic Ocean. Their stories and others offer a panorama of English history and America's first colonists.

Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress (1724) is Daniel Defoe's last and darkest novel. It is the purported autobiography of a woman, the mistress of rich and powerful men, who has traded her virtue for survival and then for fame and fortune.

Further Study

Backscheider, Paula R., *Daniel Defoe: His Life,* Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

In this highly regarded biography of Defoe, Backscheider reveals new information about Defoe's secret career as a double agent, his daring business ventures, and his cat-and-mouse games with those who wanted to control the press.

Defoe, Daniel, *A Journal of the Plague Year,* Oxford University Press, 1998.

This book was originally published the same year as *Moll Flanders* and is a compelling account of the Great Plague of 1665. In the book, Defoe scans the streets and alleyways of stricken London in an effort to record the extreme suffering of the victims of the Great Plague, which occurred during Defoe's early childhood. The book is both horrifying and sympathetic and offers a frightening vision of the city laid to waste.

Hay, Douglas, and Nicholas Rogers, *Eighteenth-Century English Society: Shuttles and Swords,* Oxford University Press, 1997.

Drawing on recent work on demography, labor, and law, this book covers the period 1688-1820 and focuses on the experience of the 80 percent of the population that made up England's "lower orders." The authors provide insights into food shortages, changes in poor relief, use of the criminal law, and the shifts in social power caused by industrialization that would bring about the birth of working-class radicalism.

Waller, Maureen, *1700: Scenes from London Life,* Four Walls, Eight Windows, 2000.

This book presents a huge amount of detail about daily life (and death) in eighteenth-century London, focusing on where people lived and worked, how they behaved, what they wore and ate, and how they suffered from illness and injury. The book is made up of vignettes drawn from the author's research and by excerpts from contemporary diarists, novelists, and commentators.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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