

The Novels of Daniel Defoe

The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous
Moll Flanders (1721)

Edited by
Liz Bellamy



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THE WORKS OF DANIEL DEFOE

General Editors:
W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank

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Volume 6:

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2009 by Pickering & Chatto (Publishers) Limited

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

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BRITISH LIBRARY CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION DATA

Defoe, Daniel, 1661?–1731

The novels of Daniel Defoe

Part 2, vols. 6–10. – (The works of Daniel Defoe) (The Pickering masters)

1. Defoe, Daniel, 1661?–1731 – Criticism and interpretation 2. Adventure stories, Eng-
lish 3. Adventure stories, English – History and criticism

I. Title II. Owens, W. R. III. Furbank, Philip Nicholas
823.5[F]

ISBN-13: 978-1-85196-753-7 (set)

Typeset by P&C

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INTRODUCTION

Moll Flanders is nowadays generally regarded as Daniel Defoe's second most famous and successful novel, after *Robinson Crusoe*. Indeed, with the rise of feminist approaches to literary studies in the past forty years, along with the interest in crime and punishment which developed following the publication of works such as Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, *Moll Flanders* has increasingly displaced *Robinson Crusoe* on undergraduate courses and reading lists, as a work that addresses some of the fundamental concerns of our age, as well as a text that represents the emergent form of the novel. It has been heralded as the first true novel, and as a work that helped to determine the definitive characteristics of the form;¹ it is the subject of extensive critical debate and there are numerous scholarly, critical and popular editions. Yet it was not always like this. Although the novel sold reasonably well on first publication, going through several editions within a year of its first appearance in January 1722, Defoe's text was published only infrequently for almost two centuries thereafter. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *Moll Flanders* was not seen as in any sense a literary classic or a serious contribution to the genre of narrative fiction.

But while Defoe's novel was excluded from the literary canon, the character of Moll Flanders took on a life outside the text, appearing in a range of pirated and chapbook editions, slipping into folklore and popular culture, before largely fading from sight in the nineteenth century. It was not until the start of the twentieth century, with the revolt against Victorian concepts of literary propriety, and the reappraisal of *Moll Flanders* by Modernist writers such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, that the novel

¹ See Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, ed. G. A. Starr (London, 1971), p. vii; Paula R. Backscheider, *Moll Flanders: The Making of a Criminal Mind* (Boston, Massachusetts, 1990), p. 7.

became the subject of serious critical scrutiny and began to be reprinted regularly in its original form. In this introduction I look at the history of both *Moll Flanders* and *Moll Flanders* to explore some of the reasons why a work that existed almost exclusively within the realms of popular culture and historical arcana for almost two centuries, should come to be such a significant and well known literary text in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

* * * * *

It is clear from the very start of her narrative that Moll Flanders is a born survivor. As wife, mistress, thief and pickpocket, she struggles and schemes through life, from her inauspicious birth in Newgate prison until her retirement with a husband with whom she lived 'with the greatest Kindness and Comfort imaginable'.² Moll's account of the events of this life of 'continu'd Variety' takes its readers into the underworld of early modern England, with its poverty, criminality, greed and vice, but it also takes us into the equally complex realm of the mind of its heroine. The narrative is characterised by the relentless activity of Moll and by what Ian Watt has identified as the 'concrete particularity' of Defoe's literary style.³ Terry Eagleton argues in a similar vein that 'Defoe's realism is a realism of things'.⁴ Judgements such as these reflect a long-standing critical emphasis on Defoe as the master of realism and the detailed evocation of the material world. We are given an often minutely particular account of Moll's movements and the various 'shifts' and scams in which she is involved, but the reader comes away from the narrative with a paradoxical sense that the primary effect of this accumulation of external detail is in fact to convey the internal consciousness of Moll herself. The more we are told about the technical details of how to pick a watch from a pocket or how to steal a bundle of cloth from under the mercer's nose, the more insight we get into the character and motivation of Moll Flanders. And this character is itself shown to be intriguingly paradoxical, comprising a fascinating blend of self-assertion and self-doubt; penitence for her criminality, and satisfaction at the success of her criminal schemes; delight in her professional notoriety and desire for concealment and disguise. It is not so much Defoe's presentation of the world of things, but his use of this world to represent

² *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders*, below, p. 274. All further page references are to this edition, and are given in parentheses in the text.

³ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957; London, 1987), p. 29.

⁴ Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (Oxford, 2006), p. 23.

individual character and motive, and his recognition of the potential complexity of these, that makes *Moll Flanders* such a resonant text for twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers, and it is perhaps fitting that the novel first came to be recognised as a serious literary work in the era which saw the birth of psychoanalysis.

One of the earliest incidents involving Moll is the story of how, when she was 'not above three Years old', she escaped from a band of gypsies in Colchester (p. 29). This story embodies the egregious determination to control her own destiny that was to characterise the rest of Moll's life, with the tiny child hiding herself away and refusing to go any further with companions whom she seems to have regarded as beneath her. But the account also manifests the blend of circumstantial detail and narrative uncertainty with which so much of the novel is presented. We are told that this 'Notion' about the gypsies is the first thing that Moll can 'Recollect, or could ever learn of myself', so that it is not entirely clear whether the 'Notion' is true. Even assuming it is true, we cannot be certain whether it comes from Moll's memory, or from stories that she has heard, or from the records of the parish officers to whom, we are told, the three-year-old child, showing a rather precocious talent for narrative construction, 'gave an Account' of the incident (p. 28). As with Moll's story as a whole, the mystification of the process of recalling and retelling reinforces the enigmatic status of the tale.

Later on, when living with her 'good motherly nurse' in Colchester, Moll again reveals the independence of spirit and refusal to be determined by social restrictions that is her abiding characteristic. To the amusement of both her nurse and the Mayor's family who patronise the parish school, Moll asserts her determination to become a 'Gentlewoman'. The scene is based on a misunderstanding, for by 'Gentlewoman' Moll simply means 'to be able to Work for myself, and get enough to keep me without that terrible Bug-bear *going to Service*', whereas the Mayoress and her daughters understand it as meaning 'to live Great, Rich, and High' (p. 31). But the irony of the scene is complicated when Moll explains that she wants to be a gentlewoman like the person who comes to mend and wash the lace, for 'she ... is a Gentlewoman, and they call her Madam'. By aspiring to support herself in the manner of someone who is a 'Madam' in the sense that she is, as the nurse explains, 'a Person of ill Fame' who 'has had two or three Bastards' (p. 32), Moll reveals the extent of her desire for material success and independence, but also the price that she is (here unwittingly but later knowingly) prepared to pay.

Yet there is a further level of irony in this scene. As the wife of a Colchester tradesman, the Mayoress defines gentility in terms of wealth and

consumption rather than aristocratic or genteel birth, so that Moll ultimately succeeds in becoming a gentlewoman in the Mayoress's sense as well as her own. She ends her days 'in considerable Circumstances' living great, rich and high with her 'fine Gentleman' husband, Jemy (p. 273). Moreover, she achieves this success, as she says she will at the beginning of the novel, by her 'Fingers Ends', although not in the sense that she originally intends (p. 30). She uses her fingers to steal rather than work her way to prosperity and gentility. By highlighting Moll's ruthless determination to shape her own destiny and to avoid a life of subordination and servitude, and by exhibiting her comical refusal to be restricted by prevalent social expectations, the opening scenes of the novel introduce the defining features of its central character and delineate the restless individualism that will drive the narrative forward. Moll therefore comes across as a peculiarly modern heroine, presented within a distinctly eighteenth-century text.

For just over half of the book, Moll makes her way in life by the only method that was available to many women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, gaining her maintenance through marriage or by living as a kept mistress, to a variety of partners: she is mistress to one Colchester brother and wife to the other; wife to the 'Gentleman-Tradesman' and then to her own brother; mistress to her fellow lodger in Bath; wife to Jemy, her 'Lancashire husband' and true love; and then wife to the banker with whom she lodged her money. Later, towards the end of her thieving career, when Moll is over fifty, she sleeps with a baronet whose pockets she picks (pp. 188–9). She subsequently receives several visits from the baronet, and 'tho' he did not KEEP, as they call it, yet he never failed doing things that were Handsome, and sufficient to Maintain me without working' (p. 198). The title-page to *Moll Flanders* asserts that she 'was Twelve Year a Whore' (p. 21)⁵ and Moll uses this term to describe herself on ten separate occasions, yet she is presented throughout the novel as an exceptionally dutiful, loyal and affectionate wife and mistress. 'Whore' here seems to signify a kept woman or courtesan rather than a common prostitute but for all her self-condemnation, in most respects, Moll's behaviour is very far from that commonly associated with a whore.

Although Moll remains largely true to her maxim 'that a Woman should never be kept for a Mistress, that had Money to keep her self' (p. 67) she does not appear to draw a great distinction between her marriages and her

⁵ See Rodney M. Baine, 'The Evidence from Defoe's Title Pages', *Studies in Bibliography*, 25 (1972), pp. 185–91, and P. N. Furbank, Introduction to *The Fortunate Mistress*, in *The Novels of Daniel Defoe*, Vol. 9, pp. 8–9, where it is argued that Defoe's title-pages were probably the work of a printer rather than Defoe himself.

affairs. Apart from the technical difficulty that she is already married, both to her Gentleman-Tradesman and to her brother, at the time of her subsequent liaisons, and aside from the fact that she marries Jemy after having more or less promised to marry the banker, Moll is entirely faithful and true to her husbands and also her lovers. But with the exception of her two difficult relationships, her marriages to the Gentleman-Tradesman and subsequently to her brother, Moll passes over the period of her wedded life with little comment, famously summarising her marriage to Robin with the words 'I had two Children by him, and ... at the end of five Year he Died' (p. 65). Of her life with the banker she tells us, 'We liv'd an uninterrupted course of Ease and Content for Five Years' (p. 162). Moll's story focuses on periods of struggle and hardship rather than ease, prosperity and happiness, for the latter are not seen as appropriate material for fiction. It is clear, however, that Moll has a remarkable facility in attracting partners from some of the higher echelons of society, despite her Newgate and charity school origins, and even in the declining years of her life. This shows the extent of her ability to evade the determining influences of birth and social status, but also suggests that she is an essentially amenable character who is happy to live in domestic tranquillity unless driven to do otherwise by distress of circumstance.

Even from her very earliest youth, Moll displays a natural gentility. The Mayoress recognises that she has 'a Gentlewoman's Hand' despite having had to work for her living at her needle (p. 31), and throughout the narrative she emphasises her neatness and tidiness, her hatred of dirt, and her desire to be well dressed and well turned out at all times (pp. 32, 209). She tells us that during her thieving career she always went out 'very well Dress'd, and ... had very good Cloaths on, and a Gold Watch, as like a Lady as other Folks' (p. 178). The irony of this last assertion implies that the gap between appearance and reality in Moll's attire can be generalised to represent a more general deceptiveness and pretension within society as a whole but, at the same time, Moll's words can be seen to be true in that she shows in her narrative that she is able to pass herself off as a lady. This is manifested in the incident towards the end of the novel when she meets young Lady Betty in the Mall, and persuades the child that she is a friend of her father, Sir Thomas, in order to steal her gold watch. Moll's success in masquerading as a lady of quality, talking 'familiarly' to the child, indicates her ability to assume the language and manners as well as the costume of the social elite.

After the death of her first husband, Robin, when Moll is left in affluent circumstances with a fortune of £1,200, she reveals her own social aspirations in her decision to marry an 'amphibious Creature, this *Land-water-*

Thing, call'd, a *Gentleman-Tradesman*' (p. 66). Although Moll subsequently regrets this alliance and condemns her own imprudence in marrying a husband who was a 'Rake, Gentleman, Shop keeper, and Beggar all together' (p. 67), the two seem to have had more in common than Moll is prepared to admit in her wry retrospective narration. Moll is still young when she enters into this relationship and the couple share a desire to enjoy life to the full and appear in a condition that is well above their humble origins. Moll's primary regret is that they maintain this 'profusion of Expence' by running through her money at a remarkable rate, although she recognises that as well as having 'the pleasure of seeing a great deal of my Money spent upon my self', she 'had some of the spending it too' (p. 67). On one occasion, her linen-draper husband has 'a mind to look like Quality for a Week', so the couple take a trip to Oxford with 'a rich Coach, very good Horses, a Coachman, Postilion, and two Footmen in very good Liveries; a Gentleman on Horseback, and a Page with a Feather in his Hat upon another Horse' (p. 67). This is an equipage fit for an extremely wealthy and important family, and Moll and her husband have no difficulty imposing themselves on the people that they meet. The innkeepers follow the servants in calling the linen-draper 'my Lord', and Moll is '*Her Honour* the Countess'. The pair hold discussions with two or three college fellows about possible arrangements for sending a non-existent nephew to the University, and 'diverted' themselves 'with bantering several other poor Scholars, with hopes of being at least his Lordship's chaplains' (p. 67). While clearly highly enjoyable, this 'Frolick' proves a significant financial drain, with the twelve-day 'ramble' costing around £93, but there is no suggestion that the couple's false gentility is suspected at any point. The feckless extravagance of Moll and her husband is exposed, but this adventure also highlights the shallowness of a society in which status is dependent on the show of wealth and anyone who wears a decent watch can be as like a lady as other folks.

The danger of reliance on appearances is perhaps most clearly exemplified in Moll's third marriage to her 'Lancashire husband', Jemy. The cast-off mistress marries a bankrupt highwayman, while each is under the impression that the other has a substantial fortune. Both have been deceived by rumour and superficial display, and also by a reluctance to inquire too closely into the other's affairs, lest their own deceptions should be revealed. Jemy is therefore constructed as Moll's male equivalent, a reckless adventurer who survives through trickery. Yet despite, or perhaps because of, this similarity, Moll represents her short-lived marriage to Jemy in far more positive terms than she employs for her other liaisons. She tells the reader that she 'really lov'd him most tenderly' (p. 137).

Moll's relationship with Jemy in the first half of the book epitomises the paradox that is at the heart of Moll's character and her narrative. Moll is emotional and affectionate, falling into 'a vehement Fit of crying' and repeatedly calling Jemy's name when he first leaves her (p. 135). At the same time, she manifests a rather ruthless sense of self-preservation, for in addition to concealing her true name from him, she does not reveal how much money she has, once she realises that he is not in possession of the great fortune she has been led to believe. Even after the two are reunited at the end of the book and happily settled in Virginia, it is a long time before Jemy is let into the secret of her history and, more importantly, the true extent of her wealth (p. 273). Moll's relationships are simultaneously intimate, as she appears to inspire the most unswerving devotion in a succession of men, and yet curiously distant as she manages to conceal such important matters as her previous marriages, the birth of her various children and her financial resources.

The reader enjoys a similarly ambivalent relationship with Moll. We empathise with her energy and enthusiasm, her zest for life and her apparent frankness, yet at the same time there is a lurking suspicion that Moll may not be being entirely candid with us. She could be deceiving us, as she has deceived fond husbands like Robin, whom she married against her own inclinations while in love with his brother, or the banker, whose wife she became despite having married and borne a child to Jemy between accepting his proposal and solemnising the nuptials. We too do not know Moll's real name, which she tells us, rather cryptically, that she will conceal 'till I dare own who I have been, as well as who I am' (p. 27). The writing style reinforces this sense of suspicion and uncertainty, not only by its reticence in relation to significant elements of the story, but also by the recurrent use of the technique of making a positive assertion which is then undercut by a subsequent statement that appears to modify or contradict the initial claim. Thus when Moll goes to her Governess's house for her lying-in with Jemy's baby, she notes the number of 'Ladies of Pleasure' that are being cared for by the midwife. Moll proclaims:

THIS was a strange Testimony of the growing Vice of the Age, and such a one, that as bad as I had been my self, it shock'd my very Senses, I began to nauseate the place I was in, and above all, the wicked Practice.

Yet this assertion is immediately followed by Moll's observation that 'I never saw, or do I believe there was to be seen, the least indecency in the House the whole time I was there' (p. 147). The certainty of the initial polemical declaration is undercut by the later admission, leaving the readers in some doubt about how they are supposed to view the Governess's

establishment and also about how far the narrative can be taken at face value.

This kind of ambiguity pervades the portrayal of Moll's relationship with her 'Governess', which dominates much of the second half of the novel. This woman is a procuress, a receiver of stolen goods, and a kind of early female Fagin, who profits from the activities of younger thieves. Moll constructs her as someone who encourages her in her criminal activity, telling us 'I had a new Tempter, who prompted me every Day, I mean my Governess' (p. 177), and in general she presents her as an exploitative figure. At one time, when Moll has been frightened by the arrest of some of her colleagues and does not want to go out, she tells us that:

my Governess who I always made Partner in my Success ... now plaid a sure Game with me, for that she had a Share of the Gain, and no Share in the hazard, *I say*, my Governess was something impatient of my leading such a useless unprofitable Life, as she call'd it. (pp. 180–1)

We are told that this woman has brought eleven people to the gallows (p. 232), and the preface to the novel describes her as

a Whore, and a Bawd; a Midwife, and a Midwife-keeper ... a Pawn-broker, a Child-taker, a Receiver of Thieves, and of Thieves purchase, that is to say, of stolen Goods; and in a Word, her self a Thief, a Breeder up of Thieves, and the like. (p. 26)

Yet as readers we find that our response to this character is far more positive than such a job description might suggest. Although initially introduced by the unprepossessing title of 'Mother Midnight', reflecting her roles as midwife and procuress, this character is very far from the frightening figure often associated with her occupation, as epitomised for example in Hogarth's portrayal of the bawd Mother Needham in *The Harlot's Progress*, or the brothel-keeper Madame Sinclair in Samuel Richardson's novel *Clarissa*. Despite Moll's initial moral reservations about the respectability of her Governess's establishment cited above, it becomes clear that there is more mother than midnight in this character, as she increasingly becomes a source of emotional as well as practical support for Moll. She cares for Moll during her confinement with Jemy's child and makes arrangements to ensure that the boy will be brought up by a reliable nurse. Later, when Moll has once again fallen upon hard times, the Governess uses her role as pawnbroker to facilitate the disposal of Moll's stolen goods, or, in the case of the valuables taken from the baronet, she returns them to their owner in exchange for a reward. She even proves invaluable in helping Moll to equip herself for a life as a planter in the colonies. She is the person

to whom Moll turns in her times of trouble, and her response is invariably supportive and maternal.

We see the character through the lens of Moll's perceptions, and for all Moll's moralistic condemnation of her Governess's activities and her occasional attempts to hold her responsible for the continuance of her criminal career, the portrait betrays an increasing fondness for this genial and maternal figure, not least because Moll shows an almost complete reliance on her Governess's judgement. Just as Moll relishes her own skill and dexterity in a range of illegal activities, she appreciates her Governess's talents, telling us that 'she was a woman of admirable Address' (p. 193), referring to her as 'my fast friend' and 'faithful to the last Moment' (pp. 248, 250). In a world that is represented as inherently rapacious, in which individuals continually betray one another, Moll's relationship with her Governess is characterised by absolute loyalty and mutual reliance, belying the idea that there is no honour among thieves. Once again, therefore, the narrative creates a tension between our sympathy and our moral sense and challenges our preconceptions about character and occupation.

Moll initially turns to crime following the death of her banker husband, as a consequence of his inability to survive a financial loss, which Moll presents as 'a Stab that touch'd the Vitals' (p. 162). But while he succumbs to melancholy, Moll responds to 'Misery and Want' with the 'Spirit and Courage' that she has unsuccessfully tried to instil in her husband. The account of her first theft is prefaced by a lengthy appeal to the reader,

O let none read this part without seriously reflecting on the Circumstances of a desolate State, and how they would grapple with meer want of Friends and want of Bread; it will certainly make them think ... of the wise Man's Prayer, *Give me not Poverty least I Steal*.

LET 'em 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? (p. 163)

The wise man's prayer is cited elsewhere in Defoe's works, including the *Review*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Col. Jacque*, and represents an adherence to the concept of natural law.⁶ This was the argument that, in a state of nature, it would be legitimate for an individual to steal rather than starve and that when driven to desperation most people would make the logical choice to

⁶ *Review*, 5 March 1706; *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), in *The Novels*, Vol. 1, ed. W. R. Owens, p. 58; *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1720), in *The Novels*, Vol. 3, ed. G. A. Starr, p. 80; *The History and Remarkable Life of the Truly Honourable Col. Jacque* (1722), in *The Novels*, Vol. 8, ed. Maurice Hindle, p. 154.

do the former rather than the latter. While natural law had no legal force in the eighteenth century, there was a general acknowledgement in judicial circles that it had a certain moral resonance, and while poverty could not be used to excuse or justify crime, it was thought to provide an explanation for criminality and a motive for the exercise of judicial clemency.⁷ Moll therefore gives an elaborate account of the circumstances which force her to choose a path of crime, in language which invokes ideas of natural law, and in doing so she makes an explicit appeal for the sympathy of her readers, by inviting them to empathise with her predicament and decide what they would do in the same situation. Criminality is therefore represented as a rational and logical course of action, rather than a manifestation of deviance. But, as with Moll's ambivalent portrayal of her relationship with her Governess, the terms in which her crime is presented ensure that the moral stance of the novel is in practice considerably more complex than initially appears.

On her return from her first criminal adventure, Moll recounts that the 'bundle' that she has stolen contains

a Suit of Child-Bed Linnen ... very good and almost new, the Lace very fine; there was a Silver Porringer of a Pint, a small Mug and Six Spoons, with some other Linnen, a good Smock, and Three Silk Handkerchiefs, and in the Mug wrap'd up in a Paper Eighteen Shillings and Six-pence in Money. (p. 164)

This is followed by a detailed account of Moll's 'Terror of Mind' and the sense of guilt that tormented her 'for three or four Days time' as she thought of the fate of the person who had lost the bundle (pp. 164–5). Our empathy with Moll's mental distress is therefore rather uncomfortably juxtaposed with our identification with her sense of satisfaction that the linen is 'very good and almost new' and the lace is 'very fine', so that the reader is encouraged to share the ambivalent attitude towards criminal activity that is embodied within the narrative.

Moreover, by the time Moll starts her criminal career in the second half of the book, the reader is prepared to temper admiration for her cunning and determination with a degree of scepticism about the reliability of her account and the moral sentiments expressed. It is nonetheless difficult not to be seduced by the almost loving level of detail with which Moll's criminal activities are portrayed. For example, Moll describes the method by which she and her 'School-Mistress' set about stealing a 'charming' watch from 'a young Lady big with Child' as she comes out of church:

7 Maximillian E. Novak, *Defoe and the Nature of Man* (Oxford, 1963), p. 65.

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. (p. 171)

This accumulation of concrete detail and the sense of satisfaction at the successful completion of a complex task are reminiscent of Crusoe's account of the processes by which he makes bread or fashions his cooking pots when alone on his island. Moll, however, is an artist, who shows pride in her professional skills and her knowledge of the 'right way' to hold a watch in order to steal it. Readers are invited to admire the flair and panache with which her crimes, or, as she tellingly calls them, her 'adventures', are carried out, even while we may condemn the criminal impulse which motivates the action and sympathise with the losses and distress of her victims.

Moll does not confine herself to pocket picking: she also describes the techniques used in shoplifting; outlines how she collects other people's parcels from the stagecoach; and details the best way to engross other people's goods during the chaos of a house fire. She is even prepared to use the legal system to her advantage, giving a lengthy account of how she extorts money from a shopkeeper who has falsely accused her of shoplifting and how she profits from the discovery of smuggled goods by reporting them to the customs officer.

Most of the crimes in which Moll engages, up until her last fateful adventure, are profitable and successful and Moll is able to give a precise account of the value of the stolen goods. On one occasion, however, she gets a bit carried away, and steals a horse which she has been asked to hold. Horse stealing was regarded as a serious criminal offence in the eighteenth century, and was one of the few aspects of eighteenth-century illegality which was largely controlled by organised gangs. These gangs had established outlets for the disposal of stolen animals and were able to alter the appearance of the beasts in order to evade detection once descriptions were posted in the *Gazette*.⁸ Conviction almost invariably led to a capital sentence since horse theft was a crime without benefit of clergy. Moll therefore departs from her customary prudence in this 'unlucky Adventure', an action which, as she says, 'had like to have cost me dear' (p. 209). Moreover she is unable to profit from her crime, since neither she nor her Governess has any idea of how to dispose of the horse without risking detection. After

8 J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England 1550–1750* (London, 1984), pp. 106–7.

her initial impulsive action in walking away with the animal, however, her natural caution reasserts itself, and in the end she and her Governess send a note to the owner telling him where he might find his horse. So, as Moll concludes, 'this was a Robbery and no Robbery, for little was lost by it, and nothing was got by it' (p. 210). This incident highlights the extent to which Moll has become not only hardened to crime, but actually rather obsessed by it so that she is no longer acting in a rational way. If she sees an opportunity, she cannot resist taking advantage of it, without always thinking through the consequences.

Social historians have drawn attention to the paradoxical juxtaposition in the early eighteenth century of the imposition of an increasingly draconian penal code, manifested in the rapid expansion of the number of capital offences, with systematic attempts to mitigate the severity of punishments through mechanisms of clemency, such as the reprieve, the pardon or the commutation of sentences to less severe penalties such as transportation or whipping. Douglas Hay suggested that the proliferation of new kinds of property required additional legislation to protect its diverse forms, although at the same time courts appeared to be increasingly reluctant to impose the death penalty. J. A. Sharpe supports Hay's argument on the grounds that 'all surviving evidence suggests that levels of execution were much higher in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods than they were in the first half of the eighteenth century', while Roger Ekirch argues that 'however notorious England's "Bloody Code", courts and crown officials commonly circumvented the formal severity of statute law'.⁹

A similar ambivalence towards crime and criminals can be identified within some elements of eighteenth-century popular culture. In Defoe's 1728 treatise *Augusta Triumphans: or, The Way to Make London the Most Flourishing City in the Universe*, the spokesman, Andrew Moreton, argues that one of the causes of the recent increase in crime is the popularity of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, which has taught thieves 'to value themselves on their Profession, rather than be asham'd of it'.¹⁰ This suggests a recognition that literature and popular culture have a determining function in shaping ideas of crime and the criminal character, and that characters such as Gay's dashing highwayman Macheath have encouraged a glorification of illegal

⁹ Douglas Hay, 'Property, Authority and the Criminal Law', in Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, E. P. Thompson *et al.* (eds), *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1975), p. 22; Sharpe, *Crime*, p. 65; A. Roger Ekirch, *Bound for America: The Transportation of British Convicts to the Colonies, 1718–1775* (Oxford, 1987), p. 32. See also K. J. Kesselring, *Mercy and Authority in the Tudor State* (Cambridge, 2007).

¹⁰ See *Political and Economic Writings of Daniel Defoe* (8 vols, London, 2000), Vol. 8, ed. W. R. Owens, p. 280.

activity. This was certainly the case with some of the eighteenth-century popular press, in which criminals and criminal gangs were celebrated as folk heroes, particularly when their crimes were against property rather than people. Readers of pamphlets and newspapers avidly followed the exploits of larger-than-life characters such as Jack Sheppard. Sheppard was a notorious thief who was repeatedly arrested and repeatedly escaped from imprisonment until he was finally captured on the evidence of the thief-taker Jonathan Wild, and executed at Tyburn in 1724. Readers saw his daring escapes from prisons such as Newgate as a symbol of individual defiance against the power of authority. Many critics have commented on the great popularity of criminal biography in the early eighteenth century, and Lincoln Faller has suggested that 'Criminal biography developed in England ... because people in an age of increased individualism and anomie liked identifying with outlaws, masterless men, and other defiant disturbers of the social order'.¹¹

There is certainly good evidence to suggest that the crowds that turned out at executions were often sympathetic to the victims, cheering their final speeches, while shouting down the sermons delivered at the gallows by the prison chaplain.¹² One explanation for the increase in the number of pardons and reprieves in the early eighteenth century is that it was felt that the public would become disorderly if the law were perceived to be too bloodthirsty and executions became too frequent. The reader's ambiguous response to Moll's uncomfortable combination of penitence and satisfaction can therefore be related to a wider uncertainty within eighteenth-century society, literature and the judicial system towards both crime and punishment, as criminal activity was perceived as both a rational individual response to poverty and destitution, and as a social evil that needed to be eradicated.

Yet Moll's reliance on poverty as an explanation for her behaviour is undermined by the fact that the second 'Adventure' that is recorded in the book involves the theft of a child's necklace, during which Moll considers 'Killing the Child in the dark Alley, that it might not Cry' (p. 166). Such an act, even in order to obtain 'a String of Beads ... worth about Twelve or Fourteen Pounds' (p. 166), cannot be justified under natural law and, although Moll does not act on this suggestion of 'the Devil', the incident implies that her motivation is rather more complex than the simple neces-

11 Lincoln B. Faller, *Crime and Defoe: A New Kind of Writing* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 5.

12 Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750–1850* (Harmondsworth, 1978), p. 22; Peter Linebaugh, 'The Tyburn Riots Against the Surgeons', in Hay *et al.* (eds), *Albion's Fatal Tree*, pp. 65–117 (at pp. 66–8).

sity that she initially invokes. This implication is developed further later in the novel, when Moll describes the impossibility of abandoning her criminal way of life. Even when she has accumulated £200 in cash, and is in a position to support herself through needlework, she finds that she is unable to give up the thieving habit. The Devil is once again held responsible for this continued deviance, for Moll tells us that once she was 'in the Devil's Clutches', she 'was held fast there as with a Charm, and had no Power to go without the Circle' (p. 172). Later still, when she is 'in good Circumstances', with £700 in money as well as gold watches and other stolen goods in her possession, Moll tells us that she 'could not forbear going Abroad again, *as I call'd it now*, any more than I could when my Extremity really drove me out for Bread' (p. 209).

Moll has previously described how she was able to meet with Robin's brother 'when his Mother and the Young Ladies went Abroad a Visiting' (p. 14). By representing her criminal excursions in language derived from social intercourse, Moll subverts conventional ideas of propriety and gentility, but also indicates how crime has become a form of leisure activity for her. Her 'Adventures' are clearly a source of entertainment and excitement and a chance to display her skill. From being a rational response to physical need, stealing has become an irresistible urge or psychological necessity, and the account of the theft of the horse reinforces this impression. Indeed, by the end of the story Moll manifests considerable pride in her criminal achievements and her notoriety, recounting that 'I grew the greatest Artist of my time' (p. 180), 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*' (p. 216).

The text therefore highlights the complexity of criminal motivation, as well as the ambiguity of social attitudes to crime in early modern England. Moll's story does not represent a simple tale of a soul driven to desperate measures by physical privation, in the manner, for example, of the unsuccessful highwayman encountered by Henry Fielding's Tom Jones. Nor is it a tale of a naturally and incorrigibly venal individual, who indulges in criminality for its own sake. Moll is a complex character whose criminal career develops as a result of the operation of a range of interdependent social and psychological factors. Moll is at once a product of her historical context, embodying the anxieties and ambivalences in relation to crime and punishment that were a feature of the early eighteenth century, but she is also an individual, manifesting the complexity, conflicts and uncertainties that characterise individual behaviour and decision making. It is Defoe's exploration of these internal tensions that perhaps more than anything else

signals the emergence of the novel, as distinct from earlier forms of prose fiction.

* * * * *

This account has so far discussed *Moll Flanders* in relation to the eighteenth-century context, but Defoe's text concludes with the line 'Written in the Year 1683', suggesting that the action of the novel takes place during the seventeenth rather than the eighteenth century. Perhaps coincidentally, 1683 is also the year in which Defoe's other fictional heroine, Roxana, first comes to England, but most critics have argued that the use of precise dates is not intended to suggest a specific historical setting, but merely represents a literary device to create verisimilitude. There is general consensus that the setting of both novels owes far more to the 1720s than to the seventeenth century.¹³ This certainly seems to have been the view of the eighteenth-century abridgers of *Moll Flanders*, for the 1722 serialisation of the book in the *London Post* includes a copy of Moll Flanders's will, which is dated 30 March 1722.¹⁴ Yet this relocation of the story to the present day may also represent an attempt to present Moll's story as contemporary 'news' rather than fiction. It belongs in a newspaper because it tells the story of a real character who has only just died, rather than an historical or fictional figure.¹⁵

In the *London Post* version of the story, Moll Flanders is described as a sincere penitent at the end of the text. This is in line with the conventions of the genre of criminal autobiography, in which the protagonists invariably come to repent their evil deeds and often seek to make amends in the shadow of the scaffold, but it is in striking contrast to Defoe's original narrative, which, notwithstanding the assertion on the title-page that Moll 'at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest, and died a Penitent', is in fact distinctly ambiguous. There are various references in Defoe's text to Moll's penitence during her time in Newgate, but when she finally receives her reprieve and hears her fellow felons going off to execution, she tells us that 'there was hardly room for so much Composure of Mind, as was requir'd for me to bless the merciful Providence that had as it were snatch'd me out of the Jaws of this Destruction' (p. 237). This leaves open the question of whether she did gain sufficient composure to bless merciful Providence, and Moll shows none of

¹³ See, for example, *Moll Flanders*, ed. Starr, p. xv. (But for a different view of *The Fortunate Mistress*, see P. N. Furbank's Introduction to that novel in *The Novels*, Vol. 9, pp. 9–13.)

¹⁴ For details of the *London Post* serialisation and other aspects of the early publication history, see Textual Notes, below, p. 314.

¹⁵ David Goldthorpe, 'Textual Instability: The Fortunes and Misfortunes of *Moll Flanders*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, The Open University, 1995), p. 95.

the signs of mental distress that characterise the narrative of the heroine of *The Fortunate Mistress*. The preface contains the cryptic comment that after her return to England from Virginia, Moll 'was not so extraordinary a penitent, as she was at first; it seems only that indeed she always spoke with abhorrence of her former Life, and of every Part of it' (p. 26). This element of equivocation is in line with the moral complexity of Defoe's text, but it undermines the unproblematic morality associated with the earlier genre of criminal autobiography, of which repentance was almost a defining feature. The alteration of the serialised version to produce a more unambiguous and traditional ending suggests that while Defoe was seeking to develop narrative fiction in new and unexpected directions, the producers of many of the subsequent adaptations were anxious to return the text to the confines of the conventional codes. Either they or their audience were not yet ready to embrace the innovations of Defoe's novel form.

The first pirated edition of the novel, *The Life and Actions of Moll Flanders*, follows the *London Post* version in ending with the death of the heroine. The narrative is also divided into chapters, perhaps to make it more accessible to readers with limited time and skill. A dramatic reduction in length has been achieved by concentrating almost exclusively on the action of the story, and omitting the passages of moral reflection that are so definitive of Defoe's style. Moll Flanders is presented as an incorrigible rogue, committing crime after crime, with no thought for her victims or her moral position, and with none of the moral complexity of the original heroine.

In 1730, Moll appeared again in a ninety-one-page work entitled *Fortune's Fickle Distribution*, which Pat Rogers has described as 'halfway to a chapbook'.¹⁶ This includes not only the life and death of Moll Flanders, but also the life of her Governess, now given the name of Jane Hackabout, and of Moll's Lancashire husband, now James Mac-Faul. A new edition of *Fortune's Fickle Distribution* was published in 1737 and again in 1759, but in this latter version the fickleness of fortune is emphasised further, since the ending of the story is changed quite dramatically. Instead of living to tell her tale, as in Defoe's version, or travelling to Ireland and dying a penitent, as in *The Life and Actions* and the first two editions of *Fortune's Fickle Distribution*, the penitent Moll is tricked into marriage by a female criminal disguised as a Virginia planter. The woman absconds with the majority of Moll's possessions, and her remaining goods are taken by the nurse who attends her on her deathbed. Moll is thus made the victim of a much more absolute poetic justice than that designed by Defoe, perhaps reflecting an

¹⁶ Pat Rogers, *Literature and Popular Culture in Eighteenth Century England* (Sussex, 1985), p. 184.

increasing lack of tolerance towards criminality in the popular literature of the second half of the century, and a belief that Moll should receive a rather more significant punishment for her crime.

As well as the various pirated and abridged Molls, there were also chapbook versions, in the form of massively shortened, simplified and illustrated narratives, for those for whom the original or the slightly shortened versions would have been too much, in terms of price or volume of literary content. Most chapbooks presented traditional folk tales or fairy stories, but a few works of fiction were adapted for the chapbook market and *Moll Flanders* was one of the select group, along with *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*, that made the transition from the bookseller's shelf to the chapman's bag. In his thesis 'Textual Instability: The Fortunes and Misfortunes of *Moll Flanders*', David Goldthorpe has identified twenty-nine different chapbooks of *Moll Flanders*, produced between c. 1750 and c. 1828, containing eight or twenty-four pages, and illustrated by woodcuts of significant scenes from the story, with on average six or seven illustrations in twenty-four pages of text.¹⁷ Most of these narratives utilise the first-person format of Defoe's original, but some are written in the third person, and they often have a comic tone or element which owes much to the humorous rogue tale that typified the chapbook tradition.¹⁸

The various adaptations exemplify the way that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, *Moll Flanders* took on a life of her own, outside the confines of Defoe's original narrative. She is transformed from a fictional character to a folk heroine and, like Robin Hood or Jack the Giant Killer, she appears in a range of literary forms and guises. While Defoe was developing a narrative structure that was based on the ambiguities of character and difficulties of moral reflection that are nowadays associated with the psychological complexity of the novel, other purveyors of the story sought to contain Moll within discursive conventions that derived from earlier genres such as the criminal autobiography or the comic folk or rogue tale. Different audiences were served by different versions of the text, and Pat Rogers argues that in the eighteenth century *Moll Flanders* 'lost almost all its currency in its full and authentic form' and 'survived only in truncated forms'.¹⁹

¹⁷ Goldthorpe, 'Textual Instability', pp. 136–59. This account is greatly indebted to Goldthorpe's work.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 138–9.

¹⁹ Rogers, *Literature and Popular Culture*, p. 178. For an account of an extensively altered edition entitled *The History of Laetitia Atkins, Vulgarly called Moll Flanders*, which was produced in 1776 for a circulating library readership, and was the first to carry Defoe's name on the title-page, see P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens, 'Defoe and Francis Noble', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 4 (1992), pp. 301–13.

This association of Moll's story with the low-life tradition of popular fiction may have contributed to the novel's fall from favour in the nineteenth century. Although it was included in various collections of Defoe's works, no separate edition of *Moll Flanders* was published between 1800 and 1896²⁰ and the novel was generally regarded as unsuitable for polite tastes. In 1856 a writer in the *National Review* suggested that *Moll Flanders*, *The Fortunate Mistress* and *Col. Jacque* 'are defaced by much both of narrated incident and expression which unfits them for the delicacy of modern readers', and a review in the *Dublin University Magazine* in the same year complained that Defoe 'exercised his talents in depicting scenes of sensual enjoyment, which no virtuous nature can dwell on without pain'.²¹ Similar sentiments were expressed by writers throughout the Victorian period.

This disapproval is clearly not purely derived from the salacious nature of the novel's content, for *Oliver Twist* contains scenes and characters which are infinitely more seedy and sinister than those presented by Moll. But while Dickens's characters are described through the distancing lens of authorial narration, and are placed within a clear and explicit framework of moral judgements, *Moll Flanders* appears to address her readers directly and requires the audience to evaluate the moral implications of her tale. Her vice seems to be laid bare, unmediated by a controlling moral voice, and as Defoe suggests in the Preface to the novel, the reader is able to 'take it just as he pleases' (p. 23). While readers are assured that the text, when properly applied, has a moral as well as a cautionary function, the reader is responsible for achieving this appropriate application, without the assistance of an omniscient narrator. The text therefore requires a degree of interpretative ability that the Victorians were often reluctant to attribute to the majority of the consumers of popular fiction, as well as being associated with an autonomous realm of popular or folk literature that represented a challenge to the values of élite culture.

But as Victorian moral stringency waned, and with it the dominance of the aesthetic and mimetic codes of didactic realism, *Moll Flanders* began to return to favour and became academically respectable more or less for the first time in its history. In her article on 'Defoe' in *The Common Reader*, Virginia Woolf suggested that her contemporaries might agree with a comment of Thomas Wright, one of Defoe's Victorian biographers, that *Moll Flanders*, *The Fortunate Mistress*, *Captain Singleton* and *Col. Jacque* 'are not works for the drawing-room table', but famously went on to argue that

²⁰ Goldthorpe, 'Textual Instability', p. 188.

²¹ Quoted in Pat Rogers (ed.), *Defoe: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1972), pp. 130, 152.

‘unless we consent to make that useful piece of furniture the final arbiter of taste, we must deplore the fact that their superficial coarseness ... has led them to be far less widely famed than they deserve’.²² Woolf celebrates Defoe’s interest in the position of women and his creation of scenes which ‘might have been turned into plays by Ibsen’, but she identifies such achievements as incidental consequences of the fact that Defoe ‘deals with the important and lasting side of things and not with the passing and trivial’ and ‘achieves a truth of insight which is far rarer and more enduring than the truth of fact which he professed to make his aim’.²³ Woolf’s account draws attention to the form of the narrative and its psychological preoccupations as the primary subject of critical debate. She addresses the work as an unequivocally literary text, and in this she was accompanied and succeeded by other twentieth-century critics in both England and France.

It was, therefore, from the early twentieth century that Defoe’s novel began to be regularly reprinted and regarded as a serious and respectable work and, with the development of textual scholarship in the course of the twentieth century, it was increasingly republished in its original form, rather than in the various truncated versions that had been propagated in the eighteenth century. A range of factors coincided to ensure that this text was seen as particularly relevant to contemporary concerns. The development of the discourses of psychology and sociology led to a new interest in the exploration of deviance and individual motivation, and the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, published in translation in the 1980s, would encourage an academic embracing of folk culture and the carnivalesque that had been eschewed during the nineteenth century. The larger-than-life figure of Moll Flanders, with her indomitable spirit, her disregard for social hierarchy and her willingness to challenge authority and transgress rules, fitted the modern conception of the heroine. Moreover the problematic character of Moll’s narration has been taken to typify modern ideas of the nature of utterance and literary authority. Thus the development of new theoretical approaches to literature in the second half of the twentieth century put a new emphasis on the importance of paradox, ambiguity and textual tension as definitive features of literary works. *Moll Flanders* has therefore emerged into the twenty-first century as a novel which, in both its content and its narrative form, embodies current concepts of what makes a great literary work.

²² Virginia Woolf, ‘Defoe’, in *The Common Reader* (1925; Harmondsworth, 1938), p. 97.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 102–3.



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THE
FORTUNES
AND
MISFORTUNES
Of the FAMOUS
Moll Flanders, &c.

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.

LONDON: Printed for, and Sold by W. CHETWOOD, at *Cato's-Head*, in *Russel-street, Covent-Garden*; and T. EDLING, at the *Prince's-Arms*, over-against *Exeter-Change*^a in the *Strand*. MDCCXXI.^b



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THE PREFACE.

THE World is so taken up of late with Novels and Romances,¹ that it will be hard for a private History² to be taken for Genuine, where the Names and other Circumstances of the Person are concealed, and on this Account we must be content to leave the Reader to pass his own Opinion upon the ensuing Sheets, and take it just as he pleases.

THE Author is here suppos'd to be writing her own History, and in the very beginning of her Account, she gives the Reasons why she thinks fit to conceal her true Name, after which there is no Occasion to say any more about that.

IT is true, that the original of this Story is put into new Words, and the Stile of the famous Lady we here speak of is a little alter'd, particularly she is made to tell her own Tale in modester Words than she told it at first; the Copy which came first to Hand, having been written in Language, more like one still in *Newgate*,³ than one grown Penitent and Humble, as she afterwards pretends⁴ to be.

THE Pen employ'd in finishing her Story, and making it what you now see it to be, has had no little difficulty to put it into a Dress fit to be seen, and to make it speak Language fit to be read: When a Woman debauch'd from her Youth, nay, even being the Off-spring of Debauchery and Vice, comes to give an Account⁵ of all her vicious Practises, and even to descend to the particular Occasions and Circumstances, by which she first became wicked, and of all the progression of Crime which she run through in three-score Year, an Author must be hard put to it to wrap it up so clean, as not to give room, especially for vitious Readers to turn it to his Disadvantage.

ALL possible Care however has been taken to give no leud Ideas, no immodest Turns in the new dressing up this Story, no not to the worst parts of her Expressions; to this Purpose some of the vicious part of her Life, which cou'd not be modestly told, is quite left out, and several other Parts, are very much shortn'd; what is left 'tis hop'd will not offend the chastest Reader, or the modestest Hearer;⁶ and as the best use is made even of the worst Story, the Moral 'tis hop'd will keep the Reader serious, even where

the Story might incline him to be otherwise: To give the History of a wicked Life repented of, necessarily requires that the wick'd Part should be made as wicked, as the real History of it will bear; to illustrate and give a Beauty to the Penitent part, which is certainly the best and brightest, if related with equal Spirit and Life.

It is suggested there cannot be the same Life, the same Brightness and Beauty, in relateing the penitent Part, as is in the criminal Part: If there is any Truth in that Suggestion, I must be allow'd to say, 'tis because there is not the same taste and relish in the Reading, and indeed it is too true that the difference lyes not in the real worth of the Subject; so much as in the Gust⁷ and Palate of the Reader.

BUT as this Work is chiefly recommended to those who know how to Read it, and how to make the good Uses of it, which the Story all along recommends to them; so it is to be hop'd that such Readers will be much more pleas'd with the Moral, than the Fable; with the Application, than with the Relation, and with the End of the Writer, than with the Life of the Person written of.

THERE is in this Story abundance of delightful Incidents, and all of them usefully apply'd. There is an agreeable turn Artfully given them in the relating, that naturally Instructs the Reader, either one way, or other. The first part of her leud Life with the young Gentleman at *Colchester*, has so many happy Turns given it to expose the Crime, and warn all whose Circumstances are adapted to it, of the ruinous End of such things, and the foolish Thoughtless and abhorr'd Conduct of both the Parties, that it abundantly atones for all the lively Discription she gives of her Folly and Wickedness.

THE Repentance of her Lover at the *Bath*,⁸ and how brought by the just alarm of his fit of Sickness to abandon her; the just Caution given there against even the lawful Intimacies of the dearest Friends, and how unable they are to preserve the most solemn Resolutions of Vertue without divine Assistance; these are Parts, which to a just Discernment will appear to have more real Beauty in them, than all the amorous Chain of Story,⁹ which introduces it.

IN a Word, as the whole Relation is carefully garbl'd¹⁰ of all the Levity, and Looseness that was in it: So it is all applied, and with the utmost care to vertuous and religious Uses. None can without being guilty of manifest Injustice, cast any Reproach upon it, or upon our Design in publishing it.

THE Advocates for the Stage, have in all Ages made this the great Argument to persuade People that their Plays are useful, and that they ought to be allow'd in the most civiliz'd, and in the most religious Government; Namely, That they are applied to vertuous Purposes, and that by the most

lively Representations, they fail not to recommend Vertue, and generous Principles, and to discourage and expose all sorts of Vice and Corruption of Manners; and were it true that they did so, and that they constantly adhered to that Rule, as the Test of their acting on the *Theatre*, much might be said in their Favour.

THROUGHOUT the infinite variety of this Book, this Fundamental is most strictly adhered to; there is not a wicked Action in any Part of it, but is first and 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: There is not an ill thing mention'd, but it is condemn'd, even in the Relation, nor a vertuous just Thing, but it carries its Praise along with it: What can more exactly answer the Rule laid down, to recommend, even those Representations of things which have so many other just Objections lying against them? Namely, of Example, of bad Company, obscene Language, and the like.

UPON this Foundation this Book is recommended to the Reader, as a Work from every part of which something may be learned, and some just and religious Inference is drawn, by which the Reader will have something of Instruction, if he pleases to make use of it.¹¹

ALL the Exploits of this Lady of Fame, in her Depredations upon Mankind stand as so many warnings to honest People to beware of them, intimating to them by what Methods innocent People are drawn in, plunder'd and robb'd, and by Consequence how to avoid them. Her robbing a little innocent Child, dress'd fine by the vanity of the Mother, to go to the Dancing-School, is a good Memento to such People hereafter, as is likewise her picking the Gold-Watch from the young Ladies side in the *Park*.

HER getting a parcel from a hair-brained Wench at the Coaches in *St. John-street*; her Booty made at the Fire, and again at *Harwich*; all give us excellent Warnings in such Cases to be more present to ourselves in sudden Surprizes of every Sort.

HER application to a sober Life, and industrious Management at last in *Virginia*, with her Transported Spouse, is a Story fruitful of Instruction, to all the unfortunate Creatures¹² who are oblig'd to seek their Re-establishment abroad; whether by the Misery of Transportation,¹³ or other Disaster; letting them know, that Diligence and Application have their due Encouragement, even in the remotest Parts of the World, and that no Case can be so low, so despicable, or so empty of Prospect,¹⁴ but that an unwearied Industry will go a great way to deliver us from it, will in time raise the meanest¹⁵ Creature to appear again in the World,¹⁶ and give him a new Cast¹⁷ for his Life.

THESE are a few of the serious Inferences which we are led by the Hand to¹⁸ in this Book, and these are fully sufficient to Justifie any Man in recommending it to the World, and much more to Justifie the Publication of it.

THERE are two of the most beautiful Parts still behind, which this Story gives some Idea of, and lets us into the Parts of them, but they are either of them too long to be brought into the same Volume; and indeed are, *as I may call them* whole Volumes of themselves, (*viz.*) 1. The Life of her Governess, as she calls her, who had run thro', it seems in a few Years all the eminent degrees of a Gentlewoman, a Whore, and a Bawd; a Midwife, and a Midwife-keeper, as *they are call'd*,¹⁹ a Pawn-broker, a Child-taker,²⁰ a Receiver of Thieves,²¹ and of Thieves purchase, that is to say, of stolen Goods; and in a Word, her self a Thief, a Breeder up of Thieves, and the like, and yet at last a Penitent.

THE second is the Life of her Transported Husband, a Highway-man; who, it seems liv'd a twelve Years Life of successful Villany upon the Road, and even at last came off so well, as to be a Voluntier Transport, not a Convict;²² and in whose Life there is an incredible Variety.

BUT as I have said, these are things too long to bring in here, so neither can I make a Promise of their coming out by themselves.²³

WE cannot say indeed, that this History is carried on quite to the End of the Life of this famous *Moll Flanders*, as she calls her self, for no Body can write their own Life to the full End of it, unless they can write it after they are dead; but her Husband's Life being written by a third Hand,²⁴ gives a full Account of them both, how long they liv'd together in that Country, and how they came both to *England* again, after about eight Year, in which time they were grown very Rich, and where she liv'd it seems, to be very old; but was not so extraordinary a Penitent, as she was at first; it seems only that indeed she always spoke with abhorrence of her former Life, and of every Part of it.

IN her last Scene at *Maryland*, and *Virginia*, many pleasant things happen'd, which makes that part of her Life very agreeable, but they are not told with the same Elegancy as those accounted for by herself; so it is still to the more Advantage that we break off here.