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摩尔·弗兰德斯

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DANIEL DEFOE



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丹尼尔·笛福(1660—1731),英国小说家。生于伦敦一个反对英国国教的清教徒家庭,父亲是一名油烛商,因家贫未能进入有名的大学,仅在中学里练就了清晰和简练的文笔。早年经商,到过欧洲大陆各国,后因多种原因屡次失败,1703年以后再未积极从商。

笛福以写政论和讽刺诗著称,反对封建主义,主张发展资本主义工商业,被称为英国小说和报刊文学之父。在英国托利和辉格两党相互偏见很重的年代,笛福虽然倾向于辉格党,但他企图用著作和行动去调解党派和宗教斗争。结果两边都不讨好。他忠诚地支持信奉新教和来自荷兰的威廉三世国王。1701年写了政治讽刺诗《真正的英国人》,驳斥反对“外族”国王的种族偏见。1702年写了有名的政治小册子《消灭不同教派的捷径》。1703年以后的20年间他周游英国,1724—1726年完成了《不列颠全岛纪游》。晚年的笛福主要写作海上冒险小说、流浪汉小说和历史小说。其代表作为长篇小说《鲁滨孙漂流记》,歌颂资本原始积累时期资产阶级冒险进取的精神,一位德国评论家曾称之为“世界性的书”,为世界著名之作。其他小说还有《摩尔·弗兰德》、《大疫年日记》、《杰克上校》等。笛福是高产作家,有著作500多种。涉及政治、经济、历史、传记甚至犯罪等多方面的领域。

摩尔·弗兰德斯生在新门监狱里，母亲是盗窃犯，即将被流放到弗吉尼亚。这个被遗弃的女孩子在富有同情心的科尔切斯特市长家中长大，对自己的身世一无所知。15岁时，遭诱奸，但是她后来体面地结了婚，扭转了命运。可是当第一个丈夫去世后，她一再婚嫁——先后嫁过五次，有几次甚至还嫁给了有妇之夫，并且为捞几个钱与各种人私通。有一次，她访问了弗吉尼亚，结果发现她眼下的丈夫竟是她的同母异父兄弟，于是撇下他独自回到英国。在过了一段极端穷困的生活后，她竟成了一个非常高明的扒手但终究还是被抓住了，并和她母亲一样，被投入了新门监狱。在狱中，遇到了一位被宣判有罪的拦路抢劫犯詹姆斯，这人正是她许多前夫中最喜爱的一个，他俩都被发配到弗吉尼亚。他们设法带去了所有的不义之财。到了弗吉尼亚，摩尔发现自己还从母亲那里继承了一个种植园。从此她和詹姆斯在发家致富和痛改前非的气氛中度过余生。

THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

MOLL FLANDERS

DANIEL DEFOE was born in London in 1660, the son of a tallow-chandler. He was educated for the Presbyterian ministry at Newington Dissenting Academy, but quickly abandoned this intention. Thereafter he embarked on a life of several careers and great complexity. He took part in Monmouth's Rebellion; his early engagement in commerce ended in bankruptcy but he later dealt in ship-insurance, wool, oysters and linen; he became a secret agent, a political pamphleteer and was several times arrested. He died 'of a lethargy' in 1731.

Defoe was the author of some 500 works, ranging over politics, economics, history, biography and crime. Among his best-known novels are *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724).

G. A. STARR is Professor of English at the University of California and author of *Defoe and Casuistry*.

THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

DANIEL DEFOE

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.

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
G. A. STARR

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INTRODUCTION

I

Robinson Crusoe has often been referred to as a romance, but *Moll Flanders*, which followed it by three years, is widely taught and written about as the first English novel. Few other works of fiction have been the subject of so much critical debate in recent years; most widely canvassed has been the question of Defoe's artistic control. Are the numerous contradictions in the words, actions, and total character of *Moll Flanders* the result of deliberate authorial strategy, of unresolved ambivalences in Defoe's conception of his heroine, or perhaps merely of hasty and unrevised composition by a wonderfully gifted yet somewhat primitive writer? Is *Moll* the object of Defoe's sustained conscious irony, or do we as readers perceive ironies which Defoe did not intend, and in which his own values are gravely implicated? Criticism preoccupied with the problem of irony has called attention to many inconsistencies that might otherwise have gone unnoticed in *Moll's* narrative; considerable research into the moral, economic, social, and literary background of *Moll Flanders* has been brought to bear on the discussion, and although such information has not settled the debate over irony,¹ it too has fostered a sense of the book's complexities. At the same time, an unstated premise of much of the debate has been that Defoe's artistry is vindicated if inconsistencies can be shown to have been deliberate. This view is not confined to critics of Defoe—works of all kinds are prized today for containing paradoxes, untrustworthy *personae*, and other forms of calculated ambiguity—nor is it groundless; but it may shed less light

¹ The main contentions are summarized in Watt, 'Recent Critical Fortunes of *M.F.*'; for fuller references to works cited in this Introduction see Bibliography, *infra*.

on what is distinctive and valuable in Defoe than on the achievements of certain of his contemporaries, such as Swift and Pope. At all events, criticism that puts a premium on calculated ambiguity tends to conceive of both the creative process and the reading experience in highly intellectual terms, and although a predilection for subtlety and complexity is not the sole explanation of recent critical interest in *Moll Flanders*, one suspects that it does account for the comparative critical neglect of *Robinson Crusoe*, a greater work the chief merits of which lie elsewhere.

But so, I would maintain, do those of *Moll Flanders*. It may be that insofar as this book is what we should ordinarily describe as a novel, it is abundantly and deliberately ironic. Yet within the novel is a romance, which gives the story much of its emotional force, and from which irony is absent. We cannot solve critical problems, of course, simply by manipulating generic labels, but whatever term we choose, we should recognize that *Moll Flanders* is akin to tales of obsession by Hogg or Hawthorne or Melville as well as to the traditional English novel. We are drawn into the quest of a heroine who in some degree escapes the bounds of everyday moral, social, and psychological laws. To be sure, much of Defoe's celebrated realism consists in his submitting Moll to such laws. She is in part the product of her environment—many of her actions as orphan, widow, and criminal are traced to the pressures of society on those who are its victims—and when she likens herself as an unattached female to 'a Bag of Money or a Jewel dropp'd on the Highway, which is a Prey to the next comer', her image of the plight of women is firmly rooted in the facts of contemporary life. Yet this picture is belied by a great deal in Moll's own story. Far from being predatory in the manner of Richardson's Lovelace, the men she has to do with tend to be timid and solicitous towards her, and the roles of initiative and passivity assigned to male and female in the account of her first seduction are virtually reversed in most later episodes. In fact, Moll is curiously immune to the

influences of her sex and milieu: although she engages in frequent self-reproach, she distinguishes her admittedly sinful and criminal outward behaviour from her essential self, which remains untainted by her background, her associates, and even her own actions. Nor do her actions have the effect on others that we should normally expect; just as she herself does not become embittered or brutalized, so others stay strangely attached to her, despite her neglect or exploitation of them. So if Moll is in some ways the product of sociological and psychological conditioning, in other ways she is quite untouched by experience, a free spirit whom no pitch can defile. In this sense she leads a charmed life: she is not spared vicissitudes, but spared their ordinary consequences.

Judged by standards of novelistic realism, this aspect of *Moll Flanders* makes for implausibility, as in the reunion scene between Moll and her son Humphry towards the end of the book.¹ But such scenes can also be regarded as obeying formal demands of a different kind, for they follow a pattern which runs through nearly all Defoe's imaginative works. Although his major narratives are usually associated with a variety of distinct genres, such as voyage literature and criminal biography, they are no less closely linked to one another by the quest which is their common theme. Most of Defoe's heroes and heroines are actual or virtual orphans, victims either of abandonment (Colonel Jack), of kidnapping (Captain Singleton), or of their own willful relinquishment of paternal protection, through early mis-marriage (Roxana), or flight (Robinson Crusoe). All are motivated not only by the social and economic aspirations discussed by recent critics, but by regret for a kind of lost paradise, and despite their far-flung wanderings, all long for family reunions, and show as remarkable an aptitude for acquiring surrogate parents and children as for accumulating other kinds of security-yielding property. This pattern extends to such conduct manuals as *The Family Instructor* and *Religious Courtship* as well as the better-known first-person

¹ On this point see Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, pp. 110-4.

narratives; in all these books, attachments between the sexes tend to be weaker than familial or quasi-familial ones involving the dominance of one party—parent, master, mentor, governess, or God—and the submission of the other. Love is mentioned, but guilt and anxiety are the prevailing emotions, and give a sombre undertone to many otherwise cheerful or sedate passages. Crusoe's elaborate self-enclosure is only the most graphic version of a task that preoccupies most of Defoe's characters, that of achieving impregnability; each seeks a 'safe Harbour' from poverty and other external threats, but also from the painful sense of his own isolation, which is more or less explicitly regarded as a punishment for his own or his parents' misdeeds. The Defoe hero fears betrayal, and to lessen his risks he tries not to get 'entangled with the dull Measures of other People', as Moll puts it, yet he yearns for a perfect community, more often represented in terms of parent-child than of husband-wife relationships. His dream of familial paradise comes true when he manages to find extraordinary exemplars of parental or filial loyalty, who echo God's assurance to Crusoe: 'I will never, never leave thee, nor forsake thee'.

In *Moll Flanders*, this quest-pattern emerges most clearly in the heroine's recurring attachments to older women, each of whom she 'learn'd to call Mother'—the 'good motherly Nurse' in Colchester, the midwife-governess at the Sign of the Cradle, and the mother-in-law who turns out to be her real mother; 'trick'd once by *that Cheat* call'd LOVE', Moll is less intimate with any of the men in her adult life than with this series of maternal figures. It is as if she were intent on demonstrating that she would have been an ideal daughter had she had a proper mother. But one 'mother' leaves her in the lurch by dying, another countenances incest, a third proposes abortion and later leads her 'as it were by the Hand' into a labyrinth of crime: none proves quite equal to Moll's filial longings. Near the end of the book, however, positions are reversed. Hitherto frustrated in the search for an ideal mother, Moll seizes on an alternative possibility,

and the reunion with her son Humphry serves as a testimonial that she herself, favoured with a proper child, would make an ideal mother. This latterly-assumed role may also help to explain Moll's satisfaction with her last husband, the ex-highwayman Jemy, who is helpless both in Newgate and Virginia, but who trustingly submits to Moll's maternal care.¹

Such themes are not as prominent in *Moll Flanders* as in *Robinson Crusoe*, nor does Moll's quest yield any sanctuary to compare in dramatic effectiveness with Crusoe's island 'castle', any parental figure to compare with Crusoe's God, or any filial figure to compare with Crusoe's Friday. And although Moll is in a sense no less alone within society than Crusoe on his island, her story lacks 'the mythical starkness of Crusoe's solitary encounters with natural and supernatural forces. Nevertheless, within the framework of a realistic novel *Moll Flanders* contains various elements of fantasy, and as we are caught up in the heroine's quest, we find a compelling logic—if such patterns can be called logical—in certain scenes which no doubt fall short of (or exceed) our 'realistic' expectations. In any case, an important source of the book's continuing appeal is its power to involve us imaginatively in Moll's quest; and without denying that amused detachment is a legitimate response to much of the story, one can regard some of Defoe's intermittent irony at Moll's expense as a means rather than an end; that is to say, as a device enabling the reader—and possibly the author as well—to escape the self-reproach which complicity in such activities as Moll's might otherwise cause him.²

¹ The idyllic relationship between Colonel Jack and his final wife appears to have a similar basis: after suffering sexual betrayal at the hands of various women, Jack finds security at last with a woman who masterfully shelters and directs him.

² The heroine is not the sole object of irony in *Moll Flanders*; respectable society also comes in for its share, in the course of Moll's casuistical attempts at self-justification. When it succeeds, such irony tends to strengthen her hold on the reader rather than distancing him, for it suggests that the difference in their behaviour is owing mainly to the difference in their circumstances; that the reader too would be driven to crime by poverty and the other pressures which Moll faces; and (more boldly) that bad as she acknowledges herself to be, her values are essentially the same as those of contemporary society at large.

Moll's search for a lost familial paradise takes place, however, alongside other pursuits, and there is no question that yearnings for wealth and gentility play just as conspicuous a part in her narrative. Moll also seeks spiritual salvation; less consistently, perhaps, than her other goals, but at certain moments no less intently. One's opinion as to which of these aspects of *Moll Flanders* is most fundamental will probably depend less on the book itself than on one's personal convictions about the relative weight of psychological, economic, social, and religious 'explanations' of human behaviour. Defoe was clearly fascinated by the complex and overlapping roles of economic, social, and religious motivation as springs of conduct, and it would be wrong to represent him as reducing all such promptings to rationalizations of unconscious urges on the part of his heroes and heroines. My intention in dwelling on psychological themes has not been to assert their primacy, but to point out a significant dimension of Defoe's fictional works, including *Moll Flanders*, which has been neglected by critics. What should be emphasized, though, is the relatedness of these four themes. As recent scholarship has shown, *Moll Flanders* merits the serious attention of students of English economic, social, and religious thought. But however great their historical or theoretical interest, these topics probably possess fictional vitality only insofar as Moll permeates them with her anxiety, and makes money, gentility, and salvation obsessive goals complementary to (and partly interchangeable with) the familial security she also seeks.

II

The first modern editor of *Moll Flanders* surmised that the book was based on the life of a real criminal, and thought it 'quite possible that the person's name will some day be traced'; other scholars have predicted that 'journalistic and biographic sources shall be eventually found for all of Defoe's great narratives'; and in a recent article entitled

'Who Was Moll Flanders?', Gerald Howson proposes Moll King, alias Mary Godson or Golstone, as the pick-pocket who served as the model for Defoe's heroine.¹ Few as they are, the correspondences between this actual Moll and the fictional Moll are quite suggestive. In 1718 Moll King had been sentenced to seven years' transportation for stealing a gold watch from a gentlewoman in St. Anne's Church, Soho; six months prior to the appearance of *Moll Flanders* she was condemned to death at the Old Bailey for returning illegally from America, and although she was soon given a reprieve from execution, she remained throughout the autumn of 1721 in Newgate, where Defoe may have met her. Moll King's vicissitudes were reported in the newspapers of the day,² and *Moll Flanders* may represent Defoe's attempt to gratify public curiosity by writing at length about someone whose adventures had been treated only briefly in journals and pamphlets. But to say that Moll King 'was' Moll Flanders suggests an identity where there may be a relation at best fleetingly, sketchily allusive; it suggests that, even if Defoe did not set out to write what we should call a biography, he derived the *Fortunes and Misfortunes Of the Famous Moll Flanders* from those of his real-life 'subject', who may in fact have furnished little more than an occasion for writing about a female criminal late in 1721. In short, it may be misleading to imply that *Moll Flanders* is to any significant degree about Moll King, for the book is even less her history than *Robinson Crusoe* is Alexander Selkirk's. The

¹ G. A. Aitken, Introduction to *M. F. in Rom. & Narr.*, vii, ix; E. Bernbaum, *Mary Carleton Narratives* (1914), p. 87; cf. William Minto, *Daniel Defoe* (1902), p. 136; Thomas Wright, *Life of Daniel Defoe*, second edn. (1931), pp. 89, 138; Howson, *TLS*, 18 Jan. 1968, pp. 63-4.

² Mr. Howson pieced together her career from court records, but other contemporary writings attest to her notoriety. See e.g. *Life of Mr. John Stanley* (1723) pp. 10-11, in *Works of Thomas Purney*, ed. H. O. White (1933), pp. 100-101, where she is associated with St. Anne's Church, said to be 'well known for her Dexterity in borrowing Gold Watches, or Snuff Boxes, from Ladies', and reported to have been 'apprehended for privately taking Things, (as I remember from a Mercer) . . . convicted at the *Old Bailey*, afterwards transported, etc.'. Cf. Defoe's reference to 'M-I K-ng' in *Life & Actions of Jonathan Wild, Rom. & Narr.*, xvi, 264-5.

heroine's varied criminal exploits have been assembled from diverse sources. One ruse is called 'an old Bite', and several others recall the 'Tricks' and 'Pranks' of traditional rogue literature, but on the whole her career owes less to such semi-fictional narratives than to accounts of actual thefts, which were available to Defoe in newspaper reward-advertisements, in the published proceedings of Old Bailey trials, and in conversation with friends. The image of Defoe hobnobbing with criminals in Newgate has appealed greatly to his biographers, and to those critics who regard his novels as essentially journalistic achievements. He may have come by some information in this way, yet his closest lifelong associations were not with Moll King and her fellows but with the mercantile class on whom they mainly preyed, and Defoe could have obtained as much of his underworld lore from victims, in bourgeois coffee-houses and shops, as from actual thieves in Newgate. If so, his ability to portray crime vividly and sympathetically from the criminal's point of view is all the more noteworthy. It may be that few if any of the thieving exploits in *Moll Flanders* are purely imaginary, but to acknowledge this is quite different from identifying the heroine with one or another criminal of the day.

That Defoe was working from any single model appears even more unlikely if we turn from the criminal section to the other three-quarters of the book. Molly Bloom's conception of her namesake—the one from Flanders a whore always shoplifting anything she could cloth and stuff and yards of it—takes into account only a fraction, after all, of the earlier heroine's *Life of continu'd Variety*. Many of the non-criminal scenes have precedents in earlier literature and close analogues elsewhere in Defoe's writings; for instance, various passages reflect his long-standing concern over the callousness of society towards the unprotected and the unproductive—orphans, debtors, criminals, single women without trades, and other marginal types. A similar interest in borderline cases characterizes Defoe's presentation of moral problems: certain of Moll's dilemmas can be traced to

cases of conscience which had been discussed in the casuistical literature of the seventeenth century, in John Dunton's question-and-answer periodical, *The Athenian Mercury* (1691-7), and in Defoe's own *Review* and conduct manuals. And there are several scenes, such as Moll's exchange of rhymes with the Virginia planter, in which Defoe may be indebted to earlier writings that have not been traced. The notes to the present edition indicate the background of some of Defoe's material, but his 'bookishness' should not be exaggerated. If (as I believe) some commentators on *Moll Flanders* have attached undue importance to Defoe's hypothetical interviews with Newgate prisoners, it would nevertheless be a mistake to regard the work as entirely derivative, the product of literary eclecticism rather than first-hand journalism. The truth probably lies somewhere between these extremes, and the remarkable thing is that passages evidently based on traditional materials should seem no less lifelike than those drawn from contemporary events.

In this connection it is perhaps worth stressing that Defoe does not use traditional materials to represent an earlier period. Some investigators of the sources of *Moll Flanders* have been led astray by its last five words, 'Written in the Year 1683'. Once or twice, it is true, places and customs are referred to as no longer existing, but no attempt is made to recreate seventeenth-century life from the vantage point of 1721, let alone of 1683. Insofar as the story can be dated, it is almost entirely contemporary, both in its materials and its perspective; as my notes indicate, it touches on many subjects of immediately topical rather than historical interest. Indeed, some events and practices to which Defoe alludes were so recent that we should have to judge Moll's retrospective mention of them anachronistic, if ordinary chronology were at all crucial to her narrative. But it is not. The only past that concerns her is her own; the passage of time may furnish the chief organizing principle of her recollections, but the tale she tells ultimately eludes calendars and clocks, and hovers in a timeless fictional once-upon-a-time.

III

Who read *Moll Flanders*? What makes this a question of more than antiquarian interest is the difficulty of determining, behind the voice of the first-person narrator, what Defoe's intentions are. Some critics have supposed that his attitude towards Moll can be deduced from views expressed elsewhere in his writings; others have maintained that the identification of his original reading public can shed similar light on the meaning of the book, since Defoe presumably catered, as a thoroughly professional man of letters, for the tastes and expectations of his audience. Whether either assumption is inherently valid is too large a critical problem to be dealt with here; in practice, however, both indirect approaches to the text of *Moll Flanders* have been beset with difficulties. On many moot points in the book Defoe did express himself elsewhere—abundantly, emphatically, yet inconsistently; and even if his pronouncements in other contexts were altogether uniform, one might hesitate to regard them as decisive prescriptions as to how *Moll Flanders* should be read. One might similarly question the legitimacy of basing interpretations of the book on information about its original readers, even if the evidence were abundant and consistent. In fact, it is neither. That Defoe addressed himself to a petty-bourgeois audience, prizing respectability yet craving adventure, has been inferred from Defoe's own background and from the tone of the novel itself; that many readers were drawn from a class which had only recently achieved literacy has been inferred retroactively from mid-eighteenth-century data about the growth of the reading public; and allusions by enemies and rivals to Defoe's popularity among 'low' readers have been accepted as sociologically and critically revealing. Reprints, piracies, and 'continuations' by other hands indicate that *Moll Flanders* was an immediate success, but we do not really know very much about who its readers were, or what they thought of the book. One contemporary distich—'Down in the