Moll Flanders

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DANIEL DEFOE

Defoe was born in the parish of St. Giles Cripplegate in London to James Foe, a successful candle-maker and butcher, and his wife, Anne, who died when Defoe was just 10 years old. Defoe's father was a Presbyterian dissenter—meaning he did not follow the Church of England—and even though it was illegal to worship outside the Church of England, Defoe was educated at a dissenting academy in London, where he most likely attended a Unitarian church. After his schooling, Defoe became a merchant, dealing mostly in wool and wine, and he married Mary Tuffley, a wealthy merchant's daughter, in 1684. Defoe was accused of marrying Mary for her dowry, but though it is said they had a rocky union, they were married for 47 years and had eight children together. In 1685, he joined the Monmouth Rebellion, which attempted to overthrow King James II of England, but Defoe was later pardoned. After Mary II and William III were crowned as Queen and King of England in 1689, Defoe worked as a trusted adviser and spy for King William. By 1692, Defoe was bankrupt and later arrested and jailed for excessive debts. After he was released from prison, Defoe travelled for a bit before returning to England in 1696. Around this time, Defoe began writing—mostly political, economic, and social essays and pamphlets—and published *An essay upon projects*, a series of writings on society and economics, in 1697. In 1703, Defoe was arrested for his political and religious views—like his father, Defoe was a nonconformist—and he was sent to Newgate Prison, the same prison where Moll Flanders is held in Defoe's novel of the same name. He was later released and went on to write over 300 essays, novels, and pamphlets. He published his most famous work, *Robinson Crusoe*, in 1719; however, the book was originally published with Robinson Crusoe as the author as well as the title character and was received much like a travel journal. Defoe wrote *Moll Flanders* in 1722, but the book was published without an author and was assumed to be an autobiography. It was not until 1770, many years after Defoe's death, that he was credited as the book's author by a London bookseller. He wrote one of his last books, *The Complete English Tradesman*, a political work that also focuses on trade, economics, and marriage, in 1726. Defoe died of a likely stroke in 1731, at which time he was penniless and still running from creditors. He was 70 years old.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the preface of *Moll Flanders*, Defoe claims Moll's story—which is full of "Debauchery and Vice"—is useful instruction for the modest reader looking to live an honest life. He references "the Advocates of the Stage," who have argued through the ages for the usefulness of plays when "applied to virtuous Purposes." Beginning in the 16th century, plays performed in public settings (such as theaters) were thought to carry messages of excessive humor and vice, which some feared would poison society and lead to increased sin and crime. Additionally, there was some concern over playwrights, who were often of the lower classes, representing royalty and the upper classes, and some worried that plays and the theater would lead to the feminization of society, since men and boys often played women's roles. In 1642, London theaters closed entirely and the official stance on plays aligned with that of the Puritans: the theater exposed citizens to "lascivious Mirth and Levity" and made them more susceptible to sin and immorality. London theaters remained closed until 1660, at which time the English monarchy was restored, and theaters as they are known today opened. The "Advocates of the Stage" that Defoe mentions in *Moll Flanders* supported the theater as a form of moral instruction and warning, which is exactly how Defoe sells Moll's story—as a cautionary tale. Defoe's note situates Moll Flanders within a historical context that was still very conservative in its views of sin and virtue (especially for woman) but that was becoming more open to considering depictions of sin—so long as they served a moral purpose.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Defoe's novels *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* are seen by many as the earliest English novels. Defoe's novels, while not always received well in his day, paved the way for other major novels of the 18th century, such as Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Early English novels such as these influenced generations of English novelists, including Charles Dickens, who went on to write some of the Victorian era's most famous novels, like *Great Expectations*, *David Copperfield*, and *Oliver Twist*. Defoe's *Moll Flanders* is, above all, a critique of 17th- and 18th-century English society, a tradition that is well established in English literature. Other works that remark on the state of English society include *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *1984* by George Orwell, as well as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. *Moll Flanders* also explores marriage and the role of women in society, a theme that is central to works including *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, and *The Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll*

Flanders, Etc.

- **When Written:** 1722
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** 1722
- **Literary Period:** Enlightenment or Neoclassical
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** England and the American colonies during the 17th century
- **Climax:** Moll is arrested and sent to Newgate Prison
- **Antagonist:** 17th-century society
- **Point of View:** First-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Great Balls of Fire. Defoe was just a boy during the Great Fire of London, which started at a bakery on Pudding Lane and burned through most of London from September 2 to September 6, 1666. The Fire was devastating, and of the 80,000 people living in London, 70,000 were left homeless. When the fire was finally out, Defoe's house and two others were the only homes left standing in Defoe's neighborhood.

Multiple Identities. During Defoe's career, in which he wrote hundreds of essays, pamphlets, and novels, he was known to have used at least 198 pen names, including T. Taylor, Andrew Morton, and Heliostrapolis, secretary to the Emperor of the Moon.

PLOT SUMMARY

Defoe begins with a preface to Moll Flanders's "private History," in which he concedes that Moll's story may not be believable to some readers, as many of the characters' names and circumstances have been concealed. Moll will explain her reasons for hiding her identity in the beginning of her story, but for now, readers must be content with their own opinions about what's to come. Defoe also admits that Moll is a woman of "Debauchery and Vice," and her story is one of wickedness and corruption. However, great care was taken to make her story suitable for the public, and readers who approach the story with "virtuous Purposes" are likely to find great moral instruction within it.

Moll claims her real name is well-known in the records of Newgate Prison and Old-Baily in London, so it is necessary that she use an alias, as some matters of criminal significance are still pending there. Moll is born to a convict mother in Newgate Prison, where, after stealing a few pieces of fabric, her mother was sentenced to death. However, Moll's mother "pleaded her belly" (that is, asked to be spared due to her pregnancy) and her sentence was commuted to transportation to the American colonies. When Moll is just six months old, her mother is sent to Virginia to be sold as a servant, and Moll is left alone. Moll lives with some relatives for a time, but she ends up in a band of traveling Egyptians, who leave her in Colchester when she is just three years old. The local parish assumes Moll's care, and they place her in the service of a nurse, who is employed by the church to care for children until they are old enough "to go to Service, or get their own Bread." The nurse tenderly cares for Moll through her childhood and raises her with the utmost attention to manners, and she even keeps Moll from going to Service—working as a servant or maid, as most women of the lower class are expected to do—which Moll dislikes the idea of doing. When Moll is teenager, her nurse dies, and Moll is taken in by the lady, a woman of high social standing and wealth, and her family. There, Moll falls in love with the older brother, the lady's handsome eldest son, who promises to marry Moll as soon as he inherits his estate. Of course, the older brother has no intention of marrying Moll—she is of the lower class and isn't considered a suitable match—but he strings her along with declarations of love and gifts of money. Once their relationship turns sexual, which Moll only agrees to because he has promised her marriage, the older brother grows distant. He ultimately leaves her, and Moll is forced to marry his younger brother (who has also fallen in love with Moll despite her social status) or she will be put out in the street.

Moll and the younger brother are married for five years and have two children, but she never loves him and dreams of being with the older brother. At the end of five years, the younger brother dies, and Moll is again left alone. She leaves her children with the lady and, with a **bank** of about £1,200, goes out into the world. Moll is still young and beautiful, and she has many suitors, but she has vowed "to be well Married or not at all." She soon marries the linen-draper, a man she believes to be wealthy and of high moral standing; however, after spending much of Moll's money, he runs off to France to avoid debtors' prison, and Moll is again left alone. As Moll must also evade the linen-draper's creditors, she decides it is best to move to a neighborhood where no one knows her and change her name, so she goes to the Mint (a sanctuary in London for debtors) and answers to the name Mrs. Flanders. Moll's bank is down to £460 (still a considerable amount of money in Moll's time), and she soon marries a wealthy plantation owner—even though she is still technically married to the linen-draper. The plantation owner has an estate in Virginia, and Moll finally agrees to accompany him to the American colonies.

Moll and the plantation owner move to Virginia, where they live with the plantation owner's mother, a delightful woman who often tells stories of her younger days in London. Moll's new mother-in-law tells Moll quite openly that she is a transported criminal—which is no shame in America—and Moll realizes that she is looking at her own mother. What's worse, Moll's husband, the plantation owner, is her half-brother, and they have already had three children together. Moll lives with her

secret for years, but she does confide in her mother, and after Moll's relationship with her husband/brother deteriorates so much that he threatens to commit her to a madhouse, she finally tells him the truth. He slips into a deep depression and twice attempts suicide before finally consenting to send Moll back to England. Moll finds herself alone again in London, this time with her bank reduced to £300, so she decides to go to Bath, a city in England known for its public spas. She begins an affair with the gentleman, a married man whose wife has been committed to the madhouse, but he ultimately has an attack of conscience over their adulterous affair and leaves Moll after several years and three children. Alone again, Moll's bank has increased to £400, but she is now 42 years old, and her options for a future husband are sparse.

Concerned about her future and with no one to advise her, Moll takes her money to a banker and asks him to manage her affairs. The banker is a kind man and agrees to help Moll. The banker's wife has been cheating on him, and he asks Moll to marry him as soon as his divorce is final. Moll, not completely against the idea of marrying the banker, travels first to Lancashire, where she meets James, the man who will become her fourth husband. James says he is a rich Irishman, and Moll has convinced him that she is a wealthy widow; however, once they are married, Moll and James discover that they are both penniless. Having equally deceived each other, and both looking for a more suitable match, Moll and James part amicably, and Moll returns to London, where she discovers she is pregnant with James's child. Unable to present herself to the banker—who still wishes to marry her—Moll boards with a midwife, who promises to see Moll through her pregnancy. Moll gives birth to a son, and the midwife helps her to place the baby with a family in the country for a sum of money. Then, with most of her £400 bank still intact, Moll sets out to find the banker.

Moll and the banker are married for five years and together they have two children, but the banker falls ill and dies after a dishonest business associate steals most of his fortune. Alone again and without any money in her bank, Moll returns to her friend the midwife, who agrees to let Moll board in her home at a reduced rate. There, in a state of absolute poverty and destitution, Moll embarks on a life of crime and prostitution. Moll becomes a successful thief and pickpocket, and she watches lesser criminals meet their ends at the gallows of Newgate. Moll steals indiscriminately from wealthy women, children, and aristocrats, and she even steals a man's horse, although she doesn't know what to do with it or how to sell it, so she is forced to take it back. Moll's criminal career is incredibly lucrative and her bank grows to nearly £700, but she is ultimately arrested for stealing fabric from a London home and sent to Newgate Prison.

Moll is found guilty at Newgate Prison and sentenced to death, but once Moll repents her sins and vows to live a pious and moral life, a kind minister gets her sentence reduced to transportation to America. While Moll is in prison waiting to be deported, James, who has been making his living as a thief, is also arrested and sent to Newgate. James's case, however, is weak, and it seems likely to be dismissed due to lack of evidence. James agrees to be voluntarily sent to the American colonies, and after a tearful reunion, James and Moll vow to go to America together and change their lives for the better. When they finally arrive in Virginia, Moll immediately goes to see about her mother and quickly learns she has died. Moll also learns that her brother still lives on his plantation with Humphry, his son with Moll, and the entire town knows about their scandalous history. Moll also discovers that her mother has left her a sizable inheritance and a plantation, which has been kept in operation by Humphry. Moll isn't sure what to do—she wants to claim her rightful inheritance, but she doesn't want James to know about her past. In the meantime, Moll and James build a successful plantation, and Moll decides to contact her brother. She sends him a letter, but Humphry intercepts it and immediately comes to see Moll. He greets her as a loving son and tells her all about her plantation, which is sure to bring her £100 per year in profits. Moll returns to the plantation she shares with James, and when her brother dies a year later, she finally tells James all about her past. James happily accepts Moll and her past, and they live many more years together, prosperous and happy. When Moll is almost 70 years old, she returns to England with James, and the two live the rest of their years "in sincere Penitence, for the wicked Lives [they] have lived."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Moll Flanders – Moll is the protagonist and narrator of *Moll Flanders*. Moll is born in Newgate Prison to a convict mother. She is raised by a kind nurse and later taken in by the lady, an upper-class woman, and her family, where Moll falls in love with the older brother of the family. He promises to marry her, but after their relationship turns sexual, his affection wanes. Moll is ultimately forced to marry his younger brother, Robin, or be put out on the street. Robin dies after they get married, and Moll is left with little money and fewer options. Moll is married four more times, including to a linen-draper and a plantation owner, the latter of which turns out to also be her brother. When Moll's fifth and final husband, the banker, dies, Moll moves in with her friend, the midwife, and begins a life of crime. She starts as a pickpocket and moves on to shoplifting, and she even burgles a house or two. She runs scams and frauds and works occasionally as a prostitute. As Moll's **bank** grows, so does her desire for more. She begins stealing things she doesn't need and can't use, like a horse and a trunk too large to move, and she is finally arrested and sentenced to hang at Newgate

Prison. In prison, under the direction of the minister, Moll repents her life of crime, and her life is spared. She reconnects with her fourth and favorite husband, James, and builds a happy and prosperous life with him after they are transported to the American colonies. When Moll's sentence is up, she returns to England with James, and they spend the rest of their days "in sincere Penitence" for their lives of debauchery and vice. Moll represents sin and immorality in the novel, but Defoe implies she only turns to dishonest behavior because she has few options as a woman in 17th-century England. Moll does repent and claims to be sincere, but Defoe suggests that whether Moll is remorseful or not matters very little. Poverty is a powerful motivator, and when she is faced with starvation, Moll has no choice but crime.

The Midwife – The midwife is Moll's friend. The midwife is a pickpocket early in life, but after she is arrested and transported to Ireland, she becomes a midwife and procuress—meaning she is prostitute who also delivers babies and provides other, usually illegal, services. The midwife ignores her sentence and returns to England early, where, thinking pickpocketing too risky, she continues her work as a midwife. After Moll becomes pregnant with James's baby, she is introduced to the midwife, and the midwife cares for Moll at her London brothel throughout the rest of Moll's pregnancy. The midwife arranges for a woman to take Moll's baby for a yearly sum, and Moll goes off to marry the banker, but she comes back after the banker dies. Moll boards with the midwife and they become friends. The midwife introduces Moll to her "Comrades"—the midwife's criminal associates—and sets her up to learn the pickpocketing trade. Moll and the midwife live together for years, and the midwife encourages Moll's life of crime. The midwife has for years made her living off facilitating jobs for her Comrades and acting as a pawn broker, and Moll is a cash cow. Moll grows into a successful thief, and once the midwife is set for life, she suggests Moll retire. Moll won't hear of retiring, however, and she starts stealing more and more. Moll is finally arrested and sent to Newgate Prison, where she is found guilty and sentenced to hang, and the midwife is devastated. She has watched many of her Comrades hang, but Moll is her friend, and she can't bear to see her die. When Moll's life is spared, the midwife is overjoyed and begins to reflect on her own wicked past. She grows sincerely remorseful—at times more than Moll—and abandons her criminal life. The midwife represents sin and repentance within the novel. She lives a life of sin and vice, sees the error of her ways, and repents. While Moll's remorse may be doubtful at the novel's end, the midwife is depicted as genuinely penitent.

The Older Brother – The older brother, who remains nameless, is the lady's son, Robin's brother, and Moll's first lover. The older brother is handsome, charming, and incredibly wealthy. After Moll comes to live with his family, the older brother is immediately taken by her beauty, and he quickly begins to pursue her. He flirts with Moll and compliments her, and then he throws Moll onto her bed and "violently" kisses her. He professes his love and gives her five Guineas before leaving. Afterward, the older brother continues his advances and promises he will marry Moll after he inherits his estate. Moll is doubtful, so by way of convincing her, the older brother gives her 100 Guineas and promises to give her 100 more every year until they are married. Their relationship grows sexual, and the older brother, who never intended to marry Moll, stops talking about marriage all together. When his younger brother Robin falls in love with Moll, the older brother convinces her that Robin is the better choice. It may be years before he comes into his fortune, the older brother says, and marrying Robin is the perfect way for Moll to restore her reputation. He gives Moll £500 "to make [her] some Amends for the Freedoms" he took with her, and tells her he will look upon her as a sister. Moll and Robin marry, and a few years later, the older brother marries a woman from London. The older brother underscores the connection between sex and money in the novel. From the first near-sexual encounter the older brother has with Moll, he pays her; and when he leaves her, he pays Moll for taking her virtue and potentially ruining her reputation—a priceless asset in 17th-century England. From early on, it is clear to Moll that sex and money are intimately connected, and in a society that offers women limited opportunities to provide for themselves, sex becomes a form of currency for Moll.

The Irishman/James – James is Moll's fourth husband. Moll meets James in Lancashire, and she believes him to be a wealthy estate owner from Ireland. Shortly after they are married, Moll and James learn that they are both poor, each having lied to the other about being wealthy. Moll doesn't know it, but James is a highwayman, and he makes his living robbing travelers and stagecoaches. Moll and James are exceedingly disappointed. They are in love, but they both vowed to marry for money, so they agree to separate. James and Moll travel together back to London, where he leaves her just outside of town. Moll doesn't see him again until she marries the banker in Brickill, where, from the window of her room, she watches James and two other men go into a house across the street. She later learns that three highwaymen have struck, but Moll tells the authorities the suspects in question are fine men from Lancashire, not highwaymen, and James is able to escape. Moll later sees James at Newgate Prison, where they are both held for theft. Luckily, James's case is weak, and he is able to escape death in exchange for being deported to the American colonies. James and Moll are transported to Virginia, where they buy their freedom and purchase a plantation near the colony of Carolina. They live a happy and prosperous life there until James is 68 years old, at which point they both return to England. Moll and James live the rest of their lives in England "in sincere Penitence, for the wicked Lives [they] have lived." James serves as an example of a hardened criminal who sees the error of his ways and repents; however, it is never clear if

James's remorse is sincere, especially since he breaks the law by returning to England at the end of the novel.

Moll's Brother/The Plantation Owner – In London, Moll meets the wealthy plantation owner from Virginia, and he quickly begins courting her. The plantation owner is led to believe by Moll's friends that Moll has a large fortune, but Moll makes him promise to love her even if she is poor. After they are married, the plantation owner learns that Moll doesn't have much money at all, but he truly loves her and doesn't mind. Moll and the plantation owner move to his estate in Virginia, where they live with his mother and sister. Moll soon discovers that she and the plantation owner are really half-siblings (his mother turns out to be her own biological mother), and she keeps the secret from her husband for two years, during which time their relationship begins to suffer. Moll treats the plantation owner "like a Dog" and refuses to go to bed with him, and he threatens to send her to a madhouse. When Moll finally tells the plantation owner the truth, he becomes lethargic and depressed, and he twice attempts suicide. He sends Moll back to England, and they never see each other again. The plantation owner lives with his and Moll's son, Humphry, in Virginia for the rest of his life and dies a senile old man. Moll's marriage to the plantation owner is another example of immorality and vice in the novel. Moll secures him with deception, and their incestuous relationship is the very picture of sin; however, neither Moll nor the plantation owner know they are related until well into their relationship, and Moll firmly maintains that sins committed in ignorance don't count.

The Banker – The banker is Moll's fifth husband. Moll meets the banker in London, when she hires him to advise her and manage her **bank**, and he is immediately interested in her. Because his wife has been unfaithful to him, the banker petitions for a divorce and asks Moll to marry him. She declines and goes to Lancashire, but she leaves her money with him, and they keep up a correspondence. The banker obtains a divorce from his wife, after which she commits suicide, and he again asks Moll to marry him. While the banker doesn't know it, Moll is already married to James. They have already separated, but Moll is pregnant with his child. After Moll gives birth, she gives her child up and marries the banker. They have two children and are married for a handful of years, until the banker grows lethargic and dies after a dishonest business associate tricks him out of most his fortune. Until his death, the banker is a "safe harbour" for Moll, and he provides her with a stable and happy life. Moll wishes she had married a man like the banker from the beginning. That way, perhaps her life wouldn't have come to crime, vice, and sin. The banker underscores the connection between poverty and immorality in the novel. While Moll is married to the banker and is not faced with poverty and starvation, she has no need to break the law or behave in immoral ways.

The Younger Brother/Robin – Robin is the lady's son, the older brother's brother, and Moll's first husband. Robin falls in love with Moll when she comes to live with his family, and even though he knows his family will resent him marrying a woman from the lower class, he vows to do so anyway. Moll, however, is in love with the older brother, and it is unclear if Robin ever discovers this. Robin professes his love and proposes to Moll multiple times, but she always resists him. The lady believes that Moll refuses to marry Robin out of respect for the lady and her husband, so the lady encourages her to marry Robin. Moll, of course, is still in love with the older brother; however, he has no intention of marrying her, and if she doesn't marry one of lady's sons, Moll will soon be out on the street. Moll and Robin marry, and the older brother gets Robin so drunk at the wedding that he passes out before he and Moll can consummate their marriage. The next morning, Moll lies and says that they did have sex, successfully hiding the fact that the older brother took her virginity long ago. After five years of marriage and two children, Robin dies, leaving Moll alone. Because of her relationship with Robin, Moll learns that marriage during the 17th century is a "politick Scheme for forming Interests, and carrying on Business," and that love has nothing, or very little, to do with it.

Moll's Mother – Moll's mother was a convict in Newgate Prison at the time of Moll's birth. Mother is sentenced to death for stealing a few pieces of fabric, but because she is pregnant, her sentence is commuted to transportation to the Colonies. When Moll is six months old, Mother is deported to Virginia, where she is sold as an indentured servant. Mother later marries her master, who is a good man and gives her a good life. They have two children, the plantation owner and Moll's sister, and operate a successful plantation. After her husband dies and the plantation owner marries Moll, Moll comes to live on Mother's plantation, not knowing that they're at all related. Mother tells Moll stories of her early life, at which time Moll discovers she is Mother's daughter and has married her own half-brother. When Moll tells Mother the truth, Mother suggests Moll keep her secret and live as man and wife with the plantation owner. Mother stands to lose just as much as Moll if their secret gets out, as the scandal of their incestuous family is sure to ruin everyone's reputation. Mother supports Moll when she decides to tell the truth anyway, and she promises to leave Moll money in her will. Mother helps Moll return to England and later dies an old woman on her plantation. In her will, Mother leaves her plantation to Moll, which allows Moll to live a very comfortable and happy life with James.

The Drunk Man – Moll meets the drunk man at the Bartholomew Fair in London. The drunk man is rich and obviously intoxicated, and he takes to flirting heavily with Moll. They have sex, after which she takes his gold watch and money and slips out the door. Moll returns home and tells the midwife, who, after a hearty laugh, insists she knows the man. The midwife goes to see him and finds him depressed and worried

he has contracted a venereal disease. She gives back his watch and facilitates a meeting between him and Moll, at which time he tells Moll that since they have already committed the sin once, he doesn't see the harm in doing it again. The drunk man is married, but he continues paying Moll for sex, which allows her to live rather comfortably. After about a year, he stops calling on Moll, and she never sees him again. The drunk man illustrates vice and immorality in the novel, and he also underscores the lengths women are forced to go to support themselves in 17th-century England. Furthermore, the character of the drunk man and Moll's association with him highlight the ease with which sins can be repeated—once the thing is done once, it becomes easier to commit the next time, which basically sums up Moll's entire career as "a Thief and a Whore."

The Linen-Draper – The linen-draper is Moll's second husband. Moll meets the linen-draper in London after the death of her first husband, Robin. She never loves the linen-draper, but she does find him agreeable, and she is led to believe he is quite wealthy. At the end of two years, however, the linen-draper has spent much of Moll's money and is arrested for his excessive debts. As it turns out, he isn't wealthy at all and is just another poor tradesman. He manages to escape from the bailiff's house where he is being held, but before he does, he tells Moll to take whatever money she can dig up and run. As his wife, she, too, is wanted for his debts. The linen-draper runs to France and never sees Moll again. After the linen-draper runs off, Moll is left alone without money or means to obtain a legal divorce. Moll is married three times after her marriage to the linen-draper; however, since she is never officially divorced from him, none of her subsequent marriages are legal. Thus, Moll is an adulterer for most of the novel, yet another sin to add to her growing list of offenses. Like most of Moll's husbands and lovers, the linen-draper is an example of immorality and vice, and he serves as a warning for honest readers, whom, Defoe hopes, will use the book for moral instruction.

The Gentleman – The gentleman is a married man and Moll's lover. The gentleman is introduced to Moll by her landlady when Moll lives in Bath, and he first claims to have the utmost respect for Moll and her virtue. He offers Moll money with no strings attached and seems to be sincerely concerned for her wellbeing. He even tells Moll that he can be trusted with her virtue "naked in Bed," but the moment Moll offers to have sex with him, the gentleman jumps at the chance. Like most of the men in Moll's life, the gentleman is chiefly interested in her for sex, and his claims to respect her are presumably just a ploy to get close to her. Moll and the gentleman have a longstanding affair, and they have three children together. He eventually falls ill and has an attack of conscience, after which he refuses to continue seeing Moll. He gives her £100 and leaves her. The affair between Moll and the gentleman serves as an example of the moral instruction Defoe mentions in the novel's preface, and it illustrates the immorality of adultery.

The Minister – After Moll is sent to Newgate Prison for theft and is sentenced to death, the Minister comes to see her in her cell. He quotes scripture and asks Moll to repent, which she does sincerely for the first time in her life. While Moll has long since considered much of her "wicked" life a sin, the Minister helps Moll to see the true error of her ways, and she gives herself over to the mercy of God. The Minister is so moved by Moll's genuine remorse that he convinces the authorities to reduce Moll's sentence to transportation to the American colonies, and Moll's life is saved. The Minister even tries to get Moll's sentence commuted altogether, but he is told to quit while he is ahead. The moment Moll repents with the help of the Minister is "the best part of [Moll's] Life, the most Advantageous to [her], and the most instructive to others." The Minister represents piety and forgiveness, and he underscores the importance of morality and penitence in Defoe's novel.

The Nurse – The nurse is Moll's caretaker from the time Moll is three years old until she is a teenager. The nurse takes in orphaned children on behalf of the local parish, and she tenderly cares for them until they are old enough to either "go to Service"—work as maids, cooks, or other positions of service—or care for themselves. The nurse is kind and attentive, and she is from a good family. She enjoys art, and she makes sure that all the children under her care are able to read and dance. When Moll is eight years old and ordered into Service, the nurse agrees to keep her on, and she promises Moll that she will never have to go to Service. The nurse dies after a sudden illness, and Moll goes to live with the lady. The nurse represents piety and virtue in the novel, and she serves as an example of morality and goodness.

Humphry – Humphry is Moll's son with her third husband, the plantation owner. Humphry is the only one of Moll's 12 children to be mentioned by name, although even Humphry's name isn't revealed until he is well into adulthood. Moll abandons Humphry after she discovers his father is really her half-brother, and she doesn't see her son again for over 20 years. After Moll is transported to Virginia from Newgate Prison, she sends her half-brother a letter, which is intercepted by Humphry. Humphry has been maintaining the plantation Moll's mother left Moll in her will, and despite her long absence, he happily welcomes Moll as a mother. Humphry is a kind man who cares for his aging and senile father, and he never marries. At the end of the novel, Moll hires Humphry to continue managing her plantation, and they enjoy a pleasant and easy relationship as mother and son.

The Lady – The lady is the mother of the older brother and the younger brother, Robin. After the nurse dies, the lady takes Moll in. The lady and her family are wealthy and of the highest standing in society. When Robin falls in love with Moll and insists on marrying her, the lady is less than pleased. As a member of the lower class, Moll is not, in the lady's opinion, an

appropriate match for her son, and the lady considers kicking Moll out. However, when Moll claims to resist Robin's advances out of her sincerest respect for the lady, the lady changes her mind about Moll. The lady begins to encourage the marriage, and she enlists the help of the older brother to convince Moll. Robin dies five years into his marriage to Moll, and after Moll leaves town, the lady takes charge of Moll and Robin's two children.

The Male Comrade – The male comrade is one of Moll's partners in crime. Fearing her identity has been compromised, Moll begins dressing as a man and takes to working with the male comrade. Moll and the male comrade pull off several robberies together—their specialty is relieving distracted shopkeepers of their goods—but he never suspects Moll isn't a man. The male comrade is arrested for a botched robbery, but Moll manages to get away. He is sent to Newgate Prison, where he attempts to turn Moll in for a reduced sentence; however, he tells authorities that his partner's name is Gabriel Spencer, and when the police are unable to find a man by that name, the male comrade is punished severely and presumably hanged. Like the couple, the male comrade serves to underscore the extreme danger involved in Moll's life of crime.

The Shopkeeper – Moll is falsely accused of robbing the shopkeeper's store in London. The shopkeeper confirms Moll wasn't the woman who robbed him, but Moll is detained by his two men and held against her will. A constable arrives and ultimately lets Moll go, but she insists on taking the shopkeeper before the magistrate, so that she might be compensated for her slight. The magistrate apologizes to Moll for the inconvenience, but he refuses to order her compensation. On the advice of the midwife, Moll sues the shopkeeper and is awarded £150 and a suit of black silk. The shopkeeper is another one of Moll's scams, and he further highlights the dishonesty Moll turns to in order to support herself.

The Couple – The couple are a crime team whom Moll briefly works with as a thief in London. The couple (a man and a woman) aren't married, but they steal together and sleep together. They pull off a few robberies with Moll, but when they ask her to break into houses, she refuses. Breaking into houses is something Moll is hesitant to do, and the couple is ultimately arrested and hanged for the crime. Like the male comrade, the couple highlight the risk Molls runs each time she steals.

The Landlady – The landlady owns the house where Moll boards in Bath. The landlady does not "keep an ill House," but she doesn't have "the best Principles." In other words, while the landlady does not keep a brothel, she is a prostitute. Moll and the landlady become friendly, and she introduces Moll to the gentleman. After Moll becomes pregnant with the gentleman's child, the landlady finds her a midwife and allows Moll to rest at her house during her pregnancy.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Moll's Sister – Moll's half-sister is the daughter of Moll's mother. She is born in Virginia after Moll's mother is transported to the American colonies. Moll's sister lives with Moll's brother on his plantation in Virginia.

The Mayor's Wife – The mayor's wife is a socialite in Colchester. After the death of the nurse, the mayor's wife invites Moll to live with her and her family, but Moll declines and instead chooses to live with the lady.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

POVERTY AND MORALITY

At its core, Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* serves as a sort of cautionary tale and moral guidebook for readers. Protagonist Moll Flanders lives, for the most part, a life of crime. Moll is a thief and a prostitute, and when she isn't actively breaking the law, she is lying and deceiving nearly everyone she meets. She is married five times, has an incestuous relationship with her brother, and gives birth to several children, all of whom she abandons. Moll is born in London's Newgate Prison to a convict mother, and it seems as if she is destined to follow in her mother's criminal footsteps; however, this doesn't mean that Moll doesn't struggle with her morality. Each time she breaks the law or is otherwise dishonest, she feels appropriately guilty—at least until she breaks the law or lies again. As a member of the lower class, Moll has few opportunities or choices in life, and she is often forced to break the law or resort to dishonest means to survive. Defoe draws a direct parallel between crime and poverty in *Moll Flanders* and ultimately argues that morality, like many things, is a luxury that the lower class often cannot afford.

Whenever Moll behaves in an immoral way, she is quick to point out her own sins and express her guilt, which suggests Moll is often acting against her true moral compass. When Moll is young, she falls in love with the older brother, the son of the wealthy lady who takes Moll in, and they have a longstanding affair. He initially promises to marry her but later refuses to do so, and Moll is forced to marry his younger brother or be put out on the street. Moll never loves her husband, and she constantly thinks about his brother. "In short, I committed Adultery and Incest with him every Day in my Desires," Moll admits, "which without doubt, was as effectually Criminal in the Nature of the Guilt, as if I had actually done it." In this case, it is only Moll's thoughts that are immoral, but she still feels guilty. When Moll marries her third husband, she later discovers that

he is also her half-brother; however, she lives with this secret for two whole years, because she has nowhere else to go. "I liv'd therefore in open avowed Incest and Whoredom, and all under the appearance of an honest Wife," Moll says, "and made my Husband, as he thought himself even nauseous to me." Moll knows her marriage is wrong, and it makes her sick to her stomach, but again, she can't do much to change the situation. After Moll's fourth husband, James, leaves Moll alone and pregnant, she is forced to "Lye-Inn"—women of Moll's time where expected to completely remove themselves from society during pregnancy—at a brothel. "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 nauceate the place I was in, and above all, the wicked Practice," says Moll. Again, Moll is forced into an immoral situation that makes her makes her sick to her stomach.

Moll repeatedly reminds the reader of her poverty and implies that she wouldn't break the law or behave dishonestly if she had more money and opportunity. As Moll embarks on her life of crime, she begs the reader not to continue reading "without seriously reflecting on the Circumstances of a desolate State" and to remember "the wise Man's Prayer, *Give me not Poverty lest I Steal*." Moll doesn't break the law and live an immoral life because she is an inherently immoral woman; rather, she breaks the law and lives an immoral life because she has few choices and little opportunity to do anything else. Moll admits that she regrets many of her immoral decisions. Her choices, however, are made with immorality on one hand and "the terrible prospect of Poverty and Starving" on the other. "But as Poverty brought me into it," Moll says of her immoral choices, "so fear of Poverty kept me in it." Moll's choice is clear, and she must resort to crime and dishonesty in order to survive. Moll explains that there are certain temptations that people are powerless to resist. "As Covetousness is the Root of all Evil," Moll says, "so Poverty is, I believe, the worst of all Snares." Moll is caught in a trap of poverty, and Defoe explicitly states that the only way for her to get out is by stealing and other dishonest means.

By the end of the novel, Moll is living comfortably with her ex-husband, James—who is also a reformed criminal—and they spend the rest of their days "in sincere Penitence" for their "wicked Lives." Moll's atonement may be genuine, but it is likely she would return to her life of crime and dishonesty if not for her newfound wealth. For Moll, "Vice [comes] in always at the Door of Necessity, not at the Door of Inclination." It is poverty and limited opportunities that lead Moll to a life of crime, not a lack of moral fiber.

GENDER AND SOCIETY

Just as Daniel Defoe draws a parallel between poverty and morality in *Moll Flanders*, he likewise implies that Moll's circumstances and subsequent life of crime are closely related to her gender. As a woman in 17th-century England, Moll has very few options in life. She does not enjoy the same freedoms and privileges as men, such as access to education or the right to own personal property. A woman's choices are limited to "going to Service" (working as a servant or maid) or marriage, and Moll quickly learns that marrying for love is another luxury she can't afford. For Moll, marriage is simply a business arrangement—a way for her to secure social standing and wealth—and she is married five times throughout the course of novel. Moll's marriages are mostly are a series of disasters, and after they fail to secure her wealth or status, she turns to a life of crime. With his portrayal of gender and society in *Moll Flanders*, Defoe highlights the sexist nature of 17th-century English society and ultimately argues that women, especially women of the lower class, have few options for social mobility.

From a very young age, it is expected that Moll will eventually "go to Service," which underscores the limited opportunities available to women of her socioeconomic status. Moll spends much of her childhood under the care of a nurse, who is funded by the church to keep orphans like Moll until "a certain Age, in which it might be suppos'd they might go to Service, or get their own Bread." When Moll is just eight years old, the courts order her into Service. At such a young age, Moll can do little but run errands "and be a Drudge to some Cook-Maid," so she begs her nurse to keep her. Moll promises to work instead for her nurse, and "Work very hard," which she indeed does, giving the nurse every penny from her needlework and sewing. No matter what, it is expected that as a girl, Moll will be in the "Service" of another. Moll dreams of being a "Gentlewoman," which to her means working for herself and earning enough to keep herself out of Service. "Poor child," the nurse says, "you may soon be such a Gentlewoman as that, for she is a Person of ill Fame, and has had two or three Bastards." A "Gentlewoman" turns out to be a polite term for a prostitute, and, the nurse thus implies, prostitution is the only way in which Moll will ever be able to work for herself.

As Moll has a "thorough Aversion to going to Service," her only other (legal) option is marriage, which further highlights her limited choices as a woman. Moll quickly learns that marriages are "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 short, marriage (especially for women) is not about love; marriage is about securing the best possible social and financial status. After the death of Moll's first husband, Robin—a man she didn't love but was forced to marry to keep from becoming homeless—she is "resolv'd now to be Married or Nothing, and to be well Married or not at all." In other words, Moll has accepted the fact that she must get married, but she will only marry a wealthy man. Moll is married a total of five times and gives birth to 12 children, but she is never able to secure herself any real wealth or social

status through marriage, and she secures even less love and happiness. It is only *after* marriage that Moll takes her "Estate in [her] own Hands" and supports herself, but she must do so through dishonest means.

Moll does eventually manage to find financial security—and some happiness and love—and she even does it without marriage or breaking the law, but that security comes about through pure chance. After Moll's biological mother dies, she leaves Moll a modest fortune, which allows Moll to live happily with her ex-husband James—Moll's fourth and favorite husband, whom she only left because he didn't have any money. Without the chance fate of her inheritance, Moll would be stuck in a cycle of loveless marriage, petty theft, and prostitution, which highlights the restrictions women face in 17th-centruy England; most women, Defoe implies, have little chance for such a happy outcome.

IDENTITY

In the preface to *Moll Flanders*, Daniel Defoe immediately draws attention to identity. He concedes that it may be difficult for readers to believe his story, as many of the characters' names and circumstances are concealed, but Defoe offers no solution to this problem. In the opening pages, the novel's protagonist, Moll Flanders, says she must conceal her identity because of her criminal history— "after which there is no Occasion to say any more about that," Defoe writes. There is thus a sense of mystery surrounding identity in the novel, and Defoe neglects to give many of the characters names. Characters are often identified instead by the roles they fill in Moll's life—such as mother, husband, or brother—and if their names are known, they are rarely used. Even Moll's own name describes *what* she is, not *who* she is: "Moll" is 17th-century slang for a low-class woman of ill repute, and "Flanders" is a reference to the Women of Flanders, once known as the best prostitutes in England. Plus, that name matches only 12 years of her long and varied life. Identity in *Moll Flanders* cannot be boiled down to one's name or even one's role in society, and through the novel Defoe underscores the complexity of identity and ultimately argues that one's identity is constantly changing and evolving.

Moll changes her name several times throughout the book, adjusting as her life changes, which suggests that identity is not static but rather changes with the circumstances of one's life. Moll is an orphan, and after the nurse who cares for her dies, she goes to live with a wealthy lady and her family in Colchester, where Moll is known as Mrs. Betty. Betty, a reference to the chambermaid in Alexander Pope's famous poem *The Rape of the Lock*, is a generic name used strictly by Moll's Colchester family. After Moll's second husband, the linen-draper, leaves her deep in debt and without the means to obtain a legal divorce, she finds it necessary to again change her identity. "Upon these Apprehensions the first thing I did," Moll says, "was to go quite out of my Knowledge, and go by another Name: [...] Mrs. *Flanders*." Moll's only choice, she realizes right away, is to move where no one knows her and assume a false name. After several failed marriage attempts, Moll is forced to enter a life of crime to support herself, and it is during this time that Moll's criminal friends give her the name Moll Flanders. "For it was no more of Affinity with my real Name, or with any of the Names I had ever gone by, than black is of Kin to white, except that once, as before I call'd my self Mrs. *Flanders*," Moll says. In other words, Moll's new name has next to nothing to do with her previous identities, but because Moll is entering into a new life of crime, she likewise needs a new name to go with it.

Moll is not the only character whose identity changes throughout the novel, and many of the characters are not who they appear to be, which also suggests that identity is not static or easy to understand. For instance, Moll thinks her second husband, the linen-draper, is a wealthy gentleman, but he turns out to be just another poor merchant. "Well, at last I found this amphibious Creature," says Moll, "this *Land-water-thing* call'd, a *Gentleman-Tradesman*." Despite being of low social status, the linen-draper lives as Moll's aristocratic husband for two years before finally exhausting much of Moll's money. Her description of him as an amphibian highlights the way his identity shifts to match his environment, just as a creature like a frog can belong equally on both land and water. After Moll marries her third husband, a wealthy captain who owns land in Virginia of the American colonies, she finds out that he is really her half-brother, born after Moll's biological mother was exiled to the colonies as punishment for petty theft. "I look'd upon him no longer as a Husband, but as a near Relation, the Son of my own Mother," Moll says. Just like Moll's second husband, her third husband turns out to be someone else entirely. Moll's fourth husband, James from Lancashire, has "the Appearance of an extraordinary fine Gentleman; he was Tall, well Shap'd, and had an extraordinary Address," Moll recounts; however, this is all just appearance. Like Moll's, James's real identity is that of a penniless fraud looking for a wealthy spouse.

The true identity of Defoe's protagonist is never revealed, and she asks that readers refer to her simply as Moll Flanders. "[S]o you may give me leave to speak of myself under that Name," Moll explains, "till I dare own who I have been, as well as who I am." This explanation of Moll's identity suggests that she isn't the same person she was in her earlier years, and again implies that personal identity more generally is always shifting.

SEX AND MONEY

Much of Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* revolves around sex and money. In 17th-century England, personal wealth is the very foundation of social status and importance. In Moll's experience, "if a young Woman have Beauty, Birth, Breeding, Wit, Sense, Manners, Modesty, and all these to an Extream; yet if she have not Money, she's no

Body." That is, all the virtues in the world add up to nothing if they're not accompanied by wealth. Of course, Moll is a poor orphan and doesn't have any money, so she must find alternative means to security. Additionally, according to Moll, it is necessary "for all women who expect any thing in the World to preserve the Character of Virtue." In other words, a woman's worth is based on purity and virginity, which Moll finds difficult to feign after five marriages. Broke and without a husband, Moll turns to crime to survive, and she spends 12 years as a "whore." For Moll, sex is a sort of currency, both in her marriages and in her career as a prostitute, and she uses it to secure her place in society. Through *Moll Flanders*, Defoe highlights the intricate relationship between sex and money and ultimately argues that women like Moll can rarely separate the two—and that society's expectations for women's wealth and virginity are thus an impossible standard.

From the moment Moll falls in love for the very first time, there is a definite connection between sex and money, which suggests the two are inseparable. When the older brother, the son of the wealthy lady who takes Moll in, kisses Moll, he throws her down and kisses her "most violently." He only stops when he hears someone coming, at which time he professes "a great deal of Love for [her], […] and with that he put five Guineas into [her] Hand, and went away down Stairs." This is one of Moll's first romantic encounters with the older brother, and she is already, in effect, paid for it. Moll's relationship with the older brother grows sexual and he promises that he will one day marry her, but Moll doubts it. By way of convincing her, "he pulls out a silk Purse, with an Hundred Guineas in it," and gives it to Moll. "I'll give you such another," the older brother says, "every Year till I Marry you." Again, there is a direct connection between money and sex implied in the older brother's promise of marriage. Of course, the older brother has no intention of marrying Moll, and he gives her even more money when he finally admits it. "I here offer you 500 £, in Money, to make you some Amends for the Freedoms I have taken with you," he says to Moll. He has taken Moll's virtue by having a sexual relationship with her, and he makes it clear that the going rate is 500 pounds.

Later, after Moll turns to prostitution, sex becomes currency in a more literal way, which further highlights the connection between sex and money in the novel and in 17th-century England more generally. After the death of Moll's first husband, Robin, she moves to a place where no one knows her and changes her name. Moll dresses up "in the Habit of a Widow, and call'd [herself] Mrs. *Flanders*." In London, there is a long association between Flemish women (women from Flanders) and prostitutes, and Moll obviously knows this. By calling herself Mrs. Flanders, Moll implies that she is not opposed to prostitution as a way to secure herself wealth and status. Moll admits that her name is a nickname given to her by her "Comrades"—her friends in crime and, likely, other prostitutes. The name "Moll" is slang for a woman of ill repute, such as a prostitute, which is precisely why they give her that name. Again, in Moll's case, it's impossible to separate sex and money if she wants a stable, independent life. From the moment Moll meets the Gentleman, she knows he is just what she needs to lift herself out of her life of poverty. "I resolv'd to let him lye with me if he offer'd it," Moll says, "but it was because I wanted his help and assistance, and I knew no other way of securing him than that." Here, Moll explicitly says that without money, she has only her body and sex, which she must use to get what she needs; she literally doesn't know of any other options for securing stability.

After Moll's fifth and final husband, the banker, dies, she is ultimately left on her own again. Afterward, Moll works almost exclusively as a thief and a prostitute, until she is finally arrested near the end of the novel and thrown into Newgate Prison. For Moll, sex and money can never be separated, even though society might claim that it's necessary for women to preserve their virginity. Through Moll's story, Defoe implies that women like Moll are in an impossible double bind: they must have money and they must preserve their sexual purity, but in many cases, those two apparent virtues are in direct conflict with one another.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

MOLL'S BANK OF MONEY

Moll keeps a secret "Bank of Money" throughout most of *Moll Flanders*, and it symbolizes security and Moll's ability to care for herself. The bank of money shrinks and grows during Moll's long life, and it keeps her from starving and having to work as a servant. Moll's bank is closely associated with sex, and it begins to build during her relationship with the older brother, who gives Moll money before they have sex. When the older brother leaves Moll, he pays her £500 for her virtue, and Moll has a significant amount of her own money for the first time. When Moll's marriages and affairs fail, she stops each time to take stock of her bank, which is sometimes modest, and sometimes nearly dry. After Moll's fifth and final husband, the banker, dies, Moll has less than £200 in her bank. She lives on her money until it runs out, and when Moll is faced with starvation, she turns to a life of crime. She works as a pickpocket, a shoplifter, and a prostitute, and her bank quickly expands to include over £700 and various items of value. When Moll is arrested and sentenced to transportation to the American colonies, she brings her bank with her, but she leaves £300 with the midwife in London. Moll goes to Virginia with her fourth and favorite husband, James,

where they build a happy and prosperous life after buying their freedom. Safe and secure in her life with James, Moll no longer fears homelessness or starvation, and she sends for the midwife to spend her remaining bank on supplies for the plantation Moll shares with James. In her happiness and newfound wealth, Moll is finally secure enough to let her bank go and set aside her criminal past for good, suggesting that wealth brings not only material security but also emotional freedom and the ability to live a moral life.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Moll Flanders* published in 1989.

The Preface Quotes

The World is so taken up of late with Novels and Romances that it will be hard for a private History 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.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs in the very beginning of *Moll Flanders*, and it is significant because it identifies the novel as a narrative and introduces the theme of identity to the book. In 1722, when *Moll Flanders* was first published, the English novel was a rather new and increasingly popular concept. While there were several "Novels and Romances" by Defoe's time, *Moll Flanders* is generally accepted as the first "private History"—a narrative that may or may not be true. Defoe seems unconcerned if his readers believe the story or not, and he leaves each reader to "pass his own Opinion."

Defoe explains that he is not the author of the novel. The novel is written by a woman who sees fit to conceal "Names and other Circumstances," including her own. The author, known as Moll Flanders, later admits that she is a criminal, still wanted for many of her crimes, and she must conceal her identity to avoid arrest. Defoe is again unconcerned if the author's secrecy makes it difficult for readers to believe the story and take it "for Genuine." Moll's true identity is never revealed, which indicates that her identity shifts so much over the course of her life that it is ultimately unknowable.

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, than one grown Penitent and Humble, as she afterwards pretends to be.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

This passage also occurs in Defoe's preface, and it is important because it implies Moll isn't an entirely moral woman and it casts doubt on the sincerity of her remorse. Here, Defoe explains that Moll had to rewrite her story and "put [it] into new Words." Moll is a former criminal and an ex-convict, and her language the first time around was apparently too rough. Women during Defoe's time were expected to be modest and refined, and Moll's story is neither. Moll's "Stile," or way of writing, has been changed somewhat to contain "modester Words" fit for public consumption.

Defoe claims Moll's original draft—"the Copy which came first to Hand"—was written in the language of "Newgate," the London prison in which Moll is born and later serves time. Prison language conjures thoughts of harsh words and obscenities, and such language would have been considered highly distasteful and taboo during Defoe's time. The second draft of Moll's story, the one that became *Moll Flanders*, is in the language of the "Penitent and Humble," which Moll "afterwards pretends to be." Moll grows remorseful for her crimes and sins toward the end of the book, but she is hardly humble, and her penitence is never completely believable. The word "pretends" meant something more like "profess" or "aspire to" during Defoe's time, so it does not necessarily mean that Moll is faking her remorse, but doubt remains through much of the book.

> 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 Account 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 threescore Year, an Author must be hard put to it to wrap it up so clean, as not to give room, especially for vicious Readers to turn it to his Disadvantage.

Related Characters: Moll's Mother, Moll Flanders

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37-8

Explanation and Analysis

This passage from the preface explains Defoe's difficulty in dressing up Moll's story, and it is significant because it reflects the sexism that pervades most of the novel. Defoe implies here that he is merely the book's editor, "employ'd in finishing [Moll's] story," and he says it wasn't an easy job. Moll is a woman "debauch'd from her Youth" and is "the Off-Spring of Debauchery and Vice." That is, she was born in a prison and lives a life of crime and inappropriate sex, and the novel is "an Account of all her vicious Practises." As such, it was difficult for Defoe to "wrap it up so clean, as not to give room, especially for vicious Readers to turn it to his Disadvantage." In other words, he had to work very hard to make sure Moll's story doesn't read like a how-to manual for criminal behavior and immorality.

Defoe depicts Moll here as someone deplorable, and he claims he had a hard time putting Moll's story in "a Dress fit to be seen." Women during Moll's time where expected to be refined, well mannered, and virtuous, so it's nearly impossible to make Moll and her story fit that impossible ideal. Regardless, both Moll and her story are forced to conform to the standards of 17th-century British society, which demands women fill a subordinate and incredibly limited role of domestic work and piety. Without that appearance of virtue, Moll's story could never be told at all.

> 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 applyed to virtuous Purposes, and that by the most lively Representations, they fail not to recommend Virtue 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.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39-40

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears near the end of Defoe's preface, and it is important because it establishes *Moll Flanders* as a novel of moral instruction. "The Advocates for the Stage" is a reference to the state of London's theater during the 16th and 17th centuries. During this time, theater and plays were thought by many to portray excessive vice and immorality, and they were considered a bad influence on society and even outlawed for decades. However, there were others during this time who supported theaters and thought plays were instructive and "useful" when "applied to virtuous Purposes." For some, plays "expose[d]" and "discourage[d]" vice and immorality, and that is exactly how Defoe offers Moll's story.

The "most lively Representations"—that is, the most corrupt and immoral stories—"fail not to recommend Virtue and generous Principles," which means that there is much to be learned from Moll's story. She is a thief and a prostitute, and she is guilty of incest, adultery, bigamy, and fraud. She spends time in Newgate Prison, abandons 12 children, and steals and lies indiscriminately. In telling Moll's story, Defoe warns readers of the dishonesty and immorality of those around them, and he urges readers toward virtue by showing them a vivid example of how *not* to behave in an upright and moral way.

Moll's Childhood Quotes

My True Name is so well known in the Records, or Registers at Newgate, and in the Old-Baily, and there are some things of such Consequence still depending there, relating to my particular Conduct, that it is not to be expected I should set my Name, or the Account of my Family to this Work; perhaps, after my Death it may be better known; at present it would not be proper, no, not tho' a general Pardon should be issued, even without Exceptions and reserve of Persons or Crimes.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears in the very beginning of Moll's story, and it is significant because it establishes Moll as a wanted criminal. "Newgate" is the prison in London during Moll's time, and "Old-Baily" is the courthouse across the street. Moll can't use her "True Name" in telling her story, because her real name is "well known" to those at Newgate and Old-Baily. Furthermore, Moll has "things of such Consequence still depending there," which means Moll is a wanted woman and still sought by the law for her crimes.

This quote becomes even more significant when considered in context with Moll's remorse and penitence. Moll claims to be sincerely remorseful for her crimes and immorality, but her repentance is less than convincing. It is difficult for Moll to sin and lie when she first begins breaking the law, but once she grows used to it, she has an easy time being a criminal. She sees the error of her ways when she is sentenced to death and given a last minute reprieve, but even then, it takes her little time to return to her dishonest ways. Accordingly, Moll's pending criminal cases are suspect. She writes her story when her adventures are over—*after* she has been arrested and repented—yet she still has open cases, which suggests Moll's criminal life isn't just a thing of the past.

It is enough to tell you, that as some of my worst Comrades, who are out of the Way of doing me Harm, having gone out of the World by the Steps and the String, as I often expected to go, knew me by the Name of Moll Flanders; so you may give me leave to speak of myself under that Name till I dare own who I have been, as well as who I am.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

This quote also appears in the beginning of Moll's story, and it reveals her assumed name as "Moll Flanders," which introduces the novel's connection between sex and money. Moll's alias is given to her by "some of [her] worst Comrades"—the criminal associates Moll works with as a pickpocket and shoplifter—but she claims most of them are gone and can no longer do her "Harm," meaning they can no longer influence or encourage her to break the law. Most of Moll's comrades go "out of the World by the Steps and the String," which is to say they are hanged at Newgate Prison, just as Moll nearly is.

The name Moll Flanders is highly meaningful, and its signifiance would have been very obvious to readers during Defoe's time. "Moll" is slang for a low-class woman of ill repute, and "Flanders" is a reference to the "Women of Flanders," the Flemish women who worked as London's most famous prostitutes during the 17th and 18th centuries. Moll's nickname describes who she is: a woman of the lower class who often makes money through sex. Moll learns early on that sex is something that is expected of her (even though she is *also* expected to be chaste and virtuous), and she also learns it can be highly lucrative. Moll makes most of her money through sex in some way, either as a prostitute or in unspoken agreements with her husbands and lovers. For Moll, sex is a sort of currency, and her name reflects this from the start.

Had this been the Custom in our Country, I had not been left a poor desolate Girl without Friends, without Cloaths, without Help or Helper in the World, as was my Fate; and by which, I was not only expos'd to very great Distresses, even before I was capable either of Understanding my Case, or how to Amend it, nor brought into a Course of Life, which was not only scandalous in itself, but which in its ordinary Course, tended to the swift Destruction both of Soul and Body.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders (speaker), Moll's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears in the early stages of Moll's story, after she notes that *some* countries take care of orphaned children, and it is important because it reflects Defoe's argument that Moll's life of immorality is the direct result of English society's failure to care for orphaned children. Moll's mother gives birth to her in prison, and she is transported to America when Moll is just six months old. Moll is, quite literally, "left a poor desolate Girl without Friends, without Cloaths, without Help or Helper in the World." She is taken in and cared for by strangers, but it seems Moll never really has a chance in life.

If Moll had been cared for early in life—had caring for orphaned children and giving them the life they should have had with their parents "been the Custom in [Moll's] Country"—Defoe implies that Moll might not have been destined "to the swift Destruction of both Soul and Body." Moll lives a tough life of poverty, crime, and prostitution, and this "scandalous" existence takes its toll on her, especially on her morality. Morality and ethics are of the utmost importance in 17th-century English society; however, in Moll's case, society is also the very reason why Moll is unable to claim the moral high ground.

The Older Brother and Moll's First Marriage Quotes

❝ I wonder at you Brother, *says the Sister*; Betty wants but one Thing, but she had as good want every Thing, for the Market is against our Sex just now; and if a young Woman have Beauty, Birth, Breeding, Wit, Sense, Manners, Modesty, and all these to an Extream; yet if she have not Money, she's no Body, she had as good want them all, for nothing but Money now recommends a Woman [...].

Related Characters: Moll Flanders (speaker), The Lady, The Older Brother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Moll is living with the lady and her family, and it reflects the impossible ideal expected of women in the sexist society of 17th-century England. Moll relays this quote, which is spoken to the older brother by one of his sisters after he admits that he thinks Moll is beautiful. The older brother's sister warns him that Moll, a poor orphan, is only after "one Thing": the older brother's money. The marriage market in London during Moll's time is tough, and only those with the best dowries are offered the best husbands.

Women are expected to fill a very limited role in Moll's society—they remain in the domestic sphere and usually marry young—and they are expected to have "Beauty, Birth, Breeding, Wit, Sense, Manners, Modesty, and all these to an Extream." Still, without money—without a sizable dowry to offer her new husband—a woman is nothing. Moll, of course, doesn't have any money, and as such, she has nothing to "recommend" her to potential husbands, despite her beauty and fine manners. As a woman's role is limited to either marriage or working as a servant, Moll has little choice in the direction her life takes, but she is determined to make her own money and provide for her herself.

❝ Then he walk'd about the Room, and taking me by the Hand, I walk'd with him; and by and by, taking his Advantage, he threw me down upon the Bed, and Kiss'd me there most violently; but to give him his Due, offer'd no manner of Rudeness to me, only Kiss'd me a great while; after this he thought he had heard some Body come up Stairs, so he got off from the Bed, lifted me up, professing a great deal of Love for me, but told me it was all an honest Affection, and that he meant no ill to me; and with that he put five Guineas into my Hand, and went away down Stairs.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders (speaker), The Older Brother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears early in Moll's relationship with the older brother, and it is significant because it reflects the novel's connection between sex and money and suggests that the older brother doesn't have the best intentions for Moll. The older brother waits for the perfect time to take "his Advantage" with Moll. He goes upstairs to her room and waits for everyone to leave, and then he throws her on her bed and kisses her "most violently." He offers Moll "no manner of Rudeness," but he clearly doesn't respect her, as he is rough and jumps up the moment he hears someone coming. The older brother's quick action implies he is ashamed of his relationship with Moll—or, at least, that he doesn't want others to know about it.

The older brother professes "a great deal of Love" for Moll and claims to have "an honest Affection" for her. Yet he keeps their relationship a secret and gives Moll money—"five Guineas"—as a way to convince her that he means "no ill" to her. This gift of money and the older brother's "violent" kisses begin a connection between sex and money that will last throughout the whole novel. The older brother makes it clear that he is sexually attracted to Moll, and he makes it known that he is willing to pay for it, introducing her to the harsh reality that offering sex will often be her easiest path to financial security.

❝ My Colour came and went, at the Sight of the Purse, and with the fire of his Proposal together; so that I could not say a Word, and he easily perceiv'd it; so putting the Purse into my Bosom, I made no more Resistance to him, but let him do just what he pleas'd; and as often as he pleas'd; and thus I finish'd my own Destruction at once, for from this Day, being forsaken of my Virtue, and my Modesty, I had nothing of Value left to recommend me, either to God's Blessing, or Man's Assistance.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders (speaker), The Older Brother

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after the older brother proposes to Moll, and it is significant because it further underscores the connection between sex and money in the novel. When the older brother proposes to Moll, he also gives her a purse of 100 Guineas and offers to give her 100 more each year until they are married. Moll swoons at the purse and proposal—her "Colour came and went"—and she is speechless. At the "Sight of the Purse," Moll offers the older brother "no more Resistance," meaning she finally consents to have sex with him.

As a poor orphan girl, Moll has no money and no dowry, which is the only thing society truly cares about, and all she has of value is her virtue—which is to say, her virginity. The older brother takes that virtue, and he gives Moll 100 Guineas in return. This trade, however, isn't exactly fair, and it leads to Moll's "Destruction." Without her virtue, Moll has "nothing of value left to recommend [her]," and she is left with only the older brother's purse. This purse turns into Moll's "Bank of Money," which she keeps and builds throughout the novel to care for herself, indicating that for disadvantaged women like Moll, virtue and money often come to be interchangeable.

Moll Marries the Linen-Draper Quotes

❝ Upon these Apprehensions the first thing I did, was to go quite out of my Knowledge, and go by another Name: This I did effectually, for I went into the Mint too, took Lodgings in a very private Place, drest me up in the Habit of a Widow, and call'd myself Mrs. Flanders.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders (speaker), The Linen-Draper

Related Themes:

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Moll's second husband, the linen-draper, leaves her. It highlights Moll's evolving identity and also emphasizes the connection between sex and money within the novel. After the linen-draper leaves, Moll is left in debt and is in danger of being thrown in debtors' prison. Knowing this, Moll thinks it is best "to go quite out of [her] Knowledge"—that is, go to where no one knows her—and change her name. Moll takes refuge at "the Mint," a district in London that is a jurisdictional interzone due to the coin mint that used to operate there. In the district of the Mint, the local authorities don't have jurisdiction and criminals can't be arrested there, making it the perfect place for debtors like Moll.

Moll calls herself "Mrs. Flanders," a name that is also given to her later in the book by her criminal associates. "Flanders" is a reference to the Women of Flanders, the Flemish women who were known as London's best prostitutes at the time. By giving herself the name Mrs. Flanders, Moll implies that she isn't opposed to prostitution to support herself. As Defoe claims Moll was made to rewrite her story in more modest words, Moll's sexual encounters, especially those involving prostitution, are subtle, and her name is a prime example of this. Much of the inappropriateness has been scrubbed from Moll's story, but her name—which also serves as the title of the book—is a clear indicator of Moll's true behavior.

❝ This Knowledge I soon learnt by Experience, (viz.) That the State of things was altered as to Matrimony, and that I was not to expect at London, what I had found in the Country; that Marriages were here the Consequences of politick Schemes for forming Interests, and carrying on Business, and that L o v e had no Share, or but very little in the Matter.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders (speaker), The Older Brother, The Linen-Draper, The Younger Brother/Robin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears as Moll is looking for a new husband, and it is significant because it establishes that Moll is looking to marry for money, not love. Moll learns this lesson through her own "Experience." By this time, Moll has already had two husbands, neither of whom she loved. She first marries Robin to ensure she isn't kicked out into the street, but she never loves him. He offers her stability, money, and shelter, but that is all, and Moll is never really happy with him. Moll marries the linen-draper for money and stability, too, but he turns out to be even poorer than she is and looking for his own support.

Both of Moll's marriages by this time are based on money and security, and every subsequent marriage and long-term relationship she has hereafter is based on the very same thing. "L o v e" (which appears with extra spacing, as if to imply how far away she is from love) doesn't figure into Moll's marriages at all, and she doesn't seem to love any of her five husbands as much as she loves her very first lover, the older brother. The older brother takes advantage of Moll, and he never intends to marry her, but she learns this the hard way—just as she learns the truth about love and marriage.

❝ No Man of common Sense will value a Woman the less for not giving up herself at the first Attack, or for not accepting his Proposal without enquiring into his Person or Character; on the contrary, he must think her the weakest of all Creatures in the World, as the Rate of Men now goes; In short, he must have a very contemptible Opinion of her Capacities, nay, even of her Understanding, that having but one Cast for her Life, shall cast that Life away at once, and make Matrimony like Death, be *a Leap in the Dark*.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears when Moll claims women should be permitted to ask questions as to a man's character and fortune before consenting to marry him. It further underscores the sexist nature of 17th-century English society and highlights the ways in which Moll resists such oppression. Women during Moll's time are not permitted to be picky when it comes to men, and it is considered in extremely bad taste to ask about a man's character or his money. To Moll, this is ridiculous. She recommends asking, regardless of social expectations, and she doesn't think any reasonable man of "common Sense" should think any less of her (or any other woman) for doing so.

As a woman, Moll is taught to be grateful for the attention or proposal of *any* man, but here Moll reveals just how unwise that perspective is. A woman who immediately submits to men, either in marriage or in sex, is "the weakest of all Creatures in the World." According to Moll, women should ask questions and say no more often, and any man who expects otherwise has "a very contemptible Opinion of [a woman's] Capacities." In other words, any man who expects a woman to accept him without any questions asked insults her intelligence and expects her to waste the "one Cast for her Life." People only have one life to live, Moll argues, and marrying without asking questions leaves one's life to chance and makes marriage "like Death," like a blind leap of faith.

Moll Marries the Plantation Owner Quotes

❝ He took my Carriage very ill, and indeed he might well do so, for at last I refus'd to Bed with him, and carrying on the Breach upon all occasions to extremity he told me once he thought I was Mad, and if I did not alter my Conduct, he would put me under Cure; *that is to say, into a Madhouse*: I told him he should find I was far enough from Mad, and that it was not in his power, or any other Villains to Murther me; I confess at the same time I was heartily frighted at his Thoughts of putting me into a *Mad-House*, which would at once have destroy'd all the possibility of breaking the Truth out, whatever the occasion might be; for that then, no one would have given Credit to a word of it.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders (speaker), Moll's Brother/The Plantation Owner

Related Themes:

Page Number: 140-1

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears after Moll discovers that her third husband, the plantation owner, is also her half-brother, and it is important because it further underscores the sexism and misogyny that pervade much of the novel. While Moll is aware of her husband's true identity, he does not yet know the truth, so he grows irritated as Moll grows more distant. His "Carriage" becomes "ill," which means he begins to treat Moll badly, and this situation comes to a head when Moll refuses "to Bed with him," which is to say Moll stops having sex with him. Moll's husband is so angry she withholds sex from him that he accuses her of being "Mad," and threatens to "put [her] under Cure" in a "*Madhouse*," or insane asylum.

During Moll's time, men often had their wives admitted to psychiatric hospitals for perceived mental afflictions or as an alternative to divorce, simply to be rid of them. Admittance to the madhouse was a real fear for women, and it was a major way in which they were controlled and oppressed by their male-dominated society. Furthermore, women in madhouses can never be taken seriously—or reveal a bombshell truth like Moll's marriage to her brother—because everything they say is considered insane, and no one gives "Credit to a word of it." As such, with threats of the madhouse, the plantation owner demands sex from Moll in the most powerful way he can, which clearly shows that he sees sex as her duty as his wife.

Moll and the Gentleman Quotes

❝ This was evidently my Case, for I was now a loose unguided Creature, and had no Help, no Assistance, no Guide for my Conduct: I knew what I aim'd at, and what I wanted, but knew nothing how to pursue the End by direct means; I wanted to be plac'd in a settled State of Living, and had I happen'd to meet with a sober good Husband, I should have been as faithful and true a Wife to him as Virtue it self could have form'd: If I had been otherwise, the Vice came in always at the Door of Necessity, not at the Door of Inclination [...].

Related Characters: Moll Flanders (speaker), The Gentleman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Moll's long-term lover, the gentleman, leaves her alone and with very little money, and it is significant because it underscores the connection between immorality and poverty within the novel. When the gentleman leaves Moll alone with a child and no way to take care of it, Moll is a "loose unguided Creature," and she has no one at all to help her or give her advice. Moll knows what she "aim'd at, and what [she] wanted," which means she wants a husband and financial stability, but she doesn't know "how to pursue the End by direct means." That is, Moll can't seem to find a reasonable husband—they are all married, like the gentleman, or poor, like Moll's other husbands.

In "a settled State of Living" with "a sober good Husband," Moll won't have to steal, work as a prostitute, or live as a mistress. If given the chance, Moll will be a perfectly virtuous wife, but Moll is never given a decent chance. Without marriage, one of the only options available to women in 17th-century England, Moll is left to fend for herself, and she is frequently under the threat of poverty and starvation. Without the chance to settle down in a safe household, Moll is forced to turn to crime. For Moll, vice and sin come in "always at the Door of Necessity, not at the Door of Inclination." In other words, Moll breaks the law and sacrifices her morals to survive, not because she wants to or is innately immoral.

Moll Meets the Midwife and Marries the Banker Quotes

❝ 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 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*.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 253-4

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears right before Moll steals from a London shop for the first time, and it highlights how Moll's criminal behavior is directly tied to her dire poverty. Before Moll recounts the moment she takes a package from an apothecary's shop, she stops and begs the reader not to go on "without seriously reflecting on the Circumstances of a

desolate State." In other words, Moll is destitute, and she has no friends, money, or food, and she asks the reader what they would do in her shoes, with "want of Friends and want of Bread." The answer to Moll seems simple: steal or die.

Moll is initially ashamed of her need to steal (although this shame doesn't seem to stick), and she wants the reader to know this. She knows it isn't easy to accept her or her sins, and she isn't looking for pity or a handout—she doesn't want others to think "of sparing what they have"—she simply wants others to look "to Heaven for support" and remember "the wise Man's Prayer, *Give me no Poverty lest I Steal*." Moll doesn't steal because she is an inherently immoral person; she steals to stay alive, and her plea here reflects Defoe's argument about the link between poverty and crime.

Moll and the Drunk Man Quotes

❝ Thus you see having committed a Crime once, is a sad Handle to the committing of it again; whereas all the Regret, and Reflections wear off when the Temptation renews it self; had I not yielded to see him again, the Corrupt desire in him had worn off, and 'tis very probable he had never fallen into it, with any Body else, as I really believe he had not done before.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders (speaker), The Drunk Man

Related Themes:

Page Number: 306

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears when Moll and the drunk man begin their relationship, and it is important because it reflects the ease with which the same crime can be committed again, after it is committed for the first time. When Moll first meets the drunk man, they have sex and then Moll robs him. He believes her to be a prostitute, and he keeps coming back and paying her for sex. As the drunk man sees it, after a crime or sin is committed once, it doesn't hurt to do it again. When repeating a crime, guilt fades away, and continuing the thing is easy.

Moll believes that if she had refused the drunk man, whom she doesn't think has ever solicited a prostitute before, his "Corrupt desire" would have "worn off." Without her consent, he would have forgotten all about the desire to sin, but repetition makes their sin comfortable and easy. This passage has additional importance when put into context with Moll's life as a thief. When Moll first steals, it is incredibly difficult; however, after the sin is repeated, it becomes easy, like second nature, and Moll transforms into a talented thief. In this way, Defoe illustrates how the life of a criminal like Moll can get so out of hand.

Moll's Crimes Escalate Quotes

❝ On the other hand, every Branch of my Story, if duly consider'd, may be useful to honest People, and afford a due Caution to People of some sort or other to Guard against the like Surprizes, and to have their Eyes about them when they have to do with Strangers of any kind, for 'tis very seldom that some Snare or other is not in their way. The Moral indeed of all my History is left to be gather'd by the Senses and Judgment of the Reader; I am not Qualified to preach to them, let the Experience of one Creature compleatly Wicked, and compleatly Miserable be a Storehouse of useful warning to those that read.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 343

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs near the end of Moll's story, after she has repented her life of crime and sin, and it reinforces Moll's intention for her story to be used as moral instruction for responsible readers. According to Moll, "every Branch of [her] Story" can "be useful to honest People." Moll's story is full of sin and corruption, but it can "afford a due Caution to People of sort or other to Guard against the like Surprizes." In other words, the world is full of sin and corruption, and Moll's story teaches people what to look out for, and what to avoid.

It is impossible for one to keep an eye out and pay attention for vice and corruption at every turn, and there is always "some Snare or other"—that is, some scheme to catch honest people—to watch out for. Moll makes such "Snares," or sin, more visible, and in doing so, she provides a public service. Moll claims she isn't "Qualified to preach" at readers—after all, she is just a repentant sinner—and she wants everyone to gather their own "Senses and Judgement." What she is qualified to do is offer "a Storehouse of useful warning to those that read" and help readers through revealing the errors of her own ways.

Moll in Newgate Prison Quotes

❝ This may be thought inconsistent in it self, and wide from the Business of this Book; Particularly, I reflect that many of those who may be pleas'd and diverted with the Relation of the wild and wicked part of my Story, may not relish this, which is really the best part of my Life, the most Advantageous to myself, and the most instructive to others; such however will I hope allow me the liberty to make my Story compleat: It would be a severe Satyr on such, to say they do not relish the Repentance as much as they do the Crime; and that they had rather the History were a compleat Tragedy, as it was very likely to have been.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders (speaker), The Minister

Related Themes:

Page Number: 369

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes after Moll sees the error of her ways and repents, and it is significant because it makes Moll's remorse appear sincere and genuine, despite the sin and corruption that pervades most of the novel. Moll is concerned that those "pleas'd and diverted with the Relation of the wild and wicked part of [her] Story" will dislike the part of her story that details her remorse and penitence. She is pointing out that, since most of her story is concerned with sex and crime, she fears this more reflective and serious section will be a disappointment to readers who were enjoying those earlier section. However, Moll maintains, it isn't a disappointment to her and shouldn't be to any other moral person, either.

Moll's reflection on her wicked life and her subsequent remorse and penitence are, she says, "the best part of [her] Life, the most Advantageous to [herself], and the most instructive to others." Furthermore, she believes anyone who disagrees isn't looking closely enough. For Moll, it is impossible not to "relish the Repentance" as much as the crime, and she doubts readers really want a story in which Moll is hanged and killed having never repented. Moll believes her true and complete "History" is better; her personal narrative expresses fully her sincere remorse and the importance of reflecting on one's sins and repenting, and she wants readers to appreciate these central points.

Conclusion Quotes

❝ Thus all these little Difficulties were made easy, and we liv'd together with the greatest Kindness and Comfort imaginable; we are now grown Old: I am come back to England, being almost seventy Years of Age, my Husband sixty eight, having perform'd much more than the limited Terms of my Transportation: And now notwithstanding all the Fatigues, and all the Miseries we have both gone thro', we are both in good Heart and Health; my Husband remain'd there sometime after me to settle our Affairs, and at first I had intended to go back to him, but at his desire I alter'd that Resolution, and he is come over to England also, where we resolve to spend the Remainder of our Years in sincere Penitence, for the wicked Lives we have lived.

Related Characters: Moll Flanders (speaker), The Irishman/James

Related Themes:

Page Number: 427

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs at the very end of Moll's story, after she repents and is transported to the colonies, and it illustrates both Moll's remorse and the happiness she finally finds with James. Living in the colonies with James, Moll's life is finally "made easy," and they live "with the greatest Kindness and Comfort imaginable." Most of Moll's life has been a struggle full of crime and heartache, but she has finally found happiness and security and left her life of crime behind. Moll does return to England, after "the limited Terms of [her] Transportation," meaning after her criminal sentence is up.

James returns, too, but the terms of his own transportation are not up. James has been transported for life and can never legally return, so when he goes back with Moll, he does so against the law. Moll and James live "in good Heart and Health" until a ripe old age, and they swear to spend the rest of their lives feeling genuinely remorseful for the immoral things they did when they were younger. James and Moll claim to be sincerely repentant, but it's also true that they're essentially rewarded with happiness and luxury after living lives of crime. What's more, they're breaking the law just by returning to England, since James is forbidden from doing so. By ending on this somewhat ambiguous note, Defoe leaves it up to readers to decide whether Moll's story is really a tale of "sincere Penitence."

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE PREFACE

It may be difficult, Defoe says, for readers to take the following pages as genuine when names and circumstances are concealed; however, readers must pass their own opinion on the following story. The author, Moll Flanders, is writing her story, and she will detail early on why she must conceal her identity. Defoe admits that the story was rewritten, and Moll was made to tell her story more delicately than she did at first. The first copy of Moll's story was written in the language of Newgate Prison, not as a remorseful woman, as she claims to be.

Moll isn't who she says she is, and her concealed identity immediately makes her story appear mysterious. Since Moll originally wrote her story in the language of Newgate Prison (London's main prison for over 700 years), the reader can infer that she is some kind of criminal. This passage also suggests that Moll isn't really remorseful for whatever it is she has done, a question that will come up over and over again throughout the novel.

For the one finishing Moll's story, it was difficult to "put it into a Dress fit to be seen." Moll is a woman depraved from her youth and is the very "Off-spring of Debauchery and Vice," but great care has been taken to avoid giving readers any "lewd Ideas." It is recommended that only those who will make good use of the story read it, and such readers are likely to find they are more pleased with the moral than the actual story. As "the Advocates for the Stage have in all Ages made this great Argument," Defoe maintains, there is something to be learned from wicked stories. As such, there is something to be learned from every part of Moll's story—if the reader wishes to make use of it.

Defoe's claim that Moll's story must be "put into a Dress fit to be seen" reflects the sexism that pervades most of the book. Society expects women to be pictures of modesty and virtue, and Moll's story—and by extension Moll herself—must be modified to fit that ideal; that is, they must be dressed up in order to become acceptable to polite society. Moll's identity as one of "Debauchery and Vice" and the "lewd Ideas" Defoe mentions suggest Moll's story is one of sex and sin. In the 15th and 16th centuries, theaters and plays were often considered dangerous examples of vice that influenced people to sin. Those who supported the theater, however, maintained that plays were valuable examples of what not *to do. Defoe suggests the same thing here and offers Moll's story for moral instruction, not entertainment.*

MOLL'S CHILDHOOD

Moll's real name is well known in the records at Newgate and Old-Baily—and some things of significance are still pending there—so she has concealed her identity. It is enough for the reader to know that some of Moll's "worst Comrades" (who can no longer hurt her, as they have left the world "by the Steps and the String"), gave her the name Moll Flanders. This name will be used, Moll says, "till I dare own who I have been, as well as who I am."

Newgate Prison and London's courthouse sat at the corner of Newgate and Old-Baily Streets; thus, Newgate and Old-Baily are synonymous with crime and criminals. As Moll has concealed her identity over things pending there, it can again be inferred that Moll is a criminal, and perhaps a wanted one at that. Moll's "worst Comrades" were obviously criminals, as they went out by "the Steps and the String," which is to say they were hanged for their crimes. Moll's comment as to who she was and who she is now suggests that identity evolves and changes over time, and she isn't the same person she used to be. Furthermore, the name Moll Flanders is itself highly suggestive. "Moll" is English slang for a low-class woman of ill-repute, and "Flanders" carries connotations of sex and prostitution, as London's most prominent prostitutes for years were Flemish women (that is, women from Flanders). As Moll's name was given to her by people who knew her, it must have special significance, and this suggests that Moll is both a criminal and a prostitute.

In some European countries, when a criminal is ordered to prison, death, or transportation, any children they have are taken into the care of the government until the children are able to provide and care for themselves. Had this been the case in Moll's country, had she not been left to fend for herself, perhaps her story would not entail "the swift Destruction both of Soul and Body."

Defoe implies that England's failure to care for orphaned children is directly to blame for the "destruction" of Moll's "Soul and Body," which indicates that Moll's morals are destroyed, as well as her physical wellbeing. Defoe suggests here that Moll is more a victim than she is a criminal, and the fault lies with society.

Moll's mother was a criminal, convicted of a felony for stealing three pieces of fabric, and she is sentenced to death. She "[pleads] her Belly," however, and Moll is born seven months later. In the meantime, Mother's sentence is commuted to transportation to the Plantations, and she leaves Moll at just six months old. Moll is taken in by family for a time, but she somehow ends up in the care of a wandering group of Egyptians. The Egyptians leave Moll in Colchester, where she is taken to the church. The church provides for Moll, but she is too young—only three years old—to do any work. The Magistrates place Moll under the care of a nurse, who makes her living keeping children for the church until they are old enough to "go to Service, or get their own Bread."

Punishment was harsh in the 17th century, as evidenced by Moll's mother's death sentence for stealing fabric. Pregnant women were given a stay of execution if they "pleaded their Belly" (that is, asked to be treated gently due to their pregnancy,), or they were deported to the American colonies to be sold as servants. Moll is just an infant, and she is completely neglected and left uncared for, which reflects, as Defoe suggests, a major problem in English society. London churches often cared for orphans if the children were born into that parish, but Moll—born in a prison with no church affiliation—slips through the cracks. Women of the lower class are expected to "go to Service" when they come of age, which means they are expected to work as maids, cooks, or in other service positions, and this reflects the limited opportunities available to women during Moll's time.

The nurse also operates a school, in which she teaches children "to Read and to Work." The nurse, who comes from "good Fashion," also teaches the children about art, and she takes a good deal of care in her work. She is a pious and "Mannerly" woman, and she brings the children up just as if they had been educated at a fancy school. When Moll is eight years old, the Magistrates order her into Service; however, Moll has no intention of ever going into Service, so she begs the nurse to keep her. Moll promises to work for the nurse, doing embroidery and sewing, and she swears she'll work hard.

The nurse's curriculum reflects society's expectations of women. They are taught minimal academics—only reading—and otherwise, they are taught to work, likely at domestic work such as needlepoint and embroidery. The nurse's "good Fashion" and "Mannerly" ways suggest she comes from high society, and she is committed to turning girls like Moll into women who fit society's expectations: well-mannered, modest, and pious.

All day long, Moll works and weeps, until the nurse asks her why she is crying. Moll explains that she doesn't want to go to Service, where the other maids will surely beat her and make her do difficult work. The nurse convinces the mayor not to send Moll to Service until she is older, but for Moll, this isn't enough. She *never* wants to go to Service. "What," asks the nurse, "would you be a Gentlewoman?" Moll explains she will; she will make three-pence for embroidery and four pennies for sewing. The nurse assures Moll that won't keep her, but Moll promises to work harder—and give all her money to the nurse.

The fact that Moll is expected to go into Service at such a young age underscores the oppression of women, especially lower-class women like Moll, in English society. Those in Service are little more than slaves, and they are clearly abused and exploited, as Moll fears violence and forced labor. While Moll doesn't know it yet, a "Gentlewoman" is a polite term for a prostitute, and the nurse implies here that if Moll doesn't go to Service, her only other option is prostitution.

Moved by Moll's sadness and determination, the nurse agrees to keep Moll. The nurse relays Moll's pleas to the mayor, who calls in his wife and daughters to hear the story, and they all laugh and laugh. A week later, the mayor's wife comes to visit. She asks Moll if she is the little girl who wants to be a "Gentlewoman," and Moll confirms she is. The woman smiles warmly and gives Moll a shilling. "Mind [your] work," the woman says, "and learn to Work well." Moll doesn't realize, however, that she does not have the same understanding of a "Gentlewoman" as everyone else.

Clearly, Moll thinks being a "Gentlewoman" means not being poor and going into Service. The mayor calls in his family to laugh at Moll's story because, in her innocence, she has said she wants to be a prostitute. The lady means just what she says—that Moll should work hard, since she only has a life of service ahead of her—but her words take on new significance in the sexual context that Moll doesn't yet understand. Furthermore, when she gives Moll a shilling, it creates a connection between sex and money that continues throughout the book.

Moll continues her work, all the while talking about how she will become a "Gentlewoman." The nurse later asks Moll what she means by "Gentlewoman," and Moll explains that it is a woman who supports herself without going to Service. Moll tells the nurse about a woman in town, who mends lace and launders ladies' hats. "She," Moll says, "is a Gentlewoman, and they call her Madam." The kindly nurse explains. "Poor child," she says, "you may soon be such a Gentlewoman as that, for she is a Person of ill Fame, and has had two or three Bastards."

Clearly, the "Gentlewoman" Moll speaks of is the madam of a brothel and a prostitute herself, since she is of "ill Fame, and has had two or three Bastards." The nurse's claim that Moll may soon be a Gentlewoman just like the madam foreshadows Moll's future life of crime and prostitution. This passage also reflects the limited opportunities of women, as Moll is stuck between a life of servitude or a life of prostitution, even though she dreams of simply working hard to support herself.

When Moll is about 10 years old, she has begun to mature and is rather pretty. She is humble and has fine manners, and the ladies in town say she will grow into a beautiful woman indeed. Moll continues to work, mending linen and lace, and she gives all her money to the nurse, who promises to hold it and give it back when Moll comes of age. By the time Moll is 12, she makes enough money to buy her clothes, pay the nurse for keeping her, and have some extra spending money. The ladies in town also give her clothes, such as stockings, petticoats, and gowns. One lady in town is so impressed with Moll that she offers to take Moll for an entire month. The nurse objects, and they finally decide on one week. Moll spends the next week living with the lady and her family, after which they are disappointed to see her go.

The ladies in town are impressed with Moll because the nurse has raised her to be the epitome of society's idea of a woman. Moll is pretty, humble, and well-mannered; however, this passage also reflects the ways in which Moll resists society's expectations of a woman. She is capable, determined, and independent. She makes her own money, buys her own clothes, and is nearly self-sufficient. Women are supposed to be dependent and reserved, but Moll is more than able to take care of herself—within the restricted role society has created, that is.

By the time Moll is 14, she has grown even more beautiful. She continues working for the nurse, which, since Moll's "Taste of Genteel" living at the lady's house, isn't as easy as it used to be. In short time, the nurse grows sick and dies. The nurse's daughter, a woman with six or seven children, comes to clean out the house; however, she refuses to give Moll the money the nurse was holding for her. Alone and frightened, Moll is pleased when the maid of the lady with whom Moll previously spent a week arrives to get her. The mayor's wife also offers to take her in, but Moll is more than happy to live with the lady and her family.

The lady is wealthy and of the upper class, and Moll was exposed to this luxury during her "Taste of Genteel" living. The nurse, by comparison, is poor, and Moll finds it difficult to return to poverty after a taste of high-class living. Defoe implies that the nurse's daughter keeps Moll's money even though she knows it didn't belong to the nurse, but her six or seven kids suggest she badly needs the money and perhaps only keeps it to take care of them, reinforcing the idea that dire circumstances can push people into immoral behavior.

THE OLDER BROTHER AND MOLL'S FIRST MARRIAGE

Living with the lady and her family, Moll enjoys the advantages of an education. By the time she is 18, Moll can write, dance, and speak French, and she has a reputation of "Virtue and Sobriety." The lady has two sons, and the older brother of the two is known as a handsome and "gay" young man. He tells Moll (whom he calls Betty) how pretty she is every chance he gets, which Moll rather enjoys. His sisters warn him that Moll is only after money, but they can hardly blame her. Even the most beautiful and refined woman is nothing without money. The younger brother, however, claims that, for the right woman, he wouldn't worry about money.

This passage reflects the importance of money in society. "Virtue and Sobriety" are exactly what society thinks Moll has, but since she still doesn't have any money, her refinement isn't worth much. The word "gay" denotes happiness, but it also had negative connotations during Defoe's time and was often used to describe rakes and men of poor reputation.

One day, the older brother visits Moll in the room where she does her work. He grabs her and kisses her several times. "Dear Betty," he says breathlessly. "I am in Love with you." Moll's heart jumps with desire. She knows nothing of protecting her virtue, and if he were to offer, Moll would allow him to do whatever he wanted to her. The older brother finds other opportunities to corner Moll in the house, kissing her and professing his love, and she doesn't resist. One day, he again visits Moll in her room, where he throws her to the bed and kisses her "most violently." Suddenly, he hears someone coming and jumps up. The older brother helps Moll to her feet, telling her again how much he loves her, and presses five Guineas into her hand before leaving.

"Betty" was a generic name for a chambermaid in Defoe's time, which again reflects Moll's lower-class standing. Here, Moll implies that she would have sex with the older brother, which would be detrimental to her virtue in the eyes of society, but she doesn't even think of protecting her virtue; it's clear here that her life is governed by social norms that she doesn't even fully understand. The older brother's "violent" kisses suggest he has power over Moll—or at least thinks he does—and that sex is something owed to him. He gives Moll money after passionately kissing her, which implies that sex is essentially Moll's job and something that is expected of her. This connection between sex and money is directly at odds with society's demands of "Virtue and Sobriety," so this moment underscores the impossible double-bind women are in; Moll needs money in order to be considered respectable, but so far the only way she can get it is by giving up her virtue—which would be seen as distinctly not *respectable.*

Moll is more confused with the money than she is with the love. She is a young woman who thinks herself pretty, and she has no reason to doubt the older brother's love for her. He soon returns—there was no one coming, he says—and quickly takes to kissing her again. He tells Moll that he loves her passionately, and that he wants to marry her. He kisses her again, and they go farther than Moll can politely mention; however, it does not reach "that, which they call the last Favour." Then, the older brother gives Moll a handful of gold and exits.

Moll has been made to clean up her story, which is why she can't politely mention what she did with the older brother; however, they do not have sex, since they don't reach "the last Favour." There is again a connection between sex and money, and as the older brother strings Moll along with marriage proposals and brings her closer to actually having sex, he pays her—which is sure to keep her coming back and get him what he wants.

Moll, full of "Vanity and Pride, and but a very little Stock of Virtue," thinks only of gold and the older brother's words. Careful not to draw suspicion, Moll goes to great lengths to ignore him in the company of others, until the day he secretly passes her a note in the hall. He says he will publicly order Moll on an errand the next day, and then he will meet her on her way to town. Sure enough, the older brother orders Moll to town the next day on some petty errands, after which a man comes to the door in a coach. He needs the older brother on urgent business in town, the man says.

Defoe suggests that Moll's "Vanity and Pride" are also a source of her undoing. Had Moll not been so vain, she may have noticed the older brother's true intentions and realized that he is only taking advantage of her and has no intention of marrying her. The way the older brother and his family order Moll around reflects her low standing in their house and society. She isn't a servant or a maid exactly, but she is certainly treated like one.

The older brother hired the coach and the man the day before, but no one knows this. He grabs his best wig and exits, but before he does, he whispers to Moll to get away as soon as she can. Later, when they are together, the older brother tells Moll that he plans to marry her as soon as he comes into his estate. He promises to never leave her, but Moll hesitates. She has no reason to doubt his feelings for her, but… "BUT WHAT my Dear?" he asks. He asks if Moll worries about being "with child," and she admits she does. In that case, the older brother says, he will take care of them both. Then, to prove his sincerity, he takes out his purse and gives Moll 100 Guineas and promises to give her another 100 every year until they marry.

While it isn't explicitly stated, Moll and the older brother are obviously talking about sex. There isn't birth control during Moll's day, and she worries about pregnancy if she takes her relationship with the older brother to a sexual level. In telling Moll he will take care of her and her children, the older brother entices her to sex, and then he pays her again. The older brother's actions cement the connection between sex and money for Moll—if she has sex with him, he will keep giving her money. 100 Guineas is a lot of money; it is over £100 , and during Moll's time, an entire family could live on just £40 per year.

Moll swoons at the sight of the older brother's purse and the sound of his proposal, and she does not resist as he has his way with her. With this, Moll forsakes her virtue, and she is left with "nothing of Value to recommend [her]." Afterward, Moll and the older brother have many occasions to repeat their "Crime," until the younger brother confesses his own love to Moll. He wants to marry her, too, the younger brother says, but Moll firmly resists him. They are an unequal match, she says, and it wouldn't be the right way to repay the lady for taking her in. Moll doesn't, however, tell him the truth.

Moll swoons upon seeing how much the older brother will pay her, which suggests she is as attracted to his money and the financial security and social status he represents as she is to the brother himself. Presumably, Moll has sex with him on the condition he plans to marry her. In Moll's time, a woman's worth is judged by her virginity and chastity—the description of sex as a "Crime" reflects the immorality of sex before marriage—and Moll is now essentially worthless.

To Moll's surprise, the younger brother does not hide his feelings like the older brother, and he makes it plain to the lady and the rest of his family that he is in love with Moll. Soon, the lady and her family begin to treat Moll differently, and one of the maids tells Moll that she will soon be asked to leave. Moll isn't surprised. Plus, since she expects to be pregnant at any time, she expects to have to leave soon. The younger brother tells Moll that he will tell his family that he intends to marry her. They may resent it, he says, but he is a lawyer and can take care of Moll himself.

Marrying outside of one's social class was frowned on in the 17th century, which is why the lady begins to resent Moll once she discovers her son is in love with her. It is customary for women to come to their husbands with a dowry, which Moll obviously doesn't have. Moll doesn't bring any money to the table, and she will only cost them money instead. This passage also portrays the desperate nature of Moll's situation, as she is likely to become pregnant and homeless at any time but can do little to change her situation.

Moll has "no great Scruples of Conscience," but even she cannot imagine "being a Whore to one Brother, and Wife to the other." Still, the older brother hasn't mentioned marriage since they began having sex. Moll doesn't know what to do about the younger brother. She is sure she will soon be put out on the street, which must be no secret to the older brother. She begins to think seriously for the first time and decides to tell the older brother that she will soon be kicked out of the house.

Moll has "no great Scruples," which suggests she is of poor moral fortitude since she began having sex with the older brother. Moll frequently refers to herself as a "Whore," which she becomes the moment she takes the older brother's money and has sex with him, but Defoe implies that her choice is understandable; without money, she has no real social standing or ability to take care of herself. The older brother clearly has no intention of marrying Moll—he hasn't even talked about it—and he likely knows she will be kicked out but doesn't care.

The first chance she gets, Moll goes to the older brother. She has been crying, and he asks her what's wrong. Moll lies and tells him that one of the maids must have discovered their affair and told the lady of the house, because now there is talk that Moll will be asked to leave. The older brother smiles. No one knows about their affair, he says. Then why, Moll asks, is she being treated so unfairly? It is the younger brother, Robin, he says, who has convinced everyone he loves Moll. She breaks into tears, admitting the younger brother's love. But, Moll says, she denied him without giving him a reason.

Moll likely doesn't want the older brother to know about the younger brother because she fears it will negatively affect her relationship with the older brother. The older brother doesn't take any of this seriously (he smiles as Moll cries), which suggests he doesn't really care about her and is just using her for sex. This is also the first time Moll mentions the younger brother by name, and this reflects her indifference toward him.

It is bad enough the lady knows the younger brother is in love with Moll, but it will be much worse when the lady finds out Moll denied him. The lady is sure to suspect that Moll is in love with another if she is turning down such a match as the younger brother. The older brother asks Moll to do nothing for the time being and give him time to think. Moll reminds him that she can't possibly agree to marry the younger brother when she is already engaged to the older brother; she already thinks of herself as married to the older brother. He kisses her and gives her more money, and then he leaves.

The older brother's kiss and gift of money again underscore the connection between sex and money. What Moll is really saying is that she can't marry the younger brother because she has already had sex with the older brother. If she marries the younger brother, he may find out she isn't a virgin, which would likely be detrimental to their marriage—and to Moll's security.

Days later, the older brother tells the younger brother that he heard stories that the younger brother is in love with Moll. Yes, the younger brother admits. He loves her more than any woman in the world, and he will have her. The younger brother doesn't believe that Moll will deny him. Moll can't believe it when the older brother tells her later. She must deny the younger brother, and she can't imagine why he expects she won't. The older brother says that he reminded his brother that Moll is poor, but Robin claimed to love her still. Well, says Moll, if the younger brother proposes marriage now, she will say no and tell him that she is already married.

The younger brother is convinced he will have Moll, which reflects the overall sexism of the time. He wants her, so he plans to have her; how Moll feels about it doesn't really matter. He doesn't believe Moll will deny him because he is rich and she is poor, and Moll would be foolish to turn down such an offer. Still, the younger brother clearly loves Moll, since he is willing to endure the resentment that he will likely experience for marrying outside his class.

The older brother says that telling anyone about his relationship with Moll is not a good idea, and she agrees. He asks Moll what she will say when she denies the younger brother's proposal. Moll doesn't see why she owes anyone an explanation, but the older brother says offering no explanation will be suspicious. Moll doesn't know what to do, but the older brother says he has been thinking a lot about it. "Marry him," the older brother says. Moll is shocked, but he says she should at least consider it.

An explanation will be expected from Moll, and her refusal to give one again reflects her resistance to the sexism of the time. It isn't anyone's business why Moll turns down a marriage proposal, but society thinks otherwise. Society expects Moll to jump at the chance to marry someone rich like the younger brother, but she isn't interested—at this point, she still believes that that should be reason enough.

Moll asks the older brother what happened to his love and faith, and he admits that he did promise to marry her when he came into his estate, but his father might live another 30 years. He says Moll never suggested marrying him any sooner—she knows it "might be [his] Ruin"—and she has never wanted for anything. Moll knows this is true, but she doesn't say so. With the younger brother, the older brother says, Moll "may come into a safe Station, and appear with Honour and with splendor at once." It will be like Moll's relationship with the older brother never happened, and he will count her a "Dear Sister."

The older brother implies that Moll may be able to hide the fact that she is no longer a virgin if she marries the younger brother. Their marriage will be "a safe Station" (Moll will be financially secure), and she can "appear with Honor and with splendor," meaning Moll can appear to be a virgin and therefore continue to seem worthy in society's eyes. The older brother's claim that he will count Moll a "Dear Sister" has incestuous connotations, which foreshadow the incest that appears later in the novel.

Moll reminds the older brother that even though they aren't legally married, she is his wife just as sure as if the ceremony had passed between them. She can't possibly stop loving him and consent to love the younger brother instead. She would rather, Moll says, be his "Whore" than the younger brother's wife. The older brother is obviously pleased with Moll's affection for him, but he tells her he has done nothing to break his promise to her. He says they can remain friends, and then he asks Moll if she is sure that she isn't with child. Moll says she is sure, and he stands to leave.

Moll considers herself married to the older brother because they have already had sex. Since sex consummates a marriage, sex at this time was considered just as important as the actual marriage ceremony, if not more so. Therefore, in Moll's mind, they are already married. Of course, Moll truly loves the older brother, but he is just exploiting Moll for sex and placating her with money. Moll again calls herself a "Whore," which reflects the sexist nature of society; she's doing what she thinks makes sense to secure her future and be with the man she loves, but society would view her as immoral for doing so.

Afterward, Moll falls ill with a fever. She is confined to bed for five weeks, and her recovery is so slow that the doctor fears she will slip into a "Consumption." The doctor claims that Moll's "Mind [is] Oppress'd," and he suspects that she is in love. The younger brother tells his family that if Moll were in love with him, he would gladly help her recover, and the older brother begins to suspect that his brother knows about his relationship with Moll. Moll assures the older brother that she has said nothing of their affair, and she further says that she detests the idea of marrying Robin and will never consent. "Then I am Ruin'd," the older brother says.

The older brother risks angering his family and losing his inheritance if his affair with Moll is discovered, in which case his reputation and status as a member of the upper class will be ruined. During Moll's time, a "consumption" was known as a long, lingering illness, one that was often vague and nondescript. Consumption was often associated with depression and other forms of mental illness, which is why the doctor suspects Moll is in love.

Weeks later, Moll is fully recovered, but she still suffers from bouts of melancholy and sadness. One day, Moll decides to tell the lady of the house about the younger brother's proposals. She tells the lady that Robin asked her several times to marry him, but she resisted him each time, telling him that such a relationship cannot come to pass without the consent of the lady and master of the house. The lady is both shocked and touched by Moll's honesty. It seems, the lady says, that Moll has treated them much better than they have treated her.

Obviously, Moll isn't being honest here. She cared nothing about the lady's consent when she agreed to marry the older brother. Moll is clearly trying to manipulate the lady and get into her good graces again, so she won't be kicked out. Moll has little money and no way to support herself—unless she goes into Service, which Moll has already said she absolutely will not do.

Later, the lady of the house sits down with the younger brother and asks him about his proposals to Moll. It is true, Robin confirms: he has asked Moll to marry him several times, and she has always resisted him. The lady listens and declares the resentment Moll has been forced to endure in the house is not Moll's fault. Moll's behavior reflects true respect, the lady says, and she values Moll more because of it. Soon, the lady begins to encourage a marriage between Moll and Robin, and she even recruits the older brother to convince Moll.

Moll's behavior doesn't really reflect true respect for the lady, illustrating the deterioration of Moll's morals. Before having sex with the older brother, Moll was of superior moral standing, but her morals go steadily downhill from the moment she loses her virginity. Here, Moll deceives the lady to serve her own interests. Whether the sex itself is immoral is debatable; however, the behavior the sex leads Moll to is certainly immoral, which reinforces Defoe's point that virtuous readers can learn what not *to do by studying Moll's story.*

The older brother visits Moll in her room, where he gently kisses and hugs her. He tells Moll that she has the consent of the lady and the entire house to marry the younger brother. If Moll doesn't, the older brother says, he fears that she will "be sunk into the dark Circumstances of a Woman that has lost her Reputation." He begs her to marry Robin, and then he gives her £500. "To make you some Amends for the Freedoms I have taken with you," the older brother says. He adds that if Moll refuses to marry Robin, their relationship can never be again what it once was.

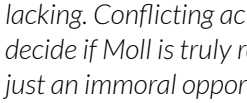
Virginity and chastity are so important in society that Moll will be ruined if she is found out. Here, the older brother puts a price on Moll's entire future and worth and basically pays her for potentially ruining her reputation. £500 is a lot of money (one could live in relative luxury at £300 per year), but he insults Moll and reduces her worth to her body and sex—a common message in Moll's sexist society.

Afterward, Moll considers her life as "a meer cast off Whore," and she is terrified. She had never really considered the danger of her situation. If she is eventually dropped by both the older brother and the younger brother, she will be left to fend for herself with nothing and no one to support her. With these thoughts, Moll agrees to marry Robin, but she never loves him. On their wedding night, the older brother gets the younger brother so drunk that he can't remember whether their marriage was consummated. Moll lies and assures him it was.

Presumably, the older brother gets the younger brother drunk on purpose, so he is less likely to notice that Moll is not a virgin. Moll again calls herself a "Whore," which society considers any woman who has sex out of wedlock to be, and this again underscores the extremely sexist and misogynistic nature of 17th-century England. This insulting view of women is so ingrained in society that even Moll believes it about herself.

Moll lives with the younger brother as his wife for five years, and they have two children together. Each time Moll is in bed with her husband, she dreams of being with the older brother. "In short," Moll says, "I committed Adultery and Incest with him every Day in my Desires," which is just as criminal as actually doing it. The older brother marries and moves to London, and at the end of five years, the younger brother dies. He was a kind man and a good husband, but Moll's finances have not improved by much. Hidden in her private **bank**, Moll still has most of the money given to her by the older brother, about £1,200, but that is all. The children are "taken happily off of [Moll's] Hands" by the lady and her husband, and she is free.

Moll's words suggest guilt over marrying the younger brother while being secretly in love with the older brother. Despite the slow deterioration of Moll's morals, she clearly feels bad about her decision to marry Robin (which she was forced to do by a sexist society), and this suggests she isn't innately immoral; she was simply doing what she had to do to survive. However, Moll also "happily" abandons her children, which suggests that Moll's morals are lacking. Conflicting actions such as these make it impossible to decide if Moll is truly repentant at the end of the novel, or if she was just an immoral opportunist all along.



MOLL MARRIES THE LINEN-DRAPER

Moll is still young and attractive, and she has many suitors, including a linen-draper, the brother of her landlady. Still, Moll isn't impressed with any of the men she dates. She isn't concerned with love at all—not after losing so badly in love with the older brother—and she resolves "to be well Married or not at all." Still, it isn't long before she is caught in the "Snare" of the linen-draper, a "*Land-water-thing* call'd, a *Gentleman-Tradesman*," and she marries him. The linen-draper quickly takes to spending all the money Moll saved, and within two years, he is bankrupt.

In short, Moll is looking for a wealthy husband; she isn't looking for love after her experiences with the older brother. At first she obviously thinks the linen-draper has money, but the fact that he spends all her money implies he isn't wealthy at all. Moll is caught in the trap of a "Gentleman-Tradesman," a man she thinks is wealthy but who is just a poor tradesman. Moll's amphibious description of him reflects his slippery identity and ability to deceive her.

The linen-draper is arrested for his sizable debts, and Moll goes to see him at the Bailiff's House where he is being held. He apologizes for the state he is leaving Moll in and tells her to take whatever money and valuables are left and run. He wishes her well, and Moll leaves, never seeing him again. Later, the linen-draper breaks out of the Bailiff's House and flees to France. Moll is left with only £500 in her **bank** and nowhere to go. The only child she had with the linen-draper died in infancy, but since she is still legally married, Moll's options are limited.

According to the law, the linen-draper's debt are legally Moll's debts since she is his wife, and she could be thrown into debtors' prison because of him. Moll keeps her personal bank throughout the book, and the hidden stash of money is symbolic of security and Moll's ability to care for herself. 500 pounds is a lot of money, but it must last Moll her whole *life. The only way for Moll to increase her wealth is to marry again or go into Service, and since Moll doesn't have a way to divorce the linen-draper, it will be hard for her to marry again.*

Fearing creditors, Moll goes to the Mint, poses as a widow, and changes her name to Mrs. Flanders. She has little money, no friends or family, and no idea what she will do. Moll sees nothing but "Misery and Starving" before her, and she vows to get out of the Mint, where the people and conditions are terrible. Moll leaves the Mint and lives for a time with a kind widow, but the widow soon remarries, and Moll is again on her own.

The Mint was a district in London so named because coins were once manufactured there. The actual mint was closed in the 1500s, but the area remained a jurisdictional interzone, meaning it was ruled over by a lord and the established law didn't have jurisdiction there. Criminals can't be arrested at the Mint, so it is a sort of sanctuary for wanted debtors like Moll. Moll's circumstances are bleak—she has only "Misery and Starving" ahead of her—and she is desperate to get out. Moll's assumed name, Mrs. Flanders, connotes sex and prostitution. At the time, it was said that London's best prostitutes were Flemish women (that is, women from Flanders), and by calling herself Mrs. Flanders, Moll implies she is willing to resort to prostitution to improve her circumstances.

Living in London, Moll discovers that marriage is "the Consequence of politick Schemes for forming Interests, and carrying on Business," and it has nothing at all to do with love. She also learns that women don't have "the Privilege" to turn down marriage proposals and should consider themselves lucky just for being asked. Women can't question a man's character or fortune before agreeing to marriage, but men enjoy this right. The men go "Fortune Hunting" without "Fortune themselves to Demand it, or Merit to deserve it."

This passage reflects the sexist and classist nature of Moll's society. Marriage isn't an expression of love; it is an expression of one's wealth and place in society. Women are considered another piece of property owned by men, only it is the women who must pay, either in the form of a dowry or with their virtue, and always with the expectation of sex. A man can be poor and of little character, but a woman has no right to question him.

Women have much to gain, Moll explains, by holding their ground and saying no. There are few good men available these days, and women have good reason to be cautious. Those women who easily give themselves to marriage without questioning the fortune or character of their husbands place their entire lives in "a Lottery" with 1,000 to one odds. No good man will condemn a woman for enquiring about his character and wealth upon a proposal, Moll claims, and any man who does has a "very contemptible Opinion" of the woman he expects to take marriage on like a leap of faith.

Moll is practical and reasonable in her approach to marriage, and her opinion here implies she respects herself, since she doesn't want to settle for just any husband; however, Moll's sexist society doesn't allow Moll such control, not even over her own life and future. Moll has a better chance of winning the lottery than finding a good man, but she is expected to take whoever will have her, which reflects the "contemptible Opinion" of women in Moll's society.

MOLL MARRIES THE PLANTATION OWNER

It is nothing but cowardice and fear of being "*an old Maid*" that brings many women to marriage, Moll says, and this is "the Woman's Snare." Still, in Moll's current circumstance, the thing she needs most in the world is a husband. Of course, she has next to nothing of value—only £460 in her **bank**, some expensive clothes, a gold watch and some jewelry, and £40 worth of linen. She moves in with the friends of an acquaintance, who start a rumor that Moll is their cousin from out of town and that she's worth at least £1,500. Moll soon has her choice of suitors, and she picks out a handsome plantation owner without much difficulty.

The "Woman's Snare" again highlights the sexist nature of Moll's society. Woman are forced to marry against their will to avoid being marginalized by society and downgraded to spinster status. Moll's reasons for marriage, however, are financial. She's running out of money, and she wants a rich husband. While Moll doesn't start the rumor that she is rich, she doesn't deny it either, and she secures the plantation owner through deceptive means.

The plantation owner courts Moll and frequently professes his love to her. He promises to love her forever, and Moll pretends to doubt his sincerity, claiming he only loves her for her fortune. One day, the plantation owner visits Moll in her room. He takes off his diamond ring and uses it to write upon the windowpane: "*You I Love, and you alone.*" Moll takes the ring. "*But Money's Virtue; Gold is Fate*," she writes. He takes the ring back. "*I scorn your Gold, and yet I Love.*" She writes again: "*I'm poor: Let's see how kind you'll prove.*" The plantation owner promises to love Moll even if she is poor, but Moll can tell that he doesn't really believe she is poor.

Writing sonnets and confessions of love on windowpanes with a diamond was a common courtship practice during the 17th century. Here, by writing on the glass, Moll tricks the plantation owner into promising to love her even if she doesn't have any money. He assumes she is just joking to make him prove his love; he has no idea that Moll is deceiving him and really is poor.

One day, Moll asks the plantation owner how and where they will live if they are married. She has heard he owns an estate in Virginia, but Moll does not wish to be "transported." He openly and easily speaks to Moll of his affairs and finances. He has three Virginia plantations, he says, which provide him a comfortable living of about £300 a year. But, he says, that number will obviously go up if they are married. As for Virginia, he would not dream of making Moll live there unless she freely chose to.

Moll equates going to the American colonies with criminal behavior, which is why she calls moving there being "transported"; deportation was a common punishment for criminals at the time. The plantation owner is obviously wealthy, and he seems to be a decent and honest man. He isn't trying to hide anything (like Moll is), and he doesn't wish to force her into anything against her will.

Moll tells the plantation owner that she has learned the actual value of her fortune, and it is not quite £500. He seems unconcerned. It is true he expected more, but he does not regret his "bargain." The only difference, he says, is now he won't be able to keep Moll as well as he had hoped. They get married, but the plantation owner says nothing of Moll's fortune and does not ask for the money, until Moll decides it is time for her to bring it up herself. The plantation owner asks Moll to tell him plainly if she has nothing; he will not feel cheated if she is poor. After all, she did write on the glass that she was poor, so he should expect it.

The plantation owner's description of Moll as a "bargain" again reflects the sexism of the time. He is clearly fond of Moll, but he refers to her as an object to be bought, not as a feeling person equal to himself. Moll is honest here about her money, although she is vague and says no more about it for some time. Society expects Moll to turn her money over to her husband, and the law says it legally becomes 100% his from the moment they are married.

Moll gives the plantation owner £160, and a few days later, she gives him about 100 more in gold. A week later, she gives him £180 and £60 in linen. At last, Moll tells him that is all she has—her entire **bank**. The plantation owner is so relieved that Moll has any money at all that he never complains about the sum. "And thus," Moll says, "I got over the Fraud of *passing for Fortune without Money*, and cheating a Man into Marrying me on pretence of a Fortune." However, Moll adds, a fraudulent marriage is the most dangerous thing a woman can do, and it opens her up to a host of problems and ill treatment.

This passage again speaks to Moll's lack of morals, as she openly admits to cheating the plantation owner into marriage. But Moll also slips in a warning as to her poor moral choices, which supports Defoe's initial claim that Moll's story is morally instructive.

In short time, the plantation owner begins to talk of returning to Virginia alone. Life there is pleasant and inexpensive, he says. Moll is thankful that he accepted her fortune, and she knows that he is only looking to save money because of her, so she agrees to go to Virginia. The plantation owner is overjoyed. He may be disappointed with his wife's fortune, he admits, but he isn't disappointed with his wife. He promises that his house in Virginia is very nice and well furnished. His mother lives there, as well as his sister, and they are his only living relations.

The plantation owner's claim that he is disappointed in Moll's fortune but not in Moll is meant in good humor, but it subtly highlights the fact that Moll has not lived up to expectations, and that she is somehow considered less because she doesn't have much money. This again reflects the sexist and classist nature of the times, as Moll's worth as a woman and a wife is directly related to her wealth.

Moll and the plantation owner's trip to Virginia is long and dangerous. Their ship is hit with two big storms, and they are even robbed by a pirate. Finally, they arrive in Virginia, and Moll finds the plantation owner's mother delightful. She often tells Moll stories of the Colonies and their people, and she even tells old stories of England. Mother claims that very few people come to the Colonies of their own accord as Moll did. Most people are brought to the Colonies by shipmasters and are as "Servants, *such as we call them*," Mother says, "but they are more properly call'd Slaves." Other people are transported from Newgate Prison or other places after being found guilty of a felony that is otherwise punishable by death.

The trip from England to America during this time was extremely dangerous and often took well over a month to complete. Illness and weather often claimed lives, and pirates were common as well. Here, Mother means to differentiate between people of color sold as slaves and white people transported to the Colonies as criminals and sold as servants. Transported criminals were sold under similar conditions as slaves, but they often had the chance to better their lives, which was rarely the case with people of color sold as slaves.

No one thinks anything of a felon in the Colonies, Mother says. Felons are usually bought by planters, who keep them until their sentences expire. Afterward, felons are encouraged to stay in the Colonies and they're even allotted land on which to plant and live. "Hence Child," Mother says to Moll, "many a Newgate Bird becomes a great Man." In fact, some of the Colonies' most important magistrates and officers are "burnt in the hand," Mother adds. She shows Moll a small brand burned into the inside of her palm.

During this time, criminals were branded for easy identification, which is why they are described as "burnt in the hand." When Mother shows her brand, she admits to Moll that she is herself a transported criminal. Transported criminals and indentured servants were common at the time and had opportunities to do well in America. Even Benjamin Franklin's grandmother came to the Colonies as an indentured servant, and Mother notes here how common it is for people who were criminals in England to become "great" in the Colonies.

Mother begins to tell Moll terrible stories of Newgate Prison, which, she says, is a dreadful place that "ruin'd more young People than all the Town besides." She claims more "Thieves and Rogues" are made by Newgate than by all the criminals in England. During one story, Mother has occasion to tell Moll her name, and Moll is instantly struck. Mother notices Moll's change in demeanor and asks if she is all right. Moll assures her she is just overcome with sadness by her story, and Mother tells Moll not to fret. Her story may be sad, but she ended up in a good family. After her Mistress died, the Master married her, and together they had the plantation owner and his sister. Mother's husband is dead now, but he gave her a good life.

Defoe again implies that society is to blame for criminal behavior, just has he previously implied that it is responsible for Moll's destruction because she was abandoned and neglected as a child. It is Newgate, the very solution to criminality, that leads to crime in society. In this way, Defoe implies it isn't wicked books and staged plays that cause depravity, but rather society itself. Obviously, Moll's demeanor changes because she realizes the plantation owner's mother is her mother, too—which means Moll is married to her own half-brother.

Moll knows without a doubt that she is looking at her own mother. By now, Moll has two children with the plantation owner, and she has been sleeping with her half-brother the whole time. Moll has never been so unhappy, and she wishes Mother had never told her the story—it isn't a crime to lie with one's brother if one knows nothing about it. Moll fully expects to lose her husband; the plantation owner is a good man and will never agree to live with his sister as his wife. Moll doesn't know what to do, and she takes a moment to remind the reader that she is in a foreign country with no way to return home.

Moll's little reminder that she is in a foreign country with no way to get home again underscores her restrictions in society as a woman. As far as the law is concerned, Moll is a married woman, and she can't leave the Colonies without her husband's permission. Furthermore, even if she does leave, she has nowhere to go and no money to support herself (she gave her bank to her husband/brother), so she is forced to stay and compromise her morals.

Moll lives "in open avowed Incest and Whoredom, and all under the appearance of an honest Wife." The sight of the plantation owner makes her sick to her stomach, but she thinks it is best to keep the truth hidden from him. Moll conceals the truth for three years, but she has no more children with the plantation owner. One cannot expect any good to come from "the worst sort of Whoredom," and Moll's life indeed becomes most difficult. The plantation owner grows unkind and frequently argues with Moll. She reminds him that he made a promise to return to England if Moll didn't like Virginia, and says that she would like to go back as soon as possible.

It is not a coincidence that the plantation owner grows unkind once Moll stops having sex with him. As his wife, Moll is expected to have sex—sex is, so to speak, how Moll earns her keep. Sex is a form of currency for Moll, and, Defoe thus implies, for all women. Meanwhile, Moll is tormented because her marriage to the plantation owner isn't legal. He is Moll's brother, and Moll is still legally married to the linen-draper, which makes Moll guilty of "Incest and Whoredom"—though again, there's not much she can do about it at this point.

Moll complains frequently and openly that she wants to return to England, and even Mother tries to dissuade her, but Moll won't listen. She hates the idea of sleeping with the plantation owner, and she gives every excuse and illness not to. At last, the plantation owner grows so angry that he refuses to return to England as he promised. To do so would be death to their finances, he says, and no reasonable wife would ask a husband to do something that would harm their estate. Moll knows he is right; he knows nothing of the terrible truth, and her desire to return to England now must seem very unreasonable.

Even though Moll stays so long and lives as her brother's wife, she clearly is not comfortable with the arrangement, which again suggests Moll is not an innately immoral and depraved person. She knows that lying and living as the plantation owner's wife is wrong, but she doesn't have another choice without subjecting herself to complete poverty and despair.

Even though Moll knows the plantation owner is right, she can no longer look at him as her husband, and she vows to be rid of him. Moll asks him to let her return to England alone; that way, he can remain on the estate and work. She brings the idea up repeatedly until the plantation owner explodes in anger, asking her what kind of "unkind Wife" and "unnatural Mother" looks to leave her family. Moll doesn't want to see the plantation owner or their children ever again, but she knows he will never let her go, and she cannot think of leaving without his consent—"as any one that knows the Constitution of the country I [am] in, knows very well," Moll says.

This passage, too, reflects the sexist nature of Moll's society, as she is immediately considered "unkind" and "unnatural" for not wanting to fill the traditional role of wife and mother. Of course, Moll has good reason for wanting to leave—she isn't trying to up and leave her family on a whim—but the law is against her for any reason. As a woman, Moll is not allowed to freely travel and needs her husband's permission to leave.

Moll and the plantation owner fight all the time, and their life together grows increasingly tense. She refuses to go to bed with him, and he accuses her of being "mad." He tells Moll that if she doesn't change her behavior immediately, he will "put [her] under Cure; *that is to say, into a Madhouse.*" Moll is terrified. If the plantation owner puts her into a Madhouse, she will never get back to England, and any word she speaks of the truth will not be believed.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, it was not uncommon for husbands to place their wives in insane asylums, or madhouses, as an alternative to divorce or simply to be rid of them. Again, the plantation owner is angry because he is denied sex; he considers sex something Moll owes him as a woman and his wife.

Months pass, and Moll and the plantation owner find themselves in an explosive argument. He pushes Moll so far that she nearly tells him the truth outright, but she thinks better of it. The argument begins with the plantation owner calmly pointing out Moll's urgent desire to return to England. She treats him more like a dog than a husband, he says, and she doesn't treat the children much better. While he isn't very fond of violence, he finds it is necessary now, and he will certainly resort to such means in the future to "reduce [Moll] to [her] Duty."

During this time, a husband legally had the same control over his wife that he had over his children, which made it legal for husbands to beat their wives. He threatens to beat Moll to force her to her "Duty," which is to say he will beat her if she doesn't start acting like his wife again—in the bedroom and everywhere else. In short, he tells Moll to shape up and consent to sex, or he will beat her and throw her in a mental hospital.

Moll is furious. She tells the plantation owner that she *will* be returning to England and that she has good reason to treat him and the children the way she does. Moll tells him he is not her lawful husband, and she says the children aren't lawful either. The plantation owner looks as if he has a stroke. He grows cold but sweaty, and then he vomits. He takes to his bed, where he burns all night with fever. The next day, Moll apologizes to the plantation owner for sending him into such a state and begs him not push her for an explanation, which, she says, will only make things worse.

Moll's behavior here again calls her true sense of morality into question. Despite the dire situation, her brother and children are essentially innocent, and they surely don't deserve Moll's misplaced anger. The plantation owner's response to Moll's admission that their marriage and children aren't legal suggests that he deeply loves Moll despite their recent problems.

In the meantime, the plantation owner enlists his mother to get an explanation out of Moll. Mother presses Moll, who finally tells Mother that the secret "[lies] in [Mother] herself"; Moll has only suppressed it out of respect for her. It is in Mother's best interest, Moll says, not to insist. Mother, however, persists, and Moll agrees to tell her—provided she doesn't tell the plantation owner without Moll's permission. She agrees with hesitation, and Moll tells her the entire story, beginning with her own birth in Newgate Prison. She tells Mother that she is indeed her daughter, and Mother is shocked. Moll's story seems at first unbelievable, but she soon takes Moll in her arms. Mother laments Moll's unhappy circumstances and the horror of having three children—two living, one dead—with her own brother.

When the plantation owner enlists his mother to discover Moll's secret, it recalls the lady in Colchester and her efforts to persuade Moll to marry the younger brother. The circumstances are decidedly different, but both situations illustrate the dismissive way in which Moll is treated. Moll doesn't want to tell her secret, just like she didn't want to marry the younger brother, but no one respects what Moll wants. Moll's secret "lay in Mother herself" because Mother is the source of Moll's problem with the plantation owner.

Mother promises not to tell Moll's secret to the plantation owner, but neither Mother nor Moll knows what to do. They don't know how the plantation owner will receive the truth, but they are both convinced that if the truth gets out publicly, it will ruin the entire family. Mother wants Moll to bury the secret and continue living with the plantation owner as husband and wife until a better opportunity arises to tell him the truth. She promises to provide for Moll and, upon her death, to leave money for Moll to separate from her son. Then, if Moll wishes to leave after Mother is dead, she will have the means to do so. Moll refuses; it is impossible to continue living as her brother's wife, and she can't believe Mother is asking her to.

As a woman, Mother stands to lose just as much as Moll if Moll's secret gets out. Mother's reputation will be ruined in society as well, and it is sure to cause an embarrassing scandal. Mother would rather have Moll live in misery and sin than face the devastation of their secret. Mother's willingness to live in such a way underscores the desperation of Moll's situation as a woman in a sexist society. Moll has no money and few options, other than to pretend she doesn't know her husband is her brother.

It is one thing, Moll argues, for Mother to confirm Moll is her daughter, but her secret will hardly be believed if it comes to light after Mother is dead. And, Moll adds, the plantation owner has already threatened her with the madhouse. Moll suggests Mother help her convince the plantation owner to send Moll back to England with an adequate amount of money and an understanding he will later join her. Then, in Moll's absence, Mother can tell him the truth in any way she sees fit. In the end, Moll and Mother can't reconcile their difference of opinions. Moll insists she cannot sleep with her brother, and Mother insists she cannot convince her son to allow Moll to return to England alone.

As a woman in a sexist society, Moll's word is considered less than a man's, and if Moll is put in a madhouse, anything she says—especially the truth that her husband is really her brother—will appear to be the ranting of a madwoman.

Mother and Moll agree to keep their secret for a time. Mother tells the plantation owner that she doesn't know Moll's secret, but she believes it is serious, and he shouldn't cause Moll undue stress with threats of violence and the madhouse until they can discover what the secret is. He agrees—he wasn't serious about the madhouse anyway—and he begins to treat Moll better. His kindness returns, and he doesn't quarrel with her. Moll begins to think she can live long-term this way, expect she can't stomach going to bed with him. She resists him as much as she can, and when she must relent, she is awkward and uncomfortable. Moll decides she must tell him the truth.

Moll is desperate for security and wealth, and she appears willing to live as her brother's wife—provided she doesn't have to have sex with him—which again reflects Moll's limited options as a woman in 17th-century society.

Moll tells the plantation owner that she will reveal her secret if he will make her a few promises in writing. He immediately agrees and grabs a pen, and Moll tells him to write the following: that he will not blame her, insult or injure her, or make her suffer in any way. He agrees that is reasonable and writes it all down. She further makes him promise not to divulge her secret to anyone, except his mother, without Moll's consent or permission. Again, the plantation owner agrees that Moll's demand is reasonable and writes it down. She then makes him promise that he will receive her secret with composure, and after he agrees, she begins to talk.

This section, in which Moll makes the plantation owner put his promises in writing, mirrors the part of the novel when the plantation owner etches his promises of love on the windowpane. Just as she did then, Moll makes the plantation owner promise something before divulging the truth. In this way, Moll manipulates the plantation owner, but, as Moll always points out, she does it for a good reason, not because she is an inherently bad person.

Moll tells the plantation owner that they are brother and sister. Mother, Moll says, is her mother as well. The plantation owner grows pale, and Moll must get him a glass of rum to calm him. After he composes himself, he tells Moll that he has a solution that does not involve her going back to England. Moll says that isn't likely, since she can't see how she can possibly stay, but he promises to "make it easie." In the following days, the plantation owner grows depressed, and Moll thinks he is beginning to lose his mind. He even makes two attempts on his own life, and if not for Mother catching him and cutting the rope, he would be hanging dead.

Presumably, the "easie" way in which the plantation owner plans to keep Moll from having to return to England is by killing himself. The plantation owner obviously can't live with such a taboo and morally reprehensible truth, suggesting that rigid moral strictures can be painful for men as well as women. Plus, he truly loves Moll as a wife, but now he must think of her as a sister, and he is clearly heartbroken.

The plantation owner falls into a long consumption, and Moll knows he is dying. She supposes she can stay in Virginia and marry again once he is dead, but she badly wants to return to England. Finally, the plantation owner and Mother both agree to send Moll back to England. They decide that in due time, the plantation owner can claim Moll has died in England, and he can marry again if he likes. In the meantime, he urges Moll to correspond as his sister. So, after eight years in Virginia, Moll leaves her brother—as she may now call him—and boards a ship to England.

Moll behaves quite selfishly here. She thinks her brother is dying, but she only worries about herself and marrying again once he is gone. This self-interest again suggests that Moll's moral fiber really is lacking, which somewhat complicates Defoe's argument that Moll only makes immoral choices because her poverty and oppression force her to.

MOLL AND THE GENTLEMAN

Moll's return trip to England is smooth, and they reach the coast of England in 32 days, but a series of rough storms sends them off course to Ireland. After 13 days, they return to sea, but rough waters again blow the ship off course. The ship makes port in Wales, far from its intended destination, but Moll refuses to get back on the water. The ship sets sail for Bristol with Moll's belongings, and she heads for London. She arrives weeks later and is told the ship was tossed by considerable weather on its way to Bristol and lost much of its cargo. Without her belongings, Moll is reduced to around £300 in her **bank** with no hope for more.

Moll is again destitute. She only has enough money to see her through the immediate future—if she stretches her money she may make it last a few years—and the only legal ways to increase her wealth are to get married or go into Service. Moll refuses to go into Service, so she will have to find another husband (even though she's still technically married to the linen-draper) or resort to other illegal means.

Moll decides to go to Bristol anyway, but she stops in Bath along the way. Bath is a "Place of Gallantry" and is "full of Snares," and since Moll is still a young woman, she decides to take her chances there. But, Moll says, Bath is where men go to find a Mistress, not a Wife, and she has little luck finding a suitable man. She befriends a landlady, who lets Moll lodge at her house. The landlady does not "keep an ill House," but she doesn't have "the best Principles" either. Moll is sad and a bit lonely living in Bath, but it is inexpensive, so she stays.

Bath is a fashionable tourist destination known for its public spas, but it is also known for its vice, which is reflected in Moll's description of the city as "full of Snares." There is much temptation in Bath—men, money, and likely alcohol and gambling. Moll implies that her landlady isn't running a brothel ("an ill House"), but she suggests the landlady herself is a prostitute, as she doesn't have "the best Principles."

Moll tells the landlady that she lost her fortune at sea, which indeed cost Moll nearly £500. She has written to her mother and brother in Virginia, Moll says, and she is waiting for them to send more goods for her to the port in Bristol. The landlady takes pity on Moll and reduces her rent to an even cheaper rate, and then she introduces Moll to a gentleman. The gentleman believes Moll is a widow, and she knows that he has a mad wife, whom he left under the care of her family so he wouldn't be accused of "mismanaging her Cure."

Again, it was common during this time for husbands to place their wives in mental hospitals just to be rid of them. The gentleman turns his wife's care over so it doesn't appear as if he had her committed just so he could see other women. This again reflects the sexist nature of society.

The gentleman treats Moll with the utmost respect, honor, and virtue, and even though he occasionally visits her in her room, he never offers more than a kiss. One day, he asks Moll how she manages to live and cover her expenses, and she assures him that she manages well enough while she waits for goods from her family in Virginia. He tells Moll that he asks not because he is curious, but because he wishes to help her, if she needs it. Moll says she is not looking for his assistance, but he makes her promise that if she should find herself in need of money, she will ask him for help as freely as he has just offered it.

It was not uncommon for platonic friends to receive each other in their bedrooms, or in bed for that matter, and at this point the gentleman appears to be a genuinely respectful person. He treats Moll well and doesn't make any sexual advances toward her, even when he has the opportunity. He appears to want to help Moll with no strings attached, but she isn't interested. Moll likely denies him because the gentleman isn't free to marry, since his wife is still alive.

The next day, the gentleman calls Moll to his room while he is still in bed. He tells Moll to empty her purse. She has three and a half Guineas, and he asks if that is all she has. Moll says no, and he tells her to go to her room and fetch all her money. She returns with six more Guineas and some silver, which the gentleman places, without counting, into a drawer. Then he gives Moll a key and tells her to open a wooden box on the table. The box is full of gold, and the gentleman pushes Moll's hand into the box, forcing her to pick up as much as she can hold. Then he dumps the drawer with Moll's six Guineas into her lap and tells her to take her money to her room.

Even though it isn't uncommon for friends to receive each other while in bed, the gentleman's questions about Moll's wealth and the gift of money he gives her while lying in bed has sexual connotations, and it furthers the connection between money and sex within the novel. The gentleman could have easily talked with Moll and offered her money after he was up and dressed, but he doesn't, hinting that his motivations might not be so honorable as they initially appeared.

The gentleman begins to spend lots of money on Moll, buying her new clothes and lace, and he even hires her a maid. His kindness is a gift, the gentleman says, and he does not wish for Moll to pay him back. Soon, he falls ill, and Moll cares for him for five weeks with as much attention as a loving wife. Once he is better, the gentleman presents Moll with 50 Guineas for her care and tells her he has the sincerest affection for her. He claims he will always preserve her virtue as if it were his own, and even "if he was naked in Bed with [her]," he would not violate her virtue.

While the gentleman does seem sincere, it is possible his sincerity is just a ploy to get Moll to let her guard down and invite him in, at which time he will more easily be able to take advantage of her. Like the older brother, the gentleman equates his affection for Moll with money, so it isn't a stretch to imagine that he might equates sex with money as well.

Moll soon has reason to go to Bristol, and the gentleman offers to travel with her. When they arrive at the Inn, the innkeeper only has one room with two beds. When they're alone in the room, the gentleman tells Moll that he has occasion to prove to her that he can lie with her without violating her virtue. He climbs into bed with her and holds her all night long, without the least inappropriate touch. They return to Bath and live together for two whole years, until, after a bit too much wine, Moll offers to give him her virtue for one night. He takes her immediately, and with that, Moll becomes, in her words, his "WHORE."

Again, Moll equates unmarried sex with being a whore, which reinforces the sexist nature of her society. Furthermore, the fact that the gentleman so quickly gives in to Moll's desires suggests that he isn't so concerned with her virtue after all. If he were, it is likely that he wouldn't allow Moll to endanger it, no matter how badly he wanted her.

Both Moll and the gentleman regret their decision, but there is no going back, so they continue their sexual relationship. Moll is soon pregnant, and the landlady helps her to find a midwife and nurse. As Moll gets closer to giving birth, the landlady convinces the Parish Officers that there is a woman "Lying Inn" at her residence, but the woman's husband is a wealthy man from London and has covered all expenses. The Parish Officers are satisfied, and Moll saves as much of the gentleman's money as she can. She gives birth to a handsome boy, and the gentleman relocates both Moll and the baby to London.

During the 17th century, the sight of pregnant women was considered obscene (pregnancy, after all, is evidence of sex), so women were expected to remove themselves from society in for a period of time that was called "lying in." Churches would assume the cost of unmarried pregnant women and automatically take charge of them, but the landlady convinces them that Moll is married and covered financially. Both the need for "lying in" and the church's interference further highlight how tightly constrained women's rights are at this time.

Moll lives in London at the height of her wealth, and she wishes nothing more than to be the gentleman's wife. Moll knows marrying the gentleman is unlikely, and she also knows that men only keep mistresses for so long, so she continues to hide money away in her **bank** whenever she can. Moll admits that from the moment she met the gentleman, she vowed to "let him lye with [her] if he offer'd." She needed his help and "knew no other way of securing him." So, "as Poverty brought [her] into it, so fear of Poverty kept [her] in it," and she lives six years with him. During this time, Moll has two more children, but, sadly, both children die.

While Moll doesn't explicitly state it here, she again implies that her relationship with the gentleman—in which he takes care of her and she has sex with him—makes her a whore. Moll again looks to sex as a sort of currency to give her security and wealth. She's terrified of poverty, so she trades her body and sex for security. Moll has limited options for making money on her own, and she doesn't know any other way to take care of herself.

One day, Moll comes home to a letter that says the gentleman has again fallen ill. He is at home with his wife's family, and it isn't appropriate for Moll to come to him. Time passes without word, so, out of curiosity, Moll disguises herself as a servant and goes to his house and inquires as to his condition. A maid tells her the gentleman is suffering with pleurisy and a fever, and he isn't expected to live. Moll returns home and soon learns that his condition is slowly improving. She writes him several letters, and after much time, he finally writes back.

Pleurisy is a painful respiratory illness that was often fatal during Moll's time, and it further reflects how precarious Moll's situation is. Without the gentleman, Moll is destitute, and she won't be entitled to any money upon his death since they aren't legally married. Moll's life has been going well, but it is still just one disaster away from completely falling apart and leaving her on the street.

The gentleman writes that being so near death has made him genuinely reflect on the time he has spent with Moll, and he now sees the sin they have committed. He encloses £50 so Moll can return to Bath, and he says he can no longer see her. She is free to take their child or leave him; if she leaves the child, the gentleman says, he will care for the boy. Moll is heartbroken. She is aware of their sin herself, and she has often thought it would have been a lesser offense to stay in Virginia as her brother's wife. And all this time, Moll has been married to the linen-draper too, which means she has been living as a "Whore and an Adultress" since he left.

The gentleman's sudden attack of conscience underscores the immorality of his relationship with Moll, which aligns with Defoe's claim that Moll's story is useful moral instruction. By pointing out the sin Moll is guilty of, it warns readers away from making similar choices. In giving Moll money to go away, the gentleman again equates sex with mone; it's as if this final sum is his last payment to her for the relationship they've had.

Moll has no intention of returning to Bath, but she doesn't know what to do about the child. The thought of leaving him causes her pain, but so does the thought of trying to care for him on her own and being unable to, so she leaves him. She again writes the gentleman and asks him to send her £50 more, so she can go back to her family in Virginia, even though she has no intention of leaving England. He agrees, and Moll again finds herself alone. With the additional £50 from the gentleman, she has nearly £400 in her **bank**, including some silver, clothes, and linen.

Moll's son with the gentleman is just one of the 12 children Moll abandons, which makes her appear immoral; however, Defoe implies that Moll isn't entirely to blame for this awful situation. Birth control doesn't exist, and Moll has few options to support a child. Plus, she is forced into sexual situations in order to survive. In this way, children can't be avoided, and Moll can only do her best to take care of them for as long as she can.

Now, Moll isn't the same woman she was when she set out alone for the first time 20 years ago. She is 42 years old now, and the years have been hard on her. She has no friends and no one to advise her, which is one of the worst conditions a woman can find herself in. Moll says "woman," she points out, because men are their own advisers, and they don't have to worry about "being wrong'd and deciev'd." A woman alone with no adviser is like "a Bag of Money, or a Jewel dropt on the Highway." Moll wants to settle down to a quiet life, and if she had a husband, she would be true and faithful. But, Moll says, vice comes in "always at the Door of Necessity, not at the Door of Inclination."

Moll changes as her life progresses, which illustrates the evolving nature of identity. Her comment that women are susceptible to deception because they lack advisers again underscores the sexist nature of society. Women are considered helpless and easy prey for men who are only looking for money, and a woman alone like Moll is a prime target. Moll again suggests that she only acts immorally (doing things like having sex and abandoning her children) because she is desperately poor and has no other options.

Moll lives as frugally as she can and decides to move to the North Country, where a neighbor talks her into moving again to Liverpool. There, Moll must decide what to do with her money. She considers the bank, but she has no one to help her, and she doesn't trust "Bank Bills" and "Talleys." Still, she worries she may be robbed or murdered for her gold, so she decides to go the bank anyway. Moll tells the man at the bank her situation, and he directs her to a second banker, who he is sure will be able to help Moll manage her money and affairs.

During this time, paper money and bank receipts (now known as checks) were a relatively new concept, and Moll has a hard time trusting them. Plus, if Moll puts her money in a bank and it goes bankrupt, she will lose all her money. Keeping her money on her isn't realistic either, it is heavy and bulky, and she might get robbed. Despite the risk, putting her money in a bank is her safest option.

MOLL MEETS THE BANKER

The banker is a kind man. Moll tells him she is a widow from America, and he quickly agrees to help her. He seems like an honest man, and he advises Moll as to her financial options, such as lodging her gold in the bank and drawing bills from a cashier as she sees fit Or, she can invest in stock, which will gather her interest and make her more money. As the banker advises Moll, he slips in details of his own life. He has "a Wife, and no Wife," he says, whom he wouldn't mind seeing hanged. "I am a *Cuckold*," the banker says, "and she is a *Whore*."

The banker's condition of having "a Wife, and no Wife" mirrors Moll's own state with the linen-draper—she is legally married, but for all intents and purposes, she doesn't have a husband. A "cuckold" is a word that describes a man whose wife is unfaithful, a point made clearer by the banker's claim that his wife is a "Whore."

The banker's wife ran off and had two children with a linen-draper's apprentice. The banker tells Moll that his wife "is a Whore not by Necessity, which is the common Bait of [Moll's] Sex, but by Inclination, and for the sake of the Vice." He asks Moll what he should do to get justice, and she suggests getting a divorce. It won't be difficult, Moll says, if the wife has really done as the banker says. The banker admits that he would like to marry again, and then he asks Moll if she would have him. "No," Moll replies sternly. She has come to him for help with her finances, and she is appalled that he has been so forward.

Here, the banker, too, implies that women are often forced into performing sex for money and security, which is why he calls it the "Bait" of Moll's gender. His wife, however, is a "whore" because of desire and not need, which suggests she is innately immoral; whereas Moll, who is a "whore by necessity," does it to survive and is thus not innately immoral. The banker's forwardness is again evidence of their sexist society. He is more concerned with making Moll his wife than in helping her with her problem, proving her point about how vulnerable women without advisers are.

The banker takes to flattering Moll, which she rather enjoys, but she knows the best way to secure him is to appear standoffish. It is most important, Moll says, to "preserve the Character of [her] Virtue," even if the virtue itself has already been sacrificed. Moll promises to come back the next day to conclude talking about her business, and when she returns, the banker professes his affection for Moll and promises to marry her as soon as he has obtained a divorce from his wife. He asks Moll to sign a contract obliging her to marry him after his divorce, but Moll refuses, as she will soon be leaving for Lancashire with a friend.

Moll's comment again reflects the importance of a woman's virtue in a sexist society. Only virtue has worth (other than money, that is), so Moll must fake it, even though she has been married several times, has many children, and even trades sex for money and security. The banker is again forward with Moll—he barely knows her but wants her to sign a marriage contract. She seems *virtuous and has a bit of money, and that is enough for him.*

Moll tells the banker that she will leave her money in his hands while she travels, and he agrees. Moll has been in Lancashire for about six weeks when she meets the Irishman. According to Moll's friends, the Irishman is very rich—his estate is valued at £1,000 to £1,500 yearly—and he is very handsome. He is tall and shapely, and he speaks often of his estate in Ireland. He never asks Moll about her own fortune, but he promises to give her a £600 dowry if she agrees to go with him to Ireland.

With an income of 1,500 pounds per year, the Irishman is seriously wealthy, and he is willing to give Moll a dowry, instead of the other way around. The Irishman seems too good to be true, which suggests that he probably is. His fortune is in Ireland, and he can easily lure Moll to Ireland on the pretense of money, and by the time she discovers the truth, she'd be trapped there.

MOLL MARRIES THE IRISHMAN

Moll thinks often of the banker and feels bad for disregarding him, but she soon marries the Irishman, and Moll's new husband begins to arrange travel to Ireland. He asks Moll if she has any business in London that needs tending to, and she assures him that any business she does have can be settled by letter. He asks her about her money and banking. If anything needs to be transferred, he says, it may be necessary to see to it before going to Ireland. Moll tells the Irishman that she doesn't know what he is talking about and says she doesn't have any money in London.

The Irishman is obviously fishing around about Moll's money, which again suggests he isn't as wealthy as he claims to be. He is trying to get his hands on Moll's money, and since he doesn't know that Moll is legally married to another man, he believes he is entitled to her wealth. Moll has a considerable amount of money with the banker, but she doesn't appear willing to share. That way, if Moll is again left alone, she is covered financially.

The Irishman is shocked to discover that Moll doesn't have any money, and she is quick to point out that she never led him to believe she had any wealth at all. He claims she looks like a "Woman of Fortune," and, he adds, he heard from mutual friends that Moll was very wealthy. Then, the Irishman admits that he, too, is poor and doesn't really own an estate in Ireland. It appears, Moll says, they have been married "upon the foot of a double Fraud," for she has no estate. Moll is incredibly disappointed. She knows the Irishman can make her very happy, but his finances are certainly a problem, and she can see nothing before them but ruin. She pulls a Bank Bill from her purse worth £20 and 11 Guineas, which, she says, is all the money she has in the world.

Moll is lying about her money (she has over 400 pounds with the banker), which seems immoral; however, Defoe implies she doesn't have much of a choice. If the past is any indication of Moll's future, she will soon be alone and expected to support herself, and she can hardly be blamed for covering herself on her end. And unlike the Irishman, Moll doesn't openly lie about having money; he just assumes she's wealthy, and she doesn't initially correct him.

Despite her disappointment, Moll is not willing to be without money, and she tells the Irishman as much. They spend the evening together and he still tries to make the best of it, so he orders a bottle of wine with dinner. The Irishman apologizes for deceiving her, and Moll asks what he was planning on doing once they arrived in Ireland. He never intended to go Ireland, he admits, but was going to feign a reason for staying in London after Moll secured her fortune from the bank.

Clearly, Moll is fond of the Irishman, and he is fond of her; however, marriage is a business arrangement, not a statement of love, so they can't be together. Despite his deception, the Irishman is a pleasant and agreeable man, which suggests that, like Moll, he only behaves immorally because of poverty and the need to survive.

Moll and the Irishman spend the night together, and once Moll falls asleep, the Irishman slips out. He leaves her a letter, in which he begs for her forgiveness and claims he has left money in her pocket to cover her expenses back to London. When she wakes, Moll is devasted. She looks in her pocket and finds 10 Guineas, along with a gold watch and diamond rings. She begins to weep, calling him by his name. "James, O Jemy!" Moll cries, wishing he would return to her. Moll spends the whole day crying, and near nightfall, James returns.

Presumably, Moll and the Irishman have sex, and he too pays her for it, albeit in a more indirect way. This is the first time Moll uses James's real name. James's identity as, variously, the Irishman, Jemy, and Moll's Lancashire husband again underscores Defoe's argument as to the fluid nature of identity.

When James arrives, he goes directly to Moll and takes her in his arms. When their "Extasies" are over, James tells Moll that he didn't get 15 miles away before he heard Moll calling to him. Hearing her voice in his head, he knew he had to be near her for a bit longer. There is no need for her to travel back to London alone, James says. He can accompany her to the city, or close to it, at least. Molls is miserable without him, so she agrees. His good nature and manners—and the fact that he left Moll what little money he had—make him quite attractive to Moll.

Referring to their "extasies" is a polite way of saying Moll and James have sex, and it is an example of the modest language Moll was forced to write her story in. James's connection to Moll, and his ability to sense her calling for him, again suggests that James truly loves her. But because of his poverty, he is forced to deny his feelings and keep looking for a wealthy woman, just as Moll must look for a rich man.

James and Moll travel as far as Dunstable, about 30 miles outside London, and James refuses to go on. Circumstances, which James doesn't explain, won't allow him to go on to London. Moll convinces him to stay a week or so in Dunstable to delay their inevitable parting, and they rent rooms in a private house. Moll asks James to live with her in Dunstable until her money runs out. She will not let him spend a bit of his own money. If she isn't likely to see him again, Moll says, it will be money well spent.

Moll only offers to spend all her money on James because she knows she has more money with the banker in London. While Moll clearly likes James, she is careful to still ensure her own security. James's refusal to go to London is suspicious and implies he is hiding from something or someone, and it further suggests he isn't exactly who he says he is.

Living together in Dunstable, Moll tells James all about Virginia. Her mother is still living there, Moll says, but her husband has been dead many years now. She tells him all about the quality of the land and the money to be made. Moll says that a sum of £300 can get them established in the Colonies, and after seven years or so, they will be able to leave their plantation under the care of another and live comfortably on the profits in England. James says he has the same idea about Ireland. Farming land in Ireland can secure one a life that £3,000 a year wouldn't buy in England, James maintains. He suggests he go on to Ireland, and she to London, and in a year, if things are as good as he supposes they will be, he will send for her.

James's suggestion that he go to Ireland and Moll to London to wait for him again underscores the sexist nature of their society. Moll wants to go to the Colonies, but James wants to go to Ireland, and he completely disregards Moll's desires in favor of his own. He doesn't give what she wants equal thought before simply deciding to act on his own desires, which leaves Moll in a position in which she must act against her own will and desires.

James is so insistent on his plans for Ireland that Moll finally agrees to go to London and wait. They part at last—with great reluctance on Moll's part—and she heads off to London. Moll takes lodging near Clarkenwell and discovers after a short time that she is pregnant. Moll isn't pleased with this unexpected interruption, and she isn't quite sure how to handle her lying in. She has kept up correspondence with the banker during her time away, but she hasn't had the need to remove any money from the bank. She knows from his letters that he has started divorce proceedings; they are going well, but they are also difficult and long.

Moll is still scheming to get the richest husband possible, which is why she continues corresponding with the banker even when she is with James. Again, this implies Moll is of loose morals, since she strings one man along while pregnant with another's child; however, she can't very well go out and get a respectable job and support herself in the manner she is accustomed to, which again reflects Moll's limited options as a woman in the 17th century.

MOLL MEETS THE MIDWIFE AND MARRIES THE BANKER

Moll knows she isn't in any condition to see the banker. She isn't foolish enough to marry one man while pregnant with the child of another, but she still doesn't want to fully let the banker go. So, she vows to have him, if his interest holds, as soon as she is able. After all, Moll isn't likely to ever see James again. Her belly grows, and people start noticing Moll's condition. She knows she must remove herself from society, but again, Moll is without friends or anyone to advise her. She grows depressed and ill, and she hopes her illness causes her to miscarry. Of course, Moll clarifies, she would never *make* herself miscarry.

Moll clearly isn't happy about being pregnant, but this sequence of events makes it clear just how few options she has. Moll's plan to hide her pregnancy from the banker and go to him once she has, presumably, gotten rid of the baby may seem despicable, but again, Moll has few chances to ensure her future stability and no way to take care of a child.

In short time, the lady of the house where Moll boards sends a midwife to see her. The woman seems to be an experienced midwife, and she has a different calling as well, "in which she [is] as expert as most women, if not more." Moll's "Mother Midnight" begins to explain. She knows Moll needs assistance for her "Lying Inn," and she can help. The Midwife tells Moll that Moll's circumstances are of no concern to her—in other words, she doesn't care if the baby's father is Moll's husband—and Moll understands that she is a "Whore" here.

A "midwife" during Moll's time is often used as an umbrella term for women who deliver babies and are also prostitutes. The midwife is an "expert" more than "most women," and she is a "Mother Midnight," both of which imply prostitution. Moll understands she is a whore in the midwife's house because the midwife is literally operating a brothel.

The midwife tells Moll that she has an agreement with the local Parish to handle such cases, and she runs a house where many women go to "Lye-Inn." Moll understands perfectly, she says, and tells the midwife that she doesn't have much, but she can afford the cost of her keeping. The midwife returns the next day with details—she has three different care packages to choose from—and presents them to Moll. The three options range from £13 to £53 for three months' service, and Moll selects the least expensive. But, Moll says, she still has a few months to go and might need to stay longer than three months. The midwife assures Moll she never puts anyone out before they are ready.

The midwife's business and her detailed plans to care for woman who are lying in again connects sex and money. The midwife makes a living from sex directly as a prostitute, and indirectly from caring for pregnant women. Again, local churches often assume the care of needy pregnant women, but the midwife's agreement with the church means they will stay out of Moll's business. The midwife sees Moll as a way to bring in more money, but she is also kind and likely won't turn her away, which suggests it's possible for seemingly immoral people like the midwife to be virtuous and compassionate at the same time.

Moll soon moves to the midwife's house, where Moll is pleased to find the house clean and quite luxurious. The midwife has several businesses and one such business is finding people who, for a bit of money, will take children after they are born and provide for them. Moll questions what happens to the children after they are gone, but the midwife assures her she takes great care in all her business. Furthermore, the midwife says, she has saved the lives of countless children, who otherwise might have been destroyed by their desperate mothers. The midwife also offers to provide Moll with something to make her miscarry, if she wants to be rid of the problem that way, but Moll refuses.

The midwife's business of selling babies is certainly an immoral practice, but she views it through more moral terms. She says the babies would likely have been aborted or neglected had she not found them appropriate homes, which makes her work seem more morally sound. She still offers Moll an abortion, though, which suggests she isn't looking to judge Moll regardless of her decision.

During Moll's time with the midwife, Moll is comfortable and well cared for. It is obvious to Moll that the midwife has a thriving business, which is clearly a "whoring Account." The Midwife has 12 "Ladies of Pleasure" and a number of other women "Lying Inn." Living in such a place "shock'd [Moll's] very Senses," and she feels sick to her stomach. However, Moll admits, she never sees anything indecent take place there. Before long, Moll receives a letter from the banker. He has divorced his wife, and Moll is pleased, but she writes back and claims to doubt the lawfulness of such a decree.

If Moll wasn't sure before that the midwife is a prostitute and her house a brothel, Moll certainly knows now. Moll's morals are clearly offended by being in the brothel, as being there makes her sick to her stomach. Moll's response to the brothel again implies that she isn't innately immoral; she is simply a poor woman in a sexist society and is without other reasonable options. Moll doesn't really doubt the legality of the banker's divorce; she simply must string him along for a little longer until her lying in is over.

By mid-May, Moll gives birth to another son. Soon after, she again receives a letter from the banker. He has obtained a divorce from his wife, and after she was served with the papers, she committed suicide. With his cheating wife out of the picture, the banker invites Moll to come to London and be with him. Moll is pleased, but she isn't sure what to do with the child. In search of advice, Moll tells the midwife all about her predicament—her marriage to James, his inability to go to London, and his blessing for Moll to move on—and she says that she has found a good offer in the banker. The problem, Moll says, is the child. If she returns to the banker with the boy, the banker will know that Moll has been with another since she left London for Lancashire.

Moll is again scheming to ensure she gets the banker and she is willing to give up her child to do it, which again suggests Moll has rather loose morals. Furthermore, both the banker and Moll seem r pleased that his wife is dead. This rather heartless response is likely in response to the wife's status as a whore, but since Moll considers herself a whore too, this makes her appear even more heartless and immoral. But still, Moll remains motivated by concerns for her own safety; Defoe implies that she probably wouldn't do or feel any of these things if she weren't desperately trying to avoid poverty.

However, the thought of giving up her child deeply pains Moll. The midwife reassures Moll and tells her that the children she places are cared for just as their mothers themselves would care for them. If she knew for sure that her baby would be well cared for, Moll says, she would happily agree to place the child in the midwife's hands. The midwife arranges—for an added fee, of course—for Moll to have the option of seeing the child whenever she wants. Moll agrees, and the next week, a woman arrives from the country. She will take the child off Moll's hands for £10, and for an additional £5 a year, she will allow Moll to see him whenever she desires.

Moll clearly loves her child and giving him up isn't easy for her, which again indicates that she's not simply an uncaring person. Defoe implies Moll is simply faced with difficult choices and limited options. In this way, it is again society that is truly to blame for Moll's decisions. If she had a reasonable way to support herself and her children, she likely wouldn't be looking for an alternative.

Afterward, Moll begins to write the banker in a more friendly tone, and she tells him that she will be in London come August. The banker suggests instead that they meet in Brickhill, a town just outside London. They find lodging and go to dinner, and Moll gets the feeling that the banker is going to propose to her. She knows that she will not deny him. The innkeeper asks to speak to the banker alone, and Moll overhears the men talking about a minister, who is willing to serve them as discreetly as they like. After dinner, the banker begins kissing and sweet-talking Moll, and then he takes out several official documents and places them before her.

Presumably, the banker wants to meet Moll in Brickhill because he wants to marry her before *taking her back to London. That way, when he brings Moll home, she is already his wife, and he won't appear to be fooling around with a woman he isn't married to, which, in the eyes of society, would reflect poorly on his own morality. However, the banker makes his plans without consulting Moll, which again illustrates how little agency women have in their society.*

The banker presents Moll with documentation of his divorce from his wife and proof of her crime as a "Whore," and he further presents Moll with proof of his wife's death and burial. Moll can see he has yet another document, and she asks him what it is. "Ay," he says slyly. He then produces a box, which contains a very nice diamond ring. Moll is so happy that she can't refuse. The other document, the banker says, is a marriage license, and he begins to "violently" kiss her. He knocks Moll to the bed, all the while kissing her and professing his love, and he refuses to let her up until she agrees to marry him. She won't refuse him, Moll says, so he might as well let her up.

The banker's "violent" kisses and his refusal to let Moll up until she marries him again implies that he has control over her as a man and she is powerless to resist him. He doesn't know that Moll has no plans to resist him, and he is willing to force her, which is evident in both his violent force and his preparation. He goes to a lot of trouble securing documentation to ensure their marriage because he has no intention of taking no for an answer.

The banker is so happy that Moll has accepted him, there are tears in his eyes as he stands. Moll must turn from him, because there are tears in her eyes, too, and she begins to feel remorse for the wicked life she has led. She briefly wonders how her life would have been had she met a nice, loving man like the banker earlier. She starts to feel bad that she has deceived him as to the full truth of her past. Little does he know, Moll thinks, he has gotten rid of one "Whore" just to take up with another. What will the banker think if he ever finds out that Moll is the daughter of a thief, born in Newgate Prison?

Since Moll is still legally married to the linen-draper, Moll is technically a whore, just like the banker's first wife, and Moll's guilt over this fact again reflects her sexist society. Moll's husband left her through no fault of her own, yet she is supposed to take a vow of chastity and wait for him to come back—which is unlikely to ever happen. Moll's question as to how her life would have been had she not been poor again suggests that her immorality is a product of her poverty, not of some innate depravity.

Before long, a minister arrives, and the banker presents him with the marriage license. Satisfied, the minister asks where the bride is, and the banker goes to fetch Moll. She is shocked that he means to be married now—at an inn and so late at night, far from the sacred church. The minister convinces Moll that a marriage performed at an inn is just as legal and binding as one performed in a church, and she finally agrees to marry the banker now.

Again, the banker doesn't consider Moll's feelings and preferences for getting married. He wants to marry her now because it is better for him, and he cares very little how Moll feels about it. The banker's indifference to Moll's desires again mirrors the overall oppression of women in 17th-century England.

Moll and the banker's marriage is kept completely secret, and they return to their room as husband and wife, where they "enjoy'd [themselves] that Evening compleatly." The next morning, they remain in bed until nearly noon, at which time Moll rises and goes to the window. She looks outside, and to her absolute surprise she sees James go into a house across the street with two other men. She panics. The banker cannot see her so undone, and she quickly thinks about her options. She wants to know what James is doing there, but she doesn't want to see him—running into him could ruin her life with the banker. Two hours later, Moll watches as James and the two men exit the house and head out of town.

The banker keeps their marriage a secret, which implies that he is ashamed in some way. Likely, the banker isn't ashamed of Moll per se, but he does seem to be ashamed that he wasn't married before. This shame reflects the importance of marriage in society, and it also implies that he doesn't want to be seen with a woman who isn't his wife. Moll's claim that she and the banker enjoyed themselves completely again suggests sex and is another example of the modest language Moll must use to tell her story.

The next day, as Moll and the banker are getting ready to return to London, excitement breaks out all over town. Three highwaymen robbed nearly £560 in money and goods from travelers, and three strange men have been seen in the area. Moll tells the constable that she indeed saw the men in question, and one of them she knows very well from Lancashire. He is an honest and good man, Moll says, and he can't possibly be one of the highwaymen. The constable tells his men they are mistaken; the three men seen in town have nothing to do with the robberies. The excitement delays Moll and the banker's departure, and they finally head back to London four days later.

Obviously, James is a highwayman—a thief who robs travelers and stagecoaches—which is likely why he can't return to London. The reader can infer that James is wanted in London for some sort of crime, probably robbery, which also implies James has loose morals himself—but again, that may just be because he's impoverished and has few options. Moll and the banker don't leave for London right away because with known highwaymen in the area, they stand to be robbed on their way back.

Moll returns to London a married woman and she moves directly into the banker's house, which she finds well-furnished and more than adequate. There, Moll lives a very happy life. She has "landed in a safe Harbour," and she "sincerely" repents her wicked past. But, Moll points out, as "Covetousness is the Root of all Evil, so Poverty is, I believe, the worst of all Snares." Moll lives an easy life for five years, until the banker loses a large sum of his money to a dishonest business associate. The banker grows depressed and lethargic after losing so much money and promptly dies, leaving Moll alone with two children.

The "safe Harbour" of Moll's marriage and her subsequent financial security again imply that Moll only resorted to the wickedness of her past out of desperation and a need to survive. This implication underscores the connection between poverty and vice, and it suggests vice isn't necessarily a choice that is freely made. Poverty is "the worst of all Snares," in which one is bound to break the law and commit other immoral acts just to survive—especially as a woman with few options otherwise.

After the death of the banker, Moll isn't left in debt, but she doesn't have enough money to support herself either. She is again without friends or anyone to advise her, so she sits and cries, lamenting her miserable existence. Moll lives this way for two years, and then she decides to leave her house and move on. She sells everything she owns and lives on that sum for nearly a year, but she has no hope of bringing in any additional money. Moll interrupts her story and begs the reader not to continue without "seriously reflecting on the Circumstances of [her] desolate state." And, Moll adds, it is best to remember the adage: "*Give me not Poverty lest I Steal.*"

Moll's interruption and her insistence that the reader consider her state of absolute poverty before continuing suggests that Moll is going to make some immoral choices in the upcoming pages, and that her poverty is directly the cause of these choices. The biblical quote Moll references (Proverbs 30:9) implies that people wouldn't steal if not for poverty, and Moll likewise wouldn't behave in immoral ways if not for her "desolate state."

MOLL'S LIFE OF CRIME

One day, as Moll is walking through the shopping district in London, she looks in the window of an apothecary's shop. On a stool sits a package wrapped in white cloth. The apothecary's apprentice is standing on the counter, reaching for something on a high shelf, and his servant is beside him, her back to the shop. Moll slips in the door, snatches the package with little thought, and exits without being seen. She walks quickly through the streets without stopping, and feels "Horror" fill her soul. She rests for a bit, and then continues walking, not returning to her lodgings until nearly nine o'clock at night.

Presumably, Moll steals the package because she doesn't have any money. She takes the package with little thought, as if she is compelled to do it because she knows she may starve otherwise. Moll resorts to shoplifting in a moment of absolute desperation, which suggests she is not innately immoral or depraved; she is simply poor and likely hungry.

Back in her room, Moll opens the package and finds it full of valuable linen and lace, various silver mugs and spoons, and money totaling 18 shillings and six pence. As Moll goes through the contents of the package, she is struck with fear. She is a thief, and such things can get her sent to Newgate and hanged. Moll goes to bed, but she can't sleep. She reflects on her sin, but she knows that she won't starve now. Still, she has sincerely repented the sins of her life only to be "driven by the dreadful Necessity of [her] Circumstances" to thievery. Moll falls to her knees and prays to God for deliverance.

Moll seems sincerely remorseful for stealing the package, and she also appears to regret the way she has been forced to live in the past—multiple illicit affairs, "whoredom," and abandoned children—which all point to Moll's moral fortitude. Sinning and vice aren't easy for Moll, and she truly regrets her choices, but she has had to choose between staying moral and staying alive.

The next day, Moll goes out walking in the street and encounters a young girl walking home alone. Moll notices a handsome gold necklace around the girl's neck, so she offers to see her home safely. The girl agrees, and Moll leads her into an empty alley, where, pretending to fix the girl's shoe, Moll slips the necklace from the girl's neck without her noticing. Moll turns the girl in the direction of her house and leaves her. As she walks, Moll reflects on her crimes. She isn't too concerned with the girl. After all, Moll didn't hurt her, and she indeed taught the girl's parents a valuable lesson about leaving their daughter unattended.

The fact that Moll steals indiscriminately even from children complicates her claim that she isn't innately immoral. Moll could choose to target an adult, but she steals whatever is available, even if she must take from a child. Moll rationalizes her choice to steal from the child, and even tries to tell herself that she is helping the child in the long run by teaching the parents a lesson. Moll's rationalization suggests that she is morally bothered by her decision to rob a child.

As Moll walks, a man runs past her and throws a package into the street. He tells her to leave the package in the gutter and continues running. Within moments, a second man runs by yelling: "Thief!" and Moll watches as the first man is caught, arrested, and carried off. When the commotion dies down, Moll retrieves the package from the street and goes back to her room. Inside the package, Moll finds pieces of expensive silk and velvet, along with various pieces of gold and diamond jewelry. Days later, Moll finds occasion to steal two more diamond rings from a shop window, but she doesn't know how to turn her loot into money. Much of what Moll has stolen is too expensive to simply sell on the street, so she decides to go see the midwife for advice.

The arrest of the thief right in front of Moll underscores the danger she is in of going to Newgate and being hanged if she continues to steal. Just as the threat of immorality isn't enough to keep Moll from stealing, neither is the threat of death, which further emphasizes just how desperate Moll is. She isn't stealing for the fun of it; she does it to survive.

Luckily for Moll, the midwife happily receives her and reveals that she also works as a pawn broker, so she can help Moll turn her goods into money. Moll moves into the midwife's house and tries to survive on only quilting work, but it isn't long before Moll steals again. While having a drink in a bar, Moll steals the silver cup she drinks her ale from. When she returns home to the midwife and tells her what she has done, the midwife begs her not to take the cup back. The punishment for theft is harsh, the midwife reminds Moll, and they will hang her without thought. The midwife melts down the silver cup so no one will recognize it, and Moll tells her that she is running out of money and isn't a very good thief.

Unlike Moll, the midwife is *a hardened criminal. In addition to being a prostitute, the madame of a brothel, and a procuress, the midwife is also a pawn broker who can turn jewelry and silver into spendable money. The midwife has clearly been at her life of crime for a long time, and this again illustrates the limited options of women in society. The midwife isn't married, and she certainly isn't independently wealthy, so she must piece together several illegal jobs to provide for herself.*

The midwife sets Moll up with a "Comrade" and experienced thief, who teaches Moll to shoplift and pickpocket without getting caught. Moll puts her new skills into practice, and it isn't long before she grows rich. At one point, Moll and her comrades have 120 gold watches between them. Moll has over £200 saved in her **bank**, but she continues to steal. "As Poverty brought me into the Mire," Moll says, "so Avarice kept me in." Before long, two of Moll's comrades are arrested and sent to Newgate Prison, where one is sentenced to death and hanged. The other comrade is granted a reprieve, but watching a comrade hang is traumatic for Moll, and she vows to stop stealing.

Moll and the midwife refer to their criminal acquaintances as "Comrades." They aren't exactly friends, and they never have names, which helps them to maintain their anonymity. With 120 watches and 200 pounds saved, Moll is no longer stealing just to stay alive; now Moll is stealing to get rich, which again suggests she isn't as moral as she pretends to be. Moll decides to stop stealing because she's scared of being hanged and isn't as poor as she once was—her decision seems to have nothing to do with morals.

Not long after, Moll wakes in the middle of the night to sounds of yelling and distress. Part of the neighborhood in which she lives is engulfed in flames, and the midwife tells Moll that the commotion of the fire is the perfect opportunity to rob the surrounding houses without notice. Moll agrees and manages to steal some silver from a nearby house, and when she returns to the midwife with their booty, she tells Moll to go out and get more. She runs out to a new house, which she finds even more lucrative, and she returns with a considerable amount of gold jewelry and a purse containing £24.

Moll's stealing spree during the fire again suggests that her moral compass is faulty. She doesn't need the money to survive, and she preys on fire victims, who are already under stress and in danger of losing all their valuables. In Moll's defense, however, she only seems to run into the fire to steal because the midwife tells her to. Still, Moll doesn't at all object to stealing from victims, and she appears to relieve them of their goods easily enough and with no thought as to the moral implications.

Moll admits the "inhumanity" of her actions during the fire and tears spring to her eyes; however, she can't force herself to make amends. Moll is quite a bit richer than she was before, and she quickly forgets all about her vow to stop stealing. Moll enjoys great success as a thief, but since the hanging of her comrade, she is leery of shoplifting, which is incredibly risky. As such, Moll sticks mostly to pickpocketing and lives with the midwife, who encourages Moll to keep stealing and introduces her to new comrades, including a couple. The couple isn't married, but they work together and sleep together, and Moll pulls off a few jobs with them.

While Moll does admit her actions during the fire are immoral, she doesn't admit this until after the fire, when she has had time to reflect on what she has done. Even then, she doesn't repent or feel remorse. She knows stealing is wrong because society tells her it is wrong, but she doesn't seem to innately appreciate this. Moll's primary worry is getting caught, not behaving morally. Again, Moll is no longer stealing just to stay alive; she is stealing to get rich.

One day, the comrade couple asks Moll to break into a house with them, but she refuses. Breaking into houses is something Moll won't do, so they go ahead without her. The couple are arrested and hanged, and Moll, having so narrowly escaped joining them, again grows hesitant to continueas a thief. The midwife tries to talk Moll out of quitting and tells her about a nearby house where she knows some illegal lace from Flanders can be found. If Moll were to tell the police about the fabric, the midwife says, they would certainly give her a reward.

Moll clearly doesn't think her actions during the fire count as breaking into a house. In Moll's mind, her crime is worse if she forces her way in; however, if she just wanders in and doesn't break a window or a door, she considers the crime less immoral—or at least less risky. While the midwife's plan to call the police about the illegal lace isn't stealing, it is still immoral, as she is willing to give up someone else just to make a little money.

Moll goes to the police and tells them about the illegal lace, which is indeed valued at nearly £300. Moll negotiates a £50 reward and steals a piece of lace worth about eight or nine pounds when no one is looking. Moll divides her profits with the midwife and goes back to work. She decides to lift a gold watch off a woman on a crowded street, but as Moll grabs the watch, it doesn't at first release from the woman's arm. Moll is worried the woman will discover her attempt, so, just as the watch breaks free, Moll screams at the top of her lungs that someone has tried to pick her pockets. Someone tried to grab her watch, Moll lies. The woman, standing nearby, is shocked to discover that she has been robbed. Her watch is missing, the woman says.

Again, Moll's behavior is far from moral. Moll's neighbors will likely get into trouble for having illegal lace, and since the punishment for stealing a even bit of fabric is death, the consequences are probably severe. Moll easily gives her neighbors up for 50 pounds and a piece of lace, which isn't the behavior of an innately moral person. Moll claimed earlier that she wasn't a good thief, but that is obviously changing. Her quick thinking helps her pull off a robbery and avoid being caught. Moll is officially becoming a seasoned criminal.

Suddenly, there are cries from elsewhere in the street, and as the crowd parts, Moll watches as a young man is arrested as the alleged pickpocket. Moll continues down the street, the woman's watch in her pocket, and decides it is best not to steal anymore for a while. In the meantime, the midwife tells Moll a bit of her own story. The midwife was born a pickpocket, but she was arrested and ordered to be deported years ago. She bribed officials to send her to Ireland instead of the Colonies, and she lived there for years, working as a "Midwife and Procuress." She left Ireland before her sentence was up, and upon returning illegally to England, she thought it best if she didn't return to pickpocketing.

The young man who is arrested as the pickpocket is obviously innocent, but he will likely be sent to Newgate and hanged. Moll knows this, and she lets it happen without a thought. Again, Moll's actions don't seem like those of a moral woman, since at this point she doesn't need to steal to survive. Defoe seems to suggest that small, necessary acts of immorality (like the ones Moll once committed out of desperation) can grow into larger ones over time. According to the midwife's story, she began working as a prostitute (a "Midwife and Procuress") because it wasn't safe to steal, which again underscores the limited options available to women.

Moll marvels at the midwife's history. Moll herself has been a thief for over five years and Newgate doesn't even know her name. By this time, Moll is well known among the other thieves in town, and they give her the name Moll Flanders. This new name has nothing in common with Moll's former name, except that she once went by the name Mrs. Flanders years earlier while hiding at the Mint. Moll's success as a thief means that she is the envy of the other thieves, and she worries they may inform on her to the officials at Newgate. To ease Moll's fears, the midwife helps Moll to disguise herself as a man and introduces her to a new male comrade.

Moll's new name and identity as a man illustrate Defoe's argument that one's identity evolves over time. Moll's name is again associated with sex and money, which underscores the intricate connection between sex and money, and it also identifies Moll as a prostitute herself. Moll isn't a prostitute (yet) quite in the same way the midwife is, but Defoe implies that Moll's past behavior with men essentially makes her a prostitute all the same.

Moll and the male comrade work several jobs together. They stick mostly to robbing distracted shopkeepers, and Moll's comrade never once suspects that she isn't a man. One day, Moll's comrade notices a preoccupied shopkeeper turn his back on several pieces of valuable silk. Moll tells him it isn't a good idea, but the comrade won't listen. He snatches the fabric and runs down the street with the police in hot pursuit. Moll runs back to the midwife's house and slips inside, a group of concerned citizens chasing her. When the citizens bang on the door and claim a male thief has run inside, the midwife assures them there is no man there. If they want to come in and look, she says, they will have to bring the constable.

Obviously, Moll is dressed as a man, so her comrade and the concerned citizens looking to turn her in as an accomplice all believe they are looking for a man. Moll's slick actions and ability to disguise herself are more evidence that she is becoming a hardened criminal. She isn't just stealing to survive anymore. For Moll, theft is now her career, and she is very good at it. Or, she is very lucky, which means her luck will have to run out at some point.

Soon after, a constable knocks on the midwife's door, and she allows him inside. He looks the house up and down for the man the citizens witnessed running in, but he finds nothing. When he gets to Moll's door, he finds her inside, wearing only her nightclothes and surrounded by mounds of embroidery and quilting. Assuming Moll has been hard at work all day, he closes the door and goes downstairs. There is no man, the midwife says again, and if there was, he is long gone now. The constable agrees and leaves.

Presumably, Moll is in her underclothes because she has just ripped off her male disguise. Again, it is Moll's quick thinking—evidence of her skill as a thief—that keeps her out of Newgate and in business. Moll appears to easily lie and deceive her way out of trouble, which further indicates that her long history of immoral behavior has made it easier and easier for her to continue acting immorally.

After the excitement with the constable, Moll refuses to let the midwife dress her up as man again. The male comrade is arrested and agrees to inform on Moll for a reduced sentence. He tells the police his accomplice is a man named Gabriel Spencer, which is the false name Moll gave him at their first meeting. The police look everywhere for Gabriel Spencer but come up emptyhanded. The authorities accuse the male comrade of lying about his accomplice to get his sentence reduced, and they punish him severely.

While it isn't explicitly stated, the reader can infer that the male comrade is hanged for his crimes. Just as she did with the young man in the crowd, Moll must know her comrade is going to die, but it doesn't even seem to cross her mind. This selfishness implies that Moll's moral character is continuing to deteriorate.

The male comrade's arrest makes Moll increasingly uneasy, so she decides to leave town for a while. She goes back to Lancashire, where she stays for over a month at a boarding house. Moll tells the landlady there that she is waiting for her husband to arrive from Ireland, and after some time, she pretends to receive word that his voyage has been delayed. Moll returns to London, where the midwife promises not to make her dress up as a man anymore. Plus, the midwife points out, Molls works best alone.

Moll isn't uneasy because her comrade is dead; she's uneasy because she doesn't want to join him. Moll's trip to Lancashire underscores her oppression as a woman in a sexist society. As an unmarried woman, Moll must come up with an elaborate story just to get out of town for a few days. A single woman is bound to draw negative attention.

Moll has almost £500 in her **bank**, which she could live on for quite some time, but she has no intention of retiring just yet. She goes on a job with a new momrade and manages to lift a large piece of quality damask fabric from a shop and hand it off to her comrade without drawing any attention. They leave the store and go in opposite directions, and Moll watches as this comrade is arrested, too. Moll sneaks into a nearby shop and even buys some fabric to look like a regular shopper. The comrade is taken to Newgate, where she claims the damask was originally stolen by a woman named Moll Flanders.

The fact that Moll won't retire even when she has the means to again proves she isn't stealing just to survive. If Moll were truly concerned about her morality, she would steal only the bare minimum, but instead she goes to excess. With the arrest of her latest comrade, the authorities at Newgate now know her name. Ironically, Moll was just bragging that no one at Newgate even knows her name. Moll was arrogant, and now she is paying the price.

In time, Moll's name is known at Newgate and Old-Baily, but they don't know her face. Moll's comrade is eventually deported, and Moll again grows paranoid. Soon, however, another fire breaks out, and Moll attempts to rob another house in the chaos. Just as Moll is about to enter a house, a featherbed comes flying out of a window overhead and falls directly on top of her, pinning her to the ground. Her bones are not broken, but she is bruised and banged up, and she must wait for someone to lift the bed before she can limp away.

Again, it is remarkable that Moll won't "break" into a house, but she will walk in through an open door in the middle of chaos. Moll appears to think the crime is somehow less if she doesn't have to use force, which may be a symbolic echo of the way she didn't originally choose to be a criminal; she just did it because it was the only door open to her. The featherbed, meanwhile, seems to be a sign that Moll should stop breaking into house.

MOLL AND THE DRUNK MAN

Much later, during the Bartholomew Fair, Moll meets a drunk man, and he is clearly very rich. Since the man is so intoxicated, he talks freely and flirts with Moll, offering her drinks. Moll refuses the man's drinks, but he says he is an honorable man, and he convinces Moll to return to his room with him. There, the drunk man has his way with Moll, and she lets him do what he wants. Then, after he passes out, Moll takes his watch and his purse of gold and slips out the door.

Presumably, Moll has sex with the drunk man with the intention of robbing him after, and she it does it with such ease that it is likely she has done something like this before. Moll's actions further underscore the connection between sex and money in the novel; Defoe implies that because Moll has long been forced to trade sex for money, it no longer even occurs to her that her behavior might be immoral.

Now, Moll says, she certainly didn't go out looking to do what she has done, but the drunk man seemed like a nice enough guy. As for taking his money, Moll feels bad about that, too, since she thinks he probably has a nice wife and family. Moll goes home to the midwife and tells her the story. The midwife is very pleased to hear the story and laughs so hard, she nearly cries. The next day, the midwife tells Moll that she thinks she knows who the drunk man is. Moll begs her not to look for him—after all, Moll has caused him enough pain already—but the midwife promises not to do him harm.

Moll frequently makes excuses and claims to feel guilty for what she has done, but it is hardly believable at this point. Still, Defoe paints Moll as a desperate woman with few options in life, which doesn't excuse her behavior, but it certainly makes it more understandable. Moll takes it to quite an extreme, though, which suggests that even one sin is a slippery slop that will likely lead to more sin.

The midwife goes to a friend and asks about the drunk man, and the next day, the midwife's friend finds him. The friend says the man is very ill and has recently been violently robbed. He has been beaten up, too, she says, and he suffered several injuries. The midwife says she is sure the man just got drunk and found a whore, who probably took advantage of him, but the friend claims that is unlikely. The man, she says, is an aristocrat and of the finest moral standing. The midwife takes word of the drunk man's condition back to Moll, who assures her that he was just fine when she left him.

Obviously, Moll didn't beat up the drunk man. Presumably, he made up a story that he was beaten and robbed so no one will think he was robbed by a prostitute, like the midwife says. As a married man looking for a prostitute, the drunk man clearly has loose morals as well and is another example of the "moral instruction" Defoe speaks of in the preface.

Ten days later, the midwife goes to visit the drunk man. Even though she is a stranger, the midwife says to him, she has come to do him a service. She promises that their dealings will remain a secret, and he is at first shy and says he knows nothing that requires such secrecy. The midwife tells him that she knows all about the misfortune that befell him recently, and he looks suddenly angry, claiming not to know what she is talking about. The midwife promises that she wants nothing from him and did not come to bribe him or reveal his secret.

Obviously, the midwife has some sort of angle. She isn't visiting the drunk man out of the goodness of her heart to console him—she wants something from him. The drunk man is angry because he doesn't want anyone to know he was robbed and humiliated by a prostitute, which would likely be bad for his own reputation and his marriage.

The drunk man tells the midwife it is very unfortunate that a stranger should know all about the worst day of his life. As for the woman, the man says, whoever she may be, he takes full responsibility for what transpired between them. "She prompted me to nothing," he adds. He doesn't know for sure if the woman is the one who stole from him, but what he lost is the least of his present concerns. The midwife begins to understand what the man is hinting at and assures him the woman is a "Gentlewoman," and she has been with no man since the death of her husband eight years ago.

When the man says Moll didn't "prompt" him, what he means is that Moll didn't proposition him, so he takes full responsibility for their sin. Presumably, the man is mostly worried that Moll has given him a venereal disease, and the midwife tries to convince him that Moll is safe; however, her choice to refer to Moll as a "Gentlewoman" is less than convincing, since it is another word for prostitute.

The drunk man looks immediately relieved and again tells the midwife that he doesn't care about his money. Perhaps the woman is poor, he says, and she needed the money. The midwife interrupts him. Yes, yes, she says. The woman would have never dreamed of robbing him had she not been in terrible poverty and in desperate need of money. The drunk man is pleased to hear it, and he hopes the woman was able to put the money to good use. He then asks the midwife if she can arrange a meeting between him and the woman who robbed him, but the midwife says such a meeting might be tricky.

Again, Defoe implies that there is a direct connection between poverty and criminal behavior. Moll only robs and has illicit sex because she doesn't have any other reasonable options as a woman. She has only two legal options: marriage, or going into Service and being little more than a slave. Moll doesn't have a choice; if she doesn't break the law and sin, she won't be able to survive.

The drunk man tells the midwife that he very much wants to the see the woman, as he would like his gold watch back. If the midwife can't arrange a meeting for him, he asks if she might be able to get his watch back for him, at which point he will pay her what the watch is worth. The midwife promises to try and leaves. She returns the next day with the watch, and he pays her 30 Guineas, which is much more than they would have been able to sell it for. He asks the midwife how it is that she knows so much about his misfortune, and she tells him a long story about being a pawn broker and coming into possession of his watch, which she resolved to return to him as she has.

Presumably, the midwife had no intention of giving the watch back, and she only does it because he offers to pay her. Of course, the midwife is pleased because he is generous, and her job as a pawn broker is little more than a convenient story to cover up her ill intentions. What exactly the midwife's intentions are is never revealed, but it may be that she is subtly offering her own services as a prostitute.

Moll has serious reservations about seeing the drunk man again, but the midwife goes to see him often. Each time she sees him, he is exceedingly kind and gives her money. On one occasion, he again asks the midwife to arrange a meeting between him and the woman who robbed him, and she promises to try. The midwife goes home and tells Moll all about her visit with the man, and Moll finally agrees to meet him. On the day of the meeting, Moll takes great care in readying herself, and when the drunk man arrives, she can tell he has again been drinking.

Again, it isn't stated that the midwife visits the drunk man as a prostitute, but since she always comes back with money, it is certainly implied. The drunk man is always drunk when he approaches a prostitute, which suggests he thinks it is wrong and needs some motivation and courage to go through with it. Such behavior goes against his own moral compass, so his story is again an example of the kind of moral instruction that Defoe claims to offer his readers.

The drunk man is very happy to see Moll. He apologizes for their last meeting and tells her that had it not been for the wine, he would have never taken such freedoms with her. He has been long married, the man says, and has not been with another woman since he met his wife. Moll tells him not to worry. She hasn't suffered any from their first meeting, and she, too, has not been with another man since her husband died some eight years ago. Yes, the man says, the midwife has already told him that Moll is a widow. Finally, the man tells Moll that since they have already committed the sin once, he doesn't see the harm in doing it again.

The drunk man makes excuses for his sins and immorality and blames the alcohol, which further suggests he feels guilty. His suggestion that repeating their sin won't matter because it was already committed once underscores how, after time and repetition, a crime can become easier to commit. Moll's own experience as a thief underscores this as well—stealing was difficult at first for Moll, but now it is easy.

The midwife suspected the visit would come to this, as did Moll, so they had readied a room. Moll leads the drunk man to a chamber with an inner bedroom, and they spend the night there together. After committing a crime once, Moll explains, the regret wears off and makes it easier to do the thing a second time. When the drunk man goes to leave, Moll promises that she did not rob him this time, and he gives her five Guineas. Moll has not made money in such a way in many years, and she has several more visits with him that go the same way. One day, he asks Moll exactly how she makes her living, and she tells him that she works with embroidery and quilting. It is a tough life, Moll says, but she manages.

This incident is the first time Moll explicitly talks about working as a prostitute, but she implies here that she has done it before. Subtle insinuations like Moll's comment here and the implied meaning of her name suggest that Moll has worked as a prostitute on more than one occasion, so the fact that this is just now being revealed to the reader is evidence of the modest language Moll is forced to use to tell her story.

Several months pass, and Moll continues to see the drunk man. He doesn't keep her as a mistress, but he pays her more than enough money, and she does not have to return to stealing. After about a year, the drunk man stops calling on Moll as often, and then he quits coming all together, without so much as a word. Moll lives on her savings for a few months, and when she begins to run out of money, she knows she must go back to work. Moll dresses herself up in various disguises—a widow, a woman in an apron and straw hat, a beggar, etc.—and goes out looking for opportunities to steal.

Moll still doesn't openly admit that she is working as a prostitute. Instead of calling it what it is, she says only that she isn't the drunk man's mistress. Moll choice of words again reflects modest language, but it also suggests that Moll can't admit it because it she is ashamed; it seems that prostitution goes against her moral fiber. Moll calls herself a whore when she behaves promiscuously, but she doesn't when she works as a prostitute.

MOLL'S CRIMES ESCALATE

One day, Moll dresses up in the apron and straw hat and stands in front of a local inn, where the carriages come and go. Travelers frequently come through with packages, looking for a carriage or coach, and Moll thinks it is the perfect place to work. A woman is standing nearby, and she asks Moll if she is waiting for a carriage. Moll says yes and says she is waiting for her mistress. The woman asks Moll the name of her mistress, and Moll answers the first name that comes to her head, which, as luck would have it, is the name of a family in town. The woman knows them well, she says, and goes back to the inn.

The various schemes Moll runs are again evidence of her skill and proficiency as a thief. She is experienced, and she knows the best places to go. Moll has come a long way from the novice stealing to stay alive, which again reflects how a repeated crime gets easier and easier. The first time Moll took something, she was a wreck, but now she is calm even under pressure.

Soon, a woman approaches with a small child. She is holding a large package, and she tells Moll that she is looking for a coach for two passengers. Moll shows her to an empty coach and helps the child in. Moll asks the woman if she would like to put her package in the coach, but the woman says no. She is worried that the package will be stolen out of the coach with only the child to watch it. Moll offers to hold the package for her, and the woman agrees, passing it Moll. The woman goes about loading the coach, and when she isn't paying attention, Moll quietly slips off with the package.

Again, Moll steals indiscriminately. She doesn't care if she steals from women or children, and she is getting increasingly bold in her approach. Ironically, the woman is worried about her package getting stolen and unknowingly gives the package away to the thief directly.

Moll takes the package home to the midwife, and they find it full of fine clothing worth quite a bit of money. Given the success of Moll's latest adventure, she tries the scheme many more times, although never at the same inn, and she begins scoping out warehouses, too. One day, Moll goes to a warehouse by the waterside and, with a forged letter of ownership, is easily given a large box full of linen and glassware worth nearly 22 pounds. One day, Moll dresses in the disguise of a widow and goes to work. Suddenly, she hears someone cry: "Thief, stop Thief." A shopkeeper appears and claims a woman dressed as a widow has just robbed him.

Moll's schemes are becoming more elaborate and bolder. 22 pounds is about six months' salary for a working-class person, and Moll easily steals it in plain sight. Moll is getting way too comfortable and way too brave, which implies she will soon put herself into a situation in which she will get caught. Moll did not rob the shopkeeper in this case, but the reader can infer that she will be accused of it, which mirrors the way that she previously let others take the fall for her own crimes.

A mob gathers around Moll, and she finds herself seized and dragged back to the shop, where the shopkeeper confirms she is not the widow who robbed him. The shopkeeper tells the mob to let Moll go, but one man says it is best to detain her until a constable arrives. Moll grows increasingly angry. The shopkeeper has already said she is not the offender, and they have no right to detain her, Moll says. Two men arrive with the real offender, and a constable arrives, too. The shopkeeper tells the constable that Moll is not the offender in question, and he apologizes for any inconvenience. Moll, however, is furious, and she wants the men who detained her to go before the magistrate so she might be compensated.

Moll's treatment again demonstrates the sexist nature of 17th-century English society. The men have no reason to suspect Moll, other than her gender, and like Moll says, they have no right to detain her. The men assume power and control over Moll simply because she is a woman, and they hold her against her will. Moll has every right to be angry with her treatment; however, given her criminal history, going anywhere near the law seems ill advised.

A fight breaks out between the shopkeeper's men, the mob, and the constable, so they all head to see the magistrate. When they arrive, the magistrate asks Moll her name, and she says her name is Mary Flanders. Moll claims to be a widow whose husband was killed at sea. She says she went shopping this morning to buy new clothes for her "second Mourning," but before she bought a thing, she was accused of stealing by the mob. Even after the shopkeeper said she wasn't the offender, two men detained her and treated her very badly. The magistrate apologizes for Moll's poor treatment, but he tells her it isn't his place to award her reparations. He does, however, send one of the men to Newgate for assaulting Moll and the constable.

"Second Mourning" is a reference to the second year of a widow's mourning, in which a widow typically wore softer and lighter shades of black. Presumably, Moll is hoping to be rewarded money for her inconvenience, but it seems a terrible risk for little reward. Moll must have known she would have to give a name, and Flanders seems a poor choice, as one of her comrades has already informed on Moll to the authorities at Newgate. Moll is getting greedy and looking for money wherever she can grab it.

Moll goes home and tells the midwife all about her eventful morning, and the midwife laughs heartily. She asks Moll if she even realizes how lucky she is and tells her to sue the shopkeeper and make him pay her £500. Moll hires an attorney, who tells the shopkeeper that Moll is a wealthy widow with a great deal of resources at her disposal, that she and plans on suing him to the greatest extent. Moll's attorney demands £500 from the shopkeeper and he offers £50, so they make plans to meet and negotiate.

The midwife again influences Moll to behave in an immoral way, but Moll agrees easily enough. Moll's lawsuit is further evidence that she is looking for money schemes everywhere. Her crimes and dishonesty are getting easier, and her greed is getting out of control.

Moll arrives at the meeting in a coach with a maid, and the shopkeeper proceeds to again tell her how sorry he is; however, the shopkeeper says, it hardly seems a reason for Moll to ruin his business. Moll admits that she isn't looking to put the man out of business, but she does want what is coming to her for enduring such terrible treatment. They finally agree on £150 and a suit made of black silk, and Moll goes home happy. She is in good financial shape indeed. She has over £700 in her **bank**, plus a good deal of valuable clothing, silver, and gold jewelry.

Moll's bank is quite large, and she can no longer call herself poor. She doesn't need the shopkeeper's money at all, and she certainly doesn't need a suit make of black silk. Moll was wronged by the men in the shop, but that isn't necessarily the shopkeeper's fault. Moll's desire for more is dangerous and immoral, and the reader can infer that this greed will likely be her downfall.

After the ordeal with the shopkeeper, Moll decides to go back to work dressed as a beggar. The first night she tries the disguise, she just wanders around without any opportunities to steal, but on the second night, she comes upon an adventure. Moll is standing outside a tavern dressed as a beggar, when a man approaches her and hands her the reins of his horse. He tells Moll to hold the horse awhile, so he can go into the tavern. As soon as he goes inside, Moll walks off with the horse. She takes the horse home to the midwife, who is very confused. She doesn't know what to do with a horse or how to sell it, so they decide it is best if Moll leave it at a stable.

Moll doesn't need a horse—she doesn't even know what do with a horse—but she steals it anyway. Moll's greed and increasingly bold actions (she can't hide a horse) seem certain to get her caught before long, but she doesn't appear to be slowing down. With Moll's bank at 700 pounds, she doesn't ever have to steal again in her life, and everything she does from here is just an unnecessary risk.

Moll again dresses as a beggar and goes out to work, and she meets two "Coiners of Money," who offer to take her in on their enterprise. Moll refuses, wanting nothing to do with their business, for which the punishment is "to be burnt to Death at a Stake." She meets other comrades, mostly those who break into houses. Moll doesn't like breaking into houses either, but she does it for a bit and quickly grows tired of it.

The "Coiners of Money" are counterfeiters, and punishment for forging and counterfeiting money during Moll's time is death by fire, which is enough to deter Moll. But what few rules Moll had are fast disappearing: She used to refuse to break into houses, but now she occasionally does it, which further reflects the deterioration of Moll's morality.

The next day, Moll dresses as an upper-class lady and goes to the Mall at St. James Park, where many ladies are walking in the park. There, Moll sees two young girls, about nine and thirteen years old. The older girl is wearing a gold watch, and the younger girl has a gold necklace with pearls. Moll asks a footman who the girls are, and he tells her they are the daughters of wealthy aristocrats. Moll falls into step with the older girl as she walks and begins talking to her as if they are old friends. Suddenly, the king arrives to attend a meeting at the Parliament-House, and all the people clamor to get a look. Moll helps the girls get closer, and as she does, she steals the girl's gold watch.

The Mall at St. James Park is a park in central London, and in Moll's day, it is fashionable for wealthy ladies to walk in the park. Moll goes to the park looking for high-class targets, and she again proves herself an indiscriminate thief when she targets children.

After the Mall, Moll goes on a new adventure to the Gaming-House at Covent-Gardens. Inside, a man offers Moll a chance to bet, but she declines, claiming not to know the game. He assures her there is nothing to it and gives her money to place a bet. When Moll sits down, she finds the gambling men extremely pleasant, and she takes to winning their money. She offers the man's money back and all the winnings, but he refuses and instead gives her more money to bet. She wins more, and after slipping a bit of the money into her purse, she again offers the man his money and winnings. He decides it isn't right to keep all the money, so he gives Moll half—about 73 Guineas.

During Moll's time, gambling was considered an immoral vice, especially for a woman. Moll claims not to know how to play, but her ignorance is obviously a hustle. Moll is a skilled gambler, too, which suggests she is familiar with multiple forms of vice. She doesn't stop at prostitution or theft—Moll will do any scheme that brings her money, which is another indication of how greedy and immoral she has become.

Moll returns home and shares her winnings with the midwife, who is indeed happy to have them. She commends Moll on her ability to secure money, but she warns Moll about visiting Gaming-Houses. Moll understands the danger of "the Itch of Play" and decides not to place any more bets. The midwife suggests Moll stop stealing and be happy with what they have made so far, but Moll has no intention of stopping. Moll's success grows and she becomes a notorious thief, and her name is now even more common at Newgate and Old-Baily.

Moll is definitely getting too greedy; even the midwife is telling her to slow down and eventually stop. Moll is so greedy that she even disregards the rules of a successful criminal, like staying away from gambling, which, with "the Itch of Play," can quickly become addictive and rob her of all her money. Furthermore, Moll is drawing attention to herself, which suggests she will soon get caught.

Moll begins to travel under various disguises. She goes to the spas in Tunbridge and Epsom, and then she moves on to a fair in Suffolk. Moll secures a gold watch, and then she moves on to Cambridge, where she gets some new linen. She arranges for a linen shop to deliver goods to her rented room and after the delivery boy arrives, she skips out on the bill. From there she goes to Ipswich and on to Harwich, where she encounters many foreigners and little of value. She does manage to lift a large suitcase, which is too big to move, so she leaves it where she found it.

Moll is expanding her area and stealing more and more. She goes to neighboring towns to steal and comes up with new schemes. Moll doesn't appear to have any moral reservations or difficulty in breaking the law so frequently and brazenly. Just like her "crime" with the gentleman, repetition makes Moll seemingly numb to the immorality of her career as a thief.

Back on the road, Moll is stopped by Custom-House officers in Ipswich, and they break open her suitcase when she claims not to have the key. Thankfully, there is nothing incriminating in Moll's suitcase, and the officers let her go. She moves on to Colchester, where she lived her early years as Robin's wife. Moll realizes she knows no one in Colchester anymore, and after a few days, she moves on. She returns to London and tells the midwife all about her travels. Moll claims her story is most useful to honest people, as it reminds them to guard themselves against the dishonesty of others. Moll leaves the moral of her story to be decided by the reader; she isn't qualified to make judgements or "preach."

Moll's realization in Colchester reflects her evolving identity. Moll is nowhere near the same person she was then, and anyone she knew is dead or gone. Lewd or promiscuous books were considered inappropriate and taboo in the 17th and 18th centuries, which is why Moll, and therefore Defoe, implies that her story is an example of how not to behave and a reminder to readers to arm themselves against the evil of the world. But of course, Moll isn't qualified to "preach" the moral of her own story, because she herself is immoral.


One day near Christmas, Moll enters a silver shop and is tempted by the spoons. A man across the street watches Moll enter, and since no one else is in the shop, he grows concerned. He runs into the shop and grabs Moll, accusing her of stealing. She tells him she simply came in to buy a half dozen spoons, but he isn't listening. A crowd gathers, including the owner of the shop and a city Alderman. The Alderman is also the Justice of the Peace, so he stops to see what the commotion is all about. Moll tells him she had simply stopped to buy six spoons when a man accused her of stealing. The situation is easily resolved, and Moll goes home.

The man's suspicion of Moll is further evidence of their sexist society. Of course, Moll is going to rob the shop, but he doesn't know this for sure. The man simply sees an unattended woman in an empty shop and assumes she is up to no good. He could just quietly watch her and see what happens, but he immediately stops her and accuses her of being a thief.

Three days later, Moll walks by a house and notices the door is open, so she goes inside. She picks ups two pieces of silk, and as she is walking out the door, two women run from across the street and detain her. A constable arrives, and when Moll can't bribe him, he takes her before the Justice. Moll pleads with the Justice and tells him that she didn't break anything to get into the house and she has taken nothing, so there is no harm done. The Justice is about to let Moll go, but then he learns that she was detained with fabric in her hands, which she would have stolen had she not been stopped. Moll is immediately sent to Newgate Prison.

Again, Moll seems to think that walking into an open house is less of a crime than breaking into a locked house. Moll has never liked breaking into houses, and the featherbed that dropped on her head the last time she tried should have served as a warning to her, but Moll's greed is her downfall. She walks into the house without thinking, almost like it is a compulsion, which again reflects her deteriorating morals; theft is now like second nature to her.

MOLL IN NEWGATE PRISON

Alone and miserable in Newgate Prison, Moll repents her past crimes, but doing so gives her no satisfaction. She knows she is only repenting because the ability to continue her sins has been removed. Moll doesn't sleep for days, and the other women give her a hard time and try to take advantage of her. Soon, the midwife comes to visit Moll and offers her much comfort, but she can't help Moll any other way. She has tried to bribe the witnesses, but Moll is most likely to be sentenced to death. The prison chaplain comes to visit Moll and give her spiritual counsel, but he brings her little comfort.

Moll can't repent for her crimes because she isn't genuinely remorseful. Moll began a moral woman, but her crimes of necessity have snowballed and made her a full-blown criminal. Plus, if Moll had to do it all over again, she would likely make the same choices. Moll had little choice but to turn to crime. Her crimes have obviously gotten out of control, but Defoe implies that is to be expected of someone with options as limited as Moll's.

Soon, word spreads around the prison that three highwaymen were brought in the night before. Out of curiosity, Moll goes to investigate and discovers that one of the men is James, Moll's husband from Lancashire. She is shocked and doesn't at first know what to do. He doesn't seem to recognize Moll, and she is thrown into deep thoughts about her love for him. She grieves for him, as he will surely be hanged, and Moll soon learns that she will certainly be tried for her own life. Learning of her impending death, Moll again tries to repent, but she is still unable.

Moll seems to be more concerned with James's sentence than her own. She is a hardened criminal, and she expects to die for her crimes. Moll has committed a slew of crimes—prostitution, incest, adultery, fraud, robbery—and she doesn't think she deserves to repent now, after all this time and all her crimes. Moll's inability to repent highlights just how deeply her life of crime has affected her.

The midwife tries to bribe the jury, but she is unsuccessful, and they indeed will try Moll for felony burglary. When Moll learns of her fate, she cries with the midwife, and that night, Moll begins to pray. Moll hasn't prayed since the death of her last husband, but she repeatedly begs the Lord to have mercy on her. The midwife seems even more concerned than Moll—and she seems a great deal more penitent, too—and she gets to thinking about all the comrades she has seen hanged over the years. For years, the midwife has sat back and let others steal for her, and now she will be forced to watch Moll die.

The midwife is much more remorseful than Moll, but Moll also appears to be moving closer to true penitence and remorse as she moves closer to death. The midwife and Moll are more than just "comrades"; they are friends, and Moll's impending death has thrown the midwife into a penitent state, which is making her reflect critically on her own criminal past.

Moll is arraigned on Thursday for stealing two pieces of silk worth £46 and tried the next day. She pleads not guilty, but she isn't optimistic. The witnesses testify first and maintain that Moll entered the house and would have stolen the fabric had she not been detained at the door. Moll listens as they all recount the truth, and then it is her turn to plead her case. She insists she broke nothing and stole nothing. She did not break a door to enter, and it cannot be positively concluded that she intended to steal the fabric. The Justice is unconvinced, and Moll is found guilty and sentenced death.

Moll is sentenced to death for stealing fabric just like her mother was, which reflects the harsh punishment of the time but highlights how disadvantage (and hence criminality) can run in families. Moll's mother was a thief, and so is Moll. This connection again highlights the role of poverty in their lives and the lack of legal and reasonable opportunities for women to make a living. Moll's mother had few choices, just like Moll, and so they suffer the same fate.


Upon hearing her sentence, Moll begs for her life and reiterates that she broke nothing and took nothing. The Justice says nothing, and Moll's sentence stands. The midwife is inconsolable. She vacillates between anger and mourning, and she appears to be "as any mad Woman in Bedlam." The midwife again repents for the sins she has committed, and she is devasted by their misfortune. For Moll, there is nothing before her but death. The names on the death warrant will come soon, and the execution will take place soon.

"Bedlam" is a reference to Bedlam Royal Hospital, a psychiatric hospital in London that was built in 1247 and still exists today. The term "Bedlam" has long since been synonymous with insanity and chaos. The description of the midwife as a "mad Woman in Bedlam" further reflects the sexism and misogyny of the time, as it employs popular stereotypes of women as innately hysterical and insane.


The midwife sends a minister to see Moll, and he begs Moll to repent and see the error of her ways. He praises Jesus and quotes scripture, and then he kneels before Moll and prays. For the first time, Moll is moved to repent. She thinks back on her life with disgust and hate, and she thinks about Eternity. With the highest sincerity, Moll asks forgiveness for her sins and reflects upon her life of crime. Moll interrupts her story and tells the reader that she is not fit to read "Lectures of Instruction," but she hopes her story causes others to "make just Reflections" on their own lives.

Moll's story suggests that even the most hardened criminal can repent if they turn to the Lord, which reinforces Defoe's message of morality and moral instruction. Moll again addresses the reader directly. She admits that giving lectures on morality would be hypocritical for her, but she still reinforces the importance of reflecting on one's own morals, and this also aligns with Defoe's aim of moral instruction.

The minister asks Moll to confess as much as she is able or willing, and he promises to comfort her and assures her that what she says will remain in secrecy. Moll tells him everything, and she repents and begs for mercy. The minister visits again the next day and explains to Moll what it means to be forgiven. Divine forgiveness and mercy occur when one who is sincerely repentant and desirous of forgiveness asks for it. If they are willing to accept that forgiveness, they shall have it. Moll again expresses her remorse and desire for mercy, and the minster is so moved by her sincerity that he promises not to leave her until the very end.

This passage suggests that Moll is finally remorseful and that she is sincere, but Defoe leaves enough doubt that the reader can never be sure that Moll's repentance is genuine. It takes her years to come to this point, and many of her crimes suggest that she has little, if any, morality left. It may be the fear of impending death that leads Moll to atone, not a sudden return to morality and God.

On Wednesday, Moll's name is on the death warrant. The minister tries to comfort her, but he leaves that night and does not return until late the next day. When he finally arrives at the door of Moll's cell, she is overjoyed to see him. The minister immediately tells Moll that he has received a good report from the Justice serving on Moll's case, and he has obtained her a reprieve. Moll will be transported instead of executed. The minister reminds Moll not to let her happiness and relief remove the "Remembrance of [her] past Sorrow" from her mind. Moll again interrupts her story. She understands that readers who are "pleas'd and diverted" by the "wild and wicked" parts of Moll's story with be dissatisfied with this part of her story; however, the reader must know that this is the best part of Moll's life and is "most Advantageous" to her and "most instructive" to readers.

This part is "most Advantageous" and "most instructive" to readers because it is the exact moment Moll is redeemed and returns to moral living again. Moll is careful to reiterate that her story of vice isn't meant to be entertaining; it is meant as moral instruction. Readers who are reading Moll's story for the wrong reasons, or as Defoe says, in the wrong way, are drawn to the "wild and wicked" parts, but both Moll and Defoe remind readers that this is not how Moll's story is intended to be read. The minister's warning suggests that surest way to avoid sinning again is to remember the pain and disgust she feels for her sins now.

It is 15 weeks before Moll is ordered to a ship for deportation. In the meantime, she learns that James has been moved to the other side of the prison. James found a way to bribe the witnesses in his case and there is little evidence to convict him. Moll disguises herself and tells the authorities she can provide evidence against the highwaymen in question because they robbed her in Dunstable. Soon, rumor spreads that Moll Flanders will turn in the highwaymen to reduce her own sentence, and she is taken to identify them. When Moll is brought into the room with James, she throws back her hood and reveals her face. She weeps, as does James, and he asks her how she can betray him so.

Obviously, the highwaymen didn't rob Moll in Dunstable, and she has no intention of turning James in for anything. Identifying James is just an excuse to see him. Moll is still disguising herself, even in prison, and while her lies here are harmless, she is still guilty of dishonesty and is technically sinning. Moll's instant return to lying again suggests she isn't as remorseful and penitent as she claims.

James listens closely to Moll's story, and when she gets to the part in Brickill, where she lied to the police about seeing him leave town with the highwaymen, he is incredibly thankful. He has always wondered who saved his life in Brickill, and he is very glad that it was his very own wife. He says he is now greatly indebted to her and will do whatever he can to deliver her from her current circumstances. James tells Moll a little about his own history, including crimes he pulled in West Chester and Lichfield, and Moll suddenly understands why James wouldn't go to London with her years earlier.

James knows Moll isn't trying to betray him when he discovers she was the one to save him in Brickill. James's crimes in West Chester and Lichfield make it clear that James couldn't go to London with Moll because he has been a wanted criminal for many years.

James says he wrote Moll letters over the years, which she knows to be true. She saw the letters, but she never read them or responded for fear her husband, the banker, would find out. James then tells Moll about his case. They only have one witness against him, which isn't enough to convict, and he has it on good authority that if he volunteers to be transported, he will be allowed to do so. However, James admits, he would rather be hanged than deported.

James's letters suggest that he is truly in love with Moll and not just stringing her along for money or taking advantage of her in any other way. Criminal cases during this time required two witness to convict, and since James was able to bribe one, his life will likely be spared.

Moll attempts to persuade James using "Womans Rhetorick," which is to say she cries and pleads with him to volunteer for transportation. There is a great deal of money to be made in the Colonies, Moll says, and he can later buy his freedom. James says he doesn't have much money, and Moll assures him he can start over in America with very little. She claims their shared troubles are enough to convince them both to leave this part of the world and start new. James agrees, and they part with love, just as they did years earlier.

Moll's reference to "Womans Rhetorick" again underscores the sexism of her time, which even Moll herself perpetuates here. This reference relies on popular stereotypes that women are hysterical and over-emotional, and she uses this trope to try to manipulate James's feelings.

MOLL AND JAMES IN AMERICA

Meanwhile, the midwife tries to get Moll's case pardoned, but the cost is way more than they can afford. Even the minister goes on Moll's behalf to try and argue her case again, but the authorities tell the minister that he should be happy Moll's life was spared. In February, Moll is taken with seven other convicts and placed on a Merchant's ship headed to Virginia. The ship set sails and begins up the coast, but the Merchant first stops at a place called Bugby's-Hole. Moll convinces an officer on the ship to mail a letter on her behalf, so she writes to the midwife and tells her to bring the goods she packed for Moll to the next port, and she also encloses a letter for James.

The fact that the midwife could have gotten Moll's case pardoned with enough money suggests the criminal system in England is corrupt—it is just as immoral as Moll was, which again indicates that Moll's behavior is a symptom of widespread social ills, rather than evidence of her personal failings.

Two days later, the midwife delivers Moll's goods to the ship at port. She brings a trunk full of things that will be useful and needed when Moll arrives in America, along with a portion of Moll's "**Bank** of Money." Once Moll is established in America, she will send for the rest of her money to be shipped to her. The midwife is heartbroken at the sight of Moll, and she hates the idea of being separated from her. The midwife also brings with her a response from James, in which he says he has voluntarily asked to be transported. Unfortunately, James says, it is impossible to get on the same ship, and he will have to meet Moll in Virginia.

Again, Moll claims to be penitent, but she is already scheming to get money and goods to America, which is obviously prohibited. It is part of Moll's punishment that she must go to America with nothing and work off her debt to society in the form of indentured servitude, but Moll clearly has no intention of sticking to her punishment. If Moll were truly penitent, she would likely accept her punishment, but she doesn't.

Moll is concerned that James won't be able to meet up with her at all, so she tells the midwife all about their relationship—except that they were married—and she tells her about their plans to start a new life in America. The midwife is so happy to hear Moll's story that she promises to make sure James gets on the boat before it sails. She succeeds, and when the ship sails, both Moll and James are on board. Moll's sentence will last for five years, but James is not allowed to return to England for the rest of his life, and he is quite upset. What's worse, since James voluntarily transported, he is made to pay for his passage.

Unlike Moll, James clearly doesn't want to leave London. For Moll, going to America isn't so much a punishment as it is a new opportunity for her to make money and increase her wealth. She is still very much tempted by greed and the prospect of making more money, which again suggests Moll hasn't learned her lesson and isn't as remorseful as she claims. On the other hand, she may simply be making the best of the situation, since, as usual, she has few other options.

Moll and James pool their resources. James had a fair amount of money when he went to prison, but the cost has been considerable, and he is down to £108 in gold. Moll puts in the money she has on board—£246 and a few shillings—but she doesn't tell him about the £300 **bank** she left safe with the midwife in London. Their main problem at present is that their stock is all in money, except for the clothes and linens Moll has in the trunk from the midwife, which is useless in the Colonies. Moll bribes a member of the crew, and for 15 Guineas, she and James are allowed a nice room and a seat at the captain's table.

Moll seems to be back to her old ways. She doesn't tell James about all her money, and she continues to keep her secret bank in case she is left alone and destitute. Again, Moll's limited opportunities and vulnerability as a woman are the source of her dishonesty; however, she is back to bribing and scheming, which implies Moll's morals are still flexible.

Before the ship sails, however, the midwife finds occasion to befriend the captain and inquires what kind of equipment one would need to become a planter in America. His lists off goods totaling around £100, and the midwife quickly secures them. She boards the goods on the ship in her own name and endorses them over to James to be collected when the ship gets to America. By the time the ship sails and all expenses are covered, Moll and James have £200 in money and the contents of two trunks secured by the midwife—more than enough to start a good life in America.

Despite getting caught for her crimes and technically being punished, Moll is right where she wanted to be years ago—on a ship with James on her way to America. In this way, Moll's punishment isn't much of a punishment at all. In a roundabout way, Moll is getting exactly what she wants, which makes Defoe's claim that her story is instructive seem a bit insincere.

It is in this happy state that Moll and James set sail from Bugby's-Hole. Their journey begins easy enough, but they are delayed by bad weather later in the trip. When they arrive in Virginia, Moll and James are sold as servants to a planter, and he offers them their freedom for a large amount of tobacco. Moll and James immediately secure the tobacco, along with 20 Guineas for good measure, and settle in Virginia, near the Potomac River. Moll receives their goods from the ship and stores them in a warehouse, and they secure lodging in a small village.

Again, Moll is right where she wants to be. She has purchased her freedom and is able to start a new life with James. Moll and James seem to be rewarded for their immorality and crime, not punished, which sends a conflicting message in a book supposedly aimed at "moral instruction."

The first thing Moll does is inquire about her mother and her brother—or husband, depending—and she learns that though her mother is dead, her brother lives on a nearby plantation with one of his sons. Moll asks around town about the man living on her brother's plantation, and she learns that he lives with his son, Humphry. Humphry is the name of her own son, and she has not seen or spoken to him in over 20 years. Moll also learns that the whole town knows their incestuous secret.

Moll's reputation is still vunerable to her secret after all these years, and she fears that if others find out who she is, she will be ruined. Humphry is the only of one of Moll's 12 children whose name is mentioned, which suggests some level of importance compared to Moll's other nameless children.

According to rumors, when Moll's mother died, she left her estate to her Moll, to be collected if she ever made herself known. Moll is pleased to hear it but secretly laments her luck. Clearly, her secret is out, and if she makes herself known, she will be ruined. She debates her choices day and night for some time, until James notices her preoccupation. She tells James as much of the story as she must—that she has relations living nearby and that her mother has died and left her money—but she claims she is hesitant to reveal herself to them because she doesn't want them to know she is a transported criminal.

Moll is still misleading James because she thinks he won't accept her when he finds out about her incestuous past. Defoe implies Moll has good reason for holding out on James—he might very well leave her if he knew—but again, this reason highlights how impossible Moll's circumstance as a woman are. She's forced to lie because society wouldn't understand that the events of the past were never really her choice.

James tells Moll that he is willing to go and do whatever she wants. He will relocate to another part of the country or go to a whole new country if she wants, but Moll is torn. She wants her mother's estate, but she doesn't want James to know about her past with her brother. And, Moll says, she wants to at least see her brother and Humphry before relocating. Moll again interrupts her story and reminds the reader that the publication of her story is meant "for Instruction, Caution, Warning and Improvement to every Reader," so they should not look too harshly on her for keeping secrets from James.

Moll's claim that her story is intended for the "Improvement to every Reader" again recalls Defoe's argument that wicked stories can be put to good use through moral instruction. Moll's desire to see Humphry after all this time further suggests that she loves and cares for him and didn't abandon him because she is a heartless and immoral woman. Moll had little choice in abandoning her son, and she clearly regrets it.

Moll and James decide to relocate to a new part of the country, where they will be just a couple looking to farm, not transported criminals. Moll selects Carolina, the southernmost colony, because she detests the cold, but she can't decide whether she should send James on without her and visit her brother's plantation first, or if she should settle in Carolina and then return to Virginia. She decides to first go to Carolina, and the trip is 200 miserable miles. Moll and James arrive at a place called Phillip's Point and learn that the ship to Carolina sailed three days earlier. Exhausted and unwilling to travel further, they decide to settle right where they are.

It has already been established that it is not frowned on or considered taboo to be a transported criminal in the Colonies, but Moll and James are determined to conceal their identities as former criminals. This suggests that they are ashamed of their criminal past and don't want to appear immoral to others. The constant back and forth between Moll's remorse and her continued signs of immorality leave it ultimately unclear whether her penitence is genuine.

James and Moll buy two servants and the required goods and lodgings, and within two months, they buy a sizable plantation with nearly 50 acres of cleared land. They plant tobacco, and it isn't long before they have a thriving estate. Then, Moll tells James she must return to Virginia to see some friends, and she leaves for the east side of the Potomac River. When she arrives, Moll wants to walk up to her brother and tell him directly who she is, but she thinks better of it. She decides instead to write him a letter stating her case, in which she adds several warm remarks about Humphry, whom, Moll says, she knows to be her son.

Again, this isn't much of a punishment for James and Moll. They live in luxury with servants and a private estate, and their success seems much more like reward. Furthermore, Moll continues to lie to James, which means she continues to sin and behave immorally, regardless of everything she has been through.

Moll sends the letter to her brother, and when it arrives, Humphry intercepts it. Soon after, Humphry arrives at Moll's lodgings in town. Moll is pleasantly surprised when she opens the door to Humphry, who is ready to receive her as his loving mother. He is overjoyed to know she still lives, and he goes on to say that he did not show his father Moll's letter. His father is old, he says, and quite senile. He asks Moll how she has come to be in the Colonies, and she tells him that she is staying on a friend's plantation across the bay. Humphry immediately insists that Moll live with him. His father won't even notice her, Humphry says, but Moll can't conceive of leaving James.

Just as Moll lies to James, she lies to Humphry, and she is further rewarded by Humphry's willingness to forgive her and seek a future relationship as mother and son. Moll has little reason to lie to Humphry. It could be argued that Moll doesn't want her son to know she is living with a man in an unlawful marriage—such a thing reflects badly on her morals. But Moll's marriage to her brother wasn't legal either, and Humphry doesn't know about the linen-draper, so her marriage to James wouldn't necessarily appear inappropriate to Humphry.

Humphry comes to visit Moll again, and he brings with him the will of Moll's mother, which leaves Moll a plantation on the York River. The plantation has been kept in operation and maintained by Humphry, who visits a few times a year. There are a stock of cattle and several servants there, and Moll asks how much it is worth. Humphry says she would get £60 per year if she let the land out, but living on the plantation, she would likely garner upwards of £150. If she lives in England or across the bay and hires a steward to manage the land, she can expect somewhere around £100 per year. Moll is silently thankful for her good fortune, and she is never more ashamed of her wicked past.

Moll's sudden shame over her criminal past implies she feels guilty and doesn't think she deserves her sudden good fortune. But nonetheless, Moll's main concern is still money, and her shame over her wicked past seems to be secondary.

Moll tells Humphry that he is her only child and sole heir, and she says the plantation will go directly back to him upon her own death. Moll then gives Humphry the only thing she has of value—a gold watch—but she doesn't tell him how she got it. Moll signs the appropriate paperwork and takes possession of her land, and then she hires Humphry to live there and manage it. He draws up a contract promising Moll £100 profit per year, and since she has a right to the current year's crops, Humphry gives her £100 in gold. Moll stays for over a month, settling her affairs and visiting with her son, and then she returns to James.

The watch that Moll gives Humphry suggests she hasn't left her criminal past completely behind her, and she is still benefiting from her stolen goods. What's more, Humphry isn't Moll's only child, and she has nothing to gain by lying to him and claiming he is. Humphry's honesty and willingness to pay Moll all the money she is owed makes her dishonesty appear all the worse.

CONCLUSION

Over the next year, James and Moll build up their plantation with much success. They build a large house and buy more servants, and then Moll writes the midwife and asks her to take Moll's remaining **bank** in England—£250 or so—and spend it on supplies and send them to Moll and James's plantation. When the supplies arrive, James is caught off guard and is little nervous. How will they pay for all this, he asks, without running into debt? Moll smiles and tells him it is all paid for. "Who says I was deciev'd, when I married a Wife in Lancashire?" James asks. "I think I have married a Fortune, and a very good fortune too," he concludes.

Moll finally spends her bank, which suggests she is finally secure in her life and no longer needs to worry about losing everything and being put out on the street. James's comment is clearly meant to be lighthearted, but it also carries an element of truth. James obviously loves Moll, but he still bases at least part of her worth on material wealth.

The next year, Moll goes to see Humphry on her plantation to collect her earnings, and she learns that her brother has died. She tells Humphry that she will likely marry her friend, who owns the plantation where she lives. Moll immediately tells James all about her past with her mother and her brother, as well as Humphry and her plantation. James responds with good humor and suggests they invite Humphry for a visit. They live an easy and pleasant life for the next several years, until Moll is nearly 70 years old. Her sentence is long over, so Moll and James return to England, where they vow to live "the Remainder of [their] Years in sincere Penitence, for the wicked Lives [they] have lived."

Moll seems to wait for her brother to die before she tells James and Humphry the truth. His death seems to release Moll from obligation in a way, and she is free to move on, even though their marriage wasn't legal; it's as if the change in her circumstances changes her ability to be truthful as well. However, while Moll's sentence is over, James isn't supposed to ever return to England. Moll claims they live their lives in "sincere Penitence," but they break the law the moment they go back to England, and this further casts doubt on the sincerity of Moll's remorse, leaving open the question of her true moral character.

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